

A qualitative approach to practices, reflections and the radical imagination of parent activists



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Introduction - Situating the Project, Research Questions and Starting Points

He expressed it once in a very, very clear way. He said, ‘all this has destroyed my world, but I don't have an alternative for it. I don't see a different world yet. So all I see is what goes wrong, and there is no alternative’ (Janneke, about her son).

Childcare is valuable, critical, beautiful labor. As a form of work, childcare has been feminized and devalued in our society (Regeneración, 2009).

Imagination, understood as a process of developing capacities in order to envisage a different world, is, in the academic discourses I have encountered and researched, often associated with realms of aesthetics or with a far away utopia. In the broader political public, general social movements that argue that ‘another world is possible’ or slogans such as ‘let's be realistic, demand the impossible’ are, as Ciara Bottici (2014) states, “easily labeled unrealistic, if not fanatical, and thus are excluded from the spectrum of viable political option” (p.1). In stark contrast, I find that in feminist and Radical Left communities, I am engaged in a long history of struggle and knowledge production against figurations of the present and for working toward the construction of autonomous spaces in which a different kind of existence can be practiced. I also find that the access to resources for this work is aspired to be shared in horizontal, democratic ways.

Since at least the 2000s, there is a renewed and growing interest in the old question: How do we want to live together? Feminist and anti-capitalist activists and scholars call for alternative visions of society and new ways of living and relating. It is in this context that ‘the common/ s’¹, as a leftist political strategy, has become one of the key terms in the struggles against neoliberal capitalism, and for the creation of alternatives to state or market organized properties. An underlying conviction of this thesis is that these debates and struggles can only be successful if feminist knowledge is taken into account. With and through a feminist perspective the politics of the common/s have to be a politics of difference if they want to be truly transformative. As Ida Dominijanni (2006) states, “feminine difference reveals what has been left out, bringing to the fore a crucial element of the picture: the complicity that modern politics entertains with the symbolic

¹ When I write common/s with a slash, I mean the debates in their broadest sense, including the two strands I map in Chapter 1.

order of patriarchy" (p.95). In fact, I will show that feminist critique and debates on common/s converge in fundamental views: the importance of the everyday, the need to challenge capitalist, individualistic values and the idea of the autonomous subject. In this sense, I am concerned with two, interrelated things. First, addressing current, pressing issues in social movements in the global north. Second, performing conceptual, theoretical work for the academic fields of feminist social theory and feminist philosophy.

In January of 2013 in Utrecht, Netherlands, activist and scholar Silvia Federici gave a talk on commons as an anti-capitalist politics. For her, anti-capitalist commons have a double function. Firstly, they are "spaces from which to reclaim control over the conditions of our reproduction" and secondly, these spaces can be a basis from which to struggle against processes of capitalist enclosure and continuing disentanglement from markets and from the state (Federici&Caffentzis, 2014, p.101). It can be a basis for sustainable social movements and for experiments in living, cooperating and struggling together differently. Federici intervenes in an already existing debate on the commons by underlining the need to put social reproduction and care relations involved therein in the centre of these struggles. She arrives at this point after a Marxist feminist analysis of the gendered division of labour in global capitalism, which leaves care work still mostly to women in precarious positions. Her talk is the beginning for this thesis project, in which I inquire as to how care relations figure in anarchist/Radical Left activist communities and the role they might have in transforming the capitalist and patriarchal ways of living and relating so predominant even in emancipative movements. My focus is on practices of (collective) childcare outside of the (bio) familial home, though this is still the locus from which a lot of people's stability comes, including for activists.

For the purpose of this thesis, I have interviewed eight parent activists in Germany and the Netherlands (Barbara, Joop, Hanna, Janneke, Lisa, Sonja, Stefan and Casie²), and have conducted one workshop at an activist camp in Germany. Five out of eight participants live as single mums or in nuclear family homes with their child(ren). Hanna and Lisa both live in new house projects, and Casie in a squat. All of the participants are involved in political groups working on different topics and are actively involved in their local activist communities, co-creating its autonomous spaces and attending activist camps, events or demonstrations. It is these spaces in which the participants and their communities try to common material means of existence and processes of decision making. While I can say that for some participants, their homes are such a commons, for others these

² These are pseudonyms.

commoning practices are to be found outside the home. The workshop I conducted facilitated an encounter similar to my interviews, but in a more collective way. The fifteen people attending the workshop had a range of living conditions similar to the eight other participants.

I asked all the participants in this research about their practices of and reflections on children and collective childcare in their activist communities and social movements. I did so not only for the sake of collecting and analyzing data, but to also open up spaces of encounter in which to spark a collective and dialogical process of radical imagination. I am very thankful for the work of Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish (2012), who have conducted research with self-defined radical activists in Halifax and propose a methodology for social movement research called ‘convoking the radical imagination’ (p.408). ‘Convoking the radical imagination’, as a methodology, goes beyond a lot of conventional social movement research, which maps and analyzes social movement practices in an existing field of economic and political powers. Instead of only mapping or collecting, I invited the participants to actively reflect on their practices and ideas and, if it was not the case already, to politicize and make visible the ways they practice childcare. This methodology is much more dialogical than a lot of qualitative methods, and underlines the importance of keeping in sight the researcher-participant relation in the encounter. In my writing, I try to make it possible to trace the dynamics of this relation and the ways I work and struggle with the material. Accordingly, I demonstrate (what has paved) the way to the radical imagination presented in this thesis.

Imagination is not one single thing somewhere out there for me, as a researcher, to discover. Instead, it emanates out of ways of living and cooperating differently, out of radical practices that seek to escape all kinds of oppressions underlying and crisscrossing people’s lives. From the practices in which the participants of this research are involved. “These radical practices are happening everywhere, all the time, in small ways and big ways, as our love, our hope, our solidarity, our critical thinking, our optimism, our skepticism, our anger and our communities fight against the powers that be” (Khasnabish&Haiven, 2010, n.p.). My methodology aims to push the participants and myself to put this imagination into words and to ask how, through radical imagination, movements challenge the patriarchal form of the sociopolitical itself, including predominant forms of relating in common. In this sense, the common/s, understood as a process of commoning, of inventing new forms of life, is intimately entangled in the radical imagination as a “collective process of developing alternative modes of reproducing our selves”(Haiven, 2014, p.19).

The radical practice I focus on in this research is childcare as I feel it stands exemplary for all kinds intersubjective care relations that are largely invisible and devalued in German, Dutch and other societies. I set out with two interrelated research questions:

How do activist parents figure their experiences with children and collective childcare in social movements and (how) are these practices translated into their activism? Do they thereby redefine practices and imaginaries of caring and relating in communities and social movements?

I choose to describe these practices as a ‘commoning of childcare’ because, as soon as they are situated in activist spaces or social movements, they become part of broader struggles to build sustainable alternatives, living autonomous from both state and market.

Two issues, which I see pressing in both the participant’s social movements and feminist philosophy/social theory, can be detected as main starting points for the project. The first one is what Khasnabish and Haiven call the “double crisis of reproduction” (2014, p.94). The second one is a paradox of how to engage with questions of critique and affirmativity, of negativity and creativity in critical thinking and radical practices. The double crises of reproduction means that everyone in society faces challenges when reproducing their (social life) in capitalism. Attacks on people’s means for survival in the form of austerity measures, such as privatizations, cut backs to the welfare state or the precaritization of the labor force, started in the 1980s with what is often referred to as neoliberalisation. It has risen to a peak since, at least, the economic crises in 2008. All this causes a crises of social reproduction, which, as Marxist feminists argue, is largely battled on the backs of women and described as processes of accumulation by dispossession (Hartsock, 2011; Winker, 2011). There is also a more specific crises, a crisis in the reproduction of social movements in the global north, which is characterized by “egoism and loneliness, breakdowns in communication, burnout resulting from endless struggles against movement and individual entropy and consequences of grappling with success and failure” (Haiven/Khasnabish, 2014, p.95). Both these crises became apparent at certain points in many of my research participants’ lives. And both these crises are addressed by feminist voices in the common/s debates.

The second pressing issue, is the paradox of critique and affirmativity, of negativity and creativity in critical thinking and radical practices. With good reason, Radical Left and anarchist movements are negating and critiquing the present as a basis for struggles for sociopolitical change. However, it seems that there is growing discontent with using strategies that, all too often, only react instead of actively construct alternatives. As Janneke’s quote in the beginning of this

introduction exemplifies, there is a desire to experiment with a “different world” (Janneke), to be creative and to affirm the possibilities opening up in the here and now. The commons debates can be seen as one of the discursive fields in which these kinds of questions around creativity and ‘possibilities for the new’ are brought up and debated. However, in the discussions of the relations of commons and class struggles (deAngelis, 2012) or the relations of commons and capital (Federici/Caffrentzis, 2014), the ‘old’ question of negativity necessarily comes back. Feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti calls this tension a paradox in her own work. She asks, “how [can we] engage in affirmative politics, which entails the creation of sustainable alternatives geared to the construction of social horizons of hope, while at the same time doing critical theory, which implies a resistance to the present?” (Braidotti, 2011, p.267). This paradox is constantly present in this thesis, sometimes explicitly, always implicitly.

One way to handle this paradox resonates in my theoretical work, in which I bridge the gap between the different approaches to care relations implicit in feminist voices in the common/s debates. While Marxist feminists stress the violent ways that the gendered division of labour organizes care work in patriarchal capitalism, feminist philosophies of the subject hope that ethical possibilities will evolve out of (care) relations. With the work of feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray and some scholars stressing the importance of her thought, I argue that these strands, and notions of care implicit in them, are intimately entangled feminist concerns. These strands are situated in violent systems caught up in what Irigaray terms the logic of the One/the Same, in which care relations and people involved therein are pushed into a feminized and depoliticized social sphere. This structure of socio-, economic and symbolic orders therefore shows itself in the ways care relations figure in society and in the deep structures of subject constitution. Discussing the possibilities of radical change, Irigaray (1993b) underlines radical changes needed on different levels, stressing the fact that there is no way not to care:

Social functioning has to be ensured in some other way. The relation to space-time must be modified and micro- and macrocosmic rhythms must be trusted. This will entail a reduction - without new sacrifice - in the condensation of time, the concentration of space, which have been built upon immolation - of man, of animals, more secretly of plants and growing things, of our elementary food and space, etc. (p.82).

Irigaray also offers concepts with which to think about an ethics in which two subjects can engage in horizontal, non-dominating ways of relating through the bringing into representation of the negative as that which exceeds the male symbolic order. Following this, I am indebted to her for the

way she has made me see both oppressive and enabling forms of relating, and for changes in my research data.

This thesis sets out to explore the ways parent activists talk about their practices of collective childcare in social movements and the ethical-political possibilities emanating from them. It builds on the experiences, knowledge and powerful stories of people who are engaged in communities that are always already practicing forms of commoning, whether this is in a ‘Vokü’³, a living project or an activist camp. These kinds of commoning experiences shape Janneke’s answer to her son’s despair about a lack of alternatives. She says: “I can tell them, yes there is an alternative, because I know a lot of people who do things in a different way [referring to squats/house projects]”. And later on in the interview: “So, I believe in the bubbles that rise everywhere, connected. And then if it grows bigger it grows bigger. If it doesn't it doesn't” (Janneke). She thereby also touches upon the experimental nature of every commoning practice and the uncertainty of where these might lead. Federici phrases the same impression, thereby also making a statement on the necessity to see both negativity and creativity as political strategies:

The challenge we face is to build a commons that must necessarily be transitional in form, thus to some extent they must be of an experimental nature, existing as they do in a society where private property relations, for now, remain hegemonic (2013, p.100).

A society, I add, where also a patriarchal logic of the Same frames both intersubjective relations in communities and the position of care relations in society. This thesis collects and actively convokes the kind of radical imagination that has the potential to transform these social relations in fundamental ways, thereby situating this imagination not in, as so often proclaimed, the realm of the arts or a far away utopia, but in the practices of childcare in activist communities and the collective reflections of these.

Trajectory of the Thesis

The theoretical explorations of Chapter 1 can be seen as small, interdisciplinary research projects in themselves, in which I let Marxist feminists theories speak to feminist philosophies of the subject in order to develop a complex and critical picture of change and transformation in the socio-symbolic and economic order. Further, I add Irigaray’s perspective to the common/s debates, in which calls for new subjectivities are so far under-theorized. The theoretical chapter is also deeply intertwined with my field research, doing the ground-work for the perspective I take in my analysis. Chapter 2

³ The English equivalent would be a collective soup kitchen.

delves deeper into the methodological choices I have already touched upon, paying special attention to my role as a researcher and the potentials and dangers of participatory social movement research. The research process and methods are described. The methodology chapter is followed by three analysis chapters, in which the participant’s narratives and reflections are read with the theory. Each of these chapters focuses on a specific theme.

Chapter 3 deals with the spatial and temporal dimensions that confine practices of collective childcare in the participants’ movements, and therefore the emanating radical imaginations. As one participant in the workshop reminded me, “negative experiences are part of the radial imagination, as are positive ones”. It became apparent that the participants struggle with police repression, state regulations and the enclosure of autonomous spaces. I also noticed the construction of a specific type of a ‘successful’ activist and an assumed norm of ‘correct’ and ‘productive’ activism in this context. Alternatives to this construction became the main focus in Chapter 4 and 5. Starting from Irigaray’s understanding that for new forms of social functioning to come into being, “the relation to space-time must be modified” (Irigaray, 1993, p.82), I carve out traces of alternative spatialities (Chapter 4) and alternative temporalities (Chapter 5) in the participants’ childcare practices. I show that these experiences and active reflection have the potential to trouble the construction of the ‘successful’ activist and the predominant ‘productivity ethos’ in the participants’ movements. The practices, therefore, carry great ethical-political possibilities for transforming the ways the sociopolitical order figures into their activist communities and beyond.

This thesis aims to contribute to different debates and spheres of knowledge production, crossing borders between the binary poles of activism and academia, intervening in both debates on new political strategies in social movements and academic discussions in the broad field of feminist critical theory. These different spheres meet in my (re)thinking and rearranging of the central concepts of common/s, care and the imagination. In regards to my academic inquiry, it is an interdisciplinary endeavour, trying to build yet another knot in which Marxist feminist theory meets psychoanalytical feminist philosophy.

Chapter 1: Theory - Commoning the Care Relations between Oppression and political-ethical Possibilities

Commons will become increasingly important for feminist movements in Europe.

(Federici, 2013, p.93)

Could these small enclaves working in a different way cause the whole society to mutate? Some men and women are gambling they can. Their gamble is far from being a simple utopia, as others have claimed, but to succeed it relies on a highly rigorous code of ethics that prevents small cells from falling back into the system they are working against.

(Irigaray, 1993b, p.87)

With this thing of creativity or play, I can't really relate to that in my everyday practices. I can somehow understand it and I find an idea of defunctionalisation interesting. But I think that certain societal structures or certain things are just present. Also structures I would reject are that, in this house, we sometimes have to do things enormously, yes, rationally and functionally, because otherwise the project wouldn't exist. Well, if we wouldn't do that, we also wouldn't have the room where things could go differently. And I think this is often similar for me with many political struggles (Geschichten). That I think, ey no, the circumstances are so harsh/sick (krass) right now, that we maybe have to do other things that do not always already carry the utopian element within them, and instead maybe are simply a concrete defence.

(Lisa)⁴

I have described two starting points for my thesis project: A double crisis of reproduction and the question of the role of negativity in critical theory and social movements. The common/s debates serve as a discursive field around new radical political strategies that focuses on relations outside of capital or market. They address some pressing issues in social movements as well as material feminist philosophy and social theory. I have aligned myself with Federici's notions of anti-capitalist commons and their roles in social movements. The debates are also inspirational for my theoretical explorations of the ethical-political possibilities and stumbling blocks for practices of commoning childcare, and the roles that care relations play. This chapter is dedicated to two discourses within the commons debates that have rarely been connected, and their grabs on care

⁴ “Ich kann das zwar irgendwie nachvollziehen und finde ja so ne Idee von Defunktionalisierung auch interessant. Aber ich denk mir halt dass bestimmte gesellschaftliche Strukturen oder bestimmte Dinge ja auch einfach so präsent sind. Ja auch an Strukturen die ich ablehnen würde, das wir hier in diesem Haus manchmal irgendwie so ganz enorm, ja, rational und funktional Sachen tun müssen, weil es sonst dieses Projekt nicht geben würde. Und dann könnten wir damit dann auch nicht, also wenn wir das nicht tun würden, hätten wir diesen Raum auch nicht in dem Sachen auch anders laufen können. Und ich glaub bei so politischen Geschichten ist es bei mir of ähnlich. Das ich mir so denke ey nee, die Zustände sind einfach grad so krass, da müssen wir jetzt vielleicht einfach Dinge tun, die vielleicht nicht irgendwie das utopische Element immer schon in sich tragen, sondern vielleicht auch einfach ein konkreter Abwehrkampf sind” (Lisa).

relations. I would label both as explicitly feminist interventions as they represent philosophical standpoints and points of discussion that go beyond simply the common/s debates and into alliance with feminist ideals.

Firstly, feminists call for focusing attention on social and ecological reproduction (Federici, 2010; Mies&Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999). Social reproduction refers to a complex of activities and services that re-produce human beings, as well as commodity labour power. Commoning childcare is one form they can take. And secondly are calls for politics and ethics that deconstruct the patriarchal idea of the autonomous subject in favour of new relational subjectivities and intersubjective relation based on the acknowledgment of difference (DeAngelis, 2012, p.xiii). I do see these calls as being in line with a long history of feminist philosophical thinking. It is important to note that the discourses sometimes show up together in the work of proponents of the common/s debates. My distinguishing them is, therefore, analytical in the sense that I will think through their connections more deeply and more systematically than any of these texts have. I will do so by dedicating most of this chapter to arguing that they both deal with relations of care, critiquing how people involved are therein drawn into a feminized social sphere. This study, therefore, deals with the logic of the Same in different systems (economic, cultural symbolic, political). After bridging the gap between them, however, I will point out important differences that become obvious if they are posited in Braidotti's paradox of negativity/creativity.

Introducing the Common/s Debates

Before coming to two explicitly feminist strands, I want to map the debates on common/s in general. This will provide important context for the two feminist interventions. Of course it is impossible to map them in their entirety, as they are situated in diverse spaces such as activist communities, different academic disciplines and the World Bank. They cross a range of topics, from the arts to sustainable living, ethics or occupations of public spaces. Therefore, the summary I make can only be partial and is directed by choices following my research questions. As this research sets out to look for experiences and strategies in relation to childcare in spaces of radical social movements, I focus my discussion of struggles for common/s in the context of their revolutionary or emancipative potential, and interpret the use of the term by nonradical forces (i.e. the World Bank) as a discursive enclosure (Federici, 2010, p.40). As activist and scholar Massimo de Angelis (2012) phrases:

Thus the commons – their development, their networking, their survival – must be conceived within fields of power relations, and viewed not only as sites of alternative ways of reproducing life, but as sites of struggle, as well as potential targets of cooptation and enclosure (p.xiii).

In this sense, the language of the common/s presents both great possibilities for diverse spaces of exchange, and the dangers of being co-opted and reintroduced into the market or institutions of the Law. Following this diversity of the debates, it is difficult to frame what it is that all the perspectives might share. Nevertheless, I will try to point out some of the most basic commonalities.

A negative definition that all initiatives and thinkers using notions of common/s or communizing build upon, is that common/s are not property, neither state, market, public⁵ nor private. This means that no sovereign has a monopoly of decision-making or the means to limit access to a commons (Hardt, 2012, n.p.). For some proponents of the debate, fighting against property should lead to a third form that complements public and private property. For the more radical proponents, it is about going beyond the public and the private. The common/s debates further present a shift in thinking about radical politics. Analyzing a number of more or less well known English and French radical groups explicitly concerned with communizing their struggles, Benjamin Noys (2011) carves out three central directions of struggle these groups theorize: “Struggle as immediate, immanent, and as anti- identity” (p.8). While there are disputes over what these terms mean, they designate central directions that, I argue, apply to all debates on common/s I have encountered, and therefore can serve as an entry into the field. Communization is immediate in that there is no stage of socialism required in transition to communism and, in that, a linear idea of a way to the revolution is refused. Rather, its processual character is underlined. Some participants in the debates prefer the verb ‘commoning’ to talk about such practices. For some, this might mean to start building communism in the here and now. For others, Noys (2011) states, “contemporary struggles can only be negatively prefigurative, indicating the limits of our forms of struggle and indicating only possible new lines of attack” (p.9). Communization is immanent in that transformation is thought from within the conditions of global capitalism and not from some communist outside. There are disagreements, though, on how ‘holey’ the system is for spaces and times of revolt (ibid., p.9). Communization is anti-identity in that it is suspicious of both old

⁵ ‘Public’, here, means state regulated/owned.

identity markers of Marxism, such as the worker or proletarian, as well as newer forms of identity politics.

The common/s have to come with some kind of community (Federici, 2013), meaning that some kind of organizational (Hardt, 2012) or managerial (Ostrom, 1990) project is involved in ‘governing’ a common/s. Although I disagree with Nobel Prize winning economist Elinor Ostrom in the way she imagines a harmonious relation of commons to market and state, her empirical work on collective management of resources clearly shows how the myth of the ‘Tragedy of the Commons’⁶ is only that, a myth. She shows how the collective management of resources can be more effective and sustainable than other ways of organizing (Ostrom, 1990).

The German anarcho-syndicalist magazine *Wildcat* sees a number of different practical initiatives on the commons emerging mostly out of the former alter-globalisation movement: solidarity economies and collective house projects that try to anticipate a different society in the here and now; commons in the form of infrastructure; basic (re)production as a way to revolt; and communization within revolts (Wildcat, 2010a, n.p.). At the same time, the common is debated as what underlies the multitude, the new working class, in debates inspired by post-operaist Marxism (Wildcat, 2010a, n.p.). In this sense, disagreements and discussion already start with the language used. Is it commons in plural or the common in singular? In what follows, I elaborate upon both of these strands in order to show their possibilities for my endeavor.

The Common or Commons?

Within critical theory, Michael Hardt’s and Antonio Negri’s Trilogy of *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004) and *Commonwealth* (2009) are cornerstones. The latter book especially puts the question of the common at the centre of attention for many radical intellectuals and activists. Autonomist Marxists constitute the common not as an outside of capital but as a development inherent in the transformations of work in capitalism and the rise of what they term immaterial labour⁷: A labour that produces immaterial goods, such as services, and is based on cooperation and affects. This means that wealth of the material world is part of the common, but more central is immaterial wealth, such as knowledge, languages or affects (Hardt&Negri, 2009, p.viii). For Negri and Hardt,

⁶ ‘The tragedy of the commons’ is a theory by Garrett Hardin, who argues that common-pool resources are depleted as people rationally act in their self-interest rather than in the long-term collective interest (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tragedy_of_the_commons).

⁷ Quite explicitly, they turn away from the long philosophical line of dialectical thinking and align themselves with a new philosophical paradigm, associated with Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza and French philosopher Gilles Deleuze.

the question of the production of, access to and maintenance of the common is becoming more and more central in today's world. In fact, they claim that what builds continuity between current social movements and revolts, such as Occupy internationally or Democracia Real Ya in Spain, is the principle of a right to the common. This right to the common is basically the call for a right to democracy, not a representative one, but as a horizontal, collective and grassroots project (Hardt, 2012).

What comes together based on the common is neither the proletariat nor a revolutionary avant-garde, but the multitude, a concept invented to describe today's class society in which the shop-floor spreads beyond the factory and cooperative forms of work profoundly change the dominant mode of production. This already challenges capitalist laws of value. Consequently, the multitude is not composed of a unitary revolutionary subject following a singular strategy, but of a coming together of singularities in all their plurality. Philipp Metzger (2013), in an article published in the German speaking communist⁸ network *Ums Ganze...*'s magazine *Mole*, explicitly proposes the perspective of the multitude as a way to think about the “Blockupy - Solidarity Beyond Borders. Building Democracy from below” campaign, in which *Ums Ganze* is invested. The campaign labels a number of decentralised action days and two central actions days in Frankfurt that protest against European austerity politics. For the central actions, mobilization is regularly going on in other European countries, including the Netherlands. Referring first to Hardt and Negri's analysis of the Arab Revolts as a coming together of the Multitude, Metzger (2013) argues that Blockupy tries to achieve the same thing:

The only thing being important as a strategic lesson is to understand that a revolt can only be successful in a coming together of all kinds of different singularities. This is what we can learn from the strategy of (Post)Operaism. Also, that against this background Blockupy is an attempt to gather the different singularities (actors) in their plurality against the hegemonic-German crisis project. This should not replace the construction of sustainable structures and struggles - on the opposite - these are a part of it (p.40, my translation).⁹

⁸ In contrast to many other European countries, there has been an appropriation of the notion of communism in the German Radical Left, which explicitly distinguishes itself from historical and totalitarian socialism.

⁹ “Wichtig für die strategische Lektion ist nur, dass erkannt wird, dass jede Revolte nur in dem Zusammentreffen der unterschiedlichen Singularitäten gelingen kann. Das können wir von der Strategie des (Post-)Operaismus lernen. Ebenso, dass Blockupy vor diesem Hintergrund ein Versuch ist, die unterschiedlichen Singularitäten (Akteure) in der Pluralität gegen das hegemoniale deutsch-europäische Krisenprojekt zu sammeln. Das kann und soll nicht den kleinteiligen Aufbau von nachhaltigen Strukturen und Kämpfen ersetzen - ganz im Gegenteil - sie sind ein Teil davon” (Metzger, 2013, p.40).

This latter remark on the simultaneous need for sustainable structures and struggles resonates with what I, following *Wildcat*, will describe as the strand of the debates that uses the notion of commons in plural. In a way, it seems that Hardt and Negri, by using it in its singular version, propose a synthesized version of all kinds of struggles against state and private property. As James Read (2012), in a review essay on the trilogy, states:

Thus, the shift of terminology from the commons (plural) to the common (singular and/or multiple) is an attempt to synthesize and elevate these different terms, and different struggles over the production of wealth, into one central political and ontological condition (p.212).

Whereas their concepts of the multitude in relation to immaterial labour and their optimism of a ‘communism in waiting’ is convincingly criticized from a feminist and other perspectives, Hardt’s and Negri’s posing of ontology and the production of (alternative) subjectivities as political provides one interesting strand of the commons debates. They are seen as the “terrain from which [Hardt and Negri’s] ethical and political project must set off” (Hardt&Negri, 2009, p.x).

Indeed, there are numerous calls for the production of a different kind of subjectivity as a political and ontological concern in the common/s debates. These are calls for the deconstruction of the autonomous (patriarchal) subject in favour of new relational subjectivities based on the acknowledgment of difference. Teacher of law and activist Ugo Mattei, for example, states that instead of asking whether we have commons, we should ask in how far we are commons (Mattei, 2012, p.42). David Bollier asks in his blog:

But what if participating in commons produced a very different sort of human perception and subjectivity, and indeed, produced human beings as self-aware subjects/agents? What if this process could be shown to be essential in integrating human culture with a specific ecological landscape? (Bollier, 2014, n.p.)

In this latter quote, another important ontological presupposition of the strand of the debates inspired by Hardt and Negri (2009) becomes obvious. For them, the common is not positioning humanity as opposed to nature, exploiting or controlling it, “but focuses rather on the practices of interaction, care, and cohabitation in a common world, promoting the beneficial and limiting the detrimental forms of the common” (p.viii). The question, in terms of radical change, is not anymore who is the agent or revolutionary subject or from which identity to struggle, but rather what possibilities of becoming, in the Deleuzian sense, does commoning offer (ibid., p.x). Or, as I will

further conceptualize with the help of feminist philosophies of the subject, which kind of non-dominating forms of relating beyond self-other relations does it help to envision and/or enable?

Whereas the notion of the common is pretty clearly bound to Hardt and Negri's thinking, commons in plural is much more of a container for all kinds of struggles and resistances to the law of the markets. In this strand of the debates there are strong references to historical commons in pre-capitalist societies and social formations. These are very often the commons as described by Karl Marx, which, in a violent process of enclosure, were taken away from people in the beginning of capitalism or indigenous commons in South American before colonization (Mignolo, 2009). Here, it is inevitable to take postcolonial perspectives into account in order not to construct, romanticize and appropriate a foreign Other.¹⁰

Approaches using the notion of commons differ in their foci. Some bring into representation the myriad of community economies already existing as an invisible basis of capitalist value production. Others hope to find a new language to bring together all these different initiatives (Bollier, 2014), or focus on the actual construction of alternative social relations of (re)production around resources governed by communities. A construction of alternative and possibly autonomous commons is thereby often connected to values differing from the capitalist law of value and production for people's needs, not profit. In 2013 an event in Berlin titled 'Economics and the Commons Conference'¹¹ brought together 'commoners' from all over the world to discuss its multiple facets in different streams called Money, Markets and Value; Knowledge Culture and Science; Land and Nature; Infrastructures for Commoning; and most interestingly in the context of my research project, Working and Caring. New York based artists Rene and Ayreen organized a similar, but much smaller and locally based event, an 'Uncommon Festival of the Commons'¹² in Utrecht, Netherlands, during their residency with the art institute *CasCo - Office for Art, Design and Theory*. This festival tried to bring together 'commoners', such as artists and other activists from and around Utrecht, to exchange ideas. Several blogs and online platforms are set up for the same purpose.¹³

¹⁰ In an article in the magazine *Turbulence*, Walter Mignolo shows important differences between indigenous concepts of 'the communal' and leftist notions of 'the commons', underlining that reading the former from within the latter western-European logics perpetuates forms of violence and coloniality (Mignolo, 2009, p.29).

¹¹ Website of conference: <http://commonsandconomics.org/>

¹² Announcement of the festival: <http://new.cascoprojects.org/opening-uncommon-festival-of-the-commons>

¹³ i.e. <http://onthecommons.org/>, <https://commonsblog.wordpress.com>, <http://www.gemeingueter.de/>

To conclude for now, the language of and debates around the commons pose both socio-ontological and political questions (Griffoen, 2011), and practices of commoning are apparent all over the world even though they may not be named as such. The debates around them are diverse and multiscalar, allowing for a lot of space and many voices in the project of rethinking what a radical politics can and should be nowadays. Following *Wildcat*, I have described two strands of the debate, one using the notion of the common and another employing commons in plural. The two explicitly feminist voices in the discourses, which I summarize in what follows, can each be positioned within one of these strands.

Explicitly Feminist Voices in the Debates

Perhaps not surprisingly, the debates on commons are largely male dominated, including but a few feminist voices. The conviction underlying this thesis is that the commons debates have great potential in imagining and practicing a new kind of politics, but only if feminist knowledge and perspectives are taken into account. There is ground that feminist critique and the debates on common/s share, for example the importance of the everyday or the need to challenge the idea of the autonomous subject of The Enlightenment.

The first strand of explicitly feminist interventions into the debates brings feminist critiques of the gendered division of labour in capitalism to the commons. I would classify most of these as calls to put the organization of social reproduction and, more specifically, human to human care relations into the centre of struggles around commons, both on the level of society and on the small-scale level of activist communities. These are responses to what I describe as two ‘crises of reproduction’, one on the level of society and one as a crisis of social movement reproduction. Both of these crises are addressed by feminist voices in the commons debates. These voices reveal capitalism’s invisible base of reproductive work. Activist and scholar Silvia Federici is probably the most visible of these voices. Federici comes from a line of Marxist feminist thinking that has long been campaigning for the recognition of housework as work, and is currently diagnosing a crisis of social reproduction in the global north. Following the cut back of welfare states, she argues for experiments with collective forms of reproduction:

One crucial reason for creating collective forms of living is that the reproduction of human beings is the most labor-intensive work on earth and, to a very large extent, it is work that is irreducible to mechanization. We cannot mechanize childcare, care for the ill, or the

psychological work necessary to reintegrate our physical and emotional balance (Federici, 2010, p.145).

The work Federici refers to here is a specific but central part of what is considered reproductive activity, namely care¹⁴ work formed by direct human-to human relations. A sphere of work that is fundamentally restructured in contemporary capitalism, and in times of its re(privatization) (Winker, 2011). Federici is not the only one underlining the need to construct commons in the global north, especially around relations of care. A debate in the weekly Berlin-based newspaper *Jungle World* following the ‘Care Action Conference 2014’ takes a similar approach. All articles stress the need to find new and potentially emancipative ways to organize reproductive needs in times of a crisis of social reproduction. Bini Adamczak and Margarita Tsomou see a space for self-organised networks of solidarity, production and distribution in the current dissolution of older structures. They argue:

In the construction and defense of these solidarity relations we do see the possibility to counter individualized subjectification without falling into the trap of the citizen-subject. What we aim for in connection to the global movement are relations based on commons, which eke out and provide social, health, affective and economic safety¹⁵ (Adamczak/Tsomou, 2014, p.9; my translation).

The group *d.i.s.s.i.d.e.n.t.*, organized in another big activist network in Germany, the *Interventionistische Linke*, explicitly criticizes the lack of focus on the everyday reproductive activities in the Radical Left in Germany. They not only propose to make visible this work, but also to think through it in terms of building alternative structures in movements:

This is why we set out to ask, from a feminist perspective, how needs could be handled in our ‘socialization’-utopia and where we can start today to build a part of a better society through an emancipatory understanding of needs and their satisfaction¹⁶ (d.i.s.s.i.d.e.n.t., 2012, p.17; my translation).

¹⁴ I consider reproduction and care as sister concepts (Hughes et. al., 2005, p.259).

¹⁵ “In der Konstruktion und Verteidigung solcher solidarischer Beziehungsweisen sehen wir die Möglichkeit, der individualisierenden Subjektivierung zu begegnen, ohne dem Staatssubjekt anheimzufallen. Was wir im Anschluss an die globalen Bewegungen anstreben, sind auf Commons basierende Beziehungen, die soziale, gesundheitliche, affektive und ökonomische Sicherheit erkämpfen und zur Verfügung stellen” (Adamczak/Tsomou, 2014, p.9)

¹⁶ “Daher haben wir uns auf den Weg gemacht aus einer feministischen Perspektive heraus zu fragen, wie es sich denn mit den Bedürfnissen in unserer Vergesellschaftungs- Utopie zu verhalten hätte und wo wir heute schon beginnen können, durch ein emanzipatorisches Verständnis von Bedürfnissen und deren Befriedigung ein Stück „bessere“ Gesellschaft zu verwirklichen” (d.i.s.s.i.d.e.n.t., 2012, p.17).

Therefore, the first strand is full of debates in respect to both a vision for society as a whole and possibilities for social movement strategies.

The second strand of the debates I label as feminist focuses on the transformative potential of the common on an ontological level, calling for new forms of subjectivity outside of the autonomous male subject. Several texts on care work in a special issue of the online journal *The Commoner* are exemplary. In their preface, Massimo de Angelis (2012) mentions that, “commoning must include a transforming of subjectivities” (p.13). “The Regeneracion Childcare Manifesto” (2009) states: “We believe childcare is a central part of our creative activity as a people, a kind of labor that creates and molds subjectivity, producing human beings who can interact with others and cooperate with their peers” (p.399). Rosaria Adrian Vargas, who comes from a Bolivian feminist organization, was interviewed by Federici (2012) about their their objective and describes it as follows: “We have dealt with many social problems: violence against women, the construction of our autonomous economy. Our objective is to build an autonomous political subject starting from a women’s perspective” (p.430). Federici (2010) also claims that, “indeed, if commoning has any meaning, it must be the production of ourselves as a common subject” (p.145). In the German context, *d.i.s.s.i.d.e.n.t.* connects the construction of alternatives to an existing tension between autonomy and dependency, as described by psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin. This tension is covered up by the construct of the autonomous male subject in neoliberal capitalism. The group concludes:

What follows is a discussion about needs and capacities, which can be meaningfully used and negotiated in collective spaces and in the tension field of the autonomy and dependency of subjects¹⁷ (*d.i.s.s.i.d.e.n.t.*, 2012, p.21; my translation).

These are some of the few interventions into political debates on new strategies that bring into contact autonomous social reproduction in commons with a need for reconfigurations of subjectivity. However, only *d.i.s.s.i.d.e.n.t.* goes beyond a mere call for the latter, trying to think them together more systematically.¹⁸ I see the need and the possibility to connect the two in productive ways. For me, this is taking the most useful contributions from debates associated with *the common*, namely their ontological inquiries into subjectivities, and combine them with the contributions on debates on *the commons*, which try to counteract the devaluation/invisibility of

¹⁷ “Daran schließt sich die Diskussion um Bedürfnisse und Fähigkeiten an, die in kollektiven Rahmen und im Spannungsfeld von Anerkennung und Autonomie der Subjekte verhandelt und sinnvoll eingesetzt werden könnte”.

¹⁸ Interestingly, there also seems to be a growing interest in common/s from the side of philosophers dealing with reconstitution of subjectivities and ethical relations in difference (Thiele, 2014; Couze, 2014). A field of discussion I am not able to cover in this thesis, but which is promising in terms of a more systematic thinking-through of these connections.

social reproductive activities within them. These latter contributions shed light on some of the most important relations producing subjectivities. Exactly this intersection of the two strands of the common/s debates is the entry point I take in my empirical (Chapters 3-5) inquiry into practices of childcare in social movements. In what follows, I use the work of feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray to build a theoretical argument that systematically bridges the gap between the discourses,. In order to do so, I first elaborate on each one's perspective on the notion of care.

Perspectives on Care

It serves my research on practices and values of childcare, as well as my theoretical argument, to go a bit deeper into the notion of care. I will do so by extracting what both strands of the common/s debates as described above have to say about it. This gives a perspective on care that does justice to the complexity involved in thinking about relations of care.

In general, there are many different perspectives on care in feminist theory. All of them share, I argue, at least two things. Firstly, a focus on care as relational and embodied, building on mutual needs and interdependencies between humans and non-humans (Held, 2006; Hamington, 2014). Secondly, the underlying assumption that it is impossible not to care. Philosopher Maurice Hamington, as well as artist and psychoanalytic thinker Bracha Ettinger use a horrible circumstance, the experiences of Jews in the holocaust, to show this fact. As Hamington (2014) states: “Care is irrepressible. It is like the weed that grows through the cracks of a city sidewalk. If the human will to care exists, even repressive circumstances cannot stop it” (p.2). Ettinger goes further, making care not a matter of will, but rather an effect of a matrixial space of relationally that underlies the symbolic order (2009, p.7).¹⁹ Most of the differences in approaches to care are, as Hughes, McKie, Hopkins and Watson (2005) note in a wonderful article on ethics of care and the disabled people's movement, differences in emphasis. Where, i.e., some focus on the care-giver in that relation, others focus more on the recipient of care. The dynamics of care are envisioned differently.

What then is the difference of notions of care in both strands of the debate? Assigning specific notions of care to each strand is surely simplifying and always only schematic, as both draw on a long history of complex and sometimes conflicting thought.²⁰ I show that for the Marxist

¹⁹ It would be interesting to further inquire in which ways her theory, which focuses on the pre-symbolic or non-symbolic sphere of the matrixial, helps to rethink the notion of care.

²⁰ Therefore, although it might sound different sometimes, I am well aware that there is no such thing as THE Marxist feminists or THE feminist philosophies of sexual difference. I mostly pick specific names, namely Silvia Federici and Luce Irigaray, as representatives.

feminist approach to commons, care relations are often seen as a barrier to women's emancipation, whereas the other strand sees possibilities for new ethical relations, which represent what is left outside of the phallogocentric order.

Proponents of the debates aligning themselves with a Marxist feminist tradition of thought argue for the need to put social reproduction at the centre of struggles. They do so out of a perspective that underlines the oppressive or dominating forms care relations take for care-givers in the intersection of racist, sexist and capitalist systems. Against common assumptions about reproductive activities, such as childcare or housework being a 'labour of love', the Marxist feminist tradition has, since the 1970s, been arguing for the recognition of these practices as work. While pursuing this strategy, some also emphasize the nature of this reproductive work as functioning within different logic and values than traditional productive labour (Donath 2000, p.11). Federici argues that women were historically more dependent on access to communal resources than men because of their responsibility for reproductive work like housework and childcare (Federici, 2010). Together with this work, women were, in the advent of the industrialization, confined to the newly created private sphere. Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen (1999), feminists focusing on ecological commons, state:

In this process, slowly but steadily the economic importance of work in the house, with children, and on the subsistence farm - all mainly done by women - was neglected, until it became socially totally invisible. Now it is no longer considered as work, but only as a mere labour of love. In other words, women's work has been idealised and at the same time de-economised (p.154).

From a global perspective of spatial interdependence, Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen connects capitalism's need for housewives in the global north with colonies in the global south, both serving as non-market sectors of capitalist expansion. This means that care relations are bound to a global division of labour and class system. These spheres, as constitutive outsides to capitalist value practices,²¹ are substantially being reorganized in postfordist capitalism. Federici and Mies, in line with many other activists and scholars in the commons debates, stress capitalist enclosures of commons. Indeed, capitalism is an extremely flexible system, continually involving new influences and events in the cycle of accumulation. This process is necessary as capitalism is also a crises-ridden system, haunted by the over-accumulation it continually produces.²² One of the important

²¹ For a more complex conceptualisation of capitalist value practices and their outside see: De Angelis (2007, p.227)

²² In a situation of over-accumulation, there is too much capital that cannot be reinvested profitably.

perspectives on this constitutive relation between capital and commons is therefore a spatial one. Not without reason do the most interesting accounts I draw upon in this thesis come from human geographers, such as David Harvey or Doreen Massey. The latter thinker’s conceptualization of space, care and responsibility will become important in Chapter 4.

A more nuanced account of processes as described by different Marxist feminists, not all of whom are active participants in the common/s debates, contextualizes this first strand of feminist interventions as the commons debates. Nancy Hartsock (2006) describes the current processes of capitalist enclosure of former non-capitalist relations and resources as “accumulation by dispossession”²³ (p.167). These enclosures, she argues alongside Federici, are deeply gendered in terms of who is affected as well as in their (ideological) structure. Hartsock sees four dialectically interrelated processes of accumulation by dispossession. The most fundamental one is that they involve a transformation of social reproduction. Exemplary here is the case of care work. On the one hand, care work as maintenance for the elderly and infirm is provided more and more by private enterprises under the pressure of making profits (Hartsock, 2011, p.22). These processes are becoming even more violent due to what feminist economist Mascha Madörin (2011) terms “diverging productivities”, meaning that the relative productivity of the care sector cannot increase as much as that of other sectors in the economy, or, rather, if it tries to, an immense loss in quality of the work will follow (p.59).²⁴ On the other hand, feminists show the huge amount of (care) work undergoing re-privatization. This concerns, for example, the high numbers of migrant domestic workers who work during an era of irregular un-free labour or the fact that women have to somehow compensate the amount of work welfare states cared for before. In this sense, no space outside of market relations can be easily championed as an emancipative common.

It is from these analyses that a focus on struggles for autonomous reproduction arises, a focus that is still always connected to struggles of making visible that reproductive work is women’s labour and to pointing out how it is devalued in all spheres of society. Care relations, as they are organized in the current economic system and along the public/private divide, are demonized and seen as exploitative of women’s lives. Similarly, other feminist debates underline that direct human-to-human care relation, i.e., between carers and children or disabled recipients of care, all too often reproduces dominating structures. In these, the main recipient of care is not taken

²³ The concept of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ is originally developed by David Harvey, who derives it from Marx’s analysis of primitive accumulation (Harvey, 2003, p.137)

²⁴ This means that there is an economic reason for care work’s low paid position in society, as Mascha Madörin points out (2011). In the rest of the thesis, I leave this aside and rather focus on other reasons for the devaluation of care work.

serious as a subject (adultism, ableism) and/or is infantilized. In fact, disabled or children's bodies are actively constructed in these relations as being dependent.

While not all of the contributions to the common/s debate that focus on the transformative potential of practices of commoning for subjectivities explicitly use the notion of care, they do share the relational ontology associated with care and they hope for arising ethical relations in difference. As Helene Cixous states, while there are structures of domination in care, “it is also a ‘gift’ and as such it is redolent with positive properties such as ‘generosity, trust, confidence, love, commitment, delight and esteem’”(in Hughes et. al, 2005, p.263). In this sense, some feminists are drawn to the ethical possibilities of care as a gift, just as proponents of the commons debates are drawn to similar ethical possibilities of relations in a common/s community. The hope in both cases is that new subjectivities and non-patriarchal/racist forms of self/other relations can arise in collective experiments. Care, then, is much more than labour. It is also inherently relational and therefore “other directed” (Hammington, 2014, p.5). It “transcends the dualisms of body and mind, self and other, will and social construction, personal and political”(ibid. p.1). It is a practice and a value (Held, 2006, p.42) that might be able to bring to the fore that which is left out in the male imaginary of autonomy and in an ethics based on notions of justice. The approaches to a ‘relational ethics’ or ‘ethics of love’ (Irigaray, 1993; Benjamin, 1982) by both the growing Anglo-Saxon field of ‘ethics of care’ (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2006; Tronto, 1993) and feminist psychoanalysis deal with exactly this from different angles (law, politics, sociology or philosophy).

The different perspectives on care are understandable considering the standpoints and subjects its users come from or are engaged in. These conflicting positions are the same that Hughes et al. see between feminist approaches to the ethics of care and the aims of the disabled people's movement (DPM). In their article, “Love's Labours Lost? Feminism, the Disabled People's Movement and an Ethic of Care” they aim to:

Transcend the binaries of an analysis derived from clear and distinct gendered subject positions and embodied political standpoints of feminism and the DPM by arguing that the relations of care draw all those involved in it into a feminized social space. We also propose that the feminization of care in a phallogentric culture makes participants in the caring relationship – regardless of gender identity – necessarily subordinate (2005, p.260).

In what follows, I pursue a similar approach in order to bring together the two discourses of the common/s debates and their descriptions of the dynamics of care relations. My principal theoretical source for this will be the work of Luce Irigaray.

Care Relations as Other of the Same - Intertwining Discourses in the Common/s Debates

Irigaray is one of many feminist psychoanalysts who has long been defending an ontological assumption about the radical relationality and dependency of the subject, and a critique of how this relationality is formed and made invisible in patriarchy (Benjamin, 1982; Ettinger, 2006; Irigaray, 1993a). This patriarchal subject is institutionalized in subject constitution, as described by traditional psychoanalysis, in which one must separate from the “mother-monster” in order to become a subject (Ettinger, 2006, p.118). Differently, Irigaray underlines the primal experience of a mother-child relation of dependency before the Oedipus scene and before the Law of the Father, and states:

The exclusivity of this law refuses all representation to that first body, that first home, that first love. These are sacrificed and provide matter for an empire of language that so privileges the male sex as to confuse it with the human race (1993b, p.14).

In this sense, while children appear irregularly in her work, they are always implicit in her thinking of relationality. The early mother-infant relation builds the substrate of the patriarchal symbolic order and imaginary. Thereby, the complicated difference between a relation of a ‘male-child’ and a ‘female child’ to the mother is immediately repressed and replaced by the logic of the One/the Same, in which the child is defined negatively as Other of the adult, as an unfinished ‘grown-up’ and a form of property of the father (Gill-Peterson, 2013, n.p.). This also means that, in a way, woman relates to man as does a child to an adult. Julian Gill-Peterson summarizes Irigaray’s thoughts: “as a product of strict genealogy, the child is only quantifiable through an equation of sameness to the adult, along degrees of resemblance and likeness, according to which it is always less than the adult, unfinished, awaiting psychic acculturation” (2013). Queer theorist and Lacanian Lee Edelman, in his book *No Future. Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), shows what consequences things like an Image of the Child can also have on politics. The figure of the Child becomes the all-accepted justification for any politics in the sense that if you are fighting ‘for the children’ it is assumed you are on the right side, for sure:

In its coercive universalization, however, the image of the Child, not to be confused with the lived experiences of any historical children, serves to regulate political discourse-to prescribe what will count as political discourse-by compelling such discourse to accede in advance to the reality of a collective future whose figurative status we are never permitted to acknowledge or address (Edelmann, 2004, p.11).

While Edelman goes on to criticize this ‘reproductive futurism’ from a queer perspective, I simply want to underline with Edelman that this figure of the Child emanates from the logic of the One, a desire for being one, which in Lacan’s theory of the split subject can only ever be Imaginary (ibid., p.10). Consequently, the image has not much to do with the flesh and blood of ‘real’ children. The question of ethical relations to children with respect for differences, not in the sense of ‘different from’ but radically different, is one that parallels Irigaray’s thought on horizontal relations between man and woman, as elaborated later in this chapter.

A representation of Irigaray’s rich and controversial thought can always only be insufficient. I focus on aspects of her analysis of how violent subject-object (male-female) relations come into being and are institutionalized in different systems. I will do so in order to show that these systems are built on an excluded, feminized social space, from which both strands of the common/s debates can be said to ‘speak’. The work on Irigaray’s thought by Morny Joy, Linda Daley and Gail Schwab will help me make these connections.

Irigaray’s attempts have always been to uncover and critique the logic of the One and the economies of the Same of Western patriarchy, logic and economies that can only function in the exclusion or elimination of other(s); the denial of difference in favour of sameness (Schwab, 1998, p.81). Her work says a lot about the way self-other relations are violently organized. Women are, according to Irigaray, that which is excluded and objectified. They are the builder of the ‘house of language’ without possessing it and are associated with the mother who, in the Lacanian mirror stage, has to be repressed and separated from in order to enter the symbolic order (Soiland, 2010, p. 324). Thereby, the gendered separation of form from matter, culture from nature is institutionalized with the mother being deemed the latter and all women associated with not being full subjects. Instead of having the position of a subject, women are the object: the lack upon which the male subject position relies. Therefore, according to Irigaray, sexual difference does not exist and every relation to the other is one between a subject and an object. In explaining this relation, she further argues that women lack a limit, a third term needed to become a subject. She explains misogyny as caused by fear of the seemingly unlimited feminine:

The one who offers or allows desire moves and envelops, engulfing the other. It is moreover a danger if no third term exists. Not only to serve as a limitation. This third term can occur within the one who contains as a relation of the latter to his or her own limit(s): relation to the divine, to death, to the social, to the cosmic. If a third term does not exist within and for the container, he or she becomes all- powerful (Irigaray, 1993, p.12).

An identity²⁵ for women as different from man is sacrificed. Against this background it is not surprising that Irigaray critiques philosophical discussions on the gift, one strand that feeds into the commons and care debates, for their championing sacrifice (and heroism).

Her critique is highly relevant not only because I do see one strand of the commons debates rooted in these philosophical discussions, but because Irigaray's intervention shows, contrary to some critiques, she does not simply idealize the feminine. Instead, Joy, drawing upon Irigaray's work, criticizes the often too easily reproduced opposition between the gift/sacrifice and exchange/work. She further argues that the binary is not only a false one, but gendered. Starting from anthropological descriptions of gifting and sacrificing, she states: There is a "(lack of) place of women in the description of these procedures" (1999, p.316). Taking up Irigaray's work, she shows how women are made invisible while "providing the infrastructure of the entire socio-cultural-economic apparatus of patriarchy"(ibid., p.318). Historically, women are bound to a giving for nothing but love. This is not only made invisible but, at least since the coming into being of the nuclear family, often organized in patriarchal and oppressive ways, i.e. binding women to their households. So, while women are maligned and excluded in these earlier accounts of gift economies, they tend to be idealized as a side of excess in later philosophical accounts. Braidotti asks: "Why do men, when their system appears on the brink of collapse, appeal to the 'feminine', as emblematic of a force, external to their system, which may provide a viable alternative? The ultimate irony is that this 'feminine' has no relation whatsoever to flesh and blood women" (in Joy, 1999, p.325).

This remark is of utter importance considering that the common/s debates are, in a way, intensified attempts at dealing with the capitalist crisis that continues from 1970s. Dichotomies between logics of exchange and logics of gift, the latter idealized as a site of transformation, are problematic. In fact, they are false dichotomies produced by thinkers uncritically affirming the great binaries of Western philosophy. John Cutler Shershow shows that the opposition between the work and the gift is false in modern day capitalism, caught up in the same logic of productivity. Cutler-Sherdhow (2005) sees "how even writers engaged in powerful and necessary critiques of work

²⁵ It is important to note that Irigaray's conception of gendered identity differs from common understandings of it in, i.e., the Anglophone tradition of Gender Studies. Here, I follow Tove Soiland, who argues that these differences are grounded in different understandings of the subject and subjectivization. Irigaray sticks with the Lacanian split subject, whereas for Judith Butler and some of her followers, the subject becomes multiple. In the latter, the subject and its gender identity is constituted through attributions of specific identities and other conflicting social discourses. In contrast, the gender/sex of the split subject is constructed on a different level/register than other social identities, a register in which the unconscious has a crucial role. Consequently, gender identity is constituted through a different dynamic than attributions only. See also: Soiland (2010, p.21). One could further argue that Judith Butler, in her reception of Lacan's theory of the subject, collapses the registers of the symbolic and the imaginary into one another.

under capitalism cannot give up their faith in creativity and self-development as definitive characteristic of the human condition”(p.4). The gift then is drawn back into “the horizon of rational exchange” and therefore is work’s ally rather than contestator. Joy reveals dichotomies of gift/exchange as false dichotomies in the same way that Irigaray argues that what is termed ‘women’ in the patriarchal symbolic order is still caught up in the logic of the One, not allowing for real sexual difference because woman is excluded from this as the other of the other. Irigaray herself criticizes the close association of the gift with sacrifice in the Western Christian tradition. She is suspicious of any idealization of economies of the gift as being outside of values of exchange. As Linda Daley (2012) argues, she is unsure whether a feminine gift economy would turn into another appropriative and phallogocentric system. Instead, she searches for a new system of non-exploitative exchange between women, and between men and women (p.59).

Irigaray’s Essays on Political Economy - Making Analogies

Just as Federici and Mies, from the perspective of women’s unpaid labour, are careful not to champion the commons as an emancipative outside of capital per se, so Irigaray urges not to too easily idealize the gift as an opposite to exchange. All three thinkers arrive at this note of caution by showing that which is made invisible: the feminine sphere. In her article “Luce Irigaray's Sexuate Economy”, Daley (2012) shows how Irigaray makes an analogous move by psychoanalyzing Marx as a big man of western thought. She reveals a logic of capitalist exchange in which women function as commodities. In her political economy essays ‘Commodities Among Themselves’, “Women on the Market” and “Women, the Sacred and Money”, Irigaray uses analogies to weave the discourses of psychoanalysis and Marx:

Where psychoanalysis posits a subject whose identity is constituted by the exchange of unconscious processes of desire, it does so by positing an account of feminine identity that is opposite, complementary or lacking in its relation to its male counterpart, and thus offers a disavowed masculinity as the model of its subject. Where Marx offers a notion of the subject as produced by a system of exchange based on its historical material relations to the means of production, it is a subject divested of psychic and corporeal processes that is sexually neutral (Daley 2012, p.64).

Irigaray argues that this seemingly gender neutral subject of Marxist theory is in fact male, as is the economy of exchange in capitalism. It is an exchange in which only men take part, while women “lend themselves to alienation in consumption, and to exchanges in which they do not

participate...” (Irigaray in *ibid.*, 2012, p.65). In Marxist theory, the commodity is split in its use value and exchange value. Irigaray argues that this distinction becomes a false one as Marx, in the end, leaves out the former. A commodity seems to be solely its exchange value, a value that is only discerned in the body of another commodity. It is valued for what it is not: its exchange value comes into being through a relation to an other and is fed by transcendent human labour, which is yet another commodity in capitalism (*ibid.*, 2012, p.67). The mirror relation carved out in psychoanalytical subject formation comes back here.²⁶ This double function of the commodity is similar to the role of women as either mothers-wives, bearers of use value, virgins or bearers of exchange value in the symbolic order (*ibid.*, p.65). In this sense, children are exchanged by women to get status: “Women trade children - with no explicit market organization - in exchange for a market status for themselves, insofar as they are objects of value or maternal subject (?) or function as mothers” (Irigaray, 1993b, p.84). And the analogies Irigaray draws go further. She takes up the role of money as special commodity in Marxist analysis, showing that its role as general equivalent of value in capitalism equals the role of the phallus as a symbol in subjectivization (*ibid.*, p.67).

In other [Irigaray’s] words, all the social regimes of ‘History’ are based upon the exploitation of one ‘class’ of producers, namely women. Whose reproductive use value (reproductive of children and the labour force) and whose constitution as exchange value underwrite the symbolic order as such, without any compensation in kind going to them for that ‘work’. (Irigaray, 1985, p.173).²⁷

Irigaray’s argument is very much in line with Federici’s analysis of women’s work in capitalism. Interesting is also the word ‘compensation’, as it resonates with the calls of other Marxist feminists in the 1970s for ‘wages for housework’. Irigaray herself calls for women to “put a price on their labour” (1993b, p.83). Very importantly, though, she does not merely imply the need for recognition of housework as work or the compensation of this work in monetary form.²⁸ For her, “compensation

²⁶ “For Irigaray, the entire history of Western thought is characterised by this feature of mirroring understood as thought reflecting or turning back on itself in order to achieve its self-foundation of knowledge. It is a feature of metaphysics that has been challenged since at least Plato, but which persists up to the present. With Descartes it registers the start of philosophical modernity; with Hegel (with whose thought Marx’s science is of course heavily inflected) it reaches its apogee. What makes Irigaray’s critique of this feature of metaphysics profound is that her philosophical interventions locate woman and the feminine as the material underside to the mirror’s reflective surface” (Daley, 2012, p.66).

²⁷ It is important to add a note of caution. Irigaray’s analysis is partial in that it is restricted to Western (Christian) women. This means that it is not necessarily valid in all histories and cultures (Joy, 1999, p.329).

²⁸ To do justice to the ‘wages for housework’ campaign, I add that probably none of the women active there seriously thought capitalism could survive if all reproductive work would be paid. Rather, the impossibility of this demand revealed, as Haiven/Khasnabish state, “the exploitative nature of the system itself” and “forced the imagination beyond the tepid liberal terrain of rights and superficial and grudging wealth redistribution” (2014, p.104).

would imply a double system of exchange, that is, a shattering of the monopolization of the proper name (and of what it signifies as appropriative power) by father-men” (Irigaray, 1985, p.173).

She places women and everyone associated as a caregiver or the feminine as the material underside of different systems, as the other of the Same. This is in line with the role of reproductive work as the invisible basis of capitalist accumulation and its intersubjective nature, stressed so much in what I describe as the first discourse in the common/s debates.²⁹ Irigaray shows how different systems, the economic as analyzed by Marx as well as the symbolic or cultural space, are caught up in the same patriarchal logic of the One. Connections arise between the process of subject constitution, where subjects are responsible for what constitutes ‘women’s work’ and its position in society. To conclude, the devaluation of work associated with women in society and the exclusion of the feminine from the symbolic order that causes dominant subject-object relations are intimately entangled. Everything that is connected to being dependent on an other, including the mother as first (m)other has to be repressed and devalued while being the invisible basis for the symbolic order and capitalism.

This means that all perspectives on care relations are responding to being marginalized, reduced into a position as the other of the Same in the symbolic order and the seemingly autonomous male subject. All people involved in care relation are pushed into a feminized social space. For the strategies following these positions, this means that they might be headed the wrong way if they a) ‘only’ ask for the recognition of reproductive work as work or b) champion the possibility of care as a gift that represents the feminized space and its properties (as gift is so closely aligned with sacrifice in western culture). Both these strategies feed into the male imaginary “that is to ‘... the attributes of the father’s production. To be. To own. To be one’s own”” (Irigaray in Hughes et. al., 2005, p.268).

Ethics of Sexual Difference and the Negative - What Could ‘New Subjectivities’ Mean?

For Irigaray, the puissance (power in a positive sense) of the dependency on the mother can never be fully repressed. “The ban does not prevent a certain number of failures of compliance, a certain blindness” (Irigaray, 1993b, p.15). In her later work, she aims to bring this puissance into representation. Irigaray tries to imagine a different social order and community:

²⁹ With its focus on forms of subject constitution, it might even be an answer to a question neither Marxist feminists nor current debates on care work dare to ask, namely, why is it still mostly women doing this kind of work, even in radical activist circles? My friend and scholar Anna Hartmann is currently writing her PhD on exactly this topic with a scholarship by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung in Germany.

Interdependency between subjects is thus no longer reduced to questions of possessing, of exchanging or sharing objects, cash, or an already existing meaning. It is, rather, regulated by the constitution of (non-exploitative) subjectivity. The subject does not vest its own value in any form of property whatsoever. No longer is it objecthood, having or the cost of having that governs the becoming of a subject or subjects and the relation among them (1996, p.127).

It is from here that she starts to explore an ‘ethics of love’ between two radically different subjects.³⁰ And it is coming from here that Hughes, et. al. (2005) hope for the coming into being of new representations of care:

Care is a social sphere in which all participants are blighted because they live wasted lives. Yet, the very temporal and fluid rhythms of the body and tactility that animate the world of care and are the source of its suspect symbolic status may provide the route to the semiotic feminine voice which is missing from representations of care (p.267).

I want to shortly introduce Irigaray’s concept of ‘the negative’ and the closely connected ‘interval’ as ways in which she figures the coming into being of non-exploitative forms subjectivity, and therefore non-violent care relations. In this research I aim to look at care relations as connected to this negative. There is no place or language for them in the male symbolic order. This exploration can, however, only be explorative and profoundly fragmentary in the timespace of this chapter. Nevertheless, it will be beneficial in giving an idea of what kind of care relation could arise out of the “route to the semiotic feminine” (ibid.).

An ethical relation based on sexual difference, for Irigaray, needs the “recognition and cultivation of the negative in subjectivity” (Schwab, 1998, p.82). Schwab (1998) argues convincingly that this concept of the negative is helpful and inspirational for “an ethics for the global future” (p.76). Joy, reflecting Irigaray’s thoughts on women and the gift understands ‘the negative’ as developed in conversation with Hegel (Joy, 1999, p.326). Instead of using ‘the negative’ as a process of consciousness leading to a higher form of spirituality, Irigaray reclaims it on the side of the feminine as that which sets a limit in a double sense: *le négatif* is an outside limit between the sexes as well as a limit or crossing of a subject’s identity (Soiland, 2010, p.351). It thereby allows the recognition of the irreducibility of the other. For Schwab, ‘the negative’ is a

³⁰ I am aware that this ‘phase two’ of her work is highly debated and criticized by many feminist scholars as being heteronormative and essentialist, mostly because of her figuration of these relations as being among men and women. I do not have the timespace to discuss this debate or defend Irigaray extensively in this thesis. I can only ask the reader to trust the judgement of innovative scholars such as Joy and Schwab, to see the value these explorations of Irigaray have for my analysis, specifically in Chapter 4.

labour of love based on acknowledgment of the other, an acknowledgment that stems from the subject being sexed: “I am not all because I am sexed” (Schwab, 1998, p.82). Or in the words of Joy: With the negative, encounters with difference

Will be based on a concern for the other that confirms him/her in their utter alterity. Thus the negative can mean access to the other of sexual difference and thereby become happiness without being annihilating in the process (Joy, 1999, p.326).

‘The negative’, in other words, no longer serves the autonomy of the subject, but instead radical relationality. The play with language in ‘I love to you’ nicely shows what Irigaray might mean. The relation inherent here is mediated by the preposition ‘to’ being an intermediary in the subject-object relation. “I love to you means I maintain a relation of indirection to you. I do not subjugate you or consume you. I respect you (as irreducible)” (Irigaray, 1996, p.109). Although this indirection does not function in all languages, it still posits the idea of a ‘space in between’ two different beings, a more true intersubjectivity. It can be a model for ethical relations of sexual difference in communities (Schwab, 1998, p.88). Rebecca Hill (2008), in an article on Irigaray’s and Bergson’s notions of ‘the interval’, shows how knowledge (production) can change: “The maternal-feminine would no longer function as the repressed ground of knowledge because thought would begin from the sexual relation or interval between man and woman. [...] thinking can no longer be understood as a neutral activity” (p.120). ‘The interval’, in the Irigarayan sense, has both a spatial and a temporal dimension (Chapter 5). The timespace of this thesis does not allow me to go further into the possibilities of these concepts. Importantly though, Tove Soiland argues that ‘the negative’ mediates the subjective and the societal, as the representation of the feminine necessarily has to take a societal form (2010, p.362). It will be interesting to inquire in further research how this space of ‘being-two’ or ‘becoming two’, which Irigaray constructs as a model of an ethical relationship, can potentially take a societal/collective form within the commons.

To conclude, doing the creative as well as critical work of thinking through the two strands in the commons debates and their perspectives on care relations might help to recognize

That we are still and have always been open to the world and to the other because we are living, sensible beings, subject to the rhythms of time and of a universe whose properties are in part our own, different according to whether we are men or women (Irigaray, 1993, p.87).

The Paradox of Affirmation/Critique in Care Relations

In the introduction, I describe a contemporary paradox in the role of philosophy. This paradox ranges between questions of affirmativity and critique, engaging with the repressive side of power in the Foucauldian sense (potestas) and hoping for its productive side (potentia). As Braidotti (2011) phrases it, activists and scholars alike have to figure out “how to balance the creative potential of critical thought with the dose of negative criticism and oppositional consciousness that such a stance entails” (p.267). I position the common/s debates at this impasse. And indeed, the exact same paradox seems merely to be rephrased and re-contextualized in the words of some participants of the common/s debates. One of the articles in the *Jungle World* debate summarized earlier underlines the connection between the fields’ more traditional unionist struggles and the commons (Nowak, 2014). Obviously, diverting from what I summarize as the ‘Hardt and Negri’ line in the debates, political economist and scientist de Angelis shows how the positive movement for commons and the negative movement of class (and social movements) are different, but entangled and dependent (2012, p.1), for no one can protest on the street hungry, and chances for a self-sustainable community rise if it is embedded in a broader political discourse. The question, for him, is: “How do we at the same time set a limit to capital while allowing the reproduction of alternative systems that disentangle us from it ?”(2012a, p.8). In the same vein, Federici and Barbagallo argue that “no struggle is sustainable that ignores the needs, experiences, and practices that reproducing ourselves entails” (2012, p.2). Kevin van Meter (2012) makes a clear distinction between care work and care giving (in alternative experiments), pointing out that both are different sides of struggle. While care work, as he says, should be abolished, alternative systems of care giving have to be included in (activist) communities. De Angelis’ question is rephrased and even specified by Federici: “How do we struggle over reproductive labour without destroying ourselves, and our communities?” (Federici, 2006). All these examples can be interpreted as part of the philosophical paradox described by Braidotti, also showing its impact on socio-political spaces. They all try to think through how to combine a resistance to the present (critique) with the construction of alternatives (creativity) from the perspective of social movement struggles.

Against this background, it is not surprising to find that different strands in the debates are drawn more to one or the other side of that paradox. In the first part of this chapter, I argue at length that the two feminist interventions into the commons debates have to be thought of together as they are both dealing with what is outside of the male imaginary and symbolic order, with what is deemed the other of the Same. Seeing them, however, from the perspective of the paradox of

creativity/critique clearly shows that they cannot be simply collapsed into one another. Within this paradox, their different standpoints and foci posit them at different ends. The Marxist feminist line of thinking, focusing on social reproductive labour, is deeply indebted to dialectical thinking. The definition of reproductive and care labour is oriented by Marx’s distinction between productive and reproductive labour, which implies that it is seen as repetitive and merely reproductive rather than transformative (Held, 2006, p.32). A big part of their important work, within and outside of the debates on commons, is to organize resistance to the current conditions of the global division of labour and to point out how restructurings happen mostly on the backs of (migrant) women. The oppressive side of care relations in the present global condition is therefore stressed. This contrasts with the other strand in the debates, which tries to see ethical potentials in commoning and care relations, including transformations of subjectivities and ways of relating.

It is important for me to underline the genealogy of the Marxist feminist line of thinking in dialectics because I believe that their profound analysis of the intersection of capitalism and patriarchy is absolutely necessary if radical strategies and discourses want to be transformative and/or revolutionary. In this sense, I am uneasy with the optimism of some thinkers, like Negri/Hardt and Braidotti, pursuing the Deleuzian/Spinozist line of thinking. Braidotti and Negri/Hardt have in common an analysis of the changes in capitalism towards ‘immaterial labour’, based on cooperation rather than competition. They judge this as an “entropic and self-destructive element [...] that exposes or endangers its [capitalism’s] very sources of wealth and power” (Braidotti, 2011, p.281). This leads to, i.e., Hardt voicing that he believes capitalism is already “digging its own grave”, propagating a kind of “communism in waiting” (DeAngelis, 2012a, p.13). The following embrace of the concepts of the common or creativity underestimates the processes of enclosure that were central to capitalism’s functioning from its very beginning. The ‘shift in perspective’ is therefore ambivalent or dangerous, and does, sometimes, as the quote by research participant Lisa in the beginning of this chapter shows, not always do justice to people’s experiences and needs. This is the importance of navigating this paradox within the context of my field research on the radical imagination grounded in collective practices of childcare. I mostly look for ‘positive’ or, rather, transformative experiences in my participants’ lives. However, during the research process, I quickly realized that it is just as important to discuss what confines these transformative experiences, which is why I dedicated Chapter 3 to this topic.

Lastly, my research positions childcare practices as a commoning of childcare because they are situated in social movements that struggle to build common/s in Germany and the Netherlands.

Furthermore, I show how the tension field between critique and negativity resonates in these practices. I have developed not only an independent argument using feminist materialist theories of Marxism and psychoanalysis and the debates on common/s, but also did the groundwork for my field research. My aim is to look at one of the often invisible care relations, childcare within activist communities, in order to inquire what ethical and political possibilities for transformation emanate from them, in a process in which I actively convoke this imagination in encounters with the participants.

Chapter 2: Methodology and Methods

Research Question - Field Research

I have introduced the debates on the politics of common/s as a language to speak about the diversity of social practices organized outside of the state and market, and as a horizon to explore possibilities of new, left strategies in contemporary times. My interest lies in anti-capitalist commons as autonomous spaces that support the creation of self-sustainable social movements and, more explicitly, in the commoning of childcare within them. The Radical Left and anarchist movements in Germany and the Netherlands are my chosen field, investigating what is possible in such alternatives and exploring the questions and tensions raised in my theoretical chapter. I have opened up spaces of encounter with radical activists and caregivers, who I consider specifically well suited to inquire on commons and commoning because of their long history struggling for autonomous spaces in their movements. I wanted to see if such encounters, in the form of in-depth interviews, redefine and help re-imagine the potential of care and more specifically childcare practices for social movements, as well as theories of change, ethics and the political discourses on the common/s. In the context of my thesis, I see commoning as closely connected to what I will introduce as radical imagination. Accordingly, I have chosen a methodology of ‘convoking the radical imagination’ for my project.

The questions for the field research are as follows:

How do activist parents figure their experiences with children and collective childcare in social movements and (how) are these practices translated into their activism? Do they thereby redefine practices and imaginaries of caring and relating in communities and social movements?

In the time between June and August of 2014, I conducted eight interviews in anarchist and Radical Left activist milieus in Germany and the Netherlands (six with women, two with men) and facilitated one workshop at an activist camp. All the participants had some kind of experience with collectivizing and sharing childcare, which, however, differed in substantial ways. Hanna and Lisa live in living projects where commoning of reproductive activities of all kinds is a substantial basis, Barbara and Janneke told me about positive experiences in ‘timespace’ commons, like activist camps and squats in which they were not living permanently, and Stefan and Joop had some negative experiences in their attempts to collectivize in shared flats. The participants of the workshop were in the middle of a commoning childcare experience in camp that we shared.

The Dutch anarchist and German Radical Left milieus are the spaces in which I experienced my own political socialization as a feminist activist and scholar. Therefore, I try to be self reflective about the possibilities as well as stumbling blocks of doing research in communities of which I am part, or at least identify with. The activists and their communities serve not merely as research objects/subjects, but as spaces of knowledge production in which I aim to intervene with my engaged research, which is, in ways, also activism. I hope that the feminist legacy of activism and research I position myself in, as well as being a ‘scholar-in-solidarity’ (Khasnabish/Haiven, 2012, p. 409), keeps me from producing yet another academic piece that appropriates movements’ knowledge for the sake of a scholar’s career. Rather, I am inspired by the task anthropologist David Graeber (2004) sees for radical intellectuals:

One obvious role for a radical intellectual is [...] to look at those who are creating viable alternatives, try to figure out what might be the larger implications of what they are (already) doing, and then offer those ideas back, not as prescriptions, but as contributions, possibilities – as gifts (p.12).

In order to do justice to this admittedly ambitious task, I draw from a rich history of feminist thought on the ethics of research and the methodologies for doing it in accountable ways. In what follows, I introduce my research methodology and methods. Central for my project is the concept of ‘convoking the radical imagination’, which will be elaborated upon as a main methodological tool. In the methods, I summarize the research process, from field access and collecting data to analysis and the feedback process.

Community, Movement, Activist Milieu - Defining the Field

The field I research is the anarchist or Radical Left social movements in Germany and the Netherlands. While I have gotten insights into the Dutch activist scene while living in the Netherlands for over two years, the German scene is my ‘home base’. I do not have the timespace to fully discuss whether calling them social movements is legitimate. It is more important at this stage to underline that these movements are not homogenous, but rather composed of a number of different groups and concerned with all kinds of topics. Moreover, the histories of these movements are different in the two countries in which my research participants are active. This, of course, leads to differences between the movements. I try to give context when needed in the process of my analysis. It has become evident, for example, that the movements my participants are involved in have different relations to theory. Whereas the German movements are often theory-driven and very

literate in this sense, the production or consumption of theory does not seem to play such a big role in the Netherlands. In describing or referring to the participants and their environments, I regularly use the terms ‘community,’ ‘activist milieu/scene’ and ‘social movement.’ In what follows, these terms will be framed more clearly and the field of research will be described in more detail.

The notion of social movement refers to a group or collective attempt at struggles around specific political or social issues, aimed at a transformation of society and/or its values. In an activist milieu/scene, a number of different social movements are included. The notion describes a subcultural space in which activists live and share knowledge together, while possibly also having similar lifestyles, such as a specific style of clothing or a music subculture. Importantly, an activist milieu might be composed of different groups and lifestyles, from ‘traditional anarchist-punk’ to ‘queer-feminist’. When studying in an activist milieu versus studying a specific social movement, Khansnabish and Haiven (2012) point out:

Studying an activist milieu made up of many movements (sometimes working in concert, often sharing members, rarely on the ‘same page’), rather than particular social movements, offers up a much richer picture of the radical imagination at work and is an important theme for those who would devise research strategies aimed at working with social movements (p.412).

In many ways an activist milieu is quite nebulous and fractured, there is no one social movement organization, but a number of complex and shifting networks and communities. In the case of my research project, the participants’ milieus were situated in specific cities in Germany and a broader milieu spanning across all of the Netherlands. The latter is the case because the anarchist activist scene in the Netherlands is considerably smaller than the one in Germany. All participants are involved in activist groups, whose networks go beyond specific local places.

I use the notion of community in a double sense.³¹ Most often, I use it in the traditional sense, of a group of people situated in the same geographical space (Lykes & Crosby, 2011,p.149). I sometimes use the notions of activist community and activist scene/milieu interchangeably in my interviews, although community focuses on the participants’ social networks and networks of care

³¹ The notion of community has been critiqued from many sides. Vijay Devadas and Jane Mummery (2007) summarize these criticisms: “The idea of community and identity formation has had a vexed history within critical theory. It has come under critique from various fronts: traditional Marxists are critical of its focus on culture not economics; postcolonial studies is critical of its appeal to a romanticized view of community; and it has been criticized, specifically by the poststructuralists, because of the essentialism and politics of othering that takes place in the affirmation of community and identity” (2007). A lot of rethinking is at stake also within the common/s debates if a unified and continuous collectivity is to be rejected. While I am not explicitly engaging in these kinds of debates in this thesis, I connect in my analysis of alternative forms of relating (Chapter 1 and 4) and rethinking of the space/place, local/global binary in the context of the participants’ communities (Chapter 4).

in everyday life and activist milieu/scene gives weight to collective identities and subcultural factors. The networks might stretch across several diverse forms of community, such as family, neighbours, colleagues or the activist scene/milieu. I also use the notion of community as developed in critiques of the essentialism of identity or its geography-based definitions, namely as a “discursive invocation” or “performance of belongingness” (ibid., 2011, p.150). Here, I see the Radical Left and anarchist community as connected across geographical space or national borders in transnational or epistemic communities (Stoeltzer & Yuval-Davis, 2002, p.320). In both cases it is shared political values and the desire to share knowledge that binds people together. The most important spaces where these communities meet are knowledge and information networks, mailing-lists online (i.e. news platform *indymedia*), bigger activist events and protests where people meet in person (i.e. no border camps, blocupy protests), transnational activist networks (*no border network, beyond Europe - Antiauthoritarian platform against capitalism*) and (solidarity) campaigns.

Of course, there comes a specific language or slang with these spaces of knowledge production and sharing. Along with many autonomous, non-hierarchical groups, the wider network of communities, transnational or not, also include institutions like left parties or foundations. Building blocks and common sense practices of these communities are direct action tactics (radical art, guerilla communications), consensus based decision-making processes and affinity based organizing (Luchies, 2014, p.110). Knowledge and publications from people’s social movement experiences and/or studies are widely shared. This work, in the form of DIY Zines, Magazines or blog posts, concerns discussions on specific topics, solidarity statements with other groups as well as practical information, i.e. how to deal with police and state repression. Although the activist scenes and communities are diverse, it seems from my interviews that the autonomous movement in Germany and the autonomous squatter movement in the Netherlands are the identity groups most visible and with the most impact on the participants’ understandings of activists.

My research participants can be described as parent activists who see themselves as actors in local communities, activist milieus made up of a wide range of anti-authoritarian radicals and groups active in different struggles and social movements, i.e. anti-capitalism, prison abolition, anti-fascism, ecological, feminist, queer or antiracism. I could profit from the participants’ knowledge and experiences in social movements that actively build alternative spaces (aka commons). These experiences will always include some form of commoning (aka *selbstorganisierung*). On the discursive level, it has become evident in my research that the ongoing discourse on care work and

reproduction in the Radical Left in Germany has influence on the German participants' stories, whereas such a discourse is absent in the Netherlands. Furthermore, for most of the participants, the inclusion of parents into activist practices is a commonsense political strategy. I use Marxist feminist theory and philosophy of the subject with (the narratives of) my interviews to show that there is more at stake. Not being child-inclusive means ignoring connections linking different systems, it means ignoring the fact that we rely on each other all the time and have different needs that might change over a lifespan. As I argue in the next chapters, a narrative of inclusion in the sense of making space for these practices might not be enough, as more radical changes are needed. For my methodological approach of convoking radical imagination, this perspective, my perspective, plays a crucial role in my attempts to actively spark the participants' reflections and imagination.

The group of participants is quite homogenous in regard to their educational backgrounds and, seen per country, their age. The participants from Germany are between 24 and 34 years old, whereas the ones from the Netherlands range between ages 35 to 50. This might partially be related to the snowball sampling via four specific gatekeepers. I consider this age range as particularly interesting as it gives me the chance to learn about a longer timeframe of discussions on and experiences with the inclusion of children and childcare in the participants' movements. In regards to educational background, all participants have at least started university studies, some having degrees and some still studying. Due to the difference in age of the participants, the younger German ones are all still studying, whereas the Dutch ones have jobs or live from benefits. Just like I am, all of them are white citizens of their country and involved in a largely white community of activists. All the participants live their political activism mostly in urban areas, though some of the Dutch participants reside outside of bigger cities. All these parameters that make the group of participants homogenous limit the scale to which my analysis and statements apply and call for constant self-reflection and modesty. It would be interesting for further research to go beyond all these parameters and to bring my questions to other activist communities and movements.

Not all my research participants use the same language that I use here. Both the German and Dutch people I have talked to employ the notion of activist scene or 'Umfeld' (environment) rather than community, the Dutch participants taking this latter notion most often during the interviews. This might have to do with the language being English. All of the participants can relate to the

notion of being an activist³², seeing injustices and perspectives of agency being the most important factors in the term’s assigned meaning. Barbara describes how she left university to do more activism:

But, this study was not so long lasting, this study, because, when I came here, ähm, I found the philosophy quite... ja, it's only in the head. I want to put things on earth and do something concrete. So I left after nine month, I left university to, ja, to only be practical (laughs) (Barbara).

Hanna explicitly underlines the search for possibilities of agency in her activism:

What does it mean for me to be an activist? Ähm, I think to engage with topics, and somehow to get an active perspective on that. Whether visibly to the outside or for oneself, to draw conclusions (Hanna).³³

The Role of Common/s in the Dutch/German Activist Milieus

The notion of common/s is present in the German (radical) left movement, with all pertinent newspapers or magazines having published at least one addition with it as a cover story.³⁴ In the Dutch context, I could not find any discussions on the notion of common/s in the research participants’ movements, only in the academic, intellectual and art spheres. A lot of publications concerning the common/s are in English, therefore, I draw on debates in the US and England as well. I place the debates on common/s within a contemporary search for new left strategies reacting to the multiple crises we are faced with and as a follow up to the disillusioning ways of real existing socialism. Commons significantly shift ideas of revolution away from any linear dimension and from demands toward states. They can also be seen in the context of new social movements like Occupy, Democracia Ya Real or the right to the city movements, which successfully claim public spaces for their grassroots democratic experiments. Graeber (2013) and Haiven/Khasnabish (2012) call this the ‘anarchistic turn’ in social movements.

In the way I have encountered debates on commons, they are always situated at the borders of the academia/practice binary, with its proponents being engaged in constant border crossing. As

³² There are pitfalls in using activist as a self-defining term, as Isabelle Fremaux and John Jordan (2012) point out. In fact, this notion should not serve as an isolation of activists from ‘normal’, nor fetishize action or self-sacrifice. Activism in the end can be all kinds of things, everyone choosing their own ways.

³³ “Was es für mich bedeutet Aktivistin zu sein? Ähm, ich glaube sich mit Themen auseinanderzusetzen und irgendwie eine handelnde Perspektive da rein bekommen. Also entweder nach außen sichtbar oder für sich selber daraus im eigenen Handeln sozusagen erstmal Schlüsse zu ziehen” (Hanna).

³⁴ i.e. *CONTRASTE*, *Oya, analyse&kritik*, *Jungle World* (<http://keimform.de/2010/jungle-world-ueber-commons/>)

already pointed out, I perceive the Dutch activist scene as a lot less theory-affine, or at least not as explicit as the German. Most resources explicitly mentioning the notion of commons or the construction of spaces of alternative social reproduction stem from German publications. In the interviews, the notion of common/s is not present aside from when I bring it in. Participants rather talk about sharing or collectivizing childcare and responsibilities for children. Consequently, I want to underline that it is me who speaks of common/s and the commoning of childcare in the context of this thesis. I do so, firstly, because of the rich and inspirational debates around the common/s, as elaborated upon in Chapter 1. Secondly, I choose to do so to underline that the social movements and communities my research participants and I myself are active in have a long history of creating and struggling for autonomous spaces, which I could also call commons. Anarchist and Radical Left movements have and create common spaces, whether these are house-projects, autonomous youth centres, squats, communes or temporally limited activist camps and other kinds of network creating meetings. Tatjana Golova (2013) writes about these alternative spaces:

The attempts to practice alternative ways of living and acting means that the production of orientation and meaning in everyday life is not a rest or by product of mobilization, but its condition (p.71; my translation).³⁵

The questions of autonomy from the state or market and how to dismantle oppressive structures within autonomous spaces play important roles. I agree that one of many strategies of social movements is to create experimental zones for alternative modes of social reproduction (Haiven/Khasnabish, 2014, p.25). These spaces are important building blocks for the activist communities, they stabilize common material and mental forms of collective action and identity; a fact that my interviews reinforced regularly. Sonja, for example, told me about the difficulties coming with not being able to be physically present in her political group's space:

P (Participant): ... well there were people among us who, whatever, wrote their final thesis in the office and therefore weren't active in the student's union for three quarters of the year. But they were in the office and wrote there and that was an excuse for everyone. That's totally clear, totally logical. But other things don't work, and that's sad.

I (Interviewer): But then the room in which you are together is extremely important for activism, right?

³⁵ Die Versuche, alternative Lebens- und Handlungsweisen zu praktizieren, d.h. die Produktion von Orientierungen und Sinn im Alltag, sind keine Rest- oder Begleiterscheinungen der Mobilisierung, sondern eine ihrer Bedingungen (Golova, 2013, p.71).

P (Participant): yes. (Sonja).³⁶

This reinforces the importance of a common/s as a space to be physically present because a lot of political organizing lives from being together in this sense.

‘Convoking the Radical Imagination’ as a Methodology- Developing Situated Tools and Standpoints

Being at a Dutch university in a Humanities department gives me a huge amount of freedom in what to research, where and how to do it. This freedom is a privilege I mobilize while negotiating my conflicting desire to be in solidarity with the activists I meet and movements of which they are part. At the same time, Dutch universities are being transformed into corporations in a neoliberal regime. Budget cuts and the precaritization of its staff limit my and many other students’ hope of finding future places in academia (Edu-factory Collective, 2009, p.9). I strongly feel myself how academic work as a ‘labour of love’ seems to be merged with these new forms of precarious work and norms of efficiency and productivity. Let me therefore quote a longer paragraph from an article by Khasnabish and Haiven (2012) to explain a bit more my self-positioning as a ‘scholar in solidarity’. I would like to align myself with this description:

This generation of scholars-in-solidarity (if we may call them that) has also been inspired by the more ‘anarchistic’ turn in recent social movements, with its relentless intolerance for hierarchies, its refusal of intellectual or political vanguardism, its objection to the over-privileging of class as the fulcrum of oppression, and its feminist, antiracist, and postcolonial attention to the way power operates not only through overt political composition but also through knowledge, speech, and interpersonal behavior” (p.409).

In fact, my whole research design is heavily inspired by these two scholars and their experimental research with self-defined radical activists in Halifax, titled “The Radial Imagination: A Research Project About Movements, Social Change, and the Future”. Not only is the target group of their research similar to mine, but also their aim to open up spaces for imagining different futures.

Further, I agree with what they frame as their political research strategy, which informs their relationship as social researchers in/with movements. The way they describe this relation is an inherent part of what they call ‘convoking the radical imagination’ as a research methodology. The

³⁶ “P : Also es gab dann halt bei uns Menschen die dann, was weiß ich, ihre Abschlussarbeit im Büro geschrieben haben und deswegen erstmal ein Dreiviertel Jahr im Asta nicht aktiv waren. Aber sie waren halt im Büro und haben da geschrieben und das war für alle ne Entschuldigung so. Ist ja auch klar, völlig logisch. aber andere Sachen gehen da halt nicht und das ist schade.

I: Aber dann ist dieser Raum, also in dem man sich gemeinsam aufhält einfach auch extrem wichtig im Aktivismus, ne?
P: ja.” (L.)

strategy Haiven and Khasnabish (2012) experiment with departs from two other strategies. The first of these is using more traditional methodologies, in which the researcher merely reports on and affirms social movement activity and aims to legitimize and underline its value in the academic context. The second strategy is found in a lot of feminist action research and involves deep work in the movement. Often any specific claims of knowledge production or truth by the scholar are given up.

While developing the first steps and questions for my research, I realized that I tend towards the latter strategy. I have always talked about how I want to try to be very open, to listen to the participants, their concerns and ideas without imposing my own thoughts or theoretical arguments. What, however, actually seemed to happen was that I implicitly started to hide my own position as a researcher. Ultimately, I frame the research and any discussion or interview, and it is I who will analyze the ‘data’ and write a thesis with which I hope to obtain a degree. Last but not least, it is I who decides the framework of the politics of common/s and has done a lot of work on mapping and adding to these debates. I see myself faced with a danger Sharlene Hesse-Biber (2014) describes, of participants being too close to the researcher in the situation of an in-depth interview. She writes:

While self-reflection is important to decreasing power differentials between the researcher and the researched, being too personal with a participant can provide the false illusion that there is no power or authority. [...] The researcher, however, still has the power to analyze and interpret the participants’ stories in a way that renders them with little or no voice in the process (p.199).

In order to negotiate my position as a researcher in relation to the researched, I have chosen Haiven and Khasnabish’s (2012) third research strategy. From the location and situation I have conducted my research, I consider this the most apt and fruitful choice. The objective of this middle way is “to critically and self-reflexively mobilize” the position of a scholar in order to create ‘spaces of encounter’, which is a process inspired by social movements, “but not entirely folded within” (ibid., p.410) them. In other words, they ask: “What if we understand research not as the accumulation of facts or the mobilization of knowledge but as a unique and special way of creating new zones of encounter?” (ibid., p.413). These ‘spaces of encounter’ in my research are to share experiences and knowledge, but also to try to collectively imagine and stimulate imaginative possibilities for including children and collective childcare in current social movements and struggles for commons. I thereby divert from a lot of conventional social movement research, which focuses on mapping

social movements in an existing field of economic and political powers. Instead, I pay attention to how movements challenge the patriarchal form of the sociopolitical itself.

I argue that one way to analyze how ‘movements challenge the patriarchal form of the sociopolitical itself’ is to employing the concept of imagination and, more concretely, ‘radical imagination’ can reach beyond existing socio-political and symbolic systems without being disembodied. Radical imagination may, therefore, be what can transform these systems. ‘Convoking the radical imagination’ as a methodology implies a specific configuration of the researcher-researched relation as described in the previous paragraphs. Further, it asks me to collect data through talking, listening and discussing with the participants and to go further by taking initiative, asking people to reflect on their experiences, sparking their imagination with challenging questions. I have engaged in an ongoing dialogical process of radical imagination in which practices and reflections of the participants and my own reflections create knowledge. Knowledge that I aim to give back to activist communities as a proposal through workshops or articles in prevalent platform/publications.

In order to clarify my methodological choices, it is beneficial to elaborate a bit on the specificities of my notion of imagination. I follow Chiara Bottici (2014) to underline that imagination is not, as so often implied in everyday language and certain philosophical strands coming from Emmanuel Kant, only connected to the unreal or fantasy. It cannot be limited to the realms of utopia or aesthetics alone. It is, in Bottici’s (2014) words, “the radical capacity to envisage things differently and construct alternative political projects” (p.1). Bottici is very much in line with Khasnabish and Haiven, for whom the radical imagination is also what allows people to envision a future. At the same time, the radical imagination is about “bringing those possible futures ‘back’ to work on the present” and “drawing on the past, telling different stories about how the world came to be the way it is, and remembering the power and importance of past struggles and the way their spirits live on in the present” (Khasnabish & Haiven, 2014, p.3). Very importantly, though, Haiven and Khasnabish indicate that the notion of imagination as such is ambivalent. Imagination is, on the one hand, that which allows for transformation, emancipation and the crossing of borders, while it at the same time constructs and stabilizes them. There is no possible easy or innocent celebration of the creativity of the imagination. This is why I find it useful to use the prefix ‘radical’ for my search for imagination. Radicalism does not mean a specific set or strategy, but rather the will to, however it may be done, always tackle the deep systematic roots of economic, cultural or social problems (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p.5).

The imagination is not, for any of the authors I build my understanding of imagination on, something we possess or have (as an individual faculty). Rather, it is something that is done and done collectively, always in a dialogical process whose direction is open. “We create, with those around us, multiple, overlapping, contradictory and coexistent imaginary landscapes, horizons of common possibility and shared understanding” (Haiven&Khasnabish, 2014, p.12). The common/s debates, as employed in this project, can be seen as one such landscape or horizon with which communities of people worldwide try to develop a shared language and “vision of a new world” (Bollier, 2014). Practices of commoning are interconnected with radical imagination. It would exceed the purpose of this section to go deeper into the genealogy of the notion of imagination or its closely connected counterpart the imaginary. There are excellent texts on this from Haiven & Khasnabish (2012) or Bottici (2014). However, considering my use of psychoanalytic theory, it might be important to note that the imaginary is closely connected to unconscious or preconscious forces rooted in a subject; it is a psychoanalytical term. For Lacan, it is “a domain of pre-linguistic, specular identification”(Whitford, 1981, p.3) necessary for a child’s subject constitution.

Feminist psychoanalyst and philosopher Luce Irigaray describes exactly this imaginary as a phallic and therefore destructive one, dedicating some of her later work to bringing into representation what she terms a female imaginary (Whitford, 1981, p.5). Sarah Donovan (2009) engages with Spinoza’s notion of imagination as one of three forms of knowledge and Irigaray’s concept of the imaginary. She carves out a number of similarities in their thinking, most centrally that both concepts “bring the body and affectivity to the realm of reason” and that both are necessarily and always productive of knowledge (Donovan, 2009,p.178). Following this, it is justified to use the (radical) imagination as a methodological, analytical category rather than a mere normative judgment (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p.6). My interest can not be in clearly defining what radical imagination can be content-wise, but must investigate how it works in the context of specific, lived experiences; to actively spark imagination in the encounters I create and to ask what it can possibly do.

Some more work is necessary if the conceptual explorations of the notion of imagination are to be made useful as a methodology. Luckily, Nira Yuval-Davis and Marcel Stoeltzer (2002) have done this work, proposing to combine standpoint theory with a concept of imagination that allows me to ‘ground’ ‘convoking the radical imagination’ as a methodology in my project. Much has been said and written about the situatedness of knowledges and there are long discussions on the relation

of social positioning to standpoints. The legacy of standpoint theory gives me the tools to account for these social positionings and the social practices coming from them while not giving up on a certain notion of or approximation to claims of truth. Yuval-Davis and Stoeltzer (2002) give an account of standpoint theory as a dialogical, epistemological method that does not assume any direct correlation between social positioning and standpoint, or access to truth. Rather, they argue that it is social practices in which standpoints are anchored. I have elaborated on the importance of not only knowledge production but the notion of imagination in my research project. For Yuval-Davis and Stoeltzer (2002), it is through imagination that “the transitions from positionings to practices, practices to standpoints, knowledge, meaning, values and goals” (p.320) take place. Similarly, Khasnabish and Haiven (2014) state:

We understand the imagination as our capacity to think those things we do not or cannot directly experience, but it is also the filter or frame through which we interpret our own experiences. For this reason, the imagination is an intimate part of how we empathize with others (p.4).

And it is the activists’ practices, but more importantly their common goals and values concerning care relation and the reflection processes I initiate by convoking radical imagination, which are of interest to me. To wrap up, the imagination is just as situated as any knowledge, and I will have to account for that in my research process. Or, what we can anticipate or hope for is shaped by being embodied in racist, sexist and otherwise oppressive societies (Khasnabish & Haiven, 2012, p.411).

Going back to my research question, there is, next to the imagination, another notion that needs a bit of attention. This is the notion of experience, whose pitfalls Joan Scott points out. She observes how many feminist scholars tend to take the notion of experience as a given black box, independent of social processes. I hope to have shown with my account of standpoint theory, the role I give to imagination and its relation to social practices, that I consider experience situated as well. I try to keep in mind what Allaine Cerwonka (2011) concludes from Scott’s and others critical interventions:

Instead of looking to the experience to provide intact ‘standpoints’ from which to generate accounts of the world, we must ask what factors constituted the experience and identities, and how the positionality - even of marginalised people - is relational to a range of influences. [...] If we take identity (or standpoint) as the starting point of analysis, we risk reifying and naturalising the very things we seek to explain (p. 66).

The relational ontologies of the subjects I work with in other parts of my thesis encourage me to not take any identity or fixed standpoint, but take processes of becoming (of the subject, the community, relations etc.) as starting points for my research. This means that I expect to be surprised and to change in the process of the field work, as will the participants. It also reflects on my choice of methods, as I have not based my sampling methods on fixed identities. It further resonates with my conception of commons as something we do in the form of commoning, rather than it being something we have. Donna Haraway points out the connection between the transformative potential of the imagination and the non-identical self: “[t]he split and contradictory self is the one who can interrogate positionings and be accountable, the one who can construct and join rational conversations and fantastic imaginings that change history” (Haraway in Stoeltzer/Yuval-Davis, 2012, p.326). I will not be able to directly access the participants’ experiences, as it will mostly be narratives of these experiences. Experience will be mediated by the participants’ thoughts and imaginations. An imagination that I have tried to convoke through opening spaces of encounter with the research participants, in which my role as a researcher is not only to collect data, but to actively engage in conversations in ways that initiate reflections on possible futures in the current childcare practices of parent activists.

The choice of concrete research methods for my thesis is not entirely, but in big parts, determined by the methodology as sketched out so far. Other factors are the timespace available for the research and the frame of a Master’s thesis. I have not been able to do justice to all the important and complex issues I conceptualize as crucial methodological pre-thoughts for the project. Rather, I take them as guidelines from which to experiment. My thesis topic and my methodology are of an experimental nature, as are probably all practices of commoning in a world in which private property relations remain dominant. While process of sparking radical imagination in my research are experimental, my choice of methods is not. In depth interviews are the main tool I use. Furthermore, I try to involve a number of more ethnographic methods in the research process.

Methods

If I had to find a term for my research, I would use the notion of participatory social movement or community research. Access to the participants has been gained in two different ways, via gatekeepers and via events that I visited and at which approached people. My aim by using radical imagination as a methodology is to build relationships that go beyond one interview. Therefore, I have involved them in later stages of my research by sending them my analysis for feedback and

comments. During the process of accessing the field at events, I kept a field note diary containing notes on observations or informal conversation. The research has been processual and non-linear, meaning there has not always been a straight, chronological line through the research process of accessing the field, conducting interviews, analyzing them and asking for feedback. For example, I occasionally and informally have discussed preliminary research outcomes with fellow activists who engaged with them in fruitful, inspiring ways. Some of these conversations enter my research as inspiration or even ‘data’. The freedom to be so open with my methods has been a bit scary, but at the same time held great possibility. I owe this opportunity to being situated in the Humanities and encouraged by my supervisors to be creative. The research design, then, is mainly qualitative interviews and some minor ethnographic tools.

I have loosely set three requirements in my sampling method: The participants should self-define as radical-activists, be parents or caregivers of a child and, ideally, should have some kind of experience with collective childcare. The self-definition as radical activist is something I often assume, considering the kind of community or activist milieu with which the participants are engaged.³⁷ I defined the criteria loosely and started from the political communities and practices the participants are engaged in rather than fixed identities. This choice originates in notions of situated experience and situated imagination. All in all I took about two and a half months for the field research. In the preliminary research phase, I decided to spark a range of informal conversations about the topic to test what kind of ground on which my research lies. Mainly, this phase entailed conducting two interviews. Elana Buch and Karen Staller (2014) write: “At the preliminary stages [of research], the ethnographer focuses on finding out whether a field site is suitable and refines her research question or changes in the focus of study to better address the broader problems she is interested in” (p.122).

I have approached all my participants via gatekeepers or my own networks and contacted them both via email with an introduction text about my project and in person at different activist events. Often people I meet and know do not have children themselves, but know fellow activists who do. These first-step contacts acted as incredibly important gatekeepers in the organization of my field access. While using personal contacts has saved me a lot of time and hassle in accessing the field, a possible danger is that being visibly aligned with them may have kept me from approaching people who might have opposing views or a tumultuous relationship with the gatekeepers (Buch & Staller, 2014, p.125). This risk, however, has been limited by relying on

³⁷ This is of course problematic. But I consider it equally problematic to only meet people who use these categories or identity markers as self-definition.

multiple gatekeepers. Furthermore, I consider every process of accessing a research field as highly subjective, formed to a large degree by the people involved and the (power) relations in which they are situated. Seen from this perspective, my approach is as problematic as every other. Next to approaching potential gatekeepers, I have decided to consciously spread the word about my research in the parts of the Dutch activist milieu to which I have access. This has had several advantages. Firstly, possible gatekeepers started approaching me with their contacts, secondly people have become more aware of my sometimes ‘double role’ as fellow activist and researcher. The latter instance is important for me in terms of the ethics of my project. Thirdly, I have experienced a lot of positive feedback about the project, with a lot of people expressing desire to read the outcome as they consider it important. This kind of reassurance has helped me inquire further, which, if I am honest, had become important for me out of no more than a gut feeling. The prospect of opening up space for the topic of collective childcare and the role of children in social movements has been appreciated by many of my contacts.

Methods for Encounters - In-Depth Interviews and a Workshop

Hesse-Biber (2014) describes the format of interviewing in research along a scale of informal to formal interviews. The former ones are mostly used to build an initial relationship with participants. I have only used them occasionally to bring parts of my analysis back to the field and possibly be further inspired by reactions. My main data gathering method is semi-structured and therefore more formal interviews. An interview guide has given some control over the conversation, while I did not necessarily stick to the order of questions in the guide. Hesse-Biber (2014) describes, very importantly: “I am still open to asking new questions, on-the-fly, throughout the interview. I have an agenda; but it is not tightly determined, and there is room left for spontaneity on the part of the researcher and the interviewee” (p.187). I took a lot of that room by jumping between questions and, now and then, bringing in an experience of my own or by cross-referencing the other interviews.

The main task before conducting interviews has been to construct that interview guide. Every interview begins by me introducing myself and my agenda, and asking for the scale of anonymity the participants want me to guarantee. Consenting to participate in the research has therefore been verbal. Furthermore, I discuss the process of possibly commenting on my analysis and withdrawing consent from the research. Coming from my main research questions, the final guide is constructed around three main theme blocks, which are interconnected. The first block

deals with experiences and imaginations of parenting in activism in general, whereas the second one asks more about specific experiences with and wishes for the collectivization of childcare. The third block focuses on the radical imagination and visions of the participants. It includes participants commenting on two quotes from radical childcare collectives as an attempt to actively convoke a Radical Imagination. All the blocks contain questions both aimed at a critical reflection and at narratives of concrete practices and experiences.

I had expected especially this latter level to be difficult to reach with activists who are quite self-reflexive and might only tell me stories that fit their reflections. From my experience in the German scene, I know that people rationalize a lot, read a lot, but often do not connect this knowledge to their everyday experiences, which is why I started with the reflection questions. Only after that did I direct the conversation towards more concrete practices and experiences. I asked for descriptions containing specific times and places, which helps people to become concrete. In the reality of interview situations, this expectation has only been fulfilled in some instances. However, the interview guide has worked well in all of them. I have continually managed to build common grounds for a floating conversation and listened to a lot of powerful stories.

After three preliminary interviews to test the guide, I conducted six further interviews, one of them via skype for practical reasons. The language of the interviews was English in the Netherlands and German in Germany. Instead of pretending that they do take place in a laboratory, I include in my analysis a reflection of the where, when and how of the surroundings in which I conducted the interviews.³⁸ As I let the participants decide on these circumstances, sometimes a child or a flatmate was in the room. I soon realized that it does indeed make a difference who else is in the room. The conversations I have had with children around were, in general, shorter and often interrupted. I do not understand this as problematic. Rather, in some cases, I see it as a praxis example of what it means to have children around in meetings and organizing politics. As one of the participants jokingly stated reacting to her baby, “(her child is playing with her zipper) when suddenly zippers are more interesting than the political issue (laughs)” (Hanna).³⁹

At the end of the interview process, I facilitated a workshop at the activist camp ‘Wer lebt mit wem, warum und wie?’⁴⁰ in Kassel, Germany. Instead of presenting preliminary outcomes of my field research, I decided to open up another space to discuss some of the questions from my

³⁸ For specific descriptions of interview situations, see appendix.

³⁹ “(Kind spielt mit Reißverschluss) wenn dann auf einmal Reissverschlüsse interessanter werden als das politische Thema (lacht)” (Hanna).

⁴⁰ ‘Who lives with whom, why and how?’

interview guide with a bigger group of people and used limited version of my interview guide. Furthermore, I added some ‘getting to know each other’ methods and a list of inspirational quotes in the two hour workshop time. The quotes were distributed among the participants, who decided to read them out in the course of the discussion (Appendix). The interest was great and 15 people attended the workshop, giving me a more interactive and also more critical perspective on their reflections and opinions. I took field notes during and after, which entered my research data as a ninth interview.

I want to underline the notion of dialogue again, because I believe that semi-structured interviewing has made it possible to position myself actively in the interview situation. It allows me to dig deeper into specific experiences I consider fruitful or interesting, as well as occasionally express my own opinions or share my own experiences. The further the research process went, the more I included outcomes of pre-analysis or cross referenced other interviews in my questions in order to already get a reactions to these.

Analysis and Feedback Process

In the research process, I recorded about 15 hours of speech and transcribed all of it using the software f5. As oral historians and feminist qualitative researchers have long noted, transforming oral material into visual, into text, always already includes a certain amount of interpretation. And in fact, while transcribing, I realized with uneasiness how much liveliness is taken out of the conversation in the process. As Izabella Agardi (2012) quotes Alessandro Portelli (1992):

The transcript turns aural objects into visual ones, which inevitably implies changes and interpretation... Expecting the transcript to replace the tape for scientific purposes is equivalent to doing art criticism on reproductions, or literary criticism on translations. The most literal translation is hardly ever the best, and a truly faithful translation always implies a certain amount of invention. The same may be true for transcription of oral sources (p.29).

Transcribing is always a lot of work and doing it with great care for atmospheric, affective components of the interview situation is even more time-intensive. I have transcribed the interviews with as much care as possible in the timespace, but still work from the ‘rough transcript’, meaning, that only the quotes I use in the thesis are edited. By setting time markers, I can always go back to the original oral data of a certain interview paragraph. Often, however, I have not done this as the limited amount of material allows me to remember the interview situations surprisingly well. I have

indicated longer pauses, transcribed filler words and clearly indicated interruptions and emotions, mostly laughs, in the transcripts. Embedded dialogues or anecdotes are indicated in order to make clear the self-positioning of the speaker in her/his narrative. Furthermore, my presence in the script is constantly indicated through my speech and, when important, as passive listening sounds. Language-wise, I left the German interviews in German and sparse Dutch words in Dutch. For the quotes used, I have performed some translation work, not only language-wise but also cultural, geographical-wise, when quotes are used directly or paraphrased. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak discusses the untranslatability of some words in specific languages (Agardi, 2012, p.30). Whenever I feel like such a word was used, I have somehow marked it or give further explanations in a footnote.

The interview analysis is a mixture of top-down and bottom-up techniques of coding interview sections with the help of Atlas.ti, a scientific software. This means that one part of my coding process is inspired by grounded theory, a bottom-up method of analysis that develops theory inductively from the data. In praxis, this means that I have gone through every interview, coding every section of it by giving one or more summary of what it is about. This kind of open coding is the initial step in data analysis according to grounded theory (Clarke, 2012, p.346). In the next steps, I assess what kinds of codes reappear, might be linked or reused across different interviews, and organize them in code families and subcategories. Adele E. Clarke (2012), in her article “Feminism, Grounded Theory, and Situational Analysis”, convincingly argues that grounded theory is always already implicitly feminist. Amongst other things, this is due to its roots in George Herbert Mead’s concept of perspective, which resonates with feminist notions of situatedness and the partiality of both the researcher and the participants, and the attention given to variety and differences in the participants’ narratives. I have tried to do justice to these latter differences by marking paragraphs whose content has surprised me or diverted a lot from the rest of the data. This has made me remember these testimonies and given me the ability to refer to them in a positive way. However, this process of open coding is always already theory driven and therefore a top-down process as well. About half of the codes in my coding list (Appendix) are codes developed deductively from the theory and research questions developed in Chapters 1 and 2. The development of code families and subcategories is also highly influenced by my research interest and theory.

I have analyzed and organized the in-depth interviews with the help of the software Atlas.ti. Atlas.ti is a computer-aided, qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). Most of this work

includes creating and working with coding for the interviews. Software has two advantages compared to manual analysis. Firstly, I could easily move from my more abstract analysis to the ‘raw’, transcribed interview material. This is more difficult and often gets forgotten in manual analysis (Frieze, 2012, p.2). Secondly, using the software, my research process has become even more explorative because I am able to modify and reorganise the codes I create. To prevent any misunderstandings, it is important to note that the program does not actually analyze data itself. Rather, it is a tool that has supported my analysis process. The main way in which I use the program is to organise my data, which is the software’s most important but also most basic function. Susanne Frieze (2012) argues that it can as well be used for much more.

From the beginning I have wanted to include a certain kind of feedback process in the research, meaning that participants will have a stake in where the analysis goes. The possibilities of doing so are many and a decision on how to do this is far from innocent. In the construction of a feedback process within the process of data interpretation, my research is most obviously participatory. Whereas I initially planned to give the participants the chance to withdraw their consent from the research at any time and without reason, I have limited this possibility to changing or excluding direct quotes. This is to do justice to my role as a researcher doing analysis. After the finalization of the interview phase, I have sent my analysis for the participants’ comments. This gives the participants a considerable amount of power without ability to crash the whole project. The feedback I have received is largely positive and encouraging, underlining their appreciation for my work and the importance of it. There were some minor comments on my interpretations and choice of quotes. I have adjusted my text in all cases and made this visible in a footnote in one case.

I want to underline that none of the steps in the research process necessarily follow the other one. In reality, the research process has been non-linear, i.e. editing the coding list even in the feedback process.

Chapter 3 - What Confines the Radical Imagination?

During my field research, I have asked the participants some apparently challenging questions. I ask, very broadly, “What would it mean for you to win? What is your vision of a better society?” and/or I ask, “What effect do you see or imagine collective childcare having on your social movement(s) and community?”. With these questions, I aim to step from inquiring about narratives of the participants’ experiences, their everyday strategies and activism, towards inquiring about what it is that might motivate them to struggle and search everyday anew. I want to know what visions and imagination they have, what they are looking toward while fighting in the present. By convoking this perspective, I put into practice my methodology of ‘borrowing’ from the future to make it act in the present with the concept of radical imagination. I push the participants toward reflecting on their experiences with a perspective of possible change. Of course, considering the overall topic of the conversations, these questions are always situated in the participants’ experiences as parents and caregivers.

Surprisingly for me, what has followed these questions has been neither complex visions of a different world, nor the pessimism or resistance to thinking utopian futures that I so often experience in my communities. The only moment I have felt this latter in the research process, has been at the workshop I gave. The notion of ‘radical imagination’ attracted quite some people, sceptically waiting for me to explain what exactly I mean and whether I am looking for full visions of a system that could replace the current one. It has been, at times, frustrating to realize that transmitting what I mean with the notion is difficult, if not impossible. In the conversation, it quickly became apparent that what these participants are most weary of is my positive understanding of ‘radical imagination’ and its creative potential. This way of thinking about the future in the here and now diverts from the dominant narrative in Radical Left Germany, which posits negativity and critiquing the present as the starting point for all strategies of resistance, but hardly goes beyond it. Against this background, I have had trouble explaining the ambivalence of the concept, which, by being, ambivalent includes this narrative and goes beyond it. Radical imagination does, as I tried to make clear quickly, not only stem from positive, collective experiences of alternative modes of living, but from all lived experiences of bodies (see Chapter 2).

In contrast to this scepticism in the workshop, the questions I ask in the interviews have often been followed by long, pregnant pauses. Pauses sometimes accompanied by feelings of uneasiness by both of us, and some insecure laughing on the side of the participants. These pauses,

then, especially in relation to other pauses in the course of the conversations, have not been comfortable. In psychoanalysis, a pause is interpreted as a revelation of fundamental conflicts in the ego struggling with unconscious desires, repressed material and the outside world (Khasnabish & Haiven, 2014, p.93). Analyzing the silences in situations that seem to be about rhetoric has become a central method of textual analysis (Farmer, 2001, p.1). In the context of my research, I believe that the pauses of the participants are valuable as material of analysis. They might be more telling than the actual content the participants provide me with.

Very pertinent is, for example, Casie’s reaction. When asking for her vision of a better society, she answers:

P (Participant): puh... that's difficult... .tja... I don't know, it would be weird to have nothing to fight for. (laughs). Probably we would find something, but... I think there would ... yeah...

I (Interviewer): It's a very difficult question...

P (Participant): ja... I think it would still mean lots of work, but it would be good because you are doing it because you want to, and it's for a good cause. But I think that's also what I am doing at the moment... (Casie).

Sonja, very similarly, reacts with an 'oh je', falling into that long pause. After the pause, as the quote shows, Casie answers by naming what she thinks stays the same in a better society, namely hard work. Others give very personal and limited visions of their ways of doing politics in a “more relaxed” (Hanna) way, or of the inclusion of new topics like pedagogy and children (Stefan) in their movements. Stefan confirms that there is a prevalence of negativity in the German Radical Left when he states that his vision is connected to a critique and negation of the present. Lisa mentions a vision of a ‘de-functionalisation’⁴¹ of her movements, only to then immediately stress the impossibility of this in her concrete circumstances of living, and the ‘Sachzwänge’ (inherent necessity/practical constraints) inherent in it. After a very long pause, Joop goes to historical examples of autonomous reproductive spaces in Spain and toddler groups initiated in the 1970s by the feminist movements in the Netherlands.

The silences and all the statements after them can easily be interpreted as a lack of radical imagination and creativity, an unwillingness to or impossibility of imagining a future. With my understanding of imagination, however, all their words are simply exemplary of the situatedness of radical imagination (Chapter 2) in their specific lives, intertwined with experiences/knowledge and

⁴¹ What she means is a vision in which the need to be productive, to reach a certain goal is not more important than the process of reaching it.

crisscrossed by the paradox of creativity/negativity (Chapter 1). Joop, for example, goes to movements he has only heard of or read about to develop his vision of a possible future. Stefan’s approach of negating the present and the confinements of a capitalist society Lisa describes for her movement are excellent examples of the forms the paradox of negativity/creativity can take. The situatedness of the radical imagination also means that it is influenced and confined by socio-, economic- and historical circumstances and regimes, such as the continuous production of multiple crises in capitalist societies. Concerning the pregnant pauses following my questions, I agree with Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) in interpreting them as symptomatic of the two overlapping crises of reproduction, which I introduce as pressing issues for both social movements and wider society.

Analyzing my interview material further, I interpret these statements also as symptomatic of the forces (potestas) that prevent change and make people struggle with radical imagination in the reproduction of the always-same patterns of oppression and violence. Two areas are striking in my research data: Firstly, police repression and the enclosure of autonomous spaces/times. Secondly, a hegemonic construction of what it means to be active and/or a ‘successful’ activist. In what follows, I elaborate upon both.

Police Repression, Enclosures of Commons and the Crises of Social Reproduction

All but one of my research participants prominently talk about police repressing their movements and their reactions after becoming parents. A large amount of these stories are situated in the space of demonstrations. In general, a shared reaction according to the participants’ stories is a hesitation to attend demonstrations out of an increased need for safety. Joop describes one horribly violent instance at a demonstration:

P (Participant): I saw it go completely wrong at the G8 protest, when the summit was in Evian 2000-something. We had a large demonstration, going into Lausanne, and police were really aggressive. And they, it was a really sunny Sunday morning and we were tens of thousands, I don't know exactly how many, and we were also very effective. That was the reason they thought ‘now we have to attack them’. And the police attacked when we entered a big park, Green Park. And it was full of children and parents, and they didn't know anything about the demonstration. And the confrontation took place there. And they just covered it with tear gas...

I (Interviewer): fuck...

P (Participant): And there were panicking children running around everywhere. I took one with me that was completely blind because of the tear gas and I ran away with her. And tried to find the parents later. But then I thought, ‘well, this is how the police acts, you know, they don't care at all’. In those kinds of situations there is really no solution. You don't bring your children there if you have a choice (Joop).

Joop repeats his conclusion that police violence and children in actions is not a solvable problem several times in the interview. Janneke and Barbara have had similar experiences. They both have attended demonstrations in the Netherlands that unexpectedly turned violent. As a result, their children wish to never attend a demonstration again. “It is way too traumatizing”, concludes Janneke. The police repression at demonstrations, Janneke and others tell, not only endangers the participants and children in their communities, but also fuels anxieties. This results in excluding them from demonstrating as a form of activism. When asked what she wants to teach her child, Hanna answers:

Well, what I would like to teach him is not to be afraid of the police (laughs). Because I do know some people, where some parents had some bad experiences with the police, what leads the children to always be afraid and not to feel like attending demonstrations... Well, I don't want that. Somehow, one can have daunted by some situations to not become careless, but not fear (Hanna).⁴²

In Hanna's story, the effects of police violence are long-lasting and not necessarily connected to direct experiences. What her words implicitly tell me is that it also has an immediate effect on children and members of her community in an inter-subjective transfer of traumas.

Another factor often mentioned in my interviews is the risk of getting arrested at demonstrations. Several participants point out that when a child is waiting at home, this risk is a frightening possibility. Casie and Barbara tell me their decisions whether to attend a demonstration with or without a child are always connected to a specific risk calculation for the event. Janneke talks about risks:

Then there was the risky part, that effected them [the children] as well. It's not nice when you see your mum on television getting beat up by a cop with a stick. The first time I got

⁴² “Also was ich ihm gerne beibringen würde ist keine Angst vor Polizei haben (lacht). Weil ich irgendwie ein paar Kinder auf jeden Fall kenne wo dann die Eltern zum Teil auch schlechte Erfahrung mit der Polizei gemacht haben oder so, was bei den Kindern dann dazu führt, dass sie immer Angst haben und keine Lust haben auf Demos mitzukommen... Also das will ich nicht. Man kann da schon irgendwie nen Respekt vor Situationen haben damit man nicht leichtsinnig wird oder so, aber keine Angst” (Hanna).

arrested, everyone panicked. And it took me some time to know that, to explain to them that being arrested was not that much of a problem (Janneke).

Janneke's understanding that getting arrested is 'not much of a problem' stands out here. I want to use it as an entry point into the complexity of repression and the different ways subjects are affected by it. Janneke's experiences of arrest are situated in a specific, nation-state regime, in which she is positioned in relative safety. Although there are drastic differences in types of repression, a common definition is given by Stockdill. He states that repression is "any [action] taken by [government] authorities to impede mobilization, harass and intimidate activists, divide organizations, and physically assault, arrest, imprison, and/or kill movement participants" (1996 in Earl, 2003, p.45). Police repression is, of course, not limited to the context of demonstrations. The participants mention possible attacks at action camps (Joop), house searches (Lisa) and information gathering tactics by the police force. Lisa says she was happy that her 14 month old child slept through a house search. Next to these, repression has taken place in the participants' narratives in other forms. They tell about changes in their behaviours in an attempt to counter it. Casie describes that her change of tactics after having children was in her squat. She and her community have tried to keep their squatting more invisible, rather than making it a public statement, to decrease the risk of police interventions (Casie). At the same time, they always try to take care in their discussions around children, out of a fear of that the children may repeat or refer to sensitive information (Casie).

The police are not the only government authority that the participants find repressive, or that hinder their activism and collective experiences of organizing. Schools and education are mentioned as one of the main things to deal with when becoming parents. The participants' experiences with these institutions differ. While some are happy with the specific institutions they have chosen for their kids, for example a Rudolf Steiner kindergarten (Stefan) or a democratic school (Casie), all of them still see the education system in general as repressive. Stefan repeatedly calls school a part of the "ideological state apparatus" and Joop is shocked about the differences between his school experiences and those of his 20 year old child:

The amount of testing that they do now on kids. it's really disgusting I thought. They already start when the kids are eight, they already start having to do these tests to see... and then it never stops again. Schooling now is more about tests than about learning anything. So these things you... but then, what to do with it politically... most of the time some, some things you can't have influence (Joop).

Joop feels he has a lack of options for intervening into his child's experiences of education; a certain hopelessness surrounds his statement. This hopelessness and feeling of powerlessness is symptomatic of the forces that confine radical imagination.

Barbara and Janneke tell me about specific state laws they find problematic. Barbara, in her regular work with children, feels that more and more laws are set in place that claim to support children's safety, but actually prevent their imagination from flourishing:

All these social rules, you have to, I mean, you cannot make... All these safety rules. You cannot make a little fire in you backyard, because it's not safe. Everything is not safe. For children, that means they learn that nothing is possible (Barbara).

Janneke, an enthusiastic supporter of what she calls 'the birth movement', also is critical of new state laws on the bodies of mothers:

And it's getting worse... there is a law in preparation now that will force mothers at the beginning of their pregnancy to go see a gynaecologist. And all the responsibility of the parents, of how they want to pass the pregnancy and how they want to give birth, is taken away from them. Because it will actually be the gynaecologist who is going to decide where she gives birth and under what conditions, with what medical assistance etc. And home birth doesn't make the economical market turn around. Hospital birth does (Janneke).

I could interpret some of these statements as implicitly, and sometimes very explicitly, romanticizing an allegedly better past, a past in which children were still able to play without caregivers having to oblige to safety rules (Barbara), and in which schooling was still connected to freedom (Joop). However, by reproducing such a narrative of loss, as described by feminist scholar Claire Hemmings (2005), I would mask the fact that certain oppressive structures were just as present 50 years ago, maybe just showing themselves differently. My argument is, therefore, that another way of analyzing the participants' narratives is to take seriously their experiences of significant change in neoliberal capitalism and changes of nation states. The perspective of Marxist feminist theorists, as developed in Chapter 1, makes it possible for me to make connections between the different forms of repression that the participants mention, be them state laws or police forces. I interpret them as part of processes of enclosure of commons, of formerly non-capitalist spheres. The anti-squatting bill in the Netherlands is exemplary of such a process, in which non capitalist commons, spaces of alternative reproduction are converted into spheres of the market.

The anti-squatting bill is present in all of the Dutch participants' stories. The bill (2010) has made squatting de jure illegal. Following this, squatting has become exponentially more difficult

and a lot of the bigger, older squats, especially in city centres, have been evicted. This has affected the Dutch activism scene immensely, as their autonomous spaces have been shut down. Barbara says, “people are either really busy with living, squatting, like... that's really a thing when people want to live in the city and the city is really difficult to squat now, because you get kicked out really soon. So people are either busy with that or busy with working to pay the rent” (Barbara). Time, she seems to imply, is taken away from possible political actions. Only the Dutch participants mourn the lack of spaces to organize alternatives, while all participants agree on the importance of these spaces (Chapter 4). The spaces of organizing in the German participants' lives are also regularly threatened by capitalist laws of value and the ‘Sachzwänge’ coming with them, as Lisa explains in the context of cost pressures in the building of her house project (Lisa).

The old Dutch squatting law dated back to 1981 and was called the ‘Vacant Property Act’ (Leegstandwet). Under this law, squatting was allowed under certain circumstances, namely if the building was empty for more than six and, with later legal revisions, more than twelve months, and if the squatters did not intentionally cause damage and were not caught in flagranti. The law was part of a pacification process after a series of strong protests under the label ‘No Homes, No Crown’ (geen woning, geen koning) in 1980. In this process, a lot of squats were legalized. With the new law for ‘Squatting and Vacant Property’ (Kraken en Leegstand), as of 2010 squatting is illegal and squatters risk up to a one year prison sentence, up to two years and eight months if they use force as a group. The parties initiating the law argue that squatting does not have a lot to do with lack of living space, that squatters take their rights too much into their own hands and that there is a ‘hardening’ of the squatter movement. They want the property rights of the owner to be of higher priority (NOS, 2010).

I interpret this law as a means of enclosing commons, the kind of commons of alternative social reproduction I place as central for sustainable social movements (Chapter 1). The property rights of the house owners are supported and the spaces are given to the market for sale, or for whatever other use businesses see. Barbara's words quoted earlier describe the effect of the law on squatter's lives as attacks on peoples' spaces for social reproduction and their survival. She exemplifies what it is that a process of enclosure can imply. Feminists have pointed out that these processes of accumulation by dispossession, and the crises of social reproduction accompanying them, are not limited to commons, but also concern bodies and ideologies. Seen from this perspective, the law that prevents mothers from home birth, which Janneke describes, is such an enclosure as well. Decisions are forced on mothers' bodies for the sake of increasing profit. In this

sense, every law and the authorities working on people's compliance with them always also act on bodies, whether these are adolescent or grown up bodies.

To further develop my argument that the forms of repression discussed in the interviews and the enclosure of squats (aka commons) are interconnected, I introduce the language of the Regulation School. Laws and other doings of states can be seen as enacting specific modes of regulation. The term 'mode of regulation' is used in Regulation Theory to explain the relation of institutions and individuals to the regime of accumulation. The realm of regulation is seen as relatively autonomous, often diverse and contradictory; a field of negotiation that is crisscrossed with power relations, but also rooted in the current accumulation regime (Jenson, 1987, p.6). Both the regime of accumulation and the mode of regulation are continually changing and in process historically and geographically. This resonates with the analyses of thinkers I introduce in Chapter 1, who use the theory of accumulation by dispossession. Going back to Marx, Harvey (2003) and Hartsock (2006) argue that the state is always an active proponent in these processes. It has, for example, caused the invention of private property laws that forced farmers to leave their land and move to big cities, forming the proletariat in the first processes of primitive accumulation and the beginning of the industrialization. And it is still nation states and other institutions including them that force neoliberal austerity measures, which effectively cut back welfare states and privatize formerly non-privatized spheres, on European countries. What we can see is a non-deterministic, but historically specific correlation between changes in the dominant regime of accumulation and modes of regulation. One dominant way to describe these socio-economic transformations is, according to Massimo De Angelis (2007), as a change from disciplinary to control societies. This transformation is, just as in the beginning of accumulation by dispossession as a regime, situated in the 1970s. Massimo De Angelis quotes Hardt and Negri's position according to which the 'regulation' of society changes from a diffused network of dispositives to:

Mechanisms of command [that] become ever more 'democratic': ever more immanent to the social field, distributed throughout the brains and bodies of the citizens. The behaviors of social integration and exclusion proper to rule are thus increasingly interiorized within the subjects themselves (DeAngelis, 2007, p.122).

Both forms of society indicate a specific way that the imaginations of its citizens and non-citizens are confined via direct force on their bodies or internalized forms of power. Social Movement researchers Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani (2006) see exactly this change in strategies of policing protests in Western 'democracies'. They argue that an 'escalated-force model', which is

characterized by a low priority on the right to demonstrate and the use of coercive, sometimes illegal methods, such as agent provocateurs, got replaced by a ‘negotiated-control-model’ in the 1970s/1980s. In this latter model, the focus is on the right to demonstrate peacefully, “a reduction in the use of force, greater emphasis on ‘dialogue’, and the investment of large resources in gathering information” (Della Porta&Diani, 2006, p.198).

The participants’ narratives about their experiences with state repression as parent activists complicate this description of a regime change. Rather than hearing about instances of this negotiated control model, I have heard about a growing fear of repression ‘escalated force style’, which is fueled even more after they became parents. How can these experiences be thought together with the diagnosis of a transformation from disciplinary to control societies? I see two grounds to do so, one conceptual and one contextual. Firstly, there is a problematic inherent in the diagnosis by Negri/Hardt that mirrors my critique of their ‘communism in waiting’ (Chapter 1). By conceptualizing the transformation as an epochal passage from one to the other, they interpret the new, ‘democratic’ freedom as “some type of liberatory movement tout cour” (de Angelis, 2007, p. 123). I do follow de Angelis in underlining that instead both disciplinary mechanisms and control systems always go together, if not even complement each other in capitalism. Some incidents that went viral in the radical activist scenes in the last year support this argument. There are the violent outbursts of police forces in southern European countries, the repression of anti Zwarte Piet demonstrations in the Netherlands,⁴³ in which 90 activists were arrested during a silent protest (2014), and the conviction of the German protester Josef in Vienna, 2014. After being in custody for six months for protesting the “Akademikerball”, Josef was sentenced to twelve months, eight of them spent on probation for “Landfriedensbruch” (breaking of peace), under circumstances that even the mainstream German newspaper *Der Spiegel* (2014) describe as “guilty by lack of evidence”⁴⁴. And indeed it is quite obvious, that his conviction is not based on evidence, but on the will to criminalize left-wing protests. Everyone participating in a demonstration in Austria has to deal with the possibility of sharing Josef’s fate.⁴⁵ David Graeber (2013) states that for the US context,

⁴³ The tradition of Zwarte Piet (Black Piet) is criticised as being racist. An article on the arrests can be found here: <http://www.nltimes.nl/2014/11/16/90-arrested-gouda-zwarte-piet-protest/>

⁴⁴ ‘Deutscher Student Josef S.: Schuldspruch aus Mangel an Beweisen’ retrieved from <http://www.spiegel.de/unispiegel/wunderbar/josef-s-in-oesterreich-urteil-in-wien-zu-haft-ohne-beweisen-a-982410.html>.

⁴⁵ More information: <http://soli2401.blogspot.eu/2014/07/24/an-injury-to-one-is-an-injury-to-us-all/>

Objections... are to be met with truncheons, lasers, and police dogs. It's no coincidence that marketization has been accompanied by a new ethos where challenge is met with an instant appeal to violence. In the end, despite endless protests to the contrary, our rulers understand that the market is not a natural social arrangement. It has always had to be imposed at the point of a gun... (2013).

Important for my argument is the way in which Graeber points out the connections between capital and state, the dominant regime of accumulations and modes of regulation, in his story one which diverts from mere control society mechanisms.

The second and contextual argument against a clear-cut change in modes of regulation or regimes is that we are in the middle of another change in the regulation of European societies. Whether the changes are interpreted, as de Angelis (2007) sees it, as a reconstitution of the relation between disciplinary and control mechanisms, or if a new mechanism is coming into being, such as the state of control Agamben (2014) describes, is not relevant in the context of this analysis. What is relevant is that the neoliberal enclosure of commons, aka Marketization, is accompanied and secured by both mechanisms of control societies or governmentality, and, if met with the resistance of, i.e., the participants of this research, with mechanisms of violent disciplinary force.

To conclude, I interpret the participants' narratives of police and other forms of repression with the background of enclosures of commons and bodies, the attacks this builds on people's spaces of social reproduction and the enforcement of these processes by state authorities. Enclosures are the spatial dimensions of (capitalist) exploitation. In the context of this research, they are also positioned as one of the two forms power (potestas) takes in preventing children from being a part of social movements and autonomous spaces (commons), thereby also shaping and confining the participants' radical imagination.

The Successful (because Independent and Productive) Activist

The second area of force confining the radical imagination that emanates from my research data concerns the social movements and their activist scenes internally. In the next part of this chapter, I summarize and analyze some difficulties the participants say they encounter in their communities when becoming parents. I interpret these in one of many possible ways, namely through the lens of what kind of hegemonic practices and definitions of activism are constructed in their communities and what kind of dominant time regime comes with it. Importantly, I argue that this construction

does not come out of nowhere, it is a reproduction of the dominant logic of the Same and capitalist value practices.⁴⁶

All participants tell me about changes in their movement participation, meaning their participation in their political group and (direct) actions, after they became parents. While the scale in which this happens varies, they all take a step back and/or organize their life a lot more in order to still be part of events. Lack of time is mentioned most often as the reason for this. All the participants describe difficulties with reconciling or bringing together all the different spheres in their lives, studying, working for wages, leisure time, with time for activism. Another important reason for a decline in movement participation is, according to the participants, something I summarize as child-unfriendliness in the participants' communities. The most obvious points of conflict in the interviews are cigarette smoke and the use of alcohol in the evenings in movement spaces. Some of the participants are tired of continuously having to be the ones addressing these as problems. Stefan is annoyed by the way community building is intimately entangled with partying. Furthermore, a lot of participants have told me that they often feel uncomfortable bringing their child to activist meetings, as it, depending on the age of the child of course, tends to disturb meetings. Joop, for example, talks about a situation before he even became a father himself:

P: And then, of course, never bring the child with you. Because that is for both, is, it's still impossible. And I was part of that also... I was at a meeting once and there was someone who brought a baby and it was crying all the time and then you couldn't have the meeting...

I: What happened?

P: And then, of course, this person left after some time. And then somebody brought up... I thought it was a good thing that he left cause it was interrupting the meeting (Joop).

While he agrees with the other person at that time, he also tells me that he changed his mind later, when he became a parent himself. Hanna explains that it is not the norm to bring a child to an event, and if she does, it is always met with surprise:

Well, I just often have the feeling that it is more a 'huh, you are bringing your child to the event?' or 'you are bringing your child to the meeting?' instead of just saying, 'hey, it's cool you're here' (Hanna).⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Masimo deAngelis (2007) defines value practices as “those actions and processes, as well as correspondent webs of relations, that are both predicated on a given value system and in turn (re)produce it. These are, in other words, social practices and correspondent relations that articulate individual bodies and the whole of social bodies in particular ways” (p.24).

⁴⁷ “Also ich hab halt oft das Gefühl es ist eher so ein, huh, du bringst dein Kind mit zur Veranstaltung? Oder du bringst dein Kind mit zu Treffen? Anstatt einfach so zu sagen, hey cool, dass du da bist” (Hanna).

Interestingly, I saw a difference between the German and the Dutch participants and their communities in this respect. While the Dutch participants told me that care relations are never a topic, the German participants have all encountered discourses on reproductive work and care in their communities. I see this difference as grounded in the (non)presence of the topic of care in their movements’ discourses and self-definitions. It seems that, in terms of an activist’s self-definition, being aware of care work and the way it is gendered is included in Germany. However, there seems to be a discrepancy between this self-definition, theoretical awareness and actual practice. For Stefan, this means that he feels a subtle child-unfriendliness:

I think a bit, because the thing is, I notice the positive reactions, but the negative ones are never told to me. Well, because I do believe that there is some kind of sentiment, at least in the context I am moving in, in which one would not say, ‘the children aren’t allowed to be there.’ Or, ‘look, that’s a problem, you’re not allowed to have your child with you now’ or, ‘take care that it’s silent when it’s with you. Ähm... Because no one would really dare to. Because that is politically... yes...” (Stefan)⁴⁸

Lisa tells of a similar, subtle child-unfriendliness. She also has a theory on where this might come from. Becoming a parent, in her story, immediately puts one into the box of a nuclear family life, something she experienced in her house project and interpreted as a “hidden child-unfriendliness” (Lisa). While she does support critiques of the nuclear family model, she thinks that an uncritical reproduction of it is too often ascribed to families who actually try to do things in a different way. Stefan has not felt supported in his community when it comes to topics of pedagogy and raising kids. His theory about why a sentiment of child-unfriendliness prevails is that there is no space for discourses on pedagogy, that instead an ‘anti-pedagogical’ attitude is the norm.

While all these examples of the participants’ experiences are rather direct, I want to bring up three less obvious factors I have encountered in my research. All these further complicate the possible inclusion of parents and practices of commoning childcare into communities, and give a deeper understanding of the confinements to radical imagination. My analysis of the construction of a ‘successful’ activist adds a temporal dimension of (capitalist) exploitation to the spatial dimension, in the form of enclosure of commons discussed in the first part of this chapter. This temporal dimension is facilitated in the ways capitalist logics are articulated in people’s everyday

⁴⁸ “Also ich glaube, also, ein bisschen, weil die Sache ist, die positiven Reaktionen bekomme ich halt mit, aber die Negativen werden mir ja nicht gesagt. Also, weil ich, ich glaube schon so ne Stimmung da ist, zumindest in dem Kontext in dem ich mich bewege, in dem man jetzt nicht sagen würde die Kinder dürfen nicht dabei sein oder guck mal, das ist ein Problem du darfst ein Kind jetzt nicht mehr dabei haben oder kümmer dich darum dass es still ist, wenn es dabei ist. Ähm.. Weil sich das niemand so richtig trauen würde. Weil das nun politisch auch.. ja...” (Stefan).

lives through a specific time regime or, as Harvey (1989) calls it, a “chronological net”. Historically, he explains that “the conquest of space first required that it be conceived of as something usable, malleable, and therefore capable of domination through human action” which means that space has had to be represented in a specific time regime “and value, as abstract, objective, homogeneous, and universal in its qualities” (p.176). In Marxist terms, the ‘traditional’ analysis of worker’s exploitation as a basis for profit places time as the central axis of exploitation. Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) state: “It is the system’s ability to make us trade our time [...] that gives it such a power over social reproduction” (p. 204). In a neoliberal time regime, there is not only the need to trade one’s time, but, furthermore, to organize one’s time 24/7 in the most effective way through a form of self government. Political scientist Janine Brodie (2004) traces this regime along policy changes from “welfare to workfare”⁴⁹ and argues that the very selective ascription of what kind of work is productive in this context reinforces reproductive work as an invisible outside (p.25). I call the value system produced here a ‘productivity ethos’, which is the fulcrum through which I look at the participants’ narratives in order to analyze what systems of oppression are all too often reproduced in social movements and which prevent the commoning of childcare as an emancipative and transformative practice. In respect to activism, scholar and activist Manuela Zechner (2013) summarizes: “Our political activity too is configured by neoliberal time, space and subjectivity: we have too little time and space, they are fragmented and unstable, it’s hard to commit to projects” (p.187). The three factors I carve out in what follows are, in a way, instances of the configuration of ‘neoliberal time... and subjectivity’ within the participants’ communities.

Firstly, I find that devaluing reproductive activities, such as childcare, does not stop at the ‘entrance’ of communities trying to live a life different from the majority of their societies. Maybe not surprisingly, systems of oppression are regularly reproduced in Radical Left communities. This is one of the observations that led Silvia Federici to advocate for the importance of autonomous social reproduction within commons and the debates about them. In countering this devaluation, I stress her intervention into the common/s debates as important and inspirational in this thesis, and have decided to look at and ask for experiences with these devalued practices (Chapter 1).

In the 1980s, Joop wrote an article about not being able to bring his child into squats. In his interview, he expresses that his imagining of facilities for children was not taken serious at that time:

⁴⁹ ‘Welfare to workfare’ programs aim at reintroducing people who live on benefits into the employment market as fast as possible. They thereby undervalue unpaid care work being increasingly done in the privat sphere (Brodie, 2004,p. 25).

I said, ‘I’m not going to visit any squat bar anymore unless they make a children’s corner’. Everybody thought it was very funny, which is telling, you know. I mean, it was meant funny, but the fact that it is considered funny is also a bit depressing (Joop).

Hanna, talking about much more current times than Joop, notices a devaluation of housework when doing the dishes. With an ironic undertone, she tells me that she often sees her fellow activists thinking: “I could write an immensely important text in the same amount of time” (Hanna). What she says is that the intellectual work of writing a text for the movement is considered a more important task, as an activist, than doing the dishes. And Lisa, explicitly using the notion of ‘value’, tells me:

We are trying, in the project, to see this somehow equivalently. But in praxis, I would say, it has again another value for the people. That’s, for example, one of these things I see in Kim when she says, ‘yes, but, Nele’, or whoever else, ‘she doesn’t do so much for the project’. I once answered, ‘but, well, she does take care of the kid or she sewed the swags for the backyard-fest’. It is already in the children’s heads, that sewing doesn’t have the same value as knocking down a wall. It is like that often, people talk about who carried heavy stuff upstairs or how great they were at using the drill. And a lot less about reproduction stuff (Lisa).⁵⁰

What I see in this example is a discrepancy between the discourses and self-definitions of her community, which ‘tries to see things equivalently’ but actually acts different in praxis. Taking into account all the interviews, I can only agree with Lisa’s conclusion that in activist communities there is not a lot of talk about ‘reproduction stuff’. Listening to the participants’ narratives, I conclude that the valuation of certain activities over others remains prevalent.

The second and, for me, most impressive factor is the way a certain ‘productivity ethos’, which I introduce in relation to Harvey’s (1989) notion of a ‘chronological net’ that structures space through time, seems prevalent in the participants’ communities. I see this ethos when Hanna portrays politics as often being ‘verbissen’ (dogged/sticking to one aim). The way she describes the effects of this being ‘verbissen’ makes the fellow activists in her political group almost seem driven by the need to accomplish as many things as possible in a short amount of time. In fact, the most

⁵⁰ “Wir versuchen im Projekt, das ist schon eigentlich gleichwertig irgendwie zu sehen. Aber so in der Praxis würde ich sagen hat das schon nochmal für die Leute nen anderen Stellenwert. Das ist zum Beispiel ne Sache die sehe ich auch wieder in Kim Wenn sie dann irgendwie sagt, ja... aber, hm, Nele oder was weiß ich wer, die macht gar nicht so viel fürs Projekt. Und dann hab ich auch schon gesagt, aber mensch, naja, aber die kümmert sich ja auch irgendwie um das Kind oder hat beim Hoffest irgendwie die Girlanden genäht. Und das das also selbst bei den Kindern schon so ankommt so, ja ey, das hat jetzt einfach nicht so den Stellenwert, wie ne Wand einreißen. Das ist schon oft so, dass dann mehr darüber geredet wird, was die Leute für schwere Sachen hochgeschleppt haben oder wie toll sie mit dem Bohrerhammer umgegangen sind. Und weniger über so Reproduktionsgeschichten”(Lisa).

obvious symptom of what I call ‘productivity ethos’ is the amount of activists experiencing phases of burn-out. I argue that every activist, including myself, struggles with this at a certain moment in their lives. As Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) also find, “burnout is key... because it is so universal among activists” and because “movements, we learned, often have difficulty offering the institutions, practices and spaces to help individuals avoid or return from burnout” (p. 129). Janneke and Sonja experience exclusion when having a depressed or burned out phase. When Sonja withdrew a bit from her work in the student’s union because of feeling burned out, she says encountered a lack of understanding. When others withdrew for the reason of writing a thesis it was ok (Sonja). Hanna explicitly broaches the issue as a lack of time for childcare practices:

I believe that if one would have more time and not everyone would be so haunted all the time, having the feeling they are sitting here but have to be somewhere else in ten minutes and everything has to go very fast, that then I believe, the handling of children or care activities would be easier (Hanna).⁵¹

Hanna’s statement strikes me in that it is obviously a thought inspired by the kinds of questions I ask while trying to convoke Radical Imagination. She does some important theorizing here by explicitly connecting, in my words, the possibilities for the commoning of childcare with the prevailing ‘productivity ethos’ of her political group. Janneke has another interesting dissatisfaction with her community, not so much connected to childcare but the question of how to deal with burn-out. She complains about a lack of space for vulnerability in her community:

I: So there is something, would you say there is no space for vulnerability?

P: It's difficult, it's very difficult. Ja.. I've, I'm slowly but surely climbing up from a depression. And I know two other people who really broke down because of all the information, all the suffering they encounter, all the fighting, all the lack of, of constructible alternatives. But there is hardly any room to talk about that. We talk about the technical things. We evaluate the action, we talk about the technical things. We don't talk about what police violence does to you. And how it was traumatizing. And if we talk about it, we say to each other, you know, go take a rest for a couple of weeks and then come back. But come back as soon as possible (Janneke).

⁵¹ “Ich glaub wenn man mehr Zeit hat und nicht alle so gehetzt sind und das Gefühl haben das sie eigentlich gerade hier nur sitzen weil sie in 10 minutens chon wieder woanders sein müssen und alles ganz schnell gehen muss, dann wäre auch glaube ich oft der Umgang mit Kindern oder mit Care tätigkeiten allgemein einfacher” (Hanna).

I interpret this lack of space for vulnerability and childcare relations in the participants’ movements as one side of a coin, whose other side is the pressure of being ‘productive’, doing ‘real political struggle’, as Joop describes when talking about the childcare work Barbara does:

But in this case, they also have stuff outside and they do gardening and involve children in that. So it happens a bit. But when it comes to real political struggles or something like that it's very seldom (Joop).

When asked what he means with ‘real political struggle’, he answers campaigning and confrontation. I suspect this might have to do with him having been involved in the autonomous movement rather than, for example, feminist struggles. Feminist struggles, according to Lisa, are the ones left to house an awareness of care relations. Nicole Tomasek (2013), in her article “Parents, Children and the Radical Left”,⁵² provides a longer list of activities considered “correct activism”:

Days are filled with squatting of houses, schools, squares or trees, with debates, plenaries, conferences, strikes and demonstrations, with the writing of leaflets, position papers and other resistive articles, with the founding and working in collectives, with glittering solidarity parties and everything else, which is belonging with correct activism (p.73, my translation).

Following this, she, and also two of the participants of this research, concludes that the Radical Left scene is a very young scene, with a lot of people older than 30 dropping out. Consequently, the ‘productivity ethos’ is connected not only to a specific notion of ‘correct activism’ but also a factor of generationality.

Scott Cutler Shershow (2005), in his book *The Work and the Gift*, conceptualizes the power of an ethos of production even in classical Marxist work. His observation is close to what I describe as a ‘productivity ethos’. I also see in the participants’ descriptions of their communities,

A kind of ethos, or even an ontology, of production: an assumption that work is not only an indispensable requirement for democratic citizenship but, indeed, the absolute token of our common social being, the very figure of our personal or collective freedom (Cutler Shershow, p.4),

Here, I would like to recall Casie’s vision of a future that “would still mean lots of work” (Casie). I argue that buying into this ethos of productivity, and thereby reproducing the dominant time regime of capitalism, keeps movements from spending time on the construction of alternative care relations or other important anti-oppression work, as “movements fear ‘investing’ time in the seemingly

⁵² “Eltern, Kinder und die radikale Linke”

eternal struggle against oppression” (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014, p.205 & Chapter 5). What Cutler Shershow (2005) does not say, but what I mention in my discussion of care as a gift in Chapter 1, is that this ethos is deeply gendered and built on the exclusion of everything and everyone who fails to produce the products asked for. What is excluded and pushed into the private sphere of a political/private binary, is everything that has to do with self- and community care (see Chapter 5).

I outline, from the descriptions of the participants, communities along the contours of an ideal type of a successful (male, young) activist, who seemingly does not need care, is instead independent and able to perform what is considered activism, namely attending demonstrations, writing articles and organizing campaigns. Khasnabish/Haiven (2014) argue that this archetype is partly inherited from the enlightenment tradition:

Given the way many social movements are forced to participate in the liberal political arena, the dominance of this archetype is not surprising. Often movements will select from among their ranks public spokespeople who appear to match this archetype most closely, further contributing to the power of the archetype as a paradigm for a successful activist (p.116).

This ideal type emanates from a configuration of politics as a domain of rationally debating men, distinct from the feminized private sphere. Activist parents (women more severely) and children are positioned as other to that ideal type of a productive activist. Practices of (child)care and the people involved in these relations are, just as I describe in Chapter 1, pushed into a feminized space outside of activist communities. Following this diagnosis, it is no wonder that the crisis of movement reproduction from which I start my research project often stays invisible as well. Most strategies to involve parents and children into movements, in this context, are headed in the wrong direction or do not go far enough, merely aiming to assimilate that which is left outside into the order of the Same, an order in which activism is closely connected to that archetype of a productive activist. Lisa reflects on a specific movement strategy in this context. She tells me that the instability of political groups and the often irregular attendance of meetings, because the members of the group have to work for wages or are sick, is often countered by putting even more pressure on the members of the group. This is an automatic reaction. She herself expresses doubts about its adequacy, asking whether reinforcing attendance in the very same way that ‘kicked’ people out in the first place is the correct strategy. In connecting the question, she raises about strategies to counter her groups attendance problems with the common/s debates as introduced in Chapter 1, I reason that indeed what she hints toward is that there is more to commoning practices in a political group

than the autonomy of social reproduction and organizing. They have to go hand in hand with a broader transformation of the group and its values as a (collective) subjectivity (Chapters 4+5).

Having discovered this reduction of care relations to a role as other of the same, even in activist communities who try to live things differently, I am not surprised that the gendered division of labour is reproduced as well. I consider this the third factor confining transformative experiences of collective childcare. Joop seems a bit ashamed that at action camps it is mostly women doing the childcare. When I point this out, he laughs uncomfortably:

P (Participant): What I find is that in these circumstances with action camps, which for at least the activities that I took part in were always important, it was more, was easier to do and it happened more, because then there were always people, mostly women, that thought ‘ok, we have to organise also one tent for children stuff’...

I (Interviewer): And it is mostly women?

P (Participant): Ja. But not only. But mostly (laughs) (Joop).

Hanna also mentions that it is “always the same people” and “almost always women” doing the childcare. When Sonja enters her political group, the work of organizing the childcare is automatically assigned to her, as a mother:

P: I think it’s a bit sad. Well, I then said very consciously... because I had or have a child, I was automatically, for example for the summer fest, in the beginning inscribed, grouped to do the children’s space and to do children’s actions.

I: Oh no...

P: ...,to be responsible for that, I found totally silly. And I also said then ‘sorry people, I have... I can give you tips or something like that, what would maybe be cool, but I really feel like doing something else’ (Sonja).⁵³

After becoming mothers, both Casie and Lisa have been surprised by the stability of the gendered divisions of labour and responsibilities. Lisa puts a lot of work in changing these structures. She has felt “pushed back” by negotiating with the father of the child. Casie underlines the way she sees a

⁵³ “Ich finds halt ein bisschen schade, also das hab ich dann auch ganz bewusst gesagt, dadurch dass ich ein Kind hatte oder habe, wurde ich dann automatisch so ein bisschen, beispielsweise fürs Sommerfest anfänglich dafür eingetragen, eingeteilt ein Kinderspace zu machen, für diese Kinderaktionen da zu sein.

I: Oh nein...

P: verantwortlich zu sein und das fand ich total blöd. Und ich hab dann auch gesagt: ‘sorry Leute, ich habe irgendwie jetzt... ich kann auch da auch Tips geben oder so, was vielleicht cool wäre, aber ich aber echt mal Lust was anderes zu machen’” (Sonja).

gendered division of labour fostered by society, which “surely makes it difficult (for example by putting these tables for changing diapers only in 'women's' toilets and things like that)” (Casie).⁵⁴

I show, through my research material, that just as in general society, the way activism figures in my research participants' lives constructs a feminized social space outside of 'real' political struggle, in which relations of care are pushed aside and to which female activists are bound in bigger numbers than males, due to the division of labour being reproduced. This analysis, based on Irigaray's conceptualization of an order of the Same, places childcare as an other of the Same and reveals the connections between the devaluation of care, the 'productivity ethos', the archetypical activist and the gendered division of labour.

While imagination as such is an ambivalent concept (Chapter 2), I define radical imagination as a collective process needed in emancipatory struggles, having the potential to transform society and the forms these struggles take. Out of my research material, I identify two factors that confine this radical imagination in the participants' communities: The enclosure of commons and police repression; and the hegemonic construction of what it means to be active and what activism is within the communities. Both are interconnected with the temporal and spatial dimensions of the power (potestas) of capitalism, touched upon in my analysis. The broader aim of this thesis is to find traces of 'positive', or at least transformative experiences with children and childcare, in order to stress the strand of the commons debates that asks, from a political and ontological perspective, what a commoning of childcare can do. The next two chapters are dedicated to these questions, inquiring whether there are traces of alternative spatialities and temporalities arising out of these experiences and practices.

⁵⁴ She wrote me this in an email commenting on the first draft of this thesis. I received the email on November 4th, 2014.

Chapter 4 - Childcare Within Social Movements as a Space-Making Practice

Throughout the research phase of this project, I have repeatedly listened to reports about positive and recharging childcare practices in the participants' movements. These have happened in contexts in which social reproduction is organized collectively for particular spaces - commons - even if only for a weekend activist camp. As soon as I had realized the importance of experiences of collective reproduction, I gave my observation back in the conversations with the participants. When I asked Sonja if she shares my observation, she replied: “I think yes, it is just being lived there. What you preach all the time is largely implemented and exemplified... and that is really important” (Sonja). My observations about the power of collective practices of (child)care have made me stick to my plan and look closely at what it is these experiences enable.

In Chapter 3, I analyze specific aspects of the spatial and temporal dimensions of capitalist and patriarchal exploitation visible in the participants' narratives. In this chapter, I focus on the notion of space, or rather processes of space-making in practices of childcare, while the temporal aspects are central in Chapter 5. Accordingly, my question here is how spaces of social movements, commons, are shaped or transformed by collective (child)care and whether these transformations can be made/are meaningful beyond their local contexts. In a way, this question follows my theoretical exploration of the two strands of the common/s debates (Chapter 1). Asking it means looking at both practices within commons and the transformative potential that discussions on the common and practices of commoning have. I show how the participants experience and/or imagine alternative spatialities for social movements. My analysis relies on a relational understanding of space. The relation between space and commons of social reproduction is more complicated than one in which space simply serves as the ground or site for commons use. Commoning is a form of space or place-making; a (re)shaping of socio-spatial dynamics and structures (Moss, 2014, p.462).

I approach the way space figures from different angles in this chapter by summarizing some, and more closely analyzing three ways space matters in my research data. Firstly, I show how the commons of childcare created by the participants and children opens up spaces of shared responsibility. Secondly, I engage with a much more symbolic and maybe cryptic notion of space by writing about the spaces in between the participants and the children as Others. These will be interpreted as standing for the activist community's attempts to relate to their children in a way that acknowledges their differences. It is here that the political and ontological question of relating in

the common is most prevalent. Thirdly, by showing spaces of encounter that go beyond the activist community in question, I argue that transformative possibilities are not limited to a place-based geography of care. Instead, a relational understanding of space shows that they are always already meaningful beyond the local.

Spaces of Shared Responsibility and Embodied Solidarity

Hanna was the first to point out clearly how shared responsibilities beyond the nuclear family are created in her living project, in which many positive experiences have been fostered:

I do indeed believe that it has to do with whether people are already used to children. I believe that, especially with really small children, a lot of people fear ‘oh my god, I could do something to them’. Inhibitions are bigger then... I believe when one never sees the child, it is more difficult to build a relation to them. And when one doesn’t have a relation, it is also more difficult to care for them. So, and I believe when one then lives in such a house project together with people and sees them everyday, then it is a bit more familiar (Hanna).⁵⁵

In another moment of the interview, she explains her belief that living together, for people without children, increases the empathy for what it means to be a main caregiver, namely that it is a 24-hour job and even ten minutes without a child is a real relief (Hanna). In a similar manner, Barbara tells me how, in her experience spending time in a big squat, the sharing of care responsibilities comes ‘naturally’: “All these things, people take care automatically, and that's very nice. It's, they are conscious that the kids are around, that they have other needs than adults” (Barbara). Lisa underlines the conscious, strategic efforts that go into organizing caring outside of the nuclear family relation, while also stating that her house project has made things easier:

I would say that the living together in the house, that, well, the approaches and ideas were actually already there before it. But the living together here makes things a lot easier, because a lot becomes self-evident and I don’t have to think long about how to divide the weeks, because a lot just emanates out of everyday life. But I believe this happens because we organized very consciously in the house from the beginning, or in our flat-sharing

⁵⁵ “Ich glaube schon das es was damit zu tun hat ob Leute schon Kinder gewöhnt sind. Ich glaub gerade bei ganz kleinen Kindern haben viele Leute Angst, oh Gott, da tue ich denen irgendwas, da sind die Hemmungen größer. [...] Ich glaube halt, wenn man das Kind nie sieht dann fällt es einem schwieriger, generell einfach ne Beziehung dazu aufzubauen. Und wenn man keine Beziehung dazu hat fällt es einem glaube ich auch schwerer sich darum zu kümmern. So, und ich glaube wenn man dann in so nem Hausprojekt mit den Leuten zusammen wohnt und jeden Tag die sieht so, dann ist das halt in bisschen familiärer...” (Hanna).

communities, to organize the way we do it now. I believe if we were the three of us now, the father and the child, in this house, in a flat together, then it wouldn't be like that (Lisa). ⁵⁶

Lisa reminds me that the question of 'how to live together' is an old one in traditions of radical left and anarchist activism. A strategy that tries to put into practice alternative structures of care seems to be a common-sense idea that her living project started from. Lisa, Hanna and Barbara describe ways in which community members have taken responsibility when regularly surrounded by children.

To rephrase their words, it appears that the possibility of distributing responsibilities, the creation of a space to do so in the first place, is closely connected to this 'being surrounded with'. Although this observation is remarkable, it does not surprise me. As already discussed in Chapter 1 from a theoretical angle, there is no way not to care, even more so, the material shows, if one is living together in a commons. The creation of spaces in which responsibility for childcare is collectivized is intimately entangled with spaces of everyday reproduction in a way that the latter open up the former.

In line with my attempts to convoked processes of radical imagination, I have pushed the participants who told me about good experiences of sharing responsibilities to think further, to reflect on what this means for their community and activism. In this context, Hanna tells me that, for her, the involvement of community members in caring for her child is “somehow a question of solidarity” (Hanna). This solidarity is not necessarily one in which “other people constantly look after my child” (Hanna). What she wishes for is a readiness, some initiative and a restructuring of values, so that solidarity is not only about “time and money”, but also “somehow, the children”. I classify the latter notion of solidarity as an abstract form of solidarity often practiced in social movements, which circles around organizing funds (money) for campaigns of groups with less possibilities or a high valuation of the time an activist gives to organizing in his/her political group. Silvia Federici (2010) argues that this abstract solidarity “often characterizes relations in the movement,... limits our commitment, our capacity to endure, and the risks we are willing to take” (p.144). By adding children to that list of forms of solidarity, Hanna brings care relations into the notion of solidarity.

⁵⁶ “Ich würde sagen das dieses Zusammenleben in dem Haus, das, also die Ansätze und Ideen waren eigentlich vorher schon da, aber dieses Zusammenleben hier erleichtert halt ganz viel, weil viel dann so selbstverständlich wird und ich nicht großartig überlegen muss wie Wochen jetzt aufgeteilt werde, weil sich so ganz viel aus dem Alltag raus ergibt. Aber ich glaub das liegt auch schon daran, dass wir uns auch von Anfang an im Haus bewusst organisiert haben oder in unseren Wohngemeinschaften so organisiert haben wie wir das eben jetzt tun. Ich glaube wenn wir jetzt zu dritt, der Vater, das Kind und ich hier in diesem Haus wohnen würden, dann wäre das nicht so” (Lisa).

To formulate it in terms of my view that the role of care relations is a feminized sphere (Chapter 1), I argue that her bringing care relations into representation within commons transforms a disembodied understanding of solidarity, which I place in line with the order of the Same. Consequently, thinking, as Hanna does, of spaces of responsibility as a form of solidarity opens up an embodied notion of it. Commoning of material means of life is a powerful mechanism to create mutual bonds and collective interests that go beyond relations of these abstract forms of solidarity. (ibid., p.144). It is a solidarity that goes beyond money transfers, statements or the organization of a demonstration, and is instead grounded in utterly ordinary, everyday life. At the same time, the spaces shared are transformed into scenes of solidarity.

Spaces in Between

The second kind of space I see emanating from the research material is ‘spaces in between’. I choose the notion of ‘spaces in between’ in reference to Luce Irigaray’s work (1993a) on non-hierarchical relations between men and women, a sexual difference secured by a representation of the negative, which metaphorically is something like a ‘space in between’ two radically different beings (Chapter 1).⁵⁷ I find that the question of how to relate to one another always already comes along with the participants’ discussions of the commoning of childcare. It comes in the form of negotiating differences between caregivers and in the form of grassroots, democratic ways of decision making. The narratives of these attempts to relate in difference get an extra twist in the way they tell of their relation to children. In what follows, I analyze some of the ways in which I see this ‘extra twist’, namely a concern with the question of how to relate to children in their difference.

On my first look, many of the participants’ statements seem to imply the need to treat children as equals instead of different. Casie, for example, underlines the independence of children:

And also, but that's more a different way to look at children, to see them as capable of making their own decisions and mistakes instead of continuously telling them how to avoid making mistakes (Casie).

Sonja tells me that she tries to raise her child according to a pedagogical approach of equality, in which one idea is to treat children a bit like “a good friend” (Sonja). This discourse of equality is a mainstream one in the public sphere of politics, as well as in discussions of inclusion and exclusion in the radical communities with which I am engaged. In light of my research methodology,

⁵⁷ This is more of a metaphorical decision, as I am well aware that this interval is spatial and temporal (Hill, 2008).

however, it would be too superficial to stop after diagnosing it. Instead, I take a second look. In reading the participants’ statements with my theoretical perspective of sexual difference, I see an awareness of and will to question the role difference plays in ‘grown-up’/child relations.

On my second look, I have found that Lisa, Hanna, Sonja and Barbara all have a similar concern. They feel the need to underline that they take care not to impose their beliefs or their ways of organizing (i.e. consensus-based decision making) on the children in their communities. Sonja states that the risk of imposing something does “exist a lot” (Sonja). Hanna and Lisa reflect on the danger of imposing a specific order, an activist culture or ideology. Hanna thinks it is important to take care that one “lets children be children” (Hanna). For her, the other side of trying to be inclusive of children in social movements (as equals) is the risk of somehow hammering certain ideologies, for example anti-nationalism, in the children’s heads. For Lisa, it is not only about ideologies being imposed. In the context of her living project, there is a lively discussion of whether to organize a children’s general meeting as part of the democratic structure. At the time of the interview, the decision had not been made. She describes the climate around that issue:

I ask myself sometimes, ähm, I am a bit unsure sometimes, if our forms organizing, if that is adequate and right. And I am in a lot of exchange about this with other parents in the project. There actually were situations in which Kim [her daughter] said, yes, she wants a plenary as well, a children’s plenary. But there were also other parents in the project who thought that these are the kind of forms in which grown-ups organize themselves and children might have totally different possibilities. And this need to make a plenary is, indeed, that they want to imitate and somehow, it’s a game... And not at all the way they negotiate their needs (Lisa).⁵⁸

I myself have experienced a children’s plenary at an activist camp, in which the children not only phrased their wish to stop fighting and arguing with one another, but also the wish to not have carrots in the food anymore. What they instead wished for was making bread on sticks with the fire, a theatre workshop in the circus tent and more chips and chocolate. The plenary was led by an activist who has experience working with children in this context, and was mostly composed of children. What I find interesting is the way that the facilitator presented the outcome of the plenary

⁵⁸ “Ich frag mich nur manchmal ob, ähm, also... ich bin mir da manchmal so ein bisschen unsicher ob unsere Formen uns zu organisieren ob das für sie so angemessen und das richtige ist. und da bin ich auch mit anderen Eltern hier im Projekt viel im Austausch drüber. Es gab tatsächlich auch Situationen wo Kim dann meinte, ja, sie will auch mal ein Plenum machen, ein Kinderplenum. Aber dann gab’s aber auch andere Eltern hier im Projekt die meinten das sind vielleicht irgendwie so Formen wie sich Erwachsene organisieren und Kinder haben da vielleicht noch irgendwie ganz andere Möglichkeiten und dieses Bedürfnis Plenum machen zu wollen ist dann tatsächlich auch eher so dass die das imitieren wollen und irgendwie so’n Spiel.. Und gar nicht so die Form wie die ihre Bedürfnisse aushandeln” (Lisa).

in the general meeting of the camp (because the children participants were too shy to talk). She seemed to have actively adjusted the content to what is accepted in or closer to an outcome of a similar meeting in a grown-up session. This means she left out some of the wishes of the children, namely all the ones concerned with chocolate and chips. I have concluded for myself that with a skilled facilitator, such a structure can work very well for children, but that it also is clear that the outcome of such a meeting can be, in many ways, different from and sometimes incompatible with the grown-up dominated structure, culture and values of the camp.

The most impressive story comes from Janneke. She tells a wonderful story about how she and her activist friends realized the ways they discourage her grandson from experimenting and, thereby, impose upon him specific ideas of how to do things. This story is worth quoting at length:

P: Last year my daughter was here with her son. And there were more activist people spending a couple of days here and... my grandson was playing with the puzzle over there. It has four different geometrical shapes, like a circle and a square and a triangle. He was randomly trying out different forms and they would not fit. We would not respond until he put the right form into the right hole and then we would all applaud. So he was looking at us applauding, and he was doing it again. But then, all of the sudden, we all realized what we were actually doing. What the idea behind it was. We discouraged any experiment, if it doesn't fit how things should be done. We would not applaud if he was just experimenting.... My children spend a small time at the ‘Vrije School’, the Steiner based school. And in the kindergarten, they would not allow puzzles. And I never understood, I mean, what's wrong with a puzzle? But that day I understood what was wrong with a puzzle.

I: It's a wonderful metaphor also for activism... A great story.

P: It goes for a lot of things... Like experimenting is socially not accepted, doing the things how they should be done is socially accepted and rewarded (Janneke).

This conversation is a great moment I owe to the specificity of my research methodology. I, when impressed by her story, asked Janneke to think about the way it provides a metaphor for activism and she agreed. Furthermore, her story shows in clarity a process of collective reflection and discussion about how to relate to her grandson in light of a dominant culture, which discourages experiments and encourages self-reproduction instead.

Lisa, Hanna, Sonja, Barbara, Janneke and myself all are concerned with more or less successful attempts to not impose a dominant system on a specific group of people in a community,

in this case children.⁵⁹ Underlying this concern is, I argue, a rejection or at least questioning of certain dominant characteristics of society and specific activist cultures. Thereby, these are implicitly situated as limited, contextual and not universal.

Is this not a too speculative conclusion? On the one hand, it certainly is diverting from the words and language used by the participants. On the other hand, though, it has never been my intent to remain on that level of analysis. I consider it a strength of my qualitative approach to the participant's narratives, to not only encourage reflections, but also intermingle them at specific points with my own radical imagination. A radical imagination partly shaped by the Marxist feminist theories and feminist philosophy presented in Chapter 1. It is in this context that I analyze the narratives and reflections of the participants on imposing orders and ideologies as a consciousness of the participants of the dominant structure and symbolic system in their communities, made by grown up men (and women). A purely equality based approach to the topic would mean discussing the possibilities and tools in a way that includes children as equals in existing structures instead of questioning the very structures themselves. Being with children in a community is clearly not a 'simple' matter of inclusion of children for the participants. Using Irigaray's language, I rephrase my interpretation of the stories and say I find statements that hint at an awareness of children as different, as Others of the Other to the existing culture in society and activist communities. I also find efforts to do justice to this in the narratives. In my words, not theirs, some participants' statements imply a lack of space for children as subjects in their communities. They go beyond aspirations of including children as equals and towards an awareness of the ways in which children are, just as women, pushed into a position of an other of the Same.

Lisa's critique of the anti-adultism⁶⁰ of the radical childcare collectives I brought into the conversation shows another aspect of her trying to think through how to relate to children. She states:

I think, what I always find problematic with these positions that so strongly criticize a kind of adultism... well, with the quotes I have the feeling that children are represented a something very positive somehow... I think, well, very often children reproduce what they experience, sometimes even more extremely... Well, there are also these kind of discourses

⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that I did not find a story that resonates here in the two male research participants' narratives. However, I do not have enough material or space to dig deeper into this observation.

⁶⁰ One definition of adultism states that adultism is “all those behaviors and attitudes which flow from the assumption that adults are better than young people and entitled to act upon young people in a myriad of ways without their agreement” (Hopeworks Camden <http://www.hopeworks.org>). Implicit in these and other definitions is the will to treat children as equals.

in which education is relatively ill reputed. In the meantime, I find it quite reasonable to intervene in things, and yes, somehow to encourage the child to reflect on how another person would feel in that situation (Lisa).⁶¹

Consequently, she says, it is not the right strategy to deconstruct the category of children, as done in some positions of anti-adultism. Children are “more dependent as a group” and “affected by specific relations of power”, however, she adds, they often are not represented in activist communities (Lisa).

It would be easy to disqualify Lisa’s position as one of an othering of children, leading to hierarchical relations between her and children. In contrast, I argue that Lisa is aware of this danger and that she is in line with anti-adultist positions in pointing this danger out. Where she diverts is the question of what alternative forms of relating could be. For her, they can explicitly not be treating children solely as equals with no need “to intervene in [their] things” (Lisa). Furthermore, Lisa clearly unmasks a “grown-up projection” of children as positive and innocent (Lisa). In Chapter 1, I touch upon Lee Edelman’s (2004) critique of the image of the Child and its role in politics and public discourses. Reading Edelman together with Irigaray (1993b), I argue that this image is to be placed within the language of an order of the Same, in which there is no space for a subject position for children. Lisa does not want to reproduce the image of the Child, which she sees as prevalent in anti-adultist positions and which Edelman embeds in a discourse of ‘reproductive futurism’. This reproductive futurism, according to the Lacanian Edelman (2004), shapes political discourses, both in the realm of public politics and social movements, in terms in which the “Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention” (p.3).

By rejecting any romanticized image of the Child and by being careful not to impose their own beliefs and ways of organizing on the children in their communities, the participants practice and are concerned with the theoretical questions Irigaray and Edelman address. Or, Edelman and Irigaray address what the participants are concerned with already. What I carve out, in a process of reading the narratives of the participants together with my theoretical explorations and radical imagination, is a double strategy in the participants’ reflections about how to relate to children in

⁶¹ “Und ich glaube was ich irgendwie an so Positionen die irgendwie so nen Adultismus so stark kritisieren auch immer schwierig finde.. also ich hab schon bei den Zitaten das Gefühl das Kinder irgendwie so als was sehr positives dargestellt werden irgendwie... und ich denk so, naja, ganz oft ist es auch so das Kinder das reproduzieren was sie so mitkriegen und teilweise aber einfach noch extremer, [...]also es gibt ja auch so Diskurse in denen so Erziehung relativ verschrien ist. Mittlerweile find ich’s aber schon durchaus sinnvoll da Sachen irgendwie einzugreifen und ja, irgendwie das Kind dazu anzuregen irgendwie darüber nachzudenken, wie jetzt die andere Person in der Situation fühlen würde” (Lisa).

commoning childcare. When narrating the relations to (their) children, the participants follow a strategy of equality, but also, more interestingly, a strategy of (sexual) difference.⁶² Of course, this meaning of sexual difference in Irigaray’s work, the conceptualization of non-hierarchical relationships between men/women and adults/children, is in some sense utopian; sexual difference is non-existing. Consequently, I am consciously modest in arguing that I find traces of an analysis mirroring Irigaray’s, and a will to respect a certain degree of uncertainty and limit in understanding children in the participants’ narratives. For sure, though, it has become clear that sharing childcare in commons necessarily also opens up the question of how to relate to one another, an ontological question raised in debates on the common, in the participants’ narratives. The possibility of rethinking relations in ethical terms of ‘spaces in between’ two subjects, in this case an adult and a child, starts from the recognition of the position of women (mothers) and children in the symbolic order of the Same. I argue this recognition is implicit in some of the participants’ reflections of how to relate to children in commons.

“How is this radical?” - A Relational Understanding of Space and Spaces of Encounter

When I did the workshop at the activist camp, I introduced the aim of my thesis, namely to find these traces of political and ethical possibilities in commoning childcare. Then I facilitated an exchange between the workshop participants on the issues of children and childcare in their lives and activism. While many of them have expressed appreciation for the space to discuss these sometimes disillusioning experiences, the feedback of one woman strikes me. She said something like, “I really found it interesting to listen to all these communal, everyday life questions, but I ask myself: How is this radical at all?”. She elaborated on her view that “local solutions” cannot change the bigger “global systems” and therefore cannot make differences on these scales. They are, rather, neoliberal and individualized ways of privatizing conflicts and reproduce “left parallel worlds” that give young people a comfortable bubble to live their lives. She did, at that time in the research process, hit a nerve because I was increasingly asking myself what the political impact of commons of childcare could be apart from their grounding in a specific place and community. In fact, it is, as

⁶² Equality and Difference are often seen as opposing feminist strategies. In this context, historian Joan Scott’s article “Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference: Or the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism” is interesting (1988). She criticises the binary opposition between the two positions in which feminists seem to have to take sides, a move that weakens the feminist movement. Employing poststructuralist tools of analysis, Scott (1988) states: “In fact, the antithesis itself hides the interdependence of the two terms, for equality is not the elimination of difference, and difference does not preclude equality” (p. 38). With help of an exemplary court case, Scott aims to answer the question of how the dichotomy itself works. She concludes that a choice between equality or difference cannot and should not be an option for feminists. The antithesis to equality is inequality, not difference. And the opposite of difference is neither sameness, nor identity, but a thinking of differences differently and more diversely (p.44).

touched upon in Chapter 1, an ongoing discussion within the common/s debates how revolutionary or reformist they can be. In this chapter, I use the interview material to argue that the ways in which this woman in my workshop implicitly pits a notion of what is local against an abstract force called the global is not the only way to see the force of commons. I will propose a relational understanding of space in the context of my research data, which enables me to deconstruct this dichotomy.

One perspective often taken in a relational understanding of space is a social constructivist one. However, Timothy Moss (2014), in an article on the spatiality of the commons, states that there is, in this perspective, a “danger of subsuming material elements purely to objects of human perception and thereby disregarding their intrinsic and distinctive attributes” (p. 463). I see Federici (2006) making a similar point within the common/s debates when she criticizes Hardt and Negri for ignoring the material basis on which the internet, as one of the celebrated common/s, relies. She refers to servers worldwide, which are in the hands of transnational companies. My research data further makes it impossible to subsume the material elements of the construction of space, as it is these elements that figure prominently in the participants’ narratives.

The materiality of space matters in the way the participants describe the importance of specific places in meeting their needs as caregivers and the needs of their children. Casie, when asked about positive experiences with collective childcare, mentions the importance of this physical space. She says whether they are good experiences for her changes:

In the old squat, we had a lot of space, so there were more children going around and if they wanted to play together, they play together and if not, then not. So that was good (Casie).

Not only the dimensions of space matter to the participants, also the division of it and the physical resources within play a role in their narratives. Explaining his experiences at activist network meetings, Stefan describes in detail the ways different rooms were arranged:

The premises were very good for it. There was a room where the children could go, at the same time possibilities to sleep... so, because it went on for a whole weekend... on the same compound... it was possible in these premises that one could have a baby monitor, also in the evenings when it [the meetings] went on. The children could sleep, and, ähm, one could also still do something in the evenings (Stefan).⁶³

⁶³ “Und die Räumlichkeiten waren halt total gut dafür. Es gab nen Raum wo die Kinder hin konnten, gleichzeitig die Schlafmöglichkeiten, waren... also weil’s ein Wochenende ging, waren auch auf dem gleichen Gelände. [...] das [war] von den Räumlichkeiten so möglich, dass man quasi ein Babyphon auch abends wenn das noch weiter ging, haben konnte. Die Kinder konnten schlafen und ähm, man konnte noch auch Abends noch was machen irgendwie” (Stefan).

Sonja describes similar needs of the spaces in which political meetings and events are held. The material setup of the spaces the participants move in plays a crucial role in the way (collective) childcare figures in their activism and community.

The materiality of spaces or specific places is often associated with an essential, local identity of these places. Sometimes, in both academic research and activism, a hierarchy is set up between local places and space as a more abstract and global force (Massey, 2004, p.5), such as global capitalism penetrating local places and their communities. I explicitly see these specificities and subscription of identities in places in the narratives. For example, the participants consider caring practices as political only in specific places. Barbara says that she is “more conscious of the activism when there is an action or a festival which is about it or when we are among activists” (Barbara) and Lisa makes a difference between cooking lunch for her daughter and cooking during the Vokü at the local autonomous youth centre. Doing childcare in these spaces has the same differing meanings.

At the same time, I want to show in what follows that this impression of seemingly fixed ascription of meaning to places by the participants is only one side of the story. The narratives also allow for an interpretation in which these specificities of places are not essential nor unchangeable essences, but rather, as is every space, relationally constructed. My analysis of *spaces of shared responsibility*, *spaces in between* and the materiality of spaces so far relies on the locally grounded experiences and narratives of the participants, their direct human-to-human care relations. The childcare practices discussed are bound to the physical proximity of activist communities. I also find in the research data that commoning childcare seems to open up unexpected *spaces of encounter* with members and topics outside of the participants’ communities.

Especially Barbara and Joop talk of how, through being with children, they enter into new communities and thereby open up spaces of encounter with people outside their activist circles. For both of them, these experiences have been beneficial in terms of satisfying their needs for care and support, and in terms of politicizing their caring practices. Barbara, who works with children in an autonomous centre, describes how all kinds of women from the neighbourhood bring their children on Wednesdays when they are open:

The mix of the people, I think, is very good. Then you already are doing (giggles), some friend of mine, he was a bit shocked when he came to help out here. I asked him to do a music workshop with the kids. And he saw these rich mothers come in, like, perfumed and like, what he was not used to or he didn't like at all. And then he was asking me and then I

told him about, I like this mix. And then he told me, ‘Ah oohh. You’re doing direct activism’ (laughs) (Barbara).

To her surprise, Barbara’s friend defines her work as direct action after overcoming the suspicion surrounding unusual encounters with women from the neighbourhood. This way Barbara realizes that, indeed, her work is political. Joop has been surprised by his change in position in his neighbourhood after becoming a father. He has not only been treated more friendly, but has also come to value the importance of a local community supporting each other:

I (Interviewer): So you discovered somehow a new community? Which is the neighbourhood community?

P (Participant): Well, ja, the need, the importance of it, in our case it wasn't immediately there... Suddenly you saw lots of more people in the streets and in the neighbourhood. (interruption by boat passing by)... I suddenly discovered that you have a completely different position in society. People greet you even if you don't know them in the tram, they start talking to you. So in a way, I mean, I don't think everybody should be a parent or something like that, but it is worthwhile to have a different position in the same neighbourhood. And, as an activist, you always thought you were so important... but in fact you were not. You were a marginal kid in the squat and nobody knew you... (Joop).

It is very interesting to see that by engaging in a space with new encounters, Joop is confronted with his partiality as an activist living in a parallel world. In both Joop’s and Barbara’s cases, the spaces of encounter open up through practices of childcare, carrying within them the potential to trouble a limited notion of politics in favour of a politics in which childcare is considered direct action (interventions into public space), and in which a limit is set to the universalizing norm of the successful activist. Stefan describes what he likes about the idea of spaces of encounter with other caregivers at nationwide activist meetings, underlining that they are encounters defined not only as private, but political:

One gets to know people with children in other cities, with children the same age, and that far away from a space defined as political. Well, not fully far from it, but, making contacts maybe in a private way, which is probably really nice. And not only in this somehow private way, but in a political context (Stefan).⁶⁴

⁶⁴ “Das man Leute in anderen Städten kennenlernt mit Kindern, mit gleichaltrigen Kindern und das auch nochmal so fernab vom politischen. Also ne nicht ganz fernab, aber so, so ne, also privat man da vielleicht Kontakte knüpfen kann und das ja vielleicht auch ganz nett ist. Und nicht nur in diesem irgendwie privat, sondern in nem politischen Umfeld” (Stefan).

Inspired by our conversation about a lack of caring practices in radical communities Janneke, at a certain point, imagines support networks for people close to activists, i.e. in the case of arrest. However, she says these structures could be “either physically or not in the same place” (Janneke). I see her imagination as going beyond an idea of care and responsibility necessarily bound to local places. Encounters reported by the participants, opened up by children and collective childcare, are not only limited to intersubjective relations, but also include encounters with new, sociopolitical issues and conditions. Joop suddenly was confronted with the price of nappies and other baby utensils, Janneke became an engaged supporter of the mothers’ birth movement and especially the German participants of my study started to engage with pedagogies (Joop, Janneke, Sonja, Stefan).

What I want to show by summarizing and analyzing all these different spaces of encounter, which are facilitated by practices of childcare, is two things. Firstly, in the narratives of the encounters, I see the participants transforming and redefining meanings they had given to specific places or practices, as political (Barbara, Stefan, Joop). Secondly, it has become clear that the participants’ local practices are always already embedded in wider, if not yet global social relations. Such a relational perspective on space has the advantage of the binary between place and space being deconstructed. Doreen Massey (2004), a leading feminist human geographer states: “‘global space’ is no more than the sum of relations, connections, embodiments and practices. These things are utterly everyday and grounded at the same time as they may, when linked together, go around the world” (p. 8). Consequently, the ways the women in my workshop pit global against local and criticize ‘left parallel worlds’ is inadequate. Instead, every ‘left parallel world’ is always already hybrid, multiple internally as well as externally. The ways in which the participants describe unexpected encounters in their childcare practices support this view. There is no easy way to say that targeting a global force is more radical than local politics, and vice versa.

In the participants’ stories of childcare in commons spaces, I find that these practices are also always practices of space-making, creating experiences of alternative spatialities that might transform common understandings and values of the participants’ movements and discourses. Different potentials are facilitated in their commoning of childcare through the creation of different kinds of symbolic and material spaces: An embodied notion of solidarity in *spaces of shared responsibility*; the recognition of children in movements as a matter of equality and difference, metaphorically, as *spaces in between*; and the politicization of local care relations through *spaces of encounter*. I further hope to have shown, if only in side-notes, that all the dimensions of spatiality elaborated upon are interconnected. Instead of formulating a clear path towards a feminist politics

of the common/s, I try to bring into representation care relations that are, even in progressive movements, often pushed into a feminized sphere. By doing this, it has become clear that there is more to these relations than the inclusion of parent activists in communities. Collective childcare practices in commons, in the stories I re-narrate, go hand in hand with engaging the ethical and political questions I frame in terms of how to relate to one another in the common.

Chapter 5 - Alternative Temporalities in Commoning Childcare

The Dutch participants of my research say that living with children, with different generations in general, has changed the way they experience the present. For example, comparing these experiences to often very young anarchist communities, Joop says he has found new connections to (his) past and future. He points out that there used to be feminist toddler groups in his neighbourhood, groups to which he referred to when discussing his vision of sustainable and multigenerational movements.

So these kind of spaces I think, neighbourhoods should organize these kind of spaces for their children. Also because they have to be aware that children are important, I mean for the obvious reasons, because they are nice and everything, but also because they are the future caretakers of... we will get old. And we won't be able to take care of ourselves anymore and then you have to have nice people that take that role... That's one of the main things squatters really don't understand, and I probably thought that, that we will be young and healthy forever. But that's not the case (Joop).

In this context, he mourns the many historical social struggles forgotten by today's activists. Joop says that he has reconciled with his parents after becoming a father, realizing the many ways in which they care for him, something he otherwise had forgotten. Barbara observes similar reactions from activists when they encounter the children she works with:

I've seen people who are indeed not so much in contact with kids, when there is this kids corner or whatever, they see it, they experience it. And everybody has been a child. So, it's nice to see then people open up a bit and remembering probably 'oh yeah, when I was young, I loved to do this'. And I have very nice chats around sometimes with young activists (Barbara).

The people she describes find connections to their own past experiences as children, which often leads them to desire to enter the children's play. And indeed, playing as a practice of childcare in commons has a big and possibly transformative role in the participants' narratives.

After having shown how the commoning of childcare creates experiences of alternative spatialities, which are accompanied by questions of how to relate to one another (Chapter 4), and after having pointed out the ways in which the participants' experiences with commoning of

childcare are shaped by both spatial and temporal dimensions of capitalist and patriarchal power relations (Chapter 3), this chapter inquires relations of time within play as a specific practice of childcare. I argue that in playing, the participants experience moments of alternative temporalities that challenge a dominant culture in activism that is overly saturated by what I term a ‘productivity ethos’. This ethos is intertwined with the construction of an ideal type of successful activist, a temporal regime aimed at the need to be productive and a devaluing and/or excluding of care relations in movements,

The Time of Play as Healing Versus Serious Political Work

In my interviews, I ask the participants not only generally what the presence of children in activist spaces does, but also inquire more specifically into the role that playing plays for them personally and for their activism. Of course, different people have different relations to playing. For Barbara, playing with the children in squats is essential for her well being as a young squatter:

I wanted to be more in fantasy and play, and maybe I was a bit shy. I was young then, I was, like, 19 years old. Well, for sure I was squatting with adults and in this squat there were no kids at all. But in other places there were. And I felt, ja, I felt a connection, like, and joking around and making fun with them. So it was a bit natural that I went for them and playing with them (Barbara).

Janneke has a similarly positive relation to playing with her grandchild. It is important for her to bring a “strong anti-capitalist” (Janneke) notion into her play by focusing on things that can be found in nature instead of buying new and overly stimulating things, which are most likely produced under exploitative conditions. Casie and Stefan, when asked about the role of playing in their lives and activism, could not really connect to the question, finally answering that it basically does not have a big role at all or at least is “not a big thing” (Casie). Nevertheless, I have found in the other six narratives that play certainly is an important part of childcare practices, an essential part of this kind of care work.

Marxist feminists have long been arguing that care work as a subject-subject relation functions under a different logic than object-oriented forms of work. Susan Donath (2000), in her analysis of these kinds of practices as ‘the other economy’, states that “the other economy functions by gifts and reciprocity rather than by exchange” (p.117). Following this, another mode of measuring this work, another time regime, has to be applied. Taking into account Donath’s thesis, I can say that the “chronological net”, a notion termed by David Harvey (1989, p.176) to describe the

ways a specific time regime structures the space and life of people in capitalist societies, never covers all spheres of society. Play, here seen as a form of care work, diverts in its temporality from the ‘chronological net’ of linear time, busyness and the need to be productive. Brigid Schulte (2014) has written an interesting but not very radical book titled *Overwhelmed: Work, Love, and Play. When No One Has the Time*. In it, Schulte paraphrases psychiatrist Stuart Brown, who did research on play as a crucial activity functioning under a different mode of time: “Active play, says Stuart Brown, is a state of being unlike anything else. It is timeless, like flow, and crucial to humans from the moment of birth to the last breath” (p. 243). She further argues that there is a connection between playing and creativity: “Research is finding that play is what enables humans to create, improvise, imagine, innovate, learn, solve problems, be smart, open, curious, resilient, and happy” (p.166). Commons theorist Massimo De Angelis (2007) begins his book *The Beginning of History. Value Struggles and Global Capital* by narrating what his son has taught him. The way he describes his changing perception of time has inspired my thinking and interview construction:

Children are often said to be living in another dimension. Leonardo, my 20 month old child, teaches me something very important when I observe his praxis of time and reflect on how it is articulated to mine. He seems to be living in phase time all the time, his attention being enthusiastically taken by new objects to which he points, to new directions to walk the street’s walk. This of course means that my partner and I must constantly invent new ways of keeping him happy while we take him on our daily trivial yet necessary pursuits rooted in linear time (going to the shop, washing dishes etc) and circular time (the alternating rhythms of daily life, going to bed, eating and so on). Phase time is the time of mergence of new dimensions and it is part of life as linear and circular time (p.1).

He goes on to say that while all these dimensions are shaped by capitalist value practices of time, all of them also have to be part of revolutionary struggle. His son, through his playful attitude, has made him aware of all the dimensions. In what ways do the participants phrase relations between playful interactions with children and their activist practices?

One of my first findings of the participants’ narratives around play and creativity is that they set up a dualism between playfulness/playing and being serious/doing serious activism. Casie’s partner Michael tells me that becoming a father has made him more militant and therefore more serious, and he criticizes younger activists whom he finds too emotional and lack rationality:

For me the stuff will get more serious. One problem with lots of activists is that in my view they are just fending off their emotions and not thinking about strategy. And having kids suddenly means that you have to think and plan for the future (Michael).

Admittedly he does not refer directly to play. Nevertheless, he sets up a dualism between his needs and ideas as someone living with a child, and the way he perceives activist culture as not serious enough. Michael was the only one who set up the dualism this way. Others, like Barbara or Hanna, associate seriousness with activist culture and playfulness/creativity/being with children as an opposite. Hanna explains the little role of play and creativity in her activist practices:

Well, creativity you can see it very well in the preparation of actions. For example with painting banners one can involve children because it is something they can do as well and which is fun. Where one makes something collectively and can really achieve something. And playing I find difficult most of the time in a political environment. Because I always have the feeling that political environments have such a seriousness, which one also doesn't want to have taken away. Well everything is very serious and one has to, with a lot of seriousness... and at the same time overworking. And playing or creativity is more of an opposition to that (Hanna).⁶⁵

It seems Hanna thinks that with the exception of painting banners there is neither space nor time for playing and creativity in her activist community. Janneke tells a similar story situated in the Dutch scene that, according to her, always only “reacts”:

This very, very good friend of mine is going through depression now, severe depression because of all the fighting and struggling and last year we were [working with illegalised migrants]⁶⁶. And that's really the part where you get the most horrible experience, suffering to deal with. And he said the other day, ‘I want to get out of the responsive activism’. If something happens and you are like, ‘oh we need to do something about this’. And then you do some kind of action, you always react... Because that always gives this frustrating feeling of being let, instead of initiating things by yourself. And, ähm. nine times out of ten it doesn't change a fucking thing. So it's very, very frustrating. And he literally said, ‘I want to have more fun in the actions, and I want to be more playful’ (Janneke).

⁶⁵ “Also Kreativität finde ich merkt man immer gut in Aktionsvorbereitung zum Beispiel Banner malen ist etwas wo man prima Kinder mit einbinden kann, weil es ist was was sie auch können und was spaß macht und wo man so gemeinsam auch was macht und schaffen kann. Und spielen finde ich in politischen zusammenhängen oft schwierig. Weil ich hab immer das Gefühl das Politzusammenhänge oft so ne Ernsthaftigkeit haben, die man sich auch gefühlt oft nicht nehmen lassen will. Also es ist alles ganz ernst und muss mit ganz viel Ernsthaftigkeit und gleichzeitig überarbeiten. Und das spielen und Kreativität ist da eher so ein Gegenpart so” (Hanna).

⁶⁶ Words are changed by me for anonymity reasons.

Hanna states that there is a connection between the activist culture that wants to be serious all the time and the fact that many activists are “overworked”, frustrated or burnt out. The story of Janneke’s friend is a similar one.

I see playing in both statements as associated with relaxation (Hanna) and fun/joy (Janneke). In the narratives, the former pole of the playing versus being serious duality is not part of the sphere considered ‘correct activism’ and, consequently, what is considered political. Social movement researcher Michael Osterweil (2010) comes to a similar conclusion in a different context. He analyzes left movements in the global north and sees within them a failure to relate these movements to “human desire for leisure, love, fun and so on” (p. 82). What might it be that makes this figuration of activism prevail? I argue that a reason for the failure to relate to desires of care and joyfulness lies partly within the powerful public/private binary in society. This binary reappears in the participants’ construction of two spheres (one of which is apparently difficult to integrate into their activist cultures) as a political/private binary (see also Chapter 1 and Chapter 3). The dualism in the participants’ narratives relies on the exclusion of play, as a caring activity, and alienated to a feminized sphere, the private sphere.

Another important finding of mine is that, especially in light of the ‘productivity ethos’ within social movements, playing with their children, for some of the participants, is a way of relaxing or healing. Janneke, for example, talks a lot about playing with her grandson, which is a great excuse to relax. To all her overworked friends she says, “get yourself a grandson and play in the mud” (Janneke). I asked whether this playing is for her, as she suffers from depression as well, a kind of healing, and she agreed. Lisa also describes the time she spends with her daughter (playing) as a break from her busy, everyday life, in which she performs activism, including the setting up of a living project, and is studying:

Well, when she now sometimes wants to play with me, I just find that really nice. And it is also just some recovery and relaxation for me that I am not doing anything else in that time but instead really go into it. Yes... In this sense it does indeed pull me away from my duties and the things I still have to do today. And I have, I don’t know, sometimes days where I think it was really good I did this today. And I am very balanced and relaxed after that (Lisa).⁶⁷

⁶⁷ “Also wenn sie jetzt manchmal mit mir spielen will, find eich das einfach total schön, und es ist für mich auch einfach so ein bisschen Erholung und Entspannung, das ich in der Zeit dann eben nichts anderes mache sondern mich total drauf einlasse. Ja, ... insofern reißt mich dann glaub ich schon so ein bisschen aus meinen Verpflichtungen und was ich heute noch alles so tun muss raus. Und ich hab, weiß ich nicht, echt manchmal so Tage wo ich so denke, das war jetzt total gut das ich das gerade gemacht habe. Und bin danach dann sehr ausgeglichen und entspannt” (Lisa).

What both quotes indicate is that it is difficult for Lisa and Janneke to take breaks. Playing with children is a preeminent form of childcare, a necessity. I see it functioning as a good excuse and to make some time for ‘recovery’, ‘relaxation’ or ‘healing’ in Lisa’s and Janneke’s lives.⁶⁸

Playing is, I understand the participants to believe, not solely connected to childcare as work but is, in these two cases, also a form of recovery or self-care. It pulls Lisa and Janneke out of the ‘productivity ethos’ prevailing in society, reproduced in their activist scenes, and introduces, if only temporarily, a different rhythm and logic into their lives. I recognize these stories from a manifesto by a radical childcare collective, *Regeneracion* (2009), which organizes childcare during activist events in New York. They explicitly advocate for the inclusion of play into social movement strategy and argue that it is an important (self)caring practice (p.398).

The participants clearly communicate about the little time and space for play and creativity in their movements. Nevertheless, they also tell about moments in which practices of commoning interact with playing in activist spaces. This is why, in my search for radical imagination characterised by looking beyond what is and towards what might be, I still find potential for the transformation of social movement practices and activist cultures in playing. In what follows, I elaborate on two of them, firstly, a change of behaviour and atmosphere, and secondly, visions of a politics that do not need to always produce outcomes/programs visible to the public.

Changes in Atmosphere and Visions of Unproductivity

When asked what the difference is between an activist space with children and one without, almost all the participants answer the same thing: There is a big difference, one in atmosphere.

There is a lot of difference in the atmosphere. If there are children around and there is childcare, that makes it, on one hand, possible for the parents to go more into the action... But the activists are also... The funny thing is that they get more... well they have to... if they are angry against society, it's getting a bit off. Because they get softer in a way (laugh), when there is kids around... It doesn't mean that when they go off the terrain to do a direct action somewhere that they are not like this (makes a gesture). But it changed the atmosphere. It's also at some festivals or places that I know that some people drink a lot in the night or use drugs. What is not really related to activism, that has nothing to do with it

⁶⁸ This is not to romanticise childcare as a ‘labour of love’ in the sense in which it was criticized by Marxist feminists (Chapter 1). Rather, in thinking the participants’ experiences further, it is important to find a form of care giving that differs from the way care work figures in society (see also van Meters’ phrasing of the negativity/creativity paradox in Chapter 1).

actually, but it happens. When there is children around, the behaviours is less like, it softens also their behaviour...” (Barbara).

Her gesture, which imitates a ‘stereotypical’ male activist (maybe of the type ‘successful’ activist), suggests that it is exactly these people and cultures that Barbara refers to when she says ‘they become softer’. Janneke says a very similar thing. She tells me that actions and the atmosphere become “less ‘extremist’ and violent”, and Casie uses the words “less heated up, aggressive atmosphere” to describe the changes.⁶⁹

In light of these descriptions, I put to record that childcare relations within movements seem to transform the ways activists behave in commons, as social movement spaces. But do these changes in atmosphere have an impact beyond the temporal deconstruction of the figure of the autonomous and productive activist? Regeneracion (2009), in their vision statement, answers with a clear ‘yes’. They write: “Kids change how we do politics. Kids teach us that movement is a process– not a program– and that this process is playful, imaginative and creative, not just serious and rational” (p.396). Looking at my research material, I find similar narratives, not of ways the participants already do politics, but rather in the visions they formulate, triggered by my questions aiming at their radical imagination.

Lisa, Janneke, Sonja and Hanna all imagine what it might mean for their activist communities to make time for play or alternative modes of temporality, distant from one focused on productivity. Lisa, who is very critical of my ‘positive’ take on children/childcare and the possibilities of getting out of that ‘productivity ethos’, nevertheless, states toward the end of her interview that the idea of a “defunctionalisation” is interesting. She says:

If all these restraints (Sachzwänge)... could be shaped differently and if the organization of them is different, then a lot is won already, I believe. Yes, or if it sometimes simply is not important/not the problem to need longer for things. And the temporal dimensions could also be a bit different then (Lisa)⁷⁰

Without referring so directly to the temporal dimensions of possible alternative political strategies, Sonja states that she would like it if doing politics could be more playful, not only serious:

⁶⁹ There are vibrant debates on the question of militancy and appearance in radical communities. Therefore I find it important to mention that none of the participants made statements that distance themselves from forms of politics that are ‘aggressive’ or militant.

⁷⁰ “Wenn diese Zwänge [...] auch einfach anders gestaltet werden können und wenn die Organisierung davon anders ist, dann glaube ich ist schon viel gewonnen. Ja oder wenn’s dann vielleicht auch einfach mal nicht so wichtig ist, nicht so das Problem ist für Sachen länger zu brauchen und die zeitlichen Dimensionen dann auch ein bisschen anders sein können” (Lisa).

It would be nice if we could bring this a bit more to our minds, that it actually is important to implement political work in a playful manner and not so rational, and ähm, pragmatic... because it shouldn't be this (Sonja).⁷¹

Hanna's vision, which she brings up toward the end of the interview, is to see politics become more serene or easygoing, and not be so “verbissen” (dogged). Interestingly, she uses the same formulation earlier in the interview to describe what actually already happens when younger children are present in activist meetings. My intent to ask the participants to reflect on their experiences and to formulate imaginations seems to have worked explicitly well in this case. During the interview, Hanna transfers her experience of the commoning childcare in community spaces to a broader vision of her politics.

Hanna says that commoning childcare can have both positive and negative consequences. When the children are very grumpy, debates can be more fierce because people get passive-aggressive. However, it can also have a positive effect:

I believe there is such a moment in which the child takes on a lot of space. Then the political discussion is not necessarily in the focus anymore and everyone does things casually/along this way. In this case, I believe it becomes more relaxed and not so dogged anymore because one is somehow a bit distracted (Hanna).⁷²

What Hanna points out is that the inclusion or presence of children in her community delays political meetings, takes away concentration and occasionally makes people impatient or even aggressive. In the understanding or implicit reception of many fellow activists, in this way time is taken from things considered more important. I suspect that she means the kind of things I outline in Chapter 3 as the ‘correct activism’ of a certain type of activist. However, Hanna does not judge distractions by children as necessarily bad things. She sees something relaxing in these processes.

I see a parallel here with the possibilities Haiven and Khasnabish find in the work of anti-oppression within movements, which is often pushed out of the agenda for reasons similar to why childcare relations are. In making a case for the importance of this work, they argue that, “it is precisely in the capacity of anti-oppression to impose, delay and to make us impatient that transformative power lies” (Khasnabish & Haiven, 2014, p.191). I argue that the presence of

⁷¹ “Es wäre schön wenn wir uns das ein bisschen mehr vergegenwärtigen würden, dass politische Arbeit eigentlich wichtig ist in ner spielerischen Art und Weise umzusetzen und nicht so rational ist. Und äh, pragmatisch... weil das sollte es eigentlich sein und das wäre super schön, wenn wir das spielerischer umsetzen könnten” (Sonja).

⁷² “Ich glaube es gibt so nen Moment das das Kind einfach sehr einnimmt. Dann ist auch die politische Diskussion gar nicht mehr so unbedingt im Fokus oder alle machen das so nebenbei. Dann wirds glaube ich entspannter und es zum Teil nicht mehr so verbissen, weil man glaub ich auch irgendwie ein bisschen abgelenkter ist” (Hanna).

children in the participants’ movement spaces carries transformative potentials resembling the ones of anti-oppression work. It creates discontinuities and stems the tide of a dominant time regime oriented at a ‘productivity ethos’ in the participants’ communities. It is in reflecting on these moments of interruption that I have witnessed Hanna and Lisa develop what I call ‘visions of unproductivity’ for their activist politics. These visions go further than propagating the need to include and therefore make space for practices of childcare in social movements (Chapter 4). They illustrate the need to also take into account a temporal dimension. What lies in the different logic and form of these practices is that making time for them is another important factor.

Khasnabish and Haiven (2014), in taking their diagnosis of the role of anti-oppression work in social movements one step further, go so far as to favour a strategy of making time over one of making space (p.191). From a Feminist Philosophy perspective, to do so is the reproduction of a hierarchical binary, which is always also gendered. I want to shortly summarize Hill’s analysis of Bergson’s notion of ‘consciousness as duration’ as an example for such a feminist critique of the exclusion of a spatial dimension. Hill (2008) shows, with an Irigarayan analysis based on her concept of ‘the interval’, that Bergson in fact relies, once again, on the exclusion of a sexed other; woman: “The discovery of duration is only achieved through the subject’s encounter with the alterity of the duration of the sexed other” (p.129). Hill underlines that Irigaray’s notion of the interval as a concept of ethical and political change is both spatial (as discussed in Chapter 4) and temporal. Haiven and Khasnabish lose sight of the spatial dimension of change when they privilege time over space and thereby reproduce the gendered exclusion Hill analyzes. I refer back to Irigaray’s quote from my introduction, as it exemplifies a perspective on change that takes into account subjects’ relations to time and space. The quote is now enriched by, or at least might read differently after my analysis of the participants’ experiences with alternative spatialities and time-regimes:

Social functioning has to be ensured in some other way. The relation to space-time must be modified and micro- and macrocosmic rhythms must be trusted. This will entail a reduction - without new sacrifice- in the condensation of time, the concentration of space, which have been built upon immolation - of man, of animals, more secretly of plants and growing things, of our elementary food and space, etc. (Irigaray, 1993b, p.82).

Commons are experiments in trying to ‘ensure social functioning in some other way’. Importantly, Irigaray warns of another social order based on sacrifice. I discuss this in Chapter 1 in relation to the hope so often put into an order based on a logic of the gift, rather than exchange and

productivity. John Cutler Shershow (2005) analyzes that, for the opposition of work and the gift, the latter is always in danger of being drawn back into the horizon of productivity and rational exchange. The same applies, I claim, to the opposition between work and play. I consider this as exemplary for the danger of capitalist enclosures of people's practices of social reproduction, their bodies, and ideas. Max Haiven (2014) cautions to not uncritically champion the concept of creativity in times when neoliberal capitalism does the same. He points out:

Capitalism now voraciously feeds on and learns from resistance and critique. We have, over the past forty years, seen 'enclosure' of words, practices and ideas we once shared and that we once used to point to possibilities and potentials beyond the status quo. Concepts like education, imagination, the commons, creativity, memory and the public have been largely brought into the conventional capitalist imagination (p.9).

My reason for underlining the danger of these enclosures at this point in my argument is to make a point about the dualism of playfulness and seriousness set up by the participants. While playing may indeed follow a different logic than dominant activist work, read through my feminist perspective, the dualism of play/serious activism as a vision of a feminist politics of the common/s within social movement is a false one. The participants set up the two poles in parts of their stories. However, the changes in atmosphere and imaginations of unproductivity in their community spaces blur the very same dualism. The experiences of different temporalities have the potential to interrupt and transform the dominant 'serious' activist culture rather than replace it. This is relevant in that it pushes the radical imagination beyond the ways these practices currently figure in the sociopolitical order of movements, and society as a whole.

To wrap up, the participant's practices of commoning childcare within social movements and activist communities open up experiences of alternative spaces (Chapter 4) and alternative times of social reproduction. I exemplify this logic and requirements of childcare relations by listening to what effect playing and the presence of children in meetings has on the participants' communities and lives. In playing or the interruption and delay of meetings through children, lies the possibility to imagine politics as a process that does not always have to go forward and be productive of, i.e., campaigns and programs.

Conclusions - We Don't Know Yet What Commons That Care Can Do, Do We?

What experimentations need to become possible? And what experience and tools-resources do we already have? (Zechner, 2013, p.190)

Throughout this thesis I have reported on how the research participants and myself are involved in co-creating radical imagination, which confronts and transcends confinements of the imagination by capital and patriarchal power. In order for a material understanding of imagination to appear and to ground these processes in the ordinary and yet radical practices of the everyday, I have interviewed eight parent activists and facilitated one workshop on the topic of children and collective childcare in social movements. I frame childcare as a specific care relation that is, in the context of activist communities, a form of commoning. My desire is to delve into the possibilities of a feminist radical imagination based on Feminist Philosophy of sexual difference and Marxist feminist theory. I am motivated by building emancipative forms of solidarity, relationality and a desire to explore the possibilities of a new language and discourse arising out of care relations as that which is excluded, which does not have a language of its own in the male symbolic order. Using ‘convoking the radical imagination’ as a methodology has allowed me to open up spaces of encounter with the participants, giving their narratives and reflections the crucial roles they deserve. I have provoked their imaginations by asking those kinds of questions that intend to ‘borrow’ from the future to make it act in the present. This qualitative approach necessitates constantly positioning myself, my agenda and role as a ‘director’ or ‘reader-writer’ of the research process and data. Only this way can I make clear that the extensive use of theory in almost all the chapters, Chapter 1 specifically, is a working through of what my radical imagination partly feeds off of, not necessarily that of the participants. The choices I make here are the knowledge and imagination I propose in that dialogical process termed the radical imagination. What I try to do then is what David Graeber (2004) suggests for radical intellectuals, enriched by a feminist perspective on standpoints and choices of content. I look at “those who are creating viable alternatives”, specifying viable alternatives as practices of childcare in order to figure out the “larger implications of what they are (already) doing” (Graeber, 2004, p.12). The process of offering these thoughts back as contributions or possibilities into my communities is, as I touch upon in my methodological chapter (Chapter 2), ongoing.

In what follows I attempt to summarize my research, drawing four main conclusions. *Firstly*, as I argue in Chapter 1, there is great potential within the common/s debates to discuss some of the pressing issues in both social movements and feminist critique. While they are situated at the impasse of the critique/negativity paradox, they are most clearly making an argument for the creation of alternative ways of cooperating in the here and now, in ways that might disentangle activist communities in social movements from the reach of capital and power. Childcare practices, as one of the many care relations social reproduction takes, should be, as feminists in the debate argue, put into the centre of discussion. I put into practice what these feminists argue in my field research and thereby demonstrate the advantages and importance of doing so. By employing feminist materialist theories and philosophies of the subject, I show that the exclusion, devaluation and repression of these kinds of activities in society is part of a deep, socio-symbolic structure. They are relegated to a feminized social sphere of dependency as the other of the Same of the phallogocentric order. A Marxist feminist analysis shows how the organization of care work changes in current neoliberal times. Consequently, while this strand of the debates sees the way care relations are organized in society as oppressive for people involved therein, another line of thinking hopes to find ethical and ontological possibilities in caring. Seen in the context of the common/s debates, though, they merge in their attempts to build alternative ways of caring and relating. I argue that Luce Irigaray’s theory of the subject, if brought to the common/s debates, enriches the so far under-theorized calls for new subjectivities in the debates, creating a more complex and strong feminist intervention, and pushing the debates to think the impossible, to think beyond that which already exists.

A lot of the analysis of the socio-symbolic and economic structure of society from Chapter 1 comes back in Chapter 3. Here, to draw a *second conclusion*, I analyze how it figures or is reproduced in the participants’ activist communities and thereby confines the radical imagination. The participants, especially the ones in the Netherlands, struggle with the ongoing enclosure of their autonomous spaces, state regulations and police repression. I point out how all these factors are interconnected, building an important spatial dimension of the force of capital and the state. More interestingly, the participants also talk about the difficulties they encounter when trying to involve childcare relations in their movements. What I find is a reproduction of some aspects of the way the order of the Same figures in society, namely the devaluation of reproductive activities and the gendered division of labour. Most clearly this order figures in the norm of the ‘successful’ and independent activist and a prevailing ‘productivity ethos’ within the movements. I point out that

these are temporal dimensions of the ‘chronological net’, which structures people’s lives and social reproduction in capitalism.

Thirdly, I show in Chapters 4 and 5 that there are ethical and political possibilities to be found in the participants’ reflections and practices of (collective) childcare. Their practices and reflections produce radical imagination to transform those confining forms movements take. More concretely, these chapters exemplify how commoning and the radical imagination can go hand in hand. I show that the practices open up different kinds of spaces in which new ways of relating in solidarity are tried out. In spaces of shared responsibility an embodied form of solidarity is practiced, a space-in-between, in the Irigarayan sense, can be detected in the way the participants discuss relating to their children while respecting their differences, and spaces of encounter show how every space is always already embedded in the wider (neighbourhood) community, theoretically up to a global scale.

Chapter 5 makes clear that these experiences of alternative spatialities within movements take time, or rather trouble the dominant temporality in the participants’ movements. I show in the participants’ narratives on playing and the presence of children in activist spaces that time, in some ways, is slowed down or interrupted. The focus is taken off of the constant need to ‘do things’ that produce visible outcomes; from the need to be productive. I argue that the participants experience alternative times of social reproduction, which in the cases of Janneke or Lisa are healing or relaxing, and in the cases of Sonja or Hanna spark an imagination of social movements beyond that ‘productivity ethos’. In this latter moment, I find a force that transcends the reproduction of the political/private binary in their movements. In both chapters, I present radical imagination as a product of difference, in the sense that I focus my analysis on moments in which the participants tell about their experiences with “the unexpected, the foreign, the new” (Khasnabish & Haiven, 2014, p.7). The wider impact of these analyses is to show how commoning does indeed go hand in hand with sparking radical imagination.

Fourthly, in concluding these last two chapters on alternative experiences of space and time, I show that a double strategy, or rather a paradigm shift in thinking is needed. Both making space and making or taking time are bases for resisting the crisis of movement reproduction and possibly wider crises of social reproduction in society. This is because it might not be enough to try to make space for parent activists or children in movements, the dominant undertone that accompanies debates of inclusion. I show that there is much more at stake, namely that there is a need to also make or take time for (child)caring practices and their different logics. Furthermore, I show that if

done, the ways social movements or activist communities figure might be transformed in fundamental, yet, from the perspective of caregivers, necessary ways. In some way or another, we are all giving and receiving care.

Although with this thesis, I am engaged in a debate on new political strategies for the radical left, strategizing should not be aimed at finding the perfect (politically correct) rhetoric or movement organization. It is also not about writing universal programs for the way to a revolution. The attraction of the common/s debates lies in not trying to do any of this. In fact, Irigaray's philosophical thought on sexual difference emphasizes that every such program or rhetoric can only reproduce the 'master's' language in the logic of the Same.

When I asked Joop what would be important for him when trying to share childcare as part of his movement he said “hundreds of things. Really... and I don't think you can solve it that way, by just naming them. You would have to have/be a completely different movement”. This is, on the one hand, a pessimistic statement judging the state of his own movement as not capable of being more inclusive of parents' and childrens' experiences and needs. However, on the other hand, he opens up the horizon for the kind of radical change that might be needed, and is opened up by the radical imagination emanating from practices of collective childcare in movements. I trace how such a 'completely different movement' (Joop) could look according to the narratives and reflections of the parent activists who participated in my research. In this vein, I discuss how radical imagination is confined by the way the participants' subjectivities (and probably every other) are caught up in the capitalist and patriarchal here and now. More importantly, I examine how in the commoning of childcare, which is situated in refractory social movement spaces (commons), a different logic prevails, and how encounters with this logic help to gain insights that go beyond the status quo. Especially my analysis in the last two chapters phrases the kind of experiences and reflections that push the imagination beyond current strategies or architectures of the radical left and anarchist social movements. The two strands in the common/s seem no longer solely interconnected because of a theoretical argument (Chapter 1). In my field research, I point out how reflection on the participants' childcare practices within commons, ways of relating and subjectivities in the common are transformed.

In many ways this research builds me a starting point from which I could take different routes of further inquiry. Most importantly, although my method of analysis for the research data, bottom-up and top-down coding, has given me the possibility to include almost all of what has been said by the participants, I have also made choices. This means I focus on certain things and have to

leave out other topics brought up by the participants. For example the ways they refer to other historically or geographically located movements, stories of personal/political failures or the ambivalent role that the state education systems and pedagogy have in their narratives. Furthermore, different forms of data analysis could bring other aspects of the participants' stories to the fore. I am thinking here about a more linguistic analysis of how they speak, or a psychoanalytically informed analysis of the more latent content produced. It would be interesting to look at this rich research data from these other perspectives and with new questions in the future. In the same vein, it would be interesting to test my research methodology in spheres outside of radical politics. My field research has been situated in specific activist communities composed of predominantly white and rather young activists. I am sure that a lot can be learned from other activist communities and movements with a much more elaborated practice of movement reproduction, as some communities can afford even less to not involve these in their activism. Theoretically, I have only managed to touch upon the relation between the position of care work/care relations in society and the constitution of subjectivities and ways of relating. I believe there is much more work to be done in this field, and at the crossroad of Marxist feminist theory and philosophies of sexual difference. For example, it would be interesting to think through the possibilities of Irigaray's on-first-sight solely philosophical concepts of the interval and the negative for social theory, to inquire more in depth about the role that society (and the socio-symbolic order) plays in her configuration of them.

The present research is already doing this kind of interdisciplinary work in that it brings together Feminist Philosophy of sexual difference with the work of feminists Marxists. The research is further a documentation of my travels in between and through activism and academia. In realizing this, I have tried to be accountable to my specific position in both. Talking with the participants about their children and their activism is the fulcrum through which a number of essential political, social and philosophical questions about relationality, caring, solidarity and resistance were discussed. In other words, I conceptualize and rethink care as a back door through which new forms of struggle can be imagined.

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Appendix

Interview Overview

The following descriptions are all based on the participants narratives. While some of them might be taken up already in the analysis, this overview is meant to provide a clearer picture of the participants, their age, way of living, activism and experiences with commoning of childcare therein. I did not ask specifically for background information, firstly out of safety reasons for the participants identity and secondly, because I made decisions to include only certain markers of their location in the interviews, while others not.

1. **Interview with Barbara** on Jun. 11th, 2014 from 10:00 hrs - 12 hrs. I met her in her workplace, an autonomous cultural center in Amsterdam.

The big amount of Barbara's experience with children in social movements made this first interview very inspiring and impressive to me. Barbara organizes a regular children's program in a cultural/autonomous center, but also regularly goes to activist camps, festivals or squats with it. For her, children where part of activism from the very moment she entered the squatting scene and saw a blind spot there. It makes her happy to be able to earn money with basically doing what she already did for a long time. Talking to fellow activists I realized that she seems to have done a lot for the inclusion of children in the dutch activist milieu, or at least she is known for doing that work. One other participant even recommended me to meet her, although he does not know her in person.

Barbara was born in the netherlands and in her 40th (?) when I met her for the interview. I approached her during an activist camp in which I volunteered in the children's program. Barbara started studying after high school but never finished it, instead focussing on squatting and activism. She has a son who is in his teens and a partner with whom she is living together in a flat. Her experience with collectivizing childcare come, as she says, mostly from activist camps and festivals and some squats she is visiting regularly.

The interview with Barbara is explicitly mentioned on the pages 2, 33, 38, 55, 57, 58, 67, 72, 73, 75, 76, 81, 82, 83, 85, 86, 88, 91.

2. **Interview with Joop** on Jun. 11th, 2014 from 15:00 hrs - 17:00. I met him at his workplace, a political bookshop and we sat down at the Gracht in front of it to do the interview.

Joop started the interview by clearly stating a lot of frustration considering children in his movement experience. Childcare never seemed to be a topic in his experience, even in a magazine he was editing in the 1990s. Joop entered the autonomous scene in the netherlands in the early 1980s and is active since then. He underlined that activism was never a choice for him, but something 'you just do' out of the way the world is. During the interview it seemed that the negative statements got less and he was instead inspired to think about some good experiences as well. These where mostly bound to activist camps. Moreover, he remembered that he wrote and article once stating that he would never visit a squat bar again "unless they made a children's corner".

Joop was in his 40th when we did the interview. He has two children, a son who is already studying at the university and a toddler. In this sense he has, as he said himself, a sense for different activist generations and their interaction with children. His narrative was also peppered with experience he made in activism outside the netherlands.

The interview with Joop is explicitly mentioned on the pages 2, 33, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 62, 64, 65, 67, 69, 81, 82, 83, 85, 98.

3. Interview with Hanna on Jun. 17th, 2014 from 10:00hrs - 11:30hrs. I met Hanna in a café as there was, as she said in advance, no quiet place in her house right now.

The conversation with Hanna was my first one in german and I was nervous to test the interview guide. The fact that using english words here and there was not a problem, made translating my project easier. Her 6th month old Baby I. was part of the interview situation, which made it more difficult to concentrate but also lively through interruptions. Hanna's narrative was largely circling around a new 'Hausprojekt' she just moved in with her partner, the father of the child. Having experience in her activist community as well I was very surprised about all the positive experiences she had with it after her pregnancy. Although she and her partner are the main caregivers for the child, fellow activists and her political group regularly are willing to take responsibility as well. We traced most of these positive experiences to the space of the Hausprojekt.

I know Hanna from my studies and activist community in germany. She was in her 20th during the interview and working in a job which gives her some freedom. In terms of taking time for the child. As she was on maternity leave when we met she started studying a bit again.

The interview with Hanna is explicitly mentioned on the pages 2, 33, 38, 48, 53, 55, 62, 65, 66, 69, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 88, 89, 91, 92, 93, 97.

4. Interview with Janneke on Jul. 8th, 2014 from 13:00hrs - 15:00hrs. I visited her at her home in a city in the netherlands and we sat in her living room while occasionally one of her sons or friends were passing by.

Janneke only entered activism with the occupy movement, when her three children were already in their teens or older. In the last years one grandchild was born. Becoming politically active had a lot of effects, positive and negative, on her relationship to her kids. As she tends to jump into things too much and then burn out, she described playing with her grandson and working in her veggie garden as important practices of healing. While her house is an anarchist common she underlined that it is not some bubble unconnected to the rest of society. This is mostly due to one of her sons still living with her and going to school. One of her main projects right now is to try to connect a radical birth movement with more traditional anarchist movements.

Janneke was in her 40th during the interview and I made contact with her via a gatekeeper. She is happy to be retired early and therefore not having to work anymore for wages.

The interview with Janneke is explicitly mentioned on the pages 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 33, 55, 56, 57, 58, 66, 76, 83, 86, 88, 89, 90, 91, 97.

5. Interview with Sonja on Jul. 15th, 2014 from 13:30hrs - 15:15hrs. We sat in the park at her university campus.

Sonja started being active in the environmentalist movement but stepped out of being organised in a political group for a while when her son, who goes to school now, was born. She describes this as a sad but necessary experience, also because of an unhealthy relationship with the father. In terms of negotiating her political beliefs with her son, she describes the difference of her value system to the one of the father as the most difficult fact. Sonja organizes most childcare activities in private with her new partners but hopes to live in a Hausprojekt, where more sharing is possible soon. She suffers a bit from not being able to be as often physically present at her student's union as her co-workers. Her son taught her a great deal about communicating needs to other people.

I met Sonja during a holiday academy some month before and contacted her again for my research. She was in her 20th when we met and actively thinking about having another child in the next years.

The interview with Sonja is explicitly mentioned on the pages 2, 39, 40, 53, 66, 69, 71, 74, 75, 76, 81, 83, 91, 92, 97.

6. Interview with Lisa on Jul 28th, 2014 from 10:30 hrs - 12:00hrs. We sat in the yard of her new Hausprojekt.

Coming with moving into a Hausprojekt questions of selforganization were central in Lisa's life at the time of the interview. There is a lively and regular discussion on the topics of children and child-friendliness in that environment. In general, her (queer-feminist) community was supportive from the beginning on, setting stakes high in terms of trying to counter i.e. the gendered division of labour. Lisa's daughter Kim asks many questions and Lisa learned a lot from trying to explain to her what she thinks is the right answer. Experimenting with a childcare model that goes beyond the nuclear family was part of her life since she became pregnant.

Lisa was in her 20th during the interview and after living apart from the father of Kim for a while they now moved into the same house. Six year old E. has her own room in a flat and regularly visits her flatmates' plenaries, as do her parents in their own flats. Some days per week the father has the main responsibility for the child and some days Lisa has it.

The interview with Lisa is explicitly mentioned on the pages 2, 4, 8, 31, 33, 53, 54, 58, 63, 65, 67, 68, 69, 72, 73, 75, 76, 77, 78, 81, 89, 90, 91, 93, 97.

7. Interview with Stefan on Jul. 31st, 2014 from 19:15-21:00 via skype. I was at my home in Utrecht and he was in his new flat.

Stefan studies to become a teacher and feels that pedagogical topics are a blind spot of his radical left community. He does not have a lot of experience with the explicit commoning of childcare, but feels it is becoming more of a topic in his political group, a development he supports. He is doubting the success of more longterm agreements of collectivization of childcare in i.e. a Hausprojekt as most people just did not learn that in their own upbringing. Moreover, he believes that children need a certain structure, safety or regularities in their everyday life. Something he does not see being possible a lot of activist lifestyles he observes. His group started to organize or at least consider childcare facilities for all events and meetings. Nevertheless, Stefan and his partner largely

withdrawed from active campaigning and going to meetings, especially since their second daughter is born.

Stefan was in his 20th during the interview and writing his master thesis. He just moved in with his partner whose daughter he adopted. She goes to a kindergarten. His other daughter was less than a year old when we talked.

The interview with Stefan is explicitly mentioned on the pages 2, 33, 53, 54, 56, 62, 63, 80, 82, 83, 86.

8. Interview with Casie and Michael on Aug. 2nd, 2014 from 17:00 - 18:45. We met in their new squatted house.

While the main interview was with Casie her partner Michael joined occasionally. The main problem with children and activism for Casie are safety issues. This made her change her political work towards a less endangering praxis. When she was pregnant the fact that she as a mother is carrying the child and therefore has certain obligations struck her feminism and ideas of equality hard. She realized that (physical) differences between women and men during pregnancy cannot be ignored. Activism is part of her everyday life as she is, with some exceptions squatting since over 15 years. Her 11 year old daughter has two fathers and they do share responsibilities among the three of them. the daughter goes to a democratic private free school. Michael was radicalised by becoming a father, it is no longer a game but about his child's future he said.

Casie was in her 30th during the interview. They both tried studying some time in the past but never finished anything. W. has a regular job and a volunteer activity. Currently, she is facing some fears about her daughter being overly interested in things like clothes, make up or facebook.

The interview with Casie and Michael is explicitly mentioned on the pages 2, 53, 55, 56, 67, 69, 70, 74, 80, 86, 87, 91.

Call for Participants

Looking for conversation partners to discuss practices of and experiences with childcare in political movements

Hello,

my name is Deborah, I am a feminist activist and currently master student of Gender Studies in Utrecht. For my research about the everyday life of parent activists and the potential of organising childcare collectively I am looking for conversation partners.

Being politically socialised in the radical left in Germany and having experiences with a feminist community which build relations of care and recognition I want to explore the role of children and childcare in all of this. The absence of children in the movements I am part of is striking and sad. I do believe that experimenting with collective childcare (whether it is just during an event or in an activist camp) can enrich our radical imaginaries of how to relate to one another in communities or of what it means to be an activist. Current debates on commons as a space to construct alternative social relation are somewhat of a framework into my exploration of the topics of parenting in activism and commoning of childcare. With my field research I want to open up spaces for these crucial topics.

If any of these concerns speaks to you, I would love to meet you (as in singular and plural) and discuss your experiences and ideas in an interview/conversation/discussion.

Most important, I am very aware that it can be tricky to do research in a community that I am part of or at least identify with. I want my research to be helpful for the community, which means I am offering to stay in conversation after the discussion, by i.e. sending you my analysis to comment on. Needless to say, I guarantee anonymity and your right to withdraw your consent in the case I quote you with something you don't want me to use.

What I have in mind is a meeting of around 2 hours in a place that you choose, but which somehow is part of your everyday life and routine. If you want to bring your kid or have friends/community members which are interested as well, they are very welcome!

I am happy to answer any question and to tell you more on request. Please write me to:

d.sielert@students.uu.nl

I am looking forward to meet you! Deborah

Interview Guide

Parenting in Activism	Commoning of Childcare	Radical Imagination
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What does it mean to be an activist? ...for you? How does this play a role in your everyday life? Can you give some examples? - Did this change when you had a child? what and why? example? - How and why did you become a parent? - What do you teach your child? and what teaches your child you? Did your child inspire you politically? - What is the most important aspect of being a parent for you? - (When) does your relationship to your child influence you politically? Can you give some examples? - How is it to play with children/your child? describe what it does with you? - How much time do you spend with your child? Do you include him/her in your activist life? Why (not)? - In which way do you, if at all, communicate about your life with a child to other people? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What spaces do you share with your communities? - Are there people around you that have children as well? People from the scene/ activist community? How do you relate to these people? - Do you take care of each others children? - <i>if yes</i>: how, why, when, who does it, - are there structures, agreements, decisions in place? - <i>if no</i>: why not? Would you like to do it? how? - Do you know about initiatives of collective childcare now or in the past? What do you think? - What's the difference between being in a 'political space' with children and without? - What would be/is the most important factors for you and your child in such collective childcare initiatives? needs? - Is there something you would like to see changed in the activist community concerning children and parents? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What effect does or do you imagine has collective childcare for social movements and community? - what does it do when reproduction like childcare or food production is done collectively, i.e. on activist camps? Do you have experience with that? - what is the role of play, creativity and radical imagination in your movement and your own politics? Are the three connected? - What role does everyday reproduction and (self)care play? - What would it mean to win? What's your vision of a better society? Do these visions matter to you and your movement? - What are the barriers to the radical imagination that you face?

Radical Childcare Collectives in the US

Does anything from these quotes from radical childcare collectives in the US speak to you? Why? How?

Regeneracion:

Kids change how we do politics. Kids teach us that movement is a process—not a program—and that this process is playful, imaginative and creative, not just serious and rational. In turn, we teach kids that their play is a powerful tool they can and should cultivate throughout their lives, with serious implications for the world we inhabit. Interactions with kids produce another kind of politics, one that recognizes play as a crucial ingredient of any movement, and demolishes the walls that sequester it in childhood or bar it from our adult lives.

chichico:

Our work is also grounded in the belief that play has an important role in radical politics (as do laughter, dancing, and blowing bubbles!). Doing childcare allows us to bring joy to our work, a radical stance in activist communities that often de-value self-care and ignore the possibility that social justice struggles should also sustain and feed us. Our interactions with children are informed by anti-adultist principles. We treat young people as powerful human beings by engaging their fierce questions, respecting their bodies, and honoring their feelings.

List of Codes

(lack of) radical imagination

ACTIVISM_a

activism_care in discourse as political

activism_child(un)friendliness

activism_childcare as political

activism_Generationality/age

activism_inclusion of children

activism_militancy/radicalism

activism_movement participation

activism_other movements

activism_productivity ethos

activism_space for vulnerability

activism_what it means for p.

COMMONING CHILDCARE_a

commoning Childcare_as constructive practice

commoning Childcare_experiences of children vs. nuclear family

commoning Childcare_importance of space

Commoning Childcare_needs

dependency structures

family_alternative models

family_nuclear

GENDER/SEXDIF_a

gender/sexdif_a womens&mothers work

gender/sexdif_birth movement

gender/sexdif_gender identity and equality as topics

gender/sexdif_mothering dependencies

IMAGINATION_a

Imagination_children transforming politics

imagination_for movement

Imagination_Link to future

Imagination_Play/creativity

Imagination_Relation to child_being transformative

imagination_troubling division of labour

Imagination_winning

LOCATION_aa

location_Action camps and festivals

location_Demonstrations

location_Politgruppentreffen/abendevent

location_Squats/ hausprojekt

METHODOLOGY_a

methodology_chosen family

methodology_Community

methodology_my

powerful/interesting story or quote

PROBLEMS_a

problems_devaluing of care

problems_what blocks inclusion in movements

RELATION TO CHILD_aa

Relation to child_as other/letting go

Relation to child_educating/teaching

REPRESSION_a

Repression_enclosure collective spaces

Repression_police

Repression_schools

Repression_state regulations

RESPONSIBILITY_a

responsibility_affinity between carers

responsibility_collective reproduction

responsibility_negotiating

SPACES OF ENCOUNTER_a

Spaces of encounter_importance of

Spaces of encounter_new people/communities

Quotes from Workshop at Activist Camp

“Statt diese Welt zu ändern, haben wir sie nun voller gemacht, Statt Banden bilden wir Baugruppen. Statt Debatten um Detailfragen wie ‚Reform oder Revolution‘ führen wir stundenlange Diskussionen u so etwas Existenzielles wie die Frage, ob Zähne putzen vor dem Schlafen gehen wirklich sein muss. Kinder sind einfach nicht linksradikal. Sie sind zwar äußerst rebellisch und phantasievoll, aber sie mögen vor allem zutiefst Böses, wie Rennautos, Barbies, Waffen...” (Mecklenbrauck, Annika/ Böckmann, Lukas (2013) (Ed.). *The Mamas and the Papas, Reproduktion, Pop & widerspenstige Verhältnisse*, ventil verlag, 74)

“Politische Arbeit lebt vom Da-Sein, von direkter Kommunikation.« Und diese Kommunikation verändert sich, wenn Kinder dabei sind. Zum Besseren, glauben die Eltern. Auch wenn Anna und Mirko kurz zögern, nennen sie die Stimmung bei den Gruppenwochenenden von FeS dann doch »familiärer«. Durch die Anwesenheit der Kinder entstehe ein persönlicher Bezug zueinander. Die Leute machen nicht die ganze Zeit straight Politik, jeder ist mal dran, sie zu betreuen. Man kehrt sich nicht nur die harte »Politcheckerseite« zu – Mirko glaubt, Politik wird dadurch »geerdet«, gesellschaftlich relevanter.

(Wallrodt, Ines (2014). ‘Wer macht denn gleich die Kinderschicht? Wer macht denn gleich die Kinderschicht?’ *Neue Presse*, May 3, 2014.)

Also, organisiert Elternsyndikate! Oder Babysitting Schutzschichten oder was auch immer. Solange die Eltern dabei nicht allen an der Organisation der gemeinsamen Betreuung oder der Optimierung ihres Nachwuchses während selbiger austoben, sondern die kinderfreie Zeit auch für sich oder ihren liebgewonnen Politaktivismus nutzen, ist das nur wünschenswert. Praktisch ist auch die lokale Nähe zu solidarischen Familien - in Wohngemeinschaften, Hausprojekten oder einfach nur ‚normalen‘ Häusern und der Nachbarschaft, wo die Betreuung abwechselnd übernommen werden kann. (Mecklenbrauck, Annika/ Böckmann, Lukas (2013) (Ed.). *The Mamas and the Papas, Reproduktion, Pop & widerspenstige Verhältnisse*, ventil verlag, 80)

”Was sind die Vorteile mit Kindern in einer Gemeinschaft zu leben?

Florian: ...Es ist sehr angenehm Freunde direkt um mich herum zu haben. Für die Kinder ist es schön, viele andere Kinder um sich zu haben. Außerdem ist der Raum zum Spielen, der hier zur Verfügung steht, immens groß. ... Es gibt einfach viel Platz.

Carola: Die Kinder lernen durch die Art des Zusammenlebens auch, dass sie Dinge aushandeln müssen...”

(Mecklenbrauck, Annika/ Böckmann, Lukas (2013) (Ed.). *The Mamas and the Papas, Reproduktion, Pop & widerspenstige Verhältnisse*, ventil verlag, 88)

“In weiten Teilen der deutschen Linken wird der Umgang mit Reproduktionsarbeit lieber theoretisch diskutiert, als die eigene politische Kultur hinterfragt. Wie linke Eltern Familienzeit und Politik unter einen Hut kriegen, gilt oftmals noch als ihre Privatsache. Üblich ist die individuelle Lösung: Wer kann, bezahlt einen Babysitter oder bemüht Freunde und Verwandte. Zur Not wird das Kind eben mitgeschleppt, wohl wissend, dass sie dann nur die Hälfte von den Diskussionen mitbekommen. Obendrein nagt an aktivistischen Eltern das Gefühl, die anderen könnten sich durch ihren Sprössling gestört fühlen. Nur selten kümmern sich politische Strukturen kollektiv darum, Menschen mit Kind die Beteiligung zu ermöglichen”.

(Wallrodt, Ines (2014). ‘Wer macht denn gleich die Kinderschicht? Wer macht denn gleich die Kinderschicht?’ *Neue Presse*, May 3, 2014.)

“Kids change how we do politics. Kids teach us that movement is a process—not a program—and that this process is playful, imaginative and creative, not just serious and rational. In turn, we teach kids that their play is a powerful tool they can and should cultivate throughout their lives, with serious implications for the world we inhabit. Interactions with kids produce another kind of politics, one that recognizes play as a crucial ingredient of any movement, and demolishes the walls that sequester it in childhood or bar it from our adult lives”.

(Regeneración childcare collective 2009)

“Our work is also grounded in the belief that play has an important role in radical politics (as do laughter, dancing, and blowing bubbles!). Doing childcare allows us to bring joy to our work, a radical stance in activist communities that often de-value self-care and ignore the possibility that social justice struggles should also sustain and feed us. Our interactions with children are informed by anti-adultist principles. We treat young people as powerful human beings by engaging their fierce questions, respecting their bodies, and honoring their feelings.”

(chichico, Chicago childcare collective, accessed November 10, 2014 <http://www.chichico.org/about/>)