

CONTESTING THE DANGER ZONE

Creative Protest against Police Surveillance in the Post-Fordist City

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In January 2014, residents and activists in Hamburg protested against the declaration of a so-called danger zone (*Gefahrengebiet*). The police created the zone after violent attacks on police stations had taken place. Inside this danger zone, the police were authorized to search and restrict the mobility of pedestrians. The protest attracted a high level of media coverage due to its creativity. My article discusses a form of protest, which activists and residents invented during the ongoing protest called “Danger Zone – The Real Life Game.” By utilizing playful practices, as well as narratives, activists contested the measures of the police throughout the protest and also, therefore, its interpretation by the media and by the police. Furthermore, they managed to link online to offline practices.

Keywords: urban space, protest, post-Fordist city, narrative, performativity

In January 2014, residents and activists attracted considerable media attention by marching through the streets of Hamburg holding toilet brushes in their hands in order to protest against the Hamburg police’s declaration of a “danger zone” (*Gefahrengebiet*) in the districts of Sternschanze, Altona, and St. Pauli. Within the danger zone, the police were authorized to use “stopandsearch” powers and to restrict the mobility of pedestrians. During the event called “Danger Zone – The Real Life Game,” a household article – a toilet brush – became a symbol of protest. Activists at the event contested the official state of emergency by drawing on performative and playful practices, as well as narratives, and by linking online activities to street activities.

Using the example of the “Danger Zone,” this article exemplifies the relevance of playful and per-

formative online and offline practices and narratives in the context of current social struggles for urban space.¹ Following a short outline on the current transformation of urban space, I will trace some of the events leading up to the declaration of a danger zone within the Hamburg city center. I will then explain why the protests against the danger zone turned out to be so massive, pointing particularly to the role of narratives and playful practices of protest. Residents and activists combined those online and offline practices in developing the protest event entitled “Danger Zone.” I will argue that those practices of protest can only be analyzed adequately in relation to the ongoing socio-economic process by which urban space is transformed toward an “enterprising” and “creative city.”²

Contesting the Creative City

Not only metropolises, but also medium-sized towns are increasingly orienting their urban politics toward the post-Fordist concept of the “creative”³ or knowledge-based city. A functional understanding of the city dominated the actions of urban administration well into the 1980s. It corresponded with the then predominant Fordist mode of regulation and was characterized by the spatial separation of living, working, and consuming. Furthermore, it was accompanied by processes of suburbanization, as well as by a comprehensive and centrally steered provision of social services (cf. Häussermann 2012).

David Harvey (1987, 1989) investigated the subsequent shift in urban politics and its programmatic orientation, which was not only caused by the crisis of the Fordist mode of regulation, but also its corresponding model of the city. Scholars in critical urban studies, particularly in the fields of sociology, human geography or political science, characterize these processes as “neoliberal” (Jessop 2002; Coleman, Tombs & Whyte 2005), “neoliberalizing” (Mayer 2013a), or “entrepreneurial” (Hall & Hubbard 1996; Jessop 1997; Coleman et al. 2005). Therefore, city administrations increasingly perceive themselves as being in a global competition with other cities, especially for transnational corporations in the field of knowledge and creative industries, as well as for high-income households, consumers, and tourists.⁴ In the course of this entrepreneurial restructuring of the city, not only can a commercialization and rearrangement of city centers along economic interests⁵ be observed, but also an “eventification” (Jakob 2012) and “festivalization” (Häussermann & Siebel 1993; Jamieson 2004).⁶

Due to the restructuring of the city, urban areas become commercialized spaces of consumption and events where galleries, expensive boutiques, and restaurants, as well as museums are used to attract high-income tourists and residents. According to Ronneberger referring to Zukin (1991) the newly built environment is realigned toward “the exhibition and selling of cultural codes and symbols” (Ronneberger 2012). This involves an increase in public space surveillance (cf. Coleman 2005) with

particular focus on social groups perceived as “dangerous.”

Finally, this entrepreneurial reorganization toward a “knowledge-based” or “creative city” exploits and strategically draws on urban culture. Hence, urban administrations promote the resettlement of agents from the artistic and creative scene (Smith 1996; Hackworth & Smith 2001).⁷ The specific images and narratives of a city also gain importance in the context of these socio-economic, political and cultural transitions of urban space. Expensive marketing campaigns are launched to create an attractive and unique image of the city – addressing residents as well as an international audience (cf. Hall & Hubbard 1996; Cronin & Hetherington 2008).⁸ However, these designed images of the city have to be distinguished from the “urban imaginary” in terms of the symbolic representation of the city, “the interpretive grids through which we think about, experience, evaluate, and decide to act in the places, spaces and communities in which we live” (Soja 2000; cited after Lindner 2006: 36). According to Lindner, these imaginaries are latently and deeply rooted within the social conscience. Thus, designed urban images have to correspond to the urban imaginary in order to become part of it (*ibid.*).

Scholars in critical urban studies stress the dissent these transitions toward the entrepreneurial city face. According to Mayer (2009), social movements and protests politicize and oppose the effects of neoliberal labor market policies, the destruction of the welfare state and the materialization of economic globalization on the local level of everyday life. More than that, they campaign against the commercialization of public space and the entrepreneurial self-marketing of cities in global competition. Protest researchers in urban social movements increasingly focus on protests and initiatives that organize themselves on a transnational level and under the slogan “Right to the City,” which was originally formulated by Henri Lefèbvre (1992). These initiatives against the entrepreneurial reorganization of urban space have also taken place in Germany since 2009 (Brenner, Marcuse & Mayer 2009; Vogelpohl 2012b).⁹

The formation of such initiatives is analyzed on

a transnational as well as a local level, asking for their specific contribution to urban development (Scharenberg & Bade 2009; Birke 2010). The initiatives are read as social controversies in the “creative city,” where the contribution of cultural workers is especially highlighted (cf. Novy & Colomb 2012; Mayer 2013b). Mayer (2009) analyzes the claims of these initiatives, which range from the radical critique of current relations of production to the reformist demand for sectional rights. Addressing research in social movements, Marion Hamm and Stefan Adolphs stress the intensified use of popular narratives and symbols by political activists. Referring to the EuroMayDay parades against precarious work, which, since 2005, have taken place in several European cities every May 1, they show how these playful and performative practices are used in order to stage sensual and eventful forms of protest within the urban environment (see Hamm & Adolphs 2009; Hamm & Sutter 2010).¹⁰

Other authors suggest using the terms “imagining” (Maier 2008) or “imagineered resistance” (Routledge 1997), in order to signify media interventions of protest. Maier stresses the fact that activists need to know about the “cultural grammar” (autonome a.f.r.i.k.a.-Gruppe 2012: 17ff.) within the current state of “cognitive capitalism” (Moulier-Boutang 2011) in order to initiate powerful interventions on the aesthetic and symbolic level.

Further research on written and oral narrative in social movements highlights its role in transferring irritating, particularly violent incidents during protests, into precise and intelligible frames. Furthermore, scholars examine how activists use narrations in order to establish specific perspectives on protests within and beyond social movements, as well as how they coordinate individual perspectives with “collective action frames” (Benford & Snow 2000). In doing so, they produce popular movement identities and manage to mobilize further activists (Benford 2002; Davis 2002; Polletta 2006). Carroll and Ratner show, from a neo-Gramscian perspective, the relevance of mass media within the process of implementing certain frameworks of interpretation as hegemonic perceptions of specific

protest and conflict (Carroll & Ratner 2010).

Scholars of social movements have examined the relation between performative acts and the generation and transformation of emotions into acts of protest. Fear, panic, anger, and hate operate as activating devices, while, at the same time, they are transformed into affective-emotional solidarity (see Collins 2001, cited after Juris 2008; Routledge 2012).

Police research and, to some extent, the protest research connected with this (cf. della Porta & Reiter 1998; della Porta, Peterson & Reiter 2006), underscore the ways in which protests are structured, above all in relation to policing practices, and how policing functions as a “social control of dissent” (Fernandez 2008). Routledge, thus, investigated the emotional instances in the interaction between protesters and police (Routledge 2012). He illustrated the way in which protest practices can be directed at the infiltration of emotional organization in protests, as witnessed in relations between the police and protesters, by way of the form of protest as employed by the “Rebel Clown Army.”

Petzold and Pichl, in particular, in their analysis of “summit policing,” stressed that protest-policing is both symbolically and discursively connected with the production of dangerous spaces, and that the policing of related communication management is aimed at the interpretation prerogatives as pertain to events in contested spaces (Petzold & Pichl 2013; Dopplinger & Kretschmann 2014). In this connection, Winter emphasized that policing also accounts for media discourse on protest events and police operations (Winter 1998).

Since the present survey does not contain data collected about the policing of protests or on the relation between the police and protesters, the present article focuses on a select range of media and on the symbolic-discursive forms of confrontation between police and protesters.

“We’re All Staying!”

In the following, I will go into more detail regarding this protest on claiming the right to urban space in Hamburg. Firstly, I would like to trace some of the events leading up to the conflict. On December

21, 2013, approximately 10,000 people, who used the slogan “Right of Residence for Refugees – Esso houses – Rote Flora – We all stay!,” assembled in front of the “Rote Flora,” a building used for squatting for more than 24 years that has since then been transformed into a cultural center run by left-wing activists. In 2013, the activists marched against recent developments targeted toward the city’s urban development and domestic policies. In previous years, there had been other protests concerning the issues of the demonstration. In 2009, for instance, different initiatives aligned to the campaign “Right to the City” fought against the entrepreneurial shift of the city and its effects on social life (Füllner & Templin 2011).

In 2013, residents and their supporters had demonstrated several times for the preservation of a block of flats known as the “Esso houses,” named after an Esso petrol station in front of the building, in the popular district of St. Pauli. They accused the company owner, “Bayerische Hausbau,” of letting the buildings dilapidate on purpose in order to dismantle them. Since then, the buildings, situated between the popular entertainment area Reeperbahn and the newly built commercial and residential area “Brauquartier,” have become a symbol for the protest against the ongoing socio-economic transformation of the City of Hamburg.¹¹ Throughout the night of December 15, 2013, tenants of the Esso houses reported concussions of its stonework. The police immediately evacuated the building and closed the surrounding shops.

More protests for the right to the city arose from the city’s department of the interior’s treatment of Libyan refugees. The refugees came via the Italian island of Lampedusa and arrived in Hamburg in March, 2013. They stayed for a while in the “Church of St. Pauli” near the famous former squats on “Hafenstraße,” which are still being inhabited by left-wing activists. On October 3, more than one hundred refugees drowned in the sea near Lampedusa and, for a short time, this event shed light onto the European Union’s refugee policy. One week later, the Hamburg police conducted massive stop-and-search-patrols in St. Pauli and St. Georg in order to

record the legal status of the refugees. The coincidence of both events, the drowning of the refugees nearby Lampedusa and the restrictive handling by the police, caused another series of marches, which had up to 15,000 participants and were aimed at showing solidarity with the refugees.

Just before Christmas Eve, the owner of the building Rote Flora proclaimed an ultimatum in order to clear the squat by December 20. Finally, in the middle of the night of December 20, several unknown people attacked the police station called “Davidwache” on the Reeperbahn, and destroyed several windows and police cars. The concurrence of these events turned the demonstration on December 21 into an explosive political issue, largely because left-wing activists of the Rote Flora mobilized their nationwide network of supporters. The march of protesters, however, did not last for long. After a few steps of marching, several units of riot police immediately stopped the demonstrators and the situation escalated.¹² As a consequence, riots occurred within the city center and caused serious material damage, more than 160 injured police officers and hundreds of injured protesters. Due to comprehensive video footage published on social media platforms over the following days, an increasing number of media articles not only criticized the violent protests, but also questioned the behavior of the police (welt.de 2013; Spiegel Online 2013). Public opinion turned again when the police sent out a press release on December 29 proclaiming that several offenders wearing scarfs of the left-wing football club FC St. Pauli had attacked the Davidwache and had badly injured some of its officers (presseportal.de 2013).

Contradictive Mobilizations of the “Creative City”

On January 3, 2014, police declared a “danger zone” in the districts of Sternschanze, St. Pauli, and Altona, which combined approximately 80,000 residents (presseportal.de 2014a). In doing so, the police used a practice developed during the 1990s, which allowed them to conduct checks on people without suspicion within defined sectors of the public space. In Hamburg, this practice was codified by the amendment

of police law in 2005 (Belina & Wehrheim 2011: 218). Previously, the police had justified the institution of danger zones with drug crime, left-wing demonstrations, or football games (ibid.: 219).¹³ This time, the police legitimized the measure by referring to the preventive protection of its officers in the face of the previous attacks on the Davidwache and on the police station near the Rote Flora. Since then, police officers, equipped with helmets and batons, patrolled the streets of the affected areas afoot and in police buses. On the first weekend they conducted 414 identity checks and searches “without suspicion,” forced 8 people to leave the area, executed 83 residency prohibitions, and took 45 people into police custody (Stahl 2014).

For various reasons, it was not surprising when concerned residents started protesting against the new measures. Firstly, a decades-long history of social struggles concerning the squatted houses in Hafenstr  e, the Rote Flora and the trailer park “Bambule” had already persistently shaped the districts affected and their residents. These conflicts left an imprint on the architecture and infrastructure of these districts. They affected the social relations of their residents, formed the districts’ self-image and how they were perceived by others, and finally, they generated specific images and narratives.

Secondly, different campaigns for a right to the city, predating the protests, established a critical view of the problematic outcomes of the entrepreneurial transformation of urban space within a broader public. Paradigmatic examples of these campaigns and alliances include: “S.O.S. St. Pauli” (see <http://www.sos-stpauli.de/ueber-uns>), “It’s Raining Caviar – Network against Gentrification” (“Es regnet Kaviar – Aktionsnetzwerk gegen Gentrification”; see <http://esregnetkaviar.wordpress.com>), the artist initiative “Frappant,” which demanded affordable studios (see <http://frappant.org>), and the initiative “Lux and Co” (“Lux und Konsorten”; see <http://www.lux-net.de>), which fought for affordable premises within the district of Altona.

Thirdly, the protests against the danger zone did not come as a surprise considering the fact that the residents already perceived the police practice to be

very authoritarian. The police limited the mobility of the residents, a practice which was a fundamental contradiction to their lifestyle. An increasing number of knowledge-based and creative industries, particularly in the fields of new media and advertising, had settled within the affected areas since the 1990s. The new residents were attracted by the areas’ alternative and creative image (Vogelpohl 2012a: 160 ff.). The working conditions and lifestyles, along with these forms of “immaterial labor” (Lazzarato 1996), are characterized particularly by the demand of and the desire for self-determination. The authoritarian appearance of the stop-and-search-actions in the streets contradicted this way of living.

On the other hand, urban administration particularly utilizes these lifestyles for urban development processes, for example, the residents’ skills in self-governance and proactive improvisation or their desire for self-responsible participation. Urban development projects frequently correspond to a mode of governance, which regulates already existing processes of self-governance, for instance, the provision of underused buildings as working spaces and exhibition rooms, the inexpensive funding of resident-organized social projects and the involvement of grassroots initiatives in processes of urban regeneration.¹⁴ The German sociologist Andreas Reckwitz calls this mode of urban governance “culture-oriented governmentality” (Reckwitz 2009). The police practices within the danger zone were also contrary to this current mode of governing the “Creative Class.”

The “Gefahrengebiet” is Becoming a “Danger Zone”

During the first nights of the new police measures, residents and activists met at different locations within the city center in order to stroll around the danger zone. During the interview, Simon, a resident and political activist, who is about 30 years old, tells me about the first time he participated in these “strolls”:

So, I immediately set off with my neighbors and my friends. I thought, alright, then let’s go for another walk today – a Sunday ritual. So we im-

mediately walked through the neighborhood and, naturally enough, were among the first to be checked. [...] But the police were completely running riot there and were in breach of the law on several occasions, going way beyond their mandate for such a danger zone. We pointed this out repeatedly, so that we ended up entering into a twenty-minute discussion, by which time we were faced by sixteen heavily armed police officers – with journalists all around and a great many residents. For all intents and purposes, this was the point at which we began to feel shocked – even though we were all political activists – about the police tactics, by which they were now really attempting to establish a containment zone. This may sound overdone, but they were behaving like occupying forces. They patrolled in large numbers around St. Pauli, controlling practically anything which, in their eyes, did not conform to middle-class norms. We were practically the first to be directly issued with a warning to vacate the area. Afterwards, we felt pretty shocked about actually being forced to go home. Then there was the other question: if we were already shocked, then how would other people there be able to deal with it?¹⁵

Simon gives an impression of the emotional dimension of the confrontations with the police when he talks about how he “began to feel shocked.” The excerpt also shows the activist’s perception of the police as authoritarian since he calls them “occupying forces.”

Some of these strolls formed into spontaneous demonstrations, while others converted the streets of the affected districts little by little into a playground. Consequently, over the course of a few days the protest event “Danger Zone – The Real Life Game” turned into a collaborative process. One of the significant characteristics of these collective activities was their low-threshold offer to participate in the protest. “Danger Zone” drew less on political convictions than on everyday experience. The protest event enabled its participants to bring in their knowledge about the structures and rules of the locally-based social relations, and the functionality

of popular styles, images, and narratives. The participants brought in competencies that are characteristic for the residuary milieus of the creative and knowledge-based industries. They utilized their skills in organizing public-oriented, attractive, and intensive sensual urban events. These ranged from urban beach clubs, self-organized street festivals, exhibitions, and artistic performances to oppositional events, such as the squatting of the urban area “Gängeviertel” by artists and cultural workers in 2009 (Birke 2010) or the EuroMayDay parades against precarious labor on May 1 (Hamm & Adolphs 2009; Hamm & Sutter 2010). Participants also brought in their competencies in analyzing and designing symbols, creating social cooperations, and attracting media attention.¹⁶

The interviewee Simon emphasizes the importance of the existing networks in Hamburg between political activists and artists, in particular musicians. Furthermore, he highlights how the playful practices of “Danger Zone” enabled the participants to cope with the shock caused by the unaccustomed police presence and to convert it into protest activity.

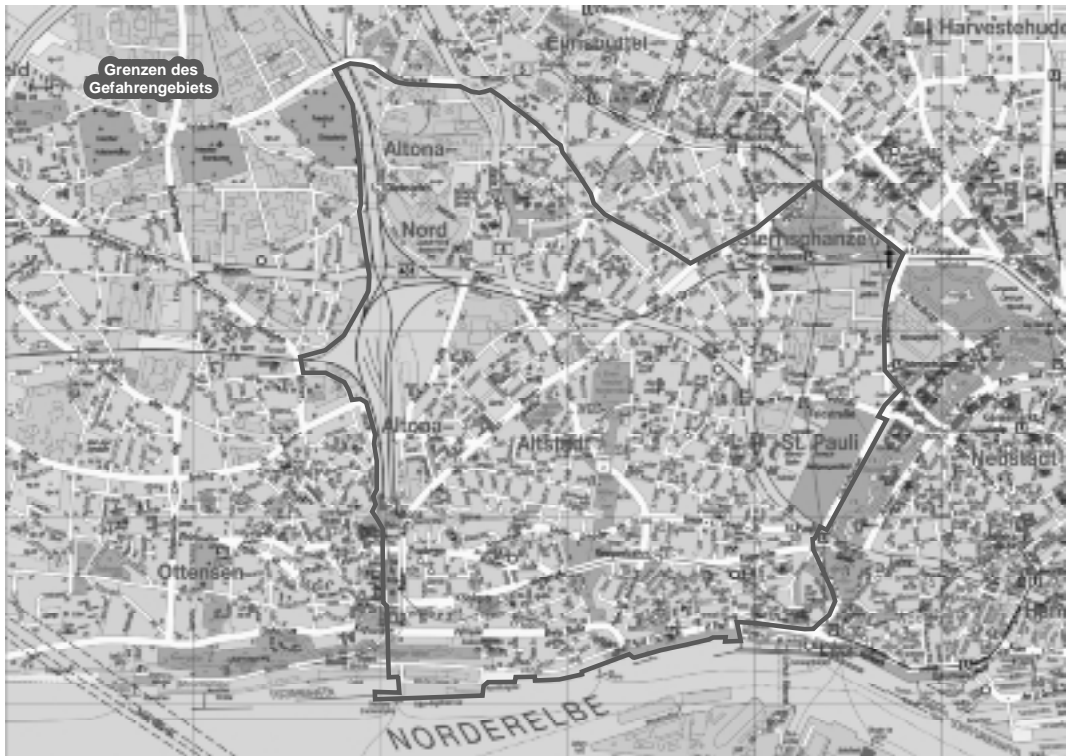
It then quickly became clear that we have a very good network in Hamburg. Pretty quickly this [event] then turned from shock to outrage. Together, we then tried to find out what we could do. The more hedonist types from the music scene then came up with the idea of lampooning the whole thing. Things began developing their own momentum fairly quickly. Various forms of protesting about the situation began to emerge – firstly, from the radical left perspective, which meant that one continued running around a bit so as not to miss an opportunity, and secondly, from a more hedonist angle, namely, that this excessive attack on everyday life was carried out *ad absurdum* by turning the whole thing into a game in an attempt to diffuse the anxieties associated with the situation. I mean, if one is checked every time one steps out of the front door just because one looks a bit shabby and is scared of police attacks, then this is also something that one has to find a way of dealing with ...

“Danger Zone – The Real Life Game” worked in a similar way as the so-called urban games, which in recent years emerged as popular forms of game-playing within urban space. Urban games, such as “Big Urban Game” (B.U.G.) or “Spreezone – The Upcoming Park” (“Spreezone – der kommende Park,” named after the river running through Berlin), developed in 2011 and based in Berlin, employ the streets, squares, and buildings as playing grounds where several players interact according to specified rules (de Souza e Silva & Hjorth 2009; Metzger 2013). In doing so, the players combine practices derived from digital media with activities that require their physical presence and face-to-face interaction (de Souza e Silva & Hjorth 2009: 612). The designers of the games embed the urban space into a fictive narrative including and overlying its existing architecture as well as its usage and representations. In the course of the game, the players but also pedestrians live through new experiences within the familiar spatial setting of their everyday lives.

In contrast to conventional or commercial urban games that come with an elaborate design, the Hamburg activists created the game “Danger Zone” during the protest and used social cooperation. As a first step, they created the playing ground of the game. As part of a press release on January 3, 2014, the date the police administration declared the installation of the danger zone, the authorities sent out a city map indicating the outlines of the zone with a thick red line (see illustration 1). Considering the concept of space as developed by Henri Lefèbvre (1992) and subsequently elaborated by scholars of radical geography (Peet 1977; Soja 1989), space is constructed not only on the level of its materiality, but also on the symbolic level by “contested societal practices and processes” (Belina & Wehrheim 2011: 208). Insofar as danger zones are always produced and legitimized on the discursive level, for instance, via media coverage (Dopplinger & Kretschmann 2014), the published map worked as a discursive contribution to the production of a dangerous space within the city center of Hamburg. Maps as “coherent and consistent representations of spatial situations” communicate a “feeling of manage-

ability” (Binder 2010: 89). Due to the abstract and codified form of maps as well as their ability to provide a mode of presentation free from experiences (ibid.), they make the city space appear as a realm of “orderly coexistence” (ibid.). The publication of the map can be interpreted as policing in terms of communication management, as an act of restoring order, as it created explicit borders and rendered the almost uncontrollable social movements of the past weeks invisible. The map drew a red line around the areas, symbolically separated the “zone” from the surrounding areas, and visibly underlined the police’s claim to enforce spatial constraints and to exercise control over the urban space. By presenting a space empty of its occupants, the map of the danger zone concealed the social relations and conflicts of the affected area. Furthermore, it redefined the social problems of these areas as a problem of public order to be solved by the police. The publication of the map can be interpreted as an intervention by the police on the symbolic and discursive level in order to enforce a certain interpretation of the incidents within the areas concerned.

The activists responded to the spatial intervention of the police on the symbolic level with a practice borrowed from the repertoire of guerrilla communication. This included the stealing and the subversive reinterpretation of pictures and symbols (autonome a.f.r.i.k.a.-gruppe 2002, 2012: 87f.). The activists changed the meaning of the map by integrating it into other pictures and, thereby, producing remixes of the cartographic presentation of space, so-called mash-ups. Exemplarily, they embedded pictures of demons with horns or cats within the drawn borders of the danger zone. Other pictures presented the danger zone as the region of Mordor in Tolkien’s novel *Lord of the Rings* (see <http://urbanshit.de>), and other people reinterpreted the Davidwache as Sauron’s dark tower. Activists created pictures of the danger zone shown as a playing board of the parlor game “Risk” (see twitter.com 2014a). By doing so, they reinterpreted the area of the danger zone as a playing field. Those pictures were disseminated on social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook. Thereby, they occupied the contested space by



Ill. 1: Map of the “danger zone.” (presseportal.de 2014a)

using subversive meanings and recaptured the area on a symbolic level and in a playful form.

At the same time as those online activities, activists also marked the borders of the danger zone within the physical space. They pasted street signs, street lamps, and advertising columns with labels welcoming the residents with the slogan “Welcome to the Danger Zone.” Amongst others, the renaming of the “Gefahrengiet” to “Danger Zone” was promoted by members of the art collective “ILL,” who published a Facebook page called “Danger Zone – Das Real Life Game” (see facebook.com 2014a) on January 5. By doing so, they provided further important devices for the playful and contentious events that occurred during the following days. Originally intended as an ironic comment on the danger zone, the Facebook page evolved into a platform for playful protest activities. In addition to photomontages and media coverage, activists particularly posted

stories and commented on photos documenting their activities within the danger zone. The elaborately designed cover of the website showed a yellow danger sign saying “Caution – Police out of control!” as well as a warning triangle showing the black profile of a riot police officer readily holding up a baton and some hands trying to avert him (see urbanshit.de 2014a).

The text published below the Facebook image, written as a hybrid of German and English, suggested some rules for the game “Danger Zone.” The linguistic composition appeared to some degree silly, but it provided an understanding of the game as a humorous act of protest:

Hyper hyper is now – in downtown Hamburg
 The danger zone game is on! The challenge
 for brave hoodwalkers (sic!) and families!
 It is easy and it brings tons of fun! We swear!

Invite all your friends!

Form a funny group and leave to fresh air. Wear black or use some band/soccer merch swag to win. Pack some baking powder, oregano or other herbs in small plastic bags and of course put funny little things in your rucksack or pocket.

Then walk around happily in Altona, St. Pauli or in the Schanzenviertel.

In order to win the game your team needs to run into a checkpoint of the police as often as possible and therefore collect most credit points.

You earn maximum hood walker (sic!) respect!

You get credits for document shares, pic posts and stories e.g.!

1 checkpoint score = 5 credits!

1 pic post twitter = 10 credits!

1 document pic posting twitter = 15 credits!

Very important:

You need to post your scores on Twitter and show them to the other gamers in the zone.

Only by using the following hashtag

#Gefahrenzone

You are not in need of something you do not have.¹⁷

Another script, which formed the playing rules of the game “Danger Zone” and, therefore, affected the choreographies of its participants, was the alleged “Field Report of a Pedestrian within the Danger Zone.” The “report” was published on January 6 on the blog: “md-protestfotografie” (see md-protestfotografie.com 2014) as well as being shared on Facebook. In this text, the protagonist spoke about her experiences within the danger zone and the subsequent stay at the police station:

Today, me and a friend strolled around the danger zone in fine weather, dressed up warmly and our faces covered by a black scarf (after all it is winter). Furthermore, as the sun came out occasionally we wore sunglasses in order to protect our eyes from UV radiation. Our pockets were filled with all kinds of useful goods without which one cannot take a stroll: socialist literature, a book of fairytales, sex toys, adhesive tape, sexy underwear, condoms, a banana, an audio drama of the

Famous Five, rescue blankets, tourist maps, wet wipes, cord, chocolate and some dried parsley and alga powder packed in small transparent bags, plus a little bag filled with cat shit. As we were somewhat scared by the high presence of law enforcement officers in order to keep some distance we always walked a little bit faster or changed the direction the moment we saw them appearing round the corner.¹⁸

This short narrative was accompanied by an illustration of a person wearing sunglasses, a hood, and a black scarf holding in her hands a little transparent bag containing indefinable herbs. In this manner, the author referred to the aesthetic of the images showing masked and rampaging protesters, which had dominated the media coverage during the previous weeks. The communicative effect of this visual and linguistic narrative pointed in two directions. On the one hand, it mocked the media stereotype illustrating the protesters as members of a “black bloc” acting violently and homogeneously. On the other hand, the unserious pose mimicked the fetishism of militancy practiced by groups of demonstrators on December 21. The text and the picture did not only parody the media stereotypes, but also questioned the self-image and appearance of some of the protesters.

Other participants of the game “Danger Zone” dressed up as hooded members of the autonomous left (see facebook.com 2014b); they also published pictures on social media and, again, using the linguistic mixture of German and English, titled posts “Let’s go to the danger zone” (see facebook.com 2014c). Furthermore, they filled their pockets with suspicious objects, such as divers’ goggles, toy guns, and fruit pasted up with fuses. The goal of the game was to get searched by the police: in doing so, they collected as many credit points as possible and, subsequently, published the outcome on the Facebook page: “Danger Zone.”

The participants shared so-called selfies (self-taken photos) on the Facebook page with comments, hiding their faces behind the move-on order handed out by the police (see facebook.com 2014d). Others

created “bonus cards for residents” offering a free coffee at the “police station of your choice” after every ten police checks (see facebook.com 2014e). They not only posted photos of those bonus cards on Facebook, but also distributed them within the danger zone.

On the one hand, the participants transformed the urban space not only by changing its material shape, but also by creating narratives and staging physically reenacted choreographies. By combining playful narratives with physically performative activities, the players of “Danger Zone” slipped into a role, which added a subversive moment to their daily routine.¹⁹ In the interview, the activist Simon gives an example how the playful protest of “Danger Zone” continued during everyday life and how it added moments of resistance to the daily routine.

Firstly, it became an issue when going down to the bakers, when meeting people you knew, for example. “So, what was your score yesterday?” was always the first question. I mean, it was always very present in everyday life. [...] It also became the topic of conversation down at the pub. “Have you been checked already today?” and “Yes, I gained fifteen points” had become everyday talk down the pub. It was no longer “Hello, how are things?” but “Hello, scored yet?”

By reframing the danger zone as a game, the activists converted feelings such as outrage and fear into amusing protest activity. Interviewee Simon emphasizes the importance of this feature of “Danger Zone.” In the following excerpt Simon clarifies his view on how the ironic narrative of “Danger Zone” as well as the related activities enabled residents to cope with the exceptional circumstances caused by the danger zone. It also gives an example on how the narrative enabled activists to “overcome” their fear of being forced into stop-and-search-actions:

It was an attempt to find a way for people to overcome fear by responding to the whole thing ironically, while still being able to say that what the police are doing is just not on. [...] Of course, you

can be critical about presenting the whole thing as a game. But many people found it helpful as a way to make them feel less inhibited when walking out the front door. And then it developed its own dynamic relatively quickly, so that a multiplicity of protests began to develop, spontaneous demonstrations, but also this “Danger Zone” game, which really became a favorite among youth. An increasing number of groups of youths passed through the neighborhood, without fearing the police. Which was not the case on Sunday: one was really worried about walking round the corner because one was checked there. It took the sting out of the whole thing.

“Danger Zone” utilized social online and offline networks between political activists, residents, and artists in order to not only initiate protest on the Internet, but also to stimulate social and political cooperations in the physical and public space of the danger zone. In order to participate in the online game, activists needed to collect credit points at the same time by protesting within the physical urban space. The reports of the protesters’ street activities, in turn, inspired imitators via Facebook. However, social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, should not be considered as having caused the social cooperations of the protests. They functioned rather as an enabling tool, which allowed the activists to employ their already existing social relations and networks and their “social dispositions”²⁰ for cooperation in order to organize their protest activities.

“Danger Zone” offered the possibility of participating in the game retrospectively and to become part of the social cooperation to those passersby who unintentionally got involved in a police check. Hence, the game gave them the chance to reinterpret an experience of powerlessness as a collective activity and, thus, as an experience of empowerment.

Within a few days, the number of protesters and the diversity of playful practices of protest increased. On the evening of January 7, activists again assembled within the danger zone. Meanwhile, journalists had also arrived in order to report on the protest.

That night the newscast “Nachtmagazin” broadcasted a short video sequence showing two riot police officers checking a person, and suddenly finding a white toilet brush underneath his black hoodie. Stills and clips of this remarkable sequence spread immediately over social media (see twitter.com 2014b). The next evening, dozens of activists marched through the streets of the danger zone shouting “toi-toi-toilet brush operation” (“Klo-Klo-Klobürsteneinsatz”). Over the next few days, the toilet brush became the symbol of the protest against the danger zone. Shops decorated their windows with toilet brushes, residents used them in order to trim their flower tubs, and others used video projectors in order to screen pictures of toilet brushes on house walls (see facebook.com 2014f). Interviewee Tanja, about 30 years old, lives in the area affected by the protest. Her activities during the protest were grounded somewhere between urbanism and artistic activism. During the interview, she talks about how she faced the protest symbol of the toilet brush during her daily routine.

I take the tram everyday between nine and half-past ten and travel to work. Once, I noticed how a young man on his way to work attached a toilet brush to his waistband, where a belt would normally have been; that he really travelled to work like this. And this is not only a symbol that I carry around with me through the streets when actively protesting, but I take it with me when walking through the city or, like I said, when going to work. Many attached the brush to their bicycles; I found this quite amusing.

The excerpt of the interview gives an impression of how the everyday object of the toilet brush became a powerful protest symbol. Referring to the video sequence, which went viral on social media, activists connected the everyday object of the toilet brush to subversive meanings. Furthermore they not only distributed these meanings on the Internet but also transferred them into the physical urban space.

The activists recombined popular symbols, such as the peace dove, replacing the laurel branch in her beak with a toilet brush (see facebook.com 2014g).

Others altered official movie covers from blockbusters by substituting, for example, the sword of Braveheart or the magic wand of Harry Potter with toilet brushes and sharing them on social media (see facebook.com 2014h). Utilizing techniques of “culture jamming” (Routledge 2012), such as “textual poaching,” they appropriated those icons of popular culture and gave them new subversive meanings by using their established codes and combining it with other symbols (autonome a.f.r.i.k.a.-gruppe 2012: 119f.).

In the end, activists appropriated logos known nationwide as the trademark for the City of Hamburg. For that purpose they utilized the practices of “adbusting” and “subvertising,” which encompass the techniques of montage and alienation in order to add subversive meanings to commercial logos (autonome a.f.r.i.k.a.-gruppe 2012: 104f.; Irzik 2010; Walton 2012). In the case of the skull logo of the FC St. Pauli football club, they replaced the crossbones with toilet brushes (see facebook.com 2014i), changed the cupola of the Mariendom cathedral on the emblem of the city into a toilet brush (see *ibid.*), and added a toilet brush as a tower to a skyline view.

Both the protest activities against the danger zone and the police activities show that protest events constitute simultaneous struggles for gaining sovereignty over interpretation. The police was pressured into further legitimization of the danger zone and interpretations of the protest as of January 5, 2014, when the counselor of the Rote Flora, Andreas Beuth, publicly expressed doubts about the second attack on police officers on December 28, as told by the police (mopo.de 2014). On January 7, the police themselves had admitted that they had falsely reported the incident (von Appen 2014; zeit.de 2014).

As interviewee Simon recounts, one could also perceive the shift of public opinion about the protest in the streets of the declared danger zone:

So, the “toilet-brush application” soon established itself along with the other thing that soon became common, which was that the official police version was no longer believed. As soon as police appeared, they were shouted at through mega-

phones with the words “liars, liars.” This was also a unique feature, in other words, that one didn’t believe the police – something which, naturally, intimidated the police. So, it’s not very encouraging for them when a mob turns up and yells “liar, liar!,” or when twelve- and thirteen-year olds roam the streets abusing them shouting “liars.”

Finally, on January 8, several national and also international news media, such as the BBC and *The Times* reported a warning from the US Embassy in Berlin sent out to US citizens living in Germany to stay out of the danger zone (bbc.com 2014; germany.usembassy.com 2014; n-tv.de 2014; thetimes.co.uk 2014). On January 9, police announced the reduction of the danger zone to three small areas called “danger islands” (*Gefahreninseln*), which were placed around three endangered police stations. Although the police justified this measure with the success of its previous operations, activists celebrated it as an outcome of their own commitment. Despite the reduction of the danger zone the playful protests continued over the next few days leading to a public pillow fight in front of the police station Davidwache and an unannounced “brush mob” demonstration through the Schanzenviertel district.

Although the local and nationwide media coverage of the protest increased during the next days, the spokesman of the police of Hamburg rejected the reinterpretation of the danger zone as a game until the end. In a report of the nationwide broadcasted newscast “Nachtmagazin” on January 10, he rather attempted to sustain the police interpretation of the protest as “dangerous” and “life threatening.” He said: “One can laugh about it, but I don’t find it that amusing because it not only has to do with the life and limb of officials, but also of innocent bystanders” (see youtube.com 2014).

On January 13, the police completely revoked the danger zone. In a press statement and with a factual accent, they justified the end of the measure by its success, particularly referring to the prevention of further attacks on police officers and without saying a single word about the now nationwide known protest.

When the past weeks had seen repeated attacks on police officers and public institutions, such as police buildings, the Hamburg police installed a danger zone on January 4, 2014. The danger zone is to be removed as of today. The objective in installing danger zone was to prevent considerable criminal activity in the area by extending monitoring powers so as to improve civilian and, in this case, also police protection. Since the introduction of the danger zone, potential troublemakers could be identified by way of specific police monitoring measures, after which serious crimes were largely eliminated. The positive development in danger zones led to a reduction of the zone on January 1, 2014, in the area around the district police stations 15, 16 and 21. This positive development was recently continued in modified danger zones. Among other things, there were no further targeted attacks on police officials. The objectives hoped for by way of the introduction of danger zones were successfully fulfilled. According to police daily situation assessment, the continuation of the danger zones is no longer necessary, and their removal is thus justified. The removal of the danger zones is to be put into effect immediately. The Hamburg police will continue their presence measures in the former danger zones in the appropriate form (presseportal.de 2014b).

The activists, meanwhile, posted the news on the Facebook page of “Danger Zone” and changed its cover image to the faces of the senator of the interior, the mayor and the spokesman of the police, and above the image the slogan “GAME OVER” showed in red letters (see facebook.com 2014j).²¹

Conclusion

The protest event “Danger Zone – The Real Life Game” illustrates how the everyday experiences, skills, and knowledge of the creative milieus shape the protest activities within the creative and entrepreneurial city. Utilizing narrated reports as well as the playful and performative practices of “Danger Zone,” the activists contributed to the shift of public opinion concerning the conflict surrounding

the danger zone. My analysis shows how the playful, media and performative protest activities can be understood as part of the struggle between activists and the police about the dominant interpretation of the protest event concerning the danger zone. Though the event was not planned, it emerged over the course of the protest from the social cooperation of the affected residents. I argue that the high level of commitment cannot only be reduced to the intense usage of social media. Although social media facilitates a strong organization and mobilization, the usage of social media cannot invent, but rather recombines already existing and historically shaped forms of protest, particularly those of guerilla communication. The practices of online activism were closely connected to practices of street protest. Furthermore, they emerged from the already existing social relations between occupants, artists, and political activists living in the affected areas. Following Postill and Pink (2012), a social media ethnography, which also comprises fieldwork within the physical (urban) space, enables to examine how the practices of online activism scrutinized in this article were “interwoven with the qualities, political structures and histories” (Postill & Pink 2012: 1) of the area concerned.

“Danger Zone” was particularly effective as it engaged with the everyday experiences of the occupants. Employing online activism as well as street activities, the protest event provided a low-threshold possibility for the occupants to bring in their skills and their knowledge about popular culture. It also enabled them to articulate their personal interpretation of the conflict and, in doing so, allowed them to take part in the protest activities. The activists contested not only the media interpretation of the conflict around the danger zone by the police and the municipal administration, but also the official and commercialized image of the city by adding subversive narratives and images. It became apparent that social media, due to its high diffusion rate, its low-threshold access, and its close connection to social networks, can be efficient tools for activists in order to subvert and oppose elaborated and expensive campaigns by city marketing. “Danger Zone”

further provided an alternative interpretation and usage of the spatial setting via its counter narrative and its oppositional script. The residents’ experiences of the danger zone as limiting their scope of action shifted to an experience of the political recapture of urban space. “Danger Zone” enabled its participants to rediscover and newly experience their familiar environment. Those narrative and playful moments of protest may further affect the urban space on the level of the urban imaginary, as the spatial experiences of the residents may also shape their future perception of the affected areas. The residents’ experiences of resistance also remain part of narratives on the micro level of everyday life.

The practices of protest scrutinized in this article may be conceived as oppositional imagineering or imagineered resistance, as the activists protested against the danger zone not only in the street, but especially by reinterpreting the police activities as well as popular symbols and official images of the City of Hamburg in a subversive way. My analysis of the protest event “Danger Zone” shows how the production of oppositional imaginations can become an effective practice in order to contest the post-Fordist transformation of the city.

Notes

- 1 This article builds and expands on an earlier version of this research published in German (Sutter 2014). I would like to thank Katharina Hajek, Jonas Füllner, and Janine Hassink for their valuable comments to this article as well as the reviewers for their time spent commenting on my manuscript, which helped to improve the article.
- 2 The article is mainly based on the analysis of postings, pictures and videos on Facebook, Twitter and other websites, as well as on the media coverage throughout the course of the protests. I also draw on informal conversations with activists and participants of the protest event “Danger Zone” and two interviews with activists, which I conducted via Skype in March and May 2014. As I did not conduct participant observation during the protests against the danger zone, I use material from participant observation that I conducted during previous protests in Hamburg, for example the protest in January 2005 against the rebuilding of a disused water tower as a four stars hotel, which is located within the local recreation area of the Schanzenviertel in the dis-

- trict of St. Pauli, or at the EuroMayDay parade on May 1, 2009. Although I focus on data from research carried out on the Internet, my approach follows conceptual suggestions of a “social media ethnography” as conceptualized by Postill and Pink (2012). According to Postill and Pink, social media ethnography combines online media analysis with participant observation in the physical space in order to “follow ethnographically the (dis)continuities between the experienced realities of face-to-face and social media movement and socialities” (ibid.: 2).
- 3 Central to this debate are the concepts by Richard Florida (2002) and Charles Landry (2000).
 - 4 Even in 1983, the then-mayor Klaus von Dohnanyi of the Social Democrats argued for the mission statement of the “enterprise Hamburg,” which addressed the audience of the famous Übersee-Club (cf. Dohnanyi 1983). He not only spoke in favor of an economization of the local city administration and social policies, but also focused on the service sector instead of on the industrial sector.
 - 5 For the case of Hamburg, an example is the opening of the first Ikea downtown store in the district of Altona.
 - 6 These developments can also be observed in Hamburg. See, for example, paradigmatic events such as the public screening of the Football World Cup in 2006 on the central square “Heiligengeistfeld,” the “Port Birthday,” the “Harley Days,” or the “Reeperbahn Festival,” the failed candidature for the Olympic Games 2012 in 2002, or the ongoing development of the new urban district “HafenCity” and its landmark construction projects such as the “Elbphilharmonie” within the city center.
 - 7 Such programmatic initiatives recently took place in Hamburg during the reorganization of the Altona district next to the shopping street “Große Bergstraße.”
 - 8 For the activities of the “Hamburg Marketing GmbH,” which aims at installing a “Hamburg brand,” see Hiller (2013).
 - 9 It is important to mention here the manifesto “Not In Our Name, Marke Hamburg!” by cultural workers from Hamburg in 2009 who opposed the valorization and instrumentalization of cultural work for urban politics in Hamburg (see <http://nionhh.wordpress.com/about>).
 - 10 Another example of illustrating such forms of intervention in Hamburg is the campaign “Fuck U,” by which activists commented on the “Blue Port” event (Füllner 2012).
 - 11 Among other things, those protests contested the strong increase of rents, the reevaluation of the district Altona-Altstadt by the opening of an Ikea store, and the construction of the new housing area “Bernhard-Nocht-Quartier” in the district of St. Pauli.
 - 12 The police authorities legitimated their intervention by arguing that the demonstrators had started too early and that the protestors had thrown firecrackers at police officers. In contrast to this, supporters of the protest argued that police executives, in the form of the former right-wing senator of the interior, Ronald Schill, had planned to prohibit the demonstration from the beginning.
 - 13 Other justifications were the theft of cars, violence, damage to property caused by arson, and domestic burglary (Belina & Wehrheim 2011: 218).
 - 14 The urban administration of Hamburg had already utilized such strategies of governance in the 1980s by authorizing the alternative redevelopment agency “Stattbau” to supervise the development of alternative and self-organized housing projects. Other examples include the foundation of the agency for urban renewal and development (STEG) in 1989 by the senate of Hamburg as well as the installation of a neighborhood management, which established round tables in order to involve residents in urban development processes (Stattbau 2002).
 - 15 All excerpts from the interviews were translated into English. The transcribed excerpts have been adjusted for the purpose of improved legibility.
 - 16 Referring to Lloyd, urban residents who deal with their urban environment by utilizing media practices can be called “community media makers.” To him, they act as “practitioners of urban citizenship” who tell stories and in doing so reinterpret the urban space (Lloyd 2013: 320).
 - 17 For the original version, see <https://linkspankow.wordpress.com/2014/01/05/gefahrenzzone-hyper-hyper-is-now-in-downtown-hamburg/>.
 - 18 See *md-protestfotografie 2014*; field reports like these were published on the Facebook page “Zeckensalon” run by a FC St. Pauli football fan group (see <https://www.facebook.com/zeckensalon>).
 - 19 Regarding its content and form, the protest activity at first sight seems to follow the tradition of the situationist urbanism from the 1960s, for example, the practice of “dérive” and “détournement” (Raunig 2005: 154ff.). The protest event “Danger Zone,” however, emerges from the socio-economic and cultural transformation of the urban space. The situationists acted against the background of the Fordist city and its spatial separation of work, leisure, and consumption (for the concept of the Fordist city, see Häussermann 2012). In contrast to this, the current protest occurred within the post-Fordist city and its multifunctional concept of space connecting different areas of life.
 - 20 By using the term “social disposition,” I refer to a social practice linked to the lifestyle of specific social milieus.
 - 21 Regarding the conflict around the Esso houses, the

demolition of the building started in February 2014. The independent neighborhood assembly of the district of St. Pauli with approximately 400 participants demanded participation in decision-making regarding the reconstruction process (see http://www.st-pauli-selber-machen.de/?page_id=434). Due to the struggle around the Esso houses the owner "Bayerische Hausbau" agreed on planning more than 50 percent of the apartments as social housing. Furthermore, activists and former tenants founded the initiative "PlanBude" in order to "collect ideas, analysis and opinions" regarding the new building complex (see <http://planbude.de/>). The collected ideas were officially taken into account during the following architectural competition. When the competition was decided in September 2015, the solidarity group "Initiative Esso Häuser" issued a press statement saying that they welcome the decision of the jury (see <http://www.initiative-essohauser.de/index.html>).

Regarding the protest of the Libyan refugees, most have not yet been granted a residence permit. While some live in official accommodations and others are still homeless, more than hundred refugees have been provisionally accommodated by supporters. Since 2014 the initiative "Lampedusa in Hamburg" has organized several protest events. In their latest march on November 14, 2015, up to 9,000 participants aimed at showing solidarity with the refugees (see <http://nevermindthepapers.noblogs.org>).

Meanwhile, the Rote Flora remains as a cultural center squatted by left-wing activists. In October 2014 the City of Hamburg bought back the building for the sum of 820,000 euro after its owner had to file for insolvency. In summer 2015, the year of the 25th anniversary of the squat, activists and supporters renovated the building extensively in order to "prepare it for the decades to come" (see <http://florabaut.noblogs.org/aufwurf/>).

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