9.

Sensing Late-Liberal State Failure

Ecologies of Resistance in a Post-industrial German City

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Abstract

Harbour cities smell differently: the sea mixes its own odours of fish and seaweed with the exhaust gases of heavy ships and marine industries. In one of those major seaports, the German city of Bremerhaven, my informants noticed a different smell in the hot summer of 2014: the stench of waste from other European countries temporarily stored near the city's touristic fishery harbour. Whilst the public outrage forced local authorities to swiftly remove the waste, the wastes of the local incineration plant are not sensed so easily. This paper concentrates on the work of a local activist group against the extension of the landfill where the plant's toxic filter dusts are deposited. A group of former natural scientists, they track these carcinogenic dusts with the help of both their senses and their scientific training. By that, they draw into power's remit what cannot be seen. They hold the power of a failing late liberal state accountable by producing knowledge that transcends the limits of governance as defined by local authorities. Although my informants' attempts often remain unsuccessful, their scientific-sensory agency exemplifies an important ecological take

on power and resistance. This form of ecological agency takes into account a variety of nonhuman actors and intricate sets of biochemical and geological data. It also favours ideas of longevity and sustainability. As an exercise in ecological thought, this form of activism forces us to redefine the nature of power and the responsibilities of the state in the age of the Anthropocene.

The "Shifting States" theme of the conference, around which this volume evolves, is a tricky one. It makes a clear reference to the state as a political entity. However, the conference organisers did not only see the classical topics of political anthropology--power, state institutions, citizenship, political economy, etc.--to be undergoing change in the contemporary era of late liberalism. They also inferred that the states, which we find 'the state' and its crafts forces and effects in, might be different from the ones we usually investigate. Rather than in, for instance, bureaucratic state apparatuses, we find the state in material objects and structures, affects and emotions, and the most intimate relations to others and oneself (for example, Navaro-Yashin 2002[BIB-019], 2003[BIB-020], 2012[BIB-021]; Schwenkel 2013[BIB-031]; Mazarella 2009[BIB-018]; Gregg and Seigworth 2010[BIB-013]; Petryna 2002[BIB-022]; Rose and Novas 2005[BIB-028]). For long, there has been a consensus in the discipline that we should expand our understanding of how power, and in particular state power, works (for example, Rose and Miller 1992[BIB-027]; for a critical perspective, see Candea 2011[BIB-005]). Studies of affect,

materiality, and power, for example, have already shown that 'the state' in late liberalism is to be found in a variety of 'states': from ephemeral, visceral and intuitive understandings of the world to the slow and dramatic decay of large-scale infrastructures (see Stoler 2004BIB-032; Thrift 2004BIB-029, 2008BIB-030; Weston 2011; Povinelli 2012).

In the Antropocene, these states of 'the state' might vary even further. Or rather, the variety of these states that our informants do--and we accordingly should--take into account has expanded. Posthuman and new materialist turns allow such conceptual expansion (for example, Braidotti 2013; Coole and Frost 2010BIB-007; Bennett and Joyce 2010BIB-004). However, the question is why we should expand our focus and analysis in the first place. In this chapter, I propose two answers to this question. First, to expand our register for understanding the workings (or failings) of the state translates into new forms of holding the state accountable. This move acknowledges that the nation state remains a continuously powerful actor in our world despite (or because) of the many changes brought to it by neoliberal reforms (Aretxaga 2003BIB-002; Hansen 2006BIB-014). Expanding our analysis is therefore in itself a political act. For example, one ethnographic example, which I present further below, concerns the civic use of smell to make political claims, depicting a sensory form of agency. By shifting our analyses of the state in order to include, among other

things, such sensory approaches (see Desjarlais 2003[BIB-008]; Howes 2003[BIB-015]; Pink 2009[BIB-023]), we can trace new political subjectivities and forms of citizenship, in which the relationship between the state and those governed is being renegotiated.

Second, in the age of the Anthropocene, we as well as our informants are forced to expand the analytical and theoretical toolkits for understanding the world as well as the dramatic changes it is currently undergoing. I refer to this as an exercise in ecological thought, when the variety and scope of political thought involves more actors and factors, and generally aspires to more complexity. This exercise is crucial for tackling problems such as climate change. It, too, allows for the emergence of new forms of agency and citizenship. In reciprocal ways, citizens and state representatives might be teaching each other a few lessons in ecological thought. For example, when state institutions try to educate their citizenry about carbon dioxide footprints, they force respectively invite these citizens to see the world differently--namely, as being made up of invisible carbon dioxide molecules that are at the core of global warming. Such educational efforts politicise a certain aspect of the world that is or might be of a different nature or 'state' (gaseous, in this instance) than, say, the rather solid objects and subjects of traditional governance (such as crime or insanity, comp. Foucault 1988[BIB-011][1961[BIB-011]], 1995[BIB-012][1975[BIB-012]]) Obviously, governance has always worked on a variety of scales when governing viruses and diseases, roads and

airplanes, or large-scale resource extraction. In turn, citizens like in my fieldsite, Bremerhaven, also draw the state, or in this case, their city and state (*Land*) authorities, into a variety of sometimes broader, sometimes more focused claims about aspects of reality that they are concerned about. They therefore question what is or should be subject to state power and regulation, and hence what the state can be held responsible for.

In the late liberal era, however, this happens at a moment when the state itself keeps on shifting. In Germany, for instance, discourses about the state and its remits have been changing at least since the 2008/2009 financial crisis and what is referred to as the 2015 refugee crisis. After years of austerity policies, and with the failings of the state in the wake of the latter crisis, the demands for more of the state with regards to its general services to the public [*Daseinsvorsorge*] gained momentum, involving all kinds of institutions, issues of infrastructure, and the health care system. Similar to the United Kingdom, new demands for a recommunalisation of certain services and infrastructures mark a new phase in post-welfare state expectations. In this context, critique of the state in general or of certain neoliberal forms of its governance, such as private public partnerships, can be seen as potentially shifting the state into new domains, urging it to solidify in very material, actual terms.

It is these shifts that I explore in this chapter by considering a variety of governable matters in solid, liquid, and gaseous states. The chapter falls into three parts. At first, I will introduce my fieldsite, the post-industrial harbor city of Bremerhaven and the expectations of the state that are currently being voiced there. After that, I will present two ethnographic examples that depict how the city's inhabitants have tackled the failure of the local administration to administer and manage processes that my informants describe as 'natural', the rotting of imported waste and the rising of ground water levels. I then discuss in more detail the work of a citizens' initiative, which tries to prevent the extension of a local waste disposal site. All three examples of local state failures, I claim, invite us to consider how the relations between the late-liberal, post-welfare state is currently being renegotiated in this post-industrial city. These renegotiations also tentatively point to a future of urban sustainability beyond the city's post-industrial crisis, a professed aim of the city's official urban development strategy. In such a more sustainable future, my informants presume, these kinds of failures would simply not occur anymore.

Expectations of the State in Bremerhaven

My fieldsite, Bremerhaven, is a German harbour city at the North Sea and a typical postindustrial city. Once the proud home port of the West German high sea fishing fleet and several successful shipyards, as well as the US army's port of

embarkation, Bremerhaven was the richest city in post-World War II Germany. Currently, it is the nation's poorest city. For at least the last three decades, it has featured high levels of long-term unemployment, poverty, and crime. Throughout its industrial crises in the 1970s and after reunification in the 1990s, the city administration was expected to keep the city going in economic and social terms. With federal and EU funding, it arguably succeeded to do so and brought the city's shrinkage temporarily to a hold. However, recent austerity measures have forced the highly indebted city to cut down its spending and general support even more. Furthermore, as with many other urban communities worldwide, Bremerhaven has also privatised some of its main assets, the city's silverware (*Tafelsilber*) as the Germans have it, including its municipal energy provider (*Stadtwerke*) and public utilities (*Versorgungsbetriebe*).

Still, as a harbour city there are several services that are non-negotiable with local inhabitants (comp. Humphrey 2003BIB-016), including, for example, the maintenance and the enlargement of Bremerhaven's dykes. The city barely escaped a storm flood catastrophe in 1962, having completed the erection of a new storm flood barrier just the year before. Handling the river and the sea, as much as other weather extremes, is seen as the responsibility of the state. However, the creation of public-private partnerships (*Öffentlich Private Partnerschaft*, henceforth PPP) for running

some of the most essential services (waste removal, sewage disposal, water supply, energy supply, etc.), seem to have changed local expectations of state responsibilities. Critiques of these recent rearrangements of state power in the city surface time and again. Particularly the city's waste-fuelled heating and power plant has come into focus--not because it would not supply heat or energy, but because of the way the PPP treats its employees and handles the plant's toxic remains.

The plant is the first thing a visitor sees when entering the city centre from the motorway. Built in the 1970s, it dominates the city's outskirt with its high red and white chimney. Recently, several onshore wind turbines were built next to it. They also have symbolical importance because they materialise the promise of a new urban future: expectations of a very different, less toxic, and more sustainable future for Bremerhaven. Ironically, this plant was opened at the onset of the city's post-industrial crisis in 1978. In recent years, wind turbines, rotor blades, and other parts produced for the emerging offshore windfarms in the German bay came to signify not only a shift in the nation's and the city's energy regime. They also mark the transition to sustainability, in which the industrial era responses to problems of a growing city (how to handle increasing amounts of waste and how to match higher energy demands) are overcome by the technological possibilities of a sustainable post-industrial city.

Indeed, Bremerhaven prides itself to be the "Home Port for the German Offshore Wind Industry". The city's recent reindustrialisation efforts have proven successful at first. Several thousand new jobs were created in factories that opened on the large brownfield in the Southern Harbour. Just recently, the world's biggest wind turbine has been erected in Bremerhaven--despite the recent crisis in the once ambitious German transition to renewable energy, the country's *Energiewende*. The turbine's rotor-blades span 180m, and the whole plant is more than 200m tall. One of the good things about this new form of producing energy is that there are no emissions and not yet any visible forms of waste--although that might change in the future. However, there are still a few ecological problems with wind turbines, too. Some people are concerned for birds, who might be injured by the rotor blades. Some feel visually annoyed by wind turbines positioned in some pristine countryside. Because of that, all German offshore wind farms have to be built out of sight from the coastline. Their erection, in turn, also faced its challenges: reportedly, porpoises were put at risk by the noise disturbance when ramming the offshore wind turbines' foundations into the seabed. Two circles of air bubbles provided the technical fix for that, and now these offshore wind parks constitute sanctuaries for maritime wildlife, because they prevent the huge fishing trawlers from fishing there. Either way, in

contrast to the incinerator, people cannot smell the renewables. When it comes to smell, however, the city is well-attuned due to its legacy as a fishing harbour.

Olfactory agency is one form of ecological agency. In the upcoming examples, it is exercised in relation to the by and large invisible residues of the local incineration plant and its global connections in a wider political economy of waste and energy production. By deploying it, local activists attempt to, literally, sense power and its effects and failings, as well as speak sense to power, thereby reformulating their own expectations of the state. Whilst these efforts face overpowering enemies at local and translocal level and have thus far often been unsuccessful, they should still be taken seriously when it comes to analysing contemporary reconfigurations of states and their crafts. In a world that understands itself in ever more detail and with a concern for sustainable futures, practices aiming at sensing and extrapolating what is hardly seen or otherwise sensed are a first step towards holding power responsible in more ecological and all-encompassing ways. In this particular case, they also remind city officials of the duty and responsibility they have towards the citizens of Bremerhaven when it comes to issues of health and public security. Because of opposing a private-public partnership that undermines the late liberal local government's role in environmental and health protection, these practices also provide a critique of contemporary forms of capitalism that is voiced with new kinds of expert

knowledge--insights that those in charge choose not to see. Such speaking sense to power, to rephrase Foucault, then makes available other forms of knowledge to be considered politically in the operations of current relations of dominance and disempowerment as well as resistance and citizenship.

Smells like State Failure

Apart from offshore wind energy, Bremerhaven also opted for tourism as a potentially sustainable industry in order to reinvent itself in post-industrial times. In the city centre's Old and New Harbour, but also in the Fishery Harbour in the south of the city, impressive tourist attractions have emerged in recent years. Particularly, the Fishery Harbour builds on local industrial traditions with its main focus on fish. Most of the fish that is still processed and refined in the many local food producing companies, however, comes to Bremerhaven via train; for instance, from Germany's biggest import 'harbour' for fresh fish, the Frankfurt/Main airport. The times when the nation's high-sea fishing fleet was based in the city are long over. Back then, fish were everywhere, and many people worked 'in the fish' (*im Fisch*), as a local phrase has it.

Obviously, fish has its own olfactory qualities, and many people still remember the different smells that were present during these times. One anecdote was often shared with me: The former tramline 4, which once connected the main station

and the fishing harbour, always reeked of fish. However, there were nuances that most Bremerhaveners were attuned to. One could, I was told, clearly tell each passenger's occupation. The women from the marinating companies smelled differently than the men from the smokehouses. Traces of these former olfactory realities, the city's unique smellscape, linger. Some of the buildings in the harbour still carry the odour from the past, particularly the former fish packing hall (*Packhalle*) Nr. 10, previously the place where the freshly unloaded fish was auctioned and sold. Even decades after the end of these auctions, current inhabitants still constantly air the building to get rid of the fish smell (see Ringel 2016[BIB-026]). A courageous start-up chocolate company had to close and remove its headquarters from the premises since their production was olfactorily disturbed.

In summer 2014, however, the Fishery Harbour wreaked not of fish but of waste. "A scandal!", the local newspaper reported, citing many angry citizens severely affected by this odour. The source of this malodour were huge bags of rubbish stored in an area not far from the main tourist attractions of this part of the harbour. The waste, I was told, originated in Ireland and, since German waste incineration plants had higher capacities than German rubbish can fill (after all that recycling), it was economically viable to import refuse from other countries--and by that disincentivising them from building up their own recycling infrastructures. This

refuse was waiting to be transported not even to Bremerhaven's own incinerator station, but to another one near Hamburg. In fact, the depot was also not rented by a firm from Bremerhaven. In this case, the city and its inhabitants became part of, and affected by, the current international waste regime rather by accident. However, its own waste-fuelled power plant is similarly dependent on external waste. As my activist informants claim, only approximately 40000t of the 300000t rubbish burnt in it are originally from Bremerhaven. The rest originates from all over Europe; the example most often cited was waste from Naples in Italy. That means that burning the rubbish not just from the city, but from, for example, southern Europe, which is shipped all the way to Bremerhaven, is still profitable.

After seagulls had ripped the trash bags open, the ordour nuisance strongly intensified. It became a major political issue in city and *Land*. To most citizens who had demanded a quick solution to this olfactory problem, it came as a big surprise that the local and regional government fairly quickly shut the storage depot down and instructed the company to remove the waste. Apart from the citizens 'and the tourists' health and well-being, I presume, the adjacent food processing industry also played a role. Their fish products might smell of fish but not of rubbish. This example of the politics of olfaction seems like a successful example--senses were made to speak to power and power reacted quickly, stopping sensual nuisance. Indeed, the political

actors involved were seen to stand clearly on the side of its citizens, prosecuting a private company whose failure (in proper storage and management of the Irish waste) had caused the threat to the health and well-being of the local population and other businesses. But what if the company runs public services that were previously the task of the city or state itself?

As mentioned beforehand, the privatisation of public services in the late 1990s and early 2000s has already shifted the responsibility of local state authorities in the state of Bremen and the city of Bremerhaven (which together with the city of Bremen forms this state). The late-liberal state retreated from some of the core services it previously provided. One of them was the supply of drinking water. This included the running and maintenance of the local water works and general infrastructure. One of the waterworks, located in the city's southern district of Wulsdorf, came, as the supplier suggested, "to the end of its life span" in 2016, after almost 80 years of use. When it was still run by the city, people were allowed to build houses in its vicinity. The new owners, the public limited company *SWB AG* warned residents that the planned closure of the works could lead to rising groundwater levels. They would rise to their "natural level", the company predicted. Indeed, many residents soon complained about water in their basements. They felt the state had failed them twice, first by allowing them to buy landholding in the area and erect property there, second

by not forcing the company to maintain, renew, or replace the water works rather than closing it down altogether. The city authorities reacted too late, in the eyes of many. Some pointed to famous examples of recent recommunalisations of drinking water suppliers, for instance in Berlin in 2012. A proper state-run company, they argue, would have handled the situation better and with the interests of its citizens in mind.

Bremerhaven's authorities promised help but never questioned the closure of the water works. Together with the *SWB AG*, they set up a "voluntary" relief fund of 1.2 million euro, sponsored half by the city (i.e., by taxpayers' money) and half by the company. As the fund's website explains, this should help the 187 households of the "relief fond area" (*Hilffonds-Gebiet*), who might potentially be affected, to help themselves. This means that both sponsors do not accept legal responsibility but only supported self-help (*Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe*). Their motivation is rather moral than legal (comp. Fassin 2008[BIB-009]). In 2017, they commissioned a status report which 79 households contributed to. Sixty-nine of them were affected. They also commissioned a further hydrogeological investigation to properly determine the "natural groundwater levels" (*natürliche Grundwasserpegel*). Each household concerned can apply for funding between 5000 and 32000 Euro--which, some claim, does not even cover a fourth of their actual costs. More than two years later, there is still no technological fix that the *SWB AG* and the city could find and agree upon.

Particularly in 2018, they seemed to publically clash over questions of responsibility, with the company publishing an open letter demanding that the city authorities should be more realistic in their assessment of the situation and their communication of possible solutions. For the company, the "*Projekt Wulsdorf*" is coming to an end, and the risk of the enduring high water levels firmly remains a matter for the residents.

As both of these examples show, the late-liberal state's sphere of influence in Bremerhaven is fairly obscure. Malodour from rotting waste is an issue that can easily and swiftly be resolved. Rising ground water levels, in contrast, leave official authorities largely powerless. Both of these issues were raised by citizens who demanded that the state should act and help them. The waste problems were detected with olfactory means, whereas the rising groundwater levels, respectively the resulting dampness, were variously seen or felt in the walls or on the floors of residents' basements. But what if the threat that people perceive cannot be sensed per se, and only lingers in vague forebodings and premonitions? I turn to the explicit production of knowledge that has to assist the experience of the world through the senses in order for them to be spoken to power. In other words, the waste in the fishery harbour, close to food production, citizens, and tourists, would still have been there if seagulls and early summer heat and logistic problems had not made it so blatantly, sensorially detectable. Similarly, if the water had not pushed its way up into

the basements, the rise of groundwater levels would have potentially gone unnoticed. The knowledge produced on the basis of these detections could have not led to the formulation of a political claim. How to engage with the state then, when the object of that claim is beyond one's senses?

Making the State Know

The waste-fuelled power plant in Bremerhaven opened in 1977. Since then, it has not only produced energy by burning waste; it also produced its own litter, particularly toxic, carcinogenic filter dusts. These filter dusts accrue when the fumes of the burning waste are expurgated. The handling of these dusts (or scoria) is usually highly regulated. However, the plant in Bremerhaven has often been implicated in accusations of lax standards and proper irregularities. This is surprising for many of my informants, since the plant was first opened and run by the city. However, in 2003, the Bremerhaven Disposal Company BEG (*Bremerhavener Entsorgungsgesellschaft*) was privatised. Since then, a well-known global waste disposal company owns 75% of the company, and the city retained 25%. Still, as a part-owner of this cooperation, the city should take all environmental and health and safety regulations seriously. However, one informant pointed out how he had witnessed several times that the plants filters were cleaned by Rumanian workmen, who laboured bare-chested and without masks instead of wearing protective suits and

respiratory masks as demanded by German law. A recent survey by one of the company's union representative also showed shocking results: almost half of the 60 workers at the plant have been diagnosed with cancer and/or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). I was also told that in most other places in Germany these dusts are considered to be so toxic that they have to be stored underground in sealed off depots. Not so in Bremerhaven.

In Bremerhaven these dusts are brought to the landfill site "Grey Ridge" (*Deponie "Grauer Wall"*). In 2012, the city even granted the legal permission in the form of an elaborate planning approval procedure (*Planfeststellungsverfahren*) for the site's extension despite vocal critique and its previously promised closure. This extension is, many believe, crucial for the BEG to keep its costs of running the plant down. The lawful underground disposal of the filter dusts and other toxic material would be too expensive. A 52m hill could therefore potentially overlook the site's flat environment, particularly the nearby water reserve and the adjacent park. This park has recently been revamped as a Health Park (*Gesundheitspark*)--one project of the city's sustainable urban redevelopment strategies (comp. Ringel 2019[BIB-025]). Toxic substances next to an area dedicated to sport, health, and well-being with heavy winds blowing from the North Sea--does not sound right, particularly not in a city that

claims to become a Climate City (*Klimastadt*), and even less so for the people living in proximity to the landfill site.

At first sight, the inhabitants of the city's most affluent district, Speckenbüttel, might appear to have a rather egoistic agenda--that is what some of their opponents often insinuate: An extended nearby landfill site lowers their house prices, and hence local residents are actually not concerned about their health but only about the value of their property. But somewhere these dusts have to be stored, they would add, and why not in an affluent neighbourhood? However, the concern of the citizens' initiative "No Extension of the Grey Ridge" (*Bürgerinitiative Keine Erweiterung Grauer Wall*), in short BIKEG, are of a more existential nature, and mirror many other citizen initiatives' protests against waste-fuelled power plants in Germany (Berglund 2001BIB-003) and worldwide (for example, Alexander and Reno 2014BIB-001). The BIKEG was formed in 2010, when the plans for the site's extension became public. One of the first things they decried was the depositing of asbestos. In a news report of the regional TV station, one worker reported that the asbestos lay loose on the ground of the heap, and they would drive over it. He could hear the asbestos break and burst--and he was wearing no protective gear at all. Another concern was voiced with regards to the temporarily stored household refuse, which would often catch fire. Particularly in summer, when the power plant was closed for maintenance for six

weeks at a time, the waste was pilling up, awaiting its incineration. Regularly, the self-decomposing waste would catch fire in the heat. Nearby residents would notice the smell of what they had to presume were harmful or toxic smoke from the site. The initiative's website still describes them as "bestial stench" (*bestialischer Gestank*). One idea the activists had was to compile a "stench protocol" (*Gestanksprotokoll*). However, there were other substances that left no olfactory traces.

After personal changes in the initiative, two academics, Frieder and Sabine, ran the BIKEG during my fieldwork. They led the biweekly board meetings, organised and conducted the annual plenary meetings, handled communications with local and national media and politicians, coordinated the initiative's legal actions, and organised all kinds of protest rallies and other practices of resistance. Frieder was very fond of the latter. He was one of the old *68er*, as they are called in Germany. This is the West German 1960s protest generation, which was later superseded by the protesters against nuclear power that, in turn, evolved into the Green Party. Frieder has his fair share of protest experiences, and he seems to enjoy them. He is one of several residents of Speckenbüttel who permanently sport a protest sign in front of their houses, copying the official city limit sign (*Ortseingangsschild*), but replacing the usual administrational unit of "Customs Border District" (Zollgrenzbezirk) with a new subheading--"Toxic Waste District" (*Giftmüllbezirk*)--to the already modified

"Climate City (*Klimastadt*) Bremerhaven". At a 2015 rally of waste workers against privatisation of communal waste management and for a referendum in favour of their recommunalisation (*Rekommunalisierung*), he wore a white onesie with an advert sign on his head reading "Bremerhaven Holiday Advice Special!!! Health Park with Hazardous Waste Deposit" ("*Bremerhaven Urlaubstipp Special!!! Gesundheitspark mit Sondermülldeponie*") and handed out leaflets to the striking waste workers, explaining the aims of the BIKEG initiative.

Most importantly, Frieder and Sabine also conduct the hands-on research that is at the core of their strategy. This includes all kind of investigative work in state archives and public documents, and the consultation with experts, such as geologists and ecologists. It also involves making graspable what is only tentatively accessible. As many of their neighbours, both had initially noticed the presence of the nearby landfill site in many different ways. You can still just about see it when driving by, but the site is fenced off and surrounded by trees that prevent a proper inspection. Even if particles of the filter dusts and the other toxic substances such as the aforementioned asbestos were taken beyond the site by the often-strong North Sea winds, it would be hard to see them. Every morning Sabine checks the wind direction to decide on her airing practices at home and, as other neighbours, they use their sense of smell to look out for potential fires on the site. These fires, as the BIKEG initiative documented,

happen quite often. It could have been these incidences that sharpened their sensual awareness and made the--literally--dig deeper.

Frieder and Sabine started some investigation and measurements themselves. This included the in-depth analysis of water and soil samples, as well as the collection of hardly visible dust samples from their--and some of their neighbours'--windows, skylights, and roofs. As trained scientists with a PhD in geology and bio-chemistry respectively, they did some of the analyses themselves. For other analyses they hired proper experts or asked friends who work in laboratories and gave them access to proper equipment, such as a scanning electron microscope. The results of these analyses were put in detailed reports and communicated both to the wider public and the politicians in charge. For instance, they have found alarming amounts of lead in the samples, whose source could only be the filter dusts. Given that they could detect them off-site, the dusts were certainly not properly stored, posing high risks to the local population.

The politicians nonetheless refused to agree to these claims. The city's Office for the Environment (*Umweltschutzamt*) and the *Land*'s Industry Control Office (*Gewerbeaufsichtsamt*) challenged both reports, calling them unprofessional or amateurish (*laienhaft*), thereby questioning their authors' professional qualifications. Even the in-depth geological report Sabine compiled, laying out how the groundwater

will most likely be contaminated with the site's extension because of a too thin layer of clay--only 20cm instead of the lawful 5m--under the site's premises. The city refused to take these analyses seriously, and only growing public support for the BIKEG initiate forced the local administration to commission their own surveys and studies. The costs for these, however, were presented as being unaffordable for Germany's poorest city. The city still agreed to create an advisory committee consisting of representatives of the city, the licensee, and the initiative. This committee quickly failed, proving true to Frieder and Sabine that it only ever was a pacification strategy (*Befriedungsstrategie*) to silence their critique.

After the city's studies and on-site examinations finished, BIKEG members noticed that more transports from the waste incineration plant were reaching the landfill site again. Nothing had changed; however, their fight against the BEG continues. One of their most serious allegations with regards to the PPP format--and here rumour abounds--is that there must be personal dependencies between state representatives and the private waste company. One occurrence seemed to prove this. It concerned the rotational assignment of a new contract for the cleaning of Bremerhaven's sink traps or catch basins (*Auffangbehälter*) in all local gullies. This task, many activists were hoping for, could have been recommunalised, particularly because the city had been unsatisfied with the work of the BEG. A small communal

firm could have taken over. Indeed, at first, the contract with the BEG was discontinued. However, just a day later, and despite all failure and critique, the same contract was suddenly renewed.

Conclusion

Although at first sight unsuccessful, the BIKEG activists continue to fight for the closure of the Grey Ridge. Through their complex work, they have already managed to challenge the public-private partnership that runs the site. Their form of activism is exemplary for many other initiatives in Bremerhaven and worldwide which try to speak sense(s) to power. This activist work depends on representing what otherwise cannot be seen or only hardly be sensed through smell and other means. For the BIKEG it included a science-based approach, which initially followed peculiar smells and small-scale observations but then had to grapple with the complex issues in a scientifically sound way. In their representational work, Frieder and Sabine made little particles 'visible' and thereby included them in their fight. They forced the city to consider more than what is seen and to commence their own inquiries.

This speaking senses and science to power entails, I claim, an ecological paradigm shift in the power-knowledge relations of our time: the political elite is forced to take citizen groups' ecological, geological, chemical, medical, and biological representations and arguments into account (comp. Petryna 2002[BIB-022]).

Otherwise, they lose control over what is to be governed. This bottom-up, science-based activism challenges local governance by confronting power with something that requires hard work to be represented. It depicts a form of agency that follows all senses and deploys a more complex and ecological framework, in which power and the state, I believe, are held differently responsible.

In the context of this post-industrial city, such forms of agency and activism shifted the states to be considered by the state from the scales of microscopic particles and toxic fumes to the material realities of wet basements and huge big bags filled with rotting waste. What was being renegotiated all along, however, was the remit of the state and its responsibilities. This is not to be mistaken for a conservative nostalgia for a welfare state past. Rather, what my informants formulated, I believe, is a demand for the future, in which the complexity of the processes to be governed will only ever increase. The challenges of the 21st century demand a state that is much better equipped and more knowledgeable and holds a much more long-term perspective. The realisation of the idea of sustainability requires exactly that kind of state--as do the harmful legacies of the industrial-modernist era, which haunt the city's post-industrial present. A weak, late-liberal state seems to be doomed to fail with this task.

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