



# **trespass**

**issue one**

**Trespass Journal**  
Volume 1, 2017

Contents  
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# Introduction

## The editors

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# **Punk and Anarchist Squats in Poland**

**Jim Donaghey**

## **Abstract**

*Squats are of notable importance in the punk scene in Poland, and these spaces are a key aspect of the relationship between anarchism and punk. However, the overlap of squatting, punk, and anarchism is not without its tensions. This article, drawn from ethnographic research carried out between 2013 and 2014, explores the issues around punk and anarchist squats in Poland, looking at: criticisms levelled at punk squats by 'non-punk' squatting activists (e.g. Przychodnia in Warsaw); instances of squats as a hub for a wide spectrum of anarchist activity (e.g. the 'anarchist Mecca' of Rozbrat in Poznań); and the repression of squatting in Poland through eviction and legalisation (affecting all squats in some form). (Other squats and social centres mentioned here include Elba and ADA Puławska in Warsaw, Wagenburg and CRK in Wrocław, and Od:zysk in Poznań.) Among the various squats, there were tensions around approaches and tactics identified as 'more anarchist' or 'less anarchist' – this speaks to the supposed 'workerist'/'lifestylist' dichotomy within anarchism more widely, but the lived experience of the squatters is shown here to be far too complex to be encompassed in any false binary.*

## **Keywords**

Squatting; anarchism; punk; Poland; repression; eviction; legalisation; lifestylism; workerism.

## Introduction

Anarchism is a multifarious set of ideas which encompasses a myriad of approaches and strategies – including strands which are (at least in theory) mutually antagonistic. One such perceived antagonism is between ‘workerism’<sup>1</sup> and ‘lifestylism’<sup>2</sup> with their caricatured exclusive emphases on workplace struggles and consumption practices, respectively. Squatting is very often lumped-in with the ‘lifestylist’ pole of this supposed dichotomy, and usually in a derogatory manner.

The article begins by laying out the connections between anarchism and squatting (and also legally rented ‘social centres’), before moving on to look at how these relationships play out in the context of Poland. Tensions around diverging tactics and approaches between squats are examined, as well as issues around repression of squats through eviction *and* legalisation. The key argument here is that anarchist and punk squats are a bricks-and-mortar example of anarchism in action, and that while they do perform a cultural and ‘lifestyle’ function, their impact is felt in a wide range of anarchist activisms, including typically ‘workerist’ forms, which complicates the ‘workerist’/‘lifestylist’ dichotomy to the point of redundancy.

The interview and participant observation material which informs this article was carried out in May/June 2013 and October 2014 as part of PhD research and while on tour with a punk band.<sup>3</sup> The research was based around several squats: in Poznań – Rozbrat and Od:zysk; in Wrocław – Wagenburg and CRK; in Warsaw – Przychodnia, and also interviews with people from the recently evicted Elba squat

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1 ‘Workerism’ is used here to denote anarchist perspectives which focus *exclusively* on workplace issues and materialist economic analyses (and not in relation to autonomist ‘*operaismo*’).

2 ‘Lifestylism’ denotes anarchist perspectives which focus on personal (and sometimes cultural) aspects. While a few writers have attempted to recuperate the term (see: Laura Portwood-Stacer, *Lifestyle Politics and Radical Activism*, (New York/London: Bloomsbury, 2013) and Matthew Wilson, *Biting the Hand that Feeds Us. In Defence of Lifestyle Politics*, Dysophia Open Letter #2, (Leeds: Dysophia, 2012)) it is generally used as a slur, often in terms echoing Murray Bookchin’s polemic *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism. An unbridgeable chasm*, (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995).

3 Grounded theory informs the research method, giving primacy to the perspectives of the squatters and activists themselves, and an anarchist underpinning seeks to avoid exploitation of interviewees, while remaining rigorous and critical.

(who subsequently opened a new space named ADA Puławska).<sup>4</sup> One other squat was also visited during the research, but after sending a draft version of the article to the collective there they opted to exercise a veto over content relating to them. This was partly driven by security concerns, and about fears of damaging relations with the squatting community in their area, and while it is disappointing not to be able to include their views and opinions here, their wishes are, of course, respected.<sup>5</sup>

## Squatting and anarchism

Squatting<sup>6</sup> has numerous intrinsically anarchistic qualities, which are made explicit in many squatting actions. The autonomist-Marxist writer Geronimo asks (rhetorically) whether ‘squatting demonstrate[s] yet another form of libertarian-anarchist communism?’<sup>7</sup> In Colin Ward’s view, certainly yes – he viewed the post-World War II squatters’ movement in the UK ‘as an example of the human tendency for direct and cooperative self-help, and thus a key model of “*anarchy in action*”.’<sup>8</sup> As Ward puts it: ‘Squatting is an example of *direct action* applied to the housing problem in a non-revolutionary situation,’<sup>9</sup> and Hans Pruijt suggests that this activist mentality and expertise can be transferred into ‘sundry troubled

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<sup>4</sup>Piotrowski notes that ‘there were and are also squats in Gdańsk, Toruń ... Gliwice, and Białystok.’ (Grzegorz Piotrowski, ‘Squatting in the East: The Rozbrat Squat in Poland, 1994-2012,’ in Bart van der Steen, Ask Katzeff, and Leendert van Hoogenhuijze (eds), *The City Is Ours. Squatting and autonomous movements in Europe from the 1970s to the present*, (Oakland: PM Press, 2014), p. 233)

<sup>5</sup>For a more detailed discussion of ethical issues in similar contexts, and notes towards an anarchist methodology to overcome (or at least ameliorate) such issues, see: Jim Donaghey, ‘Researching “Punk Indonesia”: notes towards a non-exploitative insider methodology,’ *Punk & Post-Punk*, vol. 6, no. 1, (forthcoming, Spring 2016)

<sup>6</sup>In many cases, squatting simply represents a practical solution to homelessness and occurs with no ‘political’ motivation (though the existence of homelessness in society is deeply ‘political’ in itself). See: Colin Ward, *Cotters and Squatters. Housing’s Hidden History*, (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2009 [2002]), pp. 167-168

<sup>7</sup>Geronimo, ‘Foreword,’ in *The City Is Ours*, p. xiii

<sup>8</sup>Carissa Honeywell, *A British Anarchist Tradition. Herbert Read, Alex Comfort and Colin Ward*, (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 141, [emphasis added]

<sup>9</sup>Colin Ward, *Housing: an anarchist approach*, (London: Freedom Press, 1976), p. 25, [emphasis added]

spots in society.<sup>10</sup> Ward describes squatting as ‘a political education,’<sup>11</sup> which has an important ‘effect on the participants’:

it ‘reveals a great deal about the state of mind that is induced by free and independent action, and that which is induced by dependence and inertia: the difference between people who initiate things and act for themselves and people to whom things just happen.’<sup>12</sup>

The Squatters and Homeless Autonomy (SHA) Collective<sup>13</sup> in London argue that squatting engenders an ‘[o]ppositional self-identity ... [which] continues to make squatting a threat to cultural power’ by adding to ‘larger *cultures of resistance*.’<sup>14</sup>

Pruijt concurs, but notes that:

[i]deology is only loosely coupled to practice ... [which] allows for considerable freedom when creating an ideology around squatting such as instant anarchism, i.e. suddenly discovered with little influence from the anarchist tradition, or ideologies with an anti-capitalist or anti-property rights theme.<sup>15</sup>

The Needle Collective and the Bash Street Kids also argue that the squatting/direct action ‘scene’s politics are not always clear-cut or universal, but they do revolve around such ideas as activism for social change, non-hierarchical decision-making, and a DIY ethos.’<sup>16</sup> The SHA Collective argue that squatting ‘has always meant struggle’ and that there is a ‘permanent need to politicise’ these struggles.<sup>17</sup> In a communiqué titled *Against Apolitical Squatting* they stress that squatting is only viable *because* it is ‘political’:

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10Hans Pruijt, ‘Squatting in Europe,’ in *Squatting in Europe. Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles*, Squatting Europe Kollektive (eds), (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013), p. 29

11Ward, *Housing: an anarchist approach*, p. 125

12Colin Ward and David Goodway, *Talking Anarchy*, (Oakland: PM Press, 2014 [first published Nottingham: Five Leaves Press, 2003]), pp. 81-82, [*Anarchy In Action* reference not given]

13Not to be confused with SHAC (Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty).

14SHA Collective communiqué, *Against Apolitical Squatting*, <https://www.facebook.com/squatterhomelessautonomy/> [accessed 11<sup>th</sup> November 2015], [emphasis added]

15Hans Pruijt, ‘Squatting in Europe,’ in *Squatting in Europe. Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles*, (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013), p. 28

16Needle Collective and Bash Street Kids, ‘Ebb and Flow: Autonomy and squatting in Brighton, 1973-2012,’ in *The City Is Ours*, p. 153

17SHA Collective communiqué, *Against Apolitical Squatting*



A squatted space not used for politics soon loses the politics of squatted spaces. Creating spaces intolerant to social hierarchy and state surveillance, for organising and consciousness-raising, is integral to the creation of effective resistance in squats *and on the streets*.<sup>18</sup>

So while the politics of squatting and the political motivation for particular squatting actions might sometimes be hazy in terms of theory, it is possible to recognise squats as ‘symbols of *anarchist*, “autonomous,” and “free” spaces,’<sup>19</sup> which are an example of ‘the libertarian way of organising’ which has been a constant in European ‘radical urban youth movements’ since 1968.<sup>20</sup>

Eric Mattocks, a founder and treasurer of the Advisory Service for Squatters, stressed that ‘squatting was not merely a demonstration, it was *an initiator of social change*,’<sup>21</sup> and, as the SHA Collective note, squatting is directly opposed to the underlying hegemonic ideology of capitalism, and as such: ‘Squatting continues to prove itself as direct action against power.’<sup>22</sup> This challenge to unequal distribution of property and the concept of private property itself is a crucial aspect, because as Ward argues (quoting Kropotkin): ‘Once the principle of the “Divine Right of Property” is shaken, no amount of theorising will prevent its overthrow.’<sup>23</sup> And in fact, state authorities adopting a stringently neo-liberal view of private property rights repress squatting on *exactly* these grounds.

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18Ibid. [emphasis added]

19Nazima Kadir, ‘Myth and Reality in the Amsterdam Squatters’ Movement,’ in *The City Is Ours*, p. 22, [emphasis added]

20Bart van der Steen, Ask Katzeff, and Leendert van Hoogenhuijze, ‘Introduction: Squatting and Autonomous Action in Europe, 1980-2012,’ in *The City Is Ours*, p. 8

21In Colin Ward, *Cotters and Squatters. Housing’s Hidden History*, (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2009 [2002]), p. 165, [emphasis added]

22SHA Collective communiqué, *Against Apolitical Squatting*

23Ward, *Housing: an anarchist approach*, p. 25, [Kropotkin reference not given]



Image 1: Mural at Rozbrat, Poznań

## Punk squats in Poland

So squatting has both practical and theoretical connections with anarchism, and in the case of Poland,<sup>24</sup> squats are also often associated with punk. Van der Steen, Katzeff, and van Hoogenhuijze emphasise ‘the link between radical politics and subculture,’ arguing that in both ‘squatted houses’ and ‘rented social centres ... the focus on ... youth and alternative lifestyles remains a constant’ – they identify punk (and hardcore) as key examples of this.<sup>25</sup> Lucy Finchett-Maddock argues that punk ‘is *automatically* connected to the squatting movement through their freeing of space and anti-authoritarian practices.’<sup>26</sup> Indeed, in countries where squatting movements have emerged more recently, such as Spain, punk has been a crucial catalyst.<sup>27</sup> Punks also introduced squatting to Poland, but even in countries with longer squatter histories like the UK or the Netherlands, a

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24See also: Dominika V. Polanska and Grzegorz Piotrowski, ‘The development of squatting in Poland: local differences and the importance of cohesion and durability,’ *Baltic Worlds*, vols 1-2, (2016), pp. 46-56

25Bart van der Steen, Ask Katzeff, Leendert van Hoogenhuijze, ‘Introduction: Squatting and Autonomous Action in Europe, 1980-2012,’ in *The City Is Ours*, pp. 8-9

26Lucy Finchett-Maddock, ‘Squatting in London: Squatters’ Rights and Legal Movement(s),’ in *The City Is Ours*, p. 220

27See Claudio Cattaneo and Enrique Tudela, ‘¡El Carrer Es Nostre! The Autonomous Movement in Barcelona, 1980-2012,’ in *The City Is Ours*, p. 98

'prevalence of punk squats'<sup>28</sup> developed by the 1980s. Van der Steen et al. argue that punk's impact was reciprocated, with 'the punk subculture [being] nourished by the 1980s squatter movement'<sup>29</sup> in terms of providing infrastructure for punk gigs while emphasising the political aspects of punk.



Image 2: Squat logo near Wagenburg, Wrocław

In other European countries there are significant parts of the squatting movement with little or no connection to punk, but the overlap appears to be nearly ubiquitous in Poland. Of course, there are at least *a few* squats in Poland which are not connected to punk, and while squats are extremely important for Polish punk scenes, punk gigs do often occur in commercial venues, such as bars – however, these gigs are likely to be less engaged with anarchist politics.<sup>30</sup> Several interviewees stressed the punk/squat connection: respondent J<sup>31</sup> said, 'squats in Poland equal punk;' respondent I<sup>32</sup> likewise stated, 'all the squats are punk squats;' respondent H<sup>33</sup> noted that, until very recently, 'the squatter's

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28Finchett-Maddock, 'Squatting in London,' in *The City Is Ours*, p. 214

29van der Steen et al, 'Introduction,' in *The City Is Ours*, p. 11

30For more on anarchism in Poland see: Grzegorz Piotrowski and Magnus Wennerhag , 'Always against the state? An analysis of Polish and Swedish radical left-libertarian activists' interactions with institutionalized politics,' *PArteecipazione e CONflitto*, vol. 8, no. 3, (2015), pp. 845-875

31Interview conducted 31/05/2013

32Interview conducted 27/05/2013

33Interview conducted 27/05/2013

movement was *very strictly connected* with [the] punk scene.<sup>34</sup> Respondent F<sup>35</sup> further backed this up, saying, 'my first experiences with anarchism and [the] punk scene ... were *of course* on the squat.'<sup>36</sup> Grzegorz Piotrowski concurs, writing that the squatting scene which 'began in the mid-1990s, was limited to anarchist and punk subcultures.'<sup>37</sup> There are some exceptions to this conflation, but even within such places the relationship between punk and squatting is recognised as near-ubiquitous in Poland, so the connection is understood as being very strong indeed. Squats are where Polish punk most tangibly experiences repression, both in the form of attempts from the state and private landowners to evict them, and in the form of physical attacks from street-level fascist groups. It is impossible to properly understand the relationship between anarchism and punk in Poland without due consideration of the influence of squats.

As Piotrowski notes: '[s]quatting in the former communist bloc is a very different phenomenon than its counterparts in Western Europe or in the United States'<sup>38</sup> with 'almost no [squatting] tradition in Central and Eastern Europe prior to 1989.'<sup>39</sup> Squatting in Poland is shaped by the country's abrupt transition from centrally (mis)managed socialist economy to rampant neo-liberal capitalism. This rupture created the need to squat (since housing was no longer provided by the state), the opportunities to squat (with property ownership often becoming a contested or confused issue), but also created the most significant pressures *against* squatting (primacy of private-property rights, gentrification, evictions). (Squatting is illegal in Poland, but the law leaves some small leeway.<sup>40</sup>)

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34[emphasis added]

35Interview conducted 24/05/2013

36[emphasis added]

37Piotrowski, 'Squatting in the East,' in *The City Is Ours*, p. 251

38Piotrowski, 'Squatting in the East,' in *The City Is Ours*, p. 251

39Ibid. p. 249

40See Ibid. p. 233

Buildings that had come under state control during the socialist regime are being restituted to the descendents of their pre-1945 owners.<sup>41</sup> Regulations around restitution are limited, and even where they do exist are manipulated to the advantage of property developers. Typically, a building might be restituted to, say, the grandchild of the pre-1945 owner, but this person is unlikely to have the resources to maintain the upkeep of the building. At this point the property developers, who are closely informed of these changes in ownership, step in to offer the new owners a lump sum for the property. As far as the new owners are concerned, even if the offer is significantly below market value, this is a good deal - instant cash for a property they may not have known they owned (though of course, many survivors know very well what their families lost), and the relief of the responsibility of owning an old building likely in need of repair, and the rates payable to the state. Once the property developers have control of the building their primary concern is maximising their return, which means gentrification and getting rid of the current tenants. Local squatting activists explained that developers are often ruthless in this regard, forcing the eviction of sitting tenants by raising the rent to extortionate levels, and cutting off the electricity and gas. Piotrowski notes that, despite housing laws stating that 'current tenants must be given a three-year notice ... companies have been established that specialise in the "cleaning" of such houses, with workers cutting off electricity and water pipes and using other means to get rid of the people living there.'<sup>42</sup> Opposition to this deliberate gentrification, which is particularly rapid in Warsaw, forms a main political focus for squats in Poland (as elsewhere).

Squats also have political significance beyond the housing issues to which they directly relate. Respondent G,<sup>43</sup> who is involved with the Przychodnia collective, emphasised the propagandistic value of squats:

They are also sending a message, which starts from 'you can live in a different way, and be happy, and you don't have to take a loan which you will have to pay off until you are seventy to have a place to live.' And then they are also sending

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41More information on this policy can be found here - <http://propertyrestitution.pl/> [accessed 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015]

42Piotrowski, 'Squatting in the East,' in *The City Is Ours*, p. 240

43Interview conducted 25/05/2013

a message ... to make a campaign against gentrification, make a campaign against animal abuse ... [T]hey are more visible, they are more interesting for the media, so it's easier for these places to spread [a] message about state repression, for example.

So squats, in addition to their political value *as squats*, also provide organising space and a platform for the benefit of other intersectionally related political campaigns or causes. However, as Piotrowski notes, in the 'ideological climate in post-communist Poland,' gaining support from the local community is sometimes a challenge because of neo-liberal mind-sets and a suspicion of anything deemed 'leftist.'<sup>44</sup> So the 'political' aspect of squatting is crucial, both for those involved and for those who would seek to repress it.

Hans Pruijt, in his overview of squatting in Western Europe, succinctly identifies the 'unique property' of squatting as: 'combining self-help with demonstrating an alternative and a potential for protest.'<sup>45</sup> He argues that squatting, particularly when identified as an alternative housing strategy:<sup>46</sup>

seems to have everything going for it. It is open to everyone, regardless of social class, it is interesting for resourceful activists but can simultaneously offer a haven for vulnerable people. It allows a wide range of skills to be exercised, empowers and produces fun instead of a display of misery.<sup>47</sup>

The issue of openness is not actually as straightforward as Pruijt suggests, but in general this understanding of squats readily applies in Poland. However, respondent G recognises that squat 'havens' are 'all the time under pressure from the system, from the capitalist system.' In addition to the attempts by the state and private landowners to shut down squats, capitalist economic and social relations still influence these anti-capitalist spaces. As respondent G notes:

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44Piotrowski, 'Squatting in the East,' in *The City Is Ours*, 252

45Pruijt, 'Squatting in Europe,' in *Squatting in Europe*, p. 51

46Pruijt divides squatting into five identifiable types: deprivation-based squatting; squatting as an alternative housing strategy; entrepreneurial squatting; conservational squatting; political squatting. The punk squats more-or-less fall into Pruijt's category of squatting as an alternative housing strategy, but squats in Poland straddle squatting as an alternative housing strategy, conservational squatting, and political squatting. And in terms of defence of squats, the tactics Pruijt attributes to entrepreneurial squats are also deployed by alternative housing strategy squats and political squats. So while the typology is interesting from a theoretical perspective, in practice it fails to reflect the tactics and approaches of Polish squats.

47Ibid. p. 49

'People have to buy stuff, it requires money to run this kind of place. Even if you get food from the dumpster [skip] or as much materials as you can, it's kind of impossible 100%, which produces new kinds of conflicts.' But, even with these limitations, respondent G argued that squatting offers some socially transformative potential:

I would call it like a laboratory or experimental area where we actually get to see which kind of conflicts are generated by this kind of society, plus some extra traditional conflicts from the capitalist society. [Y]ou see ... how the transition works, you get from the outside world and you get into here, how difficult it is to internalise the local [squat] rules, to follow them ... You can call it a model of an ideal society. A very early model ... a very simple one, and a very narrow one.

So while respondent G recognises the limitations placed on squatting by the totalising capitalist system, he values the opportunity to live-out anarchist politics on a practical level.

The manifestations of anarchism within these squats is, of course, not uniform, with divergence in purpose and tactics - tensions which are frequently framed in terms of being 'more anarchist' or 'less anarchist.' This echoes the supposed 'lifestylist'/'workerist' dichotomy in anarchism more widely - but these tensions play out with some important differences, and the complexities herein completely undermine the dichotomous analysis.

## **Tensions between punk squats and non-punk squats in Poland**

While anarchism has an especially close association with squatting, a range of ideologies motivate different squats and squatters, resulting in tensions between differing approaches. One such point of disagreement is the use and function of squats, e.g.: openness versus subcultural identity; space for activist purposes versus squatting as an end in itself. Compromise (or opposition thereto) with the authorities is another area of disagreement. As Ward makes clear, these tensions go back to the 1960s at least, with disputes between 'respectable' and 'hippy' squatters.<sup>48</sup> The more common dispute today is between 'respectable' squatters

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<sup>48</sup>Ward, *Housing: an anarchist approach*, p. 30, quoting Ron Bailey, *The Squatters*, (London: Penguin, 1973), [page number not given]

and those prepared to employ violence to resist eviction. Ward argues that ‘as time goes by ... it becomes difficult to distinguish between the two categories of squatter,’<sup>49</sup> but on the contrary, it appears that disagreement and division between different groups of squatters is a recurring theme. Nazima Kadir draws another tension between ‘parasites’ and ‘politicos’ in Amsterdam, differentiating ‘between activists who mainly identified as squatters versus activists who resided in squats but primarily invested their time and energy in other radical left issues.’<sup>50</sup>

Pruijt notes the importance of ‘squatting as an end in itself [as] part of the movement’s *identity*,’ which he argues ‘offers a barrier against cooptation.’<sup>51</sup> Respondent G made this point as well: ‘squats, social centres, they still do [have an impact] because ... they cannot be taken by capitalism, because that’s exactly what [squats] are against ... I can’t really imagine a way in which a place like this could be commercialised.’ This sense of a squatting identity or culture that stands apart from, and in opposition to, capitalism raises an important issue, and as Pruijt writes this can result in ‘only attracting members of a highly exclusive “scene”.’<sup>52</sup> This criticism has been levelled at punk squats in Poland. Pruijt argues that the absence of a particular squatter (i.e. punk) identity can result in ‘becoming culturally mainstream and *non-political*.’<sup>53</sup> However, in terms of the tension between punk squats and squats which aim to be accessible to the wider public, Pruijt’s analysis does not fit. In fact, the criticisms against the punk squats is that they are not political enough, because they are overly concerned with culture and identity, while the ‘activist’ squats make every effort to be open to the general public in their political campaigns. As Piotrowski puts it, the tensions centre around:

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49Ibid.

50Kadir, ‘Myth and Reality in the Amsterdam Squatters’ Movement,’ in *The City Is Ours*, p. 35

51Pruijt, ‘Squatting in Europe,’ in *Squatting in Europe*, p. 51 [emphasis added]

52Ibid. p. 35

53Ibid. p. 35



the question of the openness ... and the balancing between the 'subcultural ghetto' model (where the squat mainly serves a counter-cultural function for a specific group) and the 'social centre' model (which is more focussed on politics and on mobilising broad coalitions of people).<sup>54</sup>

This tension is observable in the criticisms levelled at Przychodnia in Warsaw by local non-punk squatting activists. Przychodnia is certainly identifiable as a punk squat in terms of its residents, the activities it hosts, and its general aesthetic. The building was first squatted as part of a tenants' movement demonstration in the wake of the high-profile eviction of the long-running Elba squat. This was to give a clear statement that if the state evicts one house, the activists would squat 'ten more' in reply. Other people started making use of the space and Przychodnia became the main venue for punk gigs in the city, largely filling the void that had been left by Elba in that respect. Local non-punk squatting activists were concerned that the noisy gigs at Przychodnia were having a negative impact on relations with the local community.

Respondent E, who is involved in the anarcho-syndicalist group *Związek Syndykalistów Polski* (ZSP - Association of Polish Syndicalists) and with anti-fascist activities, was dismissive of squatting in general, saying, 'I really don't care about squats,' but offered this analysis of Przychodnia:

Przychodnia is completely punk and *not political* ... And [in] Przychodnia, [the] people who started this squat were intelligent and ideological people, but after [a] little time they left and people who stayed are only Jabol punx ... Jabol is very cheap wine prepared from apples, and [a] Jabol punk is a punk who only drinks this wine ... [Przychodnia is] only parties. Parties, punk rock, and nothing more.<sup>55</sup>

A damning view, then, but the essential point here is that respondent E described Przychodnia as 'not political' *because of its association with punk*. This reflects the framing of the supposed dichotomy between 'lifestylist' and 'workerist' anarchisms, but while respondent E's stance is a typically 'workerist' anti-lifestylism, similar critiques have also been levelled at Przychodnia from *within* the 'lifestylist' activism of squatting. So while the terms of the

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54Piotrowski, 'Squatting in the East,' in *The City Is Ours*, pp. 242-243

55[emphasis added]

'lifestylist'/'workerism' tension are evident, the complexities here defy any simple dichotomy.

The squatters at Przychodnia were conscious of the criticisms levelled at them. Respondent H, who had lived at Elba and was now involved with Przychodnia, summed up the difference: 'Probably you feel it ... here is more like ... punk and subcultural, and creating the society actually ... In [other places] it's more about like coming to the neighbours, especially the poor people in the neighbourhood.' He diplomatically assessed that 'both things are OK, and both things can have problems.' As well as hosting regular punk gigs, Przychodnia is involved in other activities, such as public 'pikniks,' cinema showings, debates, meetings, hosts an anti-fascist group and a queer group. Respondent I defined this function as a 'cultural centre' but asserted that 'you can't call it [a] social centre, absolutely not.' This emphasis on 'culture' is understood to mean less emphasis on 'political' activism. Respondent I continued: 'here is a little bit like it was in Elba. They were just, y'know, creating a small autonomy':

Like we have our own world here and ... we do here what we want. You don't like [it]? You don't have to participate, this is our way of life, right? We like punk rock, we like shows, sometimes we organise some meetings or debates ... or festivals, like this political festival, Resistance Festival ... So it's not like guys here are completely out of politics.

But even the idea of 'being political' is not straight forward, as respondent I explained:

Guys here are ... not really into this political stuff. I mean, if you talk with [them] they're really political, and they have very y'know, straight ideas about life ... most of them [laughs] at least ... Because punk rock ... it's [a] political thing. So ... it's very difficult to say you are political or you are not political.

So, while Przychodnia is 'political' in a broad sense, it is recognised as being more culturally focussed. Criticisms of this approach from some local non-punk squatting activists was the source of some tension. Respondent I described the situation as 'completely freaky,' because the divisions between groups meant people 'don't give a shit,' viewing other groups as 'fuckers' or 'not true squatters, or ... *not true anarchists*,'<sup>56</sup> as is clearly reflected in the opinion expressed by

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56[emphasis added]

respondent E, above. Respondent I viewed that non-punk squatting activists had attempted to interfere in the running of Przychodnia:

Actually it's quite funny because they call themselves anarchists, and sometimes it looks like they're very authoritarian ... It's like when they come here, for example, and say 'OK, these are the rules and from now, you have to obey these rules.' Y'know, [the] position of someone who is looking from up to down.

Respondent I continued:

It's weird. Instead of supporting our activities and understand[ing] that people ... have different needs ... [they're just] building these power-relations ... 'Cause their position is like ... 'we know better ... what activism is, and what squatting is' and so on. That's why people here [at Przychodnia] they just ... feel strange about it ... You can imagine that the idea is, 'hey, it would be good if you just move out and we will squat this place, because we know what to do with such [a] great building, right, because ... what you are doing with this building, this is shit. It's like wasting space and energy and everything.'

Respondent I said that this perceived patronising attitude made relations 'really ... tense ... [I]t was [a] really really bad situation. Right now it's kind of better,' so relations were already improving at the time of research (and since that time this improvement has continued). Respondent H defended Przychodnia's activities in terms of outreach and visibility:

Y'know, if 200 people come [here] for the concert, and 10% of them take a look at the posters ... and take this message, and one of them keeps it in mind, and goes vegetarian and ... maybe starts to also build something like this, it's already good.

He also argued that displaying a punk aesthetic was important, because it symbolised a different lifestyle, and undermined the message of mainstream conformity:

We didn't want to paint the walls white to make people come and think that it's a normal place ... Because when the anarchists ... try to ban subculture [in] the movement, I think it's a threat that it [will become] like any other movement ... We can prove with our lives that it's possible to live in a different way.

This is archetypal 'lifestylism' but also resonates with the importance of a 'squatter identity' vaunted by the SHA Collective and Hans Pruijt, above.

Respondent I agreed that 'this is ... [a] very important part of this movement, of punk rock, y'know, this anti-aesthetic stuff,' but was conscious that this could alienate 'people from outside': 'Someone who is from the "normal" world [would

think] this [place] is like a shit ... It's quite difficult for people just not to think about all this mess and just focus [on] what we want to say.' So, even within the punk squat, they were conscious of the issue of 'respectability' and how their aesthetic might be read by others.

The repeatedly expressed notion of certain activities as marking out 'proper anarchists' speaks to the (erroneous) dichotomy between 'workerist' and 'lifestylist' anarchisms. Even though all squatters might be considered as engaging in 'lifestylist' politics, there are clearly divisions at work *within* this form of activism too. Of all the interviewees, respondent E's views are closest to the caricature 'workerist,' and as such felt that squats were largely irrelevant to anarchist politics:

Most tenants don't want to just boycott rent, they want to have flats. Most of them are old people, or single women with little children ... Squatting is the last thing ... they can do ... [ZSP] sometimes ... cooperate, but we have different groups and *different politics*.<sup>57</sup>

This explains respondent E's dismissal of squatting, above, but despite his negative view, respondent E had helped with the attempted defence of Elba in 2012 and the successful defence of another squat in 2011, because, said respondent E, 'one of the people who lived there was my comrade from anti-fascist actions ... Defending squats, I just learned how to fight with police [laughs], nothing more. For me people who live on the squat are tenants, that's it.' So, even as respondent E appears to subscribe to the 'workerist' stereotype in his dismissal of squatting, he was still motivated to physically defend squats from eviction out of solidarity for his squatter comrade, and because of a shared opposition to state repression.

The tensions between Przychodnia and local non-punk squatting activists, though both engaged in activism that might be described (or derided) as 'lifestylist,' point towards a wider dismissal of punk by some anarchists - respondent E here included among them. However, the theoretical separation between 'proper anarchism' and 'bourgeois distractions,' so clearly demarcated in online forum communities, becomes much less clearly defined on the ground, where punk is

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57[emphasis added]

engaged with a diffuse spectrum of anarchist perspectives - the 'workerist'/'lifestylist' dichotomy simply doesn't stack up in lived experience.



Image 3: Mural at Rozbrat, Poznań

## **The anarchist politics of punk squats in Poland**

Another instance which confounds the supposed dichotomy between 'workerism' and 'lifestylism' is Rozbrat squat in Poznań - a large compound of warehouses, out-buildings, DIY-built living quarters, and caravans, which began life as opportunist housing for a group of punks in 1994, who later began putting on gigs. Piotrowski writes that the punk gigs 'were complemented by more political public events and the squat became the centre of an eruption of social activism.'<sup>58</sup> The space subsequently became the home of *Federacja Anarchistyczna* (Anarchist Federation) in 1997, and, later, numerous other anarchist political and cultural initiatives, including the syndicalist workers' union OZZIP (National Union of Workers Initiative). Rozbrat also houses a bike workshop, martial arts classes and training gym, facilities for car repair, a library, computer and internet facilities, meeting rooms, and more. It is the longest running squat in Poland, and is widely recognised as an organisational hub for anarchism across the country.

Respondent A,<sup>59</sup> a resident of Rozbrat, noted the importance of this:

This place is really like the best example for [the] whole [of] Poland I guess, and everybody says that ... We really help a lot, like we print posters and send them

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<sup>58</sup>Piotrowski, 'Squatting in the East,' in *The City Is Ours*, p. 235

<sup>59</sup>Interview conducted 15/05/2013

to all [over] Poland and we have our *Anarchist Review* [journal] ... So we are like this base ... One of the guys from the local government, who was really against Rozbrat, he was terrified that Poznań [laughs] is like a Mecca of anarchism. It's really funny, I mean, but yeh, maybe it's actually like that.



Image 4: Bike workshop at Rozbrat

Respondent C,<sup>60</sup> a squatter at Rozbrat, is an example of the blurred 'workerist'/'lifestylist' divide with her involvement in the syndicalist union OZZIP. Respondent C viewed that when *Federacja Anarchistyczna* began regular weekly meetings at Rozbrat in 1997, it 'was kind of started in a contrast to the place,' suggesting a consciousness of the potential tensions between a punk squat and organised anarchist political groups. However, since then, Rozbrat's importance as a base for anarchist organising has grown, even while it continues to host punk gigs and other culturally focussed initiatives. Respondent C was positive about the mix of activities within the compound:

It really works, like when we for example do a syndicalist demonstration the people who are organising gigs here, they would come and set-up the microphone and speakers for us, like to provide infrastructure. Or, they would invite us to come before some gig to talk about some action ... demonstration, or campaign ... So, I think this particular place, it plays a role actually because it is a space for concerts, it's a living space, but it's also a ... political place, with a place for meetings ... I think because [of] this place really, it is [a] meeting point, and it mix[es] everything.

Respondent A, whose interests might be described as more 'lifestylist' than respondent C's, echoed this:

There are a lot of people who [are] involved in different things, but it's actually all mixed together. Like for example, I'm not really involved in the workers'

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<sup>60</sup>Interview conducted 17/05/2013

unions stuff, but if we have [a] demonstration, even in the other city, I'm still going there, because I feel like it's the same struggles anyway. And like I'm an anti-fascist and I'm struggling for animal rights and ... for me, it's the same struggle ... So I think it's really important to work together.

So respondent A, who describes her own activist focus as anti-fascism and animal rights - activisms which are often predominantly associated with punk - views anarcho-syndicalist support for workers as part of 'the same struggle.'

Respondent C was conscious of the theoretical tension between divergent approaches, but felt that this could be transcended in practice. Piotrowski emphasises the significance of OZZIP's syndicalist organising within Rozbrat squat, pointing to the establishing of connections with workers in a local factory as a turning point,<sup>61</sup> leading to a 'new political agenda' and 'changes in political style.'<sup>62</sup> Typically anarcho-syndicalist activism was (and is) being organised within the squat, with co-operation between squatters and workers. Respondent C emphasised the immediate political significance of squatting: 'We regularly support the tenants' struggles, not only in Poznań but also in other cities ... The issue of the houses is a political issue, and squatting is, for me, a political issue.' Respondent C also recognised squatting as an important end in itself, but considered it vital not to succumb to temptations to retreat into an 'anarchist ghetto':

I think it's very important to not sit in here all day, it's nice, and I mean it's an easy way of living of course ... I don't have to pay rent and I don't have to do wage labour, so I can spend my time on supporting the movement ... But we are kind of consciously also trying to somehow also include the squatters' movement, tenants' movement and the workers' movement ... we try to put it together on the practical level ... But also we try to write and theorise on connections between work, hous[ing] and ... alternative culture, or squatting as a means of survival in the capitalist economy.

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61Piotrowski, 'Squatting in the East,' in *The City Is Ours*, p. 237

62Ibid. p. 240



Image 5: Banner at Rozbrat in solidarity with Köpi (Berlin), Ungdomshuset (Copenhagen), Les Tanneries (Dijon), Blitz (Oslo), Yfanet (Thessaloniki)

Squatting, then, provides an effective base for organising, in terms of resources and space, and by freeing activists from wage slavery, enabling them to devote more time and energy to their political activities. Respondent C's point about making a conscious effort to bring these strands together, both in practical and theoretical terms, demonstrates that the broad mix of activities at Rozbrat is not just some accidental arrangement. People at Rozbrat are actively challenging divisions within the anarchist movement, such as those typically stereotyped as 'workerists' and 'lifestylists.' Piotrowski writes that because 'Rozbrat was founded by anarchists, anarchism still dominates the collective and has become more visible and vibrant over time.'<sup>63</sup> Respondent A argued that the various initiatives and interests of Rozbrat were held together by this shared anarchist *identity*:

with every kind of struggle it's the most important to have this political identity, always ... In the end ... if you don't have this political identity then ... usually you lose ... It's very important that you ident[ify] yourself as anarchist.

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63Ibid. p. 234



Respondent I, from Przychodnia, expressed admiration for Rozbrat's ability to connect with people from outside of the punk/squatter/anarchist milieu:

With Rozbrat, it's a little bit [of a] different situation, because they are really partners in the city ... [with] local organisations and so on ... People started to think, 'hey, this is OK, I mean they look strange, the place is kind of strange, and trashy and whatever, but they are saying ... good things. They want to do something good for ... local, people' ... But it took about fifteen, sixteen years for local people to understand that.

This points to the importance of longevity in combination with community engagement, and as Piotrowski notes: '[a]s a result of eighteen [and now more than twenty] years of continuous activities and actions, Rozbrat is nowadays seen as a counter-example for the neoliberal policies of local authorities.'<sup>64</sup> In fact, Rozbrat is so much a 'partner in the city' that its location is marked on the tourist information maps distributed by Poznań city council, despite being an illegal squat. However, this 'official' recognition belies the reality of the threat of repression, with Rozbrat recently facing eviction by the city council. State repression is a feature of squatting wherever it exists, and Poland is no exception.



Image 6: "Poznań not developers. Rozbrat, it's not for sale." Mural at Rozbrat

64Ibid. p. 240

## Repression of squatting in Poland - eviction and legalisation

Eviction is the most blatant tool of repression against squats, and against the anarchist and punk communities that reside within and utilise them. As Martínez, Piazza and Pruijt write: 'squatters are in principle quite vulnerable because of the strong legal protection of private property and the virtually unlimited repressive powers of the state. Plus, the squatters who actually live in their squats ... are sitting ducks for the forces of repression.'<sup>65</sup> As discussed above, squats are an affront to the capitalist principle of private property - even where they are not engaged in political activism, their very existence challenges the norms of ownership. The legal frameworks of capitalist (and especially neo-liberal) economies are set-up to protect and enforce private property rights, and squats across Europe have come under increased pressure from eviction over the last decade.<sup>66</sup> Elba in Warsaw was one victim of this wave of repression. Respondent H described the eviction:

A lot of police came to support this private owner, who came with the security. But the security was not enough ... There was a lot of police including the water cannons, and then the firemen [*sic*] to take us out of the roofs.

Respondent H was critical of the state's role in what was essentially a private ownership dispute:

It's only a private business of the guy, but still the police came to support him, which was actually illegal ... If we have to leave this place the court should decide, not just 'oh, I have a problem, I need a lot of police' [laughs].

Respondent C from Rozbrat described another instance of police violence being used to evict squatters:

The people from the new squat [Od:zysk] ... tried to squat another building and there was [an] eviction ... and fifty cops with machine guns came and then I was teargassed. And one of us now is accus[ed] of spitting on the uniform of the cop. And I mean, y'know, bullshit like this. It's not really repression ... that's kind of more intimidation or like, y'know, showing there are some limits.

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<sup>65</sup>Miguel Martínez, Gianni Piazza and Hans Pruijt, 'Introduction,' in *Squatting in Europe*, p. 15

<sup>66</sup>Resources like <https://en.squat.net/> document the relentless efforts to evict squats across Europe, and resistance to this repression.

This constant threat of repression against squats creates a vigilant security culture within them, as well as diverting considerable time and effort into fortification of the spaces. Another recognised outcome of this is the closing off of squatted spaces from outsiders. The threat of attacks from fascists further compounds this defensive mindedness and security consciousness.

The evictions of Elba and the first Od:zysk squat were carried out with the weight of state violence. However, in the case of Elba, this heavy handed response 'was also quite good press for us,' said respondent H, 'because it was [a] very expensive action, y'know, there was 100 policemen or something.' Despite the eviction going ahead, respondent H said that 'it went good, because it [put] ... the press also on our side.' The eviction mobilised significant public support for Elba, as respondent H notes: 'many people came to support us ... We did the big demonstration ... like more than 2,000 people there ... (for Poland [this] is good) against the eviction.' This had an immediate effect in terms of forcing the city council into negotiations over a new space for the evicted Elba collective, but also staved-off subsequent eviction attempts at other squats in Warsaw. An eviction attempt at Przychodnia was, again, supported by large numbers of police, but respondent H noted that the squatters were able to resist the eviction 'because ... we had the good press, so the city didn't want to make new riots. So ... somehow we kept this place.' There is a dual threat to the city government here; negative press coverage of its violent eviction tactics *and* the threat of highly disruptive (and expensive) riots breaking out in retaliation for evictions. Natalia described the response in Poznań to the threat of eviction against Rozbrat, which in 2009 and 2010 mobilised two:

big demonstration[s]. A lot of people came ... maybe 2,000 ... We have some support from the other cities, I think that some people wanted to help us ... They were supporting us all the time. So for us [this] is very important, and we have some ... journalists ... that are supporting us and ... a lot of people involved in culture, and some people involved in politics ... and they are supporting us [against] ... the evict[ion].

E.T.C. Dee focuses on the 'Robin Hood' aspect of squats as a motivation for public support, writing that 'there is a certain public sympathy for those who squat houses worth millions which are standing derelict. The need to protect private property is coming into conflict with a basic belief which frames emptiness as

itself criminal when people have a need for housing.<sup>67</sup> This certainly plays an important role in the examples discussed above, but far more prominent in their defence strategies is what Pruijt describes as the advancing of 'a functionalist frame, emphasising the valuable role of the project in the community, for example as a breeding place for the creative class.'<sup>68</sup> This was particularly the case with Rozbrat, but not just as a plea for clemency from the state. Because of its longevity, and its success in attracting people into the squat for various social, cultural, and political functions, there is a pool of supporters, who might ordinarily have little or no involvement with the squat, that can be called on to defend Rozbrat in times of crisis. Respondent B,<sup>69</sup> another resident of Rozbrat, appreciated the significance of this popular support, but felt that it was fundamentally limited: 'When Rozbrat was in danger of eviction, *then* suddenly everyone came for a demonstration ... That's also our problem, we would rather treat Rozbrat as [an] aim to achieve some goals, and still, a lot of people ... tend to treat it as a goal [in] itself.' Respondent G was more optimistic about mobilisations to defend squats, considering their inherent opposition to state forces as a good introduction to radical politics:

Many people know the place because they went to party here or they went to a meeting here, they went to a lecture here, to a workshop, whatever. So when one of those places is threatened ... those situations always mobilise loads of people ... And if people are smart then they can use this for mobilising people for other events, because that's often the first demo people go to, or [the] first kind of struggle or physical struggle where they get involved. It's also less dangerous than, I dunno, going to beat some Nazis in the streets or get[ting] involved into any other conflict where there is 2,000 people and all of them are ready to fight for the place. It also shows people who are already involved in the movement their strength, their possibility of mobilising many, many people to fight for whatever they see as right.

So, as much as squats offer opportunities to expose people to anarchist politics by the fact of their existence, through their cultural roles, and through their political activism, the confrontation generated with the state and with private capital actually creates a further potential point of politicisation. These mobilisations

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67E.T.C. Dee, 'Moving Towards Criminalisation and Then What? Examining dominant discourses on squatting in England,' in *Squatting in Europe*, p. 253

68Pruijt, 'Squatting in Europe,' in *Squatting in Europe*, p. 34

69Interview conducted 16/05/2013

send a clear message to the parties interested in evicting squats, particularly the state, which clearly alters how, or even if, they proceed with eviction attempts. This is, then, a prime concern for squatters, as demonstrated in the repeatedly expressed desire for ‘good press.’ But as respondent G notes, there is also a beneficial effect from large mobilisations as politicising encounters, and an expression of support which gives the squatter movement (and anarchist movement more widely) increased confidence.

To avoid the potential repercussions of these confrontations, city councils and local governments often attempt negotiation and accommodation as a tactic to neutralise or contain squats. Legalisation can be viewed as a major success for individual squats, offering some level of security against eviction, but the compromises made to reach this kind of agreement are contentious. Respondent D<sup>70</sup> from Od:zysk in Poznań discussed some of the compromises they had made in order to extend the longevity of their squat:

People ... from the city administration ... check[ed] the ... state of the building, like ... is the building OK for making some gigs and so on ... [The] bailiff was here too, two times ... So yeh let’s say in [an] official way ... they try to move us.

Respondent D recognised that co-operating with government officials was a compromise, but reasoned that:

by the law these people could come with police [and a locksmith], so in this way the police could go inside [and] we don’t want them [to], of course. So we decided to go by the law ... and to let [the city officials] in ... We are thinking that ... behaving in that way we can stay here longer.

*Image 7: Sign at Wagenburg, Wrocław. Addition to the left reads: “Private area. No trespassing.”*



<sup>70</sup>Interview conducted 18/05/2013

As mentioned already, Warsaw city council had been forced into negotiation with the collective from the evicted Elba squat, in large part because of the mass support the squatters had received. At the time of research these protracted negotiations were still ongoing, but a legal 'autonomous non-profit socio-cultural centre' has since been opened, called ADA Puławska. This move towards legalisation created another area of tension for the Przychodnia squatters, this time with the Elba collective, because one of the proposed conditions for the opening of the legal social centre was the eviction of Przychodnia, meaning that Przychodnia didn't want Elba to sign the agreement - which respondent I recognised as being somewhat ironic. Respondent H described the negotiations with the city council as 'bureaucratic shit' and said that he 'didn't see a point' in running a 'half-legal place.' Pruijt identifies a major issue surrounding squat legalisation as the potential 'loss of the oppositional edge.'<sup>71</sup> He cites a study of squat legalisation in Amsterdam which 'describes the commonly occurring effects ... as a loss of links to various societal structures, of ties with other free spaces, and a decline in dynamism and political engagement.'<sup>72</sup> As noted already, squats' illegality imbues them with an intrinsic confrontational value, making them politically significant places. A 'half legal squat' might still effectively operate as a space for political organising, but it loses some of its intrinsic political opposition, and as Pruijt notes this can also remove spaces from the networks of support and solidarity that exist around squats. In this sense, legalisation can be understood as a tool of repression, attempting to contain the squat within a legal framework, and cutting off the opportunity for politicising confrontation. Respondent K,<sup>73</sup> who lives at Wagenburg in Wrocław, identified this issue in the legal status of CRK (*Centrum Reanimacji Kultury* - Centre for the Resuscitation of Culture):

CRK is not, like, 100% squat anymore ... [the] city took ... [a previous squat] and instead they gave CRK, they exchange[d] place[s]. So CRK was not squatted, they got this place from the city ... like many houses in Europe in a similar

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71Pruijt, 'Squatting in Europe,' in *Squatting in Europe*, p. 34

72Ibid. citing Pieter Breek and Floris de Graad, *Laast duizend vrijplaatsen bloeien. Onderzoek naar vrijplaatsen in Amsterdam*, (Amsterdam: De Vrije Ruimte, 2001), p. 77

73Interview conducted 02/06/2013

situation. That's why it's now ... legal ... it's just [an] 'official alternative culture house' ... And it's, like, y'know, CRK is not centre of the anarchism in Wrocław. There is [an] anarchist movement in Wrocław, but it's not CRK.

So in this instance, legalisation meant a loss of connection to the local anarchist movement. During the research, CRK was largely closed for major renovations, being carried out by the city council. Respondent K was worried about this situation, saying, 'no one is really sure if we[re] gonna get this place back,' and felt that the centralised concentration of the movement's energies into CRK has left them vulnerable:

The thing is ... of course all the squats have some limit time now ... [but] if we lost this place then I don't think no one's gonna make [a] new place. Maybe because the place [existed for] too long ... and [the] movement [has] concret[ised] somehow, it's like centralised ... They [take] just one direction, like mak[ing] alternative culture, and not so much networking with local people.

So as Pruijt notes, and as may be the case for CRK, legalisation does not necessarily guarantee security or permanence: 'An important factor is the level of control that occupants retain after legalisation.'<sup>74</sup> As stated already, the legal system is heavily biased in favour of private property, and an 'official' agreement with squatters can actually provide the state with ammunition, such as written lease agreements, to make a legal case for eviction. So the binary trade-off between the 'oppositional edge' of illegality and the 'security' of legalisation is often a false one. The unrest around the eviction of Elba in Warsaw led to the promise of a new space being opened by the city - legalisation need not mean meek compliance to the demands of the city government. Rather, it can be used as a pragmatic tactic to create further squatting opportunities and to prolong the life of existing spaces. Negotiation and resistance can go together in reality, even while they are contradictory in theory. As Margit Mayer notes:

under specific circumstances, some squatting movements have been able to experiment with double track strategies and been able to go back and forth between (or even apply simultaneously) direct action and negotiation, most often in some kind of division of labour between radical core groups and more moderate supporters, and thereby manage to extend their squats and with them the infrastructures for their collective living, working, and political organising.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Pruijt, 'Squatting in Europe,' in *Squatting in Europe*, pp. 34-35, citing Breek and de Graad, *Laast duizend vrijplaatsen bloeien*, p. 50

<sup>75</sup>Margit Mayer, 'Preface,' in *Squatting in Europe*, p. 3



*Image 8: Squat kayak, Wagenburg, Wrocław*

So, even while entering into any compromise with the state (even something far short of legalisation) looks like a fatal flaw for the anarchist political grounding of squats, it can in fact be sensibly understood as a tactic of pragmatism. ‘Illegal’ squats are inevitably embroiled in legal wrangling in the courts anyway, and in this regard are no more able to evade state interference than ‘compromising’ legally rented social centres. With consideration of the wider squatting movement in Warsaw, this ‘double track strategy’ has been a particular success. Just a few years ago, Elba was the only remaining squat in the city, but with different collectives employing diverging yet complementary strategies, they now have *three* spaces – two ‘illegal’ squats in Warsaw (one of which is Przychodnia), and the ‘half-legal’ ADA Puławska. Negotiation with the city might not be a purist’s idea of anarchist politics, but this combination of mobilising popular support, resistance of evictions, and compromise with the city has resulted in significant practical success. This doesn’t prevent the theoretical tensions having a real impact, as was the case between Przychodnia and the Elba collective, but it does emphasise the oft-observed gap between theoretical abstraction and practical application. The repression of squatting is where the anarchist movement and



punk scene in Poland are most tangibly repressed, so consideration of these dynamics is crucial. But, again, the terms of the 'workerist'/'lifestylist' schism are evident in the identification of strategies and tactics as 'more anarchist' or 'less anarchist' - and, again, that theoretical dichotomy is shown to be false in practice.

## **Conclusion**

Squats in Poland are predominantly associated with punk *and* anarchism, representing a bricks-and-mortar manifestation of that relationship, but as has been shown here, these overlaps are not straightforward. This examination of squatting in Poland has helped identify some key tensions in the relationship between anarchism and punk, reflecting many of the terms and frames of the supposed 'lifestylist' versus 'workerist' dichotomy in anarchism more widely. But, crucially, these tensions play-out in more complex forms, and on closer inspection the dichotomy is revealed to be anyway false. Rather, a spectrum of anarchist perspectives is evident in the experience of squatting in Poland.

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Respondent A (w) - 15/05/2013 - Poznań - Member of Rozbrat squat

Respondent B (m) - 16/05/2013 - Poznań - Member of Rozbrat squat - Member of hardcore/metal band

Respondent C (w) - 17/05/2013 - Poznań - Member of Rozbrat squat - Member of *Ogólnopolski Związek Zawodowy Inicjatywa Pracownicza*

Respondent D (m) - 18/05/2013 - Poznań - Member of Od:zysk squat

Respondent E (m) - 21/05/2013 - Warsaw - Member of *Związek Syndykalistów Polski*

Respondent F (m) - 24/05/2013 - Warsaw

Respondent G (m) - 25/05/2013 - Warsaw - Member of Przychodnia squat

Respondent H (m) - 27/05/2013 - Warsaw - Member of Przychodnia squat (former member of Elba squat)

Respondent I (m) - 27/05/2013 - Warsaw - Member of Przychodnia squat - Member of post-punk band

Respondent J (m) - 31/05/2013 - Wrocław - Operates DIY label

Respondent K (m) - 02/06/2013 - Wrocław - Member of Wagenburg squat

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# **Reclaiming Inclusive Politics: Squatting in Sweden 1968-2016**

**Dominika V. Polanska**

## **Abstract**

*Squatting, or the use of property without authorization, can take many forms in different contexts. It has been used as both a means in a struggle for a more just city by redistributing resources, and a goal in itself. In Sweden, the first squatting attempts occurred in late 1960s, in the same period as many other squatting attempts in Northern and Western Europe. The objective of this paper is to outline the history of squatting in Sweden. Currently, there is no systematic and comprehensive research on this matter, and aside from presenting a historical outline of squatting, the ambition is to present a typology of goals or main motivations behind squatting in Sweden between 1968 and 2016. The analysis is qualitative and based on data produced by and about squatting activists and gathered from national and local news media, alternative leftist news media, thematic magazines, documentary films, material produced by the studied groups (pamphlets, Internet-based websites and blogs), a transcript of a debate on the topic of squatting in Sweden including activists involved in squatting, along with previous research on the topic. It is argued that it is important to study short-term and demonstrative squatting as it has the ability to uncover how squatting is used as a technique, and thus contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon. I distinguish between the goals of providing housing, preserving areas from clearance and demolition, protecting areas from environmental threats, creating free spaces for activities, and criticizing national (welfare) politics. Furthermore, it is maintained that despite its short-lived character Swedish squatting has been continuous with a low frequency, and overtly political in its character, by reclaiming the rights to housing and more egalitarian distribution of societal resources.*

## **Keywords**

squatting, contentious politics, goals of squatting, Sweden

## Introduction

Squatting, or the use of property without authorization, can take many forms in different contexts. In its collective use, the focus here, it has been used as a means in a struggle for a more just city by redistributing resources, and a goal in itself. In Sweden, the first squatting actions occurred in the late 1960s and were inspired by influences from outside of the country at the same time as they were criticizing local housing issues and planned educational reforms. Moreover, they took place in the same broad time period as squatting movements grew stronger across Northern and Western Europe (Squatting Europe Kollektive 2013; 2014). Although squatting attempts intensified in the 1970s and 1980s, and in the 2000s in Swedish cities, none of the squats lasted for long periods of time, and never longer than three years.

The objective of this paper is to outline the history of squatting in Sweden. Currently, there is no systematic and comprehensive research on this matter, and aside from presenting a historical outline of squatting, the ambition is to present a typology of goals or main motivations behind squatting in Sweden between 1968 and 2016. Squatting in Sweden is theorized as contentious politics since squatting has been used in the country as a tool or a technique of disruptive actions used by collective actors and social movements (Tilly and Wood 2009: 5).

Qualitative methodology was chosen to understand the reasons for squatting, how they are connected, and if and how they have changed over time. The analysis builds on data produced by and about squatting activists gathered from:

news media: 1) national (Dagens Nyheter (DN), Svenska Dagbladet (SVD), Swedish TV (SVT), Swedish Radio (SR), Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå (TT), Expressen (EX), Aftonbladet (AB) and 2) local (Sydsvenska Dagbladet (SSD), Skånska Dagbladet (SD), Västerbotten Kuriren (VK), Mitti, Direktpress, Hela Gotland (HG),

leftist non-mainstream media (Arbetaren, Fria tidningarna, Alltid, ETC),

omagazines (Brand, Direkt Aktion 1996-, Ordfront),

odocumentary films,

omaterial produced by the studied groups (pamphlets, publications, Internet-based websites, blogs),

oa May 2016 transcript of a debate on the topic of squatting in Sweden including activists involved in squatting,

oprevious research on the topic.

The objective was to triangulate different data sources in the analysis and to avoid the biases that are associated with news media reports (Ortíz *et al.* 2005). A potential bias in using only national news media is the inclination to report on major events in larger cities, neglecting smaller events in peripheral locations. Therefore, local news media were included in the selection. Moreover, as mainstream media tends not to cover squatting attempts if they are not exceptionally spectacular or controversial, articles from alternative news media and thematic journals were also included. Additionally, in the analyzed news media more attention was paid to the statements made by the activists and less to the journalists' analyses of the situation. In the selection of articles covering different squatting actions the procedure was to include at least one article stating the aims of the squatting attempt.

The digitalized database of printed news media of the Royal Library in Stockholm (including newspapers such as Aftonbladet, Dagens Nyheter, Expressen, Svenska Dagbladet) was used to cover reports between 1970 and 1999. The Swedish Retriever Research (Mediarkivet) was used to find news articles about squatting in the 2000s. The keyword used in both databases was "husockupation" (squatting). Not all hits were relevant and only those regarding squatting in Sweden were initially chosen and reduced to only one per registered squatting event, preferably with the criteria of stating the aim of squatting activists. Moreover, some additional searches via other search

engines (Google, Artikelsök) for specific squatting events not found in the media archives were run to ensure as complete coverage as possible. Worth mentioning is that the gathering of relevant material was easier and richer since the introduction of the Internet. Also, past issues of thematic magazines, along with documentary films made about squatting, and publications produced by the groups involved in squatting, were used in the analysis.

One problem encountered in the collection of data was the invisibility or biased representation of some of the squatting events held in the past. This is partly due to the centralized focus of the media (on cities) and away from other more peripheral locations throughout the studied period, to the uneven media coverage over time, and the existence of covert squatting in Sweden, as suggested by Ekberg (2016), that is difficult to uncover and study.

Another potential limitation could be the insufficiency of the keyword “squatting” in the collection of the material not capturing squatting events that were not explicitly framed as squatting by the activists or reporting journalists.

One unconventional method of producing information on the topic was to organize a debate during a conference including activists representing different squatting attempts (from the 1980s to recent squatting actions) to discuss the development of squatting in Sweden and local differences.

Furthermore, the paper was distributed to a number of activists previously involved in squatting in Sweden for comments and suggestions that were integrated in the final version. More than 100 articles were included in the analysis (from national and local news media and alternative media), two documentary films, over 30 texts produced by the activists (for instance in the magazine *Brand* and on the Internet), and a transcript from a 1.5 hour long debate. Only cited or referenced articles are presented in the Appendix, due to space concerns.



The paper begins with a review of previous research on squatting, putting squatting in Sweden in a broader perspective. Next, theoretical framework is introduced arguing for the importance of general, but complex, analysis of goals of squatting and in particular in the Swedish case, the inclusion of collective, short-term and demonstrative forms of squatting. The following presentation is for analytical reasons divided into roughly ten-year-periods in the history of squatting in Sweden, stretching from 1968 to 2016. In the conclusion I argue that the goals of providing housing, creating free spaces, and preserving areas from clearance and demolition have been present in all periods of squatting in Sweden. In the 1980s, the goal of creating free spaces for activities became even more explicit. In the 1990s and 2000s, the critique of national politics and environmental protection were distinguished as important motives among Swedish squatters. The main argument in this study is that despite its short-lived character, Swedish squatting has been continuous, with low frequency and overtly political in its nature, reclaiming the rights to housing and more egalitarian distribution of societal resources.

## **Squatting in Sweden: an under-researched field**

Squatting has been observed in the West, including Italy, Germany, Spain, Great Britain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Denmark, France and the US (Corr 1999; Martínez 2013; Milligan 2016; Squatting Europe Kollektive 2014; Thörn *et al.* 2011), and literature on squatting in these contexts is relatively rich. Squatting in Sweden is under-researched and there are few studies directly focusing on squatting. Moreover, the existing studies, except for two Masters theses, concern squatting in the 1970s, 1980s, and/or 1990s. Developments since the 1990s have been under-studied. Studies of other phenomena indirectly involving squatting are more numerous. Usually these studies concentrate on youth cultures, music studies (punk and rock), or social movements (left autonomous, “alternative”, anarchist, urban, or

environmental movements) touching upon squatting only indirectly. Also, most of the studies on squatting are local, examining squatting in a particular local setting in a particular period.

A significant contribution to the field was done by Thörn (2012; 2013) who focused on squatting in Gothenburg and the district of Haga. He is one of the few researchers analyzing squatting practices in depth and presenting explanations for squatting's extinction in the city in the 1990s. His studies focused on the late 1960s to the 1990s, and he has shown the goals of squatting in Haga to have been directed toward 1) the provision of housing, 2) provision of free spaces for activities along the ambition of squatters, and 3) preserving the district from demolition and clearance of its population. Squatting in the same city in the 1990s was examined in a study by Carle (1991), tracing the inspiration for squatting in this period coming from the BZ-movement ("besätt" or occupy) in Denmark. The movement was driven by the ideals of autonomous organization, creation of autonomous zones, and striving for freedom from work-related social and economic oppression (cf. Jämte 2013; Brink Pinto 2012). Like Thörn (2012), Carle distinguishes three goals of squatting in Sweden until 1990: 1) to preserve an urban area; 2) to provide housing; and 3) to provide space for activities. The city of Gothenburg is mentioned by Carle as one where squatting was resolved at the negotiation table in the 1980s.

The more recent period in Sweden's squatting history was analyzed in two Masters theses on Stockholm and Umeå by Lindell (2015) and Lundstedt (2016). In his thesis, Lindell focused on squatting in buildings in Stockholm in 2009 and 2012 by studying the protest characteristics of two squatting actions and their political responses in light of political opportunity structures in the city. Lindell's selection includes squatting in Aspudden (2009) and Husby (2012), and distinguishes between moderate and radical goals, cooperative and confrontational strategies, and concludes that radical goals of squatters might run the risk of being labeled "extreme" and

“undemocratic”, while moderate goals were perceived as politically relevant and discussed by the local politicians. His study demonstrated a difficult controversy for the squatters that, in order to be “successful” and elicit a reaction from the politicians, they need to frame their claims in moderate terms and show a cooperative attitude. Confrontational and radical claims in the studied cases were dismissed as irrelevant.

The dismissal of radical critique and the requirement of a more moderate approach in Swedish politics were also uncovered in Lundstedt's (2016) study where the author examined the change that occurred in the collective self-understanding of the autonomous left in Umeå and the role of squatting there. The author focused on squatting in the city in 2004, 2008, and 2014, and demonstrated how the movement shifted from a militant self-representation to a more open and cooperative position in the recent period of the 2000s. The overall goal of the three squatting events was the creation of free/autonomous spaces, even if the framing and methods varied from case to case. At the same time these three actions criticized other parts of local politics, in the 2003/2004 case housing politics, in 2008 case cultural and spatial politics, and in the 2014 case a reaction to cultural politics of the city.

Other relevant studies have been done by Stahre (2004, 2007, 2010) and (Ekberg (2016), focusing on the development of specific social movements/collective actors in Sweden and touching on their squatting practices. Stahre examined urban social movements active in Stockholm in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the environmental movement in particular, the neighborhood movement (Byalagsrörelsen), and later the new urban movements (organizing on issues of residents' rights to the city, its environmental development, critique of commercialism and globalization, and protesting against urban renewal projects, among others). He describes how the environmental movement in the capital city reached substantial numbers in its organization around 1970 and how it is connected to the

emergence (since 1968) of an urban movement mainly opposing urban renewal processes and organizing on the local level (Stahre 2004). A fraction of this very heterogeneous and fragmented urban movement is described by Stahre in a study from 2007 emphasizing its radical character (with a background in the local anarchist milieu), and its frequent use of blockades and squatting actions as tools (2007: 159). Ekberg (2016) focused on “alternative” groups’ spatial practices in Sweden during the 1970s concluding that urban squatting was one of these practices, however, somewhat different from other place-making practices popular among these groups. Driven by environmental concerns, collective living in rural locations, eco-villages as well as party politics became important parts of alternative groups’ repertoires.

All of these studies give a fragmented picture of the development of squatting in Sweden, even if the vast majority presents the goals behind squatting. They provide good insights on the development of squatting on the local level as well as social movements behind squatting actions, but are often limited to particular periods in history. The aim of this study is to bind together the different periods and give a more comprehensive view of squatting practices in Sweden since their 1968 beginning by mapping and examining squatting in different geographical locations throughout the country and their explicit goals.

## **The goals behind squatting**

In this study, squatting is conceptualized as contentious politics according to Tilly and Tarrow, and refers to the “interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else’s interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties” (1998: 4). In the Swedish case, contentious politics describes squatting politics more accurately than the concept of social movement, as squatting practices have been used in the

country by the urban (Thörn 2013) and environmental movements (Stahre 2004, 2007), the alternative environment (Ekberg 2016), left radicals (Pries and Zackari 2016), or the autonomous left (Carle 1991; Lundstedt 2016). Squatting in Sweden has been used as a tool or a technique of disruptive actions and has been infrequent in numbers compared to other countries, fragmented and sporadic in most cities and squatting actions have been relatively short-lived (putting some serious limitations on the creation of unity among squatters) making it difficult to apply the concept of a social movement. Thus, the coordinated efforts of Swedish squatting activists are studied here as contentious politics, and the shared interests and programs of these activists expressed in the form of goals are central.

In the scholarly literature, squatting's more specific goals were portrayed differently from case to case, but its overall ambition is to redistribute resources in a more egalitarian way (Corr 1999). It has been described as enabling and providing self-help (Katz and Mayer 1985), providing housing alternatives (Wates 1980), expressing a Do-It-Yourself culture (McKay 1998), a struggle for a better society (Kallenberg 2001), a manifestation of political/ideological activism (Della Porta and Rucht 1995; Katsiaficas 1997), or as a response to housing deprivation and problems inherent in neoliberal capitalism (Squatting Europe Collective 2014).

Most often scholars discuss squatting as either need-based or as political activity (Lowe 1986). Vasudevan argues that the two main lines of investigation in squatting studies treat squatting as "the expression of housing precarity or as an attempt to construct a radical alternative to more traditional forms of dwelling" (2015: 341), and points to the unsatisfied housing needs as fundamental to all forms of squatting. However, this analysis of squatting is not refined enough to reflect the complexity of the Swedish case, as it will be shown later in the text. Moreover, it divides squatting into categories of political and non-political incorrectly, playing down its conflictual and confrontational nature (cf. Milligan 2016).

A more refined typology of types of squatting was presented by Pruijt (2013), distinguishing among five configurations of squatting; deprivation-based squatting, squatting as an alternative housing strategy, entrepreneurial squatting, conservational squatting and political squatting. The first type, deprivation-based squatting, aims at providing housing for people in need. The second, squatting as an alternative housing strategy, strives to create housing alternatives for groups that are not necessarily homeless, but look for different housing solutions. Entrepreneurial squatting, the third configuration described by Pruijt, aims at setting up an establishment that provides infrastructure for a wider movement to meet and generate support in a non-commercial setting. The fourth type, conservational squatting's goal is to preserve a cityscape or a landscape. The fifth type, political squatting, is motivated by an anti-systemic aim and autonomous ideas. Based on squatting in Copenhagen and Gothenburg, Thörn argued that another type of squatting should be added to the model—the place politics of open space—building on Pruijt's second and third type of squatting and including a combination of autonomy and publicness in this sixth type (2012: 156). Furthermore, the configurations presented by Pruijt (2013) include activists' goals, class, organization, type of buildings, demands, framing, and cultural and political embedding. The model presented is complex and takes into account many dimensions in squatting, but builds incorrectly on the assumption that only one of these configurations can be present in a squatting project (Milligan 2016: 14). It also includes individual forms of squatting that are not in focus here. Only collective forms of squatting are analyzed in the paper because of 1) analytical reasons as it is difficult to map individual squatting as it often takes covert forms in Sweden and as 2) its collective forms are empirically and theoretically more interesting to a sociologist. Pruijt has also discarded demonstrative squatting from his model focusing on "relatively long term use" cases of squatting (2013: 29). In the mapping presented, even short-term squatting actions are included, as

Swedish squatting history is, for reasons (repression, cooptation, legalization, among others) that will be given limited attention here, dominated by short-term squatting. If short-term squatting is excluded from the analysis in this case, there would be only a few disconnected squatting events left and the analysis would lack an important dimension in Swedish squatting struggles—the more strategic and demonstrative character—as well as the continuity of the phenomenon in the country, and particular cities would not be included in the picture.

To make the mapping of squatting in Sweden comprehensible to the reader the focus is on the goals and motivations behind squatting in different periods since the late 1960s. I treat squatting, in accordance with Cattaneo and Martínez (2014), as a political act and the cases when squatting becomes a secret solution to an individual housing situation are not included in the analysis. Moreover, in line with Milligan (2016), I argue that the nature of all squatting is inherently political, criticizing Pruijt's configurational scheme for not recognizing overlaps between different configurations of squatting and adding to the false dichotomy of political and non-political squatting. Here, squatting is considered a political act as it is confrontational in its practice to re-claim space and thus questions the authority of the state and property relationships inherent in capitalism. Moreover, due to the difficulty inherent in the analysis of collective but covert forms of squatting, only overt forms of squatting are analyzed (cf. Ekberg 2016). Therefore, the criteria used for the included squatting events are that they are 1) organized collectively, 2) taking over buildings (not land), 3) overt (and not hidden). As it will be shown later on, the goals of squatting are often overlapping, not mutually exclusive, and inherently political.

## **Squatting in Sweden in 1960s to 1990s**

The first squatting attempt in Sweden took place in 1968 in Stockholm and was organized by students and influenced by the May '68 revolution in France (Documentary "Kårrockupationen"). Since then, and throughout the 1970s and 1980s, different squatting actions were undertaken in various Swedish cities. Lund was going through a series of squattings around 1969, Stockholm had a wave in the second half of the 1970s and in the mid-1980s to 1990s, Gothenburg in the 1980s, and there were a considerable number of squatting actions undertaken in other Swedish cities and towns during this period (see Table 1-3).

Gothenburg's squatting scene in the 1970s and 1980s was concentrated in a particular area in the city of Haga, and was heavily influenced by the Danish squatting movement (TotalBrand 1987, 1988; Brand 1988). Thörn argues that the threat to "slum clear" Haga mobilized the local forces and made it "the only old working-class district in Gothenburg's inner city that was relatively successfully defended through a mobilization of the district's inhabitants" (2012: 212). Squatting in the city intensified in the 1980s, and in the end of the 1980s several buildings in the district of Färjenäs in Hisingen were squatted for about two years.

In its beginning, squatting in Stockholm was also concentrated in the central city, later spreading to other parts (Brand 1978; 1979; TotalBrand 1987; Brand 1988). The district of Södermalm has been described as an area perceived as founded in a "specific popular culture blending radicalness with a happy-go-lucky spirit" (Franzén 2005: 59), and was the place where most, but not all, of the squatting actions were undertaken between the 1970s and 1990s. One of the activists involved in squatting in the 1980s explained that: "The development of Stockholm's inner-city is what we found problematic. That it would house office-buildings" (Panel 2016-05-17). In the 1970s and 1980s there were some exceptions where squatting events were taking place outside of central parts of the city in more peripheral locations, like Rågsved



(1977), Bromsten (1986), or Handen (1988) (Brand 1980; 1988; 1994). In the 1990s most of the actions were carried out in the suburbs of Stockholm or nearby municipalities.

Squatting in Umeå started somewhat later than in the other Swedish cities. The first squatting action was carried out in 1982, even if the city is today known for its rent strikes in the early 1970s. Until today, the activists in Umeå have achieved a legalization of two previously squatted places (*Kvinnohuset* and *Umeå Kulturhus*), one of which was recently closed as a result of privatization (Lundstedt 2016).

Furthermore, squatting in Lund in the 1960s was concentrated in vacant buildings in the central part of the city, and led to the legalization of a social/cultural center, *Kulturmejeriet*, among others in the 1980s (SD 1987-06-26). In Jönköping, a fire station was squatted in 1982, and as a result the center, *Kulturhuset*, was founded after negotiations with the municipality (Arbetaren 1998/24; Ericsson 2016). During this period four squatting actions are known to have taken place in the nearby city of Malmö (Brand 1990; 1991; Sandén 2007).

## **Late 1960s and 1970s: preservation and housing needs in focus**

Sweden's squatting history begins with the occupation of the student union of Stockholm University in 1968, protesting against planned educational reforms (Table 1). The most reported squatting event in the late 1960s and 1970s was *Mullvaden* in Stockholm, which lasted almost a year, between 1977 and 1978. *Mullvaden* consisted of four buildings in the area of Södermalm in Stockholm owned by the municipality and administrated by Svenska Bostäder, a public housing company. Parts of the area around Hornsgatan were included in the city clearance plan and threatened by demolition.

Stockholm	Lund	Gothenburg	Other cities
1968: Kårockupationen	1969: Västra	1970: Haga/Pilgatan	Markitta 1972, Skolbyggnad
1969: Gamla Bro	Mårtensgatan	1972: Hagahuset	Lerum 1974, Hedefors
1974: Brunnsgatan	1969: Kiliansgatan	1976: Kungstorget	
1976: Tomtebogatan	1969: Råbygatan		Malmö 1976, Victoriabiografen
1977: Kvarteret Mullvaden/Krukmakargatan			Karlstad 1977, unknown address
1977: Rågsved/Oasen			Helsingborg 1978, central city
1979: Kvarteret Järnet			

Table 1. Squatting in Swedish cities between 1960s and 1970s

One recurring motivation mentioned by the activists in the media was to **stop the clearance of the central parts of the city**, a plan that was interpreted as top-down, focused on new construction and profitability, and not taking tenants' interests or voices into account. The squatters demanded that the existing buildings be kept and renovated according to the needs of their tenants, and the recurring slogans on the banners during this period were: "Plan for people, not for money" and "Stop the bulldozers" (Ockupationshandboken 1979). Politicians and civil servants interviewed in the newspapers responded to the squatting with arguments on the "illegality" of squatting actions and the "not particularly valuable" character of the buildings (DN 1977-11-12). The squatters themselves emphasized:

The old workers' houses showed all the good craftsmanship from the turn of the century. Wooden floors, decorated doors, beautiful stairwells with marble. Everything was vandalized under politically organized forms. (DN 1987-11-12)

The housing company owning the four buildings of Mullvaden was accused of a strategic lack of maintenance of the buildings so they could be demolished. On a banner outside of the squatted space one could read: "The

occupation is extraordinary administration of intentionally run-down houses. We demand a comprehensive and impartial evaluation of the case of Mullvaden 7, 16, 17 and 18. If this is carried out, we will dismantle the occupation” (Ockupationshandboken 1979: 51).

The motive to protect an area from demolition was common for other squatting events in Stockholm and other Swedish cities of that time, although it did not guarantee that the squatted buildings would be protected or restored. In many cases squatting actually speeded up demolition plans. During this period, lasting until the 1980s, a top-down approach to urban renewal was used in Swedish cities, usually leading to the destruction of run-down buildings, inhabited by the working class in the inner cities, to be replaced by office or apartment buildings resulting in gentrification. This approach to city planning was interpreted by the activists as lacking democratic legitimacy and caused protests and squatting actions.

For instance, in Gothenburg, when four houses in the Lustgården neighborhood were threatened by demolition, and where the landlord HSB wanted to build new construction, the tenants decided to squat. Their action was described as aiming at “preventing demolition” and “preservation of the neighborhood” (DN 1978-02-12).

Another important motivation behind squatting in the 1970s was **the housing situation and the need for affordable/free housing**. In 1978 the tenants in a building on Tomtebogatan in Stockholm occupied their apartments when Svenska Bostäder decided to terminate their contracts in order to realize a planned renovation of the building. Their main motive was that they could not afford the rents in newly built apartments due to their low incomes and had no other option but to squat:

We are squatting our house because we don't have anywhere to go after March 1<sup>st</sup>; we are simply standing on the street. (DN 1978-02-03)

It was common during this period that tenants facing eviction organized rent strikes or squatting actions to be able to stay in their apartments. In the small town of Lerum, tenants appealed to the court as their landlord did not fulfill his obligations, which in turn led to a rent strike, an eviction order, and a squatting action initiated by the tenants in 1974 (SVD 1974-08-22).

The **provision of free spaces** was another motive emphasized by the squatters of this period. For instance, in the late 1960s squatters in Lund demanded spaces for activities and protested against the commercialization of the central parts of the city (Thörn 2013: 43). Also, the squatting of *Mullvaden* in Stockholm led to cultural activities held in the squatted space (theater group for instance), and some punk and youth groups began squatting in the beginning of the 1980s to seize spaces for their activities (Ericsson 2016; Pries and Zackari 2016). One of the reasons this goal gained attention later on in the 1980s could have been the greater responsiveness of authorities in the 1960s and 1970s to youth demands for autonomous activities (Thörn 2013: 50).

## **1980s: free spaces gaining importance**

During the 1980s the motive of **preservation of buildings** from demolition and the aim to **provide housing** were still significant among the Swedish squatters (Table 2). In Stockholm, the housing stock of the municipal Svenska Bostäder was frequently squatted during this period. The squatters were criticizing the existence of vacant buildings in the inner city and the lack of affordable housing.

Stockholm	Gothenburg	Other cities
1980: Bellmansgatan	1982: Husargatan	Lund 1980, Stora Södergatan
1985: Skaraborgsgatan	1986: Järntorget	Sollefteå 1980, Taråbergstorpet
1985: Drottninggatan	1986: Kvarteret Sabeln	Höberg 1980, Torp
1986: Norr tullsgatan	1986: Kvarteret	Ronneby 1980, Kyrklokaler
1986: Bromstensvillan	1987: Kvarteret Furiren	Sollefteå 1981, Eisers fabrik
1986: Luntmakargatan	1988: Mellangatan	Umeå 1982, Nygatan
1987: Tavastgatan	1988: Sprängkullsgatan	Jönköping 1982, (4*) Brandstationen
1988: Klevgränd	1989: Färjenäs	Malmö 1982, Föreningsgatan
1988: Ultrahuset/Handen	(several buildings)	Västerås 1982 (3*), Knutsgatan
1988: Kindstugatan		Helsingborg 1983, Villa Skalet
1989: Vasagatan		Umeå 1983, Vasagatan
		Landskrona 1983, Österportsskolan
		Lund 1984, Gamla mejeriet
		Örebro 1986, Nygatan
		Lund 1987, (unknown address)
		Helsingborg 1988, (unknown address)
		Hässleholm 1989, Markan

\* number of times the building was squatted, if more than once

Table 2. Squatting in Swedish cities in the 1980s

The purpose of squatting of several locations by the mid-1980s in Stockholm was described by one of the involved activists as, “to protest against vacant dwellings in times of housing shortage” that was encouraged by the fact that the squatting action at Skaraborgsgatan was deemed successful by the activists and stopped the planned demolition (Vårt 80-tal 2015: 1). The squatters in Stockholm kept track of empty buildings in the city (SVD 1987-03-22) and used it to draw attention to the issue of vacant buildings in times

of housing shortages. One of the activists taking part in the squatting of Tavastgatan in 1987 explained to the journalists why squatting was used to highlight the housing situation in the city:

We no longer believe that the politicians can do anything about the situation. This is the only way to get people to react. (DN 1987-03-12)

In 1986, one of the squatters wrote in the magazine Brand and explained the goal of squatting at Norrtullsgatan:

So in Änkehuset we would not pose any demands, we would take the house and live there. (TotalBrand 1986)

The slogan of "Housing for all" (Bostad åt alla) was used repeatedly during this period in all locations. Housing as a right was stressed by the squatters as superior, and a recurring argument was to stop the office expansion in the central parts of the city. When the one day squatting event in the central part of Stockholm was organized, the activists explained:

People talk about the sneaky office expansion of Stockholm, says [name]<sup>1</sup>. But it is not the culprit; it's the big legal office expansion. Soon nobody will live here in Klara. The city culture is dying. Only banks and departments are left. (EX 1985-11-02)

During another squatting action at Drottninggatan in Stockholm a year later, 1986, an activist explained to the media:

Here they are planning to clear and build offices or luxury apartments, said [name], age 15 years. Politicians said they would do something to solve the housing shortage among youths but nothing has happened. We will continue to do different actions, but we will not reveal where or when we will attack. (DN 1986-12-15)

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<sup>1</sup>The names of squatters appearing in the studied material have been anonymized.

In Gothenburg, the planned demolitions or lack of renovations of working class districts resulted in a resistance in the district of Haga that, since the 1970s, was driven mainly by young students, but culminated in the 1980s (Thörn 2012). A group called “Husnallarna” (house bears) was continuously squatting places in this part of the city to block demolition and clearance, also protesting against housing politics in the city. In addition, Helsingborg experienced squatting in the 1980s that criticized office expansion in the central parts of the city, condemning the lack of municipally-administered distribution of housing in the city, which was dismantled during the 1970s (SVD 1988-05-31).

Another motive crystallizing during this period was the intention to **create free and alternative spaces for activities**. In a debate article, the first one to be published in Swedish national news media with a squatter as the author, it was explained:

Squatting is a way of achieving a free space that is needed to act against a society that you perceive as unjust and mendacious. We have chosen this way because it is also a concrete action that in practice gives the possibility of testing how far theories of anti-authority, solidarity, and freedom with responsibility function. (DN 1986-06-20)

The author of the above article was involved in the squatting of Skaraborgsgatan in Stockholm in 1985 and some other squatting actions in the city in the following years. There was a growing discontent among the activists of the lack of meeting spaces in the city. Thörn argues that the 68-generation formulated clear demands for free spaces for autonomous activities and they were largely responded to by the authorities in late 1960s and 1970s (Thörn 2013). It seems, however, that this demand was seriously unsatisfied in the 1980s, as many of the squatting actions revolved around this issue. In Jönköping, for instance, a closed fire station was squatted in 1982 and Ericsson (2016) explains that since the 1970s different civil society organizations demanded a space for their activities in the city. Eventually,

the struggle was taken over by a group called “Action group for a space in the center” (Aktionsgruppen för ett hus i centrum) and “their goal was to occupy the fire station and not give up until the municipality accepted their demands to give the building to a self-organized cultural center” (Ericsson 2016: 173).

In Umeå, the struggle for free spaces took off during this period and an interesting squatting took place in 1983 when a building (*Gula villan*) was squatted by a feminist separatist group. The group was active in the city since the beginning of the 1980s and demanded a free space for women only. In less than four months the group of squatters was able to gather enough resources to legalize their activity after the eviction. The “Women’s House” (*Kvinnohuset*) is still present in the city landscape of Umeå (VK, 2014-04-25).

## **1990s: expanding the goals further**

Apart from the above goals of **providing housing, preserving buildings and communities from demolition or clearance, and creating spaces for activities**, squatting was used in the 1990s **to protest against the accession of Sweden to the EU and against plans for new traffic routes** (Table 3 below).



Stockholm	Other cities
1990 (2*): Folkungagatan	Gothenburg 1990, Landsväsgatan
1990: Kommendörsgatan	Malmö 1990, Ringgatan/Borgen
1991: Teatergatan	Umeå 1990, Storgatan
1991: Folkungagatan	Gothenburg 1991, Teaterkompaniet
1994: Häggvik/Linnévägen	Västerås 1994, Västra Utanbygatan
1994: Hässelby	Örebro 1994, Kulturhuset Viktoria
1994: Rålambsvägen	Alingsås 1995, Bryggeriet
1995: Sollentuna	Borås 1995, Viskafors (5 buildings)
1996: Häggvik	Alingsås 1996, Bryggeriet
1997: Norra Hammarbyhamnen/ Alsnögatan	Gothenburg 1997, Tullpackshuset
1999: Beckomberga	

\* *number of times the building was squatted, if more than once*

Table 3. Squatting in Swedish cities in the 1990s

Throughout the 1990s, it was still very common for activists to protest against the housing situation in their city through squatting. Homelessness was raised as an important issue and the necessity of acting outside of the formal system was propagated by the Swedish squatters (read more about the tension and differences between the alternative groups and the Swedish left in the 1970s in Ekberg 2016). Here are the words of the activists who squatted a building in Beckomberga, Stockholm, in 1999:

We are tired of all the talk of politicians. Homelessness is an urgent problem and politicians are not taking their responsibility. We are therefore taking the law and our self-evident right to housing in our own hands. We encourage everybody else, lacking housing or not, to do the same. Occupy more! Don't let houses stand empty! (Direkt Aktion 1999/18).

One of the longest squatting actions of 1990s was the one that lasted six months in Malmö. The activists involved were described in the media as youths in need of housing (SVD 1990-11-17). The squatters of Borgen in Malmö tried to discuss housing politics in the city with the municipal council responsible for housing (Pries and Zackari 2016: 200), and proposed to take care of the renovation of the building (Brand 1990/37-38: 20). However, their struggle ended with a violent eviction after 187 days.

A hotly debated issue in Sweden in the beginning of the 1990s was accession to the EU. In 1994, there was a referendum in which a small majority voted in favor. Two days later there was a squatting action held in Västerås. In an article called "They wanted to create an EU-free zone", the squatters in Västerås explained to the media the goal of their squatting action:

This was a protest against the EU. We wanted to organize an EU-free zone. It is difficult for youths to be heard. This is why we have to do this, he explained before the door of the police bus was shut. (AB 1994-11-15)

Another reported squatting attempt was the occupation of Dagens Nyheter's offices (largest national newspaper) in Stockholm in November 1994, by a group called "Kick upwards, not downwards" (Sparka uppåt, inte neråt). They demanded the newspaper nuance its reporting on the events of November 30, when Swedish nationalists commemorate the death of the Swedish king Karl XII. The group argued in a press release:

All the established media are willing to legitimize police actions through serving relevant threat scenarios. One technique is to only focus on the anti-fascist protesters' real or feared acts of violence. But the questions of "in what context" or "with what goals" are absent. (Pressmeddelande 941130)

These two examples show how the tactic of squatting was used in struggles other than those of housing, preservation, and creation of free spaces, and how the new claims contributed to the extension of the goals previously

formulated in the 1970s and 1980s. The extension included a **critique of national politics and media practices**. Yet another expansion of the goals of squatters in the 1990s included protests **against new road construction and the extension of goals to environmental protection** during this period (even if environmental claims were present in earlier periods, see Ekberg 2016). The agreement, called the “Dennis package” (Dennispaketet), that was signed in Stockholm in 1992 and aimed at specific extensions of traffic routes in the city, provoked a number of squatting events in the city in the 1990s. Environmental issues were frequently raised in squatting actions of this period. The first planned road construction encountered resistance in 1994. One of the activists explained:

I am against the whole Dennis package, against the vision of society and Stockholm as constantly expanding and getting bigger, says [name], age 23, a peaceful squatter for seven nights. (SVD 1994-04-19)

During 1994-1996, different squatting actions were directed toward the planned traffic route crossing through Häggvik. The squatting of an office of one of the leading construction companies in 1996 was described by one of the activists in the following way:

We were able to do what we came here to do. We burned their plans and sabotaged their computers, said the squatter [name] to TT before he was taken away into the police van. We are doing this as a step in the mass mobilization against Dennis [referring to the plan on traffic extensions in Stockholm]. There must be more Stockholm residents wanting to be able to breathe in the future, said a 27-year-old man who calls himself [name]. (TT 1996-05-31)

## **2000s: reactions to cutbacks**

A large wave of squatting swept the country in 2008 and 2009 (Table 4). Four main motivations, although not mutually exclusive, can be distinguished among the squatting attempts undertaken during the 2000s (Table 4). One common motive, similar to the past squatting, was the one to **create a multi-activity center**, where alternative cultural and social activities could be held. These squatting attempts were often initiated by youths and students striving for a free space.

Stockholm	Gothenburg	Malmö	Umeå	Lund	Other cities
2000: Svedmyra	2008:	2002:	2003/2004:	2008:	Linköping 2000:
2003:	Drakbåten	Ystadgatan	Haga/	Smultronstället	Gamla
Östermalm	2008 (2*):	2002:	Kvinnohuset	/	Westmanska BB
2004:	Agnesberg	Rasmusgatan	2008:	Kävlingevägen	Grängesberg
Telefonplan	2008:	2002:	Tullkammar	2008:	2002
2007:	Holländareplat	Lönngatan	en/ central	Kårhuset	Visby 2005:
Solna	sen	2003:	city	2008:	Lagerlokal
2008:	2008:	Industrigatan	2008:	Bankgatan	Nyköping 2008:
Gärdet	Gamlestan/	2008:	Kvarteret	2008:	Fåfågan
2009:	Församlingshe	Johanneslusts	Hammaren	Klosterängsväg	Visby 2009:
Liljeholmen	mmet	gatan	(2*)	en	Göransgården
2009: Aspudden	2008:	2008:	2008:	2009:	Lunnarp 2009:
2009:	Luftvärnsväge	Ramels väg	Övägen (2*)	Squatting	Julmusthuset
Farsta	n/ Kviberg	2009:	2008:	festival	Nyköping 2009:
2009:	2008:	Sofielundsgat	Djursjukhus	(two buildings)	Stora Berga
Gröndal	Lärje	an	et	2009:	Östersund
2009:	2009:		2014:	Romano Trajo	2009: Lyckliga
Nettovägen/	Viktor		Haga	2009:	gatan
Järfälla	Rydbergsgatan			Högevallsväge	Uppsala 2010:
2009:	2009:			n/ Muraren	Ulleråker
Rinkeby	Gamla			2009:	Uppsala 2011,
2012:	Almedalsvägen			Botulfsgatan	Sävja
Husby	2009:			2010:	Dorotea 2012,
2012:	Gårda/Tritonga			Magle Stora	Sjukstugan
Kristineberg	tan			Kyrkogata	Helsingborg
2015:	2010:				2014, Västra
Högdalen	Biskopsgården				Sandgatan
2015:	2011:				Jönköping 2014,
Årsta	Allmänna				Rosenlunds
2015:	vägen				herrgård
Södermalm	2012:				Katrineholm
2016:	Alelyckan				2015, Björkvik
Akalla					Landskrona
2016:					2015, Unknown
Östermalm					address
2016:					Uppsala 2016,
Hagsätra					Flogsta
2016:					
Socialstyrelsen					

\* number of times the building was squatted, if more than once

Table 4. Squatting in Swedish cities in 2000-2016

When a building in central Linköping was occupied in 2000, the activists described their goals in the magazine Brand:

We want a youth house that functions like a free zone. A house that can work independently of privatizations and cuts in the society. It should be run by the youths and for the youths. We also want the house to be free from prejudice like racism, sexism, and homophobia. (Brand 2000: 2)

In Stockholm, one of the most well-known social centers in the 2000s was *Cyklopen*. It started with squatting an empty building in 2003 and developed into an established social center in Högdalen from 2013 onwards (Brand 2004/1; Ordfront 2012/3). In Umeå, different squatting events aimed at creating free/autonomous spaces, even if the framing and methods varied from case to case and were intertwined with a critique of local (housing and cultural) politics (Lundstedt 2016).



Figure 1. A banner stating “Evict Veidekke before Veidekke evicts you” from the Högdalen’s People’s House, May 2015. Photo: author

The motive for protesting against **unjust housing politics and providing housing** was often intertwined with the above incentive to create a free space for activities. In some cases, when squatting was undertaken by homeless people, the objective of finding a place to live overshadowed other reasons. The most common argument among those emphasizing housing politics as the main reason for their squatting action was the inefficiency of the existing system for distributing housing and providing affordable housing

to all. Activists squatting a vacant building, standing empty for three years in the district of Gamlestan in Gothenburg in 2008, explained to the media:

We want to draw attention to the housing situation and that more rental dwellings should be built. There are many people queuing and rental housing is being transformed to private housing, says [name], one of the squatters. (Göteborgs Fria 2008-11-14)

Another important motive was to **preserve (building, area, and community), and go against planned demolition of buildings** like school buildings (Högdalen 2015), bath houses (Aspudden 2009), municipal buildings (Rinkeby 2009), or storage buildings (Visby 2005). The planned demolitions were described by the interviewed activists as unjustified in light of the existing housing, community center, or school shortages. Here, are the words of an activist from Malmö who squatted a building owned by the Swedish Railway company in 2008:

It is sick that I need to be homeless when there are houses like this that are planned to be demolished, says [name]. (SD 2008-11-16)

The demolition of buildings was often intertwined with the critique of displacement of lower-income groups caused by urban renewal projects. It was not so much focused on the preservation of historical buildings or housing areas, but on the preservation of communities, where squatting events were framed as resistance to processes resulting in displacement and “renovictions” (a term used in the last few years), as, for instance, in the case of Valla torg in Årsta in 2015 (Internationalen 2015-12-03).



Figure 2: Squatted theater in the district of Årsta, south of Stockholm, November 2015. Photo: author

**Reaction to closure and suppression of a particular activity/sector** was also found to be a significant motivation for the squatting undertaken during this more recent period. One of the longest occupations driven by this motive was the over three-year-long occupation of a local hospital in Dorotea, threatened to significantly cut down its activity in the area (SR 2015-01-30). Also, other social and cultural community centers threatened by re-location or closing chose to squat their facilities in protest (such as *Järvas Vänner* in Akalla, which protested in 2015 against civil society organizations being thrown out from the premises, *Lundabor mot nedskärningar* (Residents of Lund against cutbacks). Other examples include Lund in 2009, reacting to the closing of an after-school center, *Romano Trajo*, residents of Husby protesting against a re-location of their community center to smaller premises in 2012, or the protest against changes planned by the municipality in the activities held in the cultural center *Kulturhuset* in Jönköping in 2014. One of the representatives of the network *Järvas Vänner* (Friends of Järva), occupying the premises that they formerly rented, explained the situation in 2016:



The company Fast Partner has gone too far with their greediness; they have plenty of empty premises and do not want to rent them out at a sensible price. Everywhere I see premises without renters; people cannot afford to pay the rents. (Stockholms Fria 2016-03-02)

These kinds of motives for squatting, increasing in the 2000s, were usually framed as a critique of the cutbacks in the welfare state, privatization of formerly public companies, market-orientation, and an increased focus on profitability. The squatting groups used the slogans of “Reclaim the welfare” (Documentary “Anarkistiska Kliniken 4”) or “We didn’t create the crisis. We don’t want to pay” (<https://lundabormotnedskarningar.wordpress.com/>).



Figure 3: Squatted school building in Hagsåtra, south of Stockholm, June 2016. Photo: author

There have been some other motives guiding squatting in Sweden, but they are quite unusual. One motive could be a solidarity action and the squatting of the Student Union in Lund in 2008, as an example (YouTube, “Vänsterns Studentförbund Lund ockuperar kårhuset i solidaritet med Smultronstället”). Another more uncommon motive is the above mentioned squatting festival

organized in Lund in 2009 that aimed at popularizing squatting as a protest tool against the housing shortage (Arbetaren 2009-05-13). Both could be categorized as showing support to local squatters. Yet another motive was to protest against the lack of payment of wages to construction workers that led to the occupation of a building in Gärdet, Stockholm, in 2009 (SVD 2009-11-28).

## **Conclusions**

It seems there were two important periods of squatting in Sweden since 1968. The first one started at the end of the 1960s and went on throughout the 1970s and 1980s, slowing by the end of the 1990s. The second culminated in a great wave of squatting in 2008-2009, when all the larger Swedish cities reported squatted buildings. However, as seen internationally, squatting actions in Sweden have been relatively short-lived, and never lasted more than three years. In the 2000s, they most often lasted between a month and two months, while the shortest actions lasted several hours.

I argue that the goals of providing housing, preserving areas from clearance and demolition and creating free spaces have been present in all periods of squatting in Sweden and intimately intertwined. The goal of creating free spaces gained even more importance in the 1980s and has been present since. However, in the 1990s and 2000s, the goals of squatting were expanded to include a more explicit critique of national politics and environmental protection. It was also during the 2000s that a large squatting wave took place. The goals presented in Figure 4 were impossible to separate and rank as they were often mentioned together by the squatting activists. Especially in the 1970s and 1980s, the stated goals appeared in almost all of the studied cases simultaneously when the reasons for squatting were explained by the activists.

In the 1990s, a more explicit focus on environmental issues was expressed by squatters when squatting actions were used, for instance, to stop the

construction of new traffic routes. During this period, the goals of squatting showed variety and were not all stated simultaneously. It was also during this time that other questions were raised by squatters, such as the issue of Sweden's EU accession and the critique of media practices. These were not the most common goals, but their appearance shows that the use of squatting as a protest tool was not only limited to the goals of housing provision, preservation of areas, and the creation of free spaces, but was diversified and popularized among other collective actors than those who squatted in the past.

In the 2000s, yet another goal of squatting was emphasized in Sweden. It was a critique of cutbacks in the Swedish welfare provisions in the 2000s, and it reflected ongoing changes in Swedish society. The squatting was focused on condemning national politics related to the provision of welfare in the country. Links were drawn to similar situations in different locations (in the country as well as outside), and it was during this period that the activists started to explain their situation more explicitly with concepts such as *gentrification*, *renoviction*, or *displacement*. Encouraged by the large wave of squatting in the country by 2008-2009, the activists also used squatting either in support of other squatters or with the objective of popularizing squatting. It also seems that squatting was used during this period by a group of workers lacking payment from their employer, suggesting that squatting was seen as an effective instrument to claim back the group's right.

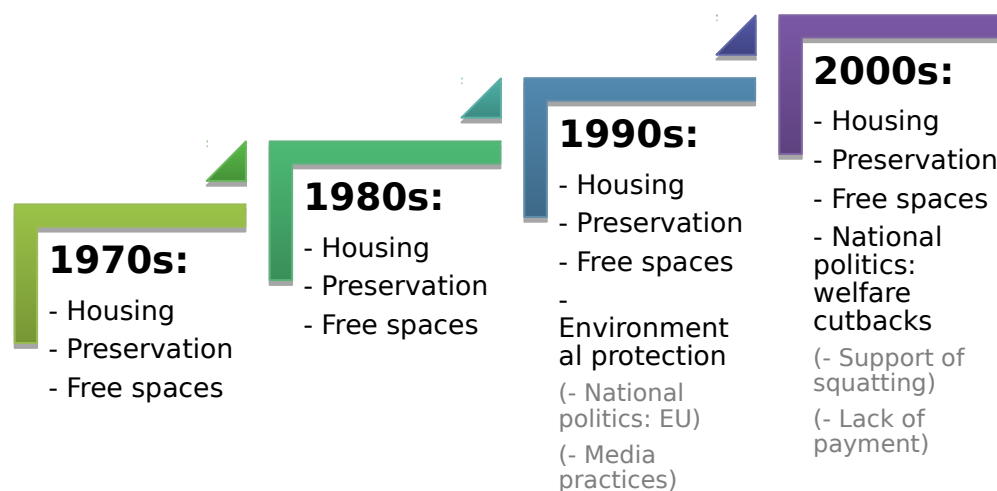


Figure 4. Motivations behind squatting in Sweden 1968-2016

If we define a social movement according to the criteria presented by Tarrow (1998) as consisting of groups of individuals who act collectively to reach their goals, who share common purposes, solidarity, and who are constantly interacting with the elites, authorities and opponents, the case of squatting in Sweden could probably classify as a social movement. However, I would like to argue that other social movements, such as the left autonomous movement, the environmental movement, or the urban movement, have used squatting as a disruptive tool in their struggles (Carle 1991; Lundstedt 2016; Stahre 2004, 2007, 2010; Thörn 2013). Moreover, the diverse goals of squatting, even if sometimes connected, were far from displaying unity (Tilly and Wood 2009). The claims posed by the Swedish squatters, but also their variety and these actions' uneven distribution among Swedish cities, proposes the term of contentious politics as a better match in this case. In a sense, squatting in Sweden sounds more like the "demonstrative squatting" that Pruijt discards from his model of analysis, as this kind of squatting is rather short-term (2013: 29). Despite its short-lived character, Swedish squatting has been continuous with low frequency and overtly political in its character, by demanding better/more egalitarian housing conditions, spaces

for activities and preservation of existing communities, among others. During its most recent development it also explicitly criticized national politics and the successive dismantling of the Swedish welfare state and its consequences in this period. Yet, it has lacked unity in the important aim pointed out by Cattaneo and Martínez to “prefigure ways of living beyond capitalist society” (2014: 3). This kind of prefigurative politics has been more a result of the squatting actions or a hidden purpose behind some of the actions, than an explicit goal in itself that could function as unifying. The reasons for it are plenty, but one of the most important is the quick, sometimes violent, and effective repression that squatting has encountered in Sweden along with the preference/tendency for choosing legal solutions (living collectives, cooperatives, cultural institutions, cf. Ekberg 2016), a topic that not been developed in this paper as the aim has been to outline the goals behind squatting, not the conditions for squatting.

The repression faced by squatters has left marks in the collective memory. Squatters (and potential squatters) often share a belief in the impossibility of holding a place for a longer period of time, and refrain from fantasizing about more utopian ways of collective living in an ever-toughening neoliberal context. Moreover, the neoliberal ideas playing an important role in Swedish politics since the 1990s (Hedin *et al* 2012) have more or less made claims of prefigurative politics difficult (if not impossible) to raise, to resonate, and to legitimize in the eyes of a society characterized by individualism and a widespread belief in a “well-functioning” welfare state.

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank her colleagues at the Institute for Housing and Urban Research at Uppsala University for their comments and support in writing this article. I would also like to thank all of the activists taking part in the panels arranged by me at different occasions discussing squatting in Sweden in the present and in the past. I am grateful for the comments made by activists to this text and would like to give special thanks to Mathias, Björn, Sarah and Jelena. Thanks to Trespass editors and reviewers.

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- TotalBrand, nr 12 1987 "Tavastgatan"
- TotalBrand, nr 12 1987 "Göteborg"
- TotalBrand nr 17 1988 "Hagaockupanterna åker ut"
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- Brand nr 23 1988 "Klevgränd"
- Brand nr 37-38 1990 "Borgen ska stå kvar"
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- Brand nr 62 1994 "Barbarhuset rivet"

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Dagens Nyheter (DN) 1986-12-15 "110 husockupanter gripna"  
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Västerbotten Kuriren (VK) 2014-04-25 "En sommar av systerskap"



## **•Other material**

Transcription of a panel held 2016-05-17 with four participants involved in squatting actions in Sweden in different periods (1.5 h).

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<https://www.trespass.network/?p=726&lang=en>

# Clarooscuro de la okupación y la comunidad

Ruymán Rodríguez

## Resumen

*Okupar tiene las connotaciones de un verbo reivindicativo. Es tomar lo que está en desuso, abandonado, y darle utilidad. Es señalar la desproporción establecida por la propiedad privada sobre un bien de primera necesidad como es la vivienda. Sin embargo, hay muchos matices.*

## Palabras clave

Okupar, okupación, comunidad, autogestión, anarquismo, FAGC

## Clarooscuro de la okupación y la comunidad

Okupar tiene las connotaciones de un verbo reivindicativo. Es tomar lo que está en desuso, abandonado, y darle utilidad. Es señalar la desproporción establecida por la propiedad privada sobre un bien de primera necesidad como es la vivienda. Sin embargo, hay muchos matices.

Siempre creí que okupar tenía intrínsecamente ese cariz vindicador y que no importaba qué vivienda okuparas mientras estuviera abandonada. La realidad me ha hecho ampliar la perspectiva.

Cuando empezamos (la FAGC) a intervenir en la vivienda nos especializamos en parar desahucios a través de piquetes (aunque ya habíamos hecho nuestros pinitos en okupación). Queríamos hacer una alianza con la PAH local para que abordara el aspecto legal y con el Movimiento Okupa para que nos ayudara en los realojos. Al final los primeros no estaban por la labor y los segundos, aunque lo intentaron, no pudieron cambiar de dinámica. Nos vimos así empollándonos el Código Penal y especializándonos en abrir casas.

Recuerdo el caso de una familia con 4 niños recién desahuciada que había llegado a nosotros demasiado tarde. Fuimos a una casa okupa cercana a

pedir que les dejaran quedarse un par de noches hasta que pudiéramos abrir una de vivienda de urgencia (por entonces no teníamos el superávit de inmuebles expropiados que llegamos a tener después). Los miembros de la casa okupada nos dijeron, nada más abrir la puerta, que era imposible. Las habitaciones que tenían libres eran para "viajeros" (gente del ambiente okupa internacional que venían a algún festival de música, de vacaciones o de Erasmus) y el resto eran zonas de meditación. Me di cuenta entonces de cuán lejos estaba esa okupación profesionalizada de la reivindicación, de cuán lejos estaba de la calle y de la necesidad de la gente de a pie. Esa noche, con prisas y angustiado por esa familia, frustrado y cabreado por la insensibilidad de los "concienciados", abrí una casa sin tomar ninguna precaución y por poco pierdo un pie (en la entrada de la puerta había un enorme cepo de caza que no vi en la oscuridad; desde entonces nunca entro a oscuras).

Darse cuenta de que había que elegir a quién se le expropiaba fue, sin embargo, en parte estrategia y en parte confrontación con la realidad. Muchas veces tratamos de contar con la complicidad del barrio donde actuamos para que la okupación se prolongue en el tiempo. Cuando es de un particular, a no ser que nadie lo conozca ni a su familia, o la vivienda lleve décadas abandonada, los vecinos no lo aprueban o hasta llaman a la policía. Por el contrario a un banco nadie lo defiende, salvo los políticos. En esos casos los propios vecinos nos animaban a que entráramos y hasta se implicaban en las labores de abrir la puerta o facilitar suministros. Fue así como vimos que además de atacar a la propiedad privada había que hacerle daño al poder financiero, pues era importante incluso a niveles prácticos.

Sin embargo, la okupación también puede ser un círculo cerrado en otro aspecto. Cuando se okupa por necesidad podemos ahorrarnos muchas de las tonterías que contaba antes, pero surgen otros problemas. Okupar por necesidad puede suponer que cuando acaba la necesidad también lo haga la implicación. Creemos que el apoyo mutuo y compartir herramientas de autonomía supone de por sí la emancipación, y esto es una idealización. La persona a la que ayudas a abrir una casa puede denunciarte tranquilamente si le dices que no te es posible pincharle la luz. Sé de lo que hablo. El capitalismo se ha extendido entre la población de forma tan perfecta que también los necesitados, cuando dejan de serlo, aprenden rápido a aplicar el darwinismo social. He comprobado como el antiguo paria, que gracias a tener vivienda puede reunificar a su familia y garantizarse un subsidio, pasa

a considerarse un potentado al tener unos ingresos que, aunque escasos, puede invertir íntegramente en consumo. He visto cómo después de producirse esta situación la misma persona que huía de la miseria ahora se niega a tener okupas, indigentes y migrantes al lado y no quiere que se expropie ninguna casa cerca de la suya. He visto lo oscuras e insondables que son las entrañas de las personas producidas en serie por el capitalismo.

Todo lo que cuento es duro y quizás sorprenda si digo que a veces, cuando conoces la vida de la gente, puedes llegar incluso a comprender la raíz de estas actitudes. Pondré un ejemplo: un joven de 20 años que acababa de ser padre contactó con nosotras porque no tenía vivienda. Después de ayudarle a conseguirla, no sólo no colaboró sino que se convirtió en un saboteador que no tenía impedimento en recurrir a la policía cuando se le contrariaba. Se convirtió en el enemigo y ninguno, obviamente, quisimos saber más de él. El desprecio se mitigó cuando conocí su historia: hablamos de una persona que sufrió abusos sexuales desde la infancia por parte de casi todos sus familiares, que tenía unos padres toxicómanos y que se pasó en un centro de acogida desde los 7 años hasta los 18. Salió de allí acostumbrado a hacer daño para no ser aplastado, a engañar para obtener un poco más, a explotar a sus iguales y a mantener una relación de sumisión resentida con la autoridad. Periódicamente medicado, maltratado y humillado, toda su vida se desarrollaba en un centro que era a la vez cárcel, escuela y ONG; todo instituciones que deberían ser abolidas. No le enseñaron nada y durante gran parte de su infancia y adolescencia lo único que sabía es que tenía garantizadas una cama y tres comidas diarias, sin afecto ni empatía, sin que se le estimulara ninguna inquietud creativa. Alienado, nunca supo de dónde venían las cosas, ni quién las producía ni por qué llegaban a sus manos; sólo quería llegar a mañana, arrastrar su rencor y disfrutar algún día de la vida hedonista que le vendía la tele. Ni lo excuso ni lo justifico, pero lo raro cuando le tiendes la mano a alguien que ha pasado por eso no es que se aproveche, sino que no te la arranque. La gente que ha vivido así, fabricada a conciencia por la violencia del Sistema, debería echarse a la yugular de sus semejantes y despedazarlos, y sin embargo no lo hacen y se conforman con avasallarse mutuamente.

Estas experiencias me han hecho convencerme de que la okupación debería ser entendida como expropiación pero también como socialización. Si no hay detrás una aspiración y un proyecto revolucionario que suponga ir recuperando los bienes de consumo, sea poco a poco o de forma más

ambiciosa, la okupación puede convertirse en una actividad exclusivamente onanista. Hace falta pedagogía entre los que okupan, pero esta no es una panacea. Hay que exigir compromiso si se quiere recibir ayuda, y si no hay compromiso pues que sigan adelante solos; cualquiera puede dar una patada en la puerta. Hay que ver también a quién se dirige el discurso, si a los convencidos que no lo necesitan o a los necesitados que no se convencen. La respuesta no es fácil, pero de ella depende que la okupación sea una actividad endogámica de autoconsumo o que sea una actividad, que enfrentándose a mil retos y derrotas, pueda transformar mínimamente el mundo que la rodea.

Lo dicho sobre okupación en general llega a otro estadio de profundidad cuando se habla de la creación de comunidades alternativa, ya que este otro lugar común, y a veces la única meta, cuando se okupa un inmueble. No en vano la mayoría de movimientos sociales reproducen en su discurso, de forma insistente, la idea de “crear comunidad”<sup>1</sup>. Cuando los sueños revolucionarios chocan con la realidad, también es hacia la creación de comunidades hacia dónde se dirigen las expectativas. A su vez en los ambientes revolucionarios hablamos recurrentemente, pero de forma vaga, de levantar “comunidades de resistencia” (haciendo más hincapié, en la práctica, en el primer término que en el segundo). Lo hacemos sin concebir casi nunca que este mito de nuestro imaginario común también tiene sus límites. Esto no significa que lo considere algo negativo ni un elemento a desterrar, pero sí a cuestionar, a replantearnos sus aparentes certezas.

Durante el siglo XIX muchos de los primeros socialistas desarrollaron, tanto en el plano práctico como teórico, modelos comunitarios idílicos de implantación inmediata; todos fracasaron. Tanto los inspirados en Owen como en Saint Simon, Cabet o incluso el modelo más libertario de Fourier, corrieron la misma suerte. Josiah Warren, considerado el primer anarquista consciente de Norteamérica, participó en una de esas primeras comunas owenistas estadounidenses, y el resultado fue el desencanto total por su parte y abrazar un concepto individualista sobre la interacción social que

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1 A lo largo de este texto cuando aludo al término *comunidad* lo hago principalmente para referirme, más allá de su sentido general, a las comunas alternativas creadas en los márgenes de la sociedad capitalista (desde las utópicas del s. XIX hasta las hippies de la segunda mitad del s. XX), que aspiran a la demostración práctica de un modelo social teórico. Tienden por tanto a la estabilidad. No confundir con las comunidades creadas en situación, buscada o no, de conflicto, desde la de los *diggers* ingleses del s. XVI pasado por la Revolución española de 1936 hasta experiencias más actuales como la zapatista. Estas comunidades tienden a ser de otra naturaleza, no aspiran al aislamiento y su aspecto experimental necesita más la irradiación y el contagio, el movimiento, que la conservación estática.

él llamaba la “desconexión”. Según su opinión, la gente era más feliz cuanto más independiente era y más libre se sentía en sus hábitos, cuanto más desconectada estaba de estructuras generales. Esto no quiere decir que Warren rechazara los lazos sociales; sólo consideraba que reglar todos los aspectos de la vida de los miembros de una comunidad conducía a la muerte de la misma.<sup>2</sup>

Muchas décadas antes que él, e incluso antes de que se dieran las primeras experiencias comunitarias utópicas decimonónicas, William Godwin ya había alertado de estos excesos. Godwin, que en su *Investigación sobre la justicia política* (1793) defiende precisamente un modelo de vida basado en la propiedad colectiva, considera que esta forma de propiedad no puede suponer comunalizar también usos y costumbres. Para él la propiedad común no debe significar obligatoriamente comedores, horarios, trabajos y pensamientos también comunes<sup>3</sup>. La propiedad colectiva debe inspirar, sin renunciar a los vínculos sociales, a la independencia de espíritu. Algo muy parecido defendería casi un siglo después Oscar Wilde en su ensayo *El alma del hombre bajo el socialismo* (1890)<sup>4</sup>.

Los experimentos comunitarios que se dieron a finales de ese siglo XIX y principios del XX también fracasaron. Estos fueron en su mayoría de corte libertario y se extendieron por Italia, España, sobre todo Francia y también los países sudamericanos más afectados por la migración europea (como Argentina o Brasil). Desde los primeros ejemplos de mano de personajes como Fortuné Henry hasta la popularización de los llamados “medios libres”

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2 “[El gobierno de la combinación] tiende a prostrar al individuo y reducirlo a mera pieza de una máquina; involucrando a otros en la responsabilidad de sus actos y responsabilizándolo a él, a su vez, por los actos y sentimientos de sus asociados; que, de esta manera, vive y actúa sin control sobre sus propios asuntos, sin poseer ninguna certeza sobre el resultado de sus acciones y casi sin un cerebro que se atreva a usar por su propia cuenta; y que, en consecuencia, nunca llega a conocer los grandes propósitos para los que la sociedad ha sido expresamente formada” (Warren, *Manifiesto*, 1841).

3 “[...] Nuestro sistema de propiedad igualitaria no requiere ninguna especie de superintendencia ni de coerción. No hay necesidad del trabajo en común, ni de comidas en común, ni de almacenes comunes. Estos son métodos erróneos, destinados a constreñir la conducta humana, sin atraer los espíritus. Si no podemos ganar el corazón de las gentes en favor de nuestra causa, no esperemos nada de las leyes compulsivas. Si podemos ganarlo, las leyes están demás. Ese método compulsivo armonizaba con la constitución militar de Esparta, pero es absolutamente indigno de personas que sólo se guían por los principios de la razón y de la justicia. Guardaos de reducir a los hombres a la condición de máquinas. Haced que sólo se gobiernen por su voluntad y sus convicciones. ¿Para qué han de instituirse comidas en común? ¿Acaso he de sentir hambre al mismo tiempo que mi vecino? ¿He de abandonar el museo donde trabajo, el retiro donde medito, el observatorio donde estudio, para presentarme en un edificio destinado a refectorio en lugar de comer dónde y cuándo lo exige mi deseo?” (Godwin, op.cit.).

4 “Con la abolición de la propiedad privada tendremos, entonces, un verdadero, hermoso, sano individualismo” (Wilde, op.cit.).

que se extenderían hasta finales de la *Belle Époque*, los anarquistas pusieron mucho de su esfuerzo en estas experiencias. Muy pocas consiguieron asentarse en el tiempo y la mayoría se fueron destruyendo más por la acción disolvente interna que por la represión del Estado.

Uno de los ejemplos mejor documentados fue el de “La Cecilia” (1890-1894), un experimento sui géneris pero muy paradigmático hecho en su mayoría por migrantes italianos en un paraje aislado de Brasil. Explicar los pormenores de la vida comunitaria de esta comuna daría para varios artículos y no es mi intención. Baste con explicar que a nivel personal se produjeron muchas de las contradicciones de nuestros ambientes actuales, no sólo a nivel de celos y mezquindades, si no a la hora de forzar a la gente a experimentar situaciones amorosas o emocionales para las que no estaban preparadas (como si eso significara obtener algún tipo de pedigrí evolutivo revolucionario). A nivel social y económico, el egoísmo, la vagancia, la insolidaridad, el autoritarismo, también hallaron brecha. ¿Nos extraña? Una comunidad humana se compone de vicios y virtudes humanas. Ponerle el adjetivo anarquista a algo no sirve como si fuera un fetiche animista que sacudir delante de la cara para espantar a los malos espíritus.

Estamos educados como estamos y aunque hayamos querido eliminar muchas de las influencias del medio eso no quiere decir que lleguen a desaparecer del todo. Un ambiente creado con fines libertarios no puede blindarse ante la autoridad que le rodea ni depurar a golpe de decreto el autoritarismo que sus miembros llevan insertos. Y aunque se pudiera, ¿qué saldría de este espacio hermético?

Ya Élisée Reclus en su breve pero genial texto “Las colonias anarquistas” (1900) nos advertía de todas estas circunstancias. Apuntaba:

“[...] ¿Crearán los anarquistas Icarias para su uso particular del mundo burgués? Ni lo creo ni lo deseo. [...] Sostenidas por el entusiasmo de algunos, por la belleza misma de la idea dominante, pudieron durar algún tiempo esas empresas, a pesar del veneno que las consumía lentamente; pero a la larga hicieron su obra los elementos disgregantes, y todo se hundió por su propio peso, sin necesidad de violencia exterior. [...] El aislamiento no queda impune: el árbol que se trasplanta y que se pone bajo cristal, corre peligro de perder su savia, y el ser humano es mucho más sensible aún que la planta. La cerca puesta alrededor de sí por los límites de la colonia, es letal; se acostumbra a su estrecho medio, y de ciudadano del mundo que era, se empequeñece gradualmente a las

mínimas dimensiones de un propietario; las preocupaciones del negocio colectivo que lleva entre manos, estrechan su horizonte; a la larga se convierte en un despreciable gana-dinero”<sup>5</sup>.

Estas cosas que señala Reclus ¿se diferencian en algo de lo que hemos visto en todas las comunas modernas desde las hippies en los años 60 y 70 del s.XX hasta las contemporáneas? Es imposible que algo se reproduzca siempre, de forma impecable, porque sí.

Podríamos pensar que el problema es la gente ideologizada, que con personas libres de taras políticas sería distinto; pero no. Los problemas son exactamente los mismos; menos sofisticados a nivel retórico, pero idénticos.

La cuestión es que aún cuando consiguiéramos crear una sociedad perfecta, ¿qué ocurre con el resto de la sociedad? Aún no se ha resuelto el problema planteado por Bakunin cuando exponía que no se puede ser libre rodeados de esclavos<sup>6</sup>. Una microsociedad aislada, con un funcionamiento libertario perfecto, sería a niveles generales muy poco libertaria. Un grupo de estrechos “gana-dineros” como decía Reclus, obsesionados por sacar a flote el pequeño negocio familiar y que convertirían la comunidad en una empresa con formato de sociedad limitada. Quizás 15 personas vivan un espejismo de libertad, pero 7000 millones seguirán reptando exactamente igual que siempre.

¿Hay que eliminar toda intención de crear comunidades entonces? No va mi discurso por el lado de las aseveraciones. Recuerdo cuando Kropotkin definía la propuesta libertaria en la Enciclopedia Británica (1905) y hablaba de comunas autónomas de distintos tamaños y si se deseaba temporales. Recuerdo también la idea de las “asociaciones de egoístas”<sup>7</sup> de Stirner. E incluso los ejemplos de vida de personajes como Thoreau que huían de las ciudades y que colocaban en sus casas solo tres sillas: “una para la soledad, la segunda para los amigos y la tercera para la sociedad”<sup>8</sup>. Ninguno sabía que depararía el futuro como no lo sabemos ninguno de nosotros. Discutir el mejor modelo basándonos en la teoría es estúpido y estéril. Sólo la práctica lo zanjará. Este texto habla por tanto de lo que la experiencia, histórica y personal, me ha demostrado.

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5 Reclus, op.cit.

6 Mijaíl Bakunin, *El Principio del Estado*, 1871.

7 Max Stirner, *El Único y su propiedad*, 1845.

8 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden o La vida en los bosques*, 1854.



Una comunidad, si quiere subsistir, debe evitar enredarse en lo que yo llamo “la política de lo imposible”. Hay cosas que una comunidad puede votar en asamblea por mayoría, incluso consensuar, pero si lo aprobado escapa de lo posible no se cumplirá. Votar por mayoría absoluta que mañana vamos a levitar no nos levantará un centímetro del suelo. La comunidad no puede abordar asuntos que se escapan a su control. Si acuerda, por ejemplo, un horario de ruidos tendrá que ver la predisposición real de los comunadados hacia dicho acuerdo, la capacidad comunitaria de hacerlo cumplir y las consecuencias de un posible incumplimiento. Si el análisis nos indica que no hay posibilidad real de hacer cumplir lo que se ha acordado, más vale ni proponerlo. Y esto entronca con tomar decisiones sobre ética y moral y la esfera privada del domicilio y las costumbres. Por mucho que determinados hábitos molesten y desagraden, hay cosas cuyo cumplimiento no puede constatarse. Y aunque se pudiera, ¿es deseable? Para conseguirlo habría que poner en marcha una repugnante y pesada maquinaria represiva semejante a la del Estado, o una labor de pedagogía y autoformación que con suerte, de funcionar, nos llevaría décadas. Hay elementos en los que la comunidad debe reconocerse, aunque sea temporalmente, incompetente.

Con respecto a los individuos que la componen o rodean la comunidad sólo puede abordar aquellos asuntos que afectan al común, que implican a la mayoría o que directamente la amenaza o pone en peligro. Mientras eso no ocurra debe inhibirse.

Sobre esto recuerdo un ejemplo ocurrido en la acampada del 15M de Las Palmas. Se hizo una asamblea promovida por la “Comisión de respeto” para ver la forma de evitar que una persona con actitudes “inconvenientes” (motivadas por abuso de drogas y problemas mentales serios) accediera a la plaza. Todas las voces hablaban de expulsión y “patrullas de control”. Cuando me tocó tomar la palabra planteé dos objeciones: primero, el dilema moral de la exclusión, de barrer bajo la alfombra aquellos problemas que nos incomodan tal y como hace esa sociedad capitalista que tanto nos desagradaba; segundo, aunque se aprobará por mayoría impedirle participar, ¿cómo llevar dicha resolución a la práctica? Una plaza es un espacio público al que no se puede impedir el acceso. ¿Crear una policía del 15M que vigilara constantemente el perímetro? Y de poner en marcha esa aberración, ¿recurrir a la violencia si el individuo cruzaba el cordón? Llamé la atención sobre el hecho de que los mismos pacifistas que censuraban la autodefensa ante las agresiones policiales aprobaran la violencia a la hora de

“protegerse” de una persona acuciada por múltiples enfermedades mentales y sociales. Propuse entender la situación del aludido y proponerle, ya que le interesaba el Movimiento, alguna ocupación y forma de implicarse. Como le gustaba pintar, le propuse encargarse de diseñar la cartelería y estuvo dedicado a eso durante varias semanas, hasta poco antes del desalojo. No fue una panacea, pero los problemas de convivencia se redujeron.

Siempre habrá individuos disruptivos, elementos que sabotean desde dentro. La comunidad debe plantearse qué herramientas tiene para enfrentarse a estas situaciones y si puede aplicarlas sin convertirse en el mismo modelo autoritario que condena. Debe estudiar si el individuo es permeable a la persuasión o a la pedagogía, si se requieren medidas sancionadoras (una vía peligrosa que no conoce techo y que no se aplica con palabras<sup>9</sup>) o si hay que recurrir a la expulsión. Y, sobre todo, si tiene posibilidad de aplicar alguna de esas medidas. Debe plantearse también cuál es la proporción real de los elementos disruptivos. Una comunidad donde la mayoría sabotea ya no es una comunidad y lo mejor es abandonarla.

La comunidad<sup>10</sup> debe dejar de verse como un ente con vida propia, suprahumano. Es sólo una estructura inánime que existe gracias a quienes la componen. Su naturaleza, si es negativa o positiva, está determinada por la calidad humana de sus componentes. Hay que contemplarla como un cuerpo que nunca es el núcleo de sí mismo; ese cuerpo se compone de células y para bien o para mal son ellas las que determinan el estado de salud o enfermedad de dicho cuerpo. El cuerpo puede eliminar una célula maligna, extirpar un cáncer, pero no puede hacerlo sin automutilarse.

La vida en comunidad es un fenómeno social que parece incuestionable; cuestionarlo sería tanto como enredarse en cuestionar si el ser humano es sociable o no por naturaleza. No me interesa ese debate desde que era adolescente. Me interesa cuestionar sólo los límites del modelo, las fronteras que no puede cruzar sin arriesgarse a morir (a morir, desgraciadamente, matando).

Después de todo lo dicho no creo conveniente, en relación a los proyectos sociales, contemplar la constitución de comunidades como un fin en sí mismo. La comunidad es un medio, para contrastar las propias teorías, para

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9 Esta vía abre la puerta al aforismo de Friedrich Nietzsche: “quien pelea con monstruos corre el riesgo de convertirse en uno” (*Más allá del bien y del mal*, 1886).

10 Sus miembros más bien, pues la comunidad ni piensa ni siente ni hace nada por sí misma, es solo un agregado de individuos.

ponerlas a prueba, para hacerse fuertes, para ejercitar la convivencia, para crear estructura y tejido, para sacar músculo en la práctica cotidiana y común del día a día; todo muy importante, pero sigue siendo un medio y no una meta. Ver la creación de comunidades como nuestro fin último es como invertir todas nuestras fuerzas en arreglar un vehículo, en engrasarlo y prepararlo, en hacer de él un objeto digno de exposición, pero sin ser capaces nunca de arrancarlo, bien porque se ha convertido en un artículo decorativo inutilizado para la automoción, bien porque tenemos miedo a que se deteriore durante el viaje. Me viene a la mente el llamado "Proyecto A" promocionado por Horst Stowasser en Neustadt (Alemania) a finales del s. XX. Es un ejemplo, una demostración de capacidad, una experiencia con muchas lecciones válidas, pero verla como el objetivo sería, en mi opinión, errar el disparo. Es un proyecto que justamente representa lo que acabo de comentar: la necesidad de fortalecer la herramienta, de crear una estructura poderosa, sin darse cuenta de que se puede perder la perspectiva al transformar una parte en el todo. Es el ejemplo de lo que pasa cuando se subvierten los términos, cuando los métodos pasan a ser las finalidades y los recursos sustituyen a los objetivos. Se daba ingenuamente por sentado que el proceso revolucionario se produciría *per se* con sólo reforzar la red autogestionaria, que el conflicto con la autoridad vendría dado, de forma inevitable, con el propio crecimiento del proyecto. La verdad es que el poder suele tolerar cualquier proyecto paralelo mientras ocupe todo el tiempo de los implicados y no tenga la intención de interferir en el funcionamiento del *status quo* de forma directa. A veces hasta lo alienta, dejando que nos agotemos, que no demos solos el batacazo o que hagamos de nuestro proyecto el objetivo de nuestra vida en vez de un simple elemento para ayudarnos a cambiarla. Al final, los participantes acaban obsesionados por el buen funcionamiento del proyecto, por mantener su estabilidad, por perfeccionarlo y mantenerlo libre de alteraciones. Ya sólo interesa el proyecto en sí y para perpetuarlo se sacrifica todo, hasta la finalidad inicial que le dio vida. Los anhelos emancipadores del comienzo han desaparecido, eclipsados, y ya solo queda el propio objeto que hemos creado: el huerto, la fábrica, la comunidad, como receptáculo de todas nuestras expectativas. El medio para mejorar la vida se ha convertido en la vida misma. Debía ser un simple escalón más hacia la liberación, pero en vez de eso se convirtió en una escalera sin principio ni fin: una escalera de caracol que gira sobre sí y que acaba justo donde empieza, incapaz ya de llevarnos a ninguna parte fuera de sí misma. Un sucedáneo aceptable de la emancipación.

En consecuencia, si queremos crear comunidades, a un nivel reducido (anarquistas) o grandes comunidades de resistencia, amplias (ahora y de cara al futuro), con proyección en nuestros barrios, tenemos que quitarnos de encima la mitificación comunitaria. En común solo se pueden dirimir los asuntos que afecten al conjunto, pero tratar de regular aspectos de la esfera puramente personal o imponer patrones conductuales o prácticas colectivas que la propia comunidad no demanda, es la mejor forma de crear crispación y desafección en la comunidad. Es un fenómeno que no catalogo de positivo o negativo pero del que me he dado cuenta: cuando hemos okupado una o dos casas dentro de un edificio no okupado y los realojados han sabido adaptarse han habido pocos problemas de convivencia. Cada vecino ha sido autónomo, ha regulado su propia vida y la interacción se ha limitado a asuntos comunes. Nadie ha interferido en la vida de nadie. Cuando hemos okupado mazanas y edificios enteros y las asambleas no han sabido limitarse a tomar decisiones sobre lo que afecta al conjunto y han tratado de cuestionar lo que cada uno hace en su casa sólo han habido fracasos y conflictos. Podríamos pensar que es una cuestión proporcional: a menor contacto menos desencuentros. Y, sin dejar de ser cierto, tiene también mucho que ver con las atribuciones de la comunidad y su tendencia a extralimitarse en pos de una perfección imposible e inalcanzable.

El anterior ejemplo es extrapolable a casi cualquier situación. En nuestro medios hablamos de comunidad como en las series y películas norteamericanas: un conjunto amorfo y superior a los individuos que lo componen. Ser un “miembro respetable de la comunidad” equivale a respetar normas cuya naturaleza y funcionalidad desconocemos, y esto no suele ser ni deseable ni bueno. Una comunidad no puede entrometerse en la dimensión puramente individual -mientras no afecte al conjunto- por mucho que le agrade o disguste lo que se mueva dentro de dicha esfera. El esfuerzo de los participantes no debe ser tanto “crear comunidad”, “sentimiento colectivo”, “pertenencia al grupo”, como reforzar el criterio propio, la capacidad de criticar y disentir. Ya he dicho en alguna ocasión que si hoy en día somos insolidarios no es por individualismo, sino por gregarismo; por adaptarnos a la insolidaridad imperante, por ser como todo el mundo. Ser solidario, sin competir ni sacar tajada, es minoritario y está mal visto. A niveles de moral superficial puede que no (“no matarás”), pero sí a nivel de moral profunda (“sé político, policía o militar y sé respetado por matar”).

En una comunidad hay que tratar de fortalecer la independencia de criterio, el querer colaborar por convicción y no por inercia, el saber llevar la contraria cuando la comunidad se equivoca. Ninguna de nuestras comunidades, ni siquiera las libertarias, han sabido hacer esto. Han tratado de forzar la uniformidad de hábitos y una armonía ficticia dada por la semejanza y no por la diferencia. Incluso hace falta individualidad para detectar pronto la muerte del proyecto, para saber cuándo se vive en una comunidad y cuándo en otra cosa impulsada por las ganas de unos pocos y lastrada por la desidia y vagancia de una mayoría. También es necesaria para detectar cuándo la comunidad se resigna con su condición de medio (para facilitar la vida de sus participantes, para armarnos de cara al acontecimiento revolucionario) y cuándo no, y se revuelve hasta convertirse en el fin de todo esfuerzo (cuando exige que se trabaje sólo por y para la comunidad y no asume ser el trampolín que nos permita transitar a otros estadios revolucionarios).

Pensar por uno mismo, saber oponerse al número, generar disenso, sentirse dueño de la propia vida, es el precio que toda comunidad humana debe estar dispuesta a pagarle a sus miembros si quiere permanecer sana, construirse con personas reales y no ser una simple abstracción ajena a los seres concretos que deberían darle vida.

La comunidad que no entienda esto corre el peligro de crear a sus propios refractarios y que se cumpla lo que anunciaba Renzo Novatore cuando avisaba de que “cualquier sociedad que construyas debe tener sus límites”<sup>11</sup>.

## Sobre el autor

Ruymán Rodríguez es miembro de la Federación Anarquista de Gran Canaria (FAGC).

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## Enlace

Este artículo se puede encontrar en línea en la página web de Trespass en la siguiente dirección:

<https://www.trespass.network/?p=595&lang=es>

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11 Renzo Novatore, “Il mio Individualismo Iconoclasta” (en *Iconoclasta!*), Enero de 1920.

## **Okupación y Comunidad**

**Laia Vidal, Grup de Reflexió per l'Autonomia**

### **Comentarios acerca del artículo de Ruymán Rodríguez**

El artículo de Ruymán Rodríguez tiene dos partes, una sobre okupación y la otra sobre comunidad. Y las relaciona...hablando tanto de los límites de la okupación activista como los de la okupación por necesidad, y después de los límites de la comunidad en términos generales. Se podría titular pues «Los límites de la okupación y los límites de la comunidad».

En él la okupación activista queda muy mal parada, porque es cierto que durante mucho tiempo se ha okupado por voluntad y no por necesidad, en una sociedad de la abundancia como la nuestra. Paradojicamente es quien más tiene quién más crítica puede hacer a lo que hay, porque lo ha probado, ha vivido en ello y de ello, y es consciente de lo que tiene que perder. Pero a quien no ha tenido y no tiene siempre le da la sensación que si tuviera estaría mejor, y no puede renunciar tan fácilmente al espejismo social que por defecto le ha excluido, no puede renunciar a aquello que no conoce.

El artículo no tiene en cuenta que la okupación activista de espacios hasta cierto punto no crea espacios de vivienda para gente necesitada porque su voluntad es más de carácter cultural-social y no tanto de necesidad primaria. Aunque esto ha cambiado mucho en los últimos años. Como precedente de okupación con un carácter más social y que quería salir del guetto político hay que citar a la [PHRP \(Promoción de Vivienda Realmente Pública\)](#), un precedente de lo que después fue la PAH. La PHRP tenía el proyecto de que

la okupación fuera algo mucho más allá del activismo político, que cualquiera pudiera okupar, y tuvo conflictos con los colectivos okupas más «tradicionales» de Barcelona, que le recriminaban un supuesto apoliticismo. Esta trataba de subvertir las políticas institucionales a partir de campañas de guerrilla urbana, nada que ver con la cooptación de algunos colectivos de vivienda que ha ocurrido después. Si bien también demandaba medidas a tomar por parte de los poderes públicos, utilizaba sobre todo en la práctica la acción directa, viendo que sus demandas eran difíciles de asumir o largas.

La okupación por su idiosincracia puede provocar unos determinados problemas, por ejemplo al ver las casas como algo de paso, al no sentirlo «suyo», se puede tender a currárselo menos, a cuidarlo menos...y la precariedad vital puede conllevar precariedad de perspectivas y del proyecto. Por contra, otros modelos que requieren más compromiso, como la compra colectiva, nos obliga a responsabilizarnos más y nos da más estabilidad y seguridad, que al mismo tiempo se nos puede girar en contra como dice el mismo Ruyman cuando habla de que la estabilidad puede generar estancamiento, sobretodo si el proyecto se concibe como un fin en si mismo, para satisfacer las necesidades de los usuarios, y no como una parte de una estrategia más amplia de transformación social que va más allá de la gente que lo compone en un determinado momento.

Respecto a su crítica a las comunidades, en general se podría decir que las comunidades actuales son mucho más prácticas, mucho más centradas en necesidades, más pragmáticas incluso, que las anteriores. Estamos hablando de personas concienciadas que quizás no comparten tanto una ideología única sino más bien unos valores, una forma de ver y vivir la vida. No es lo mismo las comunidades utópicas del siglo XIX y las hippies de los XX, de las que habla Ruymán, que las experiencias más actuales. Quizás se podría objetar que actualmente han perdido idealismo, pero por contra se centran

en vivir de otra forma aquí y ahora; también muchas no se aíslan de su entorno social sino que buscan contribuir a él y hacer sinergias, saliendo de la hostilidad que otrora las enfrentaba al mundo. El nivel de dogmatismo es inferior, puesto que hay en ellas una voluntad de integrar personas con perfiles diferentes, aunque sea en varios grados de implicación, reconociendo las necesidades individuales y que la forma de maximizar el potencial revolucionario de cada quién puede ser distinto, sin por ello ser la persona menos «pura». Por eso creo que se está desarrollando una nueva forma de entender la comunidad en el siglo XXI. El tiempo dirá si se mantienen los mismos escollos que en el pasado o si sobrellevamos ciertas cuestiones a un nuevo nivel de construcción de la realidad.

El accento en la propiedad colectivizada-socializada, y no tanto en el colectivismo de la vida, sí se aleja de las tendencias actuales en los movimientos sociales. De hecho, desde muchos lugares se reivindica el «poner la vida en común», para curarse del economicismo imperante en nuestros tiempos y del solo actuar interesado, se intentan valorar más los cuidados, los tempos, los procesos...Así, no sería tan importante qué estructuras tenemos sino que formas tenemos de relacionarnos, y que estas sean cooperativas, colectivas, basadas en el apoyo mutuo...más allá de si todas compartimos el mismo techo o si los medios de producción y reproducción están colectivizados realmente. Otra forma de entender la comunidad en nuestros días de despojo, quizás no sólo en un sentido material, por mucha falta que haga la materialidad.

Estamos con Ruymán cuando remarca que nos cuesta mucho no ser críticos con la gente que consideramos que «tendría que ser perfecta según los estándares anarquistas» y seguramente nos desilusiona más esto que no si alguien «no explícitamente anarquista» comete faltas. Esto mina la resistencia a la frustración en nuestros proyectos y pone un estándar de



exigencia personal quizás poco real y deseable. Por otro lado, la desilusión también impera si actuamos en un ámbito social más amplio, puesto que otra creencia anarquista es que la naturaleza de las personas es esencialmente buena y en la realidad vemos que muchas veces no es siempre así -sea por lo que sea-. Andamos así decepcionados tanto por nuestros compañeros como por las personas a las que «ayudamos». Visto lo visto, ¿cómo mantener el idealismo sin frustrarse por las limitaciones humanas y las lacras del sistema imperante?

Los referentes teóricos de los que bebe el artículo son Nietzsche, Stirner...Thoreau...todo referentes del anarquismo individualista por excelencia o bien pensadores utópicos del siglo XIX. De Nietzsche se ha dicho que es el filósofo del odio y se han mostrado sus relaciones con el movimiento nazi. Se echan en falta los filósofos y pensadores políticos de las corrientes de la autonomía, como por ejemplo Cornelius Castoriadis, Murray Bookchin o Takis Fotopoulos, los cuales no conciben una autonomía individual sin una autonomía colectiva y que tratan de dar un marco de actuación para los proyectos del anarquismo social, el anarquismo organizado, o el socialismo libertario. Podríamos decir que estas corrientes pecan de no ser realmente «sociales», al menos en un inicio, puesto que el grado de consciencia que las implusa es elevado, pero esta situación puede cambiar a bien al juntarse con las necesidades de nuestro tiempo, que harán bajar estas teorías a pie de calle, y juntarse con el sentido común popular, que es de dónde realmente salen. El énfasis en el individualismo que hace Ruymán parece una cura contra el colectivismo y la anulación de las capacidades individuales frente a un colectivo abstracto en el que a veces hemos dejado recaer nuestra emancipación y saco de evitación de nuestras responsabilidades intrínsecas, pero creemos que las tendencias actuales nos llevarán a una sinergia mucho mayor entre individuo y colectivo, a un «colectivismo individualista» si se quiere. Las nuevas teorías de sistemas

también indican una relación simbiótica entre el todo y las partes, en la cual la comunidad sería un organismo vivo con sus distintas partes constituyentes, y se habla ya de un sistema holográfico.

Por último y relacionado con lo anterior, también es fundamental entender las bases que alimentan a una comunidad desde sus inicios. Hoy en día muchas comunidades son flojas porque empiezan simplemente con el deseo de vivir juntos, sin más, los individuos cada vez tienen menos individualidad y se agarran al hecho comunitario para cubrir sus propios vacíos. Mal punto de partida...Pero si las comunidades se plantean desde la base de individuos fuertes o dispuestos a hacerse fuertes juntos, con crítica y autocrítica, desde el amor, y con una perspectiva ética y política, un programa y una estrategia orientadora que las sitúe en un marco más amplio, creo que tendremos otra receta para nuevos avances revolucionarios en el siglo XXI, paradójicamente el siglo de un individualismo sin individualidad y de un colectivismo sin convivencialidad, tendencias que tenemos que ir revirtiendo.

## **Sobre la autora**

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## **Enlace**

Este artículo se puede encontrar en línea en la página web de Trespass en la siguiente dirección:

<https://www.trespass.network/?p=741&lang=es>

# **I remember waking up next to you in the morning**

**Anonymous**

*This piece explores love within our resistance, and the possibilities that exist outside of capitalist 'clock time' and how we can escape them by rejecting notions of waged labour and rent through creating autonomous, squatted spaces.*

I remember waking up next to you in the morning ... this is what life is. Waged labour crushes us, crushes our existence. But here I am, waking up next to this person. Kissing them - embracing them. Freely. There's no rush - no need to get to work for 9. Yes, we will be productive today. We will work together constructing the new guest space; we're getting quite busy this Spring in our squatted community. Guests are now sleeping in communal spaces, a source of tension already. But let's take our time. Let us break with the capitalist's insistence of punctuality. I'm sure this is one of the sweeter moments of existence. It's fallen on us - the beauty of the universe, here in this crusty dwelling we've built, believe it or not. These moments too few and far between I know, but lying here with you, it makes as clearer sense as ever - why this universe exists, at least, to know that moments like this can exist. Whilst knowing all the despair and pain we cause each other on this earth, there is this. At least there is this. They can never say this hasn't happened.

Made possible through squatting? That we met? That we can share this moment? Whilst most in this city are working this morning. What damage modern life must inflict. No chance to meet and lie with another person. No space to breathe and talk freely, besides from the rushed, artificial 7:00pm date after work, arranged via a dating website. This is one personal tragedy that waged labour reaps on us.

In our home, this autonomous space, we are triumphant over capitalist control over time. We've transcended 'clock-time', who's arrival came in step with the brutal imposition of labour-discipline in the industrial workplace. Here, we have time to get to know one another. Lie next to each other, look

into each other's eyes. And when we get out of bed, our activity won't feel anything like work. It will be effortless, enjoyable, interlaced with discussion and debate on existence.

I love you because you're searching for something other than financial gain. We know that financial incentives and the rule of money degrade any activity, eroding the richness of any given moment, leading to a feeling of indifference towards anything other than the pursuit of money. They must witness your approach. How you've smashed the notion that work must be monotonous and dull. You've decided to think more deeply about what it means to be a human being. Life beyond a CV-building exercise. A place where dedication and bravery is likely to make you less, not more employable.

To not have that spikey action hanging over my head, I feel free, liberated, ready to love again. Ready to kiss you again. Since leaving the police cell, I've thought about and missed you very much. Last night I confessed to comrades my love for you. I described you as someone who embodies Anarchism, without being aware of it. Which is true. Without appearing to have read much on the theory of Anarchism, you breathe the spirit of autonomy. Such love and energy for other humans; your capacity to love humans indiscriminately is second to none. Your creative doing appears effortless, but under the surface is sustained with a fierce resolve.

Should I come out and meet you? Why am I not making this decision? I'm worried that venturing abroad, leaving behind my family, my community, I would be dishevelled, without any regularity of activity. Do you consider making a life in this community? In this city? No one from this island has your energy, expresses your liberty. At least, I have not met them. Perhaps we lost your energy, that impulse, to capitalist work discipline a long time ago. I worry society here would crush your big smile, your liberty - you - the one who grew up on a vegetable garden. You miraculously found us in this small corner of the world - I'll always be grateful for those months we shared.

## **Link**

This article can be found online at the open access Trespass website at <https://www.trespass.network/?p=560&lang=en>

# Mapping the Movement: Producing maps of squatted social centres in Western Europe

**Thomas Aguilera**  
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**Bart van der Steen**  
**Jakob Warnecke**



*This text was produced by people working on a project mapping squatted social centres at [maps.squat.net](http://maps.squat.net).*

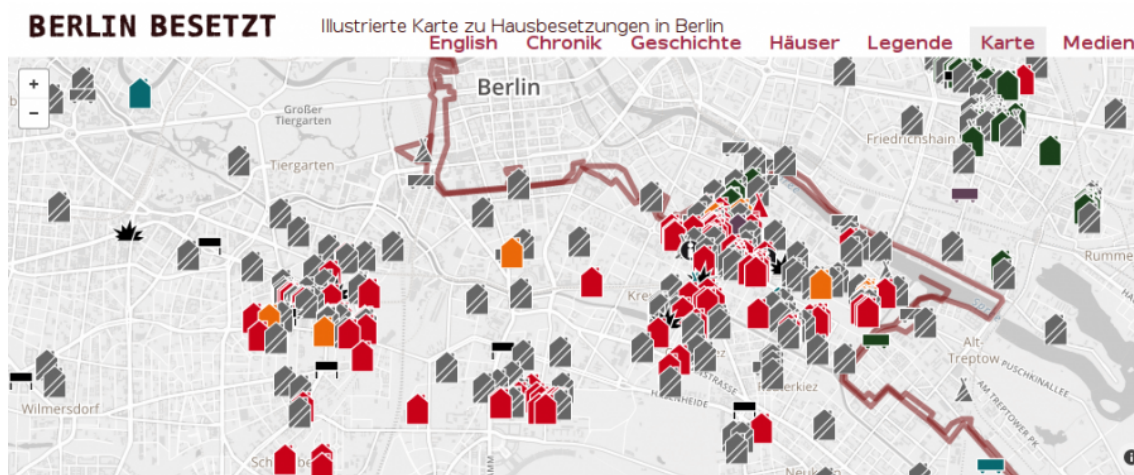
## Introduction

In 2013, a group of activist historians came together to map the history of the Berlin squatters movement in a digital and interactive way. They write on the concept of mapping the movement: “Because the claiming of urban

space is the central theme in squatter movements, its history must also be presented in a spatial way.” The goal of the Berlin group is “to make visible” the self-managed and collective spaces that the city holds and held, and to make “traceable the development and spatial expansion of the movement.”

Needless to say, they did an impressive job. Their [website](#) offers a near-complete overview of squatted places in Berlin from 1970 onwards, and provides an enormous amount of information and material on individual squats. Not only does the Berlin map offer an amazing number of entries, the website also offers photos, scanned documents, a chronology of events and information on events and organizations that are linked to squats, such as demonstrations, infoshops and the like.

Naturally, such a project requires an enormous amount of work and coordination. The Berlin group got their data from movement publications, newspaper articles, interviews with activists and archival research. As they write, this endeavour translated into “several years of self-supported research,” as the thus gathered data was “entered meticulously in ever more extensive excel-sheets.” As this kind of research was done by several persons simultaneously, commitment and communication was essential.



The website of [Berlin Besetzt](http://www.berlinbesetzt.net) is meant as a valuable tool for both historical research and reflection by activists on the history and present of urban social movements. Interestingly, the Berlin group reflects on this issue in a dual way. As a group, they believe that mapping the movement historically poses a political intervention, as it shows “that there were and are possibilities to intervene.” On the other hand, they quote “older activists” who told them that it would be “nonsense” to spend so much time studying the history of a movement that has “failed and disappeared.”

Both issues mentioned above, commitment and communication to a project and the question if mapping a movement poses a political intervention or if it is just plain “nonsense,” were to play an important role when other groups set out to follow the example laid out by Berlin Besetzt. As soon as other activists and academics got to see the map, they wanted to do something similar. This, then, is where the Squatting Europe Kollektive ([SqEK](http://www.sqek.net)) comes in.

SqEK is a group of activist researchers working on the squatting movement. As the [research agenda](#) (available in EN/ES/FR/IT) states: “Our aim is to produce reliable and fine-grained knowledge about this movement not only as an end in itself, but also as a public resource, especially for squatters and activists. Critical engagement, transdisciplinarity and comparative

approaches are the bases of our project.” The collective represents a broad group of researchers, coming from different disciplines and focusing on different fields of interest. While some may focus on the political history of squatting, others aim at developing sociological analyses of present squatter scenes, while yet more may prefer looking at squatting from a philosophical or cultural perspective. The group’s strength lies exactly in its focus on stimulating interaction and crossovers between these different approaches.

The collective organizes annual conferences and has authored various books and edited volumes. It also provided the inspiration for a comparative research project on squatter movements in twelve European cities. Under the banner of [MOVOKEUR](#), the research project aimed to analyze the contexts in which these movements thrive, the development of protest cycles, processes of institutionalization, and the ways in which identities are shaped through and subsequently influence these movements. Graphical representations of some of these themes are [online](#). The project’s point of departure was to first draw up databases on squatted social centres in these twelve cities. This would then provide the raw data for further analysis. This has provided the basis for individual case studies as well as comparative studies, which will be published by Palgrave Macmillan in book form in 2017. Already, databases and articles written about the data are available [online](#).

However, whilst data on squatted social centres in various cities was being gathered, compiled and processed, it soon seemed only logical to visualize the thus produced datasets through digitalized, interactive maps. As such, it was an unplanned but very welcome spin-off from the original MOVOKEUR project. Yet, this step was only made possible through the inspiration provided by the Berlin Besetzt website and their sharing of expertise, as several Berlin Besetzt researchers are also part of the SqEK network.



**Wenn Räumung -  
dann Beule**

**Ohne Puschmann kein Krawall**



**Räumung der Kadterschmiede am 28.5. verhindern  
Rigaer94 bleibt - keine Räumung niemals nicht**

Die Rigaer94 ist ein ex-besetztes Haus in Berlin. Ein Gerichtsvollzieher - ein gewisser Thomas Puschmann - verlangt für Dienstag, den 28.5.'02 die friedliche und freiwillige Herausgabe von mehreren Erdgeschoßräumen, in welchen sich das Projekt Kadterschmiede befindet. Angekündigt hat sich der Herr Gerichtsvollzieher für 8.00 Uhr morgens. Es ist unklar und wird wohl auch unklar bleiben, ob er sofort mit Bullen anrückt oder sich deren Unterstützung erst in den folgenden Stunden, Tagen oder Wochen besorgt.

Ihr seid aufgefordert, Aktionen gegen die Räumung mit den Euch als geeignet erscheinenden Mitteln zu unterstützen. Möglich und sinnvoll ist das Blockieren der Zufahrtsstraßen um die Rigaer94. Ab dem 25.5. wird es Pennplätze geben.

**28.5. Berlin -  
Friedrichshain**



<http://rigaer94.squat.net>

vide: gerhard müller, bochagener str. 34, berlin

An image from the Berlin map

Even so, the [SqEK mapping project](#) soon developed a dynamic of its own. True to the core ideas of the collective, the mapping project was organized from the bottom up. Thus, there is no central coordinating body, guiding or steering the project overall or managing the mapping of individual cities. New groups and individuals can apply to join the project and start mapping the city of their choice. The MOVOKEUR project stands at the heart of the effort, and therefore several cities are pretty well mapped. At the same time however, other cities are far from complete. This situation is directly related to the way the project is organized. As new people join the project, they are free to map “their” city in their own way and at their own speed.

Since the various contributors are dotted around Western Europe, it can at times be hard to keep in touch and properly organize collective efforts. Similarly, discussing certain issues can be hard to do via group email. Inherently, some will not feel addressed individually by an email that is addressed to all. This issue links back to the previously mentioned topics of commitment and communication.

As SqEK forms a transnational collective, the issue of language also plays a role in this, both because English is the dominant academic language whilst being the native language of only a small minority in the group and because the MOVOKEUR project was split between Spanish-language researchers working on cities in the Spanish state and researchers communicating mainly in English who were working on northern European cities.

Although the bottom up structure lends the SqEK mapping project its vitality, there are also certain downsides. First of all, because of the above, many of the SqEK maps cannot (yet) claim completeness in the same way Berlin Besetzt does. The web developer only added the possibility to upload photographs in May 2015, when the MOVOKEUR project was officially coming to an end; as a result, some cities such as Amsterdam, Barcelona, Brighton and Madrid do not have uploaded visual documents since the work

was finished before the possibility existed and no more economic resources were available to take the work further.

As communication between the different mappers is not always optimal, this creates a risk to the uniformity of the data (and data processing) that stands at the basis of the mapping process. For example, different cities often use different time frames for their mapping projects, while there are also different views on the kinds of squats that should be mapped. While most projects focus on primarily mapping squatted social centres, others have chosen to also include residential squats.

Finally, and certainly not least, the [SqEK maps](#) do not yet possess the visual appeal of the [Berlin Besetzt](#) website. The maps were supposed to be produced by the developer at a quality resembling the Berlin map, but this is clearly not the case yet. Berlin Besetzt has more features and overall looks a lot prettier. This is of course crucial for a project that sets out to make the various squatter initiatives “visible” as the Berlin group stated it.

To better understand the challenges to the SqEK mapping project, and think of effective ways to move forward, it is vital to gain a better overview of how the SqEK collective works in practice. Considering the significant autonomy of the individual mappers, and staying true to the bottom up approach of SqEK, this issue translates to questions regarding the individual mappers. What kinds of challenges do they encounter when mapping “their” cities? How do they see these challenges, deal with them and reflect on them? These questions will stand at the heart of this chapter, where we focus on the individual projects making up the SqEK mapping effort. In a concluding paragraph, we will reflect on the more general conceptual issues that are brought up through the mappers’ individual experiences.

## The process of mapping



*[An image from the Leiden map](#)*

The website at [maps.squat.net](http://maps.squat.net) at present features finished city maps from Amsterdam, Barcelona, Brighton, London, Madrid, Potsdam and Rotterdam. Information for other cities such as Copenhagen, Hamburg, Leiden, Oslo, Paris and Seville is still being added. The first mentioned maps are considered finished in that the researcher(s) have completed the input of data.

Of course, a project such as this is never fully finished, since there will always be new squats to upload. Furthermore, ever more people are adding squats from the past. This process is facilitated by an added feature (a comment form), through which people can anonymously add squats. This

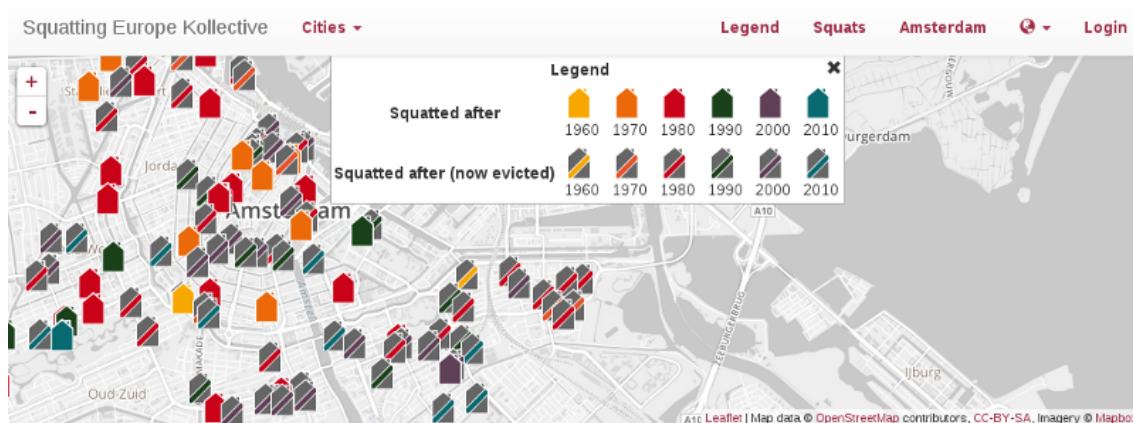
feature builds forth on the bottom up approach of SqEK, and it is hoped that in this way crowd-sourced information can become a vital part of both old and new maps.

Even so, at present cities are being mapped by individuals or groups. Upon request, most of them have answered to our call and sent us brief reflections on their experiences. In the following, we will cite the experience of those who are mapping the following cities: Amsterdam, Barcelona, Brighton, London, Madrid, Paris, Potsdam, and Rotterdam.

In doing so, we will focus on specific questions, such as

- 1.) What kind of sources did you use, and in what way did you process the information that you gathered?
- 2.) How do you define the squats that you are mapping?
- 3.) Is your map complete, is your project finished?
- 4.) How have you experienced the process of mapping and what effects did it have on you or on your environment?

## Amsterdam



With 171 projects listed from the 1960s to end 2013, Amsterdam is far from finished. I spent the best part of a week at the Institute for Social History ([IISH](http://www.iish.nl)) in Amsterdam, devouring information and reading all the

Grachtenkranten, the squatters' newspaper which counts over six hundred issues and lasted from 1979 to 2008. Still, I could have done more. Not living in Amsterdam meant that my research was hampered, although several people did help out a bit.

There is one thing that is really brought out by the map. When you untick the 'all years' box and drag the timer slowly from year to year, you will see the number of projects from the 1970s and 1980s that are still in existence. Many of these project still adhere to radical politics and are still linked to the movement today. In doing so, they provide a massive amount of infrastructure and indeed form a sort of living history for today's activists. By the simple fact of their continued existence, these places provide a huge boost to current struggles.

## **Barcelona**

The Barcelona map covers the entire Metropolitan Area. It only includes squatted social centres. Residential squats are excluded. Due to their large numbers it would be extremely difficult to acquire a complete listing of them. In total, the map covers roughly six hundred squatted social centres, providing basic information on each of them (mainly the start and eviction dates).

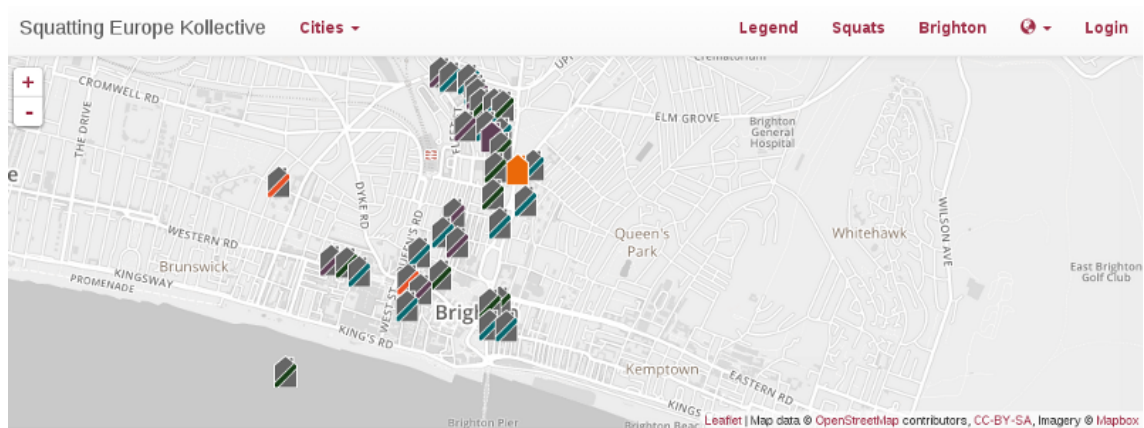
Our data on squatted social centres from 1995 to the present has been drawn from the websites [Info-Usurpa](#) and [Contra-Infos](#). These two tools made it possible to easily gather information on a large number of political squatting projects. For the most recent information, we were able to use the website [15mpedia.org](http://15mpedia.org) as a source of information. For the period prior to 1995, we have drawn from bibliographic research and activist knowledge.

Due to various reasons, it has become increasingly difficult to map recent events and squatter actions. First of all, since the emergence of the 15M movement in 2011, the number of squatter actions has risen dramatically. Furthermore, communication within the movement is at times hampered by

the movement's heterogeneity. Not only are there differences between an old and a new generation of squatters, the same holds true for Catalan and foreign squatters.

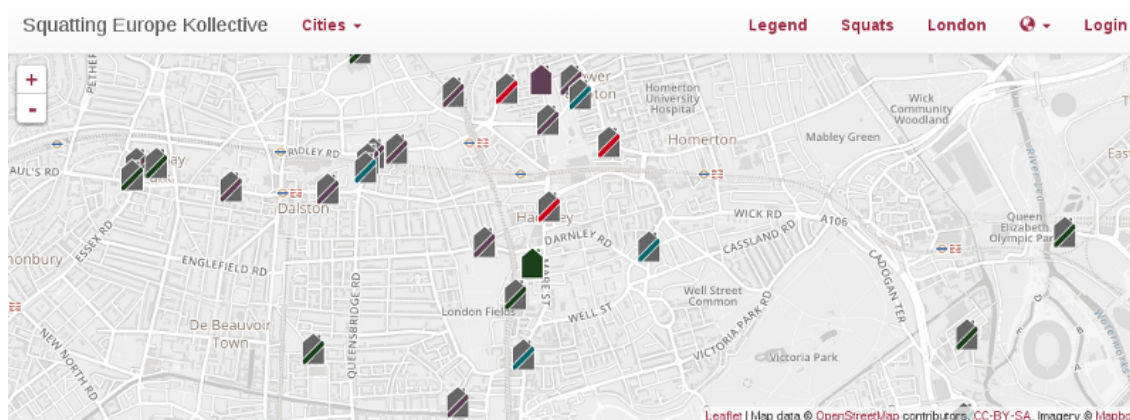
Those who are interested can access the map and add new information. So far however, only one collective has posted an update on the original database. This may also be explained by the limited publicity that we have given on the map amongst activists.

## Brighton



Mapping Brighton was fun to do in that I lived there and thus had access to people who had squatted in different times from the 1970s to the present day. This means that the map feels quite complete, especially since (compared to the other cities listed here) Brighton is not very large. Of course there will be projects still to be added.

## London



Most people scoffed when I told them I was mapping squats in London, since the city is so vast and has experienced thousands if not hundreds of thousands of squatter actions since the 1960s. However, limiting the project to mapping social centres made the task easier, even if the result still needs much more input. So far, 263 projects have been inserted.

The information for the map was mainly gathered at the [56a Infoshop](#) in Elephant & Castle, London. This is a rare long-lasting movement project, which has a large archive to trawl through. Their suggestion was to add photos of projects (then and now) which would be a great addition but also a lot of work. Surprisingly, the [Institute for Social History](#) in Amsterdam was also quite helpful in finding places from the 1980s, a decade for which the map is still far from complete.

## Madrid

When we started our map, we could rely on the work done by others. [One of them](#) listed squatter actions until the mid-1990s, while others focused more on recent squats, for example [okupa tambien](#), [agita madrid](#) and [15mpedia](#).

A problem with these sources was however that they were not complete and that many data inputs were wrong. We could verify much of the information



and add new cases by checking squatters and mainstream news websites.

Often, firsthand knowledge was crucial in checking data.

Our mapping effort sparked a group that from 2008 to 2010 met regularly to research and discuss the history of squatting in Madrid. These meetings among other gave way to a book publication.

Our database is limited to squatted social centers and covers the period from 1977 to 2015. This choice was informed mainly by the fact that information on these squats is more easily accessible and public. All of them are located in the metropolitan area of Madrid (municipality and region). In one case, a squat from a bordering province (Guadalajara) is included due to its active role in the 2008 campaign against the eviction of social centers. In addition, fourteen cases of occupation urban plots of land are also included. In most cases, regular squatters were involved in these projects, and many of these spaces functioned as a sort of outdoor social centers. In total, it covers 155 squats, although it must be noted that only eight are registered for the period between 1977 and 1980.

Residential squatted houses are generally excluded from the list. Usually, squatters do not recognize the residential function of a squat, because that entails more legal risks. Thus, researchers are not to mention the residential function of squats unless a prudent amount of time has passed. This applies specifically to the currently active squatted houses or the recent ones from the last 5 years.

In fact, less than thirty squatted social centers hosted residents. In some cases, the initial purpose of a squat was to provide a home. More often than, however, it was later decided to open up parts of the building as a cultural and political venue.

## **Paris**

The map for Paris is not finished and currently under progress. The process is long. I work with a database of around 400 squats since the 1950s. I have

collected the data for a research about squatting and urban policies between 2010 and 2015. The data were collected and completed through interviews with squatters or previous squatters for the most recent period, also helped by press reviews and analysis of websites documents (squat.net + Intersquat). For the oldest squats, I used works from historians (among others C. Pechu and B. Colin) and press reviews. For each squats, I tried to find informations for 20 variables about location, period, type of property, type of squat, relations with authorities, with neighbours etc...

But the database is not exhaustive and focus too much on the Paris centre and its closest suburbs while there are / were also many squats in the suburbs. Besides, most of the squats in Paris (as in most of the European Cities) are invisible and cannot be considered as social centres. They are rather residential squats where different kinds of population live, mostly very precarious, in Paris and its Northern suburbs. I have an aggregated database (by Departments) and I won't put them in the SqEK Map. We can estimate that there are more than 3000 squats of this kind in the Paris Region.

A map is an important resource for both sides. Statistics and maps are tools for power: governments can build and analyze database in order to control the population. However, social movements and resistant can also use this tool as a way to resist and develop an alternative knowledge on the history of squatting for example. Thus, the issue is to turn this map into a tool for resistance. Among many debates we had with SqEK members and other activists, I found the idea of mapping only squatted social centres that have been closed very interesting. The issue is important. On the one hand, it is necessary to respect the will of collectives not to be visible on the map. On the other hand, this work could be part of a process of memory building for social movements.

## Potsdam

### Boumanns bei einer Neu-Besetzung 2000



*An image from the Potsdam map*

The map is almost complete and documents the history of squatting in Potsdam between 1985 and 2006. In the beginning of the 1990s, Potsdam was a centre of the German squatting movement.

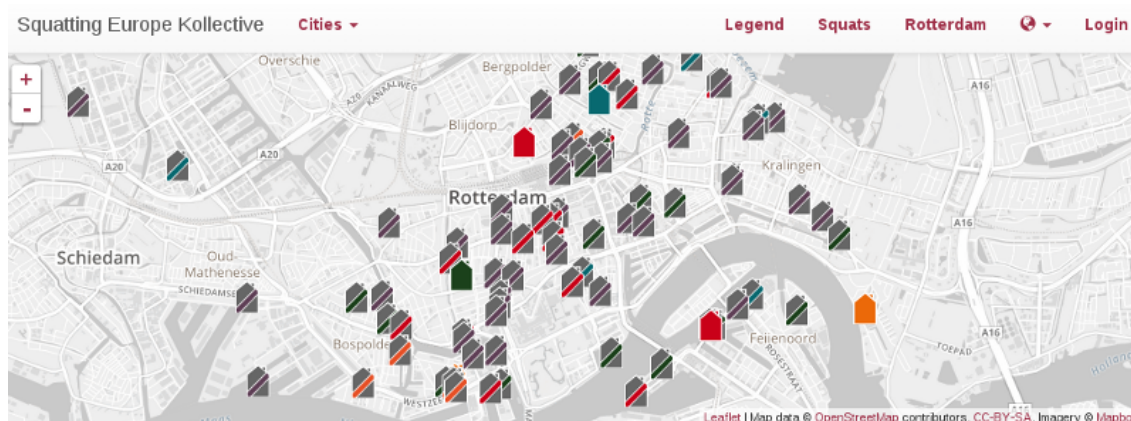
It was not easy to find all this material. There was no coherent collection of information about this local phenomenon, the relevant sources were scattered in different places. The sources of this collection are newspapers, different archives, flyers from the movement, interviews with squatters, movie clips, pictures... . A lot of former squatters gave me their collections of material and supported this project.

Some houses have a description, for a lot of buildings background information was not found.

I added a short history of squatting and tried to explain squatting from a historical perspective. A central point in this contribution is the system change 1989/1990 where public squatting was born. I try to show the main

lines of development and the connection between squatting in the time of GDR and the practice of squatting after the fall of the Berlin wall. I think the map makes it possible to show the diversity of squatting, local concentrations, spaces of public struggles and more.

## Rotterdam



Rotterdam has a largely hidden and underground squatting history, so it was a question of pretty much starting from scratch with the research. Since I had squatted in Rotterdam in the 2000s I had some leads and one squatter from the 1980s was very helpful. Otherwise people were supportive but were either not very interested to spend time adding places or could not remember much coherent info from their days of squatting. The city archive had a limited amount of information but what revolutionised the search was the tip from the Leiden mappers to use [delpher](http://delpher.nl), a website which facilitates the online search of digitised newspapers from the 20th century in a very easy format. I thus began a second phase of research (which is still ongoing) in which I am discovering the squats of the 1970s and 1980s. Whilst some people undoubtedly know about this since they were participants at the time, for me it is all totally fresh. I'm reading about the Phoenix Motorclub cracking a series of places for their workshop space, action groups occupying buildings for gastarbeiders (foreign migrant workers),

communities protesting emptiness and dereliction, the people of Spangen reopening their baths, artists providing themselves with atelier space, punks smashing up the ABN AMRO bank after an eviction, kids in the south squatting youth centres and police shooting at demonstrators during the eviction of a former bicycle factory.

It is very exciting to discover all this new information and the map is currently being used as a repository for data which will then be utilised for a separate project to produce a book about squatting in Rotterdam.

Hopefully recording all these projects will help contribute to a broader awareness of how squatters have shaped the city of Rotterdam.

Unfortunately, as the map shows, there are not so many current projects. Nevertheless, it brightens up my day as I cycle around the city to see places which I have just inputted on the map and to see what function they have now.

## **Moving forward**

The maps we have produced, through hours of labour, have the potential to be a really useful activist resource. Over time, hopefully crowd-sourced data will improve them and make them more complete. Despite the difficulties engendered through varying approaches, a disinterested developer and the transnational nature of the collective, the maps form a delightful means to feed our academic work back into a more activist function of radical history, since many more people will see the maps than read the articles and databases.



The mapping project aimed at presenting the history of squatting in an easy manner to access and navigate for past and new activists. Compared to academic articles the maps, pictures, locations, short texts and links open up more ways to delve into that history. They also provide indications to compare cities and urban areas within cities. A map is just a tool to facilitate access to information and to produce knowledge, although all the political implications are responsibility of those who interpret this information. Squatting projects tend to be omitted, stigmatised and misunderstood, so the maps contribute to the public debate about it. As a collaborative tool open to suggestions from visitors to the webpages, it bridges the activist scenes and the SqEK in a supplementary fashion to the meetings, talks and publications we also produce. Given the complexity of the technical aspects involved (new icons for the legends, implementation of queries, scales, different languages, etc.) and the social networks of people involved (those collecting data, those entering in the maps, those maintaining and updating, etc.) the project is for sure a work in progress that need to be enhanced in the coming years and, perhaps, linked to similar ones.

Finally, as one would expect, there were concerns for many about the utility of the maps for the state and other repressive organisations, an issue which has occasioned much debate. There is no easy answer here and different cities approached the maps in different ways. One approach was only to profile social centres, defined in a loose sense as politically active squats open to all, which therefore already had a public presence. Thus these places were already present in the media and often had websites, so the maps are not so much revealing anything as collating data already available.

Otherwise one city was requested to be taken off the database since participants in the local squatters movement decided they would rather not be profiled in an online, publicly available map.

As can be seen from the individual accounts above, people are using the mapping project in different ways and new research opportunities are the result. The process is ongoing. Within this, there are still of course questions to be answered, for example:

What can we usefully say with this kind of visualisation?

Can we represent connections and relationships between the different local movements in Europe?

How could the maps grow?

## **Link**

This article can be found online at the open access Trespass website at <https://www.trespass.network/?p=231&lang=en>

# Mapping the Movement: Die Erstellung von Karten von besetzten sozialen Zentren in Westeuropa

Thomas Aguilera  
Claudio Cattaneo  
E.T.C. Dee  
Miguel Martinez  
Bart van der Steen  
Jakob Warnecke



## Einführung

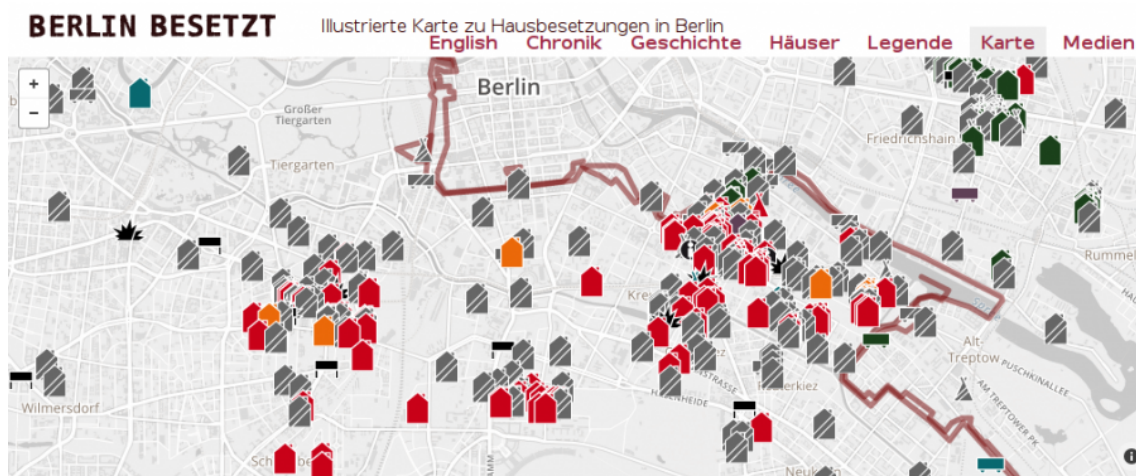
Im Jahr 2013 kam eine Gruppe von Aktivist\_innen zusammen, um die Geschichte der Berliner Hausbesetzer\_innenbewegung digital und interaktiv abzubilden. Über das Konzept der Kartierung der Bewegung schreiben sie: „Da die Aneignung des urbanen Raumes das zentrale Thema der Hausbesetzer\_innenbewegung ist, muss auch ihre Geschichte räumlich dargestellt werden.“ Ziel der Berliner Gruppe ist es, jene selbstverwalteten und kollektiven Räume sichtbar zu machen, die sich in der Stadt fanden



und finden, und die „Entwicklung und räumliche Ausdehnung der Bewegung“ nachvollziehbar machen.

Es ist überflüssig zu erwähnen, dass sie eine beeindruckende Arbeit geleistet haben. Ihre Website bietet einen nahezu vollständigen Überblick über besetzte Plätze in Berlin seit den 1970er Jahren und stellt eine enorme Menge an Informationen und Material zu den einzelnen Besetzungen bereit. Die Seite bietet zudem nicht nur eine erstaunliche Anzahl von Beiträgen, sondern auch Fotos, gescannte Dokumente, eine Chronologie, Informationen zu Veranstaltungen und Organisationen, wie Demonstrationen, Infoshops und dergleichen, die mit Hausbesetzungen zusammenhängen.

Natürlich erfordert ein solches Projekt enorme Arbeit und Koordination. Die Berliner Gruppe erhielt ihre Daten aus Bewegungspublikationen, Zeitungsartikeln, Interviews mit Aktivisten und Archivforschung. Wie sie schreiben, hat sich diese Aufgabe auf „mehrere Jahre selbstgestützte Forschung“ ausgeweitet, da die so gesammelten Daten „in immer umfangreichere Excel-Tabellen eingegeben wurden“. Da diese Art von Forschung von mehreren Personen gleichzeitig durchgeführt wurde, waren Engagement und Kommunikation essentiell.



Die Seite von [Berlin Besetzt](#) ist ein wertvolles Instrument für die historische Forschung und die Reflexion von Aktivisten über die Geschichte und die Gegenwart der urbanen sozialen Bewegungen. Interessanterweise reflektiert die Berliner Gruppe dies zweifach. Als Gruppe glauben sie, dass die historische Abbildung der Bewegung eine politische Intervention darstellt, da sie zeigt, dass es Interventionsmöglichkeiten gab und gibt. Andererseits zitieren sie „ältere Aktivisten“, die ihnen sagen, dass es „Unsinn“ wäre so viel Zeit damit zu verbringen, die Geschichte einer Bewegung zu studieren, die „gescheitert und verschwunden“ ist.

Die beiden oben erwähnten Fragen, das Engagement und die Kommunikation zu einem Projekt und die Frage, ob eine Bewegung eine politische Intervention darstellt oder ob es sich um einen bloßen „Unsinn“ handelt, sollten eine wichtige Rolle spielen, wenn andere Gruppen dem Beispiel von Berlin Besetzt folgen. Als andere Aktivist\_innen und Akademiker\_innen die Karte gesehen haben, wollten sie etwas Ähnliches machen. Dabei kam das [Squatting Europe Kollektive](#) (SqEK) ins Spiel.

SqEK ist eine Gruppe von Aktivisten, die zu Hausbesetzer\_innenbewegungen arbeiten. In der [Forschungsagend](#) (in EN / ES / FR / IT) heißt es: „Unser Ziel ist es, zuverlässige und genaue Kenntnisse über diese Bewegung nicht nur als Selbstzweck, sondern auch als öffentliche Ressource, vor allem für Hausbesetzer\_innen und Aktivist\_innen zu produzieren. Kritisches Engagement, Transdisziplinarität und vergleichende Ansätze sind die Grundlagen unseres Projektes.“

Das Kollektiv repräsentiert eine breite Forscher\_innengruppe, die aus unterschiedlichen Disziplinen stammt und sich auf unterschiedliche Interessenfelder konzentriert. Während manche sich auf die politische Geschichte der Hausbesetzer\_innen konzentrieren, zielen andere darauf ab, soziologische Analysen der gegenwärtigen Hausbesetzer\_innenszenen zu entwickeln oder Hausbesetzungen aus philosophischer oder kultureller

Perspektive zu betrachten. Die Stärke der Gruppe liegt in ihrem Fokus auf der Förderung der Interaktion und den Übergängen zwischen diesen verschiedenen Ansätzen.

Das Kollektiv organisiert jährliche Konferenzen und hat verschiedene Bücher und Bände verfasst und herausgegeben. Dies war auch die Inspiration für ein vergleichendes Forschungsprojekt zu Hausbesetzer\_innen-Bewegungen in zwölf europäischen Städten. Unter dem Motto [MOVOKEUR](#) zielte das Forschungsprojekt darauf ab, die Kontexte zu analysieren, in denen diese Bewegungen gedeihen, Protestzyklen sich entwickeln, wie Prozesse der Institutionalisierung sich gestalten und auf die Art und Weise wie Identitäten durch diese Bewegungen geprägt und beeinflusst werden. Grafische Darstellungen von einigen dieser Themen sind [online](#) verfügbar.

Ausgangspunkt des Projekts war es zunächst, für diese zwölf Städte Datenbanken zu besetzten sozialen Zentren aufzustellen. Diese würden dann die Rohdaten für weitere Analysen bereitstellen. Dies stellt die Grundlage für individuelle Fallstudien sowie Vergleichsstudien bereit, die von Palgrave Macmillan 2017 in Buchform veröffentlicht werden. Bereits jetzt sind Datenbanken und Artikel über diese Daten [online](#) verfügbar.

Während die Daten über besetzte soziale Zentren in verschiedenen Städten gesammelt, kompiliert und verarbeitet wurden, schien es bald nur logisch, die so erzeugten Datensätze durch digitalisierte, interaktive Karten zu visualisieren. So war dies eine zwar ungeplante, aber sehr willkommene Ausgründung aus dem ursprünglichen MOVOKEUR-Projekt. Dennoch wurde dieser Schritt erst durch die Inspiration der Berlin Besetzt-Seite und deren Fachwissen ermöglicht, da auch einige Berlin Besetzt-Forscher\_innen zum SqEK-Netzwerk gehören.

Dennoch entwickelte das [SqEK-Mapping-Projekt](#) schnell eine eigene Dynamik. Getreu dem Kerngedanken des Kollektivs wurde das Kartierungsprojekt von unten organisiert. Es gibt keine zentrale

Koordinierungsstelle, die das Gesamtprojekt leitet oder steuert oder die Kartierung einzelner Städte verwaltet. Neue Gruppen und Einzelpersonen können sich bewerben, um dem Projekt beizutreten und die Stadt ihrer Wahl zu bearbeiten. Das MOVOKEUR-Projekt steht im Mittelpunkt der Bemühungen und deshalb sind mehrere Städte ziemlich gut abgebildet. Gleichzeitig sind aber andere Städte noch lange nicht abgeschlossen. Diese Situation steht in einem direkten Zusammenhang mit der Organisation des Projekts. Wenn neue Menschen dem Projekt beitreten, können sie „ihre“ Stadt auf ihre eigene Art und Weise in ihrem eigenen Tempo abbilden.

Da die Mitwirkenden in verschiedenen Orten Westeuropas verteilt sind, ist es manchmal schwierig, in Verbindung zu bleiben und kollektive Bemühungen richtig zu organisieren. Dabei kann es mitunter schwierig sein, über E-Mails zu diskutieren. Einige fühlen sich durch eine Mail nicht angesprochen, die an alle gerichtet ist. Dieses Thema ist mit den bereits erwähnten Themen Engagement und Kommunikation verbunden.

Da SqEK ein transnationales Kollektiv ist, spielt dabei auch die Frage der Sprache eine Rolle, weil Englisch die dominierende akademische Sprache ist, während es die Muttersprache nur einer kleinen Minderheit in der Gruppe ist, und weil das MOVOKEUR-Projekt in spanischsprachige Forscher\_innen, die an Städten im spanischen Staat arbeiten, und Forscher\_innen, die vorwiegend in Englisch kommunizieren, die an nordeuropäischen Städten arbeiteten.

# Wenn Räumung - dann Beule

Ohne Puschmann kein Krawall



Räumung der Kadterschmiede am 28.5. verhindern  
Rigaer94 bleibt - keine Räumung niemals nicht

Die Rigaer94 ist ein ex-besetztes Haus in Berlin. Ein Gerichtsvollzieher - ein gewisser Thomas Puschmann - verlangt für Dienstag, den 28.5.'02 die friedliche und freiwillige Herausgabe von mehreren Erdgeschoßräumen, in welchen sich das Projekt Kadterschmiede befindet. Angekündigt hat sich der Herr Gerichtsvollzieher für 8.00 Uhr morgens. Es ist unklar und wird wohl auch unklar bleiben, ob er sofort mit Bullen anrückt oder sich deren Unterstützung erst in den folgenden Stunden, Tagen oder Wochen besorgt.

Ihr seid aufgefordert, Aktionen gegen die Räumung mit den Euch als geeignet erscheinenden Mitteln zu unterstützen. Möglich und sinnvoll ist das Blockieren der Zufahrtsstraßen um die Rigaer94. Ab dem 25.5. wird es Pennplätze geben.

28.5. Berlin -  
Friedrichshain



<http://rigaer94.squat.net>

vide: gerhard müller, bochagener str. 34, berlin

Obwohl die Bottom-up-Struktur dem SqEK-Mapping-Projekt seine Vitalität verleiht, gibt es auch gewisse Nachteile. Vor allem können viele der SqEK-Karten (noch) nicht den Anspruch auf Vollständigkeit wie bei Berlin Besetzt vorweisen. Der Webentwickler fügte erst im Mai 2015, als das MOVOKEUR-Projekt offiziell zu Ende ging, die Möglichkeit hinzu, Fotos hochzuladen. Daher haben einige Städte wie Amsterdam, Barcelona, Brighton und Madrid keine visuellen Dokumente hochgeladen, da die Arbeit beendet war, bevor diese Möglichkeit bestand und dann keine weiteren wirtschaftlichen Ressourcen zur Verfügung standen, um die Arbeit fortzuführen.

Da die Kommunikation zwischen den verschiedenen Mappern nicht immer optimal ist, besteht ein Risiko für die Einheitlichkeit der Daten (und Datenverarbeitung), die auf der Grundlage des Mappingprozesses stehen. Beispielsweise verwenden verschiedene Städte oft unterschiedliche Zeitrahmen für ihre Mapping-Projekte, während es auch unterschiedliche Ansichten über die Arten von Hausbesetzungen gibt, die abgebildet werden sollten. Während die meisten Projekte sich auf die primäre Kartierung von besetzten sozialen Zentren konzentrieren, nehmen andere auch Hausbesetzungen zu Wohnzwecken auf.

Nicht zuletzt lassen die [SqEK-Karten](#) noch den optischen Reiz der Berlin Besetzt-Seite vermissen. Die Karten sollten vom Entwickler mit einer der [Berliner Karte](#) ähnlichen Qualität produziert werden, aber dies ist eindeutig noch nicht der Fall. Berlin Besetzt hat mehr Features und sieht insgesamt viel hübscher aus. Das ist natürlich entscheidend für ein Projekt, das die verschiedenen Squatter-Initiativen „sichtbar“ macht, wie die Berliner Gruppe es ausdrückte.

Um die Herausforderungen des SqEK-Mapping-Projekts besser zu verstehen und effektiv voranzutreiben, ist es entscheidend, einen besseren Überblick darüber zu erhalten, wie das SqEK-Kollektiv in der Praxis funktioniert. In Anbetracht der signifikanten Unabhängigkeit der einzelnen Mapper, die dem Bottom-up-Ansatz von SqEK treu bleiben, werden in diesem Beitrag Fragen

zu den einzelnen Mappern gestellt. Welche Herausforderungen begegnen euch bei der Kartierung „eurer“ Städte? Wie seht ihr diese Herausforderungen und wie behandelt und reflektiert ihr diese? Diese Fragen stehen im Mittelpunkt dieses Kapitels, in dem wir uns auf die einzelnen Projekte konzentrieren, die den Aufwand des SqEK-Mapping ausmachen. In einem abschließenden Absatz werden wir über die allgemeineren konzeptionellen Fragen nachdenken, die durch die individuellen Erfahrungen der Mapper hervorgerufen werden.

## **Der Prozess der Kartierung**



Auf der Website von [maps.squat.net](http://maps.squat.net) finden sich Stadtpläne von Amsterdam, Barcelona, Brighton, London, Madrid, Potsdam und Rotterdam.

Informationen zu weiteren Städten wie Kopenhagen, Hamburg, Leiden, Oslo, Paris und Sevilla folgen. Die zuerst genannten Karten werden als abgeschlossen betrachtet, da die Forscher\_innen die Eingabe von Daten mittlerweile abgeschlossen haben.

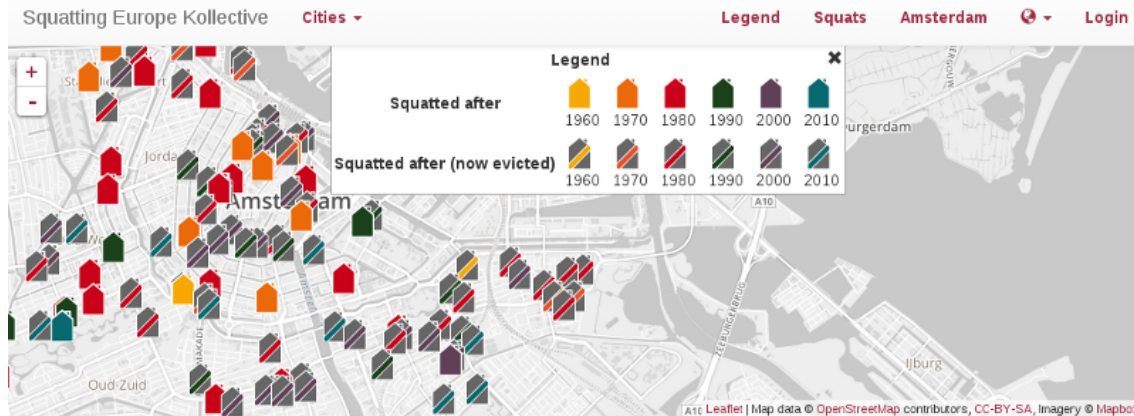
Natürlich kann ein solches Projekt nie als vollendet betrachtet werden, da es immer neue Besetzungen zum Hochladen gibt. Außerdem werden immer mehr Menschen Besetzungen aus der Vergangenheit hinzufügen. Dieser Prozess wird durch ein zusätzliches Feature (ein Kommentar-Formular), bei dem anonym Besetzungen zugefügt werden können, erleichtert. Dieses Feature basiert auf dem Bottom-up-Ansatz von SqEK und es ist zu hoffen, dass auf diese Weise die Crowdsourcing-basierten Informationen ein wichtiger Teil sowohl der alten als auch der neuen Karten werden können.

Dennoch werden gegenwärtig die Städte individuell oder durch Gruppen bearbeitet. Auf Wunsch haben die meisten von ihnen auf unseren Aufruf geantwortet und uns kurze Überlegungen über ihre Erfahrungen geschickt. Im Folgenden werden wir die Erfahrungen derjenigen zitieren, die folgende Städte darstellen: Amsterdam, Barcelona, Brighton, London, Madrid, Paris, Potsdam und Rotterdam. Dabei konzentrieren wir uns auf konkrete Fragen, wie zum Beispiel:

1. Welche Art von Quellen hast du verwendet und auf welche Weise hast du die gesammelten Informationen verarbeitet?
2. Wie definierst du die Besetzungen, die du kartografierst?
3. Ist Ihre Karte vollständig, ist das Projekt beendet?
4. Wie hast du den Kartierungsprozess erlebt und welche Auswirkungen hat er auf dich oder auf deine Umwelt?



## Amsterdam



Mit 171 Projekten von den 1960er Jahren bis Ende 2013 ist Amsterdam noch lange nicht fertig. Ich verbrachte gut eine Woche am [Institut für Sozialgeschichte](#) (IISH) in Amsterdam, verschlang Informationen und las alle Grachtenkranten, die Hausbesetzer-Zeitung, die über sechshundert Ausgaben zählt und von 1979 bis 2008 erschien. Nicht in Amsterdam zu leben, erschwerte meine Forschung, obwohl einige Leute ein bisschen helfen. Es gibt eine Sache, die wirklich durch die Karte zum Vorschein gebracht wird. Wenn ihr den ‚all years‘ -Kasten deaktiviert und den Timer langsam von Jahr zu Jahr ziehen, seht ihr die Anzahl der Projekte aus den 1970er und 1980er Jahren, die noch existieren. Viele dieser Projekte halten sich an radikale Politik und sind noch heute mit der Bewegung verbunden. Damit stellen sie eine gewaltige Infrastruktur zur Verfügung und bilden für die heutigen Aktivisten eine Art lebendige Geschichte. Durch die einfache Tatsache ihres Fortbestehens bieten diese Orte einen gewaltigen Schub für die gegenwärtigen Kämpfe.

## Barcelona

Die Karte von Barcelona umfasst die gesamte Metropolenregion. Es enthält nur besetzte soziale Zentren. Besetzte Häuser, die Wohnzwecken dienen sind

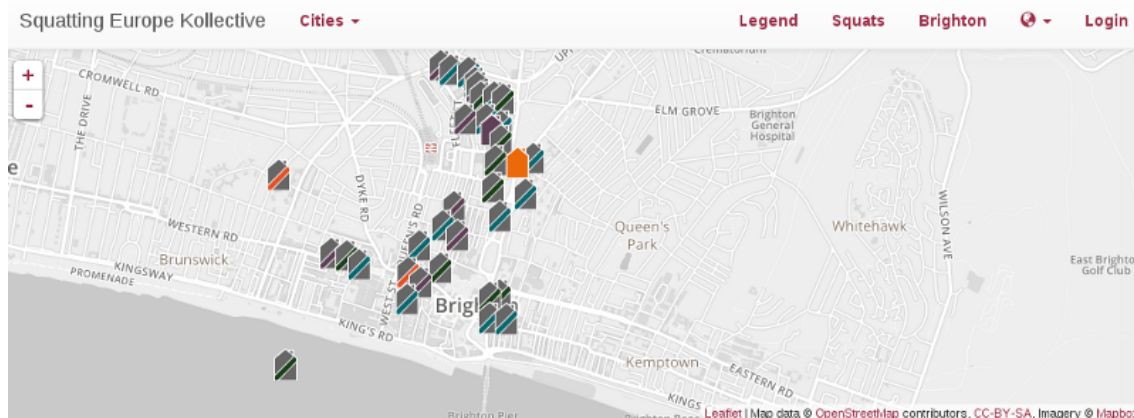
ausgeschlossen. Aufgrund ihrer großen Anzahl wäre es extrem schwierig, eine vollständige Auflistung von ihnen zu bieten. Insgesamt umfasst die Karte rund sechshundert soziale Zentren, die grundlegende Informationen über jedes von ihnen bereitstellt. (vor allem die Start- und Räumungstermine).

Unsere Daten über Sozialzentren von 1995 bis heute wurden von den Webseiten [Info-Usurpa](#) und [Contra-Infos](#) bezogen. Diese beiden Werkzeuge ermöglichten es, auf einfache Weise Wissen über eine große Anzahl von politischen Besetzungen zu sammeln. Für die aktuellsten Informationen konnten wir die Website [15mpedia.org](http://15mpedia.org) als Informationsquelle nutzen. Für den Zeitraum vor 1995 haben wir dies aus bibliographischer Forschung und aktivistischem Wissen gezogen.

Aus verschiedenen Gründen ist es zunehmend schwieriger geworden, jüngste Ereignisse und Squatter-Aktionen abzubilden. Zunächst ist seit der Entstehung der 15 M Bewegung im Jahr 2011 die Zahl der Besetzer\_innenaktionen dramatisch gestiegen. Darüber hinaus wird die Kommunikation innerhalb der Bewegung mitunter durch die Heterogenität der Bewegung selbst behindert. Außerdem gibt es Unterschiede zwischen einer alten und einer neuen Generation von Hausbesetzer\_innen, das gleiche gilt für katalanische und ausländische Hausbesetzer\_innen.

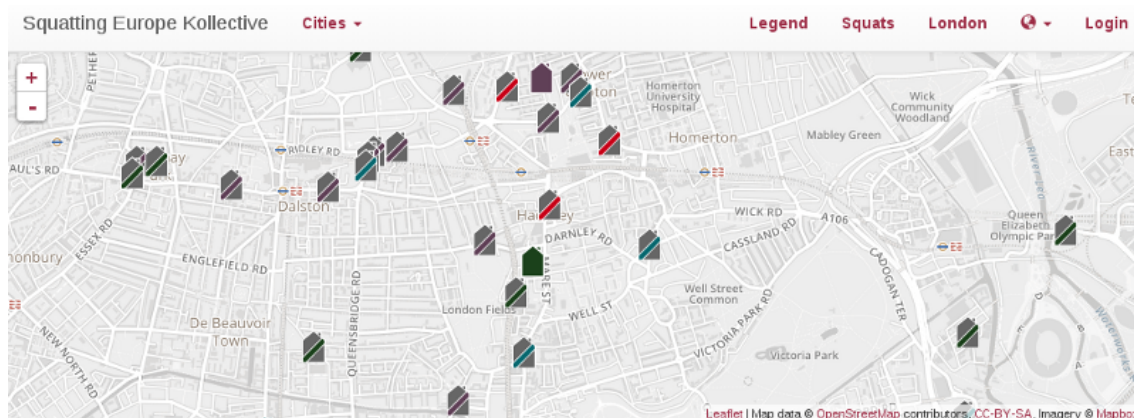
Interessenten können auf die Karte zugreifen und neue Informationen hinzufügen. Bisher hat jedoch nur ein Kollektiv ein Update auf die ursprüngliche Datenbank gepostet. Dies kann auch durch die begrenzte Öffentlichkeit erklärt werden, die wir auf der Karte unter Aktivist\_innen gegeben haben.

## Brighton



Das Mapping für Brighton machte Spaß, weil ich dort lebte und so Zugang zu Menschen hatte, die in verschiedenen Zeiten von den 1970er Jahren bis heute besetzten. Das bedeutet, dass die Karte ziemlich voll ist, zumal (im Vergleich zu den anderen Städten hier) Brighton nicht sehr groß ist. Natürlich kommen noch Projekte hinzu.

## London



Die meisten Leute spotteten, als ich ihnen sagte, dass ich Hausbesetzungen in London auf einer Karte abbilden würde, denn die Stadt ist so groß und hat Tausende, wenn nicht gar Hunderttausende von Besetzungsaktionen seit den

1960er Jahren erlebt. Die Begrenzung des Projekts auf die Zuordnung von sozialen Zentren erleichterte die Arbeit, auch wenn das Ergebnis noch viel mehr Input erfordert. Bisher wurden 263 Projekte eingefügt.

Die Informationen für die Karte wurden vor allem im [56a Infoshop](#) in Elephant & Castle, London, gesammelt. Dies ist ein selten langlebiges Bewegungsprojekt, das ein großes Archiv hat. Ihr Vorschlag war, Fotos von Projekten (damals und heute) hinzuzufügen, was ein großer Zusatz wäre, aber auch eine Menge Arbeit. Überraschenderweise war das [Institut für Sozialgeschichte](#) in Amsterdam auch sehr hilfreich bei der Suche nach Orten aus den 1980er Jahren, ein Jahrzehnt, für das die Karte noch lange nicht abgeschlossen ist.

## Madrid

Als wir unsere Karte begannen, konnten wir uns auf die Arbeit anderer verlassen. [Einer von ihnen](#) hat Squatter-Aktionen bis Mitte der Neunzigerjahre aufgelistet, während andere sich mehr auf die jüngsten Kniebeugen konzentrierten, z. B. [okupa tambien](#), [agita madrid](#) und [15mpedia](#).

Ein Problem mit diesen Quellen war jedoch, dass sie nicht vollständig waren und dass viele Dateneingänge falsch waren. Wir konnten viele der Informationen überprüfen und neue Fälle hinzufügen, indem wir Besetzer\_innen- und Mainstream-Seiten auswerteten. Oft war das Wissen aus erster Hand entscheidend für die Überprüfung der Daten.

Aus unseren Bemühungen entstand eine Gruppe, die von 2008 bis 2010 regelmäßig zu Forschung und Diskussion über die Geschichte der Besetzer\_innen in Madrid zusammenkam. Diese Treffen ebneten unter anderem den Weg für eine Buchveröffentlichung.

Unsere Datenbank ist auf soziale Zentren begrenzt und umfasst den Zeitraum von 1977 bis 2015. Diese Auswahl begründet sich vor allem durch die Tatsache, dass Informationen über diese Besetzungen leichter zugänglich und öffentlich sind. Alle befinden sich in der Metropolenregion von Madrid

(Gemeinde und Region). In einem Fall ist eine Besetzung aus einer angrenzenden Provinz (Guadalajara) aufgrund ihrer aktiven Rolle in der Kampagne gegen die Vertreibung von sozialen Zentren im Jahr 2008 enthalten. Darüber hinaus sind vierzehn Fälle von Besetzungen städtischer Grundstücke enthalten. In den meisten Fällen waren regelmäßige Hausbesetzer\_innen an diesen Projekten beteiligt, und viele dieser Räume fungierten als eine Art soziales Zentrum im Freien. Insgesamt handelt es sich um 155 Besetzungen, obwohl zu beachten ist, dass nur acht für den Zeitraum zwischen 1977 und 1980 registriert sind.

Besetzte Wohnhäuser sind von der Liste ausgeschlossen. Normalerweise verzichten Hausbesetzer\_innen darauf, die Wohnfunktion eines besetzten Hauses zu kennzeichnen, denn das bringt mehr rechtliche Risiken mit sich. So erwähnen die Forscher\_innen die besetzten Wohnhäuser nicht, es sei denn, eine gewisse Zeit ist bereits vergangen. Dies gilt speziell für die derzeit besetzten Häuser oder die jüngsten der letzten 5 Jahre.

In der Tat, weniger als dreißig besetzte sozialen Zentren sind bewohnt. In einigen Fällen war der ursprüngliche Zweck einer Besetzung, eine Wohnmöglichkeit zu schaffen. Häufig wurde aber im Nachgang beschlossen, Teile des Gebäudes als kulturellen und politischen Ort zu öffnen.

## **Paris**

Die Karte für Paris ist noch nicht fertiggestellt. Es ist ein langwieriger Prozess. Ich arbeite mit einer Datenbank von rund 400 Besetzungen seit den 1950er Jahren. Ich habe die Daten für eine Untersuchung über Besetzungen und Stadtpolitik zwischen 2010 und 2015 gesammelt. Die Daten wurden gesammelt und durch Interviews mit Hausbesetzer\_innen und ehemaligen Besetzer\_innen für die jüngste Zeit, auch durch Presse-Reviews und Analyse von Internetdokumenten (squat.net + Intersquat) ergänzt. Für die ältesten Besetzungen verwendete ich Arbeiten von Historikern (ua C. Pechu und B. Colin) und Presseberichte. Für jede Besetzung versuchte ich, Informationen

für 20 Variablen über Lage, Zeitraum, Art der Eigenschaft, Art der Besetzung, Beziehungen mit Behörden, mit Nachbarn usw. zu finden...

Aber die Datenbank ist nicht vollständig, denn der Fokus liegt vor allem auf dem Pariser Zentrum und seinen nächsten Vororten, während es auch viele Besetzungen in den Vororten gab und gibt. Außerdem sind die meisten Besetzungen in Paris (wie in den meisten europäischen Städten) unsichtbar und können nicht als soziale Zentren betrachtet werden. Sie sind eher besetzte Wohnhäuser, wo verschiedene Arten von Bevölkerung leben, meist sehr prekär, in Paris und seinen nördlichen Vororten. Ich habe eine aggregierte Datenbank (von Abteilungen), und ich werde sie nicht in der SqEK-Karte integrieren. Wir können schätzen, dass es mehr als 3000 Besetzungen dieser Art in der Region Paris gibt.

Eine Karte ist eine wichtige Ressource für beide Seiten. Statistiken und Karten sind Werkzeuge für die Macht: Regierungen können Datenbank nutzen, um die Bevölkerung zu kontrollieren. Allerdings können soziale Bewegungen und widerständige Gruppen dieses Tool nutzen, um zu widerstehen und ein alternatives Wissen wie etwa über die Geschichte der Besetzungen entwickeln. Daher besteht das Problem darin, diese Karte zu einem Werkzeug für den Widerstand zu machen. Unter vielen Diskussionen, die wir mit SqEK-Mitgliedern und anderen Aktivisten hatten, fand ich die Idee, nur besetzte soziale Zentren zu kartieren, die geschlossen sind, sehr interessant. Das Thema ist wichtig. Auf der einen Seite ist es notwendig, den Willen der Kollektive zu respektieren, nicht auf der Karte sichtbar zu sein. Auf der anderen Seite könnte diese Arbeit auch Teil eines Prozesses der Gedächtnisbildung für soziale Bewegungen sein.

## Potsdam

### Boumanns bei einer Neu-Besetzung 2000



Die Karte ist fast vollständig und dokumentiert die Geschichte der Besetzungen in Potsdam zwischen 1985 und 2006. Anfang der 1990er Jahre war Potsdam ein Zentrum der deutschen Besetzer\_innenbewegung.

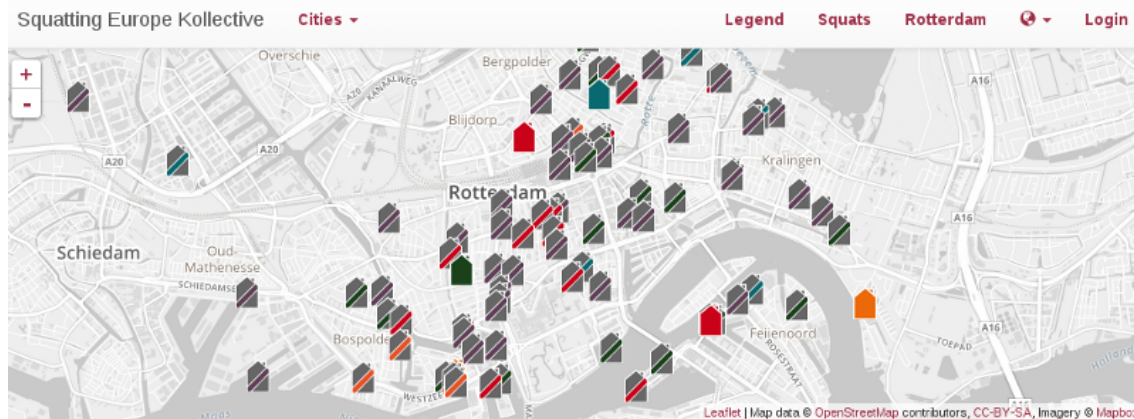
Es war nicht leicht, all dieses Material zu finden. Es gab keine zusammenhängende Sammlung von Informationen über dieses lokale Phänomen, die relevanten Quellen sind an verschiedenen Orten verstreut. Die Quellen dieser Sammlung sind Zeitungen, verschiedene Archive, Flyer aus der Bewegung, Interviews mit Hausbesetzern, Videoclips, Bilder .... Viele ehemalige Hausbesetzer gaben mir ihre Materialsammlungen und unterstützten dieses Projekt.

Einige Häuser haben eine Beschreibung, für viele Gebäude wurden keine Hintergrundinformationen gefunden.

Ich habe eine kurze Geschichte der Besetzungen angefügt und versucht, dies

aus einer historischen Perspektive zu erklären. Ein zentraler Punkt in diesem Beitrag ist der Systemwechsel 1989/1990, wo öffentliche Besetzungen entstanden. Ich versuche, die Hauptlinien der Entwicklung und die Verbindung zwischen den stillen Besetzungen in der DDR und der Praxis der Besetzungen nach dem Fall der Berliner Mauer zu zeigen. Die Karte macht es möglich, die Vielfalt der Besetzungen, lokale Konzentrationen, Räume der öffentlichen Kämpfe und vieles mehr zu zeigen.

## Rotterdam



Rotterdam hat eine weitgehend verborgene Squatting-Geschichte, so musste mit der Forschung erst begonnen werden. Da ich in Rotterdam in den 2000er Jahren besetzte, hatte ich etwas Vorsprung und ein Hausbesetzer aus den 1980er Jahren war sehr hilfreich. Ansonsten unterstützten mich die Menschen, aber sie waren nicht sehr interessiert Zeit mit dem Hinzufügen von Orten zu verbringen oder sie konnten sich nicht an sonderlich viele zusammenhängende Informationen aus ihren Besetzer\_innenzeiten erinnern. Das Stadtarchiv hatte eine begrenzte Menge an Informationen, aber was die Suche revolutionierte war der Tipp von den Leiden-Mappers, delpher zu verwenden, eine [Website](#), die die Online-Suche von digitalisierten Zeitungen aus dem 20. Jahrhundert in einem sehr einfachen Format erleichtert. Ich



begann damit eine zweite Phase der Forschung (die noch nicht abgeschlossen ist), in der ich die Besetzungen der 1970er und 1980er Jahre recherchiere. Während zweifellos einige Leute darüber Bescheid wissen, da sie Beteiligte in dieser Zeit waren, ist für mich alles ganz frisch. Ich lese über den Phoenix Motorclub, der sich eine Reihe von Plätzen für seine Werkstätten aneignete, Aktionsgruppen, die Gebäude für „gastarbeiters“ okkupierten (ausländische Wanderarbeiter), Gemeinden, die gegen Leere und Verlassenheit protestierten, wie die Leute von Spangen ihre Bäder erneut öffneten, Künstler\_innen, die sich selbst mit Atelierraum versorgten, Punks, die die ABN AMRO Bank nach einer Räumung beschädigten, Kids im Süden, die Jugendzentren besetzten und von der Polizei, die während der Räumung einer ehemaligen Fahrradfabrik auf Demonstrierende schießt. Es ist sehr aufregend, all diese neuen Informationen zu entdecken. Die Karte wird derzeit als Quelle für Daten verwendet, die dann für ein eigenes Projekt genutzt werden, um ein Buch über die Besetzungen in Rotterdam zu produzieren.

Hoffentlich wird die Aufnahme all dieser Projekte dazu beitragen, ein breiteres Bewusstsein dafür zu schaffen, wie Hausbesetzer\_innen die Stadt Rotterdam geformt haben. Leider, wie die Karte zeigt, gibt es nicht so viele aktuelle Projekte. Nichtsdestoweniger erhellt es meinen Tag, wenn ich durch die Stadt ziehe, um Plätze zu sehen, die ich gerade auf der Karte eingegeben habe und sehe, welche Funktion sie jetzt haben.

## **Das Projekt vorwärts bringen**

Die Karten, die wir durch viele Arbeitsstunden produziert haben, haben das Potential, eine wirklich nützliche Ressource zu sein. Im Laufe der Zeit werden die auf crowd sourcing basierten Daten die Karten verbessern und komplettieren. Trotz der Schwierigkeiten, die durch unterschiedliche

Ansätze, einen unbeteiligten Entwickler und den transnationalen Charakter des Kollektivs entstehen, bilden die Karten ein erfreuliches Mittel, um unsere akademische Arbeit wieder in eine aktivere Funktion der radikalen Geschichte einzubringen, da mehr Menschen die Karten sehen werden als die, die Artikel und Datenbanken lesen.



Das Mapping-Projekt zielte darauf ab, die Geschichte der Besetzer\_innen in einer einfachen Weise zu präsentieren und diese für ehemalige und neue Aktivisten zu navigieren. Gegenüber wissenschaftlichen Beiträgen eröffnen die Karten, Bilder, Orte, Kurztexpte und Links mehr Möglichkeiten, sich auf diese Geschichte einzulassen. Sie geben auch Hinweise darauf, Städte und Stadtgebiete innerhalb der Städte zu vergleichen. Eine Karte ist nur ein Instrument, um den Zugang zu Informationen zu erleichtern und Wissen zu erzeugen, obwohl alle politischen Implikationen für diejenigen verantwortlich sind, die diese Informationen interpretieren. Besetzte Projekte tendieren dazu, übergangen, stigmatisiert und missverstanden zu werden, so dass die Karten zu der öffentlichen Debatte über sie beitragen kann. Als kollaboratives Tool für Anregungen von Besucher\_innen der Webseiten bündelt es die aktivistischen Szenen ergänzend zu den von SqEK

produzierten Treffen, Vorträgen und Publikationen. Angesichts der Komplexität der technischen Aspekte (neue Ikonen für die Legenden, die Umsetzung von Abfragen, Skalen, verschiedenen Sprachen usw.) und die sozialen Netzwerke der beteiligten Personen (Datenerfassung, Datenerfassung, etc.) ist das Projekt sicher eine laufende Arbeit, die in den kommenden Jahren verstärkt werden und vielleicht mit Ähnlichem verbunden sein muss.

Schließlich, wie man erwarten würde, gab es Bedenken für viele über die Nützlichkeit der Karten für den Staat und andere repressive Organisationen, ein Thema, das viel Diskussion verursacht hat. Es gibt keine einfache Antwort und verschiedene Städte näherten sich den Karten auf unterschiedliche Weise. Ein Ansatz war, lediglich soziale Zentren zu profilieren, die in einem lockeren Sinne als politisch aktive Besetzungen offen für alle sind und daher bereits eine öffentliche Präsenz aufweisen. So waren diese Orte bereits in den Medien präsent und hatten oft Webseiten, so dass die Karten nicht mehr enthüllten, wie in den Datensammlungen bereits verfügbar war. Ansonsten wurde eine Stadt angefordert, aus der Datenbank genommen zu werden, da die Teilnehmer\_innen der lokalen Hausbesetzer\_innen beschlossen, dass sie lieber nicht in einer öffentlich zugänglichen Karte profiliert werden wollen. Wie aus den obigen Einzelzugängen ersichtlich ist, nutzen die Menschen das Mapping-Projekt unterschiedlich und neue Forschungsmöglichkeiten sind das Ergebnis. Der Vorgang läuft. Dabei sind natürlich noch Fragen zu beantworten, zum Beispiel: Was können wir mit dieser Art von Visualisierung sinnvoll sagen?

Können wir Beziehungen zwischen den verschiedenen lokalen Bewegungen in Europa vertreten? Wie können die Karten weiter wachsen?

## **Link**

<https://www.trespass.network/?p=588&lang=de>

## **Steun De Vloek 10!**

### **Samen kunnen wij deze schadeclaim dragen!**

Op 9 september 2015 werd sociaal centrum De Vloek ontruimd. De Vloek, gelegen in de haven van Scheveningen, was toen 13 jaar gekraakt en uitgegroeid tot een plek waar allerlei non-profit initiatieven zich hadden ontwikkeld. Anderhalf jaar lang werd er een breed gedragen campagne gevoerd voor het behoud van De Vloek en tegen de uitverkoop van de haven. Tien mensen die zich tot het laatst hebben verzet tegen de ontruiming werden daar opgepakt en veroordeeld tot gevangenisstraffen. Nu worden zij ook nog aansprakelijk gehouden in een absurde schadeclaim van de gemeente, en moeten van de rechter meer dan 33.000€ betalen.

Steun De Vloek 10 en help hen met het betalen van de schadeclaim!

Maanden na de ontruiming diende de gemeente een schadeclaim in van ruim 50.000€, waarvan nu ruim 33.000€ is toegewezen. De 10 zijn in hoger beroep gegaan, maar de gemeente weigert dit beroep af te wacht en eist dat het bedrag eind januari wordt overgemaakt. Omdat de 10 dit geldbedrag simpelweg niet hebben, hebben ze een betalingsregeling voorgesteld, maar hier worden ze nu door de gemeente mee gechanteed: die willen alleen praten over een betalingsregeling als het hoger beroep wordt ingetrokken. De Vloek 10 weigeren te buigen voor deze chantage. Dit heeft wel tot gevolg dat de gemeente binnen afzienbare tijd beslag zal laten leggen op loon en bezittingen.

Alle initiatieven die een plek hadden binnen de Vloek werden opgezet en draaiende gehouden zonder subsidie, en het pand werd in eigen beheer gerund door vrijwilligers. De Vloek gaf ruimte aan het biologisch-veganistisch restaurant "Water en Brood", de concertzaal "de Piratenbar",

vele werkplaatsen, ateliers, woonruimtes en oefenruimtes voor bands. Wekelijks kwamen er honderden mensen af op de activiteiten in De Vloek. Wij willen niet dat de 10 mensen van De Vloek, die zich tot het allerlaatst hebben verzet tegen de onnodige ontruiming en sloop van deze mooie en belangrijke plek en daar al vast voor hebben gezeten, nu zelf moeten opdraaien voor een strijd die zoveel mensen aanging, en die door zovelen werd gesteund. Daarom vragen we jullie om de Vloek 10 te steunen en hen te helpen met het betalen van de schadeclaim. Samen kunnen wij deze schadeclaim dragen!

Steun de Vloek 10, doneer!

<https://www.doneeractie.nl/steun-de-vloek-10/-850>

## **Link**

<https://www.trespass.network/?p=653&lang=nl>

## **Défendre la zad**

### **Mauvaise Troupe**

#### **Resumé**

*Ce texte est un appel à défendre la zad partout, et, à travers elle, tout l'espoir contagieux qu'elle contient dans une époque aride. La zad, comme conviction qu'il est possible d'arrêter les projets destructeurs de ceux qui prétendent nous gouverner. La zad, comme espace où s'inventent ici et maintenant d'autres manières d'habiter le monde, pleines et partageuses. Cet espoir s'ancre dans une histoire commune, riche des élans de dizaines de milliers d'insoumis et des liens soudés par le temps. Les lignes qui suivent évoquent quelques fragments décisifs de cette aventure, comme autant de repères éclatants pour l'avenir.*

#### **Mots clés**

ZAD, commune, habiter, territoire, expulsion, résistance

#### **Défendre la zad**

À l'automne 2015, le gouvernement annonçait, une fois de plus, que démarreraient au plus vite les travaux de l'aéroport de Notre-Dame-des-Landes. Il martèle depuis sa volonté d'expulser la zad de l'ensemble de ceux qui l'habitent et la cultivent. Avec les efforts conjugués des tractopelles de Vinci et des grenades de la gendarmerie, il entend tenter, «dès que possible», de venir à bout de tout ce qui pousse et vit dans ce bocage. Face à cette menace renouvelée, ce texte est un appel à défendre la zad partout, et, à travers elle, tout l'espoir contagieux qu'elle contient dans une époque aride. La zad, comme conviction qu'il est possible d'arrêter les projets destructeurs de ceux qui prétendent nous gouverner. La zad, comme espace où s'inventent ici et maintenant d'autres manières d'habiter le monde, pleines et partageuses. Cet espoir s'ancre dans une histoire commune, riche des élans de dizaines de milliers d'insoumis et des liens soudés par le temps. Les lignes qui suivent évoquent quelques fragments décisifs de cette aventure, comme autant de repères éclatants pour l'avenir.

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Nous sommes quelques habitant.e.s de la zad de Notre-Dame-des-Landes ou proches compagnons de route qui vivons au diapason de cette rébellion. Au sein de la Mauvaise troupe, nous travaillons depuis quelques mois à en récolter et à en colporter les récits à travers la publication d'une série d'entretiens et d'un ouvrage à paraître ce printemps. Mus par un sentiment d'urgence, nous avons décidé de prendre la plume pour raconter et répandre partout ce pour quoi il faut défendre la zad. Dans un monde où règne le « je », nous avons l'ambition de parler ici au « nous ». Celui employé dans ce livre nous dépasse et se risque même à incarner au fil du récit une des paroles collectives d'un mouvement fort de son hétérogénéité. Il n'en est pas la voix unique, mais une tentative d'énonciation de ce qui se construit de commun et d'indéracinable, dans l'entremêlement vivant de nos positions et de nos expériences singulières.

## La victoire face à César

C'était à l'automne 2012 dans le bocage de Notre-Dame-des-Landes. Ce fut le moment où, brusquement, tous les regards se tournèrent vers cette lutte contre un projet d'aéroport, qui devait atterrir sur près de 1650 ha de zones humides, hameaux et terres agricoles. Nous gardons le souvenir encore vif de ce que cet automne-là a bouleversé en chacun de nous, qui avons alors été happés, de près comme de loin, par le cours intense des événements.

Au petit matin du 16 octobre, sur une route de campagne bordée de haies et noyée dans une brume lacrymogène, une interminable colonne de fourgons s'ébranle. Cette armada précède les engins de chantier venus détruire quelques dizaines de fermes et cabanes occupées « sans droit ni titre », selon les termes des arrêtés d'expulsion reçus quelques mois plus tôt.

L'État semble alors tout avoir de son côté : des moyens financiers considérables, plus de mille hommes mobilisés, un équipement ultramoderne, une discipline de fer, des médias de masse pour relayer sa propagande, une « Déclaration d'Utilité Publique » de laquelle se réclamer pour asseoir son autorité. Ce projet d'aéroport est, bien sûr, au service de la *croissance*, de l'*emploi*, de la *transition écologique* et même de la sécurité ; en bref de tous les fétiches dont ceux qui nous gouvernent sont les gardiens et camelots.

Depuis les premières oppositions au projet dans les années 1970, et plus encore depuis sa relance début 2000, les années de travail de contre-expertise et d'information ont contribué à rendre l'aéroport largement impopulaire. D'année en année, les regards aiguisés ne se laissent plus berner. De bourg en bourg, la parole se libère et les enjeux se croisent : réchauffement climatique, protection de la biodiversité, préservation des terres agricoles, défense d'espaces réfractaires au désert consumériste qui s'étend avec la métropole... Le projet d'aéroport apparaît pour de plus en plus de gens comme étant d'abord un moyen de remplir les poches des industriels du btp, en tête desquels son constructeur et concessionnaire, la multinationale Vinci. Mais les consultations et enquêtes publiques de rigueur font peu de cas des solides arguments des opposants et ne se risquent pas à donner tort à leurs commanditaires. Puisque l'État semble aussi royalement s'asseoir sur les lois encadrant ces « *aménagements* », et dont il est pourtant censé être le garant, les associations anti-aéroport, acipa (Association Citoyenne Intercommunale des Populations concernées par le projet d'Aéroport) en tête, ont porté le combat sur le terrain des tribunaux. Elles y ont érigé méticuleusement, pendant des années, des barricades de papier propres à retarder l'échéance. La justice a fini par rejeter un à un presque tous les recours déposés. Sur bien d'autres fronts, les plus déterminés finissent alors généralement par baisser les bras et par laisser place à la marche forcée du progrès. Mais dans le bocage, celles et ceux qui habitent la zad refusent toujours de se soumettre et de dégager le terrain pour laisser place aux chantiers. Les études préliminaires aux travaux, forages et démarches de « compensation environnementale » ne cessent d'être bloqués ou sabotés.

Dans les cabinets de la Préfecture où l'on traite le dossier de l'Aéroport du Grand-Ouest, on planifie depuis des semaines l'intervention policière qui doit sécuriser le début des travaux. Un petit génie a l'idée saugrenue de baptiser cette intervention « opération César », dans un excès d'arrogance au pays d'Astérix. Le 16 octobre, après avoir déployé ses troupes, le préfet, persuadé d'avoir terrassé les irréductibles anti-aéroport, déclare en conférence de presse : « À 10 heures, tout était terminé. » Il ne se figure pas encore la détermination qui se dresse face à lui.

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Depuis ce 16 octobre au matin, face aux flics, il y a nous. Nous ne sommes d'abord pas nombreux, mais dès les premiers jours, nous sommes forts de



l'ancrage de cette lutte et de ce qu'elle a d'ores et déjà permis de rencontres composites.

Nous sommes des groupes d'« occupant·e·s » arrivés petit à petit depuis quelques années dans le bocage à l'appel d'un collectif d'« *Habitants qui résistent* ». Nous nous sommes attachés à ces terres en résistance, aux sentiers que l'on arpente à la recherche de mûres ou de champignons, aux aventures, aux fêtes et aux chantiers collectifs. Nous nous démenons autour de nos cabanes et maisons avec des boucliers de fortune, du matériel de grimpe pour se percher à la cime des arbres, des pierres, des feux d'artifice et quelques bouteilles incendiaires pour contenir et repousser les assauts adverses, du citron pour se prémunir des gaz et des ordinateurs pour contrer la propagande médiatique. Nous ne cessons de courir, haletants, dans la boue, pour entraver les mouvements policiers, et disparaissions derrière les haies et bosquets qui nous sont devenus si familiers. Nous attendons des heures, sous la pluie battante, derrière des barricades qui s'embrasent à l'approche des troupes.

Nous sommes des habitant·e·s et des paysan·e·s de la zad pour lesquels partir d'ici a toujours été inconcevable. Malgré les pressions incessantes et la précarité d'un avenir incertain, nous avons résisté jusqu'ici pour ne pas perdre les jardins que l'on bichonne et les liens avec nos voisins, les fermes rythmées par les horaires de la traite et les joies qu'offrent les lumières lunatiques du bocage. Nous ne sommes pas directement visés par cette première tentative d'expulsion grâce à un accord arraché au terme d'une longue grève de la faim en 2012 et protégeant encore, provisoirement, les habitants légaux. Mais sans hésitation, nous ouvrons nos granges et nos maisons, comme autant de refuges et de bases logistiques depuis lesquelles résister ensemble.

Nous sommes des alentours, militant·e·s chevronné·e·s, paysan·ne·s solidaires ou simples voisin·e·s que la situation a révoltés, abruptement. Nous nous retrouvons dans la grange de la Vacherit avec l'intime conviction d'avoir un rôle actif à jouer à ce moment-là. Nous avons pour armes et bagages des chaussettes sèches, des calicots, de quoi filmer l'expulsion et témoigner des violences policières, des stylos pour rédiger des lettres courroucées et des tronçonneuses pour renforcer les barricades en sacrifiant quelques arbres. Parmi nous, beaucoup d'anciens sont encore portés par la mémoire des luttes acharnées dans la région, qui ont déjà coûté à la « puissance économique de la France » l'échec de trois projets de centrales

nucléaires en 20 ans, à Plogoff, au Pellerin et au Carnet. Nous aussi, nous faisons face aux gendarmes, nos corps en travers de la route.

Nous sommes une communauté de lutte en train de naître.

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Entre les flics et nous, nos barricades semblent d'abord de bien frêles édifices. Érigées à la hâte dans la nuit, elles sont faites de bric et de broc : vieilles carcasses de voitures, pneus usagés, bottes de foin et tout ce qui passe sous la main. Ce qu'elles matérialisent, avant tout, c'est une obstination qui grandit.

Notre première victoire, en ces jours sans fin, c'est d'avoir tenu le terrain coûte que coûte face à ce déploiement massif dont le seul objectif était de nous acculer à la fuite et au renoncement. Notre première victoire fut de nous défendre malgré tout, alors que, justement, rien ne laissait présager la victoire.

Rapidement, plusieurs bâtiments de la zad sont néanmoins réduits à l'état de ruines, emportées jusqu'à la dernière pierre dans des camions-bennes, comme pour nettoyer jusqu'aux fragments de nos souvenirs. Mais de nombreux autres, parmi ceux qui sont menacés, restent encore debout.

“Après la première semaine d'expulsion, il y a eu la première manif à Nantes et je devais faire le discours introductif, et je tremblais, et j'ai eu cette idée d'énumérer tous les noms des lieux qui avaient été expulsés ou qui résistaient encore, des lieux-dits mais aussi des noms inventés par le mouvement d'occupation : la Bellich', le Coin, la Gaité, les Planchettes, les 100 Chênes, le No Name, les Fosses noires, les Vraies rouges, le Far west... Pour moi ça exprimait la manière dont cette zone qu'ils disaient vide était au contraire pleinement en vie.”

Jasmin, Naturaliste en lutte.

Nul ne peut prétendre être insensible à la peur, aux doutes et à la fragilité qui nous traversent en de telles circonstances. Mais il est un moment où éclôt la certitude partagée que s'il existe la moindre chance - si infime soit-elle - de pouvoir peser sur la situation dans laquelle nous sommes pris, alors

il faut la saisir. C'est cette certitude qui repousse les limites face au manque de sommeil, à l'humidité, à la boue et aux munitions policières. Il s'agit de relever la tête et d'accepter que résister, c'est toujours un coup de dés. En cet automne 2012, une fois les dés jetés, tout s'emballa.

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Chaque jour de plus en plus de monde converge vers la zad. À la Vacherit, le ravitaillement atteint des proportions délirantes, au point que le hangar agricole mis à la disposition de la lutte prend des airs de caverne d'Ali Baba, avec ses montagnes de fruits secs et de bottes, ses monticules de médicaments et de tablettes de chocolat, de radios à piles et de vêtements chauds. Le mouvement incessant de notre logistique improvisée et des va-et-vient à travers la zone fait fluctuer la taille de ces stocks vitaux, qui ne menacent cependant jamais de se tarir. Les barricades se reforment, de plus en plus imposantes, nuit après nuit, inlassablement reconstruites après chaque nouvel assaut. Des milliers de personnes, suspendues au flash-infos du site internet de la zad, vivent au rythme des événements. Sur Radio klaxon, qui pirate le 107.7 de Radio Vinci Autoroutes, les ondes résonnent des indications des positions des flics, entrecoupées par la lecture des messages de soutien qui affluent par centaines.

Au jardin maraîcher du Sabot, puis à la ferme squattée du Rosier, des paysans des quatre coins de la région, regroupés dans le collectif copain (Collectif des Organisations Professionnelles Agricoles INdignées par le projet d'aéroport), se jettent de tout cœur dans la bataille. Les « *tracteurs vigilants* » viennent décupler la force matérielle du mouvement, superposent bottes de foin et pylônes pour bloquer les chemins ou forment un anneau de protection autour des bâtiments menacés. L'esprit de révolte insufflé dans la région par le mouvement des Paysans-Travailleurs tout au long des années 1970, qui avait contribué à initier l'opposition à l'aéroport aux côtés des agriculteurs menacés par le projet, semble gronder de nouveau dans les campagnes de Loire-Atlantique.

De partout en France surgissent plus de 200 comités locaux, qui s'organisent collectivement pour venir sur le terrain et mènent chez eux des actions de solidarité protéiformes : contre-information, occupations de mairies, visites animées de permanences du Parti socialiste, péages gratuits sur les autoroutes Vinci et sabotages de ses chantiers, manifs et rassemblements... Tous ces gestes viennent étendre la lutte au niveau national et lui donnent une nouvelle dimension, dont on prendra vraiment la mesure avec la

manifestation de réoccupation. Annoncée de longue date, elle faisait le pari stratégique de déplacer l'enjeu du conflit. Il ne s'agissait plus seulement de se préparer à résister face à une expulsion, mais de démontrer que même s'ils parvenaient à nous chasser, nous reviendrions plus nombreux - « *un mois plus tard* » - pour reconstruire quelque chose d'encore plus puissant que ce qu'ils auraient cru pouvoir anéantir.

Nous sommes le 17 novembre 2012. Après quatre semaines de destructions et de combats, les flics s'effacent du paysage. Ils laissent place à une marée humaine de 40 000 personnes. Au départ de la manif, le petit bourg de Notre-Dame-des-Landes est comme englouti par la foule, au point que les centaines de tracteurs présents ne pourront se joindre au cortège. Quelques kilomètres plus loin, on voit passer de main en main d'innombrables planches et poutres qui disparaissent dans la forêt. Lové au cœur d'une châtaigneraie, un village surgit de terre en une journée, avec sa cuisine, sa manufacture, ses dortoirs, son « black bloc sanitaire », sa salle de réunion et sa « NoTAVerne », gargote dont le nom rend hommage à la lutte sœur du Val Susa contre le Treno Alta Velocità (le TGV italien). Pendant plusieurs mois, « La Chat-teigne » sera le point de ralliement des comités locaux, se relayant pour habiter les lieux. Ce soir-là, nous sommes des dizaines de milliers à repartir avec le sentiment d'avoir tordu le cou à César et renversé le cours de l'histoire. Nous sommes des dizaines d'autres à tout simplement ne plus pouvoir repartir du tout, saisis par l'intensité de l'aventure et prêts à désertier emplois et appartements.

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Nous sommes les 23 et 24 novembre 2012. Ce qui se joue ici a pris une ampleur telle que cette portion de territoire en suspens devient un sujet quotidien : des unes de la presse locale aux gros titres des médias nationaux, en passant par les discussions de comptoir et les réunions en haut-lieu, la zad est devenue le centre éphémère de la vie politique française.

“Il est hors de question de laisser un kyste s'organiser, se mettre en place, de façon durable, avec la volonté de nuire avec des moyens parfois dangereux. Nous mettrons tout en œuvre pour que la loi soit respectée (...) pour que les travaux puissent avoir lieu.”

Manuel Valls, alors ministre de l'Intérieur, le 23 novembre 2012.

Bien avant l'aube le vendredi 23, une cohorte de gendarmes mobiles pénètre en silence jusqu'au cœur de la zad. Dans les dortoirs, des corps en rang serré, emmitouflés dans leurs sacs de couchage, se reposent de la fête mémorable de la veille. Les guetteurs sur les barricades sonneront l'alerte, mais trop tard. Le temps pour tout le monde de s'extirper du sommeil, d'enfiler ses chaussettes humides et son emblématique paire de bottes boueuses, et les militaires ont déjà pris position autour des cabanes de la Chat-teigne. Une vitre brisée et quelques généreuses rasades de gaz lacrymogène plus tard, nous sommes chassés dans l'obscurité de la forêt alentour.

En cette fin de semaine, les autorités veulent reprendre le contrôle et laver l'affront de la manifestation de réoccupation. Le lever du jour révèle le tragique de la situation. La Chat-teigne est aux mains des flics. Au Rosier, les *tracteurs vigilants* n'ont pas pu arrêter les pelleteuses qui s'attaquent bientôt au bâtiment. Dans la forêt de Rohanne, suspendue entre ciel et terre, une bande d'ami·e·s tenaces s'agite au bout des cordes qui les relient au plus haut des arbres. Au sol, de petits groupes de gendarmes escortent les machines censées détruire à nouveau leurs cabanes perchées dans les branchages, plusieurs fois déjà reconstruites ces dernières semaines pour empêcher physiquement le déboisement, première phase des travaux prévus dans la foulée des expulsions.

La nouvelle se répand. Nombre de ceux qui sont repartis le 17 novembre avec en eux un peu de la zad, ont aussi le sentiment d'avoir laissé un peu d'eux-mêmes dans la construction commune de la Chat-teigne. À l'annonce de l'assaut, ils rejoignent la forêt toutes affaires cessantes.

Nous sommes désormais des centaines à nous retrouver au milieu de la brume et de la fumée. On se tient ensemble. Au pied des arbres où se cramponnent nos camarades, nous harcelons en une ronde endiablée l'escorte policière des machines à broyer la forêt. Elle frôle, provoque et désoriente les gendarmes mobiles sur un air traditionnel breton, ou au rythme d'invectives qui tiennent plus du cri du cœur que du slogan. On chante, on hurle, on se bat, on pleure, on discute, on s'étreint. En face, la consigne est claire : il faut marquer les chairs pour faire passer le goût de cette irrépressible disposition à l'insoumission. Nous compterons, après la bataille, nos blessés : une centaine, dont près d'une trentaine de plaies et lésions sérieuses pour la seule journée du samedi. Les éclats des grenades, du même genre que celle qui tuera Rémi Fraisse deux ans plus

tard sur une autre zad, à Sivens, pénètrent nos corps et restent fichés sous notre peau. Comme pour qu'à l'avenir leur présence douloureuse nous enjoigne de baisser la tête. Mais cette fois, il n'était de toute façon pas question de reculer, et chaque coup n'a fait que renforcer notre résolution. Pour longtemps.

“Voilà, c'était le jour où il y avait le bordel dans la forêt de Rohanne. Et ce que j'y ai vu, la violence des flics, ça m'a énervée propre et net. Et depuis, ça n'a pas arrêté de m'énerver. Ça ne m'a pas lâchée.”

Anne-Claude du comité local de Blain.

Hors de la forêt, le conflit s'amplifie et contamine. Le vendredi soir, des dizaines de tracteurs convergent vers les quatre points de franchissement de la Loire en aval de Nantes. Le Pont de Cheviré à Nantes, celui de Saint-Nazaire, ainsi que les bacs du Pellerin et de Basse-Indre sont bloqués dès la fin d'après-midi. Le samedi, devant la préfecture de Nantes, 10 000 personnes battent le pavé et se heurtent au canon à eau mobilisé pour l'occasion.

La nuit finit par tomber sur la forêt de Rohanne. Nous assistons au retrait désordonné des forces de l'ordre, sous les projectiles et les hurlements de loup. Tout à nos conjectures sur le sens de ce repli, nous apprenons par la radio que le gouvernement annonce la fin de l'opération César. Nous savons que ce n'est qu'une bataille et que le projet n'est pas encore enterré. Nous devons maintenant faire face à une stratégie plus fine de la part du gouvernement : la mise en place d'une « *commission du dialogue* », une instance de négociation à l'image de celles qui sont venues à bout de tant de luttes sociales par le passé. Elle cherche avant tout à diviser le mouvement, à défaut de pouvoir lui arracher le territoire qu'il habite. Mais l'acipa refuse de participer à la mascarade et de s'enfermer sagement dans un salon entre « personnes raisonnables ». Qu'y aurait-il à négocier au juste ? L'équation est simple : soit l'aéroport est abandonné, soit le bocage est détruit et ses habitants expulsés.

En parallèle, et ce à peine quelques heures après la déroute de César, des fourgons reviennent se positionner aux carrefours de la Saulce et à celui des Ardillières. Ces checkpoints, qui coupent la zone en deux et visent à en contrôler les entrées, seront permanents pendant près de cinq mois. Les flics

resteront là, figés autour de leurs camions, sans rien à attaquer et sans rien d'autre à défendre que la vacuité de leur propre présence. Ils contempleront, impuissants, la foule qui chaque jour les contourne. Ils subiront le mépris, les quolibets et des attaques diverses et variées. Les matériaux de construction, interdits de circulation sur la zone par un absurde arrêté préfectoral, seront malgré tout acheminés par des chemins détournés. Un gendarme spécialiste du maintien de l'ordre confiera, dépité, à un journaliste du *Télégramme*: «*Évacuer, c'est toujours possible, même sur une zone aussi importante et difficile. Il suffit d'y mettre les moyens. Mais tenir c'est impossible.*»

## **De toutes nos forces, habiter la zad**

Nous sommes le 12 avril 2013, l'automne et l'hiver humides dont nous nous extirpons cèdent la place aux premiers bourgeons, baignés par la lueur d'un soleil tant attendu. Les gendarmes quittent enfin le bocage tandis que le gouvernement annonce que l'aéroport se fera bel et bien... un jour. Mais, au milieu des haies comme dans les rues de Nantes, dans les réunions des comités comme dans les assemblées communes à la Vacherit, est né le sentiment partagé d'une victoire à portée de main. C'est ainsi que la revendication «*non à l'aéroport*» s'est transformée en une certitude dont nous ne démordrons pas : «*Il n'y aura jamais d'aéroport à Notre-Dame-des-Landes.* »

Le lendemain, c'est l'opération «*Sème ta zad*». Quelques milliers de personnes convergent, fourches et bêches en main, sur la départementale 281 encore ponctuée de chicanes et au milieu de laquelle trône une tour de guet, «*Bison Futé*», dont l'ossature élancée défie l'idée même de ligne droite. Des cultures reprennent dans les champs encore jonchés de cartouches lacrymogènes. Des jardins démarrent sur des espaces investis au cours de l'hiver : la Wardine, les 100-noms, les Rouges et Noires... À Saint-Jean-du-Tertre, on plante des pieds de vigne qui ne donneront du vin que dans plusieurs années. De nouvelles cabanes poussent partout au rythme effréné des coups de marteaux qui résonnent aux quatre coins du bocage.

Avec la défaite de César s'ouvre une nouvelle page de la lutte. Pour plusieurs mois au moins, voire plusieurs années, la zone est à nous. Il faut mettre à profit ce temps suspendu, jusqu'à la prochaine tentative de nous transformer en complexe aéroportuaire. Le sentiment grisant de liberté est à la hauteur

du défi auquel nous faisons face. Si les flics ont désormais l'ordre de ne plus s'aventurer sur la zone, le pouvoir ne s'évapore pourtant pas. Il se retire pour mieux réajuster le tir et espère que son absence laisse place à un inéluctable chaos à partir duquel légitimer son retour.

Il faut se figurer qu'en ce printemps, tout se concentre en un noyau bouillonnant, qui tient bien plus de l'explosion que du repli sur soi. Depuis l'opération César, nous n'avons jamais été aussi nombreux et divers à habiter la zad de mille manières. Les paysans des alentours, depuis l'ouverture et la reprise collective de la ferme de Bellevue, y dédient une bonne partie de leur temps. Les comités locaux, avec lesquels s'établissent de nouvelles circulations, viennent parfois construire des cabanes pour renforcer l'occupation et s'y aménager un pied-à-terre. Les *Naturalistes en lutte* se réunissent chaque mois pour inventorier la faune et la flore, créant ainsi un lien intime avec les mares, les prairies naturelles ou les salamandres de la zad sans pour autant y vivre.

Des dizaines de nouveaux venus peuplent le bocage. Il y a ceux pour qui la zad est un refuge, parce que sans contrôle d'identité : des mineurs en fugue aux réfugiés de Calais venus se reposer quelque temps faute d'avoir pu gagner l'Angleterre... Il y a ceux, burinés par les galères et la rue, pour qui la zad est un rivage. Il y a tous ceux qui débarquent et s'installent attirés par ce que l'endroit porte d'utopie. À quoi s'ajoutent bien sûr ce passage et ce brassage permanent qui, même s'ils nous épuisent parfois, témoignent de l'espoir et de la curiosité qu'éveille ailleurs la magie de la zad.

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Dans cette effervescence, la situation inédite de la zad et la vacance du pouvoir nous offrent l'opportunité rare d'avoir une prise directe sur ce qui conditionne matériellement et affectivement nos existences. Face au défi d'une vie partagée sur la zone, une autre bataille s'engage alors, contre nous-mêmes et en nous-mêmes cette fois. Il ne s'agit plus seulement d'affronter le pouvoir sous sa forme la plus visible, mais de se battre contre ce qui s'est niché au plus profond de nos êtres. Il y a toujours, en nous tous, quelque chose de ces individus séparés, engoncés dans leurs identités sociales, culturelles, politiques. La mise en échec d'un dispositif policier ne suffira jamais à détruire ce qui nous tenaille encore de consumérisme, de dépendances dévastatrices, de préjugés, de sexisme ordinaire... Comment nous délester de l'habitude lâche de vouloir tout déléguer, qui cohabite si bien avec l'ambition néfaste de vouloir tout contrôler ? Les conflits qui



naissent dans le bocage, qu'ils portent sur l'usage d'un bien commun, sur un désaccord politique ou sur une agression physique, ne sont pas fondamentalement différents de ceux qui animent n'importe quel quartier ou village. Sauf qu'il n'y a plus ici d'instance supérieure et hégémonique pour arbitrer et intervenir. Nous devons alors prendre à bras-le-corps des enjeux complexes que nous nous empressons d'ordinaire de taire ou de confier à une quelconque institution spécialisée : police, justice, hôpital psychiatrique, conseil municipal, chambre d'agriculture...

Mois après mois, le mouvement s'attache à acquérir un art acéré de la composition, capable de transcender nos différences et nos différends, sans aplanir pour autant les enjeux éthiques et les tensions fertiles. Les querelles autour de l'accès aux terrains agricoles qui ont éclaté au printemps 2013 illustrent la difficulté d'un apprentissage forcément tributaire du temps. Un certain nombre de conflits d'usage ont ainsi vu se heurter des conceptions antagonistes : celle de la terre comme outil de travail, et celle d'une nature qu'il faudrait laisser à elle-même pour la préserver de la corruption des activités humaines. Si cette opposition est d'abord vécue comme inconciliable, on finit par avancer dans le chemin tortueux d'une expérience où se conjuguent la réappropriation collective du territoire par ses habitants, la mise en partage d'une partie de ses ressources - terres agricoles, bois, routes et chemins, etc. - mais aussi l'attention à ménager des espaces qui existent pour eux-mêmes, et non parce qu'ils répondent à tel ou tel besoin humain. C'est ainsi qu'au fil des conflits, dont nul ne peut nier la dureté, une certaine intelligence collective se dégage de la confrontation entre nos différentes sensibilités.

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En 2011, la propriété des 1 650 ha de la zad a été déléguée par l'État et le conseil général à la société Aéroports-du-Grand-Ouest (ago), filiale de Vinci. Un quart de cette superficie est constitué de friches, de bois et de forêts, et un autre quart est toujours cultivé et habité par les paysans résistants. Mais dans l'attente du démarrage des travaux, les 800 ha restants sont censés être redistribués d'une année sur l'autre par ago aux agriculteurs qui ont signé un accord à l'amiable et touché des indemnités d'expropriation. Si l'aéroport est un véritable désastre pour ceux qui refusent de partir, il est en revanche pour d'autres, qui ont déjà retrouvé des terres ailleurs, l'occasion

d'agrandir un temps leur exploitation. À partir de 2013, le mouvement de lutte décide qu'il n'est plus possible de laisser à Vinci le contrôle de ces terres, ni de les laisser pleinement à disposition de ces exploitants *cumulards*.

Dans l'assemblée bimensuelle « Sème ta zad », dont l'idée est née des discussions passionnées entre occupant·e·s et paysan·e·s sur les barricades du Rosier à l'automne 2012, on discute de l'usage agricole des terres de la zone. On fait un point sur les potagers collectifs et sur leurs besoins en matériel et coups de main. On définit les parcelles libres d'usage qui seront dévolues aux cultures de plein champ, dont on attend quelques tonnes de patates et d'oignons. On se dispute sur la dépendance au pétrole de l'agriculture mécanisée ou sur l'exploitation des animaux. On se dote d'une *Coopérative d'Usure, Réparation, Casse, et éventuellement Utilisation de Matériel Agricole* (la curcuma) qui prendra soin des tracteurs en fin de vie légués à la lutte. Le groupe « vaches » ou le groupe « céréales » mettent en place la rotation culturale entre blé, pâtures, sarrasin et fourrage. Un paysan qui refuse l'expropriation propose d'inclure certains de ses champs dans le cycle de rotation, tandis que des occupantes préparent l'expérimentation d'une culture de légumineuses avec des éleveurs bovins de copain. Le résultat, à l'heure actuelle, c'est l'occupation collective et progressive de 220 ha. Un rendez-vous hebdomadaire, qui ressemble à s'y méprendre à un marché - si ce n'est que tout y est à prix libre : chacun donne ce qu'il peut et veut -, permet de mettre en partage une partie de la production agricole. Le reste sert notamment au ravitaillement d'autres luttes, de cantines populaires ou de squats de migrants dans la métropole nantaise.

D'innombrables autres expériences d'autonomie fleurissent, hors des logiques marchandes et gestionnaires. Ce qui était déjà en germe avant la période des expulsions a pris une nouvelle dimension. On voit apparaître un atelier de couture ou de réparation de vélos, une conserverie, une brasserie, une nouvelle boulangerie, un restauroulotte, une meunerie, un espace d'écriture et d'enregistrement de rap, une salle de danse et des cours d'autodéfense... On travaille à la réappropriation du soin avec des jardins de plantes médicinales et des formations médicales, notamment sur les premiers secours aux blessés par les armes de la police. On cherche à construire nos propres réseaux de communication, du site internet à la radio FM. Un bulletin, qui regroupe rendez-vous, comptes rendus d'assemblées, récits et coups de gueule, est confectionné et distribué chaque semaine dans

les soixante lieux de vie de la zone par des « facteurs » à pied ou à vélo. On explore des manières de faire la fête à mille lieues des clubs branchés et de l'industrie du divertissement : un fest-noz pour inaugurer un hangar convoyé, malgré l'interdiction formelle de la Préfecture, depuis les confins du Finistère ; un banquet de 60 mètres linéaires dans la poussière des balles de blé lors d'une fête des battages ; des transes nocturnes dans une grange graffée, sur de la musique expérimentale ou envoûtés par la voix d'une cantatrice d'opéra... On entretient nous-mêmes une partie des haies, des chemins, des réseaux électriques et des adductions d'eau, lors de grands chantiers collectifs plus ou moins réguliers. On multiplie les constructions, sans permis, ni plan local d'urbanisme, mais avec une inventivité architecturale certaine : à l'aide de matériaux de récup', de terre, de paille ou de bois d'œuvre abattu et découpé sur place par une scierie mobile amie qui a traversé la France. On cherche sans relâche à s'accorder sur l'usage de ce qui est commun, à en élargir le champ et à densifier les liens qui nous tiennent.

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L'autonomie, telle qu'elle s'expérimente dans ce bocage, ne peut être réduite à sa dimension matérielle ou alimentaire. L'autarcie n'a pour nous rien de désirable. Ce dont il est question ici c'est d'autonomie politique. Ce que nous inventons à tâtons, c'est la capacité collective à définir nous-mêmes nos propres règles. Mais la façon dont elles s'établissent et évoluent au rythme de notre vie commune tient plus des us et coutumes que des lois écrites de la République. La légitimité sur laquelle elles s'appuient est celle du vécu, de l'expérience, et ne relève pas d'une quelconque transcendance - intérêt général incarné par l'État, marché ou volonté divine. Dans la brèche ouverte par le repli du pouvoir, s'engouffrent une multiplicité d'espaces de décision, d'organisation et de délibération autonomes qui viennent progressivement le destituer.

Parmi ces espaces, les réunions hebdomadaires des occupant·e·s et les assemblées du mouvement de lutte se succèdent avec une régularité et une constance qui évoquent la solidité d'institutions coutumières. Les structures officielles que sont l'acipa, l'adeca (Association de Défense des Exploitants Concernés par l'Aéroport), copain ou certains comités locaux côtoient des groupes plus informels qui s'organisent, se composent et se recomposent. À ces espaces d'organisation s'ajoutent les dizaines de collectifs d'habitation où le quotidien est mis en partage, les histoires d'amour et d'amitié, les

affinités politiques et les belles rencontres qui sont la base de la solidarité quotidienne qui tient la zad depuis des années. Qu'elles concernent les enjeux propres à la vie sur la zad ou les manifestations pour maintenir la pression sur les pro-aéroport, l'organisation de la solidarité avec les communes kurdes ou avec les inculpés de la lutte contre la ferme industrielle des mille vaches, les initiatives sont nombreuses et peuvent émaner d'une discussion au coin d'un feu comme d'une décision collective en assemblée. C'est ce foisonnement constant qui conjure la possibilité d'une prise de pouvoir. C'est ce qui rend impossible qu'une composante de la lutte ne devienne hégémonique, ou qu'un leader détienne entre ses mains la parole et le destin du mouvement.

“Je me suis habitué à ce bouillon, parce qu'il y a un gros chaudron ici, même s'il y a plusieurs feux dessous et qu'ils ne chauffent pas tous en même temps... Ça me ferait vraiment chier que ça s'arrête d'un coup. On a tous envie de voir quelque chose en sortir. J'ai envie qu'ici ça reste une pépinière pour penser et vivre autrement, qu'il y ait une zone expérimentale qui reste ouverte, sans contrôle, sans recherche de rentabilité, quelque chose qui soit libre de flicage, un endroit où on arrive à se reconnaître, à se dire bonjour, et que ça trouve un équilibre. J'aurai gagné ma lutte personnelle quand on aura gagné ça. Il faut que la lutte laisse un espace ouvert, le plus grand possible.”

Dominique, porte-parole de l'acipa, natif de Notre-Dame-des-Landes.

Il y a dans ce qui se trame à la zad quelque chose de la commune. Quelque chose de la Commune de 1871, quand une irrépressible émotion collective saisit les habitants de Paris qui devinrent, derrière les barricades, les maîtres de leur vie quotidienne et de leur histoire, soulevant un immense espoir révolutionnaire et entraînant à leur suite des soulèvements dans de nombreuses autres villes. Quelque chose des communes du Moyen Âge qui parvinrent à s'arracher à l'emprise du pouvoir féodal et à défendre les communaux, ces terres, outils et ressources à l'usage partagé. Quelque chose, aussi, de l'éphémère commune de Nantes en 1968, pendant laquelle ouvriers et étudiants occupèrent l'hôtel de ville, bloquèrent la région et organisèrent le ravitaillement des grévistes avec les paysans. Quelque chose qui, désormais, est à la fois le moyen et le sens de notre lutte, et que nous devons continuer à approfondir. Ces imaginaires sont de ceux qui viennent

irriguer le bocage de Notre-Dame-des-Landes dans la quête d'un présent désirable et d'un futur possible.

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Depuis le printemps 2013, nous ne cessons d'envisager l'avenir de la zad sans aéroport. De chantiers collectifs en assemblées, au fil des semailles et des récoltes, quelque chose est en train de naître de notre ancrage sur le territoire. On dresse un état des lieux du foncier. Il s'agit de construire parmi nous une compréhension partagée de la situation. À mesure qu'avancent les débats, on s'écarte d'une approche strictement agricole et juridique pour penser ensemble ce que seraient nos objectifs politiques en cas de victoire. En novembre 2015, après plus d'un an de discussions dans tous les espaces d'organisation du mouvement, ses différentes composantes prennent ensemble un engagement décisif pour l'avenir. En voici les termes :

“Une fois le projet d'aéroport abandonné, nous voulons :

1. Que les habitant·e·s, propriétaires ou locataires faisant l'objet d'une procédure d'expropriation ou d'expulsion puissent rester sur la zone et retrouver leurs droits.
2. Que les agriculteur·trice·s impacté·e·s, en lutte, ayant refusé de plier face à ago-Vinci, puissent continuer de cultiver librement les terres dont ils·elles ont l'usage, recouvrir leurs droits et poursuivre leurs activités dans de bonnes conditions.
3. Que les nouveaux habitant·e·s venu·e·s occuper la zad pour prendre part à la lutte puissent rester sur la zone. Que ce qui s'est construit depuis 2007 dans le mouvement d'occupation en termes d'expérimentations agricoles hors cadre, d'habitat auto-construit ou d'habitat léger (cabanes, caravanes, yourtes, etc.), de formes de vie et de lutte, puisse se maintenir et se poursuivre.
4. Que les terres redistribuées chaque année par la chambre d'agriculture pour le compte d'ago-Vinci sous la forme de baux précaires soient prises en charge par une entité issue du mouvement de lutte qui rassemblera toutes ses composantes. Que ce soit donc le mouvement anti-aéroport et non les institutions habituelles qui détermine l'usage de ces terres.
5. Que ces terres aillent à de nouvelles installations agricoles et non agricoles, officielles ou hors cadre, et non à l'agrandissement.
6. Que ces bases deviennent une réalité par notre détermination collective. Et nous porterons ensemble une attention à résoudre les éventuels conflits liés à leur mise en œuvre. Nous semons et construisons déjà un avenir sans aéroport dans la diversité et la cohésion. C'est à nous tou.te.s, dès aujourd'hui, de le faire fleurir et de le défendre.

En cet automne 2015, il ne s'agit plus seulement de nous battre contre un projet d'aéroport, ni même contre son monde, mais aussi de défendre la possibilité d'une destinée commune sur ce bocage.

## **Gardez le Bourget, on prend Versailles. Vive la Commune !**

Nous sommes à Versailles, le 28 novembre 2015, à la veille de la COP 21, sommet intergouvernemental sur le réchauffement climatique. Depuis des semaines le gouvernement assène qu'il démarrera bientôt les travaux de l'aéroport et qu'il viendra à bout de la zad, « *territoire perdu de la République* ». Toute honte bue, il entend en même temps faire la promotion de ses préoccupations environnementales au Bourget lors de la COP.

Depuis les attentats du 13 novembre, l'exécutif a considérablement augmenté ses moyens de contrôle sur la population avec la déclaration de l'état d'urgence. Il en profite opportunément pour interdire toutes les manifestations de rue prévues pendant le sommet et pour lancer une série de perquisitions et d'assignations à résidence visant, entre autres, des compagnons du mouvement.

Nous sommes partis de Notre-Dame-des-Landes il y a une semaine avec cinq tracteurs, une cantine mobile et 200 cyclistes de 1 à 70 ans, en direction de la capitale. Galvanisés par la menace d'une nouvelle tentative d'expulsion de la zad, nous avons décidé d'aller mettre le gouvernement face à son hypocrisie. Dès le lendemain, le convoi a bravé un barrage policier puis les interdictions successives qui lui étaient faites de circuler. Nous n'avons cessé d'avancer.

Si les autorités ne voulaient visiblement pas de nous, ce n'était pas le cas des habitant·e·s des régions traversées, bien au contraire. Ceux-ci, par centaines, nous ont ouvert leurs maisons, leurs champs, leurs salles des fêtes et nous rappellent à quel point le mouvement est vivant bien au-delà de la zad. Ces insoumis ne nous ont pas offert leur hospitalité dans un unique geste de soutien, mais aussi parce qu'ils se battent eux-mêmes localement contre la privatisation d'une forêt, pour que des migrants aient un toit au-dessus de la tête, contre l'emprise de l'agro-industrie ou pour empêcher la création d'une nouvelle zone commerciale en installant à la place un jardin collectif. Et dans le climat fébrile qui a saisi le pays, beaucoup ont trouvé

dans l'accueil du convoi l'occasion de braver à leur manière la chape de plomb « antiterroriste ».

D'autres marches et convois nous ont rejoints en cours de route depuis d'autres territoires en bataille : de Bure où se projette un centre d'enfouissement de déchets nucléaires, du quartier libre des Lentillères à Dijon, de la lutte contre la ligne à grande vitesse autour d'Agen, des bouilles de Sivens ou des forêts de Roybon et du Morvan. En trois ans, la zad est devenue un cri de ralliement qui circule bien au-delà du bocage, et duquel ne cessent de naître des barricades habitables face à ceux qui aménagent nos vies.

La nuit dernière, réunis dans un manège équestre, assis sur le sable ou perchés aux balcons, nous avons décidé que notre équipée irait jusqu'à Versailles. C'est depuis cette citadelle anachronique que, dix jours auparavant, le Sénat et le Parlement réunis, pris d'une poussée d'absolutisme, ont décidé de prolonger de trois mois l'état d'urgence.

Nous avons roulé depuis l'aube, euphoriques des kilomètres parcourus et des liens qui se sont tissés cette semaine. Peu avant la Place d'Armes, le convoi fait halte et nous marchons ensemble derrière une grande banderole peinte pendant la nuit d'après un vers de Shakespeare : « *Si nous vivons, nous vivons pour marcher sur la tête des rois* ». Aux abords des édifices de la cour, un rang de policiers cherche une dernière fois à nous contenir, autour de la statue de Louis XIV. Mais nous continuons à avancer, et eux à reculer, jusque devant les grilles du château. Des tables sont déployées en cercle pour un grand banquet partagé. La voix d'un paysan venu en tracteur se détache sous les hourras : « *En 1871, les Versaillais avaient écrasé la Commune de Paris. Les zads sont aujourd'hui comme autant de nouvelles communes libres. Et nous affirmons ici que ces communes ne se laisseront plus expulser.* »

Il y a parmi nous deux compères qui ont fait la route ensemble en tandem, alors qu'ils se connaissaient à peine avant le départ, et qui ne se sont plus quittés d'une semelle. Tandis que la nuit tombe, aux portes du château, ils entonnent ensemble : « *Et dans dix ans les avions ne décolleront pas.* » Chacun reprend en chœur chaque fois un peu plus fort. « *Leur aéroport ils peuvent toujours l rêver, chaque jour un peu plus on les fera cauchemarder.* » Tout le monde danse en cercle, corps à corps.

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*Il faut défendre la zad.*

La défendre comme expérience et force d'une résistance collective dans un coin de bocage qui a rassemblé et inspiré des dizaines de milliers de personnes depuis des années. S'ils s'entêtaient à revenir, nous appelons à faire front par une défense bec et ongles de la zone, par un blocage de la région et par l'occupation des lieux de pouvoir, ainsi que par des banquets sur les places des villes et des villages. Nous appelons à multiplier les actions à même d'arracher sans plus attendre l'abandon du projet d'aéroport, et d'assurer la poursuite de l'expérimentation politique en effervescence dans ce bocage.

Mais il faut aussi défendre la zad comme possibilité historique, d'ores et déjà devenue contagieuse, qui peut s'actualiser en mille autres endroits, et de mille manières encore. Nous appelons à ce que l'esprit de la zad continue à se diffuser, empruntant chaque fois des voies singulières, mais avec le désir d'ouvrir partout des brèches. Des brèches face à la frénésie sécuritaire, face au désastre écologique, face à la fermeture des frontières, à la surveillance généralisée, à la marchandisation de tout ce qui existe.

La zad et tout ce qu'elle représente, à l'image des combats d'hier ou d'ailleurs, constituent ici et maintenant une précieuse lueur d'espoir dans cette époque désenchantée.

*Il faut défendre la zad.*

*À Notre-Dame-des-Landes.*

*Partout.*

## Sur le collectif

*Constellations*, c'est d'abord un livre, publié aux [éditions de l'éclat](#), qui raconte par petites touches une quinzaine d'années de vie et de lutte, ce qu'on a appelé des [trajectoires révolutionnaires](#). C'est aussi ce site, qui a d'abord publié en version [lyber](#) les textes du livre, et qui regroupe désormais les nouveaux travaux du collectif mauvaise troupe sur les [luttés de Notre-Dame-des-Landes et de la Val Susa](#).

Contact : mauvaise-troupe [chez] riseup [point] net



## **On activist research and critical knowledge production**

A intervention by Galvão Debelle and Liliana López

*This short collection of interviews to the participants of the Antipode Workshop and to the Studies Network for Autonomy (Joan from Xarxa d'Estudis per l'Autonomia) explores the conflicts and potential of activist research and critical knowledge production.*

A film in Catalan, English, Spanish with English subtitles.

### **Link**

<https://www.trespass.network/?p=745&lang=en>

# **Book review - *The Anarchist Roots of Geography: Towards Spatial Emancipation***

**Rowan Tallis Milligan**

## **Squatting as Spatial Emancipation**

Simon Springer's *The Anarchist Roots of Geography*, published earlier this year, functions both as a brief history of the main theoretical intersections between anarchism and geography, and also as a personal manifesto of Springer's conception of anarchism and framework for what he terms 'spatial emancipation'. In this review, I will focus on this concept of spatial emancipation and outline its significance for a practice of squatting.

Springer's idea of 'spatial emancipation' encapsulates the intellectual roots of anarchist thought and, in so doing, exemplifies anarchism's vital links with geography. That said, it is the practical and everyday implications of this theory of spatial emancipation on daily life that has most implications for squatting and that I want to tease out in more detail within this review.

First I will offer a brief overview of the text. Springer begins by introducing his key points: his disagreements with a Marxist framework of revolution and geography; a suggestion of his disapproval of violence within anarchism; and a reference to some of the main theorists he will be discussing. In chapter one he offers a brief history of the intersections between anarchism and geography, focusing on the works of Proudhon, Reclus and Kropotkin for his main theoretical points. He makes a convincing case during this chapter for the importance of including these key thinkers in any conception of a radical geographic trajectory, and demonstrates how they have been

sidelined, wrongly, compared to Marxist theorists, who came to dominate any conception of radical geography. In the next chapter, he continues along this line of argument, focusing specifically on the twin trajectories of Marxist and anarchist theory within the discipline, and demonstrating the prioritisation of a Marxist analysis within academia. He then turns towards the key values of anarchism, discrediting the media-fuelled misconception of anarchism as only violent chaos, focussing instead on mutual aid, prefigurative living, and the struggle towards equality and harmony between all living beings.

During this chapter he still gives great prominence to the discussion of anarchism's values in comparison with Marxism, although he recognises that there has been an anarchist turn in more recent years, assisted by radical journals such as ACME and Antipode. He also offers a touching personal explanation of his own reasons for identifying as an anarchist and the important link between his scholarship and his own beliefs, which is very refreshing in an academic text. Chapter four, 'Emancipatory Space', is most relevant to squatters, in its treatment of the public/private space dichotomy, and the concept of spatial emancipation. He explores both the importance of public space to anarchist practice and also offers an interpretation of Radical Democratic theory as a framework for conceiving of a politics that embraces his anarchist sensibilities and beliefs. During this chapter he also extensively grounds his beliefs in non-violence, using the Radical Democratic concept of agonism to explain his ideal public sphere.

He continues the discussion on non-violence in the subsequent chapter, which also offers an anarchist understanding of the role of [organised] religion in repressive regimes. Finally, he concludes with an overview of his core anarchist values. Therein, he argues for a concept of 'flattening' the world in order to explain how theories of scale can both obfuscate the significance of engaging in anarchist practices in our everyday life and shut down anarchist arguments for a politics of prefiguration. His final note is a

rally to prefigurative living as in order for “the promise of spatial emancipation to be fulfilled as the realisation of an anarchist geography, we must become beautiful ourselves, we must become the horizon ... if one courageous act can make the Colossus tremble, then together, united as a vista of hope, we might just bring the giant to its knees” (p.117).

The main argument discussed in this review is Springer’s emphasis on space and on prefiguration, which has important implications for any discussion and practice of squatting. At the beginning of his chapter, ‘Emancipatory Space’, he outlines his beliefs in an agonistic public space as a basis for emancipation. Springer derives his concept of agonism from Radical Democratic Theory, and primarily through the works of Chantal Mouffe. Emerging out of the work of theorists such as Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau and Jacques Rancière, Radical Democratic Theory enables a politics of contestation. (Alan Finlayson, ‘Rhetoric and Radical Democratic Political Theory’ in Adam Little and Moya Lloyd, eds. *The politics of radical democracy*, (Edinburgh, 2009), p.13)

Within this framework, the concept of agonism refers to the practice of mutually respectful contestation between adversaries in contrast to antagonistic forms of engagement aiming at the destruction of one’s enemy. (Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, (London, 2000), p.102)

This has important implications for social movements, suggesting that movements which strive towards social and political change need to have an alternative framework of democracy which challenges that of neoliberalism, which centres consensus and thus obfuscates dissent (Eric Swyngedouw, ‘The Post-Political City’, in *Urban Politics Now: Re-imagining democracy in the neoliberal city*. Vol. 6., Nicholas Lakides, (NAI Publishers, 2007)).

For Springer, Radical Democracy envisions public space as ‘the battlefield on which the conflicting interests of the rich and poor are set as well as the object of contestation’ (p.98). Squatters understand only too well the battles

over space which are wrought, whether in attempts to create a public social centre or a more private domain of living, and in struggles over definitions of ownership of space. Paramount to much squatting ideology and practice is the assertion that a space does not belong to a single individual but rather to a collective, with their own self-defined limits (Barocchio Occupato [\*Against the Legalisation of Occupied Spaces\*](#), 1995).

Thus, Springer's argument for a reconceptualization of public space has important theoretical implications for squatters, who openly challenge the public-private dichotomy and could benefit from a strong theory of public space with which to reinforce their struggles

Springer uses Radical Democratic theory to call for a more agonistic public space, arguing that attempts to impose order onto a public space from above initiate violent conflict with those resisting this imposition "from below".

Here, I want to tease out both his arguments in favour of an agonistic public space (in opposition to one of open antagonism) and his conceptions of public space as socially produced. Agonistic politics attempt to convert the 'enemy' who must 'be destroyed' into the 'adversary', whose position is to be respected if a solution is to occur. In other words, politics aims at domesticating violent divisions, whereby groups can contest each other without destroying one another. In the context of squatting, there is clearly an us/them division, and one that is explicitly between squatter, and the state, corporations, and neoliberal society in general (Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, p.102; Rowan Tallis Milligan, 'The Politics of the Crowbar: Squatting in London, 1968-1977', *Anarchist Studies*, (Forthcoming, 2017)).

Whilst Springer recognises that conflict is a necessary part of any kind of democratic living, as any politics that aims to disavow conflict borders on authoritarianism, Radical Democratic theory seems unable to provide Springer with the theoretical grounding for such a conflictual politics. An agonistic conception of politics relies on a rough equality between

adversaries contesting space. (Andrew Schaap (ed.), *Law and Agonistic Politics*, (London, 2016), p.9)

However, such adversarial equality is lacking in the context of squatting. In no instance are squatters on a level playing field with property developers, owners, security forces, or the team of lawyers, policemen and institutional powers which they rally to defend themselves. To argue against a narrative of violence in favour for 'harmonious' contestation would, in this case, propagate the status quo, as the institutional imbalance between squatters and the state is not surmountable through debate within a democratic sphere, as Mouffe's model suggests, even with a platform for peaceful protest and civil disobedience. Mouffe's conception of agonism tends more towards a pacification of the very real conflicts in which squatters find themselves (Rowan Tallis Milligan, 'The Politics of the Crowbar: Squatting in London 1968-1977', *Anarchist Studies*, (2017)).

I would find it very difficult persuading anyone who has ever had their head kicked in by a security guard, been thrown against a wall by a policeman, or even gone through the ritual humiliation of defending oneself in court against a wealthy institutional framework that an agonistic solution is possible, at least in the short term.

Indeed, squatting exemplifies an antagonistic relation of violence that the conceptual framework of agonism fails to capture. Arguing against violence in this manner takes away some of the very few tools we have in our arsenal against the established orders and leaves us even more susceptible to manipulation and pacification. We ought to stay angry!

Yet, Springer's position regarding this kind of 'violent' resistance is unclear. He acknowledges his pacifist views and argues against violence, dismissing some of the insurrectionist trajectories within anarchism, such as Propaganda of the Deed. However, he also differentiates between violence

and counterviolence, suggesting that fighting back against an oppressor does not constitute violence in itself (p.120).

Thus, he fails to draw out the conceptual parallels between the 'everyday insurrection' necessary and important to squatting, and his own conceptions of prefiguration. A strong tension thus exists between Springer's advocacy of the 'insurrection of everyday life' and his hesitation to associate his brand of anarchism with openly insurrectionist elements within anarchist history (Sasha K, *Some Notes on Insurrectionary Anarchism*). I feel this complexity could have been further developed, as our right to defend ourselves with anger and aggression is necessary and important to promote, if we are to attempt to overcome repression in our daily lives.

While he demonstrates the importance of public space and recognises the social production of such space, Springer does not go far enough in asserting the need for the publicisation of space. Again, such activity of making-public is fundamental to the practice of squatting; to take a space formerly accessible to only a privileged few and opening it up to a broader range of participants is itself an empowering politic act. Springer recognizes this possibility when he states that 'public space can be understood as the very practice of Radical Democracy' (p.107). It is through the construction of shared spaces that we attempt to have our ideals put into action as individuals and collectives as it is 'in the making and *taking* of space and place that allows us to move towards a more radical democracy' [my emphasis] (p.106). This very definite action of taking space, of asserting oneself and ones collective ideas, is an essential element of of anarchism, prefiguration, and just one of the many reasons why squatting is a key element of serious anarchist praxis. We must be actively fighting to de-privatise spaces; we must be openly critiquing private institutions, even those we benefit from; we must recognise that private spaces are paramount to borders, walls, and exclusion. Any true Radical Democracy must attempt to dismantle the category of exclusion as far as possible, and as such, an

agonistic framework does not give adequate space for the violence sometimes necessary in claiming a space as (y)ours and the broader publicising of space.

This ties into Springer's important critique of the liberal rhetoric of publicness which inscribes certain forms of subordination and exclusion, as access to the public is conceived only insofar as one leaves their own particular subjectivities (e.g. sexual, racial, gendered, etc. identity) behind in the private sphere. Thus, he advocates for a material and embodied conception of public space that 'rests in its potential to be a site of political participation where diverse publics can interact'(p.113). As he recognises, public space is only a site of democracy when crowds took matters into their own hands. Again, chafing against his analysis of anarchism as essentially nonviolent, he suggests that 'to demand inclusion in a space often means forcibly occupying the space of exclusion, reinforcing the idea that public space has never been guaranteed and, by its very definition, must be contested' (p.113).

This is an important justification of squatting, as squatters are on the front line of the battle over claiming space every day and exist in an ongoing conflict that does not cease once you have managed to secure your building. To take a space in which you are able to be your own bodies is an affront to capital and private conceptions of space and as such is never simply allowed but continually challenged. The use of force is not only desirable (especially to those tired of being told to "stay calm" and "maintain respect" to those who are taking away their home) but also often necessary. As he himself recognises, crime is most often conceived in terms of property rights and accordingly, the poor and propertyless are repeatedly cast as transgressors of public space", something which he recognises needs to be challenged.<sup>16</sup>

This book is an important intervention into current theoretical discussions around the importance of anarchism within academia and life, and in challenging dominant conceptions of public and private space. Thus, it is



worthwhile for squatters to discuss his ideas and suggestions, as both of these elements - contestation of space and prefigurative living - are key to squatting practice, and concepts which I hold dearly. It is a valuable text that hopefully will expand the discussion of anarchism's worth within academia and everyday life beyond the marginal milieus in which it currently resides. As squatters we are on the front lines of the battle over space and as anarchists we know what it means to live based on mutual aid and collective efforts. On this note I will close this review with a quotation from Springer:

Without embracing our capacity for living now and doing for ourselves in this moment what we would otherwise leave to the protocols of authority, we kneel exposed at the foot of the giant with his cruel and ugly shadow drawn upon our backs. Those of us who embrace anarchism don't simply yearn for the light. We stand and walk towards it, claiming that strength is to be found not in what is dreamed possible but as an illumination of the powerful beauty we collectively represent. So let us reject the darkness that threatens to devour us all. Let us convene a new language of aesthetics that places each and every one of us at the centre of its conversation. Let us become beautiful by recognising the meaning of each other's lives in concert with our own. But most of all, let us awaken to the fact that beautiful is something we already are. This sentiment forms the heart of an anarchist geography. It is our path to spatial emancipation.

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## **Book Review - *War in the Neighborhood***

**Alan W. Moore**

Seth Tobocman, *War in the Neighborhood* Ad Astra Comix, 2016 re-issue. Paperback. 328 pages. First published by Autonomedia, 2000.

My copy of Seth Tobocman's *War in the Neighborhood* stands up on my desk, right beside the poster Yoko Ono publishes in the New York Times every year around New Year. "War Is Over if you want it." But the kind of war Seth is describing is never over, want it or not. It's the unceasing war of the better off against the poor, and Tobocman's *War* tells the story of a time when the poor fought back. The neighborhood in question is Manhattan's Lower East Side in the 1980s and 1990s. It was when gentrification was really sinking its teeth into the housing stock, and the City of New York was executing auction sales of hundreds of vacant buildings and empty lots it had seized for default of taxes. No new public housing was being built, and the steady stream of low income tenants out of the area was becoming an exodus. Analyses of the contemporary process of inner city development had just begun to be developed (cf. Neil Smith). But already determined bands of people resisted by occupying many of those buildings and living in them - squatters.

Seth Tobocman is an artist, and "War in the Neighborhood" is a graphic novel. It is ostensibly a work of fiction. If it were a movie however, it would be a docu-drama. He based it on personal experience in the Lower East Side squatting movement and extensive research and interviews. The book is a masterpiece of squatter literature. More than any textual production, *War in the Neighborhood* reaches out and grips the reader, regardless of language (although translation of the text should be the next step!). It describes the political and emotional project of squatting, the milieu in its utopian and dystopian moments with all the force of graphic art. Tobocman is a master of

tension and fear, outrage and reaction. This book contains some of the strongest images of solidarity in the face of repression that I have seen. In this, it is a classic work of left art in the age of neoliberalism, when reappropriation of the spaces of the “redundant” urban working classes and extreme rent-seeking has become the basis for amassing great wealth.

Resistance is necessary, law doesn't work. On this and other issues, Tobocman is one of the world's best propagandists for direct action. His raw-limned dramatic images of squatting, resistance and solidarity have been used by activists and collectives around the world to advertise their projects. For sure he's not the only New York movement artist whose work on squatting gets around - Eric Drooker's work is softer and more idealized, with classical allusions, while Fly Orr's outsider-y graphics and symbols have an antic quality. But Seth's work is pure politics.

This political edge, the resolve behind the line is a large part of what makes *War in the Neighborhood* such a great work of art. As much or more is its humanity, its subtle understanding of personality and human damage going into and coming out of political struggle, and its penetration into the spheres of the domestic. Oddly, very little written by or about squatting and squatters goes down that road (in English; in German there's much more). This very oscillation between public and private has been a fulcrum of recent academic research into squatting (e.g. Lynn Owens [\*Cracking Under Pressure: Narrating the Decline of the Amsterdam Squatters Movement\*](#) Penn State, 2009)

The book starts with the story of a young couple, familiar with squatting from experience in England, who move into a vacant building. A group of people burst into their apartment, and demand that they leave - the building, they say, has already been claimed. What's up? Tobocman gives a few-page history of exploitation and radical reaction on the Lower East Side. He tells the story of arson, abandonment and city housing programs designed to fail. (The “urban homesteading” program he describes was a reaction to an

earlier wave of squatting, and effectively ended it.) Jane and John must build support to protect their building from a thug eviction.

The next chapter deals with the well-remembered Tompkins Square Park riot of 1988, building the story through the eyes of one dog-walking resident. After a conversation with his talking dog (!), Steve ends up in front of a picket line facing the cops. Throughout the night of rioting - provoked by out-of-town police, as later court cases proved - Steve meets the homeless encamped in the park who stay weirdly unmolested throughout the riot. Tobocman unfolds a dense, complex event and its aftermath through his succinct narrative, which is centered on the boy and his dog. Finally, Steve is beaten at a demo in the park by right-wing skinheads as cops (and tough-talking left radicals) stand by. He is alone as everyone is turning into pigs, including himself as he considers copping out on a court case seeking justice.

The next chapter looks at one building, one of many squatted on one street. Written as a full-dress comic book adventure (it originally appeared in the glossy alt-comic mag *Heavy Metal*), "The Tragedy of 319 East 8<sup>th</sup> Street" features people turning into skeletons - arsonists, police, doctors, drug dealers, bureaucrats - as they deliver mortally threatening messages to the characters. This chapter includes a brilliantly condensed vignette on the Puerto Rican griot poet Jorge Brandon, an important figure in the place many call Loisaida. Dotted throughout *War in the Neighborhood* are real-life characters like Clayton Patterson, Frank Morales, Michael Shenker, John Penley and more. Most are not named, but they are depicted in recognizable likenesses. Several pages depict the squatters' resistance through the courtrooms, their own meetings, the surrounding of the building by cops, various characters' vacillations and flashes of heroism. It's a tangled tale, with every step fraught with tension both inner and outer. In the end, the squatters lose the building, an experience which leads to their intransigent position against negotiation - "No deal!"

Chapter four tells the story of the “Tent City” homeless people’s encampment in Tompkins Square Park which was extant when the riot happened in 1988. Seth’s voice for this story is Ron Casanova, Black, Puerto Rican, and an important homeless and anti-poverty activist. Casanova rose up during the Reagan 1980s when homelessness was epidemic in New York City. (He tells his own story in *Each One Teach One: Up and Out of Poverty, Memoirs of a Street Activist* with Stephen Blackburn, Northwestern University Press, 1996.) Corruption in the homeless shelters is carefully described, as well as a NIMBY-based anti-homeless meeting. These rough truths are told not with statistics and explication, but through vignettes of the organizers who moved against these injustices.

Not only in this chapter, but throughout, accounts in *War* are attentive to history. The “Tent City” chapter begins with a quote from homeless youth in 1933, and references 19<sup>th</sup> century land occupations in New York City. Luc Sante introduces the original publication of *War*. He wrote *Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York* (1991), a book which lays out the centuries-long tradition - nay, industry - in the Empire City of deceiving and robbing visitors. (Not sure if this introduction is retained in the planned reprint.)

“Tent City” is at moments inspiring, when it tells of black-white solidarity, and depressing when it recounts betrayals and apathy on the part of white leftists towards the homeless activists when the shit on the street goes down. But this chapter of *War* soon leaves the conflicted scene of the Lower East Side to recount the story of Tent City’s march on Washington - on foot! The march was hard, and in the end politicians lied to them. But it changed lives, as Seth shows. This kind of poor peoples’ organizing - a feature of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s movement in its later days - has not been seen recently in the U.S.A., and it is important to be reminded that indeed it existed in the days of Reagan. Going forward, the organization Picture the Homeless in New York has continued to press for rights and dignity for the homeless,

working in tandem with international housing rights organizations, just as the Tent City activists did 20 years before them in their presence at the U.N. (as Seth recounts).

Chapter five is the story of another squat which underwent a harrowing and dangerous eviction and demolition. Again, although it's a "historical fiction," it is likely closely based on fact. This time the author himself is a main character. To prove his credibility within the movement, Seth moves out of his apartment into a squat - called Deadlock House. (This place provides situations for succeeding stories in the book as well.) The residents are diverse - "a low budget version of the United Nations" - but thrown together in the face of cruel police harassment. They hide in their building when police come to evict them; the cops bring dogs to sniff them out. In the deserted building, the author confronts himself on questions of cowardice and bravery, and "personal honor" (as he holds his cock to take a piss in a bucket). He dreams the house itself is rising up to defend itself against the cops, in virtuoso panels of political surrealism. A key character among the resistant squatters - "gargoyles" in the dream sequence - is Rage, a man who declares he will die rather than be evicted. When the cops back off, Rage goes crazy from the stress, and throws a hatchet at the author. Finally, Seth realizes, he has faced intimidation his whole life; being a squatter has taught him how to face up to it.

"Fortress of the Spirit," chapter six, tells the story of the short-lived ABC Community Center. This was intended not only as a squat for housing but to be a social center, a large-building occupation providing many services. These are spelled out in a double-page spread. They echo the formations in many a squatted European social center - free clothing store, political art space, recycling program, "hobo theater" group, temporary housing for homeless, and a needle exchange for drug addicts. The former public school building is christened like a ship by Jorge Brandon, but runs into "stormy

seas” with two Democratic mayors (Ed Koch and David Dinkins) blowing gale force winds.

There are contradictions from the start as the needle exchange activist who faces off the non-profit scheduled to receive the building from the city is revealed to be himself a coke addict. Homeless people had a significant presence in ABC. “Many of the homeless in the [Tompkins Square] park had drug problems, prison records. The sidewalks don’t make many saints, but they do produce some heroes. And in 1989 homeless Americans were standing up, organizing as a class.” Tobocman tells a love story, shows a dramatic disruption of a community board meeting (constituted advisory groups with unelected members), and tells the beginning of the complex story of the eviction.

“Go ahead. Hit me in the head!,” one squatter tells a city worker preparing to bust down the door. “You might as well if yer evicting this house.” The worker flees. Say what you will of the mental stability of many of the Lower East Side squatters, this kind of full tilt dedication, heedless of personal risk, is what made the movement so powerful.

A solidarity camp arose across the street from the besieged social center. “Fuck da police/ Comin’ straight from da underground,” from the rap group NWA, plays on the boombox. Little kids chase some of the squatters on the street throwing stones at them and calling them communists. Skinheads attack another group - “help arrived in the form of a molotov cocktail,” and the skinheads run off. They don’t like to be called ‘nazis,’ another activist explains, because a lot of them are Jewish.

One of the most poignant monkey wrenches thrown into this dramatic story of populist organizing concerns the struggle over gender relations. The feminism born of abuse meets the patriarchy sprung from deprivation and thwarted lives. “One thing is for sure,” Seth writes, “being barricaded into

ABC with a group of macho homeless men, many of whom were ex-cons, was a stifling and intimidating experience for some of the women." That's part of it. The RCP takeover is part of it (Revolutionary Communist Party). As is bitter cold, and a Christmas party in a squat barricaded by police. But Tobocman includes some pages of portraits of individual homeless people involved in the struggle for ABC in which they tell of their pride to be involved and their reasons and dreams. In the end, the occupation wears down with the cold and infighting. City officials try to strike a deal, and then in the end evict the center. The experience, Seth realizes, has marked him and the others for life. ABC as a ship is seen floating in the clouds; it will "always live in our hearts."

The next chapter again concerns Seth's own "Deadlock House." Much of the story revolves around the divides between white and black squatters. The whites include Europeans - "the European" and her friends, casual heroin users. Many of the blacks were active in the Tompkins Square Park Tent City, and their drug use is looked on as more heinous than that of the whites. In his concluding pages Tobocman writes: "We tried to build a movement of diverse people united by a common need for housing. But our distrust for each other undermined our best efforts. The cop in our head" - (represented by a skeleton running a control panel with wires into each of the main characters' skulls) - represses us better than any police force.... When will we have a movement that renovates people as well as buildings?"

"Memorial Day Provocation," chapter 8, is the story of a riot in the park three years after the famous one of 1988. It was provoked by the police murder of a young black artist, Grady Alexis, and another beating of a black man in full view of denizens of the park. This one went awry when a local store was looted. The City under Mayor Dinkins used the event as an excuse to close the large 10+ acre park entirely for over a year, for "renovation," The historic bandshell in the center of the park, home to free concerts by many famous artists, was demolished. A resistant activist was caught and



tortured by police. The closing of the park and the end of the bandshell spells the demise of the neighborhood as it had been. Gerrymandering reconfigures the district as part of a richer area. A right-wing councilman is elected. The Lower East Side Seth has known is over...

Chapter 9 "Kicking in Joan's Door" is a depressing tale of sexual violence and intimidation which eventually divides a squat. It is the last chapter in the artist's life in "Deadlock House," and it isn't pretty. Chapter 10 is more straightforwardly historical, built as it is with photographs and text. The last one is a kind of coda that interweaves a frankly told ideology of resistance, and a deeply felt self-knowledge born of defeat.

The graphic novel is a form that still suffers from sidelining in the hierarchy of literary genres. Seth Tobocman developed this book over many years, running chapters of it in the "comic book" graphic art and literary journal he ran with friends called World War III. To call it a 'graphic novel' is to really seek to elevate this genre to the level of the more privileged text-only work of literature. In fact, it might more properly be called an artist's book. As such, it is a fusion of image and word that effectively accomplishes what neither can do alone.

*War in the Neighborhood* tells stories particular to the Lower East Side, but the conflicts described will surely be familiar to squatters all over the world. The Lower East Side squatters' movement was raw populist organizing. Old school anarchist direct action emerged from real need, made spectacularly public through homelessness. The movement unfolded in a fog of drugs (its own kind of war, as defined by the government). The squatters themselves saw the aims and values of their movement through a scrim of class and gender, with continual misperceptions, oppression-bruised sexualities and incommensurable lifestyles clashing continually. The movement was based not in the needs of laboring people, but in the needs of any people for housing, pure and simple. This is the kind of struggle that is emerging globally with the migration crises of our day, and one in which political

squatters are taking an active role.\* And the differences among those who take part are as sharp as any told in *War*.

\*(See the new anthology produced with the SqEK group and edited by Pierpaolo Mudu & Sutapa Chattopadhyay, [\*Migration, Squatting and Radical Autonomy\*](#) Routledge, 2016)

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# Notes

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