

**CONTESTED SPACE:  
THE HISTORY OF SQUATTING  
IN DIVIDED BERLIN  
c. 1970 – c. 1990.**

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*In Erwägung, daß da Häuser stehen  
während ihr uns ohne Bleibe laßt  
haben wir beschlossen,  
jetzt dort einzuziehen  
weil es uns in uns'ren Löchern nicht mehr paßt.*

- Bertolt Brecht, *Resolution der Kommunarden* (1934)

*Wir brauchen keine Hausbesitzer,  
denn die Häuser gehören uns.  
Wir brauchen keine Fabrikbesitzer,  
die Fabriken gehören uns.*

- Ton Steine Scherben, *Die letzte Schlacht gewinnen wir* (1972)

for my mother and father

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and that no part of it has previously been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification, nor has it been published in any form.

6 April 2015

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the history of urban squatting in East and West Berlin from c. 1970 to c.1990. In doing so, it explores the relationship between urban space, opposition and conformity, mainstream and alternative cultures, as well as questions of identity and belonging in both halves of the formerly divided city. During Berlin's history of division, illegal squatting was undertaken by a diverse range of actors from across the period's political and Cold War divides. The practice emerged in both East and West Berlin during the early 1970s, continuing and intensifying during the following decade, before the traditions of squatting on both sides of the Berlin Wall converged in 1989-90, as the city's – and Germany's – physical division was overcome. Squatting, this thesis argues, provides an important yet little studied chapter in Berlin's – and indeed Germany's – post-war history. What is more, it provides an example of the ways in which, during the period of Cold War division, Berlin's and Germany's symbolic meaning was not only contested between East and West, but was, within the respective societies, also re-interpreted from below.

Drawing on a broad range of archival sources, this thesis compares and contrasts the experience of squatters on both sides of the Berlin Wall, and the ways in which the respective polities responded to this phenomenon. Broadly similar paradigms of urban renewal, this thesis argues, account for not only parallels in the temporality but also the geography of squatting in East and West Berlin. In both Berlins, this thesis demonstrates, the history of squatting was interconnected with that of domestic opposition and political dissidence. Moreover, squatting contributed to the emergence of alternative urban lifestyles, which sustained comparable urban sub-cultures on both sides of the Cold War divide. Perhaps counter-intuitively, this thesis argues that, East Germany's apparatus of control notwithstanding, the relationship between squatters and the authorities in the GDR was generally more consensual than it was between their counterparts in West Germany and West Berlin. The thesis not only points to the limits of the totalitarian model of interpretation when applied to late Socialist society in the GDR, but also questions the dominant historiographical trend of studying the two Germanys in isolation from one another. Taking its cue from a number of influential scholars, this thesis asserts the importance of incorporating the experiences of both East and West Germany into a narrative of the nation's divided past. Through identifying and analysing the overarching variable of urban squatting, this thesis attempts to develop a perspective that regards the post-war history of East and West Germany as part of a wider whole.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

APO	<i>Außerparlamentarische Opposition</i> (Extra-Parliamentary Opposition)
APOusB	<i>Archiv 'APO und soziale Bewegungen', Fachbereich Politische Wissenschaft der Freien Universität Berlin</i> (Archive 'APO and Social Movements', Faculty of Political Science at the Free University of Berlin)
BAB	<i>Bundesarchiv Berlin</i> (Federal Archive, Berlin)
BStU	<i>Bundesbeauftragten für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik</i> (The Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic)
CDU	Christian-Democratic Union
FDJ	<i>Freie Deutsche Jugend</i> (Free German Youth)
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
FFBIZ	<i>Frauenforschungs-, -bildungs- und -informationszentrum e.V.</i> (Woman's research, education and information centre e.V.)
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GSG9	<i>Grenzschutz Gruppe 9</i> (Border Security Group 9)
HAV	<i>Robert Havemann Gesellschaft e.V. Archiv der DDR Opposition</i>
IBP	<i>Instandbesetzer Post</i>
KPD	<i>Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands</i> (Communist Party of Germany)
KPD/ML	<i>Die Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands/Marxisten-Leninisten</i> (The Communist Party of Germany/Marxist-Leninist)
KWB	<i>Kommunistischer Bund Westdeutschland</i> (Communist League of West Germany)
LAB	<i>Landesarchiv Berlin</i> (Berlin State Archive)
MfS	<i>Ministerium für Staatssicherheit</i> (Ministry for State Security) <i>Papiertiger Archiv und Bibliothek der sozialen Bewegungen</i>

PA	(Papertiger Archive and Library of Social Movements)
RAF	<i>Rote Armee Fraktion</i> (Red Army Faction)
RTB	<i>Runder Tisch Berlin</i> (Berlin Round Table)
SAPMO	<i>Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv</i> (Archive Foundation of Parties and Mass Organizations of the GDR)
SDS	<i>Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund</i> (Socialist German Student Federation)
SED	<i>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands</i> (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)
SEW	<i>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Westberlins</i> (Socialist Unity Party of West Berlin)
SPD	<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i> (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
taz	<i>die tageszeitung</i>
VfS	<i>Verfassungsschutz</i> (Office for the Protection of the Constitution)

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# INTRODUCTION

## I. SETTING

'Without Schnapps you'd freeze your arse off here', said Johnny, a squatter in one of Berlin's run-down, inner-city districts. Sporting a beard, shoulder-long hair, and dressed in jeans and a Parka, Johnny had recently left his family home in the provinces and moved to the metropolis on the Spree. After two days searching, he found an empty apartment in a *Hinterhaus* (back house) of a dilapidated tenement building. The flat Johnny occupied consisted of a room and kitchen, heated by an old-fashioned, coal-burning oven. A communal toilet, shared between four apartments, was located on the half-landing above. The courtyard below smelled of rubbish and damp. In the stairwell, the lighting was out of order in all but one floor.<sup>1</sup>

It was the winter of 1980-81, and in West Berlin the *Instandbesetzer* (rehab squatter) movement was reaching its climax. Thousands were taking to the streets in regular demonstrations against the Senate's housing policy and buildings were being occupied on an almost daily basis. The general atmosphere was tense and polarised. Police raids and baton charges were being met with barricades and militant resistance. Those arrested were being tried in special courts, originally designed for holding terrorists, while the judiciary was passing out harsh sentences, in an attempt to break the squatters' resolve. In

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<sup>1</sup> See Dieter Bub, ' "Stern" Bericht', reproduced in *Instandbesetzer Post*, Nr. 15, 19. June 1981.

the City Hall, new anti-squatting legislation was being drafted, while the mainstream press was calling for the occupied houses to be cleared by force.

None of this was bothering Johnny, however, for he had squatted in the district of Prenzlauer Berg, in East Berlin. The events in the western half of the city, while taking place only a couple of kilometres from his doorstep, belonged to those of a different world. His was one of several thousand apartments that had been illegally occupied in the eastern half of the city, and although West Berlin was home to one of the largest squatter movements in Europe, it is possible that there were just as many illegal tenants in the East German capital at this time. Indeed, squatting in East Berlin seems to have been a remarkably straightforward enterprise. As one contemporary put it: 'In an afternoon, you [could] find a dozen empty buildings in Prenzlauer Berg [alone]'. And despite the fact that Johnny had moved into his apartment illegally, without the prior knowledge or permission of officials in the local housing organs, he did not seem particularly concerned about being forced out. '*Biste erst mal drin*', he explained, '*bleibste auch drin*'.<sup>2</sup> Still, the history of squatting is largely overlooked in the major biographies of the city: the subject is not addressed at all in Alexandra Richie's thousand page tome, *Faust's Metropolis*, while in David Clay Large's study of the city between German unification in 1871 and reunification in 1990, the history of squatting in West Berlin receives but the briefest of mentions, and that in East Berlin, none at all.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 'Once you're in, you're in.' See Dieter Bub, ' "Stern" Bericht', reproduced in *Instandbesetzer Post*, Nr. 15, 19. June 1981.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Richie, *Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin* (New York: Carol & Graff, 1998); David Clay Large, *Berlin* (New York: Basic Books, 2000). There is a brief overview of the history of

## II. OUTLINE AND CURRENT HISTORIOGRAPHY

This thesis provides a comprehensive study of the history of urban squatting in post-war Berlin. It offers an analysis of the parallel emergence of the practice of illegal squatting in both halves of the city during the 1970s and 80s before going on to examine the continuation and intensification of this phenomenon once Berlin's physical division had been overcome. The thesis demonstrates that, with the possible exception of Amsterdam, no other continental European city was home to such large squatter milieus or witnessed such sustained squatter movements in the post-war era as did Berlin; and, given the city's unique post-war division, even Amsterdam's history of squatting cannot claim a comparable complexity with that of Berlin's. Squatting in Berlin was intertwined with the city's history of opposition to post-war urban planning, it played an important role in the evolution of Berlin's post-sixties protest culture, and it constitutes an important chapter in the city's longer-term history as centre for counterculture and alternative lifestyles. The history of squatting also provides an example of the ways in which East and West Berlin's symbolic meaning was not only contested between East and West but was also re-interpreted from below during the last two decades of the Cold War. Indeed, studying the phenomenon of squatting enables us to analyse a facet of Berlin's turbulent history from a unique street-level perspective.

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squatting in West Berlin in Wilfried Rott, *Die Insel: Eine Geschichte West-Berlins 1948-1990* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2009).

Squatting, as defined by Hans Pruijt, is the occupation of a particular property – such as a residential apartment, a disused industrial building, or a vacant piece of urban land – ‘without the consent of the owner’, or, we might add, the relevant administrative or political authority.<sup>4</sup> Illegality is implicit in this definition. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, to squat is ‘to *unlawfully* occupy an uninhabited building or settle on a piece of land.’<sup>5</sup> Reflecting the particular history of squatting in (West) Germany, Switzerland and Austria, the German language definition differs slightly. Duden defines ‘Hausbesetzung’ as: ‘illegally moving in as a group to an empty building or a building scheduled for demolition’.<sup>6</sup> In addition, squatters in both Germanys supplied their own terms, adding new layers of meaning to describe this particular practice. In West Berlin, squatters often referred to themselves as ‘*Instandbesetzer*’ (rehab squatters), and the practice as ‘*instandbesetzen*’ – a neologism of the verbs ‘*instandsetzen*’ (to renovate) and ‘*besetzen*’ (to occupy). During the early 1970s in Frankfurt, and again in West Berlin in the early 1980s, a number of activists framed the squatter movement as the ‘*Häuserkampf*’ – a term which evoked the often violent struggle between squatters and the state authorities that was a significant feature of the history of squatting in West Germany. Indicative of the more covert and less openly antagonistic nature of squatting in the GDR, its practitioners here were more inclined to use the term ‘*schwarzwohnen*’ – one that does not lead readily to translation, but which is

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<sup>4</sup> See Hans Pruijt, ‘The Logic of Urban Squatting’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37, no. 1 (2013), p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of English*, s.v. ‘squat’. Emphasis added.

<sup>6</sup> Duden – Deutsches Universalwörterbuch, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., s. v. ‘Hausbesetzung’.

redolent of 'schwarzfahren' (fare dodging) or 'Schwarzmarkt' (the black market). Not all GDR squatters were happy with this expression and its apolitical connotations, however.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, in East Berlin, the term most often used was 'wohnungsbesetzen' (apartment occupying), reflecting the fact that it was most common to occupy individual apartments, rather than complete buildings, as was the case in West Berlin.<sup>8</sup> Occasionally, East German squatters borrowed from the West German movements, referring to themselves, too, as 'rehab squatters'. For the purpose of this dissertation, the terms 'squatting' and 'occupation' will be used interchangeably to encompass the practice in both the FRG and GDR.

There has been a long history and tradition of squatting in post-war Europe.<sup>9</sup> The practice was already widespread in England by the 1960s, particularly in London, while on the Continent, a number of countries – including the Netherlands, Switzerland, France, Italy, Denmark and Austria – witnessed the emergence of large and often militant squatter movements in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>10</sup> West Germany's tradition of squatting dates back to

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<sup>7</sup> See Udo Grashoff, *Schwarzwohnen: Die Unterwanderung der staatlichen Wohnraumlentung in der DDR* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2011), pp. 11-12.

<sup>8</sup> Unpublished interview: Moldt, Dirk. Interview by Peter Mitchell. Berlin, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2013.

<sup>9</sup> For general overviews see Squatting Europe Collective, ed. *Squatting in Europe: Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles* (New York: Autonomedia, 2013); Anders Corr, *No Trespassing!: Squatting, Rent Strikes, and Land Struggles Worldwide* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999). Hans Pruijt, 'Okupar en Europa,' in *¿Dónde están las llaves? El movimiento okupa: prácticas y contextos sociales* (Madrid: La Catarata, 2004). See also Jan-Henrik Friedrichs and Hanno Balz, eds., *All We Ever Wanted...': Eine Kulturgeschichte europäischer Protestbewegungen der 1980er Jahre* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> For the Dutch squatters, especially those in Amsterdam, see Lynn Owens, *Cracking Under Pressure: Narrating the Decline of the Amsterdam Squatters' Movement* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009). For the Danish context see Flemming Mikkelsen and Rene Karpantscho, 'Youth as a Political Movement: Development of the Squatters' and Autonomous Movement in Copenhagen', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25, no. 3 (2002). For a comparative study of the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria and Switzerland

September 1970, with Frankfurt, which had been one of the nodes of the West German '1968', witnessing the first case of overt squatting in the *Bundesrepublik*. Buildings were occupied in other cities, such as Cologne and Hamburg, but the stronghold of the '*Häuserkampf*', as the Frankfurt squatters called it, remained the Hessian city. By 1973, Frankfurt was home to around ten openly squatted tenement buildings, most of which were concentrated in the city's West End.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, however, numerous disused industrial complexes were taken over across the FRG, in large cities and in the provinces, in a loosely coordinated Youth Centre Movement that reached its high-point in the middle of the decade.<sup>12</sup> Following a lull during the second half of the 1970s, a much larger wave of squatting again swept across the FRG during the early 1980s. Over the course of 1981, the year in which the number of occupations peaked, the Federal Criminal Police Office counted some 595 occupations in 153 towns and cities undertaken by around 12,900 squatters. This time, West Berlin served as the squatters' stronghold, while regional centres of the squatter movement also included Frankfurt, Munich, Hamburg, Cologne, Dusseldorf, Gottingen, Freiburg and Nuremberg.<sup>13</sup> However, it was not only cities to the west of the 'Iron Curtain' that witnessed urban squatting during these decades.

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see Andreas Suttner, *'Beton Brennt': Hausbesetzer und Selbstverwaltung im Berlin, Wien und Zürich der 80er* (Vienna and Berlin: Lit-Verlag, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> For the Frankfurt '*Häuserkampf*' see Wolfgang Kraushaar, 'Die Frankfurter Sponti-Szene: Eine Subkultur als politische Versuchsordnung', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 44(2004). See also Sven Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014), pp. 506-16.

<sup>12</sup> For an overview see Detlev Siegfried, 'Einstürzende Neubauten: Wohngemeinschaften, Jugendzentren und private Präferenzen kommunistischer "Kader" als Formen jugendlicher Subkultur', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 44(2004).

<sup>13</sup> Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*, p. 502.

It was, as this thesis shows, increasingly practised in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) during the 1970s and 1980s, while anecdotal evidence suggests that squatting was undertaken in a number of other Eastern European countries at some time or another during the post-war era. In 1972 in Yugoslavia, for instance, over one million citizens were living on illegally squatted land. In fact, according to one study, 'illegal buildings constituted half of all private housing constructions' in Tito's republic by the early 1970s.<sup>14</sup> In May 1981, the West German *Tageszeitung* reported cases of squatting, evictions and subsequent protests in the Polish capital Warsaw and the industrial city Kattowitz.<sup>15</sup> The history of squatting in the Soviet Union and the countries of the Eastern bloc lies beyond the scope of this thesis, though it provides a potentially fruitful area for future research.

The historical literature on squatting in Berlin and indeed in Germany and in Europe more generally is still in its infancy.<sup>16</sup> 'Mainstream research', as Margit Mayer argues, 'has paid scarce attention to the unfolding of squatting movements, their dynamics, their differences [and] their transformations'.<sup>17</sup> To be sure, the political scientists Ruud Koopmanns and Roger Karapin have drawn

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<sup>14</sup> Boris Pleskovic, 'Squatter Housing in Yugoslavia,' in *Spontaneous Shelter: International Perspectives and Prospects*, ed. Carl V. Patton (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> 'Hausbesetzen als Menschenrecht', *taz*, 15.5.1981.

<sup>16</sup> The most detailed study of squatting in West Berlin to date is provided by Andreas Suttner. Drawing on his doctoral dissertation at the University of Vienna, Suttner seeks to analyse the history of squatting and youth movements in West Berlin, Vienna and Zürich in the 1980s in comparative perspective. Suttner seeks to connect the youth revolts in these three cities through reference to Michel Foucault's theories of heterotopias. Suttner, *'Beton Brennt': Hausbesetzer und Selbstverwaltung im Berlin, Wien und Zürich der 80er*. As a work of reference, Suttner has made an important contribution, not only to the history of squatting in West Berlin but also in Vienna and Zürich. However, as one reviewer pointedly puts it, '[a]s a critical historical analysis the book utterly fails'. For a critical review see Joachim C. Häberlen, 'review of "Beton Brennt": Hausbesetzer und Selbstverwaltung im Berlin, Wien und Zürich der 80er. By Andreas Suttner.', *German History* 30, no. 2 (2012).

<sup>17</sup> Kollektive, *Squatting in Europe: Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles*, p. 7.

on case studies of squatting in West Berlin in order to draw broader conclusions about the nature of mobilisation waves and political processes, and Werner Linder and Matthias Manrique have incorporated the subject into their studies on youth protest.<sup>18</sup> Still, as Freia Anders has recently pointed out, 'the historical analysis of this phenomenon has thus far attracted little academic attention'.<sup>19</sup> This is beginning to change, however, and the last few years have witnessed an increasing interest among historians in squatting, especially its history in West Germany.<sup>20</sup> The historiography on the history of squatting in the GDR is, by contrast, much less developed. Barring one contribution by the historian and contemporary Dieter Rink on squatting in Leipzig, the only other academic to broach the subject is Udo Grashoff.<sup>21</sup> Grashoff's two slim volumes, one an overview of squatting in the GDR and the other a case study of his hometown Halle, provide admirable and highly readable introductions to the

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<sup>18</sup> Ruud Koopmans, *Democracy from below: new social movements and the political system in West Germany* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 170-78. pp. 170-78; Roger Karapin, *Protest Politics in Germany: Movements on the Left and Right since the 1960s* (College Park, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), pp. 61-116. pp. 61-116; Werner Lindner, *Jugendprotest seit den fünfziger Jahren: Dissens und kultureller Eigensinn* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1996), pp. 260-74.; Matthias Manrique, *Marginalisierung und Militanz: Jugendliche Bewegungsmilieus im Aufruhr* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1992), pp. 72-77, 115-25.

<sup>19</sup> Freia Anders, 'Wohnraum, Freiraum, Widerstand: Die Formierung der Autonomen in den Konflikten um Hausbesetzungen Anfang der achtziger Jahre,' in *Das Alternative Milieu: Antibürgerlicher Lebensstil und linke Politik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Europa, 1968-1983*, ed. Sven Reichard and Detlef Siegfried (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2010), pp. 474-75.

<sup>20</sup> See Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*, pp. 498-571. Alexander Sedlmaier, *Consumption and Violence: Radical Protest in Cold-War West Germany* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014), pp. 24, 205-32. See also Friedrichs and Balz, *'All We Ever Wanted...': Eine Kulturgeschichte europäischer Protestbewegungen der 1980er Jahre*.

<sup>21</sup> Dieter Rink, 'Der Traum ist aus? Hausbesetzer in Leipzig-Connewitz in der 90er Jahren,' in *Jugendkulturen, Politik und Protest. Vom Widerstand zum Kommerz?*, ed. Roland Roth & Dieter Rucht (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2000); Grashoff, *Schwarzwohnen: Die Unterwanderung der staatlichen Wohnraumlenkung in der DDR*; Udo Grashoff, *Leben im Abriss: Schwarzwohnen in Halle an der Saale* (Halle: Hasenverlag, 2011).



subject, though they cannot be considered as the final word.<sup>22</sup> Building on Grashoff's observation that the history of squatting in the GDR provides evidence for the 'room for manoeuvre' that existed within the East German dictatorship, this thesis subjects the relationship between squatters and the GDR authorities at the local level to an in-depth analysis.

There are many different motives for urban squatting, as Hans Pruijt's typology suggests.<sup>23</sup> Material deprivation is one such inducement, and the spread of urban squatting from Brixton to East Berlin was testament to what Kesia Reeve terms as the 'enduring relevance of material need'.<sup>24</sup> Despite the marked increase in general prosperity in the western world over the course of the 'Golden Age' (Hobsbawm) of post-war capitalism, marginalised elements within Western European and North American societies often continued to struggle to satisfy one of their most basic requirements: finding a place of their own to live. This situation was particularly pronounced in the GDR and in other countries in the Soviet bloc, moreover. The ruling parties' commitment to resolving the 'Housing Question' notwithstanding, an acute housing shortage remained in East Germany and in the other Socialist republics throughout the post-war era.<sup>25</sup> In the GDR, material deprivation was one of the main motivations for squatting. In spite of its illegality, the practice, as this thesis

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<sup>22</sup> Professor Grashoff is currently supervising Jakob Wernecke's PhD dissertation at the University of Leipzig which focuses on squatting in Potsdam between 1980-2000.

<sup>23</sup> See Pruijt, 'The Logic of Urban Squatting.' In this article, Pruijt breaks squatting down into five basic configurations: Deprivation based squatting; squatting as an alternative housing strategy; entrepreneurial squatting; conservational squatting; and political squatting.

<sup>24</sup> Kesia Reeve, 'Squatting since 1945: The enduring relevance of material need' in *Housing and Social Policy: Contemporary Themes and Critical Perspectives*, ed. Peter Somerville and Nigel Sprigings (Oxon: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> See Hannsjörg F. Buck, *Mit hohem Anspruch gescheitert: Die Wohnungspolitik der DDR* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004).

shows, was used by increasing numbers as an alternative housing strategy throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Recent studies by urban historians and sociologists have situated the emergence of squatter movements within the broader international crisis of urban housing and urban renewal in Western Europe and North America.<sup>26</sup> Squatting served as a tactic practised by conservational urban movements that sought to challenge dominant planning paradigms which envisaged the erasure of the existing urban fabric to make way for new infrastructure projects or for modern high-rise apartments. Squatting as a tactic for initiatives seeking to oppose prevailing urban renewal paradigms was widely practised during the 1970s and 1980s in what might be interpreted as a 'romantic' resistance to an urban modernisation project that left little room for nostalgia. Early examples of 'conservation squatting' are to be found in the squatter movements that emerged in Tolmers Square neighbourhood in the London borough of Camden, Amsterdam's Nieuwmarkt district, and Frankfurt's West End in the early 1970s.<sup>27</sup> In the early 1980s, conservational squatter movements that lamented the destruction of the traditional inner city urban fabric proliferated in towns and cities across Western Europe, most prominently in Amsterdam and West Berlin.<sup>28</sup> This opposition ultimately played a significant role in the collapse of

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<sup>26</sup> Andrej Holm and Armin Kuhn, 'Squatting and Urban Renewal: The Interaction of Squatter Movements and Strategies of Urban Restructuring in Berlin', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35(2011). Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> Pruijt, 'The Logic of Urban Squatting,' p. 33. Kraushaar, 'Die Frankfurter Sponti-Szene: Eine Subkultur als politische Versuchsordnung.'

<sup>28</sup> H. Bodenschatz, V. Heise, and J. Korfmacher, *Schluss mir der Zerstörung? Stadterneuerung und städtische Opposition in West-Berlin, Amsterdam und London* (West Berlin: Anabas, 1983).

urban renewal paradigms across the continent, with German cities, and West Berlin in particular, emerging, in the words of Cristopher Klemek, as the ‘true heirs of New Left urbanism’.<sup>29</sup>

In Western Europe, the history of squatting and squatter movements was closely intertwined with that of the post-1960s extra-parliamentary opposition; indeed, during the 1970s and 1980s, the city increasingly served not simply as the ‘stage’ but also the ‘object’ of protest, as a recent publication points out.<sup>30</sup> In this context, squatter movements emerged not only as a result of a crisis of urban housing and in opposition to urban renewal, as a number of scholars have noted, but also, as Sebastian Haumann and Susanne Schregel argue, as a means to experiment with ‘alternative spatial practices’.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Sven Reichardt and Alexander Sedlemaier have highlighted the role which squatting played in the search for alternative lifestyles amongst West Germany’s ‘alternative milieu’ and radical left.<sup>32</sup> The increasing importance which the West German extra-parliamentary opposition and the radical left attached towards the appropriation of urban space and the search for alternative lifestyles

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<sup>29</sup> Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin*, p. 237.

<sup>30</sup> Jan-Henrik Friedrichs and Hanno Balz, ‘Individualität und Revolte im neoliberalen Aufbruch: Annäherungen an eine Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte der europäischen Protestbewegung der 1980er Jahre,’ in *All We Ever Wanted...: Eine Kulturgeschichte europäischer Protestbewegungen der 1980er Jahre.*, ed. Hanno Balz and Jan-Henrik Friedrichs (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2012), p. 22.

<sup>31</sup> Sebastian Haumann and Susanne Schregel, ‘Andere Räume, andere Städte und die Transformation der Gesellschaft: Hausbesetzungen und Atomwaffenfreie Zonen,’ *ibid.*, ed. Jan-Henrik Friedrichs and Hanno Balz.

<sup>32</sup> Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*, pp. 498-571. Alexander Sedlemaier. See Sedlemaier, *Consumption and Violence: Radical Protest in Cold-War West Germany*, p. 24, pp. 205-32.

'represented a new privileging of the local', as Timothy S. Brown points out.<sup>33</sup> With the politicisation of everyday life within the post-1968 radical left and alternative milieu, and prioritising immediacy and concrete experience over abstract theory, squatted buildings and occupied Youth Centres provided an opportunity to establish 'autonomous' spaces in which alternative concepts of community organisation could be pioneered in the here and now.<sup>34</sup>

Opposition to urban renewal, on the one hand, and efforts to secure and defend autonomous spaces and alternative lifestyles, on the other, were often accompanied by considerable levels of militancy and violence. Militant confrontations between squatters and the authorities were not confined to West Germany but manifested themselves in various local contexts, noticeably in Copenhagen, Amsterdam and in Zürich.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the squatter movements of the early 1980s, as Freia Anders demonstrates, served as a crucible for the formation of the *Autonomen*, whose ritualisation of militant confrontation established itself as a feature of the *Bundesrepublik's* radical opposition in the 1980s, continuing into the 1990s.<sup>36</sup> As Joachim C. Häberlen and Jake P. Smith

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<sup>33</sup> Timothy S. Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties: The Anti-Authoritarian Revolt, 1962-1978* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 175.

<sup>34</sup> Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*, p. 569. Haumann and Schregel, 'Andere Räume, andere Städte und die Transformation der Gesellschaft: Hausbesetzungen und Atomwaffenfreie Zonen,' p. 54. For the Youth Centre Movement see Siegfried, 'Einstürzende Neubauten: Wohngemeinschaften, Jugendzentren und private Präferenzen kommunistischer "Kader" als Formen jugendlicher Subkultur.'

<sup>35</sup> Mikkelsen and Karpantscho, 'Youth as a Political Movement: Development of the Squatters' and Autonomous Movement in Copenhagen.'; Gerard Anderiesen, 'Tanks in the streets: The growing conflict over housing in Amsterdam', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 5, no. 1 (1981); Suttner, '*Beton Brennt*': *Hausbesetzer und Selbstverwaltung im Berlin, Wien und Zürich der 80er*.

<sup>36</sup> Anders, 'Wohnraum, Freiraum, Widerstand: Die Formierung der Autonomen in den Konflikten um Hausbesetzungen Anfang der achtziger Jahre.' See also Freia Anders and Alexander Sedlmaier, 'The Limits of the Legitimate: The Quarrel over 'Violence' between

argue, the violent history of political squatting and the often authoritarian manner in which the authorities responded to it, sits uneasily within the 'democratisation narrative' of post-1968 West Germany.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, it provides a cautionary note to those, such as Karrin Hanshew, who view the late 1970s as a pivotal point in the history of the extra-parliamentary left in which, in the aftermath of the German Autumn and in the context of the rise of the environmental, anti-nuclear and women's movements, violence was rejected in principle.<sup>38</sup>

The militancy that often accompanied squatting in the West, it should be noted, was absent from the GDR where the practice was conducted in a more clandestine and less openly confrontational manner. Nevertheless, the history of squatting was intertwined with that of East Berlin's alternative culture, affirming, in the words of Wolfgang Rüdtenklau, a 'self-determined way of life' behind the Berlin Wall.<sup>39</sup> Although it does not feature in studies of opposition in the GDR, the history of squatting in the GDR, as this thesis shows, provides numerous examples of private – if not collective – resistance to the total claims of the party-state during the last two decades of Communist rule.<sup>40</sup>

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Autonomous Groups and the German Authorities,' in *Writing Political History Today*, ed. Willibad Steinmetz, Ingrid Gilcher-Hotley, and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (Frankfurt: Campus, 2013).

<sup>37</sup> See Joachim C. Häberlen and Jake P. Smith, 'Struggling for Feelings: The Politics of Emotions in the Radical New Left, c. 1968-84', *Contemporary European History* 23, no. 04 (2014), p. 637.

<sup>38</sup> Karrin Hanshew, *Terror and Democracy in West Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Ch. 4. Hanshew's conclusions are undermined by the fact that, in the words of one reviewer, she does not extend her analysis to incorporate the 'very tangible violence continued to mar protests of citizens' initiatives well into the 1980s and beyond'. See Wilfried Mausbach, 'Review of *Terror and Democracy in West Germany*', *American Historical Review* 118, no. 4 (2013), p. 1276.

<sup>39</sup> Wolfgang Rüdtenklau, 'Vorwort,' in *moAning star: Ein Ostberliner Untergrundpublikation, 1985-89*, ed. Dirk Moldt (Berlin: Robert-Havemann-Gesellschaft, 2005), p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> For the standard work on the history of opposition in the GDR see Ehrhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR, 1949-1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1998). See also Andrew I.

There is a considerable debate surrounding what in fact constituted ‘opposition’ and ‘resistance’ under Communist regimes, with historians of the GDR drawing on the various interpretations put forward in the much larger scholarship of opposition to the Third Reich.<sup>41</sup> While some, such as Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, opt for the broad definition of ‘oppositional behaviour’ which encompasses ‘immunity’ or ‘*Resistenz*’ (Broszat) to the dictatorship and its claims, others, such as Erhart Neubert, advocate a narrower conceptual framework that restricts oppositional activity to that which consciously sought to circumscribe the regime’s power.<sup>42</sup> The latter interpretation, however, proves unnecessarily limiting, and omits diverse forms of dissent and non-conformity from those who were not in a position to challenge the regime but who nevertheless sought to assert their own *Eigen-Sinn* or agency, albeit within the parameters of the one-party state.<sup>43</sup> Through analysing the compromises struck between squatters and the local organs at the grassroots, this thesis highlights ‘the limits of the dictatorship’ and challenges the ‘totalitarian’ interpretation of GDR history on a micro-level.<sup>44</sup>

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Port, *Conflict and stability in the German Democratic Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>41</sup> See Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (London: Arnold, 2002). Ch. 5.

<sup>42</sup> Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, ‘Von der Freiheit, Ich zu sagen: Widerständiges Verhalten in der DDR,’ in *Zwischen Selbstbehauptung und Anpassung: Formen des Widerstandes unter der Opposition der DDR*, ed. Ulrike Poppe, Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, and Rainer Eckert (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1995); Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR, 1949-1989*

<sup>43</sup> See Alf Lüdtke, ed. *The History of Everyday Life. Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 313-14.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Bessel and Ralph Jessen, eds., *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996). For a classic top-down, totalitarian interpretation of the GDR see Klaus Schroeder, *Der SED-Staat: Partei, Staat und Gesellschaft, 1949-1990* (Munich & Vienna: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1998). For an insightful critique of this approach see Mary Fulbrook, ‘The Limits of Totalitarianism: God, State and Society in the GDR’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society Sixth Series* 7(1997).

### III. METHOD

This study adds to the existing scholarship by providing not only a detailed case study of squatting in both halves of divided Berlin but also through comparing and contrasting the experience of squatting across the Cold War divide.<sup>45</sup> In attempting to use the common theme of squatting to integrate the histories of East and West Germany, this thesis runs against some entrenched trends in the post-war scholarship more generally, as the two German states tend to be analysed in isolation from one another by academics who specialise either in the history of the *Bundesrepublik* and Western Europe or the GDR and the Eastern bloc. Although the recent ‘trans-national turn’ has encouraged historians to trace the diffusion of ideas and cultural practices across national boundaries, the German-German division has thus far provided a barrier that proved difficult to surmount historiographically. While studies often situate the developments that took place in the Federal Republic within a wider Western European or North Atlantic context, the same developments are rarely analysed in conjunction with those of the GDR.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, East German history is usually considered as belonging to that of the Communist world, with events and experiences there compared and contrasted with those of its COMECON neighbours. Some recent exceptions notwithstanding, the Cold War fault lines

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<sup>45</sup> Stephanie Warnke, *Stein Gegen Stein: Architektur und Medien im geteilten Berlin 1950-1970* (Frankfurt & New York: Campus Verlag, 2009).

<sup>46</sup> Examples of recent comparative studies with a Western Europe and North American focus Belinda Davis, Martin Klimke & Carla MacDougal (eds.), *Changing the World Changing Oneself: Political Protest and Collective Identities in West Germany and the US in the 1960s and 1970s* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn, 2010); Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976* (Oxford: OUP, 2007).

continue to demarcate the scholarship.<sup>47</sup> As Konrad Jarausch laments, more than 'two decades after the peaceful revolution of 1989/90, the historiography of the second half of the twentieth century remains largely divided as if German Unification had not happened.'<sup>48</sup>

Yet the division of German history, as Christoph Klessmann points out, is itself 'a product of historical development'.<sup>49</sup> The official policy of *Abgrenzung* (demarcation), in which both German states sought to assert their own distinct claims and identities, found its echo in the history faculty where separate disciplines concerned with either East or West German history were established. The respective specialists, both in the German speaking world and elsewhere, often found it difficult to see beyond the differences between the two systems and their societies.<sup>50</sup> For much of the era of division, those such as Christoph Klessmann, who argued the merits of a comparative approach, belonged to a distinct minority.<sup>51</sup> German Reunification has deepened this trend rather than undermined it. The West's victory in the Cold War has encouraged a teleological reading of Cold War history, in which the FRG's (considerable) success is contrasted against the GDR's (numerous) failings. The

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<sup>47</sup> Timothy S. Brown, "'1968" East and West: Divided Germany as a Case Study in Transnational History', *American History Review* (2009): 69-96; Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Los Angeles and Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>48</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, 'Divided, Yet Reunited - The Challenge of Integrating German Post-War Histories', <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-German&month=1102&week=a&msg=lnK7XIEc2qqANKFyP6tmew&user=&pw=>> retrieved 4. Feb. 2011.

<sup>49</sup> Christoph Klessmann, 'Spaltung und Verflechtung - Ein Konzept zur integrierten Nachkriegsgeschichte 1945 bis 1990,' in *Teilung und Integration: Die doppelte deutsche Nachkriegsgeschichte*, ed. Christoph Klessmann and Peter Lautzas (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2005), p. 23.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>51</sup> See Christoph Klessmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung: Deutsche Geschichte 1945-1955* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1982).



German academy, as Andreas Wirsching argues, quickly produced its own 'Whig Interpretation of History', in which the historical questions asked and conclusions drawn were determined 'from the perspective of 1990.'<sup>52</sup> Recent syntheses have also served to reinforce this tendency. In Hans-Ulrich Wehler's five volume *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, he dismisses the GDR to little more than a 'footnote in world history'.<sup>53</sup> In Heinrich August Winkler's master-narrative of German history from 1789 to 1990, it is the establishment of the *Bundesrepublik*, and the *Bundesrepublik* alone, that enables the nation to complete its 'long road west'.<sup>54</sup> In these interpretations, written by Germany's leading historians, most of whom learned their trade in the former West, the GDR serves predominantly as the negative foil against which the achievements of the Federal Republic are measured.

The state of the literature as it stands is not without its critics, however. Mary Fulbrook, an expert in GDR history, has authored a pioneering study of post-war Germany which provides a nuanced and balanced account of the nation's divided past.<sup>55</sup> More recently, Uta G. Poiger has provided an excellent comparative analyses of cultural politics in the two Germanys through studying their respective reception and responses to American culture, while in his recent study of West Germany and the global sixties, Timothy S. Brown makes a

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<sup>52</sup> Andreas Wirsching, 'Für eine Pragmatische Zeitgeschichtsforschung', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, no. 3 (2007).

<sup>53</sup> 'Was der Schriftsteller Stefan Heyn als bange Frage aufgeworfen hatte, erwies sich seither als Faktum: Die kurzlebige DDR, sie war nur "eine Fußnote der Weltgeschichte".' Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Bundesrepublik und DDR* (München: Beck, 2008), p. 361.

<sup>54</sup> Heinrich August Winkler, *Germany: The Long Road West, 1933-90* (Oxford: OUP, 2007).

<sup>55</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *Fontana History of Germany: Divided Nation 1918-1990* (London: Fontana, 1991).

commendable effort at drawing connections between events and developments on both sides of the German-German divide.<sup>56</sup> What is more, a number of essay collections have challenged the dominant trend in post-war historiography, setting out, with varying degrees of success, the ways in which a comparative approach integrating the post-war experience in the *Bundesrepublik* and GDR could be undertaken.<sup>57</sup> Andreas Wirsching has recently called for a ‘pragmatic’ approach that incorporates the GDR more fully into the post-war narrative.<sup>58</sup> Other influential voices, such as Jürgen Kocka, Konrad Jarausch and Christoph Klessmann, have added weight to this argument.

According to Marc Bloch, an early pioneer of the comparative method, the aim of historical comparisons is to:

make a parallel study of societies that are at once neighbouring and contemporary, exercising a constant mutual influence, exposed throughout their development to the action of the same broad causes just because they are close and contemporaneous, and owing their existence in part at least to a common origin.<sup>59</sup>

The GDR and FRG were, of course, ‘neighbouring and contemporary’, straddling the ‘Iron Curtain’ that divided Europe for the duration of the Cold War. Each, it can be argued, exercised a ‘constant mutual influence’ on one another; no other

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<sup>56</sup> Poiger, *Jazz, Rock and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany*. Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties: The Anti-Authoritarian Revolt, 1962-1978*. See also Timothy S. Brown, “‘1968’ East and West: Divided Germany as a Case Study in Transnational History”, *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>57</sup> Christoph Klessmann and Peter Lautzas, eds., *Teilung und Integration: Die doppelte deutsche Nachkriegsgeschichte* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2005); Frank Moeller and Ulrich Maehlert, eds., *Abgrenzung und Verflechtung: Das geteilte Deutschland in der zeithistorischen Debatte* (Berlin: Metropol, 2008).

<sup>58</sup> Wirsching, ‘Für eine Pragmatische Zeitgeschichtsforschung.’

<sup>59</sup> Marc Bloch quoted in Alett Olin Hill and Boyd H. Hill Jr., ‘AHR Forum: Marc Bloch and Comparative History’, *The American History Review* 85, no. 4 (1980), p. 830.p. 830.

two countries existed in such 'dialectical unity', to borrow the phrase of Karl Dietrich Erdmann, as did the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany during Europe's division.<sup>60</sup> Throughout their development, East and West Germany were exposed to similar influences and shared common post-war challenges. Both had to integrate displaced populations in the aftermath of the Second World War and oversee a period of reconstruction. Each served as a junior partner in its respective military alliance structure and was, therefore, situated on the front line of a potential nuclear war between the superpowers. As modern industrial societies, East and West Germany were affected – albeit in different ways, through different institutional systems, and at differing paces – by the implications of industrial production, revolutions in technology, urban reconstruction, and the spread of an increasingly global youth culture.<sup>61</sup> And lastly, they shared a long-standing historical and cultural heritage which shaped their subsequent development. In the words of one German philosopher, 'the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.'<sup>62</sup> That is to say, although 1945 was a caesura that marked the end of the 'German Catastrophe' (Meinecke) and the starting point for a new historical epoch, neither state could make a clear, unambiguous break with its past.

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<sup>60</sup> Karl Dietrich Erdmann, 'Drei Staaten – zwei Nationen – ein Volk? Überlegung zu einer deutschen Geschichte seit der Teilung', *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 36(1985), p. 682.

<sup>61</sup> Klessmann, 'Spaltung und Verflechtung – Ein Konzept zur integrierten Nachkriegsgeschichte 1945 bis 1990.'; Wirsching, 'Für eine Pragmatische Zeitgeschichtsforschung.'

<sup>62</sup> Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York & Berlin: Modial, 2005), p.1.

Any comparative study of divided Germany has, of course, to bear in mind the differences between the GDR's and the FRG's respective political systems. Yet the 'fundamental dichotomy', between the pluralist democracy in the *Bundesrepublik* and the one-party rule of then SED, as Horst Möller puts it, in no way undermines the comparative method.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, the very differences make the case for comparison more compelling. Due to their common historical and cultural heritage, and their (relatively) short-term political divergence, the FRG and GDR provide a 'unique field of study for approaching the history of democracy and dictatorship in Europe', as Kocka points out.<sup>64</sup>

Divided Berlin itself provides a historical laboratory *par excellence* for studying post-war history. Situated at the cross-roads of Western and Eastern Europe, with its respective halves belonging to the capitalist and Communist blocs, Berlin reproduced and connected the Cold War fault lines that divided the continent in microcosm. The divided city, as Michael Lemke puts it:

symbolized and represented not only the global conflict between systems [capitalism and socialism]; the division of the world, Europe and Germany [into East and West]; but also the nature, structure and goals of their supporting, antagonistic world political systems.<sup>65</sup>

But the divided city served not only as a stage for inter-bloc rivalry; from the sixties onwards, East and West Berlin played an increasingly important role for

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<sup>63</sup> Horst Möller, 'Demokratie und Diktatur', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, no. 3 (2007), p. 3.

<sup>64</sup> Jürgen Kocka, 'Bilanz und Perspektiven der DDR-Forschung', *Deutschland Archiv*, no. 6 (2003), p. 69.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Lemke, ed. *Schaufenster der Systemkonkurrenz. Die Region Berlin-Brandenburg im Kalten Krieg* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2006), p. 11.

their respective societies' alternative cultures. An important nodal point of the West German 1968, 'the encapsulated island city West Berlin', writes Sven Reichardt, 'can undoubtedly be described as the stronghold [of] and model [for] the left-alternative culture.'<sup>66</sup> 'What draws the New Yorker to West Berlin', reflected one West German journalist writing on East Berlin in the early 1980s, 'the [East German] from Dresden finds in his own capital city'.<sup>67</sup> Within the two halves of the divided city, moreover, alternative 'micromilieus' emerged in districts such as Kreuzberg, Schöneberg and Prenzlauer Berg.<sup>68</sup>

This tension between West Berlin's official projection as a bastion of freedom and democracy, East Berlin's status as the capital of the first Socialist state on German soil, and the re-reading of the city's symbolic meaning from below, serves as one of the reasons for choosing Berlin as a case study. On a more practical level, squatting was more extensively practised in East and West Berlin than it was in other towns and cities in the FRG and GDR. What is more, in contrast to other cities in East and West Germany, Berlin's two distinct squatter traditions flowed together in the East Berlin squatter movement that emerged in the aftermath of the 'Peaceful Revolution'. While the archival research for this thesis was undertaken in Berlin, material relating to squatting outwith the former divided city has been incorporated into the study at various

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<sup>66</sup> Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*, p. 22.

<sup>67</sup> 'Die Punker von Prenzlauer Berg', *Tip*, Nr. 15 (1982) in BStU, MfS AOP Nr. 9610/83, fols. 202 – 205, here fol. 204.

<sup>68</sup> A milieu, to give a succinct definition, is 'a conglomerate of individuals, groups, places, institutions and infrastructures who, through their physical and symbolic presence, mark a particular space (Raum)'. See Dieter Rucht, 'Das alternative Milieu in der Bundesrepublik: Ursprünge, Infrastruktur und Nachwirkungen,' in *Das Alternative Milieu: Antibürgerlicher Lebensstil und linke Politik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Europa 1968-1983*, ed. Sven Reichardt and Detlef Siegfried (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2010), p. 65.

points. Indeed, while this first attempt to integrate the histories of squatting in the GDR and FRG has chosen to focus on Berlin as a case study, a comparative analysis of squatting in the East and West German province – Leipzig and Hamburg, for instance – certainly provides a potential area for future research.

#### IV. SOURCES

Dealing with the difference in archives and sources has been one of the most challenging aspects of this project. Due to the contrasting nature of the two polities, on the one hand, and on account of the differing characteristics of squatting East and West, on the other, there is little symmetry in the primary material on which this thesis is based. In West Germany, squatter movements unfolded in the public sphere. Squatter demonstrations, riots and evictions filled column inches in the national and local media, while political magazines, such as *Der Spiegel*, printed a number of in-depth investigations and reports. On account of the *Bundesrepublik's* multi-party democracy, the background to squatting and the strategies for responding to this phenomenon were debated by politicians and Senators both in Bonn and at the local *Land* level in West Berlin. Most importantly, the various and often conflicting voices of the West Berlin squatters themselves can be analysed, as the West German extra-parliamentary opposition, to which the squatter movements belonged, consciously sought to preserve its own history through establishing movement archives. Indeed, the squatter movements themselves played an important role here. Both the *Frauenforschungs-, -bildungs- und Informationszentrum* (FFBiZ) and the *Papiertiger Archiv der sozialen Bewegungen*, two repositories from

which this thesis draws on, were first established in occupied buildings in West Berlin during the 1980s. The latter, for example, was established in early 1981 and was initially located a squat in West Berlin's Anhalter Straße, known as the *Kunst und Kulturzentrum Kreuzberg* (Art and Cultural Centre Kreuzberg, hereafter KucKuk). Following the eviction of this building in 1984, the archive moved to a legalised squat in Kreuzberg's Cuvrystraße, where it remains to this day. The archive contains a wealth of material relating to all manner of extra-parliamentary opposition, and the research for this project was greatly facilitated by the archive's detailed collection of press clippings, which saved hours of potentially laborious research at the State Library's newspaper repository. Moreover, the archive contains an unparalleled rich collection of material produced by the squatters themselves, material which ranges from flyers, policy statements, brochures documenting the renovation work carried out in the occupied buildings, to minutes taken from meetings and councils. If anything, the student of squatting in the *Bundesrepublik* suffers from a plethora of primary sources that need to be worked through and distilled.

There are of course potential pit-falls for any project drawing so heavily on movement archives. The sources produced by the squatters were by no means neutral, reflecting the biases and subjective viewpoints of their authors. What is more, the sources tend to converge on certain key moments, such as occupations, evictions and demonstrations, while the mundane everyday life of the squatters between these events is less well documented. Moreover, there was considerably more material produced during the early stages of the West Berlin squatter movement, between 1979 and 1982, as it was gaining

momentum, than the later years of its gradual decline – a fact that is reflected in this analysis.

In contrast with the voluminous primary material produced by squatters in the *Bundesrepublik*, the student of squatting in the GDR suffers from no such embarrassment of riches. Whereas the emergence of political squatting in West Germany arguably served to expand the political space available for the country's extra-parliamentary opposition, squatters in the GDR operated in a context where this space remained strictly delimited by the SED-state. Squatting was never reported in East Germany's state-controlled press, while official deliberations surrounding this phenomenon were few and far between. As I began undertaking this research, I was cautioned by more than one archivist in the state archives that there would be a paucity of sources. Even for the case workers at the BStU, the process of finding material relating to this topic proved challenging. Nevertheless, research undertaken in the *Landesarchiv* in Berlin and the *Bundesarchiv* did unearth many valuable sources, though this process required time and patience, and involved sifting through voluminous material, most of it superfluous. Periodic reports on housing vacancy compiled by the authorities at the grassroots or by Workers' and Peasants' Inspection Groups proved helpful, as did reports compiled by special working groups in the GDR's Council of Ministers.

Over the course of my research, I discovered that the local organs' *Eingabenanalyse* (analysis of citizens' petitions), in addition to the citizens' petitions themselves, provided rich sources. Of the material available in the state archives, the citizens' petitions are unique in that they allow the voice of



the squatters themselves to emerge. Mindful of the unspoken rules by which the petitioning process operated, individual squatters nevertheless spoke candidly of their housing deprivation or the reasons why they resorted to illegal squatting in their letters to the authorities. In addition, and particularly for the later chapters, this thesis was able to draw on samizdat literature and material accessed in the Robert Havemann Archive for the History of the GDR Opposition. Lastly, the project was able to make use of the recollections of various contemporaries from both sides of Berlin's Cold War divide. I conducted a number of interviews with former squatters from East and West Berlin, which proved to be one of the most enjoyable aspects of the research. Nevertheless, the findings of this thesis are primarily based on printed sources. Oral history only constitutes a small part of the overall research and the material collected from interviews is used sparingly, primarily to inject an element of colour into the narrative, rather than serving as the basis for broader conclusions and interpretations.

## V. STRUCTURE

The thesis begins with tracing the contours of Berlin's contested history, examining in particular the various ways in which regimes of differing political stripes have attempted imprint themselves onto the city, through adding to, modifying, or erasing parts of the urban fabric. The chapters that follow progress in roughly chronological order, with the first chapter focusing on events that occurred in the early seventies, while the last chapter concentrates on the period surrounding the collapse of the SED-state and East Germany's

subsequent integration into an enlarged *Bundesrepublik*. Over the course of the thesis, the narrative moves back and forth across Berlin's Cold War divide, and at times attempts to draw out and analyse the interconnections and parallels between the two histories and traditions of squatting, East and West. Chapter 2 takes as its subject matter the case study of the 'Rauch-Haus', one of West Berlin's *ur-squats* and one which engaged the attention of the authorities and inspired the imagination of activists on both sides of the city's divide. Chapter 3 then goes on to analyse the history of squatting in the GDR, focusing in particular on East Berlin, and from the perspective of the squatters themselves. Chapter 4 then moves back across the Cold War divide to West Berlin, and traces the emergence of the practice of 'rehab squatting' – a practice that would trigger the largest squatter movements in the history of the *Bundesrepublik*. Chapter 5 takes a thematic approach and focuses on the search for alternative lifestyle inside the squats, on the one hand, and the increase in militancy that incorporated violent forms of political action on the street, on the other. Chapter 6 analyses the composition of the West Berlin squatter milieu in more detail and traces the emergence of the infrastructure of a squatter movement, before going on to look at the strategies employed by the West Berlin authorities to counter and ultimately crush it. Chapter 7 goes back and re-visits the history of squatting in the GDR, though this time focusing on the SED authorities and their ultimately unsuccessful attempts to combat this practice. On account of the 'Peaceful Revolution' in the GDR and the opening of the Berlin Wall, the two traditions and histories of squatting, East and West, were able to flow together. Chapter 8 examines the emergence of a squatters' movement in

East Berlin in the context of the interregnum that accompanied the dissolution of the SED-state, closing with the violent showdown between the city's radicalised and marginalised squatters and the authorities of the newly enlarged *Bundesrepublik*.

# CHAPTER 1:

## BERLIN'S CONTESTED LANDSCAPE

### I. INTRODUCTION

During the twentieth century, Berlin served as the seat of government of five separate German states. Until 1918, it was the capital of the Kaiser's Imperial Germany, and thereafter, the ill-fated Weimar Republic. In the wake of Hitler's rise to power, Berlin became the first city of the Third Reich and remained so from 1933 until National Socialism's defeat in 1945. Lying in ruins after the Second World War, the Spree Metropolis was stripped of its capital status and divided into four sectors of occupation, each administered by one of the victorious Allies. However, following the founding of the German Democratic Republic in 1949, the Soviet sector of the city was chosen as the capital of a new, Socialist Germany, and after the collapse of the Socialist polity, reunited Berlin emerged as the capital of an enlarged *Bundesrepublik* in 1990. Throughout the period of superpower rivalry, moreover, the divided city arguably served as the capital of the Cold War in Europe.

Each state sought to appropriate and define Berlin's meaning, and each has attempted to imprint itself onto the city, through adding to, modifying, or erasing parts of the urban fabric. As Andreas Huyssen puts it, the city can be thought of as an urban palimpsest, i.e. a text which has been rubbed out and re-

written, yet which still leaves traces of its earlier self behind.<sup>1</sup> As such, Germany's turbulent twentieth century history is thus very much inscribed into its capital city and its physical form.

Over the course of an epoch which Eric Hobsbawm has termed the 'Age of Extremes', Berlin has been identified with widely diverging ideologies and political systems. It has been regarded as both a centre of western culture and a nucleus of barbarism. Once viewed as a bastion of Prussian authoritarianism, the city, or at least its western portion, projected itself as an outpost of democracy and 'freedom' in the post-war era. Between 1933 and 1945, and especially during the Second World War, the city was the nerve centre of National Socialism; yet following Nazism's defeat, East Berlin served as the capital of a self-professed 'anti-fascist state'. Berlin has inspired countless literary homages and works of enduring cultural significance, though it will forever be scarred as a site of book burnings and public displays of 'degenerate' art. The fall of Berlin in 1945 marked the end of the Second World War in Europe and the victory of the Allies. However, the first Berlin crisis of 1948 confirmed the coming of the Cold War and Europe's division into Western and Soviet blocs. The construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 rendered the brutality of Germany's – and Europe's – partition visible in the urban landscape for all to see. Equally, the toppling of the Wall in 1989 symbolised the end of the post-war era and the beginning of a new age – one in which Europe's divisions supposedly crumbled.

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<sup>1</sup> See Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003). esp. Ch. 4.

The history of urban squatting in Berlin is imbedded in the city's larger history of turbulence and contestation and, as such, it is a story that cannot be detached from the city's longer-term record of convulsion and upheaval. This chapter begins with an overview of the city's rapid growth from a Prussian garrison town to one of the largest and the most densely populated industrial metropolises in the world. This growth, in turn, bequeathed a great tenement city, whose form was criticised by urban reformers of all stripes. The chapter then goes on to provide an overview of Berlin's war-time destruction and post-1945 reconstruction, arguing that the early Cold War in the divided city was to a great extent fought through a combination of bricks and mortar and the 'soft power' of cultural diplomacy. East and West Berlin emerged as architectural show-cases of their respective polities, and were invested with strong symbolic meaning. However, the Cold War identities of both halves of the divided city were not only contested between East and West but also from below, within the respective societies. Counter-narratives relating to Berlin's identity emerged in both sides of the divided city. The history of urban squatting and this re-interpretation from below were, it is argued, closely intertwined.

## II. A TENEMENT CITY

One of the earliest recorded instances of what could be labelled as squatting in Berlin took the form of shanty-town development and the construction of wild settlements, or *Hüttendörfer*, just outwith the old city limits in the late nineteenth century. 'A large number of shabby and miserably constructed wood huts', reported the *Volksstaat* newspaper in August 1872, had sprung up 'in

open country [beyond] the Cottbus Gate.<sup>2</sup> These shanty-towns were soon cleared, as the countryside beyond Berlin's mediaeval customs wall was swallowed up by the expanding industrial city. The city of Berlin grew rapidly over the course of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth, both demographically and geographically. In 1800, Berlin's population stood at around 150,000, equivalent to that of Paris in the middle ages. By the mid-century, however, it had reached the half-million mark, doubling again to one million in 1877. The exponential rise continued apace, and the city's population had doubled again to two million by 1900. When Greater Berlin was established in 1920, incorporating the fast growing industrial suburbs that had hitherto lain outside the city limits, the number residing within the metropolis stood at over four million.<sup>3</sup> In a relatively short period of time, Berlin had undergone a wholesale metamorphosis, from Prussian garrison town in the backwaters of East-Elbia to a modern *Weltstadt*. During the inter-war era, the German capital was larger than any other city in continental Europe; measured by population, only London and New York surpassed it. And the forces that conjured this sprawling metropolis out of the sandy north German plain were the forces of the modern world: those unleashed by Prussia's, and later Imperial Germany's, rapid industrialisation. Relics of the Prussian past, to be sure, would still have been visible, particularly in Berlin's historic centre: the Brandenburg Gate, the Royal palaces, Schinkel's

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Rainer Nitsche and Otto Glagau, *Häuserkämpfe 1872, 1920, 1945, 1982* (West Berlin: Transit Verlag, 1981), p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> For a good introduction to the longer-term history of Berlin see Gordon A. Craig, *The Germans* (New York and London: Meridien, 1982). Ch. 2.

magnificent thoroughfare, Unter den Linden. Nevertheless, this was a landscape that was firmly stamped by the modern age.

Berlin was and to a considerable extent remains a tenement city. Indeed, to quote the title of the twentieth century urban reformer Werner Hegemann's influential tract, the Spree Metropolis was the 'greatest tenement city in the world'.<sup>4</sup> The tenement was the building unit inhabited by most of Berlin's population, including its middle classes. Only the haute-bourgeoisie could afford to live in the villa quarters beyond the inner city districts. The Berlin tenement was also a distinct type, referred to as the *Mietskaserne* or 'rental barrack' in the local patois. According to the Hobrecht Plan (1862), land in the expanding city had been divided into narrow but deep lots, in the hope that the large city blocks would be filled with green spaces and gardens, especially the still undeveloped areas in the north-east). Ultimately, however, 'the form of layout, the form of the building and the production of housing [were] all determined by the processes of speculation', as the contemporary urban reformer Rudolf Eberstadt put it.<sup>5</sup> In the working class districts especially, instead of gardens and green spaces, the lots were filled with a warren of back-houses (*Hinterhäuser*) and courtyards (*Hinterhöfe*).

Like the close in Glasgow's tenements, these courtyards in Berlin served as extensions of the street. They provided spaces into which hawkers and peddlers passed, in which children played, where relationships were forged and

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<sup>4</sup> Werner Hegemann, *Das steinerne Berlin: Geschichte der größten Mietkasernenstadt der Welt* (Berlin: Kiepenheuer, 1930).

<sup>5</sup> Rudolf Eberstadt, quoted in Nicholas Bullock and James Read, *The Movement for Housing Reform in Germany and France, 1840-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 182.



where scores were settled. They were ‘centres of genuine social, cultural, and economic vitality’, as David Clay Large puts it.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, however, especially in the poorer neighbourhoods, they could be murky and foreboding places. ‘One single glance’ into the city’s courtyards, the Austrian author Joseph August Lux commented, ‘reveal[led] the misery of urban living conditions.’<sup>7</sup> The 1853 *Bauordnung* had set their minimum width to five-and-a-half meters – enough space to enable a horse-drawn fire engine to turn. In the poorer districts, this minimum requirement became the standard.<sup>8</sup> Even at the height of summer, little fresh air or light penetrated these deep recesses. ‘Narrow and deep, like a coffin standing on end’ was how Christopher Isherwood morbidly described a courtyard in the proletarian Hallisches Tor district.<sup>9</sup>

The tenements, along with their *Hinterhöfe*, served as the main target of the urban reformers of all political stripes and would continue to do so until well into the post-WWII era. Tenements, when not overcrowded and equipped with basic amenities, can of course serve as excellent places to live, as the West Berlin squatters would argue and show in the 1970s and 1980s. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to grasp the reasons why the Berlin tenement once provoked such widespread condemnation. First of all, the working class tenement districts were blighted by overcrowding. Already by German Unification in 1871, Berlin had the highest population density in Europe, and this became ever

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<sup>6</sup> Large, *Berlin*, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Harald Bodenschatz, ‘Auf dem Weg zur Mietskasernenstadt?’, in *Berlins 19. Jahrhundert: Ein Metropolen-Kompendium* ed. Roland Berbig, et al. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2011), p. 302.

<sup>8</sup> New legislation enacted in 1887 and 1897 increased the minimum requirement to sixty and eighty square meters respectively. See Bullock and Read, *The Movement for Housing Reform in Germany and France, 1840-1914*, p. 186.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Isherwood, *Mr Norris Changes Trains* (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 98.

more acute as the number of Berlin's residents rocketed, as part of a very rapid and massive migration from rural to urban areas in 1871-1914. By 1910, Berlin had an *average* of 76 residents per building unit, by far the highest in the industrial world.<sup>10</sup> Whole families often occupied one single room, and more than 10,000 rooms in the city were shared between nine residents or more.<sup>11</sup> In the city's poorer districts, the tenements were literally crammed to the rafters. According to official statistics, some 60,000 Berliners even lived in the city's coal cellars.<sup>12</sup> Berlin's industrial districts were only rarely punctuated by green spaces. As Hegemann put it, the German capital was a city of stone.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to problems of overcrowding, sanitary conditions, too, could be horrendous. At the start of the twentieth century, fewer than one in ten of Berlin's dwellings had an indoor lavatory, and it was not until the 1890s that the installation of cold running water inside tenement buildings became standard.<sup>14</sup> Before that, residents used the communal well in the street or in the *Hinterhof*. The damp, rubbish-strewn courtyards, moreover, served as incubators of diseases, and their eradication was considered by urban reformers to be a prophylactic necessity. As late as 1905, 45 per cent of infants born in the working class district of Wedding did not survive their first year (compared with a national rate of 20%).<sup>15</sup> There were, of course, a number of factors – general poverty, poor diet, lack of access to medicines – that contributed to this

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<sup>10</sup> Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 101.

<sup>11</sup> Richie, *Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin* p. 160.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>13</sup> Hegemann, *Das steinerne Berlin: Geschichte der größten Mietkasernenstadt der Welt*.

<sup>14</sup> Richie, *Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin* p. 164.; Bullock and Read, *The Movement for Housing Reform in Germany and France, 1840-1914*, p. 222.

<sup>15</sup> Richie, *Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin* p. 164.

startlingly high mortality rate. Still, the conditions in which Berliners were housed clearly presented a contributing factor. As Heinrich Zille famously quipped: 'You can kill a man with a tenement quite as easy as you can kill him with an axe'.<sup>16</sup>

Attempts at urban reform were pioneered in a small-scale in industrial towns and cities across Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but it was the First World War that marked a key turning point in attitudes towards working class housing. The cataclysm that befell the belligerent societies, which ultimately ushered in the dissolution of the old monarchical order in Russia, Germany and the Hapsburg Empire, served to stoke a fascination for the 'New' across Europe. In Germany, the twenties were a time of New Living (*die Neue Wohnung*), New Architecture (*die Neue Architektur*), the New Art of Space (*die Neue Raumkunst*), while the official building policy of the German capital was named the New Berlin (*Neues Berlin*). This passion for the New transcended national settings and extended to conceptions of the 'New Man', whose emergence New Living, New Architecture and the New Art of Space was supposed to facilitate.<sup>17</sup>

In Weimar Germany, attempts to provide modernist alternatives to the industrial era working class slums were most notably pioneered in Frankfurt and Berlin. Under the stewardship of Ernst May, 15,000 new homes were built in the former between 1924 and 1933. The results in Berlin were even more

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<sup>16</sup> Heinrich Zille quoted in Bullock and Read, *The Movement for Housing Reform in Germany and France, 1840-1914*, p. 242.

<sup>17</sup> Wolfgang Pehnt, 'The 'New Man' and the Architecture of the Twenties' in *Social Utopias of the Twenties: Bauhaus, Kibbutz and the Dream of the New Man*, ed. Jeannine Fiedler (Wuppertal: Müller and Busman, 1995), p. 15.

impressive. Between 1924 and 1929, 135,000 modern apartments were constructed in the city under the direction of chief city planner Martin Wagner.<sup>18</sup> 14,000 of these units in Berlin, Barbara Miller Lane notes, were designed by 'radical architects' such as Bruno Taut.<sup>19</sup> The architects of these new housing estates sought to eradicate the spatial hierarchies built into the tenement unit between those living in the front houses, facing the street and with access to light, and those cramped deep within the warren of courtyards. Through situating the new housing projects in park-like settings, the architects sought to provide residents with equal access to 'light, air and sun', the watchwords of modernist urban planning.

Urban reform was in part an effort to live up to promises made to the citizens of the belligerent nations during the conflict, hence the British pledge of 'Homes fit for Heroes'.<sup>20</sup> In Germany and in the new nations of the former Habsburg Empire, the provision of working class housing served as a litmus test for the post-monarchical, Social Democratic order. But the fascination with modernist housing reform, as Betts and Crowley remind us, was also a product of the new understanding of role of the home that arose in the wartime economy. In the context of scarcity and economic autarky, the home and in particular the housewife were regarded 'as a vital cell of rational production

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<sup>18</sup> Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 176.; See also Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 90-103.

<sup>19</sup> Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918–1945* p. 103.

<sup>20</sup> Mark Swenarton, *Homes Fit for Heroes: The Politics and Architecture of Early State Housing in Britain* (London: Heinemann, 1981).

and efficient energy resourcing ... in the face of national scarcity and sacrifice.’<sup>21</sup> Reflecting the contemporary enthusiasm for rationalisation, inter-war architects integrated Taylorist methods into the production, design and planning of working class housing.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, it was the kitchen, the domestic space that corresponded most to the production plant, that served as a particular target for the reformers’ rationalisation efforts.<sup>23</sup>

The spatial organisation of the new working class housing, drawing on the *Neue Raumkunst*, was intended as an expression of democratic equality in the new, post-war order. Indeed, the democratisation of space, on the one hand, and its scientific organisation, on the other, were two of the tenets of architectural modernism. The third was the prioritisation of the collective and its corollary: the ‘renunciation of the individual’. This manifested itself in a ‘severe asceticism’, which characterised the interior and exterior design of modernist working class housing.<sup>24</sup> Ornamentation was rejected, as were the trinkets of the working class abode. The modernists harboured little nostalgia for the idiosyncrasies of the pre-war home, dismissing sentimentality as reactionary. Capturing the *Zeitgeist*, modernist urban renewal, pioneered in its purest form in Frankfurt and Berlin, was to influence a whole generation of architects and planners, not only in Germany, but also internationally. Its spread was in part due to the fact that, following the rise of Hitler, many of the

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Betts and David Crowley, ‘Introduction’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2, Domestic Dreamworlds: Notions of Home in Post-1945 Europe (2005), p. 220.

<sup>22</sup> Pehnt, ‘The ‘New Man’ and the Architecture of the Twenties’. and more generally More generally Charles S. Maier, ‘Between Taylorism and Technocracy: European Ideologies and the Vision of Industrial Productivity in the 1920s,’ in *In search of stability : explorations in historical political economy*, ed. Charles S. Maier (Cambridge Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>23</sup> Pehnt, ‘The ‘New Man’ and the Architecture of the Twenties ’ p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

world's most pioneering architects and planners chose or were forced to leave Germany, and thus exported their ideas abroad. Mies van der Rohe emigrated to the United States in 1937 and went on to have an influential career there. Martin Wagner and Bruno Taut left for Turkey, where they were involved in projects in Atatürk's young republic. These German expatriates, along with their counterparts, such as the Frenchman Le Corbusier and the American Frank Lloyd Wright, played a prominent role in ensuring that the influence of modernist architecture and urban planning would become truly international. Neither tainted by fascism nor Stalinism, modernist architecture and planning would provide the foundations for the post-1945 urban renewal order in the West and, following Stalin's death, in the Soviet bloc as well.

Whether one considers the geometric alignment and colour coding of Onkel Toms Hütte (1926-31), or the sweeping curve of the Hufeisensiedlung in Britz (1925-33), the modernist estates constructed in inter-war Berlin approached something resembling an art form. For those able to secure a new home in the modernist housing constructed during the 1920s, this would have marked a dramatic material improvement from the conditions they had experienced in the inner city working class tenement districts. However, the adaption to these austere new environs were not always easy, as contemporaries reported.<sup>25</sup> Wolfgang Pehnt is surely right in commenting that 'the idolatry of engineered rationalism, severe asceticism and noble frugality' which characterised the New Architecture, 'masked the importance of

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

sensuality'.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the 'abstract and functional character' of the mass produced modern residential areas, as the French urban theorist Henri Lefebvre noted, reduced the concept of *habitat* to its purest form.<sup>27</sup> For all its audacity, modernist urban planning, Lefebvre argued, ultimately bequeath in its large-scale implementation following the Second World War, 'the worldwide, homogeneous and monotonous architecture of the state, whether capitalist or socialist.'<sup>28</sup>

The National Socialists temporally put an end to architectural modernism in Germany, abhorring what they regarded as the modernists' 'cultural bolshevism'. Moreover, they were suspicious of the *Großstadt* in general. Although it was the capital of the Third Reich, Berlin evoked much of what the Nazis loathed and feared. For a start, it had long been a stronghold of organised labour and the Left. The Social Democrats dominated local politics for most of the Weimar Era, while the German Communist Party (KPD) was also a major force. The city's gay scene – for Isherwood, 'Berlin meant boys'<sup>29</sup> – was also an affront to declared Nazi moral values. Detested too were the large number of Jews who resided in the German capital, many of whom were recent arrivals, having fled earlier pogroms in Tsarist Russia. Because it was a modern, cosmopolitan city, and due to its strong traditions of Social Democracy and later

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>27</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), p. 79. p. 79.

<sup>28</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 304.

<sup>29</sup> Christopher Isherwood, *Christopher and his Kind* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976), p. 3.

Communism, Berlin has often been regarded as the unloved capital of the Third Reich. However, although Hitler has often been portrayed as a provincial who was not at ease in the metropolis, the Führer, as Thomas Friedrich notes, shared both contempt *and* fascination for the *Reichshauptstadt*.<sup>30</sup>

Hitler and his favourite architect, Albert Speer, had great plans for the city. As with all of the twentieth century regimes whose seat of power was located on the Spree, the National Socialists sought to imprint themselves on Berlin's urban landscape. The well-known image of Hitler inspecting a model of the future capital of the *Reich* on his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday indicates the extent of his personal vision. The centrepiece of the new Berlin, to be re-named Germania, was to be a three mile long north-south axis, framed at each end by a victory column and a gargantuan Great Hall – the latter was to be so large that its planners worried that it might produce its own micro-climate. 'The Great Hall's size shall reduce St. Peter's and its square to insignificance', boasted Hitler in 1941.<sup>31</sup>

Little of this was realised, however. Despite its grand ambitions, the Nazi dictatorship's *direct* influence on the city's architecture was minimal. The buildings bequeathed to posterity are primarily limited to government complexes, such as Göring's *Reichsluftfahrtministerium*, in which the GDR was founded in 1949, and a few scattered suburban developments, which mainly catered for the party elite. The cold aesthetic of the Olympic Stadium and the

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas Friedrich, *Hitler's Berlin: Abused City* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape*, p. 126.



airport at Tempelhof also serve as reminders of the National Socialist past, as do the city's seven rubble mountains.

Although National Socialism embraced aspects of modernity, its genesis can also be traced to a backlash or reaction against modernity, and Nazism's Janus-face reveals itself in Albert Speer's plans for constructing an urban utopia. Speer and his colleagues were determined to harness the power of modern industry and construction methods in order to create monumental buildings on a scale hitherto unknown – just as National Socialism, it might be pointed out, sought to harness the power of modern industry and modern warfare to defeat its enemies and thus return Germany to some imagined bucolic past. But although the Nazis utilised modern means, their point of reference was not the modern city, precisely because its incarnation in contemporary Berlin stood for much of what they opposed. It was rather to the past where National Socialists looked for inspiration, and specifically to the cities of the ancient world. Berlin was not to be in a constant flux and evolution, but redesigned and frozen in time to commemorate the greatness of the National Socialist Idea. Speaking before the war, Hitler instructed that 'These buildings of ours should not be conceived for the year 1940, not for the year 2000, but like the cathedrals of our past they shall stretch into the millennia of the future.'<sup>32</sup>

Speer himself was a proponent of the 'ruin theory of architecture', and Berlin would indeed be reduced to ruins, if much earlier than Speer would have expected. Returning from exile after the war, Bertolt Brecht commented that

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<sup>32</sup> Quoted in *ibid.* p. 126.

the Berlin he had once known had been reduced to ‘a rubble-heap near Potsdam’.<sup>33</sup> Germany’s other urban centres experienced extensive devastation too, as a result of Allied bombings and at the hands of the advancing Red Army. In total, around fifty per cent of the country’s built-up urban areas were badly damaged or destroyed by 1945. However, Berlin, by far the largest city in the *Reich*, registered the most damage in absolute terms.<sup>34</sup> In the central districts of Mitte and Tiergarten, 80 per cent of the buildings had been levelled.<sup>35</sup> Displaying their irreverent wit even in times of hardship, the Berliners referred to the district of Steglitz as ‘Stehnix’ (stands nothing), to Charlottenburg as ‘Klamottenburg’ (rubble mountain), and to Lichterfelde as ‘Trichterfelde’ (crater field).<sup>36</sup> For contemporaries who visited after the Third Reich’s total defeat, Berlin did not resemble ancient Rome or the Acropolis, as Speer would have hoped, but rather a modern ‘Babylon or Carthage’.<sup>37</sup> ‘This city’, British Air Commander-in-Chief Sir Arthur Tedder declared, ‘can never be rebuilt’.<sup>38</sup>

### III. HOUSING AND THE COLD WAR

Arguably, Berlin emerged as *the* key point of intersection in Cold War Europe and remained one of the most important theatres of the conflict’s global history. Accordingly, Berlin witnessed numerous crises, which on occasions threatened

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<sup>33</sup> Herbert Nicolaus and Alexander Obeth, *Die Stalinallee: Geschichte einer deutschen Strasse* (Berlin: Verlag für Bauwesen, 1997), p. 32.

<sup>34</sup> Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin*, p. 29.

<sup>35</sup> Warnke, *Stein Gegen Stein: Architektur und Medien im geteilten Berlin 1950-1970*, p. 31.

<sup>36</sup> Lorke Heinke, ‘Der Tod kam aus der Luft’, *Der Tagesspiegel* 2. 4. 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Sir Arthur Tedder, quoted in Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape*, p. 174.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 174.

to boil over into a hot conflict between Soviet and Western troops stationed in the city. However, an open conflagration did not break out, and the Cold War in the divided city was ultimately not waged with troops and weapons, but primarily through verbal salvos and symbolic gestures, urban reconstruction, and, as Greg Castillo points out, in the 'soft power' of cultural diplomacy.<sup>39</sup> While the 'Island City' of West Berlin sought to portray itself as a window to the West during the post-war era, the Soviet sector, which in 1949 became the capital of the GDR, also strove to promote the virtues of the Socialist system.

After the war, the ruined German cities in general provided urban planners with laboratories for experimenting with urban reconstruction, renewal and for promoting new models of domesticity.<sup>40</sup> The administrations in both East and West strove to erect a new Berlin out of the rubble – a Berlin that would reflect the aspirations and resonate with the values of their respective polities. Whether it was the SED regime in East Berlin or West Berlin's Social Democratic Senate, both administrations sought to distil their essence into architecture and the built environment. It was of little importance that many of the buildings outside the areas worst affected by the war-time damage, in Berlin and elsewhere, were still standing and reparable, if not fully intact. In Berlin's western sectors, for example, 638,000 of 980,000 apartments

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<sup>39</sup> See Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> As Jörn Düwel and Niels Gutschow put it, German cities presented a 'Laboratorium vor, in dem mit städtebaulichen Ausdrucksformen und Utopien experimentiert wurde.' Jörn Düwel and Niels Gutschow, *Städtebau in Deutschland im 20. Jahrhundert: Ideen – Projekte – Akteure* (Stuttgart, Leipzig & Wiesbaden: Teubner, 2001), p. 11.

were still habitable.<sup>41</sup> Had there been the political will, the city could have been meticulously reconstructed, as was the case in central Warsaw. However, this was a time when many Germans thought in terms of a ‘zero hour’, and the wish to make a clean break with the past and embrace a new and better future was widespread. Such thinking certainly pervaded the urban planning departments in both halves of divided Germany. The war-ravaged cities were designated not as sites for reconstruction, but were rather thought of as *tabula rasa*, where new and better urban forms – and societies – could emerge. Hans Scharoun, appointed by the Allies as the first post-war director of the city’s *Abteilung Bau- und Wohnungswesen*, embraced the opportunity presented by damage wrought in the conflict. ‘Its outcome’, he noted, ‘facilitates for us to design a new type of townscape’.<sup>42</sup> This was an outlook shared by many of his colleagues. One of the seminal planning documents drawn up by the West Berlin Senate, the *Flächennutzungsplan*, published in 1950, candidly spoke of the ‘opportunities [presented by] the destruction’.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, in the GDR, the conviction that Socialism was destined to triumph fostered an environment that favoured new urban designs to the old.<sup>44</sup> Whereas the SED dismissed the worth of the pre-war cityscape as a ‘capitalistic inheritance’, the turn-of-the-century tenement districts, in the words of one West Berlin Social Democratic Senator, had served

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<sup>41</sup> Bodenschatz, Heise, and Korfmacher, *Schluss mir der Zerstörung? Stadterneuerung und städtische Opposition in West-Berlin, Amsterdam und London*, p. 20.

<sup>42</sup> Geschichtswerkstatt Stalinallee, ‘Die Chance eines Neubeginns: Die Nachkriegsplanungen,’ <http://www.karlmarxallee.eu/kma.php?menu=1&thema=2&showMenu1=true&seitenanzahl=21&ht=Ein%20l%E4ngerer%20Spaziergang&nr=6>.

<sup>43</sup> Harald Bodenschatz, *Platz frei für das Neue Berlin! Geschichte der Stadterneuerung seit 1871* (West Berlin: Transit, 1987), p. 152.

<sup>44</sup> Buck, *Mit hohem Anspruch gescheitert: Die Wohnungspolitik der DDR*, p. 215.

as 'the breeding grounds for diseases of the body and soul'.<sup>45</sup> From an early stage in its post-war history, therefore, the total erasure of the tenement city in both halves of divided Berlin was actively being planned.

The provision of new and better housing formed the kernel of urban reconstruction programmes, East and West, with the superpower rivalry of the early Cold War serving to amplify the political significance of the home. Indeed, 'the home attracted a remarkable amount of public attention', as Betts and Crowley write, and 'occupied the centre of social policy in every European country after the war, despite extremely divergent experiences of material devastation, stock shortages, social dislocation, and refugee crises'.<sup>46</sup> In contrast to 1920s, the post-1945 home was idealised as a place of refuge and reproduction rather than as a site of production and efficiency. 'Dangled before war-weary citizens', the ideal of the home as a sphere of leisure and security functioned as a 'harbinger of postwar peace and prosperity.'<sup>47</sup> In the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, the geopolitical anomaly of the open border in divided Berlin invested the city with a particular significance as an ideological showcase for promoting the post-war home. The city hosted numerous exhibitions, either displaying the 'American way of life' or advertising the merits of Socialist design. The struggle over legitimacy in divided Berlin in the late 1940s and during the 1950s in which notions of the home were invested with ideological significance would culminate in the famous 1959 'kitchen debate' in

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<sup>45</sup> West Berlin Senator Paul Hertz quoted in Roland Strobel, 'Before the Wall came Tumbling down: Urban Planning Paradigm Shifts in a Divided Berlin', *Journal of Architectural Education* 46, no. 1, p. 28.

<sup>46</sup> Betts and Crowley, 'Introduction.'

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

Moscow between US Vice-President Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev.<sup>48</sup> During this bad-tempered meeting, Nixon informed the Soviet premier that 'American superiority' in the Cold War did not rest on weapons but rather 'on the secure, abundant family lives of modern suburban homes.'<sup>49</sup> In response to this American 'soft power', as Castillo shows, the Soviet bloc would 'devise its own variant of the Marshall Plan social contract', which centred on 'citizen enfranchisement through consumer rewards'.<sup>50</sup>

Following the founding of the GDR in 1949, East Berlin's Stalin Allee, billed as the 'first socialist street of the German capital', served as the showpiece of the GDR's national reconstruction programme in the early 1950s. Monumental in its scale and intentionally bombastic, the Stalin Allee would not have looked out of place in 1950s Moscow. The new residences in this two-kilometre-long boulevard, named in honour of the Soviet premier, were trumpeted by the SED regime as 'workers' palaces'. The apartments were fitted with modern appliances and central heating, while the façades of the Stalin Allee were covered with tiles from Meissen. Through providing such accommodation, the regime sought to articulate the message that workers in the new, Socialist Germany would now be able to enjoy privileges that had hitherto been reserved for the bourgeoisie. Housing construction and urban planning, the East German regime argued, would be centred around the citizen and the collective, rather than catering to the interests of capital and profit.

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<sup>48</sup> See Greg Castillo, 'Domesticating the Cold War: Household Consumption as Propaganda in Marshall Plan Germany', *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Paul Betts and David Crowley, 'Introduction', *ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>50</sup> Greg Castillo, 'Domesticating the Cold War: Household Consumption as Propaganda in Marshall Plan Germany', *ibid.*, p. 284.

Originally it was to serve as the blue-print for the reconstruction of the entire East German capital, though this plan was quietly abandoned following the Generalissimo's death, in part due to pragmatic considerations, as the project proved too costly, but also for ideological reasons.

The Social Democratic controlled Senate of West Berlin responded to the SED's urban renewal projects in both word and deed. Unveiling the Ernst Reuter Siedlung, a modernist estate built between 1953-55, Senator Paul Hertz (SPD) hoped that 'this extraordinary construction might show our fellow countrymen in East-Berlin and in the Eastern Sector what new and beautiful things a free and democratic organization, without pressure or force, can produce.'<sup>51</sup> For the construction of the Hansaviertel, West Berlin's own prestige project of the 1950s, the West Berlin Senate commissioned the world's best-know modernist architects, including Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, Oscar Niemeyer and Le Corbusier. With its individually designed buildings spread across a park-like setting, the Hansaviertel, modelled on the 'international' style, could have fit neatly into any post-war Western European or North American city. As with the Ernst Reuter Siedlung, the layout of the Hansaviertel was indented to emphasise the 'free naturalness' and '*Zwanglosigkeit*' of the quarter in a conscious contrast to the 'dictatorial alignment' of the Stalin Allee.<sup>52</sup>

Still, despite the ideological, political and economic differences, there were 'numerous [areas of] common ground' in planning paradigms and urban renewal that transcended the Cold War divide, as Stephanie Warnke's recent

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<sup>51</sup> Strobel, 'Before the Wall came Tumbling down: Urban Planning Paradigm Shifts in a Divided Berlin,' p. 28.

<sup>52</sup> Warnke, *Stein Gegen Stein: Architektur und Medien im geteilten Berlin 1950-1970*, p. 121.

study notes.<sup>53</sup> Whether or not they were purporting to provide ‘workers’ palaces’ or new housing for a supposedly free and democratic Germany, architects and planners, East and West, sought to ensure that citizens would live in clean and healthy environments. The modernist maxim of providing ‘light, air und sunshine’ was adhered to in both the FRG and GDR, even though architects in the latter were operating under Stalinist auspices. A commitment to family values, moreover, was a further area where the social and housing policies of the administrations in West and East Berlin converged more than they diverged. One of the first laws enacted by the West Berlin Senate, the *Berlinplanungsgesetz* (22<sup>nd</sup> August 1949), stated that the ‘primary’ objective of reconstruction was to ‘create the preconditions for a healthy population and *family life*.’<sup>54</sup> Similar family values were also preached by the East German Communists, who regarded the nuclear family as constituting the ‘smallest cell of society’.<sup>55</sup> The family was considered to be of central importance to the socialist way of life. ‘You must live clean and respectably and *take care of your family*’, was one of the ‘ten commandments’ (sic.) of socialism, announced by Walter Ulbricht at the SED’s fifth party conference in 1958.<sup>56</sup> Urban renewal paradigms further coincided when the East German regime jettisoned Stalinist urban planning and embraced architectural modernism. Following Stalin’s death in 1953, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>54</sup> Bodenschatz, *Platz frei für das Neue Berlin! Geschichte der Stadterneuerung seit 1871* p. 152. My emphasis.

<sup>55</sup> Hartmut Häussermann and Walher Siebel, *Soziologie des Wohnens: Eine Einführung in Wandel und Ausdifferenzierung des Wohnens* (Weinheim & München: Juventa Verlag, 1996), p. 174.

<sup>56</sup> Bundesarchiv Bild, retrieved (11.5.2013) from [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/36/Bundesarchiv\\_Bild\\_183-57163-0001%2C\\_V.\\_SED-Parteitag%2C\\_Rede\\_Ulbricht.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/36/Bundesarchiv_Bild_183-57163-0001%2C_V._SED-Parteitag%2C_Rede_Ulbricht.jpg) My emphasis.



(CPSU), Nikita Khrushchev, sought to distance himself from the wastefulness and extravagance of his predecessor's urban policies. In 1955, 1,800 delegates from the GDR's construction industries met in Berlin for a conference on urban planning, housing design and technology. Taking their cue from developments in the Kremlin, the delegates proposed 'better, quicker and cheaper' housing construction.<sup>57</sup> Without any fanfare, East German planners and architects quietly reverted to the modernist paradigm that was firmly in place in the West.<sup>58</sup>

In West Berlin, the modernist urban renewal paradigm in its pure form – in the form that foresaw the complete erasure of the tenement city – remained ascendant through the late-fifties and into the sixties. Once enough new housing had been built on the periphery of the city, the intention was to redevelop the old tenement districts. From 1962, the Island City was the benefactor of the *Berlin-Hilfe-Gesetz*, and the funds flowing in from the central government in Bonn were funnelled into further housing projects constructed between the early 1960s and mid-1970s. The Gropiusstadt, built between 1962-75, provided accommodation for 45,000 residents, the Falkenhagener Feld in Spandau (1960-65) for 30,000, and the Märkisches Viertel (1963-74) near the northern limits of the city, for 38,000.<sup>59</sup> At the time, these modern housing estates in West Berlin counted among the largest on the European continent. In

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<sup>57</sup> Düwel and Gutschow, *Städtebau in Deutschland im 20. Jahrhundert: Ideen – Projekte – Akteure*, p. 195.

<sup>58</sup> As Ladd notes, after initially being condemned by the Communist authorities as 'decadent and dehumanizing ... the "international style" of modern architecture had returned to East Berlin'. Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape*.

<sup>59</sup> Düwel and Gutschow, *Städtebau in Deutschland im 20. Jahrhundert: Ideen – Projekte – Akteure*, p. 204.

1963, Mayor Willy Brandt designated huge tracts of the inner city as 'redevelopment areas', which encompassed neighbourhoods in the districts of Tiergarten, Wedding, Charlottenburg, Schöneberg, Neukölln and Kreuzberg.<sup>60</sup>

Measured quantitatively, post-war urban renewal did indeed produce impressive results, particularly in the Federal Republic. In 1964, Axel Springer's *Bildzeitung* could boast of the construction of 250,000 new homes in West Berlin. The city could 'be proud of itself,' the paper added. 'In 15 years a *Weltstadt* has emerged from the ruins'.<sup>61</sup> During the Ulbricht era, the GDR lagged behind the Federal Republic in terms of its housing construction programme, having initially diverted much of its resources into consolidating its industrial base, which had been largely destroyed through a combination of war and Soviet reparations. Between 1951 and 1954, just under 2 million new dwellings were constructed in the *Bundesrepublik*, whereas the GDR managed just over 170,000 – considerably less even in proportion to its population size.<sup>62</sup> Still, in 1971, nearly 80 percent of the GDR's housing stock still predated 1945, while the majority of that had been constructed before the First World War.<sup>63</sup>

Under First Secretary Erich Honecker (1971-89), however, the Socialist state elevated housing to the centrepiece of its socio-political programme and considerably upped the tempo of its large-scale housing construction

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<sup>60</sup> Bodenschatz, Heise, and Korfmacher, *Schluss mir der Zerstörung? Stadterneuerung und städtische Opposition in West-Berlin, Amsterdam und London*, p. 30.

<sup>61</sup> *Bildzeitung* 14.5.1964 quoted in Stephanie Warnke, *Stein Gegen Stein: Architektur und Medien im geteilten Berlin 1950-1970* (Frankfurt & New York: Campus Verlag, 2009), pp. 245-6.

<sup>62</sup> Jay Rowell, 'Wohnungspolitik 1949-61,' in *Geschichte der Sozialpolitik in Deutschland seit 1945, Deutsche Demokratische Republik 1949 - 1961: Im Zeichen des Aufbaus des Sozialismus*, ed. Dierk Hoffmann and Michael Schwartz (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2004), p. 712.

<sup>63</sup> Brian Ladd, 'Socialist Planning and the Rediscovery of the Old City in the German Democratic Republic', *Journal of Urban History* 27(2001), p. 588.

programme. It was in the 1970s and 1980s that new mega estates were created on the peripheries of East German cities – which remain among the most enduring visible legacies of the SED regime in Germany's urban landscape.<sup>64</sup> By the end of the East German dictatorship, one third of East Berliners lived in the satellite developments of Marzahn, Hohenschönhausen and Hellersdorf, all of which were constructed during the last two decades of SED rule. Indeed, although they were later in adopting the aesthetic and construction methods of their western counterparts, who had enthusiastically embraced modernism from an early stage in the post-war era, the authorities in the GDR would ultimately come closer to creating modern urban totalities through their erection of satellite cities and 'hyper-estates' on the peripheries of East German towns and cities.<sup>65</sup>

In the West, during the 1960s, a number of factors began to converge that challenged the paradigm of total renewal, as in the FRG and in other Western countries, a modest reaction against aspects of urban planning began to be articulated. In 1961, Jane Jacobs published her influential critique of urban planning, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Shortly after, in a nod to Jacobs, Wolf Jobst Siedler published his book, *Die Gemordete Stadt*, lamenting the modernist erasure of the old Berlin.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, in 1963, Peter Koller, a professor of urban planning at West Berlin's Technical University,

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<sup>64</sup> For a good analysis of one of the largest such 'hyper estates' see Danielle Sibener Pensley, 'The Socialist City? A Critical Analysis of Neubaugebiet Hellersdorf', *Journal of Urban History* 24, no. 5 (1998).

<sup>65</sup> For the history of one of East Berlin's 'hyper-estates', see *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> See Warnke, *Stein Gegen Stein: Architektur und Medien im geteilten Berlin 1950-1970*.

warned against 'destructive "technocratic conceptions"'.<sup>67</sup> An aesthetic which in its inter-war manifestation had approached something nearing an art form, it was increasingly being argued, had degenerated into a mere banality. Critics of post-war urban renewal only had to point at the vast, anonymous satellite estates, such as the Märkisches Viertel or the Gropiusstadt, for self-confirmation that the modernist aesthetic had been debased. With construction still ongoing, West Berlin's satellite estates had developed a nationwide reputation as 'urban problem-zones' by the early 1970s.<sup>68</sup>

The gravest challenge to modernist 'total renewal' in the *Bundesrepublik*, however, was not initially presented by the criticism levelled by architectural dissidents, but instead came in the form of the Oil Crisis of 1973/74 which sent the costs of petroleum, and by extension construction, spiralling upwards. Indeed, in the West, the seventies, and the year 1973 in particular, can be viewed as a caesura. It was at this juncture that a discourse emerged around the 'limits of growth', as the new era witnessed the jettisoning of a number of old certainties.<sup>69</sup> The changing economic climate that followed the OPEC embargo and the challenges to West Germany's export orientated economy contributed to a re-examination of urban renewal paradigms in the Federal Republic. Ambitions were modified and scaled back, and in West Berlin the

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<sup>67</sup> Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin*, p. 90.

<sup>68</sup> Christiane Reinecke, 'Am Rande der Gesellschaft? Das Märkische Viertel – eine West-Berliner Großsiedlung und ihre Darstellung als urbane Problemzone', *eithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History, Online-Ausgabe* 11, no. 2 (2014).

<sup>69</sup> Donella H. Meadows and Club of Rome, *The Limits to growth : a report for the Club of Rome's project on the predicament of mankind* (London: Earth Island Ltd, 1972). See also Konrad Jarausch, ed. *Das Ende der Zuversicht?: Die siebziger Jahre als Geschichte* (Göttingen: Vadenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008).

Senate announced a 'turn to modernisation' in the mid-1970s.<sup>70</sup> As total urban renewal was no longer economically feasible, a new, differentiated approach was proposed. Instead of being completely erased, inner city areas were now to be 'modernised'. In practice, this entailed demolishing the worst remaining housing and replacing it with new build, while at the same time renovating and improving the old stock that was deemed salvageable through tearing down the back-houses and opening up the *Hinterhöfe*. These policies, implemented in the designated inner city redevelopment areas, form the immediate context to the emergence of squatter movements in the Island City in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The utopian zeal of the reconstruction era was diluted by a good measure of pragmatism in the GDR, too. Despite their longstanding hostility to the industrial city and the tenement, the SED came to the realisation that they would need to utilise the existing housing stock, at least in the short term, if they wanted to solve the 'Housing Question'. Due to the burden of reparations and the regime's focus on investing in its productive capacity in the 1950s and 1960s, the construction of new housing in the Honecker era served only to make up for the short-fall inherited from his predecessor, Walter Ulbricht. Thus, in the mid-1970s, it was announced that socialist urban planning would no longer strive for the complete erasure of the GDR's 'capitalist inheritance', but rather for the 'unity of new build, reconstruction and modernisation'.<sup>71</sup> However, the new pragmatic approach proved largely unsuccessful in the GDR

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<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Bodenschatz, *Platz frei für das Neue Berlin! Geschichte der Stadterneuerung seit 1871*

<sup>71</sup> Buck, *Mit hohem Anspruch gescheitert: Die Wohnungspolitik der DDR*, p. 328.

as the centralised East German construction industry, geared towards the mass production of pre-fabricated modern apartment complexes, struggled to provide material and manpower for the labour intensive task of renovation.<sup>72</sup> Much of the older housing stock remained as it was or deteriorated further. As of 1985, 35 per cent of apartments in the GDR still had no toilet, while six per cent were without a water connection.<sup>73</sup> These were almost exclusively concentrated in the turn-of-the-century tenement districts.

In the GDR, the party's supervision over the renovation, construction and distribution of the housing stock, it was assumed, would lead to erosion of traditional class distinctions.<sup>74</sup> In theory, a spatially undifferentiated socialist city would emerge, without privileged neighbourhoods inhabited by privileged classes.<sup>75</sup> The provision of good quality housing would result in egalitarian standards of living for all, creating the basis for a new socialist *Lebensweise*, or way of life. These were the social objectives of the Communist parties throughout Eastern Europe, though neither in the GDR nor elsewhere in the Soviet bloc were these progressive – though highly ambitious – goals fully realised.<sup>76</sup> Over the course of the history of the GDR, skilled workers, SED-party members, those who were central to the functioning of the Socialist economy

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<sup>72</sup> Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape*, pp. 264-65.

<sup>73</sup> Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (hereafter SAPMO), DY/30/IV 2/2.039 - Büro Ergon Krenz, Akademie für Gesellschaftswissenschaften beim Zentralkomitee der SED Institut für Marxistisch-Leninistische Soziologie, 'Studie zur Lösung der Wohnungsfrage als soziales Problem bis 1990 in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik', Juni 1985. fol. 109.

<sup>74</sup> Häussermann and Siebel, *Soziologie des Wohnens: Eine Einführung in Wandel und Ausdifferenzierung des Wohnens*, p. 171.

<sup>75</sup> David M. Smith, 'The Socialist City,' in *Cities after Socialism: Urban and Regional Change and Conflict in Post-Socialist Societies*, ed. Gregory Andrusz, Michael Harloe, and Ivan Szelenyi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 72.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

and the administration of the state – what could be considered as the ‘core’ population – increasingly moved to the *Neubauggebiete*. ‘Marginal’ elements, on the other hand – the old, unskilled workers, political non-conformists, those categorised as ‘asocial elements’, the mentally unstable, criminals, alcoholics, the workshy – were left behind.<sup>77</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Post-war urban renewal strategies in Berlin aimed, on the one hand, to improve the material (and moral) conditions of the residents in both halves of the divided city. At the same time, they were also closely connected with attempts to construct official narratives regarding the Cold War identities of East and West Berlin respectively. But although Berlin served as a showcase for Cold War competition between East and West, the post-war urban renewal projects of the SED in East Berlin and the authorities in West Berlin mirrored each other in a number of ways. While city planning diverged on certain important issues, the parallels in policies as well as in the attitudes and ambitions of the urban planners and architects on both sides of the Cold War divide are striking, especially when we consider that their respective polities were diametrically opposed to one another.

While Berlin’s symbolic meaning was contested *between* East and West, it was also, as this thesis argues, re-interpreted, from below, *within* the respective societies. Already by the mid-1950s, moving to the Island City from

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<sup>77</sup> Buck, *Mit hohem Anspruch gescheitert: Die Wohnungspolitik der DDR*, p. 281.

West Germany enabled West German citizens to avoid otherwise obligatory military service in the *Bundeswehr*. By, 1990, some 50,000 young men, who could overwhelmingly be categorised as belonging to West Germany's leftist or 'hedonistic-libertarian' spectrum, had taken advantage of this loophole.<sup>78</sup> At the same time, inner city districts such as Kreuzberg also became home to an increasing number of immigrants and so-called *Gastarbeiter*. To be sure, the city's political establishment remained strongly anti-Communist, while the average West Berliner shared this hostility. Nevertheless, from the mid-sixties onwards, the idea of a plucky Island City struggling to maintain its freedom deep behind enemy lines – a notion that had emerged during the Soviet Blockade of West Berlin in 1948/49 and then been cemented with the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 – increasingly coexisted with a counter-narrative of West Berlin as an centre of radical politics and counter-cultural experimentation. The international student movement in the 1960s – a movement which among other things challenged the simple dichotomy that juxtaposed the 'democratic' and 'free' West with a 'totalitarian' Soviet Union and GDR – played an important role here. West Berlin, after all, was one of the centres of the West German and international '1968'.<sup>79</sup> But it was the Island City's history of squatting – a history which spans the seventies and eighties – which arguably cemented this counter-narrative.

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<sup>78</sup> Bodo Mrozek, 'Vom Ätherkrieg zur Popperschlacht. Die Popscape West-Berlin als Produkt der urbanen und geopolitischen Konfliktgeschichte', *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 11(2014).

<sup>79</sup> For an excellent history of the West German '1968' see Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties: The Anti-Authoritarian Revolt, 1962-1978*.



East Berlin, the GDR's only real metropolis, exerted an attraction for young people across the Socialist republic hoping to break free from the ennui of the East German province in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet, although the SED regime was at this time pursuing a policy of *Abgrenzung*, whereby it sought to consolidate its own distinct East German identity, those moving to Berlin were not universally drawn there due to its status as the capital of the first Socialist state on German soil. Rather, it was the city's small but vibrant sub-culture that served to entice many.<sup>80</sup> Günter Gaus famously wrote that East Germans were able to establish their niches in the family sphere, in their private holidays and their garden allotments.<sup>81</sup> To this should be added the crumbling tenement districts that were to be found in every East German inner city.

Lest we should forget, it was the construction of modern housing estates on greenfield sites and on the city's periphery that originally enabled the inner city to emerge as a potential alternative niche in the first place. The construction of the mega-estates of Marzahn, Hellersdorf and Hohenschönhausen, to which a third of the GDR capital's population relocated during the Honecker era, resulted in the thinning out of the population in East Berlin's old tenement districts. In West Berlin, these demographic changes began earlier. Over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, Kreuzberg's population, for instance, dropped from 213,000 in 1952 to 158,000 in 1970, as residents

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<sup>80</sup> See Barbara Felsmann and Annett Gröschner, eds., *Durchgangszimmer Prenzlauer Berg: Eine Berliner Künstlersozialgeschichte in Selbstauskünften* (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 1999); Harald Hauswald and Lutz Rathenow, *Ost-Berlin: Leben vor dem Mauerfall*, 4th ed. (Berlin: Jaron Verlag, 2008). Paul Kaiser and Claudia Petzold, eds., *Boheme und Diktatur in der DDR: Gruppen, Konflikte, Quartiere, 1970-1989* (Berlin: Fannei & Waltz Verlag, 1997).

<sup>81</sup> Günter Gaus, *Wo Deutschland liegt. Eine Ortsbestimmung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1983).

moved out to the Gropiusstadt and the Märkisches Viertel on West Berlin's periphery. During the next two decades the infrastructure of an alternative milieu would establish itself here and in other inner city neighbourhoods in West Berlin. This did not simply emerge without incident, however. As we shall see in the next chapter, it had to be seized, it had to be fought for, and it had to be defended.

## CHAPTER 2:

# ‘THIS IS OUR HOUSE!’ THE STRUGGLE OVER THE ‘RAUCH-HAUS’

### I. INTRODUCTION

On the night of 8 December 1971, some 300 youths, together with runaways and members of a number of local grassroots initiatives, occupied the ‘Rauch-Haus’ in Kreuzberg, an erstwhile nurses’ home which since 1970 had been standing empty.<sup>1</sup> This 96 room building belonged to the Bethanien hospital complex, which had been constructed in 1845-47.<sup>2</sup> The Bethanien and the surrounding Kreuzberg neighbourhood had survived the Allied bombing and the Red Army’s assault on the city relatively unscathed. However, the division of the city and its resulting spatial redefinition had relegated both to West Berlin’s geographic margins. The northern perimeter of the Bethanien marked the boundary between the two halves of the divided city, while the front door of Rauch-Haus stood only six meters from the Berlin Wall.

The Rauch-Haus, which exists to this day, was one of the first buildings in West Berlin to be openly occupied and as such constitutes an important early chapter in the history of squatting in the ‘Island City’. At the same time, the

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<sup>1</sup> For first-hand accounts of this event see ‘Georg von Rauch Haus Besetzt’, *Agit 883*, Nr. 87, 21. January 1972, pp. 10-11; Manfred Kappeler et al., “Ein Ansatz Proletarischer Jugendarbeit im Stadtteil: Das Georg-von-Rauch-Haus in Berlin-Kreuzberg,” *Erziehung und Klassenkampf: Zeitschrift für marxistische Pädagogik*, no. 7 (1972); Autorenkollektiv, *Kämpfen, Leben, Lernen* (West Berlin: Jugendzentrum Kreuzberg, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> The young Theodore Fontane had worked in its apothecary ‘zur Geschichte des Bethanien’, [http://www.kunstquartier-bethanien.de/geschichte\\_bethanien.html](http://www.kunstquartier-bethanien.de/geschichte_bethanien.html). Retrieved 20 Oct. 2012.

Rauch-Haus squatters drew from and built on the tradition of radical protest which had emerged in West Berlin during the student movement of the 1960s. Indeed, the Rauch-Haus, and similar initiatives, this chapter argues, served as an important nexus linking the politics of '1968' and the patterns of extra-parliamentary opposition (APO) of the 1970s. The struggle over the Rauch-Haus was a manifestation of the politicised 'youth culture' of the early-1970s – itself one of the legacies of the 1960s New Left – and provides a concrete example of the intersection of politics and culture during this period. What is more, the history of the Rauch-Haus provides an example of the transnational dissemination of ideas and anti-authoritarian practices within Europe and Germany, East and West, during the Cold War era. The story of the Rauch-Haus comprises not only a chapter in the early history of squatting in West Germany and West Berlin but belongs to those of squatting, non-conformity and alternative cultures behind the Berlin Wall too.

This chapter begins by focusing on the occupation of the Rauch-Haus, situating this event within the wider political context of post-1968 West Berlin and analysing the actors involved and the tactics they used. The second section examines the Rauch-Haus' importance to the broader Youth Centre Movement which emerged in West Germany and elsewhere in Western Europe during the early to mid-1970s. The section also provides an example of the way in which the Rauch-Haus occupation captured the imagination of some East Germans, who were politically influenced by the project. Lastly, the chapter looks at attempts by the authorities to infiltrate and undermine the collective. The Rauch-Haus attracted an unlikely array of foes in the form of the security organs

of both German states, the *Verfassungsschutz* (The Office for the Protection of the Constitution, hereafter VfS) and *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* (Stasi) respectively. Situated between the fronts of the Cold War, occupied at the temporal juncture of the early 1970s, and providing a concrete example of the trans-national dissemination of anti-authoritarian ideas as well as of the intersection of New Left politics and counterculture, the story of the Rauch-Haus provides an introduction to the struggle over urban space in post-1968 Berlin.

## II. SQUATTING THE GEORG-VON-RAUCH-HAUS

1968 witnessed a series of set-backs for the anti-authoritarian New Left in West Germany and internationally. The Emergency Laws were ratified in the *Bundestag* in Bonn on May 30, and the following month the Gaullists won an election landslide in France, enabling them to reassert their power in the Fifth Republic. This was followed shortly thereafter by the events of 21 August, when Warsaw Pact troops marched into Czechoslovakia, bringing to an end the hopes of a democratic renewal of Socialism envisioned during the Prague Spring.<sup>3</sup> Unable to agree on where it all went wrong, the extra-parliamentary opposition in the *Bundesrepublik* unravelled. In 1969, the *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund* (SDS) dissolved itself amidst fratricidal infighting. Many of its former leading figures were in jail or had gone into the terrorist underground,

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<sup>3</sup> See Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth, eds., *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956-1977* (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

while Rudi Dutschke was abroad in convalescence following the attempt on his life in 1968.

Following the demise of the SDS, the *Bundesrepublik's* APO splintered into a plethora of groups and factions, including Maoist 'Red Guards', Communist K-Groups, grass-roots organisations, neighbourhood initiatives, as well as terrorist cells who engaged the West German state in an armed, underground struggle. Between July 1969 and May 1972, according to official estimations, some 115 terrorist attacks were carried out in West Berlin alone.<sup>4</sup> Those involved in the terrorist underground numbered only a handful of individuals, a few dozen at the most. Nevertheless, these small groups of urban guerrillas exerted a disproportionately strong influence on the post-1968 radical left (and its historiography), and they commanded a broad level of sympathy within the wider West German APO.<sup>5</sup>

On 4 December 1971, four days before the occupation of the Bethanien, the anarchist Georg von Rauch was fatally injured in a shoot-out with the West Berlin police. Born in 1947, the twenty-four-year-old von Rauch had moved to West Berlin in 1967 to study philosophy at the Free University and had signed up as a member of the SDS on his arrival. Radicalised by the death of Benno Ohnesorg that year, and by the escalation of the war in Vietnam, von Rauch then moved into the *Wielandkommune*, a militant left-wing commune in West Berlin's

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<sup>4</sup> Nick Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany: A Social History of Dissent and Democracy* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2003), p. 203.

<sup>5</sup> In one poll, undertaken in the FRG in 1971, 6 per cent of those questioned confessed that they would be willing to conceal a fugitive left-wing terrorist. Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 2004), p. 199.

Wielandstraße that existed between 1968-69. From here began his trajectory from student radical to the terrorist underground. First a member of West Berlin's 'Hash Rebels', von Rauch later became involved in the terrorist organisation *Bewegung 2. Juni*.<sup>6</sup>

The death of von-Rauch produced a tense and polarised atmosphere in the Island City, akin to that which had followed the shooting of Benno Ohnesorg and the attempted assassination of Rudi Dutschke at the height of the West German student movement only a few years earlier.<sup>7</sup> On 8 December 1971, a teach-in was convened in the Audimax of West Berlin's Technical University, the very location where Dutschke and the SDS had held their own rallies and events during the student protests of the 1960s. The teach-in itself was packed to the rafters. Jutta Matthes' photographs of the event show both the lower and upper tiers of the lecture hall filled with young people, sporting the long hair, beards, jeans, corduroy and unkempt style of the West German (and international) counterculture.<sup>8</sup> During the event, the cult rock band from Kreuzberg, *Ton, Steine, Scherben*, took the stage to perform while, 'between the songs', according to one contemporary, 'ever shorter political texts were read.'<sup>9</sup> The mood was charged and emotions running high, and when a proposal to occupy part of the Bethanien complex and to name it the Rauch-Haus was put to

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<sup>6</sup> For a first-hand account of the Wielandkommune see 'Bommi' Baumann, *Wie alles anfing* (Munich: Trikont Verlag, 1980), pp. 44-49.

<sup>7</sup> We now know that the West Berlin police officer who shot Ohnesorg was in fact a Stasi informant. See Helmut Müller-Enbergs and Cornelia Jabs, "Der 2. Juni 1967 und die Staatssicherheit," *Deutschland Archiv*, no. 3 (2009).

<sup>8</sup> For a photograph of the teach in see [http://www.umbruch-bildarchiv.de/bildarchiv/foto1/bildgalerie\\_rauchhaus/pages/1301c.htm](http://www.umbruch-bildarchiv.de/bildarchiv/foto1/bildgalerie_rauchhaus/pages/1301c.htm) retrieved 10 November 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Christina Perincioli quoted in See Timothy S. Brown, 'Music as a Weapon? Ton Steine Scherben and the Politics of Rock in Cold War Berlin', *German Studies Review* 32, no. 1 (2009), p. 12.

those assembled, it was met with enthusiasm. ‘The entire demonstration suddenly took off’, the activist Christina Perincioli, who was present at the teach-in, recalls.<sup>10</sup> Hundreds of people began to spill out of the Audimax, heading towards Kreuzberg. ‘At around nine-thirty’, reported West Berlin’s *BZ* newspaper, ‘the police were alerted as the demonstrators began to force their way into the Bethanien.’<sup>11</sup> Some 300 people were able to make it inside, through a hole in the perimeter fence that had been prised open in advance. Meanwhile, the police attempted to disperse the remaining youth gathered in the nearby Mariannenplatz, firing off rounds of teargas in the direction of the crowd. These demonstrators initially scattered, but re-grouped in neighbouring streets, where they blockaded traffic and attacked passing patrol cars.<sup>12</sup> With the authorities’ attention temporarily diverted, the occupants secured themselves in the building, and a large banner was draped from the building’s façade, spelling out the words ‘BESETZT’ (occupied).

This tactic of taking over a space and declaring it ‘occupied’ or ‘liberated’ has witnessed a renaissance among contemporary social movements. Pioneered during the US Civil Rights era, where it manifested itself in the form of the ‘sit-in’, the tactic of site-occupation was integrated into the campus politics of the 1960s student movement and became central to the protest repertoire of the ‘new social movements’ of the 1970s and 1980s. In autumn 1970, the first buildings were occupied in Frankfurt’s West End sparking a small

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<sup>10</sup> Christina Perincioli quoted in *ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Tumulte in Kreuzberg’, *BZ*, 9. Dec. 1971.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*



but militant and enduring squatter movement in the Hessian city.<sup>13</sup> In December 1971, the *Kursbuch* devoted an issue to the 'class struggle' in Italy and what lessons the German APO could draw from it. The editor of this volume, Peter Schneider, penned an article on squatting in Milan's Via Tibaldi in which he stressed the positive potential of this tactic. Not only had the Milanese squatters brought attention to their own housing deprivation, noted Schneider. Their struggle had served to rally together the different strands of the city's radical left.<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless, opting to occupy or seize control of a property entailed potential legal and physical hazards – particularly in the polarized context of 1970s Cold War West Berlin. Indeed, it provides an example of what the social movement theorist Doug McAdam terms 'high risk activism'.<sup>15</sup> On 1 May 1970, an attempt to occupy an empty building in the Märkisches Viertel district of West Berlin was swiftly ended when, according to the instigators, 'some 100 police officers stormed [the building] with batons at the ready' and 'brutally' attacked the occupants.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, for those with little institutional or political leverage, site occupation could prove successful, especially when carefully planned and executed. Indeed, the political scientist Ruud Koopmans

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<sup>13</sup> See Kraushaar, 'Die Frankfurter Sponti-Szene: Eine Subkultur als politische Versuchsordnung.' See also Til Schulz, 'Zum Beispiel Eppsteinerstrasse 47: Wohnungskampf, Hausbesetzung, Wohnkollektiv', *Kursbuch* 27(1972).

<sup>14</sup> Peter Schneider, 'Die Häuserbesetzung in der Via Tibaldi (Mailand)', *Kursbuch* 26(1971), p. 110.

<sup>15</sup> See Doug McAdam, "Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer," *American Journal of Sociology* 92, no. 1 (1986).

<sup>16</sup> From the accompanying text to the film 'Die Besetzung' von Max Willutzki, Christian Ziewer u.a. Berlin (West) 1970. Reproduced in Volkhard Brandes and Bernhard Schön, eds., *Wer sind die Instandbesetzer: Selbstzeugnisse, Dokumente, Analysen - Ein Lesebuch*, (Bensheim: Pädex, 1981), p. 52.

argues that site-occupation constituted 'the single most important innovation' of the post-war protest movements.<sup>17</sup>

The events of 8 December 1971, while being injected with an element of spontaneity, had in fact been thought out and planned in advance. On 25 November 1971, exactly two weeks before the Rauch-Haus was occupied, various activists first met together with the aim of pressurising the local administration in Kreuzberg to grant them access to the empty Bethanien. One of the groups present, the *Basisgruppe für Heim und Lehrlingsarbeit* (BHL), required space for working with runaways and homeless children.<sup>18</sup> The Marxist BHL, whose pedagogical goals and analyses were articulated in the suitably named journal, *Erziehung und Klassenkampf* (Education and Class Struggle), was one of the many *Basisgruppen* that had emerged out of the sixties student movement.<sup>19</sup> These groups tended to focus on local, neighbourhood issues, and sought to forge connections with residents at the grass-roots. The *Basisgruppen* also sought to politicise young people, such as school pupils and apprentices, and had a presence in a number of existing state-run youth centres. The BHL, for instance, had been active in a youth centre in Kreuzberg's Naunynstraße, where many of the Rauch-Haus squatters had passed their free-time. As one member of the organization put it, 'I sought, from the very start, to

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<sup>17</sup> Koopmans, *Democracy from below: new social movements and the political system in West Germany*, p. 122.

<sup>18</sup> 'Georg von Rauch Haus Besetzt', *Agit 883*, Nr. 87, 21. January 1972, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Already by May 1968, Marxist *Stadtteilgruppen* (neighbourhood groups) had emerged in 11 districts in West Berlin. See Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties: The Anti-Authoritarian Revolt, 1962-1978*, p. 239.

explain my political motivations to the youth.'<sup>20</sup> These radical *Basisgruppen* not only spread the anti-authoritarian ideas of the APO to a new generation of actors, but also provided them with practical experience. In the case of the BHL and the youth in the Naunynstraße, they helped with the production of a youth centre newspaper, the *Kritik*.<sup>21</sup>

Another of the groups present, which along with the BHL would play a key role in the occupation, was the *Jugendzentrum Kreuzberg*. This group consisted primarily of young people and apprentices from the local neighbourhood, and their demands included 'living space for apprentices and young workers' as well as space for an 'apprentice commune'.<sup>22</sup> Most members of this group were still living at home. Bernhard, one of the local youth who occupied the Rauch-Haus, for instance, lived in a cramped 40 square meter apartment with his parents and two siblings. For many of his friends the situation was the same. 'Everyone just wanted their own space', he recalls. 'Then came the idea to squat this house: the Rauch-Haus'.<sup>23</sup>

This younger cohort of actors had been politicised in part through their contact with leftist organisations based in Kreuzberg, such as the BHL. Also of importance, however, were their encounters with *Hoffman's Comic Theatre*, a radical collective that built on the agitprop and street-theatre of the 1960s. *Hoffman's* founding members included Gert Möbius (also known as Rio Riser),

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<sup>20</sup> Kristine Liebel, 'Praxisbericht aus einem Jugendfreizeitheim in West Berlin', *Erziehung und Klassenkampf: Zeitschrift für Marxistische Pädagogik* no. 3 (1971), p. 74.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>22</sup> 'Georg von Rauch Haus Besetzt', *Agit 883*, Nr. 87, 21. January 1972, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Unpublished interview: Ka, Bernhardt. Interview by Peter Mitchell. Berlin, 10 December 2011.

the lead singer of *Ton, Steine, Scherben*.<sup>24</sup> They performed in the Nanystraße youth centre and inspired local apprentices to form their own theatre troupe, named the *Rote Steine Proletarisches Lehrlingstheater* (The Red Stones Proletarian and Apprentice Theatre). On 3 July 1970, the *Rote Steine* were involved in the occupation of an empty factory building in Kreuzberg's Mariannenplatz – the first successful case of open squatting in West Berlin.<sup>25</sup>

These initiatives were optimistic of winning the backing for their projects from Erwin Beck (SPD), Kreuzberg's district councillor for youth affairs. Beck, who belonged to the SPD's left-wing and who later became an outspoken critic of the *Radikalenerlass*<sup>26</sup>, was regarded as a sympathetic figure within the local administration. It was decided, therefore, to first go through the bureaucratic procedures and see how receptive the local authorities were to their demands. At the same time, however, the initiatives made preparations for direct action. From the first meeting it was clear that, should their demands not be conceded, the Bethanien 'would have to be occupied'.<sup>27</sup> The shooting of von Rauch, just as the project was in its embryonic stage, however, led the groups to re-evaluate their strategy. Instead of resorting to squatting as a last resort, a decision was made to seize the moment by exploiting the anger and

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<sup>24</sup> For the history of *Ton, Steine, Scherben* and their earlier projects see Kai Sichtermann, Jens Jöhler, and Christian Stahl, *Keine Macht für Niemand: Die Geschichte der Ton Steine Scherben* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2000).

<sup>25</sup> 'Leere Fabrik Erfolgreich Besetzt', *Kreuzberger Stadtteil-Zeitung*, Nr. 6 (July/Aug 1971).

<sup>26</sup> The legislation introduced by Willy Brandt's SPD-led coalition in 1972 barred individuals with connections to radical organisations (especially communist organisations) from working in the public service. The author Peter Schneider is one such individual whose career as a teacher was blocked by the legislation.

<sup>27</sup> 'Georg von Rauch Haus Besetzt', *Agit 883*, Nr. 87, 21. January 1972, p. 11. Underlined in the original.

emotion that followed this incident and channelling it towards an occupation.<sup>28</sup> The Monday following von Rauch's death witnessed several thousand taking to the streets in a large demonstration, and both the youth from the *Jugendzentrum Kreuzberg* and the BHL were conscious of the fact that they would have a receptive audience at the upcoming teach-in at the Technical University (TU).<sup>29</sup> Thus they began to plan the occupation. Leaflets and placards were drawn up and printed, while essential material, including ladders, equipment for barricades, mattresses, food, transport vehicles and candles were all organised in advance.

The seizure of the former nurses' home was but an initial salvo in the struggle over the Rauch-Haus. Given the escalation of political tension between the authorities and the APO in West Berlin and in light of the Rauch-Haus squatters' open sympathy towards the terrorist left, as the naming of their building after one of its members clearly showed, the outcome of the struggle was far from certain. While certain figures, such as Erwin Beck, were inclined to tolerate the project, there were many in the SPD administration who were hostile to the radical politics of the Rauch-Haus collective and the wider extra-parliamentary left in general. Moreover, the city's mainstream press added to the pressure, insinuating (not entirely baseless) links between the Rauch-Haus squatters and fugitive left-wing terrorists.<sup>30</sup> West Berlin's main opposition party, the conservative CDU, repeatedly called for such 'terror-centre[s]' to be

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> 'Die Ereignisse nach der Ermordung Georg von Rauchs', *Agit 883*, Nr. 87, 21. January 1972, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> 'Bastelte die Bethanien-Besetzer die Bomben: Beweismaterial bei Großrazzia sichergestellt', *BZ*, 20. Apr. 1972.

shut down.<sup>31</sup> Even in 1976, the CDU were still rallying against the Rauch-Haus and other squatted youth projects in West Berlin, with their 'red flags fluttering from their roofs.'<sup>32</sup>

The groups that planned the occupation of the Rauch-Haus were prepared for a longer struggle, however. They were able to draw on broader networks of support – from the *Rote Hilfe*, local K-Groups, politicised youth as well as local residents from the neighbourhood – who could be mobilised to campaign on behalf of the collective. The actors involved – both the BHL and the apprentices from the *Jugendzentrum Kreuzberg* – had already gained experience in political organisation and were able to put this to use. The Rauch-Haus squatters claimed to have distributed 60,000 leaflets in the two weeks following the occupation and gathered 3,500 signatures supporting the initiative within the first 48 hours.<sup>33</sup> Demonstrations of support were mobilised while the collective organised a three-day May Day festival on the nearby Mariannenplatz in 1972, which included performances from the *Rote Steinen*.<sup>34</sup> Displaying media-savvy, the Rauch-Haus squatters agreed to be interviewed live in the studios of the RIAS (Radio in the American Sector) and the *Freies Sender Berlin*, and they also allowed the *Westdeutsche Rundfunk* to produce a documentary about everyday life in the house.<sup>35</sup> The squatters could also draw

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<sup>31</sup> 'Kontroversen um Bethanien: CDU löste heftige Debatte aus', *BZ*, 7. Jan. 1972; 'Polizei fand Material für Bomben-Bastler in Bethanien', *Der Tagespiegel*, 20. April. 1972.

<sup>32</sup> CDU Flyer, reproduced in Rauch-Haus Kollektiv, *Friede den Hütten Krieg den Palästen: 6 Jahre Selbstorganisation* (West Berlin: Keule Druck, 1977), p. 96.

<sup>33</sup> 'Georg von Rauch Haus Besetzt', *Agit 883*, Nr. 87, 21. January 1972, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> Autorenkollektiv, *Kämpfen, Leben, Lernen* (West Berlin: Jugendzentrum Kreuzberg, 1972), pp. 128-31.

<sup>35</sup> See *ibid.*; Archiv 'APO und soziale Bewegungen', Fachbereich Polit- ische Wissenschaft der Freien Universität Berlin (hereafter APOusB, Folder: Georg von Rauchhaus 1971-73: 'Interviews

on the alternative publics that existed in the alternative press, such as the anarchist APO publication *Agit 883*, to disseminate their message. Ultimately, in 1973, the Senate granted the Rauch-Haus collective a five-year use-contract for the building that recognised the project as a social-pedagogical experiment.<sup>36</sup>

### III. 'WE DIDN'T JUST LISTEN TO BIERMAN'

The successful occupation of the Rauch-Haus was followed by a number of similar initiatives in West Berlin. On 19 March 1972, echoing the events of the previous December, a call to occupy an empty factory in Tiergarten's Lützower Straße was announced during a 'political' rock concert at the TU, headlined by the American band MC5. Again, several hundred youths took part in the occupation, demanding the building be converted into an autonomous youth centre. This initiative was brought to an end, however, when a large contingent of riot police moved in and forcefully cleared the property.<sup>37</sup> More successful was the occupation of an empty factory known as the 'PUTTE' in Wedding in the same year, while in 1973 an abandoned tenement building in western Kreuzberg was taken over and named the 'Tommy Weisbecker Haus' – again in honour of a martyred left-wing terrorist.

These occupations in West Berlin belonged to a nationwide *Jugendzentrumbewegung* (Youth Centre Movement) that experienced its high-point in the Federal Republic of Germany in the early to mid-1970s. Frustrated

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(Protokol) gegenüber RIAS und SFB vom Georg v. Rauch-Haus'; West-Deutsche-Rundfunk, 'Das ist unser Haus,' (West Germany 1972).

<sup>36</sup> BStU, MfS, ZA, HA I 3801, 'Konzeption', fols. 110-125, here fol. 116; see also Kollektiv, *Friede den Hütten Krieg den Palästen: 6 Jahre Selbstorganisation*, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> 'Die Besetzung', *Agit 883*, Sonderausgabe Nr. 1, April 1972, p. 3.

with the paternalistic organisation of existing state-run facilities, and critical of the more commercial culture and entertainment available, youth across the Federal Republic strove to establish autonomous, self-managed centres during this period.<sup>38</sup> The Youth Centre Movement took hold in cities such as West Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, Frankfurt and Munich. However, it was not only large urban centres where this phenomenon could be observed. As the political weekly *Der Spiegel* reported in 1974, there was 'scarcely a town or a large village' in the country which had not witnessed the struggle for an autonomous 'youth' or 'communication' centre in one form or another.<sup>39</sup>

Although it has retrospectively been overshadowed by the 1960s student movement, on the one hand, and the extra-parliamentary opposition's descent into terrorism in the 1970s, on the other, the Youth Centre Movement played an important role in the evolution of the West German protest culture post-1968. Following the dissolution of the SDS and the subsequent splintering of the *Bundesrepublik's* New Left, autonomous youth centres provided important points of convergence for the disparate strands of the Federal Republic's extra-parliamentary opposition, whether Marxist, post-Marxist, Maoist, countercultural or terroristic. And not only did the Youth Centre Movement provide a focal point for the post-1968 APO; it also drew new actors, such as apprentices, young workers or 'de-classed' youths, as the Marxist *Basisgruppen* viewed them, into the political struggle. 'In many places', as Detlev Siegfried argues, 'the fight over a youth centre constituted one of the most important

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<sup>38</sup> See Siegfried, 'Einstürzende Neubauten: Wohngemeinschaften, Jugendzentren und private Präferenzen kommunistischer "Kader" als Formen jugendlicher Subkultur.'

<sup>39</sup> 'Wo aber fängt das Petting an', in *Der Spiegel*, Nr. 3. 1974, p. 38.



themes of contention during the 1970s.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, the Youth Centre Movement drew from the ideas and tactics of the '68ers' who had preceded them.<sup>41</sup> The radicalism of the 1960s resonated particularly strongly among the Federal Republic's youth, politicising a new generation of actors. According to contemporary surveys, half of all 16 to 19 year olds in the *Bundesrepublik* in 1970 claimed to 'fundamentally' support the student movement and its goals.<sup>42</sup> Whether it was a willingness to engage in direct action, the questioning of traditional figures of authority, the promotion of organisational principles such as direct democracy, or experiments in new patterns of collective living, there were numerous areas where the influence of the anti-authoritarian student movement on the Youth Centre Movement was evident.

As their names suggest – the 'Old Mill' in Filderstadt, the 'Pewter Foundry' in Hamburg, the 'Slaughterhouse Cultural Centre' in Bremen, the 'Pumping Works' in Wilhelmshaven, the 'Old Fire Station' in Cologne – many of the autonomous youth centres were established in former industrial buildings. The emergence of post-industrial landscapes in the inner cities, where former factories or tenements stood empty, provided the raw material for the Youth Centre Movement to emerge. Large and structurally sound, these buildings proved ideally suited for holding social events and concerts, for workshops and

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<sup>40</sup> Detlev Siegfried, "Einstürzende Neubauten: Wohngemeinschaften, Jugendzentren und private Präferenzen kommunistischer "Kader" als Formen jugendlicher Subkultur," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 44(2004). p. 58.

<sup>41</sup> Lindner, *Jugendprotest seit den fünfziger Jahren: Dissens und kultureller Eigensinn*, p. 271.

<sup>42</sup> See Siegfried, 'Einstürzende Neubauten: Wohngemeinschaften, Jugendzentren und private Präferenzen kommunistischer "Kader" als Formen jugendlicher Subkultur,' p. 44.

recording studios, or for establishing living collectives.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the Youth Centre Movement and the urban counterculture in general were ahead of the curve in ascribing new purposes to discarded urban spaces.<sup>44</sup>

The contest over urban space increasingly came to dominate the issue repertoire of the West German extra-parliamentary left during the 1970s and 1980s, and the occupation of the Rauch-Haus marked one of the early chapters in this struggle. There had, of course, been other such occupations before it; even in the district of Kreuzberg, the Rauch-Haus was not the first building to be squatted. That status belonged to the factory on the Mariannenplatz, occupied in July 1970, in which the *Jugendzentrum Kreuzberg* was established.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, while not quite the *ur-squat* of West Berlin, the Rauch-Haus was the most influential. This was in part because of the spectacular nature of the occupation and its timing, in part because of the project's association with the band *Ton, Steine, Scherben*, but also due to the fact that the struggle ended in success.

News of the occupation of the Rauch-Haus quickly spread through both the mainstream and the underground press, and the collective soon served as a model for similar projects. In January 1973, Bremen's edition of the *Agit 883* printed a leaflet with a picture of the Rauch-Haus under the heading: 'Georg-v-

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<sup>43</sup> Those who occupied the empty five-floor factory in the Lützower Straße sought to establish a auto workshop, a kindergarten, a bar, various workshops, a photograph development studio, as well as space for 'group work'. 'Berlin Lützower Straße', *Agit 883*, Sonderausgabe Nr. 1, April 1972, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> See Diethard Kerbs, 'Über die Lust am Wiederbeleben verlassener Räume,' in *Kultur und Gesellschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: eine Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Arno Klöne*, ed. Peter Ulrich Hein and Harmut Reese (Frankfurt am Main: Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1996).

<sup>45</sup> 'Leere Fabrik Erfolgreich Besetzt', *Kreuzberger Stadtteil-Zeitung*, Nr. 6 (July/Aug 1971).

Rauch-Haus in Berlin – Autonomous Youth Centre in Bremen’, connecting the successful struggle for the former with the on-going campaign for the latter.<sup>46</sup> The letters mailed to the Rauch-Haus by other youth centre projects in West Germany and beyond also testify to the Rauch-Haus’ importance. ‘Your struggle can teach us a lot’, wrote the local Association of Youth Centres in the south-western federal state of Baden-Württemberg in January 1973, just after the Rauch-Haus collective had secured the right to remain in the building it had occupied.<sup>47</sup> Another letter received in March the same year, this time from an organisation in Switzerland, noted that ‘here in Zurich we are faced with many of the same problems that you are in Berlin ... Please send us ten copies of your book [*Kämpfen, Leben, Lernen*] as quickly as possible.’<sup>48</sup>

However, it was not only those in the West who were inspired by the Rauch-Haus. News of the occupation spread across the Cold War divide, capturing the imagination of young East Germans as well. As the East German civil rights campaigner Thomas Auerbach recalls, the history of the Rauch-Haus occupation ‘naturally influenced us [in the GDR] politically’.<sup>49</sup> In the early 1970s, Auerbach lived in the Thuringian city of Jena and belonged to a small alternative cultural scene which had coalesced around authors such as Lutz Rathenow, Jürgen Fuchs, Bernd Markowski and Wolfgang Hinkeldey. Despite being separated from the *Bundesrepublik* by the Iron Curtain, Auerbach was able

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<sup>46</sup> *Agit 883 Bremen*, Nr. 1, January 1973, p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> APOusB, Folder: Georg von Rauchhaus 1971-73 – Letter ‘Kreisverband der Jugendzentren Roms/Murr to Jugendzentrum Kreuzberg’, 31 Jan 1973.

<sup>48</sup> APOusB, Folder: Georg von Rauchhaus 1971-73 – Letter ‘Selbsthilfeverein Lebensraum Zürich to Jugendzentrum Kreuzberg’, 1 March 1973.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Henning Pietzsch, *Jugend zwischen Kirche und Staat: Geschichte der kirchlichen Jugendarbeit in Jena 1970 - 1989* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2005), p. 57.

to forge personal contact with Manfred Kappler, a West German activist who was closely involved with the Rauch-Haus and who co-authored an article on its occupation in the Marxist journal *Erziehung und Klassenkampf*.<sup>50</sup> This example of the transfer of anti-authoritarian and countercultural ideas across the German-German divide was not itself new. Such trends dated back to the 1960s and beyond.<sup>51</sup>

In contrast to Czechoslovakia and its capital Prague, East Germany did not serve as one of the nodal points of the global sixties. Indeed, there has been much ink spilled over the question of whether there was in fact a '1968' or even a '1968 generation' in the GDR.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, it would be difficult to argue that the 'spirit of the times' (Horn) did not in some way impact on East German society.<sup>53</sup> Due to advances in technology and the availability and attraction of an increasingly global youth culture, the post-war generation in the GDR, Dorothee Wierling argues, 'became part of the West – despite the wall.'<sup>54</sup> Western records, magazines, publications and pamphlets were smuggled into the Socialist republic. With some isolated locations notwithstanding, the Iron Curtain proved permeable to Western radio and television signals, which

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 51. p. 51; Manfred Kappler et al., 'Ein Ansatz Proletarischer Jugendarbeit im Stadtteil: Das Georg-von-Rauch-Haus in Berlin-Kreuzberg', *Erziehung und Klassenkampf: Zeitschrift für marxistische Pädagogik*, no. 7 (1972).

<sup>51</sup> For the sixties see Brown, "1968" East and West: Divided Germany as a Case Study in Transnational History.; Mark Fenemore, *Sex, Thugs and Rock 'N' Roll: Teenage Rebels in Cold-War East Germany* (New York: Berghahn, 2007).

<sup>52</sup> For contrasting opinions see Dorothee Wierling, 'Do the 1929ers and the 1949ers Differ?,' in *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961-1979: The 'Normalisation of Rule'?*, ed. Mary Fulbrook (New York & Oxford: Berghahn, 2009). Marc-Dietrich Ohse, *Jugend nach dem Mauerbau: Anpassung, Protest und Eigensinn (DDR 1961-1974)* (Berlin: Ch. Verlag, 2003).

<sup>53</sup> Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>54</sup> Wierling, 'Do the 1929ers and the 1949ers Differ?,' p. 210.

transported the images and sounds of the West into Eastern living rooms and bedrooms. Although it could only be experienced remotely, 'one felt a part of the international anti-authoritarian protest culture', as Lutz Kirchenwitz, an East German 68er, recalls.<sup>55</sup> In the 1960s in East Germany, a new generation of dissidents were exposed to the ideas of the western New Left, as well as the democratic Socialism of the Czechoslovakian reformers. Prominent figures from the Western protest movements and counterculture occasionally appeared in person in the East German capital. In 1967, Pete Seeger performed in both halves of the divided city, while in March 1968 Fritz Teufel of the *Kommune I* was spotted in the Mokka-Milch-Eisbar in East Berlin's Karl Marx Allee.<sup>56</sup>

The *Kommune I*, founded on 12 January 1967 by Dieter Kunzelmann, was central to the history of the West German APO in the 1960s. Gaining notoriety on account of their pranks and provocations, as well as their radical experiments in communal living, which, among other things, sought to reconceptualise the public and private divide, the commune operated out of various apartments in the city until 1969. The *Kommune I* played an important role in disseminating the student movement's radical critique of West German society, in no small part due to their media savvy and their publicity grabbing stunts (they were famously arrested for their role in planning the 'pudding assassination' – a conspiracy to attack US Vice-President Hubert Humphrey with stink bombs during an official visit to West Berlin.) At the same time, the

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<sup>55</sup> Lutz Kirchenwitz, '1968 im Westen – was ging uns die DDR an?', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, no. 45 (2003), p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> Tobias Wunschik, 'Die 'Bewegung 2. Juni' und ihre Protektion durch die Staatssicherheit', *Deutschland Archiv*, no. 6 (2007), p. 1018.

communards' Situationist-inspired politics marked a shift in emphasis, if not a complete break, from the serious Marxism of Rudi Dutschke and his cohort in the SDS.

The radical experimentation of the West Berlin 'psycho commune' spawned an imitator in the GDR, the *Kommune I-Ost*. Founded by a small group of critical intellectuals, including Frank, Florian and Sybille Havemann, the children of the well-known dissident intellectual Robert Havemann, the *KI-Ost* operated out of various apartments between 1969 and 1973.<sup>57</sup> The *KI-Ost* served as a regular gathering place for East German dissidents, some of whom stayed for extended periods of time, and attracted visitors from West Germany and other western countries.<sup>58</sup> It was first located in a three-room apartment in Friedrichshain's Samariter Straße, in a flat, which, the security organs noted, established itself as a 'meeting place for negative youth'.<sup>59</sup> In July 1970, the *KI-Ost* exchanged their apartment in Friedrichshain (without official permission) for a larger five-room apartment in Berlin-Mitte, which offered more space for the commune to expand.<sup>60</sup>

As one Stasi report noted, the internal organisation and the politics of the *KI-Ost* were informed by their knowledge of the communal experimentation being practised 'in West Berlin and West Germany'.<sup>61</sup> As the contemporary Paul Kaiser recalls, the communes in both halves of the divided city shared 'similar

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<sup>57</sup> See Timothy S. Brown, 'A Tale of two Communes: The Private and the Political in Divided Berlin, 1967-1973' in *Between The Prague Spring and the French May 1968: Transnational Exchange and National Recontextualization of Protest Cultures*, ed. Martin Klimke, Jacco Pekelder, and Joachim Scharloth (New York & Oxford: Berghahn, 2011).

<sup>58</sup> BStU, MfS, BV Berlin AKG 771, fol. 2, 9.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., fol. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., fol. 2, 8.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., fol. 2.

interests in psychedelic theories and anti-authoritarian child-rearing, [an obsessive focus on] self-discovery, and Far Eastern philosophy.<sup>62</sup> Prior to the establishment of the *KI-Ost*, a number of the group's members had articulated their support for the Prague Spring through unfurling a banner at the official 1 May 1968 demonstration, spelling out the name of the Czechoslovak leader 'Dubcek' – an action that resulted in their arrest and short-term imprisonment. Despite being closely monitored by the Stasi, they continued to engage in oppositional and non-conformist behaviour. In March 1970, for instance, two members of the *KI-Ost* disrupted a communal election meeting, exhibiting 'provocative' and 'undisciplined' behaviour, which included bringing along an alarm clock – presumably intended to be interpreted as a wake-up call to their fellow citizens.<sup>63</sup>

An important difference between the two communes, however, was their relationship to their respective social systems. Although the crushing of the Prague Spring, which was aided by troops from the NVA (*Nationale Volksarmee*, National People's Army), revealed that democratisation of Socialism under Soviet hegemony was not possible, the eastern communards retained an ambivalent attitude to the East German state. On the one hand, as a result of their anti-authoritarianism, they remained critical of the GDR's political hierarchy, which 'consisted of idiots'.<sup>64</sup> Their criticism notwithstanding, however, the members of the *KI-Ost* at the same time strove to prove their

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<sup>62</sup> Paul Kaiser quoted in Brown, "'1968" East and West: Divided Germany as a Case Study in Transnational History,' p. 92.

<sup>63</sup> BStU, Mfs, BV Berlin AKG 771, fol. 7.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., fol. 7.

loyalty to the Communist system as a whole, signing up as members of workplace *Kampfgruppen* and opting to undertake their military service – actions which they justified with reference to their study of the ‘classic’ works of Marxism-Leninism. Indeed, the *KI-Ost* studied the Marxist-Leninist canon intensively – considerably more so than their western counterparts – regarding themselves, in the assessment of the security organs, as ‘[the] “genuine” advocates of the ideas of Marx and Lenin’.<sup>65</sup>

The *KI-Ost* is the best known countercultural experiment that existed behind the Berlin Wall, but by no means the only one. In 1971, the GDR’s *Generalstaatsanwalt* reported a ‘rise in decadent ways of life’, with ‘groups of young people, particularly Beat fans, striving to live in “extended families” or “communes” ’.<sup>66</sup> In a few isolated cases, it proved possible to found such communes in illegally occupied apartments or buildings.<sup>67</sup> Between 1973 and 1976, some 20 people inhabited a run-down building in Jena’s Gorkistraße, for example, which was referred to by the occupants as the *K1*, ‘*Kommune Gorkistraße I*’. In its very name the recognition of Western counterculture in the alternative milieu in the GDR is evident. Engaging in their own communal experiment, the communards evidently felt – as had those of the *KI-Ost* – that they belonged to an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson) or ‘discourse community’ (Kätzel) of non-conformists that transcended the East/West

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<sup>65</sup> BStU, Mfs, BV Berlin AKG 771, fol. 7-8.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism. Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 94.

<sup>67</sup> Pietzsch, *Jugend zwischen Kirche und Staat: Geschichte der kirchlichen Jugendarbeit in Jena 1970 - 1989*, p. 55.



divide.<sup>68</sup> However, the Rauch-Haus and the unfolding struggles over urban space in the *Bundesrepublik* also provided a point of reference for the group. 'That's why we didn't just listen to [Wolf] Bierman', the GDR's famous dissident folk singer, recalls Auerbach, himself a resident of the commune, 'but also to *Ton, Steine, Scherben*'. The band had not only been personally involved in the occupation of the Rauch-Haus but also celebrated this event in their 'Rauch-Haus Song', which was released on their second album, *Keine Macht für Niemand*, in 1972. 'When they [*Ton, Steine Scherben*] sang "this is our house"', Auerbach recalls, 'that spoke to us straight from the heart. To us that meant the [house in] the Gorkistraße'.<sup>69</sup>

#### IV. DRIVING THE STASI UP THE WALL

Although there was a flux of residents over the years, the demographic background of those living in the Rauch-haus remained fairly constant. As the occupants put it in 1977, it 'serves primarily as a living-collective for young workers, apprentices and run-aways.'<sup>70</sup> Around 50 people lived in the collective. Most were between the ages of 16 and 22. Men outnumbered women by around three to one. In 1977 there were 10 children living there too, between the ages of one and seven.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).; Ute Kätzel. 'Kommune I/Ost,' *Der Freitag*, 20 December, 2012.

<sup>69</sup> Pietzsch, *Jugend zwischen Kirche und Staat: Geschichte der kirchlichen Jugendarbeit in Jena 1970 - 1989*, p. 57.

<sup>70</sup> Autorenkollektiv, *Kämpfen, Leben, Lernen*, p. 10.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

In its early history, the heterogeneity of the politics of the Rauch-Haus reflected that of the wider APO. The occupants comprised an eclectic mix ranging from hard-line Marxist-Leninists, through countercultural 'freaks', to apolitical runaways and homeless children. Over the course of the early to mid-1970s, however, Marxist-Leninist and Maoist K-Groups began to dominate the APO in West Berlin and in other cities in the *Bundesrepublik*. It has been estimated that, over the course of the 1970s, between 100,000 and 150,000 West Germans were politically involved with the K-groups in one way or another.<sup>72</sup> This broader trend was mirrored in the internal politics of the Rauch-Haus. For some time, noted a East German intelligence report from the late 1970s, 'the political line of the "Georg-von-Rauch-Haus" has been determined by left-wing extremist groups such as the KPD/ML and the KBW'.<sup>73</sup>

The East German border security, which could monitor the Rauch-Haus from its watch-towers, suspected that the building had become a meeting point for left-wing militants and 'terrorists'. They also had reason to believe that it was being used as a hide-out by those on the run from the West Berlin authorities.<sup>74</sup> In his highly entertaining autobiography, the self-styled 'urban guerrilla', 'Bommi' Baumann, indeed recalls that he and his compatriots often slept over in the Rauch-Haus.<sup>75</sup> Baumann, who grew up in the Märkisches

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<sup>72</sup> Andreas Kühn, *Stalins Enkel, Maos Söhne: Die Lebenswelt der K-Gruppen in der Bundesrepublik der 70er Jahre* (Frankfurt & New York: Campus Verlag, 2005), p. 287. p. 287.

<sup>73</sup> One MfS report from 1979 noted: 'In den vergangenen Jahren wurde die Politische Linie im "Georg-von-Rauch-Haus" von solchen linksextremtemen Gruppen wie KPD/ML, KBW bestimmt'. BStU, MfS, HA I Nr. 3801, fol. 117.

<sup>74</sup> BStU, MfS, ZA, HA I 4226, 'Analyse zum Schwerpunktbereich', fols. 4-11, here fol. 7; BStU, MfS, ZA, ZOS 3546, 'Auskunftsbericht', fols. 251-262/2, here fol. 259; *Ibid.*, 'Auskunftsbericht', fols. 251-262/2, here fol. 253.

<sup>75</sup> Baumann, *Wie alles anfing*, p. 118.

Viertel district of West Berlin, had been a friend and accomplice of George von Rauch himself. They had both been involved in the *Wielandkommune* as well as in the 'Haschrebellen' and the *Bewegung 2. Juni*.<sup>76</sup> The fugitive Baumann and his compatriots' reported presence in the Rauch-Haus led to it being raided by the West Berlin police on 18 April 1972, though Baumann himself was nowhere to be found. The Rauch-Haus was again raided in 1975, following the kidnapping of the CDU mayoral candidate for West Berlin, Peter Lorenz, by the *Bewegung 2. Juni*.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, the building was targeted by the West German VfS, who sought to infiltrate it with their agents. One agent – a former GS9 commando – was duly unmasked and reportedly suffered a 'brutal beating' at the hands of the collective.<sup>78</sup>

We know of the VfS's activities not on account of their own reports, which are not accessible, but rather through those of the Stasi, which also sought to infiltrate the project. Despite the building's proximity to the border installations, the East German security organs only had 'limited information' on the Rauch-Haus squatters up until 1976.<sup>79</sup> Although the Rauch-Haus and its surroundings had a certain 'extra-territorial' status, the Stasi did not initially view it as a 'problem area'.<sup>80</sup> Two developments, however, would lead the East German security organs to reassess their evaluation. Firstly, in early 1976, the Stasi noted an increase in the number of 'enemy provocations' at its border to West Berlin, a highly sensitive issue for the East German regime which

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<sup>76</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> BStU, MfS, HA I Nr. 4226, fol. 9.

<sup>78</sup> BStU, MfS, ZA, HA I 3801, 'Überprüfungsbericht', fols. 55-61, here fol. 58.

<sup>79</sup> BStU, MfS, ZA, HA I 15769, 'Bericht', fols. 1-19, here fol. 6.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Bericht', fols. 1-19, here fol. 3.

considered any infringements of the integrity of its frontiers as an attack on the legitimacy of the polity itself.<sup>81</sup> And there was one section of the Wall where the number of incidents had increased considerably in recent months: the stretch of the border known as 'section 35' that separated the West Berlin neighbourhood of Kreuzberg from the historic district of Mitte in the GDR. Here, the Berlin Wall ran directly past the front door of the Rauch-Haus.

The East German regime had only just started constructing a new generation of wall, the *Grenzmauer 75*, along this border section. Since work had begun there, however, the security organs had noted a series of disturbances, ranging from acts of vandalism perpetrated against the new border installations, to verbal abuse directed towards construction crews, and even instances of border guards and soldiers being physically threatened by West Berliners wielding 'baseball bats'.<sup>82</sup> Such incidents did not cease once the construction works had reached completion, however. Subsequent reports noted that border units at their post along this section of the wall had been 'shot at' with air rifles.<sup>83</sup> On one occasion, nine Molotov cocktails were thrown into the border strip, 'seriously endangering the life and safety' of the guards on patrol, according to the official protocol.<sup>84</sup> The East German organs were under no illusions as to who was responsible for these acts of aggression: all intelligence pointed to the occupants of the nearby Rauch-Haus. Indeed, the 'residents of the "Georg-von-Rauch-House" ', wrote a captain of the Border

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<sup>81</sup> BStU, MfS, BA Berlin, DVW 1/39509 fol. 122.

<sup>82</sup> BStU, MfS, ZA, HA I 4226, 'Analyse zum Schwerpunktbereich', fols. 4-11, fol. 9.

<sup>83</sup> BStU, MfS, ZA, HA I 3801, 'Aufgabenstellung', fols. 110-114, here fols 110-112.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 'Information', fols. 33-35, here fol. 33.

Commando in Mitte in 1979 in an official report, '[present] a permanent and serious danger to order and security at the state border.'<sup>85</sup>

For what reason the occupants of the Rauch-Haus suddenly embarked on this aggressive posturing vis-à-vis the East German border regime and its personnel is not entirely clear. The conclusion the Stasi drew, however, was that a direct connection lay between this 'enemy activity' and the organisations that wielded influence within the collective. The building and its surroundings, the Stasi noted, were adorned with Maoist slogans, clearly visible from East German territory. Intelligence gathered suggested that the occupants of the Rauch-Haus were 'predominantly' either 'sympathisers' or 'members' of the 'KPD/ML' and the KBW.<sup>86</sup> The former group, the Maoist KPD/ML, had been active in Kreuzberg since the early 1970s. It operated throughout the *Bundesrepublik* and was one of the few K-Groups of the period whose activity also extended across the Cold War frontline, encompassing underground organisation in the GDR. The KPD/ML sought to establish contact with Maoist cells in East Germany and in 1976 it founded a sister organisation, its 'section GDR'.<sup>87</sup> This now largely forgotten organisation, which received scant attention from the *Bundesrepublik's* media and whose only western support came from the politically marginalised, poorly resourced K-groups, as Tobias Wunschik points out, counted among the few groups who engaged in genuine 'active

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 'Konzeption', fols. 110-125, here fol. 120.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 'Analyse zum Schwerpunktbereich', fols. 37-44, here fol. 40.

<sup>87</sup> See Tobias Wunschik, "Die maoistische KPD/ML und die Zerschlagung ihrer "Sektion DDR" durch das MfS," *BF informiert* 18(1997).

resistance' during the East German dictatorship.<sup>88</sup> Consisting of clandestine cells operating behind the Berlin Wall, the KPM/ML's 'section GDR' was committed to the violent overthrow of the East German regime.<sup>89</sup>

The KPD/ML's 'section DDR' presented little actual threat to the SED and its apparatus of control.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, the structure of the GDR party-state did not allow for any tolerance of openly hostile activity, especially from an organisation that propagated a violent social revolution against what it deemed the 'social-fascist' SED. Indeed, Erich Mielke, the Stasi chief himself, personally supervised the operation to infiltrate and liquidate the GDR's KPD/ML.<sup>91</sup> Any strike against the organisation in the GDR, however, would have to simultaneously target the KPD/ML in the West. The Stasi's strategy papers spoke of the need to undermine the organisation's 'bases' in the FRG and West Berlin, which allegedly included the Rauch-Haus and other autonomous youth centres, in a three-pronged attack. To this end, the East German intelligence organs considered, firstly, infiltrating West Berlin's K-groups and left-wing organisations in order to play them off against each other. Secondly, the Stasi spoke of aggravating tensions between these groups and 'right-wing extremists'. Moreover, Mielke's organs hoped to promote conflicts between Maoist organisations and the 'authorities in the FRG and in West Berlin'.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> See *ibid.* For a discussion on what served as 'active opposition' in the GDR see Hubertus Knabe, 'Was war die DDR-Opposition? Zur Typologisierung des politischen Widerstandes in Ostdeutschland', *Deutschland Archiv* no. 2 (1996).; see also Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR*. Ch. 5.

<sup>89</sup> Wunschik, "Die maoistische KPD/ML und die Zerschlagung ihrer "Sektion DDR" durch das MfS".

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Ironically, with regards to the second of the three strategies, the East German security forces were actively seeking to encourage neo-Nazi attacks on left-wing organisations on the western side of their 'anti-fascist protection rampart'.

Between 1976 and 1979 (after this point the sources dry out), the East German security organs spent a significant amount of time and energy seeking to infiltrate and destabilise the Rauch-Haus. The building was put under constant surveillance, and all those entering and leaving the property were photographed from covert observation points inside GDR territory and added to the Stasi's intelligence portfolio. The most mundane aspects were recorded. In one protocol we are informed that on an early summer evening – 16.50, 22 August 1976, to be precise – 'a young lady flicked ash out of her bedroom window.'<sup>93</sup> On 26 February 1977, at 11.27, 'window 12 was opened for approximately three minutes', reads another entry.<sup>94</sup> Of more practical use was the recording of number plates of cars belonging to residents and visitors to the property. These could be run through the Stasi's databases or passed on to agents in the West German police force, who could crosscheck them with their own records. Such measures would enable the Stasi to intercept and apprehend any of those linked to the collective, should they attempt to enter the GDR. What is more, they allowed the identification of potential targets who could be won over as 'contacts' or informants. The Stasi believed that one of the residents, codenamed 'Rudi', sympathised with the SED's sister party in West Berlin, the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Westberlins* (SEW). Such 'progressive' individuals,

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<sup>93</sup> BStU, MfS, ZA, HA I 3918, fol. 81.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., fol. 103.

the Stasi hoped, could be recruited to their cause.<sup>95</sup> Gaining such informants would help secure the Stasi's stated objective of penetrating the collective and destroying it from the inside – a process referred to by the security organs as '*Zersetzung*' and which was widely practised on oppositional groups in the GDR.<sup>96</sup>

The Stasi, of course, had their own unofficial informants (IMs) in West Berlin on whom they could call. A 60-year old West Berliner who lived close by, codename 'Amalfi', was told to go on 'regular "walks" ' past the building between five and seven o'clock in the evening. He was also tasked with gathering information on nearby bars and meeting places where the residents of the Rauch-Haus and other 'left-wing extremists' gathered.<sup>97</sup> Given his advanced age, 'Amalfi' was not best suited to infiltrating the Rauch-Haus collective itself. To this end, the Stasi deployed the IM 'Kern', who had 'personal contact' with the occupants.<sup>98</sup> Informants in West Berlin's administration were also set to use, to find out the authorities' plans for the future of the project. In 1978 the collective's five year lease was set to run out and would have to be negotiated anew. Both the ruling SPD and the opposition CDU, the security organs noted, had spoken out against the continuation of the project.<sup>99</sup> The Stasi hoped to influence this process.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> BStU, MfS, ZA, HA I 3801, 'Operativplan', fols. 10- 18, here fol. 12.

<sup>96</sup> See Ibid., 'Operativplan', fols. 10- 18.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 'Einsatz des IM "Amalfi"', fols. 133-146, here fol. 140.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 'Operativplan', fols. 10- 18, here fol. 11.

<sup>99</sup> BStU, MfS, HA I 3801, fol. 118.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 'Konzeption', fols. 110-125, here fol. 120.



Fortunately for the collective, these attempts to undermine the Rauch-Haus proved unsuccessful. The Stasi began planning its operation against this 'enemy object' in 1976, yet still in March 1979, its officers reported, none of their IMs had been able to infiltrate the building.<sup>101</sup> What is more, the East German security organs failed to achieve their 'operational objective' of forcing the West Berlin Senate to 'dissolve' the Rauch-Haus.<sup>102</sup> By this point, however, the KPD/ML 'section GDR' had itself been eliminated, and the infiltration of the Rauch-Haus was now less pressing for Mielke's bureaucracy.<sup>103</sup> In a last report before the sources dry up in 1980, the Stasi noted that attacks on the border facility perpetrated by the occupants of the Rauch-Haus over the previous six months had reduced considerably in terms of their 'quantity', their 'intensity' and their 'danger'.<sup>104</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

The history of the Rauch-Haus, as we have seen, influenced and was influenced by a diverse range of actors from across the period's temporal, political and Cold War divides. Occupied in 1971, the Rauch Haus presented both a continuation and a departure from the politics of the West German student movement that preceded it. On the one hand, the Rauch-Haus squatters were inspired by a set of anti-authoritarian ideas that are associated with the 'global' sixties. Moreover, they also built on the student movement's protest culture

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 'Überprüfungsbericht', fols. 55-61, here fol. 58.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 'Konzeption', fols. 110-125, here fol. 120.

<sup>103</sup> Wunschik, "Die maoistische KPD/ML und die Zerschlagung ihrer "Sektion DDR" durch das MfS".

<sup>104</sup> BStU, MfS, ZA, HA I 3801, fol. 61.

and repertoire of tactics. However, at the same time, struggle over the Rauch-Haus and the wider Youth Centre Movement pointed forward to new patterns of extra-parliamentary opposition, in which the primacy of the class struggle at home and the Third World liberation movements – ideas central to the SDS and the later K-Groups – were gradually eclipsed by a radical politics focusing on local issues and centred on urban space. Such conflicts would flare up again in West Berlin in the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, in the GDR, there was by this time also an embedded history of contested urban space, albeit manifesting itself under different conditions. It is to this history of squatting behind the Berlin Wall that we shall now turn.

## CHAPTER 3:

### SQUATTING 'BEHIND' THE BERLIN WALL

#### I. INTRODUCTION: URBAN SPACE AND THE SOCIALIST CITY

All politics have spaces and all spaces have politics, and nowhere was urban space more clearly politicised than in the state-socialist polities of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The ruling *Socialist Unity Party* (SED) in East Germany was in fact quite candid about the matter. According to the GDR's seminal planning document, the *Sixteen Principles of Urban Planning*, published in 1950, the East German city was to provide a 'truthful reflection of the new power relations' in the Socialist republic.<sup>1</sup> As such, the party-state laid a total claim to the production, distribution, uses and even meanings of urban space. Socialist space was to impose and re-enforce the order of Socialist power. In his path breaking and highly influential work, *The Production of Space*, the French theorist Henri Lefebvre argues that space is 'equivalent, practically speaking, to a set of institutional and ideological superstructures that are not presented for what they are.'<sup>2</sup> His compatriot, Michael Foucault, believed 'space [to be] fundamental in any exercise of power.'<sup>3</sup> But where there is power, there is also subversion, and the history of urban space, whether in the Socialist or the

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<sup>1</sup> 'Sixteen Principles of Urban Planning', 1950. Quoted in Astrid Ihle, 'Wandering the Streets of Socialism: A Discussion of the Street Photography of Arno Fisher and Ursula Arnold,' in *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, ed. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2002), p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 349.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Rainbow, ed. *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 253.

capitalist city, is not only a study in the exercise of hegemony; it is, at the same time, a history of contention.

Research into everyday life under Communism has uncovered manifold ways in which individuals were able to obstruct, ward off and impede the state's aspirations towards total control.<sup>4</sup> In fact, despite – or rather because of – the party-state's all embracing claims, Communist dictatorships witnessed a diverse assortment of everyday resistances. '[S]ocialist space', both in the GDR and in other polities in Eastern Europe, as a recent publication argues, constituted a 'contested aspect of life in the [Soviet] Bloc.'<sup>5</sup> This chapter concerns itself with the way in which urban space in the GDR – and in particular, in East Berlin – was contested by urban squatters. During the 'Honecker Era' (1971-89), as this chapter shows, the practice of squatting proved relatively widespread and enduring. The emergence of squatting in East Germany was, on the one hand, testament to material deprivation and the polity's inability to solve the 'Housing Question'. As late as 1990, some 89,000 families and 382,000 individuals in the GDR were still without accommodation of their own – a damning indictment after four decades of Communist rule.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, however, the practice was embedded in the GDR's wider patterns of dissent and non-conformity. Through recourse to illegal squatting, a significant number of GDR citizens were able to circumvent and even challenge asymmetric power relationships

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<sup>4</sup> See, for instance: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Fulbrook, 'The Limits of Totalitarianism: God, State and Society in the GDR.'

<sup>5</sup> David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, 'Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc,' in *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*, ed. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2002), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Buck, *Mit hohem Anspruch gescheitert: Die Wohnungspolitik der DDR*, p. 383.

between the state and its citizens, at times providing an effective means for ordinary citizens to ‘negotiate the parameters of their own individual lives’ within the context of one-party rule.<sup>7</sup> In addition, illegal squatting played an important role in establishing niches for East Germany’s alternative and sub-cultures, as was often the case in the West. Indeed, the historical contours of squatting in the GDR and the contours of its urban sub-cultures were closely intertwined. As we shall see here, and in more detail in chapter 7, this novel spatial practice often forced the authorities at the local level to react in ways unforeseen by the party-state hierarchy. That is to say, the SED-state at the grassroots level was at times compelled to respond to this manifestation of non-conformist behaviour in unconventional ways.

## II. SQUATTING AS AN ALTERNATIVE HOUSING STRATEGY

In 1981, as militant squatter movements were emerging across the Federal Republic of Germany and elsewhere in Western Europe, an article on housing policy in the GDR appeared in the *Deutschland Archiv*, the leading West German academic journal concerned with East German affairs. Since assuming the leadership of the ruling *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED) a decade earlier, the article noted, the East German premier, Erich Honecker, had elevated housing to the centrepiece of the country’s socio-political programme. Over the course of the seventies and eighties, the highly-centralised East German construction industry built millions of new dwellings in the ubiquitous

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<sup>7</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 270.

satellite estates that sprang up across the GDR. Indeed, by 1989, one in three East Berliners lived in Marzahn, Hohenschönhausen and Hellersdorf, modern housing projects that had all been built over the past two decades. However, for every two new homes constructed under Honecker, one older property fell into dereliction. Levels of vacancy in the GDR in fact doubled during the 1970s, and by 1981 some 200,000 apartments, or 3.1 per cent of East Germany's total housing stock, were standing empty, either scheduled for demolition or waiting essential repairs. At the same time, housing waiting lists remained as long as ever: around six to eight years for the average East Berliner. As the *Deutschland Archiv* noted, '[t]he outcomes are the same as here [in the West]'. Empty apartments in the GDR were being 'squatted' while illegitimate tenants were being served with 'forced evictions' and 'fines'.<sup>8</sup>

Illegal squatting in the GDR had in fact been going on for some time. In the late 1960s, the Magistrate of East Berlin had been warned that the 'relevant state organs are completely incapable of maintaining order and control' over the assignment and allocation of housing in the city.<sup>9</sup> In 1971, moreover, the Mayor of East Berlin, Erhard Krack, was informed that a 'substantial number' of letters and petitions directed towards the civic authorities in the previous six

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<sup>8</sup>Manfred Ackermann, 'Architektur und Bauwesen in der Diskussion', *Deutschland Archiv*, no. 6 (1981). For the SED's housing policy in the Honecker era see Jay Rowell, 'Wohnungspolitik 1971-89,' in *Geschichte der Sozialpolitik in Deutschland seit 1945, Deutsche Demokratische Republik 1971 - 1989: Bewegung in der Sozialpolitik, Erstarrung und Niedergang* ed. Christoph Boyer (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2008).

<sup>9</sup>Landesarchiv Berlin (hereafter LAB) , C Rep. 100-05 Nr. 1397 - Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats, Sitzung des Magistrats am 5. März 1969, 'Analyse über die Verwirklichung des Erlasses des Staatsrates der DDR "Über die Eingaben der Bürger und die Bearbeitung durch die Staatsorgane" durch die örtlichen Staatsorgane in Berlin im Jahre 1968'.

months had concerned themselves with 'the illegal occupation of dwellings.'<sup>10</sup> Subsequent reports noted that the number of such cases was 'rising' and referred to an 'intensification' in the practice of illegal squatting in the city.<sup>11</sup> In March 1978, a commission charged with inspecting the empty housing stock reported back to Konrad Neumann, Politburo member and First Secretary of the SED in Berlin. It identified some 893 properties that had been illegally occupied or where the tenancies were 'unclear'.<sup>12</sup>

By the early 1980s, around a thousand incidences of illegal squatting were being registered in the GDR capital per annum.<sup>13</sup> In 1983, the local authorities in East Berlin uncovered some 954 such cases, which resulted in the SED leadership in the capital passing a resolution calling for 'a more energetic application of the [current] legal measures available to combat the unlawful occupation of dwellings.'<sup>14</sup> Illegal squatting occurred not only in the East German capital, moreover, but also in urban centres across the Socialist republic, including, though not restricted to, Leipzig, Dresden, Halle and

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<sup>10</sup> LAB C Rep. 100-05 Nr. 1472 - Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats, Sitzung des Magistrats am 29. Sept. 1971, 'Eingabenbearbeitung 1. Halbjahr 1971'.

<sup>11</sup> LAB C Rep. 100-05 Nr. 1500 - Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats, Sitzung des Magistrats am 13. Sept. 1972, 'Analyse über die Bearbeitung der Eingaben der Bürger im 1. Halbjahr 1972'; LAB C Rep. 100-05 Nr. 1578 - Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats, Sitzung des Magistrats am 13. Nov. 1974, 'Analyse über die Bearbeitung der Eingaben der Bürger im III. Quartal 1974'.

<sup>12</sup> LAB C Rep 902 Nr 4320, 'Information zur Kontrolle der Leitungstätigkeit zur Erfassung und schnellen Vergabe leerstehender Wohnungen in der Hauptstadt', 22. May 1978, p.8.

<sup>13</sup> LAB C Rep. 111 Nr. 57, 'Stellvertreter des Oberbürgermeisters für Wohnungspolitik: Information über die Eingaben während der Vorbereitung der Wahlen am 6. Mai 1984', 'Ungesetzliche Bezüge im I. Halbjahr 1984'. LAB C Rep. 100-05 Nr. 1996 - Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats, 'Stand der Erfüllung der Wohnraumvergabepläne der Räte der Stadtbezirke per 21. Aug. 1985', 2. Okt. 1985.

<sup>14</sup> LAB C Rep 100-05 Nr. 1945/1, 'Eingabeanalyse 1983', pp. 7-8; BAB, SAPMO, DY30/22387 - 'Bezirksleitung Berlin der SED, Büro des Sekretariats: Beschluss des Sekretariats der Bezirksleitung Berlin der SED 03 -7/83 - 131 - vom 21.3.1983', p. 5.

Potsdam.<sup>15</sup> In 1988, the security organs in the northern part of Rostock reported that in the city's old town there had emerged a 'concentration' of students from the local university who had illegally squatted in buildings in the district.<sup>16</sup> Even small, provincial towns were not immune to the phenomenon.<sup>17</sup> It was, however, in East Berlin where the practice was most widespread.

In the East German capital itself, and presumably in other urban centres, squatting was a citywide phenomenon. Of the 1,338 officially empty apartments being 'blocked' by squatters in the city as of August 1985, 265 were in working class Friedrichshain, 115 in Treptow, and a further 114 in Lichtenberg – the district that was home to the Stasi's sprawling headquarters.<sup>18</sup> In the same period, the better-heeled neighbourhood of Pankow in the north had 104 recorded cases, while in the outer lying district of Köpenick, 87 incidences were registered.<sup>19</sup> However, although squatting was distributed throughout the city, the practice tended to be concentrated in the turn-of-the-century tenement quarters. In the post-war Socialist housing estates, incidences of squatting were few and far between.

Due to gaps in the archival records and the local organs' often insufficient overview of the vacant housing stock, it is difficult to map the geographical spread of squatting with any greater degree of accuracy. An

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<sup>15</sup>Bundesarchiv Berlin (hereafter BAB), DP 1/20292 – 'Information über Probleme und Hinweise aus Wohnung eingaben zur Wohnraumlennungsverordnung', unpaginated; Bundesbeauftragten für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (hereafter BStU), MfS BV Dresden, AKG Nr. 10070.

<sup>16</sup> BStU, MfS BV Rostock, Abt. XX, Nr. 1633, fol. 3.

<sup>17</sup>BStU, MfS, HA XXII, Nr. 21940, fol. 6.

<sup>18</sup> LAB C Rep. 100-05 Nr. 1996 - Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats, 'Stand der Erfüllung der Wohnraumvergabepläne der Räte der Stadtbezirke per 21. Aug. 1985', 2. Okt. 1985

<sup>19</sup> LAB C. Rep. 100-05 Nr. 1968 – 'Information über eine Untersuchung ausgewählter Aufgaben auf dem Gebiet der Wohnungspolitik', 13. Nov. 1984.



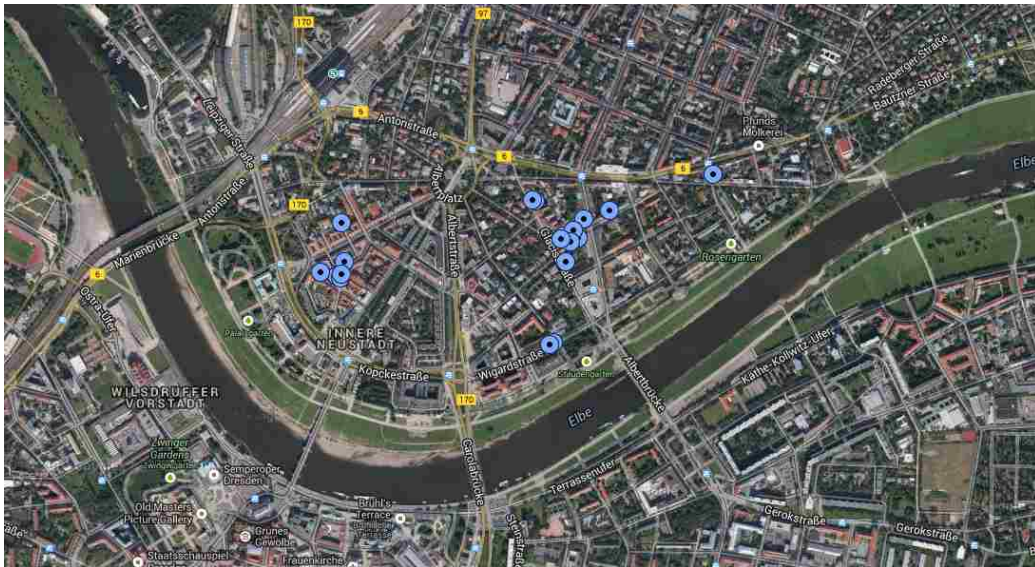
exception, however, is provided by the case study of Dresden, where one diligent official in the city's KWV compiled a comprehensive list of the empty housing stock and illegally squatted apartments in the city's *Innere Neustadt* (inner new city). As of November 1984, some 230 empty properties had been identified in the district, which had been boarded up by the city's Building Control Department (*Baupolizeilich gesperrt*) (see figure 1). Of this number, 18 – or eight per cent – had been illegally occupied by squatters (see figure 2).<sup>20</sup> As we can see from figure , the illegal squats are clustered in two distinct geographically constrained areas; their spread is not as extensive as that of the district's vacant housing as a whole. This, in addition to further evidence cited elsewhere, suggests if not a community of squatters then at least the existence of informal networks through which information about empty properties was spread.



**Figure 1: Vacant Housing in Dresden's inner new town, November 1984.**<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> BStU, MfS BV Dresden, AKG 10079, fol. 9.

<sup>21</sup> Source BStU, MfS BV Dresden, AKG 10079, fols. 17-21.



**Figure 2: Squatted apartments in Dresden's inner new town, November 1984.<sup>22</sup>**

Over the course of the Honecker Era, squatting was practised by an increasingly broad section of the East German population. Although it is again difficult to build up a detailed picture, the majority were probably young adults, such as the eighteen-year-old Tina Barrow, who swapped the comfort of her family home in the Berlin suburbs for a 'a dark, cold room' with no toilet.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, the aforementioned case study of Dresden does not shed much light on the demographic composition of the city's squatters, as their identities were often unknown to the local officials. Those whose occupations were established, however, included a gardener in Dresden's zoo, an engineer at the *VEB Zentrum für Forschung und Technologie Mikroelektronik*, the GDR's leading centre for semiconductor research, and a journalist employed at the popular magazine *Zeit im Bild*.<sup>24</sup> Squatting, therefore, was not a practice that was restricted to the

<sup>22</sup> Source BStU, Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Felsmann and Gröschner, *Durchgangszimmer Prenzlauer Berg: Eine Berliner Künstlersozialgeschichte in Selbstauskünften*, p. 44.

<sup>24</sup> BStU, MfS BV Dresden, AKG 10079, fol. 9.

GDR's marginalized outsiders. Elsewhere, there are records of squatters who were mechanics and machine workers, employees of the postal service and other large state enterprises. Squatting was often undertaken by students, though there were also cases of middle aged and middle class squatters, such as Dr. Geier and his wife Frau Schubert who 'illegally squatted in the ruined side wing' of a building in Prenzlauer Berg's Schliemanstraße.<sup>25</sup> In addition, squatting was a tactic that was practiced by couples and young families who were desperate to find a place together, as well as by those whose relationship had come to an end and who were looking to part. 'We have unlawfully moved into an empty apartment', explained one young family in a letter to the SED leadership in Berlin in 1979. Not having a home of their own, they argued, their condition apart had become 'intolerable'.<sup>26</sup> In a separate case, Frau S. informed the local officials in Berlin-Friedrichshain that she had resorted to squatting in an empty property because 'life together with her ex-husband [in her old apartment] had become unbearable.'<sup>27</sup>

Housing in the GDR, as Mary Fulbrook reminds us, 'was a truly political matter'.<sup>28</sup> The right to housing was anchored in the East German constitution and the East German Code of Civil Law explicitly stated that 'the Socialist state

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<sup>25</sup> LAB C Rep. 135-02-02, Nr. 1250 Rat des Stadtbezirks Friedrichshain, Ratsitzung am 18. December 1980, 'Zustimmung zur Räumung von Wohnungen auf dem Verwaltungswege gemäß § 23 der Verordnung über Lenkung des Wohnraums (268/80)'; HAV-WSi 01, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup>LAB C Rep 902 Nr. 4899, Bezirksleitung der SED, Eingabenbearbeitung durch die Arbeitsgruppe für Staats- und Rechtsfragen beim 1. Sekretär der Bezirksleitung der SED, 'Legalisierung eines illegalen Bezuges', 12.7.79, unpaginated.

<sup>27</sup>LAB C Rep. 135-02-02, Nr. 1186 Rat des Stadtbezirks Friedrichshain, Ratsitzung am 1. Feb. 1979, 'Zustimmung zur Räumung von Wohnungen auf dem Verwaltungswege gemäß §23 Verordnung Wohnraumlenkung (12/79).

<sup>28</sup>Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*, p. 50.

guarantees all citizens and their families the right to housing.<sup>29</sup> The SED-state claimed an unprecedented responsibility not only for the construction and maintenance of the housing stock, but also for the allocation of apartments and living space. In East Berlin, the state-controlled *Kommunale Wohnungsverwaltung* (Communal Housing Association, hereafter KWV) was responsible for administering 359,000 – or 72 per cent – of the capital's 500,000 individual properties. A further 77,000 apartments units were classed as Workers' Cooperative Housing, belonging to the large state enterprises which were based in the city. Only 14 per cent of the housing stock was in private hands.<sup>30</sup> But even this latter category fell under the purview of the party-state's control as, irrespective of whether the property belonged to the KWV, a workers' cooperative, or a private individual, only after first obtaining written consent from their local state housing organ were citizens legally permitted to take up residence at a particular address.<sup>31</sup> Through controlling the provision of housing in the GDR, the authorities hoped to bind citizens in a relationship of dependency to the East German state – and, by extension, to the ruling party, the SED. Squatting, however, provided one of the few means available to circumvent this relationship of dependency, its illegality notwithstanding.

During the Honecker-era (1971-89), the provision of good quality housing was *the* major social priority in the GDR. Indeed, housing policy was

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<sup>29</sup> Buck, *Mit hohem Anspruch gescheitert: Die Wohnungspolitik der DDR*, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> LAB C Rep 100-05 Nr. 1894/2, 'Leistungsentwicklung der VEB KWV für die Wohnrauminstandhaltung und Maßnahmen zur weiteren Verbesserung der Führungstätigkeit des Magistrats und der Räte der Stadtbezirke', 11. 08.1982, Anlage 1.

<sup>31</sup>Buck, *Mit hohem Anspruch gescheitert: Die Wohnungspolitik der DDR*, p. 363.

elevated to the 'centrepiece' of the ruling SED's socio-political programme.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, an acute housing shortage remained one of the constants of the GDR's forty-year history. At the beginning of the 1970s, there were 600,000 people on the official housing waiting lists, and by the decade's end the average waiting time to obtain an apartment in East Berlin still stood at between six and eight years.<sup>33</sup> For those who were not considered a pressing social priority, such as young, unmarried adults without children, or citizens who had not displayed the requisite amount of political conformity, the wait could be even longer. On submitting a request for improved housing, Ulrike Poppe, a founding member of the dissident organisation, *Frauen für den Frieden* (Women for Peace), was told: '[I] should first have a child, and this child had better have Asthma or TBC, then I might have a chance of being allocated a new apartment'.<sup>34</sup> But even those who were deemed a priority could face difficulties. In 1981, Honecker was informed that for newly-married workers in Rostock's Neptune shipyard, 'the waiting time before being assigned an apartment was circa four years.'<sup>35</sup> Especially among the younger population, there was a widespread loss of confidence in the state's ability to deliver on its promises adequately. As officials in East Berlin admitted, 'young people are critical of the

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<sup>32</sup> For the SED's housing policy in the Honecker era see Rowell, 'Wohnungspolitik 1971-89.'

<sup>33</sup> Häussermann and Siebel, *Soziologie des Wohnens: Eine Einführung in Wandel und Ausdifferenzierung des Wohnens*, p. 169. p. 169; SAPMO DY 30/2201 - Informationen an Erich Honecker über regionale Probleme in den Monatsberichten des Ersten Bezirkssekretärs der SED in Berlin (Bd 4: 1978-1979), fol. 30.

<sup>34</sup> Felsmann and Gröschner, *Durchgangszimmer Prenzlauer Berg: Eine Berliner Künstlersozialgeschichte in Selbstauskünften*, p. 362.

<sup>35</sup> SAPMO, DC 20/12744 - 'Sekretariat des Ministerrates: Information über die Eingabenarbeit im 1. Halbjahr 1981', fol. 5.

fact that the resolutions passed by the party and regime [with respect to solving the housing question in the capital] do not affect them'.<sup>36</sup>

The regime's inability to deliver in this key area resulted in an increasingly big legitimacy problem for the socialist polity as a whole. As late as 1990, some 89,000 families and 382,000 individuals in the GDR were still without accommodation of their own – a damning indictment after four decades of Communist rule.<sup>37</sup> Indeed housing was one of the primary causes of public dissatisfaction in the GDR, as testified by the high number of *Eingaben* (citizens' petitions) submitted to the authorities regarding this matter.<sup>38</sup> Over the course of the GDR's forty-year history, tens of millions of such petitions were submitted to the authorities, and they provide one of the most reliable barometers of public opinion in the East German dictatorship. They were addressed to officials at all levels of the party-state apparatus, from low-level functionaries to local mayors and to regional party bosses. Frequently, citizens sought to petition the state premiers Walter Ulbricht and Erich Honecker themselves. In 1989 alone, over one million formal written complaints were registered by the GDR authorities, while countless others were made in person, at weekly 'open surgeries', or *Sprechstunden*, around the country.<sup>39</sup>

An analysis of these 'everyday texts' reveals a picture not of a population completely cowed by a malign and overbearing state (malign though its security

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<sup>36</sup> LAB C Rep. 100-05 Nr. 1578 - Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats, 'Analyse über die Bearbeitung der Eingaben der Bürger im III. Quartal 1974', 13. Nov. 1974.

<sup>37</sup> Buck, *Mit hohem Anspruch gescheitert: Die Wohnungspolitik der DDR*, p. 383.

<sup>38</sup> As Fulbrook points out, 'by far the largest category of complaints in individual citizens' petitions, or *Eingaben*, were complaints about adequate housing.' Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*, p. 51.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 175.

organs certainly could be), but rather of assertive citizens who, for the most part, did not shy away from venting their discontent, particularly when they felt 'socialism's social contract' (Betts) had been breached. Petitioners would complain about the numerous inadequacies and shortages of the socialist *Alltag*, demand personal redress on any number of issues, and often denounce the bureaucratic cold-heartedness of state officials and party representatives.<sup>40</sup> To be sure, East Germans learned to 'speak Bolshevik', and most petitions display professions of (often genuine) allegiance to the Socialist state and its wider goals. But these declarations of loyalty were often coupled with threats to reconsider or withdraw this commitment, should a particular grievance not be addressed. For instance, in 1968, one East Berlin denizen, who claimed to be an active member of his local workers' militia, wrote directly to the then GDR premier Walter Ulbricht, stating that unless something was done to improve his housing conditions, he and his family would be forced, 'against our personal conviction', to apply for permission to emigrate to West Germany, so that they might find 'a home fit for human habitation'.<sup>41</sup>

Citizens in the East German dictatorship, as Paul Betts writes, 'became adept at bluff'.<sup>42</sup> In order to increase their leverage, they would issue a whole manner of ultimatums, and one historian has gone as far as to categorise the *Eingaben* process as the 'main source of uncoordinated resistance to the SED

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<sup>40</sup> See Felix Mühlberg, *Bürger, Bitten und Behörden: Geschichte der Eingabe in der DDR* (Berlin: Dietz, 2004).

<sup>41</sup> LAB C Rep 307 Nr 84 - 'Brief an Walter Ulbricht von Herrn Michaelis' 14. Jan 1968.

<sup>42</sup> Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* p. 186.

rule in East Germany'.<sup>43</sup> Yet although East Germans cajoled and coerced state officials, these established channels of communication between the state and its subjects nevertheless remained 'asymmetrical conversations', based upon a relationship in which the former always had the final word.<sup>44</sup> What is more, this practice of petitioning favoured not only those who were in need, but those who were most needed by the polity, while it was also contingent upon citizens proving their loyalty and contribution to the state. The refusal to do one's army service on pacifistic grounds was not likely to count in an individual petitioner's favour. A skilled worker or professional would probably have more purchase than an unskilled labourer or a student. The needs of families would be prioritised over non-normative cohabitation arrangements.

Thus for a number of citizens, the *Eingaben* process was accompanied with illegal squatting. Squatters were often assertive, stating that they illegally occupied an empty apartment, while at the same time they could strike a conciliatory tone, as was the case with one petition submitted by a young family to the *SED-Bezirksleitung* in East Berlin in 1979. 'We have unlawfully moved into an empty apartment', their petition confessed. The family wanted to 'live in conditions fit for human beings', as was their constitutional right, they stated, 'so that we can devote our energy to the construction of *our* state and provide our child with a happy future.'<sup>45</sup> In another petition, dated from September

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<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Zatlin, *The Currency of Socialism: Money and Political Culture in East Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007), p. 315.

<sup>44</sup> Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*. p. 13.

<sup>45</sup> LAB C Rep 902 Nr. 4899, Bezirksleitung der SED, Eingabebearbeitung durch die Arbeitsgruppe für Staats- und Rechtsfragen beim 1. Sekretär der Bezirksleitung der SED – 'Legalisierung eines illegalen Bezuges', 12.7.79, unpaginated. Emphasis added.



1986, one illegal tenant addressed Friedrichshain's Department for Housing matter-of-factly: 'I wish hereby to inform you that I have occupied the abovementioned apartment, which has been standing vacant since May 1986, without prior official permission', they wrote. On account of 'urgent' family reasons (that are not elaborated on), on the one hand, and on account of waiting lists of between 6 and 8 years for apartments, on the other, the petitioner in question felt 'forced' into this illegal measure. Still, they were hoping for 'a quick solution' to the predicament, which would ideally be in the form of a retrospective legalisation of their tenancy.<sup>46</sup>

As a form of *private* protest, squatting could prove effective, enabling a number of East Germans to lay claim to their right to housing – a right which the East German state promised its citizens, yet one which it was unable to guarantee universally. As the East German historian Iko-Sascha Kowalczuk recalls, the practice could provide one of the surest means for East German citizens to secure accommodation of their own, its illegality notwithstanding.<sup>47</sup> Squatting could thus present itself as a viable alternative housing strategy, providing a means to bypass the laborious and often unfruitful process that attempting to obtain a place through the official channels entailed. Rather than fearing the repercussions of their actions, a number of squatters viewed this act of transgression as a means to empowerment, one which could provide them with leverage when confronting the bureaucracy. On 30 October 1978, for

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<sup>46</sup> BStU, MfS, AKG 3565, fol. 3.

<sup>47</sup> '[Die] Besetzungen von Wohnungen[gehörte] zu einem der sichersten Mittel, zu einer Wohnung zu kommen.' Iko-Sascha Kowalczuk, "Historische Streiflichter zu Wohnungsnot und Mieterwiderstand in Berlin," in Susan Arndt, Stephan Bialas, and Grit Friedrich, *Berlin, Mainzer Strasse: 'Wohnen ist wichtiger als das Gesetz'* (Berlin: Basisdruck, 1992), p. 253.

instance, the housing department in East Berlin's Friedrichshain district was informed that one of the properties which it administered had been illegally squatted. The flat in question had been vacated that morning, following the departure of the previous tenant, and it soon became clear that Herr G., a neighbour who resided in the same building, was responsible for this transgression. Herr G. was nineteen years old and worked as a meatpacker in the local abattoir. He still lived with his mother, although he had recently submitted an application to his local Communal Housing Association (KWV), in the hope of getting a place of his own. Nevertheless, as an unmarried young man, who plied a low-skilled trade and was not a member of the SED, Herr G. would not have been viewed as a priority case. Indeed, in consideration of the large number of people who were on the official housing waiting lists, he could reasonably expect to wait several years, perhaps even longer, before he was finally able to move out of the family home. The vacated apartment, however, provided Herr G. with an opportunity, which he duly seized. He squatted in the property, and when confronted by the authorities, who demanded that he leave and hand over the keys at once, Herr G. refused. 'Now I have something in my hand', he was reported as saying, referring to the apartment he had occupied, with which to force the organs into addressing his concerns.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>LAB C Rep. 135-02-02, Nr. 1179 Rat des Stadtbezirks Friedrichshain, Ratsitzung am 23. November 1978, 'Räumung einer Wohnung gemäß § 23 der Verordnung über die Lenkung des Wohnraums Betrifft (259/78)'.

[REDACTED]

Gärtnerstr. 27  
Berlin  
1035

Berlin, den 10.9.1986

Rat des Stadtbezirks  
Friedrichshain  
Abt. Wohnungspolitik

Betrifft: Wohnung Nr. [REDACTED]  
Gärtnerstr. 27  
1035 Berlin

Hiermit möchte ich Ihnen mitteilen, daß ich in die o.g. Wohnung, die seit Mai 1986 nicht mehr bewohnt wurde, ohne Zuweisung eingezogen bin. Weil die normale Bearbeitungszeit von Wohnungsanträgen 6 bis 8 Jahre beträgt, ich jedoch aus familiären Gründen d r i m g e n d eine eigene Wohnung benötige, sah ich mich zu diesem Schritt gezwungen. Da ich sehr an einer schnellen Lösung dieses Problems interessiert bin, bitte ich Sie, mich bald über die Möglichkeit der Zuweisung dieser Wohnung zu benachrichtigen.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen

[REDACTED]

Figure 3: Petition to Friedrichshain's Department of Housing, September 1986.<sup>49</sup>

### III. 'IN AN AFTERNOON YOU CAN FIND A DOZEN EMPTY APARTMENTS'

On moving from Magdeburg to East Berlin, the writer Annet Gröschner and her husband had nowhere in the capital to live, so they 'did what was usual [and] set off with a skeleton key and searched for [unoccupied] apartments.'<sup>50</sup> Roland Galenza, who belonged to the punk-combo *Jähzorn*, also used illegal means to short-circuit the bureaucracy. 'After my military service', he recalls, 'it was possible to squat in an empty flat in Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg.' A rusty iron bed

<sup>49</sup> BStU, MfS, AKG 3565, fol. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Felsmann and Gröschner, *Durchgangszimmer Prenzlauer Berg: Eine Berliner Künstlersozialgeschichte in Selbstauskünften*, p. 523.

and a tape recorder sufficed as initial furnishing.<sup>51</sup> Following the death of his girlfriend's grandfather, the budding photographer, Harald Hauswald, moved from his provincial hometown of Radebeul in Saxony to the East German metropolis in 1977. 'We simply squatted in the apartment', recalls Hauswald. Rather than deferring to the official regulations, which would have required first official approval and then a long delay, Hauswald seized the opportunity presented. 'The next day I was in Berlin.'<sup>52</sup>

One common trick employed by those who wanted to circumvent the official waiting lists was to move into a property as a sub-tenant, shortly before the departure or death of the main tenant, and carry on living there illegally without informing the local housing officials.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, one report compiled on behalf of the Council of Ministers flagged up a 'tendency' among 'certain citizens' of adopting this practice in an attempt to 'bypass official regulations'.<sup>54</sup> In the first six months of 1981, the authorities detected 691 cases of illegal squatting in East Berlin, whereas a further 781 apartments were reportedly being 'blocked' by such illegitimate sub-tenants.<sup>55</sup> The total number could have been higher, as the housing organs were generally slow in detecting such cases.

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<sup>51</sup> Roland Galenza, "Wimpelgrab & Gegentanz: Berlin," in *Wir wollen immer artig sein... Punk, New Wave, HipHop, Independent-Szene in der DDR 1980-1990*, ed. Roland Galenza and Heinz Havemeister (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 1999), p. 260.

<sup>52</sup> Harald Hauswald in *Poesie des Untergrunds: Prenzlauer Berg Kontrovers 1976-1990*, DVD, directed by Matthias Aberle (Berlin: Amsolute Medien, 2009).

<sup>53</sup> LAB C. Rep. 100-05, Nr. 1837 - Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats: 'Maßnahmen zur Senkung der Leerstandzeiten von Wohnungen', 24. Sept. 1980; SAPMO, DY 30/22388 - 'Beschluss zur weiteren Verwirklichung der sozialistischen Wohnungspolitik und zur Erhöhung der Effektivität der Wohnungswirtschaft', 2.2.1982, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> SAPMO, DY 30/22388 - 'Beschluss zur weiteren Verwirklichung der sozialistischen Wohnungspolitik und zur Erhöhung der Effektivität der Wohnungswirtschaft' 2.2.1982, p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> LAB C. Rep. 100-05, Nr. 1837 - Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats: 'Maßnahmen zur Senkung der Leerstandzeiten von Wohnungen', 24. Sept. 1980.

Often it was only through irregularities in payments, or after information being passed on by informants, that officials became aware of anything untoward.<sup>56</sup>

Sub-tenants had no automatic legal right to stay in a property once it had been vacated by the main leaseholder. Nevertheless, their physical presence there still provided them with a degree of leverage when confronted by the authorities. Frau G., for example, used this tactic as a means to establish a claim on her grandmother's good-quality three-room apartment with a bath and central heating in a 1920s modernist estate in East Berlin. A single mother who was expecting her second child, Frau G. was still living with her parents, though she had been informed that she would soon be provided with a two-bedroom apartment with no inside toilet. On 5 March 1983, however, she moved into her grandmother's flat, registering as a sub-tenant and claiming that she wanted to care for her elderly relative. At this point, however, her grandmother had already been moved into hospital, and she died before the end of the month. Indeed, according to her neighbours, the grandmother had long complained that her relatives provided her with little help or support. It took the housing organs a further two months to realise that the sub-tenant Frau G. – by this point five months pregnant – was now the sole occupier of the apartment. The authorities, not wanting to evict a pregnant single-mother, agreed to let Frau G. remain in the property until her second child was born, at which point she would be offered another two-bedroom flat, though this time with an inside

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<sup>56</sup> 'Teilweise merkt die KWV erst dann einen illegalen Bezug, wenn die Mietzahlungen ausbleiben und dazu Kontrollen erfolgen' SAPMO, DY 30/22388 - 'Komitee der ABI Inspektion Bauwesen/Wasserwirtschaft, 'Zu Problem der Wohnungspolitik/Wohnungswirtschaft und der Wohnraumlencung sowie der Verantwortung der örtlichen Räte auf diesem Gebiet', 14 Okt 1982, p. 5.

toilet. Frau G initially agreed to this, but later rescinded, stating that she wished to remain in her grandmother's old apartment. She was ultimately evicted in July 1984, 17 months after having first moved in.<sup>57</sup>

While moving in as a sub-tenant was one tactic employed GDR squatters, it was often the case that finding a dwelling to occupy entailed going out and exploring the urban terrain. In their documentation of life in East Berlin – which was banned by the East German authorities, though nevertheless achieved cult status in the GDR – Harald Hauswald and Lutz Rathenow describe how their friends ‘doggedly climb[ed] stairwells, the side-wings of buildings, wander[ed] through back courtyards,’ knocked on doors and talked to residents in their search to find empty apartments.<sup>58</sup> When walking along the streets in the older tenement quarters, prospective squatters would keep their eyes peeled for windows without curtains – apparently a sure sign that the apartment was uninhabited. ‘That’s how I found the flat I moved into’, explained one East Berlin squatter on being questioned by the *Volkspolizei* (People’s Police).<sup>59</sup>

Finding an empty property to squat was not an overly difficult task in any case as an ever-increasing proportion of the country’s pre-war, tenement-housing stock stood vacant, having fallen into various states of disrepair. For every two new homes built in the GDR in the 1970s and 1980s, one older property fell into dereliction, and the number of vacant dwellings doubled

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<sup>57</sup> LAB C Rep. 134-02-02, Nr. 1322, Rat des Stadtbezirkes Prenzlauer Berg, Ratsitzung am 5. 7. 1984, ‘Räumung auf dem Verwaltungsweg von Frau G’. unpaginated.

<sup>58</sup> Hauswald and Rathenow, *Ost-Berlin: Leben vor dem Mauerfall*, pp. 31-34.

<sup>59</sup> BStU, MfS, HA IX 301, fol. 108.

during the first decade of the Honecker era. By 1981, some 200,000 apartments, or 3.1 per cent of the GDR's total housing stock, were standing empty, either scheduled for demolition or waiting essential repairs.<sup>60</sup> 'In an afternoon', explained one seasoned squatter, 'you [could] find a dozen empty flats in Prenzlauer Berg' alone.<sup>61</sup> On finding a suitable property, squatters might simply break in. After being alerted to one suspected instance of illegal squatting in Friedrichshain, the local authorities noted that 'Frau S. forcefully broke open the lock and proceeded to occupy the apartment.'<sup>62</sup> Another squatter, Dirk Moldt, recalls opting for a more cunning approach. Dirk was informed by an acquaintance that an apartment in Friedrichshain's Samariter Straße had been standing empty for some time. The apartment itself was particularly attractive, located in the front tenement building and with a balcony facing out onto the street. Instead of breaking in, however, Dirk dressed himself in blue workman's overalls and went in person to the local KWV office, purporting to be a tenant in the same building. He complained that a pipe had burst in the flat above him – the one he intended to squat in – and that water was seeping into his apartment. He asked for the key to the property, stating that he was a plumber by trade and would be willing to fix the problem himself in order to prevent any further damage. His masquerade proved successful, and a grateful housing official lent him the key. Dirk squatted in the property in

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<sup>60</sup> SAPMO, DY/30/IV 2/2.039 - Büro Ergon Krenz, Akademie für Gesellschaftswissenschaften beim Zentralkomitee der SED Institut für Marxistisch-Leninistische Soziologie, 'Studie zur Lösung der Wohnungsfrage als soziales Problem bis 1990 in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik', Juni 1985, fol. 111.

<sup>61</sup> Diemar Bub, "Hausbesetzer Ost," *Instandbesetzer Post*, 19. June 1981.

<sup>62</sup> LAB C Rep. 135-02-02, Nr. 1186 Rat des Stadtbezirks Friedrichshain, Ratsitzung am 1. Feb. 1979, 'Zustimmung zur Räumung von Wohnungen auf dem Verwaltungswege gemäß §23 Verordnung Wohnraumlenkung (12/79)'.

1986 and lived there, illegally and without an official contract, until the party-state's collapse in 1989.<sup>63</sup>

After gaining entry, the squatters would usually install a new lock, furnish the apartment with a table, a chair and bed, and, importantly, fit new curtains, 'so people can see: ah, there's someone now living there again.'<sup>64</sup> The next step would be to find out how to transfer the (nominal) rent, pay the utility bills and, if possible, obtain a police registration of their new address. According to the recollection of one East Berlin squatter, the *Volkspolizei* (People's Police) were hardly the vigilant maintainers of bureaucratic order that we might imagine. If one went down to the local station shortly before seven in the evening, when the day-shift was about to end, 'then they [the police officers] want to finish up and go home as soon as possible, and don't bother asking too many questions. You can say: "I misplaced the tenancy contract during the move", and they'll usually stamp your forms for you.'<sup>65</sup> 'After six months you'd go to the Communal Housing Association', explained another former squatter. 'Normally you'd receive no more than a fine, and then you were safe and secure.'<sup>66</sup>

Indeed, many in the GDR believed in the urban myth that if you squatted in a property and paid a set amount of months' rent you would be secure from

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<sup>63</sup> Unpublished interview: Moldt, Dirk. Interview by Peter Mitchell. Berlin, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2013.

<sup>64</sup> 'Wir wollen nicht zehn Jahre auf 'ne Wohnung warten': Instandbesetzung in Berlin (Ost)', in *Wer sind die Instandbesetzer? Selbstzeugnisse, Dokumente, Analysen: Ein Lesebuch*, ed. Volkhard Brandes & Bernhard Schön (Bensheim: Pädex, 1981), p. 127.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>66</sup> Felsmann and Gröschner, *Durchgangszimmer Prenzlauer Berg: Eine Berliner Künstlersozialgeschichte in Selbstauskünften*, pp. 443-44.



eviction.<sup>67</sup> Legally, however, this was not the case. Squatting contravened the state's claim to exercise a monopoly of control over the country's housing stock. On discovering instances of unlawful squatting, the housing officials could appeal to the GDR's statutes, which granted them the right to evict any illegally occupied properties, by force if necessary.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, the number of evictions actually carried through was surprisingly low, especially in the larger urban centres. From the 218 instances of illegal occupations registered in the district of Berlin-Lichtenberg in 1981 and 1982, local officials reported that only in 41 cases did they succeed in 'restoring order' through forcing the squatters to leave.<sup>69</sup> Only 88 forced evictions were carried through in East Berlin in 1983, despite the fact that there were 954 cases of illegal squatting recorded in the city that calendar year.<sup>70</sup> And whereas 130 instances of squatting were brought to the attention of the housing officials in Berlin-Friedrichshain in the first nine months of 1984, as of 30 September, only a single squatter had been evicted in the district.<sup>71</sup> In most cases, therefore, the chances of remaining in the property were reasonably high.

There was a number of reasons for this. Firstly, many months could pass before an instance of illegal squatting was detected in the GDR. As the

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<sup>67</sup> Grashoff, *Schwarzwohnen: Die Unterwanderung der staatlichen Wohnraumlentung in der DDR*, p. 54.

<sup>68</sup> Gesetzblatt der DDR Teil II Nr. 104, Berlin den 14. November 1967: Verordnung über die Lenkung des Wohnraumes vom 14. September 1967, § 23.

<sup>69</sup> LAB Berlin C Rep. 100-05 Nr. 1919 - Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats, Ratsitzung des Magistrats am 27. April 1983, 'Erfahrungen des Rates des Stadtbezirkes Berlin-Lichtenberg bei der Wahrnehmung der Verantwortung für die Wohnraumlentung und für die effektive Nutzung des Wohnungsfonds'.

<sup>70</sup> LAB C Rep. 100-05 Nr. 1945/1, 'Eingabeanalyse 1983', pp. 7-8.

<sup>71</sup> LAB C Rep. 902 Nr. 6050, Bezirksleitung Berlin der SED, Information zur Eingabenbearbeitung, 'Einschätzung über der Stand der Abarbeitung der Eingaben der Bürger an die Partei- und Staatsorgane im I. Halbjahr 1984', p. 4.

*Arbeitsgruppe Wohnungspolitik* (a working group tasked with combatting illegal squatting) noted: 'It is often the case that a long time passes before such a manipulation (sic.) is first noticed by the housing organs.'<sup>72</sup> Such delays in detecting cases of squatting made it all the more difficult for the authorities to counteract this illegal practice. The old adage of possession being nine-tenths of the law may not have been legally binding in the East German dictatorship. Nevertheless, duration is a conferrer of legitimacy, *de facto* if not *de jure*. By the time squatters were uncovered, they might have already transferred several months' rent into the KWV's account. Most would have moved their furniture into the apartment, or perhaps decorated and carried out repairs. Some might be co-habiting with their partner, or be expecting a child. Those who had used squatting as a means to move from the provinces to Berlin could have found a job in the city, meaning that a forced return home would affect their employers. Others would have obtained a police registration in the property (an *Anmeldung*) further complicating matters. The trick, Dirk Moldt recalls, 'was to play the different bureaucracies off against each other.'<sup>73</sup>

What is more, the squatters often occupied properties that were primitive in the extreme and in such a state of disrepair that they could no longer be assigned to legitimate tenants. One squatter, for example, recalled occupying a 'run-down pigsty' which had been standing empty for five years –

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<sup>72</sup> BAB, DP 1/20292 – 'Information über Probleme und Hinweise aus Wohnungseingaben zur Wohnraumlenkungsverordnung', unpaginated.

<sup>73</sup> Unpublished interview: Moldt, Dirk. Interview by Peter Mitchell. Berlin, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2013.

ever since the previous tenant had passed away.<sup>74</sup> In another instance, an East Berlin squatter told of how he occupied 'a damp, uncomfortable' building, which had been boarded up by the hygiene inspectors.<sup>75</sup> In such cases, unless the property in question was scheduled for immediate renovation or demolition, allowing squatters to remain in an apartment that would otherwise have stood empty not only eased pressure on the waiting lists, but also helped maintain the integrity of the building structure. The extent to which illegal squatting was tolerated out of practical considerations varied from region to region and, in East Berlin, even from district to district. Nevertheless, the authorities at the grassroots had considerable room for manoeuvre and were often inclined to adopt a pragmatic approach.

Tacit toleration of squatters was not always on account of the local authorities' pragmatism and benevolence, however. Rather, it was also due to the fact that forcing an eviction was no straightforward process, for the East German Code of Civil Law explicitly stated that 'the socialist state guarantees all citizens and their families the right to accommodation'.<sup>76</sup> Due to the fact that the right to housing was anchored in the East German constitution, the authorities had to make sure that the squatters would not be left homeless, should a forced eviction be carried through. Upon inquiring as to what measures could be taken against illegal squatters in Dresden, for instance, one local official was informed by the housing department's legal council that

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<sup>74</sup> Felsmann and Gröschner, *Durchgangszimmer Prenzlauer Berg: Eine Berliner Künstlersozialgeschichte in Selbstauskünften*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>75</sup> Bub, "Hausbesetzer Ost."

<sup>76</sup> Buck, *Mit hohem Anspruch gescheitert: Die Wohnungspolitik der DDR*, p. 7.

nothing could be done as a substitute property would first have to be made available before the courts could issue an eviction warrant.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, in East Berlin, a report filed to the Mayor's office in 1980 noted that 'an eviction is not possible in the majority of cases, because these citizens [the squatters] do not possess a home of their own.'<sup>78</sup> While officials could attempt to force squatters to move back to a previous address, such as the family home, it was possible for squatters to counter with various reasons as to why a return to their former residence was not feasible. In Prenzlauer Berg, for example, officials noted that their attempts to evict one squatter 'can not be carried through', because his parents, to whom he was instructed to return to, 'are not willing to take their son back in again.'<sup>79</sup> There were, of course, various means available to the authorities for exerting pressure on intransigent squatters, often via the GDR's mass organisations or work-place committees. When Herr and Frau B., both of whom worked in Lichtenberg's power station, refused to vacate the apartment they had squatted in Friedrichshain's Voigtstraße, for instance, the housing organs notified their factory committee, which declared the eviction of the property to be 'right and necessary'.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, the authorities at the grassroots level, it seems, were often sensitive to the fact that a forced eviction could lead to further problems down the line, either in the form of complaints and appeals from the squatters and their families, or through the attraction of

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<sup>77</sup> BStU, MfS BV Dresden, AKG Nr. 10070, fol. 10.

<sup>78</sup> LAB C. Rep. 100-05, Nr. 1837 - Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats: 'Maßnahmen zur Senkung der Leerstandzeiten von Wohnungen', 24. Sept. 1980.

<sup>79</sup> LAB C Rep. 134-02-02, Nr. 1319, Rat des Stadtbezirkes Prenzlauer Berg, Ratsitzung am 23.5.1984, 'Räumung auf dem Verwaltungsweg von Herr H.'. unpaginated.

<sup>80</sup> LAB C Rep. 135-02-02, Nr. 1210 Rat des Stadtbezirks Friedrichshain, Ratsitzung am 25. Okt. 1979, 'Zustimmung zur Räumung von Wohnungen (240/79)'.

unwanted attention from their superiors in the party-state apparatus. As one report commissioned by the Council of Ministers in 1982 concluded: 'In most cases, the local organs are inclined to retroactively sanction this practice [of squatting] as ... forced evictions are largely avoided.'<sup>81</sup>

It was this difficulty of obtaining a forced eviction that invested squatters with a degree of leverage in their negotiations with the authorities. One family, for example, appeared at the local Mayor of Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg's office to notify him that they were squatting in a three-bedroom property in the district, adding that they were not prepared to freely return to their previous one-room apartment.<sup>82</sup> If the housing officials wanted a quick solution to this predicament, they would either have to allow the squatters to remain in the property which they had occupied or provide an *ersatz*. There are, however, examples of squatters rejecting initial offers of alternative accommodation and instead holding out for a better deal. Frau L., who had squatted in a building that was scheduled for demolition, turned down the chance to obtain a tenancy in a one bedroom flat with no toilet, stating that she was entitled to at least a two room apartment with a bathroom.<sup>83</sup> Others, on the other hand, would simply refuse point-blank to leave. When local housing officials in East Berlin accused

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<sup>81</sup> SAPMO, DY 30/22388 - 'Beschluss zur weiteren Verwirklichung der sozialistischen Wohnungspolitik und zur Erhöhung der Effektivität der Wohnungswirtschaft' 2.2.1982, p. 5.

<sup>82</sup> LAB C. Rep. 134-02-02, Nr. 1180 - Rat des Stadtbezirks Prenzlauer Berg, Ratsitzung am 24. Mai 1979, 'Räumungen auf dem Verwaltungswege (146/79; 157/79; 148/79).

<sup>83</sup> LAB C Rep. 135-02-02, Nr. 1179 Rat des Stadtbezirks Friedrichshain, Ratsitzung am 23. November 1978, 'Räumung einer Wohnung gemäß § 23 der Verordnung über die Lenkung des Wohnraums Betrifft (259/78)'.

Family K. of illegally 'blocking' a property, for instance, the squatters 'rejected a voluntary eviction under any circumstance'.<sup>84</sup>

Personal meetings between obstinate authorities and obdurate squatters, could often involve heated exchanges. On being informed that he had to vacate the property that he had illegally occupied in Prenzlauer Berg's Stargarder Straße, and had been living in for over nine months, from late January 1981 until September 1982, one squatter was reported to have responded angrily, threatening to apply for a permit to emigrate to the West.<sup>85</sup> Opposition to eviction, moreover, did occasionally boil over into public (though not collective) protest. In October 1980, for instance, Frau M, a young mother, together with her one-and-a-half year-old daughter, squatted in an empty apartment building in Berlin-Mitte. Frau M had resorted to illegal squatting in order to escape her partner, at whose hands she suffered in a physically abusive relationship. She had not previously engaged in political dissent and was in many respects a model East German citizen. A working mother employed in the VEB Narva Berlin on a wage of 500 marks a month, she was a member of the Free German Youth, the Free Federation of German Trade Unions, as well as the League of German-Soviet Friendship. After illegally occupying an apartment in Berlin-Mitte, she informed the local housing organs of this transgression, perhaps expecting that, in light of her extenuating circumstances, the officials would respond with a degree of sympathy. However, the opposite was the case, and she was instructed to vacate the premises, with the suggestion that she

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<sup>84</sup> LAB C. Rep. 134-02-02, Nr. 1230 - Rat des Stadtbezirks Prenzlauer Berg, Ratsitzung am 28. May 1981, 'Räumung auf dem Verwaltungswege'.

<sup>85</sup> BStU, MfS, HA XXII 637/10, fol. 4.

move back in with her abusive ex-partner – a suggestion that Frau M understandably rejected. The housing organs later returned with a new offer of an alternative apartment, but the proposed move, scheduled for March 1981, could not be completed, as the incumbent tenant there refused to leave. In May 1981, Frau M was offered another alternative, in the Brunnenstraße. However, Frau M rejected this offer, claiming that the property in question did not meet her standards (it lacked not only an inside toilet but also a stove, and the local organs indicated that they would not help finance the necessary renovations). Threatened again with eviction, Frau M finally agreed on the move, and the date for vacating her squatted apartment was scheduled for 12 June 1981. But instead of taking her belongings to the flat in the Brunnenstraße, Frau M instead sat herself and her child in front of the Central department store on Berlin's Alexanderplatz, where she displayed a placard reading: 'Who can help us, a young mother and a one-and-a-half year old child, who have been forced to live in squalor, and are not being provided with any assistance to improve our conditions'. A crowd quickly gathered and began discussing her predicament, until the police arrived and escorted Frau M to the local station. She was ultimately released without charge, though not without attracting the attention of the MfS, who assessed her character as 'unstable, hectic, spontaneous, impulsive, hysterical and overly emotional'.<sup>86</sup>

A further example of spirited protest to eviction was undertaken by another East Berlin squatter, Verena Straße. Prior to squatting in the East

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<sup>86</sup> See BStU, MfS, 14401/83, fols. 183-186.

German capital, Frau Straße had been living with her three children (5, 7, and 8 years old) and her husband, a pastor in the Evangelical Church, in the small town of Buchholz in northern Brandenburg. In 1985, for some undisclosed reason – perhaps he came into conflict with the Church hierarchy – her husband resigned his post, and as a result the family had to vacate the pastor’s house in which they lived. At this point, both decided to move to East Berlin, although separately. Her husband squatted an apartment in the capital, which he shared with his new partner, and embarked on a new career trajectory as a gravedigger. Similarly, Verena Straße broke into an apartment in Berlin’s Metzger Straße, occupying it with her three young children in September 1985.<sup>87</sup>

In this particular instance, the local organs were quick to detect the transgression as the apartment in question had recently been renovated to a high standard, and a new tenant, an employee of VEB Robotron, East Germany’s largest electronics manufacturer, who was scheduled to move from Stralsund to the East German capital, had been found. Hoping for a quick solution, the housing organs offered Frau Straße an alternative apartment in Christinenstraße. However, she rejected this citing its ‘structural inadequacies’. A seemingly generous offer from VEB Robotron to assist her with the renovation work was also dismissed. Instead, Frau Straße threatened to apply for an exit visa to leave for the West should she be evicted – in fact she submitted an application on 23 October 1985. She then took matters further, tipping off Werner Brüssau, a West German journalist who was the ZDF

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<sup>87</sup> See BStU, MfS, ZAIG 15297, fols. 1-10.



correspondent in East Berlin, that she would be evicted from her squatted apartment on the morning of 15 November 1985. Brüssau dispatched a camera team to the scene in order to film the eviction, a report of which was broadcast on the ZDF's 'Today Journal' that evening.

From the police report, it seems as if Frau StraÙe strove to ensure that the eviction would not proceed smoothly. When two employees of the KWV arrived at the apartment at 8am, Frau StraÙe was not herself present, and they were instead confronted with two men, one of whom was Frau StraÙe's husband. Herr StraÙe had a camera with him. He informed the KWV employees that he was acting on the behalf Frau StraÙe, and that he had been instructed to refuse them entrance to the apartment, insisting that they fetch the *Volkspolizei*. Frau StraÙe arrived herself at the apartment some two hours later, and immediately began to verbally confront the officials present. By this time, the western camera team had arrived, and Frau StraÙe approached them, and began pointing to the apartment from which she was being evicted.<sup>88</sup>

One can only speculate as to the motivations behind Frau StraÙe and her husband's behaviour. Perhaps they belonged to East Germany's small circle of domestic opposition and wanted to exploit the possibility presented by the eviction to bring attention to the acute housing crisis in the GDR. Perhaps, by attracting media attention, she believe her route to the West, would be fast-tracked. What is important to note here, however, is that by going beyond the unstated boundaries, the case of Frau StraÙe, and the case of Frau M for that

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<sup>88</sup> BStU, MfS, ZAIG 15297, fols. 7-10.

matter, did not conform to the general pattern of negotiation between squatters and the authorities. They stand, rather, as rare exceptions.

#### IV. SQUATTING IN EAST BERLIN AND ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLES

In 1983, an investigation carried out in East Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg identified some 800 illegally occupied apartments in the district.<sup>89</sup> In 1987, the local authorities in the same district identified 1,270 properties with 'unknown tenancies' – a bureaucratic euphemism for illegally (or potentially illegally) occupied apartments.<sup>90</sup> The neighbourhood of Prenzlauer Berg was of course associated with the GDR's avant-garde. 'If the East German capital had a Greenwich Village or a Haight Ashbury', writes David Clay Large in his biography of the city, 'this was it.'<sup>91</sup> Here, squatters often belonged to what one historian and contemporary has termed an East German 'parallel society'.<sup>92</sup> Some had opted not to complete military service and had found that the prospect of a university place and a career was now barred. Others simply found the idea of an apprenticeship and full-time work unappealing, opting instead to get by through doing odd jobs here and there. One unemployed

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<sup>89</sup> SAPMO, DY30/22387 - 'Abschlussbericht des Verfassungs- und Rechtsausschusses der Volkskammer der DDR über die Arbeitsgruppen Einsätze zur Kontrolle der Wirksamkeit der Rechtsvorschriften zur Verhütung und Bekämpfung von Ordnungswidrigkeiten', May 1983, p. 10.

<sup>90</sup> LAB C. Rep. 134-02-02, Nr. 1398, 'Konzeption zum Abbau von Wohnungsleerständen zur Sicherung eines realen und aktuellen Nachweises des Bestands und der Nutzung von Wohnungen', referenced in Grashoff, *Schwarzwohnen: Die Unterwanderung der staatlichen Wohnraumlenkung in der DDR*.

<sup>91</sup> Large, *Berlin*, p. 514.

<sup>92</sup> Dirk Moldt, 'Parallelgesellschaft in der DDR: Ein gelebtes Ausstiegsmodell in den 80er Jahren in Ostberlin', *Horch und Guck: Zeitschrift zur kritischen Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur* no. 52 (2005).

squatter, for instance, earned his money modelling and sewing jackets.<sup>93</sup> Trading in home-made jewellery and knick-knacks to tourists was another common means for East German drop-outs to earn enough to get by.<sup>94</sup> Although squatters did not need much to get by in the GDR, they had to be careful that their lack of regular employment did not lead to them being targeted by the authorities as 'asocials', as the East German penal code criminalised unemployment.<sup>95</sup>

During the 1970s and the 1980s, small but nevertheless vibrant sub-cultural milieus emerged in towns and cities across the GDR, including in Leipzig, Dresden, Potsdam, Halle and Magdeburg.<sup>96</sup> Illegal squatting helped establish niches and spaces in which this alternative culture could operate, with empty apartments being used variously as makeshift galleries, exhibition venues and meeting places. Squatting played an important role for the pursuit of alternative lifestyles in the Socialist city – as it did in Western European cities during the same period. 'Through squatting in empty buildings', as the contemporary Roland Galenza puts it, 'a lively sub-cultural infrastructure' could emerge and take root.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> BStU, MfS, AOP 1071/91 (1/3), fols. 118-119.

<sup>94</sup> Moldt, 'Parallelgesellschaft in der DDR: Ein gelebtes Ausstiegsmodell in den 80er Jahren in Ostberlin,' p. 1.

<sup>95</sup> According to the GDR's penal code, those who withdrew themselves from 'regular occupation' were 'punishable by probation, imprisonment, rehabilitative labour or house arrest'. For the stigmatisation of 'asocials' in the GDR see Thomas Lindenberger, "'Asociality" and Modernity: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship,' in *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, ed. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008).

<sup>96</sup> Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, *Endspiel: Die Revolution von 1989 in der DDR* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2009), pp. 158-61.

<sup>97</sup> Roland Galenza, 'Wimpelgrab & Gegentanz: Berlin,' in *Wir wollen immer artig sein... Punk, New Wave, HipHop, Independent-Szene in der DDR 1980-1990*, ed. Roland Galenza and Heinz Havemeister (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 1999), p. 263.

In October 1987, for instance, the security organs in East Berlin noted that an ‘illegal youth club’ was operating out of the basement of a derelict building in Lichtenberg’s Kaskelstraße and was frequented by a ‘multitude of predominantly young people (aged between 17 and 22) of both sexes’. Other boarded-up apartments in the building, the intelligence report noted, were being used as drinking dens, and whose walls, it was noted disapprovingly, were covered with subversive slogans and graffiti.<sup>98</sup> In July 1980, to provide another example, the local authorities in Berlin’s Prenzlauer Berg were notified that one squatter, after breaking into an apartment in the district’s Wichertstraße that had long been standing empty, proceeded to knock down the interior walls and established a ‘photograph laboratory’ in the property.<sup>99</sup> The East German artist, Jürgen Schweinebraden, the founder of East Berlin’s ‘EP Gallery’, resorted to similar means. Schweinebraden had been provided with a modest apartment in Prenzlauer Berg’s Dunker Straße, measuring around 40 square meters. He required more space for his ‘private’ gallery, however, and acquired it through squatting a further two neighbouring properties in the building, which he then converted into one single unit. The gallery was first established in 1974 and operated until 1980, when it was shut-down by the Stasi. One of the most important independent exhibition spaces in the city, it showcased not only the work of ‘western’ artists but also contemporary Eastern European art.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> BStU, MfS, BV Berlin, AKG Nr. 4368, fol. 3.

<sup>99</sup> LAB C. Rep. 134-02-02, Rat des Stadtbezirks Prenzlauer Berg, Ratssitzung am 7. Juli 1980, ‘Hinweise, Kritiken und Eingaben aus den V. Wahlkreisaktivberatung’.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Die EP Galerie Jürgen Schweinebraden’: <http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/deutsche-geschichte/autonome-kunst-in-der-ddr/55803/ep-galerie-schweinebraden> retrieved 27. October 2013.

Although the closure of the EP Galerie and similar venues was a blow to the independent artist scene in the GDR, other ad-hoc exhibition spaces sprang up in their place.<sup>101</sup> In 1986, the 22 year old D. started holding various 'provocative art' events, which took place in his squatted apartment in East Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg. Located in a run-down building off the Schönhauser Allee, a busy thoroughfare to the north of the Alexanderplatz, entry to the 'gallery' was obtained via a junk-filled courtyard and then through a dilapidated stair-well in the building's side-wing.<sup>102</sup> 'I have not been to New York, but the short way from the street to the exhibition space is how I imagine Brooklyn', recalled one artist who showcased his work here.<sup>103</sup> The apartment itself, including the floorboards, was painted completely white, and illuminated with spotlights. The only piece of furniture was a raised platform next to the window, which was used alternatively as a stage during the exhibitions and as a make-shift bed.<sup>104</sup>

D.'s apartment hosted its first event in September 1986, showcasing the work of an artist from the University of Applied Arts in Dresden. Some 14 further such exhibitions were held in D.'s apartment between this point and April 1988. The exhibitions usually took place on the first weekend of the month and displayed work of artists from both sides of the German divide, including artists based in West Berlin's Kunsthaus Bethanien. Indeed, the Stasi

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<sup>101</sup> See 'Dossier Autonome Kunst in der DDR': <http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/deutsche-geschichte/autonome-kunst-in-der-ddr/55795/berlin> retrieved 27. October 2013.

<sup>102</sup> BStU, MfS, AOP 1071/91 (1/3), fol. 28; BStU, MfS, AOP 1071/91 (1/3), fol. 231.

<sup>103</sup> 'Lesung an der Wand: und danach party', in BStU, MfS, AOP 1071/91 (1/3), fol. 231.

<sup>104</sup> BStU, MfS, AOP 1071/91 (1/3), fol. 67, 235.

noted that D.'s contacts in the West appeared to be 'inspired' by his work.<sup>105</sup> According to one source, the opening nights of new exhibitions in D.'s make-shift gallery were considered as 'highlights' among East Berlin's bohemian milieu. Those present, a Stasi informant noted, had 'the outward appearance of avant-garde intellectuals'.<sup>106</sup> Such events were normally attended by between 20 to 30 guests, although one exhibition of Punk graffiti and slogans attracted some 100 visitors.<sup>107</sup> The evenings usually included film-showings and readings, and were rounded off with dancing and revelry. One tenant in the building explained to Stasi Lieutenant Kubis that, on several occasions, she had witnessed the guests engaged in 'bare-chested gyrating' to what she described as 'primitive African jungle music'.<sup>108</sup> This resident, who used a set of binoculars to spy on her neighbours, suspected that not only alcohol was consumed at these gatherings, but other intoxicants too.<sup>109</sup> Her suspicions were in fact well founded, as D. was known to supply his visitors with home-grown marijuana, which he cultivated on his father's allotment.<sup>110</sup>

One sub-culture in particular that benefitted from illegal squatting was the GDR's punk scene. Illustrative of the fact that youth culture in Cold War Europe recognised no borders, the sound and aesthetic of punk rock, born in the United Kingdom and exported to the GDR via the Federal Republic, grew in popularity in East Germany in the 1980s. The aggressive nihilism of punk music

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<sup>105</sup> BStU, MfS, *Ibid.*, fols. 235, 236, 105.

<sup>106</sup> BStU, MfS, *Ibid.*, fol. 67.

<sup>107</sup> BStU, MfS, *Ibid.*, fols. 67, 58.

<sup>108</sup> BStU, MfS, *Ibid.*, fol. 144.

<sup>109</sup> BStU, MfS, AOP 1071/91 (1/3), fol. 144.

<sup>110</sup> BStU, MfS, *Ibid.*, fol. 116.

and its harsh aesthetic arguably presented more of a challenge to the official cultural politics of the Socialist polity than the rock and hippy music of the seventies had done. Groups with names such as *'Wutanfall'* (Fit of Rage), *'Zorn'* (Wrath), *'Zwecklos'* (Pointless) and *'Skeptiker'* (Sceptic) expressed a visceral aversion to Socialist everyday life. Most of these bands were officially prohibited from performing, though 'in Prenzlauer Berg', as Torsten Preuß, a member of the punk band *'Namenlos'* recalls, there were sometimes opportunities to hold 'concerts in squatted apartments, hidden cellars or back-courtyards'.<sup>111</sup>

One squatter involved in this sub-culture was a young man whose Stasi case-file was appropriately titled *'Besetzer'* (squatter).<sup>112</sup> A 'hard-core punk', he sported 'fire-red' hair and was often seen wearing a leather jacket with the words 'beat the fascists wherever you see them' written on the back.<sup>113</sup> *'Besetzer'* originally belonged to a 'loose grouping' of Punks, most of whom were in their late teens or early twenties, who gathered in various youth clubs in Bernau, a small city just north of the GDR capital. Numbering around 30-40 individuals, the punks from Bernau were regarded by the security organs of having a 'politically negative' attitude towards the GDR while they 'celebrated

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<sup>111</sup> Torsten Preuß, 'Stasi, Spaß und E-Gitarren: Die Geschichte der Berliner Punkband *Namenlos*,' in *Wir wollen immer artig sein... Punk, New Wave, HipHop, Independent-Szene in der DDR 1980-1990*, ed. Roland Galenza and Heinz Havemeister (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 1999), p. 52.

<sup>112</sup> BStU, MfS, BV Berlin, 16816/84 (6).

<sup>113</sup> BStU, MfS, *Ibid.*, fol. 22.

western “punk-ideology”. Within this looser grouping, the Stasi identified a ‘hard core’ of seven individuals, with ‘Besetzer’ as their ‘ringleader’.<sup>114</sup>

‘Besetzer’ himself was 20 years old and had begun an apprenticeship in the *VEB Kombinat Landtechnik* at the age of 17. Repeatedly disciplined for ‘skiving’, he broke off his traineeship in February 1988.<sup>115</sup> For the next six months he had no official employment, earning money instead through selling clothes, stolen electrical goods and fake Swiss watches, which he received from contacts in the West.<sup>116</sup> A punk and unemployed wheeler and dealer of western contraband, ‘Besetzer’ was the prototype of an East German juvenile delinquent. He reportedly consumed alcohol in excess and engaged in street brawls with neo-Nazi youth gangs. In one altercation, ‘Besetzer’ and his fellow punks from Bernau ambushed a group of neo-Nazis, leaving one victim lying bloodied and unconscious on East Berlin’s Storkower Straße.<sup>117</sup> He was reported to have a girlfriend in West Berlin, who had visited him on several occasions and whom he intended to marry in order to leave the GDR. According to his Stasi file, he was known to have an ‘absolutely negative attitude towards [the] socialist state’.<sup>118</sup>

In 1988, ‘Besetzer’ and five of his friends moved to East Berlin, squatting in a number of apartments in Berlin’s Prenzlauer Berg. ‘Besetzer’ found a ‘nice’ apartment in the Schliemannstraße. A number of other punks from his hometown had already squatted in this neighbourhood, while another punk

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<sup>114</sup> BStU, MfS, BV Berlin, 16816/84 (6), fol. 67-70.

<sup>115</sup> BStU, MfS, *Ibid.*, fol. 6.

<sup>116</sup> BStU, MfS, *Ibid.*, fol. 3.

<sup>117</sup> BStU, MfS, *Ibid.*, fol. 42.

<sup>118</sup> BStU, MfS, *Ibid.*, fol. 22.



from Zepernick, a suburb of Bernau, had illegally occupied the apartment directly below – an example of the informal networks alluded to earlier, in the Dresden case study, that often resulted in the clustering of squatters in particular quarters.<sup>119</sup> In the GDR capital, the squatters from Bernau established contacts with local punks who gathered in Prenzlauer Berg's Zionskirche, and who engaged in a number of breaches of public order that coincided with sensitive political events in the capital. 'Besetzer' and the punks from Bernau were also under investigation in connection with subversive graffiti that had been sprayed on a number of buildings in East Berlin, including the slogans 'I like Gorbi' (written in English), 'Glasnost', and 'SED: Traitors of Communism'.<sup>120</sup>

By the mid-1980s, there were a number of connections between the local punk-scene in Prenzlauer Berg, to which 'Besetzer' now belonged, and the organised domestic opposition. As Jeff Hayton argues, state repression of the GDR's first-wave punk generation in the early 1980s – a policy referred to as '*Härte gegen Punk*' – served to drive its members into the Evangelical Churches.<sup>121</sup> Here, punks socialized with those engaged in the unofficial peace movement, environmental activists and champions of women's rights, providing new political perspectives which often complimented their gut-rejection of the 'actually existing Socialism' created by the SED. However, the umbrella provided by the Protestant Church was not the only space where various

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<sup>119</sup> BStU, MfS, BV Berlin, 16816/84 (6), fol. 7, 42.

<sup>120</sup> BStU, MfS, *Ibid.*, fol. 119.

<sup>121</sup> Jeff Hayton, 'Härte gegen Punk: Popular Music, Western Media, and State Response in the German Democratic Republic', *German History* 21, no. 4 (2013), p. 528.

strands of the cultural and political opposition could converge. A case in point was the *Umweltbibliothek*, an environmental opposition network that operated out of the Zionskirche.<sup>122</sup> The co-founders of the oppositional network *Umweltbibliothek*, Wolfgang Rüdtenklau and Carlo Jordan, who also edited the samizdat publication *Umweltblätter*, lived nearby in a tenement building in Fehrbelliner Straße in East Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg, which served as a 'meeting place for politically negative individuals'.<sup>123</sup> 'With the exception of two to three tenants', the security organs noted, all the other resident in this building were thought to have occupied their apartments 'illegally'.<sup>124</sup> A number of 'punk music groups' rehearsed in the squat in the Fehrbelliner Straße; indeed, members of the punk bands *Freygang* and *Feeling B* lived in this building and we can presume that it served as an informal gathering place for those involved in the East German capital's broader punk scene.<sup>125</sup> Although concrete political action was largely organised under the protective auspices of the Protestant Church, rather than in private homes, squatting was nevertheless intertwined with the history of the GDR's domestic opposition and its patterns of non-conformity. As Rüdtenklau recalls, the 'islands of squatted apartments and buildings helped to forge an alternative society, affirming a self-determined way of life.'<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> BStU, MfS, *Ibid.*, fols. 70-71.

<sup>123</sup> BStU, MfS, AOP Nr. 9610/83, fol. 173.

<sup>124</sup> BStU, MfS, AOP Nr. 16816/84, fol. 136.

<sup>125</sup> BStU, MfS, AOP Nr. 9610/83, fol. 173; Michael Horschig, 'In der DDR hat es nie Punks gegeben,' in *Wir wollen immer artig sein... Punk, New Wave, HipHop, Independent-Szene in der DDR 1980-1990*, ed. Roland Galenza and Heinz Havemeister (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 1999), pp. 34-36. pp. 34-36.

<sup>126</sup> Rüdtenklau, 'Vorwort,' p. 7.

## V. CONCLUSION

In the GDR, as in West Germany, urban spaces emerged as sites where power relations were not only produced and reproduced, but where they could also be circumvented, re-negotiated, and contested. The case study of urban squatting provides an example of East Germans asserting themselves outwith the prescribed channels of communication between state and citizen. At the same time, however, the practice of squatting highlights the fluidity that often existed between conformist and non-conformist behaviour in the East German dictatorship. Squatters normally appealed to their rights as citizens, i.e. to Socialism's social contract, when attempting to justify their acts retrospectively. The *Eingaben* addressed to the authorities often struck a conciliatory tone, with squatters, while highlighting their individual housing deprivation, at the same time stressing their support for the wider Socialist polity as a whole.

Through creating niches for the GDR's sub-cultures to take root, squatting played an important role in the emergence of alternative lifestyles in the GDR, especially in larger cities such as East Berlin, Dresden and Leipzig. In this respect, the history of squatting in East Germany has parallels with that of squatting in the West, where squatter sub-cultures emerged during the seventies and eighties. However, squatting was not only practised by those who belonged to the GDR's 'parallel society', but also, in light of East Germany's chronic housing shortage, by an increasing number of ordinary citizens. As a non-conventional means, squatting could be used for various ends, allowing people not only to drop out, but also to be part of the GDR's various sub-cultures

and oppositional movements, or even to integrate more fully into Socialist society itself.

Considered an unwelcome development by the SED-hierarchy, and one which undermined the party-state's control over the housing stock, squatting could, at the same time, serve the interests of the local organs at the grassroots. Those who occupied empty, dilapidated apartments released pressure on the official housing waiting lists, and the practice could provide an important safety valve that went some way towards containing popular dissatisfaction towards the regime and its inability to solve the Housing Question. A manifestation of 'oppositional behaviour', the political implications of squatting in the GDR were thus often ambiguous. Barring a few isolated exceptions, squatting in the GDR was undertaken as individual family-group act, a form of *private* protest that provided one, albeit extreme, example of the broader culture of complaint in the last two decades of the East German dictatorship. Only rarely, and then towards the last years of the GDR and during the *Wende*, was squatting used to challenge a specific policy or provided the basis for *collective* action. This particular episode in the history of squatting in the GDR will be analysed in chapter seven. First, however, we will re-cross the Cold War divide to West Berlin in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as it was during this period that the Island City witnessed one of the largest and most enduring squatter movements of the post-war era in Europe.

## CHAPTER 4:

### 'REHAB SQUATTING'

#### I. INTRODUCTION

Political squatting first emerged in West German cities in the early seventies.<sup>1</sup> Squatters drew from and built on the traditions of radical protest of the 1960s student movement. The activism that centred around occupying and defending squatted buildings, whether as part of the Youth Centre Movement in West Berlin and elsewhere, or during the Sponti-led squatter protests in Frankfurt, served as an important point of intersection linking the politics of '1968' and the patterns of extra-parliamentary opposition (APO) and counterculture that followed. But although these struggles attracted much interest and publicity, the absolute number of such incidences remained relatively small. In the early to mid-1970s in West Berlin, for example, there were probably no more than a half-dozen successful cases of political squatting.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, a new wave of occupations swept across the Federal Republic of Germany as cities and university towns across the country witnessed the emergence of loosely coordinated and often militant squatter movements. By the early 1980s, urban centres across the *Bundesrepublik* had emerged as sustained crucibles of political struggle, with

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<sup>1</sup> For the squatter movements of the early-1970s see Roland Roth, 'Leben Scheuert am Beton: Streiflichter aus der Geschichte der Hausbesetzungen in der BRD,' in *Wer sind die Instandbesetzer: Selbstzeugnisse, Dokumente, Analysen - Ein Lesebuch*, ed. Volkhard Brandes and Bernhard Schön (Bensheim: Pädex, 1981).; Kraushaar, 'Die Frankfurter Sponti-Szene: Eine Subkultur als politische Versuchsordnung.'; Gerd Koenen, *Das Rote Jahrzehnt: Unsere Kleine Deutsche Kulturrevolution, 1967-1977* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2001).

squatters engaging in contested collective action to a level that in certain cases matched (and arguably even surpassed) that of the 1960s student movement in terms of its intensity, duration and militancy – if we discount the terrorist offshoots of the ‘1968’ generation. Over the course of 1981, which marked the high-point of the West German squatter movements, the Federal Criminal Police Office recorded some 595 occupations in 156 West German towns and cities, undertaken by around 12,900 squatters.<sup>2</sup>

While local centres of squatting included Frankfurt, Cologne, Munich, Freiburg and Gottingen, West Berlin emerged as the squatters’ stronghold. Indeed, between 1979 and 1982 some 249 buildings were occupied by squatters in the ‘island city’. The majority of these squats were subsequently evicted, in some cases in short order, in others after protracted conflicts between the squatters, the landlords and the authorities. However, at the high-point of the West Berlin squatter movement, in the summer of 1981, just under 170 buildings were in the control of between 2,000 – 5,000 active squatters. A year later, in July 1982, the number of illegal squats in the city was still considerable, standing at 127 with almost half of these concentrated in the Kreuzberg district. Through the legalisation of some of the occupied buildings, on the one hand, and the forced eviction or voluntary abandonment of the remaining squats, on the other, the number of illegal squats dwindled rapidly

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Zusammenfassender Bericht des Bundeskriminalamtes über Hausbesetzungen und damit zusammenhängende Ereignisse im Jahr 1981,’ in: Bundesarchiv Koblenz, B 106, Nr. 113186, Bd9: Hausbesetzungen, cited in Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*, p. 502.

over the subsequent years. By January 1984 only 29 illegal squats remained in West Berlin and the last illegal squat would be evicted in October of that year.<sup>3</sup>

The history of squatting in West Berlin during the late 1970s and the early 1980s provide the subject matter for the next three chapters. This chapter begins by taking a closer look at urban renewal paradigms and their critics, which form the background to the emergence of this phenomenon. The broader factors that gave rise to political squatting in West Berlin – run-down inner cities, urban countercultures that were threatened by urban renewal through displacement, a strong tradition of extra-parliamentary opposition and a new generation of actors politicised through the emergence of the new social movements – were not restricted to the island city, however. They were evident elsewhere in the *Bundesrepublik*, and in other Western European countries, and help explain why squatter movements proliferated across West Germany during this period. West German squatters often referred to their action as *Instandbesetzen* (rehab squatting), a catchy neologism of the verbs ‘instandsetzen’ (to renovate) and ‘besetzen’ (to occupy). As a protest tactic, it first originated in the Kreuzberg district of West Berlin in 1979, but over the course of the following years spread to other parts of the city and the country. The chapter focuses on this practice of ‘rehab squatting’, and the ways in which activists were able to exploit this tactic to form powerful counter-narratives that challenged existing urban renewal paradigms. The chapter then examines an important radicalising moment in the history of rehab squatting, namely the

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<sup>3</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 519; Suttner, *‘Beton Brennt’: Hausbesetzer und Selbstverwaltung im Berlin, Wien und Zürich der 80er.* p. 190.

squatter riots in West Berlin in December 1980 and the subsequent financial scandal that led to the West Berlin Senate's resignation. These two events fuelled indignation and lent legitimacy to the burgeoning squatter movement, and were followed by the rapid increase in the number of occupied buildings in West Berlin and elsewhere. The last section explores the ways in which rehab squatting in West Berlin inspired the imagination of some individuals in the GDR.

## II. URBAN RENEWAL AND ITS CRITICS

A sharpening housing crisis, exacerbated by what was perceived by many to be a flawed paradigm of urban renewal, provided the background to the squatter movements that emerged in the *Bundesrepublik* and West Berlin during the late 1970s and early 1980s. At this juncture, there was widespread talk among commentators, academics and policy makers of a '*neue Wohnungsnot*' (a serious housing shortage) in the Federal Republic's larger towns and cities.<sup>4</sup> In early 1981, the mayor of Stuttgart, Fritz Buch (SPD), identified the housing shortage as the primary social problem facing his municipality. For all the construction of new housing undertaken in the city since the end of the Second World War, he admitted, housing conditions were redolent of the 'early 1950s'.<sup>5</sup> Similar problems were evident in the neighbouring *Bundesland*, Bavaria. According to Munich's *Oberbürgermeister* Erich Kiesel (SPD), the situation there was

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<sup>4</sup> 'Neue Wohnungsnot in unseren Städten' was the title of the *Wohnungspolitische Fachkonferenz des Deutschen Städtetags* held in March 1980. See Tilman Harlander, 'Wohnungspolitik,' in *Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1974-1982. Neue Herausforderungen, wachsende Unsicherheit*, ed. Martin H. Geyer, *Geschichte der Sozialpolitik in Deutschland seit 1945* (Baden-Baden: Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales und Bundesarchiv, 2008), p. 841.

<sup>5</sup> 'Zustände wie in den frühen fünfziger Jahren', *Der Spiegel*, 3 (1981), p. 39.



characterised by a 'catastrophic shortage of social housing and a collapse in the private housing market.'<sup>6</sup> Demand for affordable accommodation was outstripping supply in urban centres across the Federal Republic. At the beginning of the 1980s there were some 600,000 individuals registered as looking for housing across West Germany.<sup>7</sup> Despite its declining population – a trend which the East German leadership observed with great satisfaction – the situation in West Berlin was particularly acute. Of the 80,000 West Berliners registered as looking for accommodation in 1980, some 18,000 were 'cases of hardship', to be considered as a 'top priority' according to West Berlin's *Landesamt für Wohnungswesen* (State Office for Housing).<sup>8</sup>

The cause of this new housing crisis was twofold. On the one hand, the explosion in building and material costs following the Oil Shock of 1973, coupled with lower rates of growth and a declining gross social product, resulted in a reduction in public funds available for social housing.<sup>9</sup> Between 1973 and 1979, there was a 50 per cent drop in the number of social housing units constructed in the FRG.<sup>10</sup> What is more, rents in the existing social housing stock were increasing as local authorities struggled to balance budgets in the face of housing subsidies being withdrawn. In West Berlin, there were reports of entrance prices in the city's social housing doubling to over eight

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<sup>6</sup> BAB, B 134/20995, 'Wohnungspolitische Information 1/1979', p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> Heiko Artkämper, *Hausbesetzer, Hausbesitzer, Hausfriedensbruch* (Berlin & Heidelberg: Springer Verlag, 1995), p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Horst Riese, 'Wohnen in Berlin,' in *Besetzung, Weil das Wünschen nicht geholfen hat: Köln, Freiburg, Gorleben, Zürich und Berlin* ed. Ingrid Müller-Münch, et al. (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1981), p. 94.

<sup>9</sup> Düwel and Gutschow, *Städtebau in Deutschland im 20. Jahrhundert: Ideen – Projekte – Akteure*, p. 240-41, 64.

<sup>10</sup> 'Zustände wie in den frühen fünfziger Jahren', *Der Spiegel*, 3 (1981), p. 39.

deutschmarks per square meter.<sup>11</sup> 'Social housing is becoming more and more geared towards middle-income groups', argued the Berlin Tenants' Association in 1981.<sup>12</sup> What is more, these rising costs were accompanied with growing rates of unemployment and stagnating wages. The percentage of West Germans out of work grew from 1.2 in 1973 to 9.1 in 1983. Those who were the most precarious – the young, the low skilled, immigrants and the poorly paid – were most acutely affected by these developments.

The second factor behind the emerging housing crisis, as Tilman Harlander argues, was the 'on-going reduction in affordable housing stock through demolition, misuse, expensive modernisation and the conversion of rented properties into owner-occupied housing'.<sup>13</sup> Compared to the newly constructed social housing, rents in the old, pre-war housing stock, or *Altbau* as it is referred to in German, had been much cheaper. In properties that had not been renovated, the price per square meter could be as low 1.80 deutschmarks.<sup>14</sup> Whereas many of the better off residents had left the inner city tenement districts in the post-war decades, moving into the newly constructed modern housing estates in the 1950s and 1960s, much of the poorest strata had stayed behind. In 1979, in Berlin's Kreuzberg neighbourhood, for instance, the average income was 27 per cent below the average for the city as a whole.<sup>15</sup> From the early 1960s, newly arriving Turkish immigrants and guest workers also

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<sup>11</sup> Riese, 'Wohnen in Berlin.' See also 'PT Archive, Häuserkampf West Berlin press clippings: 'In nur drei Jahren haben sich die Mieten fast verdoppelt', *Berliner Morgenpost*, undated.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>13</sup> Harlander, 'Wohnungspolitik,' p. 841.

<sup>14</sup> These are the prices from 1978. Riese, 'Wohnen in Berlin,' p. 98.

<sup>15</sup> Bezirksamt Kreuzberg von Berlin (Abteilung Jugendförderung), '*... un wenn die einen steh'n im Schatten*' (Berlin: Bezirksamt Kreuzberg von Berlin, 1987), Appendix 6, I.

started to populate these neighbourhoods.<sup>16</sup> To their number were added an eclectic bunch of bohemians, students, drop-outs, draft dodgers and hippies, all of whom could be loosely considered as belonging to the city's alternative milieu.

The alternative milieu defies easy categorisation. It had no formal structure, no explicit manifesto, and neither was it informed by any one overarching theoretical standpoint. It was composed of a hodgepodge of Marxists, post-Marxists, spiritualists, ecologists, hippies, artists and students. Nevertheless, the contours of the alternative milieu can be sketched out, albeit somewhat schematically.<sup>17</sup> As with the 1960s New Left, those belonging to the alternative milieu were generally critical of mainstream consumer culture. Keenly aware of the 'limits to growth' and its corollaries, as articulated by the Club of Rome in its influential report of 1972,<sup>18</sup> the alternative milieu rejected the logic of Helmut Schmidt's '*Modell Deutschland*', based as it was on securing West Germany's dominant position as a global exporter through ever increasing industrial output and productivity. The parliamentary system of representational democracy was generally shunned in favour of direct democracy and decisions made by consensus. The milieu embraced subjectivity

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<sup>16</sup> West Berlin immigrants, especially those of Turkish origin, were underrepresented in the squatter milieu, despite the fact the movement unfolded in the city's most ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. Only 1 per cent of squatters identified by the authorities had a Turkish migrant background. See Der Senator für Inneres: Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 'Der "Häuserkampf" in Berlin (West)' (1982), p 35.

<sup>17</sup> The following sketch draws on Sven Reichardt and Detlef Siegfried, 'Das Alternative Milieu: Konturen einer Lebensform,' in Sven Reichardt and Detlef Siegfried, eds., *Das Alternative Milieu: Antibürgerlicher Lebensstil und linke Politik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Europa 1968-1983* ed. Sven Reichardt and Detlef Siegfried (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Meadows and Rome, *The Limits to growth : a report for the Club of Rome's project on the predicament of mankind*.

and strove for 'authenticity' and self-actualisation.<sup>19</sup> In contrast to orthodox Communists and Marxist K-Groups, those identifying with the alternative milieu were not content to postpone radical change until sometime after the revolution. They believed, to borrow from the title of one recent publication, that to change the world, if this was at all possible, they must first change themselves.<sup>20</sup>

The alternative milieu first emerged in West Germany in the late 1960s, though it reached its high-point in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. By 1980, there were an estimated 80,000 people *actively* engaged in some 11,500 alternative projects across the *Bundesrepublik*.<sup>21</sup> These composed but the 'hard core' of the alternative milieu, however.<sup>22</sup> According to one (possibly exaggerated) estimate, West Berlin's Kreuzberg district alone was home to between 30,000 and 40,000 members of the city's 'alternative scene' in the 1980s.<sup>23</sup> The alternative milieu was composed of West Germans of all classes, though students and children of white collar workers in particular were disproportionately drawn to its ranks.<sup>24</sup> Politically, the alternative milieu was almost exclusively oriented towards the left and the far-left. In one survey of

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<sup>19</sup> See Sven Reichardt, 'Authentizität und Gemeinschaftsbindung: Politik und Lebensstil im linksalternativen Milieu vom Ende der 1960er bis zum Anfang der 1980er Jahre', *Forschungsjournal Neue Soziale Bewegungen* 21, no. 3 (2008).

<sup>20</sup> Belinda Davis et al., eds., *Changing the World, Changing Oneself: Political Protest and Collective Identities in West Germany and the US in the 1960s and 1970s* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Reichardt and Siegfried, 'Das Alternative Milieu: Konturen einer Lebensform,' p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Georgy Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonisation of Everyday Life* (Oakland & Edinburgh: AK Press, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Christian Krause, Detlef Lehnert, and Klaus-Jürgen Scherer, *Zwischen Revolution und Resignation: Alternativkultur, politische Grundströmungen und Hochschulaktivitäten in der Studentenschaft. Eine empirische Untersuchung über die politische Einstellungen von Studenten* (Bonn: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1980), p. 194 f.

this milieu carried out in 1980, over one third of respondents regarded themselves as 'extreme left' in their political orientation, whereas another 57 per cent considered themselves to be 'strongly or moderately' left-wing.<sup>25</sup> The institutional left proved mostly unappealing, however. When questioned on their voting intentions, only 5 per cent of 'alternative students' stated that they would be prepared to cast their ballot for the SPD.<sup>26</sup> While the party may have briefly appealed during the reform euphoria that accompanied Willy Brandt's accession to the Chancellery in 1969, the SPD's drift to the right under Brandt's successor, Helmut Schmidt, shattered any illusions that social democracy could offer – or even conceive of – an alternative to the status quo. From the perspective of the alternative milieu, the SPD was firmly wedded to an old political paradigm that revolved around security and economic growth.<sup>27</sup> At its helm was a former Wehrmacht officer who famously (or infamously, depending on one's outlook) quipped: 'people who have visions should go see a doctor'. Rather than seeking to engage and influence institutional politics, many in the alternative milieu instead channelled their energies into extra-parliamentary activism. Instead of the 'long march through the institutions', as Rudi Dutschke had put it, the alternative milieu focused on establishing autonomous networks and the infrastructure of a parallel society.<sup>28</sup> As SPD politician Peter Glotz, an astute contemporary observer, commented, 'the differences [between the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 205 f.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>27</sup> For the contrasting 'old' political paradigm of the organised Left and the 'new' political paradigm of the New Left see Claus Offe, 'New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics', *Social Research* 52, no. 4 (1985).

<sup>28</sup> Reichardt, 'Authentizität und Gemeinschaftsbindung: Politik und Lebensstil im linksalternativen Milieu vom Ende der 1960er bis zum Anfang der 1980er Jahre,' p. 122.

mainstream and alternative] are so great that I have to speak of two cultures.’ The difference had become so pronounced that, Glotz put it, ‘it [was] as if Chinese are trying to communicate with Japanese.’ While ‘the one side lives in a subculture ... reading only their own fliers and information materials’, he noted ‘there exists the totally different culture of the many, who read their mainstream newspaper no matter whether the paper was produced by the Springer media conglomerate or someone else ... Those who have lived for three years in the subculture’, Glotz concluded with evident concern, ‘speak another language than those of the mainstream culture and even the common assumptions are being destroyed’.<sup>29</sup>

The West German alternative culture of the seventies and eighties had its roots in the international countercultural of the 1960s and extended its critique of the nuclear family and societal norms. Around the year 1968, a number of communes were founded in West Germany, including the *Kommune 1*, the *Kommune 2*, and the *Linkeck-Kommune*, in West Berlin, which experimented with radical forms of communal living, promoted sexual liberation through licentiousness, and strove for the complete elimination of the private sphere.<sup>30</sup> Just as important to the history of the alternative milieu, however, was the proliferation of the humble shared flat, or *Wohngemeinschaft* (WG). The number of WGs increased rapidly during the 1970s in West Germany, from a mere 2,000 in 1971 to just under 40,000 in 1980, and they were almost

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Glotz quoted in Sabine Von Dirke, *All Power to the Imagination! The West German Counterculture from the Student Movement to the Greens* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 88.

<sup>30</sup> Siegfried, ‘Einstürzende Neubauten: Wohngemeinschaften, Jugendzentren und private Präferenzen kommunistischer “Kader” als Formen jugendlicher Subkultur,’ p. 45ff.

exclusively concentrated in the *Altbau* districts of West German cities.<sup>31</sup> The spacious and cheap accommodation in the pre-war neighbourhoods offered a niche for this growing alternative scene.<sup>32</sup> ‘These types’, wrote *Der Spiegel* in 1971, in reference to those looking to establish counter-cultural communes and shared housing projects, ‘require nice tenement buildings’.<sup>33</sup>

To the evolving antagonism between traditional values and milieus and new mores and forms of cultural expression and political participation, therefore, could be added a spatial dimension. ‘Communes don’t flower in concrete cells’, the West Berlin squatters would argue in 1980 in reference to modernism’s architectonic.<sup>34</sup> The organisation of the post-war built environment was perceived as representing and reinforcing the goals and norms of the regimes and hegemonic culture, which were at odds with those of their respective alternative milieus. Affirming Henri Lefebvre’s theory of a dialectical interplay between mental and physical space, those whose values diverged from that of the mainstream increasingly began to identify with an urban environment that had been rejected by the urban planners.<sup>35</sup> From the 1960s onwards in West Berlin, sub-cultures began to emerge in the city’s cheaper districts, such as Kreuzberg, Schöneberg, which had good transport connections with the Free University, and, to a lesser extent, in Moabit and Wedding. These milieus were linked through various projects and networks,

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<sup>31</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>32</sup> A study conducted in Hamburg and Braunschweig found that 90% of WGs were to be found in *Altbauwohnungen*. Erika Spiegel, *Neue Haushaltstypen: Entstehungsbedingungen, Lebenssituation, Wohn- und Standortverhältnisse* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1986).

<sup>33</sup> *Der Spiegel*, cited in Siegfried, ‘Einstürzende Neubauten: Wohngemeinschaften, Jugendzentren und private Präferenzen kommunistischer “Kader” als Formen jugendlicher Subkultur,’ p. 46.

<sup>34</sup> PT Archiv, Häuserkampf W. Berlin 1970er, 1-8/80 - ‘Besetzer-Rat info 2’, July 1980.

<sup>35</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

including alternative cafes, schools, women's centres, workshops, and cooperatives, and the autonomous youth centres that had been established in the early to mid-1970s. However, it was a precarious *Lebenswelt* that the alternative culture had established, and one which, by the late 1970s, appeared to be threatened by the policies of urban renewal.

Much of the housing stock in the inner city districts was, of course, in desperate need of renovation and repair. There had been little capital invested in the buildings since the war's end and, in some blocks, sanitation and amenities were little improved from the Weimar era. In 1963, the then Mayor of the city, Willy Brandt, had declared vast swathes of West Berlin's inner city redevelopment areas. The initial idea was to effect a *total* renewal, through demolishing most of the housing and replacing it with new build, though this policy was later scaled down – in part because it was no longer financially feasible, in part as a reflection of changing attitudes towards urban planning – in favour of a differentiated approach that placed more emphasis on renovation. In the mid-1970s, the West Berlin Senate announced a 'change of course to modernisation', in which it admitted past errors, in particular with respect to total urban renewal.<sup>36</sup> The new policy centred on a process called '*Entkernung*', whereby the traditional tenement blocks would be hollowed out and the back tenements demolished, reducing the population density while simultaneously increasing access to light, air and sunshine, the old watchwords of the modernist planners. By the late 1970s, some 3,000 apartments in back-houses

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<sup>36</sup> Bodenschatz, Heise, and Korfmacher, *Schluss mir der Zerstörung? Stadterneuerung und städtische Opposition in West-Berlin, Amsterdam und London*, p. 40.



were being demolished annually in West Berlin.<sup>37</sup> However, given that these were some of the cheapest properties in the city, the policy resulted not only in a forced displacement of residents, but also, as Federal Housing Minister Dieter Haak (SPD) recognised, an irreversible 'loss of inexpensive accommodation'.<sup>38</sup> In order to cover the costs of renovation, rents in the remaining properties were either raised, or the properties were sold off as private apartments – a similar process to that which is driving urban displacement in the city today.<sup>39</sup>

What is more, the tenement districts were increasingly being targeted by property speculators looking to make quick fortunes – a process made possible by a nexus of corruption between the construction industry and West Berlin's Social Democratic controlled Senate. '[West] Berlin's government has for years tolerated the criminal practices of speculators', reported the *Der Spiegel* in 1980.<sup>40</sup> Property portfolios could serve as a means to obtain tax exemptions, and, due to the nature of West Berlin's subsidy laws, there was a financial incentive for landlords to allow their buildings to deteriorate to a point where demolition and reconstruction were necessary, the costs of which would be handsomely subsidised by the tax-payer. As a result, inner city districts in West Berlin and elsewhere in the Federal Republic in the late 1970s were increasingly characterised by high levels of vacancy. A journalist from West Berlin's *Tageszeitung* described walking along the Fraenkelufer promenade in

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<sup>37</sup> '“Hausbesetzer stoßen auf Verständnis”. Der Bericht des Bundesbauministers Dieter Haack über Wohnungs- und städtebauliche Hintergründe von Hausbesetzungen', in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 23. 2. 1981.

<sup>38</sup> '“Hausbesetzer stoßen auf Verständnis”. Der Bericht des Bundesbauministers Dieter Haack über Wohnungs- und städtebauliche Hintergründe von Hausbesetzungen', in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 23. 2. 1981.

<sup>39</sup> Bodenschatz, *Platz frei für das Neue Berlin! Geschichte der Stadterneuerung seit 1871* p. 47.

<sup>40</sup> 'Da packt dich irgendwann 'ne Wut', *Der Spiegel*, 22 December 1980, p. 29.

Kreuzberg in January 1981. Turning onto the street 'one passes a long row of around ten empty houses', he wrote. The buildings were run-down and decaying, with the windows boarded up. The only sign of any recent investment in these properties were the steel doors barring entry.<sup>41</sup> This was a streetscape that could be encountered across West Berlin and in other cities in the *Bundesrepublik* at this time. According to conservative estimates, between 800 and 900 tenement buildings in West Berlin alone, containing over 10,000 individual apartments, were standing empty at the start of the 1980s.<sup>42</sup> This provides a reminder that dilapidated inner city landscapes were not confined to the eastern side of the Wall in Berlin during the 1970s and 1980s.

Furthermore, over the course of the 1970s, property and land in West Berlin's redevelopment areas were increasingly being concentrated in the hands of large, state-subsidised housing corporations, such as the *Neue Heimat* and the *GeWoBe* – corporations which also owned and managed much of the modern housing that had been constructed in the satellite estates on the city's periphery.<sup>43</sup> The urban sociologist Harald Bodenschatz views this as part of a 'strategic calculation' on the part of the West Berlin housing corporations, which had a view to maintaining the value of their modern housing stock through the systematic elimination of cheaper alternatives.<sup>44</sup> Housing corporations and private landlords gained notoriety due to the measures they were adopting. 'Across the country' housing corporations were buying up tracts of the inner

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<sup>41</sup> 'Besetzungen gehen weiter', *taz*, 6. 1. 1980.

<sup>42</sup> Artkämper, *Hausbesetzer, Hausbesitzer, Hausfriedensbruch*, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> Bodenschatz, *Platz frei für das Neue Berlin! Geschichte der Stadterneuerung seit 1871* p. 176.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

city tenement districts and evicting the existing tenants, reported *Der Spiegel* in the early 1980s. Those who sought to stay put were driven away by 'wild west methods'.<sup>45</sup> In a letter addressed to the *Senator für Bau und Wohnungswesen* (Senator for Building and Housing), one Kreuzberg resident, Herr P., claiming to speak on behalf of the tenants in his block in the district's Adalbertstraße, provides an account of the practice of his landlord, the municipally owned *BeWoGe*. Since purchasing the property, he noted, the housing corporation had let the building 'systematically decay.' Essential maintenance had not been carried out, and pressure was being put on the residents to leave and move elsewhere. Herr P. had himself been informed that, 'if I'm not prepared to move out, I can forget about my broken windows being repaired.'<sup>46</sup> Similarly, a group of squatters who occupied a building in Kreuzberg's Naunynstraße in February 1981 explained that:

In a short space of time, the number of occupied apartments [in the building] has been reduced from 14 to three. Those who have left have been forced out. The empty apartments have been deliberately gutted in order to make them uninhabitable. All the windows have been removed and the heating and toilets demolished.<sup>47</sup>

These were not isolated incidents, and they were stirring widespread resentment.

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<sup>45</sup> 'Hier wird die schnelle Million gemacht', *Der Spiegel*, Nr. 3 (1983), p. 39.

<sup>46</sup> PT Archiv, Häuserkampf W. Berlin 1.2-16.2/1981 - 'Wohnraumentzug ist Lebensentzug', 11.2.1981

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

Rising rents, expensive renovation projects, high levels of vacancy and the demolition of affordable living space thus provide the immediate background to the emergence of political squatting in West Berlin. While studies of the shifting nature of protest in post-war West Germany are often informed by notions of a 'post-material value change' (Inglehart), material concerns and the emergence of urban squatting were closely intertwined.<sup>48</sup> That is not to say 'new' values, such as autonomy, self-actualisation, authenticity, and so on, were not important: they were, and squatting was regarded as a means to defend and expand the alternative niches that had been established in West Berlin and elsewhere in the FRG. Squatters spoke of the desire to 'live and work together again', of 'put[ting] an end to the separation and the destruction of communal living' and of counteracting 'agonising loneliness and emptiness of the everyday that emerged in conjunction with the ceaseless destruction of traditional relationships wrought by urban renovation and other forms of urban destruction?'<sup>49</sup> What we find in the history of urban squatting, however, is an amalgam of 'old' and 'new' issues; we can witness the overlap and intersection of material *and* post-material concerns. This amalgam is clearly articulated in one of the earliest statements issued collectively by West Berlin's 'rehab squatters' in March 1980. Squatting, they argue, 'is about

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<sup>48</sup> Ronald Inglehart, 'The Silent Revolution in Europe: Intergenerational Change in Post-Industrial Societies', *The American Political Science Review* 65, no. 4 (1971).

<sup>49</sup> PT Archiv, Schöneberger Besetzerrat, 'Offenen Brief an die Bürger Berlins', 8. Dec. 1981. Cited in Häberlen and Smith, 'Struggling for Feelings: The Politics of Emotions in the Radical New Left, c. 1968-84,' p. 630.

protecting affordable housing, resisting an inhumane urban renewal policy and maintaining our ways of life in the Kreuzberg neighbourhood.<sup>50</sup>

### III. 'BETTER TO SQUAT THAN LET THE HOUSES ROT'

Small-scale opposition to urban renewal and displacement in West Berlin's inner city emerged over the course of the 1970s, organised by various grassroots initiatives, ranging from Marxist K-Groups through to critical architects and local citizens' initiatives. This was testament to a 'new privileging of the local' within West Germany's post-1968 extra-parliamentary opposition, as Timothy S. Brown has pointed out.<sup>51</sup> Criticism of the *Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum* at Kottbusser Tor, for instance, a concrete colossus constructed between 1969-74, and referred to by locals as the '*neues KZ*', succeeded in inducing limited concessions from the city's authorities. As a result, neighbourhood organisations were offered greater involvement in the planning process. In 1977, local residents were invited to participate in the 'Strategies for Kreuzberg' competition, where they were asked to present their own blueprint for the future redevelopment and regeneration of the neighbourhood. The winning entry came from the Kreuzberg based *Verein S036*, whose name was inspired by the local postcode covering the eastern half of the Kreuzberg district. Those involved in the association were influenced by the work of the critical architect Hardt-Walther Hämer, who, in conjunction

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<sup>50</sup> PT Archiv, Häuserkampf W. Berlin 1970er, 1-8/80 - 'Besetzer-Rat info 2', July 1980, emphasis added.

<sup>51</sup> Brown, 'Music as a Weapon? Ton Steine Scherben and the Politics of Rock in Cold War Berlin,' p. 7.

with a local residents' association in Charlottenburg, had pioneered an alternative model of inner city regeneration around the district's Klausener Platz under the motto 'urban renewal without displacement'.<sup>52</sup>

The Verein's suggestions, however, were quietly ignored, as were those of similar grassroots organisations, such as the *Bürgerinitiative S036* (BISO36). Indeed, the more citizens' initiatives sought to engage with urban renewal politics through conventional channels, the more it became apparent that their ability to influence decision making was limited at best. In contrast to the large housing corporations that owned vast swathes of *Sanierungsgebiete* and had close links with the SPD establishment, grassroots initiatives had little purchase or leverage. As Kuno Haberbusch, a member of the BISO36, explained:

We wrote letters to the landlords, to the *BeWoGe* for example, which allows over 300 properties to stand empty here [in the neighbourhood], but that didn't get us anywhere. We contacted the press: no response. We spoke with representatives in the Senate and sought to initiate legal proceedings. Again, hopeless.<sup>53</sup>

With conventional channels seemingly exhausted, the citizens' initiatives resorted to the only tactic they had left: occupation.

On 3 February 1979, around 50 members of the BISO36, 'armed with building material, paint and brushes', occupied two empty apartments in eastern Kreuzberg.<sup>54</sup> On doing so, they hung banners from the building's façade

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<sup>52</sup> 'Hardt-Walther Hämer gestorben: Der große Alte der behutsam Sanierung', *Mietermagazine* 11/2012, p. 20.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Stefan Aust and Sabine Rosenblatt, *Hausbesetzer: wofür sie kämpfen, wie sie leben und wie sie leben wollen* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1981), p. 33.

<sup>54</sup> 'Ein Gespenst geht um ... Wohnungen werden instandbesetzt', *taz*, 22. March. 1979.

reading 'INSTAND(BE)SETZUNG! LEERSTEHENDE WOHNUNGEN MÜSSEN VERMIETET WERDEN' (Rehab Squatting: Empty Apartments Must be Rented Out).<sup>55</sup> The apartments targeted belonged to the *BeWoGe* housing association, which owned a number of properties in the district that were standing empty. This move quickly attracted the interest of the city's media, and the squatters held a press conference in the building, reminding the assembled reporters that, in West Berlin, citizens were guaranteed the right to housing under Article 19 of the city's constitution. Moreover, they also pointed to the fact that through leaving properties empty, speculators and housing corporations were themselves in violation of the law, and that the Senate, through tolerating this, was also implicated.<sup>56</sup> However, the masterstroke was the concept of *Instand(be)setzen*. Building on traditions of New Left counter-expertise, which had been pioneered in the anti-nuclear and peace movements, the squatters were able to challenge the planners' and policy makers' monopoly of knowledge and to demonstrate, through their practical example, that alternatives to prevailing policies were possible. Not wanting to inflame the situation – the West Berlin *Land* election was only weeks away – the municipal housing corporation that owned the property immediately provided legal contracts to the squatters and agreed to rent out a further 38 empty apartments forthwith,

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 22. March. 1979.

<sup>56</sup> There was a 'Zweckentfremdungsverbotsverordnung', which barred landlords from leaving properties empty from more than three months, without first obtaining special dispensation. This was, however, weakly enforced, and in early 1980 actually repealed. Suttner, '*Beton Brennt: Hausbesetzer und Selbstverwaltung im Berlin, Wien und Zürich der 80er*', p. 122.

thus legitimising the action at a stroke.<sup>57</sup> In November 1979, the BISO36, the initiator of the first occupations, received recognition from the *Kulturpolitische Gesellschaft* in Bonn for its 'exemplary neighbourhood work'.<sup>58</sup> The initiative duly capitalised on the publicity, squatting in further buildings in Kreuzberg's Cuvrystraße shortly thereafter.



Figure 1: Poster produced by the BISO36.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> 'Ein Gespenst geht um ... Wohnungen werden instandbesetzt', *taz*, 22. March. 1979; See also Bernd Laurisch, *Kein Abriß unter dieser Nummer: 2 Jahre In der Cuvrystrasse in Berlin-Kreuzberg* (Giessen: Anabas, 1981), p. 34.

<sup>58</sup> Karapin, *Protest Politics in Germany: Movements on the Left and Right since the 1960s*, p. 89.

Laurisch, *Kein Abriß unter dieser Nummer: 2 Jahre In der Cuvrystrasse in Berlin-Kreuzberg*, p. 187.

<sup>59</sup> *Instandbesetzer Post*, Nr. 21, p. 33.



The example of the BISO36 provided a blueprint for others to follow, and the motto of *Instandbesetzen* established itself as the rallying call for those who carried out subsequent occupations. Rehab squatters would find a building that had been standing empty, and proceed to break in and start renovating. West Berlin's rehab squatters initially focused on three interconnected themes: opposition to the Senate's urban renewal policy; criticism of the rising cost of rents; and highlighting of the large-scale vacancy in West Berlin's inner city districts, in particular in Kreuzberg. For the squatters in Kreuzberg's Naunynstraße, who occupied an empty building in February 1980, this action was framed as a response to the 'senseless levels of vacancy and the destruction of living space' in the district.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, the squatters who occupied a building in the nearby Leuschnerdamm in the same month stated that they were 'not prepared to look on' and watch the continual destruction of their 'Lebensraum' in Kreuzberg.<sup>61</sup> During this early phase of rehab squatting in West Berlin, other squatters stressed their opposition to '*Entmietungskampagnen*', whereby residents would be evicted and displaced so that the property could either be demolished or expensively renovated.<sup>62</sup> There were calls for an upper-limit rent price to be established, at 3DM per square meter – an essentially material concern.<sup>63</sup> In what was possibly the first collective statement issued in April 1980, Kreuzberg's rehab squatters stressed their opposition to the urban

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<sup>60</sup> PT Archiv, Häuserkampf W. Berlin 1970er, 1-8/80 - 'Naunynstrasse 77 Instandbesetzt', Feb. 1980.

<sup>61</sup> 'Leuschnerdamm 9 instandbesetzt', Feb. 1980 - PT Archiv, Häuserkampf W. Berlin 1970er, 1-8/80.

<sup>62</sup> PT Archiv, Häuserkampf W. Berlin 1970er, 1-8/80 - 'Gegen Abriss und Spekulanten müssen wir was tun!' April 1980.

<sup>63</sup> PT Archiv, Häuserkampf W. Berlin 1970er, 1-8/80 - 'Mieterselbsthilfe Instandbesetzung Mariannenstr. 48', 26. 3. 80.

renewal policy being pushed through by the Senate and sought to highlight the quick fortunes being made by unscrupulous property speculators.<sup>64</sup>

Rehab squatting was no simple undertaking, as the squatters were often met with challenging conditions in the dilapidated buildings which they occupied. One of the squatters who occupied a property in Kreuzberg's Cuvrystraße in November 1979 recalled that 'meter-high' piles of rubbish had to be cleared out of the building. Some proprietors had deliberately vandalised their own properties, it was claimed, in an attempt to make them un-occupiable. According to one group of rehab squatters, a construction team came round and cut through all the water pipes just days before their planned occupation of the property.<sup>65</sup> The squatters who took-over a building in the nearby Görlitzer Straße claimed that the *BeWoGe* cooperative had, over the past one-and-a-half years, 'deliberately let the house rot'. As a result of its leaky roof, the property suffered from considerable water damage.<sup>66</sup> Patching up damaged and leaky roofs was the first priority for the rehab squatters, followed by the renovation of windows, the heating systems and the buildings' plumbing. This entailed considerable cost and effort on the part of the squatters, whereas the work itself was far from straightforward, considering that most were not qualified tradesmen or tradeswomen. Advertisements in the alternative media in this

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<sup>64</sup> PT Archiv, Häuserkampf W. Berlin 1970er, 1-8/80 – *Statement by the Besetzerrat 15.4.80.* (note: handwritten).

<sup>65</sup> Ingrid Müller-Münch et al., eds., *Besetzung, Weil das Wünschen nicht geholfen hat: Köln, Freiburg, Gorleben, Zürich und Berlin* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1981), p. 122.

<sup>66</sup> PT Archiv, Häuserprojekt, Flügblätter, 'Presseerklärung: Zur Situation im Haus Görlitzerstr. 74', 22. Feb. 1981.

period were full of appeals for help and assistance.<sup>67</sup>

Not every occupation in West Berlin was followed by diligent renovation work. As with any social movement or project, 'free riders' also emerged who took advantage of the situation for their own short-term gain. Squatting, as Hans Pruijt writes, 'can be a promising field of action for those who are engaged in anti-systemic politics'<sup>68</sup>, and a number of groups of radical *Autonomen* squatted in buildings to provoke encounters with the authorities, or symbolically to expropriate private property from their owners, without much intention of carrying through necessary repairs.<sup>69</sup> Buildings that were occupied by drug addicts, down and outs, or punks, on the other hand, tended to remain in their dilapidated state. One former squatter recalled that, in the building he occupied, 'the pipes burst and water and excrement covered the stairwell. Then it froze.' Over the winter the squatters had to cope 'without a toilet and frozen sewage all over the stairs.' This particular group adopted a rather cavalier attitude towards waste disposal in general: 'Rubbish from the house', it was noted, 'was thrown over the Berlin Wall.'<sup>70</sup>

Nevertheless, the tactic of *Instandbesetzen* did serve to forge a powerful and compelling narrative for the emergent squatter movement. The BISO36, the citizens' initiative that organized the initial occupations, produced posters showing a smiling young man, dressed in workman's overalls, striding

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<sup>67</sup> See the *Kleinanzeigen* section in the *Instandbesetzer Post*.

<sup>68</sup> See Pruijt, 'The Logic of Urban Squatting.'

<sup>69</sup> For histories of the autonomen and the squatter movements from a number of contemporaries perspectives see A. G. Grauwaacke, ed. *Autonome in Bewegung: Aus den ersten 23 Jahren* (Berlin: Verlag Assoziation A 2007); Geronimo, *Feuer und Flamme: Zur Geschichte der Autonomen* (Berlin & Amsterdam: ID-Archiv, 1995).

<sup>70</sup> Grauwaacke, *Autonome in Bewegung: Aus den ersten 23 Jahren*, p. 68.

purposefully towards a block of dilapidated tenements, carrying a box of tools in one hand, and a suitcase in the other (see figure 1). As social movement research demonstrates, narratives can provide clarity and coherence to a fledgling campaign, serving as effective ‘framing devices’ and allowing a movement to delineate its goals and express its grievances.<sup>71</sup> Through the practice of rehab squatting, the West Berlin squatter movement had a coherent narrative from the very beginning. The idea of plucky citizens stepping in where institutional politics had failed resonated with many locals, faced as they were with rising rents, eviction notices and absentee landlordism, in addition to a political class that seemed either unwilling or unable to respond to their concerns.

#### IV. THE DECEMBER RIOTS AND THE ‘GARSKI AFFAIR’

In the summer of 1980, there were still only a handful of buildings in West Berlin – certainly no more than a dozen – occupied under the banner of *Instandbesetzen*. Moreover, the geographical spread of rehab squatting was initially restricted to a small, isolated area of the city. Indeed, it was not until May 1980 that a building was occupied outwith the S036 postal code which covered the easternmost section of Kreuzberg.<sup>72</sup> During the autumn of 1980, however, the number of squatted buildings began to gradually increase, and the

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<sup>71</sup> See Francesca Polletta, ‘Contending Stories: Narrative in Social Movements’, *Qualitative Sociology* 21, no. 4 (1998).

<sup>72</sup> Renate Mulhak, ‘Der Instandbesetzungskonflikt in Berlin,’ in *Großstadt und neue soziale Bewegungen*, ed. Peter Grottian and Wilfried Nelles (Basel, Boston & Stuttgart: Birkhäuser Verlag, 1983), p. 224.

practice spread to other neighbourhoods. By December 1980, over 20 buildings were in the hands of West Berlin's rehab squatters.

The early press coverage of rehab squatting was generally favourable. Even West Berlin's chief of police, Klaus Hübner, admitted that local residents in Kreuzberg initially held a degree of sympathy towards the squatters and their aims.<sup>73</sup> However, as the number of occupied buildings and apartments increased, drawing in ever more of West Berlin's alternative and leftist milieu, attitudes began to harden. In May 1980, the West Berlin police carried through the first evictions, ejecting squatters from newly occupied buildings in Kreuzberg's Wrangelstraße – an intervention that led to the earliest violent clashes between the squatters, their supporters and the authorities since rehab squatting first began.<sup>74</sup> In August 1980, Hübner went on record accusing the Kreuzberg squatters of provoking his officers, hindering them from carrying out their duty and presenting a menace to public safety.<sup>75</sup> Then in September 1980, in an interview with the Springer-owned *Berliner Morgenpost*, he implied links between the squatters and the *Bewegung 2. Juni*, a left-wing terrorist organisation that had recently carried out several bomb attacks in the city – a textbook example of the discourse of counterterrorism being used in an attempt to discredit legitimate dissent.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> 'Eindeutige Werbung für den Terror', *Berliner Morgenpost* 28. Sept. 1980.

<sup>74</sup> 'In Kreuzberg brodeln es: Polizei griff erstmals ein', *Spandauer Volksblatt*, 30. 5. 1980; 'Nach mehreren Polizeieinsätzen in der Wrangelstrasse im Laufe des Tages', reported the *Volksblatt*, 'entwickelte sich gegen Abend in Kreuzberg eine explosive Stimmung'. 'Polizeiaktion in Kreuzberg gegen eine "Instandbesetzung"', *Spandauer Volksblatt*, 30. 5. 1980.

<sup>75</sup> 'Hübner wirft "Instandbesetzern" ständige Provokation vor', *Berliner Tagesspiegel*, 23. 8. 1980.

<sup>76</sup> For Hübner's comments see 'Eindeutige Werbung für den Terror', *Berliner Morgenpost* 28. Sept. 1980. The *Besetzerrat* responded to these accusations stating: 'someone who squats in a

Confronted by an increasingly hostile Springer-dominated mainstream press, and with the threat of forced evictions looming, the squatters' rhetoric and posturing in turn became increasingly aggressive. In October 1980, tensions boiled over when a squatter demonstration held in Kreuzberg erupted into violent scenes and looting.<sup>77</sup> Shortly after, in early December, the leftist *Tageszeitung* published a statement issued collectively by the squatters. Should the authorities attempt to evict or raid further squatted buildings, the paper's readership was exhorted to 'build barricades, occupy bridges and intersections'. Redolent of the incendiary language of the *Kommune 1*, the statement also called on squatters and their supporters to 'visit the department stores'.<sup>78</sup> The dénouement duly arrived on 12 December 1980, leading to some of the worst rioting in West Berlin's history, sparked by the eviction of a newly squatted building in Kreuzberg's Fraenkelufer.

The riots started in rather bizarre fashion. At around 5pm, on Friday 12 December 1980, a group of squatters arrived at a run-down tenement building at number 48 Fraenkelufer in eastern Kreuzberg, which was scheduled for demolition. On entering the property, however, the squatters were confronted by a Turkish family, the last remaining tenants in the building, who opposed the occupation. After their remonstrations fell on deaf ears, the family notified the police, who duly arrived 20 minutes later and arrested the squatters.<sup>79</sup> News of this arrest quickly spread, however, serving as a lightning rod for the anger and

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building', an action which served to draw the attention of the authorities, 'is not stupid enough to then go and plant a bomb.' 'Wir sind keine Kriminellen', *Spandauer Volksblatt*, 17. 6. 1980

<sup>77</sup> See 'Bilanz der Krawallnacht', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 12. 10. 1980.

<sup>78</sup> 'Im Falle einer Räumung nicht tatenlos zusehen', *taz* 3.12.1980.

<sup>79</sup> 'Barrikaden in Kreuzberg', *taz*, 13. 12. 1980.

frustration of the squatters and their supporters. Already by 18.05 pm the police radio was reporting that 'squatters armed with helmets and clubs are patrolling up and down' the Fraenkelufer, while police vans in and around the vicinity were being 'pelted with stones'.<sup>80</sup> Barricades were erected in nearby streets, banks were attacked, shops plundered and violent exchanges between squatters, rioters and the authorities raged throughout the night. The following day, further rioting and street-fighting ensued, spilling out from Kreuzberg and engulfing the neighbouring districts. Militant exchanges took place on the Kurfürstendamm, while further rioting was reported in the districts of Britz, Buckow, Spandau and Wilmersdorf.<sup>81</sup> Hundreds of demonstrators and police were injured and millions of deutschmarks worth of damage were wracked up over the course of the weekend.<sup>82</sup> Journalists and politicians from across the political spectrum were shocked by the militancy of the squatter riots, which had even surpassed that of the most violent confrontations during the student movement, including the notorious 'Battle of Tegler Weg'. Comparisons were even drawn between the tense situation in West Germany's cities and those in the American ghettos.<sup>83</sup> For the squatters, this proved to be a radicalising moment. Indeed, the riots served to produce the movement with an important founding myth, which served as a catalyst for constructing a common identity.<sup>84</sup>

Nevertheless, the radicalisation of the squatter milieu should not be reduced to its militancy. Rather, as Donatella della Porta explains, radicalisation

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<sup>80</sup> 'Da packt dich irgendwann 'ne Wut', *Der Spiegel*, 22 December 1980, p. 31.

<sup>81</sup> 'Zwei Nächte Strassenkampf in Berlin', *taz*, 15. 12. 1980.

<sup>82</sup> See 'Zwei Nächte Strassenkampf in Berlin', *taz*, 15. 12. 1980.

<sup>83</sup> 'Da packt dich irgendwann 'ne Wut', *Der Spiegel*, 22 December 1980.

<sup>84</sup> Mulhak, 'Der Instandbesetzungskonflikt in Berlin.'

is best understood as a 'process of increasing totalization', whereby activists' identities are subsumed by the movement and the movement dominates activists' lives to an ever greater extent.<sup>85</sup> The broad spectrum of the West German APO had always included militant or potentially militant elements, who were often critical of one another's tactics. However, in the increasingly charged atmosphere of West Berlin in the winter of 1980-81, the distinction between the militant and moderate elements within the squatter milieu began to blur; the lines between 'us' and 'them', i.e. the squatters, their sympathisers and supporters, on the one hand, and the authorities, on the other, became more defined.

The dust had hardly settled, however, when the West Berlin Senate was further rocked by the 'Garski affair' in early January 1981, in which it was revealed that the property developer Dietrich Garski had illegally received 120 million deutschmarks in improper state subsidies from the ruling coalition.<sup>86</sup> Garski, who fled the country with a warrant out for his arrest, served as the corrupt speculator personified, whereas the whole affair exposed the all-too-cosy nexus between the construction industry, unscrupulous investors and West Berlin's political class.<sup>87</sup> The city's finance and economics ministers were forced to immediately step down. The entire government followed on 15 January 1981, while new elections were scheduled for the following May.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 149.

<sup>86</sup> Karapın, *Protest Politics in Germany: Movements on the Left and Right since the 1960s*, p. 94.

<sup>87</sup> For more on the Garski affair see 'SPD-Berlin: Der letzte Tango', *Der Spiegel*, 1981, Nr. 4.

<sup>88</sup> Bodenschatz, Heise, and Korfmacher, *Schluss mir der Zerstörung? Stadterneuerung und städtische Opposition in West-Berlin, Amsterdam und London*, p. 313.



The riots, followed by the Garski affair and the Senate's resignation, ushered in a new phase in the history of West Berlin's squatter movement – a phase that was marked by a rapid increase in the number of occupied buildings. Around 21 buildings had been occupied by rehab squatters prior to the riots in December 1980. Just a month later, however, the *taz* was asking whether '[it is] now 30, 35 or already 40 squats?' 'No one has the exact numbers', the paper noted. 'They must be updated on a daily basis'.<sup>89</sup> Ever more squatters exploited the temporary crisis in political legitimacy that followed the Senate's resignation. By the end of February 1981, the 100<sup>th</sup> building had been taken over.<sup>90</sup> Measured by the number of buildings occupied, the rehab squatter movement reached its high-point in June of 1981. At this juncture, 167 buildings were in the hands of the city's squatters. Around half (87) of these were in the district of Kreuzberg, another 32 were in neighbouring Schöneberg, whereas the rest were spread around the city. Reinickendorf was the only district in which no cases of squatting had been recorded.<sup>91</sup> By the summer of 1981, anything between 2,000-5,000 squatters were living in the occupied tenement buildings in West Berlin.<sup>92</sup> To this number, however, could be added thousands active supporters, drawn from the city's wider APO. And the proliferation of occupations was not confined to West Berlin but was being witnessed across

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<sup>89</sup> 'Berliner Häuserkampf: Eskalation des Konflikts', *taz*, 21.1.1981.

<sup>90</sup> 'Die 100 sind voll', *Tageszeitung*, 2. 3. 1981.

<sup>91</sup> See Der-Senator-für-Inneres, *Hausbesetzungen und Hausbesetzer in Berlin: Eine Statistik über die Entwicklung seit 1979* (West Berlin 1983).

<sup>92</sup> A study undertaken by the Bundesministerium für Jugend, Familie und Gesundheit puts the estimate at between 1,000-1,500 (3,000 including drug addicts). Katz and Mayer provide a somewhat higher figure of 5,000. If we take a conservative estimate of 15 squatters per occupied tenement building, then the number would be around 2,500. See Stephen Katz and Margit Mayer, 'Gimme shelter: self-help housing struggles within and against the state in New York City and West Berlin', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 9, no. 1 (1985).

the country. In February 1981, West Germany's Minister for Housing informed the Federal Cabinet that 'In the previous weeks, the number of known instances of squatting ... has increased considerably.' Cases of political squatting were being reported across the country, the minister added, in 'cities such as Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Köln, Nürnberg, Fürth, Freiburg, Münster and Göttingen', as well as in smaller towns and municipalities such as 'Detmold, Herford, Marburg, Essling and Kirchheim/Teck.'<sup>93</sup> In Bochum, for instance, in the six months following the December riots, 'over a dozen houses, several factory buildings, a bunker-complex, a cinema' and even a 'railway station' had been squatted.<sup>94</sup> By the summer of 1981, squatters claimed to be in control of almost 400 buildings in 74 towns and cities in the *Bundesrepublik*.<sup>95</sup>

#### V. IN PANKOW, WE TOO FELT CLOSE TO THE ACTION

News of squatting in West Berlin and the *Bundesrepublik* spread to the GDR through various channels, inspiring the imagination of a number of young East Germans. The GDR's state-controlled media provided one, albeit highly controlled, source of information, with flashpoints such as the December 1980 riots making headlines in the East German press. Following the riots, the Monday edition of the East Berlin daily, the *Berliner Zeitung*, reported on its front page that 'swathes of the Kreuzberg district were shrouded in clouds of tear gas.' The paper took evident satisfaction in recounting the 'brutal violence'

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<sup>93</sup> '“Hausbesetzer stoßen auf Verständnis”. Der Bericht des Bundesbauministers Dieter Haack über Wohnungs- und städtebauliche Hintergründe von Hausbesetzungen', in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 23. 2. 1981.

<sup>94</sup> 'Bewegung aus dem Nichts: Was ist den bloß in Bochum los?', in *Taz-Journal, Sachschaden: Häuser und Andere Kämpfe* 1981, p. 59.

<sup>95</sup> See *Instandbesetzer Post*, Nr. 9, 7. May 1981.

meted out against the 'demonstrators' by the West Berlin police. Interestingly, the paper made no mention of squatting, instead framing the events in terms of 'youth' protesting for 'social living space'.<sup>96</sup>

Western sources also provided a popular and informative alternative to the GDR's state-controlled media, and in the East German capital it was especially easy to tune in to western television and radio. Growing up in Pankow in the early 1980s, the East Berliner Dirk Moldt recalls listening in to the *Sender Freies Berlin* (SFB) and receiving the latest reports on the squatter movement taking place on the other side of the Wall.<sup>97</sup> The SFB filed updates from the front line of the struggle. Its correspondents interviewed squatters, police officers and property owners, and reported new occupations, demonstrations and evictions. Tuning into squatter pirate radio stations, such as 'Radio Utopia', 'Ausbruch' and 'Schwarze Ratte', provided further insights into everyday life of West Berlin's squatters.<sup>98</sup> 'We experienced it all at close quarters', Dirk Moldt recalls.<sup>99</sup> Dirk would later go on to squat two apartments in East Berlin in the 1980s before taking part in the rehab squatter movement that emerged in the East German capital in the winter of 1989-1990.

The historian and former East German squatter Dieter Rink argues that '*Schwarzwohnen*' in the GDR and rehab squatting in the West were 'not comparable'. Whereas squatters in West Germany constructed social movements, squatting in the GDR 'did not constitute a form of protest' as East

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<sup>96</sup> 'Brutaler Einsatz der Westberliner Polizei', *Berliner Zeitung*, 15. Dec. 1980, p. 1.

<sup>97</sup> Unpublished interview: Moldt, Dirk. Interview by Peter Mitchell. Berlin, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2013.

<sup>98</sup> See BStU, ZA, HA III 8502. fols. 51-137.

<sup>99</sup> Unpublished interview: Moldt, Dirk. Interview by Peter Mitchell. Berlin, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2013.

German squatters could not and did not attempt to influence or change state policy as they did in the West.<sup>100</sup> There are, undoubtedly, important differences between the practice of squatting in both German states. Most obviously, in the FRG squatting was generally overt, while in the GDR it had to remain covert. Nevertheless, the causes of squatting in both the GDR and FRG certainly were comparable, as this thesis has shown, while the practice also played a central role in establishing alternative lifestyles on both side of the Cold War divide. Whether squatting in the GDR constituted a form of protest, moreover, depends on the definition of this term. If the broader definition of social resistance is used, as it is here, then squatting can be considered as a manifestation of opposition within the parameters imposed by the SED-dictatorship. And while squatting in the GDR was generally characterised by its covert nature, there are scattered examples of East German squatters imitating their counterparts in the West, despite the associated dangers and repercussions to which such actions could lead.

At the height of the rehab squatter movement in June 1981, for instance, members of the local *Junge Gemeinde* in Fürstenwalde, a small city east of the GDR capital, occupied an empty building and sprayed the West Berlin squatter slogan, 'better to squat than to let the houses rot', onto one of the interior walls.<sup>101</sup> The following October, the initiator of this occupation posted a letter to rehab squatters in the Prinzenstraße in West Berlin's Wedding district. The Fürstenwalde squatters claimed to be interested in the 'political motivations' of

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<sup>100</sup> Rink, 'Der Traum ist aus? Hausbesetzer in Leipzig-Connwitz in der 90er Jahren,' p. 120.

<sup>101</sup> BStU, ZA, HA XXII 21940, 'Zwischenbericht, fol.6.

their counterparts in West Berlin. They also wanted to know how the western squatters had managed to maintain control of the building they had occupied without being evicted. 'We are relatively normal young adults (18 years old)', the East Germans wrote. They were trying to follow news of the squatter scene in *Bundesrepublik* as they faced 'similar conditions', whereby there were numerous 'empty buildings' that were in a state of dilapidation. The young East Germans had been able to find out some information about squatting in West Germany through tuning in to western radio stations but wanted to establish direct contact with a 'group of squatters' in the West.<sup>102</sup> Their efforts, alas, proved fruitless, as their letter was duly intercepted by the Stasi. In another example, this time from an article published in the samizdat *Umweltblätter* in the late 1980s, the squatters in East Berlin's Lychener Straße also referred to themselves as 'Instandbesetzer' – a direct reference to the practice of West Berlin's rehab squatters.<sup>103</sup> In 1988, after being served with an eviction notice, this self-styled 'collective' took the unusual and provocative step of mimicking the strategy of their western namesakes, draping a banner reading 'rebel and resist, the Lychener is ours we insist' across the front of the building. Unsurprisingly, this action was followed by their prompt ejection from the premises. However, as the *Umweltblätter* noted, the building was re-occupied shortly after by a new group of GDR squatters.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> BStU, MfS, HA XXII 21940, fol. 3.

<sup>103</sup> HAV, PS 107/22 – *Umweltblätter*, 'Behörden erneut gegen instandbesetzte Lychener 61', April 1988.

<sup>104</sup> HAV, PS 107/22 – *Umweltblätter*, 'Lychener 61 im Prenzlauerberg am Ende', October 1988.

Despite being separated by the Iron Curtain, young East Germans living in illegally squatted apartments in the GDR's run down inner cities often thought of themselves as also belonging to a community of outsiders and non-conformists which transcended the Wall and Germany's Cold War divide. They coveted the same fashions, listened to similar music, and found meaning in the same cultural markers as their western counterparts. On visiting a squatter in Prenzlauer Berg in 1982, two journalists from the West Berlin magazine *Tip* commented that his apartment, covered with anarchist slogans, reminded them of the squats in Kreuzberg.<sup>105</sup> 'During the golden period of the West Berlin squatter movement', as the GDR author Lutz Rathenow put it in *Ost-Berlin: leben vor dem Mauerfall*, 'the practising sympathisers over here believed that they were in tune with the times.'<sup>106</sup> 'Only the demonstrations', Rathenow noted, 'were missing.'<sup>107</sup>

The influence of western squatting was also evident in the naming processes adopted by squatters in the GDR, as the example of those who lived in a squat at number 5 Rankestraße in Dresden attests. Here, the occupants borrowed from their western counterparts' tendency to refer to their buildings in shorthand, through merging the first letter of the street with the house number, coning their squat the 'R5'. The 'R5' itself was a large, three story property containing several apartments, situated some 100 meters from the busy Leipziger Straße. By December 1987, the Stasi file notes, there was only one legitimate tenant left in the building; the remaining rooms were inhabited

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<sup>105</sup> BStU, MfS AOP 9610/83 Band 1/3, fol. 108.

<sup>106</sup> Hauswald and Rathenow, *Ost-Berlin: Leben vor dem Mauerfall*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

by illegal squatters.<sup>108</sup> Pictures of the building's interior indicate that the living conditions were of considerable squalor (see figure 5 & figure 6). Make-shift beds and mattresses, in addition to the presence of electric cookers, indicate that the coal cellars in the building's basement were also inhabited.<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, the squatters evidently took pride in their building, and it was a space that arguably played a role in confirming their outsider identity. 'R5 we love you', 'R5: our home, our future' and 'legal or not, the R5 belongs to us' adorned its interior walls.<sup>110</sup> Pro-glasnost slogans in addition to pamphlets produced by the Church ('Remarks in the State', 'Dialogue or disassociation') suggest some connection, however tenuous, between the inhabitants and the domestic opposition.<sup>111</sup> What is more, the squat's interior was also daubed with anarchy symbols and western slogans, including the lyrics of the rock band *Ton, Steine, Scherben*, as well as the rallying cry of the West German anti-nuclear movement: 'Where the law becomes unjust, resistance becomes duty'. One of the squatters, moreover, had nailed a Hafenstraße street sign to his bed – what we can surely assume was a direct reference to the street in Hamburg's harbour district with several squatted buildings that made national headlines in the mid-1980s when the occupants successfully (and militantly) resisted eviction.<sup>112</sup>

In his influential study of the Soviet Union, the anthropologist Alexei Yurchak puts forward the notion of an 'imaginary West' that existed in late Soviet society, i.e. an 'elsewhere' place and 'a kind of space that was both

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<sup>108</sup> BStU, MfS, BV Dresden, Abt. XX 10476, 'Protokoll über die Besichtigung', fol. 3.

<sup>109</sup> BStU, MfS, *Ibid.*, fols. 11-23.

<sup>110</sup> BStU, MfS, *Ibid.*, fols. 15,19,22.

<sup>111</sup> BStU, MfS, *Ibid.*, fol. 5.

<sup>112</sup> BStU, BV Dresden, Abt. XX 10476, 'Protokoll über die Besichtigung', fols. 20-23.

internal and external to the Soviet reality'.<sup>113</sup> For most citizens, this flight to the 'imaginary West' took the form of watching western television, listening to western music, or cultivating western (mainstream) fashions. For those in the 'R5', and their counterparts elsewhere in the GDR, squatting provided the link between this concrete 'here' and idealised 'elsewhere'. Amongst those who saw themselves as belonging to the GDR's alternative culture, squatting was not just a moment of transgression, but a continuous performance – a performance that bridged the gap between the reality of late Socialism and the 'imaginary West' and by doing so produced something that was manifest and real.

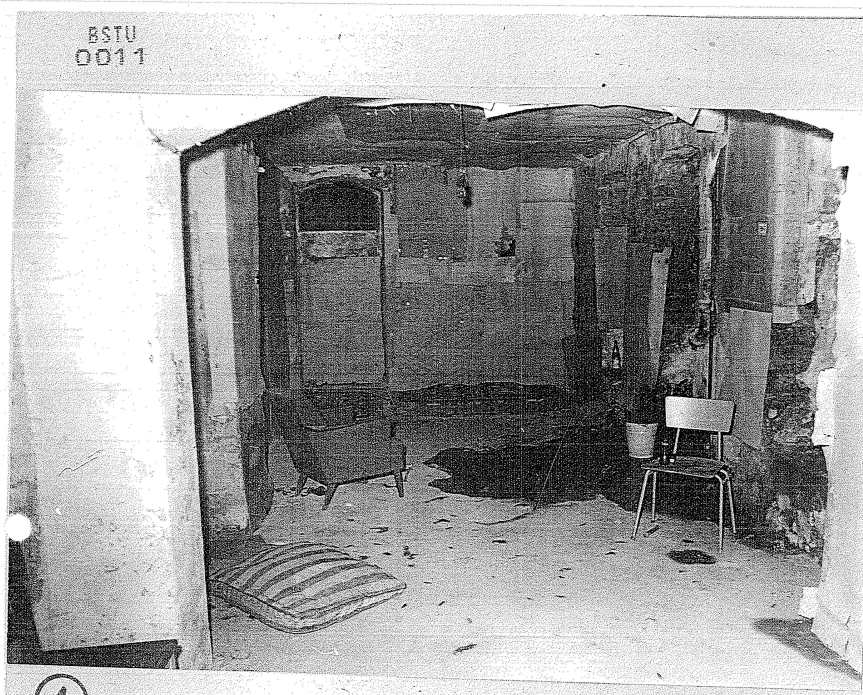


Figure 5.

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<sup>113</sup> Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, CA: Princeton University Press, 2005). Chapter V, here pp. 160-161.





**Figure :** Make-shift accommodation in the basement of the 'R5'. Despite these slum-like conditions, the squat arguably played an important role in the formation and re-affirmation of its inhabitants identities.

This interest that squatting in West Germany inspired amongst those in the East was not, on the whole, reciprocated amongst squatters in the *Bundesrepublik*, however. Although western magazines, books and newsletters occasionally published articles on squatting in the GDR, they provided, by comparison, much more coverage of the squatter movements in neighbouring Western European countries.<sup>114</sup> It was much easier for squatters in West Berlin to obtain information about developments in Frankfurt or Paris than it was to find out about conditions in Friedrichshain or Prenzlauer Berg. The struggles in Western Europe and West Germany, moreover, chimed with their own. While some of the West Berlin squatters could even peer across the Cold War divide from their bedroom or living room windows, events in Amsterdam, London, Zurich, Copenhagen and the towns and cities of the *Bundesrepublik* were

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<sup>114</sup> See, for example, Volkhard Brandes and Bernhard Schön, eds., *Wer sind die Instandbesetzer: Selbstzeugnisse, Dokumente, Analysen - Ein Lesebuch* (Bensheim: Pädex, 1981). Taz-Journal.

mentally much closer. For the majority of squatters in Kreuzberg, hemmed up against the Berlin Wall and only a stone's throw away from the East German capital, the city on the other side of the Cold War divide belonged to a mysterious and different world, beyond their political horizons. This asymmetry in the transfer of ideas and influence, which flowed from west to east, but rarely back again in the opposite direction, would have important implications once the barrier separating the two milieus and their history and traditions was swept away in the winter of 1989-90.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Rehab squatting first emerged in West Berlin in opposition to an urban renewal paradigm which, according to its critics, resulted in rent-inflation, large-scale vacancy and the irreversible destruction of historically important and socially vibrant inner city neighbourhoods and milieus. In many respects, the tactic was a striking success, forcing a public debate on these issues and challenged the authority of planners and technocrats, while at the same time (temporarily) subverting the prerogatives of private property. First initiated by a local citizens' initiative in Kreuzberg in early 1979, by winter of 1980/81 cases of rehab squatting were being recorded across the *Bundesrepublik*. At this juncture, the conditions were conducive to the spread of the practice. First, West Germany had a strong protest culture which had long included the tactic of site occupation in its protest repertoire. Second, the policies of urban renewal being pushed through in West Berlin and in other West German were increasingly being questioned, though the political system at the *Länder* level

seemed incapable or unwilling to address it. And third, and relatedly, there was no shortage of empty buildings to occupy.

As was the case during the Youth Centre Movement that preceded it, rehab squatting provided a point of convergence, in an urban setting, for the *Bundesrepublik's* diverse strands of extra-parliamentary opposition. Over time, loosely coordinated squatter movements emerged. Alongside the opposition to the *Bundesrepublik's* nuclear power programme and the campaign against NATO's stationing of Pershing II missiles in its West German military bases, the squatter movements of the early 1980s, centred in and mediated through urban space, became a central focus of West Germany's extra-parliamentary opposition. Though it initially began as a defensive tactic, however, rehab squatting soon evolved. Increasingly, as we shall see in the following chapter, squatting offered itself not only as a strategy for opposing urban renewal paradigms but also as a means for experimenting with alternative lifestyles. What is more, the burgeoning squatter movements also provided a promising field of action for those wanting to engage in anti-systemic politics, and it is to this history of the search for alternative lifestyles in the context of the escalation of militancy that we shall now turn.

## CHAPTER 5:

### COMMUNITY AND VIOLENCE

#### I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid increase in the number of squats in West Berlin in the winter of 1980-81 was undertaken by individuals and various initiatives broadly belonging to the city's alternative milieu and extra-parliamentary opposition. Writing in the *Kursbuch*, the *taz* journalist Benny Härlin noted that, already by March 1981, buildings had been taken over by 'feminists', 'anti-nuclear groups', 'Young Democrats', by 'members and sympathisers of the SEW' and the Alternative List, by a 'church youth group', by 'rocker-groups', and by 'offensive queers'.<sup>1</sup> For this eclectic mixture, squatting provided more than simply a means for opposing urban renewal, rising rents, vacancy and property speculation, though this would remain a central goal of the burgeoning squatter movement. Highlighting the extent to which the locus of radical politics had shifted from material production to social and cultural reproduction, from the objective class struggle to the left-alternative subject, these squatters were often motivated to occupy empty buildings on account of the opportunities they presented for establishing alternative projects, living and working arrangements, all of which, for the purpose of this chapter, will be encompassed under the term 'alternative lifestyles'.

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<sup>1</sup> Benny Härlin, 'Von Haus zu Haus – Berliner Bewegungsstudien', *Kursbuch* 65(1981), p.27.

This pursuit of alternative lifestyles in the occupied buildings, however, which in itself was no simple undertaking, was further complicated by the ever-present prospect of eviction, on the one hand, and the escalation of violent confrontation between the squatters and the authorities on the other. With more than five years separating the first case of 'rehab squatting' in 1979 and the eviction of the last illegally occupied building in 1984, the West Berlin squatter movement probably triggered more confrontations between activists and the authorities than any other urban protest movement in West German history. Coherence within the heterogeneous squatter milieu, this chapter argues, was forged through a general consensus that the pursuit of alternative lifestyles inside the squatted buildings and militant behaviour on the street that included violent forms of political action were both legitimate acts of resistance. Indeed, for a good many, the viability of the former was based on the willingness to engage in the latter. Within the squatter milieu, disagreements centring on the strategic utility of violence did emerge, and there was a divergence between those who regarded militancy on the street as a means to defend alternative lifestyles and others who increasingly viewed it as the telos of radical politics itself. But for all that, the squatter movements of the early 1980s in West Berlin and elsewhere in the *Bundesrepublik* did not trigger anything near to the same degree of soul-searching among leftist activists as had the paroxysm of violence of the German Autumn. For the squatters, and a good many of the squatter movements' sympathisers, militancy on the street and the pursuit of alternative lifestyles through squatting were widely regarded as a legitimate defensive reaction to the violence of the broader political

economy and its norms, on the one hand, and the violence of the governmental authority of the state embodied in the police, on the other.

## II. ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLES

The alternative living and working arrangements practised in the occupied buildings were by no means uniform, as a documentation produced by architects with links to the movement noted. 'But in all the buildings we are familiar with', the authors added, there were at the very least 'communal kitchens, communal bathrooms' and 'discussion rooms'.<sup>2</sup> Through spatially reconfigured and re-aestheticised occupied buildings, alternative living and working arrangements in the squats differed from those of the traditional nuclear family model, and normative assumptions centering on the 'home' and domestic life were often questioned.<sup>3</sup> Workshops, cafes, bars and spaces for political organisation, moreover, were often integrated into the squats, and many of the occupied buildings functioned as focal points for local leftist initiatives. For the occupants of the KuKuCK, a squat that was home to around 60 people in Kreuzberg's Anhalter Straße, the building, which contained a café, music studio, theatre stage and gallery and served as a meeting place for activists, offered 'not only enough living space for everyone to have, it means more: having fun together, performing theatre, making music, dancing,

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<sup>2</sup> Archetekteninitiative Schöneberg Planung, *Was wird in den besetzten Häusern gemacht: Eine Dokumentation am Beispiel von 13 besetzten Häusern* (West Berlin, 1981), p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Alex Vasudevan, 'Dramaturgies of dissent: the spatial politics of squatting in Berlin, 1968-', *Social & Cultural Geography* 12, no. 3 (2011), p. 293.

celebrating, chatting, watching films.’<sup>4</sup>

Squatting was often undertaken by those already active in West Berlin’s broader extra-parliamentary opposition, in part due to their opposition to urban renewal and the threat it posed but also on account of the opportunities which squatting presented. The autonomous women’s movement provides a case in point, and one social worker writing in the feminist magazine *Courage* described how she had come across many cases where people had been ‘emotionally destroyed’ on account of being forced from their homes. Women, in particular, she argued, missed the community and neighbourhood support structures that had existed in the old tenement districts. In order to pay the more expensive rents in their new apartments, many had to supplement the family income by finding paid employment or taking on extra shifts.<sup>5</sup> A number of activists in the autonomous women’s movement, moreover, commented on the discrimination they faced at the hands of estate agents and landlords. ‘How difficult it is at the moment to find an apartment in Berlin is common knowledge’, wrote one group of female squatters. ‘[F]or us women it is almost impossible,’ they added, to find an apartment as a single woman or a larger group: ‘Therefore we have squatted a building with women and for women’.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, however, squatting provided the opportunity for the city’s autonomous women’s movement to consolidate its infrastructure, and in spring 1981 a women’s group established a feminist research, education and

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*, p. 541.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Frauen besetzen Häuser’, *Courage*, (June 1981), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Wir haben dieses Haus besetzt – es wird von uns instandgehext’, *Taz*, 7. Jan. 1981.

information centre, the *FFBIZ*, in a squatted building in Charlottenburg's Dankelmannstraße. Women's squats were also established in Kreuzberg's Naunystasse and in Schöneberg's Winterfeldstrasse. In the Kotbusser Straße in Kreuzberg, a district with a large population of migrants, a Turkish women's organisation initiated an occupation of the building. Eight women, seven Turkish and one German squatted in the building along with five children.<sup>7</sup> On occupying the 'Hexenhaus' in Kreuzberg's Liegnitzer Strasse, activists from the women's movement converted part of the building into a lesbian house-project, while other individual apartments were renovated and made available to women of the city's overcrowded women's refuge, where some of the squatters had previously been active.<sup>8</sup> From September 1981, the Feminist Women's Health Centre (FFGZ), the first of its kind in the *Bundesrepublik*, was located in the building's ground floor.<sup>9</sup>

As these examples indicate, the alternative living and working arrangements in the squats not only differed from those of the traditional nuclear family model but also from those of the by then conventional shared-flat. In brochures and fliers the West Berlin squatters provided their own accounts of life in the occupied buildings and their transformation from vacant dilapidation to centres of new communities and alternative lifestyles. The self-portrayal of one squat in Kreuzberg's Cuvrystraße, a complex of formerly derelict factory buildings which housed 48 squatters, with another 150

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<sup>7</sup> 'Frauen besetzen Häuser', *Courage*, (June 1981), p. 7, 9.

<sup>8</sup> 'Frauen besetzen Häuser', *Courage*, (June 1981), p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Selbstverwaltete Häuser in Kreuzberg (ed.), *Wir wollen niemals auseinandergeh'n...* (West Berlin, 1983), p. 56.



employed in various alternative workshops in the premises, provides a classic example. With the intention of 'abolishing the distinction between workspace and living space', occupants founded a number of alternative enterprises – including a theatre production, a music school, a language school and a taxi collective – with 'no internal hierarchies' and 'no bosses or owners'.<sup>10</sup> In the section titled 'living', the squatters are pictured sitting together around the kitchen table, or under the leaves of the chestnut trees in the back-courtyard. Individual squatters are also shown in their bedrooms, sitting between shelves of books, potted plants, reading, writing, exercising or contemplating. In a representation of the intimacy that could be found within the group, a series of photographs show two male housemates playing chess in a bathtub.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, this sense of warmth and community within the occupied buildings was described by the author Ingeborg Drewitz, in an article in the *Zeit Magazin* recounting her time spent as a 'godparent' in an occupied building in Schöneberg's Buelowstraße. Here, she impresses on the reader the cosy *Gemütlichkeit* of the squat, with its pictures of trees, animals, birds, fruits and political slogans painted inside the house and in the courtyard and the 'relaxed', happy occupants. This is re-affirmed in the accompanying pictures: one of a squatter sitting in his bedroom with its walls covered in paintings of plants captioned 'the new domesticity'; another showing eight squatters in a kitchen,

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<sup>10</sup> Initiative 'Kerngehäuser Cuvrystrasse', Kerngehäuser: Gewerbehof Cuvrystrasse 20/23, Leben und Arbeiten in SO36 (1980); Kerngehäuse: Gewerbehof Cuvrystrasse, (November, 1982).

<sup>11</sup> Selbstverwaltete Häuser in Kreuzberg (ed.), *Wir wollen niemals auseinandergeh'n...* (West Berlin, 1983), pp. 30-35.

'like a big family, the squatters gather around the table for breakfast'.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, these representations of life inside the occupied buildings depict an ideal of alternative lifestyles, and served in part the function of challenging main-stream press depictions of the squatters as 'political gangsters', 'hooligans', 'rowdies' and 'terrorists'.<sup>13</sup> In one exposé, for instance, the *BZ* described the abovementioned KuKuCK as the 'most dangerous house in Berlin', and with the RAF violence of the 'German Autumn' of 1977 still fresh in the public memory, the conflation of squatters and left-wing terrorists, who were supposedly holed up in their 'criminal refuges', served as a common narrative or *dispositif*.<sup>14</sup> The reality of everyday life in the occupied buildings was often more challenging than that which the brochures and flyers produced by the squatters suggested. Contemporaries recalled the difficulties they faced establishing alternative lifestyles in the squats where the fluctuation of occupants could often be high and where the threat of eviction was always present.<sup>15</sup> Others spoke of myriad problems in the everyday life of the squatters, ranging from increasing disengagement with the internal organisation and upkeep of the building to 'chauvinism (Mackertum) that makes you want to puke'.<sup>16</sup> Still, while a romanticisation of life inside the occupied buildings is best avoided, the importance attached to the search for alternative lifestyles, for all the difficulties this entailed, was considerable. As

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<sup>12</sup> 'Morgen Leute, denkt nur nicht, wir räumen', *Zeit Magazin*, 18. September 1981.

<sup>13</sup> See Suttner, '*Beton Brennt: Hausbesetzer und Selbstverwaltung im Berlin, Wien und Zürich der 80er*', pp. 203-04.

<sup>14</sup> Rolf Amann, *Der moralische Aufschrei: Presse und abweichendes Verhalten am Beispiel der Hausbesetzung in Berlin* (Frankfurt & New York: Campus Verlag, 1985), pp. 90-91.

<sup>15</sup> Härlin, 'Von Haus zu Haus – Berliner Bewegungsstudien,' p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> Häberlen and Smith, 'Struggling for Feelings: The Politics of Emotions in the Radical New Left, c. 1968-84,' p. 632.

squatters in Schöneberg put it in mid-June 1981: 'Many of us have, for the first time, found a true home (Heimat) in the squatted houses . . . In the houses, we try to realise something that does not exist anymore in society: Relationships and Hope.'<sup>17</sup>

The search for alternative lifestyles was often framed as a response to the 'emotional void' of modern life, on the one hand, and an attempt to establish new emotional communities in the spatially reconfigured and re-aestheticised squats, on the other.<sup>18</sup> A re-occurring sentiment articulated by West Berlin's squatters was the desire not 'to live alone and isolated in small apartments' but instead 'together as a group'.<sup>19</sup> Squatting, as those who established a queer house-project put it, offered the opportunity to '[break] out of the isolation of our one-room flats'.<sup>20</sup> One squatter in Kreuzberg's Liegnitzer Strasse described how, before joining the movement, she faced 'a situation that probably everyone knows in one way or another ... unhappiness, doubt, frustration ... Living in isolation and anonymity'. She describes her 'yearning to overcome' her 'inner conflict' and her sense of continued 'alienation'. The squatter movement, or more precisely, the building they occupied, provided her and her 26 housemates 'a chance for us to pursue [our] desires, to at last live out our fantasies'.<sup>21</sup> Squatting, so many of its practitioners hoped, would provide the opportunity to establish communities that would be characterised by their intimacy and

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<sup>17</sup> Quote in *ibid.*, p. 630.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 623-29.

<sup>19</sup> PT Archiv, Häuserkampf W. Berlin 9-11/80 – 'Erklärung und Aufruf zur Unterstützung der Instandbesetzer', October 1980.

<sup>20</sup> PT Archiv, 'Tuntenhaus', undated.

<sup>21</sup> S.H.I.K (ed.), *Wir wollen niemals auseinandergeh'n...* (West Berlin, 1983).

warmth.<sup>22</sup> 'I want to stay here and live, to be at home, [I want] security and love', one squatter in Schöneberg's Bülowstraße confided in his diary. Reflecting on his relationship with his fellow housemates, he noted that he hoped to break down the existing interpersonal barriers that remained between them, to 'understand' their 'feelings' and their 'problems' and 'to live [together] without any fear'.<sup>23</sup>

This search for alternative lifestyles – the strive for inter-personal warmth and closeness, the importance of authenticity and immediacy – marked a continuation of the praxis of the alternative milieu which had emerged during the previous decade. So too did the importance of the communal kitchen or *Wohnküche* as a focal point of the community inside the squats, the do-it-yourself-aesthetic that characterised the occupied buildings, and the break with certain conventional middle-class values such as order and cleanliness – all of which were characteristics of smaller-scale collective living arrangements in the humble shared flat, whose numbers proliferated over the course of the 1970s. The squatters' endeavours to establish horizontal organisational structures, and their attempts to (re)establish the 'unity of work and life' in the occupied buildings, moreover, were redolent of the projects pioneered in rural communes and in some of the autonomous youth centres that were established

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<sup>22</sup> See Sven Reichardt, 'Is 'Warmth' a Mode of Social Behaviour? Considerations on a Cultural History of the Left-Alternative Milieu from the Late 1960s to the Mid 1980s', *Behemoth: A Journal on Civilisation* 3, no. 2 (2010).

<sup>23</sup> 'Hausbücher aus den besetzten Häusern Berlin: Bülowstraße 54, Potsdamer Straße 157/59', *Alternative* 142(February 1982), pp. 26-29.

during the 1970s.<sup>24</sup> This importance placed on subjectivities and concrete experience marked a departure from the praxis of the dogmatic New Left whose radicalism was informed by the 'coldness of abstract theory', on the one hand, as well as the 'puritanical communist lifestyles' (Koen) of the K-Groups, on the other.<sup>25</sup> But this attempt to establish alternative communities would be undertaken in a testing context that was characterised by confrontation with the authorities and escalating militancy and political violence.

### III. MILITANCY, VIOLENCE AND COUNTERVIOLENCE

The cover picture of a recently published collection of photographs of the squatting movement in West Berlin shows an image of two masked individuals in the foreground, their backs to the camera, cobblestones in hand. In front of them is a makeshift barricade, assembled out of an overturned, burnt-out car and other debris, and beyond this, two police water cannons emerging from a shroud of tear-gas.<sup>26</sup> Shot by Lothar Schmid, this depiction of a clash of unequal of forces was portrayed by a number of contemporary photographers.<sup>27</sup> Together with pictures of cowering police officers, overturned vehicles and burning barricades, the image of the masked militant, armed with a catapult or petrol bomb and facing off against the goliath of state-power, was widely

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<sup>24</sup> For an overview of the rural communes in the FRG see Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*, pp. 459-79.

<sup>25</sup> Reichardt, 'Is 'Warmth' a Mode of Social Behaviour? Considerations on a Cultural History of the Left-Alternative Milieu from the Late 1960s to the Mid 1980s.' Koenen, *Das Rote Jahrzehnt: Unsere Kleine Deutsche Kulturrevolution, 1967-1977*, p. 195.

<sup>26</sup> Lothar Schmid, *Häuserkampf im Berlin der 1980er* (Berlin: Berlin Story Verlag, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> For an overview of recently published visual sources see Hanno Hochmuth, 'Sehnsuchtsbilder. West-Berlin in neuen Fotobänden', *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 11, no. 2 (2014).

circulated in squatter pamphlets and in the alternative press and provides a dominant motif in insider histories of the movement, testifying to the symbolic and practical importance which was attached to violent forms of political action.<sup>28</sup>

Violent confrontations between the squatters, their supporters and the authorities was a regular feature of the squatter movement throughout its history. The twelve months between October 1980 and September 1981, however, were characterised by a particular intensity. During this period, there were at least 53 demonstrations, blockades and riots which were directly connected to squatting. That is a rate of roughly one per week. Fifteen of these events drew over a thousand participants, with major demonstrations drawing as many as 15,000. Two-thirds of these events triggered violent confrontations with the authorities, ranging from small-scale scuffles to major rioting.<sup>29</sup> Recounting the scenes in May 1981 where 1,000 demonstrators clashed with riot-police on Schöneberg's Winterfeldplatz, one eye-witness described how the two sides marched towards each other like 'adversarial armies', with the officers beating their truncheons against their shields and the squatters clapping together the cobblestones they held in their hands to the same rhythm as the punk music blaring out of a squatted building in the background.<sup>30</sup> Such

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<sup>28</sup> In one influential self-history of the Autonomen, for instance, the chapter on the history of squatting in West Berlin includes twenty images that depict violent forms of political action, such as militants throwing Molotov cocktails or pictures captured 'burning barricades'. See Grauwacke, *Autonome in Bewegung: Aus den ersten 23 Jahren*.

<sup>29</sup> Klaus Hermann, 'Chronologie der Räumungen und Durchsuchungen sowie anderer wichtiger Ereignisse, die in Bezug zu den Instandbesetzungen standen, vom 10.10.1980 bis zum 27.9.1981,' (West Berlin: FU Berlin, 1985), pp. 116-37.

<sup>30</sup> Aust and Rosenblatt, *Hausbesetzer: wofür sie kämpfen, wie sie leben und wie sie leben wollen*, pp. 186-87.

ritualised encounters with the police, would remain a feature of the city's and West Germany's radical protest culture throughout the 1980s.

The militant repertoire of action that incorporated political violence extended to attacks on property, threats and coercion. This frequently manifested itself during demonstrations in hit and run actions undertaken by small, mobile groups. In the aftermath of the first violent protest connected with the West Berlin squatter movement in October 1980, one squatter described in the paper *Akut und Praktisch* how '30/40 of us (moved) to Kottbusser Tor ... smashed supermarket and bank windows und other "pig-businesses"', which included the local SPD offices.<sup>31</sup> Between 12 December 1980 and 7 April 1982, West Berlin's Office for the Protection of the Constitution identified some 143 incendiary and bomb attacks on properties – that is roughly 9 per month or one every 3 to 4 days – in the city which were thought to be connected with the squatter movement and its 'fight against the pig-system'.<sup>32</sup> The majority of these attacks were undertaken under the cover of darkness, giving credence to the slogan 'you have the might, to us belongs the night', which enjoyed currency among certain circles in the squatter milieu. In half of all cases, the Molotov cocktail proved to be the incendiary of choice. Targets included the offices and buildings of housing corporations and demolition companies, banks and department stores and other 'symbols of capitalism', in addition to police patrol vehicles, police stations and other public

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<sup>31</sup> *Akut und Praktisch*, Oct. 1980, in Papiertiger Archiv Berlin, Ordner Häuserkämpfe, 9–11/1980.

<sup>32</sup> Landesamt-für-Verfassungsschutz, 'Der 'Häuserkampf' in Berlin (West),' (West Berlin 1982), pp. 47-48. According to the report, a direct connection had been established in 60% of cases, in the remaining 40% of cases a connection was 'suspected'. See *ibid.*, p. 48.

buildings.<sup>33</sup> Such attacks were often framed as a retaliation against raids and evictions of occupied buildings and the imprisonment of squatters arrested during violent confrontations. In January 1981, a group referring to itself as the 'Autonomous Republics of Neukölln and Kreuzberg' declared: 'Our hostages are their window panes, their cars, their wealth. *Make it expensive for them!!!* ... every day one of us sits in prison there should be 1 million DM damage! For every evicted house 1 million extra! For every conviction 1 million extra!'<sup>34</sup> Alongside the motto of the rehab squatters, 'better to squat than let the houses rot', 'one million per eviction' established itself as one of the militant rallying calls within the squatter milieu.<sup>35</sup>

Militancy that incorporated violent forms of political action gained currency within the squatter milieu in part due to its perceived effectiveness. The belief that 'without violence, the movement would never have come into being', as one former militant put it, was widespread.<sup>36</sup> This was a sentiment that was articulated by several squatters during a discussion on militancy and violence with '1968 leftists' held in Kreuzberg's KuKuCK in December 1981.<sup>37</sup> The December riots of 1980, which were followed by the rapid expansion in the number of occupied buildings in the city and forced the authorities into making a number of political concessions, played an important role in establishing this

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>34</sup> 'Flugblatt der Autonome Republiken Neukölln Kreuzberg', quoted in Bernd Sonnewald and Jürgen Raabe-Zimmermann, *Die "Berliner Linie" und die Hausbesetzer-Szene* Politologische Studien (West Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 1983), p. 69.

<sup>35</sup> Sedlmaier, *Consumption and Violence: Radical Protest in Cold-War West Germany*, p. 231.

<sup>36</sup> Tomas Lecorte, *Wir tanzen bis zum Ende: Die Geschichte eines Autonomen* (Hamburg: Galgenberg, 1992), p. 82.

<sup>37</sup> 'Gegen/Gewalt: Diskussion zwischen 68er Linken, Startbahn-West-Gegner und berliner Hausbesetzern im "Kuckuck" (Kunst- und Kulturzentrum Kreuzberg) am 17. 12. 81', *Alternative* 142(February 1982).



narrative and provided the burgeoning squatter movement with a founding myth.<sup>38</sup> Squatters recalled feelings of togetherness and solidarity forged with local residents during the upheaval. 'I've never experienced as much sympathy for the movement as after [the December riots]', as one squatter put it during the discussion in the KuCKuK.<sup>39</sup> Reports of the rioting in the alternative press, moreover, included pictures of 'normal' citizens joining in the plundering and old ladies opening their doors to provide refuge from those fleeing the police, reflecting an idea of the radical leftist milieu overcoming its (self-imposed) isolation through violent street-fighting.<sup>40</sup> And, with years of non-violent grassroots opposition providing few tangible policy changes, it was not only militant squatters who regarded violent protest as having forced an otherwise unwilling political establishment to the negotiating table. As Werner Orlowski, a long-time local activist in the grassroots opposition to urban renewal put it after the December riots, 'a single cobblestone yielded more than two years on the rehabilitation council.'<sup>41</sup> Within the squatter milieu and amongst its supporters, therefore, many held the impression that mainstream politics only responded to the violent tactics it condemned.

In their introduction to a recent publication, Neithard Bulst, Ingrid Gilher-Hotlley and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt argue that 'violence cannot be

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<sup>38</sup> Manrique, *Marginalisierung und Militanz: Jugendliche Bewegungsmilieus im Aufruhr*, p. 88f.

<sup>39</sup> 'Gegen/Gewalt: Diskussion zwischen 68er Linken, Startbahn-West-Gegner und berliner Hausbesetzern im "Kuckuck" (Kunst- und Kulturzentrum Kreuzberg) am 17. 12. 81.' p. 16.

<sup>40</sup> Häberlen and Smith, 'Struggling for Feelings: The Politics of Emotions in the Radical New Left, c. 1968-84,' p. 634.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Sedlmaier, *Consumption and Violence: Radical Protest in Cold-War West Germany*, p. 229.

understood without the discourses that accompany, limit, and expand it.<sup>42</sup> Violent forms of political action – whether it took the form of building barricades, defending occupied buildings from eviction, engaging the authorities during demonstrations, rioting, vandalism, attacks on property or the threat of destruction – were framed by the squatters as a defensive reaction to the broader ‘structural violence’ of the prevailing socio-economic system, on the one hand, and heavy-handed policing, on the other.<sup>43</sup> The term ‘structural violence’ itself came from the field of peace research and was coined by Johan Galtung in 1969, though the radical left’s understanding of this concept stemmed back to the anti-authoritarian movement of the 1960s and its re-reading of the locus of violence in terms of ‘structural relations’.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, as Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey argues, ‘[w]ithout knowing the term, the New Left had recognized what was later on coined “structural violence” by Johan Galtung and made it a focus of discussion.’<sup>45</sup> For the 1960s APO, the clearest example of the dynamic of ‘structural violence’ was to be found in imperialism and Western interventions in the Third World.<sup>46</sup>

Within the extra-parliamentary opposition of the seventies and eighties, the focus shifted to the ways in which ‘structural violence’ was perceived as

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<sup>42</sup> Neithard Bulst, Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, ‘Einleitung,’ in *Gewalt im politischen Raum: Fallanalysen vom Spätmittelalter bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Neithard Bulst, Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (Frankfurt: Campus, 2008), p. 11.

<sup>43</sup> Anders and Sedlmaier, ‘The Limits of the Legitimate: The Quarrel over ‘Violence’ between Autonomous Groups and the German Authorities,’ p. 279.

<sup>44</sup> See Johan Galtung, ‘Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,’ *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969).

<sup>45</sup> Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, ‘Transformation by Subversion? The New Left and the Question of Violence,’ in *Changing the world, changing oneself: political protest and collective identities in West Germany and the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn 2010), p. 166.

<sup>46</sup> Hanshew, *Terror and Democracy in West Germany*, p. 83ff.

manifesting itself in the *Bundesrepublik* itself. A re-occurring motif in the alternative press which evoked this 'structural violence' was the superimposition of images – nuclear power plants, military hardware, prisons, and modern tower-blocks – in a collage depicting the 'organised inhumanity' of West German society.<sup>47</sup> For activists in various social movements, 'structural violence' was to be found in military spending and the Cold War arms race; in environmental degradation and the expansion of the FRG's domestic nuclear power programme; in the West German 'security state'; in patriarchy; and, importantly for the squatters, in urban renewal policies that destroyed the traditional urban fabric on the one hand and reorganised it into 'monotonous concrete silos that suffocate any humanity' on the other.<sup>48</sup> It was 'precisely this violence', a statement by the squatter council read after the riots in December 1980, 'against which we are defending ourselves through the occupations'. Linking the legitimacy of squatting with that of militancy, the statement added that, should there be further attempts to evict the occupied buildings or to criminalise the movement, they would 'react to this violence accordingly'.<sup>49</sup> This framing of militancy which incorporated violent actions as a response to the violence of urban renewal was not restricted to the militant squatters but was also echoed by moderate citizens' initiatives and the wider extra-parliamentary left.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> See Taz-Journal, p. 113.

<sup>48</sup> Ermittlungsausschuß Mehringhof (ed.), *Dokumentation Dezember Berlin 1980* (West Berlin, 1981), p. 6

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. pp. 6-7.

<sup>50</sup> See Anders and Sedlmaier, 'The Limits of the Legitimate: The Quarrel over 'Violence' between Autonomous Groups and the German Authorities,' pp. 296-97.

The authorities' heavy-handed response to squatting, moreover, which included the criminalisation of the practice and the movement through the application of the controversial paragraph 129a of the Criminal Code that pertained to the 'forming of criminal or terrorist organisations', fed into the narrative that framed violent forms of political action as reactive. A commonly held view within the squatter milieu and the wider extra-parliamentary left of the period was that authoritarian tendencies lurked behind the *Bundesrepublik's* democratic veneer and the squatters went to great length to contextualise militant actions through documenting state violence in their numerous *Gegendarstellungen* produced after particular flashpoints or violent episodes in the movement's history.<sup>51</sup> The first page of one such documentation, published in September 1981, claimed that 'more than 2000' squatters and their supporters have been injured, with some suffering broken limbs, 'the loss of eyesight ... brain-damage etc'.<sup>52</sup> The publication's cover picture, moreover, featured a demonstrator lying on the ground covering his head and an officer in full riot-gear standing over him, his truncheon raised as if about to strike. In a similar fashion, the *taz* reported that during one violent demonstration a female demonstrator caught up in the melee was beaten in such a brutal manner by an officer that his truncheon 'broke into pieces'.<sup>53</sup> In the summer of 1981, the paper described the 'frayed nerves' among West Berlin's squatter

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<sup>51</sup> Exemplary are Ermittlungsausschuß Mehringhof (ed.), *Dokumentation Dezember Berlin 1980* (West Berlin, 1981); Kuno Habersbuch (ed.), *'Berliner Linie' gegen Instandbesetzer. Die 'Vernunft' schlägt immer wieder zu! Dokumentation der Ereignisse vom 3. 2. 79 bis zum 11. 8. 81* (West Berlin, 1981); Ermittlungsausschuß Mehringhof (ed.), *abgeräumt? 8 Häuser werden geräumt ... Klaus-Jürgen Rattay tot* (West Berlin, 1981).

<sup>52</sup> Habersbuch (ed.), *'Berliner Linie' gegen Instandbesetzer*, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> 'So viele Steine wie noch nie', *Tageszeitung*, 29. June. 1981.

movement, brought on by their 'fear of the organised violence of the state, cudgelling pigs' and the prospect of imprisonment.<sup>54</sup>

The repeated confrontations with the authorities that the squatter movement gave rise to, which were described in the alternative press and recounted in the everyday language of the squatters through 'the semantics of cruelty and insidiousness', served to reinforce a *Feindbild* of the brutal authorities.<sup>55</sup> In particular, police raids on squatted buildings were experienced as a violent intrusion into the squatters' *Lebenswelt*. Through investing energy into renovating 'their houses' and into constructing communities, squatters often developed strong emotional attachments to the occupied buildings, and the ordeal of eviction, which at times was followed with the demolition of the property, could be traumatic. One squatter told of the nerve-wracking 'moment, when they [the police] smash in the door down below. You hear crashing and banging and don't know what's coming'.<sup>56</sup> Another West Berlin squatter described the clearance of his squat and its subsequent demolition as 'perhaps comparable with the death of an acquaintance'.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, in Freiburg, following the eviction of the 'Schwarzwaldhof' in March 1981, another squatter described how they 'had to leave somewhere that for nine months was filled with *our* lives, [somewhere] that is now occupied by the pigs, who in their

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<sup>54</sup> 'Erst mal Sense mit dem Häuserkampf', *Tageszeitung*, 6. June. 1981.

<sup>55</sup> Härlin, 'Von Haus zu Haus – Berliner Bewegungsstudien,' p. 10.; Anders and Sedlmaier, 'The Limits of the Legitimate: The Quarrel over 'Violence' between Autonomous Groups and the German Authorities,' p. 279.

<sup>56</sup> 'Frauen besetzen Häuser', *Courage*, (June 1981), p. 9

<sup>57</sup> Cited in Häberlen and Smith, 'Struggling for Feelings: The Politics of Emotions in the Radical New Left, c. 1968-84,' p. 632.

ignorance and obsession with order trample on everything we built'.<sup>58</sup> 'Now', the evicted squatter added, 'I'm filled with hate, rage and sorrow', but 'my hate and my rage work against resignation'.<sup>59</sup> Such experiences, accompanied by the mix of powerful emotions they often served to trigger – and, from the perspective of the squatters, to legitimise – violent forms of political action. In the increasingly charged atmosphere in West Berlin in the early 1980s, in a period marked by regular demonstrations, occupations and evictions, all of which served as potential flashpoints for confrontation between the squatters and the authorities, 'the narrative of violence', as Anders and Sedlmaier put it, 'had found its patterns and its rhythm: violence and counterviolence lent legitimacy to each other.'<sup>60</sup>

There was, of course, a considerable number of squatters who were alarmed by the escalation of violence and counterviolence. 'I often think to myself: all this violence is pointless', reflected one West Berlin squatter who claimed not to have the same 'rage' that drove others to violent actions and spoke of being 'pissed off' after rioters smashed the windows of the shops on the Kurfürstendamm on 12 April 1981, as it 'really isolated us from the population'.<sup>61</sup> Many, moreover, no longer felt safe going to demonstrations which had '[become] really too brutal', as one squatter put it.<sup>62</sup> In a heated

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<sup>58</sup> 'Räumung des Schwarzwaldhofs: Kundgebung eines Bewohners', in Brandes and Schön, *Wer sind die Instandbesetzer: Selbstzeugnisse, Dokumente, Analysen - Ein Lesebuch*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>59</sup> 'Räumung des Schwarzwaldhofs: Kundgebung eines Bewohners', in *ibid.* pp. 77-78.

<sup>60</sup> Anders and Sedlmaier, 'The Limits of the Legitimate: The Quarrel over 'Violence' between Autonomous Groups and the German Authorities,' p. 299.

<sup>61</sup> Jürgen Bacia and Klaus-Jürgen Scherer, *Passt bloss auf! : Was will die neue Jugendbewegung?* (West Berlin: Olle und Wolter, 1981), p. 131.

<sup>62</sup> Monika Savier, 'Mädchen in Bewegung,' in *Autonomie aber wie! Mädchen, Alltag, Abenteuer* ed. Angela McRobbie and Monika Savier (Munich: Verlag Frauenoffensive, 1982), pp. 41-42.

discussion on violence held in the KuKuCK squat in December 1981, former 68ers attempted to impress upon the squatters the importance of engaging with ‘forms of resistance [that were] free of [cobble]stones’, stressing that the violence of the squatters only served to justify the movement’s criminalisation and heavy-handed policing in the minds of the average citizen. The minutes from this meeting, published in the West Berlin journal *alternative*, indicate that their appeals were met with scepticism and downright hostility.<sup>63</sup> Other erstwhile student radicals aired their criticism more publically. In an interview given to West Berlin’s *Tip* magazine, Bernd Rabehl, for one, spoke of the ‘irrationality’ of the ‘friend-enemy-mythology’ of the squatters – a tendency which, he claimed, provided fertile ground for a new authoritarianism to sprout within the radical left.<sup>64</sup>

Within the squatter milieu, moreover, aspersions were cast on the aggressive alpha-male culture that could be identified amongst those who experienced their ‘masculine kick’ in the violent exchanges with the authorities.<sup>65</sup> In a letter to the *taz* criticising the ‘new chauvinism’ of the movement’s leather-clad ‘hard men’, one squatter wrote that, ‘again and again they mouth off about their adventure stories after “incidents” on the street’.<sup>66</sup> Others observed that the macho-culture which street-fighting fostered served to

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<sup>63</sup> ‘Gegen/Gewalt: Diskussion zwischen 68er Linken, Startbahn-West-Gegner und berliner Hausbesetzern im "Kuckuck" (Kunst- und Kulturzentrum Kreuzberg) am 17. 12. 81,’ pp. 6-23.

<sup>64</sup> The interview is reproduced in Bacia and Scherer, *Passt bloss auf! : Was will die neue Jugendbewegung?*, here, p. 304.

<sup>65</sup> Street-fighters were often quick to show off the scars and injuries obtained during clashes on the streets or police interrogations. See Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*, p. 565.

<sup>66</sup> ‘Leserbriefe btr.: Neuer Chauvinismus’, *Taz*, 31. July. 1981; ‘Besetzerinnen über ihre miesen Erfahrungen mit Besetzern: Ein neuer Chauvinismus’, *Taz*, 27. July. 1981

re-enforce traditional gender divisions within the squatter milieu. Female squatters who engaged in the violent confrontations during demonstrations, one contemporary argued, had to be 'cool and strong, better [at throwing stones] than the guys', a process that resulted in them conforming to a 'male behavioural role'.<sup>67</sup>

Following discussions at a 'National Rehab Squatter Congress' held on 28-29 May 1981 in Münster, the majority of the 700 delegates stressed their desire for a non-violent solution to the opposition to urban renewal policies while only a minority called for violent resistance. Similarly, in West Berlin, a number of squatters stressed the importance of constructive grass-roots organisation in the local neighbourhoods rather than aggressive posturing.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, to the extent to which a '*Gewaltfrage*' (discussion on violence) emerged within the squatter milieu, it centred above all on the strategic utility of violence rather than its legitimacy.<sup>69</sup> While some would come to the conclusion 'that it's pointless with the cobblestones, with the barricades and all that ... because the cops outnumber [us] anyway and always win', the escalation of violence and counterviolence would provide a crucible for the further radicalisation of those who framed the squatter movement as 'military' conflict.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Savier, 'Mädchen in Bewegung,' p. 16.

<sup>68</sup> Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*, p. 559.

<sup>69</sup> Sedlmaier, *Consumption and Violence: Radical Protest in Cold-War West Germany*, p. 231.

<sup>70</sup> Savier, 'Mädchen in Bewegung,' p. 2. pp. 41-42.; PT Archiv, 'Häuserkampf 1981/1982 1987,' (1987), p. 2.



#### IV. THE HÄUSERKAMPF AND THE AUTONOMEN

The violent history of the squatter movements in West Berlin and elsewhere, as Freia Anders demonstrates, played a central role in the formation of the *Autonomen* (autonomists).<sup>71</sup> Described by the *taz* as the ‘residue of radicalism’, the political terrain of the *Autonomen*, as one history of the movement puts it, ‘lay somewhere between that of the Greens and the RAF, somewhere between parliamentary participation and guerrilla struggle.’<sup>72</sup> For the *Autonomen*, the occupied buildings did not only serve for experimenting with alternative lifestyles but also as ‘launching pads’ for initiating a ‘direct confrontation with the state’.<sup>73</sup> Often critical of those within the squatter milieu who strove ‘to organise their life differently, but don’t fight against the system’, they framed the squatting movement primarily as the ‘*Häuserkampf*’ – a term which has military connotations, evoking the idea of urban warfare.<sup>74</sup>

In their hastily penned documentations and leaflets, and their position papers in the journal *Radikal*, the autonomists and self-styled ‘militant squatters’ documented little about life in their houses, rather focusing ‘above all [on] actual fighting strategies (*Kampfpläne*)’.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, militancy which incorporated violent forms of political action in confrontations with the authorities was not so much regarded as a tactical necessity as fetishised as an end in itself. The cathartic release experienced during the short-lived moments

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<sup>71</sup> Anders, ‘Wohnraum, Freiraum, Widerstand: Die Formierung der Autonomen in den Konflikten um Hausbesetzungen Anfang der achtziger Jahre.’

<sup>72</sup> Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonisation of Everyday Life* p. 188.

<sup>73</sup> ‘Häuserkampf 1981/1982 1987,’ p. 1.

<sup>74</sup> Geronimo, *Feuer und Flamme: Zur Geschichte der Autonomen*, p. 120. p. 120; See also, Grauwacke, *Autonome in Bewegung: Aus den ersten 23 Jahren*.

<sup>75</sup> Grauwacke, *Autonome in Bewegung: Aus den ersten 23 Jahren*, p. 39.

of boundary transgression where power-relations were probed and tested, was often vividly described. 'This time, no panic, no paranoia, no arrests and the cops radioing for help,' one squatter wrote following violent rioting in Kreuzberg in October 1980. 'On the street an awesome [geiles] feeling, and the stones beat rhythmically'.<sup>76</sup> For these militants, '[t]he feeling of "breaking through" itself, as Häberlen and Smith argue, 'became one of the central goals of radical politics ... the feelings of liberation, of empowerment, of overcoming fear and frustration when rioting became inherently political.'<sup>77</sup>

The symbolic and practical importance which these 'militant squatters' attached to violent forms of political action was articulated not only in pamphlets and discussion papers but was also expressed through cultivating the style of the street-fighter. Central to this look was the leather jacket, an item of clothing within the *Bundesrepublik's* extra-parliamentary opposition which, since the sixties, had served as an 'expression of anarchistic militancy'.<sup>78</sup> The back of the jacket, normally black, was often adorned with the squatter or anarchy symbol, and worn over a black hooded sweatshirt. A neck-shawl and earrings were commonplace accessories, while ex-army trousers and jackboots added to the martial look.<sup>79</sup> During demonstrations and in confrontations with the authorities, militant squatters often brought additional paraphernalia, such

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<sup>76</sup> Cited in Häberlen and Smith, 'Struggling for Feelings: The Politics of Emotions in the Radical New Left, c. 1968-84,' p. 634.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., pp. 634-35.

<sup>78</sup> Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*, p. 642.

<sup>79</sup> For a number of excellent caricatures of the style of the militant squatter see Detlev et al., eds., *Legal, Illegal, Scheißegal: Der illustrierte Häuserkampf* (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 1981).

as motorcycle helmets, balaclavas, goggles and heavy leather gloves.<sup>80</sup> Testament to the trans-national diffusion of radical protest cultures during the period, this was a look donned not only amongst West Berlin's militant squatters but also cultivated by their counterparts in the Netherlands and other Western European cities, too.<sup>81</sup>

The outfit of the militant squatter, resembling a 'modern knight's armour' as Gerd Koenen put it, served a pragmatic purpose.<sup>82</sup> The heavy leather, stuffed with newspaper, could protect the body, at least to some extent, from a truncheon blow, the neck-shawl wrapped around the nose provided some relief from tear-gas, and the balaclava prevented identification. However, this stylisation also marked a conscious departure from those who identified with the alternative milieu through their long-hair, cords and knitted sweaters.<sup>83</sup> In contrast to the patchwork of colours worn by those in the alternative milieu, the street-fighter's hue tended towards jet-black; instead of relaxed postures, their bearing was characterised by 'intensity and tension'.<sup>84</sup>

In April 1981, the Federal Criminal Police Office estimated that around 1,000 squatters belonged to the squatter movement's 'militant wing' – not a majority, but a significant number and a highly visible minority nevertheless.<sup>85</sup> Some of these squatters had been radicalised in their confrontations with the authorities, for others the struggle over urban space provided a stage for them

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<sup>80</sup> See the various pictures in Taz-Journal.

<sup>81</sup> For the 'squatter uniform' in Amsterdam see Owens, *Cracking Under Pressure: Narrating the Decline of the Amsterdam Squatters' Movement*.

<sup>82</sup> Koenen, *Das Rote Jahrzehnt: Unsere Kleine Deutsche Kulturrevolution, 1967-1977*, p. 345.

<sup>83</sup> For the contrasting styles see the pictures in Taz-Journal, p. 116.

<sup>84</sup> Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*, p. 643.

<sup>85</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 561.

to act out their radical politics which incorporated violent forms of political action. There were also a considerable number of predominantly young individuals for whom squatting and the violent confrontations which it triggered whetted their appetite for adventure. Although the influence of the so-called 'militant wing' within the squatter milieu would wane over time, which, as we shall see in the next chapter, was primarily a result of their refusal to enter into discussions with the authorities over the legalisation of the occupied buildings, the history of confrontation would have a longer-term impact for the FRG's radical leftist opposition. For not only would the squatter movements in West Berlin and elsewhere serve as crucibles for the formation of the *Autonomen*, as Anders points out, but also the ritualisation of violent confrontation that was evident in these movements would establish itself as a regular feature of the *Bundesrepublik's* protest culture of the 1980s, continuing into the 1990s.<sup>86</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

The West Berlin squatter movement emerged in a context in which the influence of Marxist K-Groups within the extra-parliamentary opposition was waning and the number of those belonging to West Germany's loosely structured 'alternative milieu' was at its peak. Between the end of the seventies and the early 1980s, the number of West Germans identifying with the

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<sup>86</sup> Anders, 'Wohnraum, Freiraum, Widerstand: Die Formierung der Autonomen in den Konflikten um Hausbesetzungen Anfang der achtziger Jahre.' See also Anders and Sedlmaier, 'The Limits of the Legitimate: The Quarrel over 'Violence' between Autonomous Groups and the German Authorities.'

alternative milieu was estimated at between 700,000 and 1,3 million according to contemporary surveys – that is up to 15 per cent of those between 15 and 30.<sup>87</sup> To a significant extent, the search for alternative lifestyles was embedded in the traditions of this milieu. At the same time, however, the degree of confrontation that characterised the history of the squatter movement served as a catalyst for a new strain of radical politics. Although the autonomists incorporated certain tenets of the left-alternative habitus – the importance of autonomy, immediacy and authenticity, for instance – increasingly they sought to realise these goals through violent political action.

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<sup>87</sup> Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*, p. 42.



# **CHAPTER 6:**

## **THE RISE AND FALL OF THE WEST BERLIN**

### **SQUATTERS' MOVEMENT**

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter begins by looking more closely at the squatter milieu itself and the emergence of a political movement centred in and around the occupied buildings and with links to the city's broader extra-parliamentary opposition. The chapter also identifies some of the tensions that emerged within the movement, and examines the ways in which the authorities attempted to exploit these in order to regain the initiative which they had lost following the December riots and the Gaski affair and the subsequent rapid increase in the number of occupied buildings in the city. The chapter then focuses on the polarised situation of summer 1981, in which the squatter movement and the newly elected CDU administration faced each other off: a series of events that culminated in the tragic death of one squatter. The chapter also charts the demise of the movement and its broader legacy for West Berlin and the city's APO. The chapter ends by looking at a peculiar development where West German squatters occupied a tract of GDR territory that lay on the Western side of Berlin Wall, before it was transferred to the West Berlin authorities.

## II. MILIEU AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The West German media tended to frame the urban protests and unrest of the early 1980s in terms of a broader 'youth unrest'. In contrast to the 1960s, it was the young generation in general, rather than students in particular, who were seen as constituting the ranks of the FRG's radical opposition.<sup>1</sup> In December 1980, in the aftermath of the violent confrontations in West Berlin and in other West German cities, *Der Spiegel* led with a cover story entitled: 'Youth Riots. West Berlin, Zürich, Amsterdam, Freiburg, Bremen, Hanover, Hamburg'.<sup>2</sup> Writing following the eviction of a squat in Freiburg, one reporter noted that the 'protest potential' was becoming 'ever less intellectual and ever more – younger'.<sup>3</sup>

The majority of the squatter milieu in the *Bundesrepublik* in the early 1980s was indeed composed of a relatively young cohort. According to a report compiled by the Federal Criminal Police Office in 1981, 90 per cent of West German squatters were under 30 years old and a half of them were under 21.<sup>4</sup> The age profile of the squatters in West Berlin followed a similar pattern. Statistics gathered by West Berlin's Minister of the Interior between 1979-83 indicate that 64 per cent of squatters identified by the authorities were under

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrichs and Balz, 'Individualität und Revolte im neoliberalen Aufbruch: Annäherungen an eine Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte der europäischen Protestbewegung der 1980er Jahre,' p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Der Spiegel*, 52/1980, 20. December 1980.

<sup>3</sup> Wolfgang Prosinger, quoted in Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*, pp. 535-36.

<sup>4</sup> 'Zusammenfassender Bericht des Bundeskriminalamtes über Hausbesetzungen und damit zusammenhängende Ereignisse im Jahr 1981,' p. 18. in: Bundesarchiv Koblenz, B 106, Nr. 113186, Bd9: Hausbesetzungen, cited *ibid.*, p. 536.



the age of 25, and one in four were under 21.<sup>5</sup> Still, although the core of the milieu consisted of those between 18 and 30, the age spectrum of the squatter milieu and other social movements of the period was as broad if not broader than that of the student movement of the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> Whereas five per cent of the West Berlin squatters identified in the Minister of Interior's report were aged between 14 and 18, 13 per cent were over 30 and five per cent were older than 35.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of its social composition, the squatter milieu in West Berlin and elsewhere in the *Bundesrepublik* was certainly more stratified than that of the anti-authoritarian student movement of the 1960s. Just under two-fifths of West Berlin's squatters were university students or in full-time education, while an equivalent number had either completed vocational training or were employed. Around a fifth of the city's squatters, moreover, were unemployed.<sup>8</sup> By 1981, unemployment levels among those under 20 in West Berlin had passed eight per cent, and by the beginning of the following year it had almost doubled to just 15.7 per cent – a trend which, accompanied with rising rents, increased the degree of precariousness amongst this marginalised stratum.<sup>9</sup> Around five per cent of West Berlin's squatters were foreign-born, the majority of these hailing from Italy, Austria, Great Britain, Switzerland, the Netherlands

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<sup>5</sup> Der Senator für Inneres, 'Hausbesetzen und Hausbesetzer in Berlin: Eine Statistik über die Entwicklung seit 1979', (West Berlin, 1983), p. 6; See Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz beim Senator für Inneres, 'Der "Häuserkampf" in Berlin (West)' (1982), p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> Friedrichs and Balz, 'Individualität und Revolte im neoliberalen Aufbruch: Annäherungen an eine Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte der europäischen Protestbewegung der 1980er Jahre.' p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Senator für Inneres, 'Hausbesetzen und Hausbesetzer in Berlin', p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 'Der "Häuserkampf"', p. 41.

<sup>9</sup> Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*, pp. 538-39; Harlander, 'Wohnungspolitik,' p. 337.

and France. Although rehab squatting was predominantly focused in inner city districts, such as Kreuzberg, Schöneberg and Charlottenburg, with significant Turkish immigrant populations, squatters with Turkish migrant backgrounds composed less than one per cent of the milieu.<sup>10</sup> Just under a quarter of West Berlin's squatters had been born in the city while over two thirds were from other parts West Germany. Of this later number, the majority had moved to West Berlin since 1979<sup>11</sup> – statistics that are explained in part by the difficulties faced by those searching for accommodation on their arrival and which in part reflect West Berlin's long-term tradition of serving as a magnet for young non-conformists from across the *Bundesrepublik*.

Politically, West Berlin's rehab squatters and their supporters were often drawn from the city's – and West Germany's – broader culture and tradition of left-wing extra-parliamentary opposition. Those taking part in a squatter demonstration in April 1981, the *taz* noted, reflected the broad spectrum of West Berlin's APO, ranging from 'Kreuzberg anarchists' through to stuffy 'SEW functionaries'.<sup>12</sup> A number of West Berlin's rehab squatters were active in other new social movements or leftist organisations at the time. 'We are people from the West Berlin anti-nuclear movement', explained one group of squatters who occupied a building in Kreuzberg's Görlitzer Straße in November 1980.<sup>13</sup> According to West Berlin's Office for the Protection of the Constitution, of the

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<sup>10</sup> See Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 'Der "Häuserkampf" in Berlin', p 35; Senator für Inneres, 'Hausbesetzen und Hausbesetzer in Berlin', p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Senator für Inneres, 'Hausbesetzen und Hausbesetzer in Berlin', p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> 'Über 20,000 spazierten in der Frühlingssonne', *taz*, 13. 4. 1981.

<sup>13</sup> 'Görlitzer Strasse 36 intandbesetzt', 21. November 1980 - PT Archiv, Häuserkampf W. Berlin 1970er, 1-8/80.

604 people arrested during militant confrontations between December 1980 and January 1982, 197 had links with 'political extremist' organisations, which included terrorist factions.<sup>14</sup>

The relationship between the post-68 New Left and the terrorist struggle, as Karen Henschew argues, was 'anything but uncomplicated or trivial'. In the aftermath of the German Autumn of 1977, the West German APO entered a phase of introspection, with many coming to the conclusion that violence, and in particular left-wing terrorism, served to undermine the potential of extra-parliamentary protest through association. Nevertheless, elements within the West German APO in general, and the squatter milieu in particular, continued to articulate their solidarity towards imprisoned terrorists, while articles about violent militants regularly featured in the alternative and underground press. Numerous reports focusing on imprisoned RAF and other leftist terrorists appeared in squatter pamphlets and leaflets, where they were portrayed as victims of state oppression. The conditions that left-wing terrorists were subjected to – solitary confinement (referred to as 'isolation torture' in the alternative media), force-feeding, sensory deprivation and around-the-clock monitoring – served for many as confirmation of the *Bundesrepublik's* essentially authoritarian character. The sympathy and solidarity articulated towards imprisoned left-wing terrorists was not necessarily born out of an identification with their means, but rather, as Karrin Hanshew argues, through 'common commitment to resisting the authoritarian

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<sup>14</sup> Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 'Der "Häuserkampf" in Berlin', p. 46.

tendencies of a society in which they still saw pervasive structural violence and proto-fascist potentials'.<sup>15</sup> Still, it provided plenty of ammunition for the opponents of the rehab squatters to employ the narrative of counter-terrorism in an attempt to discredit the movement by association.

The VfS also noted links between the rehab squatters and 'dogmatic New Left' organisations, such as the KPD/ML and the KBW, which had long had a presence in West Berlin, and in particular in Kreuzberg.<sup>16</sup> In the early 1970s, the KPD/ML had organised a number of campaigns against the displacement of working class residents from the inner city and petitioned against high-rents and the lack of facilities and amenities in the new modernist housing estates.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the KBW and the KPD/ML had supported the Youth Centre Movement, and, as we saw in chapter 3, their political line had come to dominate the internal politics of the Rauch Haus and much of the city's APO. However, by the late 1970s, the influence of the K-Groups within the West German extra-parliamentary opposition was beginning to wane.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, this divergence away from a Marxist-informed world view within the West German APO was articulated during the TUNIX (do nothing) conference, held in West Berlin in January 1978, attended by up to 20,000 delegates, including Michel Foucault, and which was organised in response to the identity crisis within the New Left that followed the German Autumn. In the flyer advertising the event

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<sup>15</sup> Hanshew, *Terror and Democracy in West Germany*, p. 153 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 'Der "Häuserkampf" in Berlin', pp. 45-46.

<sup>17</sup> See Warnke, *Stein Gegen Stein: Architektur und Medien im geteilten Berlin 1950-1970*, p. 254.

<sup>18</sup> As Andreas Kühn concludes: 'In der zweiten Hälfte der 1970er Jahre, spätestens nach Maos Tod im Jahre 1976, waren die K-Gruppen einem andauernden Marginalisierungsprozess ausgesetzt.' Kühn, *Stalins Enkel, Maos Söhne: Die Lebenswelt der K-Gruppen in der Bundesrepublik der 70er Jahre*, p. 278.

the organisers poked fun at the efforts of the K-Groups and the 'socialist cells' which futilely 'dig up the yard in search of their [proletarian] base.'<sup>19</sup> Instead of breathing new life into the K-Groups, the squatter movement served to further their marginalisation; it provided another instance where the dogmatic New Left's focus on the class struggle was being eclipsed by a praxis-orientated activism.

Another organisation that had links with the squatters was the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei West* (SEW), the SED's sister party in West Berlin. According to the VfS, SEW had 'involved itself in a number of "solidarity demonstrations" in support of the squatters' and the party also provided the squatters with assistance and material, including 'food' and 'fuel'.<sup>20</sup> At first, the SEW hierarchy had been 'sceptical' towards the 'new ideas' being articulated by the squatters, as they informed their superiors in East Berlin.<sup>21</sup> However, 'following initial hesitations', the party- leadership reported to Erich Honecker in October 1982, the SEW had, 'together with the Socialist Youth Association, established contacts with and influence on the [movement]'. Honecker underlined this particular section of the report, indicating that he regarded it as a matter of interest.<sup>22</sup> Yet, the claims of the party leadership to Honecker notwithstanding, the SEW's influence within the squatter movement remained

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<sup>19</sup> See Dirke, *All Power to the Imagination! The West German Counterculture from the Student Movement to the Greens*, p. 85. p . 85. See also Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties: The Anti-Authoritarian Revolt, 1962-1978*, p. 354ff.

<sup>20</sup> Bundesminister des Innern, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 1981* (Bonn: Bundesminister des Innern, 1982), p. 73.

<sup>21</sup> DY 30/14610 - Westabteilung, Information über die Aktivitäten und die Entwicklung der SEW seit ihrem VI. Parteitag vom 15. - 17. Mai 1981. Fol. 60.

<sup>22</sup> BAB, DY 30/14610 - Westabteilung, Zur Situation und Entwicklung der SEW seit dem VI. Parteitag im Mai 1981, Okt 1982. Fol. 34.

minimal.<sup>23</sup> The party's hierarchical internal structure, its uncritical promotion of the East German leader, Erich Honecker, and its Marxist-Leninist informed worldview proved anathema to most of the young activists who composed the squatter milieu.

An analysis of the pamphlets, leaflets and literature produced by the West Berlin rehab squatters reveals an evident shift in rhetoric and symbolism from the more theoretically-minded politics of the New Left of the 1960s and early 1970s. Whereas the discourse of the SDS and the K-Groups was informed by the writings of Marx, Lenin and Mao, and their analysis of the class struggle, references to the proletariat and to figures from the Marxist-Leninist pantheon are noticeably absent from the material produced by West Berlin's rehab squatters. As one reporter from *Der Spiegel* put it in an article on West Berlin's squatters in 1980, '18 to 20 year olds who belong to the alternative milieu [do not read] left-wing theory [any more]... they do not want to know anything about Marxism and they've never heard of Adorno or Marcuse'.<sup>24</sup> Action-orientated symbols, such as the hammer and sickle (or the KPD/ML's hammer, sickle and rifle) are few and far between in the material produced by the squatters; by contrast, squatter slogans, the squatter sign and the anarchy symbol are ubiquitous. Moreover, references to Marx and the class struggle, when they do arise, are often out of jest. 'At last something new about Marxism,

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<sup>23</sup> 'Die Übereinstimmungen zwischen SEW und Hausbesetzern reichten jedoch über einen Minimalkonsens, der in der allgemeinen Ablehnung von Wohnungsleerstand und Bauspekulation bestand, nicht hinaus'. Olav Teichert, *Die Sozialistische Einheitspartei Westberlins: Untersuchung der Steuerung der SEW durch die SED* (Kassel: Kassel University Press, 2011), p. 138.

<sup>24</sup> 'Da packt dich irgendwann 'ne Wut', *Der Spiegel*, 22 December 1980, p. 27.

which is often claimed to be dead', reported one group of squatters in 1981 who had occupied 'number 20 Karl-Marx-Strasse' in the Neukölln district.<sup>25</sup>

As more buildings were occupied, moreover, a squatter sub-culture emerged, rooted in and around the occupied buildings, serving to forge an identification between the city's wider alternative milieu and the occupied buildings. Squatter cafes and pubs soon sprang up, such as the 'Besetz(A)Eck', the 'Café Kraak' and 'Café Instand' and the 'Barrikade'. Testament to the West German APO's infatuation with Irish republican terrorism, a 'Bobby Sands' bar was opened in one squatted building in Schöneberg. Moreover, other organisations and movements were drawn to squatting through the opportunities it offered. A women's health centre was established in an occupied building in Kreuzberg's Mariannenstraße, while a women's café opened in a squat in Moabit. The 'Art and Cultural Centre Kreuzberg', a squat in the districts Anhalter Straße, provided space for theatre workshops and studios.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the diversity of the milieu and its supporters, and although it had no identifiable leadership figure, the infrastructure of a squatter movement gradually began to crystallise. Already in March 1980, a *Besetzerrat* (squatter council) was established, serving to assist the coordination of resources, material and support between the different occupied buildings. Through creating this squatter council it was hoped that the individual groups of rehab squatters could overcome their isolation and 'join together in solidarity'.

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<sup>25</sup> *Instandbesetzer Post*, Nr. 7/8, p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> 'Projekte in Besetztem Haus', *Instandbesetzer Post*, Nr. 16, 9. July 1981.

'Despite the differences' between the various groups of squatters, they added, the squatters hoped to unite against urban renewal policies and to defend themselves against possible evictions.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, to help with the renovations, a squatted building in Kreuzberg's Manteuffelstraße, known as the *Bauhof*, served as a collection and distribution point for material. The *Bauhof* collective saw their role as 'facilitating self-help', through providing tools and supplies as well as technical advice and know-how to their fellow squatters.<sup>28</sup> In addition to creating its own infrastructures, the burgeoning rehab squatter movement was also able to grow out of and draw on the various alternative networks and initiatives that had been established in West Berlin – and in Kreuzberg in particular – over the course of the previous decade. The Berlin Tenants' Association, local *Mieterläden*, citizens' initiatives, and organisations such as the *Netzwerk e. V.* – one of the Federal Republic's longest standing alternative self-help groups which at the time boasted some 6,000 members – all provided the squatters with support and assistance.

As with many other new social movements and initiatives of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the squatter movement in West Berlin sought to organise itself according to the principles of 'direct' or 'participatory' democracy. Based on consensual decision-making, horizontally organised and opposed to hierarchies of any kind, this model marked a departure from the rigid internal organisation of the dogmatic K-Groups which had dominated the FRG's extra-parliamentary opposition during the early to mid-1970s. At the

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<sup>27</sup> PT Archiv, Häuserkampf W. Berlin 1970er, 1-8/80 – 'Besetzerrat-Info'.

<sup>28</sup> See 'Haus Besetzt–Haus Kaputt–Was tun?', *Instandbesetzer Post*, Nr. 0, 2. March. 1981, p. 4.



same time, the organisation of the squatter movement referred back to the anti-authoritarianism of the 1960s, which had witnessed numerous examples of direct democracy in action. These ranged from 'free' school and university projects initiated by radical students to workers' organisation at the point of production. Participatory democracy served as the organisational model for numerous groups as diverse and widespread as the SNCC in the US and proletarian factory-cells in Italy's industrial north.<sup>29</sup>

The most basic level of democratic organisation was the house council in the individual squats. This concerned itself with the internal organisation within the occupied buildings, and everyday matters such as securing supplies, carrying out repairs and organising the cleaning and cooking rosters. Personal issues and interpersonal problems – at times exacerbated through having to live in close quarters and without privacy in the initial period following an occupation – were also discussed at the house plenum. Political matters, such as the house's position regarding various issues that affected the movement as a whole – for example whether to enter into negotiations with the authorities or proprietors – could also be decided here. In addition to the house plenum, a number of neighbourhood or districts councils were established. These often concerned themselves with practical issues, such as rubbish removal, securing utility services, such as electricity and water, as well as strategies to defend the buildings, should they be targeted by police raids. Each individual squat and the district council could also send a representative to the squatter council, which

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<sup>29</sup> See Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976*. Ch. 5.

took place every Sunday in the Kuckuck, a squatted building in Kreuzberg's Anhalter Straße. Here, new occupations were announced, actions – such as demonstrations – were discussed and planned, and the important issues facing the movement debated.<sup>30</sup>

The attempt to organise the movement according to democratic principles could often be a frustrating and arduous process, however. The movement's rapid growth in the winter of 1980-81 was, paradoxically, part of the problem, creating organisational headaches as hundreds – instead of dozens – attended the city-wide squatter council. 'The same old chaos, proper discussion are impossible,' it was reported in March 1981.<sup>31</sup> 'Debates can go on for hours, days, weeks, back and forth, until an agreement is reached', another report, this time from June 1981, revealed.<sup>32</sup> Consensus based decision making, as the squatters found out, does not necessarily lend itself to decisive action. The organisational model of direct democracy was intended to counter internal hierarchies within the movement. Articles and position papers in the alternative press were often published anonymously or under pseudonyms, the intention being to prevent the emergence of individual leadership figures within the movement – or for the mainstream press to ascribe the movement with such leaders. Nevertheless, those with experience or charisma, or those who could argue well or even intimidate others, were often able to dominate debates and emerged as de facto 'bosses' in the various houses and councils. One contemporary recalls how two individuals dressed in leather jackets – veritable

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<sup>30</sup> See 'Wir verwalten uns', *Instandbesetzer Post*, Nr. 13, 5. June 1981, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> 'Besetzerrat im KuckuK', *Instandbesetzer Post*, Nr. 3, 25. March 1981, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> 'Wir verwalten uns', *Instandbesetzer Post*, Nr. 13, 5. June 1981, p. 6.

squatter commissars, one might say – burst into a packed meeting and attempted to remove someone they accused of being a police spy.<sup>33</sup> Such problems were not unique to the squatter movement in West Berlin. In Amsterdam, too, where the same principles of direct democracy were favoured, the emergence of ‘enforcers’ within the squatter milieu lead to a *bonzendisussie* (discussion over the bosses) which polarised the movement there.<sup>34</sup>

The squatter council, and the organisational structures of the movement, moreover, were criticised by many contemporaries as male-dominated environments.<sup>35</sup> Numerically, this was certainly the case, as was the movement in general. One squatter estimated that the one time she attended the *Besetzerrat*, only a fifth of those present were women. ‘There were always more men [than women] at the squatter council’ another squatter who was veteran of the women’s movement recalled. Those who did attend, she added, ‘were these “power-women”, those had the same way of acting as the guys’.<sup>36</sup> Other female squatters articulated their dislike of the environment and their feeling that they were not able to contribute to discussion or be taken seriously. ‘Sometimes I have the feeling that, as a woman you have no say in the squatter council’, was how another contemporary put it.<sup>37</sup> And these were not isolated cases. Women’s groups within the movement repeatedly took issue with the emergence of what they described as a ‘new chauvinism’ within the squatter

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<sup>33</sup> ‘Schwarzer Freitag–Grauer Samstag’, *Instandbesetzer Post*, Nr. 2, 17. March. 1981, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> See Owens, *Cracking Under Pressure: Narrating the Decline of the Amsterdam Squatters’ Movement*, p. 18.

<sup>35</sup> Savier, ‘Mädchen in Bewegung,’ pp. 35-53. See also ‘Frauen besetzen Häuser’, *Courage*, (June 1981), p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37, 51.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43, 48.

milieu and the wider radical left<sup>38</sup> – an issue that has received little engagement in a number of important insider-histories of the movement.<sup>39</sup>

There were similar reports from within the squats themselves. In an article in the *taz* in July 1981, five female activists highlighted everyday sexism in the occupied buildings. A number of feminist groups within the movement stated that they were often expected to undertake ‘women’s work’, such as cooking, cleaning and making tea, while the men within the movement carried out repairs in the buildings or manned the barricades.<sup>40</sup> ‘We’ve had enough of the euphoric self-congratulation of the rehab squatters’, the authors put it, and they were sick of their male counterparts claiming a ‘monopoly of knowledge’ on issues such as renovations and repairs. The article also documented cases of domestic violence against women within the squats, to which, they reported, a blind-eye had been turned. ‘These are the new [alternative] lifestyles that we are fighting for!’, the authors sarcastically stated.<sup>41</sup>

Although ‘a fundamental aspect of everyday “alternative” practice’, as Sven Reichardt and Detlef Siegfried argue, ‘was premised on the necessity of overcoming traditional gender roles’, the tensions that emerged between women’s groups within the squatter movement and the predominantly male-dominated squatter milieu recalled the critique of patriarchy levelled by female

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<sup>38</sup> ‘Besetzerinnen über ihre miesen Erfahrungen mit Besetzern: Ein neuer Chauvinismus’, *taz*, 27. July. 1981

<sup>39</sup> For this point see amatine, *Gender und Häuserkampf* (Münster: UNRAST, 2011).

<sup>40</sup> ‘Frauen im Häuserkampf’, *taz*, 29. 5. 1981.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Besetzerinnen über ihre miesen Erfahrungen mit Besetzern: Ein neuer Chauvinismus’, *taz*, 27. July. 1981

activists within the SDS in the 1960s.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, a statement written by activists during the nationwide squatter congress in Munster in April 1981 spoke of relationships between the men and women in the movement being characterised by a 'power position (*Machstellung*)' rather than equality.<sup>43</sup> A women's working group was established during this convention which was followed by a women's only squatter congress, held in May 1981 in West Berlin.<sup>44</sup> Here, female activists who were engaged in squatting from across the country sought to exchange their experiences, and discussions also focused on whether or not women should form their own 'faction' within the squatter councils, and whether they should establish an independent women's squatter council altogether.<sup>45</sup>

Thus an autonomous women's movement emerged within the broader squatter milieu, in part through the involvement of activists from the new women's movement, in part a product of a number of women's negative experience in the squats and forums. In addition to founding women's only squats, there were also initiatives to establish women's only floors in a number of 'mixed' squats.<sup>46</sup> But although this development was all-to-predictably criticised as factionalism by some elements within the squatter milieu, the women's only squats and feminist activists continued to identify with the

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<sup>42</sup> Sven Reichardt and Detlef Siegfried, eds., *Das Alternative Milieu: Antibürgerlicher Lebensstil und linke Politik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Europa 1968-1983* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2010), p. 14. amatine, *Gender und Häuserkampf*, p. 99. p. 99. For the emergence of the women's movement in the 1960s see Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties: The Anti-Authoritarian Revolt, 1962-1978*. Ch. 7.

<sup>43</sup> 'Frauen im Häuserkampf', *Taz*, 29. May. 1981

<sup>44</sup> 'Hausbesetzerinnentreffen in Berlin', *taz*, 29. 5. 1981.

<sup>45</sup> 'Betrieff Bezetzerinnen Kongress', *Instandbesetzer Post*, Nr. 11, 22. May 1981.

<sup>46</sup> See 'Frauen besetzen Häuser', *Courage*, (June 1981); Savier, 'Mädchen in Bewegung'.

central goals of the squatter movement. Women's groups protested for the release of prisoners who had been arrested during the December riots and other violent protests, they organised against the increasing criminalisation of the movement, and they lobbied for the legalisation of the occupied buildings.<sup>47</sup> What is more, they played a key role in forging connections between the squatter movement and grassroots initiatives at the local level.

### III. EXCURSUS: PRESS COVERAGE AND THE ALTERNATIVE MEDIA

As the rehab squatter movement grew in strength in 1980-81, it became the object of what one contemporary study describes as a 'moral outcry', orchestrated by the city's mainstream press.<sup>48</sup> The West Berlin market was dominated by the Springer media group, which owned the *BZ* and *Bild* tabloids in addition to the broadsheet *Berliner Morgenpost*. As with the student movement of the 1960s, the Springer press regularly described the squatters as 'rowdies', 'gangsters', 'thugs', 'hooligans' or fifth columnists of the GDR.<sup>49</sup> West Berlin's squatters were portrayed as presenting a fundamental threat to the city's internal security and its democratic order and were designated as 'folk devils' and an 'internal enemy'.<sup>50</sup> 'Squatters threaten a storm of fire in Berlin' or 'Anarchists and rabble-rousers want to ruin our city' were not untypical

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<sup>47</sup> amatine, *Gender und Häuserkampf*, p. 99

<sup>48</sup> Amann, *Der moralische Aufschrei: Presse und abweichendes Verhalten am Beispiel der Hausbesetzung in Berlin*, p.9.

<sup>49</sup> See *ibid.* *passim*.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10, 125.

headlines of the *BZ*.<sup>51</sup> In their reporting of the movement, the tabloid and conservative press fixed their attention on the militant elements within the squatter milieu and violent exchanges between squatters and the authorities. The contextual background that gave rise to the movement, by contrast, was largely glossed over. 'The housing shortage', argued the *Bild Zeitung* in late 1980, 'is for the radical squatters just a pretext. They want a riot!'<sup>52</sup> Emotive language – 'battle' 'terror', 'bloodbath', and especially 'riot' – were constantly repeated in front page headlines.

Such selective 'over reporting', as Stanley Cohen argues in his classic study on moral panics, had long served as standard tools to de-legitimise political movements.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, media coverage of the squatter movement also drew on the technique of distortion, that is the 'frequent use of misleading headlines, particularly headlines that were discrepant with the actual story.'<sup>54</sup> To provide a concrete example, whereas the *Tagesspiegel* and *Spandauer Volksblatt* emphasised the peaceful nature of a squatter demonstration which took place on 12 August 1981 during the context of heightened tension between the squatters and the authorities, the *BZ* ran with the headline 'Once more: Cobblestones, paint bombs and broken windows', even though these details were not connected to the actual events on which the article reported.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See Kuno Habersbuch (ed.), *'Berliner Linie' gegen Instandbesetzer. Die 'Vernunft' schlägt immer wieder zu! Dokumentation der Ereignisse vom 3. 2. 79 bis zum 11. 8. 81* (West Berlin, 1981), p. 16, 41.

<sup>52</sup> Habersbuch (ed.), *'Berliner Linie' gegen Instandbesetzer*, p. 14.

<sup>53</sup> Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 3 ed. (Oxon: Routledge Classics, 2011), p. 27.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> See Amann, *Der moralische Aufschrei: Presse und abweichendes Verhalten am Beispiel der Hausbesetzung in Berlin*, pp. 51-52, 79-83.

The mainstream media's representation of the squatters was embedded in a wider discourse surrounding West Berlin's contested identity. Since it had emerged as a centre of the anti-authoritarian revolt in the 1960s, the conservative press has sought to portray radical politics as being out of place in the free and democratic polity 'island city'. Through labelling the squatters as stooges of the GDR, or, as was at times the case, 'red SA' or 'fascist riffraff', the movement was presented as anathema to the city's democratic and constitutional order.<sup>56</sup> A case in question is provided by the coverage of a squatter demonstration on 12 July 1981 in the Grunewald in Berlin-Zehlendorf. Organised by a number of organisations, including the Alternative List, the BISO36 and the Berlin Tenants' Association, the idea behind the event was to bring the protest against urban-renewal, vacancy and rising rents to the doors of '25 of the greediest speculators' who lived in this part of the city. The leaflets advertising the demonstration printed these individuals' names and private addresses, and the event was announced as 'Sunday stroll' past their homes. 'Let's see how they live! Let's hear what they have to say ... Friends, bring coffee and pastries. We'll spend a nice Sunday afternoon in the Grunewald', the demonstration flyer mischievously added.<sup>57</sup> 5,000 squatters and their supporters turned up for the demonstration, which was accompanied by heavy police presence. In comparison with a number of recent squatter demonstrations in the city, which had deteriorated into pitched battles between militants and the authorities and widespread rioting, the Grunewald

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> 'Am Sonntag geht's zum Grunewald', in Habersbuch (ed.), *'Berliner Linie' gegen Instandbesetzer*, p. 37.



demonstration passed off with relatively minor scuffles: 26 windows were smashed, paint bombs were thrown, and a police officer was roughly handled.<sup>58</sup>

Still, the demonstration touched a nerve and attracted some of the most hostile press coverage in the movement's history thus far. The squatters' 'criminal terrorization of individuals', wrote the Springer paper *Morgenpost*, was 'obviously part of a new tactic' – a tactic described as 'psychological terror' in the paper's editorial.<sup>59</sup> The day following the demonstration, the *BZ* ran with the front-page headline 'Bloody terror at Berlin's "Sunday-stroll"-demonstration'. The article went on to detail the 'brutal mistreatment' of a 'young policeman' who, straying too far from his unit, had been surrounded by 'forty anarchists' who knocked off his helmet, ripped off his uniform and shirt, removed his shoes, and, to complete his humiliation, photographed him before his colleagues, who with the aid of their batons, were able to liberate him from the mob (it should be noted, in other papers, including the *Bild-Berlin*, the officer in question was reported to have infiltrated the demonstration in plainclothes, whereupon he was unmasked).<sup>60</sup> Human interest stories detailed the 'fear' and 'helplessness' felt by local residents forced to shelter inside their properties as marauding hoards smashed down garden fences and slashed tires outside.<sup>61</sup> Passers-by held their hands up and pleaded to the demonstrators 'please, don't harm us', it was reported, while one woman, in her trepidation,

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<sup>58</sup> 'Demo zu den Spekulanten', *Taz*, 11. June 1981; 'Spekulanten in "splendid isolation"', *Taz*, 13. June 1981.

<sup>59</sup> 'Grünwald-Krawalle', *Berliner Morgenpost*, 14. July 1981; 'Der neue Psychoterror', *Berliner Morgenpost*, 14. July 1981.

<sup>60</sup> 'Blutiger Terror beim Berliner "Spaziergang"-Demonstration', *BZ*, 13. July 1981; 'Vermummte Chaoten', *BILD-Berlin*, 13. July 1981.

<sup>61</sup> For example 'Wie Frau G. den Sturm auf ihre Ville erlebte', *BILD-Berlin*, 13. Juli 1981; 'Sie rissen Zaune ein und zerstachen Reifen der Autos', *BZ*, 13. July 1981

was reduced to tears.<sup>62</sup> The reporting of the event thus conjured up an image of an ideal tranquil domestic order (garden fences, women, cars, leafy streets) disrupted by the violent presence of the squatters running amok, while the humiliation of the young policemen served as a metaphor for the impotence of the authorities to control this growing threat to the democratic and constitutional order. Such a protest, the underlying message was, had no place in a peaceful residential area, and a movement that endorsed tactics that singled out and terrorised individuals, had no place in West Berlin. In an open letter, however, 12 academics denounced the 'demagogic media-machine' and its reporting of the 'predominantly quiet and peaceful' demonstration in the Grunewald. Re-reading the locus of violence in terms of structural relations, the 'real terror', they argued, was 'that which has for years been practised against tens of thousands of renters' in the city.<sup>63</sup>

This open letter was itself published in the *tageszeitung* (hereafter *taz*), as was the flyer advertising the Grunewald demonstration. Indeed, the *taz* arguably served as the most important organ for countering the Springer narrative, as it provided detailed coverage of the squatter movements that were emerging across the *Bundesrepublik*. Established in 1978, the paper had a daily national circulation of around 35,000 by the early 1980s. With full-time staff employed in regional desks across the country, the *taz* 'became de facto the most important mouthpiece of the alternative movement', as Sven Reichardt

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<sup>62</sup> 'Sie rissen Zaune ein und zerstachen Reifen der Autos', *BZ*, 13. July 1981; 'Erst Steine – dann rissen sie den Zaun ein', *BILD-Berlin*, 13. July 1981.

<sup>63</sup> 'Professoren zur Hetze gegen Spekulanten-Demo', *Tageszeitung*, 17. July 1981.

points out.<sup>64</sup> The paper provided an important forum of communication for the various new social movements of the period, including the squatter movements, and in doing so improved their ability to coordinate on a national level.

In West Berlin, the *taz* proved more than sympathetic to the movement, and indeed a number of *taz* journalists, such as Benny Härlin, were recruited from the squatter milieu themselves.<sup>65</sup> The paper also published its own human interest stories, focusing on injured squatters, as well as revelations criticising new police tactics. In July 1981, for instance, the paper reported that the CS gas that West Berlin's police were due to be equipped with to help maintain public order had been tested in Dachau, the former Nazi concentration camp.<sup>66</sup> Although the *taz* appealed to its readership's emotions in order to sully the reputation of the authorities and its political opponents, it should be noted that the paper was not uncritical of certain tendencies within the squatter milieu. While the legitimacy of counterviolence was not seriously questioned, the tendency of certain elements within the squatter milieu to fetishise riotous destruction was criticised. As a consequence, the paper's offices as well as the private home of its Berlin editor, Gerd Nowakowski, were targeted on a number

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<sup>64</sup> Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*, p. 263.

<sup>65</sup> See Härlin, 'Von Haus zu Haus – Berliner Bewegungsstudien.'

<sup>66</sup> 'Zugeschlagen als würden sie Holz hacken', *taz*, 16. July 1981; 'CS gas in Dachau erprobt', *taz*, 17. July 1981.

of occasions. Indeed, at the height of the squatter movement, the slogan 'the *taz* lies' was written on a number of walls in Kreuzberg.<sup>67</sup>

The squatter movement coincided with a juncture at which the alternative press was at its high-point. By 1980, there were already some 290 alternative newspapers and magazines in the FRG, with a collective monthly circulation of 1.6 million.<sup>68</sup> West Berlin's alternative milieu produced an assortment of radical publications, such as *Agit 883*, *Zoff*, *Der Schwarze Kanal*, *Frontstadt Info* and *Radikal*, to name but a few. Some of these dated from the 1960s, though others were of more recent vintage. The *Radikal*, for instance, was first published in 1976, and served as a forum for the various strands of West Berlin's splintered APO. Originally conceived as a 'socialist' publication that was close to the position of the K-Groups, the *Radikal* increasingly began to promote the perspective of the Spontis, the 'undogmatic Left' and the 'Autonomen' – a reflection of the declining importance of Marxist-Leninist and Maoist informed radicalism within the extra-parliamentary left during the late 1970s.<sup>69</sup> Yet, its evolution to an 'undogmatic' or 'alternative' publication notwithstanding, the *Radikal* was still considered to be 'too theoretical' by many of the squatters.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, in March 1981, a squatter newspaper, the *Instandbesetzer Post* (hereafter IBP), was established. The IBP announced new occupations, reported on squats that had been evicted or were threatened with

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<sup>67</sup> Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*, p. 560.

<sup>68</sup> Reichardt and Siegfried, 'Das Alternative Milieu: Konturen einer Lebensform,' p. 12.

<sup>69</sup> The magazine's subtitle was originally 'Sozialistische Zeitung für West-Berlin' See the entry in the Datenbank des deutschsprachigen Anarchismus: <http://ur.dadaweb.de/dada-p/P0001035.shtml> retrieved on 5 July 2013.

<sup>70</sup> 'Ein Rückblick: Warum die InstandbesetzerPost', *InstandbesetzerPost*, Nr. 3, 25. March 1981, p. 2.

eviction, printed lists of buildings that had been demolished, and suggested targets for new squatting actions. With an initial print run of 2,000, the IBP's circulation rose to 8,000 at its height. Typical of the aesthetic and style of alternative publications of the period, the layout of the IBP was often that of *bricolage*, where headlines, articles and pictures were mashed together in an attempt at disrupting the linear-logic of the press narrative and to ascribe new meanings onto the headlines and media images.

West Berlin's alternative press served not only to counter the narrative of the conservative media but also constituted alternative '*publics*' which stretched beyond the borders of the 'island city'.<sup>71</sup> Alongside the mass-media reporting of the 'youth revolts', these alternative publics served as key vehicles for creating a trans-national squatter identity. Squatter movements across the *Bundesrepublik* and in other countries in Western Europe were widely documented in the alternative press, facilitating the emergence of loose networks and connections between the squatters not only within the FRG but also between West German squatters and their counterparts in other Western European cities. In the summer of 1980, squatters from West Berlin had travelled to the 'International Squatters' Festival' in London organised by the London Squatters' Union.<sup>72</sup> The following December, hardened squatters from Amsterdam were involved in the militant riots in West Berlin.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, for

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<sup>71</sup> On publics see Thomas Olesen, 'Transnational Publics: New Spaces of Social Movement Activism and the Problem of Global Long-Sightedness', *Current Sociology* 53(2005).

<sup>72</sup> Lynn Owens, 'Have Squat, Will Travel: How squatter mobility mobilizes squatting,' in *Squatting in Europe: Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles*, ed. Squatting Europe Kollektive (New York: Autonomedia, 2013), p. 197.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

some in West Berlin, the '*Kraaker*' (squatter) movement in Amsterdam served as the barometer against which the success of the squatter movement in West Berlin should be measured. 'Let's go Kraaken! We'll create a second Amsterdam!', exclaimed a group of squatters who occupied a building in Kreuzberg's Adalbertstraße during the early phases of the West Berlin rehab squatter movement.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, an advertisement for an exhibition displaying photographs from Amsterdam's *Kraaker* movement in West Berlin's 'Café Block-Shock', featuring a picture of an Amsterdam squatter clad in a leather jacket, with the words '*Kraakstad*' (squatter city) written on his helmet, testified to the interests of the Dutch squatters on their West German counterparts.<sup>75</sup> Squatters from outside the *Bundesrepublik* also showed an interest for events in West Berlin, particularly as the number of occupations increased rapidly following the squatter riots in December 1980. The letter pages of the alternative press frequently include mail from squatters in Zurich and the Netherlands. In May 1981, for instance, one Dutch squatter posted 20 marks to the *Instandbesetzer Post*, a magazine produced by West Berlin's squatters, requesting a subscription to the paper, 'so that people here in Amsterdam know more and better what is going on in Berlin (sic).'<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> PT Archiv, 'Instandbesetzer Info: Adalbertstr 6', 12. 6. 1980.

<sup>75</sup> 'Café Block-Shock Präsentiert Fotos von den Kraakern', *Instandbesetzer Post*, Nr. 2, 17. March 1981, p. 16.

<sup>76</sup> 'Post an die "Post"', *Instandbesetzer Post*, Nr. 10, 15. May 1981.

#### IV. A TALE OF TWO ADMINISTRATIONS

There were many points of friction within the heterogeneous squatter movement. In addition to differing opinions on the strategic utility of militancy that involved violent forms of political action, the 'new chauvanism' that was identified among some sections of the squatter milieu, as we have seen in this chapter, created internal schisms. Still, the main dividing issue centred on the so-called '*Verhandlungsfrage*': that was, whether or not the squatters should enter discussions with the authorities, as the BISO36 had done, and, if so, under what conditions. As illustrated by the cartoonist 'Detlev', fault lines soon emerged between 'negotiating' and 'non-negotiating' factions within the movement. His sketch, published in the *Tageszeitung*, shows a small boat, representing the squatter movement, drifting rudderless in stormy waters. Paddling in opposite directions are caricatures of the two opposing factions. The 'non-negotiator', clad in a leather jacket and motorcycle helmet, shouts 'forwards: the revolution beckons at the horizon'. The negotiator, with his scruffy hair and woollen jumper, retorts: 'at the [opposite] horizon beckons tenancy agreements'. A crack is emerging in the vessel's keel, which is taking on water and threatening to go under.<sup>77</sup>

The squatters' movement had gained momentum during the administrative interregnum that followed the SPD-led Senate's resignation in January 1981. In the period between mid-December 1980 and mid-March 1981, with buildings being squatted on an almost daily basis, the West Berlin police

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<sup>77</sup> Detlev et al., *Legal, Illegal, Scheißegal: Der illustrierte Häuserkampf*. Unpaginated.

were only able to prevent one single occupation.<sup>78</sup> In this context, on 28 January 1981, Hans-Joachim Vogel (SPD) was parachuted in to act as interim Mayor until the newly scheduled *Land* elections on 11 June. Vogel was a skilled political operator who had previously held the post of Federal Minister for Planning, Building und Urban Development, in addition to various important positions within the SPD party apparatus. In 1983 he was nominated as the SPD's Chancellor candidate in the Federal elections. His arrival provided the administration in West Berlin with new energy and direction, and started to shift the momentum away from the squatters and back towards the authorities.

Shortly after taking office, Vogel dispatched advisors to Amsterdam, whose social democratic administration had plenty of experience in responding to squatting and squatter movements.<sup>79</sup> In March 1981, the Vogel Senate then announced its 'Berlin Line'. According to this policy, evictions of existing squats were only to be carried through if the owner could credibly show that he or she was intending to begin renovation or demolition of the property immediately.<sup>80</sup> What is more, the Senate pledged to tackle the problem of vacancy and to provide funding to a number of grassroots initiatives and alternative projects.<sup>81</sup> The Vogel administration also sought to enter into informal discussions with the squatters and their representatives, in order to explore the possibility of negotiating short-term contracts between the squatters and the owners of the

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<sup>78</sup> Mulhak, 'Der Instandbesetzungskonflikt in Berlin,' p. 229.

<sup>79</sup> See LAB B. Rep. 002 Nr. 14976.

<sup>80</sup> Sonnewald and Raabe-Zimmermann, *Die "Berliner Linie" und die Hausbesetzer-Szene* p. 98-101, 20.

<sup>81</sup> LAB B. Rep 002 Nr. 16494 - III - 4804: 'Landespressedienst: Zehn Punkte zur sofortigen Verbesserung der Sanierungs- und Modernisierungspolitik', 24. Feb. 1981.



properties they had occupied, though these negotiations were to take place on an individual, squat-by-squat basis. They would not, as the squatter council had consistently demanded, be conducted between the authorities and the movement as a whole.<sup>82</sup>

Alongside this carrot, however, Vogel's 'Berlin Line' also provided the authorities with a stick. According to the legislation, new occupations were to be hindered where possible, effectively clearing up a legal grey area.<sup>83</sup> The West Berlin police carried out some 43 forced evictions during Vogel's SPD-led interim administration, 33 of them in response to new occupations that contravened the 'Berlin Line'.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, the city's police officers had their leave cancelled in March 1981, and clocked up a total of 155,000 hours of overtime between December 1980 and April 1981.<sup>85</sup> What is more, repressive measures targeting the movement were stepped up and the authorities began to make use of the controversial paragraph 129 of the statute, which allowed individual groups of squatters to be targeted as 'criminal organisations'.<sup>86</sup> Paragraph 129 was invoked in early April 1981, when 1,000 officers raided an

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<sup>82</sup> Uli Hellweg and Christian Wend, 'Neue Träger "Lösungen" für Instandbesetzer in Kreuzberg und anderswo', *ARCH+* 61(1982), p. 44.

<sup>83</sup> Up to this point, owners of the properties had appealed to the old Prussian trespassing laws (*Hausfriedensbruch*) in order to force police evictions of squats, though its applicability of this legal paragraph had been questioned by a number of experts. See Margret Fabricius-Brand, 'Instandbesetzung contra Stadtzerstörung und Wohnungsnot', *Demokratie und Recht*, no. 3 (1981), p. 289. p. 289; Dieter Engels, 'Hausbesetzung ist kein Hausfriedensbruch', *Demokratie und Recht*, no. 3 (1981).

<sup>84</sup> Bodenschatz, Heise, and Korfmacher, *Schluss mir der Zerstörung? Stadterneuerung und städtische Opposition in West-Berlin, Amsterdam und London*, p. 317.

<sup>85</sup> Suttner, 'Beton Brennt': *Hausbesetzer und Selbstverwaltung im Berlin, Wien und Zürich der 80er*, p. 158.

<sup>86</sup> Laurisch, *Kein Abriß unter dieser Nummer: 2 Jahre In der Cuvrystrasse in Berlin-Kreuzberg*, p. 215.

occupied building in Kreuzberg and arrested the entire squatter council.<sup>87</sup> While Vogel effectively recognised the legitimacy of the opposition to the city's discredited urban renewal policy and attempted to co-opt elements of this movement, his administration simultaneously sought to criminalise the practice that had brought this issue to public attention in the first place. His strategy was a textbook case of divide and rule.

Vogel's strategy had an immediate impact, serving to expose the latent tensions within the heterogeneous squatter movement and its supporters. Already in March 1981, pessimism was being articulated within the West Berlin squatter milieu. 'I don't see a political solution any more', admitted one squatter at this juncture. 'Soon they're going to come and clear us all out'.<sup>88</sup> By May 1981 there was much talk about having to bring the movement 'out of the defensive'. Contributions to the IBP in the spring of 1981 spoke of a feeling of 'powerlessness' that had permeated itself. Although the number of occupied buildings was still rising, a sense of being 'under pressure' dominated the squatter council's sessions.<sup>89</sup>

The West Berlin *Land* elections on 10 May 1981, however, changed the nature of the threat faced by the squatter movement. Despite Vogel's efforts to restore credibility to the administration, the election ended in disaster for the SPD. Polling only 38 per cent, the party suffered its lowest share of the vote in

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<sup>87</sup> 'Berliner Häuserkampf: Gesamter Besetzerrat festgenommen', *taz*, 9. April. 1981.

<sup>88</sup> "Das Leben hier hat uns Radikalisiert': Hellmut Lessing und Manfred Liebel diskutieren mit Berliner Instandbesetzern (März 1981),' in *Wer sind die Instandbesetzer? Selbstzeugnisse, Dokumente, Analysen: Ein Lesebuch*, ed. Volkhard Brandes and Bernhard Schön (Bensheim: päd. extra buchverlag, 1981), p. 71.

<sup>89</sup> See 'Besetzerrat Einig', *Instandbesetzer Post*, Nr. 9, 7. May. 1981, p. 3; 'Räumung-Razzia-Rausschmiss', *Instandbesetzer Post*, Nr. 9, 7. May. 1981, p. 3.

West Berlin in the post-war era. The Alternative List, on the other hand, vocal supporters of the squatter movement, managed to double their share of the vote to 7.2 per cent. The winners, however, were the CDU, who gained a plurality of the popular vote (48 per cent) for the first time. Due to federal party-political alliances in Bonn, the CDU were unable to form a coalition with the FDP, who managed to just scrape over the five-per-cent-hurdle. Nevertheless, the CDU, were able to form a minority government, led by the future Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker.

During their election campaign the CDU had advocated 'strong action' against the squatters and the appointment of the hard-liner Heinrich Lummer to the position of Interior Minister signalled a belligerent approach.<sup>90</sup> Squatting proved the main issue of debate during the administration's first sitting in June 1981,<sup>91</sup> and shortly before this, in an interview with the *Berliner Rundschau*, the CDU party leader in West Berlin, Ebehard Diepgen, publically ruled out the provision of legal contracts to the rehab squatters.<sup>92</sup> As far as the CDU were concerned, squatting was 'illegal, [it] does not serve to improve the tense housing problem [in West Berlin] ... and can not therefore be tolerated.'<sup>93</sup> Instead of seeking to continue the Vogel administration's differentiated strategy, which he had set out in his 'Berliner Line', the minority administration under Weizsäcker sought to tackle the squatter movement head on. The Weizsäcker

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<sup>90</sup> Sven Thomas, *Die informelle Koalition: Richard von Weizsäcker und die Berliner CDU-Regierung 1981-1983* (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitätsverlag, 2005).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>92</sup> 'Neues Parlament debattiert Hausbesetzungen', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 26 June 1981.

<sup>93</sup> The quote is from a telephone discussion between a CDU/CSU office in Bonn and the CDU's local leadership in West Berlin pertaining to ' "die Vorstellungen und Maßnahmen" der CDU/CSU Fraktion beim Kampf gegen Hausbesetzungen'. It was recorded by the MfS on 12. 3. 1981. BStU, MfS, HA III Nr. 13183, fol. 11.

administration's anti-squatter rhetoric found a broad resonance in West Berlin's mainstream press. Since the first cases of rehab squatting in February 1979, the initially positive reception had been steadily replaced with ever more alarming reports of the threat squatters presented to order and security. Squatter riots and militant demonstrations were recounted in detail in the tabloids. On 25 June 1981, for instance, a demonstration organised by 'a long list of leftist, liberal and Christian organisations' culminated in violent street fighting, when a contingent of 500 to 1,000 militants broke away from the 12,000-strong crowd and attempted to storm the City Hall.<sup>94</sup> The next day, the *Bild* newspaper lead with the headline 'Fire, blood, plundering: 1,000 anarchists ravage Schöneberg', before going on to provide an account of the 'three frightful hours'.<sup>95</sup>

Anti-squatter sentiments were articulated not only in the conservative press and by CDU politicians but also by union leaders in West Berlin and elsewhere. For Horst Wagner, IG Metall's chairman in West Berlin, the city's squatters were 'anarchists' who should be 'swept out of the [occupied] buildings'.<sup>96</sup> West Berlin construction workers held anti-squatting demonstrations, claiming that their opposition to urban renewal presented a threat to their livelihood and jobs. According to Günter Döding, the head of the FRG's union for hospitality and catering workers, his members were 'hopping

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<sup>94</sup> 'Über 10,000 demonstrieren vor dem Rathaus Schöneberg', *taz*, 26 June 1981; PT Archiv, Häuserkampf West Berlin, 'Aufruf zur Großdemonstration...'

<sup>95</sup> *Bild*, 26. June. 1981.

<sup>96</sup> Brandes and Schön, *Wer sind die Instandbesetzer: Selbstzeugnisse, Dokumente, Analysen - Ein Lesebuch*, p. 148.

mad' at the situation.<sup>97</sup> Together, the Springer press, the CDU administration and the representatives of organised labour presented a powerful coalition of interest opposing rehab squatting and the squatter movements in West Berlin and elsewhere in the *Bundesrepublik*.

Nevertheless, public opinion remained divided. A survey conducted by the Allensbach Institute in April 1981, for instance, found that 51 per cent of those questioned sympathised with the actions of the rehab squatters. Amongst 16 – 29 year olds, support was an overwhelming 70 per cent.<sup>98</sup> The squatters' movement had forced a debate on issues such as urban renewal, property speculation and rising rents which directly impacted on the everyday life of the majority of urban dwellers. The swing towards the CDU in the West Berlin *Land* elections was part the result of the party's hard-line, anti-squatter rhetoric, but it also stemmed from disillusion with the incumbent SPD. What is more, some 90,000 West Berliners had cast their ballot for the Alternative List, vocal supporters of the squatter movement who now counted four elected representatives in the West Berlin Senate. And within organised labour, moreover, opinion diverged more than the statements of some union bosses suggested. The '*Aktionsgruppe Gewerkschafter*' established within the DGB passed a resolution calling for the union-owned *Neue Heimat* housing corporation to withdraw all criminal proceedings against squatters –

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>98</sup> Cited in Rob Burns and Winfried van der Will, *Protest and Democracy in West Germany: Extra-Parliamentary Opposition and the Democratic Agenda* (London: MacMillan Press, 1988), p. 176.

sentiments that were echoed by the West Berlin branch of *IG Druck und Papier*.<sup>99</sup>

Whereas the divide and rule strategy of the Vogel administration had served to stoke latent tensions within the squatter milieu, the movement now rallied together in the face of the threat posed by the new administration. In addition to holding demonstrations and rallies, the squatters also recruited a number of 'godfathers', or prominent figures, who took on the responsibility of 'sponsoring' individual squats. On 1 July 1981, for instance, 10 West Berlin professors pledged their support to the squatters at number 38 Winterfeldstraße in Schöneberg – a building that was under threat of eviction as a result of the hard-line policy of the CDU. 'We are of the opinion that squatting is currently socially necessary', the professors stated.<sup>100</sup> The feminist magazine *Courage* took on the sponsorship of a women's squat next door at number 37 Winterfeldstraße, while in Kreuzberg, 21 employees of the local *Bezirksamt* pledged their support to two threatened squats in the district.<sup>101</sup> Various artists, union members and public figures declared themselves sponsors of individual squats in the summer of 1981. West Berlin-based authors Peter Schneider and Urs Jaeggi held readings in the threatened buildings, while Günter Grass would later pledge his public support to the rehab squatters in the Bülowstraße 52, threatening never to read publicly again in the city should the

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<sup>99</sup> See 'Gewerkschaftliche Solidarität', 4. August. 1981. For further examples of grassroots union support see Brandes and Schön, *Wer sind die Instandbesetzer: Selbstzeugnisse, Dokumente, Analysen - Ein Lesebuch*, pp. 148-51.

<sup>100</sup> 'Schutz für Besetzer', *taz*, 1. July 1981

<sup>101</sup> 'Welle der Sympathie', *taz*, 17. July 1981; 'Patenschaften und Gespräche', *taz*, 13. August. 1981.

squat be evicted.<sup>102</sup> Local pastors and Church groups also provided help and assistance at the grassroots level.<sup>103</sup> Together, the support of important sections of West Berlin's civil society challenged the Senate's and the mainstream press' narrative that the squatter movement presented a threat to the city's peace and security which could only be brought to a conclusion through recourse to the use of force.

Nevertheless, the CDU minority administration pressed ahead with its hard-line policy. During a press conference in August 1981, the Minister for Building, Ulrich Rastemborski (CDU), slightly trembling and hastily puffing on his cigarette, as the *taz* noted, announced a list of 11 occupied buildings which were marked for eviction in what would be the largest single strike against the squatters so far.<sup>104</sup> On the morning of 22 September 1981, a large contingent of riot police, equipped with water canon and armour plated vehicles, moved into the neighbourhood surrounding Schöneberg's Winterfeldplatz. The Springer-owned boulevard press had been doing their bit to ratchet up the tension in advance, with the *Bild Zeitung* leading with the front-page headline, '3 days before the evictions: Squats like fortresses'. By two o'clock in the afternoon, however, the authorities had succeeded in clearing eight buildings. Interior Minister Lummer, seeking to channel the successful operation into positive

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<sup>102</sup> 'Berliner Besetzer in Bewegung', *taz*, 7. August. 1981; 'Die Berliner Linie ist ein Leichnam', *Der Spiegel*, 25/1983, p. 41.

The West Berlin squatters merit a mention in Grass' *Mein Jahrhundert*, where the narrator in his entry for 1981 belongs to the 'Hausbesetzerszene' in Kreuzberg. His squat is evicted 'ziemlich knüppelmäßig' by 'Lummers Bullen'. See Günter Grass, *Mein Jahrhundert* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2001), pp. 302-05.

<sup>103</sup> *Taz*-Journal, p. 173.

<sup>104</sup> All of the buildings were owned by the *Neue Heimat* housing corporation. See 'Bausenator kündigt Räumungen an', *taz*, 3. August. 1981

publicity for himself, opted to hold a press conference in one of the evicted squats. As he stepped out onto the balcony, however, a jeering crowd formed in the streets below. The protesters were promptly driven back by the police, though as their lines broke, one demonstrator, the 18 year old Klaus Jürgen Rattay, fled across a busy main road, where he was hit by an oncoming bus.<sup>105</sup> Caught up in the melée, the driver panicked, and instead of stopping the vehicle, drove on, dragging Rattay's battered and bloodied body along behind it. The squatter movement had acquired its first martyr.

The death of Rattay, occurring at the very moment at which Lummer was proclaiming the success of his hard-line policy, amounted to a public-relations disaster for the CDU. It also triggered a violent backlash, producing another spike in actions perpetrated by militant elements within the squatter milieu. The authorities recorded some 16 arson and bomb attacks on the offices of West Berlin building firms, housing cooperatives, supermarkets and banks between 22 and 26 September 1981. Although no one was injured by these reprisals, they amounted to hundreds of thousands of deutschmarks of damage, further confirming West Berlin as an unruly hotbed.<sup>106</sup> In echoes of the aftermath of the previous December's riots, and redolent of the flashpoints during the 1960s student protests, the city's APO seem to have been radicalised by Rattay's death – a development which served to strengthen the position of the movement's militant factions. The squatters' supporters, in turn, held the

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<sup>105</sup> For detailed press reports and eye-witness accounts of the events see Ermittlungsausschuss Berlin (ed.), *abgeräumt? 8 Häuser geräumt ... Klaus-Jürgen Rattay tot* (West Berlin, 1981).

<sup>106</sup> Der Senator für Inneres: Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 'Der "Häuserkampf" in Berlin (West)' (1982). Appendix pp. 16-18.



Senate responsible for deliberately inflaming the situation with their uncompromising tactics. Criticism of the CDU's strategy and the escalation of violence was forthcoming in the *Land* parliament too. Indeed, the SPD went as far as to table a motion of no confidence in Weizsäcker's leadership, though this move, which could have led to the squatter movement toppling the second administration of the Island City in the space of eight months, was quickly withdrawn, and Vogel in fact received a dressing down from the SPD leadership in Bonn.<sup>107</sup> Nevertheless, the events did lead the CDU into significantly moderating its strategy, as Weizsäcker jettisoned the hard-line approach of his Interior Minister and began to seek a consensus with his parliamentary opponents.<sup>108</sup>

Through the evictions of eight buildings in one single morning, the administration had demonstrated that the balance of force lay firmly in the hands of the state, and not in those of the squatters. Had they wanted to, the authorities could have carried out a similar number of evictions on a weekly basis and could have rid West Berlin of its rehab squatters by Christmas. Yet the political price of such a strategy would have been enormous, entailing large sections of the city – the West's island of freedom and democracy – being regularly subjected to conditions of near marshal-law.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, catalysed by the tragic incident on 22 September 1981, the tide of public opinion was

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<sup>107</sup> Thomas, *Die informelle Koalition: Richard von Weizsäcker und die Berliner CDU-Regierung 1981-1983*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>109</sup> A similarly surreal situation emerged during Ronald Reagan's visit to West Berlin in 1987. On the day in which he asked Gorbachev to 'open this gate ... tear down this wall!', street and subway connections connecting the Kreuzberg district with the rest of the city were physically blockaded by the *Land* authorities. See Karapin, *Protest Politics in Germany: Movements on the Left and Right since the 1960s*, pp. 106-07.

drifting further away from the Senate's hard-line policy, while the issues raised originally by the squatter movement – those of a discredited urban renewal policy and high levels of vacancy – remained as pertinent as ever. It became clear that a more differentiated approach was needed. To defeat the movement, without paying too heavy a political price, Weizsäcker realised, just as Vogel before him had, that his administration would have to display the two faces of the state: its liberal as well as its authoritarian.

## V. STANDSTILL AND DECLINE

The Senate's declaration of a moratorium on evictions, lasting until Easter 1982, provided the first suggestion of a shift in strategy.<sup>110</sup> This, the administration calculated, would provide some breathing space for all parties, including the squatters and their supporters, to attempt to negotiate a solution to the problematic of illegal squatting. After the dust from the aftermath of Rattay's death had settled, the squatters, too, moderated their stance, stepping back from their erstwhile 'purist' line, which had called for a legalisation of all houses or none. The squatters sought to establish mediating bodies through which negotiations could be brokered with the authorities and landlords, and in January 1982 the *Besetzerrat* announced its willingness to enter discussions over legalisation on a house-by-house basis, rather than as a city-wide collective bloc.<sup>111</sup> In April 1982, the alternative urban renewal agent *Netzbau* was

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<sup>110</sup> Thomas, *Die informelle Koalition: Richard von Weizsäcker und die Berliner CDU-Regierung 1981-1983*, p. 71.

<sup>111</sup> Katz and Mayer, 'Gimme shelter: self-help housing struggles within and against the state in New York City and West Berlin,' p. 34.

established in a joint collaboration between rehab squatters and the *Netzwerk* association, one of the Federal Republic's longest standing alternative self-help organisations, which at the time boasted some 6,000 members. *Netzbau* was to be administered through a governing board composed of 50 per cent of squatters, with the rest comprising representatives from *Netzwerk*, local citizens' initiatives and the Lutheran Church. *Netzbau* initially sought to negotiate legal contracts for some 20 occupied buildings. The proposal, as Stephen Katz and Margit Mayer explain, was that:

*Netzbau* would administer the buildings on behalf of the West Berlin government, which would purchase the buildings from their current private owners. While the buildings would be publicly owned, *Netzbau* would be legally responsible to the state for their management. *Netzbau*, in turn, would provide the squatters-tenants with long-term leaseholds to the property, including virtually complete self-management rights, within the legal framework and financial limitations.<sup>112</sup>

A number of similar organisations was also established by squatters who grouped together at a local level – initiatives which often grew out of the local block or neighbourhood councils. One organisation, the *Selbstverwaltete Häuser in Kreuzberg* (S.H.I.K), managed to negotiate legal contracts for six squatted buildings in the area around the district's Wrangelstraße.<sup>113</sup> Other squats entered into negotiations with proprietors on an individual basis, sometimes with help from third-party organisations. The Gossner-Mission, which belonged to the Evangelical Church, for instance, sought to buy the property deeds of one

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid. p. 34.

<sup>113</sup> See S.H.I.K (ed.), *Wir wollen niemals auseinandergeh'n...* (West Berlin, 1983).

squat in Kreuzberg's Willibad-Alexis-Straße for the sum of 650,000 DM.<sup>114</sup> The Lutheran Church indeed served as an important supporter and protector of the squatter movement in West Berlin throughout its turbulent history.

The negotiations were often difficult and frustrating and could be torpedoed at the last minute by the actions of the Senate, the intransigence of private landlords, or the stubbornness of the squatters, as was the case with the *Netzbau* initiative. Ultimately, however, some 78 squats were legalised, either through securing long-term leases or through purchasing their building via a third party.<sup>115</sup> While these efforts were regarded by many in the movement to be an unworthy compromise, they ultimately provided the squatters with a degree of security and an opportunity for them to put their ideas and projects into practice. Self-management of the occupied buildings was a key demand and ensured that a difference between the former squats and ordinary tenement buildings remained. It provided the occupants with autonomy concerning not only the ways in which the collective was organised, but also how the buildings themselves would be renovated and developed.

Legalisation also enabled the squatters to apply for state or third-party funding, which was essential for the continuation and completion of the renovation work. A large part of the initial repairs undertaken by the rehab squatters had served primarily as stop-gap measures. They had prevented the run-down tenements from deteriorating yet further and had made them habitable in the meantime. However, in order to guarantee the long-term

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<sup>114</sup> 'Die Berliner Linie ist ein Leichnam', *Der Spiegel*, 25/1983, p. 40.

<sup>115</sup> Suttner, *'Beton Brennt': Hausbesetzer und Selbstverwaltung im Berlin, Wien und Zürich der 80er*, p. 191.

structural integrity of the buildings, more investment was often needed, and the rehab squatters were, on the whole, not able to cover the costs on their own. After occupying a building in the Prinzenallee in Wedding, for instance, the squatters were confronted with a property which, they claimed, had not been maintained for 15 years. In the spring and summer of 1981, they patched up the leaking roof with material provided by the *Bauhof* collective, which prepared them for the following winter. However, more work still had to be done. The squatters wished, for instance, to undertake a comprehensive renovation and install insulation in order to make the house more energy efficient. But to fit a new roof alone, the squatters required an estimated 40,000 DM, of which they themselves could raise only 5,000.<sup>116</sup>

In 1982, the West Berlin Senate made 152 million DM available for modernising and renovating the city's housing stock.<sup>117</sup> A portion of this fund, it was announced, could also be claimed by squatters who had obtained legal contracts for their buildings. Under the conditions of the funding programme, they could apply for up to 85% of the renovation costs of their buildings.<sup>118</sup> While this provided the squatters with much needed capital, the promotion of self help remained cheaper than both standard renovation costs and the construction of new build. In the early 1980s, the West Berlin Senate was subsidising tenants in newly renovated tenement buildings to the tune of 260 DM per square meter per year, for an indefinite period. The renovation of a

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<sup>116</sup> Verein zum Schutze billigen Wohnraums e. V., *es geht auch anders* (West Berlin, 1982), pp. 102-105.

<sup>117</sup> S.H.I.K (ed.), *Wir wollen niemals auseinandergeh'n...* (West Berlin, 1983), p. 70.

<sup>118</sup> 'Senat legt Förderungsmodell für Selbsthilfegruppen vor', *taz*, reproduced in Verein zum Schutze billigen Wohnraums e. V., *es geht auch anders* (West Berlin, 1982), pp. 102-105.

former squat under self-help auspices, on the other hand, entailed a one-off cost of up to 800 DM per square meter. In the long run, this worked out considerably cheaper as the cost would be recovered in only three years.<sup>119</sup>

From a strategic perspective, the provision of funding to squatter self-help projects was also a smart move, serving as it did to erode the solidarity within the squatter movement. Politics, after all, often entails compromise, and skilful political operators realise that to take two steps forward you sometimes have to take one step back. 'Non-negotiators', such as those in the 'Turm', a squat in Kreuzberg's Leuschnerdamm, vowed to barricade their buildings and to militantly resist any forced eviction rather than compromise their principles through cutting a deal with the state. However, while such a stance could have provided the militants with leverage at the height of the movement, the non-negotiating faction became increasingly isolated within the squatter milieu and was targeted by the authorities in 1983 and 1984.<sup>120</sup> The squatted buildings that did not manage to negotiate legal contracts were ultimately evicted. In 27 incidences, the squatters voluntarily left, while in a further 60 cases the squatters were removed by the police.<sup>121</sup> In June 1983, the 'Turm' itself was cleared, dealing a symbolic blow to the non-negotiating faction.<sup>122</sup> By March

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<sup>119</sup> 'Die Berliner Linie ist ein Leichnam', *Der Spiegel*, 25/1983, p. 41.

<sup>120</sup> Geronimo, *Feuer und Flamme: Zur Geschichte der Autonomen*, pp. 116-22.

<sup>121</sup> Suttner, *'Beton Brennt': Hausbesetzer und Selbstverwaltung im Berlin, Wien und Zürich der 80er*, p. 191.

<sup>122</sup> Grauwasche, *Autonome in Bewegung: Aus den ersten 23 Jahren*, p. 82.

1984, there were only 18 illegal squats left in the Island City. By October of the same year all were gone.<sup>123</sup>

Although the rehab squatter movement had run its course by the mid-1980s, the legacy it left on West Berlin's city-scape proved enduring. Firstly, the squatters' opposition to urban renewal policies ultimately produced a shift in official planning policy, with the CDU Senate endorsing the 12 principles of 'gentle urban renewal' in March 1983.<sup>124</sup> These had been drawn up by a team led by the architect Hardt-Waltherr Hämer who was working under the auspices of the *Internationale Bauausstellung* (IBA). Points one and nine emphasised the importance of 'citizens participation' in planning decisions; point two stated that planners had to be 'accountable to residents'; whereas points three and six sought the 'preservation of the neighbourhood character'.<sup>125</sup> Hämer himself had been a long-standing critic of the existing urban renewal paradigm and, taken together, his programme for 'gentle urban renewal' reflected an unambiguous victory for the citizens' initiatives that had kick-started the rehab squatter movement.

The squatted buildings that were legalised also left their own imprint on their local neighbourhoods, adding to the infrastructure of the city's alternative culture. Securing autonomy vis-à-vis the renovation and internal organisation of the buildings, the legalised squats (what are normally referred to as 'house

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<sup>123</sup> Suttner, *'Beton Brennt': Hausbesetzer und Selbstverwaltung im Berlin, Wien und Zürich der 80er*, p. 190.

<sup>124</sup> See Matthias Bernt, *Rübergelappt: Die 'Behutsame Stadterneuerung' im Berlin der 90er Jahre* (Berlin: Schalkey & Jeep, 2003), pp. 47-63.

<sup>125</sup> See Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin*, p. 235.

projects’) provided spaces not only for living collectives but also for alternative cafés, bars and venues. A number of squats – the Hexenhaus and the Kuckuk – even opened up archives, ensuring that the history of the movement would be collected for posterity.<sup>126</sup> Often decorated with brightly painted facades, these projects were easily recognisable, reinforcing the link between districts such as Kreuzberg and West Berlin’s reputation as a centre for counter-culture and radical politics. However, while over 70 squats were legalised and their occupants were able to realise their various ideas and projects, those who were evicted found that, with the authorities’ zero tolerance approach to occupation, their space for political action was now circumscribed.

#### VI. CODA: IN THE SHADOW OF THE WALL, THE BEACH

In a curious concluding chapter to the history of squatting in West Berlin, the last major conflict between squatters and the authorities was centred on a small area of GDR territory, known as the Lenné-Dreieck, which was in the process of being purchased by West Berlin Senate. This area, measuring roughly half a hectare, jutted out into West Berlin to the north of the Potsdamer Platz, but was separated from the rest of the GDR capital by the Berlin Wall. A sort of no-man’s-land between the two halves of the divided city, the area was left largely undisturbed for over two-and-a-half decades. In 1988, however, jurisdiction passed to West Berlin as part of a deal which the East Berlin government was compensated to the sum of 76 million deutschmarks. In what appeared to mark

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<sup>126</sup> When the Kuckuk was evicted on 1984 the archive was transferred to a legalized squat in the Cuvrystraße, where it remains today.



a return to controversial urban reconstruction practices, the West Berlin Senate announced that the territory would be bulldozed to provide space for the construction of a new motorway in the inner city. The transfer of the Lenné-Dreieck from East to West was scheduled to take place on 1 July 1988. However, on 26 May 1988 the land was occupied by squatters and local citizens' initiatives opposed to the Senate's plans, who started erecting huts and makeshift accommodation on the territory. The squatters re-named the area the Kubat-Dreieck, in honour of Norman Kubat who had been convicted in connection with the May Day unrest in Kreuzberg the previous year and who had hung himself in prison the day before the occupation. The occupation was tolerated by the East German border guards, and over the ensuing weeks the population of the Kubat-Dreieck rose to several hundred.<sup>127</sup>

Until the transfer of territory on 1 July 1988, the West Berlin authorities were powerless to intervene. Confronted with the emergence of this encampment, West Berlin's police attempted to block access to and from the territory, which was accessed through a path running along the Wall, and referred to as the 'Ho-Chi-Minh Trail' by the squatters. In an attempt to induce insomnia amongst the occupants, the police positioned loudspeaker vans across from the Kubat-Dreieck, which blared out Queen's 'We are the Champions' through the night. The frontier between the Kubat-Dreieck and West Berlin proper duly emerged as a flashpoint, with regular skirmishes taking place

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<sup>127</sup> 'Hüttendorf im Niemandsland', *taz*, 1. June. 1988; 'Checkpoint Norbie', *Der Spiegel*, 27. July. 1988; See also Martin Schaad, *Dann geh doch rüber - Über die Mauer in den Osten* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2009).

between the authorities and activists, who, once safely in GDR territory, could not be pursued.

On 1 July 1988, however, the territory was incorporated into West Berlin, and the authorities moved in with a force of 900 riot police, water cannon, and demolition equipment. In what must count as one of the most bizarre scenes in the history of Cold War Berlin, some 182 activists, rather than waiting to be arrested by the West Berlin police, instead scaled the Berlin Wall and fled to the GDR. Once in the border strip, they were duly rounded up by the East German guards, loaded onto trucks and driven to their barracks, where they were fed breakfast then released back to West Berlin.<sup>128</sup>

Prior to all this, however, at two o'clock in the morning, an unspecified number of punks, had gathered on the eastern side of the wall. These individuals were known to have links with Prenzlauer Berg's Zionskirche, and congregated near the border in order to demonstrate their solidarity (the Stasi used the term '*Solidaritätsaktion*') with those being evicted from the Kubat-Dreieck.<sup>129</sup> Small though their number may have been, these East Germans were not only abreast of developments on the other side of the Wall, but also risked the very real repercussions that could follow from their actions in order to articulate their support for a milieu with which they identified with across the Cold War divide. An isolated incident in itself, it was nevertheless an example of the proliferation of dissent and the emboldening of the regime's critics which characterised the last years of the East German dictatorship.

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<sup>128</sup> 'Massenflucht über die Mauer - in den Osten', taz, 2. July 1988.

<sup>129</sup> BStU, MfS, AOPK 747/89, fol. 70.

# CHAPTER 7:

## SQUATTING AND THE SED-STATE

### I. INTRODUCTION

In contrast to their counterparts in West Berlin, the overwhelming majority of squatters in the GDR did not openly oppose the SED authorities or its urban planning policies. Nevertheless, they presented a significant challenge to the Socialist polity. For a start, squatting undermined the principles of 'order, discipline and security', to which the GDR's elites were so attached.<sup>1</sup> Through controlling the provision of housing in the GDR, the authorities hoped to bind citizens in a relationship of dependency to the East German state – and, by extension, to the ruling party, the SED. Though the right to housing was anchored in the East German constitution, obtaining a dwelling or an apartment, as Hannsjörg Buck puts it in the standard work on housing in the GDR, was ultimately, 'an act of state indulgence'.<sup>2</sup>

Squatting, as this thesis argues, provided a means to circumvent this relationship of dependency. What is more, the emergence of alternative lifestyles in East German cities – a process which itself was facilitated by illegal squatting – proved a far cry from what the East German authorities would have

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<sup>1</sup> In 1980, for example, the Council of Ministers instructed the local authorities at the Bezirk level to ensure 'eine straffe Leitung der staatlichen Wohnungspolitik ... und dafür zu sorgen, dass die Prinzipien von Ordnung, Disziplin und Sicherheit bei der Vergabe von Wohnungen konsequent beachtet werden.' SAPMO, DC/20/25332 - Ministerrat der DDR, Sekretariat des Ministerrates, 'Beschluß über Maßnahmen zur Erhöhung der Verantwortung der örtlichen Räte auf dem Gebiet der Wohnraumlenkung', 1980, fol. 4, my emphasis.

<sup>2</sup> Buck, *Mit hohem Anspruch gescheitert: Die Wohnungspolitik der DDR*, p. 169.

considered as constituting a socialist *Wohnkultur*, or way of life. Squatting led to an erosion of control in this crucially important domestic policy sphere, thus presenting a political and ideological challenge to the SED-state. For in contrast to Karl Marx, in whose name and in accordance to whose principles the East German regime purported to govern, it was inconceivable to the GDR's rulers that state control should even fray around the edges, let alone wither away.

Squatting also presented a challenge to the authorities for pragmatic reasons. While it is true that squatters often occupied dwellings that were run-down and dilapidated, and that the practice could thus serve as a safety valve by taking pressure off the official housing waiting lists, this was not universally the case. Some properties might have been standing empty for only a short time and been scheduled to be assigned to new tenants. Indeed, the longer it took the overburdened and understaffed housing authorities to allocate a property that had become vacant, the more likely it might be to get targeted by opportunistic squatters. In the north Berlin suburb of Pankow, for example, the allocation of one apartment in June 1984 was delayed for several months, 'until it was ultimately occupied without permission'.<sup>3</sup> Even small windows of opportunity could be exploited. In October 1979 in Berlin-Friedrichshain, in what must have been an embarrassing situation for all parties involved, the housing officials were forced to cut short a scheduled flat-viewing with a prospective tenant after it transpired that the property in question had already been taken over by squatters, despite standing vacant for no more than one

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<sup>3</sup> LAB C Rep. 111 Nr 57, 'Stellvertreter des Oberbürgermeisters für Wohnungspolitik: Information über die Eingaben während der Vorbereitung der Wahlen am 6. Mai 1984', 'Eingabenanalyse für das I. Halbjahr 1984', 13.07.1984.

week.<sup>4</sup> And these were no isolated incidents. An inspection undertaken in the same district in 1982 reported that there was a shortfall of hundreds of apartments due to them being 'blocked' by illegal tenants.<sup>5</sup>

Strategies to counter squatting were discussed by the highest *state* authority in the GDR, including the Council of Ministers and its subsidiary department, the *Abteilung für Staats- und Rechtsfragen* (Department for State and Legal Affairs). Squatting was a matter that also concerned the *party* leadership, particularly at the *Bezirk* level. In the GDR capital, individuals such as Konrad Neumann, First Secretary of the SED in East Berlin and Politburo member, and his successor, Egon Krenz, were keen to see illegal squatting stamped out. While it is true that squatters in the GDR did not become the targets of mass repression, the authorities at the higher echelons were not indifferent to this practice. Throughout the 1970s and particularly in the 1980s, measures to tackle squatting were discussed, debated and written into law.

This chapter investigates some of the efforts undertaken to combat illegal squatting in the GDR. It demonstrates that structural problems inherent to the various organs responsible for responding to and preventing cases of illegal squatting prevented the phenomenon from being successfully tackled. This evidence is used to question some influential interpretations of the way in which the SED party-state functioned. Even in the Honecker era, when the repressive apparatus of the GDR was at its most advanced, the East German

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<sup>4</sup> LAB C Rep. 135-02-02, Nr. 1210 Rat des Stadtbezirks Friedrichshain, Ratsitzung am 25. Okt. 1979, 'Zustimmung zur Räumung von Wohnungen (240/79)'.

<sup>5</sup> SAPMO, DY 30/22388 - 'Komitee der ABI Inspektion Bauwesen/Wasserwirtschaft, 'Zu Problem der Wohnungspolitik/Wohnungswirtschaft und der Wohnraumlenkung sowie der Verantwortung der örtlichen Räte auf diesem Gebiet'. 14 Okt 1982, p. 3.

dictatorship hardly conformed to a totalitarian society. After four decades of Communist rule, the party-state at the grassroots was considerably less rigid than a number of top-down accounts would suggest.<sup>6</sup>

## II. MAINTAINING 'ORDER, DISCIPLINE AND SECURITY': THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF SED POLICY

In the East German capital, the authorities responsible for devising strategies for tackling illegal squatting included the SED *Bezirksleiter*, the city's Mayor, and the *Stadtrat für Wohnungspolitik*. In 1983, with as many as 1,000 cases of squatting being recorded per annum, discussions involving all three – Konrad Neuman, Erhard Krack and Wolfgang Bein – focused on the potential for new legislative powers to assist 'the fight against (and prevention of) the illegal occupation of apartments.'<sup>7</sup> That same year, East Berlin's SED-party leadership passed a resolution calling for 'a more energetic application of the [current] legal measures available to combat the unlawful occupation of properties.'<sup>8</sup> Not to be outdone, Mayor Krack even ventured the use of the state-controlled press organs to 'mobilise public opinion against the illegal occupation of living space', though there is no evidence to indicate whether his somewhat implausible

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<sup>6</sup> For interpretations that adopt a 'totalitarian' interpretation, see Schroeder, *Der SED-Staat: Partei, Staat und Gesellschaft, 1949-1990*; Armin Mitter and Stefan Wolle, *Untergang auf Raten. Unbekannte Kapitel der DDR- Geschichte* (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1993). In his history of post-war Germany, Hans-Ulrich Wehler contends 'in terms of its claims ... and its political praxis, the GDR embodied the regime typology of a left-totalitarian dictatorship.' Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Bundesrepublik und DDR* p. 414.

<sup>7</sup> SAPMO, DY30/22387, 'Sektor Staatsorgane: Vorschläge zur Durchführung des von Genossen Konrad Naumann angeregten Gespräche mit den Genossen Erhard Krack und Genossen Bein .. über den Beschluß des Sekretariats der Bezirksleitung Berlin vom 21.3.1983.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 'Bezirksleitung Berlin der SED, Büro des Sekretariats: Beschluss des Sekretariats der Bezirksleitung Berlin der SED 03 -7/83 - 131 - vom 21.3.1983', p. 5.

suggestion, which would have entailed a public admission of the problem, was ever seriously considered as practical.<sup>9</sup> More pragmatically, the housing authorities resolved to decrease the time apartments were vacant, noting that properties that stood empty for an extended period served to 'encourage' citizens to move in illegally.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, buildings that were, in the view of the hygiene inspectors, not fit for human habitation, were also to be secured and their utilities cut off in order to prevent 'unauthorised entry or use'.<sup>11</sup> In addition to adopting a tougher approach towards illegal squatters, the practice of squatting itself, the authorities hoped, would become a more difficult enterprise to undertake in the first place.

At the national level, too, the party-state made an effort to coordinate a strategy that would reduce the frequency of – or better still, stop altogether – instances of illegal squatting. Thus in 1980, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Willi Stoph, passed a strongly worded resolution calling for correct procedures in the allocation of housing to be 'strictly enforced'.<sup>12</sup> To this end, a special commission, the *Arbeitsgruppe Wohnungspolitik*, was established in

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<sup>9</sup> SAPMO, DY30/22387, 'Magistrat von Berlin, Der Oberbürgermeister: Dienstanweisung zur Bekämpfung des ungesetzlichen Bezuges von Wohnraum in Berlin' 20. April. 1983.

<sup>10</sup> LAB, C. Rep. 100-05, Nr. 1847, Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats: 'Maßnahmen zur Senkung der Leerstandzeiten von Wohnungen', 21. Jan. 1981.

<sup>11</sup> 'Über die Volkspolizei-Inspektion Berlin-Friedrichshain ist wiederholt zu kontrollieren, dass die gesperrten Häuser, Gebäudeteile und Konzentrationen gesperrter Wohnungen entsprechend gesichert sind und nicht durch Unbefugte betreten oder genutzt werden.' LAB C Rep. 135-02-02, Nr. 1126 Rat des Stadtbezirks Friedrichshain, Ratsitzungen am 9. June 1977, 'Maßnahmen zur Erfassung von leerstehendem Wohnraum (0138/77)'; 'Leerstehende Wohnungen sind so zu sichern, dass eine unbefugte Nutzung verhindert wird, werden ganze Stränge oder Gebäudeteile nicht mehr bewohnt, ist sofort die Medienversorgung zu unterbrechen.' LAB C Rep 143-02-02 Nr. 1387, Ratbeschlüsse Prenzlauerberg Ratsitzung am 27. 11. 1986, 'Sperrung von Wohnungen und Nebengebäuden', unpaginated.

<sup>12</sup> See SAPMO, DC/20/25332, Ministerrat der DDR, Sekretariat des Ministerrates, 'Beschluß über Maßnahmen zur Erhöhung der Verantwortung der örtlichen Räte auf dem Gebiet der Wohnraumlentung', 1980, fol. 4.

1982, under the direct control of the Council of Ministers. A central aspect of the commission's remit was to devise strategies for countering the growing trend in illegal squatting that was being registered republic-wide.<sup>13</sup> In 1985, after several years of deliberation and consultation with local party and municipal leaders, the legislation governing the distribution of housing (the *Wohnraumlennkungsverordnung*) was modified, providing greater powers to the local housing authorities. 'In cases where living space is occupied without (official) permission', explained the introductory preamble to the legislation, 'the eviction process is to be simplified and [made] more effective.'<sup>14</sup> Fines for illegal squatting were also increased. However, the impact of these measures proved minimal. Although the number of cases of squatting recorded in East Berlin in 1985 dropped from a high of 1,251 the previous year, '870 illegal occupations clearly indicate', one report noted, that more had to be done.<sup>15</sup>

In 'totalitarian' polities, power is regarded as radiating out smoothly from the centre, encountering few hurdles and little resistance. However, one problem faced by the SED hierarchy in their attempts to tackle illegal squatting was that the new powers provided to the local organs were not effectively utilised. Contrary to the wishes of those at the higher echelons of the party-state apparatus, officials at the local level did not consistently respond to cases of illegal squatting in the disciplined manner in which they were supposed to

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<sup>13</sup> SAPMO, DY 30/22388, 'Information über die Tätigkeit der Arbeitsgruppe Wohnungspolitik und Wohnungswirtschaft beim Ministerrat', p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> 'Ibid., 'Neue Verordnung über die Wohnraumlennkung', 1985, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Lab, C Rep 100-05 Nr. 2007, 'Einschätzung über den Stand der Arbeit mit den Eingaben der Bürger in den Staatsorganen im Jahre 1985 sowie mit den Eingaben zu den Wahlen 1981 und 1984', 20. Jan. 1986. p. 9.



act. In 1987, two years after the new legislation had become operative, the *Akademie für Staats- und Rechtswissenschaft* (Academy for State Jurisprudence) commented that the 'differentiated exertion of influence' furnished by the new legislation 'is not being sufficiently applied.'<sup>16</sup> At the grassroots level there was little perceptible change in mentality. The local organs continued to respond to cases of squatting only 'hesitantly, or not at all'.<sup>17</sup> What is more, measures to secure empty properties from being occupied proved to be largely ineffective. This itself derived from the local organs' loss of oversight over the housing stock – a problem that had been building up over decades. In 1965, an investigation undertaken on behalf of the Council of Ministers noted that, in the East German capital, 'there exists no accurate overview of the housing stock'.<sup>18</sup> Another investigation, this time in 1978, concluded that 'The existing overview of the empty housing stock is not accurate enough and in many cases not up-to-date.'<sup>19</sup> Still in 1987, in Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg, the local officials had to admit that 'in the district ... there is currently no exact overview of the current conditions of the housing stock and its use.'<sup>20</sup>

A closer examination of the organ directly responsible for housing in the GDR, the Communal Housing Association (KWV), reveals the difficulties with

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<sup>16</sup> SAPMO, DY 30/22388, Akademie für Staats- und Rechtswissenschaft der DDR, 'Information über Erfahrungen bei der Anwendung und zur Wirksamkeit der Verordnung über die Lenkung des Wohnraumes vom 16. Oktober 1985' (Jan. 1987), p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> LAB, C Rep 307 Nr 7 - 'ABI Bericht über der Durchführung des Staatsratserlasses vom 2.7.1965', p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> LAB, C. Rep. 100-05, Nr. 1757/2 - Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats, Sitzung des Magistrats am 12. July. 1978: 'Erfahrungen und Ergebnisse bei der Durchsetzung der Magistratsbeschlüsse 83/76 ... und 183/76 zur Verhinderung von Leerstand...'

<sup>20</sup> LAB, C Rep. 134-02-02 Nr. 1398, Rat des Stadtbezirkes Prenzlauer Berg, Ratsitzung am 16.4.1987.

which the SED-state was confronted at the grassroots. Over 10,000 staff worked in the East Berlin KWV, which had a central office as well as sub-departments in each district. The organisation was responsible for managing almost half a million individual apartments in the capital. To put this into perspective, the *Neue Heimat*, the largest housing corporation in the Federal Republic, had 200,000 properties in its entire portfolio.<sup>21</sup> Given that the KWV impacted on the everyday lives of almost all of East Berlin's denizens, ensuring its 'efficiency', as one local party official noted, was a 'foremost political priority.'<sup>22</sup> Quite simply, the KWV counted among 'the most important organisations' in the city.<sup>23</sup>

Even a cursory analysis of citizens' petitions, however, indicates the frustration felt by many with the KWV. The KWV's staff were constantly criticised for their 'bureaucratic mind-set' and their 'cold-heartedness', both by private citizens and by those within the party-state apparatus.<sup>24</sup> To be sure, many of the problems associated with the KWV ran much deeper than the bureaucracy itself and were rather the product of entrenched structural weaknesses in the command economy. Nevertheless, as the Council of Ministers itself concluded in 1977, those staffing the KWV were often 'technically and politically under-qualified' for the job and the responsibilities that it entailed – sentiments which were echoed in reports coming from the *Bezirk* and *Kreis*

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.architekturarchiv-web.de/nhkap4.htm> retrieved 25 June 2013.

<sup>22</sup> SAPMO, DY 30/22386 - Abteilung Staats- und Rechtsfragen, 'Einschätzung des Standes der Verwirklichung des Beschlusses der Stadtverordnetenversammlung Berlin zur Entwicklung der VEB KWV', 25.10.1979, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example: LAB, C Rep. 100-05 Nr. 1458 - Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats, 'Eingabenbearbeitung 2. Halbjahr 1970', 17. März. 1971, pp. 8-10.

levels.<sup>25</sup> In 1980, for instance, those staffing the KWV in Friedrichshain were described as suffering from 'inadequate typing skills, insufficient qualifications and an underdeveloped sense of responsibility'.<sup>26</sup> Republic-wide, only one in ten of the of the KWV's staff possessed higher education qualifications, and only a small minority of officials, some 15 per cent in total, were SED party members.<sup>27</sup>

Working for the housing organs, it should be pointed out, was a demanding vocation. In large cities, a housing official might have to deal with several hundred different housing applications at any one time. What is more, officials could expect up to 100 often frustrated and angry citizens to turn up to their weekly open surgeries.<sup>28</sup> The low-level functionaries who worked in such offices inhabited a difficult position between their superiors, on the one hand, and disaffected citizens, on the other. Often incurring the displeasure of both, they were between a veritable rock and a hard place. Indeed, due to the GDR's perennial housing crisis, officials working in the KWV, as well as those who assisted the housing organs, long served as targets for popular opprobrium.<sup>29</sup>

Internal memoranda from the 1970s and 1980s indicate that those employed in

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<sup>25</sup> SAPMO, DC20/22820 - Ministerrat: 'Analyse: zur Vorlage: Vorschläge zur besseren Gewährleistung der Verwaltung und Erhaltung des Wohnungsfonds', 1977, fol. 26.

<sup>26</sup> LAB, C Rep. 135-02-02 Nr. 1246 Rat des Stadtbezirks Friedrichshain, Ratsitzungen am 23. Okt. 1980, 'Bericht über die Ergebnisse bei der Durchsetzung der gemeinsamen Arbeitsanweisung des Rates zur Arbeit mit Wohnungsleerstand zur Erschließung von Wohnraumreserven durch den VEB KWV', p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> BAB, DC 20/11272 - 'Analyse und Schlussfolgerungen zur Erhöhung der Leistungsfähigkeit und Effektivität ... der KWV...', p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> SAPMO, DY 30/22388 - 'Information: Schaffung eines Beispiels zur kadermäßigen Stärkung der Fachorgane Wohnungspolitik und Wohnungswirtschaft in den Städten Leipzig und Dresden', July 1988, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> One report from Karl-Marx-Stadt in the 1950s noted: 'Es ist kein Einzelbeispiel, dass ehrentamtliche Helfer beschimpft werden und auf der Strasse aufgespuckt werden, wenn sie Wohnungssuchenden nicht helfen konnten.' Cited in Rowell, 'Wohnungspolitik 1949-61,' p. 721.

the housing organs suffered from a 'heavy psychological and physical burden', which led to 'untenably high' levels of staff turnover, in particular in inner city districts where the housing conditions were the worst and the pressure on officials highest.<sup>30</sup> In Prenzlauer Berg, for instance, the annual turnover rate in the district's Department for Housing was 35 per cent.<sup>31</sup> Such high rates of fluctuation, as party investigations and reports noted, not only impacted negatively on the effectiveness of the bureaucracy as a whole, it also 'made an effective prevention of legal transgressions', such as squatting, 'more difficult'.<sup>32</sup>

As Mary Fulbrook reminds us, 'housing was, and remained, a central problem of the SED regime, and one of the chief causes of popular dissatisfaction'.<sup>33</sup> Yet, its social importance notwithstanding, the Housing Question was often treated as a 'hot potato', as one report from the 1960s put it, with the responsibility for addressing the fundamental material needs of the population being passed on from one department to the next.<sup>34</sup> Because of the magnitude of the housing shortage, and the difficulties that it presented, officials and local organs were hesitant to tackle the problem head-on, seeking instead to prevaricate or delegate responsibility elsewhere. Such tendencies were exacerbated by the surprising absence of a central ministry, sub-department, or

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<sup>30</sup> SAPMO, DC 20-I/4/6260 - 'ABI Bericht über die Kontrolle zur Erhöhung der Wirksamkeit der VEB Gebäudewirtschaft/KWV für die Verwaltung und Erhaltung des Wohnungsbestandes', fol. 13; SAPMO, DC/20/22820 - Ministerrat: 'Analyse: zur Vorlage: Vorschläge zur besseren Gewährleistung der Verwaltung und Erhaltung des Wohnungsfonds', 1977, fol. 26.

<sup>31</sup> SAPMO, DY30/22387 - 'Abschlussbericht des Verfassungs- und Rechtsausschusses der Volkskammer der DDR über die Arbeitsgruppeneinsätze zur Kontrolle der Wirksamkeit der Rechtsvorschriften zur Verhütung und Bekämpfung von Ordnungswidrigkeiten', May 1983, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*, p. 51.

<sup>34</sup> LAB, C Rep 307 Nr 7 - 'ABI Bericht über der Durchführung des Staatsratserlasses vom 2.7.1965'.

even an individual responsible for coordinating the regime's housing policy on the national level. While central ministries played an important role in overseeing housing construction and urban planning – initially through the Ministry for Reconstruction, and, from 1958, through the newly established Ministry for Building and Construction – there was no such framework for managing the *existing* housing stock.<sup>35</sup> From an early stage in the GDR's history, the administration of the GDR's housing stock found itself in an institutional and conceptual 'no-man's land', as Jay Rowell puts it.<sup>36</sup> This continued to be the case in the 1970s and 1980s, despite the elevation of the Housing Question to the centrepiece of the SED's socio-political policy.<sup>37</sup>

With the absence of a central organisation, it was often left to the local authorities at the *Bezirk* level to coordinate and devise their own strategies for allocating and distributing housing, the result being a lack of coherence and unity in policy.<sup>38</sup> The Council of Ministers had been informed in 1977 that the administration at the *Bezirk*, *Kreis* and municipal levels failed to work together to ensure a unified policy.<sup>39</sup> In 1980, moreover, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers could note that 'leading comrades' in the localities were continually bringing attention to the fact that, 'in such a politically important area such as housing policy ... which impacted on the everyday life of citizens in every city

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<sup>35</sup> Rowell, 'Wohnungspolitik 1949-61,' p. 703.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 709.

<sup>37</sup> Rowell, 'Wohnungspolitik 1971-89,' p. 683.

<sup>38</sup> Rowell, 'Wohnungspolitik 1949-61,' pp. 711-12.

<sup>39</sup> SAPMO, DC/20/22820, Ministerrat: "Analyse: zur Vorlage: Vorschläge zur besseren Gewährleistung der Verwaltung und Erhaltung des Wohnungsfonds", 1977, fol.10.

and community, there existed no unified central leadership vis-à-vis the local organs (*Bezirke*).<sup>40</sup>

A corollary thereof was that the ways in which the GDR authorities responded to illegal squatting varied from region to region. Whereas in smaller towns and also in certain cities the local authorities were committed to evicting squatters, noted one report, 'in the capital Berlin, for instance, citizens who act unlawfully are for the most part only confronted with fines of up to 300 marks.'<sup>41</sup> A similar tacit toleration of squatters was practised in other urban centres. One Stasi report reveals that in Dresden, in 1984, the housing officials were known to grant temporary contracts to squatters, so long as they agreed to undertake and finance necessary renovation work.<sup>42</sup> In 1988, such customs were still evident in Rostock, where the local authorities largely turned a blind eye to illegal occupations in the city's old town, being of the opinion that 'as long as these buildings remain occupied, they wont fall completely into ruin, and value will be preserved.'<sup>43</sup>

Differences in policy manifested themselves not only at a regional or city-by-city level, however. Within individual municipalities or *Bezirke*, discrepancies were evident too. This was no-where more evident than in the East German capital, where the local authorities in neighbouring districts could adopt completely different approaches in response to the same problem. Not

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., Ministerrat der DDR, Sekretariat des Ministerrates, 'Die Erhöhung der Verantwortung der örtlichen Räte auf dem Gebiet der Wohnraumlenkung', 1. April. 1980, unpaginated.

<sup>41</sup> BAB, DP 1/20292, 'Information über Probleme und Hinweise aus Wohnungseingaben zur Wohnraumlenkungsverordnung', unpaginated.

<sup>42</sup> MfS, BV Dresden, AKG Nr. 10070, fol. 10.

<sup>43</sup> MfS, BV Rostock, Abt XX, Nr. 1633, fol. 3.

only did the number of cases of squatting vary across the city, as one report to the Magistrate of East Berlin noted, but there was also a 'clear distinction ... between the ways in which the different municipal districts respond[ed]' to such transgressions.<sup>44</sup> In 1984, for instance, squatters were granted legal contracts in just over half of 311 recorded cases in Prenzlauer Berg. In Weissensee, however, this figure was 75 per cent. In Pankow and Mitte, on the other hand, only one in five squatters were able to legalise their tenancies retroactively. Yet in neither of these two districts were any squatters evicted. In Pankow, only 3 of its 104 squatters were issued with fines. In Treptow, by contrast, the authorities evicted a quarter of the district's squatters and issued fines in 96 per cent of cases. In Köpenick, 90 per cent of the district squatters were fined; yet none of the 87 illegally occupied apartments had been evicted.<sup>45</sup> With little direction from above, and needing to respond to pressures from below, the local authorities acted with a degree of autonomy, often choosing to follow the path of least resistance.

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<sup>44</sup> LAB, C Rep. 100-05 Nr. 1968 - Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats, Sitzung am 7. Nov. 1984, 'Stand der Erfüllung der namentlichen Wohnraumvergabepläne 1984 und der Vorbereitung 1985 sowie Erfahrungen in der Arbeit der Räte der Stadtbezirke'. Document included: 'Information über eine Untersuchung ausgewählter Aufgaben auf dem Gebiet der Wohnungspolitik', 13. Nov. 1984.

<sup>45</sup> LAB, C Rep. 100-05 Nr. 1968 - Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats, Sitzung am 7. Nov. 1984, 'Stand der Erfüllung der namentlichen Wohnraumvergabepläne 1984 und der Vorbereitung 1985 sowie Erfahrungen in der Arbeit der Räte der Stadtbezirke'. Document included: 'Information über eine Untersuchung ausgewählter Aufgaben auf dem Gebiet der Wohnungspolitik', 13. Nov. 1984.

**Table 1: Cases of illegal squatting in East Berlin, January to November 1984.** <sup>46</sup>

District	Total Number of Cases	Evictions	Tenancies Issued	Fines Issued
Mitte	48	--	10 (20.8 %)	12 (25 %)
Prenzlauer Berg	311	23	169 (54.3 %)	169 (54 %)
Friedrichshain	242	1	85 (35.1 %)	37 (15 %)
Treptow	56	13	18 (32.1 %)	54 (96 %)
Köpenick	87	--	40 (45.9 %)	80 (92 %)
Lichtenberg	10	1	--	1 (10 %)
Weißensee	13	1	10 (76.9 %)	10 (76.9 %)
Pankow	104	--	21 (20.2 %)	3 (2 %)
Marzahn	18	6	12 (66.6 %)	9 (50 %)

### III. SQUATTERS AND THE SURVEILLANCE STATE

The Stasi, the party's 'sword and shield', served as the nerve centre of the East German state. The behemoth, whose size ballooned during the Honecker era, operated according to Erich Mielke's dictum of 'know all, control all'.<sup>47</sup> Manfred Schell and Werner Kalinka argue that the Stasi managed to ensure a 'blanket surveillance of [East German] society', and there is no doubting that the agency exercised a constant, malign and far-reaching influence on the GDR.<sup>48</sup> In its forty-year history, the East German security organs collected some 178 kilometres of files, maintained records on six million individuals, gathered over one million photographs and negatives, and stored thousands of human scents

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<sup>46</sup> Source: LAB C Rep. 100-05 Nr. 1968 - Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats, Sitzung am 7. Nov. 1984, Stand der Erfüllung der namentlichen Wohnraumvergabepläne 1984 und der Vorbereitung 1985 sowie Erfahrungen in der Arbeit der Räte der Stadtbezirke: 'Information über eine Untersuchung ausgewählter Aufgaben auf dem Gebiet der Wohnungspolitik', 13. Nov. 1984.

<sup>47</sup> Manfred Schell and Werner Kalinka, *Stasi und kein Ende: Die Personen und Fakten* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1991), p. 100.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.



in glass jars.<sup>49</sup> By 1989, the behemoth had 91,000 full-time operatives and 174,000 unofficial informants, or IMs. Its agents were much thicker on the ground than the Gestapo's, which had 31,000 in active service covering the whole of the *Reich* in 1944.<sup>50</sup> Paul Betts argues that the Stasi did not so much lord *over* East German society as become embedded *in* society.<sup>51</sup> Over the course of the GDR's history, an estimated one in every thirteen citizens worked for the agency in one capacity or another.<sup>52</sup>

The Stasi was well aware of the problem of squatting. It received information about this practice not only through its network of informants but also from the other bureaucracies that constituted the SED-state. Indeed, on reading one report on the city's empty housing stock in 1978, General Major Schwanitz, the Stasi chief in East Berlin, stressed that 'it must not be permitted that asocial and hostile elements are able to find shelter in such objects.'<sup>53</sup> The important terms here are 'asocial' and 'hostile', however. It was not the practice of squatting itself that primarily concerned the Stasi but rather certain individuals who engaged in it, and a case in point is provided by one young squatter, Carsten Pauer, who illegally squatted a flat in Prenzlauer Berg's Christinenstraße on 18 June 1982, using a ratchet to break open the door.<sup>54</sup> The apartment itself had been standing empty for some time and was in a

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<sup>49</sup> Catherine Epstein, 'The Stasi: New Research on the East German Ministry of State Security,' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, no. 2 (2004), p. 322.

<sup>50</sup> A point made by Gieske. See Christian Semler, '1968 im Westen – was ging uns die DDR an?', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 45(2003), p. 106.

<sup>51</sup> Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* p. 23.

<sup>52</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 50.

<sup>53</sup> BStU, MfS, BV Berlin, Abteilung VIII 271. fol. 1.

<sup>54</sup> BStU, MfS AOP Nr. 9610/83 (1/3), fol. 20, 40, 41.

considerable state of disrepair, though a prospective tenant had been found and was scheduled to move in and renovate it.<sup>55</sup> Carsten was effectively preventing a legitimate tenant from moving in; he was 'blocking' living space and thus interfering with the housing allocation plan.<sup>56</sup> The district's housing department had been notified of the illegal occupation, the MfS report noted, but had failed to follow up on this information.<sup>57</sup>

Carsten belonged to the ranks of Prenzlauer Berg's squatter-drop-outs. After leaving school, he began an apprenticeship as a painter with the state-owned enterprise, VEB Berlin-Chemie, though he quit his training after two years, claiming that the work did not appeal to him. After that followed a period of unemployment. He was involved in East Berlin's punk scene, a harassed but nevertheless visible sub-culture that emerged in the GDR in the 1980s, and friends from this milieu were often observed entering and leaving the property. According to one neighbour, Carsten's squatted apartment was regularly frequented by around 20 punks, who were 'strikingly dressed'. One of them, she noted, sported a 'strip of hair' which was 'dyed green in the middle'.<sup>58</sup> The MfS identified Carsten's squat as an 'illegal meeting place of various punks from the capital [East Berlin] and the rest of the GDR'.<sup>59</sup> The windows had been painted white to prevent neighbours from being able to see in and on searching the

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<sup>55</sup> BStU, MfS AOP Nr. 9610/83 (2/3), fol. 9.

<sup>56</sup> The author of the MfS report seemed to be perplexed as to how Carsten had been able to register his address with the local People's Police: 'Unerklärlich ist aus diesem Grunde', the report's author noted, 'dass er eine Polizeiliche Meldung [für die Wohnung] erwirken konnte.' BStU, MfS AOP Nr. 9610/83 (2/3), fol. 9.

<sup>57</sup> BStU, MfS AOP Nr. 9610/83 (2/3), fol. 9.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., fol. 9.

<sup>59</sup> BStU, MfS AOP Nr. 9610/83 (1/3), fol. 20, 26.

property, the Stasi noted that ‘the entire apartment is unkempt and dirty.’<sup>60</sup> The interior walls were covered with incriminating graffiti and slogans, varying from openly hostile (‘better dead than red’) to the facetious (‘half-wobbled anarchist underground organisation [of the] GDR’).<sup>61</sup> Next to a portrait of the East German leader Erich Honecker, Carsten had scribbled the slogan ‘anarchy is possible’<sup>62</sup> – an example of *détournement*, the Situationist inspired tactic of appropriating and changing the meaning of official symbols, being applied in the context of late Socialism.

It was not the illegal occupation of his apartment that triggered the MfS’s interest in Carsten and his friends, however. Rather, the security organs’ attention was initially aroused through his contact with West German journalists who were researching on the GDR punk scene. Following a chance meeting, the journalists had visited Carsten’s apartment, where they interviewed him and his friends and took photographs of them posing outside the squat – photographs which were later published in articles in West Germany’s *Konkret* and *Tip* magazines. Carsten was subsequently arrested and, after several months of interrogation, was sentenced to 15 months in prison, on charges of forging illegal contacts with enemies of the GDR and slandering the Socialist state.<sup>63</sup> Following his conviction, the Stasi’s case file concluded that his

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., fol. 46.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., fol. 179.

<sup>62</sup> BStU, MfS AOP Nr. 9610/83 (1/3), fol. 42.

<sup>63</sup> BStU, MfS AOP Nr. 9610/83 (3/3), fol. 144.

'apartment and its use as a meeting place for decadent youths and citizens from non-Socialist countries' had been 'liquidated.'<sup>64</sup>

In these particular cases, the Stasi referred to the illegal occupations in their attempt to build up an incriminating case against their targets and to underscore their negative character. However, individual squatters attracted the attention of the security apparatus primarily for other reasons: for being perceived to be 'asocial' or hostile to the socialist state, for having contacts with the west, or for offering their apartments as meeting places for Punks and other negatively regarded subcultures. Although a number of squatters did fall under the cross-hairs of the Stasi, the security organs did not instigate a witch hunt against the milieu as a whole.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, it is perhaps worth noting that the phenomenon of squatting itself first emerged and then spread in the very decades – the 1970s and 1980s – in which the Stasi bureaucracy ballooned.

It is often overlooked, however, that the Stasi, its importance notwithstanding, constituted but one element of a larger domestic security apparatus. The task of preventing, uncovering and responding to cases of illegal squatting did not fall primarily under the remit of the MfS, but rather under that of various local organs, including the housing authorities, the *Volkspolizei* (People's Police) and the party at the district and municipal level. These organs, Klaus Schröder argues, helped to ensure that the population was monitored by an 'extensive surveillance net'.<sup>66</sup> For many observers, the East German

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<sup>64</sup> BStU, MfS AOP Nr. 9610/83 (3/3), fol. 144.

<sup>65</sup> Grashoff, *Schwarzwohnen: Die Unterwanderung der staatlichen Wohnraumlenkung in der DDR*, p. 24.

<sup>66</sup> Schroeder, *Der SED-Staat: Partei, Staat und Gesellschaft, 1949-1990*, p. 455.

dictatorship's saturation of potential informants confirm its 'totalitarian' character.<sup>67</sup>

The *Volkspolizei* was one such organ charged with maintaining order and security at the GDR's grassroots. Subordinate and responsible to the Ministry of the Interior, the People's Police could count on 175,000 voluntary 'helpers' in the late 1980s – as many as the Ministry for State Security itself.<sup>68</sup> An *Abschnittsbevollmächtigter* (a 'section commissioner' of the People's Police, hereafter ABV), was assigned to each urban neighbourhood and was charged with establishing 'close links' to the population at the grassroots. The ABV, Thomas Lindenberg informs us, would undertake 'regular visits to every household, or at least every house', in order to gather information on the local residents.<sup>69</sup> What is more, the People's Police were responsible for the mandatory citizen registration process (*Anmeldungswesen*). On moving to a new address, each citizen in the GDR was required to provide the local police station with their details, including a copy of their tenancy contract or *Zuweisung*, a policy that was supposed to ensure the authorities maintained an exact oversight over the local population.

The evidence from contemporaries suggests that those in the service of the People's Police were not always the vigilant and efficient enforcers of bureaucratic order that we might imagine, however. Indeed, there were a

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<sup>67</sup> For a good overview of the 'totalitarian' approach see Fulbrook, 'The Limits of Totalitarianism: God, State and Society in the GDR.'

<sup>68</sup> Schroeder, *Der SED-Staat: Partei, Staat und Gesellschaft, 1949-1990*, p. 455.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas Lindenberg, 'Creating State Socialist Governance: The Case of the Deutsche Volkspolizei,' in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch (New York & Oxford Berghahn Books 1999), pp. 128-29.

number of tricks that enabled one to circumnavigate such controls, allowing squatters to register as tenants at a particular address even though they lacked official documentation or papers. Figures from Prenzlauer Berg illustrate the extent of and seeming ease with which controls were being circumvented. 3,484 citizens moved to the district from other regions of the GDR in the first quarter of 1982, and of this number, the authenticity of 462 of the records was inspected. In just under half of all cases, some 42 per cent, no compulsory '*Arbeitsrechtverhältnis*' (work permit) had been provided, and from amongst those who did provide one, in twelve cases the individuals in question were not known to their stated employers. 48 families, that is over 10 per cent of cases examined, had occupied their apartments illegally. Moreover, there were a further five incidences of people claiming to be sub-tenants in addresses without the knowledge of the main leaseholder.<sup>70</sup> And such irregularities were not only confined to this neighbourhood. 'In the district of Köpenick', another report noted, 'even the city mayor, comrade Erhard Krack', had such an illegal tenant registered at his address.'<sup>71</sup>

Police registration was not the only measure in place to ensure that the authorities had an oversight of the local population. In the Honecker era, as Paul Betts notes, efforts to establish 'a new cadre of so-called "confidence men"', whose responsibility it was to 'keep tabs on tenants' in apartment blocks, were stepped up.<sup>72</sup> One of the main tasks of these 'confidence men' was to enforce

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<sup>70</sup> SAPMO, DY30/22387, Erhard Krack correspondence with Klaus Sorgenicht, 2.5.1983, pp. 2-3.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 'Probleme für eine Aussprache mit dem Minister des Innern, Genossen Dickel, zu Fragen der Handhabung der Meldeordnung durch die Paß- und Meldestellen der VP', 19.5.83, p.3.

<sup>72</sup> Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic*, p. 28.

the *Hausbuch* (Housebook), a document intended to keep a record of the tenants who lived in a particular apartment block in addition to any visitors who stayed there longer than three days.<sup>73</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, the party attached increased significance to such trusted citizens. The *Hausbuch* was ‘increasingly ... tied to security agencies’ and considered ‘an important part of the public work of the People’s Police’.<sup>74</sup> What is more, residents were legally required to establish *Hausgemeinschaften* (housing communities) and a *Hausgemeinschaftsleitung* (hereafter HGL) responsible for maintaining ‘order and security’ in the individual buildings.<sup>75</sup> The function of the housing communities was to facilitate the ‘transition of the SED’s politics into every [home and] family’.<sup>76</sup> Together, the *Hausbuch* and the HGL were to serve as the eyes and ears of the local authorities and the party-state at the grassroots.

Such initiatives had first been introduced in the 1950s, but it was during the Honecker era that concerted efforts were made to expand and consolidate them. This, however, did not always prove to be a straightforward process, and as of May 1979 some 20 per cent of buildings in East Berlin still had no functioning HGL.<sup>77</sup> The party faced significant difficulties in attempting to implement this programme. In October 1979, the National Front, charged with establishing housing communities in the East German capital, reported that ‘in

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<sup>73</sup> ‘In das Hausbuch sind alle im Hause wohnenden Personen einzutragen sowie solche Personen, die sich länger als 3 Tage im Hause aufhalten.’ ‘Einführung der Hausbücher’, *Neues Deutschland*, 11. Jan. 1954, p. 9.

<sup>74</sup> Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic*, pp. 145-46.

<sup>75</sup> Buck, *Mit hohem Anspruch gescheitert: Die Wohnungspolitik der DDR*, p. 364.

<sup>76</sup> Andreas Herbst, Winfried Ranke, and Jürgen Winkler, *So funktionierte die DDR: Lexicon der Organisationen und Institutionen Abteilungsgewerkschaftsleitung (AGL) - Liga für Völkerfreundschaft der DDR* 3 vols., vol. 1 (Hamburg: Rowolt, 1994), p. 379.

<sup>77</sup> SAPMO, DY/30/IV B/2/5/137, ‘Einschätzung der Ergebnisse und Erfahrungen bei der Durchführung der Wahlen vom 20. Mai 1979’, 28. May. 1979, fol. 27.

no district did this process pass without conflict.<sup>78</sup> Agitators working on behalf of the party in the East Berlin district of Mitte in 1980 noted that they had confronted innumerable problems. 'In a number of buildings' in the district, it was reported, 'it has not been possible to establish an HGL'.<sup>79</sup>

Historically, the district of Mitte had been home to some of the most run-down and dilapidated quarters in the city. It was here, in and around the Scheunenviertel and the Spandauer Vorstadt, where the impoverished eastern Jews had been concentrated in the Weimar era. It was this densely packed area, north-east of the historic centre, that served as the stomping ground for the pimp and petty criminal Franz Biberkopf, the main protagonist in Alfred Döblin's masterwork, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. While parts of this district had been levelled during the war, much of the physical environment that remained standing had changed little from the pre-war era. The tenements in the Acker Straße, with their interior courtyards running four or five deep, their outside toilets and only cold-running water, retained a Zille-esque squalor. Here, as officials noted, it proved difficult to overcome 'deeply entrenched' suspicions and resistance to their initiatives. The message on the doorsteps, they explained, was that 'the KWV should first carry out the repairs [to the buildings] that they have been promising for years, before we talk about the HGL'.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> SAPMO, DY 6/5113, 'Bericht über die politisch-ideologische Arbeit der Ausschüsse der Nationalen Front in der Hauptstadt der DDR, Berlin, mit Hausgemeinschaftsleitungen nach dem Beschluss des Sekretariats des ZK der SED vom 17.10.1979', p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> SAPMO, DY 6/4649, 'Bericht über Erfahrungen und Ergebnisse der massenpolitischen Arbeit der Ausschüsse der National Front bei der Bildung und Entwicklung stabiler Hausgemeinschaftsleitungen im Stadtbezirk Berlin-Mitte, 9.5.1980', p.5

<sup>80</sup> SAPMO, DY 6/4649, 'Bericht über Erfahrungen und Ergebnisse der massenpolitischen Arbeit der Ausschüsse der National Front bei der Bildung und Entwicklung stabiler Hausgemeinschaftsleitungen im Stadtbezirk Berlin-Mitte, 9.5.1980', p. 5



Similarly, around the Kollwitzplatz in Prenzlauerberg, only 64 of the 217 tenement blocks had a functioning housing community in 1981.<sup>81</sup> In 1983, the district as a whole continued to have a shortfall of over 1,000.<sup>82</sup>

In general, the SED experienced more *Resistenz* (Broszat) to their initiatives, or perhaps simply a greater apathy, in the old, run-down tenement quarters than they did in the new newly built neighbourhoods. Whereas in the modern housing estates, the work of the 'confidence men' and the party 'positively influenced the maintenance of state order', this could not be said for the city as a whole.<sup>83</sup> 'The party's effectiveness in the tenement districts is not sufficient', noted the SED leadership in East Berlin in 1980.<sup>84</sup> Problem areas, as Konrad Neumann highlighted in one of his monthly briefings to Honecker, centred on 'districts ... as well as buildings, in which asocial or other citizens live, who are opposed to our state order and way of life.'<sup>85</sup>

Yet even where initiatives such as the *Hausbuch* and the housing community were in place, they often proved less robust in preventing squatting than the SED would have hoped. The 'confidence men' could range from zealots and busybodies to the politically unreliable, and they were by no means universally party members. One seasoned GDR squatter explained that when

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<sup>81</sup> LAB, C Rep 902 Nr. 4670, 'SED-Bezirksleitung Berlin, Abteilung Parteiorgane, Arbeitsmaterial - Arbeitsmaterial zur Berichterstattung der Kreisleitung Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg der SED am 9. März 1981 vor dem Sekretariat der Bezirksleitung', 5.3.1981, p. 1.

<sup>82</sup> HAV, CH 05b, Notizbuch des Wohnbezirksausschusses, 'Ergebnis des 4 Tage Kurzlehrgang für WBZ Vorsitzende in Köpenick, 26. April 1983.'

<sup>83</sup> LAB, C. Rep. 100-05, Nr. 1847 - Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats: 'Maßnahmen zur Senkung der Leerstandzeiten von Wohnungen', 21. Jan. 1981.

<sup>84</sup> LAB, C Rep 902 Nr. 4670, 'Arbeitsmaterial über Stand, Erfahrungen und Ergebnisse der Arbeit mit Parteiaktiven in den Wohngebieten', 20.06.1980, p. 5.

<sup>85</sup> SAPMO, DY 30/2203, Informationen an Erich Honecker über regionale Probleme in den Monatsberichten des Ersten Bezirkssekretärs der SED in Berlin (Bd 6: 1982-1984), fol. 158.

looking for an apartment he would go directly to the *Hausmeister*, and 'guaranteed there are some of them who you can talk to.' If a property in the building had been standing empty for a long time, rather than reproaching the squatters for not going through the official channels, the *Hausmeister* might say: 'do what you want!' and he'll even give you the key.'<sup>86</sup> In 1977, the local authorities in Friedrichshain felt compelled to issue the directive that, 'with regards to all empty properties ... the HGL and the [responsible individuals] should be instructed ... to only provide apartment keys to legitimate' tenants.<sup>87</sup> In 1985, one employee of the housing organs in Köpenick was even accused of informing prospective squatters of the locations of empty apartments and providing them with access to these properties.<sup>88</sup> In all probability, irregularities such as these, tolerated and facilitated by the authorities and 'confidence men' themselves, were not isolated incidents.<sup>89</sup> The ease with which people could circumvent controls, as a report to the Minister for the Interior in 1983 explained, enabled numerous transgressions including 'the illegal occupation of apartments.'<sup>90</sup> The various initiatives such as the ABV, the *Hausbuch* and the HGL seem to have done little to prevent or expose cases of illegal squatting. The closer one looks at East German society at the grassroots

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<sup>86</sup> Bub, "Hausbesetzer Ost."

<sup>87</sup> LAB, C Rep. 135-02-02, Nr. 1126 Rat des Stadtbezirks Friedrichshain, Ratsitzungen am 9. June 1977, 'Maßnahmen zur Erfassung von leerstehendem Wohnraum (0138/77)'.  
<sup>88</sup> LAB, C Rep 903-01-07 Nr. 1169, 'Primärbelag zur Erfassung und Auswertung der Eingabe von Frau W.' 1985, unpaginated.

<sup>89</sup> LAB, C. Rep. 100-05, Nr. 1870/2 - Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats: 'Berricht des Rates des Stadtbezirks-Köpenick über die Ergebnisse bei der Reduzierung der Leerstandzeiten von Wohnungen', 25. Nov. 1981.

<sup>90</sup> SAPMO, DY30/22387 - 'Probleme für eine Aussprache mit dem Minister des Innern, Genossen Dickel, zu Fragen der Handhabung der Meldeordnung durch die Paß- und Meldestellen der VP', 19.5.83, p. 3.

level, the less it conforms to the totalitarian, panopticon-like model that is often suggested, and the more it becomes apparent that complete oversight of the population and the housing stock envisaged by the party-state apparatus existed only on paper. The local authorities suffered from inefficiency and a lack of resources, while the honorary helpers and confidence men they relied on were not universally dependable. A major problem in Köpenick, the local officials noted, was the insufficient cooperation between the grassroots organisations and the housing communities. The result was 'too little information pertaining to apartments that are vacated by their tenants as well as illegally used living space'.<sup>91</sup> The authorities were aware of these problems, which are referred to year on year in internal reports, yet seem to have been unable to rectify them.

The SED hierarchy certainly had totalitarian ambitions. Paranoid to the extreme, they believed that in omniscience lay the key to securing the state's authority. In reality, however, the bureaucracies responsible for the day-to-day running of the polity suffered an elementary lack of oversight, which in turn served to erode their social control. That it was not all-seeing, that it was not all-knowing, that it was often blind and ignorant, was in fact the mundane reality of East German dictatorship at its grassroots.

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<sup>91</sup> LAB C. Rep. 100-05, Nr. 1870/2 - Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats: 'Bericht des Rates des Stadtbezirks-Köpenick über die Ergebnisse bei der Reduzierung der Leerstandzeiten von Wohnungen', 25. Nov. 1981.

#### IV. SOCIALIST 'SELF HELP'

Through creating bottlenecks, or through 'blocking' the allocation of properties, to use the lexicon of the East German officials, illegal squatters could exacerbate the acute problems already faced by the overburdened housing organs. In 1979, the SED party leadership in East Berlin noted that the district authorities' ability to meet their targets for assigning apartments to prospective tenants was being 'restricted on account of the increasing number of illegal occupations'. Apartments that had been illegally squatted, the report added, were often in 'a relatively good condition'.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, however, squatting could also serve as a potential safety valve, reducing pressure on the waiting lists, especially when squatters occupied properties that were sub-standard, lacking in amenities and in a state of disrepair. In this sense, the SED suffered not only from their failure to solve the Housing Question; they were also, to an extent, the victims of their own partial success. With the construction of new, modern accommodation, equipped with bathrooms, fitted kitchens and central heating, expectations of the standards that a home should meet began to rise. 'Assigning apartments ... is becoming increasingly more difficult on account of the qualitative rise in citizens' demands', one report noted in 1982. Especially among the younger generation who had grown up in modern apartments, it was added, people were less likely to accept apartments without indoor toilets and central heating and instead 'demand better conditions'.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> SAPMO, DY 30/IV B 2/5/114, 'Bezirksleitung Berlin der SED: Analyse über die Entwicklung der Eingaben im Jahre 1979', 31. Jan. 1980. p. 186.

<sup>93</sup> LAB, C Rep. 100-05 Nr. 1894/2, 'Bericht über die Arbeit mit den Eingaben der Bürger in den Fachorganen des Magistrats und den Räten der Stadtbezirke im 1. Halbjahr 1982', 11.08.1982.

Those who were prepared to squat in empty apartments were usually more inclined to tolerate sub-standard conditions. What is more, they also demonstrated a considerable degree of initiative and resourcefulness in their ability to carry out maintenance work and repairs – qualities that were often lacking among those staffing the housing organs in the GDR's dilapidated inner city districts. One East German student, for example, told of how he occupied 'a damp, uncomfortable' building in Prenzlauer Berg's Belforter Straße, which had been boarded up by the hygiene inspectors. He proceeded to dry out the walls with an electric heater; he plastered the apartment and fixed the heating and plumbing, after which he was duly presented with a legal tenancy contract for the property.<sup>94</sup> The local housing organs, by contrast, often struggled to carry out the most basic but necessary repairs. The KWV in Prenzlauer Berg, for instance, were not able to meet their renovation targets in 1982 due to a shortage of 3,200 ovens, 1,300 bathtubs, and 700 toilet bowls. A shortfall of skilled labourers and tradesmen, in particular of bricklayers, chimneysweeps, locksmiths, joiners and plumbers, was also noted.<sup>95</sup>

The SED were not blind to the potential benefits that self-help initiatives such as squatting could bring. At the same time, however, the party wanted to ensure a controlling oversight. A precedent had been set by the annual National Front sponsored *Mach Mit* initiative, founded in the late 1960s. Under the banner of 'Beautify our cities and communities – "Join in!"', East Germans were

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<sup>94</sup> Bub, "Hausbesetzer Ost."

<sup>95</sup> LAB, C Rep. 143-02-02 Nr. 1251, Ratbeschlüsse Prenzlauerberg, Ratsitzungen am 24.2.1982, 'Information über den erreichten Stand in der Arbeit mit Hausreparatur plänen in der Wohnraumwertverhaltung', unpaginated.

encouraged to play a more active role in caring for their surroundings. The programme was intended to tap into citizens' desires to contribute to their community, while at the same time forging connections between them and 'their' state. As Jan Palmowski puts it, "Through "Join in!", party and citizens were one."<sup>96</sup>

A framework for channelling the potential resourcefulness of the squatters, without surrendering the leading role of the party-state, was first outlined by Konrad Neumann, head of the SED in East Berlin, in February 1979. The occasion was the 13<sup>th</sup> SED *Bezirksdelegiertenkonferenz*, hosted in the East German capital. Here, Neumann unveiled a new policy initiative which he and his fellow delegates hoped would help to tackle the growing levels of vacancy in the GDR's turn-of-the-century inner city tenement districts. Henceforth, anyone who was able to identify a property that had been standing empty for more than six months could apply for official permission to take it over and renovate it. There were, naturally, certain criteria that still had to be met. The property in question needed to be of appropriate size, for instance, and it had to be deemed safe for human habitation. But on the whole, the new policy was intended to provide more flexibility when it came to renovating and maintaining the existing housing stock and shortening waiting lists, through bypassing bottlenecks in the centrally planned economy and drawing on the initiative of

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<sup>96</sup> Jan Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945-90* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013).

private citizens.<sup>97</sup> Here, therefore, is an example where squatting may have influenced official SED policy, albeit indirectly.

Although such an initiative favoured those who were practically minded – that is to say, it favoured each according to their ability – it nevertheless proved popular, finding a ‘broad echo’ amongst the denizens of the East German capital.<sup>98</sup> In December 1979, for instance, Frau R. and her husband, who had been waiting for six years to be allocated an apartment, petitioned the authorities in Prenzlauer Berg. They had identified an apartment that had been standing empty for roughly a year. The property in question was of the appropriate size, a modest two-room flat with a kitchen and bathroom. ‘We would like to apply to take [it] over’, the couple wrote in a letter to the local administration.<sup>99</sup> And Frau and Herr R. were not alone in seeking to exploit this new opportunity. In the first six months of 1980, some 4,533 such applications were registered in East Berlin alone, testifying to both the levels of enthusiasm of local citizens and the extent of their housing deprivation.<sup>100</sup>

Processing such applications, which entailed inspecting the property in question, deciding who, out of the various petitioners, was most eligible, or even evicting squatters, should they have occupied the building illegally, proved to be a laborious endeavour, however. Many prospective tenants waited months only

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<sup>97</sup> *Berliner Zeitung*, 12. Feb. 1978, p. 9.

<sup>98</sup> LAB, C. Rep 100-05, Nr. 1833, Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats: ‘Information über die Arbeit mit den Eingaben in den Bereichen des Magistrats von Berlin und der Räte der Stadtbezirke im 1. Halbjahr 1980’, July 1980, p. 8.

<sup>99</sup> LAB, C Rep 902 Nr. 4900, Bezirksleitung der SED, Eingabenbearbeitung durch die Arbeitsgruppe für Staats- und Rechtsfragen beim 1. Sekretär der Bezirksleitung der SED - ‘Eingabe Frau R. an Rat des Stadtbezirks Berlin Prenzlauer Berg’, 4.12.1979, unpaginated.

<sup>100</sup> LAB, C. Rep 100-05, Nr. 1833, Magistrat von Berlin, Büro des Magistrats: ‘Information über die Arbeit mit den Eingaben in den Bereichen des Magistrats von Berlin und der Räte der Stadtbezirke im 1. Halbjahr 1980’, July 1980, p. 8.

to be told that their application had been rejected, that the apartment had been assigned to someone else, or that the property had already been scheduled for renovation. Initial enthusiasm shown for this policy quickly waned, morphing into frustration. Decisions were often taken that 'run contrary' to the guidelines that had been put forward, commented the party leadership in East Berlin disapprovingly in 1980, a year after the policy had first been announced.<sup>101</sup> Another memorandum, this time from 1983, noted that only five per cent of such applications submitted that year had been successful.<sup>102</sup>

The case of Herr S., an employee of VEB Pneumatic, illustrates the difficulties encountered by many. Herr S. had been effectively homeless since splitting up with his wife. The conditions of their divorce barred him from entering his previous home, and he was forced to sleep overnight in an office, where a friend of his worked. This could, of course, only serve as a short-term solution to his predicament. Nevertheless, he had been informed by the authorities in his home town of Fürstenwalde that he faced a wait of up to three years for a new apartment.<sup>103</sup> 'Now I've opted for self-help', Herr S. explained in a letter to the SED party leadership in East Berlin. As far as he understood, 'a citizen who identifies an empty property should be able to obtain it'.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> SAPMO, DY 30/IV B 2/5/114, 'Bezirksleitung Berlin der SED: Analyse über die Entwicklung der Eingaben im Jahre 1979', 31. Jan. 1980, fol. 186-7.

<sup>102</sup> LAB, C. Rep 100-05 Nr. 1945/1 - 'Eingabeanalyse 1983', pp. 7-8.

<sup>103</sup> LAB, C Rep. 902 Nr. 6099, Bezirksleitung Berlin der SED, Eingaben und Beschwerden zur abschließenden Bearbeitung durch die Bezirksparteikontrollkommission, 'Eingabe von Direktor VEB Pneumatik an Magistrat von Berlin', 26.1.1982.

<sup>104</sup> LAB, C Rep. 902 Nr. 6099, Bezirksleitung Berlin der SED, Eingaben und Beschwerden zur abschließenden Bearbeitung durch die Bezirksparteikontrollkommission, 'Eingabe an die Bezirksleitung der SED am 7. 12. 1981'.



Herr S. had identified an empty apartment in Friedrichshain, which he claimed had been standing empty for six months, and applied to take it over, only to find his application rejected by the local KWV. 'I thought about squatting [it]', Herr S. remarked. Nevertheless, as an upstanding citizen, or so he claimed, Herr S. stated that breaking the law was no solution. Rather, he wanted to claim his 'right as a worker and a citizen of our state' through legitimate channels.<sup>105</sup> Herr S.'s thinly veiled threat did not count against him; he was ultimately provided with a legal tenancy for the property in question. Others, however, would approach their situation differently. Attempts to co-opt self-help, though indicating a degree of flexibility and innovation on the part of SED policy makers, largely proved unsuccessful and even served to fuel more frustration towards the system as a whole. For many, squatting remained the most effective way to securing their right to housing in the Socialist state.

## V. CONCLUSION

Although squatting undermined the principles of 'order, discipline and security', and served to erode the SED-state's authority and control, the regime was not able to stamp the practice out. An analysis of the SED-state and its responses to illegal squatting does not conform to the 'totalitarian' model, i.e. an ultra centralised, streamlined administration, responding swiftly and efficiently to a barrage of directives emanating out from the Central Committee. Rather, the picture that emerges is of a chaotic and remarkably disorganised bureaucracy, staffed by undertrained and over-burdened petty officials who often responded

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

to the challenge presented by squatters in haphazard and ad hoc ways. Indeed, illegal squatting proved more enduring in the GDR capital than in West Berlin, continuing right up to the *Wende* and beyond. This was in part due to the different nature of squatting on the eastern side of the Berlin Wall, which was undertaken covertly and which was often difficult to detect. However, it was also a result of the nature of the polity itself, whose space for action was constrained by the promise of Socialism's social contract, on the one hand, which guaranteed citizens the right to housing, and the state's inability to universally fulfil this pledge, on the other.

While squatting in the GDR subverted the SED-state's control over allocation and distribution of housing, it was ultimately the regime's broader inability to solve the country's chronic housing shortage that destabilised the polity as a whole. As the clock ticked down to 1990, the date by which Honecker had proclaimed the Housing Question would be resolved, frustration with the SED-state intensified. Moreover, in the context of an increasing proliferation of dissent, as the East German leadership stubbornly dismissed the reforming tendencies emanating from the Soviet Union under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, small-scale and loosely coordinated opposition to the SED's housing policy and urban renewal paradigms began to emerge. As the Communist regime dissolved in the autumn of 1989, leaving in its wake a power vacuum that was not fully plugged until the GDR was incorporated into the now enlarged *Bundesrepublik* on 3 October 1990, a new chapter in the history of squatting in Berlin opened, centred in the inner city of East Berlin. Here, the

traditions of squatting on both sides of the Berlin Wall converged. Old divisions were overcome, while new ones would emerge.

## CHAPTER 8:

### ANARCHY IN THE EAST

#### I. INTRODUCTION:

The collapse of Communist rule in the Soviet bloc in 1989/90, from Berlin to Bucharest, signalled the end of the Cold War in Europe. Following the opening of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989, the GDR underwent a transition from a one-party dictatorship, which it technically remained until 1 December 1989, to a pluralistic democracy. In March 1990 the country would hold its first (and last) free, nationwide elections, in which East Germans delivered a clear democratic mandate for Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl's blueprint for reunification. The democratising process was referred to at the time as the '*Wende*' (change of course), though increasingly it is historicised as the 'Peaceful Revolution'. Although demonstrators were roughly handled in East Berlin during Gorbachev's visit to the East German capital on 7 October 1989, fears of a Tiananmen-style crackdown ultimately did not materialise, and once ousted, Honecker avoided the same macabre fate of his counterpart in Romania, Nicolae Ceausescu. Yet, although relatively 'peaceful', the GDR's transformation to post-Communism, via integration into an enlarged *Bundesrepublik*, was tumultuous nevertheless.

There are a number of excellent histories of this centrally important chapter in Germany's modern history.<sup>1</sup> These accounts, however, tend either to focus on the opposition to the Communist regime, which culminated in the mass protests against the SED in autumn 1989, or to analyse the series of events, both domestic and on the world stage, which led to the Re-unification of Germany according to Article 23 of the Basic Law, on 3 October 1990. Other studies have traced the longer term economic ramifications of the GDR's collapse, or have investigated the complex issue of Germany's post-division cultural identity.<sup>2</sup> Yet, the ways in which the collapse of the GDR impacted on contemporaries' everyday life has received relatively little attention. In short, a detailed social history of the East German Revolution has still to be written.

Though it does not claim to fill this lacuna, this chapter seeks to provide an insight into the ways in which Berlin's alternative milieus experienced this period of transition. The power vacuum that accompanied the dissolution of the SED-regime was exploited in East Berlin and elsewhere, and during the interregnum that spanned from late 1989 until German re-unification in October 1990, towns and cities in East Germany witnessed a proliferation of political squatting which was redolent of the squatter movements in the *Bundesrepublik* a decade earlier. These squatter movements, in Leipzig, Potsdam, Dresden, and in other towns and cities in the republic, were rooted in

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<sup>1</sup> See Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the end of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Konrad Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity* (Oxford: OUP, 1994); Kowalczyk, *Endspiel: Die Revolution von 1989 in der DDR*; Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> See Anne Fuchs, Kathleen James-Chakraborty, and Linda Shortt, eds., *Debating German Cultural Identity since 1989* (London: Camden House, 2011).

the GDR's long tradition of *Schwarzwohnen*. Due to its proximity with the West, the squatter movement that emerged in East Berlin, however, was unique. Here, the city offered itself as a political space in which the histories of squatting in the GDR and the FRG flowed together, where the two milieus, east and west, so long separated by the Cold War divide, could now meet and interact physically for the first time.

## II. GRASSROOTS OPPOSITION TO URBAN RENEWAL BEFORE AND DURING THE 'WENDE'

The rapid collapse of the GDR came as a shock to most observers. However, pressure had been building up for some time, and the warning signs were there for those who wanted to heed them. The late 1980s witnessed a shift from a 'controlled ventilation' to a 'proliferation' of dissent in the GDR, as the regime resolutely resisted initiating any Gorbachev-inspired reforms.<sup>3</sup> 'If things go on like this, there will be an explosion', the erstwhile spy-master Markus Wolf warned Honecker in January 1989.<sup>4</sup> Although it is barely covered in the standard works of the East German revolution, urban decay and the GDR's chronic housing shortage served as one of the primary causes of popular dissatisfaction towards the SED-state.<sup>5</sup> Housing, after all, was arguably as important in eroding the regime's legitimacy and creating popular

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<sup>3</sup> Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-1989*, p. 201ff.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Patrick Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall: East Germany and the Frontiers of Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 232.

<sup>5</sup> A point made by Brian Ladd. See Brian Ladd, 'Local Responses in Berlin to Urban Decay and the Demise of the German Democratic Republic,' in *Composing Urban History and the Constitution of Civic Identities* ed. John L. Czaplicka and Blair A. Ruble (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2003), p. 263.

disenchantment with the Socialist polity as were issues such as civil rights and the lack of opportunities to travel abroad.<sup>6</sup> ‘The desolate state of East Germany’s cities’, the East German environmental activists Carlo Jordan and Hans Michael Kloth recall, ‘presented perhaps the most visible symbol of the social, economic and cultural incompetence of the GDR’s leadership.’<sup>7</sup>

Questions relating to housing allocation composed 31% of all petitions to the GDR’s Council of State between January and October 1989, the period immediately preceding the autumn upheaval. A further seven per cent concerned building repairs. Petitions relating to travel and emigration, by contrast, composed just 13% and eight per cent respectively.<sup>8</sup> But GDR housing policy was not only criticised in the petitions submitted to the authorities. In the last years of the SED-regime, it also began to be opposed by loosely knit ‘citizens’ initiatives’ that emerged in cities across the GDR in 1988 and 1989.<sup>9</sup> These had formed in opposition to the SED’s urban renewal policies, for having encountered manifold difficulties in its attempts to renovate and repair the existing housing stock in the inner cities over the previous decade, the regime began to revert to paradigms of old. ‘From 1988’, Ulf Heitemann explains, it was decided to return to a policy of ‘demolition’ in the inner city.<sup>10</sup> Prenzlauer Berg, with its concentration of squatters, bohemians and dissidents, was one

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<sup>6</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Carlo Jordan and Hans Michael Kloth, eds., *Arche Nova: Opposition in der DDR* (Berlin: Basis Druck Verlag, 1995), p. 297.

<sup>8</sup> Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall: East Germany and the Frontiers of Power*, p. 230, Table 1.

<sup>9</sup> According to Ulf Heitemann, these movements manifested themselves in ‘Schelfstadt Schwerin, Dresdner Neustadt, Leipzig Eisenach, Berlin Prenzlauer Berg, [and] Bautzen’. HAV, IBIS 05 – Manuskripte und Publikationen von Ulf Heitemann 1990-1995. Unpaginated; see also Jordan and Kloth, *Arche Nova: Opposition in der DDR*, p. 297.

<sup>10</sup> HAV, IBIS 05 – Manuskripte und Publikationen von Ulf Heitemann 1990-1995. Unpaginated.

such neighbourhood now threatened by the wrecking ball. In 1988, a pilot project envisioned the demolition of the area around the Oderberger Straße and the Rykestraße, which lay to the north of the district's historic water tower.<sup>11</sup> In opposition to these plans, a small number of loosely organised initiatives sprang up at the grass roots.

There were a number of parallels between this burgeoning citizens' opposition to the SED's policy and the early grassroots opposition to urban renewal in West Berlin. First of all, as one contemporary recalls, the opposition to the SED's urban renewal policies was led by local residents who were able to elicit 'support from technical experts' including 'architects' and 'urban planners'.<sup>12</sup> These East German critics of urban renewal were not able to articulate their opposition in the public sphere, as their counterparts had been able to in the West. It was even problematic for architects and planners at the top of their profession to question official policy, as state-controlled publications, such as *Architektur der DDR*, provided no space for their criticisms to be aired. Dissident figures, such as the East German architect Jürgen Rostock, thus resorted to publishing articles in Western journals, in which he denounced the GDR's 'tower-block mafia'.<sup>13</sup> East German samizdat, which by the mid-1980s had a yearly circulation of between 12-15,000 copies, provided another outlet for architectural dissidence. In February 1989, for instance, the *Arche Nova* devoted an entire issue to the subject of the SED's housing policy and

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<sup>11</sup> See 'Flächenabrißprojekte im Prenzlauer Berg', *Arche Nova* 3, in Jordan and Kloth, *Arche Nova: Opposition in der DDR*, p. 329.

<sup>12</sup> HAV, IBIS 05 – Manuskripte und Publikationen von Ulf Heitmann 1990-1995. Unpaginated.

<sup>13</sup> See Jürgen Rostock, 'Die betonierte Zukunft: Zum Wohnungsbauprogramm der DDR', *ARCH+ Zeitschrift für Architektur und Städtebau* 102(1990).



urban renewal and its impact on the inner city. The volume, titled *Verfallen unsere Altstädte?* (Are our historic cities falling into ruin?), provided examples of threatened tenement neighbourhoods and historic districts from around the republic.<sup>14</sup>

Collective petitions were another tactic used by this burgeoning opposition. In January 1989, in a strongly worded letter to East Berlin's Mayor, the chairman of Prenzlauer Berg's Building Commission conveyed the dissatisfaction among local residents with the planned demolition of large swathes of their neighbourhood. The district might 'have the outward appearance of having gone to seed', he conceded. Nevertheless, 'we are ... not in favour of demolition'. Such a policy, the petitioners added, was considered to be 'extremely irresponsible.'<sup>15</sup> Most of the housing stock, the commissioner pointed out, was in fact structurally sound. The residents, he claimed, were upset about being kept in the dark about the neighbourhood reconstruction process and sought to be consulted on the matter.<sup>16</sup>

Neighbourhood opposition in Prenzlauer Berg strove not only to preserve a specific type of urban architecture but also to defend the particular urban milieu that had emerged there. 'In addition to the loss of a unique *Gründerzeit* streetscape', as one critic of SED policy put it in the samizdat publication *Arche Nova*, the policy would lead to many existing residents being moved out of the neighbourhood and re-located, resulting in 'the destruction

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<sup>14</sup> See *Arche Nova* 3, in Jordan and Kloth, *Arche Nova: Opposition in der DDR*, pp. 295-364.

<sup>15</sup> BStU, MfS, BV Berlin BV-Leitung 122, fol. 3. Emphasis added.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, fols. 1-3.

of ... a much loved *Kiezmilieu* (neighbourhood milieu)'.<sup>17</sup> This reference to the 'much loved' neighbourhood milieu is redolent of the discourse used by the citizens' initiatives that opposed urban renewal in West Berlin and other cities in the *Bundesrepublik* in the 1970s and the 1980s. It indicates that despite the dilapidated appearance of the neighbourhood, a number of its residents had formed a close attachment with their urban environment.

The party leadership responded to such opposition with a smear campaign in which it questioned the professional competence of the opponents of urban renewal. In his reply to the local housing representatives in Prenzlauer Berg, dated 3 March 1989, Günther Schabowski, the SED *Bezirksleiter* in East Berlin, defended the regime's policy and dismissed the worth of the neighbourhood's 'rental barracks'.<sup>18</sup> That night, however, opponents of the SED's urban renewal in Prenzlauer Berg distributed leaflets throughout the district.<sup>19</sup> One Stasi informant awoke on 4 March 1989 to find a double-sided copy outlining the planned demolition of the neighbourhood in his letter box. The authorship of the leaflets was unknown. However, due to the detail provided, the informant suspected that the distributors had access to inside information – normally such detailed plans, it was noted, were kept under lock and key in the offices of the KWV. The IM further added that many residents had reacted angrily to the news of the planned demolition, with a number of them threatening not to participate in the upcoming *Kommunalwahl* (municipal

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<sup>17</sup> 'Kahlschlagsanierung in Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg?', *Arche Nova* 3, in Jordan and Kloth, *Arche Nova: Opposition in der DDR*, p. 328.

<sup>18</sup> BStU, MfS, BV Berlin BV-Leitung 122, fol. 12-15.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 20.

elections), scheduled for 7 May 1989.<sup>20</sup> Opposition to the *Kommunalwahl*, whose results had always been a mere formality, now provided a point of convergence for the burgeoning domestic opposition. Reports to Honecker submitted by the First Secretaries in the regions noted that, 'to a greater extent than in previous elections ... negative elements have attempted to disturb events and rallies' in the run-up to the elections.<sup>21</sup> Turnout during this *Kommunalwahl* was lower than expected, while there were numerous reports of citizens spoiling their ballots.<sup>22</sup>

However, events elsewhere in the Socialist bloc presented a more fundamental threat to the East German party-state and its apparatus of control than the disputed elections. On 2 May 1989, Hungary began dismantling its fortified border with Austria, and for first time since 1961 the Iron Curtain was now porous.<sup>23</sup> This option of 'exit', as Albert Hirschman points out, gave 'voice' to those who stayed at home demanding democratic reforms.<sup>24</sup> In the summer and autumn of 1989, protesters began congregating in ever growing numbers at the weekly demonstrations in Leipzig's *Nikolaikirche*, while in the East German capital, a number of East Berlin based opposition groups – including the *Neues Forum* (New Forum), *Demokratie Jetzt* (Democracy Now) and *Demokratischer Aufbruch* (Democratic Awakening) – were founded in early September 1989, demanding democratic *renewal* in the GDR. Grassroots opposition to urban

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., fol. 20.

<sup>21</sup> BAB, DY 30/2205, Informationen an Erich Honecker über regionale Probleme in den Monatsberichten des Ersten Bezirkssekretärs der SED in Berlin (Bd 7: 1988-1989). Fol. 78.

<sup>22</sup> See Kowalczyk, *Endspiel: Die Revolution von 1989 in der DDR*, p. 318 ff.

<sup>23</sup> Hans-Hermann Hertle, *Chronik des Mauerfalls: Die dramatischen Ereignisse um den 9. November 1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1996), pp. 61-74.

<sup>24</sup> See Albert Hirschman, 'Exit, Voice and the Fate of the GDR: An Essay in Conceptual History', *World Politics* 45, no. 2 (1993).

renewal continued during this period of upheaval. Indeed, there was a degree of overlap between those who had criticised urban renewal policies in East Berlin and the instigators of open opposition to the polity as a whole. As one IM on Prenzlauer Berg put it in October 1989, the policy of urban renewal through demolition was being 'severely criticised by opposition groups.'<sup>25</sup> On 24 October 1989, the day on which Krenz was sworn in as new party leader, a meeting among opponents of urban renewal in Prenzlauer Berg's Erich-Franz-Klub was interrupted with those assembled being told that they were 'urgently needed on the streets' to join the demonstrations.<sup>26</sup>

As the numbers taking to the streets increased from week to week, and as the demonstrations spread to towns and cities throughout the GDR, the regime was forced into making numerous concessions. Following the deposition of the ageing Erich Honecker, his successor, Krenz, announced a political *Wende* (change of course). When that failed to slow the momentum of the growing opposition movement, the authorities resorted to opening the intra-Berlin border, on 9 November 1989. This desperate and botched gesture all but ensured the Communist regime's demise. On 1 December the SED's 'guiding role' was struck from the GDR constitution, and two days later the entire Politburo resigned. Round Table discussions between the regime and its opponents in the Civic Movement were initiated, and a date for free elections was set. In the space of barely a month since the opening of the Wall, the East

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<sup>25</sup> BStU, MfS, BV Berlin AKG 4256, fol. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., fol. 3.

German party-state apparatus, until recently regarded as the most stable in the Eastern bloc, had effectively dissolved.

East German squatters were quick to seize the opportunity provided by the SED-state's dissolution and the interregnum that it left in its wake. On 22 December 1989, banners and graffiti appeared on the façade of a building on East Berlin's Schönhauser Allee, declaring that it had been occupied by a group of thirty young people calling themselves the *Revolutionäre HandwerkerInnen* (Revolutionary Craftsmen). The squatters denounced the KWV who were responsible for managing the property and explained that they were taking over the building. The building itself had long been scheduled for demolition and was in a state of considerable dilapidation. Rather than allow it to deteriorate still further, the East Berlin squatters announced that they were going to begin renovating. This example of overt 'rehab squatting' in the GDR attracted considerable interest, and journalists from East Berlin's *Berliner Zeitung*, West Berlin's *taz*, and the national East German papers *Neues Deutschland* and *Die Junge Welt* soon came along to interview the group about their brazen act.<sup>27</sup> Over the next few months, many more GDR citizens replicated the example set by the *Revolutionäre HandwerkerInnen*. Already by January 1990, the East Berlin squatters had established their own squatter council.<sup>28</sup> By early April,

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<sup>27</sup> PT Archiv, Sammlung Häuserkampf Ost-Berlin, 'Schönhauser Allee 20/21', in *Hausbesetzer: Selbstdarstellung von 16 Projekten aus Friedrichshain, Mitte und Prenzlauer Berg*, (East Berlin, May 1990); 'Symphatie für Besetzer', *taz*, 3 Jan. 1990.

<sup>28</sup> 'Fünf Jahre danach und fast vergessen: Über die Hausbesetzerbewegung in Ost Berlin, Teil 1, in *Telegraph*, September 1995.

squatters had taken over around 70 buildings in the East German capital.<sup>29</sup> Further cases were also recorded in cities and towns across the republic, including in Potsdam, Leipzig and Dresden.

The squats, draped with banners and covered in political slogans, recalled those of the occupied buildings in West Berlin and the *Bundesrepublik* a decade previously. But although the GDR squatters clearly drew inspiration from their knowledge of squatter movements in West Germany and elsewhere, this was a movement rooted in East Berlin's own traditions of squatting and domestic opposition. Most of those who overtly occupied buildings in East Berlin in the winter of 1989-90 were drawn from the semi-clandestine squatter milieu that already existed in the GDR. The *Revolutionäre HandwerkerInnen*, for instance, had been living in their building in the Schönhauser Allee since August 1989.<sup>30</sup> What is more, the burgeoning squatter movement in East Berlin had close ties and often overlaps with the city's Civic Movement and figures who had been instrumental in setting the 'Peaceful Revolution' in motion the previous autumn. Those who occupied an empty building in the Schreiner Straße in Friedrichshain at the end of 1989 had met each other through their involvement in the KvU (a dissident organisation dating from 1987) and the *Umweltbibliothek*.<sup>31</sup> Support for the East Berlin squatters was forthcoming from the *Neues Forum* and the *Vereinigten Linken* (united left). In a letter to the East Berlin Magistrate – the highest authority in the GDR capital – the Berlin Round

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<sup>29</sup> Arndt, Bialas, and Friedrich, *Berlin, Mainzer Strasse: 'Wohnen ist wichtiger als das Gesetz'*, p. 32.

<sup>30</sup> 'Die Kommune von der Schönhauser Allee', *taz*, 17. Feb. 1990.

<sup>31</sup> Unpublished interview: Moldt, Dirk. Interview by Peter Mitchell. Berlin, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2013.

Table (RTB) insisted that every effort should be made to draw up legal contracts that would provide the squatters with long-term legal security in the buildings they had occupied.<sup>32</sup> In addition, the RTB passed a resolution during its 17<sup>th</sup> sitting in mid-April 1990,<sup>33</sup> prohibiting the *Volkspolizei* from carrying out evictions.<sup>34</sup>

In the open atmosphere that followed the dissolution of the SED-state, the squatted buildings themselves served as spaces in which grassroots political activity could be undertaken and planned. In early January, for example, the *Umweltbibliothek* – where many of East Berlin’s samizdat publications had been produced – relocated from the *Zionskirche* to an empty building in the Lottumstraße in Mitte. This particular squat was used by various political organisations that had been founded during the *Wende*, ranging from the *Frauenliga* (Women’s League) to the *Antifa Ostberlin*.<sup>35</sup> Other squatters established bars, cafes and spaces in which squatters and non-squatters alike could meet up and openly discuss politics. The occupants of a squat in the Kastanienallee opened up a bar in their building to provide ‘a space for holding

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<sup>32</sup> LAB C. Rep. 830 Nr. 17, ‘RTB Letter to Magistrat, Abt Wohnungspolitik, KWV der Stadtbez. 15.4.1990’; ‘Gehören die besetzten Häusern denen, die darin wohnen?’, in *Telegraph*, 31 May 1990.

<sup>33</sup> Although the round table discussions were brought to a close at the national level after the elections of 18 March 1990, regional round tables operated until the summer. The reason for this was that while the March elections provided the GDR with a democratically legitimated *Volkskammer* for the first time in its history, former SED officials continued to staff important positions at the local level until the *Kommunale Wahl* of 6 June 1990.

<sup>34</sup> LAB C. Rep. 830 Nr. 17, ‘17. Tagung des Runden Tisches vom 19. April 1990.’

<sup>35</sup> ‘10 Jahre Besetzung Lottum Strasse’. Retrieved June 21, 2010, from <http://www.stressfaktor.squat.net/2000/lottum.html>; PT Archiv, Sammlung Häuserkampf Ost-Berlin, ‘Lottum Strasse 10’, in *Hausbesetzer: Selbstdarstellung von 16 Projekten aus Friedrichshain, Mitte und Prenzlauer Berg*, (East Berlin, May 1990).

political discussions, readings and events.’<sup>36</sup> In a similar vein, the *Revolutionäre HandwerkerInnen* of the Schönhauser Allee established an ‘Info Café’ for ‘displaying left wing publications, holding events and disseminating information.’ The building also housed a library, working archive and printing facilities.<sup>37</sup> In the winter of 1989-90, therefore, the occupied buildings themselves began to take on the role that had been provided by the Protestant churches before and during the *Wende*.

As with squatting in West Berlin and other Western European cities in the seventies and eighties, a motivation for those who openly occupied buildings in East Berlin following the dissolution of the SED-state was the opportunity to establish alternative lifestyles. According to the group who moved into a property in the Lottumstraße in February 1990, the building had been squatted ‘in order that we could live together as a collective.’<sup>38</sup> Likewise, the new residents of number 39 Schliemannstraße, which was occupied towards the end of February 1990, hoped to ‘realise [their] ideas of group solidarity through living and working together.’<sup>39</sup> A number of the groups that squatted in empty buildings during this period refer to their previous feeling of alienation and isolation. The *Genossenschaft WOHN-BAU-ECK*, whose members occupied number 35 Christinenstraße in early January 1990, stated: ‘Our desire is to overcome our feelings of anonymity and estrangement through developing

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<sup>36</sup> HAV Archiv, IBIS 86, Besetzte Häuser Berlin – Prenzlauer Berg 1990-1993, ‘Konzept für die Häuser Kastanienallee 86/86’, undated.

<sup>37</sup> PT Archiv, Sammlung Häuserkampf Ost-Berlin, ‘Schönhauser Allee 20/21’, in *Hausbesetzer: Selbstdarstellung von 16 Projekten aus Friedrichshain, Mitte und Prenzlauer Berg*, (East Berlin, May 1990).

<sup>38</sup> ‘Lottum Strasse 26’, in *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> ‘Schliemann Strasse 39’, in *Ibid.*



a close knit social community.’<sup>40</sup> Similarly, squatters in the Lychner Straße hoped that by living together they could overcome the alienation of modern city life.<sup>41</sup>

Squatting in buildings also provided GDR artists and musicians with spaces for cultural expression and facilitated their emergence from Prenzlauer Berg’s back courtyards and private apartments, into full public view. On 17 January 1990, a number of East German punk bands – *die Firme*, *Ich Funktion* and *Freygang* – occupied a tenement in the Rosenthaler Straße in Mitte and founded the ‘*Kulturoperative Eimer*’ in the empty building. Their objective was to renovate the property so that they could ‘establish an independent cultural and artistic centre.’ They planned to open a bar on the ground floor, a café on the floor above, and set up practice rooms and a recording studios in the rest of the house.<sup>42</sup> The *Eimer* established itself as a legendary underground venue in the Berlin music scene of the 1990s, and was ultimately evicted by the police in 2001.<sup>43</sup>

### III. ‘GEH DOCH RÜBER’

Following the decline of the *Instandbesetzer* movement, overt squatting became an increasingly difficult undertaking West Berlin. The opening of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the SED-state, however, presented West Berlin’s and West

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<sup>40</sup> HAV Archiv, IBIS 86, Besetzte Häuser Berlin – Prenzlauer Berg 1990-1993, ‘Genossenschaft WOHN-BAU-ECK, 2 April 1990.

<sup>41</sup> PT Archiv, Sammlung Häuserkampf Ost-Berlin, ‘Lychner Strasse 18’, in *Hausbesetzer: Selbstdarstellung von 16 Projekten aus Friedrichshain, Mitte und Prenzlauer Berg*, (East Berlin, May 1990).

<sup>42</sup> ‘Rosenthaler Strasse 68’, in *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> ‘Der Eimer hat ausgetanzt’, *taz*, 6. July 2001.

Germany's alternative culture with an unexpected opportunity, and in early 1990, a small number of West Germans crossed over the now open border in Berlin from west to east. In January 1990, two buildings – the '*Rote Kastanie*' in Prenzlauer Berg and '*Køpi*' in the Köpenicker Straße in Mitte – were occupied as east-west ventures by squatters from both halves of the erstwhile divided city.<sup>44</sup> The following month, artists from East and West Berlin founded the celebrated cultural initiative, the *Kunsthaus Tacheles*, in an abandoned building in the Oranienburger Straße, in Mitte. Following this, groups comprising only West Germans began to come over and squat in empty buildings in the GDR capital. One such group of 15 squatters occupied an empty *Hinterhaus* building in Prenzlauer Berg's Kastanienallee. Prior to the fall of the Wall, these squatters had been active in the West. However, in early March 1990, 'following a number of failed attempts at squatting in West Berlin', they had 'fled over' to the East, as there 'were still so many [empty] houses' in East Berlin.<sup>45</sup> Such initiatives were initially encouraged by the East German squatters who provided their western counterparts with lists of buildings which were standing empty, and as the winter receded ever more western squatters followed.<sup>46</sup> '[L]et's give up the fight here [in West Berlin] and go over [to East Berlin] where it is still relatively

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<sup>44</sup> PT Archiv, 'Hausbesetzer – Selbstdarstellung von 16 Projekten aus Friedrichshain, Mitte und Prenzlauer Berg' undated, p. 17; HAV Archiv, IBIS86, Besetzte Häuser Berlin – Prenzlauer Berg 1990-1993, 'Konzept für die Häuser Kastanienallee 86/86', (May, 1990); A.G. Grauwascke, *Autonome in Bewegung: Aus den ersten 23 Jahren* (Berlin: Assoziation A, 2008), p. 252.

<sup>45</sup> PT Archiv, Häuserkampf, 'Besetzung des HH Kastanienallee 86', March 1990.

<sup>46</sup> 'Hausbesetzung in Ostberlin – Wir auch? Warum denn nicht!' *Interim*, 5. April 1990.

easy to squat buildings', announced the editors of West Berlin's radical publication *Interim* in April 1990.<sup>47</sup>

Despite their separate histories, there were a number of similarities and shared values and assumptions that united the squatter milieus, East and West. Barring one notable exception of a neo-Nazi squat that was occupied in Lichtenberg's Weitlingstraße, the East and West German squatters generally understood themselves as belonging to the radical left of their respective societies. Both, moreover, were opposed to German re-unification, which had been given a democratic mandate following the *Volkskammer* elections in the GDR in March 1990.<sup>48</sup> While the GDR squatters, on the whole, had hoped for democratic renewal of the GDR, their western counterparts were vehemently anti-nationalistic. In response to Helmut Kohl's blueprint for rapid unification, East Berlin's squatters organised a demonstration in Prenzlauer Berg, opposing

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> As the SED-state imploded in the winter of 1989-90, and as a rallying call at the mass demonstrations transmuted from '*wir sind das Volk*' (we are the people) to '*wir sind ein Volk*' (we are one people), it became clear that the domestic opposition's initial hope of reforming and democratising the GDR had been eclipsed. On the international level, West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl (CDU) spent much of the early months of 1990 successfully clearing the diplomatic barriers to a possible future re-unification of the two German states. (See Philip Zelikow & Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge Massachusetts & London: Harvard University Press, 2002). Consequently, the *Volkskammerwahl*, scheduled for 18 March 1990, served as plebiscite on whether, and indeed how quickly, German re-unification should take place. The original protagonists of the revolution, now organised as the *Bündnis 90*, were marginalised during the election campaign, as the western political parties poured money and resources into their eastern proxies. Kohl championed rapid unification – promising instant prosperity for everyone – and toured the GDR urging East Germans to vote for the 'Allianz für Deutschland'. The SPD, on the other hand, dispatched their elder statesman, Willy Brandt, who advocated a slower step-by-step path to re-unification (*vernünftiger Zusammenschluß*) espoused by the eastern SPD. In the end, the GDR electorate backed Kohl's blueprint as the Alliance won a landslide victory; the *Bündnis 90* only managed to collect 3 percent of the vote. This result effectively decided the outcome of the 'Peaceful Revolution'. Following the *Volkskammerwahl*, the incorporation of the GDR into an enlarged *Bundesrepublik* was only a matter of time.

'*grossdeutsche Träume*'.<sup>49</sup> Reporting on the event, the former samizdat publication, the *Telegraph*, noted that a contingent of West Berliners were also in attendance, and contributed to the spectacle through bringing along their 'western know-how (sic)', which included loudspeakers and mobile sound systems<sup>50</sup> – evidently their eastern counterparts did not yet have access to such technology. In April 1990, the squatters and other alternative and left wing groups in the city held an 'East-West' festival in Prenzlauer Berg. The objective of the festival was 'to exchange experiences and engage in mutual learning from one another.'<sup>51</sup> According to the *taz*, 'the alternative milieus of East and West [Berlin] gathered in Kollwitz Platz for a spring festival of a special kind ... Prenzlauer Berg and Kreuzberg: an alternative to unification a la Kohl.'<sup>52</sup>

Relatedly, the squatters from both halves of the city were concerned by plans to sell-off the KWV housing stock and to return the title deeds of expropriated properties to their former owners. Articles appeared in the *taz*, the radical West Berlin magazine *Interim*, as well as in former samizdat publications, all warning about the prospect of property speculators and large western housing corporations who were eying up large tracts of East Berlin. In early March 1990, the *taz* reported that the 'notorious' West Berlin property speculating company, *Data Domizil*, which had been heavily criticized in the past for its 'Wild-West-Methods' and sub-standard renovations in the *Bundesrepublik*, had entered into negotiations with the head of Prenzlauer

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<sup>49</sup> 'Demonstration "Gegen großdeutsche Träume"', *Telegraph*, 30. March. 1990.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> 'Ost-West Aufruf', *Telegraph*, 20. March. 1990.

<sup>52</sup> 'Kolli contra Camel', in *taz*, 30. April. 1990.

Berg's KWV. The goal was to take over part-management of the state managed housing stock.<sup>53</sup> The western corporation would provide the technical 'know-how' and financial capital for modernising the district's dilapidated tenement buildings, although the company director admitted to the *taz* that in order to cover these costs, rents would have to be at least quadrupled.<sup>54</sup>

*Data Domizil* was not the only western firm showing an interest in East Berlin's potentially lucrative housing stock. According to the *Telegraph*, another West Berlin based concern, *Neue Heimat*, had its eye on a number of properties in the city's Friedrichshain district.<sup>55</sup> 'A new concept has come across to East Berlin from the west', claimed the former samizdat publication, shortly before the *Volkskammer* elections. 'The wryneck functionaries of the communal housing organisations and the local administration have long since grasped the way that the wind is blowing and are looking to conclude profitable deals [with the western corporations].'<sup>56</sup> In April 1990, following the election victory for the *Allianz für Deutschland* and their blueprint of rapid unification, various groups from East and West Berlin gathered in the *Kirche von Unten* in Prenzlauer Berg, in order to plan concrete measures. In order to hinder the western speculators, the organisers called on 'women and men from east and west [to] take control of the houses, before it's too late.'<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> 'Die "Data" kreist überm Prenzlauer Berg', *taz*, 8. March. 1990; 'Modernisierung wie im wilden Westen', *taz*, 22. June. 1998.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> 'Gehören die besetzten Häusern denen, die darin wohnen?', in *Telegraph*, 31 May. 1990.

<sup>56</sup> 'Was passiert mit unseren Häusern?', *Telegraph*, 15. March 1990.

<sup>57</sup> 'Annoncen: Besetzte Häuser in Berlin/Hauptstadt!', in *Telegraph*, 26. April 1990.

At the time of this announcement, some 70 buildings had already been taken over in East Berlin. Although a number of squatters had come over from West Berlin and from elsewhere in West Germany, the milieu remained largely dominated by GDR squatters. In the following months, however, between May and August 1990, the number of squats in East Berlin almost doubled to over 130, and most of these new occupations were undertaken by West Germans.<sup>58</sup> The majority of these western squatters who came over to the East in the late spring and early summer of 1990 squatted in empty buildings in Friedrichshain, the district lying directly north of Kreuzberg, across the river Spree. Up until this point, overt squatting in this gritty proletarian neighbourhood had been minimal. Indeed, before May 1990, there were only two overtly occupied buildings in the district.<sup>59</sup> However, by the summer of 1990, Friedrichshain was home to the highest concentration of squats in the city. Eight buildings were occupied in the Kreuziger Straße. Further buildings were squatted in the nearby Rigauer Straße, while a row of twelve neighbouring buildings were occupied in Mainzer Straße, a street running perpendicular to the busy Frankfurter Allee. Essentially, Friedrichshain, and in particular the Mainzer Straße, became the nucleus of the West Berlin squatter milieu.

A visitor to the Mainzer Straße from Berkeley, California, described the scene that greeted him on his arrival in the street in the summer of 1990:

The first feeling that hits you on turning on to the Mainzer Strasse is the exhilaration of a carnival. Lining what seems to be the whole

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<sup>58</sup> 'Fünf Jahre danach', *Telegraph*, September 1995.

<sup>59</sup> 'Fünf Jahre danach', *Telegraph*, September 1995.

right hand side are buildings whose upper stories are draped with banners and flags. The street level is a patchwork of colours, murals and bright spray painted graffiti.<sup>60</sup>

Reflecting the demographics of Friedrichshain's squatter population at large, the majority of those who had occupied buildings in the Mainzer Straße hailed from the *Bundesrepublik*. One squatter who lived there estimated that at least 70 per cent of the street's new residents had come over from the West.<sup>61</sup> This western squatter population was itself diverse. Several buildings in the street were identified as 'political squats', whose residents spent a lot of time preparing and carrying out wider left wing activity. The occupants of number 2 Mainzer Straße, for instance, were regarded as 'hardliners' for their uncompromisingly radical views. A couple of doors down, the 'politicos' in number 7 Mainzer Straße had a reputation for being 'expert barrier constructors'.<sup>62</sup> Other groups in the street experimented with alternative forms of living arrangements in their houses. In one of the squats, in an experiment redolent of the *Kommune 1*, the residents eliminated all vestiges of privacy by knocking down many of the internal walls and removing doors from their frames.<sup>63</sup> The street was also home to a women's and lesbian squat and the extravagantly decorated '*Tuntenhaus*', which was occupied by a group of West

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<sup>60</sup> Joey Cain, 'Home of the Drag Queen's Trout Farm: An Interview with Queer Squatters in Berlin', *Homocore*, (summer 1990).

<sup>61</sup> Arndt, Bialas, and Friedrich, *Berlin, Mainzer Strasse: 'Wohnen ist wichtiger als das Gesetz'*, p. 76.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43-47.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

Berlin drag queens.<sup>64</sup> The *'Tuntenhaus'* opened its own gay bar whose clientele was composed of 'an amiable mixture of dykes, fags [and] queers'.<sup>65</sup>

#### IV. THE EAST BERLIN SQUATTER MOVEMENT

By the summer of 1990, there were several thousand squatters who had openly taken over some 130 buildings in the East Berlin districts of Prenzlauer Berg, Mitte, Friedrichshain and Lichtenberg. This heterogeneous milieu was loosely coordinated through a citywide *Besetzerrat*, which had first been established by East German squatters in January 1990, and whose weekly meetings were now rotated from district to district. As with the rehab squatting movement in West Berlin, the squatters established their own newspaper, the *BesetzerInnen Zeitung*, whose first edition was published in August 1990.

The East Berlin squatters were not only united by their shared hostility towards German re-unification, their desire to engage with and influence housing policy at the grassroots, and their attempts to expand the contours of the city's autonomous, non-commercial sub-culture. In addition, they were also united in their precariousness. In echoes of the rehab squatter movement in West Berlin, divergences emerged over whether or not the squatters should use their combined leverage to negotiate favourable use contracts for the buildings they had occupied.<sup>66</sup> Ultimately, in late June 1990, the squatter council voted to establish a *Vertragsgremium* (VG), tasked with representing the squatters in

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<sup>64</sup> Arndt, *Berlin Mainzer Strasse*, p. 45.

<sup>65</sup> Cain, 'Home of the Drag Queen's Trout Farm'.

<sup>66</sup> 'Anarchie und Häuserbesetzung: Vertrag oder kein Vertrag', *BesetzerInnen Zeitung*, 15. Aug. 1990, p. 16.



their negotiations with the authorities.<sup>67</sup> As of 28 September 1990, 87 of the East Berlin squats were represented by the VG.<sup>68</sup>

The prospect of eviction at the hands of authorities, which increased from summer onwards, was not the only threat East Berlin squatters faced, however. A more pressing concern was in fact the threat posed by right-wing skin-heads and neo-Nazi groups, including those who had squatted a building in Lichtenberg's Weitlingstraße. Since early 1990, a former *samizdat* publication reported, right wing hooligans had been targeting the city's squatter population with increasing regularity.<sup>69</sup> Right wing violence reached new levels in early June 1990, when skinheads brandishing baseball bats, clubs and Molotov cocktails overran the *Kunsthau Tacheles*, hospitalising several of its residents.<sup>70</sup> The following day, three hundred neo-Nazis attacked the Mainzer Straße and the neighbouring Kreuziger Straße, where a squatter street festival was taking place.<sup>71</sup>

Despite these external pressures, forging a coherent movement out of East Berlin's squatters proved a challenging exercise. Given the heterogeneity of the milieus this was always going to be the case, as it had been during the rehab squatter movement in West Berlin. That the movement was composed of both East and West German squatters, each with their own traditions and histories, added another layer of complexity, however. So too did the fact that

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<sup>67</sup> 'Diskussionspapier des Vertragsgremiums', *BezetzerInnen Zeitung*, 15. Aug. 1990, p. 12.

<sup>68</sup> PT Archiv, Häuserkampf O-Berlin, Brat, 'Bündnis der Besetzten Häuser: Zugleich die Liste von dem VG vertretenen Häuser', 28 Sept. 1990.

<sup>69</sup> 'Ein fast alltäglicher vorgang', in *Telegraph*, 31 May. 1990.

<sup>70</sup> 'Tacheles ist den Skins ein Dorn im Auge', *taz*, 5 June. 1990.

<sup>71</sup> Arndt, Bialas, and Friedrich, *Berlin, Mainzer Strasse: 'Wohnen ist wichtiger als das Gesetz'*, p. 95.

West German squatters began to numerically dominate. The new occupations between May and July 1990 'were for the most part undertaken by West Berliners', as one contemporary recalls.<sup>72</sup> From still being a minority in April, the majority of squatters in East Berlin were West Germans by the summer of 1990.

This served, on the one hand, to dilute the link between East Berlin's squatters and the local Civic Movement. Originally, prominent members of East Berlin's erstwhile opposition had been sympathetic towards the squatters and their goals. The KvU, for example, served as the space for the squatter council to first meet. A number of opposition groups had squatted in buildings themselves, while prominent members of the Civic Movement had acted as the squatters' guardians in round table discussions. But already by mid-May 1990, one of the squatters' supporters in the Round Table discussions, the *Vereinigten Linken*, had started to distinguish between the 'old' GDR squatters and the 'new' squatters coming over in increasing numbers from West Berlin.<sup>73</sup> Before long, many in East Berlin's Civic Movement had become openly critical of the behaviour and politics of the West German squatters who had made their home in the east.

Indeed, by the summer of 1990, the 'east-west conflict' had become a major discussion point within Berlin's extra-parliamentary opposition, and it soon found its way into the heart of the squatting movement itself.<sup>74</sup> Many of the GDR squatters, it was reported, had stopped attending the weekly

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<sup>72</sup> 'Fünf Jahre danach', *Telegraph*, September 1995.

<sup>73</sup> 'Editorial', *Telegraph*, 14 May. 1990.

<sup>74</sup> 'Die Bewegung ist tot, es lebe die Bewegung', *BesetzerInnen Zeitung*, 22. Aug. 1991.

*Besetzerrat* meetings as relations with their western counterparts deteriorated.<sup>75</sup> In August 1990, one GDR squatter who had been active in the council since its inception warned it was possible that ‘in the near future, the West Berliners could find themselves completely alone ... currently, you need to look very closely to find any East Berliners [in the squatter council] at all.’<sup>76</sup> According to a number of East German contemporaries, the numerical dominance of the western squatters within the movement played a significant role in contributing to these tensions. During the early stage of the movement, when GDR squatters outnumbered their western counterparts, relations between East and West Berliners had proceeded relatively smoothly, they claimed. The first West Berliners who came over ‘respected that they were in a foreign country which had different ways of doing things’. Moreover, these squatters were ‘sensitive to the fact that they were but a small minority within the movement’.<sup>77</sup> Accordingly, they ‘adapted quickly to the culture of the [eastern squatters].’<sup>78</sup> As the West Germans became the majority within the movement, however, they no longer maintained their earlier deference and increasingly brought their own style of politics to the plenums and demonstrations. Given their numerical dominance, ‘eastern positions’, it was argued, ‘were pushed to the edge.’<sup>79</sup> The GDR squatters accused the West Berliners of ‘acting pontifically’, and attempting to ‘educate’ their GDR

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<sup>75</sup> ‘Zwischenspiel in Ostberlin Häuserrat’, *Telegraph*, 6. Aug. 1990; ‘Berricht vom Häuserrat am 30. Juli in der Tucholskystrasse’, *BezetzerInnen Zeitung*, 4. Aug. 1990.

<sup>76</sup> ‘Zwischenspiel in Ostberlin Häuserrat’, *Telegraph*, 6. Aug. 1990.

<sup>77</sup> ‘Fünf Jahre danach’, *Telegraph*, September 1995.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Zwischenspiel in Ostberlin Häuserrat’, *Telegraph*, 6. Aug. 1990.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Fünf Jahre danach’, *Telegraph*, September 1995.

counterparts.<sup>80</sup> The 'fixed' structures and committees that were being created within the squatter milieu, some GDR squatters argued, led to a 'bureaucratisation' of the movement.<sup>81</sup> The accusation of 'western dominance' in the *Besetzerrat* was in turn answered by the western squatters with criticism of the 'factionalism' of their eastern counterparts.<sup>82</sup>

Another area of disagreement between the eastern dissidents and West Berlin's countercultural left arose around the question of the legitimacy, or rather the effectiveness, of militant action. Violent clashes between the *Bundesrepublik's* uncompromising riot police and militant left wing demonstrators had been a regular feature at squatter protests during the late 1970s and 1980s. During the height of the West Berlin squatting movement, between December 1980 and September 1981, two-thirds of the fifty-three squatter demonstrations involved militant or violent clashes between demonstrators and the authorities.<sup>83</sup> As the decade progressed, the 'black bloc' of *Autonomen*, clad from head to toe in jet-black body armour and motorcycle helmets, became an increasingly visible fixture at the city's demonstrations. By contrast, the political culture of East Germany's Civic Movement was characterised by its non-violence; East German dissidents lit candles at silent vigils, not Molotov cocktails at May Day riots. Indeed, one of the political slogans of the early stages of the 'Peaceful Revolution' was '*keine Gewalt*' (no violence). These differences on the question of militancy were a product of the

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> 'Zwischenspiel in Ostberlin Häuserrat', *Telegraph*, 6. Aug. 1990.

<sup>82</sup> 'Voneinander lernen', *taz*, 11 Sept. 1990; 'Die Bewegung ist tot, es lebe die Bewegung', *BesetzerInnen Zeitung*, 22. Aug. 1991.

<sup>83</sup> Karapin, *Protest Politics in Germany: Movements on the Left and Right since the 1960s*, p. 65.

differing political context in which squatters, East and West, had hitherto operated. Confronted with one another following the fall of the Wall, squatters from the GDR and FRG realised that, although sharing much in common, they were at the same time products of the respective states which they had opposed.

The new arrivals from West Berlin also served to alienate many of the East Berliners who lived in the vicinity of the new squats, and the district authorities received numerous complaints about the squatters as the West German squatter community swelled in the summer of 1990. On 29 May 1990, shortly after the street was occupied, local residents founded the *Bürger Initiative Mainzer Straße*, which lobbied against the squatters in Friedrichshain.<sup>84</sup> On 8 June, the *Bürgerinitiative* delivered a petition with 160 signatures to Friedrichshain's Mayor, Helios Mendiburu (SPD), complaining that the Mainzer Straße squatters presented a threat to their 'health, order and safety'.<sup>85</sup> In their complaints, the local citizens drew attention to the origins of the squatters. 'Where did they all come from', asked Frau F. rhetorically, herself a member of the citizens' initiative. 'From Munich! I certainly have an issue with West German problems being exported here to us', she exclaimed.<sup>86</sup> 'It is terrible the way that us "Ossis" need to put up with these "Wessis" ', argued another letter from Mr and Mrs M.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, on 17 July 1990, several residents who lived in Friedrichshain's Rigaer Straße, wrote directly to the

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<sup>84</sup> Arndt, Berlin Mainzer Strasse, p. 25.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p. 36.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. p. 157.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. p. 41.

Mayor of East Berlin, Tino Schwierzina (SPD). The tenants had been living in their building for five years, and they were used to 'peace and quiet'. Now, however, the law-abiding denizens of the Rigauer Straße informed Schwierzina that 'an extreme situation has developed in our neighbourhood. We have been overwhelmed by groups and gangs from West Berlin.' The residents '[couldn't] understand why the authorities were not able to take any action against these West Berliners.' How would the city be able to deal with its financial problems 'if Wessis are able to come over and live here for free', they asked.<sup>88</sup> One resident even wrote to the Mayor of Friedrichshain, suggesting that someone should 'throw a bomb into their squats and have them done with.'<sup>89</sup> These may have been extreme cases, and many held a less hostile view towards squatting. Indeed, Friedrichshain's Mayor, Mendiburu, himself cut a largely sympathetic figure. Nevertheless, the western squatters themselves were not oblivious to fact that they were engendering antipathy from some quarters. 'What many of us forget', noted an article in the squatters' newspaper, the *BesetzerInnen Zeitung*, 'is that we are a complete shock to the locals here'.<sup>90</sup> 'We come here and take what we want', another contribution added, 'while the people here have often waited years for an apartment.'<sup>91</sup>

In August 1990, the movement organised 'the first big squatter demonstration of the 1990s'.<sup>92</sup> Leaflets were distributed around the inner city neighbourhoods asking for 'all those who sympathise with the squatter

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>90</sup> *BesetzerInnen Zeitung*, 6. Aug. 1990.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> 'Flugblatt: Wohnraum für Alle', in *BesetzerInnen Zeitung*, 4. Aug. 1990.

movement to express your public support [at the upcoming protest].<sup>93</sup> The squatters attempted to communicate the dangers of allowing western investors to gobble up large swathes of the formally state managed housing stock – a genuine concern, which the domestic opposition had also sought to highlight. Around 1,500 squatters and their supporters turned up for the event and the ‘colourful procession’ marched through the Friedrichshain district carrying banners proclaiming ‘the houses belong to those who live in them’.<sup>94</sup> However, according to the squatters’ newspaper, the *BesetzerInnen Zeitung*, ‘the demonstration had absolutely no impact on the wider community’.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, ‘many of the local residents’, the *taz* reported, ‘observed the procession from their windows and balconies with distrusting looks.’<sup>96</sup>

## V. THE BATTLE OF MAINZER STRASSE

The squatter movement in East Berlin emerged during unique conditions: an interregnum that accompanied the decomposition of the SED-state leaving behind a relative power vacuum in the GDR. ‘The same old housing officials [were] still in charge’ in the Communal Housing Associations, as the *taz* reported in March 1990, but their authority had crumbled.<sup>97</sup> It was the same story in other areas of the bureaucracy. Until May 1990, the old SED officials continued to run East Berlin’s administration, though they were monitored by the Berlin Round Table – the only body that could claim a degree of popular

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> ‘Neubesetzung contra “Berliner Linie”’, *taz*, 6. Aug. 1990.

<sup>95</sup> ‘Discussionspapier’, *BesetzerInnen Zeitung*, 12 Sept. 1990.

<sup>96</sup> ‘Neubesetzung contra “Berliner Linie”’, *taz*, 6. Aug. 1990.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Gegen Sterbehelfer und Leichenflederer’, *taz*, 23. March. 1990.

legitimacy at this point. Municipal elections in May 1990, however, provided East Berlin with its first democratically elected local representatives since the Weimar era, rendering the Berlin Round Table superfluous. On 30 May 1990, Tino Schwierzian (SPD) was sworn into office as the Mayor of East Berlin, with his social democratic colleagues also filling other important positions. Clemens Thurmann (SPD) was put in charge of social affairs while Thomas Krüger (SPD) became Minister of the Interior, in control of the city's police and security forces. These Eastern SPD politicians – whose party was effectively the sister party of the Western social democrats – quickly established close working relations with West Berlin's SPD led Senate.

In light of the growing incidences of political squatting, the newly elected authorities sought to draw up appropriate anti-squatting legislation. This was important as the Round Table's no eviction resolution in the spring rendered the legality of squatting ambiguous. As the *taz* reported on 20 July 1990, 'at the moment the legal situation is to be clarified as it is not clear who – if anyone – has the authority to evict the squatters.'<sup>98</sup> After consultations with their opposite numbers in West Berlin's City Hall, the East Berlin Magistrate simply opted to adopt West Berlin's legislation wholesale. On 24 July 1990, in accordance with this new 'Berliner Line', the Magistrate announced that 'all further occupations are to be opposed. Any new building that is occupied will be evicted immediately [within 24 hours].' The KWV and private landlords could now apply for the police to evict any of the existing squats, so long as they

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<sup>98</sup> 'Die erste Räumung Naht', *taz*, 20. July. 1990.



could show that they were going to begin immediate renovations of the property. The Interior Minister, in accordance with the new legislation, would work closely with the *Volkspolizei* in order to develop an 'effective strategy for carrying out evictions'.<sup>99</sup>

The number of occupations declined significantly following the enactment of the 'Berliner Line', which empowered the Interior Ministry and provided the *Volkspolizei* with a clear remit to act against the squatters. Instead of being confronted with an uninterested and demoralised police force, those who occupied properties after 24 July 1990 had to reckon with swift counter measures. When one group squatted in an empty building in the Oranienburger Straße on 30 July, the *Volkspolizei* responded forthwith, evicting the squatters in a midnight raid.<sup>100</sup> Yet, although the number of new occupations declined in August and September, the state did not manage to fully restore its authority in this period, particularly in the areas where the squatters were concentrated. In late August, for example, when 100 police officers attempted to evict a newly occupied building in Friedrichshain's Niederbarnimstraße, 150 squatters from the local area quickly assembled and forced the *Volkspolizei* into beating a retreat.<sup>101</sup>

Although the East Berlin Magistrate had adopted western legislation in the summer of 1990, they did not have the resources available to rigidly enforce

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<sup>99</sup> PT Archiv, Sammlung Häuserkampf Ost-Berlin, 'Stadtrat für Stadtentwicklung, Wohnen und Verkehr & Stadtrat für Inners Magistratsvorlage nr. 96/90', 24. July. 1990; 'Presseerklärung des Stadtrates für Stadtentwicklung, Wohnen und Verkehr Dr. Thurmann zum Magistrat Abschluss 96/90', in *BesetzerInnen Zeitung*, 5 Aug. 1990, p. 22.

<sup>100</sup> *BesetzerInnen Zeitung*, 5 Aug. 1990.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

it. German re-unification on 3 October 1990, however, removed all the barriers to the reassertion of state power in East Berlin's inner city districts. From this date on, the West Berlin Interior Minister, Erich Pätzold (SPD), had full jurisdiction in the eastern half of the city as well, and the authorities in the West Berlin Senate regarded the squatter problem as a top priority. West Berlin's Mayor, Walter Momper (SPD), had grand visions for the city of Berlin, and his political career to boot. Once it became clear that German re-unification was going to be the most likely outcome of the 'Peaceful Revolution', following the *Volkskammerwahl* of 18 March 1990, Momper began lobbying for the return of Berlin's capital status.<sup>102</sup> Perhaps Momper hoped that, like his predecessors Willy Brandt and Hans Joachim Vogel, the Mayor's Office in Berlin would provide a platform for a successful bid to become SPD leader, and a political coup, such as bringing the capital back to the Spree Metropolis, would do his ambitions no harm. One of the many obstacles to the capital's return to Berlin, however, was its perceived unruliness. The fact that East Berlin was now home to a community of several thousand squatters confirmed this reputation in the eyes of the city's critics (of whom there were many).

In addition to busying himself with this 'capital question', Momper and his colleagues in Berlin's SPD administration were also preparing for a local and national election campaign, to be held on 2 December 1990. Their main rivals in the city, and nationally, were the CDU, and in Berlin the party was gearing up to run on a law and order platform. As the *taz* reported, towards the end of

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<sup>102</sup> 'Momper will Berlin als Hauptstadt', *taz*, 30. April. 1990.

October 1990, 'the CDU [began its election campaign] through conjuring up fears of a city threatened by violence, foreigners and squatters.'<sup>103</sup> The presence of over one hundred occupied houses in the SPD-run city provided plenty of ammunition for the party's right wing opponents. 'No end to squatting?' read one CDU poster, 'vote yourself free from the SPD'.<sup>104</sup>

Attempts were made to establish negotiations between the squatters representatives in the VG and the Senate, but these were characterised by inflexibility and recalcitrance from both sides. Rumours began to circle of impending evictions, while militant squatters responded to these with threats of their own. One squatter flyer from October 1990 promised 'one million deutschmarks of damage' in retaliation for each evicted house.<sup>105</sup> The Mayor of Friedrichshain, Helios Mendiburu (SPD), had warned his colleagues in the Senate that, in several of the houses in his district, 'petrol bombs had been lying ready on the balconies for months.'<sup>106</sup> In this polarised context, an early morning raid on two East Berlin squats on 12 November 1990 – one in the Pfarrstraße in Lichtenberg and another in the Cotheniusstraße in Prenzlauer Berg – triggered a wider chain of events.<sup>107</sup>

The day before these evictions, the Mayor of Prenzlauer Berg, Siegfried Zolls (Grün/Bündnis 90), had written to the Interior Minister and the Chief of Police, warning both that, at this precise moment, evicting a squat would be akin

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<sup>103</sup> 'AL und SPD – und sie lieben sich doch?', in *taz*, 26. Oct. 1990.

<sup>104</sup> PT Archiv, Sammlung Häuserkampf Ost-Berlin, CDU Plakate.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., Flugblatt: 'Was tun damiz brennt?', October 1990.

<sup>106</sup> Arndt, *Berlin Mainzer Strasse*, p. 166.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

to 'playing with fire'.<sup>108</sup> The news of these early morning raids quickly spread throughout the East Berlin squatter community, and by midday, several hundred squatters had assembled in the vicinity of the Mainzer Straße in Friedrichshain and attempted to block the six-lane Frankfurter Allee. Contingents of riot police soon appeared on the scene. Arriving in Friedrichshain in the early afternoon, Reinhart Schult, one of the founding members of *Neues Forum*, observed 'the marshal deployment of police into every street and corner of the neighbourhood.'<sup>109</sup> Throughout the afternoon there were violent exchanges between squatters and the authorities along the Frankfurter Allee and the side streets leading from it. A convoy of water cannon and armoured vehicles conducted a sortie through the Mainzer Straße, firing rounds of teargas into the squats as they passed. The squatters responded by erecting barriers at each end of the street.<sup>110</sup> By the early evening, five hundred squatters and their supporters, armed with Molotov cocktails, sling shots and crowbars, were gathered in the Mainzer Straße, while on the other side of the barricades, a force of 1,400 riot police had by now been assembled.<sup>111</sup>

As reports of these events spread, attempts were made by members of Berlin's Civic Movement to deescalate the situation. 'At around five o'clock I called the *Haus der Demokratie* in order to mobilise people, because the situation

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<sup>108</sup> HAV Archiv, Runder Tisch Instandbesetzung Prenzlauer Berg (1) November 1989 – December 1990, 'letter from Siegfried Zoels to Innensenator Pätzold, Stadtrat Krüger and Polizeipräsident Schertz', 11 Nov. 1990.

<sup>109</sup> Arndt, *Berlin Mainzer Strasse*, p. 176.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-20.

<sup>111</sup> 'Mainzer Strasse hinter Barrikaden', *taz*, 14. Nov. 1990.

appeared extremely threatening', recalled Schult.<sup>112</sup> A number of prominent members of the *Bürgerbewegung* attempted to form human chains between the squatters and the police. In scenes recalling those of the early stage of the 'Peaceful Revolution', Bärbel Bohley and other former dissidents held up banners reading 'no violence'.<sup>113</sup> The officers on the scene, however, were evidently not moved by these appeals. Bernadette Kern, a member of Democracy Now, recalls that the 'police came straight at us with water cannons'.<sup>114</sup>

After unceremoniously dismissing the former Civic Movement, the police turned their attention towards the squatters who were dug in in the Mainzer Straße. Video footage (accessible on youtube) shot from inside the street shows squatters responding with hails of paving stones and petrol bombs, thrown from behind the barricades, from balconies and from the roofs of the buildings.<sup>115</sup> Schult, who was in the Mainzer Straße while it was under siege, recalls that as the evening progressed, 'the street began to look like a war zone'. He witnessed trenches being dug to prevent the entry of police vehicles and water cannon, while dozens of wounded squatters were lying on make-shift stretchers.<sup>116</sup> At around two in the morning, after eight hours of unsuccessful attempts to break through the barricades, the police pulled back from the immediate vicinity of the street in order to regroup.

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<sup>112</sup> Arndt, *Berlin Mainzer Strasse*, p. 177.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>115</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wobyem-ZVGo> retrieved 9 Feb. 2014. See also the numerous articles printed in the local and national newspapers which are assembled in, Ermittlungs Ausschuss, *Dokumentation Zur Mainzer Strasse 12. - 14. November: Presse, Flugblätter, Presseerklärungen, Auslandspresse, Soli-Aktionen*, (Berlin: Mehringhof, 1990).

<sup>116</sup> Arndt, *Berlin Mainzer Strasse*, p. 177.

On Tuesday 13 November 1990, following the militant defence of the occupied buildings the previous night, the squatters issued a press statement in which they offered to dismantle the barricades, but only if certain conditions were met. These included the 'immediate withdrawal of the police from the Friedrichshain neighbourhood' and a written guarantee from Momper, stating that the Mainzer Straße squats would not be evicted.<sup>117</sup> The *Neues Forum*, the opposition organisation whose founding had set the 'Peaceful Revolution' in motion, also released a statement, strongly criticising the police's actions. 'We witnessed the beginning of the conflict, and observed how the police repeatedly sought to escalate the situation,' read the communication.<sup>118</sup> Members of the Civic Movement and other well respected figures, such as the Berlin Minister Bischof Forck, offered to act as mediators between the squatters and the police, in the hope that further violence could be avoided.

These offers, however, were not so much declined as ignored. 'No one was willing to speak to us,' recalls Bärbel Bohley. Determined not to give in to the militant resistance of the squatters, Pätzold mustered reinforcements and arranged for assistance from his counterparts in the SPD-governed states of Lower Saxony and North-Rhine Westphalia.<sup>119</sup> Schult, who was again in the Mainzer Straße on Tuesday evening, recalled:

Around midnight I heard that the *Bundesgrenzschutz* (Germany's Border Security Forces) were being mobilised. Throughout the day there had been reported sightings of police convoys on the

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<sup>117</sup> PT Archiv, Sammlung Häuserkampf Ost-Berlin, Flugblatt: 'Hände weg von unseren Häusern', 13. Nov. 1990.

<sup>118</sup> Arndt, *Berlin Mainzer Strasse*, p. 18.

<sup>119</sup> 'Nach der Schlacht: Pätzold rüstet auf', *taz*, 14. Nov. 1990

motorway [travelling towards Berlin] and large contingents of riot police assembling in the city's outer districts – it was clear that a big assault was being prepared for the following morning.<sup>120</sup>

Schult's worries were confirmed when on Wednesday morning a force of 4,000 police arrived in Friedrichshain and proceeded to seal off the area surrounding the Mainzer Straße.

Again prominent members of the Civic Movement attempted to form human chains between the police and the squatters, but again they were dispersed. At around half-past seven in the morning, the barricades were stormed by 1,500 officers advancing in testudo formation under a hail of paving stones and fire bombs. Simultaneously, special commandos were dropped onto the roofs by helicopter. Intense hand-to-hand fighting continued on the street and inside the heavily fortified houses for several more hours.<sup>121</sup> By three o'clock, however, the authorities were in complete control and 347 squatters had been taken into police custody.<sup>122</sup>

It was somewhat ironic that, only a year after the mass demonstrations of the 'Autumn Upheaval', West German riot police, at the behest of the city government, were turning their water cannons on the initial protagonists of the 'Peaceful Revolution' as they sought to deescalate a violent conflict in East Berlin. The helplessness of the *Bürgerbewegung*, whose repeated offers to mediate a solution between the squatters and police were ignored, highlighted their marginality in the new, unified Berlin. For former dissidents, the

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<sup>120</sup> Arndt, *Berlin Mainzer Strasse*, p. 178.

<sup>121</sup> See Ermittlungs Ausschuss, *Dokumentation Zur Mainzer Strasse 12. - 14. November: Presse, Flugblätter, Presseerklärungen, Auslandspresse, Soli-Aktionen*, (Berlin: Mehringhof, 1990).

<sup>122</sup> PT Archiv, 'Senatsverwaltung für Innere – Pressestelle', 17 Nov. 1990.

overwhelming exercise of state power was symbolic of the departure from the politics of the dialogue, which had been a defining feature of the '*Friedliche Revolution*', to that of confrontation.

In their response to the eviction of the Mainzer Straße, the Civic Movement drew parallels between the *modus operandi* of the new state apparatus and that which it had replaced. A statement by the *Bündnis 90* read: 'we have not forgotten the violence of 7 October 1989.<sup>123</sup> Once again, the state attempts to use military means to solve social and political problems.'<sup>124</sup> Other voices in East Berlin – including both sympathisers and critics of the old order – suggested that this exercise of state power was not a return to the practices of the SED regime, but in fact the beginning of a third, militaristic, stage of the GDR's annexation, which followed the economic and political takeover that had preceded it. The day after the violent events in Friedrichshain, *Neues Deutschland* ran with the inflammatory front-page headline: 'Western police rehearse for civil war in East Berlin'.<sup>125</sup> Former opposition activists found themselves in unusual agreement with the erstwhile SED supporting newspaper.<sup>126</sup> Both these insinuations and suggestions, however, were incorrect. The eviction of the Mainzer Straße did not mark a return to the brutal suppression of the SED (brutal though it was), nor was it intended to demonstrate the new state's authority over GDR citizens. Rather, these events

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<sup>123</sup> When the *Volkspolizei* and Stasi violently broke up protests during Gorbachev's state visit to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> birthday of the GDR.

<sup>124</sup> Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, Bestand B.111.1, Akte Nr. 31, 'Erklärung von Bündnis 90/Grüne/UFV', 14. Sept. 1990.

<sup>125</sup> 'Westpolizei probte in Ostberlin den Bürgerkrieg', *Neues Deutschland*, 15. Nov. 1990.

<sup>126</sup> 'Deutschlands Soldateska probte den Bürgerkrieg', *Telegraph*, 23. Nov. 1990.



were a continuation of the long history of violent confrontations between the *Bundesrepublik's* forces of law-and-order and extra-parliamentary left, only displaced to the former GDR.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In the interregnum that followed the collapse of the SED-state, East Berlin witnessed the emergence of by far the largest squatter movement in Germany, East or West, since the rehab squatter movement in West Berlin almost a decade previously.<sup>127</sup> There were a number of parallels between the broader conditions surrounding the emergence of both. As was the case in West Berlin in 1980, there was no shortage of vacant housing stock in East Berlin in 1990. Whole blocs of tenement buildings stood empty, either awaiting demolition or renovation, offering excellent prospects for potential squatters. East Berlin had a thriving sub-culture, as had Kreuzberg in the late-1970s, while both halves of the divided city had a tradition of political contention rooted in and mediated through urban space. In West Berlin in 1980/81, and in East Berlin following the *Wende*, squatters were able to exploit a temporary power vacuum. And, once state power began to reassert itself, the squatters in East Berlin encountered the same dilemma faced by the rehab squatter movement: whether and under what conditions to negotiate with the authorities.

There were, however, also important differences. Most obviously, attempts to form a squatters' movement were complicated by the division and disagreements between squatters from West Berlin and the Federal Republic

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<sup>127</sup> 'Die Bewegung ist tot, es lebe die Bewegung', *BesetzerInnen Zeitung*, 22. Aug. 1991.

and those from East Berlin and the GDR. Arguably of greater importance, however, were the difficulties faced by the movement in its attempt to construct a coherent narrative through which the squatters could frame their actions. Overt, political squatting in East Berlin was triggered by opposition to the SED's housing policy that had its roots in pre-*Wende* period. Initially, the East German squatters articulated a critique of the local housing organs' mismanagement of the housing stock and opposed official plans to knock down swathes of the local neighbourhood in Prenzlauer Berg and to replace them with prefabricated new-build. However, by March 1990 at the latest, opposition to the local housing organs and state planners had been displaced by a new threat: that of Western investors and property speculators gobbling up large tracts of the inner city. The narrative of the squatters' movement thus had to adapt to rapidly changing events, losing some of its coherence and resonance in the process.

The privatisation of the housing stock and the commodification of living space which the squatters sought to highlight did indeed potentially affect a large section of the population. Indeed, the decade that followed Re-unification witnessed considerable displacement as rising rents forced poorer residents out of the inner city.<sup>128</sup> However, this did not present an *immediate* threat in 1990. Moreover, this was a juncture in time where many East Germans were prepared to believe that the West and the Deutschmark really did offer a future of blooming landscapes and prosperity for all, as Kohl had promised. The key to the strength of the rehab squatter movement in West Berlin during the 1980s

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<sup>128</sup> See Hartmut Häußermann, Andrej Holm, and Daniela Zunzer, *Stadterneuerung in der Berliner Republik. Modernisierung in Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg* (Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 2002).

was that the interests of those who occupied empty buildings and the broader population in the local neighbourhood were often perceived to be aligned. In East Berlin, and especially in the areas taken over by western squatters, the same association of interests was not as obvious, while the potential for antagonism and animosity between local residents and new-comers was considerably greater.

Following the events of 12 – 14 November 1990, the East Berlin squatter movement – which was already suffering from the ‘east-west split’ – fragmented. The *Verstragsgremium* was dissolved, and the numbers attending the *Besetzerrat* dwindled from week to week. Through a long and often complex process of negotiations, involving local Round Table discussions, some of the squatters managed to obtain legalised status or long-term use contracts for the buildings which they occupied. Nevertheless, by 1991, the East Berlin squatter movement existed de facto no longer.

## CONCLUSION

The history of contested space is one which transcended Berlin's Cold War division, with illegal squatting emerging independently in both halves of the city around the early 1970s. The practice continued and intensified during the following decades, before the traditions of squatting, in East and West, converged in 1989/90 against the backdrop of the re-unification of Berlin and of Germany itself. Although there were a number of parallels between the histories of squatting East and West, this thesis demonstrates that they also differed in fundamentally important respects. Whereas squatting in the GDR was practised covertly and individually (or as a familial undertaking), in the FRG it was undertaken overtly and collectively. Often tacitly tolerated by the local authorities in East Berlin, the history of squatting in West Berlin was, by contrast, rooted in conflict.

In West Berlin, the intensity of squatting ebbed and flowed in two distinct waves. In the early to mid-1970s, a number of buildings were occupied as part of a loosely coordinated Youth Centre Movement, where young people across the Federal Republic, frustrated with the paternalistic organisation of existing state-run facilities, and critical of the more commercial culture and entertainment available, strove to establish autonomous, self-managed centres. The second, larger wave of political squatting in West Berlin emerged in the context of opposition to urban renewal strategies in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Here again, squatting was not confined to the Island City, being

witnessed across the *Bundesrepublik* as well as in neighbouring Western European countries.

In the GDR, isolated instances of squatting were first registered in the late sixties and early seventies, gradually increasing in frequency year by year. By the mid-1980s, thousands – possibly even tens of thousands – of East German citizens squatted in buildings across the GDR. This practice was most widespread in East Berlin, though was not restricted to the GDR capital; indeed, squatting was undertaken in urban centres across the republic, from Rostock in the north to the industrial heartland of Saxony in the south. These developments were testament, on the one hand, to the chronic housing shortage that plagued the GDR up until its very end, in addition to a willingness among citizens to resort to alternative practices that bypassed the existing state structure and exploited its weaknesses, on the other. The SED regime ultimately proved unable to curb the practice, which continued up until and beyond the ‘*Wende*’ in 1989.

In addition to parallels in the temporal emergence of squatting in East and West Berlin, there were also a number of analogies in the geography of squatting on both sides of the city’s Cold War divide. Squatters were primarily concentrated in inner city neighbourhoods, where the pre-war, tenement housing stock still remained. This was a result of comparable strategies of post-war urban renewal which formed the wider contextual background to the emergence of squatting in both Berlins. In both halves of the city, the historic cityscape was dismissed as an unworthy inheritance, and East and West, it was hoped that they would be replaced by new urban forms, which provided

denizens with 'light, air and sunshine'. Indeed, although Berlin served as a showcase for the competition between the capitalist and Communist systems, with the respective polities engaging in architectural one-upmanship, the paradigms employed by planners on each side of the Cold War divide arguably mirrored each other more than they diverged.

Post-war urban renewal in divided Berlin (and elsewhere) built on the pioneering legacy of inter-war urban reformers. Indeed, the modernist paradigm served as the foundations for a transnational 'urban renewal order' (Klemek) which emerged across the European continent. Through drawing on this progressive tradition and creating better urban environments, the planners and administrations in both German polities hoped to overcome their darker historical inheritance and provide the foundations for new societies to emerge. Faced with numerous challenges, post-war urban renewal achieved considerable results. Indeed, the administrations in both Germanys served to improve the living conditions of the majority of their citizens. Yet, these achievements notwithstanding, the housing policies failed to universally deliver. In particular in the GDR, which was always playing catch up, an inability to solve the Housing Question plagued the regime until the very end, resulting in an increasing legitimacy problem for the polity as a whole. Moreover, these interventions in the urban landscape created new spaces of conflict, with a number of critics East and West rejecting the modern, clean and orderly environments that were being produced, viewing them as the physical manifestation and representation of the values and norms of societies to which they did not want to conform. Squatting, this thesis argues, played an important

role in a process whereby Berlin's symbolic meaning was not only contested between East and West, but also re-interpreted from below.

The history of squatting in West Berlin, as this thesis argues, was rooted in and intertwined with the city's – and the *Bundesrepublik's* – rich culture of protest. West Berlin had served as one of the nodes of the international student movement during the sixties, and the emergence of politically motivated squatting represented both a continuation of and a departure from the politics of '1968'. While squatters drew from and adapted the protest tactics and the societal critique of the student radicals who preceded them, their action served to extend the spatial frontiers of extra-parliamentary political engagement. Alongside opposition to nuclear power and the campaign against the stationing of tactical nuclear missiles in Germany during the 'Euromissiles' crisis, struggles centred in and revolving around urban space provided one of the most important themes of contention for West Germany's extra-parliamentary opposition during the 1970s and 1980s. As a protest tactic, squatting was used not only to oppose specific policies – such as urban renewal, property speculation, vacancy, and so on – but, as this thesis shows, provided often unique opportunities to pioneer new forms of collective living and working arrangements.

Through organising themselves together as a social movement with links to the broader extra-parliamentary opposition, West Berlin's squatters were able, albeit briefly, to emerge as a major political force in the city. As we saw in chapter six, the movement succeeded in challenging top-down approaches to urban renewal, and ultimately served as an important catalyst for the transition

to a more sensitive, community orientated model of urban regeneration. In doing so, the history of squatting in West Berlin and elsewhere in the *Bundesrepublik* has left an enduring legacy in the built environment. And in other ways, too, the history of squatting has bestowed a legacy that is still evident today. Squatters in Berlin, East and West – and in other cities in divided Germany – engaged in the search for alternative lifestyles, with the practice serving to sustain and expand the spatial frontiers of the city's sub- and counter-cultures. This was particularly evident in West Berlin, and in East Berlin after 1989, where brightly painted squatted buildings, which often served as cultural centres, punctuated the urban streetscape, demarcating the boundaries of radical space and providing a reminder of the history of squatting in the city long after the twilight of the movements. In East Berlin, too, squatting played an important role in creating niches in which more covert political and artistic urban subcultures could operate.

Though there were, as might be expected, parallels between squatting in the divided Berlin, there were also very significant contrasts. Whereas squatting in West Berlin was usual undertaken overtly, collectively, and accompanied with demonstrations and grassroots organisation, *schwarzwohnen* in the GDR was characteristically a covert undertaking. Squatting in the GDR was a primarily a private family or group act, serving first and foremost as an alternative housing strategy, and providing an innovative means to circumvent the GDR's long housing waiting lists. Under the parameters imposed by the East German dictatorship, citizens were not able to voice public or collective opposition to the ruling party or its policies. In the few scattered instances



where East German squatters sought to directly challenge government policy, they ran up against Socialism's very real frontiers of power. Yet, so long as squatters did not attempt to openly challenge the regime, the practice could serve to circumvent and thereby subvert asymmetric power relations in the GDR. Most of those who illegally squatted in apartments in East Berlin, as this thesis has shown, would have a good chance of gaining legal tenancies for the properties they had occupied. Some would have to pay nominal fines to the local housing organs on account of their transgression. Only a minority, however, would face the prospect of a forced eviction.

This study of urban squatting highlights that everyday life in late Socialism was saturated by a complex network of implicit, unwritten rules which helped to sustain the social edifice – rules that were and could be negotiated and re-negotiated. Although important figures within the party-state hierarchy were perturbed by the emergence and spread of this phenomenon, the local authorities in the GDR's larger towns and cities and East German squatters often struck an implicit *modus vivendi*. From the perspective of the housing organs at the grassroots, those who occupied empty, dilapidated apartments often released pressure on the official waiting lists, which could at times provide a safety valve that went some way towards containing popular dissatisfaction with the regime and its inability to solve the Housing Question. Indeed, one unexpected result of this research was finding that, in responding to illegal squatting, the room for manoeuvre that was available to officials at the local level in the GDR was at times greater than that of their counterparts in the West, who were often constrained by the press and public opinion, their party

leadership at the *Land* and Federal level, powerful economic and political interest groups, as well as the prerogatives of private landlords. Though defenders of the GDR might interpret this as evidence for the system's flexibility and strength, or as an example of Socialist 'measured judgement', the (often surprising) ways in which the GDR authorities responded to illegal squatting instead would appear rather to highlight the limits of the dictatorship and its inability to exercise full control in this most important socio-economic sphere.

Separated by the Berlin Wall, the preeminent symbol of Europe's Cold War division, there was nevertheless a considerable degree of transfer of ideas, cultural symbols and tactics between the squatter milieus, though this flow was primarily in a West-to-East direction. For those East German squatters who closely followed events in West Berlin and elsewhere, in particular those who belonged to the GDR's domestic opposition or to its alternative milieu, it was possible to conceive of themselves engaging in an alternative practice that stretched beyond the borders of their small republic. Although they could only experience it remotely, the history of squatting in the West arguably also belonged to that of the GDR, despite the Wall. As soon as SED power dissolved in the winter of 1989/90, East Germans began to occupy buildings overtly, drawing on the Western tradition of using squatting as the basis for an urban social movement that sought to engage with and influence municipal politics.

Although their histories unfolded in fundamentally differing political systems, there were a number of similarities between the squatters on both sides of Berlin's Cold War divide. Many regarded themselves as outsiders who occupied a marginal status within their respective societies. Indeed, a number

in fact cultivated this marginality and, through squatting and alternative living practices, sought to achieve a degree of autonomy. Nevertheless, alternative cultures can never completely disentangle themselves from the local context in which they operate. And while squatters and alternative cultures, East and West, were influenced by common ideas and practices – ideas and practices that transcended the Cold War divide – they were also, at the same time, the products of the societies and political systems they opposed.

Berlin's squatters would become more aware of the differences between the two milieus when the histories of squatting, East and West, finally converged in the East Berlin squatter movement of 1989/90. Importantly, the western squatters brought with them to East Berlin a tradition of militancy that incorporated violent forms of political action which contrasted with the culture of opposition in the GDR. Whereas the history of West German protest movements in the seventies and eighties was characterised by a significant degree of confrontation between activists and the authorities, the domestic opposition in the GDR, by contrast, developed in a context where the balance of force vis-à-vis the state apparatus was so asymmetrical that any kind of militant posturing would have been futile and counterproductive. The western squatters brought with them the models of organisation that had been practised in the various new social movements in the *Bundesrepublik* in the 1970s and 1980s. These models, while in theory democratic and participatory, at the same time contrasted with the more informal opposition networks which had been in place in the GDR. Arguably the biggest difference between the two milieus, and the issue that caused most friction, however, was their respective awareness of

one another's histories. Those who came over to East Berlin following the dissolution of the SED-dictatorship, as we saw in chapter eight, were accused of displaying a lack of sensibility towards East Germany's own traditions of squatting and urban sub-culture. This was not necessarily a product of arrogance, as many in the GDR claimed, but rather of ignorance. On the whole, during the years of division, western squatters, just like the western public in general, did not reciprocate their counterparts' interests in the other Germany. Even when they did, they often lacked access to information on conditions in the GDR. In this sense squatting can be seen as a paradigmatic example of some of the wider social and cultural issues and problems posed by German reunification. Today, this asymmetry arguably still exists, and the history of the GDR is too often boiled down to that of oppression, on the one hand, and what is increasingly becoming a new foundation myth of the 'Peaceful Revolution' on the other. Although both German states faced a number of comparable developments and challenges over the course of four decades, there has been only a limited attempt to incorporate the history of the GDR into that of a broader post-war historical narrative. In the future, when attempts to integrate the histories of the two Germanys are undertaken, the trajectory of squatting in both parts of the divided then reunited nation should be included in the narrative.

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#### UNPUBLISHED DISSERTATIONS

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