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BOOK REVIEWS:

(1) *SQUATTING IN EUROPE: RADICAL SPACES, URBAN STRUGGLES*; (2) *SECURITIZATION OF PROPERTY SQUATTING IN EUROPE*; (3) *BARCELONAN OKUPAS: SQUATTER POWER!*; AND (4) *THE SQUATTERS' MOVEMENT IN EUROPE. COMMONS AND AUTONOMY AS ALTERNATIVES TO CAPITALISM*

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ABSTRACT

This article contains four book reviews. The reviewed books are: *Squatting in Europe: Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles* (2013), by Squatting Europe Kollektive; *Securitization of Property Squatting in Europe* (2013), by Mary Manjikian; *Barcelonan Okupas: Squatter Power!*, by Stephen Luis Vilaseca; and, *The Squatters' Movement in Europe. Commons and Autonomy as Alternatives to Capitalism* (2014), by Squatting Europe Kollektive, edited by Claudio Cattaneo and Miguel Martínez Lòpez.

KEYWORDS

Squatting, Squatting Europe Kollektive, Mary Manjikian, Stephen Luis Vilaseca, Claudio Cattaneo, Miguel Martínez Lòpez

SQUATTING EUROPE KOLLEKTIVE. *SQUATTING IN EUROPE: RADICAL SPACES, URBAN STRUGGLES*. WIVENHOE, NEW YORK, PORT WATSON: MINOR COMPOSITIONS, 2013.

A common problem in the area(s) of social science research is the attempts to reduce a complex phenomenon to a single conceptual definition. Squatting is a good example just such an operation. Squatting Europe Kollektive (SqEK), a group of scholars with past and present experiences and interests in squatting as well as direct political engagement, attempts to move research beyond reductionist interpretation. As its title suggests, *Squatting in Europe: Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles* focuses on Europe—that is, on the typical (Western) Europe of France, Germany, UK, the Netherlands, Italy, and Spain, among others. For readers outside of this frame, this narrow definition of Europe is, of course, an immediate shortcoming of the book, although there are signs that the scholarship is slowly picking up the regions of the former East and might in the future provide interesting insights in comparative or stand-alone frameworks.¹

Squatting in Europe covers a lot of ground. Among other topics, historical, theoretical, and ideological bases for the emergence, proliferation, and development of: squatting; decision making structures in occupied social centers; the particularities of rural squatting and its economic aims and consequences; the relation of squatting to various state and market initiatives of urban renewal; inter-squat mobility; criminalization, commercialization, cooptation, and alternatives to social welfare.

The starting point is usually twofold: the political logic of property and capital, where the market itself cannot guarantee everyone's needs. In most urban centers of Europe there exists simultaneously a disproportionate amount of vacant housing alongside a significant amount of homelessness and needs for spaces of political, cultural, and social expression and organization. The authors of this essay collection largely sympathize with 'political' squatting, pointing out a variety of social movements which emerged in or around practices of political squatting and squatting considered as a social movement in itself. Hans Pruit offers a topology of squatting as follows: 1) Deprivation-based squatting; 2) Squatting as an alternative housing strategy; 3) Entrepreneurial squatting; 4) Conservational squatting; 5) Political squatting (21). There might be good reason to show the diversity inherent to practices of squatting, but the need for such a typology is still not clear,

¹ For example, a recent book on squatting has a chapter on Poznan: B. van der Steen, A. Katzeff, and L. van Hoogenhuijze, eds., *The City Is Ours: Squatting and Autonomous Movements in Europe from the 1970s to the Present* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2014).

especially in relation to the 'political'. One of the authors in this book makes the point explicit: "Squatting is not a goal in its own right; it is attractive because of its high potential for confrontations with the state. The label 'political squatting' does not imply that I see other forms of squatting projects as apolitical, indeed, as Wates (1976: 160) suggested, squatting is generically political" (44). It is quite clear that the political element comes not only from the confrontation with the state, but also with the private owners, and surrounding community (whether through conflict or cooperation, or a combination of both). It is also quite clear—although rarely acknowledged in this and similar research on squatting—that the division of political and non-political squatting occasionally misses the point when self-proclaimed radicals through their rituals, aesthetics, and discourse enact the confrontation which is more imaginary than real; whereas, for example, 'deprivation-based' squatters might come into conflict or cooperation with the surrounding environment and politicize their existence in transformative ways. Another author in the book puts emphasis on an important warning about categorization: "... the experiences of each squatted building, district or city where successive squats have appeared include uniquely local characteristics that force us to undertake a very accurate and delicate appreciation of their common features" (118).

In any case, the important point is that many of these practices prefer non-representational politics and avoid as much as possible official legal channels, feeding into a larger tradition of direct action within social movements. At the same time it also, and somewhat paradoxically, alleviates the state from demands for housing provisions. In Western Europe, at least since the 1960s, squatting also has played an important role in various counter-cultural and 'anti-systemic' movements as spaces of organization, experimentation, and expression. Taking over abandoned property without permission is the founding act of each case of squatting. The ways and various aspects of how it deals with legal system, owners, municipalities, neighbors, and other squats or social centers are covered throughout the book in various ways. However, the generality of non-representation, in most cases more often than not, remains an ethical rather than practical aim.

For example, Berlin serves as an informative case study that reveals the complexities of squatting in the much larger context of urban renewal and political transformations. Once considered among the squatting capitals of Europe, Berlin today does not look anything like it did in the 1980s or 1990s with respect to squatting. The late 1970s and early 1980s saw an enormous housing crisis. Various housing struggles were emerging with the new wave of social movements. According to Holm and Kuhn, "in 1980s alone some 80,000 people were registered

as seeking apartments” while estimated 27,000 apartments were uninhabited” largely for the rent-increasing strategies of house owners and developers interested in abandoned house demolitions in favor of new construction (163). In a short span of time, there was enormous squatting proliferation: before the end of 1980, there were 21 squats, whereas “in the summer of 1981 there was around 165 houses especially in neighborhoods like Kreuzberg and Schöneberg” (164-165). By 1984, 105 squats were 'legalized,' while in 60 cases the squatters were evicted. The story of eviction or legalization is a general trend to which there are not many exceptions. The early 1990s, with the recent collapse of the Berlin Wall, became another source of squatting explosion. The old part of East Berlin was already semi-abandoned as a political statement by the GDR authorities, which favored new construction with urban amenities in the peripheries (almost universal feature of socialist city planning). Unification produced a general, if brief, legal and political chaos, creating the perfect conditions for a massive amount of squatting on the eastern side (173-174). This, however, quickly came to a halt, when city authorities issued a decree banning all new squatting and promising to evict within 24 hours (172). However, both waves of squatting produced conditions for “cautious urban renewal,” which takes into account that squatters move in and start repairing the infrastructure, which is then in many cases supplemented with the state funding allocated for self-help housing or other cooperative schemes (176-177). As a relatively large movement in the 1980s and 1990s it had to realize that militant defense and non-cooperation with city authorities was not on the table. If there are limits and self-proclaimed autonomy is always partial, it also needs to be acknowledged that the collective housing structures which often resulted from initial squatting contributed to vibrant political culture but also helped to restructure the city along neoliberal urban guidelines. Furthermore, Pruitt prods: “the first issue is whether legalization results in the loss of the oppositional edge. An in-depth study of squatted ‘free spaces’ in Amsterdam describes the commonly occurring effects of legalization as a loss of links to various societal structures, of ties with other free spaces, and a decline in dynamism and political engagement (Breek and de Graad, 2001: 77)” (34).

In many cases squatting is no longer a tool with an oppositional edge. For example, consider a statement by the Housing Department director of the Municipality of Paris: “It’s a good deal for all of us. The municipality doesn’t have to pay repairs and surveillance. For the squatters, it is an opportunity to get a building legally for some time. When we have a building where we don’t have any project we call them and they squat” (223). A further example is the proliferation of ‘squatting agencies,’ which basically serve as subcontractors and real estate

agencies for residential or other uses of space, frequently appealing to owners with their services to avoid their property from being squatted. In many of these new developments, what is at stake is a larger framework of urban governance with its contract-based relations and more importantly as a mechanism of sorting out the "good" squatters from the "bad." In case of France, the discourse is quite advanced. The art of cultural squats with small exhibition or workshop spaces is perceived positively, contributing to aging ideas about the "creative city" and larger cultural economy and even some 'political squats' which serve as social centers might have the municipality turning a blind eye. The city avoids the costs in policing, eviction, legal procedures and usually gathers below-market but still substantial rent (224). However, this option privileges a squatter who is likely already socially and legally literate, and who is able to navigate the bureaucratic system sufficiently. This is not the case for large segments of squatters, migrants among them, who do not possess the required resources (e.g. knowledge, language, status, etc.).

The book offers a lot of information and some productive debates. The topic itself is not easily exhausted; therefore new books continue to emerge from this scholarly collective. The main cautionary tale is that while the literature on squatting has been building up in recent years, the actual situation in many places known for squatting has been deteriorating: the UK has criminalized residential squatting; the Netherlands has banned squatting; Spain has created draconian repressive laws in relation to squatting; and so on in this same vein. So whether squatting will become increasingly incorporated into a neoliberal urban governance or will serve as a time-tested tool for new waves of urban social movements remains to be seen. But the effort of groups of scholars to bring complexity to the issue is a welcome development. There is occasional distance felt between reader and topic because of overly specialized academic language and rather burdensome attempts to categorize activities without justifying the categorization and organization, but at the same there is a feeling that there is a detailed knowledge of the subject matter (which is not always the case with academic texts on squatting). The book is also freely available online, which is a nice gesture—especially for those who are (some of) the objects of this research.

Reviewed by Arnoldas Stramskas

MARY MANJIKIAN. *SECURITIZATION OF PROPERTY SQUATTING IN EUROPE*. NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE, 2013.

This book on squatting is quite different from the books on squatting written from the semi-activist/scholar perspective which has proliferated recently. Manjikian's main intention is to think squatting—as one of features of larger housing policy—in terms of new developments in addressing or anticipating threat and ensuring security. The book begins by providing a general frame for a variety of historical approaches to squatting within the framework of housing, shelter, alternative lifestyles and its post-2001 transformations (9/11 marks an historical break). Manjikian asks why security scholars neglect such phenomena, if by various calculations one in six of the planet's inhabitants is or was squatting (4). According to Manjikian's review of various scholarly approaches, securitization may refer to a state of emergency, extraordinary politics, security becoming “everyone’s job everywhere,” or “a technique consciously articulated by those in authority who wish to securitize a problem, in order to resolve it quickly and with a minimum of public discussion” (31), or, citing Atland and Bruusgaard, “the essence of securitization theory is that security is a ‘speech act’ whereby a state representative moves a particular development into a specific area and thereby claims a special right to use whatever means are necessary to block it” (155-156).

Four case studies are presented, based in Europe: Roma squatting and camping in France; Christiania in Copenhagen; and the criminalization of squatting in the UK, and the Netherlands.

The first one starts with Britain's squatting history and recent developments to criminalize squatting. Residential squatting means that the buildings occupied by the squatters are owned privately and their designated use is residential. Squatting in other types of buildings still remains legally possible in Britain. Manjikian constructs the narrative of housing and planning institutions since WWII and the changing perceptions from relative tolerance towards squatting—understood as a result of market and/or state failure to provide housing—to increasing hostility since the 1990s.

According to various aggregated statistics in the UK, there might be up to 900,000 unused residential housing units (79). The statistics are unreliable because what constitutes abandoned housing varies greatly (79). In any case, there is a concern from various stakeholders that the problem exists. Social campaigners as well as squatters point to the 'moral question' of abundant empty homes as well as homelessness and needs for social housing. Neighbors are concerned with safety in

the neighborhoods (so-called broken window rhetoric) whereas the state and municipal authorities with good governance has recently started to pour money into stimulating faster re-developments (79-80). More importantly, the anti-social rhetoric becomes a technique of governance in various aspects of social life (including housing) "to regulate citizen behavior" through local municipalities and extended jurisdiction of the police through "anti-social behavior orders (ASBOs), dispersal orders, curfews, parenting orders, fixed penalty notes, closure orders and acceptable behavior contracts" (80). Its aim was not merely to deal with social problems but also to actively construct 'good' citizens through the "micro regulation of social habits and conduct" (81, citing Powell and Flint). Squatting in this context of the New Labour party's rule obviously becomes a much more difficult practice at least discursively to continue using old rhetoric of moral rights, social justice, or other abstractions, which (perhaps) was more effective in previous decades. Manjikian sees a shift from inclusionist to exclusionist policies and discourse, which was solidified in legal terms through the criminalization of squatting in 2011.

What is of interest in this matter to this (Eastern) part of Europe is that the process leading to criminalization has also had a strong component of the singled out category of 'international squatters'. Various statistics show that a very large portion of squatters in London, for example, are of Eastern European origins (Poles and Lithuanians in particular). Discursively, it lends itself to facile constructions of a/the squatter as undeserving and parasitic, alien and other. The role of largely tabloid media and certain politicians has helped to construct this narrative with frequent sensationalism of lavish squatters living in expensive houses, barbarians evading the 'way of life' of the British people, as a menace to society. Despite the variety of organizations which tried to draw much more complex picture, the debate was lost, and the law passed. But squatting in Britain—more difficult now, no doubt—still goes on.

The second case study is Christiania in Copenhagen, the world-famous enclave/commune/free-town of about 900 people established in 1971, which has been more or less successfully defended against a variety of attempts to pacify and destroy it. Manjikian traces the history of the commune: its founding principles, its legal issues, attempts to evict, incorporate, and curb the autonomy, its relation to Copenhagen and the country in general, its forms of self-organization, its acceptance of various marginals who did not find ways of living in mainstream society. However, what interests Manjikian the most is the changing perception of authorities from relative tolerance of this semi-autonomous space of social experimentation to an object of securitization, which is seen as posing a threat not

only locally but also nationally. What is so threatening about this seemingly benevolent anarcho-hippie society of several thousand people?

The first issue is the sale of soft drugs on the notorious Pusher Street, which in Christiania has been practiced since its inception. The regular raids by the police never managed to eliminate it. The sale of drugs has led to occasional gang violence and thus was increasingly conflated with criminality. Secondly, with the composition of Danish society changing due to mobility, immigration, appearance of refugees, Christiania was increasingly seen as a safe-haven for ever more diverse criminal elements, including far-stretched connections to international terrorism and political radicalism more broadly. In the 1980s Copenhagen had a thriving scene of squats, many of which had a relationship with broader autonomist movements in Europe. Most of them were evicted and almost no new squats have appeared since 1998. The most well-known of them, the social center Umdomshuset, was served with eviction in 2005 despite a large international campaign, street battles, and demonstrations. The government's intention was to get rid of Umdomshuset, which it was seen as a hotbed of political radicalism, and then to move on to clearing Christiania, which was perceived as a "failed state" within the confines of the city. So far this has not happened. On the contrary, there is an increasing realization that Christiania is becoming one of the top tourist destinations in Copenhagen, and residents were given the option to "privatize" their homes, through the scheme of down-payment and thirty year loans.

The Christiania chapter is followed by a brief chapter on what Manjikian describes as a failed attempt to securitize Roma (largely from Romania and Bulgaria) squatting in France. In 2010, Nikolas Sarkozy ordered the demolition of "300 so-called Roma squats located throughout France and to deport their residents [about 12.000 people]" (138). However, this was neither the first nor last attempt in France (nor to make a claim that other countries did not resort to similar practices), the rhetoric and practice is well-grounded in French politics across the political spectrum. Besides Roma squats or camps, there has long been a hostility from authorities in Calais as well, where encampment known as 'The Jungle' has been in place for many years, where migrants try to cross to the UK or stay there after unsuccessful attempts. What makes the 2010 case significant is the unprecedented international coverage and pressure from various institutions including the EU, the UN, various human rights agencies, and Roma organizations, for what was perceived as particularly brutal and careless ethnic targeting, which for many was reminiscent of the Vichy government's policies during the WWII. Securitization failed precisely because the attention drawn to the case did not allow the successful and swift rhetoric of the immediate and grave threat to French

society to go unchallenged. Even if locally in France, at least theoretically the right-wing government had popular support for its actions, "any attempt to stigmatize a particular ethnic group or to blame them for generating a social problem was likely to be read within this historical context [of persecution], thus limiting the effectiveness or attractiveness of a securitization strategy" (140). Thus it became nearly impossible to treat it as merely a domestic issue, because all kinds of supra-national agencies perceived the issue as at least a European problem and exerted pressure on France to follow various conventions and agreements, even if the operation was supposed to follow 'best practices' of securitization (e.g. immediate threat, swift action to prevent any interference or debate, secretive issuing of orders to local police, etc.).

The last case study, titled "'The last bastion of squatting in Europe' or the end of Dutch tolerance," deals with the long and colorful history of squatting and ending, surprisingly for many, with eventual anti-squatting legislation in 2010. Squatting in the Netherlands for decades was considered part of the liberal ethos, not merely a technical housing issue (the law implemented in 1971 allowed to squat the building if it was vacant for six months). It was a space for social experimentation and was treated with a great amount of tolerance, often looked on with admiration and jealousy in other European countries and their squatting communities. What Manjikian draws attention to reflects the international character of squatting. On the one hand, legislative initiatives in 2003 and 2009 drew attention to EU practices of increasing intolerance towards squatting, thus seemingly following larger EU trends; on the other hand, part of the construction of threat was argued over non-Dutch squatters. The 'danger', or so it was perceived, was that once the squatting would be banned all over Europe, the Dutch would have to pay the price when international squatters flood the country, bringing new costs, chaos, and criminality. Securitization was achieved, not through an attack on the local practice of squatting itself, but as a defensive anticipatory action that required immediate action.

The build-up for the legislation had a longer history, of course. Right-wing politicians were rallying against the squatting for decades, seeing them as anti-social, criminal, politically radical. In the context of the 1990s, when the Netherlands started to experience a crisis of multiculturalism and initiated policy reforms towards greater integration, all 'deviant' behaviors and practices came under the same paradigm. Thus the ideas of tolerance and certain autonomy for various social groups become increasingly policed and controlled through a variety of legal, policy, and social mechanisms.

The concluding chapter, "Is desecuritization of housing policy possible or desirable," provides an overview of the debates about possible ways and limits to desecuritization. Clearly, there is no consensus about whether and how this can happen. Some issues are more prone to desecuritization than others. But it seems that 'normalization' strategies most likely are not implementable, at least in the short term. The more optimistic voices seem to be attached to the notion of the public or a bottom-up policy revision to affect change. This seems to be no longer the case and securitization as a practice itself is one of the features of contemporary governance which turns state of exception into a permanent order of things. It does not mean that no action whatsoever is possible; rather, it is simply that action to fight securitization will not be able to proceed within the old frameworks of idealized democratic participation and public deliberation.

Manjikian's book is in many ways a valuable resource. The approach of looking at the issue of squatting through securitization lenses is a welcome addition to the quickly growing body of literature on squatting. However, the arguments are shaped by the liberal framing of the issue: e.g. the state as a benevolent institution which must represent the people; inclusion versus exclusion; tolerance versus bigotry; etc. This completely sidesteps the voices of squatters themselves and more radical approaches to political philosophy, such as those that question some of the basic features of governance within the liberal state. The inherent limitations lay in over-romanticizing the old bygone eras of social democracy, the welfare state, and the models of society based on accommodation or pacification of conflicting interests. The book, correctly, identifies that this might not be just an exception and that European discourses on danger might homogenize countries and paralyze any dissenting practices. What is missing is 'why?' The reasons provided are numerous but not entirely convincing.

Reviewed by Arnoldas Stramskas

**STEPHEN LUIS VILASECA. *BARCELONAN OKUPAS: SQUATTER POWER!*
MADISON AND TEANECK: FAIRLEIGH DICKINSON UNIVERSITY PRESS,
2013.**

"In order to fully grasp the contemporary dynamics of social transformation, an understanding of the creative production and activity of Spanish squatters, known in Spain as *okupas*, is essential. This book combines close-readings of representations of *okupas* with a study of urban experience in Barcelona, the squatter capital of Europe, in order to shed light on the innovative way *okupas* modify people's worldview through the linking of word, art, body, and built environment." (ix) The two sentences above summarize the aims of this slim volume. Vilaseca takes an interdisciplinary approach, though predominantly dealing with existing representations in the media and *okupas'* (squatters in Spanish) self-representations. He perceives *okupas* as having a political agenda and positive contribution to societal change, not only through anti- or non-capitalist practice of squatting, but also through the power of affect via cultural production and occupation of space, which goes beyond immediacy of the place to combine material and symbolic spheres.

The first chapter provides a brief history of squatting and suggests a highly problematic typology of squatting: "1) youth in search of independence (*ocupas*); 2) the poor (*ocupas*); 3) drug dealers and users (*ocupas*); and 4) activists (*okupas*)" (2). The only difference is a letter 'k' in the word '*ocupas*'. "Activists, the fourth category, are the squatters I am most interested in. They are the only true *okupas*" (3). Normally, after reading such a statement I would close the book and would not come back to it. But the relevance of the topic at least warrants further reading and consideration of the book's contents. The first category refers to middle-class youth who are doing it by choice ("They could just continue living with their parents" (2)). They are apolitical and are not interested in changing anything. The poor do not have a choice, thus, they squat out of necessity. But they are similarly apolitical and not interested in changing society. The drug dealers are frequently foreigners and squatter-vacationers, who destroy the 'good' image and political potential of activist *okupas*. And, finally, we have the good squatters—the activists, who unleash imagination and create semi-utopian urban commons in Barcelona. If only those previous three groups did not exist, the revolution would have been long-achieved.

Setting sarcasm aside: what is the problem with these kinds of typologies? First of all, those who have been in touch with squatting first-hand know well that

these kinds of categorizations almost never match reality. There are occasional drug dealers in good squats, just as there are activists in poor squats, or migrants and middle class youth living together, or any number of possible configurations. All of them are *politicized* to various degrees by simply engaging in disensual practice. Isolating activist ghettos and clearing them out of any social resonance and relations with various segments in society, including those which are most marginalized and demonized ('illegal' immigrants, drug addicts, mentally ill, etc.), is precisely a political gesture of great importance. Making these artificial divisions (such as the author does) in order not to give the media a chance to vilify squatting in general is an act of de-politicization of squatting, and not the other way round.

The genealogy of *okupas* and their influences is similarly doubtful: "in addition to autonomist Marxism and French situationists, perhaps the most influential pre-*okupa* movement was the hippies, and, more specifically [...] the Diggers of San Francisco, the Yippies of Greenwich Village, and the hip communalists" (4-5). The question is why? Of course, it is possible to make such an argument by free association, but to say that these movements "influenced and shaped their beliefs" (5) is largely unfounded. More likely all the variations of hippies were never been seen or heard of by Barcelona's squatters. The occupied social centers, for example, draw a much more direct genealogy to pre-Civil War anarchist *ateneu* (many of which still use the name for anarchist social centers today), anti-military conscription campaigns of the 1980-1990s, or the larger European squatting movement, from which it drew much inspiration and many practices.

The second chapter gives an account of political economy in Barcelona and Catalonia more broadly. The chapter investigates the role of banks, politicians, real estate developers, and urban regeneration programs which have turned Barcelona into one of the poster children of urban governance and ongoing gentrification via tourism, rate of investment, and other similar features constitutive of urban progress in post-industrial societies. Additionally, the chapters addresses the role of *okupas* in critiquing property speculation and their powerful enemies in the media and political apparatus, which tirelessly try persuade the broader public of a threat posed by squatters to the owners, communities, and urban 'civility'.

The third chapter analyzes external representations, including soap opera, feature films, and young adult and adult novels. All of these examples portray squatters in varying ways, ranging from positive to negative.

The fourth chapter examines in great detail two self-representations by the *okupas*: one experimental film and one poetry book by the Vicente Escolar Bautista, a squatter artist. Vilaseca claims that *okupas* are much more interested in "face-to-face interactions and communication;" therefore it is difficult to find examples of

cultural production which offer their world-view. It is unclear, then, why throughout the book we hear an enormous amount about creative expressions, such as "poetry, music, performance art, the plastic arts, graffiti, urban art, and cinema" (100) and, suddenly, a lack of self-representations? The only way to understand it is that *okupas* are not interested in reproducing representations of who they are but in producing themselves through those creative expressions. In other words, the question is: what are the criteria for self-representation and how meaningful is this search for individuals in the movement? Inspiration for the film, apparently, came from a publication entitled *Por una politica nocturna* (For a nocturnal politics), which calls for anonymity and disappearance. This is conflated with a lack of personal responsibility and accountability. Drawing connections to insurrectionary strands within the radical left milieu, Vilaseca states: "I am critical of the use of violence to elicit social change not only because the loss of life is tragic but because it is ineffective. The biggest insurrection ever, May '68 in Paris, was crushed in a matter of days" (103). These kinds of statements, filled with factual inaccuracy, are found throughout the book. This leads Vilaseca to an opening of his political sensibilities, denouncing violence and making definitive statements about the nature of *okupas* as uninterested in radical change (except in imagination, body, etc.), living beside and outside the structures of capital and the state, being post-anarchist, and so on. All these claims, even if they are overly positive, are generally oversimplified and reflect more a wishful thinking than reality. Consider the following statement: "However, unlike their predecessors, the political *okupas* reach altered states of consciousness not through drugs, but simply through theory and practice" (6). One gets the impression that he is talking about some kind of new-wave, quasi-religious, ascetic sect on a mission to enact humanity's salvation.

The book is full of ambiguous theoretical references, for example to Italian (post)autonomist thought, which, to put it mildly, often misses the point. For example, "The *okupas* form part of the autonomist category of immaterial laborer because they aspire to become living unpaid labor" (xxix). No matter one's take on autonomism, nowhere can one find such aspiration being desirable. The same goes for exaggerated claims about *okupas'* lack of interest in anti-capitalism and merely carving out and living the 'alternative' within capitalism. Many of the Barcelonan *okupas* would be outraged and would feel slapped in the face by this. And most likely they would like to slap back.

Whether one understands this as a negative stereotype or a positive stereotype, as in the case with Vilaseca's representation of *okupas*, both operations could be considered different sides of the same coin. Perhaps it is not a significant epistemic violence, but at least it is a work close to political propaganda. That this

propagandizing is enthusiastically optimistic does not save it from a minimum of responsibility. Taking the identity (which does not exist) and putting theoretical musings on top of it and pretending that the lived, embodied, complex relations communicate straight forward reality can hardly be considered responsible scholarship. The fantasies of autonomy, body, and affect, which are independent of capital, in some other sphere—these are all weaknesses of the book's argument.

The final brief concluding chapter attempts to make links between the US and Spain, claiming that the Occupy movement takes up assembly models from *okupas*, which is not the case. And while it is true that there are some connections successfully made, the situation is so different that predicting shared future directions is fragile, to say the least.

For whom is this book intended? It is unclear. Squatters will not learn much from it and will find themselves often frustrated reading it. Academics with a solid base of theoretical knowledge will find it shallow. The general public will find it inaccessible, just as policy makers who could be seduced by the positivity of *okupas'* interventions.

The chief friendly reminder for the author should be his own warning that he attributes to the media: "The question of representation or misrepresentation is important because whenever the *okupas* are supposedly allowed to speak directly, their accounts are mediated by a third party and, as a result, are potentially compromised" (90).

Reviewed by Arnoldas Stramskas

SQUATTING EUROPE KOLLEKTIVE, C. CATTANEO, AND M. MARTÌNEZ, EDS. *THE SQUATTERS' MOVEMENT IN EUROPE. COMMONS AND AUTONOMY AS ALTERNATIVES TO CAPITALISM*. LONDON: PLUTO PRESS, 2014.

The latest book published by SqEK is another attempt to collect articles written by squatters, activists, and academics, and to produce a coherent volume on squatting in Europe. Probably the most interesting feature of this kind of venture is the method of organisation characteristic of squats and their inhabitants, but extended over academic literature. Anarchist and directly democratic decision-making provides extremely diverse contents and a variety of moods: from strictly analytical (to the point of boredom) chapters on the overall worsening housing conditions (Chapter 1) to historical reviews of eco-squatting (Chapter 6), or the relationship of gender to squatting (Chapter 7), to inspiring poetic musings on the heterotopian nature of merging the intimate with the political (Chapter 2).

In times when revolutionary discourse emphasises the importance of "broad alliances," *The Squatters' Movement in Europe* is an alliance of activism and academia. Whether such an alliance provides enough "breadth" is, however, unclear: both fields are notorious for their tendency to make clear distinctions between the "inside" and the "outside." However, as Martinez argues: "There is great diversity among activists, researchers and activists-researchers, so stereotypes tend to play a harmful role. In general, whether activist or researcher, nobody likes to be treated as an abstract, simplified and static research object" (20). This holds true and is an important point; however, some squatters' reluctance to communicate with and even hatred of researchers can be seen as a natural symptom of a structural problem of the gaze. The latter cannot be solved by simply agreeing that every case is different. There has not yet been enough research on the researchers. Another symptom at the core of this problem is the attempts at clear typologies and hard distinction between "squatting for housing" and "political squatting" made in this book, as well as the earlier ones by SqEK. Unnecessary typology is partly compensated for by the aforementioned diversity of chapters: democratic dissensus is sustained throughout the book, which allows some contributors to resist and reject the needs-politics distinction.

Another narrow point, already mentioned by Stramskas in the reviews above, is a peculiar concept of "Europe": the cases presented are those of Amsterdam, New York, London, Brighton, Berlin, Geneva, Barcelona, Madrid, Rome, and Paris. On the one hand, "Europe" that starts at New York in the West and ends abruptly at the Eastern border of Germany and the Southern border of Switzerland misses the

opportunity to discuss and analyse interesting, abundant, and specific cases of squatting in, for example, Poland, Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, and Greece. There is a sentiment of looming decline throughout the book (related to the criminalisation of squatting in the Netherlands and the UK, mass legalisation of squats in Germany, quelling of resistance in Switzerland, etc.) which could be fought by opening new geographical horizons. However, if attention is finally directed eastwards, it ought to be no mere tokenism that is only evident of and perpetuating the centre-periphery relation. Perhaps, since this turn—at once and on a large scale—does not seem feasible in the near future, the Eastern not-yets would be better off establishing “squattings in Europe” accessible only to those who live—historically, geographically, and psychologically—East of Berlin, thus sustaining the distinction from the other side.

The Squatters' Movement in Europe is (somewhat artificially) centred on the point of building alternatives for capitalism, or, more tersely, the struggle “scaling up”. Taking into account the general enmeshment of all anti-capitalist practices in the networks of everyday life, as well as capitalism being not only a mode of production, but also a system of social relations more or less based on commodification, this centre of gravity appears to be empty, and this emptiness is, at first, both disturbing and hilarious. Martinez and Cattaneo ask: “If we consider the imaginary situation in which all the empty buildings are occupied, then the question would be: are there still housing and social needs to be satisfied?” (27). Although radical imagination has its purpose, this question is hypothetical to the point of being useless. Let us imagine a world where *all* empty buildings are occupied *everywhere*, i.e., not only in Berlin, Barcelona, or New York, but also in Tirana, Ulan Bataar, Shanghai, and La Paz, and we cannot visualise anything else but a complete collapse of one of capitalism’s grounding principles. One is tempted to suspect that this limited scope of imagination is another evidence of the West-East particularity that persists throughout the book. If the point being made is the necessity of an intersectional approach and that it is not enough to illegally occupy a building to fully replace capitalist structural and social relations, such an obvious statement does not require this sort of loftiness. The editors also argue that squatting “does not entail a change in the rules of the game, but only represents a partial transgression of some of them” (27). So, the scaling up of the squatters’ struggle depends on squatters far less than they would want to imagine. Squatting is a partial transgression of many and a negation of *one* very oppressive rule: priority of private property over the need for shelter or social space. Therefore, squatting and the practices characteristic to it (mutual aid, anti-statist social centres, refusal of money system by means of freeshops and free prices, radical

DIY, fusion of private and public, etc.), as well as their scaling up, are dependent on the ability to negate this rule: overall political climate, strength of the police states, availability of empty buildings, cultural traditions, and so forth.

Upon second glance, this empty centre is quite handy: just like Pluto's moon Charon, its gravity is strong enough to prevent the main body from revolving around its own axis. The first chapter, which is a fast-paced overview of the current housing crisis, also implies the need for intersectionality, as well as openness: sustainability of the squatters' movement offers a broad alternative once the (former) non-squatters are in need of it. Proliferation of tenants' evictions and inhumane conditions suffered by the illegal immigrants, combined with squatters' skills and the experience of living outside the law, can lead to "a development of a 'common housing movement' where creation (prefigurative experiences) and resistance (defensive struggles) coexist, expand, proliferate and diversify" (50). It seems that the alleged central point of scaling up and the promise of providing "real" large-scale alternatives to capitalism is necessary: through it, *The Squatters' Movement in Europe* turns into a series of articles on squatting's relation to the inside and outside elements that are not always seen as politically important for and by squatters (especially those clinging to strong counter-cultural identities). It opens the scope to overall housing problems, issues of legitimacy and legality, immigration, ecology, sexuality and gender, and forms a polyphonic network of connections among the chapters.

The book gives an impression of squatting that is almost always subjected to certain belatedness: at least in its current state, squatting does not fight the housing crisis or gentrification at their roots, as much as it brings attention to these processes and fights them when they are already underway, usually even in the last stages. Anyway, this is quite rightly not presented only as a shortcoming of the squatters' struggle. "Arriving late" but being very much on the ground and almost entirely in the realm of practice rather than theory, squatting is able to narrativize and historicize itself, thus providing virtually endless possibilities of its revival. Luca Pattaroni's account on squatters' movement in Geneva (Chapter 2), marked by an upsurge in activity when multiple houses were occupied in Les Grottes neighbourhood in the 1970s, is an example of such a reinvigorating narrativization. The dream behind the practice, this sort of inspiration could be an object of research on its own, and even more so a skill among the squatters. Pattaroni is also among the few contributors who explicitly remind us that "squats are places not only of struggle, but also of life" (72). He turns our attention to the 'inclination to dwell' in squatted spaces; however, this topic, worthy of a whole universe, is represented in only one paragraph:

Gradually, walls are re-erected, and the formal privatisation of certain spaces is tolerated. More broadly, certain rules to help measure individual effort and responsibility emerge and are implemented to protect individuals from wearing themselves out by investing too much, as well as recognising their need to withdraw at times. (73)

Without actual examples from certain squats or a schematic approach to these collective relations in squatting, many questions, especially “how,” remain unanswered. It seems that scholarship on squatting would benefit not only from analyses of power relations between political entities, or reviews of squatters’ struggles in a certain location; additionally, there is a lack of proper micro-historical research of actual cases of people existing in a mutual squatted space.

Mutual existence in and among squatted spaces is approached from the perspective on gender by Azozomox (Chapter 7). Expressions of patriarchy in squats and social centres, and resistance against it, are summarized but not analysed in-depth due to a broad temporal (1970s-2014) and geographical (Berlin, Madrid, and Barcelona) perspective. The general insight here is, as Azozomox poetically puts it, “while diverse squatting movements have liberated a large number of buildings, queer/trans/feminism is slowly beginning to squat the minds of a growing number of activists. But there is still a long way to go” (205). Cases of patriarchal and homo/transphobic behaviour, as well as sexual violence in squats, raise one of the most important issues for the squatting movement: the accessibility of spaces. While squats do not rely on private property to make decisions on availability, the initial promises are, to an extent, unclear: are squats public spaces? Nevertheless, the needs of privacy and sanity of the inhabitants must be ensured too. Finally, making the compromise of a “common” space—i.e. fluid and defined by participation, not by category—still, due to the persistence of patriarchy in practice, sees some squats and social centres intentionally close their doors to cis males. Others, as the given example of Köpi 137 in Berlin before 2000, “rejected any lesbian and women-only parties in its space with the argument that they did not want to exclude anyone because of their colour, sex/gender, or origin from their space – (the main exclusion its members were referring to being that of men)” (202). The issue of constantly redefining “all” and “not-all” in regards to the availability of spaces and the safety of their inhabitants/visitors remains crucial, as well as the oppressive practices in spaces that are based on anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and anti-sexist principles.

Together with gender and sexuality, race, ethnicity, and immigration are categories that become more and more important in contemporary squatting and housing struggles. In England and Wales, as E.T.C. Dee explains (Chapter 3), the

demonization of immigrants, especially those from Eastern Europe, was central in the changing of dominant ideological-discursive framework towards squatting. In the 1970s, the public in London and Brighton was generally supportive of squatters, but this all changed in the 2000s-2010s, when “a moral panic ... arose in the mainstream media about criminal, foreign squatters who targeted decent home owners, pouncing to occupy places when they popped out to get a pint of milk” (100). The ethnically marked distinction between the “good” and the “bad” squatters was pivotal in the passing of 2012 ban on squatting residential premises in England and Wales. That the immigration card can be terrifyingly powerful was demonstrated by the 2010 full criminalisation of squatting in the Netherlands (Chapter 4), where squatting enjoys a rich history of more than 50 years of massive occupations, street battles, and ingenious hoaxes. The main argument of the legislators was that, without criminalisation, barbarian hordes of non-Dutch squatters would continue to flood the Orange Empire’s cities. In Rome (Chapter 5), where squatting is a strong presence and there are three sustainable large-scale squatters’ organisations, the immigrants have been one of the most important actors in the squatting scene: Polish immigrants squatted San Basilio in 1988 (145); a former salami factory Metropoliz currently houses people from Africa, Central and South America, Eastern Europe, as well as 100 Roma (152); about 500 Africans squatted the “Hotel Africa” between 1999 and 2004 (155). The relation of immigration, squatting, and the state, so different in Italy as compared to England and the Netherlands, could be taken up as an object of comparative research. Is it the radical nature of Romans not relying on legal procedures (in comparison to Londoners, Brightonians, and Amsterdamers) that enables them to resist the anti-immigrant and racist sentiments? Once again, due to the fast-pace and broad scope of the book, the ethnicity, race, and immigration relations to squatting are not analysed in-depth.

Compared to the issues on gender and ethnicity, the book’s take on the relation between squatting, housing, and ecology is disappointing. Box 1.1 (52-54, “The environmental basis of the political economy of squatting”) presents an extremely interesting topic that needs to be expanded, taking into account the conflictual and intricate nature of housing needs as taken care of by the state (construction of social housing), urban and urban-scavenging lifestyles promoted by some squatters, and ecological consciousness of refusal. However, Chapter 6 on “Squats in Urban Ecosystems” provides none of that. Condemning cities as ecological disasters (which they most probably are), it quotes parallelisms between skin melanomas and capitalist cities by Spanish economist J. M. Naredo (167-168). The ecological discourse that cannot get rid of appeals to nature is not tolerable,

especially in works on squatting, for one can easily see the extension of this style of argumentation into sociopolitical questions of feminism, LGBT* struggle, immigration, etc. A similar claim is that “bicycle workshops in the squats of New York, together with artistic expressions such as the building of tall bikes, production of screen-printed T-shirts, and of patches, banners, and other materials for street events, mixed with the active participation of many people, contributes to the creation of bicycle riders’ urban subculture closely related to squats and offering a *powerful* alternative to capitalism, evident in the money-free activities of the collectives.” (171-172; emphasis added)

Such statements are a demonstration of how material severance with the capitalist city (demonstrated by the examples of NYC community, and three urban squats in and nearby Barcelona, one of which “cut the electricity connection to the main grid and in its place they lit candles ...” (176)) can overlap with eco-righteous theoretical and social severance with its inhabitants. This can easily lead to a subculturalism of emphasising alternative exclusive minor practices, not always accessible to those who have not yet “liberated” themselves from the capitalist city (and, for example, got their electricity cut-off due to debts). One must acknowledge that urban and rural squats, bike workshops, and urban gardens promote possibilities for raising ecological consciousness and providing social-centre services outside the metropolises. Nevertheless, the authors’ notion at the end of the chapter that all these practices “can conceivably be subsumed under capitalist relations... emptied of politically inconvenient content and used instead to promote ‘green’ capitalism...” (180) requires more attention than it is given here.

The final relation to the “outside” that is taken up in Chapter 8 is extremely important to all squats, because it is the relation of existence: legal games and evictions. Sometimes these lead to impressive battles, such as the legendary resistance of the Mainzerstraße in Berlin in 1990, when about 1,200 squatters and supporters held out for two days until finally evicted by more than 3,000 police officers with the help of tanks and helicopters (223). In most cases, however, squatting is extremely sensitive to legal issues and state repressions, as demonstrated by the decline of squatting in England and the Netherlands after its criminalisation. Here, once again, to evaluate whether the international squatters’ struggle is on the rise or in decline, as well as how squatters deal with the state and the police in different circumstances, more data than that from New York and major Western European cities would be necessary (e.g. the interesting cases of Elba and Syrena squats in Warsaw, the autonomous centre Klinika in Prague, the Exarchia neighbourhood in Athens, etc.). However, the cases of Madrid and Berlin presented here are an interesting comparison. Almost all squats in Berlin have been

legalised after a long and open struggle against the authorities, and Madrid has not seen as many street battles, but retained an illegal squat scene; however, the “better” strategy remains hazy. The general conclusion is that legalisation does not destroy “a strong and horizontal self-management mode” (227), but “entails a certain loss of autonomy” (228).

In sum, *The Squatters’ Movement in Europe* is something between a resource, a serious macro- or mid-scale political contemplation, and a micro-political guide to know-how and inspiration; plus, it is an exciting archive of past struggles, achievements, disappointments, and experiences; it is very useful: and what else would a practice so reliant on DIY as squatting require? The hands-on approach is also supported by the immense diversity and polyphony (which is nevertheless connected to a distinguishable mesh of voices) of the book, which leaves readers with a hazy but more informed general image of the squatters’ movement in Europe than what they likely had before opening it. In short, it is still an invitation to get involved and see for yourself. The abundance of stories, facts, reviews, and approaches almost makes up for a lack of in-depth analyses, and micro-sociological and micro-historical research. However, one of the most important things for those who exist in the cracks and gray zones is not to extend this grayness too blindly over the outside. In other words, the contributors and the editors do not always abstain from getting high on their own supply.

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