

# Chapter One

## Introduction: Making Radical Urban Politics

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Considering there are houses standing empty,  
While you leave us homeless on the street,  
We've decided that we're going to move in now,  
We're tired of having nowhere dry to sleep.

Considering you will then  
Threaten us with cannons and with guns,  
We've now decided to fear  
A bad life more than death.

Bertolt Brecht (1967: 655)<sup>1</sup>

We don't need any landowners because the houses belong to us.

Ton Steine Scherben (1972)<sup>2</sup>

On the evening of 1 May 1970, a small theatre troupe began an impromptu performance in the middle of a shopping district in a newly-built satellite city on the northern outskirts of West Berlin. The troupe, Hoffmann's Comic Teater, was a radical theatre ensemble formed in 1969 by three brothers, Gert, Peter and Ralph Möbius, at the height of the countercultural 'revolution' in West Germany. Wearing colourful costumes and masks and accompanied by a live band, they soon developed a reputation for staging politically daring events that took place in the streets of West Berlin and in the city's many youth homes (Brown, 2013:

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172; see Sichtermann, Johler, Stahl, 2000; Seidel, 2006). The performances focused, in particular, on the everyday conflicts that shaped the lives of Berlin's working-class residents. Audience participation was actively encouraged by the troupe who developed an engaged agitprop style in which "the predominant cultural and political consciousness of the audience member" became the "starting point for the planning and realisation of the play" (quoted in Brown, 2013: 173). Scenes were improvised while spectators were invited onto the 'stage' to act out scenes from their own lives.

On 1 May 1970, the troupe travelled to the Märkisches Viertel, a large modernist housing estate in the district of Reinickendorf whose construction was part of West Berlin's First Urban Renewal Programme initiated by then Mayor Willi Brandt in 1963. The programme was responsible for the widespread demolition of inner-city tenements and the 'decanting' of their predominantly working-class occupants – approximately 140,000 Berliners – to new tower block estates on the fringes of the city (see Pugh, 2014; Urban, 2013). The performance by Hoffmann's Comic Teater focused, unsurprisingly, on the experience of the estate's residents and their anger at the lack of social infrastructure and the unwillingness of state-operated landowner and developer GESOBAU to provide "free spaces (*Freizeiträumen*)" for local youth.<sup>3</sup> It concluded with a scene that dramatised the recent closure of an after-school club (*Schülerladen*) after which the participants and spectators were encouraged to occupy a nearby building as a symbolic protest against GESOBAU. They were prevented from doing so, however, by the police who had been following the performance and had already secured the site. A group of over one hundred activists, performers and other local residents were nevertheless able to stage an occupation in an adjoining factory. As they began discussions over the formation of an autonomous self-organised youth centre, the factory hall was stormed by riot police and the occupiers, who included the journalist Ulrike Meinhof, brutally evicted. Three protesters were seriously injured and taken to hospital (see Figure 1.1).<sup>4</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the eviction, a small group of local activists initiated a discussion about the future direction of political mobilising in the Märkisches Viertel. A strategy paper was produced and circulated by the group who criticised the new housing estate and its developers for their insufficient attention to the needs and desires of its tenants (Beck et al., 1975). One of the authors of that unpublished paper was Meinhof, who only two weeks later would take part in the breakout of Andreas Baader from the reading room of the Social Studies Institute of West Berlin's Free University (*Freie Universität*), an event which led to the formation of the Red Army Faction (*Rote Armee Faktion* or RAF) (Aust, 1985).<sup>5</sup> Hoffmann's Comic Teater continued to produce engaged performances in the wake of the occupation and also turned their attention to children's theatre (see Möbius, 1973). Members of the group were later involved in the formation of Ton Steine Scherben, one of the most important bands within the radical scene in West Berlin and whose history is largely inseparable from the



**Figure 1.1** Arrest of the journalist Ulrike Meinhof at a protest occupation in the Märkisches Viertel in West Berlin, 1 May 1970 (Klaus Mehner, BerlinPressServices).

evolution of the anti-authoritarian Left in the city (Brown, 2009). While the factory occupation in the Märkisches Viertel was itself short-lived, it was nevertheless the first squatted space in a city where the radical politics of occupation would soon assume a new and enduring significance.

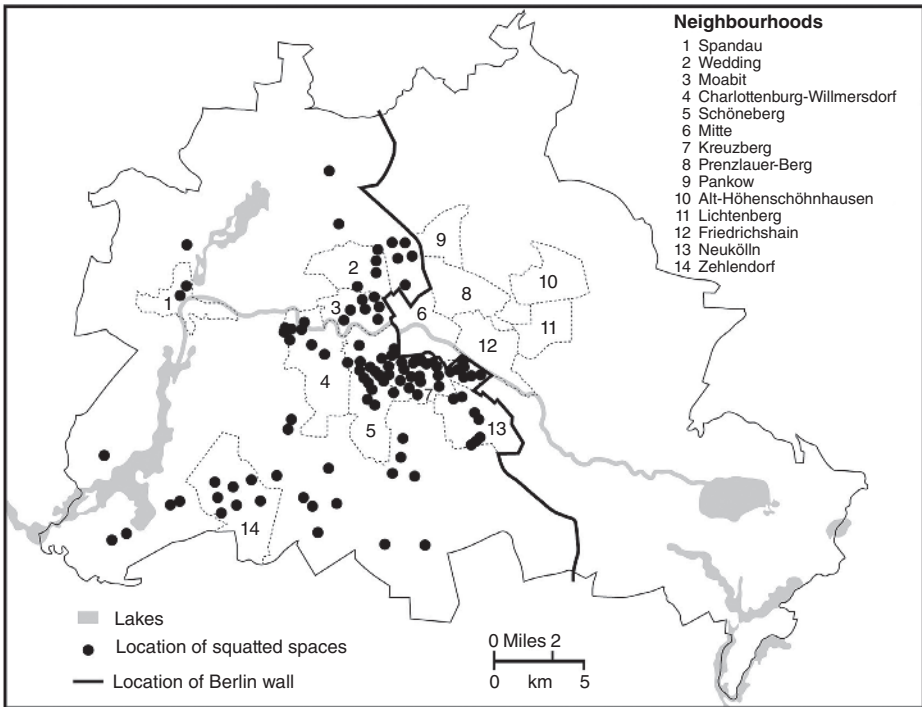
The story behind Berlin's first squat brings together a number of themes that are at the heart of this book: namely, the turn to squatting and occupation-based practices, more generally, as part of the repertoire of contentious performances adopted by activists, students, workers and other local residents across West Germany during the anti-authoritarian revolt of the 1960s and 1970s and in its wake; the relationship between the emergence of the New Left in West Germany and the transformation of Berlin into a veritable theatre of dissent, protest and resistance (see Davis, 2008); the recognition of uneven development and housing inequality as a source of political mobilisation and the concomitant privileging of concrete local struggles in Berlin for the composition of new spaces of action, self-determination and solidarity; and, finally, the widespread desire to reimagine and live the city differently and to reclaim a 'politics of habitation' and an alternative 'right to a city' shaped by new intersections and possibilities (Lefebvre, 2014, 1996; see also Simone, 2014; Vasudevan, 2011a; Vasudevan, 2014a).<sup>6</sup>

In the pages that follow, I develop a close reading of the history of squatting in Berlin. To do so, the book charts the everyday spatial practices and political

imaginaries of squatters. It examines the assembling of alternative collective spaces in the city of Berlin and takes in developments in both former West and East Berlin. For squatters, the city of Berlin came to represent both a site of political protest and creative re-appropriation. The central aim of the study is to show how the history of squatting in Berlin formed part of a broader narrative of urban development, dispossession and resistance. It draws particular attention to the ways in which squatting and other occupation-based practices re-imagined the city as a space of refuge, gathering and subversion. This reflects the fulsome emergence of new social movements in the 1960s and 1970s in West Germany as well as the tentative development of an alternative public sphere in the final years of the German Democratic Republic (see Brown, 2013; Davis, 2008; Klimke, 2010; Moldt, 2005, 2008; Reichardt, 2014; Thomas, 2003). At the same time, it is a story that speaks to a renewed form of emancipatory urban politics and the possibility of forging new ways of thinking about and inhabiting the city that extend well beyond Berlin and, for that matter, Germany.

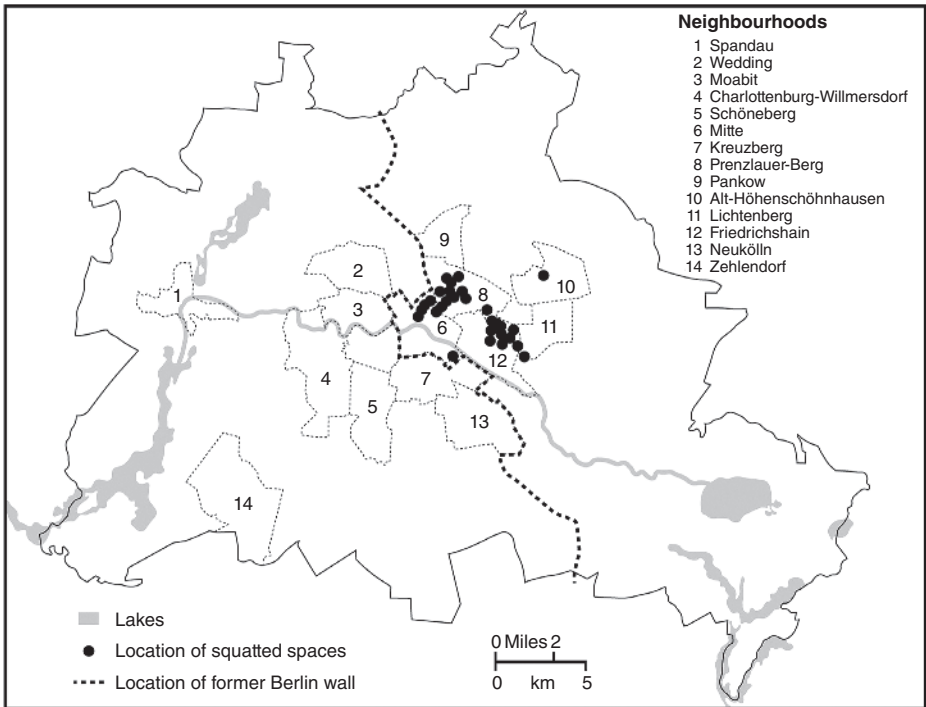
As the first book-length study of the cultural and political geographies of squatting in Berlin, this is a project that seeks to develop a rich historical account of the various struggles in the city over the *making of an alternative urban imagination* and the search for new radical solutions to a lack of housing and infrastructure. The book focuses, in particular, on what squatters actually *did*, the terms and tactics they deployed, the ideas and spaces they created. This is a history, in turn, that has had a significant impact on the transformation of Berlin's urban landscape and has shaped recent struggles over the city's identity. As I argue, squatters and the spaces they occupied were never incidental minor details in the formation and evolution of the New Left in West Germany in the 1960s and the various social movements which developed in the decades that followed. They played, if anything, a vital role in opening up new perspectives on the very form and substance that radical political action and solidarity could assume and are supported, in turn, by figures that point to an alternative milieu made up of thousands of activists and an even larger circle of sympathisers (Amantine, 2012; Azozomox, 2014a, n.d; see also Reichardt, 2014 for a wider perspective).

In Berlin, there have been at least 610 separate squats of a broadly political nature between 1970 and 2014 (see Figures 1.2 and 1.3). The majority of these actions took place in the city's old tenement blocks although they also encompassed a range of other sites from abandoned villas, factories and schools, to parks, vacant plots and even, in one case, a part of the 'death strip' that formed the border between West and East Berlin. As a form of illegal occupation, squatting typically fell under §123 of the German Criminal Code ("Trespassing") though many magistrates in Berlin as well as elsewhere in West Germany were reluctant to charge squatters as, in their eyes, a run-down apartment did not satisfy the legal test for an apartment or a "pacified estate (*befriedetes Besitztum*)" (Schön, 1982).<sup>7</sup> There were, in this context, two major waves of squatting in the city. The first wave between 1979 and 1984 involved 265 separate sites as activists



**Figure 1.2** Map of squatted spaces in West Berlin up to the end of 1981. Map produced by Elaine Watts, University of Nottingham.

and other local residents responded to a deepening housing crisis by occupying apartments, the overwhelming majority of which were located in the districts of Kreuzberg and Schöneberg. At the high point of this wave in the spring of 1981, it is estimated that there were at least 2000 active squatters in West Berlin and tens of thousands of supporters (Reichardt, 2014: 519). The second wave between 1989 and 1990 shifted the gravity of the scene to the former East as hundreds of activists exploited the political power vacuum that accompanied the fall of the Berlin Wall, squatting 183 sites both in the former East as well as the West.<sup>8</sup> Since 1991, there have been only 100 occupations across Berlin as local authorities have vigorously proscribed and neutralised attempts to squat. Of these squats, 56 were evicted by the police within four days. Overall, 200 spaces have been legalised and, in 35 cases, the squatters have themselves acquired ownership (see Azozomox, n.d.).<sup>9</sup> While these figures point to the sheer scale and intensity of squatting in Berlin, they do not take into account other forms of deprivation-based squatting carried out by homeless people nor do they include the large number of East Berliners who, from the late 1960s to the end of GDR, illegally



**Figure 1.3** Map of the second wave of squatting in the former East of Berlin, 1989–1990. Map produced by Elaine Watts, University of Nottingham.

occupied empty flats in response to basic housing needs, a process that was known as ‘*Schwarzwohnen*’ (Grashoff, 2011a, 2011b; Vasudevan, 2013).<sup>10</sup>

As these figures suggest, the history of squatting in Berlin occupied a significant place within a complex landscape of protest in the city. At the same time, the squatter ‘movement’ that emerged in Berlin was also connected to similar scenes in other West German cities in the 1970s and 1980s – most notably Frankfurt, Freiburg and Hamburg – and to a number of cities in the former East in the early 1990s (Dresden, Halle, Leipzig and Potsdam) (see Amantine, 2012; Dellwo and Baer, 2012, 2013; Grashoff, 2011b). It is perhaps surprising, therefore, that there remains little empirical work on the role of squatting – and the built form and geography more generally – in the creation and circulation of new activist imaginations and the production of collective modes of living. Why, in other words, did thousands of activists and citizens choose to break the law and occupy empty flats and other buildings across Germany and Berlin, in particular? Were these actions dictated by pure necessity or did they represent a newfound desire to imagine other ways of living together? Who were these squatters? What were the central



characteristics of urban squatting (goals, action repertoires, political influences)? And in what way did these practices promote an alternative vision of the city as a key site of “political action and revolt” (Harvey, 2012: 118–119)?

In order to answer these questions, the study develops a conceptually rigorous and empirically grounded approach to the emergence of squatting in Berlin. More specifically, it develops three interrelated perspectives on the everyday practices of squatters in the city and their relationship to recent debates about the ‘right to the city’ and the potential for composing other critical urbanisms (see Attoh, 2011; Harvey, 2008, 2012; Lefebvre, 1996; Mitchell, 2003; Nicholls, 2008; Purcell, 2003; Vasudevan, 2014a). Firstly, it signals a challenge to existing historical scholarship on the New Left in Germany by arguing that the time has come to *spatialise* the events, practices and participants that shaped the history of the anti-authoritarian revolt and to retrace the complex geographies of connection and solidarity that were at its heart. Secondly, it draws attention to squatted spaces as alternative sites of habitation, that speak to a radically different sense of ‘cityness’, i.e. a city’s capacity to continuously reorganise and structure the ways in which people, places, materials and ideas come together (Simone, 2010, 2014). Thirdly, it places particular emphasis on the material processes – experimental, makeshift and precarious – through which squatters came together as a social movement, sometimes successfully, sometimes less so. At stake here is a critical understanding and detailed examination of the conceptual resources and empirical domains through which an alternative right to the city is articulated, lived and contested (McFarlane, 2011b). A large part of this effort is, in turn, predicated on identifying concrete ways to recognise and represent the various efforts of squatters whilst acknowledging their complexity, contradictions, successes, and failures (see Simone, 2014: xi). To do so, the book ultimately argues, is to also draw wider lessons for how we, as geographers and urbanists, come to understand the city as a site of political contestation.

## **Spatialising the Anti-Authoritarian Revolt**

In recent years, the historical development of the New Left in West Germany has become a growing area of scholarly activity as a new wave of studies have challenged the ways in which the West German student movement and its various afterlives have been narrated. Traditionally, the era known as ‘68 has been framed as “the moment when West Germany began to earn its place among the Western democracies” (Slobodian, 2012: 5). According to this view, 1968 and the protests and struggles that emerged in its wake were widely seen as a key watershed event in the democratisation of West Germany. This is a story in which young West Germans rebelled against the “stifling atmosphere of cultural conformity” that shaped the immediate post-war period. In so doing, they challenged the hysteria of the Cold War whilst confronting their parents about the crimes of the Nazi

past. For the historian Timothy Brown, “such demands [...] acquired a special potency in a West Germany poised precipitously on the front line of the Cold War and struggling with the legacy of a recent past marked by fascism, war and genocide” (2013: 4). The consensus view is that the actions of the ‘68ers’ helped propel West Germany into an era of liberalisation which, in turn, provided the necessary conditions for a vibrant democratic society.

As I demonstrate in this book, this is an argument that works to polish up, obscure and eviscerate other political developments and radical trajectories within the New Left that exceeded simple categorisation and containment. The reduction of the West German ‘1968’ to a single overarching narrative thus foreclosed any meaningful attempt to assess and interrogate its nature and legacy. It was, however, the very surplus of such an event, its ability to disrupt existing explanatory models, that ultimately led, as Kristin Ross (2002) has argued in a related context, to its de-historicisation and de-politicisation. Not only were the motivation and goals of the events’ myriad actors (students, workers, apprentices, artists and many other citizens), erased but the complex multilayered causes and consequences of their actions conspicuously ignored. This tendency has, if anything, been reinforced by an “overrepresentation, among historians of the events, of veterans of the student movement, whose lack of critical distance from events readily results in a mixing up of historical events and personal biographies” (Brown, 2013: 2; see Aly, 2008; Enzensberger, 2004; Koenen, 2001; Kunzelmann, 1998; Langhans, 2008). This should not, however, be seen as a simple case of historiographic revisionism but rather an act of *confiscation* through which the very richness and complexity of a mass movement is reduced to the “individual itineraries of a few so-called leaders, spokesmen, or representatives”. Collective revolt is thereby “defanged” and recast as the jurisdiction and judgement of a small group of select ‘personalities’ (Ross, 2002: 4).

The story described in the pages of this book is deliberately set against these partisan tendencies and builds on an emergent body of work that seeks to historicise the anti-authoritarian protests that took hold in West Germany in the late 1960s as political struggles against various forms of oppression. Unsurprisingly, the events of the West German ‘1968’ have, in recent years, received extensive treatment within the German literature (Fahlenbrach, 2002; Gilcher-Holtey, 1998; Klimke and Scharloth, 2007, Kraushaar, 2000; März, 2012; Reichardt and Siegfried, 2010; Scharloth, 2010; Siegfried, 2008). While the anglophone literature remains relatively small, some historians have nevertheless argued that the faultlines of a new interpretation can already be detected, one centred on the transnational and global dimensions of the uprisings that took place in West Germany (see especially Brown, 2013). My own view is that a “future consensus interpretation”, as suggested by one prominent historian, runs the risk of substituting one historical orthodoxy for another (Brown, 2013: 3). Recent perspectives suggest, in contrast, a number of interconnecting themes that point to the sheer scale and diversity of opposition that grew out of the student protests in 1968. There has, in this context, been an attempt to pluralise the actors that were



involved in the anti-authoritarian revolt and to argue that the New Left depended on the negotiation of gendered, classed and racialised moments of encounter and was, in fact, a product of participants from widely different backgrounds, orientations and experiences (Featherstone, 2012: 6; see Davis et al., 2010; Slobodian, 2012). Others have placed particular emphasis on re-thinking the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s as a ‘global phenomenon’ that was a consequence of diverse translocal trajectories and connections (Höhn, 2008, Klimke, 2010; Slobodian, 2013a, 2013b, Tompkins, n.d.; see also Slobodian, 2012). Taken together, these approaches have shown that the construction of new movements and solidarities in West Germany was both an intensely local affair and one shaped by networks and relations that operated at a number of scales and which, in many cases, actively reshaped the terrain of political action.

Transnational histories of West German activists in the 1960s and 1970s have tended, as Quinn Slobodian has argued, to gravitate westwards and highlight the role of the United States in the development of the New Left in West Germany by retracing the exchange of protest repertoires and the movement of individuals across the Atlantic (2012: 6; see Klimke, 2010; Juchler, 1996; Höhn, 2008). While this work has yielded important insights into the entanglements between German and American oppositional cultures, it has also tended to obscure other alternative alliances and connections and downplay the impact of foreign students in drawing their West German counterparts into wider anti-imperialist struggles and, in the eyes of some commentators, into increasingly militant actions. To be sure, the emergence of a New Left internationalism in West Germany was often driven by abstractions and projections that reinforced, even instrumentalised, a mode of engagement “based on a West German Self and a Third World Other” (Slobodian, 2012: 11). And yet, it also promoted new collaborations with Third World actors which restored their agency and place within a radical history that was resolutely translocal and, as such, marked by deeply uneven geographies.

Attempts to capture the ‘globality of 1968’ have also encouraged greater sensitivity to questions of *periodisation*. There has developed, on the one hand, a new tendency in the historiography to adopt an approach that identifies the students protests of ‘1968’ as the culmination of the ‘long sixties’ and “the climax of various developments that had been set in motion due to the immense speed of the social and economic transformations after the Second World War” (Klimke, 2010: 2; see Marwick, 1998). Other scholars, on the other hand, have returned to earlier trajectories that linked the protests in West Germany in the late 1960s to the radicalisation of many students and other activists and the subsequent turn by a portion of the anti-authoritarian movement to revolutionary violence in the 1970s (Hanshaw, 2012; Weinhauer, Requate and Haupt, 2006). If the events of the German Autumn in 1977 – the kidnapping and murder of the industrialist Hanns-Martin Schleyer, the unsuccessful hijacking of a Lufthansa jet and the mass suicide of Red Army Faction (RAF) inmates in the Stammheim prison – are often seen as marking the end of the New Left, a new body of work has also returned to the 1970s with a view to recovering other histories of activism, dissent

and self-organisation that emerged in counterpoint to groups such as the RAF for whom violence was becoming the exclusive means of struggle (Arps, 2011; Baumann, Gehrig and Büchse 2011; März, 2012; Slobodian, 2013). This work has been characterised, in no small part, by a new commitment to showing how extra-parliamentary groups were able to forge oppositional geographies and alternative lifeworlds that eschewed the “leaden solidarity” that seemingly defined the ways in which such groups were compelled to either declare solidarity or distance themselves from the actions of their violent comrades (Negt, 1995: 289; Slobodian, 2013: 224).

New attempts have, therefore, been made to examine the protest landscape that emerged in the 1970s in the wake of the student movement and to document the underground histories that were responsible for the appearance of various Marxist-Leninist and/or Maoist cadre parties, the so-called *K-Gruppen*, as well as the emergence of ‘rank and file groups’ (*Basisgruppen*) that turned to local neighbourhoods and other institutions (school, factories, etc) as a source of new initiatives and solidarities (see Arps, 2011; Kuhn, 2005). A small group of studies have also begun to explore the emergence of migrant activism in West Germany in the 1970s and 1980s and the ways in which foreigners remained active participants in a range of social movements (Bojadžijev, 2008; Karakayali, 2000, 2009; Seibert, 2008; Slobodian, 2013). Recent books by Tim Brown (2013) and Sven Reichardt (2014) have, in contrast, adopted a broader plenary approach that sets out to map the vast growth of alternative practices, projects and infrastructure in the 1970s and 1980s. Reichardt’s thousand page account, in particular, retraces the emergence of an alternative milieu in West Germany in all its forms (agricultural communes, alternative bookshops, pubs and other businesses, social centres, experimental schools, neighbourhood workshops, etc.) and is one of few works that draws attention to the multiple spaces that were brought into being by activists across the country. Indeed, both Brown and Reichardt are at pains to acknowledge the significant role that squatting and other occupation-based practices played in the history of the anti-authoritarian revolt, though their accounts ultimately rely on an understanding of geography that is largely descriptive (see also MacDougall, 2011a, 2011b).

It is against this backdrop that I argue that the recent historicisation of the New Left in West Germany would also benefit from a critical framework that examines its complex *spatialisation*. By placing the everyday practices of squatters at the heart of this book, I seek to develop a geographical reading of the West German New Left and the activities and solidarities which emerged in the decades that followed. As I have already suggested, the history of squatting remains, in many respects, a blind spot within the wider historiography. The small number of studies that have been published in German are largely the work of activist-historians and have tended to place particular emphasis on specific aspects of the squatting scene at the expense of detailed historical coverage or wider theoretical reflection (Dellwo and Baer, 2012; Kölling, 2008; Laurisch, 1981; for an

exception see Amantine, 2011, 2012). If this work identifies the importance of squatting to the recent history of a number of cities in Germany (Berlin, Frankfurt, Freiburg and Hamburg), my own account is predicated on a genealogy that focuses on Berlin and the long history of squatting-based activism in the city. This is a choice guided by the city's status as a key site within a wider landscape of protest and dissent (Davis, 2008; Vasudevan, 2011a). This is, moreover, a choice that has prompted me to take a number of risks. Firstly, I have chosen to widen my sightlines beyond conventional periodisations and take in developments both before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall whilst locating the imaginaries of squatters within a much wider narrative of displacement and dispossession. My retelling both acknowledges the importance of the New Left to the repertoire of contention developed by squatters and the ways in which such configurations of dissensus and habitation were continuously made, unmade and remade. It is not, in other words, my intention to suggest that the practices mobilised by squatters in Berlin in the early 1970s were somehow homologous to the actions adopted by protesters in the 1980s and 1990s. Rather, I trace an expansive understanding of the anti-authoritarian revolt that focuses on what became known as the *Häuserkampf* ('the housing struggle') and the different ways in which a crisis of housing shaped by repeated cycles of creative destruction became a crisis of dwelling characterised by a desire to re-imagine the city as a space of autonomy and self-determination. Secondly, I have also chosen to take in developments in East Berlin and explore an alternative history of occupation that stretched from the late 1960s to the fall of the Wall and which has remained largely undocumented (for an exception see Grashoff, 2011a, 2011b; see also Vasudevan, 2013). Whilst the actions of 'squatters' in the East differed from those mobilised in the West, what was referred to as *Schwarzwohnen* nevertheless played an important role in the development of a dissident public sphere in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the 1970s and 1980s and the new wave of squatting that erupted in Berlin (and elsewhere) in the winter of 1989.

This is a book guided by a commitment to marking the relationship between a spatial history of the anti-authoritarian revolt in West Germany, the everyday geographies of squatting and the *making* of an alternative urbanism. More specifically, this is an account that treats political activity and the various actions of squatters as *spatially generative*. The conceptual tools deployed throughout the book have therefore emerged from a detailed engagement with current geographical research on the politics of cities and the nature and constitution of urban struggles (Blomley, 2010; Datta, 2012; Dikeç, 2007; Graham, 2010; Harvey, 2012; Iveson, 2007; McFarlane, 2011b; Miller and Nicholls, 2013; Nicholls, 2008). They also form part of a larger normative project on the enduring significance of the city as a site of radical social transformation. As a geographer, my aim is to contribute to a re-thinking of how an alternative urban politics is produced, lived and contested and a deeper theoretical and empirical understanding of the practices of squatters. In so doing, I hope to provide a series of

orientations that help us to reclaim a radically different right to the city shaped by a constituent desire to assemble and invent other urban spaces. This is, in other words, both a book on the history of squatting in Berlin and a critical commentary on how we conceptualise the city geographically and politically.

## The Squatted City

In the conclusion to his book on urban squatting, the investigative journalist Robert Neuwirth (2006) remarks on how “the world’s squatters give some reality to Henri Lefebvre’s loose concept of ‘the right to the city’”. “They are excluded so they take,” he writes, “but they are not seizing an abstract right, they are taking an actual place: a place to lay their heads. This act – to challenge society’s denial of place by taking one of your own – is an assertion of being in a world that routinely denies people the dignity and the validity inherent in a home” (2006: 311). For Neuwirth, the seizure of place by squatters is itself an exercise in place making: “squatters, by building their own homes, are creating their own world” (2006: 306). This process of “dwelling-through-construction”, as Neuwirth shows, is a product of countless everyday acts of adjustment and assembly, negotiation and improvisation (McFarlane, 2011a: 656). The lived city of squatters is, after all, a city structured by the shifting inequities that have come to characterise contemporary urbanisation. More often than not, to squat is to give form to a basic need for housing and shelter.

While the majority of the world’s squatters continue to live in the Global South, as Neuwirth and others have shown, the hidden history of squatting is a global history (see also M. Davis, 2006; Vasudevan, 2014b). This is a history of makeshift rural cottages, precarious and informal urban settlements, experimental housing initiatives and radical autonomous communities. It is a history shaped by a complex patchwork of customary beliefs and rights, the improvised use of materials and skills, and the development of emergent forms of dwelling, sociality and cooperation. For the anarchist and historian Colin Ward (2002), the place of the squatter in the history of housing is far more significant, therefore, than is usually realised, and it would be wrong to subsume or equate the act of squatting – be it in the Global North or South – with the term ‘slum’. If the latter’s pejorative connotations are well established, the former’s connection to a complex range of practices merits further scrutiny (McFarlane, 2008; Pithouse, 2006; Roy, 2011). This is borne out by the rich and evocative nomenclature for squatted communities across the globe, from *favela* in Brazil to *barriadas* in Peru, from *kijiji* in Kenya to *jodpadpatti* in India (Ward, 2002; see also Neuwirth, 2006: 16). And this is to say nothing of the equally large vocabulary of occupation developed by housing activists across cities in Europe and North America as part of a wave of squatting that began in the late 1960s (Birke and Larsen, 2007; Owens, 2008; Péchu, 2010; SqEK, 2013, 2014; Van der Steen, Katzeff, and Van Hoogenhuijze, 2014; Vasudevan, 2011a; Waits and Wolmar, 1980).

Squatting can be defined, in these contexts, as “living in – or using otherwise – a dwelling without the consent of the owner. Squatters take buildings [or land] with the intention of relatively (>1 year) long-term use” (Pruijt, 2013: 19). Squatting, to be sure, represents only one example of the many different strategies of shelter adopted by the urban poor that include more formal options such as ‘hand-me-down’ housing, hostels and purpose-built tenements, as well as informal forms of settlement from ‘pirated subdivisions’ to irregular peri-urban townships and other zones of extreme biopolitical abandonment (see M. Davis, 2006; Biehl, 2005; Roy, 2011). Unsurprisingly, accurate statistics are difficult to come by as the number of urban squatters is often deliberately undercounted by officials. It is estimated that there are anywhere from 600 million to 1 billion people squatting globally, with the vast majority located in cities and towns in the Global South (M. Davis, 2006: 23; Neuwirth, 2006; Tannerfeldt and Ljung, 2006). Even the UN’s own restrictive definition identifies at least 921 million slum dwellers in 2001, with the number rising to over a billion by 2005, a high percentage of whom are squatters (M. Davis, 2006: 23). Set against this backdrop, the squatting movements that emerged in cities in the Global North in the 1960s and 1970s were admittedly smaller in scale – numbering in the tens of thousands – although they still played a significant role in the development of new forms of grassroots urban politics.

In a recent set of papers, I identified a set of analytical frames that seek to imagine and inhabit the possibilities of conceiving, researching and writing a global geography of squatting (Vasudevan, 2014a, 2014b; see also McFarlane and Vasudevan, 2013). As I argued, an optic is now needed that seeks to work across the North-South divide whilst acknowledging the differing purchase that certain political-theoretical constructs can and should have in dealing with squatting in different places. It was not, in other words, my intention to develop a theory of occupation and resistance that is all-encompassing. Whether it is Berlin or Mumbai, London or Nairobi, for most squatters the struggle begins, as Pithouse (2006) has suggested, with *this* land, this eviction, this neighbourhood, this developer, this idea, these needs. What therefore matters are the *connectivities* across multiple sites and how we might link a practical concern for the everyday struggles of squatters with a set of theoretical propositions that seek to open up a problem space for rethinking what it means to “see like a city” (Amin, 2013). To do so demands, on the one hand, a greater commitment to thinking about different contingent histories of precarious city life and how they might be *shared* across the North/South divide as the basis for new research platforms. It also depends, on the other hand, on a critical perspective that zooms in on the spatial practices of squatters, the different resources and materials they mobilise, and the ideas, knowledges and spaces they produce.

My aim in this book is more focused. While it builds carefully on these earlier theoretical intercessions, its emphasis is on one city, Berlin, and on extensive fieldwork that I conducted there over an eight-year period into the history of

squatting and other forms of housing activism. The main arc of the book's argument thus emerges from the field and its archival remainders and is rooted in the often precarious and uneven intersections between social life, material infrastructure and politics that have shaped the recent history of squatting in Berlin as well as elsewhere across Europe (Simone, 2014: 2). This is, moreover, a book squarely embedded within an historical geography of squatting in Europe that began in the late 1960s and has played an important role in the social and political life of cities including Berlin, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Frankfurt, Hamburg, London, Milan and Rome. My aspiration here is to develop a form of *radical spatial history* in which the details of a particular city can generate significant concepts that lead to a better understanding of wider historical formations and which, in turn, serve as critical instruments for uncovering aspects of a city's own history that may otherwise be ignored or forgotten (Simone, 2014: 2, 21). This is an approach that follows the various geographies of action, connection and engagement that underpinned the historical development of squatting in Europe as an alternative urbanism. If it places particular emphasis on trajectories of activism and resistance whose origins are in the Global North, these are stories whose recovery and recounting also point to ways of thinking about urban life that have wider resonances for geographers as well as other scholars, citizens and activists living in an age of planetary urbanisation (Brenner and Schmid, 2011, 2014; Merrifield, 2013b, 2013c).

The book thus speaks to a small but growing body of scholarship on the veritable explosion of squatting in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s that grew first in countries like Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, the UK, France, Switzerland and Italy and, in more recent decades, in places such as Spain, Greece and Poland (Bieri, 2012; Mikkelsen and Karpantschhof, 2001; Owens, 2008; Pruijt, 2013; Van der Steen, Katzeff and Van Hoogenhuijze, 2014; Vasudevan, 2011a). For many, this wave of squatting represented a 'new urban movement' characterised by the development of practices around collective forms of self-determination, struggles against housing precarity and a broader commitment to alter-global concerns and extra-parliamentary modes of political engagement (López, 2013: 881). Research has focused, in particular, on the development of histories of occupation in specific cities and their relationship to wider logics of urban restructuring (Azozomox, 2014a; Birke and Larsen, 2007; Dellwo and Baer, 2013; Holm and Kuhn, 2010; Mudu, 2004; Owens, 2009; Suttner, 2011). At the same time, work has also clustered around a number of key themes from the various alternative identities and intimacies produced and performed in squatted spaces to the repertoire of contentious politics adopted and shared by squatters across a range of different sites (Azozomox, 2014a, Cook, 2013; Geronimo, 1992; Kadir, 2014; Katsiaficas, 2006). Others have zoomed in on the legal challenges posed by squatting, whilst the effects of an austerity urbanism have prompted some scholars to explore the re-emergence of squatting and other occupation-based practices as alternatives to the predations of contemporary capitalism (see the essays in SqEK, 2014; Vasudevan, 2011b, 2013, 2014a, 2014b).



Recent efforts by members of the Squatting Europe Kollektive (SqEK) have revived, in this context, a vital form of scholar-activism that played an important role in documenting earlier histories of squatting across Europe (see Bailey, 1973; Laurisch, 1981; Waits and Wolmar, 1980; Ward, 2002). As a collective of activist-researchers closely linked to squatter scenes in a number of European cities, SqEK have developed a programme of research which seeks to “critically analyse the squatters’ movement in its relevant contexts” and to connect squatters and activists to research practices that stress a “collaborative and dialogical approach to knowledge production”. SqEK thus encourages theoretical and methodological approaches in which the “researcher is critically engaged in squatting” (SqEK, 2014: 19). This is, as they admit, a challenging and controversial issue that they believe will lead to greater reflexivity on the part of the researcher as well as an ethos of cooperation and horizontality that builds on experiences within squats. Whilst there is much to recommend in this view, there is also, it seems to me, a danger that it privileges a form of militant research in which immediate *proximity* becomes a unique marker and arbiter of understanding and commitment. It also runs the risk of promoting certain forms of scholarship as somehow *representative* of a wider movement even though the degree to which the practices of squatters across Europe were able to come together and cohere as a single recognisable urban movement remains open to debate. In this book, I develop a different approach to the history of squatting in Berlin that seeks to address the gap between ‘official’ genealogies of subversion and their actual forms of “elaboration, circulation, re-appropriation, resurgence”. In order to do so, I have collected the various voices, ideas, practices and knowledges produced by squatters whilst retracing the “transversal paths of revolt” that they themselves often followed (Rancière et al. quoted in Ross, 2002: 128; see Rancière, 2012a). The book invites readers, in this way, to step in and think with and alongside squatters whose actions were documented in magazines, posters, films and other sources written and recorded in the white heat of the moment. It is not my intention, therefore, to produce a typology of squatting based on a differentiation of goals and motives as some scholars have attempted to do (see especially Pruijt, 2013). For many residents in Berlin, the very choice to illegally occupy a flat was predicated on a refusal to accept the categories and structures imposed on them. These were, in turn, abstractions that were often used by local authorities and the media as a means to divide squatters and foster tensions within a wider ecology of protest.<sup>11</sup> Much of my own effort has been taken up in developing a critical understanding of the everyday practices devised by squatters in Berlin that focuses on their emergent “world-making potentialities” (Muñoz, 2009: 56). As I show in the chapters that follow, the squat was a place of collective *world-making*; a place to imagine alternative worlds, to express anger and solidarity, to explore new identities and different intimacies, to experience and share new feelings, and to defy authority and live autonomously (Gould, 2009: 178; see Kanngieser, 2013). At stake here was the opportunity to build an alternative *habitus* where the very practice of ‘occupation’ became the basis for producing a different sense of shared city life.

The question that animates this book is ultimately this: in what way were the actions of squatters in Berlin constitutive of the city? How, in other words, were they able to build the necessary conditions – however fleeting – for the articulation of an emancipatory urban politics? Or to put it somewhat differently, to what extent were practices designed for the purposes of survival and the extension of often highly precarious forms of life able to offer a touchstone for other alternative imaginings of cityness (Pieterse, 2008: 14)? My own grappling with these concerns has prompted me to examine the different ways in which the squatting scene in Berlin was able to transform the urban landscape into a living archive of alternative knowledges, materials and resources. I am drawn in this respect to recent work on cities that explores the intricate intersections of people, practices, spaces and materials and how they serve as a basis for the making of common political forms (Silver, 2014; Simone, 2010, 2014). At the same time, I am equally indebted to approaches to the city that draw attention to the range of improvised tactics and coping strategies used by individuals and groups to “widen the possibilities of urban dwelling” (McFarlane, 2011b: 33; see McFarlane, 2011a; Pieterse, 2008; Simone, 2004). One major aspect of these various engagements is an understanding of city life that is radically open, uneven and shaped by momentary “gatherings of fragments, efforts and forces” (Simone, 2014: 4). Whilst this is both a productive and seductive view, especially for scholars working in Berlin, a city still routinely described (and sometimes condemned) as “always becoming and never being”, it also unwittingly belies a presentism that tends to occlude the complex histories through which other livelihoods and platforms were established and took hold in the city.

Taking the lead of one of Berlin’s former residents, the philosopher Walter Benjamin, I seek to develop a radical spatial history that insists on the need to accommodate the uncanny presence of the past in the present. For Benjamin, this demands a rigorous mode of historical writing in which the past is sharply counterposed with the present. As Benjamin tells us, “it is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past” (1999: 463, *Konvolut N 3,1*). Rather, it is a case, according to Benjamin, of recognising the way in which the two come together as ‘constellations’ that have the ability to interrupt a certain model of history, one bound inexorably to a narrative of progress and development and the lockstep march of its teleology (see Vasudevan, 2005). It is with Benjamin’s own materialist methodology in mind that I offer a thick description of the spatial practices and material geographies mobilised by squatters in Berlin. My main impulses are, in other words, both historiographic and political, especially give recent planning attempts to normalise Berlin’s built environment and provide the city with a single strong identity in which past moments of radical dissent and opposition are assigned a carefully choreographed role (Colomb, 2011; Till, 2005). If the actions of squatters, therefore, represent an important aspect of Berlin’s recent past that merits further critical attention in its own right, they also point to the enduring potential for other ways of knowing and learning the city that may lead to “more socially just possibilities” (McFarlane,

2011b: 157).<sup>12</sup> I am not interested, therefore, in re-imagining the history of squatting in Berlin as a single unbroken narrative. Rather, I am motivated by a commitment to retracing a complex, fractured and uneven story of care and solidarity, dissent and disagreement and why it still matters for how geographers conceive of the city and its relationship to radical social movements and the everyday micropolitics of dwelling and resistance.

A radical historico-geographical approach to squatting thus highlights the relationship between squatting and broader ongoing struggles over the meaning of urban space. As the Marxist geographer David Harvey reminds us, cities have perhaps become the key site for a variety of spatial struggles which, for Harvey, speak to the “intimate connection between the development of capitalism and urbanization” (2008: 24; see Harvey, 2014). Squatting may plausibly be seen, in this respect, as the political *other* to ‘creative destruction’ such that we continue to find, in the practices of squatters and the spaces they produce, resources and tools for challenging and disrupting the disagreeable materialities of capitalist accumulation. It is argued that squatters in Berlin have always cultivated an ethos of self-determination and autonomy – a radical DIY empiricism – that focused on the rehabilitation of buildings and the active assembling of new forms of dwelling. In practical terms, this depended on a modest ontology of mending and repair as squatters often confronted abandoned spaces that required significant renovation (McFarlane and Vasudevan, 2013; see also Vasudevan, 2011a). Makeshift materials and do-it-yourself practices combined with the sharing of food and other resources to provide the material supports for collective self-management. Squatted spaces represented, in this way, a fragile combination of materials, ideas, knowledges and practices through which other identities and intimacies were performed and new commonalities and solidarities developed and shared. As sites of reappropriation and rehabilitation, squats offered a suitable arena for challenging the “capitalist production of urban space” whilst playing an important role in the constitution of wider infrastructures and networks that combined housing needs and desires with broader political actions and other closely-related campaigns practices (anti-fascist organising, migrants’ and precarious workers’ rights, urban gardening schemes, etc.) (López, 2013: 870, 875; see Chatterton and Hodkinson, 2006; Mudu, 2004). But, more than this, squats in Berlin were not only embedded within local oppositional geographies and knowledges, they were also increasingly dependent on a host of translocal connections that linked activists across northern and southern Europe and which played a crucial role in the circulation and assembling of an alternative urbanism (Vasudevan, 2014a; see also SqEK, 2013, 2014; Van der Steen, Katzeff, and Van Hoogenhuijze, 2014). In the end, a detailed examination of these sites and the relations between them presents an opportunity to invigorate analyses of radical politics in Germany with a new attention to geography and the built environment – which has been explicitly lacking in most studies of the New Left (for an exception, see Hannah, 2010) – and to highlight, in turn, the generative role of the city as a key locus of protest both within Germany and elsewhere.

## Towards a Spatial Grammar of Squatting

In its detailed emphasis on the micropolitical tactics and inventive geographies produced by squatters, this is a book that points to the co-constitution of the urban and the political whilst drawing particular attention to the materials with which radical political spaces are assembled and shared and the encounters and practices through which they are stabilised. This is an approach that therefore departs from accounts of urban social movements that frame the city as simply a platform or arena in which injustices are contested and new alliances and solidarities produced. In many of these accounts, the urban only appears “as a means to an end rather than an end in its own right” (Miller and Nicholls, 2013: 453). More importantly, this is also an approach that detects, in the actions of squatters, a *generative urbanism* that is antagonistic and subversive, inventive and open-ended (see Merrifield, 2013b). To do so not only depends on a more provisional understanding of how urban social movements are constructed. It also accords them an active role in shaping the terms on which they are shaped. At stake here is a concern for engaging with urban geographies that are themselves productive (Featherstone, 2012: 39).

Perhaps more than anything else, this is ultimately a book about the city as a radical political project. Whilst this is a project that has prompted some commentators to jettison existing framings, most notably Henri Lefebvre’s ‘right to the city’ as a political placeholder, my own view is that these characterisations tend to side-step Lefebvre’s original intentions, intentions that were themselves a product of the uprisings of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Merrifield, 2013c; see Lefebvre, 1996 [1976]). At the heart of Lefebvre’s project, after all, is an understanding of the city as a work – an *oeuvre* [*oeuvre*] – produced by the daily actions of those who live in the city. The right to the city, according to Lefebvre, is a right to inhabitation, appropriation and participation. It is both the right to inhabit and *be in the city* and the right to redefine and produce the city in terms that challenge the routinising demands of capitalist accumulation. Lefebvre’s rights are, in this way, “rights of use rather than rights of exchange” (Purcell, 2003: 578). The right to re-appropriation thus implies the right to reclaim and reconfigure urban space as an oeuvre and “to maximise use value for residents rather than to maximise exchange value for capital” (Purcell, 2003: 578).

Lefebvre’s positive re-affirmation of a right to habitation engages the problem of necessity and precarity head-on. It also, in my view, allows us to retain a right to the city that is *open-ended* and responsive to a politics that is both prefigurative and nonrepresentational. For Lefebvre, such an articulation of a radical urban politics can also be extended to the concept of “*autogestion*” which he uses to describe a process of worker autonomy and self-management and which should, in his view, be extended beyond the factory and into all spheres of everyday life (the state, the family, education, etc.). “Each time,” he writes, “a social group...

refuses to accept passively its conditions of existence, of life, of survival, each time such a group forces itself not only to understand but to master its own conditions of existence, *autogestion* is occurring” (Lefebvre, 2009: 135). The political project of *autogestion* is, in other words, a constitutively geographical project to “transform the way we produce and use space” (Purcell, 2013: 41). At stake here, Lefebvre argues, is the “production of a space that is other” (1991: 391). Lefebvre describes this space as a “differential space” whereby

Living labour can produce something that is no longer a thing...needs and desires can reappear as such, informing both the act of producing and its products. There still exist – and there may exist in the future – spaces for play, spaces for enjoyment, architectures of wisdom or pleasure. In and by means of [differential] space, the work may shine through the product, use value may gain the upper hand over exchange value: appropriation...may (virtually) achieve domination over domination, as the imaginary and the utopian incorporate (or are incorporated) into the real... (1991: 348).

If Lefebvre’s understanding of *autogestion* and differential space points to a different kind of politics – autonomous, common and prefigurative – (Purcell, 2013), it also foregrounds the importance of re-appropriating space for the production of a “transformed and renewed right to urban life” (Lefebvre, 1996: 158).

There is, of course, no doubt that a workable notion of the right to the city must still confront the contradictions, divisions and exclusions implicit in rights claims. At the same time, it is equally important to recognise the *constituent* dimension of Lefebvre’s original claims. Whilst some squatters in Berlin were certainly familiar with the terms of Lefebvre’s argument, many were not. This did not stop them, however, from articulating a right to the city that was also a right to housing and infrastructure, a right to free space and self-determination, a right to explore other identities and a basic right to be in the city. What ultimately mattered, more than anything else, was a right to participate in the production of urban space and a desire to generate new counter-geographies of adaptation and experimentation, protest and dissent (Lefebvre, 1991; see Purcell, 2003). It is in this context that I therefore develop a *critical geography of occupation* as a political process that materialises the social order which it seeks to enact. Occupation, according to this view, involves different ways of extending bodies, objects and practices into space in order to create new alternative lifeworlds. The relationship between occupation-based practices of squatters in Berlin and the production of a renewed right to the city depended, in other words, on the mobilisation of an “experimental politics” (Lazzarato, 2009) and an “imaginary pragmatics” (Merrifield, 2013b) that actively prefigured a radically different sense of what it means to think about and inhabit the city.

If this book advances a geographical framework for examining the forms of political agency mobilised by squatters, it does so through a conceptual armature

that seeks to capture the very provisionality of squatting. This is a book that combines a commitment to radical historical research with modest theoretical concerns. It connects traditional Marxist urban geography (Harvey, 2012, 2014; Merrifield, 2014; Smith, 1996) with key work on urban social movements (Castells, 1983; Mayer, 2009, 2013b; Melucci, 1980; Tilly, 2008; Touraine, 1981). It also seeks to bridge wider theoretical engagements on the city (McFarlane, 2011b; Merrifield, 2013b, 2013c; Simone, 2010, 2014) with a range of cultural theory and radical political philosophy (Foucault, 2011; Guattari, 2009; Krahl, 1971; Marcuse 1964; Negri, 2005). The book advances a grounded theoretical imaginary that attempts to explain and critically interrogate how emancipatory urban politics are made and shared. It develops, as I have already argued, a close reading of the makeshift practices and experimental performances mobilised by squatters in direct opposition to inequality and oppression. It also highlights the relationship between the active assembling of urban ‘infrastructures’ and the production of situated connections and solidarities that linked squatters in Berlin to a range of activists, movements and practices. This was (and remains) a deeply fraught process and the book also confronts “some of the ‘dark sides’ of solidarity” and the forms of emotional labour that were both central in holding the scene together and in accentuating its divisions (Featherstone, 2012: 12; see Gould, 2009).

The book consists of five substantive chapters followed by a conclusion. It is broadly chronological in format and locates the genesis of the squatting movement in Berlin within a broader history of capitalist accumulation, creative destruction and uneven urban development. In Chapter 2, I attempt to position the relationship between squatting and a politics of housing in Berlin within a wider context of dispossession and resistance, and to provide a supporting framework for understanding the complex and uneven set of conditions that contributed to the emergence of Berlin’s squatting scene. The chapter retraces the relationship between the urbanisation of capital and the long history of housing *precarity* in Berlin from the middle of the 19th century to the 1960s. It does so by showing how housing inequality in Berlin has depended on recurring cycles of creative destruction that repeatedly condemned significant numbers of people to misery and prompted many to seek informal forms of housing and shelter. As crises of capital became crises of *dwelling*, they also catalysed new forms of contentious politics. The chapter thus sets out to describe a complex history of adaptation and improvisation through which an alternative spatial politics was developed in Berlin. This is done in three ways. The chapter first considers the relationship between the extension plan for the city of Berlin drawn up by James Hobrecht in 1862 and the building of squatter settlements on the outskirts of the city in the 1860s and 1870s. It then shifts attention to widespread strikes over rising rents in the 1920s and 1930s. The final section of the chapter examines the evolution of new forms of protest in Berlin that emerged in response to the redevelopment of the city. In this way, the chapter retraces a series of spatial practices that shaped an alternative



history of housing in Berlin. This is a history, it is argued, of protest, resistance and occupation that not only reclaimed space but transformed the built form into an instrument of resistance and creative re-appropriation.

Chapter 3 documents the emergence of the early squatting movement in West Berlin in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It traces the development of the squatter scene (*Besetzerszene*) through the changing set of tactics and practices adopted by the student movement and the extra-parliamentary opposition (*Außerparlamentarische Opposition* or APO) in the late 1960s. The chapter shows how a set of performances mobilised by various elements of the student movement and the APO in the 1960s – from happenings and teach-ins to new forms of theatre and agitprop – provided an important action repertoire that would later come to influence the spatial practices of squatters in both West and former East Berlin. Whilst these ‘direct action’ tactics blurred the traditional boundaries between theatrical performance and public space, they also assumed new forms in the wake of emergency laws that banned public political demonstrations in West Germany in the late 1960s. The chapter thus examines a range of oppositional geographies in West Berlin that were produced during this period from early experiments in alternative forms of communal living in West Berlin (Kommune I, Die Bülow-Kommune, Die Anarsch-Kommune) to the first squatted spaces (Georg von Rauch-Haus, Tommy Weisbecker-Haus). At the same time, the chapter situates the emergence of alternative forms of collective living and other self-organised projects as part of a broader turn to the emotional and material geographies of everyday life. Intimate settings – cafés, pubs, alternative presses, bookstores, youth centres, and squatted spaces – offered, it argues, a radical infrastructure through which alternative support networks were created, friendships made and solidarities secured. At stake here, as the chapter concludes, was the cultivation of political spaces and collective practices that promoted an alternative vision of the city.

Chapter 4 focuses on the period between 1979 and 1984 which represented the high point for the squatting movement in West Berlin. The chapter examines the practice of squatting and ‘occupation’ as an act of collective *world-making* through which an alternative understanding of shared city life was (quite literally) constructed. It concentrates, in particular, on how squatted spaces were assembled and sustained on an everyday basis. The chapter shows how this depended in no small part on a politics of *adaptation, mending and repair* that served as a direct response to an endemic housing crisis characterised by top-down planning initiatives, rampant property speculation and local corruption. Squatters in West Berlin often confronted abandoned spaces that required significant renovation and Chapter 4 offers a thick description of the wide range of practices and tactics deployed by squatters as they challenged and were later compelled, in many cases, to accommodate existing property regimes. Whilst the main aim of the chapter is to examine the everyday geographies of squatters in Berlin as a radical *makeshift urbanism*, it also draws attention to the complex constellation of affects,

emotions and feelings and the decisive role that they came to play in the social life of a squatted house. Here, it is argued that the activities of squatters was dependent on a form of *emotional labour* through which the boundaries of ‘activism’ and ‘the political’ were constantly made, unmade and remade. In practical terms, the chapter begins with a discussion of the TUNIX (‘Do Nothing’) conference that took place in West Berlin at the end of January 1978. The conference brought together activists from across Europe to explore new forms of organisation and resistance in the wake of statist repression and growing leftist violence. The TUNIX conference provided an important point of departure for the development of new activist geographies and the remainder of the chapter examines the consequential emergence of the squatting movement in West Berlin in three stages. The first zooms in on the key period between 1979 and the ‘hot summer’ of 1981 at which point over 165 houses were occupied across West Berlin. The second reconstructs the range of material and emotional geographies produced by the squatters, while the third focuses on the period after 1981 and the dissolution of the squatting scene through protracted negotiations with West Berlin authorities, the legalisation of some occupied houses and the ‘pacification’ of the more ‘militant’ elements of the movement through criminalisation and eviction. Whilst the chapter demonstrates how the everyday spatial practices of squatters in West Berlin represented, for some, an act of militant *antagonism* and *insurgency* it also shows that, for others, it constituted a delicate balancing act between existing political institutions and forms of radical citizenship. In this way, the chapter offers an opportunity to closely examine how activists responded to decline and failure, dissent and violence. Squatted spaces, it concludes, were both sites of liberation and possibility and sources of intense conflict and struggle.

Chapter 5 traces the emergence of a second major wave of squatting in Berlin in the former East of the city as activists took advantage of the political power vacuum that accompanied the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The chapter builds on the arguments set out in Chapters 3 and 4 in order to explore the complex combination of formal and informal practices – from planning, policy and law to everyday practices of dwelling and infrastructure – that shaped the development of squatting and other occupation-based practices in East Berlin before the fall of the Berlin Wall and in its immediate aftermath. The chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part seeks to reconstruct the relatively unknown history of illegal occupation in East Berlin (*Schwarzwohnen*), its relationship to both the development of a *critical public sphere* in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the 1970s and 1980s and the new wave of squatting that erupted in the winter of 1989 and which was set against a rapidly-changing landscape of property. The second part of the chapter tracks the further intensification of the squatting scene and the extension of a repertoire of contentious politics that played an important role in the history of the squatting scene in West Berlin. It also follows the growing conflict between West and East German activists in the months leading up to official German reunification. The chapter thus places particular emphasis on the fall of

the Berlin Wall which marked the beginning of a rapid process of ‘spatial redefinition’ for the former GDR. This offered, it argues, a rare opportunity for housing activists to create and experiment with radically new and autonomous spaces as much of East Berlin’s 19th-century housing stock was never properly maintained and had, by the late 1980s, slipped into serious disrepair. The chapter concludes, in this context, by revisiting the series of events that led to the violent clearing of squatters on Mainzer Straße in November 1990 and the wider implications that the evictions had on housing-based activism in Berlin.

Chapter 6 focuses on the transformation of Berlin’s squatting scene in the wake of the Mainzer Straße evictions in November 1990. The police crackdown marked the beginning of the end of the squatter movement in Berlin and the eventual re-orientation of the scene around a new set of experimental practices. If urban squatting in Berlin had its origins in an insurgent form of ‘self-help’, the chapter examines how squatting had become a major mechanism in the commodification of urban space as tactics of informal urban living were quickly transformed into new strategies for neo-liberal urban renewal especially in districts of former East Berlin. The chapter highlights the ‘capture’ and instrumentalisation of occupation-based practices by the state and the relationship of squatting to gentrification and other forms of urban restructuring. At the same time, the chapter also explores how the tactics and strategies of urban squatting were adapted and reworked by groups of activists and artists as well as a host of other organisations in Berlin. It shows how the history of squatting transformed the city of Berlin into a living archive of alternative knowledges, materials and resources. This radical ‘archive’ was, it is argued, central to more recent attempts at developing alternative modes of urban living. These have taken on a number of different forms and the main aim of Chapter 6 is to work through a variety of examples that illustrate the importance of reclaiming a renewed right to a different city. The chapter offers three interrelated perspectives. Firstly, it discusses the role of cultural experimentation and artistic practice in the development of new strategies for participatory architecture, community design and everyday dwelling. Secondly, it explores the extension of a politics of occupation and inhabitation that centred on the cultivation of other identities and intimacies. Thirdly, it considers the recent emergence of a new round of housing activism in Berlin that has come to challenge gentrification, dispossession and rising rents (new forms of citizen occupation, protest camps and eviction resistance networks). The chapter concludes by showing how the practice of urban squatting continues to offer conceptual tools and practical resources through which a more radical and socially just urbanism may be produced.

The Conclusion returns to the wider theoretical framework developed in the Introduction. It closes by identifying the implications of urban squatting for how we think, research and inhabit the city. If the book argues for the need to hold on to the *potential* of other alternative urbanisms, it does so by showing how the historical geography of squatting in Berlin has been a deeply contested project and

one through which the very forms and imaginaries of a better city have been continuously made and remade (see McFarlane, 2011b). At stake here is a right to the city that is characterised by a *constituent* desire to participate in the production of alternative urban spaces. As the book ultimately argues, the *normative* demand for an ‘alternative city’ has become an increasingly pressing issue and the history of squatting in Berlin offers not only a spatial history of occupation and resistance but a set of tactics and strategies for how we might still come to know and live the city differently.

At the centre of the book, in the end, is a commitment to recording the various actions and words of Berlin’s squatter community. This is a community that has devoted significant energy to *archiving* their own practices and representations and to documenting the development of oppositional political cultures in the city. If this points to a self-consciousness and reflexivity on the part of squatters, it has also prompted me to develop a form of historical geography that is attentive to the words of its subjects and which seeks to let the facts of their own thoughts speak for themselves. It is perhaps not surprising that, as a genealogy of radical urban politics, one of the book’s most important points of reference remains Jacques Rancière’s *Proletarian Nights* (2012a). The dreams and visions of Rancière’s 19th-century workers in Paris were, of course, different to those of squatters in 20th-century Berlin. What was important for me, in this context, was not to impose a new theory of spatial politics *onto* the actions of squatters, but instead to try and change “the very look of the *material of theory* itself” (Rancière, 2012b; emphasis added). The modest theoretical focus of this book thus emerges from concepts and debates that were immanent to the practices of squatters, the materials they mobilised and the spaces they created. These are spatial practices that, in my view, enlarge the ground of the political and how we, as geographers, document and attend to the city as a site of contestation and resistance, solidarity and experimentation.

As a form of radical spatial history, this is a book that is rooted in the vast repertoire of archives that remain an important testament to an alternative Berlin, a version of the city that is increasingly under threat by recent redevelopment and regeneration. Whilst my account is predicated on a close and detailed reading of a vast range of archival materials (eye witness accounts, letters, pamphlets, magazines, flyers, maps, photographs, documentary footage), it also acknowledges that the very existence of these makeshift archives is shaped by a conviction that effective forms of activism and protest “must necessarily emerge from an historically grounded understanding of the activist past” (Ford and Smith, 2014). I have made the decision, therefore, to focus my attention on these historical remainders and to push the numerous interviews that I conducted with former squatters and other community activists further into the background.<sup>13</sup> This was a difficult decision to make but one based on a realisation that the often heated and partisan nature of those conversations risked opening old wounds and divisions whilst fostering renewed feelings of anger, betrayal and resentment. These are feelings that

have already taken an enormous toll on individuals and the wider ‘scene’ and it seemed to me that other solidarities and connections were now urgently needed.

If I have therefore written an angry book of sorts, it is based on a growing sense of indignation at the baleful neo-liberalisation of Berlin and a realisation that there is now little room for the makeshift spaces produced by squatters and the alternative urbanisms they presumed. Attempts to squat in the city are routinely suppressed by the police, whilst the forced displacement of the city’s most vulnerable tenants has become a commonplace. And yet, the recent resurgence of housing-based activism in Berlin also points to an appetite for building *common political spaces* of care, cohabitation and solidarity that seek to reclaim a right to the city and offer an alternative to an intensifying revanchism (see essays in Holm, 2014b). The book should ultimately be read, therefore, as an archaeology of our present and as a powerful critique of the neo-liberal city. Whilst this a project informed by both a scholarly and political commitment, the book does not seek to provide a romantic gloss on urban squatting. If anything, it confronts and examines the fraught and uneven nature of squatting in Berlin and seeks to open up a critical space for exploring alternative political imaginaries and their conditions of possibility. This is, in other words, a book intimately connected to the history of one city, Berlin, but equally committed to the fostering of alternative research configurations that extend to other cities and the wider logics of displacement and dispossession that they, in many respects, share. The political challenge, it argues, is to counter the accumulation of capital with new ways of dwelling differently that “are produced and held in common” (McFarlane, 2011b: 157; see Hardt and Negri, 2009). To do so, as the history of squatting documented in these pages shows, is to reveal the conditions – the counterarchive of practices, sentiments, tactics and stories – that point to an alternative urbanism. And it is these living geographies that ultimately hold the promise for the development of a different, better city.

## Notes

- 1 All translations in the text are the author’s unless otherwise stated. An attempt has been made to translate texts as faithfully to the spirit of the original as possible.
- 2 Song from Ton Steine Scherben, “Die letzte Schlacht gewinnen wir” (LP, 1972).
- 3 Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (hereafter HIS), *Rote Presse Korrespondenz*, “Polizeiterror in Märkisches Viertel”, 2, 64 (1970): 11.
- 4 HIS, “Polizeiterror in Märkisches Viertel”, 11.
- 5 The Märkisches Viertel remained an important point of reference for Meinhof and appeared in many of the communiqués published by the Red Army Faction, including the group’s first statement in the radical journal *Agit 883* on 5 June 1970 (see Colvin, 2009).
- 6 Throughout the book, I have used the term ‘the anti-authoritarian revolt’ which I have borrowed from Lönnendonker et al. (2002) and Timothy Brown (2013) in order to encompass the wide range of practices adopted by the New Left in West Germany in

the 1960s and 1970s. Whilst I have also adopted the widely-used term ‘extra-parliamentary opposition’ (*Außerparlamentarische Opposition* or APO), I have specifically done so when discussing the (self-described) alliance of the West German student movement with other social movements in the late 1960s.

- 7 See *Der Spiegel*, 19.4.1982. As jurists and legal scholars have shown, challenges to §123 of the German Criminal Code (“Trespass” or *Hausfriedensbruch*) were contingent on an argument that showed how abandoned homes and properties no longer satisfied the legal conditions necessary as a dwelling or “pacified estate” (*befriedeten Besitzums*). The origins of the legal terms of reference date back to Prussian times and the late 18th century in the first instance (see Rampf, 2009).
- 8 Figures for the number of squatters involved in the first major wave of squatting in West Berlin in the late 1970s and early 1980s fluctuate anywhere from 1000 to 5000 (see Amantine, 2012: 18; Rosenblatt, 1981: 40). The political vacuum that accompanied the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 has made it difficult to produce similar data for the second wave between 1989 and 1990.
- 9 I’ve constructed a database of Berlin’s squatted spaces using flyers, police press releases and other archival material from the Papiertiger Archiv in Berlin-Kreuzberg. I’ve cross-checked my data with the recently published website on Berlin’s squatter movement ([www.berlin-besetzt.de](http://www.berlin-besetzt.de)).
- 10 While it is difficult to reconstruct the full history of *Schwarzwohnen* in East Berlin, recent work by Udo Grashoff (2011b) suggests that there may have been thousands of illegal occupiers living in flats across the city. I explore the topic in greater detail in Chapter 5.
- 11 I am drawing here, in particular, on the work of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière whose close reading (2012a) of the often forgotten writings of 19th-century workers in France represented a challenge to the identities that were usually conferred on them. These writings formed the basis of Rancière’s book, *Proletarian Dreams*, but also informed his earlier work with the journal, *Révoltes Logiques* (see Ross, 2002).
- 12 Whilst I am sympathetic here to recent work that mobilises ‘assemblage theory’ as a way of attending to the realisation of alternative potentialities, I do worry that it presumes an understanding of history as a standing reserve for future mobilisations and alliances. There is danger that the sheer complexity of the past is elided in the rush to focus on the ways in which certain practices and knowledges are actualised (see McFarlane, 2011b).
- 13 Interviews were conducted between February 2008 and August 2013. For the sake of consistency, I have altered the names of all interviewees and used initials to ensure anonymity.