Consumption and Violence

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In Zurich, a building that used to be a department store became the focal point of a conflict that marked the beginning of Switzerland’s 1968 protests. Young people demanded the establishment of an autonomous young people’s social centre in an edifice that the Globus Company had erected while rebuilding its headquarters, expensive retail space in the centre of Zurich that protesters wanted for nonprofit use. In the street fighting that ensued after a 29 June demonstration, bricks from the construction site for Switzerland’s first shopping mall—the subterranean Shopville, connected to Zurich’s main train station—were hurled at the police, who later faced accusations that they had used disproportionate force against the demonstrators. Several interim solutions did not settle the issue of free space for leftist young people, some of whom were homeless. In February 1971, protests again focused on Shopville, now completed, where protesters conducted daily teach-ins, using its grounds in lieu of the desired social centre. When the municipal government prohibited gatherings at the shopping centre, sixteen young people were arrested by officers in riot gear; tear gas was used for the first time in Switzerland. While 1968 protests in Germany involved direct action against manifestations of consumer society, the Swiss case offers a good example for another constellation that involved matters of consumption in debates regarding political violence. Der-

elict buildings and urban space became contested areas, pitting young protest-
ers against commercial interests backed by law enforcement.

In West Germany, students, homeless people, and foreign workers took to squatting in Frankfurt’s Westend in the autumn of 1970. In West Berlin, the early squats, the Georg-von-Rauch-Haus (December 1971) and the Tommy-Weisbecker-Haus (March 1973), were named after two members of Movement 2 June who had been killed in shootouts with the police. A comparative analysis of the squatting movements in Frankfurt and West Berlin demonstrates that squatters could be both alternative consumers and radical activists and that they faced criminalisation by the authorities, at the same time some activists opted to use militant tactics to further their cause.

In the summer of 1980, West Berlin’s squatters articulated a set of objections against their contemporary regimes of provision: “communes, workers’ collectives, and communication do not prosper in concrete cells; neither does resistance against unlimited consumption. Consumption is a substitute for interpersonal relationships; it is designed by those who make money from it. Consumption makes people dependent on even more consumption; draws battle lines between owners and consumers. more and more is being produced; wars are incited to conquer new markets.”

The term Konsum (consumption) clearly carried negative connotations, being associated with social barriers, prison cells, and even wars, while Konsumenten (consumers) were conceived as victims who could, however, resist. Since this statement was an aside in the internal communication of squatters focused on the more concrete aspects of their political struggle, it does not say much more about the origins, background, and implications of their anticonsumerist attitudes. Three years after these lines were written, West Berlin’s squatters had been either evicted or transferred into legal tenancy agreements; the movement had come to an end without significantly altering the mechanisms of the housing market, let alone of consumer society more generally.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, estimates suggested a worldwide population of one billion squatters—that is, people dwelling in buildings without legal entitlement to use them. Irrespective of the empirical accuracy of this figure, should we assume that all these people share some sort of discontent with consumer society or, to put it more neutrally, that they can serve as an indicator or pointer to the limits or shortcomings of consumerist housing markets? How does the phenomenon of squatting fit into our understanding of

history? It would be wrong to dismiss the socioeconomic phenomenon of squatting and the resistance to consumer society that accompanied it, as an aberration, as a mere footnote in German history, as nothing more than a political provocation by violent revolutionaries, or as simply a result of the unwillingness of nonconformist youths to work for their consumptive needs.

Social scientists have offered a number of—perhaps complementary—interpretations for the occurrence and escalation of violence during the squatters’ conflicts. Some emphasise the generational experience of youth facing a gloomy future, while others put the onus on police tactics, and escalations are seen as a result of policy intransigence. A third view points out that perceptions of the conflict were increasingly depoliticised by conceiving the issue as a police matter rather than a political problem, resulting in “inversionary discourses” on violence and the emergence of a militant movement, the Autonomen. This chapter’s combination of a historical analysis of discourses on violence in the context of the squatters’ movement with discourses on consumption integrates these approaches.

Squatting as a Socioeconomic Phenomenon

Conflict over housing issues took place in many European cities throughout the 1970s and 1980s. An intensification and politicisation of social protest paralleled slowing growth as a result of the 1973–74 recession. Social unrest thus needs to be contextualised with the follow-up costs of mass production and mass consumption. The restructuring measures embraced by politics and business in an effort to respond to economic challenges contributed to the further exclusion of certain social groups that had difficulty obtaining access to society’s economic wealth. Social movements responded to the destruction of environments, cities, and quality of life. The idea that the ruling political economy bred destruction became central to ideological justifications of protest. Urban conflicts—primarily acute housing shortages—made the destruction of housing space for economic motives a contested reality. Young people and mi-

5. Brandt, Büsser, and Rucht, Aufbruch in eine andere Gesellschaft, 203.
grants resorted to the self-help initiative of squatting: the unauthorised occupation of abandoned buildings.10

Social scientists have shown that Zurich, Frankfurt, and other cities were subject to “Fordist” paradigms of urban development: the planned separation of districts dedicated to living, consumption, industry, and services.11 In the context of educational expansion and continued economic growth, large numbers of students and immigrant worker families moved into inner cities, where accommodations were affordable if a bit run-down. In many places, the increased need for housing contrasted sharply with calculated vacancies and demolition to make way for shopping centres, office blocks, or traffic junctions, while politicians tried to shift the demand for housing to newly built quarters on the periphery.

In several respects, squatting appeared to be a provocative alternative to consumer society. Young people’s flat-sharing communities were located in unrenovated old buildings designated for demolition. These were often short-term lets furnished with orange crates and mattresses on the floor and relying on multicultural provisions from local grocery shops run by immigrant families. Such makeshift accommodations became symbols of youthful autonomy, and squatting sought to defend this lifestyle. These pioneers of “autonomous lifestyles” rarely referred to theoreticians such as Herbert Marcuse but did embark on a quest for social relations that would allow for the articulation of authentic needs. The concrete swaths cut into the texture of old cities appeared to be attacks on the youth cultures settling in the brittle walls. Activists confronted a dubious system in which the state protected owners’ right to destroy their property profitably.12 Real estate speculators came to epitomize the ruthless capitalist, reviving anticapitalist stereotypes. The squatter movement also faced charges of antisemitism, since a number of the disputed buildings were owned by Jews, among them Frankfurt real estate speculator Ignatz Bubis.13 A brochure published by Göttingen squatters contained a cartoon that sought to


12. Laurisch, Kein Abriss, 113.

13. Koenen, Das Rote Jahrzehnt, 341–42. See also Hargens, Müll, die Stadt, und der Tod, 54–65.
address the basic interconnection between consumption and destruction by
showing a corpulent speculator with bowler hat, bow tie, and a packet of money
who was squeezing old buildings and letting the yield drop into his mouth
while simultaneously defecating newly built structures.14

The counterconcept of squatting included a distinct emphasis on advertising
the cause, resulting in some structural similarities with the commercial
system it criticised: “With the attractive renovation and imaginative graffiti and
banners, they converted these buildings into . . . advertisement attractions for
the ‘idea of squatting’ and for self-help, for a better life in flat-sharing com-

munities, for the motto, We take what we need.”15 The activists felt a militant
hatred for “inhuman” modern estates and their backers that was manifest in a
widespread graffito, “Schade, dass Beton nicht brennt” (Too bad concrete
doesn’t burn), that eventually became the title of a documentary film on Berlin
squatters in the early 1980s.16

The legal system faced the challenge of balancing the economic, social,
and cultural interests of ordinary consumers of housing space and urban infras-
structure against the economic interests of real estate entrepreneurs, calcula-
tions that touched on constitutional law. The squatters could legitimise their
claims with reference to West Germany’s Basic Law, article 14, section 2:
“Property entails obligations. Its use shall also serve the public good.” West
Berlin’s Constitution went even further: according to article 28, section 1, “Ev-
everyone shall have the right to adequate housing.” The state of Berlin committed
to promoting “the creation and maintenance of adequate housing, particularly
for people on a low income, as well as private ownership of housing.”17

The appropriation of neglected living space practically withdrawn from
the common weal was located in an area of tension between legitimacy and
legality that became a question of legal interpretation. Unlike the law in Great
Britain, German law did not allow for the acquisition of real property via
squating.18 A minority opinion among criminal judges and lawyers, however,
came close to accepting squatters’ arguments by arguing that squatting should
be exempt from punishment. Critically, they referred to a “process destroying
living space” and to “great profiteering.”19 Most lawyers, however, clung to a

14. Wut im Bauch!, 4, IISG Amsterdam, ID 653, Bro 689/4 FOL.
16. Laurisch, Kein Abriss,65; Novemberfilm Kollektiv, Schade.
17. “Constitution of Berlin.” See also Johann Wilhelm Gerlach, “Recht auf Wohnraum und
18. Schall, “Hausbesetzungen im Lichte.” On legal responses in the Netherlands, Great Britain,
and Switzerland, see Blankenburg, “Thesen zur Hausbesetzerbewegung.”
more conventional interpretation of property. The socialist newspaper *Links* quoted a Freiburg district court judge who had authorised the eviction of a squat on the grounds that the “economic interest of the building and real estate limited liability company has to be valued over the interest of the inhabitants.”

In the early 1980s, a prevailing opinion among jurists maintained that squatting was to be punished as a breach of the domestic peace under section 123 of the criminal code (StGB). Authoritative commentaries pointed out that a “failed housing policy” could not be countered by “surrendering the legal and property order.” The central topoi of the legal debate about squatting—the granting of domestic peace, even to illegal residents, with reference to the principle of residential property being obliged to the common good, and the consideration of commensurability in cases of eviction by the police—still forced the legal authorities to check the legitimacy of the means used by executive forces.

In a profound 1972 analysis, SPD politician Hans-Jochen Vogel contended that the distribution of urban space did not exactly cater to the population’s needs. He provided a clear-sighted analysis of the economic mechanism that he held responsible for the far-reaching urban crisis, which he considered a “first-rate problem of human existence.” As he was leaving office as mayor of Munich to become federal minister for regional planning, construction, and urban development, he wrote a remarkably critical assessment of contemporary capitalism: “The crisis is the crisis of an economic system mushrooming beyond its limits. . . . Most clearly this principle can be observed in the competition for different uses for the same piece of real estate. As a rule, the type of use with the highest yield . . . will prevail. . . . Therefore, in a situation of conflict, . . . it is always the department store that wins over the cultural centre, the bank over the long-established café, the office building over the beer garden. . . . It cannot be denied that this system . . . has contributed to delivering the masses from material want. But now it is turning against the people, becoming an end in itself, dispelling humanity from our cities.” With his emphasis on the “depersonalisation of cities,” Vogel anticipated a number of ideas that became crucial for the squatters’ movement over the coming decade: “Liv-

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ing standard does not equal quality of life. Clearly, the quality of life is actually declining with increasing consumption. The production of our system is missing the real needs. It channels our energies into areas that promise growth and quick returns whilst detracting from the public... investments and services on which the quality of our life really depends.\textsuperscript{24} According to Vogel, this mechanism was choking inner cities and threatening the ecological balance. Without wanting to abolish market and competition, he pleaded for the primacy of politics over economics, relegating the latter into a servile role. To realise this far-reaching vision, he suggested higher taxes, reducing growth in consumption, and adding financial strength to the community—that is, public rather than private consumption. This was to be supplemented by a reform of the laws governing ownership of urban land by introducing fixed-term usage rights, with real estate periodically falling back to the municipality.

\textbf{The Weisbecker-Haus}

The early 1970s also saw rather different strategies for addressing related problems. In May 1973, the spontaneist newspaper with the aptronymic name \textit{Wir wollen alles} (We want everything)\textsuperscript{25} was looking at the consumer as an unmediated revolutionary agent when reporting a \textit{Klauaktion} (shoplifting action) by the occupants of the Weisbecker-Haus in Berlin’s Kreuzberg district. The Weisbecker-Haus was a self-managed collective housing project for homeless young people established in an abandoned building in March 1973. It was named after a member of Movement 2 June who had been killed by police.\textsuperscript{26} The project was legalised via utilisation agreement with the West Berlin government, leaving the occupants in the same formal legal category as inhabitants of state-run foster homes and thus entitled to subsistence. In this context, a very concrete conflict erupted over regimes of provision where formerly homeless young people resorted to their own way of procuring food: “15 people went into the shops, packed cans, roast meat, frozen stuff, schnapps, and ham into their bags... The store manager did not want to see his tasty things depart just


\textsuperscript{25}. This was adopted from their Italian counterparts, Lotta Continua, and their slogan, “Vogliamo tutto.” Cf. Lotta Continua, \textit{Nehmen wir uns die Stadt}.

like that . . . Perhaps he will have second thoughts at the hospital. . . . On the 21st of March we had negotiations with a few people from the Senat [West Berlin’s government] about the daily rate we were going to get for food. We demanded 7.50 DM (other foster homes get 9 DM); however, the Senat only wanted to give us 5 DM. . . . Then in the afternoon 200 cops stood at the door. . . . Everyone is peeved at rising prices, . . . and more and more people [shoplift].”

“Stagflation,” partly as a consequence of the pricing policies of large corporations and of high U.S. expenditures during the Vietnam War had already led to drastic price increases, with more on the way as a result of the oil crisis. Members of the Weisbecker-Haus reported huge initial difficulties in organising their collective because people stole from each other or absconded with monies earmarked for communal purposes.

The shoplifting sprees initially seem like manifestations of a crude and naive concept of politics that neglects the sphere of production, hardly differs from ordinary delinquency, and reflects a self-administered-justice mentality. Yet the example of the Weisbecker-Haus shows how the first phase of the Berlin squatters’ movement crystallised around youth centres and self-help initiatives and, more broadly, illustrates questions of the use and accessibility of urban space. The desire for self-managed spaces was linked with a quest for new lifestyles and thus styles of consumption.

Frankfurt

In Frankfurt, the problems arising from housing shortages and urban politics were more explosive than the related issue of fare increases. The same 1973 issue of Wir wollen alles that reported on the Weisbecker-Haus also printed a flyer from the Frankfurt Häuserkampf that came back to the issue of tram fares: “[The city] is raising rents for council flats up to 55% . . ., is making the tramways—on which speculators and factory owners don’t depend—more expensive, and is raising electricity and water prices at a higher rate for families than for factories. Resistance is possible.”

In 1972–73, several joint-stock building
societies in which the city of Frankfurt held the majority of shares raised rents for more than twelve thousand small flats in old tenement buildings by 20 to 60 percent. More than four thousand tenants initially objected to the increases, and more than one thousand started legal proceedings.  

A West Berlin monthly, *Der lange March*, reported on squatters in American slums, London Islington, and Milan’s Via Tibaldi. Italy emerged as a major source of inspiration. The squats and militant tenants’ rights associations (Unione Inquilini) of Northern Italy’s industrial cities attracted political tourism from Germany. The *Spontis* and the Italian far left extra-parliamentary organisation Lotta Continua tried to transfer this experience to Frankfurt, “where the most serious efforts are made to erect the predominant trade, administration, and banking metropolis of the FRG . . . , speculation in rents and property turns hot . . . : living space in relatively cheap old buildings is destroyed and replaced by modern office buildings that multiply profits. . . . New accommodations are created with smaller rooms, lower ceilings, thinner walls, and much higher rents.” The authors of these lines quickly brushed aside the new buildings’ improved sanitary facilities—probably misjudging many people’s preferences—and pointed to the “terror of the landlords” and to “consumption as a compensatory remedy against the woes of isolation.” Criticism of the modern high-rises departed from a forward-looking concept of a neighbourly integration of work, social institutions, consumption, and culture: “These flats do provide hypermodern sanitary arrangements for the working population, only they are not yet prepared to live in the loo. They continue to prefer flats that allow you to meet people without disturbing the neighbours; that leave you some money for the beer necessary for such meetings; that are located in areas with pubs, cinemas, kindergartens, schools, places of work within walking distance.” The *Spontis* embraced a decidedly anticapitalist approach: “Squatting means to destroy the capitalist plan in the urban quarters—means not to pay any rent, means to abolish the capitalist shoe box structure. . . . Squatting and rent strikes are the pivotal point for the fight against capital outside the factories.”

Frankfurt, one of the Federal Republic of Germany’s most important busi-

34. Koenen, *Das Rote Jahrzehnt*, 344.
37. Ibid., 11.
ness locations, became a focal point of the conflicts over squatting. In the emerging financial metropolis, municipal politicians prioritised economic growth and maximising income through the local business tax, with the idea that government spending would then trickle down to benefit ordinary people. According to a 1968 SPD election pamphlet, “in Frankfurt, the working people benefit from the development of the city. Frankfurt Social Democrats put the money where it is most needed.” However, the desired convergence of private and public consumption did not emerge smoothly, and the politics of housing ultimately grew into a distinct chink in the armour of those responsible for urban restructuring.

Foreign workers and students began squatting in Frankfurt’s West end in the autumn of 1970. A year later, the Frankfurt city council yielded to pressure from property owners and decided not to tolerate any new squats. Police began evictions, and street fighting broke out. When it became apparent that the misuse of residential property had become an explosive problem, the ruling SPD implemented a municipal order prohibiting the misappropriation of housing space. This was aimed at large-scale real estate companies that allowed empty buildings to deteriorate in order to make money from modernisation or demolition in favour of more lucrative new developments. However, the courts declared the municipal order unconstitutional. With the ball back in the SPD’s court, the party made the issue its central plank in the 1972 municipal election campaign. Even before the situation escalated, the SPD was seeking to prevent violence: according to a campaign advertisement, “Squats are not harmless go-ins. They have led to violence. No one can wish the use of force to become a political style.” Seeking a middle ground, the ad also pointed out that “those who call for law and order and a hard line only see one side, . . . the violence of the squatters, and overlook the power and the violence of the owners.” The government often found itself on the latter’s side of the conflict.

The interplay of different forms of violence became a highly controversial topic within the protest movement. A spokesman for the Frankfurt students’ union highlighted the tactical dimension of violence: “We want to eliminate the ostensible violence on our side to expose the violence of the other side.” Another student delegate concurred that the violence of squatting constituted “resistance against the violence of the landlords.” He assumed that most of those who supported the movement by joining demonstrations had experienced

“societal violence” as tenants. Some landlords used drastic methods to dislodge tenants, including foregoing repairs. When old residents were forced out, landlords preferred foreign workers for short-term lets. Bullies collected rents at gunpoint. Conversely, squatters feared that violence would stand in the way of mass support: “We don’t want police operations to prevent what they are meant to prevent: solidarity among the broader population.” In the long run, considerations regarding the counterproductive effects of violent escalations prevailed in the Frankfurt squatters’ movement. After a particularly fierce “battle” over the building Kettenhofweg 51, the action group Westend dissociated itself from all violence: “Stones are no arguments: groups who fight like this . . . isolate themselves from the rest of the population.” A local chapter of the Arbeiterwohlfahrt (national workers’ welfare organisation) used the occasion to denounce all “signs of violence as fascist and anarchist.” The Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF) was becoming increasingly discredited, and other activists increasingly denounced violent means of political struggle.

In May 1976, two weeks after Ulrike Meinhof’s death, Joschka Fischer gave a speech on behalf of the Sponti collective at the Frankfurt Römerberg in which he tried to rekindle earlier forms of resistance within the parameters of everyday life. His speech is often interpreted as a plea for a renunciation of terrorism, but it also harks back to the dimension of consumption. The rebels that Fischer invoked were not the classical consumers of bread or TV sets; rather, they were looking for alternative lifestyles and were prepared to defend them by militant means: “In the past, it was the envy of the hungry that the bourgeoisie suspected below their abundantly set table; today, it is the frenzy of the losers who do not find their way in careers and consumer society.” The Frankfurt Spontis invoked nonmaterial values and thus new motivators for revolutionary activity: “We are no longer driven by hunger for food, we are driven by hunger for freedom, love, tenderness, . . . new forms of work and social intercourse.” An appeal “to knock off the death trip, . . . to put down the

44. Frankfurter Rundschau, clipping, 12 April 1973, in ibid.
46. “Gewalt und Terror als faschistisch abgelehnt,” in ibid.
bombs and stones” aimed to set a new agenda for the radical left.\textsuperscript{47} Fischer’s quest contained two elements: the continuing spirit of relentlessness in political conflict, and the notion of pacifying the search for new lifestyles and thereby implicitly making it more compatible with consumer society’s mechanisms of distinction. However, this statement did not change the fact that during the following decade, conflicts over housing and squatting remained intrinsically coupled with debates over violence and terrorism.

\textbf{West Berlin}

In May 1977, at the height of the manhunt for the assassins of attorney general Siegfried Buback, a Christian Democratic city councillor for planning and building verbally clashed with a social worker and member of a citizens’ initiative in the Berlin district of Kreuzberg. The city councillor had signed off on the demolition of an old fire station used as a community centre. Although the social worker categorically rejected violent tactics, he could understand why others would resort to such means: “There is a relation between the bomb that is destroying these houses and the bombs that are thrown at people.”\textsuperscript{48} The authorities looked for the seeds of terrorism in the squats. The demolition of the old fire station was also taken as a point of reference in a statement by the imprisoned members of Movement 2 June on the occasion of the Tunix Congress in January 1978. This major meeting of left-wing initiatives marked a milestone in the development not only of alternative projects but also of the autonomist movement that criticised the decline of militant objectives in the light of the German Autumn. The incarcerated comrades invoked old models of “everyday resistance” to the eviction of squats, suggesting that activists set “fire to Springer’s newspaper self-service boxes and delivery vans” and conduct shoplifting sprees at department stores.\textsuperscript{49} The association of urban destruction with violence worked on many levels. Memorable images resulted when the U.S. Army was allowed to practice street fighting in the Kreuzberg clearance area.\textsuperscript{50}


\textsuperscript{48} Quoted in Laurisch, \textit{Kein Abriss}, 66.


\textsuperscript{50} Laurisch, \textit{Kein Abriss}, 27; “‘Da packt dich irgendwann ‘ne Wut,’” \textit{Der Spiegel} 52 (22 December 1980): 29.
In West Berlin as earlier in Frankfurt, actions by housing societies and city councillors appeared to threaten lifestyles and living space. A CDU city councillor’s proposals to remodel the public spaces at Mariannenplatz and Oranienplatz in Kreuzberg generated massive protests. Much of the conflict originated in disturbances to everyday activities. Wooden fences interfered with children and their parents and with May Day festivities, and were destroyed or set alight several times: “In the end the entire area had to be guarded day and night, with spotlights and dogs.”

In 1980, a large-scale conflict over squatting, youth riots, and the use of police force unfolded in West Berlin, in many ways paralleling earlier events in Zurich and Amsterdam. West Berlin, however, was unique in several respects. As an island completely surrounded by East Germany, the city suffered from a housing shortage. It was a major migration destination not only for migrant workers but also for dropouts, draft dodgers, artists, and other members of the alternative milieu. Moreover, West Berlin was a major target of a Cold War-inspired policy of subsidies and tax allowances favouring various forms of real estate speculation. Most crucially, Berlin had practiced Mietpreisbindung (rent control) since the final year of the First World War; by 1974, it was the only city in the FRG with such controls for buildings built before 1950. In 1979, the government decided to align conditions with West Germany by gradually introducing the Weißer Kreis, a regime of provision that allowed the market to set rents. Complete deregulation was planned for 1985, by which time rents were expected to increase by up to 200 percent.

Squatting expanded as a culmination of a range of protest forms against housing policies—petitions, informational meetings, and legal complaints—that had been practiced by tenants’ organisations and citizens’ initiatives since the early 1970s. Between 1980 and 1982, about 160 tenement houses in West Berlin were occupied by squatters, with between four and five thousand people living in those buildings and well over ten thousand willing to demonstrate on their behalf. Prior to the revival of the squatting movement in 1989–90, West Berlin’s final squat was legalised in November 1984. The squatters were supported by a number of public figures—scholars, artists, journalists, clerics, and

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52. See Sedlmaier, “Berlin als doppeltes Schaufenster.”
politicians—who spoke up in favour of the social experiment. However, squatters were also subject to vitriolic coverage in the tabloid press. Confrontations with the police frequently turned violent, especially after evictions. Kreuzberg became the centre of the movement. The district had become a catchment area for those who could not afford the rents elsewhere—students and Turkish immigrants—or those who sought cheap space initiatives such as flat-sharing communities or alternative businesses.\textsuperscript{56}

\textbf{Squatters as Alternative Consumers}

In trying out new lifestyles, the Berlin squatters built on their predecessors’ experience from the 1970s. The \textit{Instandbesetzer} (“reconditioning occupiers”) saw their activities as a symbol for the resistance against the existing system of property ownership: “As the name \textit{Instandbesetzung} implies, it includes a political line to encroach upon ownership conditions in very concrete terms. Even though this is only a little kick in the shin of a capitalist . . . , the attempt is not insignificant.”\textsuperscript{57} Although protesters no longer explicitly hoped to abolish capitalism, the fight against consumer society, perceived as an omnipresent form of oppression, was still at the fore of their efforts. The squatters’ council, K 36 outlined its self-conception in June 1980: “We don’t stop at squatting. We live in communes . . . rather than in the usual tenements. We want to experience the entire context of life and do it here and now. We fight against demolition. . . . We resist consumer terror [\textit{Konsumterror}] and any form of oppression.”\textsuperscript{58}

Even those who fought “consumer terror” needed some basic necessities such as electricity, water, and gas, and the economic component of these needs became a bone of contention between initially peaceful squatters and the authorities. Housing societies that owned buildings in the urban renewal areas commissioned teams of builders that came to destroy the infrastructure—electrical metres, tiled stoves, and windows—in empty as well as already squatted buildings.\textsuperscript{59} A group of Göttingen squatters lamented that the public

\begin{itemize}
\item[] \textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 270.
\item[] \textsuperscript{57} Jaqueline Klein and Sabine Porn, “Instandbesetzen,” in \textit{Besetzung}, ed. Müller-Münch, Proisinger, and Rosenbladt, 112.
\item[] \textsuperscript{58} Besetzerrat K 36, \textit{Wir sind dem Staat ein Dorn im Auge!} (Berlin, 1980), IISG Amsterdam, ID-Archiv, Bro 1991/13, 2. The name of the squatters’ council derived from the former postcode of the eastern part of Kreuzberg, SO 36.
\end{itemize}
prosecutor was not interested in the owner of a building who had made it uninhabitable by systematically destroying its interior, even poisoning it with a game repellent. Instead, the authorities preferred to investigate those who had painted graffiti on the shell of the building to call attention to the destruction. In another case, a group of companies from Frankfurt wanted to replace old tenements with luxury homes and business premises. Under police protection, the houses were destroyed from the inside, supply lines severed, and walls and ceilings demolished.\textsuperscript{60}

The destruction of electrical metres was a particular problem for squatters, since municipal power companies refused to install metres in squats. The removal of electrical metres forced the squatters to tap into power supply lines, which constituted an offence that the police, equipped with a complaint from the municipal power company, could easily use to justify searching, arrests, and evictions. As with the blockade campaigns, therefore, squatting contained the elements for its own criminalisation via breach of domestic peace (sections 123/124 StGB) or electricity theft (section 248c StGB). At one point Berlin’s minister of the interior reported that 4,954 squatters had committed 9,322 criminal offences, statistics that could be used to draw a picture of the squats as havens for criminals.\textsuperscript{61} Even before the situation escalated violently on the night of 12 December 1980, the police had established a special commission to observe the squatters and perceived the squatters as a serious threat to public security.\textsuperscript{62} West Berlin’s chief of police, Klaus Hübner (SPD), divided the squatters into three groups: “‘Of good will but also a bit dim-witted’ were those who wanted to address the housing problems by calculated violations of the law. Many young people who had only come to Berlin in 1979 or 80 were ‘travelling rioters.’ Finally, the third and most dangerous group merely wanted to use squatting for their strategy of confrontation and were animated by ‘sympathies for pure terrorism.’”\textsuperscript{63}

That the squatters’ critique hinged on a socially irreconcilable process of gentrification—apparently driven by profiteers benefitting from state

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{60} *Wut im Bauch!* 4, 9, IISG Amsterdam, ID 653, Bro 689/4 FOL.
\end{itemize}
subsidies—was lost in such statements. Urban sociologists have demonstrated that the processes of social restructuring that turn originally poor districts close to the city centre into affluent neighbourhoods took place in “phases of invasion.” Initially, “pioneers” willing to take risks moved into urban renewal areas, which remained marked by a high proportion of low-income households. The influx increased the range of alternative services, cultural events, and dining options, an “alternative upgrading” that drew the interest of financially stronger groups. These “gentrifiers” then crowded out the long-established, predominantly low-income population via the modernisation of flats and subsequent increases in rents and land prices. Consequently, the process of upgrading initiated by members of the alternative milieu often destroyed the local prerequisites for alternative culture.64 The squatters did not remain alone in their assessment of gentrification. Urban sociologists, too, came to describe the consequences of accelerated tenure fluctuation in a negative light insofar as the individualised, consumption-intensive lifestyle of the gentrifiers disrupted the “former unity of living conditions,” pressuring traditional residents to adapt to new conditions.65 The results of an ethnographic study, however, suggest that perceptions of gentrification crucially rested on a symbolic dimension. Barbara Lang’s concept of “symbolic gentrification” highlights the constructed nature of the opposition between yuppies and members of the alternative milieu. Though she does not deny the effects of gentrification on Kreuzberg, she points out that its actual level remained significantly below that of other neighbourhoods in other cities—for example, Frankfurt’s Westend or Zurich’s inner city.66

The government of West Berlin offered generous subsidies and depreciation allowances for the modernisation of housing, which in practice amounted to rewards for driving out the tenants and ultimately for demolishing rundown but cheap turn-of-the-century tenement buildings.67 Critics resisted “quarters for the smart set”: “cheap shops are gradually crushed out, and increased pressure is put on the cheaper flats because in an area thus pepped up, one can rent out very expensive flats: the old population is crowded out and luxury refurbishments are impending.”68 Ultimately, this critique of gentrifi-
cation led the alternative milieu to wrestle with itself, since the appropriation of substandard housing and eventually entire neighbourhoods by innovative youths and the cultural opportunities this process entailed constituted the first step on the ladder of upward revaluation. This tendency was perceived even in such squatters’ bastions as Krenzberg’s KuKuCK art and cultural centre: “Consumption is conquering new terrain, separating artists from audiences and leaving the latter in a state where individuals are strangers to each other.”

The issue was not new to the squatters’ movement and had its roots in the social divides within the alternative milieu. Agit 883 had already advertised a March 1969 campaign under the slogan, “Break up left-wing pubs.” A message “to all ideologists of the cabbage soup and the lard sandwich” called for “the nests of snug left-wing consumption to vanish into thin air. You’ve fallen for resourceful petty capitalists.”

Thirteen years later, an autonomous “Kommando Klaus-Jürgen Rattay” committed an attack on a branch of Deutsche Bank, causing material damage amounting to two hundred thousand deutsche marks. The operation was named after a squatter who had become a martyr of the movement when he was fatally injured by a bus during a September 1981 demonstration as a result of police driving protesters into heavy traffic. The statement of responsibility for the Deutsche Bank attack, however, highlighted a conflict within the alternative milieu. The “revolutionary forces of the Cold War front-line city” were asked to come out of the pubs: “It is not acceptable that hard-won houses . . . were misused in favour of a broader alternative consumer culture à la 68,” since such a culture was far from “system change and liberation.” A similar dispute figured in a brawl that erupted during the opening party for a posh lamp store in Kreuzberg in the autumn of 1982. A group of slightly drunk Autonomen invited themselves to join those whom they characterised as “having a lot of dough.” Their involuntary hosts seemed to come from Charlottenburg and now threatened “to spoil the quarter [Kiez].” The district of Charlottenburg was explicitly mentioned as an example in which in the wake of “the 1968 movement, the face of a district was changed.” The lamp store, however, turned out to be a long-established local business that had moved from across the street into larger premises. The spectre of fascism came to haunt one of the intruders: was such an unpleasant encounter not essentially the same as what “the pigs” did to those who looked and lived differently? Did consumption habits really suggest

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political position? The author ultimately pledged to work for an environment tolerant enough to accommodate a variety of cultures and consumption styles, including the more well-to-do subcultures. This rift plagued not only the larger alternative milieu but also the Autonomen movement, as its more radical members continued to occasionally target the manifestations of a materially integrated alternative culture.

Militant attacks against manifestations of affluent consumption had two targets: the shops and restaurants of the “freak aristocracy,” and the institutions of mainstream consumer society. At Easter 1983, the peak of the peace movement, a Festival Committee of Vengeance for Christ gave a militant twist to the tradition of Easter marches, announcing a plan to cause “chaos . . . in department stores, other high-calorie edifices, and speculators’ strongholds” so that the police would disturb the tourist trade. At the Kempinski luxury hotel, curtains caught fire. On New Year’s Eve 1980, a bomb threat was issued against a club in West Berlin’s Schöneberg area that was frequented by local politicians and dignitaries. A subsequent statement explained that although there was no bomb, the threat was directed against the “assembled municipality gorging and boozing.” The perpetrators then listed a number of demands taken from the squatters’ agenda, including “no luxury refurbishments” and “controlled rents.” The statement closed with a quote from Georg Büchner: “Peace to the cottages—war on the palaces!”

By mid-1983, forty-seven squats had been cleared by the police, forty-five had been legalised via tenancy agreements, and nineteen had been voluntarily abandoned by the squatters. The question of how militant the squatters’ movement should be did not contribute to its unity. Those who sought to legalise their housing conditions via tenancy agreements—often brokered by politicians trying to mitigate the conflict—may have criticised existing regimes of provision and the eternal obsession with growth, but they were also ready to integrate their way of life into an improved or alternative version of capitalist consumer society; more radical squatters of the emerging Autonomen movement, in contrast, explicitly wanted to overthrow that society.

75. Willems, Jugendunruhen und Protestbewegungen, 269–70.
76. See the cartoon “Die Stärke der Bewegung liegt in ihrer Geschlossenheit,” in Laurisch, Kein Abriss, 115.
Violent Escalation

A crucial date for the escalation of the Berlin conflict was the night of 12–13 December 1980. When police prevented squatters from taking over a building at Fraenkelufer in Kreuzberg, demonstrators set up barricades and smashed windows, surprising many observers. According to an investigating committee set up by several squatters’ organisations, 270 people were injured, 66 of them police officers, and 109 demonstrators were arrested. The police estimated property damage at more than three hundred thousand deutsche marks. The next day, between three and four thousand people assembled at the Kurfürstendamm to protest, again resulting in numerous injuries and arrests as well as broken windows. Der Spiegel reported: While “street fighters masked with Fatah [PLO] shawls used slingshots to hurl steel balls at plastic-armoured police . . . , looters indiscriminately gathered spectacle frames, rubber boots, and sliced cheese in cracked stores.” Journalists and social scientists diagnosed a new emergence of militancy, the police noted a “step change” in the “propensity for violence,” and the alternative tageszeitung castigated the “unleashed brutality of the police.”

A statement printed in taz ten days before the outburst offers some insight into the rationale behind attacking shops: “Visit the department stores!” was a means “to tie up police forces and to create publicity.” Since squatters could not hope to “defeat” the police in an “open battle” over a particular building, they resorted to a more decentralised strategy, challenging the state monopoly on violence in a number of places. Road traffic and shops were the most obvious targets for such endeavours.

The offensive against the retail sector was not an entirely spontaneous response to the police operation at Fraenkelufer, which started around 5:00 in the evening. Two obviously premeditated actions occurred against department

stores on the same day. Mimicking the language used by the RAF, members of the “Kreuzberg Mouse Army Faction” admitted having released six hundred white mice at a Karstadt branch in Berlin. The statement of responsibility contained an unmistakable pointer to the recently dissolved Movement 2 June and declared: “We mice have been sick of this consumer shit for a long time. . . . We don’t want any Disneyland—Karstadt into the hands of the mice!”81 At the same time, unknown persons placed incendiary devices at Hertie and Karstadt department stores in Göttingen, where a new wave of squatting protest had flared up. The sprinkler system prevented extensive damage and minimized publicity, but parallels with 1968 were noted by the few observers who commented on the incident.82 The fact that negotiations between squatters and the Kreuzberg SPD took place on 12 December also weighs against the argument that the street demonstrations were a spontaneous response to the police action at Fraenkelufer, as squatters commonly contended. Authorities had decided to call on the Sozialpädagogisches Institut of the Arbeiterwohlfahrt (the social-work unit of a national workers’ welfare organisation) to mediate the conflict. Though the squatters claimed that only the police had an interest in undermining a negotiated settlement, more radical parts of the movement also had such an interest.83

In the long run, smashed shop windows generated more publicity than did isolated actions against department stores. During the night of 12–13 December 1980, a total of eighty-one shops and banks suffered broken windows, but only seven of the establishments were looted. In addition, police registered two cases of arson when stones were followed by Molotov cocktails at a Daimler-Benz office and the newspaper Der Tagesspiegel. Damage to public property was recorded in only four instances and obviously was not the protest’s main focus. The police report shows a crucial time lag between the smashing of shop windows and the beginning of looting. The police reported at 19:07 hours that 150–200 “troublemakers” were smashing shop windows at a Kaiser’s Kaffee supermarket and at other shops and banks as well as damaging private cars. However, looting of the supermarket and a shoe shop did not begin until 21:26, and an adjacent ALDI discount supermarket was only looted beginning at

83. doku-gruppe vom mehringhof, Dokumentation, 5.
The people who broke the windows, therefore, were not necessarily the same ones who could not resist the temptation of unprotected goods behind those windows. The looters seem to have behaved not unlike other consumers: some reportedly bartered with their booty whilst others returned empty-handed after failing to find what they wanted. Others debated what could be taken: basic consumer durables and snacks seemed all right, but the appropriation of “luxury” goods might cast a damning light on the squatters’ movement.

In another instance involving the April 1982 looting of an ALDI supermarket in Berlin’s Kottbusser Tor neighbourhood following a demonstration of support for the people of El Salvador, an activist questioned why the discount retailer had been targeted rather than a higher-end food shop; he also wanted to target stores selling televisions. The militant newspaper *radikal*—now dubbing itself the “Newspaper of West Berlin’s Looters and Troublemakers”—was quite ready to embrace looting as a political strategy. Smashing windows “up and down the Kurfürstendamm”—especially those of the Kempinski luxury hotel—was already a “well-tried concept.” According to *radikal*, smashing the windows of a bank or looting a supermarket were “practical and radical critiques of capitalism.” From the perspective of a homeless person, a furniture store could seem like a bastion of capitalism, a cobblestone through its window like an act of resistance. In explaining the broken windows, another voice pointed to squatters’ rage at the population’s complacency regarding the calamities of the housing situation and the victims of violence emanating from the wrecking ball, boarded-up windows, and police batons. The 12–13 December police report provides information on the injuries policemen suffered during the incident: only three of the sixty-six injuries were serious enough to prevent the officers from continuing their mission; one policeman had to be hospitalized with a complicated leg fracture.

The squatters reported more than two hundred injuries, including skull fractures, and more than eighty arrests.

An intense public debate ensued. The number of windows being smashed during the conflict of the early 1980s greatly exceeded the number broken during the protest campaigns of a decade earlier. Boarded-up shop windows on the Kurfürstendamm and elsewhere became an omnipresent symbol of the struggle, which provoked loud cries of “terror” and calls for law and order. However, in marked contrast to the debates of the late 1960s, the association of broken windows with Nazi violence remained marginal. One of the few statements that drew the parallel came from a Kreuzberg vigilante organisation: “We are warning the ‘red Nazis’ . . . who smash shop windows and loot like the hordes of the SA. . . . Haven’t you noticed that your kind of class struggle is as foolish as Hitler’s race struggle? . . . If you don’t stop wasting the taxes of the general public so insanely, scaring off the tourists and new citizens who are so important for Berlin, we will soon start reporting you to the police by the dozen.”

The tabloid press, however, largely refrained from the problematic Nazi analogy. Nevertheless, protesters had a clear sense that the Springer press had to be challenged in what it reported about the squatters, often reducing them to rioters, looters, or terrorists. To make this point, the protesters issued ten thousand copies of a forty-page brochure of reply (Gegendarstellung). The logo for Bild was frequently defaced as Blöd (Stupid) or Blut (Blood), but no major campaign emerged from these impulses.

Even within the movement, some observers had increasing difficulty seeing the political content in the widespread opportunistic looting that ensued almost routinely after demonstrations or the eviction of squatters. Protesters

“Häuserkampf Jun.–Dez. 1980.”
who claimed squatting and looting as anticapitalist actions or punks who were
pride of “smashing bigwigs’ cars” met with incredulous disapproval not only
from conservative observers but also from a previous generation of revolution-
aries. Even after the Berlin squatters’ movement began to decline, looting re-
mained a central topic. Some squatters who no longer wanted to live under
permanent threat of police action and who were unwilling to sign tenancy
agreements provoked their own evictions in a last-ditch attempt to make politi-
capital. In this situation of weakness, when the battle for the houses seemed
already lost, activists still embraced small-scale arson and other actions against
banks and supermarkets. At one point, between fifty and sixty squatters went
to “dispossess” a supermarket, giving out the goods to passersby,96 a scenario
that resembled the Weisbecker-Haus’s “shoplifting action” ten years earlier
except that those activists had wanted to keep the haul for themselves. It is safe
to assume that at least a few of the 1983 looters knew Dario Fo’s play, Non Si
Paga! Non Si Paga97

Smashed shop windows and looting were not limited to Kreuzberg. West
Berlin’s commercial centre and some outer districts also saw plenty of broken
glass, as did Hamburg, Hannover, Freiburg, and Göttingen, which became an-
other focal point of the West German squatters’ movement and in 1979 hosted
the first national meeting of squatters from across Germany.98 The Göttingen
squatters faced very real threats from retail and services development, as in the
case of some buildings in the Friedrichstraße that were slated to be replaced by
an upmarket apartment building/shopping centre.99 The confrontation between
opposite regimes of provision and lifestyles suggested a clear-cut division be-
tween “us and them”: “How then are we supposed to live? Buying, working,
keeping one’s trap shut. . . . Many people notice that television makes you
stupid, that department stores and banks are temples of capital. . . . And who
doesn’t want to buy has to die.” The three thousand square metres that had been
demolished and turned into “commercial space” could have been put to alter-
native use by playgroups, a workers’ self-help organisation, a carpenters’
group, and a print shop: “Films could have been shown that otherwise aren’t
shown, bands could have performed even if they aren’t stars. Together we

97. Fo, Bezahlt wird nicht!
98. See Schwarzmeier, Die Autonomen zwischen Subkultur, 39–69; “Hausbesetzertreffen,” ra-
99. Wut im Bauch!, 1, IISG Amsterdam, ID 653, Bro 689/4 FOL. See also Ermittlungsau-
sschuss Göttingen, Dokumentation: ein halbes Jahr Abriss- und Polizeistadt Göttingen (Göttingen,
could have built up a pub without anyone making money from it.”\textsuperscript{100} These visions yielded to a political conclusion: “Anyone who responds to the desire for habitation, life, and diversity with police, defamation, wrecking ball, and dead concrete for the rich forfeits their moral legitimacy.”\textsuperscript{101}

At Göttingen’s Reitstallviertel, the university’s riding stables, built in 1735, had been demolished in 1968 to make way for a new city hall despite massive citizen and student protest. The city hall subsequently was built elsewhere and the site sold to the department store company Hertie, which, as critics put it, “planted a shopping brick” that required additional “clear-cutting” in 1977. Opponents claimed that powerful economic interests had pressured the city to agree to the department store’s location.\textsuperscript{102} In addition to the arson attacks at Göttingen’s Hertie and Karstadt branches on 12 December 1980, sensation was created a few weeks later with inner-city riots on New Year’s Eve during which shop windows were smashed and displays looted. The New Year’s Eve riots became an annual event.\textsuperscript{103}

Contrary to 1968, violent forms of protest in the early 1980s seemed to yield tangible political results. Violent protests generated public awareness, whilst the destruction of valuable living space and the squatters’ peaceful struggle against it had not spawned much public interest.\textsuperscript{104} The sacrifices of brutal street fighting finally seemed to be leading somewhere since the issue now became a major media concern, and the government offered to negotiate with squatters.\textsuperscript{105} A romanticised and nostalgic ideal of authentic lifestyles in historically evolved structures stood against dystopian visions of an economised society: “For years, redevelopment measures have turned entire districts into concrete deserts; excessive greed has replaced dreamy medieval . . . streets with the grid; people have been deformed into machines of production and consumption.” There was a clear sense that resistance paid off: “When our life contexts are to be destroyed by government policies, when humanity is choked by concrete, cops, and computers, we will offer resistance. We don’t

\textsuperscript{100} Wut im Bauch!, 20.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 10. Hertie repeatedly became the object of gentrification critics. See Brigitte Abramowski et al., Hertie-Center: Ottensen gehört nicht Büll und Liedtke (Hamburg, 1990), IISG Amsterdam, ID 1342, Bro 670/21 fol.
\textsuperscript{105} Yvonne, “. . . alle Gewalt geht vom Staate aus,” in Sanierung, ed. Aktionskomitee für Amnestie, 10–11, IISG Amsterdam, ID-6531 B, Bro 758/6 fol.
want to be turned into programmable humans who vegetate as eating-sleeping-and-working machines."

The idea that protest employing violent means had ultimately generated political results was expressed more soberly by Werner Orlowsky, the proprietor of a local chemist’s shop who became a spokesperson for the Kreuzberg protest movement: “A single cobblestone yielded more than two years on the rehabilitation council.” In June 1981, the Alternative Liste (the West Berlin branch of the Green Party) made Orlowsky a city councillor for building and planning for the district of Kreuzberg, the first time that a member of a German Green Party had filled such a position. A rhetorically talented businessman, Orlowsky had been courageous enough to support the squatters’ protest. His shop was located on the Dresdener Straße, a residential shopping street that had been cut off by the brutalist Neue Kreuzberger Zentrum, a semicircular string of twelve-storey high-rises featuring 367 flats, two multistorey car parks, and fifteen thousand square metres of commercial and retail space. The project had encountered resistance from its inception, and after the financiers declared bankruptcy, the government had to step in with a sixty-five-million deutsche mark bailout.

By West Berlin standards, this was not even a major scandal. Building booms increasingly involved local party politics in dubious lending schemes, leading to the January 1981 resignation of the scandal-plagued Dietrich Stobbe as West Berlin’s mayor. The governing SPD/FDP coalition was briefly continued by Hans-Jochen Vogel, who had been sent to the divided city as his party’s last-ditch candidate to save a traditional stronghold. Despite his soaring career in the SPD, Vogel had never tackled the problems for which he had developed theoretical solutions as the hopeful federal minister for regional planning, construction, and urban development. Rather ironically, he now found himself on the other side of the conflict. Despite embracing a moderate compromise line on squatting, he had to authorise police operations against young protesters who subscribed to a critique of the manifestations of capitalism that was not terribly far removed from his own criticisms a decade earlier.

The compromise, the Berliner Linie, was designed to transfer the conflict

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from a criminal to a political level. Under pressure from both the CDU opposition and the squatters, the Vogel government acknowledged previous mistakes in housing policy and thus granted some of the squatters’ points. The defence of squats seemed legitimate, and violent means had even proved effective since the government wanted to avoid escalation. Protesters’ experiences with police brutality added to this pattern of legitimisation. The *Berliner Linie* was gradually eroded by the police and the public prosecutor’s office. It was partly abolished, though it continued to exist at least on paper in tenancy agreements with squatters, when Vogel was defeated by Richard von Weizsäcker (CDU), who took office as mayor of West Berlin in June 1980. The authorities now increasingly resorted to forceful eviction. This created a vicious circle: street fighting, smashing of shop windows, and looting became the ritualised answer to evictions, further legitimising subsequent evictions. Justifications could be rather simple-minded: the first issue of the squatters’ weekly *Instand-Besetzer-Post* reported, “we took our anger out on banks (the actual masterminds behind any policy) and on hertie who do nothing other than squeeze the hard-earned money out of the pockets of the ‘little’ people.” The frequent demonstrations on the Kurfürstendamm—469 in 1982—many of which entailed traffic closures and destruction, brought retailers and the Chamber of Industry and Commerce to lobby the government for restrictions on freedom of assembly. Economics minister Elmar Pieroth (CDU) declared sympathetically, “We can no longer tolerate subversive groups attacking the Kurfürstendamm—the lifeblood of a free city.” The government instituted a so-called equity fund that paid for the bulk of “riot damage,” but retail organisations frequently pointed out that these sums were not enough to prevent a wave of bankruptcies in the inner city.

Similar developments were afoot in other European cities. The course of events could be strikingly similar, as squatters from Paris reported in *radikal* in September 1981: a group of about fifty people subscribing to the principle of “gratuité totale” tried to force open the blocked-off entrances of a building designated for demolition. Major conflict with the police resulted, triggering the smashing of shop windows and looting. Also in September 1981, Berlin

squatters had invited their colleagues from other Western European cities to the international Tuwat Congress, which was steeped in radical slogans. A flyer issued by the “Autonomous Republics of Neukölln and Kreuzberg” declared, “Our hostages are their windowpanes, their police cars, their wealth. **Make it expensive for them!!!** The only level on which they can understand something is money! Every day, one of our comrades sits in prison there should be 1 million DM damage! . . . For every evicted house 1 million extra! For every conviction 1 million extra!”114 “One million per eviction” became a favourite slogan of the movement.115 In July 1982, the clearing of two squats in Berlin resulted in an attack on a Wertheim department store in the Steglitz district: stones smashed the windows, followed by Molotov cocktails, which ignited a clothes rack. The sprinkler system then caused property damage in the millions.116

The legitimacy of militant struggle as “counterviolence” was not questioned as a matter of principle at the Tuwat Congress. What was discussed was the question of where the use of violence was “right” and where it was “unnecessary.” This differed from the Tunix Congress in 1978, which had marked the end of the Sponti movement because a consensus on the use of violent means of protest could no longer be reached. Unlike 1978, the movement did not uniformly discard violent means. Tuwat can be read as a distinct response to Tunix, which seemed to lead to the retreat into alternative lifestyles. The rejection of violence in 1978 must be seen in the context of the RAF and the German Autumn. Subsequently, debates about the RAF never reached the same intensity, but they continued in the early 1980s, with a number of squatters supporting the RAF’s anti-imperialist ideas and many more lumped together with terrorists in police perceptions and practice.117

Political violence related to the housing conflicts in West Germany in the 1970s and 1980s arose from a challenging search for alternative lifestyles and concepts of well-being. A comparative perspective on the Frankfurt and Berlin squatters’ movements, however, suggests a few important differences. First, authorities’ responses and their political consequences took different trajectories. Frankfurt squatters encountered an uncompromising hard line. A disintegrating movement was “conquered” by superior police forces. The SPD government

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114. Quoted in Sonnewald and Raabe-Zimmermann, “**Berliner Linie,**” 69.
under Rudi Arndt made several false steps, and the Frankfurt CDU’s surprising victory under Walter Wallmann in 1977 may have been influenced by the legacy of the *Häuserkampf*, but while the conflict lasted, the government survived the challenge to its legitimacy. Apart from some crucial corrections to the original plans for the restructuring of the financial metropolis, Frankfurt’s transformation took place. Kreuzberg, conversely, remains a stronghold of alternative lifestyles and protest. West Berlin’s government was far more willing to compromise. The politics of housing grew into a greater challenge to political authority, with a historically significant change of government in the middle—and partly as a result—of the conflict. The same shift of power brought about the parliamentary debut of a Green Party—the Alternative Liste—that openly pursued the squatters’ agenda. Squatters thus retained substantial sympathies among the wider population and realised some of their goals both in terms of tenancy agreements and in terms of political mobilisation.

Second, the movements’ positions on violence differed. Frankfurt activists perceived the end of their *Häuserkampf* in 1974 as a “military defeat,” a viewpoint that contributed to the discrediting of militancy within a wider process of erosion and division among radicals. In West Berlin, however, militancy seemed to work, generating tangible political results and remaining a mobilising factor beyond the end of the squatters’ movement in 1983.

Finally, differences existed in the critiques of capitalism and regimes of provision that the two movements developed and pursued. The Frankfurt squatters’ movement still reflected the three classical stages of revolutionary politics, imagined as distinct with regard to contents and time: critique of the status quo; revolutionary action; new society. At least rhetorically, Frankfurt activists—mainly the *Spontis*—still embraced a revolutionary mission with the goal of system change and overcoming capitalism. They hoped to reach their goal by shifting the revolutionary subject away from the industrial workers and towards those who remained marginalised by affluent society. Political activity in the realm of consumption remained a means to larger revolutionary ends. As a reflection of their defeats, they gave important support for the emergence of a politics of the first person—a focus on the here and now—that brought together the three elements of the revolutionary triad. Revolution no longer played such an emphatic role in West Berlin a decade later, where the movement’s successors also invested in a challenge of capitalism and consumer society. However, this effort was more specifically focused on particular aspects, drawing on small-scale and concrete alternative designs. The belief that the system could be overcome—that capitalism could be brought to an end—had largely evaporated.