

DEBATES AND DEVELOPMENTS

The Co-optation of Squatters in Amsterdam and the Emergence of a Movement Meritocracy: A Critical Reply to Pruijt*

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The Kalenderpanden, located in the city centre of Amsterdam, had for centuries served as warehouses for cargo trans-shipped in the port of Amsterdam. When, in the 1980s, the area had lost many of its former functions, it was planned that the Kalenderpanden should be transformed into social housing. For some reason the plans were not carried out, allowing squatters to occupy the buildings and turn them into a breeding place for alternative cultural and political projects. Throughout the latter half of the 1990s, the Kalenderpanden were, amongst many other things, the home of a monthly gothic party, a cheap vegan restaurant, artists' studios and the pirate radio channel Patapoe. A large number of people frequented the Kalenderpanden that served as a meeting place for radical squatters, political activists, artists and youngsters who simply wanted to have fun without having to cough up a day's pay. However, at some point the buildings were sold to a developer. The area where the buildings were located had now become amongst the most popular in the city and it is therefore little surprise that the developer decided to convert the buildings into luxurious apartments. The handful of squatters living in the building protested vehemently against the plans of the city council. They managed to mobilize many of the diverse groups of people who made use of the building in attempts to stop the plans. Just weeks before the squatters were evicted, a strange mix of Goths and punks marched through the city centre, playing a funeral march to symbolically bury one of the few places where non-commercial culture was still flourishing. On 30 October, the day before the eviction, a huge crowd gathered in the buildings and listened to angry speakers, ranging from the writer and then university professor Geert Mak to the city council member Hansje Kalt. The police had clearly underestimated the number of people in the building and the logistical capabilities of the squatters who lived there. As soon as they approached the building early in the morning, they were hindered by fires, fences and a rain of stones. It took several hours and a few injuries on the part of the police before the eviction was accomplished. A couple of hours later, the mayor, Schelto Patijn, appeared on the local news channel. He was furious. 'His' people were hurt. His facial expression and his speech made it abundantly clear: he was not used to this type of behaviour. With their aggressive defence of the building, the squatters had crossed a line they had not crossed for at least a decade. He made it clear that the informal 'pact' between squatters and the authorities — to quietly leave the building after a couple of water balloons or paint bombs have been thrown — had been broken.

* I would like to thank Jan Willem Duyvendak (University of Amsterdam), Ugo Rossi (University of Naples 'L'Orientale') and an anonymous referee for comments on an earlier version of this article. This reply is based on ongoing research on the Amsterdam squatter movement. More results and a historical analysis can be found in Uitermark (2004).

Apart from the absence of ‘tanks in the street’ (Andriessen, 1981), this scene is reminiscent of the confrontations that took place between squatters and the Amsterdam police in the 1970s and early 1980s (Draaisma and van Hoogstraten, 1983). It seems to be evidence that the Amsterdam squatters are still prepared and willing to confront the authorities when they think that is necessary. It is for this reason that Pruijt, in a recent issue of this journal, cites this incident as an example of the continued radicalism of the Amsterdam squatter movement (Pruijt, 2003: 139). Pruijt claims that, in spite of the many concessions the municipality has made to squatters — it legalized squats, it has involved squatters in decision-making and it generally has a very tolerant attitude towards squatting — the movement shows ‘no loss of identity in terms of willingness to cause disruption’ (*ibid.*). Contrary to what might be expected on the basis of theory (Mayer, 1998), ‘the evidence of co-optation (conversion of oppositional groups into social service providers) is extremely limited. Squatters’ groups were not transformed into organizations employed as providers of state-neglected services’ (Pruijt, 2003: 139). He even goes so far as to say that the Amsterdam squatter movement is ‘immune’ to co-optation (*ibid.*: 153). The reason for this, according to Pruijt, is that squatting has become an end in itself. Housing is no longer the single or primary concern of the movement. However, in this brief response, I want to argue that, if he had analysed the squatter movement during the last five years, Pruijt would probably have come to different conclusions.¹

Institutionalization and co-optation of urban movements

My concern is not only with Pruijt’s contribution, however. In reassessing the case of the Amsterdam squatter movement, I also want to engage with the post-Fordist social movement literature, of which Margit Mayer is the most important representative (Mayer, 1998; 1999; 2000a; 2000b). This literature argues that movements have become fragmented after the 1970s. Whereas movements during the Fordist period aspired to roughly the same ideals — transforming large-scale and ruthless processes of urban renewal into more human-scale and democratic forms of collective consumption — contemporary movements have widely diverging ideals and action repertoires. There has been a ‘fragmentation’ and ‘particularization’ of movements (Kling, 1993; Harvey, 1996). In many instances, these processes have led to changing movement-government and inter-movement interactions. On the one hand, some segments of former urban movements have become part of the state. While they continue to critique government policies (they are ‘within and against the state’ — Mayer, 2000a: 138), they inevitably lose their subversive identity. Not only have they become responsible for duties that according to their own ideology should be taken care of by the state, they also cannot avoid operating according to the logic of the post-Fordist state as ‘they frequently develop “innovative” strategies which already acknowledge the new divisions in society’ (Mayer, 2000a: 149). On the other hand, (younger) activists continue to voice radical demands and criticize the transformed urban movements. They therefore sometimes enter into antagonistic relationships with organizations that have emerged from the urban movements of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s but that have now become part of the state. Thus, the post-Fordist literature argues that the most common, and seemingly inevitable, pattern is that urban movements are partly co-opted and partly radicalized. The co-opted segments pursue progressive objectives but in fact they have become part of urban development strategies; their self-help programmes and voluntary initiatives secure services that local governments, pressured as they are by interurban competition, are no longer able or willing to provide. The radical elements continue to fight for universal rights (a secure income, housing, democracy) but their role is limited.

1 Pruijt mentions that his account is based upon fieldwork that he and others carried out in the 1980s and early 1990s and that ‘no further collection of primary data on squatting in Amsterdam was necessary’ (Pruijt, 2003: 138, note 4).

Pruijt rightly criticizes this literature for providing a somewhat deterministic view of urban movements. He argues that it mistakenly predicts that in each and every case social movements that originally oppose government policies become co-opted, i.e. become providers of services within the state.

However, he can only make such an assertion because he ignores one vital insight of the post-Fordist literature, namely that movements have become increasingly fragmented, which makes it almost impossible to say anything sensible about movements as a whole (Kling, 1993; Mayer, 1999). Thus, Pruijt feels that *the* squatter movement is not co-opted whilst post-Fordist theory would have predicted otherwise. In the remainder of this reply I want to argue that only if the heterogeneity of the squatter movement is appreciated does it become possible to fully comprehend the processes and forms of co-optation in particular instances. While Pruijt convincingly argues why squatting still continues, he fails to recognize that simultaneously co-optation of some kind *is* indeed taking place. As I will argue below, there is evidence that some segments of the movement are transforming into providers of *cultural* rather than *social* services, a scenario that has not been envisaged by the post-Fordist literature and Pruijt. The squatters who provide such services do so wittingly and with support of the state, yet they are not 'in' the state. So what I observe with respect to the Amsterdam squatter movement is this: it is possible for some segments of urban movements to retain their subversive identity, to stay outside the state and to nevertheless become part of urban development strategies. Although these changes are embryonic, they are of major analytical importance, since, arguably, the case of the Amsterdam squatters does not stand isolated. The processes observed in Amsterdam are largely the result of structural changes that also take place elsewhere. This means that it is likely that we will observe in other cities too some hybrid form of co-optation, in which both the government and the movement retain their identity, yet in which the goals of the two parties become compatible. Some segments of the movement may foster alternative subcultural identities and organize protest against the whims of capitalism whilst at the same time they become of value for the local government. Thus the local government condones or even supports these segments whilst it excludes or ignores those parts that do not contribute to the culturally-driven development strategies, giving rise to what may be referred to as a 'movement meritocracy' that ever more subtly integrates desirable and excludes undesirable elements. Interestingly, exactly those segments of the squatter movement that Pruijt feels are least susceptible to co-optation, i.e. the elements that strive for self-management within an alternative subcultural milieu, prove to be most prone to co-optation under these new conditions. In contrast, the segments that Pruijt feels are easily incorporated, i.e. those that criticize urban renewal policies and address the housing shortage, have no value for the local government and hence are excluded. Let me clarify and substantiate these points by revisiting the case of the Amsterdam squatter movement.

Heterogeneity, fragmentation and de-centralization of the Amsterdam squatter movement

Squatting originally was mainly directed against the ruthless urban renewal operations effected by the Amsterdam city council backed by the national government (Smith, 1996). From the beginning, the resistance against these plans, which destroyed the physical as well as social fabric of entire neighbourhoods, was fuelled by the fact that, while people felt the urge to leave the parental home at increasingly younger ages, the government was unable to fulfil its promise to solve the housing shortage. Favourable regulations, making it likely that squats could be saved from eviction for a long period, and a large supply of vacant buildings provided the conditions under which the number of squatters could quickly rise to record numbers. Once the squatting population had grown in size, it produced its own infrastructure of bars, concert halls, regular meetings,

etc. (Pruijt, 2003: 139). The existence of this infrastructure, in turn, fostered a collective 'squat identity'. In some instances, this meant that traditional linkages with neighbourhood organizations and residents waned. The squatter movement distanced itself from these groups partly because it was increasingly capable and willing to violently resist evictions. Towards the end of the 1980s, squatters had established themselves as an autonomous, radical and militant movement that seriously challenged the authority of the (local) government. However, under these surface appearances, the movement also became increasingly diverse (Uitermark, 2004). Some people squatted no longer just because they needed a house or to protest against government policy, but also because they felt that the infrastructure that had emerged in the 1970s provided them with ample opportunities to live their lives in ways that would otherwise have not been possible. As a result, in the 1970s at least two distinct political agendas emerged. First, some squatters continued to see squatting as a means to address (and solve) the housing shortage. The persistence of the housing shortage was considered simultaneously as an example of failing government policies and as an outcome of capitalism, which proved unable to provide decent and affordable housing for poor and young households. Second, some squatters came to see squatting as an alternative way of life. The relative autonomy they enjoyed in squats enabled them to put into practice anarchistic ideas about self-management (e.g. Mamadouh, 1992). Everything ranging from vegetable stores to podiums was produced on the basis of private, voluntary initiative. Squatting in this case became part of a more encompassing lifestyle in which people could (quite literally) distance themselves from mainstream institutions. Squatters who adhere to these ideals supported struggles that revolved around much more than housing alone; squats were hotbeds for struggles against authoritarianism, apartheid, environmental degradation and — more recently — neoliberal globalization (Duyvendak *et al.*, 1992).

For a long time, these agendas existed side-by-side. The infrastructure was fostered by squatters who aspired to create a parallel and alternative society where private initiatives could flourish. In addition, it proved a good springboard for public actions that were primarily meant to change the physical and social fabric of the city. However, occasionally there were also tensions between the two agendas. It became increasingly problematic to reconcile the collective organization that was necessary for public and violent actions with the ideal of private autonomy and self-management. Especially when the local government resorted to ever more violent tactics — the famous 'tanks in the street' (Andriessen, 1981) — the activist or leading segments of the squatter movement responded with a military-like organization. The secrecy and efficiency demanded by the confrontations with the authorities clashed with the ideals of self-management and direct democracy that were fostered in and by the ever more extended infrastructure. In the mid-1980s, the two ideals — one of a public, efficient and militant movement that sought to discredit the local government by stressing its failure to solve the housing shortage and one of a subculture in which self-management and the cultivation of an all-encompassing alternative lifestyle was central — clashed and there were some violent confrontations *within* the movement (Van Duivenvoorden, 2000). The result of this clash was clear: the squatters who wanted to rid the movement of its subcultural features and reposition it as a political force were beaten.

The result of this clash was not a total breakdown of the movement. Instead, it *fragmented*; from now on, attempts to formulate a general agenda, to organize the movement on a national or urban level or to mobilize support for any single cause were greeted with scepticism and sometimes hostility. What emerged instead was a movement that closely responded to the ideal of the rhizome; initiatives that were organized on the level of individual squats or neighbourhoods were horizontally linked together in a loose fashion (Kallenberg, 2001). Only on occasion do these linkages result in a common project, such as the Kalenderpanden, where, for a very brief period of time, different local and ideological agendas fuse to form a powerful yet ephemeral collective project. These kinds of projects, however, are an exception and it is for this reason important to revisit some of Pruijt's remarks about the squatter movement.

For this process of fragmentation of course alters the relationship of the movement to the government. This relationship is the focus of Pruijt as well as post-Fordist theorists and because of this it is important to consider, first, how fragmentation has changed the government-movement interactions in the case of the Amsterdam squatter movement and, second, whether the processes and effects in this case can also be observed elsewhere. I will argue towards the end of this article that this last question can be answered affirmatively, which means that it is necessary to amend post-Fordist theory. Let me, however, first explain how fragmentation in the case of the Amsterdam squatter movement has altered the movement's position within the local polity.

The fragmentation of the movement meant that it became increasingly rare that city- or nation-wide struggles were centred around individual squats. In the 1970s and early 1980s collective projects were developed around only a few squats, but nevertheless they quickly gained major political importance; they were the interface around which the government and the movement positioned themselves vis-à-vis each other. Squatters would normally demand that the squats were legalized and transformed into social housing and the government would decide on the basis of the expected financial and political costs whether such a demand would be heeded.

After the internal clash of the mid-1980s, as large-scale mobilization was no longer an option, the means for the struggle to retain squats shifted from violence to law cases. Since then, it became increasingly true that each squat had its own 'story'. The demands to legalize squats or to cancel demolition plans would be framed in terms of the monumental value of the squatted building, the effect of demolition plans on the social functioning of neighbourhoods or the dodgy character of the owner and his plans.² The goal now is to retain the squat as long as possible and all activities by the squatters — generating public and political support and engaging in juridical fights — are directed towards this end. This does not imply that squatters have lost their ideals but the weakening and fragmentation of the movement have made it unlikely that the political demands take precedence over the need to retain the squat. The basic need to retain the building forces squatters to channel their activist activities, as far as squatting is concerned, into a particular direction. This process has led to the 'particularization' of the squatter movement. Rather than formulating their own agenda, squatters argued that evicting them would contradict official municipal policies or would imply a violation of the law. In the 1970s and 1980s, squatters often used to chant that the legal order of the authorities is not their order; now it sometimes seems as if the reverse is true. However, the movement retained its subversive edge. The major difference was that squatting became part of all kinds of local struggles and was no longer directed to a 'major goal' (such as ending the housing shortage or taking control over urban development). Squatters and the authorities were still in a (completely) antagonistic relationship that now took the form of many small juridical and political battles instead of explosive confrontations. So fragmentation does not necessarily lead to co-optation.

However, co-optation has become increasingly likely since the mid-1990s. To understand the forms and intensity that these processes of co-optation took, we can briefly summarize some major socio-economic changes that indirectly impact on the local political opportunity structure. A first change is discussed extensively in the post-Fordist literature on social movements (but not, strangely, in the general social movement literature), namely increasing interurban competition. While it is still debated whether interurban competition has indeed become more intense (Cox, 1995), or whether it is analytically justifiable at all to talk about competing cities, it is clear that local governments perceive themselves to be in competition with other cities and that this has an effect on the way in which they formulate their policies (Uitermark, 2002). A second and related change, equally well analysed within the post-Fordist social movement literature (and equally neglected in the general literature), is that demand-side economic policies have been discredited as compared to supply-side

2 It happens quite often that squatters occupy buildings that are owned by criminals who use their property to stall their revenues or to undertake quasi-legal or illegal activities.

economic policies. Basic services, such as housing, are neglected by local governments and social movements increasingly have to take it upon themselves to provide those services, which could lead to depoliticization and co-optation (Pruijt, 2003). A third change is hardly discussed in the post-Fordist literature, and that is the growing importance of culture for urban economies. Again, it can be debated whether culture, however defined, has indeed acquired prime significance (Amin *et al.*, 2000), but it is important to recognize that local governments feel this is the case and act accordingly. Thus, apart from services in the strict sense of the word, all kinds of 'softer' qualities attain more importance as a consequence of the interurban competition for mobile capital and affluent households. These qualities are generally referred to with such terms as 'vitality' and include an aesthetically attractive urban fabric, the presence of exclusive shops, etc. This in part explains the immense popularity of Florida's recent book, in which he argues that the 'creative middle classes' may demand much from their living environment but contribute disproportionately to economic growth (Florida, 2002).

These changes have generally escaped the attention of social movement literature, including post-Fordist variants. Indeed, post-Fordist literature gives the impression that social movements increasingly have to take care of demand whilst the government is more concerned with supply. However, I would argue that taking account of these three changes, including, crucially, the last one, is important for understanding government-movement interactions. For these changes imply that we need to reconsider the notions of co-optation, depoliticization, etc. Amongst other things, it means that we would need to analyse how movements are affected by the growing importance of cultural provisions in a situation of intensifying interurban competition. Do movements, in practice or in discourse, (still) object to the exclusionary and marginalizing effects of urban development policies under these conditions or do they in some way contribute to them? In other words, do they change their agenda to meet the demands of government agencies or do they continue to voice the interests of parties that are not taken into account in strategies to make the city even more attractive for the powerful and affluent? In this context, I would argue that some segments of the squatter movement have moved away from the original agenda (affordable housing for everybody) in order to make their demands compatible with the agenda of 'new urban politics', which is no longer sensitive only to the demands of banks and real estate developers but increasingly recognizes the importance of lifestyles and cultural niches for economic performance (Zukin, 1995; Gnadiec, 2000; Latham, 2003). Because of the fragmented nature of the squatter movement, it could happen that some segments were more co-opted than others. This is especially true for artistic squatters. In fact, Pruijt seems to allow this scenario for New York since he recognizes, following Harvey (2000), that squatters fit into 'the postmodern ideal of an interesting cityscape' (Pruijt, 2003: 148). However, a similar situation can be discerned in Amsterdam, with the crucial difference that the local government acknowledged the importance in its policies, which has fundamentally altered the relationship between some segments of the movement and the government, and has led to complex and ambivalent forms of co-optation.

Embracing the artistic squatter

Since the mid-1980s, some squatters have argued that they were not only defending certain rights but also contributed to the cultural, economic and social functioning of the city. Especially during the struggle over Wyers, a squat in the centre of Amsterdam that was evicted in the mid-1980s, some squatters argued that their small shops, voluntary activities, artistic endeavours and cultural manifestations were, in fact, far more important and profitable for the city than the Holiday Inn for which the squat would have to make place. However, the government never heard such pleas or, at any rate, did not heed them. Squatters were still seen by many as a danger to society. In addition,

many squatters in fact objected to the political course of Wyers, arguing that it represented a move away from the core issues (confronting the authorities and addressing the housing shortage). Finally, the government in a sense was not aware of the fact that a hardline neoliberal policy, including the replacement of houses and marginal activities for city functions like a hotel, might at some point work counterproductively.³ This situation changed in the course of the 1990s. On the one hand the fragmentation continued, making it less likely that the movement would stop some squatters from framing their demands in terms of the contribution their squat allegedly makes to the functioning of the city. On the other hand the city council became increasingly aware that the squatters could be an asset for the city and not (only) a burden.

In this context, towards the end of the 1990s a change in the attitude of the government occurred. In 1998 some squatters, to their surprise, found that their plea to save squats because of their importance to the city was suddenly heard. They argued that ongoing commercialization of the city, especially the centre, produced counter-productive results. Some quotes from an online discussion piece authored by Van Duivenvoorden, a member of *De Vrije Ruimte* (The Free Space), an organization of volunteers that was established in response to the evictions of squats, are illustrative:

Flows of information constitute the jugular vein of the postmodern city: whoever cuts them off or lets them silt up, strikes her in the heart. And this is exactly what is happening in Amsterdam.

The postmodern city thrives on mutual contacts and encounters. Otherness and the other are not avoided but welcomed: the confrontation with the existing situation, even resistance, is more in tune with such a city than obedience and conformism.

In her rush to promote economic growth, the city has alienated precisely those groups that could play an important role in the transformation towards a creative city: it has ignored her artists, scared off potential newcomers, frustrated young entrepreneurs and driven out groups on the margins.

We cannot wait for the politicians to move ahead [with regulations to reduce costs for basic services, such as general practitioners]. Because there is already a need for affordable and accessible business spaces, artists' studios and buildings in which residential and business functions are combined . . . [These free spaces] form the productive and social laboratories of the city of tomorrow (Van Duivenvoorden, 2002: n.p., author's translation).

Largely in response to arguments like this, the city council approved the so-called breeding place policy that would help to undo the damage of escalating land rents and privatization. The breeding place policy, as part of a more general policy to create a 'diverse city', suggests that small-scale cultural activities which might disappear as a result of escalating land rents should be preserved because they contribute greatly to the socio-economic development of neighbourhoods and the city as a whole (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2000). Even though Van Duivenvoorden's discussion paper argues that the breeding place policy is no more than a slice of the pie and that we should be concerned with the whole cake, it argues in favour of policies that preserve large squats that provide the qualities and people that this author feels are crucial for the successful socio-economic functioning of postmodern cities. Some important squats, including the Kalenderpanden, tried to use this fund to prevent eviction. The sudden interest of the government also steered the political debate more in the direction of Amsterdam's cultural climate. The interface at which movement and government encountered each

3 Peck and Tickell (2002: 390) analyse how the destructive neoliberalism of the 1980s is transformed into a softer neoliberal project that 'embrace[s] a range of extramarket forms of governance and regulation', including all kinds of community initiatives. The sudden appreciation of the government for the activities in squats can also be seen in light of this development.

other was now constituted by breeding or free places rather than by buildings that have primarily a residential function.

For example, squatters who occupied an old hospital building had argued unsuccessfully that the demolition plans should be cancelled because of the monumental status of the building. When a group of these squatters later occupied a former film academy, they presented themselves as a group of artists under the name 'First Aid with Art'. Even though the squatters could have been evicted immediately on legal grounds,⁴ the group's claims have been acknowledged and it has acquired a lease contract as well as subsidies from the breeding place policy.

It would be too harsh to simply say that these squatters have been co-opted; the film academy not only concentrates many artistic activities but also functions as a centre for activists. None of the squatters I have spoken to said that legalization led to an immediate change in the nature of the activities within these squats. Some suggested that the breeding place policy in fact promoted squatting because it has become less likely that squats are immediately evicted. So, arguably, these squatters just try to retain their building in order to continue their subversive activity.

Incidents like these may be rare and ambiguous, yet they convey a dynamic that is of major political and academic importance. For squatters here *do* become providers of services that cannot be provided by the local government. In fact, they present themselves more and more as service providers and, as such, act in line with governance coalitions whose primary aim is to promote economic growth in Amsterdam. Exactly the kind of subversive squatters who want to manage their own living environment, far from being immune to co-optation as Pruijt feels, suddenly have a very strong appeal to the local government and *vice versa*. Moreover, these squatting actions fit with a more general — and in my view disturbing — trend to make an ever more accurate distinction between 'attractive' and 'unattractive' groups. Squatters present themselves as harbingers of the socio-cultural environment that Florida and others deem important for the creative middle classes and therefore cannot address the fact that the local government is already increasingly responsive to the needs of these groups whilst (less artistic) marginal groups are increasingly excluded as a result of the abolishment of social housing and escalating retail and transport prices. Like some investors, squatters threaten to leave Amsterdam and move to Rotterdam (Amsterdam's principal rival, which has also recently discovered the virtues of cultural activity) if the city council does not meet their wishes. Robodock, a squatter festival that explicitly promotes alternative lifestyles yet is attractive to a wide audience, took place for the first time in Rotterdam in 2003, where it was received with open arms (and subsidies) by the local government.⁵

These developments within the movement do not automatically lead to internal clashes. Because of the fragmented nature of the squatter movement, many political agendas can coexist without leading to conflicts or antagonisms (Uitermark, 2004). However, some incidents have taken place that point to tensions within the movement, giving support to the thesis in the post-Fordist literature that fragmentation can result in intra- or inter-movement tensions. For example, one real estate developer who supports the idea of breeding places and has indicated that he is willing to co-finance them, was pelted with eggs and feathers by squatters who labelled themselves 'The Rebellious Poultry'. It is the occasion that is especially interesting in this case: the developer had

4 Under Dutch regulations, squatters can be evicted immediately when a building has been in use during the last twelve months. If a building has not been used in this period, the owner will have to take the squatters to court if he wants to have them evicted. The owner then has to demonstrate that he urgently needs the building for business or personal purposes.

5 Again, this is not to suggest that these squatters have simply been co-opted. In fact, moving to Rotterdam might be the most effective way to criticize the politics of the city of Amsterdam with regard to alternative lifestyles and art forms. The point is, however, that these segments have effectively become part of urban development strategies, which would have been unthinkable just ten years ago.

been invited by people from De Vrije Ruimte, who had squatted a former store, to engage in discussions about the commercialization of Amsterdam. Another example: in one squat I saw an inscription on the wall that ironically stated that the recent developments within the squatter movement, i.e. the emergence of the breeding place policy, had urged the residents to consider giving out stocks. These criticisms are typical of the way in which some segments of the movement denounce the line chosen by those who are sometimes referred to pejoratively as 'breeding chickens', i.e. squatters who debate with the government and try to legalize their squat with money from the breeding place fund. Regardless of how one evaluates these criticisms, they indicate the importance of the changes in the political opportunity structure that have taken place and that make it increasingly likely that some segments of the movement are in some way coopted (without necessarily losing their subversive identity) while others continue to pursue a radical line of action.

Conclusion

Squatter: I don't understand why old buildings, which have already been written off, cannot be used. Can anybody tell me that?

Stadig (alderman for housing and spatial planning): Ah, well, that is capitalism.

[public laughs]

Chairman: Yes, that has to do with demand and supply, with speculation and interests. But we are not going to talk about that now. We are now going to look for a solution (Fragment from a public discussion that took place in the Kalenderpanden, approximately one month before the eviction).

It would be wrong to give the impression that the Amsterdam squatter movement is being completely co-opted. Today there are still activist squatters who squat primarily to solve and address the housing shortage. When recently a member of parliament proposed to make the squatting of commercial buildings impossible, a small but significant number of squatters publicly squatted an office to criticize the fact that an abundance of office space exists side-by-side with an immense housing shortage. If they resonate with public concerns, actions such as this may again change the interface of the confrontation between the movement and the government by once more prioritizing the housing shortage rather than Amsterdam's cultural climate.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to appreciate that squatting and the Amsterdam squatter movement have changed qualitatively over the last decade or so. Thus, the point is not to condemn squatters because they have been co-opted or to praise them for their subversive attitude, but to understand how different segments of the movement respond to a changing political-economic context. In this context, it is remarkable that the attitude of the government is becoming increasingly discriminatory. Some segments of the movement are no longer considered a threat but are regarded as assets for the city. These groups have retained their critical edge in many cases. The legalized squats in fact combine cultural with political activities and provide spaces to groups that struggle for animal rights and against neoliberal globalization — co-optation in some respects is not necessarily antithetical to radicalism in other respects. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that these squatters: (1) deliberately provide services that have been neglected or cannot be provided by the local government; (2) have adopted the discourse of interurban competition and the new cultural economy to support their claims; and (3) support, albeit from a distance, coalitions that have traditionally been regarded as the arch enemies of the squatters. Other segments continue to fight for universal rights but are not in a position to bargain with the local government because they are no longer able or willing to organize themselves in such a way that violent action becomes possible. In fact, even though only a (small) segment of the squatter movement aspires to create breeding places (or free places, the preferred term of the

squatters), the debate about breeding places has dominated the political discussion for a long time,⁶ much to the dismay of some segments in the squatter movement.

These conclusions, at least to some extent, contradict Pruijt's assessment of the Amsterdam squatter movement. Perhaps more importantly, they also give reason to revisit some elements of the literature that Pruijt referred to, i.e. the post-Fordist literature. Like Pruijt, this literature has so far not investigated how the increasing importance of culture to economic performance has affected government-movement interactions. So far this literature has made it seem as if movements are either co-opted and become service providers of basic provisions or continue their militant struggle.

My discussion of the Amsterdam case has shown, first, that movements which are decentralized and fragmented can respond to changing circumstances in a differentiated manner: some segments are simply co-opted, some enter into intense but tense relationships with the government, while still others continue to operate outside of governance structures. In this context, simple dichotomies (co-opted versus radical) can no longer capture the dynamics of movements that previously were, or were considered as, coherent wholes: different elements of a movement develop in diverging directions. Second, the analysis points to the fact that, due to changes in the political economy of cities, some segments of movements that were previously considered a threat may now be regarded as an asset. This is particularly true of the segments of the movement that are considered to somehow contribute to the cultural economy of the city. As such 'soft factors' as culture gain more importance, it may become increasingly important to investigate whether movements may become co-opted in some ways while retaining their subversive identity. So far, post-Fordist theory, and other social movement theory, has not sufficiently allowed for that possibility.

This is worrisome, since arguably the case of squatters does not stand isolated. In Amsterdam alone many other examples can be cited. For example, some segments and expressions of the gay movement, subculture or scene, have also recently been recognized as being of extraordinary value for local growth strategies. At the same time that the municipality of Amsterdam is withdrawing funds from organizations that represent the interests of gays and bisexuals, it celebrates their presence with a huge Canal Parade. While the Canal Parade is subversive in many ways — it celebrates exactly the kind of eroticism that conservative minded people reject and serves as a radical demand for more tolerance towards gay sexuality — it nevertheless fits with the socio-economic growth strategy of the municipality. Like some squatters, the Canal Parade is threatening to move to Rotterdam because of trouble obtaining permits for playing loud music — what previously was a subversive act has now become part of a strategy to promote the city of Amsterdam. The attitude of the municipality towards immigrants can also be mentioned as an example. On the one hand, leftist and religious organizations are increasingly considered as irrelevant or dangerous and their already meagre subsidies are being subjected to ever stricter regulations. On the other hand, more generous funding is granted to organizations that promote interaction between different ethnic groups and that organize activities that somehow contribute to the attractiveness of the city — attractive, that is, for those who do not prefer the activities of religious and leftist organizations and who appreciate a cosmetic diversity.

In each of these cases, groups that were previously considered as coherent wholes are now broken up into parts. Each part is evaluated according to the logic of the new urban politics and is rewarded or disciplined as such. In all cases, a process of 'unmilitant particularization' (compare Harvey, 1996) is evident: as some segments of the

6 The proposed anti-squat legislation prompted other segments of the movement to become more active and stimulated the media to focus on the housing shortage as well as housing activists. Under these circumstances, the segments of the movement for whom housing is still a central concern have moved back into the public eye, while at the same time the debate about breeding places is still going on. Because I am concerned here primarily with the structural conditions that make it increasingly likely that some segments will be co-opted, I ignore for now the effect of the proposed legislation and its impact on the squatter movement.

movement or cultural groups are granted special incentives by the government, it becomes increasingly difficult for the remainder of the movements to mobilize resources and to claim universal rights. What we see is the emergence of a movement meritocracy: the way in which the local polity delivers incentives follows an increasingly discriminatory pattern, allowing some movements access to the governance structures while at the same time withholding others. I suspect that these processes are not particular to Amsterdam and there is an urgent need for post-Fordist and other social movement theory to investigate what the consequences for social movements and government-movement interactions are of these recent trends towards softer neoliberal urban policies.

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