Art squats, artistic critique and resistance: Between recuperation and obliteration*

Abstract: Art squats have been a characteristic form of the development and diffusion of counter-culture since the 1960s. Their function is twofold, engaging in both art and social critique, and as a form of direct action in each field, resisting both capitalist property relations and the institutions of the art market. However, those functions may be displaced by others as a result of the effects of art squats themselves, such as neighbourhood gentrification. The changing cultural politics of the embodied critical practice of art squats are traced through three European examples. This paper follows Critical Cultural Studies in reading cultural practice as text to engage critically with Boltanski and Chiapello’s dismissal of artistic critique, and also problematising the alternative autonomist assumption that art squats unify the projects of art and social revolution by showing how their strategies can be subject to recuperation, while linking the strategies developed in art squats to contemporary practices of resistance.

Keywords: art squats, resistance, critical theories, artistic practice

Introduction

If the 1990s saw the re-appearance of critical art practice in the public sphere through a re-engagement with radical politics and a revival of art squats, the first decade of the new millennium saw the fetishisation of creativity in service to capital accumulation¹, producing the problems of how to maintain radical and innovative creativity under pressures of recuperation through projects which enrolled artistic imagination and energy in biopolitical governance². In that decade,

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¹ A working draft of this paper was presented to the European Consortium for Political Research General Conference, University of Reykjavik, 25–27 August 2011.
Michael S. Drake

Culturally innovative art practice was able to make a self-compromising claim to social legitimation and access to state funding through its role as a catalytic factor in urban regeneration. With the onset of economic recession and the political response, the very continuity of such art practice comes into question as state funding disappears and those spaces that opened up on the leading edge of neo-liberal cycles of neglect and regeneration become subject to state repression acting in corporate interest. Following the avant-garde of the later twentieth century, the art squat as a nomadic, temporarily autonomous social space is corporeal, embodied, consisting as much in performative lifestyle and the production of new subjectivities as in the production of art objects. The art squat has thus played a major part in reconstructing the social and self identity of the artist and the social milieu of ‘art’ in recent decades. Through a comparative study of art squats including Tacheles in Berlin and Schijnheilig in Amsterdam, this paper questions their future between governmental recuperation and repressive obliteration, but also links the strategies developed in art squats to contemporary practices of resistance.

Methodologically, this paper follows the precepts of cultural studies as developed by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the 1970s and 80s, which overcame the dichotomy of sociology between theoretical and empirical work, by reading cultural practice as a text. In such a perspective, cultural production itself (rather than the usual focus on the ‘works’ produced) appears as an articulation of social and political resistance, particularly when contextualised in its relations to hegemonic ideology underpinning strategies of capital accumulation and political consensus. As articulations in and of themselves, cultural practices are not reducible to economistic notions of ideology, an understanding which the CCCS had drawn from its engagement with Gramsci and which tallied with the expanded definition of ‘the political’ pioneered by Claude Lefort and taken up by Chantal Mouffe. The focus of this paper is the effective affinity of radical art practice and urban anti-capitalist resistance.

Given the recognition accorded to the role of art squats in kick-starting a process of regeneration which can eventually result in the gentrification of a locality by inadvertently effecting a sharp increase in property values from a very low base to produce opportunities for profitable redevelopment, it is surprising that the second decade of the twenty-first century has seen a reversal of tolerance of art squats by both corporate developers and local authorities across Europe. This paper explores the politics of art squats through three examples in order to attempt to explain this apparent contradiction.

Of these three examples, Telepathic Heights in Bristol was effectively evicted in the events described below, in April 2011, though a single occupant remained

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under a state of siege from police for a further month. The art collective Schijnheilig was evicted from its occupation of the otherwise disused ex-University of Amsterdam Passeerdersgracht building by police on order of the Mayor of Amsterdam on 5 July 2011. The art squat Tacheles remained open in some form until September 2012 in the face of increasingly aggressive pressure from developers which forced its eventual closure in 2012.

Telepathic Heights, Tesco and riot

The widespread riots and looting across the UK in August 2011 (often metropolitanised as the ‘London Riots’) attracted massive interpretive attention, but they were preceded in April of that year by localised riot in the Stokes Croft area of Bristol, where resistance to police eviction of a squat opposite a new Tesco supermarket store turned into a riot against the police and the supermarket chain. The Telepathic Heights squat was occupied by people who styled themselves as artists. The appearance of subsequent Banksy-style graffiti of a mock-Tesco ‘Value’ brand Molotov cocktail indicates the strong art association of the squat. The closure of the squat was made on grounds of public safety, but the dangerous and violent police tactics used in the closure (including driving cars at speed toward crowds to scatter them) incited a public riot which mobilised networks and drew more people in from across the city in protest against the police eviction operation and against the Tesco development.

There was clearly more going on here than simply the politics of police tactics or of squatting, significant though those are. The property had lain derelict for years before the squatters moved in and began to undertake repairs, but the Council had recently compulsorily purchased the building in conjunction with Tesco’s development. The police seem to have been concerned with more than the simple eviction of squatters, and in the following week closed down an itinerant film screening unit, the Occasional Cinema, who tried to screen locally-recorded

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6 Tesco are known to put such conditions on their development investment in some locations.


footage of the eviction and riot\(^9\) confiscating the screen and blockading a private house where the cinematicians attempted to show the footage\(^10\).

The August 2011 ‘London Riots’ have been framed in political debate in policy terms which probably meant little to most of those involved. Though represented in social democratic terms as a response to conservative and liberal cuts in public spending, the riots were actually sparked by police attempts to cover up their unwarranted shooting to death of a young man in Tottenham, London. Where reportage interviewed participants in the subsequent riots throughout the country, they expressed the consistent theme of protest against police surveillance and harassment of alternative lifestyles, rather than against ‘the cuts’. I want to suggest that what is happening with art squats in the current context of economic recession is part and parcel of the same struggle, a struggle not over the distribution of resources, but over the possibilities of living differently, a struggle for the *possibilities* of life itself, whether as artist or underclass, outside the societal control circuitry of commodification and surveillance.

Art squats: transversal or contradictory?

I first want to clarify what it is that we are talking about when we talk about ‘art squats’. Art squats consist of self-defined artists (often unrecognised by contemporary art institutions, most notably the art market) occupying unused, usually derelict or abandoned buildings, and turning them into artist-run open studios for a range of cultural and creative events. There are therefore two intrinsic political effects or functions of art squats, a conjunction many art squatters are very aware of and which situates them at the very centre of recent debates around labour and creativity, the changing nature of capitalism and the parameters of the political\(^11\). Firstly, they challenge given notions of art, and ultimately challenge the authority of institutions, including the art market, to determine the cultural. In that sense, they are the inheritors of the avant-garde of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Because of the wider function of art in capitalist society, as the specialist sphere or ghetto into which the imagination was consigned to enable the

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\(^11\) *Critique of Creativity*...
mass discipline of industrialisation, art squats also have the effect of embodying exemplary and actual performance of alternative arrangements for living, which includes constituting their own decision-making processes in order to ensure the conditions for free artistic development as experimental laboratories in political and social order. That aspect of embodiment is important, because art squats are usually open studios, in which the production of art is supposedly demystified, performed by the squatters, imbuing art squats with a legitimacy and authenticity that enables them to escape the cynicism which inflects public perceptions of more straightforwardly ideological squats. These loose structures also mean that squats generally are often open to infiltration by relatively destructive social forces such as the drugs trade, by agent provocateurs and by simply mischievous wreckers, but that is the cost of the open door policy which is therefore at once their legitimation and their vulnerability.

Moore\textsuperscript{12} provides a survey of art squats in the twenty-first century, but his account is highly personal and concentrates on detail rather than analysis. Moore is essentially a curator, an organiser, an administrator of arts, and as such, his focus is on the ‘works’ of artists, not on art practice. Moore’s curatorial role produces a perspective which perceives elite art networks, intersecting and overlapping with similarly elite networks of political activists. However, a critical reading of his account shows how those networks are haphazardly contingent, an effect of rather than the source of the social relation between art and resistance that is embodied in the art squat and the art of occupation.

It is not the art that is produced which differentiates art squats from other artist-run spaces, or the networks in which they are engaged which differentiate them from other squats (though they share with those the same element of direct action against the cycle of permissive dereliction and destructive redevelopment characterising the capitalist urban property market). It is rather their performative and embodied element which differentiates them in both senses. Regardless of any overt ideological stance, the social condition of the squat itself as a necessary means of finding work/practice space for extra-institutional and pre- or non-marketable artistic activity, inevitably constitutes art squats as direct action against capitalist property relations. The elective stance of this second, anti-capitalist function thus arises from a social basis, from the needs of artists to practice art. In this sense, art squats are inherently resistant in the sense that Caygill has explored\textsuperscript{13}.

In their analysis of the new (now the old?) capitalism that has developed since the 1970s, Boltanski and Chiapello seek to draw a line between art and social cri-

\textsuperscript{12} A.W. Moore, \textit{Occupation Culture: Art and Squatting in the City From Below}, Wivenhoe/New York/Port Watson 2015.

tique, arguing that the two represent the struggles of two entirely different class fractions. They argue that the apparent convergence of these struggles in ’68 and in subsequent new social movements is illusory since the two are fundamentally incompatible, representing distinct ideological expressions of exclusive social classes. Artistic critique raises (petty bourgeois) demands of ‘freedom, autonomy and authenticity’ and social critique (proletarian) demands of ‘solidarity, security and equality’.

Boltanski and Chiapello trace a genealogy of artistic critique passing from artists, to students, to a much-observed but ill-defined ‘creative class’ of media, culture, finance and information technology workers, while in their analysis, social critique has passed from the working class to a wider and equally ill-defined fraction defined by exclusion from the gains of neoliberal capitalist postindustrial development that have benefitted the former. Lazzarato has identified Boltanski and Chiapello’s resentment of the exceptional moment of ’68 and of the way they see it as having distracted the working-class movement, a normative position from which it is easy to infer the collusion of the ‘creative class’ with neoliberalism, in just the way that postmodernism was naively critiqued as an expression of neoliberal capitalism. Embedded in this is nostalgia for the clear-cut ideological oppositions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Diken has noted, this results in a reduction of social critique to a moralised sense of injustice at the rate of exploitation and the retreat of political demands from the project of social revolution to calls for profit-sharing.

While Lazzarato deals with Boltanski and Chiapello’s analysis in terms of their class analysis, a range of other work engages the concatenation of art and social critique in the form of material occupations. Chris Kraus has documented how strategies of occupation by radical artists and their making-meaningful of marginal spaces risk implosion into lifestyle, as appears to have happened with Telepathic Heights. On the other hand, Moore provides insight into how capital pressures artists to put cultural production into the service of capital development, but he also shows how cultural producers can resist. Instead of an elective affinity of artistic critique and new capitalism, Moore shows us a politics, but his curatorial perspective can only identify it, and sees in it a virtue of artists per se, replicating the idea of art as something above and beyond everyday life.

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14 Artistic critique being the critique of alienation and the lack of creativity in capitalist society and social critique being the critique of economic production and distribution in capitalist society.
16 M. Lazzarato, ‘The Misfortunes of ‘Artistic Critique’ and of Cultural Employment’, [in:] Critique of Creativity...
20 A.W. Moore, op. cit.
Boltanski and Chiapello seek to separate art and social critique in order to restore the hegemony of the latter on the left, but art squats seem to represent a conjunction of these two moments, and as such, embody another struggle, for alternative ways of living, and a politics of the possibilities of life itself, which remains invisible to Boltanski and Chiapello. Gerald Raunig\textsuperscript{21} has traced a genealogy of such ‘transversal’ struggles in which art and social revolution appear in ‘concatenations’, a series of historical moments which appear as convergences of separate tracks, but which recur spontaneously, as though their potentiality were always latent.

Institutionally of course, the two remain almost always distinct, but Raunig is not tracing ‘art’ as canonised in art histories and ossified in galleries, or social critique as demarcated and normalised in institutional social democratic parties. Rather, this moment of concatenation is embodied in the art squat as a spatio-temporal-human apparatus or machine in which cultural production becomes integral with alternative forms of life\textsuperscript{22}.

**Kunsthaus Tacheles**

Tacheles in particular functioned in this way\textsuperscript{23}. The building has a history of its own from its construction in the first decade of the twentieth century, but the large ex-department store was derelict when the Berlin Wall came down. It had been squatted initially by east Berlin artists, when it was used mainly as a musician’s rehearsal space, with a cinema on the first floor. In 1990 its final phase of existence began when the east Berliners were joined by artists from the West during a hiatus in control of Mitte by east Berlin police and its takeover by forces organised from the West, forming the Tacheles Initiative of Artists, saving the building from demolition, undertaking repairs and customising it\textsuperscript{24}.

Given the ages of some of the artists involved by my visit in 2009, there had clearly been a shifting population over the years, but at least some of the eighty-plus artists in residence then had been there since the early 90s. The squat developed a cafe which also held alternative music events, and a cinema, but consistently functioned mainly as studio/exhibition and rehearsal/performance space for artists. A similar pattern was followed by a number of other squats which were


established in the Mitte area, though by 2010 only Tacheles remained, increasingly incongruous amidst gentrified galleries, restaurants, residential apartment buildings and coffee and gift shops. Tacheles thus became a historic emblem of the Berlin squatter scene. Although there are squats in other parts of the city, Tacheles came to provide a large part of the tourist attraction of Mitte, as the squat was listed in Berlin city guides and became a popular stop on sightseeing coach and cycle tours, rendering the artists’ embodied practice of alternative lifestyle an inadvertent historical re-enactment. Boym describes how Tacheles even by 1999 was clearly a tourist attraction, but one she calls an ‘antimuseum’. Boym recounts how in 1997 Tacheles successfully resisted an investor’s attempt to gentrify the squat on the model of Montmarte or Soho, but new developers subsequently appealed to the owners, with new projects for what is now, partly thanks to the effect of Tacheles itself in revitalising Mitte from abandoned dereliction into a cultural enclave, a premium site for corporate development.

Despite its retention of some gallery conventions, Tacheles opened up art practice, dispelling the mythology and mystification of art production, and challenged institutional and market hegemony in its definition of ‘art’. Much of the art work produced in Tacheles, whether performance, sound or visual artefacts, could not easily find a home elsewhere. Since Boym’s book, Tacheles appears to have undergone a revival through the association of its aesthetics with the ambient art and ‘street’ culture of the new millennium, which recovered and recuperated for commercial use the whole range of styles, DIY aesthetics and radical representational practices of the counter-culture from the 1960s–90s, a DIY culture which Tacheles had come to represent in durable form. Thus, in just the same way that ‘indie’ music and rock festivals have become commercialised and recommodified in the new millennium, so Tacheles became ‘cool’ again, but in ways that unavoidably compromised its embodiment of the art/revolution concatenation, so this art squat remained what it had always been, but in remaining, became what it never intended to be.

In the second decade of the twenty first century, Tacheles was again reconfigured. A number of artists and the cinema and café took their share of a reported €1M payoff to leave, and the squat entered a distinctly defensive, besieged phase in the face of aggressive moves by the owners of the site HSH Nordbank, which included the demolition of the garden and outdoor exhibition, workspace and café and the erection of a 3m-high wall blocking access to the squat from Oranien-

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26 S. Boym, op. cit., p. 207.
Art squats, artistic critique and resistance

burgerstrasse on the grounds of public safety. Changes in function and now defensiveness in situ was reflected in public perceptions of the collective’s artistic endeavour as itself repetitive re-enactment\(^ {29}\). However, video and photographic footage recorded during this defensive phase shows the squat in this final phase was still popular to visitors, still holding events, and still housing a high concentration of artist practitioners loyal to the self-governing ethos of the original initiative and determined to stay. In what was to be the final year of the squat, eighty artists still remained\(^ {30}\).

The squat had actually increased its presence in the locality, in the city and with a mediated global public by undertaking an intensive campaign of protests and online activity, gaining radio airtime as the subject of documentaries (e.g. BBC Radio 4 *Crossing Continents*, 21 April 2011), and was featured in newspaper and magazine articles. Even after its demise, the ‘legend’ of the squat and its collective was maintained for a while in virtual form on a number of websites, the information society’s form of collective memory. In the final phase, spokesperson Martin Reiter had utilised a wide range of arguments as leverage, ranging from the squat’s economic function as a tourist attraction for the locality and the city to that of its value in terms of cultural regeneration and civic culture\(^ {31}\). In the face of its commercial reconstitution as a tourist attraction, with up to 300,000 visitors a year, Tacheles was thus using the alternative forms of capital it had accrued in the years of its existence to reconstruct itself as an icon\(^ {32}\). However, even the Save Tacheles T-shirts produced by the Tacheles Foundation (a campaign group established to keep the place open and true to its original ethos) have something of a tourist trophy about them.

Another venture furthermore aligned Tacheles with the critical spectrum of the institutional art world, as the collective garnered international publicity by offering to house the asylum-seeking Contemporary Art Museum CAM, Casoria, Naples, and its director Antonio Manfredi, after death threats and vandalism followed their exhibitions exposing the Camora and ‘the problems of integration of immigrants’\(^ {33}\) (Casoria Contemporary Art Museum 2011). This set a new precedent for Tacheles as a deliberate and conscious engagement with the institutional


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art world. It also raised the issue of Tacheles’ (and CAM Casoria’s) future to the level of international relations, invoking the politics of asylum, human rights and justice. Tacheles’ offer to Manfredi was ironically reversed after the squats’ closure, and Tacheles will now survive only as an inert permanent exhibit in Casoria (CAMblog n.d.), becoming an object in the context of the art world which it had always resisted in its practice.

Schijnheilig in Passeerdersgracht and the Vondelbunker

I first encountered the art activism collective Schijnheilig at the Passeerdersgracht squat as a guest of the 2009 ASCA conference, for which Schijnheilig hosted a party and short film screening. Unlike Tacheles, Schijnheilig has had previous locations and functions as a ‘wandering collective’ art and cultural centre. However, the collective then occupying Passeerdersgracht were not themselves artists. Their aims are less direct than those of Tacheles, as prospective facilitators rather than practitioners.

Schijnheilig makes space available for artists to allow them to do more than simply ‘show’ their art. Schijnheilig wants open and mutually cooperative relations. The site also serves as a working and meeting place. Artists who will exhibit in the exhibition space, for example, become gallery co-owners during the temporary exhibition. Schijnheilig, How we work. Retrieved from: http://www.schijnheilig.org/schijnheilig/ (31 July 2014).

Taking up the practice of the art squat and situating themselves in a genealogy that includes 60s hippy, 70s punk and 80s/90s Berlin-style counter-culture, Schijnheilig see the creation of free space as an imperative precondition of free art practice. Schijnheilig thus highlights the assertion of the right to squat on condition of providing space for cultural activity. In terms of the cultural politics of art squats, this is a defensive stance. The squat becomes about the defence of the right to squat and its revolutionary art function as a performative experiment in living is displaced, becoming a means for social action and no longer its end. In this move, art is no longer inherently political, but is again reified, as in mainstream arts, and mystified as something that other people (those somehow called artists) do. The fate of the Passeerdersgracht squat clarifies why Tacheles continued to emphasise its essential art function, and why Schijnheilig’s separation of the moment of artistic and social critique embodied in the art squat reduces a strategy to a tactic, leaving it exposed and vulnerable because it resituates struggle back within the context of institutional politics, as the politics of distribution within existing social

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relations, identities and cultural conventions, effectively foreclosing on possibilities of thinking and enacting alternative ways to live.

Schijnheilig subsequently occupied a disused 1947 nuclear-fallout shelter in Amsterdam’s Vondelpark, operating its cultural activities and interventions from the Vondelbunker as, ‘a fairly accessible and non-commercial meeting place where music, theater, poetry, visual arts, lectures, activism interact and merge together’\textsuperscript{35}. The bunker is under lease to Stichtung Nulpunt, ‘concerned with the preservation and development of historic buildings in the city of Amsterdam’ for cultural activities\textsuperscript{36}. Unlike Passerdersgracht, the bunker’s location in the Vondelpark offers some refuge from the aggressive advance of corporate interest on autonomously recovered urban space, but thereby loses the element of direct social action. Schijnheilig thus oscillates through successive relocations between the two moments of art and social critique, but without integrating them as Tacheles had. Tacheles became became inadvertently reconfigured into a recuperative function as a tourist attraction, contravening its original intention, partly as a consequence of its very durability, inherent in its spatial stasis and its consequent developing relation to its particular locale. On the other hand, the nomadic form of Schijnheilig provides flexibility and adaptability to changing opportunities for resistance. However, both the facilitative function and the nomadic form of Schijnheilig has also lent itself to other forms of recuperation.

Art on the development (shop)front

Some of the recent developments in the relation between art practice and urban space further illustrate how revolutionary art strategies of the radical left can become appropriated for the very purposes which the genealogy of those practices once opposed.

The incursion of counter-culture into mass culture through the pop appropriation of artistic social experiment began as far back as the 1960s, with radicalising interventions such as the involvement of the performance artist Bruce Lacey with the films of the Beatles\textsuperscript{37}, and was renewed in the 1980s when independent record labels such as Factory in Manchester established themselves as broader cultural umbrellas for innovation, utilising contemporary art styles in their DIY art and culture production in successful competition with corporate record companies. As the merging of commerce and cultural creativity extended from music into other

areas, this practice eventually became the Situationist strategy of détournement in reverse, adopting the style and spectacle of DIY popular culture and expressions of radical protest for commercial purposes, even enrolling the artists themselves, whether willingly or unwittingly, by resituating their art practice in commercial context. Recognition of the regenerative effects of art squats on urban localities played a major part in this process. The most visible example of this has been the practice of commissioning graffiti artists to paint the hoardings around development sites, appropriating the visual aesthetic and imitating the regenerative function of the art squat as a cultural cover for speculative development, without the inconvenience of the inherently resistant art squat.

ACME, set up in the 1970s to create opportunities for cheap art practice space by negotiating licences and short-term lets for artists of unmarketable property in exchange for basic repair and maintenance, provide an example of the recuperation of the facilitative function espoused by Schijnheilig. Their website carries the statement from Boris Johnson, then Mayor of London:

Artists have contributed to the international reputation of the City Fringe and East End as an artistic centre, transforming formerly derelict buildings and playing a key role in the cultural and social regeneration of neighbourhoods.

ACME thus maintain a clear distance between art and social critique, but the convergence of the two appeared in the properties they had been managing and among the artists they had accommodated in Claremont Road in the path of the M11 road development, when the artists stayed on after the expiration of their lets in 1987, in alliance with anti-road protesters and the local community, constituting a protest art squat that endured until final demolition in 1995, but which had by then played a significant part in resisting in the runaway UK road building programme of the time. More recently, ACME have been engaged in ensuring permanent studio space is built into new developments, so the tables have turned and artists have become consumers of development, promoting the marketisation of art space (National Federation of Artist’s Studio Providers 2011) integrated with development which gentrifies areas of cheap but inhabitable structures that hitherto have offered refuge for art practice. The effect of this alliance with de-

39 J.B. Slater, A. Iles, op. cit., p. 20.
41 Slater and Iles list other sources of engagement, some inadvertent and some strategic, between art and development through state governance, from the innovative practices of Joseph Beuys’ participatory ecological scheme Seven Thousand Oaks, through to the viral merging of ambient street culture with ambient advertising in the late 90s and the new millennium. It seems increasingly difficult for art to maintain critical integrity in an increasingly mediated society where art practice becomes indistinguishable from everyday life that is itself increasingly incorporated through the

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Art squats, artistic critique and resistance

Development also re-privatises art practice, restoring a monopoly on art and culture to its institutions.

For the critical Freee collective ‘The economic function of public art is to increase the value of private property’.\(^{42}\) However, even such explicitly critical analytical art-making does not always escape recuperation. Though they have refused commissions which would compromise their critical dimension, Freee have participated in engagement with urban regeneration strategies in the city of Hull under the auspices of the local architectural consultants ARC, undertaking a project to record citizen’s accounts of their passive, consumerist experiences of civic architecture\(^{43}\), a project that has subsequently taken on the function of legitimation for the quasi-democracy of the focus group era, providing local government and developers with populist soundbite prompts for architectural and cultural investment (ARC n.d.).

Re recuperation of the nomadic element of Schijnheilig can also be traced in the biopolitical employment of simulated art squats to engineer environmental aestheticisation, a sense of community and social inclusion in positive co-ordination with speculative development\(^{44}\). This project extended across the UK, promoted by the Arts Council and funded by local government, to install artwork in disused spaces, particularly in shop fronts. The initiative came into its own in the context of economic recession, as visual and moral camouflage for dereliction, but also has the effect of institutionally pre-empting the rationale of art squats. Artists now have a place in a future that is closed, pre-prepared, temporary, and which safely takes the consumable forms we know and are induced to love (the shop window display), though everyone is welcome to come and see the spectacle. Pop-up galleries do link art to social context, but the form in which that link is made now excludes critique, reducing the ideal of revolution to an iconic spectacle and restoring the false promise of consumption in the very vehicle which was intended to resist its glossy allure.

Pop-up galleries appear not in areas of dereliction, as Tacheles did originally, but where they can have a morally uplifting effect on a passively pre-existent community. Art in such settings becomes restored to institutional regulation and presented as a simulation of the commodity, drawn into service with speculative development and deployed as an instrument of legitimation through the very strategies invented in the art squat as a concatenation of free art and social critique. Pop-up galleries, as simulations of the art squat, simultaneously reappropriate

media of information technology into auto-destructive cycles of production and consumption. ‘If power has become life-like, it has also become art-like’ (J.B. Slater, A. Iles, op. cit., p. 40).


\(^{43}\) J.B. Slater, A. Iles, op. cit., pp. 84–86.

and redetermine the possibility of alternative life from its radically embodied and enacted openness in the art squat, which encouraged everyone to do it for themselves, recapturing that resistant potentiality in an insulated container. Under the sign of luxury apartment development, the displayed work of art in the pop-up gallery confronts its audience with the possibility of other ways of living, but in the form of an intervention from outside, by people different from those for whom it is provided, who evidently could not do this for themselves.

Conclusion

Pop-up galleries are thus a function of the foreclosure of potential for living differently in the reduction of everyday life to production and consumption which is ongoing across Europe, albeit at different speeds in different nation states and localities, undiminished even in the depth of global economic recession. The revival of social democratic arguments over the strategy for economic renewal merely represents the left continuum of an ideological hegemony in which quality and potentiality of life is systematically disregarded in thought and degraded in practice in favour of the pleasures and desires of consumption. Resistance to this extensive ideological normativity is still relatively inarticulate, but arises in multiple forms, from the self-immolation of Mohammed Al-Bouazizi and the Arab Spring to the Occupy movement, and most recently in protest against the prevailing orders’ complicity with corporate interest from Turkey to Brazil.

The eviction of Schijnheilig from Passeerdersgracht effectively indicated the end of the long tradition of squatting in Amsterdam, and indeed throughout Western Europe, originating in the post war condition of chronic housing shortage and widespread property dereliction, through the 60s and 70s ‘artful’ social experiments and into the 1980s defence of alternative lifestyle enclaves against municipal and corporate plans for the destructive redevelopment of historic areas that had been colonised by the counter culture. Netherlands law was changed in 2010, eliminating the quasi-legal status that could be obtained for squatters, effectively rendering the hitherto legalisable practice illegal. This resulted in riots in Amsterdam and Nijmegen and a petrol bomb attack on a police station in Amsterdam when the law came into force in October. According to Schijnheilig, the Mayor of Amsterdam said that he would not be enforcing the ban, but subsequent


ly reversed this stance, perhaps under pressure from other authorities. Arguments that this was a cultural centre were easily undone by Schijnheilig’s self-presentation and the accusation that they only attracted undesirable elements engaging in ‘kraak tourism’. This apparent turnaround in Dutch policy, however, has to be set in the context of a Europe-wide phenomenon, in which successive national and regional authorities have succumbed to both the demands of big business, their promise of jobs and investment, and a fear that with freedom of movement throughout the EU, whoever has the least repressive policy will attract the evicted squatters of other states or regions, resulting in imperative securitization across Europe.

Securitization of public space is closely linked to the securitization of property and police tactics in the case of squat evictions as in the case of other public order processes seem to be developing a global pattern, as policing becomes increasingly co-ordinated by global protocols and increasingly takes on the rhetoric and the dimensions of a social war against elements who cannot be incorporated into the web of imperatives determining life for production and consumption. In the eviction of Schijnheilig on 5 July 2011, overwhelming armed police presence and mass arrest was used against the protesters gathered outside the building. The demonstration was ‘kettled’ by police, effectively put under collective detention in the street, in tactics used also against environmental protesters, students, and the Occupy movement in street protests in the UK. This imperative foreclosure of active dissent extends even to representation and discourse; the same tactic had been used in preventing the screening of local footage about the eviction of Telepathic Heights in Bristol. ‘Kettling’ has been seen as indicating a new conception of public order consequent on a fundamental change in the nature of the rule of law which has radically reconfigured the legitimation of state violence and social relations of control.

Against this new urban order, any protest is an affront to the prevailing notion of development and a provocation to authorities. In the twenty first century, occupation of public space seems to be proving more functional for resistance than the street marches of the twentieth, and often constitutes an extension or at least a defence of that very concept of the public against the conjoined interests of neo-feudal political institutions and neoliberal capitalist corporations. The sp-

47 M. Oudenampsen, De knuppel regeert... en de Balie zag dat het goed was: Over de ontruiming van Schijnheilig en de tweet van Youri Albrecht, Joop/Opinies 2011. Retrieved from: http://www.joop.nl/opinies/detail/artikel/9341_de_knuppel_regeert_en_de_balie_zag_dat_het goed_was/ (31 July 2014).
tiality of resistance also provides a rough’n’ready indicator of the state of struggle — the occupation of streets, squares and buildings opens or re-opens new space to the public sphere as space for the performance of practices of freedom, while occupation of parks indicates a defensive phase because these are already artful spaces of the relative autonomy that industrial society assigned to leisure time. Art squats such as Tacheles and Schijnheilig at Passersdersgracht effectively extended that notion of public action in occupation, and transcended the hegemonic division between work and leisure, in a strategy which has today become globally mobile, rendering contemporary political activity of resistance a form of art in the sense of an experimental embodiment of practices of freedom. More than simply an element of the repertoire of social movements, the art of occupation has become the art of self-constitution in new modes of twenty-first century resistance such as Occupy, Gezi Park, the Maidan, and most recently Hong Kong’s Umbrella Movement, refusing the spectacular identification of definitive representation and the governmentality of disciplinary self-conduct through a continuous process of meaning-making, art-work that is itself inherently political.

Artystyczne squaty, krytyka sztuki i opór: między neutralizacją a zapomnieniem

Abstrakt

Od lat 60. squaty artystyczne są charakterystyczną formą rozwoju i rozpowszechniania kontrakultury. Pełnią dwojaką funkcję: angażują się w krytykę artystyczną i społeczną oraz podejmują bezpośrednie działania w każdym z tych obszarów, opierając się zarówno kapitalistycznym stosunkom własnościowym, jak i instytucjom zajmującym się rynkiem sztuki. Zmieniającą się politykę kulturalną ucieleśnioną w krytycznej praktyce squatów prześledzono na trzech europejskich przykładach. Niniejszy artykuł odwołuje się do perspektywy krytycznych studiów kulturowych ujmującej praktykę kulturową jako tekst. Poddaje on krytycznej analizie tezę Boltanskiego i Chiapello o odrzuceniu krytyki artystycznej oraz problematyzuje założenie autonomistów głoszące, że squaty skupiające artystów łączą przedsięwzięcia artystyczne z rewolucją społeczną. Autor pokazuje, w jaki sposób strategie tego rodzaju zagrożone są kooptacją, kojarząc jednocześnie działania środowisk sklostersko-artystycznych ze współczesnymi praktykami oporu.

Słowa klucze: artystyczne squaty, opór, teoria krytyczna, praktyki artystyczne
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