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Enclosing Autonomy

The politics of tolerance and criminalisation of the Amsterdam squatting movement.

City, 23(2)

DOI: <https://rsa.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13604813.2019.1615760#.XOZYCKZ7kWo>

Abstract

In the Netherlands squatting was tolerated and regulated for decades. In October 2010 a new law turned the occupation of vacant properties into a criminal action punishable with up to two years imprisonment. This paper argues that while squatted spaces produce autonomous forms of urban commoning, both tolerance and criminalisation of squatting engendered multiple modes of enclosure and capture of the autonomous socio-spatial relations constituted through these spaces. By analysing techniques of disciplinary integration, commodification and criminalisation, the paper suggests that the object of enclosure is not simply the *common* as such, but its radical capacity for *autonomy* from state control and capital capture.

Keywords: Urban Common, New Enclosures, Autonomy, Tolerance, Criminalisation, Squatting.

Introduction

In the Netherlands squatting was tolerated and regulated for decades. In October 2010 a new law, named *Kraken en Legestaat Wet* (Bill on Squatting and Vacancy), turned the occupation of vacant properties into a criminal action punishable with up to two years imprisonment (Dadusc 2014). This paper seeks to contribute to current discussions in *CITY* on squatting movements as well as on common and autonomous socio-spatial relation as modes of resistance to the neoliberal city (Hodkinson and Chatterton 2006; de Souza, 2006; Stavrides 2014, Dalakoglou 2016). In particular, responding to Hodkinson's (2012) call for more research on new urban enclosures, this paper traces the lines of transformations of the politics of enclosure of squatted spaces, and analyses how these have been aligned to the political and economic interests of different historical contexts as well as with shifting modes of control of urban spaces.

Although the criminalization of squatting in the Netherlands marked an important shift in the relations between squatters, the law, capital and the state, the paper argues that their enclosure takes place not only through punitive legislations and criminalization, but also through more subtle techniques of discipline and control that emerged when squatting was tolerated. Therefore, the paper seeks to comprehend how both the previous model of regulated tolerance and the current criminalisation of squatting constitute complex technologies of enclosure, discipline and capture of the common socio-spatial relations constituted through squatting.

Following Forst's (2013) and Brown's (2009) analyses of the politics of tolerance I argue that the Dutch mode of governing squatting has figured as a strategy to secure existing relations of power, public order and economic interests by neutralising and pacifying the autonomous politics of the squatting movement. Indeed, tolerance creates the conditions to *capture the use-value* of squatted spaces and their *disciplinary integration*: namely it is a technology of government to de-politicise the struggle by making it a constituent force of power (De Angelis, 2007). Moreover, drawing on Chatterton's (2000) and Uitermark's (2009) analysis of the 'creative city' politics and discourses, the paper discusses how some forms of regulated tolerance were aligned with the so-called 'creative city' framework, so as to turn *common socio-spatial relations* into *commodities*.

The second part of the paper discusses how, in the context of emerging resistance to the hyper-commodified city, enclosure of subversive urban struggles entailed violent and punitive forms of intervention through *criminalisation*, so as to capture and tame the ungovernable power of these conflicts. I argue that rather than convicting squatters, the process of criminalisation worked through strategies of spatial control, containment and temporal delimitation of squatted spaces, hence affecting the radical subjectivities and counter-conducts that can be created in this context. This way criminalisation operated not only by means of repression and punishment, but engendered an 'assemblage of capture' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2000) to order and govern common socio-spatial relations and autonomous subjectivities.

The paper does not seek to produce a linear history, nor a general representation of these complex dynamics. These technologies often coexist and are in a process of constant transformation, being shaped and affected by counter-actions and multiple modes of resistance they encounter. Yet, for sake of clarity the paper highlights the relations that prevailed under specific political and historical contexts. Moreover, these technologies have not managed to capture and enclose the autonomy of all forms of squatting. Instead, these are analysed as attempts and strategies, rather than as results. Indeed, the so-called squatting movement is extremely heterogeneous and while some parts were enclosed, others successfully resisted the powers of both tolerance and criminalisation.

Urban commons, autonomy and enclosures

In contemporary urban landscapes political and social relations and modes of life are forged via agendas of neo-liberalism and constantly subverted by a multiplicity of forces of resistance (Lefebvre 2003). According to Harvey (2007; 2012) the city is a key site for capital accumulation through practices of creative destruction, which entails enclosure and privatisation of urban spaces. Moving forward from the traditional understanding of enclosure as commodification and privatisation of space, De Angelis (2007; 2016) conceptualises enclosure as a continuous and subtle process of subjectification and control of social relations. According to Hodgkinson (2012, 509): “here enclosure means the encapturing of people, place, space and culture within the commodifying and alienating logic of capital accumulation and the competitive, marketising logic of neoliberal rationality”. Therefore, urban enclosures are not simply modes of dispossession associated with laws and regimes of penalisation to suppress and repress common spaces, but entail subtle techniques of discipline and subjectification.

New urban enclosures are extending to ubiquitous aspects of life, constituting ‘microtechnologies of social and spatial control’ (Soja 2010: 43). Foucault places particular emphasis on the spatial dimension of these relations, and analyses how techniques of government and control of urban spaces produce specific modes of conduct. In particular, in 'Security Territory Population', Foucault (2007), analyses how urban spaces constitute one of the main *milieus* for the ‘conduct of conduct’, the governmental rationality that aims at the production, domestication and normalisation

of modes of thinking, acting and living.

In the last decade, a variety of studies addressed urban squatting as a practice of resistance both to 'old' and 'new' understandings of enclosures (Cattaneo and Martinez 2014; Van der Steen 2014; Vasudevan 2017). Throughout the history of Western capitalism the practice of squatting has been related to the establishment of ownership and of private property rights, be it housing stocks or land (Ward 2002). Squatting configured as a practice of resistance not only to privatization and dispossession, but also to the modes of government of the population that these entailed, opening spaces to live outside and against the logic of rent and of wage labour (Federici 2012; Huron 2015).

In contemporary urban landscapes the spaces occupied by squatters still engender radical resistances to these processes. These practices of urban commoning lead to the creation of free housing not just as material resources, but as spaces of political struggles in opposition to the hyper-commodification of the urban. Through direct re-possession of privatized space, squatters take direct action to solve housing needs and create *autonomous* pockets for political contestation and prefiguration (Chatterton 2010; Pickerill and Chatterton 2006), where urban spaces and social relations are produced in *common* rather than as *commodities* (see Stavrides 2016; De Angelis 2016; Dalakoglou 2016). 'Autonomy' here is intended as a mode of organisation that is not simply 'outside' or 'independent' from the state: these are not simply pre-capitalist formations that operate outside of capital, nor do they fill the voids of the state and capital. Instead, squatted spaces often provide a platform for the constitution of social and political relations that *actively resist* and *contest* the enclosure of urban spaces.

Figure 1: Banner at the 'Middle East' squat in Spuistraat (Amsterdam Centre) - March 2015
Credits: HansPhoto - <https://hansfoto.wordpress.com/>

These forms of urban commoning entail the active creation of alternative forms of life through the creation of heterogeneous networks of solidarity, mutual aid and cooperation in resistance to the commodification of every aspect of social life (Hodkinson and Chatterton 2006; Pusey 2010). Autonomous modalities of organising everyday life and the creation of common urban spaces produce the conditions for the prefiguration of social relations and political practices that operate *against*, counter

and contest the norms and rationalities of neo-liberal capitalism (Federici 2012; Hodkinson and Chatterton 2006; de Souza 2006). Here, urban commoning is intended as a practice and a social relation (Huron 2015), rather than a shared good or resource.

In squatted spaces autonomy is expressed not only in relation to *macro* political institutions, but addresses the capacity to transform the very relations of power in which we constitute ourselves as subjects and where life is disciplined, domesticated, and confined within specific modalities of experience. In these ways, squatted spaces constitute practices of *urban commoning* (see: Stavrides 2014; Dalakoglou 2016), through the formation of autonomous communities of resistance to enclosure through privatization and dispossession, as well as to forms of government operating through the ‘conduct of conduct’ (Foucault 2007): namely, they open up the possibility for radical political subjectivities and *counter-conducts* to emerge (Revel 2008; Cadman 2010; Lazzarato 2009; Davidson 2011).

By analysing multiple techniques of enclosure, the remainder of this paper argues that capital *seeks* to enclose these urban commons not simply by repressing and destroying these practices, but by disciplining them and making them productive through *disciplinary integration, capture of its use value, commodification and criminalisation*. Moreover, I argue that rather than operating by means of *creative destruction* (Harvey, 2007), these forms of capital accumulation allow common spaces to exist, but under specific conditions: while letting common practices multiply across social spaces, the very *autonomy* of these forms of radical organisation is appropriated and subjugated by the state and capitalist interests. The objective of enclosure, therefore, is not simply the erasure of the *common* as such, but of its radical capacity for *autonomy* from state control and capital capture.

The Amsterdam squatting movement

Squatting in Amsterdam became a widespread practice in the 1960s. World War II left the Dutch urban landscape dilapidated, and a large number of houses were considered unsuitable for habitation (Van Gemert et al. 2012). Following the Northern American model, the municipality's strategy was aimed at expansion toward the suburbs, rather than the regeneration of the inner city. The middle classes were placed in new residential areas on the outskirts of the city, such as Purmerend and Almere, while the

central areas were inhabited mainly by the working class (Van Gent 2010). As many houses stood empty and housing shortage was a major problem among the youth (Dijst 1986), groups of people inspired by the Provo movement started occupying them both for solving their housing needs and for creating alternative socio-political spaces (Kempton 2007).

During the 1970s urban planners began fostering a more continental urban design, and undertook modernistic renewal projects aimed at restructuring the city centre (Uitermark 2009). The local government planned the renovation of damaged central neighbourhoods and the demolition of several social houses, which entailed the displacement of tenants. It is in this context that squatting started to emerge as a radical movement not only for the right to housing but more general for the right to the city (Lefebvre 2003), and both squatters and local residents actively resisted displacement and the demolition of affordable housing ⁱ (Duivenvoorden 2000).

In 1976, as a response to growing resistance, the Parliament proposed a law to criminalise squatting for the first time. The proposal immediately led to protests and insurrections all over the Netherlands. In February 1978, after an escalation of confrontations, the Senate decided not to pass the bill and argued that a law against squatting would be legitimate only when accompanied by a bill regulating vacancyⁱⁱ.

During the beginning of the 1980s the number of squatters rose from around 5000 to 8000-10,000 (Van Gemert et al. 2012), constituting a powerful anti-authoritarian movement using squatting both as an alternative housing strategy and for the creation of autonomous social centres (Adilkno 1994). Tensions exploded on several occasions when the squatters set up heavy barricades and fierce resistance to evictionsⁱⁱⁱ, while the state reacted through a spectacular performance of authority and violence. In 1981, fearing confrontations in the occasion of Queen Beatrix's coronation, the government declared that the proposals for the anti-squatting law had to be immediately withdrawn (Duivenvoorden 2000, 169).

After these tumultuous years both squatters and the police gradually replaced confrontation with negotiation, and violent interventions imposing “law and order” were replaced by pacification and integration techniques, to the point that their

encounters became institutionalised rituals^{iv} (Van Gemert et al. 2014). As a result of grassroots mobilizations by radical residents and squatters, the government initiated massive investments in social housing, strengthened tenants' rights, and started providing subsidies for tenants' organisations (Uitermark 2004a). This way, squatters' demands were integrated into institutional politics, and parts of the movement became professionalised. As Uitermark and Nicholls (2013, 971) argue, by the end of the 1980s "many of the intellectuals who participated in the new social movements had shifted alliances as they were advising on how to promote the integration, cohesion or prosperity of society rather than questioning its foundations".

At this time Dutch policies toward squatters aimed at a pragmatic, non-moralistic, and rational mode of governing (Huisman and Nelen 2014). The political priority was to de-escalate the previous levels of conflict and to manage and control social disorder and potential subversive groups, rather than using direct repression (Brown 2009). In line with the widespread practice of *Gedogen* (meaning *regulated tolerance*, namely the political management of deviant actions and events) the Dutch government aimed at negotiation and reaching agreements rather than conflict between social actors (Buruma 2007; Huisman 2014). Negotiations and constant dialogue aimed at keeping potential disorders close to the government's gaze, rather than in opposition to it.

Here, the enclosure of the autonomous potential of the movement was engendered by the inclusion and participation of conflictual actors within institutional politics. The promotion of welfare and the inclusion of subversive voices into institutional decision-making, entailed a strategy of de-escalation and 'disciplinary integration' (De Angelis 2007) of subversive forces, so that "struggles do not break away from the ordering principles (of capital) but on the contrary, become moments of its reproduction" (ibid. 81).

Regulated tolerance: disciplinary integration and capture of use value

In the 1990s one of the most intense dismantling of the social welfare state took place with the turn towards neo-liberal politics. In 1994 the housing-market was liberalised, together with large parts of social security, pension and health care^v. The meaning of urban space shifted, and the priority to social needs such as housing was overcome by

a desire to re-design urban spaces as financial objects for investment (Van Gent 2013). The city of Amsterdam became the object of large-scale projects that led to the privatisation of existing social housing and formation of new neighbourhoods at the edge of the city for both social and free-market housing units (Aalbers 2004). The main objectives of these reforms were to make the housing associations independent from state subsidies^{vi} and to encourage homeownership^{vii} (Van Gent 2013; Priemus 1995). Housing associations started compensating for the loss of state subsidies by selling social housing stock; the former social houses were demolished and redeveloped as apartments that could be sold on the free market (Priemus 1998).

Together with the changes in the housing market, both the geography and demography of Amsterdam were subjected to one of the most intensive restructurings in Dutch history. Enclosure of the city centre through privatisation of housing and dispossession of local communities went hand-in-hand with a strategic 'revitalisation' and regeneration of the urban landscape, as to reorganise the neighbourhoods according to the perceived needs and lifestyle of high-income residents (Allen 2008; Merrifield 2014). Privatisations and so-called 'urban regeneration' (Musterd and Gritsai 2013) entailed an intervention on allegedly 'problematic neighbourhoods' and 'undesired populations', leading to the socio-economic cleansing of urban spaces (Raco 2003; Smith 2005; Boterman and Van Gent 2014). This contributed to the spatial segregation of low income groups and increased homelessness among those groups displaced and not relocated (Van Kempen and Van Weesep 1998). At the time high levels of homelessness and housing shortage went hand in hand with large amounts of vacant properties (Duivenvoorden 2000), but local municipalities were not investing any resources in tackling vacancy.

In this political and economic context, squatters' presence in the city and their visible resistance to these enclosures started being regulated differently and new conditions of acceptability were set. Yet, repression and the social and economic costs of its implementation were considered inefficient tools to solve this conflict. So-called *administrative prevention* was preferred (Brants 1998): squatting was only partially tolerated, but a new regulation placed it in a grey area between legality and illegality, whose boundaries could be extended or reduced at any time (Bruinsma and Blankenburg 2003). In 1993 squatting was partially criminalised with a new law that

prohibited squatting in properties vacant for less than 12 months, while squatting buildings that had been empty for longer than one year was still tolerated^{viii}: For the latter property owners were still responsible for initiating civil proceedings against the squatters and to provide evidence of plans to put their properties into use.

In order to squat within the boundaries of the law, squatters had to conduct detailed research and bring evidence that the property had not been in use for at least one year, for what reason it stood empty, and their plans and permits for the building. On the one hand this regulation provided a strong legal basis for occupying properties abandoned for more than one year. On the other hand, despite anarchist and autonomous politics, the law often seemed to be one of the strongest tools in the hands of the movement, and the court became the major battlefield of squatters' struggles (Uitermark 2004b). Therefore, while in the 1980s the movement was characterised by anti-parliamentary confrontations and the streets constituted the main battlefield, starting from the 1990s the squatters' movement was constantly channelled into legal battles^{ix}.

This way, the government and the police set new conditions for their intervention and expanded their possibilities of using criminal law to deal with forms of squatting that did not fall within desired fields of acceptability. Urban authorities viewed squatting as a cheap, Do-It-Yourself solution to the housing problem, useful for maximizing the use value of urban space and tackling the problem of vacancy. Hence, it can be argued that enclosure took a very specific form: not simply through destruction and by extracting exchange value, but by co-opting and *capturing the use value* generated by squatted spaces that turned unproductive vacant spaces into housing: namely turning autonomous common spaces into *useful* practices at the service of state interests and bound by state regulations.

Therefore, the Dutch model of regulating squatting, *Gedogen*, did not just entail 'turning a blind eye'. As Chris Brants (1998) put it "regulating through tolerance is a gentle way of coercing people to do thing as the governments want them done, but at the same time to go about their business without too much hassle" (Brants 1998, 623). Tolerating and regulating squatting served as a technology of enclosure through capture, as a means to keep potential sources of social and political conflict under

government control, letting things happen within government-defined limits of acceptability and channelling them into a direction that would be economically and politically useful.

The creative city

At the end of the 1990s there was an important shift in the relation between squatters and authorities, mainly on the level of urban policy. Urban planners started a marketing campaign branding Amsterdam as a “Creative Knowledge City” (Peck 2012) where the coexistence of different lifestyles would attract new economic activities related to the growing ‘creative industry’ (Evans 2003; Chatterton 2000; Musterd and Gritsai 2013). The political priority was the integration of difference rather than its exclusion, in order not only to control subversive events but to capitalise from the creation of difference: the use value of urban space still prevailed over its exchange value, but new forms of accumulation and enclosure were being implemented, to capitalise on alternative uses of urban spaces. This strategy, according to Oudenampsen (2007) inverted the gaze from ‘fighting problems’ into ‘the creation of opportunities’.

In this context squatters began being addressed as 'creative entrepreneurs' and recognised for their contribution to the cultural and artistic life of the city (ibid). Eviction plans for some squats were withdrawn and some projects received contracts or were turned into cultural associations and cooperatives. In particular, in 1999 the so called *Broedplaats* policy (*BPA*– Breeding Places) was implemented, with 41 million euros allocated for subsidising between 1,400 and 2,000 creative spaces and living/working spaces for artists and so-called cultural entrepreneurs (Pruijt 2004). The Municipality of Amsterdam bought buildings occupied by squatters and many squatters negotiated both with the owners and the City Councils for receiving renting contracts for the creation of cultural and artistic centres in spaces they occupied (Duivenvoorden 2000).

Squatted spaces oriented toward art projects, such as the OT301^x and Zaal 100^{xi}, were legalised and received subsidies from the government. Others, mainly politically oriented, such as the Kalenderpanded^{xii}, were threatened with other subtle legal techniques (such as fire regulations, health and safety, public order), and were

eventually evicted^{xiii}. These policies enforced a distinction between acceptable (profitable) practices and subversive ones that should be repressed, therefore setting new boundaries regarding the legitimation of squatted projects: in order to squat successfully it became necessary to move within the limits prescribed by the law, as well as to work toward the legitimation of squatted spaces, presenting them as ‘nice projects for the image of city’ rather than spaces that challenged urban politics and aesthetics. As Uitermark (2009) points out, this policy led to the absorption of parts of the movement into providers of cultural services, so that instead of resisting gentrification they have actually contributed to the image of Amsterdam as a creative city.

Legalized projects relied on dialogues with institutions, subsidies and on contracts for their existence. These contracts aimed at eliminating existing forms of self-organisation and resistant politics in favour of bureaucratic structures, lines of responsibility, licenses and inspections (for fire safety, hygiene, alcohol license and other permits). Contracts with imperatives of cultural productivity bound the occupants to a constant monitoring of the activities organized within the spaces. In this context many formerly occupied spaces were transformed into alternative businesses serving the interests of the creative city, and lost their autonomous modes of self-organisation.

Enclosure, in this context, operated by means of commodification of common spaces as well as by exercising a high degree of control within these spaces, thereby capturing their autonomy from state control: tolerating those spaces and practices that could be commodified, as well as tolerating them *in order* to commodify them, allowing them to express their diversity and incorporating their productive elements while repressing the subversive ones.

Enclosure through tolerance

Arguably tolerance and regulation of squatting was a double-edged sword, as it provided both a tool for squatters to occupy spaces and exercise a ‘right to squat’, as well as a strict form of control aimed at pacifying and capturing the radical potential of the squatting movement: a liberal mechanism intending to leave power relations

undisturbed by gradually de-politicising, normalising and capturing political conflicts (Brown 2009). Drawing on Forst's (2013) understanding of the politics of tolerance as a practice that operates "by granting freedom for specific, restricted purposes, not through exclusions but through forms of inclusion which simultaneously discipline and liberate" (ibid, p. 7), the regulation of squatting constituted a strategy to enclose squatters' autonomy. It entailed *disciplinary integration* and *commodification*, and aimed at reducing the conditions of possibility for subversive and unexpected practices to emerge.

Enclosure through tolerance operates not as a repressive but as a productive mode of power (Foucault 2012). These techniques of regulation and anticipation allow conflictual and subversive events *within* certain limits of acceptability to circulate and multiply, rather than *outside* and *against* desired levels (Foucault 2007). This is done by setting the boundaries, the conditions and the norms of what should be done (and how) in order to comply with specific conditions of acceptability, while always leaving a possibility of repression on the background.

Tolerance entailed a liberal mode of government that emerged due to the perceived failure of fixed modes of control based on the strict enforcement of law and order techniques: while in a fixed, repressive and 'closed' structure acts of subversion would lead to a crises or failure, a mode of government based on tolerance entailed forms of control exercised according a logic of flexibility and porosity rather than pure repression and exclusion, so that a subversive event does not constitute a rupture in its functioning, but can be integrated and become a constituent force of capitalist relations.

Yet, this was not a smooth process, as the state was not always ready to intervene against those modes of squatting that could not easily be captured and tamed. The relation between squatters' struggles and the government's attempt to de-escalate and make use of the conflict have been in a continuous process of reciprocal transformation, with local authorities being forced to reconsider governmental strategies according to the actions and reactions of those squatters who aimed at subverting the imposed order. Despite attempts to enclose and pacify the movement, radical squatted spaces kept on emerging and multiplying, resisting evictions and creating ungovernable urban commons: lines of flight that played within these

technologies of power and enclosure.

The criminalisation of squatting: enclosing autonomous subjectivities

Figure 2: Police repression during a demonstration against the criminalisation of squatting – October 1st, 2011

Credits: Alex Kemman - <http://www.alexkemman.org/>

Around the year 2000 the Dutch model of tolerance began its decline, and Dutch politics took a strong right-wing populist turn. Pim Fortuyn's nationalist, anti-Muslim and free-market ideology reached its apex in 2001, but the parliamentarian was murdered in 2002. After his death, the ex-VVD parliamentarian Geert Wilders radicalized Fortuyn's idea by bringing forward law-and-order politics and describing them in terms of a civil war (Buruma 2007). A rising populist discourse began addressing the tolerant past as the cause of social disorders. In this context, the previous 'administrative regulation' of conflict has been increasingly replaced by a zero tolerance approach, entailing policing of the streets, stigmatisation of ethnic minorities and criminalisation as dominant political practice and rhetoric (Herbert and Brown 2006; Downes and Van Swaaningen 2007).

Under the discourse "safety first", new laws and regulations were promoted to clear the streets of people and behaviours that were considered as a challenge to the general feeling of safety: policing plans promoted by the municipalities aimed at fighting behaviours that could produce nuisance (Coleman 2005). Minor alleged 'disorders' such as begging were outlawed, and policing ethnic minorities and youth became a priority. Criminalisation of minor nuisances and offences began to be promoted as a preventive strategy, justified by the arguments that 'tolerating such misconduct would worsen the problem' (Van Swaaningen 2005). Hence, the previous Dutch way of dealing with diversity through regulated tolerance was overturned by new forms of populism and punitiveness toward behaviours and people labelled as a threat to the safety and security of Dutch society and values (Dadusc and Dee 2014).

This political climate had a strong effect on the attitudes toward squatting: from the beginning of the new millennium squatters became a target of right-wing politicians and the debate on criminalisation flared up again^{xiv}. On October 1st, 2010, squatting was turned into a crime punishable with up to two years of imprisonment (Van Gemert et al. 2014). This happened at a time of global financial crisis and austerity

where, next to high unemployment rates, rents were increasing, the availability of social housing was diminishing and a new, unpredictable and ungovernable wave of people started squatting as a viable solution for housing as well as a mode of resistance to austerity.

The criminalisation of squatting marked an important historical conjuncture where housing was increasingly reconfigured as a financial instrument for private investment, tax evasion and real estate speculation (Musterd and Gritsai 2013) rather than for meeting social needs of habitation and dwelling (Marcuse and Madden 2016). The role of the state has been twofold. On the one hand, it actively supported mass-scale dispossession and the hyper-commodification of the housing market through public-private partnerships, the deregulation and dismantling of the social rent sector and the precarisation of tenants' rights. On the other hand, it criminalized any form of (re-)appropriation of urban spaces and of resistance to the financialisation of housing.

Moreover, even vacant spaces became objects of financialisation, with private corporations capitalising on the management of vacancy. A large number of apartments and offices remained vacant or in disuse following the 2008 financial crisis, owned by housing associations and real estate investors who could not afford renovations or simply waited for the market value to increase again^{xv}. Instead of producing an active vacancy policy most municipalities, including Amsterdam, delegated the management of vacant properties to so called 'property guardianship' companies (also known as anti-squatting - *anti-kraak*: *Camelot*, *Zwarte Key*, *Alvast*). Real estate owners engage these private companies to place 'live-in security guards' in their properties with the aim of preventing squatting. Property owners pay for the service to the anti-squatting company^{xvi} (Priemus 2015); instead of receiving a salary for securing the space, live-in security guards pay fees to the anti-squatting companies that often resemble the price of rent, although they do not hold any tenant rights.

The law that criminalises squatting aimed at granting the police full authority to evict squatted spaces, allowing evictions without approval by a court and removing any economic or legal burden from property-owners. Immediately after the Squatting Ban had passed, a large list of squatted buildings received eviction notices, an action that has been described as a 'declaration of war' on squatting. However, the criminal law

was not used to charge and imprison squatters. Rather, it was tactically applied for obtaining fast and cheap evictions, and to ‘keep squatters rolling’ between spaces. In particular, a list was made dividing evictions into high, medium or low priority, hence evaluating which squats should be evicted immediately (those that create nuisance and disturbance to public order), which ones could wait a few months, and which ones should be evicted only when there would be resources available.

The decision to evict certain squats before others was clearly associated with a differentiation that prioritised squatters who were supposedly creating a ‘disorderly presence’ or whose way of life conflicted with the moral standards of middle and upper class neighbourhoods: mainly those who were not recognised as Dutch citizens and those whose political visibility posed a challenge to the politics, the aesthetics and the morality of local powers. These criminalising practices and discourses enforced a new morality of order, addressing the ethics and modes of life of squatters as dangerous and immoral (see Dadusc and Dee 2014), rather than as political practices that counter and resist neoliberal relations, capital accumulation and the enclosure strategies of urban planners and developers.

Figure 3: Eviction of the Tabakspand, a block of squatted buildings on the Spuistraat - April 2015
Credits: HansPhoto - <https://hansfoto.wordpress.com/>

Both before and after the introduction of the criminal law, and up until 2013, so-called ‘eviction waves’ were used to evict multiple buildings in one single round, with the use of anti-riot police. These were expensive police operations, strategically planned to each detail: from the geographical configuration of the neighbourhood, to the characteristics and political backgrounds of the squatters and their expected ‘dangerousness’ to public order. For the squatters the eviction was often the last stage of a long struggle to defend the squat, according to the politics of each space: demonstrations, court-cases, negotiations, campaigns, petitions, or various forms of direct action. With the police deploying their authority and their militarised equipment, and the squatters countering them through playful and subversive tactics, evictions often turned into a spectacle of power and resistance.

The last ‘eviction wave’ took place in July 2013. Although dozens of squats kept on emerging throughout the city these had a short life, and the squatters had little time

and energy to engage with visible and spectacular resistance to the eviction. Under the new conditions, evictions were operated by regular police officers. With a few exceptions (including *Op de Valreep*, *Antarctica*, *Pieter Vlamingstraat* and the *Tabakspanded*) squats came and went before anybody could notice, quickly and silently. For many, this mechanism operated as a time-trap, a sort of incapacitation to resist, letting the squatters lose the struggle over visibility.

By 2013, within less than two years, 330 squats were evicted. The Mayor proudly declared that he had won the ‘war against squatters’ and that Amsterdam was a ‘squat-free city’. Although not all squats were evicted, by drastically reducing the number of squatters and pushing those who remained to peripheral areas, the police intended to create ‘kettled hot spots’ easy to control and suitable for monitoring, as well as a few sites for politicians to keep interlocutors among those squatters who were seeking negotiations^{xvii}. Radical common spaces were brought under strict control and surveillance, with the police localizing, identifying and isolating potential subversive groups. The aim of the police was not simply to convict squatters and to eliminate all squatted spaces, but to manage them, to channel and contain squatters within a controlling gaze: namely, to make them governable.

Resisting Criminalisation

Criminalisation was not a smooth process but as a contested practice, constantly shaped and redefined by the resistances enacted by squatters. In the face of criminalisation hundreds of housing squats and social centres emerged, including housing projects by the ‘We Are Here’ undocumented migrants movement (see: Dadusc 2016). The squatted social centres Schijnheileg^{xviii} (2010-2011), a former school in the canals district, was tuned into a free space for art, performances, conferences and workshops. ‘*Op de Valreep*’ (2011-2014), an abandoned animal shelter, was transformed into a community space in resistance to the redevelopment of the ‘Oostport’ neighbourhood. A vacant section of the University of Amsterdam (UVA), situated in the heart of the city centre, was reclaimed by students as an open, collective space for self-organised meetings, workshops and conferences: *Het Spinhuis* (2014). A former bank on the Prins Hendrikkade 138-139, became a living space and an anarchist social centre: *De Overval*^{xix} (2015), namely, ‘the bank robbery’. These are just a few of the hundreds of squatted living spaces and social

centres created since 2010. Members of the Squatting Everywhere Kollektive (SQEK) produced maps of squatted social centres in European cities: Amsterdam's interactive map, with a historical timeline can be found [here](#).

Figure 4: Map of occupied spaces in Amsterdam - Created by the Squatting Everywhere Kollektive. Available at maps.squat.net

Beside the occupation of new spaces, several repertoires of resistance to the new law were mobilised both in court and on the streets. Protests, demonstrations, campaigns and direct actions took place regularly to oppose and subvert criminalization from different angles, including its legal aspects, police authority and eviction orders. Although these did not manage to prevent evictions and to change the law, they were successful in contesting the legitimacy of the law and in interfering with its application.

In 2010, three squats under threat of eviction (*Schijnheilig*, the 'Lange Leidse' and 'De Hallen'), filed a lawsuit against the State, claiming that the eviction under the new law was a violation of Article 8 of the European Charter of Human Rights, which protects housing rights^{xx}. As a result of a long and contested process, the Supreme Court of The Hague banned the eviction of eight squats in Amsterdam, The Hague and Leeuwarden. The judge declared that evictions were a violation of housing rights and that, although squatting is a crime, the new law offered no grounds for immediate eviction. Moreover, the court ruled that to avoid conflict with the European Convention on Human Rights evictions had to be announced in advance, as to enable squatters to initiate a court case and defend their rights. This decision undermined the new law at its core, as it prevented the police from (legally) executing arbitrary evictions. However, it did not prevent evictions at very short notice. If on the one hand the legal battles affirmed a sort of right to squatting and imposed a notice before an eviction, on the other hand the conditions for these rights to be exercised were very limited, and the possibilities of winning court cases against an evictions were almost nil.

The politics of criminalization are not just expressed through evictions orders. At the core of the new law there is an explicit intention to grant increased authority to the police towards squatters, which immediately resulted in increased violence and abuses of power. Emerging forms of police authority were subverted through a variety of

tactics, from media scandals to direct action. In particular, in 2012, a group of squatters brought to the public attention a case of police use of violence circulating a video about the arbitrary eviction of a squat on Simon Stevinstraat^{xxi} (Amsterdam Oost). The video provoked a public debate^{xxii} and forced a reformulation of police strategies toward squatters: to contain the scandal created by the documentation of police behaviour, the Mayor and the Chief of the Police ordered several restrictions to police officers' authority, prohibiting direct intervention towards squatters without previous consultation and careful evaluation of each case, thereby undermining, once more, the new law at its core.

Yet, criminalisation goes further than simply arrests and convictions of squatters. Criminalisation operated through a subtle dynamic, producing specific forms of resistance and capturing its autonomy from state norms and agendas. Under the new conditions it became very difficult to keep a squat for longer than a few weeks. In order to squat it became necessary to constantly fight against the forces of criminalisation. Those who decided to keep on squatting and to face criminalisation needed to be extremely dedicated and to set squatting as the main activity both in their political struggles and in their everyday lives: squatting became a full time occupation. Under the context of criminalisation, the regular evictions left little time to think about long-term plans, and to engage with broader struggles both within and outside of the walls of a squat. Instead, most of the efforts and energies remained focused on the 'survival' of each squatted space: defending a house by building barricades, fighting against the police, contesting the plans owner in court, and so on.

Paradoxically, evictions did not simply entail that squatters were being forced *out* of their houses. More subtly, criminalisation and constant evictions contained squatters *within* squatted spaces, within the vicious circle of squatting a property and being evicted, hence channelling all the time and resources *in* squatting and in resistance to criminalization, and leading to the incapacitation to act in broader struggles.

Therefore, these dynamics turned active power into reactivity where, instead of creating difference, squatters needed to defend themselves in reactive modes: becoming mainly forces *against* something rather than capable of creating, embodying and enacting autonomous common socio-spatial relations. This, once more, worked as a tactic of confinement and enclosure, subjecting and limiting the

multiplicity of struggles and radical subjectivities that can be experimented through squatting. The criminalization of squatting worked as a complex spatial and temporal techniques of government of spaces, conducts and radical subjectivities, and aiming, once more, not simply at erasing these spaces but at enclosing their capacity for *autonomy*.

In terms of its capacity to protest and organise spectacular resistance, in context of criminalisation the Amsterdam squatting movement reached an apex of its power since the 1980s, to the point that some activists welcomed criminalisation as a moment of re-politicisation of the movement, leading to new confrontational struggles for the right to the city and to housing. Indeed, when squatting was tolerated and regulated, rarely there were riots, confrontations and visible resistances to evictions. Yet, by forcing squatters into a reactive, oppositional force, criminalisation attempted to reduce the heterogeneity, diversity and complexity of the various practices and groups converging in the squatting movement. While the power of this heterogeneity lied in the capacity to act in unexpected and therefore uncontrollable modes of resistance, the process of criminalisation aimed at turning diverse and divergent forces into a homogenous reactive force: a movement of opposition rather than a practice of prefiguration. Therefore, the criminalization of squatting worked as a complex technique for the enclosure and the political management of spaces, conducts and radical subjectivities, aiming, once more, not simply at destroying these spaces but at capturing their capacity for autonomy from state practices and agendas.

Interestingly, while action was turned into reaction, the composition of the movement differed from the expected outcomes of criminalization. The discourses mobilized to legitimize criminalization claimed that the new law would prevent the arrival of ‘undesired foreigners’ and repress the most radical modes of action (Dadusc and Dee 2014; Van Gemert et al. 2009). However, after criminalisation Dutch squatters diverted their attention to other forms of activism, through participation in previously legalised social centres (i.e. OT301, Plantage Dockland and Vrankrijk) as well as the constitution of an independent housing association for the creation of a new model of affordable housing (Soweto^{xxiii}) that led to their first housing cooperative on the Pieter Nieuwlandstraat 93-95.

Most of those who kept on squatting were non-Dutch activists, often willing to employ radical tactics. While it became difficult for families and students to keep on squatting for housing, new groups started using squatting as a tool for political struggles. These groups, by not fixing themselves into a specific political agenda or campaign did not subject themselves to criminalisation, and were able to continue using squatting as an active, rather than reactive practice.

Despite the constant evictions of squats, arrests and the harassment by the police, the process of criminalisation failed to disrupt resistances of those that made of squatting an everyday political struggle. Those who refused to engage in a discussion with the state, who rejected its politics of normalization and legitimization and ignored the fear of arrest and conviction, might not have succeeded in resisting the eviction of a specific squat, but made it possible to challenge criminalisation at the level of affects, discourses and conduct, and to help squatting remain a subversive practice. The latter kept on engaging with multiple unpredictable and uncontrollable modes of action that criminalisation was not able to capture.

Conclusions

Building upon existing discussions circulating in *CITY*, this paper provided an insight into a multiplicity of practices for the enclosures of autonomous common socio-spatial relations. Enclosures have been analysed as disciplinary strategies aiming at normalising, capturing and commodifying resistance through a variety of techniques that go beyond repression and destruction. The paper argued that while squatted spaces aim at producing *autonomous* forms of urban commoning, both tolerance and criminalization of squatting aimed at enclosing and capturing the autonomous and subversive potential of these practices.

Indeed, rather than simply repressing, these techniques affected the conditions of possibility for the constitution of *autonomous* common socio-spatial relations, and constituted an intervention on the active and constituent character of these practices. These modes of enclosure had strong implications not only for the politics of squatting but also for its ethics. While the politics and ethics of squatting seek to create unexpectable, unconfined and therefore uncontrollable modes of action, both

tolerance and criminalisation of squatting seek to control, confine and enclose this autonomy, either by integrating these forces into the operation of capital or turning active forces into reactive ones, easy to surveil, to predict and to govern.

Yet, this does not mean that the struggles aiming at creating common and autonomous socio-spatial relations are simply contributing to the expanding forces of capital accumulations and cannot escape state control. These are still important political forces for the experimentation of radical politics and subjectivities. Yet, they need to constantly re-adapt and re-shape their forms to maintain their autonomy, to create a multitude of *cracks* in the smooth operation of power (Holloway 2010). Therefore, when discussing the criminalisation of squatting it is necessary to reflect not only on what the previous model was allowing and what is now being repressed, nor to attempt to restore the previous modes of government. Rather, it is necessary to trace the lines of transformations of these technologies, to understand how both the regulation and the criminalisation of squatting have worked, what practices have been used, what effects they produced, but also how they have been, and still can be, resisted and shaped by squatters' counter-practices. This is necessary, not for creating a better law for governing squatting, but for better understanding different modalities through which autonomous and commoning practices are being enclosed, captured and tamed, and how it is possible to resist these modes of power so as to become ungovernable.

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Endnotes

ⁱ A famous episode occurred in 1975 when a large group of squatters, together with tenants, resisted and eventually prevented the construction of a highway that was supposed to cross the city centre (Nieuwemarkt neighbourhood). As a result of one of the first violent confrontations between the police and squatters, the works in progress were halted, the project withdrawn and, instead of an highway, social houses were built (Duivenvoorden 2000).

ⁱⁱ Eerste Kamer 78/79 Handelingen 3 October, 1978

ⁱⁱⁱ The confrontations culminated in April 1980 (Owens 2009), when thousands of squatters and supporters provoked riots in opposition the coronation of Princess Beatrix under the slogan: "*Geen woning, geen kroning*" - no housing, no coronation - and "*70 million for Beatrix and nothing for the 35.000 without homes and flats*" (Hofland, Hoeben and Raviez 1981).

^{iv} Much has been said and written about those times, and especially about the internal conflicts of the squatting movement. Many claim that after these years characterised by protests, violent confrontations as much as by political achievements, the squatters' movement declined, mainly due to these internal conflicts and contradictions (Owens 2009). Yet, although many distanced themselves from the movement, and the numbers of squats and squatters was drastically reduced, squatting as a radical autonomous movement kept on flourishing beyond its demands to the state and achievements into the institutional politics.

^v See the neoliberal General Agreement on Trade and Service treaty, 1995, which aimed at the liberalization of public services).

^{vi} The Dutch social-democratic housing policy used to hand over the distribution of social houses to so-called housing associations. Since their establishment in 1901 housing associations were subsidised by the government: although officially they were private institutions, they were publicly financed and regulated (Huisman 2016). The 'National Policy Document on Housing in the Nineties' issued in 1989 (In Dutch: 'Nota Volkshuisvesting 90) was a first step toward the liberalization of the housing market through the withdrawal of the state from the social housing sector. Firstly in 1989, and later in 1997, a new policy paper placed in the political agenda the deregulation of housing policies (Aalbers 2004) and the previously government-owned housing associations such as Ymere, Rochdale and De Key were partially privatised: the government halted its subsidy and the corporations became independent of the state in regards of policies, prices and finances (Priemus 1998).

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- vii The state started actively promoting home ownership with the creation of a National Mortgage Guarantee (NMG) in 1995
- viii
Art 138, Criminal Code, Book 2, Title 5 - Article 429 *sexties*, Criminal Code (429/1993)
- ix Often, when the owner did not have plans to use the occupied buildings, the squatters received cheap rental contracts, or bought collectively the occupied building.
- x <http://www.ot301.nl/page=site.home#page-index%282%29>
- xi <http://zaal100.nl/>
- xii An anarchist social centre evicted in 2000, after 4 years of occupation
<https://entrepotdok.squat.net/engels.htm>
- xiii At a European level similar strategies were taking place: the TREVI EEC [Terrorism, Radicalism, Extremism and Violence Internationally] plan set the agenda of neutralising subversive elements within squats either by means of force or through “gradual processes of legalization/integration”.
- xiv Tweede Kamer 03/04 29200 XIII
- xv According to the *Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek* (CBS), in 2011 4, 2% of houses in the Netherlands were in disuse, namely around 300.000. In 2012, according to a survey conducted by the Amsterdam 'Wijksteunpunt Wonen Centrum' (WSC), only in the Amsterdam central district there were 12.000 vacant houses.
- xvi Anti-squatters, or property guardians, are explicitly hired as security guards, but the practice is promoted as a form of temporary housing; yet, instead of a tenants contract, they receive a *user* permit: they can *use* the building for temporary housing, and they are expected to pay water-gas-electricity bills and so called 'administration fees' of up to 400 €/month. Moreover, so-called anti-squatters have to make sure that the property is well-maintained and the anti-squatting company regularly checks the cleaning conditions of the building.
- xvii As the police and the public prosecutor stated in an interview: “it is a matter of political balance and public order; we have to leave them some spaces, the important thing is to be sure that we know where they are and what they do”.
- xviii On the Passerengracht 123: <http://www.schijnheilig.org> ; DIY art gallery and atelier, live music, information events, hackers space.
- xix On Prins Hendrikkade 138-139: <https://en.squat.net/tag/overval/> ; with bike and silkscreening DIY spaces, workshops and info-events, free-shop, punk bar, VOKU, party space.
- xx <http://schijnheilig.org/2010/05/rechtszaak-gaat-niet-door-ontruiming-van-de-baan/>
- xxi See the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAspMYXBgvo> and See: (“Kraker toont wonden, politie reageert,” 2012) http://www.at5.nl/artikelen/81134/kraker-toont-wonden-politie-reageert&usg=ALkJrhioK7YRgYU0y_KwYfQZLfpPNy0kHQ
- xxii For a summary of the newspapers articles and discussions see:
<https://www.indymedia.nl/node/4699>.
- xxiii <https://soweto.nl/>