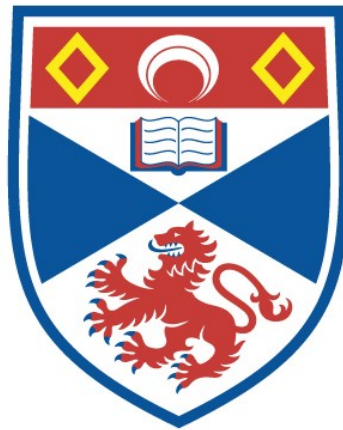# Behind barricaded doors: gender, class, and power in the London squatting movement

Rowan Tallis Milligan

A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews

2024

Full metadata for this thesis is available in
St Andrews Research Repository
at:
https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/

Identifier to use to cite or link to this thesis:

DOI: https://doi.org/10.17630/sta/880

Underpinning Research Data or Digital Outputs

Candidate's declaration

I, Rowan Tallis Milligan, hereby certify that no requirements to deposit original research data or digital outputs apply to this thesis and that, where appropriate, secondary data used have been referenced in the full text of my thesis.

Date   Signature of candidate

30/4/2024

Abstract

I explore how gender and class inform power dynamics within the London squatting movement. In perpetually precarious and temporary housing, squatters exist on the border between housed and homelessness, and squats operate as a location for both domestic and collective politics, making this a rich field for analysing classed and gendered politics and negotiations in both private and public spheres. I look at several intersecting realms through which power and hierarchy are forged and distributed: the embodied and performative self; interpersonal relations and social space; and spatial relationships in material locations.

My investigation functions both as a case study for an under researched 'subculture' and as an exploration into homemaking and everyday social relations under conditions of precarity and vulnerability, with implications for research into the broader axes of power relations in our unstable housing market.

My qualitative research methods are semi-structured interviews and participant observation, over 18 months in the field, and my personal experiences as an ex-squatter. I use a thematic and deductive content analysis to generate and organise my data. My methodology is situated within feminist and militant ethnographic traditions, in recognition of my own participation within squatter communities and commitment to the project of creating alternative and equitable homescapes.

General acknowledgements

'It's like goss with analysis' – Marijam Did

'I won't thank half of you half as well as I should like; and I'll thank less than half of you half as well as you deserve' – Bilbo Baggins (kind of)

I wish to thank my supervisory team. First, Dr Sharon Leahy for offering critical insights while apparently running the whole university. Second, Professor Nissa Finney, for asking me crucial questions like 'what is the point of this section' and regularly summarising my argument way better than I ever could. Third, Dr Antonis Vradis, comrade, enthusiast, and extremely responsive to my last-minute requests and minor panics. I could not have done it without you three at my side. An honourable mention to Dr Cristina Flesher Fominaya for helping to supervise the first and most unstructured year of my PhD.

A massive thank you to my examiners for your thoughtful engagement with my work and pushing me to make it even stronger.

I wish to thank everyone at the Advisory Service for Squatters, for their dedication to squatting, their political nous, and for tolerating me hanging about for over a year with very little to offer except an enthusiasm for archiving. Squatting couldn't exist without you and I'm very grateful for all you do.

I wish to thank all squatters, past and present for continuing the struggle for a better world and safe housing for all in the face of increasingly hostile circumstances.

I wish to thank my interviewees for being so generous with your stories and your time. I hope you won't be too mad with me when you read what I've done.

I want to thank Marijam, Zosia, and Hannah for their input on multiple horrendous, confusing drafts.

I particularly want to thank all my wonderful friends. For putting up with me having the same conversation over and over and over and over again over the last few years. For helping me refine my thoughts. And for making me laugh a lot. Particular mention to Marijam, Jish, Simon, Adam, and Sam, though there are many, many more.

Thanks to my parents for being the first squatters I ever met and providing me with a concrete understanding of home.

Finally, I want to thank my partner, Hannah, who took the crash course in squatting lore and got full marks, and kept me sane over the last two years.

Research Data/Digital Outputs access statement

The terms of participants consent do not allow the data to be made publicly available, approved by the University of St Andrews ethics committee and Research Data Management department.

Contents

1. Introduction

I squatted in London for two years, from 2014-2016. It was the best time of my life. It was also when I first began to think deeply about gender, class, and their impact on social relations. Social dynamics were taken for granted within the squats I lived in, such as house meetings, possessing practical skills, the aesthetics most of us adopted, and the ways and reasons we made decisions. I began to question the origins and endurance of these dynamics, and that I had found them difficult to deviate from. Squatting is a social movement, but it is also a means to a home, either through a political choice, or through necessity – often both. Organising norms throughout the political and anarchist scenes within London are domestic norms within the squatting scene. However, even though squats were often left-wing political spaces, they were not completely outside of societal norms within a capitalist city. For every consensus-based decision or expression of gender liberation there were the times it felt someone held more sway in decision-making or that aesthetic choices were restricted or judged. After I stopped squatting, I began having conversations with friends who were also former squatters about the elements of the community which we found difficult, frustrating, often upsetting.

I had as many wonderful, exhilarating, life-changing experiences while squatting as I did harrowing, upsetting, and discouraging ones. At the time of writing, in summer of 2023, I have a recently published article for an academic journal on a life-changing occupation I was involved with and the affective dimension of squatting buildings together. I think squatting is truly important and an experience that I wish more people had. I also think it should be better. That people should be kinder. This thesis is my attempt to navigate the tensions I first experienced back in 2014. The tensions between different members of a crew. The specific social dynamics of the house meeting and the ways in which class is performed and expected to be performed. How gender and gender presentation condition the way in which you are received and the status you can achieve.

I began this investigation in late 2019. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted my fieldwork in 2020 and 2021 severely, as I discuss in my methodology chapter, as well as affecting the communities I was studying. Nevertheless, I was able to conduct interviews with 19 different individuals, largely made up of former and current squatters. These 19 interviewees offered me generous insights, analysis, and thoughts which contribute to the analysis throughout this PhD and reinforced my belief that squatting is an avenue well worth analysis. The rest of this chapter will lay out why I believe squatting, particularly in London, is worth investigating from a classed and gendered perspective, and introduce the structure of this PhD.

1.1. Why squatted spaces?

Squatting is the practice of living in an unoccupied property without permission. Since 2012 in England, squatting is illegal if you are occupying a residential building but not if you are occupying a commercial building (such as a hotel, pub, or warehouse) (Finchett-Maddock 2014). This has been a significant change for the squatting movement in London. Despite these challenges, and the frequency and sometimes violence of evictions, squats are a vital source of free accommodation for those struggling to fit in or to find somewhere to live in our increasingly inhospitable housing market. They are also liminal spaces, bordering the public and the private. Further, those who inhabit squats often practice alternative living arrangements to those dominant in broader society. For all these reasons, and more, they are, therefore, relevant to people who are interested in the gendered and classed ramifications of the housing crisis.

I have long argued that squats present a fundamental challenge to capital as they desecrate one of capitalism's core tenets: the sanctity of private property (Milligan 2016; Milligan 2023). Choosing to occupy a property that has been designated an asset rather than a home and to turn it *into* a home is one of the most blatant subversions of the capitalist design of everyday life. Further, if interested in alternatives to the norms of the nuclear family and the capitalist logic of the home and the potential they offer, squats are of investigative value in their common denial of such an arrangement and the propensity of squatters to live together in collectives of varying sizes (Vasudevan 2017, Dadusc 2019, Grazioli 2017). This propensity is for several reasons. Part of this is practical: it is a good idea to have someone always occupying the space, and often they are heavily barricaded, and you need to be let in from the inside. This has been increasingly the case since 2012 when the ban on residential squatting was instituted. Squats have tended to be more short-term and increasingly subject to hostile evictions. Part of this is ideological: explorations and experiments into different family types, relationship types, forms of living and being and caring together are central to many squatters' outlook and personal-political ethos (Martinez 2020). As such, in an investigation into the extent to which gender and class dynamics differ in alternative spaces, they are an ideal site to explore.

 This is a time when the supposed sanctity of the private sphere is more fragile than ever, due to the Covid-related normalisation of working from home and the increase in surveillance (London is, after all, one of the most surveilled cities in the world) (Buchholtz 2021). It is also a time when the increasing privatisation of formerly public spaces such as parks and outside spaces in general, the rise of gated communities, stop and search, and, again Covid in its sociological impacts in terms of suspicion and mistrust of those around you and government-mandated disapproval for daring to enjoy yourself outside, have led to people being forced to spend ever greater amounts of time within their own homes.

So, the private is becoming less private as your boss peers into your bedroom via webcam and the public becomes less public as your right to be in these spaces is threatened through a hearty mix of societal pressure and explicit policy (Alcocer & Martella 2020). And squats and other communal living experiments lie in this juncture, the private with public functions, the spaces the owner does not occupy, and the occupants do not own. The public and private spaces rubbing shoulders, each determined by their own, precise set of rules. Squats and squatted social spaces by their very nature obfuscate and thus subvert the public/private divide.

Recognising the potential contradiction between personal and collective narratives is a mainstay of much feminist research (Eschle 2018) which complements the fields I am investigating, specifically the liminal space between the public and the private. How can there be a collective definition of the private? Is that not a contradiction? And yet, agreed 'rules' and collective understandings dominate every domestic arrangement, even if not made explicit. Some squats do make it explicit, with lists of rules on the walls or implicit with posters, stickers, and banners promoting their supposedly agreed upon viewpoint (Brown & Pickerill 2009). Often these dynamics are subtle, subconscious even. Further, in spaces and collectives which are fighting for a more egalitarian, anarchistic future, eradicating unfair hierarchies and gendered and classed power dynamics are as vital as they are difficult to identify or to challenge (Vannucci & Singer 2010).

What is interesting in terms of my research, and the role of squatting in understanding the liminality between public and private spaces, are the philosophical implications: what makes somewhere a home? Is it the presence of a bed? Is it the lack of banners hanging out the window proclaiming your political objectives? Is it the fact that people may come and go? The squatted spaces that narrate this thesis were certainly not *public* in the sense that the occupants would regulate who comes in and out – no police would be able to wander freely into these. But many held film nights, info nights, talks, and parties – for those welcome through a presupposed affinity with the occupants' goals. So, they were not strictly private residences either. London's particular legal structure and relationship with the squatting movement is what created these situations, these precarious balances teetering on the edge of the home and the community centre, the public and the private. I turn in more detail to the particular relevance of studying London in relation to squatting culture in the next section.

Finally, it is important to recognise that studying a subculture does not necessarily mean the subject itself is of niche importance. The interactions between space, social relationships, and the self operate throughout every societal location, from the home to the workplace, to the academy. The same tensions around the establishment, maintenance, and effects of unequal power dynamics – considered here through lenses of class and gender - translate into other contexts and can offer insights into the signs and symptoms of unequal power dynamics, gendered hierarchies, and class-based oppressions which will hopefully offer both scholars and laypeople some starting points for recognising and

tackling the manifestation of these unhealthy norms in their own environments. Who, after all, has not experienced an uncomfortable meeting, a disparaging put-down, a microaggression which simultaneously makes you feel small yet is difficult to adequately articulate or put your finger on? Our homes are political spaces, as are our workplaces, and activist meetings. They all have the power to disturb our comfort as much as they can comfort us when we are disturbed. It is precisely the ambivalence of these spaces and the social relationships which occur within them which my research hopefully sheds some light upon and perhaps, even, offers pathways to recovery and to strengthen the spaces and those who dwell in them.

1.2. Why London?

A primary reason why I chose London as my site of research was that I squatted in London for several years. This means that I have relevant connections to the squatting movement and individual squatters within the city and also an emotional investment in the preservation of squatting in London. Further, I understand the housing landscape on a deeper level than purely academic, having been at different times a squatter, renter, and an excluded occupier, and have been involved in housing movements of various kinds. I discuss this positionality further in my methodology chapter.

Politically, and in terms of the relevance of my research questions, I chose London because there are several elements of its history and current context which make London a prime site for investigating alternative forms of living together. Of course, housing struggles are not unique to London, or to UK cities in general: housing struggles have proliferated across the continent and much of the rest of the world in different forms throughout history, and the manifestations of struggle since the rise of neoliberalism have similarities in other major capitalist cities. This makes my case study a rich source for comparisons with other metropolitan struggles, as well as making a case for the particularities of the situation in London through specific political, policy, and legal changes which have taken place there since the 1980s.

On a national level, in 1989 Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's 'Right to Buy' policy changed the face of social housing with ramifications that have lasted until the present day. This coupled with some of the most expensive rental prices in the world, the decline in the socially rented market and the rise of the private rental sector, leaves many of its people struggling month to month to pay rent (Gillespie *et al* 2018). Added to this is the impact of the restructuring of the welfare benefits system in the UK with the introduction of Universal Credit in 2012, which revised access to housing benefit, taking it out of local authority control and centralising it, where it is now a single element within a broader Universal Credit allowance, and rarely covers rent in its entirety. These developments, and others, have led to London being a deeply politicised city in the context of housing, where very few people feel that their situation is fair (McKee *et al* 2017). A 2018 poll commissioned by IPPR from

Sky Data found that 53% of people believe the current system of private renting is unfair to tenants, with only 19% considering it fair (IPPR 2018). Of course, the private rented sector is only one form of housing, but it is the most deregulated system in the UK, and is on the rise, particularly in London (McKee *et al* 2017). According to the 2021 Census the proportion of private rented accommodation has increased across the country since 2011, with London having the highest increase with 29.9% in 2021 compared with 24.8% in 2011 (ONS 2023). National inequalities have a particular effect within London, which boasts a higher proportion of households at the bottom and at the top of wealth distribution compared to the rest of the country (ONS 2022).

The fact that London is a deeply unequal city in terms of class position means that there are stark issues in terms of access to housing that also affect women specifically. The 'feminisation of poverty', or the acknowledgement that women make up a large proportion of the working-class and, further, that the impacts of capital have unique effects upon women, mean that class-based issues, such as housing, also have specifically gendered effects (Giménez 2019). In terms of access to low-income housing, major inequalities include the majority of housing benefit claimants being female, that 94% of British properties are unaffordable for those on housing benefit, and that single mothers on benefits are deeply unlikely to be accepted by private rented landlords due to, among other things, being considered 'unreliable' (Reis 2019, McClenaghan *et al* 2019). Added to this is the underacknowledged fact that despite men making up the majority of the street homeless population, women make up the majority of the *statutory* homeless population, which suggests that homeless women are, through need, safety, or choice, engaging in alternatives to the nuclear family in more creative and more numerous ways than men (Reis 2019, Bretherton 2017). Domestic abuse charity, Standing Together, found that 40% of all homeless women state that domestic violence is a contributing factor in their homelessness (Standing Together 2023). The housing crisis has explicitly gendered – as well as classed – implications: therefore, so do any foreseeable alternatives.

Although many of these issues have been slowly bubbling since Right to Buy, they have not gone unopposed. In the last decade we have seen a multitude of responses to the struggle over housing, many of which have included occupations of council estates and other homes, to proclaim a very simple message: 'These homes need people – these people need homes'. Present and active in all these campaigns, to varying degrees, have been women and working-class people. In some cases, they have led the struggle, in others they have simply been a part of a wider movement. But in every instance of the recreation of the *domus* upon lines alternative to the logic of capitalism, there have been women, men, and other people working and living together.

London also has a particular relationship to the squatting movement. It was only in 2012 that residential squatting became criminalised. Prior to the 2012 residential squatting ban, squatting was lawful. Due to its decriminalised nature, squatting went a lot further than in some other cities, with

councils willingly giving over empty properties to families and offering licences in many cases (Milligan 2016, Wates & Wolmer 1980). Several of the institutions still used today such as the Advisory Service for Squatters (ASS) were established during this period. This long history of squatting and the ambivalence towards the movement created a rich history and established the practice as a recognisable part of London's landscape. However, in 2012, the Coalition government criminalised the practice in residential properties. This does *not* mean that squatting is wholesale banned, however. Squatting in commercial properties such as pubs, hotels, and warehouses, is still legal, and a further caveat to the S144 LASPO (2012) order was that squatting residential properties was only unlawful if there was intention to live in them. What this means in practice is that occupation of a residential property as a form of protest or as a communal social space does not fall under the Act. This loophole in the law saw great usage during the wave of council estate occupations that swept London in 2014-2015. Starting with the Focus E15 empty homes campaign in Stratford in late 2014, council estates were soon occupied across the city, from Sweets Way in the North to the Aylesbury and Guinness Estates south of the river. For all these occupations a simple notice was posted: 'This is a protest occupation: section 144 LASPO does not apply'.

The continued presence of squatting in London, in stark resistance to the increasingly carceral socio-political landscape, is a testament both to the tenacity of those engaged in the practice and the dire state of housing availability within the city. Whether through need or choice, squatters are still there, living precariously, balancing between the norms established in society and the alternative structures they attempt to enact. My investigation focuses on this tension, with a particular eye to the ways in which gender and class affect the social dynamics between those straddling this divide.

1.3. My research questions

I started this project with some simple research questions which helped me to formulate my initial interview guide. These questions were derived from conversations with friends and reflections on my experiences while squatting.

- Who has power in squats?
- What does it look like when they exercise that power?
- Why does it matter that some people exercise more power than others in squats?

As my research developed and the structure of my thesis began to take shape, so did my research questions. I realised that in order to fully understand who has power in squats I needed to look at two interconnecting realms: the development and attributes of the individual with power, and the social relationships which mediate and contribute to the power dynamics at play. Further, as I focused my lens on gender and class dynamics as those which I, and my interviewees, observed were heavily laden with power imbalances, I questioned the ways in which these dynamics replicated or subverted

the classed and gendered hierarchies operating in broader society. As such, my research questions upon writing up became:

- In what ways does social capital *manifest* in squats and what roles do gender and class play in its operation?
- How do varying levels of social capital *affect* squat dynamics and how are they informed by gender and class?

The two parts of my analysis respond to each of these questions in turn, as I outline below.

1.4. My argument and structure of this thesis

I am arguing that we need to pay attention to power dynamics in alternative spaces from both a housing perspective and one of social justice. The more precarious the form of housing, the more vital it is that you remain on good terms with your crewmates. The stakes are even higher for those of a lower socio-economic position and can also be particularly frightening for vulnerable women, for whom the experience of homelessness offers even greater risks. Through pointing to the different attributes that provide someone with authority and then documenting how this is wielded in the social relations and physical sites of squats, I aim to draw attention to the unhealthy way in which these hidden hierarchies affect social relationships. I hope that in doing so people will be better prepared for what to expect when beginning to squat. But also, that in the many different environments where these hierarchies crop up that people are better able to spot these tendencies in themselves and in others, in order to dilute them and make them visible before they have potentially extreme material consequences.

I argue that there has been insignificant attention paid to the gendered and classed ramifications of the ways in which decisions are made within squats and these need to be brought to the fore, as do the material outcomes of these decisions. I make these arguments as an advocate of the squatting movement, a former squatter, and someone who wants squatting and squatters to thrive. I also make the case for how my conclusions have broader relevance. First, for those studying the impact of the housing crisis and alternative living arrangements, as the dynamics which feature within these pages also crop up in other domestic environments. Second, for research into the tensions and hierarchies which lace through many different forms of organisation or collective, from the boardroom to the breadline. I build this case throughout the thesis, the structure of which I outline now.

My theoretical framework outlines how I use a Bordieuan theory of power to inform my analysis, utilising concepts of social, cultural, and economic capital to describe social relations and power dynamics. This is complemented by literature on critical studies of housing and the home, and research into squatting communities from an array of contexts. My methodology chapter lays out my

methodological approach, which is informed by feminist and militant ethnographic traditions, centring the experiences of those I engage with, and disavowing an objective approach in favour of an explicitly politically invested one.

I then turn to my two-part analysis which builds the argument I described in the above paragraph. In part one I look at the attributes that squatters with high and low social capital possess, arguing that these attributes are heavily gendered but also vary depending on class position, with women and working-class people offered less flexibility in their habitus. I first look at the *skills* which offer high or low social capital, before turning to the *performances* which do the same. In part two I consider how the unequal levels of social capital affect interpersonal relationships and decision-making within squats. I examine several key sites of conflict and the manifestation of power: joining and leaving a crew, house meetings, and gendered and sexual violence, as well as how the physical site of the squat affects these decisions. I draw all this together to re-emphasize why I think this matters in terms of the importance I place in squatting and in the absence of harmful gendered and classed hierarchies within alternative spaces of the home.

2. Theoretical framework

Introduction

I draw from various influential theories to shape my analysis. The primary framework is a Bordieuan perspective, complemented by feminist and queer theories addressing performativity, identity performance, and embodiment. The chapter is divided into two parts. First, I provide a concise overview of Bourdieu's key concepts, such as habitus, field, and economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital. Second, I demonstrate how I integrate these theories with scholarship on the performative self, social relations, and spatial dynamics, with a focus on squatting and the home. I conclude the chapter by highlighting relevant squatting scholarship that informs my work, particularly concerning the spatial politics of squatting and urban commons (see Dadusc 2019, Grazioli 2017, Martinez & Polanska 2020, among others) and of radical domesticity (Davies 2023). Finally, I tentatively suggest what my contribution to this field could be in terms of the integration of different theoretical bodies and the specific choice of location and time period.

2.1. Part one: Bourdieu, habitus, field, and capital

In the last two decades there has been an increased interest in using Bourdieu's theories within the geographic tradition (Holt 2008, Skeggs 2004, Gregson and Rose 2000, Archer 2005). While these terms did not originate with Bourdieu, his use and development of these concepts has been foundational to their proliferation throughout the social and behavioural sciences, to the extent that scholars continue to identify as Bordieuan or post-Bordieuan. Bourdieu's analysis of the social, situated, and embodied nature of identity (re)formation offers a means of connecting and analysing the relationship between individuals, interpersonal relationships, and the built environment, recognising them as mutually constitutive. Key concepts presented by the theorist and developed and manipulated by others since, such as habitus, field, the various interconnecting forms of capital, all have applicability within the social sciences and more specifically within geography. Several scholars (Holt 2008, Savage 2012, Miller 2014) have argued for the importance of a *situated* understanding of the intersections of power and the self, recognising the importance of the social space in which performances are enacted. Gregson and Rose (2000) apply a spatial understanding to the concept of performativity, arguing that the spaces of performance and the power of performance are mutually constitutive. Skeggs (2004), Holt (2008), Miller (2014), and Silva (2005) all acknowledge the importance of applying a feminist lens to understandings of capital, with Skeggs (2004), Tyler (2015), and Lawler (2004) also centring the importance of your class position in your ability to successfully accrue capital through your performance in specific social and material spaces. One of the most significant Bordieuan concepts I draw upon in relation to my analysis is that of boundary-drawing – where social boundaries are constructed and maintained through overt and subtle means, to exclude

and include along culturally-mandated lines (Miller 2014, Skeggs 2005, Holt 2008, McNay 2004). I suggest that in some social spaces these boundaries take on a distinctly geographic nature where they are not only socially, but spatially enforced, through the physical barring of entry or expulsion. In attempting to theorise power as relational, embodied, and situational, I integrate Bourdieu's theories with these varied geographic analyses.

One of the factors that drew me to focus on Bordieuan analysis (as well as his theories' applicability to my area of study) was that several of my interviewees drew upon concepts elaborated by Bourdieu when analysing their own experiences. Phrases and concepts such as cultural and social capital were mentioned by my interviewees. The language of social capital has been used in pop culture and social media as a way of understanding our dynamics and experiences for the past few decades, and squatting cultures and experiences of hierarchy are not exempt.

2.1.1. Habitus

Bourdieu's theory of power demonstrates how it operates via both individual, behavioural, and conscious enactments, and broader social structures, such as class domination, articulated most extensively in his seminal work *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste* (1984). One of his key concepts is that of habitus: the skills, speech patterns, gestures, mannerisms, and behaviours which are socially inculcated throughout our lives and condition the way we move within society. Holt (2008) breaks Bourdieu's the definition of habitus down into three intersecting elements, first it 'provides an unconscious framework and resource drawn upon in individuals' encounters with the world; second, as a 'way of being' or 'habitual state' (including deportment and ways of speaking); and third as 'tendency', 'propensity' or 'inclination' – tastes … thus habitus provides an unconscious backdrop to individuals' practices within particular social 'fields'' (233). Habitus and its associated social expectations are also 'generally differentiated along gender [and I would argue, classed] lines' (Cronin, 1996, p65). A key point regarding habitus is that it is not fixed. It is developed and, as Lawler puts it, ''makes sense' only in the context of specific local contexts or 'fields' – the 'games' for which 'the rules of the game' equip us' (2004, 112). Therefore, habitus is socially relational but also site – 'field' – specific, in both a symbolic and also a spatial sense. It is how the external social order becomes internalised, further reproducing the social order from which it came (Cresswell 2002). I talk more about how this concept, and those described below, can be utilised for geographic research, in part two of this chapter.

2.1.2. Field

In the last decade Savage (2012) identified a renewed interest in the concept of 'field' as a ' means of recognizing the complex interplay between social and physical space' (Savage 2012, 512). While Bourdieu's early theorising on fields (1984) conceived of them as a purely social space, Savage

argues that in his later works there was a 'reorientation of the concept of the field, in which the properties of social space are partly inferred from the analysis of physical space' (2012, 514) and it is this meaning of 'field', as both social/symbolic and materially situated that I will be operationalising here. I follow the definition of fields outlined by France *et al*:

> 'Fields act as social arenas within which struggles take place over specific resources or access to them … Each field has a different logic and structure of relevance which comprises both the product and producer of the habitus ... Thus, fields represent a site for the struggle over the power of which forms of capital have more legitimacy and by implication who the powerful are in particular contexts.' (France *et al* 2013, 602).

France *et al'*s conception of fields is of particular use to me as their work was focused on youth subcultures, which operated in their research almost entirely externally to the formal institutions which usually exemplify the use of field theory. These youth subcultures were governed by 'rules of the game' separate, but related, to those imposed by mainstream society. These 'subcultural' fields had their own logics, forms of capital, value, and exchange, and measures through which power was accrued or lost, similar in many ways to the squatting scene.

There is a clear interrelation between habitus and field, as both are mutually constitutive, something which other scholars such as Holt (2008) and Savage (2012) have elaborated, adding nuance to the rather binary division between the two concepts outlined in Bourdieu's earlier work. They argue that habitus is developed from the subconscious understanding of the 'rules of the game' within a given field, which can then be used when navigating other fields. Importantly for my research, fields mediate and are mediated by social relationships as the players within a given field have 'stakes in the same game and orient their actions towards each other' (Miller 2014, 466). The 'rules of the game' are constantly in flux and open to contestation. This means that while there is a shared understanding of the acceptable conduct within a field, they are also 'always sites of struggle and part of this struggle centres on the struggle for legitimate ownership of various forms of capital, including the ownership of authority' (Lawler 2004, 120). Fields are the spatial and social sites of the legitimation and contestation of hierarchy and the relationships between individuals, whose habitus and accrued capital determine their place, and their stake within the given field. However, awareness of the 'rules of the game' and possessing an acceptable habitus only sometimes translates into achieving power and is, Cronin argues, influenced by their 'prior social conditioning, the class [and I would argue, gendered] habitus that agent has internalised as a consequence of a position in a social field' (Cronin, 1996, 70). The field, therefore, is a useful concept for an interrogation of the impact of class and gender within a social and material space.

2.1.3. Capital and class

Class is both one of my areas under study and also a theoretical framing device in its own right. Scholars have argued over definitions of class since the writings of Marx and I won't attempt to highlight every position here. Class position in the UK is a deeply emotive and heavily contested subject (Davidson & Wyly 2012, Savage *et al* 1992). It has been separately argued to be the result of your relationship to the means of production; your propertied status and material wealth; your educational and institutional attainment and membership; and a host of minor signifiers such as cultural knowledge and understanding; access to different clubs and environments; your accent and vocabulary; and the jobs your parents – or even grandparents – possess (Friedman *et al* 2021, Lawler 2005). While I often use the language of class and capital interchangeably throughout this thesis, capital more clearly articulated the different *dimensions* and *repercussions* of your class position and the ways in which it is recognised, valued, and acted upon by others.

The concept of capital allows me to analyse the class and gender relations at play in the squatting movement with attention paid to all the ways power was mediated, as observed and experienced by my participants and I, that transcending the purely economic. Bourdieu (1986) recognised four main forms of capital that can be utilised by social actors to appropriate/access social energy and power: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic. Crucially, these forms of capital can be combined, transferred, and have different levels of significance depending on the field in which one is operating.

2.1.3.1. Economic capital

Economic capital is the most straightforward form of capital. It refers to material wealth that can be 'immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights' (Bourdieu 1986, 242). Economic capital is significant in terms of understanding the material basis of class conflict but is not always the realm within which the expression of class power is observed, instead, it is more likely to function as a contributing factor in the accrual of social, cultural, and symbolic capital.

2.1.3.2. Social capital

Social capital is a form of capital that is dependent on inter-personal relationships. Bourdieu defines social capital as:

> 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition … The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent … depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital' (Bourdieu 1986, 249–50).

Social capital is a key concept for attempting to understand interpersonal relationships, the ties that form – and fracture – between people and the social and personal significance of those ties. Further, social capital can be used to complicate and provide depth to analyses of inequality and hierarchy as experienced through everyday life in different fields and social locations (Bourdieu 1989, Holt 2008). Along with Holt, Radcliffe emphasises the utility of the concept for analysing intersecting oppressions such as class, race, and gender, all of which underpin the social networks within which we operate (Radcliffe 2006). Social capital is of particular significance as it is 'one key form of capital that serves to (re)produce socio-economic differentiation and intergenerational (dis)advantage, rather than operating as a 'general social good'' (Holt 2008, 228).

There are two sub-categories of social capital which I find useful conceptually. The first, is subcultural capital. France *et al* (2013) use the concept of subcultural capital to conceptualise social relations which take place following different 'rules of the game' than those that govern the ordering of social networks in mainstream, institutionalised society. They claim that 'theories on social capital need to include the notion of sub-cultural capital in order to understand how youth networks help young people manage their everyday lives' (France *et al* 2013, 599).

The other extension of social capital which has utility for my research, is developed by Holt (2008), who explores the concept of 'embodied social capital'. This concept speaks to an interplay between the habitus and the social network and field within which one is situated. She argues that this is a particularly useful concept from a geographical perspective because embodied social capital:

> 'more explicitly emphasizes how the process of becoming an embodied individual is inherently bound up with the sociospatial contexts within which people's lives are lived, and their social networks and relationships ... An individual's previous social encounters are embodied and influence their future social performances.' (Holt 2008, 238).

Experiences are lived in the skin we are in and condition our future experiences. Further they are socio*spatially* specific, determined by not only the *who* but the *where* in which our experiences take place and in turn contribute to the constitution of our future selves. The concept of embodied social capital provides geographers with the opportunity to more fully explore the ways in which individual identities are formed, not in isolation but relationally. I will talk further about embodied social capital and subjectivity in part two of this chapter.

2.1.3.3. Cultural capital

Cultural capital comprises of accumulated assets, which can include but is not limited to material wealth (economic capital) and high-profile connections (social capital). Cultural capital is also closely related to habitus in the sense that one's manners, dress sense, accent, and posture are as significant to

the accumulation of cultural capital as the focal points such as taste in the arts and institutions with which one engages.

Bourdieu identified three forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986). *Embodied cultural capital* is that which relates most closely to habitus, as it is the physical markers of cultural competency and disposition. *Objectified social capital* is closely related to economic capital as it manifests in material possessions and tastes. *Institutionalised cultural capital* refers to honours, certifications, credentials, and 'cv points' which one accumulates (France *et al* 2013). In terms of my research, the most significant form of cultural capital I will be engaging with is embodied, as it is most directly tied to the habitus and the development and maintenance of social capital (Holt 2008). Institutionalised cultural capital and objectified cultural capital operate in an almost inverse relation within squats and the subcultures I am looking at – overtly derided and denigrated through the uniform adoption of an anti-capitalist lens, yet still conditioning social relations in line with those exhibited in mainstream society, something I explore further in part two of my analysis. This point is made by Skeggs, who argues that it is 'possible to rework cultural capital not just as high culture if we think more generally about culture as a resource of a use-value which can be separated from the fields and means by which it is exchanged' (2004, 24). It is important to note that social and cultural capital are complexly intertwined (Holt 2008, 232). What is specific about cultural capital is the centrality of the 'exchange relations, material, social and symbolic of a given 'field of practice'' once again centring the sociospatial context in which these forms of capital are exhibited, honed, and exchanged (France *et al* 2013, 599).

2.1.3.4. Symbolic capital

Symbolic capital is the legitimation of the status derived from the accumulation of all other capitals. When social or cultural capital provide pathways into accessing other resources, be them further social, cultural, or economic capital, or other 'badges of honour', they become symbolic capital. According to Bourdieu it is the 'degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration, or honour' that someone possesses (1993, 7), that is *recognised*. Our criteria for legitimation or recognition are socially specific, therefore 'symbolic relations of power tend to reproduce and to reinforce the power relations that constitute the structure of the social space' (Bourdieu 1989, 21). Importantly, symbolic capital is specific to a given 'social space, usually a cultural field; it is the reputation of a participant in a field, among other field members.' (Miller 2014, 464). Miller's contribution here is significant as it suggests that symbolic capital is contingent on the values and tastes within a particular social (and spatial) field rather than uniform. However, symbolic capital does not end at being recognised or legitimated. A key tenet of Bourdieu's thinking is that the manifestations of power are often masked, something that mirrors my own observations. The true power of symbolic capital lies in the ability of its holder to consecrate or bestow recognition or legitimation themselves; what Bourdieu refers to as

'symbolic power'. Bourdieu argues that 'symbolic power has to be based on the possession of symbolic capital. The power to impose upon other minds a vision, old or new, depends on the social authority acquired in previous struggles. Symbolic capital is a credit; it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition' (Bourdieu 1989, 23).

Therefore, symbolic capital is not specifically a separate kind of capital but a legitimation process that all the other capitals can go through, often a combination of them. 'Tastemakers, and those who are highly regarded by others (i.e., those who possess symbolic capital), have more of a 'right to speak and be heard' … Displaying refined tastes (a type of cultural capital) only affords access to work opportunities or better social networks when one acquires a reputation as having refined taste – that is, when cultural capital becomes symbolic capital' (Miller 2014, 464).

2.1.4. Bourdieu in the boudoir: feminist critiques of Bourdieu

There has been a great deal of debate among feminist theorists as to the degree of utility of Bordieuan theories in furthering a feminist understanding of power and social relations. Some, such as Silva (2005), see Bourdieu's purist theories as unhelpfully binary, normalising and simplistic in regard to gender. Others suggest that they can still be used in conjunction with feminist analysis as 'Bourdieu himself argued for the flexibility of his theories and the necessity of inconsistency' (Skeggs 2004, 20). Holt suggested that 'feminist discussions have not as yet fully married social capital theory with understandings of normalisation power' (2008, 230) but utilised Bordieuan concepts to explore more nuanced understandings of the performance and construction of identity and power.

Feminist theorists have rightly pointed to the shortcomings of Bourdieu's analysis in terms of gender relations, primarily regarding his biological-naturalist position. Silva critiques Bourdieu's lacklustre attempts to incorporate feminist or gender theory into his theories on the role of early family and domestic life for the development of social positions. She rejects the way Bourdieu naturalises the body as a site where masculine domination takes place, describing gender as a 'sexually characterised habitus' (Bourdieu 2001, 3 in Silva 2005, 91). He also fails to pay attention to the many ways in which men, women, and others transgress or deviate from the gendered norms inscribed upon them and enforced by systems of domination, something I explore further in part two (Silva 2005, 92).

Bourdieu draws on now outdated assumptions of what constitutes a 'normal family', resisting acknowledgement of the impact of substantial shifts in the make-up of domestic life, and the (not unconnected) destabilisations of gendered norms (Silva 2005). While Silva sees little in the way of rehabilitating Bourdieu's analysis for gender, she does recognise the value of applying the theory of cultural capital to the home and the family as the 'concept of cultural capital serves to investigate the legitimising of social differences, and it brings to the fore the importance of personal areas and

inherited social dispositions where women, children, and homes have significant roles, and where the roles of men are currently shifting ... stressing the intermeshing of the personal and private with the public and vice-versa' (2005, 99). While Bourdieu's theories fall short from an understanding of the shifting, malleable complexities of gendered identity and interaction with power and capital, thankfully there are other theorists there to pick up the mantle.

Both Millar and Skeggs argue for a recognition of the gendered dimensions of symbolic capital. Miller contends that 'symbolic capital requires a gendered analysis that has so far been absent. Reputation, honour and esteem – the core components of symbolic capital – are based on individuals' perceptions and judgements of each other' which are clouded by socially-legitimated gendered biases' (Miller 2014, 463). Therefore 'men are able to turn the use of feminine dispositions to their advantage in a way that women cannot because they are perceived to have those dispositions 'naturally' (Skeggs 2004, 24). Thus, despite his less than detailed exploration into the ways in which gender intersects with the various forms and exhibitions of capital, Bourdieu 'implicitly recognizes that evaluation can be shaped by gender: his argument that we view male domination and female submission as legitimate, and the reverse as illegitimate, describes how cultural beliefs about gender organize perception and evaluation' (Miller 2014, 464).

Recognising the gendered elements of symbolic (and cultural and social) capital allows for a more nuanced exploration into the ways in which we enact contradictory attitudes towards gender, and how there can often be unconscious biases informing how we expect women to behave and which behaviours we approve of. These are also field contingent, as the field 'affects how embodied, gendered forms of capital are valued', at times leading to a cognitive dissonance regarding our expectations and desires of peoples (particularly women's) gendered behaviours (Miller 2014, 465). In her article on gendered capital within the metal and folk music scenes, Miller explores the idea of non-institutionalised symbolic capital. Whilst symbolic capital is usually conferred or understood through institutional markers, such as certifications, degrees, or awards, it can also function in non-institutional environments, such as the metal field, or, in my case, the squatting movement. Miller argues this has implications in terms of gendered analysis as 'in the metal field, many markers of symbolic capital are uninstitutionalised, like word-of-mouth, and are based on implicit standards' (2014, 463). Depending on the specific social or spatial fields the criteria of symbolic capital may be different to, or even a direct subversion of, those acknowledged within broader society.

 Therefore, gendering our analyses of symbolic, cultural, and social capital 'allows us to identify key junctures at which gender matters: for example, whether women are disadvantaged in acquiring cultural capital, converting cultural capital into symbolic capital, converting symbolic capital into other resources, or some combination of all of these.' (Miller 2014, 466).

Thus, my use of the framework of capital is supplemented with post-structuralist feminist theory, with its rich analysis of the performance of gender (and class) and the power relations and interpersonal dynamics which go along with that. Post-structuralist feminism allows us to read bodies, movements, genders, and sexualities as fluid and relational, allowing us space to ask questions regarding the value of a given gendered or classed performance and how it is placed within a hierarchy within a movement. A post-structural feminist framework sees gender and sexuality as transient, performative, and contingent. I see gender as a performance, adapted and mitigated by social relations and the power dynamics imbued in them, proscribed upon but not ingrained into the body (Gregson & Rose 2000). This research will analyse how this performance is affected by class and other avenues of power and how this is shaped by the specific social and cultural context of squatted places in late 20th and early 21st century London.

2.2. Part two: integrating theories of the self, the social, and the space

In the second part of this chapter, I explore how these Bordieuan concepts can be more fully applied to the analysis of gender, class, and power in the squatting movement, from a geographical perspective. I have broken my analytical framework down into three intersecting dimensions of the exercise, performance, and legitimation of power and how it is conditioned by gender, class, and other attributes. These sections are: the body and subjectivity; interpersonal relationships and social space; and spatial relationships and material contexts to power.

2.2.1. The body and subjectivity

As I explored above in reference to the concepts of habitus and embodied capital, post-Bordieuan theorists recognised that classed (and gendered) dispositions are transmitted both consciously and unconsciously via the physical movements of one's body and also through the 'feel for the game'. How one looks, acts, speaks, interacts, moves, and chooses to engage in the world is both a product, and producing, their social role and degree of capital accrual. Bodies do not exist in isolation. They exist in relation to other bodies, and they exist in space. The space of performance affects the performance as much as the performance leaves its mark upon the space. And both are determined by and determine the social relations that take place between bodies in space.

2.2.1.1. (Un)conscious action and capital accrual

Jenkins (1992), Holt (2008), and other scholars built on Bourdieu's original concept of unconscious performance of class position, to suggest that actors are at least partially knowledgeable of their habitus and practices and how they inform and are informed by the social world and field in which they operate. Jenkins argues that this 'is a strange form of knowledge, neither conscious nor unconscious' (1992, 97). What this means then is that our conscious decisions and unconscious

orientations both play a role in how we are perceived and how we move through the social world, shedding and accruing different forms of capital. McNay considers this to be a severe oversight in Bourdieu's understanding of agency, particularly in his understanding of performativity where he 'underplays the extent to which the autonomy of language means that it can be used as a tool to subvert dominant power relations' (2004, 182). I will talk more about performativity and the ways in which it is a useful tool for navigating the tension between conscious agency and unconscious action and decision-making in the next section.

The key element added to the discussion of conscious or unconscious performance by Holt, however, is that denial of the capital you have accrued, or even failing to recognise that you possess it does not negate the fact that it is in your arsenal, conditioning your relationships with others and your ability to move through both social and material spaces (2008). Capital does not automatically lead to power and authority, it is a social relationship, however social relationships are capital-contingent. This has implications in terms of the discussion of motivation and behaviours of those who wish to perform an egalitarian or horizontal community structure, such as the squatting movement, but are encumbered by the disparity of their (sometimes) unrecognised unequal loads of capital. These behaviours, performances, and the capital they provide are referred to by feminist Bordieuan scholars as 'embodiment'. As Skeggs explains: 'embodiment is the product of the composition and volumes of capital that can be accrued and carried by the body and the fit between the habitus … and the field. Embodiment also provides us with a way of recognising authority in its physical dispositions. The embodied entitlement to space (physical and aural) is often a statement of social entitlement' (2004, 22). Therefore, physical bodily presence, social relationships and hierarchies, and material space intersect in complex ways generating and revising power relations within and between multiple intersecting fields. I now explore further the implications of an embodied understanding of capital and identity.

2.2.1.2. Embodied capital, performance, and performativity

Important post-structuralist feminist interventions explored how identity-formation and bodily dispositions are constantly in flux, rather than fixed and constant, as Bourdieu's earliest formulations of habitus suggested. Holt suggests that embodied identities are the 'site of the reproduction (and potential transformation) of broader societal differences' cutting across presupposed binaries between the body and society and nature and society as 'the 'nature' of the materiality of the body is not a pre-given, rather it is a dynamic material process intersecting with, and impinging upon, social and cultural relations' (2008, 237). Performance and performativity are intertwining concepts which illuminate the ways in which we are constantly forming and reforming our identities. Butler describes performativity as a constant remaking of norms which 'precede, constrain and exceed the performer' (Butler 1993, 24). Identity is socially constructed, as Lawler points out in her discussion of class,

culture, and identity. She emphasises the need to 'consider identity not just as something felt or experienced (what we might see as self- identification, or subjectivity) but as something conferred – something imposed on us irrespective of how we feel about ourselves' (2005, 802). This has implications in terms of power imbalances as performativity 'involves the saturation of performances and performers with power, with particular subject positions.' (Gregson & Rose 2000, 441). Identities and power relations are produced by power and simultaneously help to produce it. As explored above, however, this is not always a conscious choice as

> 'norms of appropriate identity performance have become unconsciously inculcated into individuals. Thus, identity performances are not entirely conscious, rationalised or staged; they are often just 'done' … Performativity theories illuminate that the agent does not precede the 'doing' of the performative act or event. Rather, the actor 'becomes' through the event, while simultaneously drawing upon and reproducing a historical consolidation of previous (gendered) acts' (Holt 2008, 237).

This is key for human geographers as 'for a critical human geography concerned with the constructedness but also with the provisionality of social identities, social differences and social power relations, it is vital that we conceptualise performers as in some sense produced by power, and not – as in most current geographical accounts – virtuoso, theatrical, anterior agents at one remove from power's social script' (Gregson & Rose 2000, 441). Further, there is a spatial element at play in the creation and performance of identity, something which Gregson & Rose see as vital for human geographers to engage with as 'a notion of performance is indeed crucial for a critical human geography concerned to understand the construction of social identity, social difference, and social power relations, and the way space might articulate all of these' (2000, 434). The context in which the performance takes place conditions the performance itself (Holt 2008, 237). For my research there is a very specific spatial and social field under investigation: the London squatting scene. This is made up of both material spaces and social networks and conditions the value and hierarchy of different gendered and classed performances, and the development of field-specific habitus and 'feel for the game'. I will delve further into the spatial dynamics of power creation and mediation in a later section of this chapter (2.2.3.).

2.2.1.3. Gendered and classed implications of embodied capital

As mentioned above, feminist scholars have complicated Bourdieu's rather simplistic views on gendered identity formation, as Skeggs argues ''we need to think against Bourdieu's assumption that gender and sexuality are reproduced by the take-up of norms; rather it is precisely the inversion of norms that is the product of feminist and queer struggles … lesbians and gay men have learnt not to just occupy positions of ambiguity but also to *deploy* ambiguity to resist the forces of power and violence by making oneself unrecognisable, difficult to read, or making oneself abject in a non-pathological way' (2004, 26). Skeggs is speaking specifically of those who exist on the margins of

sexual and gendered acceptability, however, it can be argued that this deployment of ambiguity can be used in different ways, in different fields, to signify different things as there is no single normative view of acceptable gendered performance. 'The performativity of gender, then, is done in the context of varied restraints and constraints. Normative masculinity and femininity are defined in particular and differing ways contingent upon and in conjunction with location, age, race, class, culture, etc.' (Holford 2012, 23).

However, there *is* a mainstream standard against which gendered and classed aesthetics and performances are judged and monitored. 'Representations of working-class people are marked by disapproval or distain, not for the 'objective' markers of their position, but for (what are perceived to be) their identities. Everything is saturated with meaning: their clothes, their bodies, their houses, all are assumed to be markers of some 'deeper', pathological form of identity' (Lawler 2005, 437). Skeggs discusses this extensively in her work on gendered and classed working-class identities and value formation. She argues that white working-class women in particular are denigrated and translated into figures of disgust (2005). She suggests that the process of devaluing working-class dispositions and behaviours is multifaceted across varied sites, and 'solidified, concretised, condensed into bodies and personhood at different moments, generating different compositions and volumes of exchange-value' (2005, 969). Skeggs refers to the exclusionary displays and performances of power as 'symbolic boundary-marking … purposefully making mis-recognisable the episteme and power relations that underpin how to accrue the 'right' capitals (in a combination of social, cultural, economic and symbolic' (2011, 501) While she is referring to the exclusionary practices of the middle-classes it could be similarly applied to the internal regulations and norms which condition status and privilege within subcultures (Miller 2014).

However, Skeggs also argues that working-class communities develop alternative value systems that do not necessarily map onto those markers of taste and capital as regulated by the middle and upper classes, something that has implications for my research into squats as subcultural spaces with alternative markets of social and cultural capital and hierarchy. Skeggs illustrates alternative forms of value formation and acquisition outside those demarcated by the dominant class, referring to these as 'value reversal' and 'revalorisation' (2011, 504). She expands Bourdieu's (and others) analysis of the working-class as 'lack' to demonstrate alternative economies of value and community, arguing that 'working-class culture is not point zero of culture: rather, it has a different value system, one not recognised by the dominant symbolic economy' (2011, 153, see also Lawler 2005).

However, these can still become dominated and regulated by the middle-classes who merely adopt a working-class posture, as they have the flexible habitus of those taught the 'feel for the game'. This 'lack', or 'taste' can be inverted or complicated in the case of subcultures such as squatting. Those who hold a middle-class habitus and the associated cultural and social capital and thus an intuitive

20

'feel for the game' are sometimes able to perform the 'correct' form of working-class squatter better than a working-class squatter themselves who may desire a different aesthetic or cultural landscape. This could be to do with what Skeggs refers to as 'the embarrassment of class' which manifests as an attempt to deny or hide their class due to the recognition of the privilege which comes with it (2005, 976). Therefore the 'alternative forms of value' that Skeggs outlines are still, at least partially, being moderated by the middle-classes. Whether conscious or not, by devaluing the working-class the middle-classes are able to secure their own value. This can involve 'using some aspects of the culture of the working-class to enhance one's value, but also maintaining the position of judgement to attribute value, which assigns the other as immoral, repellent, abject, worthless, disgusting, even disposable' (Skeggs 2005, 976-77). The performance of a different class position than your own in order to secure your own status is a recurring theme throughout this thesis. Lawler suggests that the ironic performances that the middle-classes engage in when simulating working class culture do not rid them of their brutality: 'does the knowing smile really undo or undermine symbolic violence?' (2005, 437). Whether these performances are done with the conscious detached irony that Lawler discusses, and whether that lessens or in fact bolsters their impact, will be a feature of my investigation.

2.2.2. Interpersonal relationships and social space

The generation of individual agency and social interaction cannot be extricated from each other, both are mutually constitutive. After having looked at the main theoretical considerations behind my understanding of identity formation and embodied capital, I will now explore how this in turn affects and is affected by interpersonal relationships and social space. Agency is a linking concept as McNay argues that it is 'through developing mediating concepts, in this case agency, that the determining force of economic and cultural relations upon daily life can be made visible and, in this way, the issue of identity can be connected to that of social structure' (2004, 175). Social groupings themselves are generated through the combination and conflicts between individuals, with the group identity dependent 'on the particularity of the issue addressed and of the process performed, rather than on preexisting social identities' with the process of participation itself generating this group identity (Gregson & Rose 2000, 440). Therefore, the generation of the self can never be extricated from the social relations in which we are continually (re)formed, and vice versa (Holt 2008).

In order to analyse interpersonal relations, I draw on McNay's argument that 'structural forces only reveal themselves in the lived reality of social relations' (2004, 177). She makes this argument with reference to the Bordieuan concept of social space in which 'actors occupy positions within social fields that are determined both by the distribution of resources within a given field and also by the structural relations between that field and others' (2004, 184). This allows us to perceive gender and class as lived social relations rather than fixed within a static habitus or naturalised within the body.

21

2.2.2.1. Boundary-drawing, cultural competencies, and exclusion

Boundary drawing is an individual, social, and spatial practice – conceptually tying together the themes I have outlined above, and which run throughout my thesis. While 'social relations' is a term that suggests collaboration or kinship, it is important not to overlook the presence of conflict and power differentials within these relations. As Holt argues, 'more attention could be paid to the hierarchical and conflictual nature of all social relationships' (2008, 232). Social relations can be simultaneously sources of joy, reassurance, and connection as well as sources of tension, anxiety, and exclusion. In the first instance, France *et al* argue that within youth subcultures that have an alternative value system to the mainstream, 'the diverse forms of cultural practices that exist as forms of cultural capital are usually recognised by peers and friends as critical cultural currency that has important recognition and meaning to how they live together … such forms of cultural capital have strong relationships with habitus and 'how things are done'' (2013, 610). As Bourdieu says, 'the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term i.e. at transforming contingent relations … into relationships that are at once necessary and elective, implying durable obligations selectively felt (feelings of gratitude, respect, friendship) or institutionally guaranteed (rights)' (1986, 250–51). Culturally specific knowledge and skills can lead to symbolic capital and a higher place within the social space or field within which you are operating.

On the flip side of the process of inclusion and valuation are the processes of exclusion and boundary-drawing. Boundary-drawing is one of the ways in which the tensions and conflicts manifest as forms of exclusion or hierarchy, which can have strongly gendered and classed implications. Miller describes symbolic boundaries as 'conceptual distinctions between people, practices, and objects that symbolically distance some things from others ... When individuals define themselves in opposition to some real or imagined group, they do boundary work' (2014, 472). The squatting movement is a field in which boundary work is being done on both a symbolic/social and a material/spatial level, with decisions over who one ought to live with following certain criteria which ought to be adhered to, and certain field-specific 'rules of the game' and cultural competencies which bestow or strip value to individuals, dependent on their adherence. In her work on gender in the metal scene, Miller argues that boundary-drawing 'creates a competitive, conflict-oriented atmosphere … because this boundary-drawing exists in a context where masculine capital is valued and feminine and female capital are devalued, gender becomes a particularly effective tool with which to discredit others' (2014, 475). Likewise, there are rules to adhere to which follow gendered and classed lines within the squatting movement. Miller's justification for the application of theories of symbolic capital and boundary-drawing also rings true for my research into a different grassroots community. High stakes but a lack

of institutional markers of acceptability or being in the 'in crowd' means further reliance on subtle, unconscious forms of evaluating each other, and of shifting our identity performances to fit these standards, with lesser or greater degrees of success. This precarity or uncertainty plays a key role in the degree of inclusion or exclusion allowed within a social community as a 'great deal of effort and energy goes into producing forms of 'comfort' (via home, estrangement, boundary maintenance) or ontological security to overcome the ambivalence that beats at the heart of being human' (Skeggs 2004, 29). I am responding to Miller's call to 'ask how gender organises perception, evaluation, and reputation – that is, symbolic capital – in various cultural fields' (2014, 479).

Boundary-drawing often relies on a pre-supposed set of shared values, as well as the cultural competencies discussed above. Skeggs relays these different elements of value-formation and boundary-drawing in relation to the creation and securing of middle-class values:

> These processes: increased ambivalence and the breaking down of moral boundaries, affect stripping, the extended use and propertizing of culture in the making of the exchange-value middle-class self, the breaking down of white privilege into the morally good and bad, the imperative towards extraordinary public subjectivity, which can be both marketed and used to make political claims, and the focus on choice, ethics and self-responsibility which visualize bad choice, bad selves and no value, collectively create the conditions whereby the associations between social groups and moral value are being realigned. (Skeggs 2005, 974)

What are the actual values the group revolves around, rather than the supposed aims and political beliefs? What is an acceptable divergence and what is not? Despite adherence to the markers, the road to increased symbolic capital is not always straight-forward. In addition, there is the risk of guilt by association, losing your social standing due to the decline in status of those you have chosen to associate with. Once again, the social and the embodied are heavily interlinked (Holt 2008). McNay supports the necessary emphasis on emotions and relationships in understanding social dynamics as by 'analysing emotions as a form of social interaction it is possible to see how they are both shaped by latent social structures and also the vehicle through which invisible power dynamics are made present within immediate everyday experience' (2004, 187).

My approach towards understanding the nuances and intricacies of interpersonal dynamics and decision-making is complicated by the anarchist conceptions of mutual aid, solidarity, and consensus. These are present in squats and other communal spaces where understandings of hierarchies and the dangers of particular people occupying positions of unequal power condition the way in which decisions are made. However, believing in, and striving for consensus and the equal sharing of power, is not the same thing as its manifestation. Due to this belief, and the lack of institutional structures and bureaucracy in decision-making processes in autonomous spaces, the risk of unofficial or implicit hierarchies of power are often more present and can be more insidious and harder to pinpoint or

address. These arguments are not new, they have been recognised within the left-wing feminist organising tradition for decades now, perhaps most famously outlined by Jo Freeman in 'The tyranny of structurelessness' in 1972. One text I draw on which deals explicitly with informal hierarchy in anarchistic organising spaces is Vannucci and Singer's 2010 handbook on handling collective processes, which highlights these insidious practices with a compassionate eye towards correcting behaviours and tendencies in order to improve, rather than condemn collective organising practices. The contradictions between an explicit stance against relations of domination and the presence of them in our movements has been one of the more common critiques of left-wing spaces and organising, so much so that to this day, people are still writing treatises on how best to handle accountability processes, and still very much getting them wrong (Chen *et al* 2016).

These issues around how to deal with unofficial relationships of power and domination can be at their most dangerous when unaddressed when we deal with interpersonal relationships, particularly intimate romantic or sexual ones, where the potential hurt caused can be greater, and where we so often see our attempts to address harm in a non-carceral way fall apart. A text which strongly informs my theoretical understanding of interpersonal dynamics within activist scenes is *Conflict is not abuse* (Schulman 2016). Schulman focuses on how an overstatement of harm caused during a conflict can lead to situations of shunning and exclusion with highly problematic implications that, she argues, ultimately lead towards an embrace of the state as the arbiter of justice. The tendency towards expulsion of the figure who has 'caused harm' has been increasing in recent years with worrying effects. There is a tension between the social credit of being the injured party and the risk of vulnerability/femininity seen as a detriment in terms of access to social and cultural resources.

Schulman argues that one of the motivations for the overstatement of harm and the denial of any culpability in creating a hostile or conflictual situation is the feeling that one is only deserving of sympathy and support from their community if they are wholly in the right. She calls this being 'eligible for compassion' (2016, 105). If someone admits their part in a hostile or unpleasant situation, why does that exonerate the other party and demonise the person who admitted it? Why does admitting fault deny you the right to care and support? 'Solidarity' is a word that is often used, but rarely analysed. People would consider that they are showing solidarity by backing up their friend who claims they were wronged. But what if their friend was overstating harm? What if they were also complicit in the escalation of an unpleasant situation? Solidarity ought to be the attempt by a community to care for the other members of that community – and people external to it – and to work for your collective and individual betterment, striving to become better people with the support of your fellows. It is with this framing in mind that I approach my analysis.

2.2.3. Spatial relationships and material contexts to power

Whilst above I discussed social space as an interpersonal, ephemeral realm, it can also be manifested in physical space. Savage refers to the 'the irretrievably corporeal nature of both physical and social space, the way that shapes on the ground are associated with the organization of fields and the distribution of capital' (2012, 515). Just as individuals and social relations are intimately connected, so are social relations and the material sites in which they are enacted. 'Places are 'fields of practice' and, therefore, have their own 'rules' and can be contested spaces which have to be continually managed or 'won' … In the context of specific fields like neighbourhoods they respond to both people and surroundings in specific ways that reflect the interconnection of fields and habitus' (France *et al* 2013, 604). Both the habitus and social relations are conditioned by 'potentialities and limits in the built environment that engage those dispositions. Built environment and habitus mutually sustain each other, but neither has absolute control over the other.' (Archer 2005, 431). Archer breaks down the ways in which Bourdieu's theories can be applied to physical space. He suggests that 'the habitus encompasses two complementary relations between the self and built space: first, spatial form as an apparatus through which people establish identity and articulate social relations; and second, the enduring capacity of buildings to sustain, protect, and perpetuate those identities and social relations' (Archer 2005, 431). I will look at these two dimensions in turn, before turning to how scholars of squatting and alterative homesteads have dealt with these themes.

2.2.3.1. The mutual development of space, identity, and social relations

Gregson and Rose coherently make the case for a geographic, *spatial,* understanding of the interplay between subjects and physical space, and how both are mutually constitutive. They argue that space 'needs to be thought of as brought into being through performances and as a performative articulation of power' (2000, 434). Within the socio-spatial field of squatting, their suggestion that spaces are constantly in flux and constituted by the performers acting within them has particular resonance, as squats are not only continually socially constructed through the activities that take place within them, but are also in perpetual *physical* flux, as they move from site to site across the city, with the social activities that occur within them contingent on the structure and physical possibilities of the material space as much as the make-up, values, and interactions of those who live and work within them. Therefore, I rest much of my analytical considerations upon Gregson and Rose's attempt to reinvigorate geographic understandings of space, power, and social relationships: 'we want to examine the social relations of performances and the relationality of their spaces, and to suggest that another source of performative instability is the blurring of clear distinctions between positions and spaces' (Gregson & Rose 2000, 442).

Savage argues that 'physical space is the concretisation of social space' (2012, 515), suggesting that field theory is the most important of Bourdieu's concepts for understanding the relationship between social and physical space as it allows for the analysis of the spatial organisation of social

relationships. Similarly, McNay suggests that for Bourdieu, 'the inextricable entwinement of material and discursive relations ('structure of positions' and 'space of possibles') is evident in all social realms' and field theory is the means of dissecting and comprehending these relations (2004, 182). This has implications for analysis of class and gender as 'through examining the clustering, sifting, and sorting of people, objects, and identities in physical and social space, through investigating the mechanisms which allow some to move more freely than others ... we have the potential for enriching contemporary urban theory and recharging our understanding of social inequality' (Savage 2012, 518). The enrichment and deepening of understanding of social dynamics in urban environments is something this thesis attempts to contribute to.

2.2.3.2. Built structures, identities, and safety – 'the home'

> What does it mean, to live in a room? Is to live in a place to take possession of it? What does taking possession of a place mean? As from when does somewhere become truly yours? - (Perec 1974, 24)

In order to understand the relationship between physical spaces and personal feelings I turn to critical geographies of the home. This term was coined by Blunt and Dowling in 2006 and has been explored and developed by many scholars since then. These new explorations of the home have allowed scholars to develop a more nuanced understanding of home, transcending the idea that it is simply a physical space, to encompass the ways in which it is also a symbolic, emotive, and collective space, 'constructed not only as a line separating the inside from the outside (a house), but also as the epitome, the spatial inscription of the idea of individual freedom, a place liberated from fear and anxiety, a place supposedly untouched by social, political and natural processes, a place enjoying an autonomous and independent existence' (Kaika 2004, 266). Brickell argues that 'the home is a vital space for understanding the micro-geographies of social and spatial uncertainty which influence, and are influenced by, wider structural forces of unhomeliness, alienation, and homelessness' (2011, 227).

Squatting is a housing movement, first and foremost, and one that operates on the fringes of acceptable housing, blurring the line between housed and homeless, with heightened stakes in terms of the precarity and vulnerability of the residents. When your housing is always temporary, always at risk of being lost through violence (both symbolic and physical), when does it become a home? And how does this material precarity affect your social relationships? Maffesoli argues that 'space guarantees a necessary security. We know that limits fence one in, but also give life . . . the stability of space is a focal point, an anchor for the group' (1996, 133). So, if it is not secure, is it not considered a true home? Blumen *et al* suggest that a 'place of living is converted into a home by becoming an imagined idealization of notions such as privacy, intimacy, exclusiveness, secrecy, sheltering and even sanctity. Rather than a space of a fixed functional characterization, the home is a space of relationships and experiences of many, often contested options, and a meaningful nucleus for the

living self' (2013, 7). This suggests that a home is contingent on the social relationships which occur within it, but also necessitates a degree of shelter and security, as well as exclusiveness and intimacy. However, this suggests that a home can only be considered such if the above requirements are fulfilled. Therefore, I follow Moore, who argues that we need to also 'focus on the ways in which home disappoints, aggravates, neglects, confines and contradicts as much as it inspires and comforts us' (2000, 213). Homes can be ambiguous, hurtful, unsafe at times, fragile, precarious, ugly, discomforting, as much as they are fulfilling, comforting and secure. To suggest that a home need fulfil all the above conditions would imply many of us currently adequately housed – to a lesser or greater degree – do not in fact have a home.

Whilst Blumen *et al* (2013) offer up the starry-eyed description of a home, quoted above, they do also recognise the presence of conflict and ambiguity within the home, and, importantly, recognise that the home transcends the material space to take on a more emotive resonance, such that 'the home is a material and an affective space, real or imagined, that is formative of personal and national identity and shaped by everyday practices, lived experiences, social relations, memories and emotions ... It is also a space of paradoxical experiences and relationships, such as belonging and alienation, intimacy and violence, desire, and fear, that lie at the heart of human life' (Blumen *et al* 2013, 9). They argue that definitions of home can also transcend the immediate four walls, to spaces beyond, such as the neighbourhood, the city, the planet, and, I would argue, also the community. They argue that 'sites that extract emotions are representations of meaning that authenticate the concept of home as rich and multi-scalar, unrestricted to the place of dwelling or to family ties. It is noteworthy that such multiplicity is not predestined, but rather socially constructed and hierarchically ordered into categories of homes as containers of the self' (2013, 13).

2.2.3.3. Squats as radical homes

I have long argued in favour of squats, their legalisation, support, and continuation, both as a solution to the housing crisis and as a liminal space for the experimentation in new forms of living and development and reconfiguration of the self and your political horizons (Milligan 2016, Milligan 2023). I argue that squatting is a vital means of subverting the 'new enclosures' (Hodkinson 2012) and reclaiming property for common good. Further, I argue that the act of squatting in and of itself is prefigurative, opening new and important ways of living and being in common outside of the nuclear family or externally imposed hierarchical and capitalist structures that guide your way of living. My understanding of the importance of squatting comes from my own experiences, my discussions with my interviewees, and is supported by much academic literature. I outline some of the main arguments and analyses that have contributed to my understanding of squatting below, primarily orientated through the lens of radical homes and the urban commons. However, while many scholars have convincingly argued for the importance of squats *as alternatives* to mainstream society, both in the

material sites themselves and in the social relations which take place within them, I look at the ways in which squats may inadvertently mirror dynamics present in broader society, particularly in the ways in which classed and gendered norms which are attempted to subvert can persist.

For radical housing scholars, the housing struggle 'is framed, lived, and embodied as a struggle to affirm a different way of being in the world' (Lancione 2019, 3). Many scholars of squatting have taken up this perspective, offering insights and perspectives on the ways in which squats attempt to fulfil this mission. There have been several historical pieces on squatting in different eras which have contributed to my understanding of change over time (Wates & Wolmer 1980, Reeve 1980; see also Cook 2013, Vasudevan 2017, Wall 2017). Arguments and perspectives on the squatting movement include an urge to see squats as manifesting the 'urban commons' (Dadusc 2019, Grazioli 2017, Martinez & Polanska 2020). Martinez and Polanska define the urban commons as 'the collective self-management of resources, spaces, services, and institutions located in urban settings which are deemed essential for social reproduction' (2020, 1246). Several other scholars mention the presence of rules and guidelines for behaviour set within squats and argue for their necessity as a commoning of knowledge (Novák 2020, Polanska & Wedon 2020). These guidelines can create barriers for entry, both physical and social. 'In squats there is a permanent tension between openness and closeness. While most groups are apparently open to the incorporation of new members, this is a very slow process of getting in touch, building mutual trust and sharing efforts in multiple activities' (Martinez Lopez & Lorenzi Fernandez 2012, 169). Polanska and Wedon take this further, suggesting that squats offer a space for alternative modes of social reproduction (2020). I follow Brown & Pickerill in arguing for the importance of studying inter-relations within squats. They suggest that:

> we need to pay attention to the different spaces of activism in order to better understand the complexities of the relationship between emotions and activism. The spaces that we address extend beyond physical places, to a consideration of the conduct of the self and interpersonal relationships in activist encounters … the characterisation of these spaces better enables us to unpack the complexity of emotions in activism, and to identify those practices that might facilitate on-going commitments to activism. (Brown & Pickerill 2009, 2)

Literature on radical domesticity highlights the importance of paying attention to the home, reorientating our focus towards everyday lived experiences rather than the singular and spectacular (Davies 2023). The centrality of the home as a site of political action and change has been a hallmark of feminist understandings of politics since the 1970s (Oakley 1974/2018, Hochschild 1989/2012, Toupin 2018, Federici 2018) , with Davies broadening the possibilities of what a home can be, arguing that 'political struggle can transform the home into something radical and collective, as social clubs, community centres and the houses of friends, family and neighbours become central to everybody's lives' (Davies 2023, n.p.). This is in line with the work of social reproduction theorists

such as Federici (2018), Bhattacharya (2017), Sears (2017), and Ferguson (2020) who also call to rethink the home: 'rather than looking simply at its internal dynamics, we need to think more systematically about the household's role in reproducing capitalism' (Ferguson 2020, n.p.). Further, Ferguson calls for us to extend to focus from individual spaces to networks between spaces, arguing that:

> in placing too great an emphasis on building such spaces, one risks overlooking the importance of supporting, and building solidarity across, spaces and movements within our everyday lives within capitalism … [to] break down the barriers between them, and offer them glimpses of alternative, non-capitalist, ways of being. (Ferguson 2020, n.p.).

Further, in recognition of the precarity of the rental market in general, it is important to focus on the internal relationships within homes and how they are affected by structural issues.

Affective bonds are formed through 'encounters with forces and passages of intensity that bear out, while occasionally leaving bare, the singularly and intimately impersonal – even sub-personal and pre-personal – folds of belonging' (Seigworth & Gregg 2010, 3). Squatting often involves a fundamental shift from an individualistic aesthetic to a communal one, with all the messiness and conflict that entails, but with all the beauty that arises from it too. 'There is also a materiality to intimacy that goes beyond touch. A materiality that speaks to our willingness to co-exist in the same physical spaces and amongst the same things, to entangle our affections and attachments within our very surroundings' (Behrooz 2022, n.p.). The importance of these ritualistic moments in lives governed by instability has been recognised by other scholars. Brown and Pickerill argue that 'familiar practices form the rituals underpinning much activism that serve to emotionally sustain activists ... The development of ritual performance creates ... shared meaning' (2009, 6). Ritual is an emotionally-laden process and one that imbues the spaces with the people who dwell in them, as well as bringing a familiarity and a sense of the 'home' to a space that may be altogether new. 'The word camaraderie has its roots in the Latin word for room, used once upon a time to describe people who discovered tenderness in the shelter and stability of a shared room' (Behrooz 2022, n.p.).

'A 'home' carries implications of social relationships, ideas of family and belonging' (Tunåker 2015, 247). The process of turning an empty building, often unrecognisable as somewhere you could sleep, into a home, demonstrates that a home is more than merely a physical structure. It is imbued with meaning. 'A 'home' implies particular social relations, or activities within a physical structure, whereas 'house' does not … The word 'home' conjures up such images as personal warmth, comfort, stability and security' (Watson 1984, 60). Douglas speaks directly to the fact that for somewhere to be a home it does not necessarily have to be permanent, but the repetition and familiarity of objects play into the creation and maintenance of a home space:

> Home is located in space, but it is not necessarily a fixed space. It does not need bricks and mortar, it can be a wagon, a caravan, a boat, or a tent … For a home neither the space nor its appurtenances have to be fixed, but there has to be something regular about the appearance and reappearance of its furnishings. (Douglas 1991, 289)

She goes on to suggest that it is not only potentially impermanent, but that the practice of living within it, from a temporal, but also an aesthetic and moral perspective contributes to the home-feeling (1991). This familiarity and repetition is a feature of the squatting movement – you will come across the same kinds of furnishings, posters, stickers, and graffiti all over London, and Europe, as well as similar ways of organising and expected norms. While they can be hard to break into (both physically and socially), their familiarity can be a comfort once the rules are understood (Behrooz 2022, Vannucci & Singer 2010). This is true of other activist spaces, as noted by Brown and Pickerill:

> There is a familiarity between the activist spaces at protest camps, social centres, squats, and the homes of activists. For example, kitchens in these different locations can look and feel remarkably similar and such places serve to kindle a sense of belonging and safety within which activists can reflect. These places, which straddle the public space of protest and the private space of activist homes, can serve as 'positive spaces' from which to construct alternative futures. (Brown & Pickerill 2009, 6)

But squats are not 'normal' homes. Despite the ever-increasing precarity of the rental sector, there are still *some* protections left, some legal mechanisms that can be utilised, and some form of safety net which precludes eviction on the whims (justified or not) of your housemates. Further, the increased precarity of squatting itself over the last forty years, with the introduction of restrictions on squatting first in 1977 with the Criminal Law Act, and then in 2012 when residential squatting became illegal, means that whereas in the 1980s it may have been usual to be able to squat somewhere for years, those kinds of arrangements are nowadays few and far between (Finchett-Maddock 2014). It is now far more common to lose a place within the first week or months of living there. This high-stress environment and lack of material security affects the social dynamics at play.

Squatting can often engender a particular kind of insecurity and trauma. The traumatic effects of eviction and housing precarity have been well documented (Paton & Cooper 2017, Brickell *et al* 2017, Holl *et al* 2016), with academics arguing that 'the traumatic emotional and wider political implications of the physical demolition of, or forced eviction from, the home should not be underestimated' (Nowicki 2017, 127). Squats are one of the more precarious forms of housing to be evicted from as while the state of the rented sector is dire, the legal processes that are required to be followed and the procedures meant that they lacked the immediate vulnerability that a squat eviction could exhibit, as well as the actual physical violence which was a common occurrence during an eviction.

The significance of squatting both as a solution to, and an experience of, homelessness again draws us back to the fundamental nature of the home. 'The definition of homelessness inevitably relies on our understanding of what 'home' means, a question deeply entangled with the notions of 'house' and 'household' and everything they entail' (Tunåker 2015, 246). 'Like our bodies, the houses in which we live are so commonplace, so familiar, so much part of the way things are, that we often hardly seem to notice them. It is only under exceptional circumstances—house-moving, wars, fires, family rows, lost jobs or no money—that we are forcibly reminded of the house's central role and fundamental significance' (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995, 3-4).

Scholars of squatting have long discussed the radical potential and reality of squatting as a subversive attack on capitalist property relations, as well as a rewarding housing solution (Vasudevan 2017, Dadusc & Dee 2014, Polanska 2017, Martinez 2020, among others). The importance of these physical sites for alternative urban commons has also been taken up by other scholars, such as Chatterton who suggests that there is a lack of physical sites where you can encounter people from different backgrounds, with different political philosophies and ways of engaging in activism or experiments in creating new words, a lack of spaces outside 'the pressures of policing and assumed social roles' (2006, 273). Brown explicitly refers to squats when discussing queer autonomous liberatory spaces, arguing that:

> the act of searching for an abandoned building to take over, transform, and put back into use for a short while as a queer autonomous space poses questions about private property and the privatisation (in terms of both ownership and use) of public urban space ... Many of the other spatial practices associated with these events also contest the individualising ideological norms of neoliberal capitalism - the practice of collective cooking for a large ensemble, or the ethos of skill sharing, and the attempt to ensure that collective responsibility is taken for the smooth functioning of the event. (Brown 2007, 2696)

Squats hold this potential and have been recognised as such. Gillespie *et al* argue, as I have done (Milligan 2023) that these often-temporary urban commons leave a resonance in terms of the relationships formed and the affective experiences which are imprinted upon you long after their eventual dissolution, through social relations, as well as practices such as communal meals, mutual aid, and skill-sharing. They argue that these encounters enable 'city dwellers to go beyond 'abstract solidarity' to create concrete networks of solidarity, grounded in specific places' (Gillespie *et al* 2018, 16). This is reinforced by Brown, describing autonomous queer squats and occupations:

> The creation of these spaces is infused with a spirit of autonomy, a practical and political attempt to create alternative forms of sociality and mutual support in the here and now … [which] when tied to an explicitly anticapitalist politics, and to celebrations of queer exuberance, they can be deeply empowering (Brown 2007, 2697)

The importance of squats as spaces of queer liberation is recognised by scholars such as March, who writes on the importance of liminal spaces for trans self-expression. They describe liminality as 'space that is subversive or alternative, presenting opportunity for transgressive behaviour' (2020, 2) and recognise the importance of everyday lived dynamics in liminal environments. They see liminality as:

> an ongoing lived condition of dynamic becoming and transformation ... Liminality as a concept brings together queer ways of thinking through unboundedness, spillage, fluidity, multiplicity, and processes of contingent, non-linear becoming, as well as the relations of power and regulation that seek their stability or closure. (March 2020, 1)

This description of liminal space is certainly true of the squatting movement at times. However, liminality does not always mean transgression – indeed sometimes these liminal spaces can inadvertently enforce the very behaviours and attitudes they disavow.

The social and the material overlap heavily, with squatting becoming a 'threshold space' (Gillespie *et al* 2018, 12). 'Participants in these spaces actively create them in order (temporarily) to revel in their otherness, difference, and distance from mainstream society' (Brown 2007, 2696). Gregson and Rose speak to the interwoven nature of identity and space in their discussion of performativity.

> Performed spaces are not discreet, bounded stages, but threatened, contaminated, stained, enriched by other spaces. As are performers. So, the kinds of performances which we are interested in here are those where the distinction between `actor' and `audience' is displaced, fuzzy; which is not to say that certain performances elude power relations, but rather to suggest that power operates in a rather different, altogether less predictable, manner than that implied by the reading of Foucault's account of power which currently dominates the geographical literature (Gregson & Rose 2000, 442)

They argue that 'particular performances articulate their own spatialities, as opposed to being just located in space. But … space, is citational, and itself iterative, unstable, performative' (Gregson & Rose 2000, 446-447). While they are talking metaphorically, squats are a material manifestation of their concept of citational, unstable space, as squats are disbanded, moved, reconfigured, and re-emerge again in a geographic sense.

2.2.3.3. My contribution to the literature on squatting

In terms of investigations into gender and class dynamics within London-based squats, there have been some excellent historic contributions in recent years, such as Miller's 2023 article on the Brixton Rebel Dykes movement in 1980s and Wall's 2017 piece on sisterhood in squatting communities in the 1970s (Miller 2023, Wall 2017). Further, on a more intersectional level, Ferreri (2023) investigated how historically both squats and co-operatives merged differing interests and positionalities, drawing on feminist, queer, and racial justice ideas. On a more international level, Wittger (2017) and Datta (2016) looked at the intersection between gender dynamics and legal-citizenship frameworks within

squats in Rio de Janeiro and Delhi respectively. In terms of class, a large amount of the literature on squatting recognises its importance as an affordable housing option for those priced out of the neoliberal city (Martínez 2011, 2016, Cattaneo and Martínez 2014, Raimondi 2019, Soresina 2020) but few that I have come across have grappled with the manifestation of class difference or gender difference and power dynamics *within* squats. In terms of investigations into internal dynamics and difference I draw upon Atabien and Tekdemir (2020) and Karaliotas and Kapsali (2021) who draw attention to the importance to recognise and respond to internal conflicts, and particularly Caciagli (2019) who explicitly draws out the ramifications of conflict in terms of expulsion and the generation of rules and punishments within squatted spaces and Grohman (2020) in her interrogation of the socio-spatial effects (or lack thereof) of safer spaces policies within squats and the power differentials which can emerge at specific junctures.

Whilst these are all excellent and thoughtful works of literature which have contributed to my own analysis and broader understanding of the squatters' movement across the world, my thesis adds a unique contribution to the literature on squatting for several reasons. First, whilst some of my research is historic, much of it is contemporary or takes place in the 21st century unlike most of the gender-focused pieces I have read that are set in London. Second, I focus on classed and gendered dynamics *within* the squats, as opposed to the classed implications of unequal cities and the role of squats within them on a broader scale. Third, my site of investigation into tensions and conflict management within squats is contemporary London, with the weight of the peculiarities of Britain's class-based system in the background. Fourth, through combining Bordieuan, feminist, queer and spatial theories I demonstrate a new way of approaching this geographical subject. By analysing power as subjective, situational, informed by class, gender, habitus, and capital I offer a multifaceted perspective on its manifestation and maintenance which has implications for further study of the home, social relationships, political dynamics, subcultural arrangements, and institutional politics. How informal power dynamics and hidden hierarchies infuse different communities has resonance beyond the specific community I have chosen to focus on. Finally, by using the concept of capital I am also ensuring the language my participants themselves use is centred in my analysis of their experiences.

2.3. Conclusion

In this chapter I have laid out the main theoretical framings I use throughout this thesis. The Bordieuan concepts of habitus, capital, and field feature heavily throughout my analysis, as do considerations of performativity, gender, class, and power. Understanding the home as an ambivalent space allows me to deal with the positive and negative associations those I interviewed had with the squats they lived in. Finally, I reflect on the conceptual and spatial practice of boundary-drawing which pervades all of our relationships, with material and social ramifications in terms of inclusion

and exclusion. This framework allows me to analyse the different axes and performances of power and how they affect the interpersonal dynamics at play within squats.

I don't wish to pretend that my insights are novel, in fact part of my argument is that they are observed in a variety of social environments. There has been so much fantastic, passionate, and compassionate literature written about the squatting movement, that has inspired me in the last decade as I have written and thought about my own experiences and those of my comrades. I have mentioned but a few of those scholars and arguments above. My contribution then, is perhaps on the inverse. While acknowledging the importance of squats as spaces for experimentation, communality, and alternative, free, homescapes, I am investigating the ways in which the cultures within squats sometimes reflect, rather than disavow, broader societal trends, particularly with regard to classed and gendered norms. However, to focus on the contradictions within squats is not to write them off as mere facsimiles of society writ large. In attempting to shine a light on some of the more insidious ways in which norms of power and control can affect radical communities I hope to add to, rather than negate, the literature on the ways in which squatting is a vital and important intervention in an unjust city, and to make this intervention ever more just in the way it reacts to and rails against the confines of the world we live in.

3. Methodology

Introduction

In order to investigate the ways in which squatters live, how they handle conflict, and power imbalances, particularly along classed and gendered lines, I followed a broad methodological framework, which I delineate here. I first outline the epistemological lens through which I approached my investigation. This derives from the long tradition of feminist thought and investigation into ethical, and effective, knowledge production, complicating the researcher-'subjects' relationship. This is particularly effective in research around ways of knowing, understanding, and approaching the world and interpersonal relationships. I then turn to my methodology, which is situated within feminist and scholar-activist practices. After outlining my broad approach, I interrogate my own positionality both as a researcher and participant in these communities. I then turn to the practicalities of my methods, which are broadly ethnographic, focusing on how I ethically approached and used participant observation and interviews as the primary tools in my research arsenal. Finally, I outline my analytical approach, which falls broadly within the domain of discourse analysis.

3.1. Epistemology

There is not one feminist method. Indeed, a key tenet of intersectional feminism is understanding the multitude of perspectives, outlooks and experiences which shape and condition our understanding of reality and recognising the centrality of each individual's *specific* orientation towards the world and themselves. That said, there are certain methods of engaging with a research subject, interview and observational styles and ways of utilising and understanding one's own positionality as a researcher and as a feminist that lend themselves to research that attempts to position itself against patriarchal and hierarchical forms of enquiry.

The first step of developing a feminist methodological approach to urban geography is to grasp that, as Harding (1987) writes, it amounts to more than just 'adding women'. Whether that means women researchers or women subjects, an investigation falls far short if it imagines that the addition of women to a methodology which still rests on top-down or patriarchal understandings of space and society is an adequate 'feminist research'. It is important to recognise that we are fighting back against a centuries-long trend in the social sciences and humanities which universalises men's experiences and fails to consider those of women as equally important or relevant. When they are included in a given study, women's experiences are often segregated to a separate chapter of 'specialist interest' rather than embedded in a broader analysis, akin to the 'female friendly' categories of a porn website. However, rectifying this basic omission is not far enough, particularly if we are interested in interrogating ourselves as researchers rather than just broadening accepted categories of subjects.

Research becomes richer the more domains it enters, the more perspectives it highlights, the more histories it uncovers. As such my research is not simply a study of 'women who squat' (though such a study has yet to be fully elaborated). Through focusing on the interpersonal relationships and tensions between squatters of *all* genders, and how their behaviours reflect or contradict dominant and subcultural models of behaviour, my investigation will shine a light on the difference between intention and proclamation and the concrete enactment of behaviours. Further, as I explore later, studying squatting does not limit my conclusions to squatters, just as Hochschild's 1989 analysis of gender dynamics between 1980s North American middle-class heterosexual couples does not limit its application to only that subcategory. By *centring* gender and class dynamics within a broader exploration of a political and yet domestic community, my work can offer reflections to other forms of living and being and making decisions together, from the nuclear family to the twenty-person commune, from the grassroots organisation to the university department meeting. Understanding the complexity of the relationship between ideology and practice, intention and enactment allows us to take a closer look at ourselves, our own interpersonal relationships, and how they reflect or contradict our proclaimed political objectives.

3.1.1. The myth of objectivity: positionality and personal motivations

> 'Value-free research is an unachievable ideal. It is also an undesirable one' (Harding and Norberg 2005, 2010)

It is uncontroversial (within the humanities and social sciences) to state that there is no such thing as objectivity (Haraway 1980). I welcome that it is becoming less controversial to strive to produce explicitly socially and politically engaged research and indeed, to explicitly promote a particular set of ideals (Juris & Khasnabish 2013). I build upon Haraway's concept of 'situated knowledge' which constitutes all knowledge as partial, subjective, and embodied, and follow her and other feminist and activist scholars in applying this understanding not only to the research but to the researcher herself (Haraway 1988). I aim to contribute an informed and analytical perspective on my subject of research and to help in my small part to the furthering of squatters' political aims. I would never claim to be *the* voice, merely a voice, speaking up, alongside many others. 'The best feminist analysis … insists that … the class, race, culture, and gender assumptions, beliefs, and behaviours of the researcher her/himself must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint. … Thus, the researcher appears to us not as an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests.' (Harding 1987, 9).

I combine feminist methodology, as outlined by Harding above, with the militant ethnography methodology developed by Juris, among others. 'Militant ethnography seeks to overcome the divide between research and practice. Rather than generating sweeping strategic and/or political directives,

collaboratively produced ethnographic knowledge aims to facilitate ongoing activist (self-) reflection regarding movement goals, tactics, strategies, and organizational forms' (Juris 2007, 165). By situating the broad sweeping socially engaged movement-building aims of militant ethnography within a site as oft-forgotten and side-lined as the home, I aim to contribute to the understanding of the 'everyday life' of activists. How can we truly understand someone's commitment to equality until we discover who does the washing up?

My contribution is to take it outside the movement as a public, external, purely 'political' site of investigation and struggle into the intimate, the domestic, the semi, sometimes, halfway private spaces which as much constitute the struggle for everyday liberation, particularly from a gendered and classed perspective, as do the sites of struggle in what is perceived to be the grander public sphere. Further, as the above quotation demonstrates, the language of 'space' reigns large in the social movement lexicon, yet it is to different degrees 'concrete'. The struggle for decent and safe homes, ideally external from the capitalist housing market, is one of the most 'concrete' and 'everyday' forms of struggle. Space is often used in a metaphorical sense, but for me, space is grounded, and my ethnography is also grounded, in the physical space which I, and those with whom I fight, attempt to reclaim.

While I have talked broadly about my commitment to feminist and militant epistemic and ethnographic methods, within the geographic tradition specifically, I follow Cloke (2002) in recognising that a solution to the ethical impasse between the researcher and the research subject is for geographers to actively connect their academic and non-academic lives. I am a researcher *because* of my commitment to the political and spatial struggle my research subjects are engaged in, not the other way around (Cloke 2002, 588).

3.1.2. Ethics of Collaborative methods

Over the last few decades there has been a general agreement that collaborative methods must be part of a feminist research strategy. In the most basic sense, this approach attempts to deconstruct the hierarchy between the researcher and research subject and to *give something back* to the people who are participating in the research. 'Feminists were encouraged to share their experiences with other women, and to produce research findings that were *for* as well as about their subjects' (McDowell 1999, 236, my emphasis). Feminist research should certainly strive against exploiting a research subject or making her *feel* exploited or used. So long as it does not invalidate the results, any means by which she can be made to feel a valued participant should be utilised, and indeed, creative methods by which to achieve a solidarity or comfort should be considered, as we recognise that every person is individual and as such their levels of comfort and their needs in order to feel safe and validated may differ. In terms of my research, this included a process of overcoming (yet still acknowledging the

validity of) the general suspicion towards the researcher which is prevalent in marginalised subcultures and groups. It also included catering to the needs and levels of comfort of potential interviewees, for example allowing them to decide whether they would like to be interviewed at home, in a pub, with a friend etc. It also included sharing some of my own experiences, which may or may not relate to theirs, demonstrating my own vulnerabilities and hardships, yet not speaking over their own, something that McDowell suggests is an integral part of a feminist research strategy. She writes that 'intersubjectivity rather than objectivity is the ideal to strive for … and should be recognised as part of the research output rather than excluded from the final product' (1999, 236).

However, despite best intentions there still exist relations of power between a researcher and her subject, even if she approaches the subject in an open, empathetic, and collaborative way. The presence of the researcher *as a researcher* will ultimately not fail to condition responses and alter a dynamic. The relationship will never be fully equal (Aitken & Burman 1999). Therefore, this is not to say that as a woman relating to other people of marginalised genders I am above or separate from the dynamic of researcher and subjects, only that I strove to include myself in the experiences that they hold and empathised as far as possible with the emotional responses my questions or participation engendered.

The potential of my research leading to a sense of betrayal or exploitation by my subjects may even be heightened by the conclusions drawn, and the career path I follow because of my research, which might in turn alienate the people I engaged with (McDowell 1999), with Taylor suggesting that researchers 'emotional attachment to their friends, may make them resistant to an unsympathetic critique of the field, or if they brave an unsympathetic critique, they may be at risk of damaging or losing their closeness to the field and/or someone within it' (2011, 14) . I discuss this risk further in my below section on positionality. And yet, simultaneously, we must be wary of a condescending approach to the 'poor, vulnerable research subject' or to assume that a difference in circumstances necessarily means a worse quality of life. Nor should we assume that by sharing negative aspects of one's gendered or classed experience that necessarily equals to the total, or even the greatest share, of their attitude to their own situation. As Tuck and Yang point out, 'doing social science research is intimate work, work that is strained by a tension between informants' expectations that something useful or helpful will come from the divulging of (deep) secrets, and the academy's voracious hunger for the secrets' (2014, 233). To what extent does the academy deserve access to the 'secrets' that subcultures and marginalised groups hold dear?

Can I attempt to justify my research to myself and to my research subjects by claiming that it will improve their lives? Do they want or expect this from me in any case? I would suspect that given the long distrust of the academy most people do not. However, critiquing this condescension and attempting to overcome it is not an excuse for complacency. This again is one of my justifications for

aligning myself so closely with Juris' and others' framework – my research is a result of my involvement in these groups and practices, not vice versa (Juris 2007). And that, for now, is all I can hope to achieve.

Further, to what extent are my research methods compromised through my choice of people to interview? As McDowell rightly points out, 'in order to come to conclusions about women, we need also to ask questions about men' (1999, 228), who did indeed make up many of my interviewees and were frequently present during observation and participation, as were non-binary people and other people of marginalised genders. While we can never completely erase power relations or dynamics from research, a commitment to activist ethnography instead 'compels us to forge solidarities based on a relational ethics with resisting others and to eschew the all-too-easy separation of knowledge from action' (Juris & Khasnabish 2013, 371). All I attempted during my research was to keep these ethical questions present in my mind and to reflect on my own reasons, actions, and justifications for research as I went on, in the hope that if I am not fully able to reconcile the power dynamics and hypocrisies of the researcher I could at least participate as fully, be as present and emotionally invested, and wear my politics as much on my sleeve as I would if I were not simultaneously observing and analysing the events and emotions and lives I was participating in.

3.1.3. Positionality

Due to my long participation and friendship with various people involved in both the squatting movement and the broader housing justice 'scene' in London I am a fairly trusted and recognised figure in these spaces. Between 2014 and 2016 I was a member of the London squatting movement, with the understanding that 'movement' is here a loosely defined term. I lived both in squats that were generally oriented towards being a home, and squats with an explicitly confrontational orientation, such as occupations of council estates which were facing demolition, in which they functioned both as a home and as a political protest. I argue that the distinctions between 'political' and 'residential' squats are often far too overemphasised, codified, and fail to recognise the multiplicity of uses and associations that can simultaneously exist in a squatted space (Milligan 2016), but I mention this here in order to explain that I have lived in several of the kinds of squats that I will be drawing upon in my analysis.

During this time, I took part in multiple political occupations, such as Focus E15, the Guinness Occupation, and the Fight for the Aylesbury campaign, as well as living in squats that were primarily for the 'crew' (the acknowledged occupants of that squat, as distinct from guests and visitors), to have as a home, although we would also throw parties or host events, depending on the desires and boundaries of particular crew members at a given time. After I stopped squatting full time, I continued to be involved in the squatting movement through taking part in eviction resistances, attending parties

and fundraisers, and through spending time with my friends who continued to squat, until late 2016 when I moved abroad for two years. After returning in October 2019, I started working at Freedom Anarchist Bookshop, and from the end of 2020 I began volunteering with the Advisory Service for Squatters (ASS), which shares the same premises as the bookshop. This site, the Freedom building, is a central hub and meeting spot for squatters, anarchists, and other politically engaged folk across London and often functions as a first point of access for many people into the broader anarchist scene. Several of my friends from my squatting days' work at the ASS and prior to and during my research I rebuilt these relationships as well as attending regular events at several 'front facing' squats in London.

During all this time I have been researching squatting, from my undergraduate degree to my master's to the present day. It has been known by all my friends and they have sometimes signposted people to talk to me if they are also undertaking similar research. My research is explicitly drawn on these previous experiences and the conversations and actions that I have been privy to. I am a continuous advocate and campaigner both for repealing the current criminalisation of residential squatting and against the drive to criminalise non-residential squatting. This commitment is reflected in my research, with the one complementing the other in terms of broadening knowledge and political awareness of the legitimacy of squatting as a solution to the housing crisis and its implications in reorienting our understandings of space and the home within the city.

This also relates to why I chose to situate my research in London. Whilst London is a rich case study in terms of research, it also is the most *feasible* site for me to study personally, and a setting in which I have a strong association with the field; a claim I could not make for a social movement in any other city. And personally, as a long-time resident in London I have a personal investment in its people and their right to housing that, although I also feel is deserved elsewhere too, drives me to continual activity and research into the vagaries of the housing situation within the capital. As a long-term participant in the squatting movement, I am also aware of the many short-falls and failures that can manifest in such alternative spaces. Failures not in the sense of a squat eviction, but in the sense of an incapacity to live up to an ideal set by the political agenda of that space. Broadly, this would include a failure to enact the feminist, anti-carceral, anti-classist politics which are avowed and a failure to avoid hierarchies despite vocalising a desire for consensus and non-hierarchical approaches to interpersonal and political engagement. As such, I would argue that my participation allows a *depth* of analysis that is unachievable to many researchers of subcultures who approach marginalised communities with a desire to simply 'study them' and face the understandable scepticism and sometimes hostility of their 'subjects'. The benefits of being a trusted participant, as I have argued above, far outweigh the downsides in terms of a 'lack of objectivity', particularly since objectivity is neither possible, nor, in my case, desired. Juris argues that militant ethnography in fact *necessitates* participation: 'with respect to social movements, [militant ethnography] means helping to organize

actions and workshops, facilitating meetings, weighing in during strategic and tactical debates, staking out political positions, and putting one's body on the line during mass direct actions' (2007, 165) I have no intention of ceasing my participation in the work that I think is important and necessary due to my research, nor did I participate purely for the sake of fulfilling the goals of my research. They are, by necessity, always intertwined.

It is important to recognise that being considered a producer of knowledge is a privilege granted by mainstream society to very few, and certainly favours the academy over the opinions of squatters or homeless people. However, I have been involved in two research projects over the last five years that have sought to unbalance this status quo, even if only a little. The Squatting Everywhere Kollective (formerly the Squatting Europe Kollective) is a long-running collective of squatter-academics, who produce conferences, maps, books, and other materials collectively and with an emphasis that the knowledge generated by it ought to include those on the ground. It is an important pointer to how it is possible for activists, squatters, and others to generate their own histories and produce their own literature if they are given the resources, trust, and space to do so. More recently, the *Radical Housing Journal* has formed, offering a platform for both academics and movement actors to write about radical housing projects, experiences, and theories. This too is an attempt to unbalance the institutional bias over who is considered a valid and legitimate knowledge producer.

Through my participation in both these organisations, my experience in both the institution and in the squats, I consider myself both an institutional and non-institutional knowledge producer; I write about squatting and housing even when I am not in the academy, and I continue to write about squatting and housing from within.

As a former squatter who is researching her own community, I understand the hesitation and suspicion towards academics wishing to study us. I experienced it directly when involved in the 2015 occupation of the Aylesbury Estate – several well-meaning journalists and master's students turned up asking for access to our home and to take photographs. I experienced that discomfort and that feeling of my life and my personal living quarters contributing towards someone else's personal achievements and output, that sense of invasiveness and almost *fetishization*. However, we also wanted to help get our perspective out there and through group discussions and experimentation came up with a set of rules for talking to researchers. Among these, the primary one was that no photographs were to be taken *inside* the occupation – this was our home, and it was private. The second was that we would all be anonymous and there would be no spokesperson for the occupation who would claim to represent the views of us all. If we were to be cited it would simply be as 'an occupier'. It is with this prior experience that I approach my own ethical compass, which I lay out concretely later in this chapter. Whilst an interest in activist urbanists has been a welcome rise in

recent years, notably with the release in 2019 of the *Radical Housing Journal* and its explicit commitment to the inclusion of articles and papers from those outside of academia, institutional norms and exclusionary processes still gate-keep many 'on the ground' activists from active participation in socially-legitimised knowledge production. Before turning to the discussion of my chosen methods I first wish to briefly interrogate some of the ethical dilemmas I faced as a researcher-squatter-campaigner, and why my access and connections provided me with a unique opportunity to access spaces and communities otherwise inaccessible.

3.1.4. Positionality and intimate insider research

My ethical position in relation to the fact that those I interviewed were derived largely from close friends and a wider political circle of acquaintances is informed greatly by Taylor's notion of 'intimate insider' research (2011). She argues that the strengths of this approach can be 'deeper levels of understanding afforded by prior knowledge; knowing the lingo or native speak of field participants and thus being 'empirically literate'' along with the other benefits of being an insider that I detailed above (2011, 6). However, she also warns against the 'the grossly undertheorized impact that friendships may have upon the processes of perception and interpretation within and of the field under examination' (2011, 6). She argues that while there has been much scholarship around the methodological challenges that arise from making friends, while in the field there is little that deeply considers the field as a site already saturated with friends (2011, 8). She argues that 'intimate insider' research:

> can be distinguished from 'insider research' on the basis that the researcher is working, at the deepest level, within their own 'backyard'; that is, a contemporary cultural space with which the researcher has regular and ongoing contact; where the researcher's personal relationships are deeply embedded in the field; where one's quotidian interactions and performances of identity are made visible; where the researcher has been and remains a key social actor within the field and thus becomes engaged in a process of self-interpretation to some degree; and where the researcher is privy to undocumented historical knowledge of the people and cultural phenomenon being studied (Taylor 2011, 9)

The difficulty of boundary-drawing when the field is your own 'backyard' was also recognised by other scholars, such as Cuomo and Massaro, who's own 'intimate connections to our field sites and participants made clear to us that there is still much to consider when it comes to conceptualizing 'the field'' (2014, 2). They recognised that 'boundary-making serves an important role in creating emotional and physical distance between our participants, our field sites, and ourselves that can prove beneficial' (2014, 10). This analysis informed my actions when undertaking field research, where I attempted to straddle the divide between researcher and comrade in ways that were uncomfortable at times. However, during my fieldwork, my interviewees showed a willingness to disagree with me, to challenge the basis of some questions, and to contradict premises I had established. This comfort in

disagreement suggests to me that I was able to navigate this tension as far as possible, creating a space without a sense of betrayal or mistrust, whilst still recognising the limitations as well as benefits of insider research.

It is also important to recognise the risks of participants' understanding of my own positionality as a researcher. As Taylor says:

> Intimacy works both ways and as such the researcher's intimate knowledge of her subjects suggests that her subjects are likely to be intimately familiar with her ... Empathy and affection between a researcher and informant may result in an informant wanting to please his/her friend and the subtlety of such a gratifying gesture may make it hard for the researcher to detect given their reciprocal affection (Taylor 2011, 15)

There were times when conducting interviews when interviewees acknowledged that what they were talking about was either relating to, or was contradicting, my premise, which I had briefly laid out to them at the start of the interviews, usually saying something like 'so I am looking at gender, class, and power in the London squatting movement'. This only occurred explicitly once, when Layla, one of the interviewees I was closest friends with before the fieldwork, commented mid-sentence: 'I mean maybe that doesn't support your thesis but-'. In this instance she was explaining a position which from her perspective undermined an argument I was trying to make. That she felt the need to caveat that she didn't support my thesis could be worrying as it could indicate that she was trying to answer in ways that benefitted my aims, however, the fact that she felt able to disagree with a perspective she felt I held was encouraging.

Further, the scope of my investigation actually shifted due to the responses from my first few interviews. Originally, I was only studying gender and power, however, after several interviews, it became clear that class was as significant a contributor to my participants' experiences of unequal power dynamics as gender, and as such I reflexively expanded my research project. Therefore, I feel that the benefit of my interviewees having trust in me as an individual therefore not necessarily aiming to please, and thus being able to respond to my suggested areas of exploration with their own ideas that may or may not contradict my own, outweighs the potential implications of their having a prior awareness of my field of investigation.

3.2. Research methods

My research aims and methods therefore derive from my positionality as a researcher, an anarchist, a feminist, and as a former member, and continual participant, of the specific 'subculture' which is the object of my research. In order to answer my research questions, I used qualitative methods, as they are best suited to the interpretive work I undertook. I aimed to produce ethnographic knowledge about the behaviours, philosophies, and ideologies within a specific sub-group of people, so my

participation in the scene and close conversations with participants were the primary means by which I drew conclusions regarding power dynamics, and the ways in which gendered and classed behaviours and tensions which were enacted.

In this sense I mirror both Eschle (2018) and earlier feminist writers such as Hochschild (1989) in developing a close analysis of a limited number of situations and perspectives, rather than attempting to codify behaviours on a larger scale. Hochschild's seminal text *The Second Shift* built an analysis of the domestic division of labour around in-depth investigation into a limited number of family homes. By situating herself and her observations and interviews at the centre of her analysis she was able to create an immersive reading experience where you cared about the personal stories you were being told as well as, through her analysis, understanding the macro processes which contributed to the situations her 'characters' ended up in. The use of empathy as an analytical tool and the use of individuals' personal narratives to illustrate broader trends reflects my concern with centring the subjectivity of those I researched and their own interpretations of their situation as a key method for understanding experiences.

As my research questions involve both theoretical and practical considerations I engaged in ethnography in several different ways. Theoretically, I applied the Bordieuan understanding of different forms of capital and the 'rules of the game' to behaviours and dynamics within my chosen field: squats. Practically, I considered the ways in which these behaviours condition participation within the scene and the degree to which they create a practical solution for those at the sharp end of the housing crisis. To answer the latter question, I needed to keep track of the gender of my participants and to pay attention to, for example, the proportion of different genders within the squatting scene, within individual squats, and within the broader milieu of housing activism, to try to establish patterns and to spot holes. For example, if there are several women in one squat and none in another, why is that? Coincidence? Friendship groups? Or something different?

To understand gender dynamics, it was crucial that I did not talk only to women. Therefore, I asked people of different genders the same questions to gauge their *attitude* towards gender dynamics. Playing off the assumption found in Hochschild's early work on gender in the household, questions around who does the washing up, the sharing of responsibilities, and around romantic relationships produced varied responses depending on the gender of the person interviewed and their subjective interpretation of their surroundings (Hochschild 1989). Since squats tend to have a tacit collective ideology including 'no sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia etc.' and are often situated within a broader anarchist milieu, questions and observations around searching for discrepancies between theory and practice, and between the best laid plans and the reluctant reality featured heavily in my interactions with all participants.

A further consideration that I made is that squats tend to have a higher proportion of trans residents than society at large, due to several factors such as unsafe homes that they have fled from and a broader acceptance in alternative and political spaces (Abramovitch 2014, Sakamoto *et al* 2009). Therefore, any discussion on gender has attempted to take this into account and these complexities also informed my analysis.

3.2.1. Ethical considerations

Before I describe my chosen methods in further detail, I wish to briefly outline some ethical considerations which guided every aspect of my research. These derive both from my own experience of obtrusive and invasive researchers and the long history of ethical ethnography in the geographic tradition. Indeed, some considerations, such as anonymity, are so taken for granted in ethnographic research, they rarely bear considering in-depth when one lists their research methods and are simply added to a list of assumed geographic norms (Valentine 2005). Anonymity or pseudonymity is a default assumption for receiving ethical clearance from most educational establishments. However, while acknowledging the near universal desirability of pseudonymising research subjects, particularly in the research of subcultures or vulnerable groups (Surmiak 2018, Novak 2014), a further important consideration is the degree to which this desired, assumed, taken-for-granted pseudonymity is in fact possible. I draw here on Walford's (2018) argument that the growth of social media and digital communication technologies have made it 'impossible' for ethnographers to promise anonymity to those peoples and spaces they are researching, and indeed, that it was never fully possible beforehand. Walford argues that buzzwords such as 'informed consent' can never be truly sincere as a researcher cannot know concretely in advance of their research what they are let to find out. Regardless, just as research can never be truly objective, we must strive to do right by our research subjects and make our research as informed and accurate as possible. While all my interviewees understood that there could be some degree of their being recognised by fellow members of their communities based on their anecdotes, on several occasions I provided a separate pseudonym for a particularly sensitive extract that my interviewees explicitly requested would not be attributed to their broader narrative. This approach 'gives respondents the option to be identified and allows respondents to pinpoint which pieces of data they feel must be handled most carefully' following the reflexive guidelines used by other researchers handling sensitive communities (Kaiser 2009, 1638, see also Saunders *et al* 2015). This meant that the integrity of my participants' reflections was left intact and yet they could not be traced to them through recognising their actions in corresponding passages. Drawing on these ethical debates, established norms within the geographic tradition, and ethical and methodological routes derived from my commitment to militant ethnography and immersive, reflexive feminist research practices, I approached my research with the following guidelines:

Pseudonymise everyone	I let my participants choose their pseudonyms where possible, only intervening and suggesting alternatives when I felt the pseudonym they chose was too close to their actual name and could lead to identification. I then got their consent to use the pseudonym I had chosen. I also always included the pronouns chosen by each research participant.
Informed consent	Let people know beforehand that I am conducting research. I created a participant consent form shared with all interviewees. I also received written consent from the Advisory Service for Squatters that my observations while volunteering could be used for my thesis.
Reflexive inclusion	If a sensitive, upsetting, or potentially identifying subject matter arose during an interview I would double check with the research participant before including it. Further, upon request, I provided a separate pseudonym for an interviewee to separate one story from the rest of their testimony.
Respecting privacy and protecting subjects or spaces from identification	I never took photographs of individuals, the inside of people's homes, nor identifying outside shots of places which I was not *absolutely* sure were public without permission and acknowledgement that they may be included in my thesis. In the case of my research subject, 'outing' someone's home could lead to as serious ramifications for their livelihood as 'outing' their identity. This does not include places that are public. In every photograph, including those of public locations, I ensured that faces and recognisable features are entirely blurred unless explicit permission was given from every person who is identifiable.

Table 1. Ethics guidelines

Following on from these broad guidelines, I now look in a little more depth at the two forms of ethnography I engaged with most closely in my research: participant observation (or observed participation) and semi-structured interviews. With both methods I drew on the ethical considerations I outlined in my epistemology, regarding the role of the researcher and recognition of power dynamics at play and the institutional weight of academic scholarship during my field work. I received ethical clearance from the University of St Andrews before undertaking my field work (appendix 2).

3.2.2. Participant observation

I built upon my pre-existing participation in the squatting and housing activism scene in London to access the spaces and communities I needed to work with in conducting my research. My participant observation took place at various points over 1.5 years (2020-2022), whilst being supplemented with personal anecdotal evidence from my prior participation and experiences, particularly in the years 2014-2016. Due to the impermanence of many squatted spaces, and the uncertainty wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic, field research was conducted on a somewhat ad hoc basis, and I was granted an extension to be able to complete my field work. Further, when there was the stay on evictions in the UK during the pandemic, squats were exempt and could still legally be evicted, so their existence and precarity was more knife edge than ever. The greatest element of my participant observation was that I volunteered for the Advisory Service for Squatters (ASS) for 1.5 years during my time in London.

The ASS was set up in 1975 as a successor to the Family Squatters Advice Service which had been providing support for squatters since the late 1960s. The purpose of ASS has shifted over time, but its

central premise is to provide legal and practical advice for squatters. This can range from assisting with legal defences upon receipt of eviction notices, attending court, offering advice on how to access electricity and other utilities, helping people find a new crew to live with, and generally helping people ensure their home is secure. Since 1976 the ASS has also published the Squatters Handbook – a practical guide for squatters on the various elements involved in opening and maintaining a building.

This participation involved weekly meetings with the ASS collective, where we would discuss the cases people brought to us – such as an impending eviction – generate legal defences, arranging to support squatters in court, as well as getting involved in other aspects of campaigning or policy work. The collective was a rotation of people, usually averaging around 8 people in the weekly meeting, with a broader group of around 20 volunteers. Other squatters would often attend these meetings to discuss their particular legal case. My volunteering time at ASS equalled approximately 180 hours. Before beginning my participant observation, I made the members of ASS aware of my research and received a statement from the collective to confirm their consent to my ongoing role in the collective as both a member and as a researcher (appendix 6).

I did not actively take notes during participant observation as I felt that would be off-putting and change behaviours in cognisance of my observation. I did however let people know that I was doing research when I was there. I often wrote up accounts of the events afterwards, dated, which were used to supplement my interview data in my analysis.

3.2.3. Semi-structured, collaborative interviews

I conducted 19 interviews. These included members of the squatting community of all genders, people who work in squatted spaces such as pubs or infoshops, former squatters, anarchists, and activists of other stripes who work alongside the squatting community in the fight for decent housing. I interviewed six women, ten men, and three non-binary people. Of those I interviewed four were very close friends, two were relatives, nine were friendly acquaintances, and four were friends of those I had already interviewed who were approached on my behalf to participate in the research. Three interviewees had squatted in the 1980s and were included largely to provide background and to help me understand changes over time, one squatted from the 1980s to the early 2000s, one squatted in the 1990s and early 2000s, two were current squatters, one was an affiliate of the London squatting scene, one was involved in a squatted social centre, and ten were former squatters who squatted between the mid-2000s and the 2010s. All of those who squatted since the 2000s could be described as being part of the 'political' squatting movement, though I am hesitant to draw strict distinctions between political and non-political squatters (Milligan 2016). What I mean in this context is that they were all, to

varying degrees, politically left-wing, well-informed about political actions, and that many participated in different forms of 'activism', though few would describe themselves as activists. Despite this, they lived in many different kinds of squats, including some which might be termed 'survival squats', where there was no explicit political framework for their interactions other than the need for a roof over their heads. Most of my interviewees came from working-class backgrounds, where squatting was primarily a means of securing a safe place to sleep, while several others readily identified as middle-class. Five were from different European countries, most others were British, and all were white.

My research subjects were largely drawn from those I had a pre-established relationship with; however, this did pool out more broadly into members of the squatting scene as trust in my positionality and my research became known. While the downside of a limited number of interviews is obvious, with a smaller sample size leading to more uncertainty in conclusions drawn and less ability to generalise across other experiences, the positive is that due to the level of trust in me, I was able to obtain extremely rich data. My interviews averaged at 1.5 hours long, with the longest interview being four hours, and several others hovering around the three-hour mark. These provided an extremely rich data source with which to parse the emotionality and the feelings that squatting evoked for my participants, and a level of candidness and honesty in their reflections in a way that a larger number of shorter interviews would not have.

Whilst my research took place across multiple sites in London, these were more limited due to the impact of the pandemic and fewer interviews took place within squatted homes than initially planned. Thirteen interviews took place in people's own homes, one in the home of their friends, one in my home, one in a café, one in ASS, and two people were interviewed together in Decentre. Decentre is an anarchist social centre within the same building as ASS and Freedom Press. I had a pre-established relationship with all these sites, their residents, and their 'regulars', all of whom were aware that I was doing research and I had established trust relationships with through my long-standing involvement in and commitment to the squatting movement in London.

My interviews were semi-structured. However, as with my argument for the importance of subjective rather than 'objective' engagement with my research subject, I followed the feminist tradition of allowing the interviewee to also guide the direction of the interview and to participate as far as possible in the interview as an equal (Yost and Chmielewski 2013, Aitken & Burman 1999, Harding 1987). Whilst I had several guiding questions which I endeavoured to elicit responses to, if the interview veered into personal anecdotes, questions towards myself, or directions I did not foresee, so long as the bounds of the conversation remained broadly within my remit of investigation, I encouraged these digressions.

Name	Pronouns	Relationship to me	Relationship to squatting	Background
Alex	He/him	Close friend	Former squatter 2010s	Working-class, British
Ambrose	He/him	Close friend	Associate of squatting movement	Middle-class, British
Callum	He/him	Approached on my behalf	Former squatter 2000s-2010s	Working-class, Irish
Casey	They/them	Friend	Current squatter	Working-class, British
Daniel	He/him	Approached on my behalf	Former squatter 2000s-2010s	Working-class, British
Ellis	They/them	Friend	Former squatter 2000s-2010s	Working-class, British
Fede	They/them	Friend	Current squatter	Middle-class, British
George	He/him	Relative	Former squatter 1980s	Middle-class, British
Jana	She/her	Approached on my behalf	Former squatter 2000s-2010s	Middle-class, Central European
Jim	He/him	Friend	Former squatter 2000s-2010s	Middle-class, British
Kim	He/him	Acquaintance	Former squatter 1980s-2000s	Working-class, unknown
Layla	She/her	Close friend	Former squatter 2000s-2010s	Working-class, Eastern European
Mary	She/her	Relative	Former squatter 1980s	Working-class, British
Natalia	She/her	Friend	Former squatter 2000s-2010s	Working-class, Eastern European
Oliver	He/him	Close friend	Former squatter 2000s-2010s	Middle-class, British
Paulo	He/him	Acquaintance	Former squatter 2000s-2010s	Working-class, Southern European
Raz	He/him	Friend	Associate of squatting movement	Middle-class, British
Siobhan	She/her	Friend	Former squatter 1990s-2000s	Working-class, British
Suri	She/her	Approached on my behalf	Former squatter 1980s	Middle-class, British

Table 2. List of interviewees

My interview questions revolved around three main areas, each corresponding to a different element of my research questions. These were the rough guidelines:

1. Philosophy and ideology: what do they *think* about squatting? Why is it important to them/why not? Do they have a political assessment of the practice? Is it ideological or practical? What are their personal political ideals?

2. Safety, security, and accessibility: how and why did they come to squat? Why did they *stop* squatting? What purpose did it serve? Do they feel secure and safe here? Why/why not? Do they have a choice whether or not to squat? Would they recommend squatting?

3. Daily living: what does an average day look like? Who does which jobs e.g., food provision, cleaning, angle grinding, lock-picking? Why/why not? How do they get on with other members of their crew? What about other crews? Why did they choose to live here, with these people? Are they content?

These questions were designed to draw out interviewees' perspectives on their experiences as well as specific anecdotes in response to my questioning. Some of the questions invited subjective responses, focusing on their feelings relating to different situations while others probed for factual answers which reflected the concrete reality of their experiences. This was designed to facilitate my interviewees in interrogating the facts which they laid out, recognising potential imbalances themselves and allowing them to form their own analyses of why and how these imbalances came to be.

All interviewees obtained consent forms, participant information sheets, and debrief sheets (appendices 3, 4, and 5). Consent was given orally. Participants were encouraged to choose their own pseudonym. After obtaining consent, I recorded the interviews and typed up the transcripts. Towards the end of my write up stage I enlisted a transcription company signposted to me by the university to help me with the transcriptions, which I then went through afterwards to correct any errors. Regarding interview methods specifically, I drew upon my role as a researcher and as an activist *explicitly*. As Eschle found when she interviewed female activists involved in Occupy Glasgow, 'As Stern [2006] elaborates, what interviewees 'included and excluded, as well as the structure of the narrative, was decided in part by *who* they thought I was, what they wanted *me* to know, what they wanted me to tell *other people'* (Stern 2006, 185, in Eschle 2018, original emphasis). Like Eschle, I relied on the fact that I am a known participant in the scene and that my politics are considered up to scratch in order to achieve a greater depth and quality of interview response.

All material collected during field work was stored in my password-protected St Andrews OneDrive account, with backup on my private encrypted hard drive. Data collected was shared between myself and my supervisors, with my supervisors only accessing data that had already been pseudonymised.

After publishing, the only public versions will be wholly pseudonymised and I have been granted an exemption to providing full transcripts of my interviews, approved by the University of St Andrews ethics committee and Research Data Management department.

3.3. Methods of analysis

I used NVivo to code my data. I sorted my transcribed material by repeating themes, ideas, concepts, and specific language used. I also looked at whether there were trends in terms of emotional response to a question. This form of analysis is developed in line with my epistemological and methodological approach and as such, is derived primarily from the work of feminist scholars such as Eschle (2018) and Hochschild (1989) who interpreted interviews and observations regarding women's work and feelings towards their social relationships through such a method. Further, Polanska in her 2016 work on socio-spatial boundaries within squatter communities in Poland, used a similar method of analysis, transcribing and coding her interview material along several appropriate thematic avenues.

I developed a framework for coding broad ideas, concepts and behaviours based on this, and identified patterns and connections. To do this I broadly used discourse analysis, initially basing my coding themes upon Gee's 'building tasks' (2014):

Building Task 1: Significance	How are situated meanings, social languages, figured worlds, intertextuality, Discourses, and Conversations being used to build relevance or significance for things and people in context?
Building Task 2: Practices	How are situated meanings, social languages, figured worlds, intertextuality, Discourses, and Conversations being used to enact a practice (activity) or practices (activities) in context?
Building Task 3: Identities	How are situated meanings, social languages, figured worlds, intertextuality, Discourses, and Conversations being used to enact and depict identities (socially significant kinds of people)?
Building Task 4: Relationships	How are situated meanings, social languages, figured worlds, intertextuality, Discourses, and Conversations being used to build and sustain (or change or destroy) social relationships?
Building Task 5: Politics	How are situated meanings, social languages, figured worlds, intertextuality, Discourses, and Conversations being used to create, distribute, or withhold social goods or to construe particular distributions of social goods as 'good' or 'acceptable' or not?
Building Task 6: Connections	How are situated meanings, social languages, figured worlds, intertextuality, Discourses, and Conversations being used to make things and people connected or relevant to each other or irrelevant to or disconnected from each other? (Gee 2014).

Table 3. Discourse analysis building tasks

Whilst all the building blocks were staples of my analytical method, each block responds to a different element of my research questions. Building block one, significance, was used to understand what matters to squatter communities, and why. This included political motivations and practices, but also interpersonal goals, dreams, and achievements. Building block two (practices), allowed me to answer questions oriented towards the development (or not) of alternative *practices*, for example, who does the socially reproductive labour and commoning activities. Building block three (identities) allowed me to understand how identities are constructed and maintained and how they may come into conflict with each other. For example, identifying as a squatter, a woman, an anarchist, a homeless person, a member of a crew, an individual – all of these identities are a product of multiple sources and exist both on the individual and collective level. Building block four (relationships) was vital for understanding interpersonal and political dynamics. How are collectives affected by relationships of care, solidarity, and intimacy? What happens if these relationships transform through negative experiences, shifting boundaries, personal experiences affecting a political (perhaps) collective? Building block five (politics) reflected the *political* or personal ideologies behind collective and individual practices and their understanding of them in terms (or not) of an anti-capitalist or feminist framework. Building block six (connections) overlaps with several of the other blocks and yet extends them. Relationships are a form of connection, and connections can be interpersonal relationships, such as friends or lovers, they can also be political relationships derived from a shared goal and approach to the world. Connections can also be broader, international, they can be developed through social media, they cannot involve individuals at all but instead be formed from ideologies and groups, twitter accounts and callouts. Logics, practicalities, relationships, ideologies, identities: all came into play in answering my research questions and as such, every strand was investigated, whilst recognising that all these strands overlap, and that the very nature of codification may well lead to something being lost.

I also leaned analytically upon feminist discourse analysis, which recognises the power dynamics implicit within discourse on all levels of society, even in self-declared alternative spaces: 'discourse organizes relations among and between movement actors and others; gender, racial-ethnic, and class inequalities infuse subject positions within the discourse' (Naples 2002, 228). Feminist discourse analysis can be used to draw out the further significances of the 'everyday' and the 'mundane', enabling the drawing of political conclusions from dynamics and understandings which have become normalised. As Smith explains, this approach 'would extend people's own good knowledge of the local practices and terrains of their everyday/everynight living, enlarging the scope of what becomes visible from that site, mapping the relations that connect one local site to others' (Smith 1999, 94 in Naples 2002, 228). The use of a critical, feminist approach towards discourse analysis allows the researcher to 'treat social practices, not just in terms of social relationships, but, also, in terms of their

implications for things like status, solidarity, the distribution of social goods, and power' (Gee 2014, 68).

Through coding my initial interviews, I came to realise that class dynamics featured more heavily in my interviewees' understandings of power dynamics and the micropolitics of living together than I had originally anticipated. This process of reflexive engagement and not being tied to my initial avenue of enquiry encouraged me to broaden the scope of my investigation to look at the impact of gender *and class* within squats and the ways in which they intersect with the manifestations of power and hierarchy.

3.4. Fieldwork challenges and adaptations – limitations of research

The main limitations of my research are that:

1. My small sample size means that my conclusions drawn will always be partial.
2. I was unable to capture the experiences of squatters who were not white, and how their experiences might interlace with those of gender and class.
3. Most of my interviewees had similar political background and beliefs to each other and to myself.
4. I was already known and familiar to most of my interviewees.

I was not able to achieve my original aim of interviewing over 30 participants in the London squatting movement. This was primarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When I moved to London shortly before the pandemic hit, I was in the process of re-establishing old acquaintances and rebuilding trust and familiarity with a broad range of people. However, this was brought to a sharp stop and my ability to generate the level of trust necessary for a frank and rewarding interview was dramatically hindered. This had the effect of changing the orientation of my research from an attempt to understand broad trends to a closer and much more in-depth reading of fewer situations.

This also meant that my pool of interviewees contained a higher number of friends and comrades than initially planned for. While I made the case for the benefits of intimate insider research above, it also can have limitations such as an overconfidence on the part of the researcher in their ability to deduce the truth from subtle suggestions, so caution was needed in drawing conclusions based on inference. Therefore, I asked follow-up questions where I recognised I was beginning to make assumptions and would often double check the meaning and intent of a participant's words.

The limitations of only including white participants means that my investigation of the intersections of power only considers gender, class, and xenophobia, rather than experiences of racism within the squatting movement. This is a result of (1) the dominance of white people among the more politically

engaged wing of the squatting movement, and the broader London anarchist scene, which I had access to (although this is changing); (2) many Black political squatters chose to organise and live separately to white squatters during the time I did my fieldwork. As I did not have an entry point through my existing networks, I felt uncomfortable approaching people who have chosen to act and live separately to white people, as a white researcher, rather than someone who could contribute meaningfully to their struggle. I recognise this is a large limitation of my research, particularly given the historic centrality of Black, Asian, and minority ethnic people to London's squatting history and present, and their particular vulnerabilities in the housing context. There are other scholars such as Insansa (2021) and Begum (2023) doing excellent work on these varied traditions, and I urge anyone reading this to engage with their work.

3.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have laid out the approach I took to my investigation. My epistemological framework builds upon feminist and militant orientations towards fieldwork with an emphasis on participation, emotional involvement, and care towards research subjects and the field of study. My own positionality as a former squatter and politically engaged member of the community I studied informed my approach and also offered both rich benefits and some limitations to my study. I outlined my use of qualitative methods, primarily participant observation and semi-structured interviews, and my methods of analysis which were largely based on discourse analysis. I also laid out the limitations of my fieldwork and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the number of interviews I was able to conduct, and the effect the relative familiarity the pool of interviewees I did engage with had on my data. I made a case that the benefits of this familiarity in terms of the richness and depth of the data outweighed the potential downsides in terms of partiality. I acknowledge that all qualitative research will have limitations in terms of scope as our knowledge can only ever be fragmented and partial, however I have striven to draw conclusions which build upon the perspectives of my interviewees as experts in their field, while always with an eye on the picture that may be emerging outside of their individual scope of vision. It is with this framework behind me that I approached the investigation I will now go on to describe.

Analysis part one: gender and class in the creation of squatting hierarchies: creation of power

Introduction

'Spaces of resistance can reproduce and thus reinforce the dominant oppressive gendered [and classed] structures that they ostensibly reject' (Craddock 2019, 140).

In part one of my analysis, I answer the first of my research questions:

- In what ways does social capital *manifest* in squats and what roles do gender and class play in its operation?

I look at the skills, attributes, and performances which grant someone high status or relegate them to a position of low status within a squat. This section is split into two chapters. In the first chapter I examine the role of social connections and political organising in attributing high or low status. I then turn to the specific skills which were valued, and those which were not, and demonstrate how these lay along gendered lines. In the second chapter I move from the skillsets towards the gender and class *performances* which took place, and the different value given to those, and why. Finally, I look at why it matters – the value of a socially agreed upon set of criteria for inclusivity and acceptance, and the downsides of allowing invisible hierarchies to establish within squatting – or any - communities. This leads into part two of my analysis, where I explore the impact of these hierarchies on interpersonal dynamics.

4. Creating power – social positioning

> There's definitely a hierarchy operating. I suppose basically any group of people, there's always an informal hierarchy, made and broken, generally made and not broken, because they have a tendency to ossify, but in crews, there's definitely - like it's not even a group of people. It's more like one person who's de facto in charge. – Oliver, he/him

> I didn't know any of this stuff ... I got no training course. – Alex, he/him

In this chapter I analyse the main characteristics of a squatter who possesses high status or social capital. Before exploring the social dynamics and power hierarchies which impact squatting communities, it is important to document the different traits that contributed to someone's high or low status within the squatting scene. It is impossible to understand the ways in which domestic disputes and tensions manifest and play out without assessing the attributes which condition one's status within the domestic space. Being considered of high status was important due to the transient nature of squatting - squat crews were constantly in flux, forming and reforming between locations. Therefore, it was materially as well as socially necessary to be someone people wished to live with. Your status within domestic relationships and your future housing could all depend on it. I focus on the attributes which make you a desirable or undesirable squat-mate and how they are informed by gender and class. These attributes are: social connections and political projects, the correct language usage, and possessing particular skills, particularly those associated with physical labour. This chapter will deal with these different attributes in turn.

4.1. Social connections and political projects

> Whenever there was a problem, someone would always come to me for some reason. – Paolo, he/him

One of the main traits that secured your position in a squat hierarchy was good people skills and being considered someone with a large and valuable social network. I asked Jim what he felt the criteria for being considered a movement leader were.

> Someone that was competent and got on with people, I guess. You know, just the people that end up at the centre of social groups, because they connect people. You can get negative traits and there can be bad things, but I think for someone to be a social leader, they've got to have those prerequisites. You know, someone who's an arsehole is not going to end up being a social leader straight away unless they've got charisma or unless they hold people together to begin with. – Jim, he/him

Here Jim is pointing to one of the self-perpetuating markers of social capital, which is already being the centre of social networks. He suggests that you need to be competent in order to hold this position. To be someone who 'connects people' was an important attribute that gave you high value. Vannucci

and Singer point to several attributes of those who seek to gain more authority than others in a collective environment, including:

> setting oneself or one's faction up as the de facto leader by taking on the lion's share of administrative tasks, thereby appearing to be indispensable, and refusing offers of help … Setting oneself up as the sole coordinator of the collective's various committees (2010, 38)

Both attributes suggest that understanding and utilising social connections were key considerations for those who sought power (Brown 2007). This way of attaining unofficial authority was also recognised by Western who termed it 'stealth leadership', observing that 'stealth leadership often occurs under a different name, for example, a co-ordinator or communication role may emerge, but the role may also be a cover for leadership.' (2014, 690). This power also may be held without the person holding it necessarily being aware of this, as the quote from Paolo above suggests, and is supported by other scholars: 'power is not consciously exercised as it may be displayed unconsciously ... In these circumstances, participants accept power as natural or part of social practice.' (Nor & Aziz 2010, 89). This could have its own risks. For example, power that was held for reasonable reasons, and perhaps not deliberately utilised for nefarious means, could be transferable to those with negative traits, something that Natalia commented on:

> The only reason Martin is not completely ostracised is because he's best friends with Paolo. And my biggest grief with Paolo is this. There was also Drew - because Paolo is very much responsible for Drew being in the anarchist movement. Paolo stopped being friends with Drew. You know when men do this thing when at some point, they realise that they cannot sit on the fence anymore because they will die, and this is basically what happened between Drew and Paolo. Not rapes, not all these things … They were all defending Drew because Drew was useful, Drew is a good public speaker, Drew is a very good writer, Drew went to Kurdistan, later… Objectively speaking, Drew was very useful except for this bit of, you know, being really bad with women. – Natalia, she/her

Here Natalia is highlighting one of the key dangers of unchecked social capital. Due to Paolo's high status, he was able to protect his affiliates, who were able to harness status-by-proxy through their proximity to him. Two different men who were accused of inappropriate behaviour with women were able to escape scrutiny for a long while due to in both instances, their relationship to Paolo, and in the second, due to Drew's perceived competencies. The lack of explicit recognition of Paolo's status as a movement leader meant that it was difficult to explicitly point to the way in which his influence had undesired effects. **'S**tealth leadership occurs when leadership is denied and hidden, while some form of organised leadership undeniably takes place' (Western 2014, 687.) Further, Natalia explicitly mentions 'you know when men do this thing', suggesting both that male reluctance to make a stand was not an uncommon occurrence, and also that I would also recognise this tendency among men.

Drew was mentioned as displaying severely unhealthy degrees of power by another interviewee, Ellis:

> Drew moved into that house. [How was that?] Ups and downs. There was some difficult stuff that happened … At this period, I always felt I was living with the pariahs of the community because I felt like a pariah myself. And I didn't have the confidence or the self-worth to try and live with other people ... in many ways it was absolutely fucking awful. I mean, he just fed me drugs. I ended up developing a really bad drug habit, because he would come home every day from work with drugs and give me them. And at this point, I was like 20, I guess. Young. 20 is young. – Ellis, they/them

Drew is someone who drew their power from their influence over younger people. Ellis was only 20 at the time they were living with Drew. He was someone who chose to surround himself with younger and more vulnerable people, where his authority could be based on age and experience rather than any of the more admirable qualities that Jim suggested earlier.

> He loved having younger people around him. He's a very smart person, very smart and very quick, and he fucking loves the way it makes him feel to make young people feel small and stupid and idiotic. He made me feel like everything that I was scared of I was going to be. Which is a working-class person who didn't have the faculties or the cognitive abilities to be anyone bigger than I was at that current time. And he never made me feel any other way ... There were power dynamics happening all over the shop, but he embraced the toxicity of it, in a way that was not okay. – Ellis, they/them

You can see from Ellis' anecdote that they felt that Drew abused this position of influence, utilising age, class, and language to belittle those he felt he had power over. He was aware that he had power and was not willing to remedy the situation. 'People who feel they have carved out their little corner of power are not going to give it up easily, no matter how trivial their sphere of influence may seem' (Vannucci & Singer 2010, 113). While some people, such as Paolo, apparently were unable to recognise the power they hold, Drew actively utilised his, and was protected in doing so through his affiliation to those with high degrees of social capital, such as Paolo. This knowledge and experience enabled people like Drew to 'find ways around the official channels. Those who know the rules also know how to bend or bypass them, whom to approach if they want to get things done a certain way or whom and what to avoid if they do not want to do certain things. Such common and understandable behaviour may lead, among other things, to the emergence of informal hierarchy' (Diefenbach & Sillince 2011, 1521).

Another form of social connections could be involvement in activist projects. Alex felt that his lack of experience in activist projects made him a burden on his squatmates and weakened his position within the squat.

> Obviously, for me it was super intimidating. I feel like I'm scrounging off them and I am. But I feel like I'm just scrounging off them because I'm just taking up space. I'm not involved in all of these projects

that are really cool or whatever. I am literally taking up space. I don't know how to really talk to them about any of this stuff … I didn't really have any inroads. – Alex, he/him

As Vannucci and Singer illustrate when referring to the dynamics within activist collectives, 'newcomers can feel lost or intimidated. They might sense that they are unwelcome, or, at the very least, that they had better get with the program if they have any hope of fitting in. This creates a sort of closed loop: an exclusionary culture is cemented into place, even though nobody intended or wished for such a thing to happen' (2010, 107). This 'closed loop' mirrors Alex's comment about lacking the 'inroads' to involvement, whether or not he desired it.

Experience of activist projects such as prisoner solidarity, organising social centres, or eviction resistance actions, was a marker of cultural capital in most squatting environments. It was considered 'cool' as Alex pointed out, but also contributed to your place in the domestic hierarchy. Your voice was louder, and your opinions taken more seriously and considered to be the most politically correct.

There were some that were more politically involved and were more involved with things like the opening or the sustaining of the house that felt like they had more control. They could just kind of make decisions. The people that were more politically active, have more acronyms, were the most popular people. – Alex, he/him

Here Alex acknowledges that decisions were made by those with the most political backgrounds, 'more acronyms' referring to the names of different political organisations they might be part of. He explicitly used the term 'control' to describe how their presence was felt by him from his somewhat more precarious position. I asked him in the interview whether at any point he tried to get his voice heard in domestic decision-making and he said 'I knew I was on thin ice at all times anyway. So, no point.' (Alex, he/him). He felt that his precarious situation within the household was so unstable that he could not risk attempting to rock the boat in any way or even to attempt to influence decision-making in the home. This deferral further contributed to the power held by the other members of the crew.

The capital which could be accrued through participation in activist projects, and how it could be used against those with weaker levels of social capital also came to light during an experience I had when volunteering at the Advisory Service for Squatters. ASS is known and used by almost all squatters in London, and, as Layla says, 'the kind of people that are in a squatting scene end up in ASS and type of people in ASS kind of set the tone on how the squatting scene is going to be like' (Layla, she/her). Deliberately or not, participation in ASS can contribute to one's establishment and maintenance of power, as I illustrate here.

ASS were contacted by a crew with a complaint against two members of their crew for abusive and controlling behaviour. Most of note was that those members were former ASS volunteers and were

accused of using their status as members of ASS to move up the crew hierarchy and act abusively to those below them … We talked for a long time about how to respond. We eventually decided to respond apologising for our inability to mediate as we felt that we didn't have the appropriate tools and skills to be of help in such situations, to ask their consent to bring it up with the accused members (anonymously) if they were ever in London again, and finally to reiterate that we realise being a member of ASS can be seen as a badge of honour but that we do not endorse current or past members of ASS using their association to gain undeserved prestige in a squat crew (Fieldnotes, May 2021).

This incident was of note because it was a particularly explicit recognition of the way in which 'membership' of ASS could be used in order to wield unwarranted power over other individuals within a squat. As you can see from the above fieldnotes taken at the time, as a collective we strongly disavowed the implication that participation in ASS should allow domineering behaviour, while recognising that this tendency unfortunately exists.

In this section I have demonstrated the importance of social connections to status, and some of the consequences of having the ability to use and abuse that status. These themes continue in the next section where I explore the importance of the correct language use for climbing the staircase of power.

4.2. Talking the talk – language, class, and power

In my interview with him, Alex discussed how powerless he felt in the squat he lived in. This was due to many of the issues discussed above, but his feelings were also grounded in his perceived inferior educational and cultural background and lack of awareness of the correct ways of speaking. This perceived lack made him feel too vulnerable to articulate his opinions or positions, as he could not risk expulsion from the house. Here I am going to briefly explore the ways in which cultural background and language use impacted who felt they could have their voices heard in the squatting scene. Alex identifies one of the key reasons he felt excluded in the house as his lack of understanding of, and inability to perform, the culturally and socially expected habitus in that environment:

I was a fucking lib before I lived in a squat. I was a liberal. I didn't really know about a lot of politics, I was still learning it all, or even the language used and stuff like that. And being air quotes 'woke' for lack of a better word, just not being problematic and stuff like that. I wasn't taught that shit from my builder dad … So, I constantly was aware, trying to be conscious of not being a bell-end, you know, because I didn't know anyone, and it already felt like a space that was against me. I didn't want to make just a dumb joke, maybe not even a problematic one, but then come across as an arsehole and then get dashed out of the house or affect my partner. – Alex, he/him

Feeling excluded from a social environment due to the way you talk, or act, can be hugely affecting at the best of times. When that social environment also determines whether you have a roof over your

head, it can be extremely debilitating. Ellis spoke of how their lack of confidence in articulating themselves was used by other people to make them feel powerless.

> He, a bit like Drew, would always comment on my language use, the fact that I wasn't educated. The fact that I was a bit stupid, all of these things often came from men, right? Drew and this person were the two men that I had squatted with who made me feel so small, who I thought were actively misogynistic and I lived with them – Ellis, they/them

This is a prevailing feature of left-wing activist movements that has been condemned by many scholars: 'Those who aren't versed in the rhetoric of activism should not be made to feel that if they speak up they will be chastised on their choice of words. It is bad enough to feel overcautious about the content of one's arguments, but it is simply stifling to know that such content will also be heavily judged according to context.' (Vannucci & Singer 2010, 93, see also Brown & Pickerill 2009, Craddock 2019, Morris & Staggenborg 2004, Morris 2010, Nor & Aziz 2010). Layla also commented on how, as a migrant, she felt that the way she expressed herself contributed towards a negative perception of her:

> I was judged over the fact that I... just some cultural differences or my accent or the way that I express myself, I'd say I'm much more brash, maybe than native people are ... So, I was definitely seen as a threat in some ways. When I got together with Tom, I felt like everybody fucking hated me. – Layla, she/her

This speaks to a policing of expression, as well as of the precise words spoken. Her 'brash' manner was at odds with the middle-class activist rhetoric common on the scene. Morris (2010, n.p.) draws a portrait of the kind of language use which dominates many anti-capitalist movements, including squatting: 'the academic-speak intimidated people less educated than him because he seemed to know more about radical politics than anyone else'. By policing language, particularly under the guise of certain phrasings being deemed 'problematic' or 'harmful', and by 'demanding that people adhere to the most stringently correct jargon' you can foreclose power among those who have already learned and conformed to the unspoken norms of engagement (Vannucci & Singer 2010, 92). Nor and Aziz argue that 'language use is very much related to social position, role, identity and relationship between participants in a discourse' (Nor & Aziz 2010, 67) and we see that play out in the squatting scene. I will talk more about how the use of the incorrect language could have serious ramifications in part two of my analysis. For now, I wish to further evidence the link between educational attainment and class position, and securing a place of power within the squatting movement, by following Ellis' story once more:

> When I went to Uni my entire language changed because I suddenly was accessing knowledge that I didn't have before. And I also gained the confidence to use that language and gained the confidence to be more verbose and to be more expressive. Which was both a good thing and a bad thing for others and myself … I think for me, the use of that kind of language or the use of the language as we know it today

Ellis is suggesting that upon gaining their university education, their confidence improved, they expressed themself more, and no longer felt intimidated or excluded by the way people spoke in occupations and squatting environments. This link, between accessing positions of authority, and educational attainment, precisely maps onto the argument put forward by Morris & Staggenborg, who argue that 'educational capital is the key resource that social movement leaders derive from their privileged backgrounds" (Morris & Staggenborg 2004, 175). Ellis also suggests this, by noting that their increased confidence could be a good and a bad thing for other people. While I would not suggest that educational capital is the most important element to attaining a position of authority within the squatting movement, I do contend that it is directly linked with class position, which further evidences my point that class is one of the key markers of where you will fall in the hierarchy within squatted spaces. This was also expressed by Ambrose, in an anecdote about a homeless man he tried to help squat.

David is, as I say, a bit older. He's not from a political background, so he doesn't use rhetorical knives and forks. So, he talks about young pretty girls who he's met. He talks about ... that bitch from St Mungo's. He used language, which is totally normal in … society in general, but which is not acceptable in anarchist circles. He also, because he was rough sleeping and going through a severe mental health crisis at the time, he was prone to occasionally going off on rambling tangents. And he was, legitimately, kind of difficult to deal with sometimes. But after introducing him to Steven from ASS, who is probably the ASS's most accepting person, I think, Steven's take on it was that he that tried to help him out ... but that David's attitude to squatting was a little haphazard and that he didn't feel that David would fit in with any of the squats that were currently active. – Ambrose, he/him

Due to David's language use being considered inappropriate, and his behaviour potentially abrasive, it was considered unsuitable for him to move into one of the pre-existing squats. His lack of grasp of 'rhetorical knives and forks' actively precluded him from achieving material support in a movement which ostensibly operated with a working-class ethos. This shows that language use had a direct connection to access to housing, with more serious ramifications for those from a more precarious class position.

In these two sections I have shown how social connections, your language use, and being known as a participant in important activist projects (your 'acronyms', as Alex put it) could contribute to your social capital within the squatting movement. In the next section I will look at the value placed on different skills and attributes.

4.3. 'A very particular set of skills' (and attributes)

> There was a certain amount of kind of rugged self-reliance that you'd find in squatters that was more than you'd probably see in other… – George, he/him

> 'Who, exactly, does satisfy the criteria for activist? Who can afford to devote nearly every waking hour to their chosen cause? And while this mythic activist is off doing the good work, who, after all, is caring for the children, preparing meals, washing laundry, paying the bills?' (Bobel 2007, 153)

There has generally been acknowledged in feminist and social reproduction theory a gendering of the different forms of labour. This is most simply put as between productive and reproductive labour, with productive labour being external and masculinised and reproductive labour being internal and feminised (Craddock 2019, Ferree 1997, Coleman & Bassi 2011, Dodson 2015, Morris & Staggenborg 2004, Kennelly 2014). As squatting is a political project in which the home is the site of both the productive and reproductive forms of labour, I was interested in exploring whether the societal norms of value assigned to different forms of labour persisted, and were gendered, or whether an acknowledgement of equal (but different) value was instead in place. What I found was that there were skills and attributes that were considered high value within the squatting movement, and those that were considered, if not of low value, then less worthy of mentioning. These skills are one of the most significant markers of status as they conferred authority not only within the squat you were living in, but also made you a desirable person to live with in the future. Therefore, the benefits of having these skills, and the risks of being without, were high. In order to investigate whether this tendency rang true within squatting, I asked all my interviewees what qualities would make a person desirable to live with.

> Often, I think it's attached to a perceived competency. Are they always cracking buildings? Are they always skipping[1]? Are they always barricading? Are they always like - not cooking, but are they always doing things? How assertive are they? – Oliver, he/him

> Really on-it people basically. People who were handy, you know, I mean, they knew what they were doing. They knew how to sort of have skills … Practical skills. – Daniel, he/him

Oliver and Daniel's responses are representative of the other responses I received, which highlighted practical skills such as cracking [opening] the building and attributes such as assertiveness. Oliver's comment particularly noteworthy as he explicitly removed cooking from his list of valued attributes, hinting at the kinds of skills which were valued and those that were not. Jim recognised this

---

[1] Skipping refers to foraging in bins for discarded food, usually from supermarkets, markets, or bakeries. Also known as dumpster-diving

distinction between the specialised skills which were of value, and those which were necessary in the long run but underappreciated.

> The actual act of breaking a building, you need specialist skills … And then you have other sort of specialist skills that you need to secure a building, you need to know how to change a lock or how to dismantle sitex[2] and stuff like that, which is highly specialised … When it comes to communal living, you need to not be an arsehole. You need to be able to live with other people and to be part of a shared housing. And I think they're probably more important, because you can find someone that knows how to change a lock or to smash the window. Whereas when you're actually living with people, being a good housemate, you need to be able to live with people and be a good person. – Jim, he/him

Here Jim encapsulates the tension between the different kinds of skills: skills required to find and secure somewhere to live, and skills required to live with people. He starts off suggesting that the specialist skills required to squat are those of breaking, entering and securing a building, then finally concludes that actually the skills of living together are 'probably more important'. This tension between the singular and dramatic (and masculine) and the everyday and continuous (and feminine) is one of the themes that came through strongly in my research of what is valued (or not valued) as a high-status skill within the squatting scene. What I found is that, by and large, the former skills were prioritised and valued above the latter, and that women, in particular, were aware of this and acted accordingly. The latter skills were under-recognised by my participants in response to my questions on valuable traits, despite many of them suggesting they possess these skills, so Jim's reflection is particularly noteworthy. Siobhan spoke of how she felt vulnerable lacking the practical, masculine skills:

> I didn't know how to crack a squat, didn't know how to do the plumbing, the electrics, and these were the high-status things definitely. But it was also just really important - somebody needed to know how to do them … I felt very vulnerable as I don't have a plan b and I don't know how to crack my own squat. I don't know how to put on the electrics … So, I went to college and did 4 months of electrician training ... Gradually I went to crack places with people to help and to try to learn how to do it, but I found it very difficult to learn how to do it. Because it is quite a high stress situation, and also a lot of people are just like 'look I know how to do it and I'm not fucking about explaining things to people'. – Siobhan, she/her

Here, Siobhan recognises that the vulnerability she felt by not possessing these skills was directly related to her material class condition – she did not have a 'plan B' and therefore was relying on those she lived with to either put up with her lack of knowledge, or to help her learn the skills so she too

---

[2] Sitex is the material usually used to block up entrances and windows to buildings.

could possess them, which they were apparently unwilling to do. This effectively limited the status provided by having those skills to those individuals who already possessed them.

4.3.1. Cracking the glass ceiling – gender and physical work

While women were involved in the physical aspects of squatting, such as cracking, barricading, and defending the space against police and bailiffs, my interviews suggest that this was something very much consciously taken on by some women involved in the squatting movement, rather than automatically assumed. Layla suggests that women felt 'pressure to demonstrate their usefulness... there were certain tasks that men were more able to do, like climbing … You know, if you're a woman and you're good at climbing, you're at the top echelons of fucking everything' (Layla, she/her). While practical skills in general were of high value, the most important aspect of squatting to be involved in to secure your status was the crack. This was explicitly recognised by my interviewees. When I asked Natalia who had authority in crews she immediately said, 'Men. Because of opening the squats' (Natalia, she/her).

> The women would very much make you aware that they have and know all of the skills. I squatted with a lot of kind of power women, feminist power squatters that ... would insist they were the crowbar holders and the drillers .... I was always really keen to be there when the houses get opened. I think, first of all, that creates a little sense of ownership over the house a little bit. So those people that have opened it will always have that badge of honour. And that was, for me, always important to acquire because it's definitely in those hidden hierarchies of the squatting scene. – Layla, she/her

> I opened a lot of squats in my life, but it was quite unusual. And to be honest, it wasn't the fault of the men as much as the general community. I don't know how many times I encountered a situation where we were discussing that we have to go and open another squat because we're getting evicted next week. Then all the women would be like, 'we're going to cook the curry and you guys are going to go and open this house' ... I was always this girl who was like, 'no, I'm definitely taking a crowbar and I'm going to open the squat with you'. – Natalia, she/her

> It's not necessarily that skills were hoarded or actively denied from people … we had some quite assertive women who would not put up with any kind of only men do the cracking and stuff like that. – Oliver, he/him

These three quotations illustrate the heightened awareness women had that being included in the crack was an important marker of your position in the squat. Although Natalia suggests this awareness was not universal, both she and Layla were conscious of the importance of involvement in the crack for conferring future status. Further, Natalia recognises that it was explicitly gendered. Oliver begins by suggesting these skills were not hoarded, in contrast to Siobhan's earlier experience, however, he goes on to acknowledge that women would need to be 'assertive' to ensure their participation. Women felt pressure to demonstrate their utility and also recognised that their immediate value may determine

their later standing. Usually, the people who cracked had first choice on bedrooms and were considered to be the de facto authorities in the new building, getting to choose who joins the crew in the first instance. Therefore, this was something which could determine domestic dynamics in a general sense for a lot longer. This was a consideration noted by interviewees of all genders:

> Getting the building, yeah, you choose your room, you pick it basically ... You get there first basically. You've got to be involved. Otherwise, you don't get to. [What else gives you cred?] Plumbing and wiring it, basically. Getting your gas, your kitchen set up and stuff like that. Because a lot of places like big warehouses, you've got nothing in there. So, if I get your water on, you've got plumbing, you've got to get a shower going and that's the main thing, a shower. It's not even about the credit. It's just making sure you've got the shit you need to survive. – Daniel, he/him

There was a recognition that the authority that came from opening the building lasted long into the tenure of the squat and affected your position within domestic decisions which took place. Therefore, it was one of the most important status symbols that a squatter could attain. It is unsurprising then that women who were aware of the skills which were valued within squats took care to participate in the crack.

> The people who open the buildings are generally still the people who are still out every day looking for new places and stuff. So, you kind of got that mentality. You definitely hold clout in a meeting more, you know, people listen to you. It's like you get labelled equal, but then some people are more equal than others. – Daniel, he/him

Daniel explicitly acknowledged that you would be considered influential for having these skills and experiences under your belt. He suggests that this directly leads to people listening to you more. He suggests that something about your personality, and therefore reliability as a voice of reason, is reflected in your participation in these necessary and practical tasks. This contributed to the vulnerability felt by Alex and Siobhan, above, who did not possess these skills and were aware that that made them less desirable crew members and weakened their voice in domestic decisions. However, Layla suggests that the need to possess these skills was not uniform:

> If you're a woman, you're more likely to actually be like, 'yes, I'm staying, I'm courageous. I am courageous as a woman' ... Whereas as a man, especially in the more queer-dominated squats, to say that 'I'm in touch with my feelings and actually I feel anxiety around this, actually, I don't think my mental health or my nerves at the moment just can actually hack this', that will elevate someone. So, you know, a man that will be like, 'I'm so sorry, but I'm just a little bit anxious about this' will get more kudos than a woman that'll be like, 'yeah, of course I'll stay'. – Layla, she/her

Here Layla is arguing that women felt a greater need to perform these masculine actions, whereas a reverse kudos could be applied to men, who were supported in exhibiting 'softer' tendencies. 'Within direct action movements, in particular, masculine gendered performances can abound, as activists

compete with each other to see who can be most daring. Of course, this macho heroism is not only performed by men; and there are numerous examples of where women have queered the tendency to equate participation in embodied direct action with the markers of masculine privilege' (Brown & Pickerill 2009, 4). The fact that women felt compelled to perform masculinity to a greater degree than men is reflected also in the discussion around aesthetic choices I turn to in a later section. For women, these acts were seen as vitally important.

> You know the thing I was saying about trying to crack the squat and learning the electrics … I used to feel quite insecure with that ... Proper squatters know that stuff. I did feel sometimes the scene could be a bit hierarchical … there was a bit of the thing of getting annoyed with people who need stuff, but can't do stuff, that sort of thing. And I was desperately trying to be on the people who can do things side and feeling that really, I was still one of the people who needed stuff, but not one of the people who could do stuff. – Siobhan, she/her

Here Siobhan speaks more on this issue, suggesting that knowing about electrics and cracking were the attributes of 'proper squatters', and that therefore she was excluded from this term, or at the very least further down the hierarchy. This is despite other necessary skills that she possessed, such as negotiation, language skills, and cooking. Practical (hard) skills which facilitated immediate needs such as cracking, barricading, crowbarring, and being unafraid of confrontation with police and bailiffs were all highly valued. Softer skills such as negotiation, domestic work, and emotional labour were underappreciated, especially if performed by women.

> It is a sign of misogyny, but it's a different kind of thing where actually if there was any conflict, first of all, definitely women were the ones that were trying to create resolution, like running the house meetings most of the time. If there's any problem, there will be mostly women that will try to solve them, but that can sometimes lead to conflict. Or if there is a conflict, first of all, a woman would try and solve it more. – Layla, she/her

This extract mirrors what other interviewees said – in conflictual situations, women were usually the ones leading the discussions and attempting to find a resolution. Hard skills, and their implementation are very binary. You either have the skill and can barricade the door, or you don't. There is no room for nuance, or an emotional response, or generating hurt in the doing of the task. Conversely, being the one to manage a conflictual situation, or attempt to resolve an emotive or difficult topic, can be controversial - not everyone may be happy with your contribution, and your relative power in the room will affect how people perceive your contribution to the discussion. Simply put, it is an emotional minefield the men were, by and large, able to step back from.

This has been backed up by other scholars, with Brown and Pickerill (2009) noting that 'there is a lingering machismo within autonomous activism which persists in ignoring how the behind the scenes 'emotional work' of activism is often left to women ... and that it is this work which often sustains the

active and visible resistance of others' (8, see also Coleman & Bassi 2011). This ability to step back facilitates the idea of them as being easy going, relaxed, a great person to be around, as they never have to get their fingers dirty (metaphorically) with sticky, underappreciated, and fraught decision-making, and instead can get their fingers dirty (literally) with the grimy but highly valued and uncontroversial business of barricading a building.

4.3.2. 'Anarchism: we all share in the dishwashing' – gender and domestic work

All interviewees took for granted that domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and acquiring food ought to be shared among the inhabitants of a squat. However, whether or not this happened in practice, and the ways in which this work was perceived, differed. When I asked one of my interviewees, Oliver, to list which things that gave people authority, and suggested cooking, he laughed. I asked him about this.

> Not cooking, or cleaning, no. But it wasn't about who did this. Well, it was about who did the things, not about the gender of those things. It's complicated. – Oliver, he/him

Oliver recognised that these were gendered tasks and therefore sought to clarify that it was about masculinised or feminised forms of labour, rather than the gender of the person completing the task. This reinforces the argument in the previous section that women were aware of the need to participate in the masculine work (cracking etc.) as this was perceived to be of greater value. However, some interviewees were keen to point out the ways that men contributed to domestic work, and indeed how it was a notable badge of pride. There are two ways that men's involvement in domestic work was highlighted by my participants, and I argue that this points to a broader trend of to what and whom value is assigned. These are: 1. The washing up, and 2. Large dramatic gestures. I will deal with these one by one.

> With the food and the communal meals, women were heavily involved in cooking. But also, the men that were good feminists would be involved. – Jim, he/him

> The reason they liked me is because me and my crew turned up to stay on the floor of their living room for 3 days, twice in two weeks. And I didn't know any of these people. So, I just spent my time washing the dishes and people notice stuff like that. – Callum, he/him

> Tom was always washing the dishes and so he kind of breaks the stereotype, right? Everyone knew that Tom will just wash up. And he was always the one to wash all the dishes in all the squats which I lived in ... I can't say that women were doing more housework than men were. I think for some it was a badge of honour. So, you know for Tom he was just known as the clean guy that you can always rely on. That was his thing, you know. So, he would be invited to live in all of the squats because of that. – Layla, she/her

The first thing I think is important to mention is that no-one highlighted washing up as a way in which *women* were particularly noticed or valued. Further, Jim reflects that a main reason that men washed

up was *in order to be seen as good feminists*. Callum washed up 'because people notice stuff like that', and Layla suggests that 'for some [men] it was a badge of honour'. In *The Second Shift*, Hochschild highlights a tendency wherein men develop 'second shift fetishes' in which they 'converted a single act into a substitute for a multitude of chores in the second shift, a token' (2003, 50). While this was not explicitly remarked upon by my interviewees, that washing up was seen as notable while other forms of socially reproductive labour were not mentioned as being particularly taken up by men suggests a similar ethos at play. Further, the comments all suggest that a form of social capital arose from being a man who partakes in the dishwashing, either as a symbol of his good feminism, as Jim suggests, or because you are known as clean and reliable and thus a desirable housemate, as Layla and Callum suggest. This social capital does not seem to have been similarly attributed to women undertaking the same tasks. This suggests a normative view of the gendered nature of domestic tasks, something remarked upon by Kennelly: 'activist work remains highly gendered, and that its gendered impacts are systematically misrecognised by the women and men involved, such that these shared experiences come to be attributed to individual frailties or personal decisions' (2014, 243-244). This point was made by Jana who suggested that women almost always took on the brunt of the domestic tasks, despite them not receiving the same status as the men who cracked the building in the first place.

> Okay, the men open the squat, it's very stereotypical. They broke in and then they felt like the king because they opened this place because they climbed up some wall and went down. So, that's true. And they always felt entitled because they opened the place, no? ... But generally, when you come in, it's the women who wash and the women who cook and the women who clean. It was always like this, and it was just really horrendous, and we managed to say it sometimes, but then, I don't know, you just take it because … you also don't want to fight constantly about everything. – Jana, she/her

Jana is demonstrating that despite some men participating in the washing up in a show of solidarity or feminism, or to become more likeable, this was still not the norm. The difference is, when women undertook these tasks, it was taken for granted rather than lauded. Jana ended up putting up with a lot because of the exhaustion wrought by constantly trying to make the distribution of labour more equitable.

There was a tendency to replace the monotonous, daily, and unremarkable with one symbolic gesture of domestic reproduction. Aside from the washing up, this also took a different form: the Grand Cleaning Day.

> Callum was a good one. He'd basically always start doing a ridiculously big cleaning job, you just see him on his own doing it. And everyone would sort of see him doing it and by the end of it, you've conquered this massive pile of shite and got through it. – Daniel, he/him

> He would be someone that would go, 'Oh my God, this is disgusting', and do a great big, clean everything up and wash in a very dramatic way and then not do it again for three months. – Mary, she/her

Here we have two different interpretations of the Grand Cleaning Day. Daniel uses the example to highlight the value Callum brings to a squat, and how he is able to draw others into the grand cleaning day – whether through solidarity or fear of being seen as someone who does not contribute. Mary, meanwhile, saw the Grand Cleaning Day as a fairly blatant substitute for the daily labour of everyday homemaking – a 'second shift fetish' if ever there was one.

The final thing I want to emphasise, following on from these two sections on cracking, and the washing up, is the skills that men and women were expected to have in order to be of value in the squatting scene were almost inverse of each other, and thus inversely gendered. Women were aware that they had to be a part of the initial crack, as a marker of their position within the squat and in order to be taken seriously as valued members of the crew. Conversely, men felt that they had to engage with the more everyday domestic tasks, at least in a cursory fashion, in order to be seen as good feminists and people you want to have around after the initial crack, something women received no accolades for whatsoever.

4.3.3. How to skip bins and influence people – gender, class, and food

Feminist scholars have long drawn attention to the importance of communalising kitchens and food preparation as a vital arena for the liberation of women from their domestic chains and in the generation of a horizontal political community (Ferguson 2020, Russell 2020, Davies 2023). In her account of the resistance to the austerity imposed after the military coup in Chile in 1973, Federici discusses how 'the work of social reproduction ceased to be a purely domestic and individual activity: housework went into the streets alongside the big *ollas* (cooking pots) and acquired a political dimension. These politics did not escape the notice of the authorities, who came to view organising popular kitchens as a subversive, communist activity' (2018, 141). True to form, communal meals have long been a staple of squats, occupations, and other anarchistic and feminist political groups and projects. But who is in the kitchen mixing up the medicine and who is on the pavement thinking about the government?

> Part of the skipping would also be people who are able and willing to be out late at night. I remember cooking a meal for everyone and people being like 'this is disgusting.' And just being like 'cool, well, I won't do that again.' – Callum, he/him

> It was definitely gendered. Yeah. I mean there was the thing about going to get the skip food versus… there was just the idea that they could do that sort of thing and that you just couldn't ... There was often the thing of like, 'you won't be able to do that, get out of my way' sort of thing. I had boyfriends

explicitly who … disapproved of it, they felt it was unseemly that I was trying to do things that are not things for women. – Siobhan, she/her

I have already drawn attention to the fact that external and physical forms of labour were held in higher regard than internal and domestic. With food preparation and distribution this contrast holds true. The acquisition of food through skipping was considered to be more of a specialist skill, and one worth developing, than that of cooking. However, the act of food preparation and cooking was not inherently without value, or without its own rules and regulations, which could also be fraught and heavily imbued with power dynamics, something I discuss in a moment. When discussing the different aspects which might give you authority within the squatting scene, Ellis drew on one example in particular:

Corrine, she's a chef and she's worked in some of the best vegan restaurants in London and that's how she gets her social status. She does a lot of reproductive labour. She cooks everything. She organises food. She organises the kitchen, and because of that, she ends up developing status as the matriarch or the mother of a space. – Ellis, they/them

In this example, Corrine appears to have deliberately claimed the kitchen as her domain, as a location in which to centre her authority, based on her particular set of skills. The distinction here is that Corrine was able to develop status due not solely to the task of cooking but due to her *expertise* in the area. In this way it was valued as a unique talent of hers, leading to the acceptance of the kitchen as her realm through deference to her skill rather than through avoidance of participating equally. Deferring to the *expertise* of a woman is an acceptably feminist act, in a way that burdening a woman with the labour would not be. This is in contrast to the quotation from Callum, above, who by his own admission cooked a bad meal once and then left it to others who were better at it. It may also point to why so many of the men leaned on washing up as their primary domestic task – it would be very difficult to claim there are drastically different skill sets when it comes to the dishes. Conversely, opting out could have negative consequences for those skills more highly valued such as cracking a building, plumbing, and electrics, as Siobhan's fear of lacking those skills illustrated. Ensuring you had and used these skills were vital for being desirable squat-mates.

Squats often had an expectation of communal cooking. Alex moved into a squat in order to look after his partner, who was severely injured at the time. During this time, Alex was aware that he was expected to contribute materially in this way, all the while being financially and socially precarious in this situation, articulating that he felt a 'pressure on both me and my partner, of cooking for this house of people that we don't really even talk to, and we can't even really afford the food' (Alex, he/him). The social expectation to take part in communal meals and to contribute to the communal wellbeing of a squatted home is laden with power dynamics. You have to know how and where to go skipping, you have to know how to cook at least to an edible degree, and most importantly, you are expected to

want to. This is all very well and good in a communal living situation which is chosen, with people you choose to live with, where the communal meal is a source of delight and sociability. But when this becomes an expectation, regardless of the lack of the previous attributes, and with no recognition of disparities in one's skillset or financial situation, it can become a site of conflict and the enforcement of hierarchy.

> We would wash up extra sometimes. We were just so brassic, we just had nothing. Literally just super noodles ... later in the house when we started having house meals and stuff like that, at that point it'd already been kind of established that we weren't part of the group. – Alex, he/him

> There was the whole fascism of like, 'let's cook a dinner together' or rotational basis of cooking dinner. Maybe it's because I'm crap at cooking, or crap at vegan cooking, I don't necessarily like this kind of fetishistic food culture that happens in squats. And so, I always, always already dreaded the house meetings and the cooking together. I fucking hated it. – Layla, she/her

Both Layla and Alex are highlighting an important distinction to be made when it comes to analysis of any form of social or communal activity: desirable vs. enforced communalism. In the above squat, both Layla and Alex felt unwelcome and that their position in the crew was precarious. Therefore, they found communal meals not a genuine expression of solidarity and togetherness, but an enforced masquerade of communalism, in which the latent power dynamics at play were brought to the fore. This demonstrates that power and authority are not only exhibited in the nature of the task (from breaking and entering to breadmaking) but in the position held by those engaging in the task. Corrine was valued as a *chef*, rather than as someone who simply cooks. Alex washed up because he was unable to materially contribute in any other way due to his precarity and relative poverty.

It could be argued that Alex's unwillingness to contribute to house meals is a sign of a gendered approach towards domestic labour – that, as a man, he does not need to cook, it is not his role. However, I think it is clear from the above quotations that this was not the case. An expectation to provide for others who are not also providing for you – and not just materially, but emotionally and socially – is not communal living, it is socially coerced labour. And from a working-class man who is primarily there to care for his injured partner and who is offered no other form of social support, this expectation takes on a hostile bent. It is also worth noting, on the subject of socially reproductive labour, that Alex was caring for Layla almost entirely alone.

> People gave a shit out of courtesy, but I was the one looking after them. I guess the idea is they have a twenty-four-hour carer essentially. – Alex, he/him

This form of labour (care work) was not expected to be socialised throughout the household, while food provision was. Care work is just as feminised a form of labour as cooking, if not more so (Giménez 2019), and so that this was entirely assumed to be Alex's duty and his alone undermines a

reading of his objection to cooking for semi-hostile strangers as a gendered impulse. Further, it suggests that their desire for communal cooking was not entirely through a feminist understanding of shared domestic labour and solidarity between flatmates. Why was care work individualised while food production was not? After all, as Wright (2020) argues '[care work] is the real work of being a human being. It is what *makes you* a human being and you can't really become one otherwise. And if we are not deeply engaged with the politics of caring … we are just colluding with the narcissism so abundantly curated by capitalism'. Despite their ambitions towards anti-capitalist living, squatters are not exempt from the values assigned by broader society. The expectation of food preparation, but not care work, perhaps indicates that Alex's crewmates may have lost their way (maliciously or not) from the initial motivation for communal cooking as a communalisation of domestic tasks towards one of an assumption: in this shared space I deserve to have my meals cooked for me, regardless of the social dynamics at play within the space. Whether your own needs are met communally or not appears to have been contingent on your place in the domestic hierarchy, which, in Layla and Alex's case, was right at the bottom.

4.4. Conclusion

In the above chapter I have outlined the key skills and attributes required in order to be considered of high status within a squat crew. From the possession of - and position within - a large social network to participation in activist projects, being seen as influential to people and events was a key criterion of a high-status squatter. Further, the way you spoke and what you spoke about also contributed to your position within the field. Possessing practical, masculine skills provided you with higher status than those which were recognised as equally necessary but were less immediate, such as cooking, cleaning, and negotiation skills. Further, women felt more pressure to perform masculine actions in contrast to men who were sometimes able to forgo participation in the more dangerous activities and were not denigrated for it. The squatting movement therefore developed what Bobel identified in other activist environments as a 'complicated network of values and judgements that anchor identities, a network arranged hierarchically' (2007, 153). However, tangible skills were not the only ways in which someone could establish their position and attain high social capital. Perhaps almost as important as what you could do, was what people *thought you could do*. Therefore, I will now take a look at the role of aesthetics and identity performance in gaining (or losing) social capital, and how this intersects with class and gender.

5. Performance and power

> I wore the costume and I loved it. I really enjoyed it. – George, he/him

> I was unique. We all were! We all are unique, aren't we, just like everybody else. – Suri, she/her

Whether you fit in, belong, or are an outcast is at the first instance decided by how you look (Satchell *et al* 2023, Moskowitz *et al* 2022). It is only later, after conversation, posture, accent, and credentials are established that this first impression may be revised. Of course, aesthetics can mask as much as they can reveal, giving off an impression of one's class background, for example, which may not actually match the reality. So, for better or for worse aesthetics within the squat scene, just as within any other cultural field, matter. Importantly, the relationship between adherence to this aesthetic and social status is influenced by the gender, sexuality, class, and authority of the wearer. The politics of appearance are not merely superficial, as manner of dress can be complicit in upholding societal norms, and to reject these norms more visibly embeds the enclothed within the radical habitus. Despite the domestic setting, where one otherwise might feel able to dress as one pleases, the social scene and participation within it due to squatting leads to a collective habitus. This speaks of the need for any social form to have some coherence of identity in order to function and to have effect, including aesthetic identity, as it is 'through cultural performance that alternative meanings, values, and identities are produced, embodied, and publicly communicated within social movements' (Juris 2015, 98, see also Hebdige 1988). In this chapter I look at the relationship between the squat aesthetic and signifiers of class position, and how the dominance of a masculine visual appearance affects social dynamics and hierarchies.

5.1. Identity performance and social cohesion

When I asked my interviewees about the squat aesthetic a lot of them laughed but were not more specific about what this aesthetic entailed. The laugh suggested that of course there is an aesthetic. But more often than not they claimed that while they could identify it, they did not personally conform to it. When interviewing George and Mary separately, I came to realise how much aesthetic continuity there has been in the squatting scene since the 1980s. George explicitly articulated his aesthetic as a 'costume', and further, suggested that this costume was Mary's idea.

> Shortly after I met my partner, she basically transformed me ... I went from being a drippy hippy to what looked like a boot boy - going from flared jeans and long hair down my back to having short spiky blond hair and Dr Martens boots and drainpipe pants. In the space of about a week. Yeah, I think there's still a kind of aesthetic continuity in the scene... which some people try to push back against but it's still there. – George, he/him

This anecdote does not mirror Mary's recollection of her own attitude towards the prevailing aesthetic at the time. She is dismissive of the punk fashion which dominated the squatting scene past and present.

> People who did it... let's say more as part of their identity. The ones that I always felt that were playing at it. And I really couldn't be bothered with that … By this time, you know, the mid-eighties, the whole punk thing, if you were still going around with a Mohican or coloured hair, I think I would've thought you were a bit of a twat. – Mary, she/her

According to her testimony, Mary looked down on the brightly coloured hair and deliberately counter-cultural dress sense that George claims she encouraged him to adopt. While refuting her own part in maintaining this aesthetic dominance, Mary did recognise that people were 'playing at it', similarly to George's description of a 'costume'. The performance of a radical identity through aesthetics was something Mary was disdainful towards, suggesting that it lacked authenticity. This could be a result of Mary's squatting experience being very much a continuation of her working-class background, unlike others who came from comfortably middle-class homes and 'dropped out' - like George - who she felt had less of a stake in squatting as an actual liveable reality rather than an exciting whim. This is something I discuss in more detail later on in this chapter. Mary strongly believed that punk was about more than just the 'costume' and that the costume itself did not inherently reveal anything of interest about your personality or politics. This recognition of punk as a form of aesthetic rather than marrying directly to political beliefs or ideals tallies with Ambrose's experience thirty years later:

> If I sort of went up to someone and start chatting away at them, I would say 90 percent of the time people were fine. They were just chatting as a normal human being. 10 percent of the time it was someone who was deeply ingrained in the idea that anarchism is punk, and punk is clothes. And if you don't look the right look, then fuck you. – Ambrose, he/him

There has always been a strong correlation between anarchism and punk (Donaghey *et al* 2023). It is not surprising that many anarchists adopt a punk aesthetic in order to be read as visibly anarchist or anti-establishment. The association between punk and squatting correlate as both are a complicated mix of material solutions to economic problems and a collective performativity. Berry & Mellins speak of the 'yearning for individuality and uniqueness (as opposed to mass production and standardisation) that results in the customising or making from scratch of the accoutrements of everyday life – a DIY approach that informs the 'punk' element of steampunk' (Berry & Mellins 2011, 19). Ambrose found that assumptions were made about his politics and experience based on his lack of conformity to this aesthetic. In deciding that *their* identity is determined by their uniform some people bought into the idea that the same could be said about him. Layla also recognised this presumption, stating 'I definitely felt the pressure to conform' when describing the aesthetic dominance among her crew mates. This is an example of symbolic boundary-making (Miller 2014).

However, while you can attempt to demonstrate your affiliations through symbolic markers such as aesthetic, there is only so far that you are in control of how others view you. As Casey says, 'You don't just give out; you get perceived at the same time. And that it's a two-way thing. You're not just there, you're there and perceived' (Casey, they/them). Casey is speaking directly about gender presentation and assumptions made regarding someone's gender due to their appearance, but the sentiment holds true in general. You are not in control of how others perceive you, but you can give off markers and these markers, particularly for someone new within a scene or community, can be deeply important in forging initial connections and providing a gateway into acceptance.

5.2. Gender performance and power

> Who is deciding how are you fucking engaging with the world?' Are you deciding it or is someone deciding it for you? – Fede, they them

In this section I look at gendered aesthetic performances, focusing on who utilises gender presentation in what way and what this means in terms of subverting or reflecting existing gendered norms. The dominant squat aesthetic is that of the practical and masculine, as well as the punk. In the previous chapter I documented the valuing of masculine, practical skills above feminine, socially reproductive skills within squats, here I look at how this maps onto acceptable, or not, aesthetic choices. I first take a look at the queering of gender presentation by my non-binary interviewees before focusing on the enforced masculinity felt by others.

All three of my non-binary interviewees, Fede, Casey, and Ellis, described squatting as an empowering environment for the exploration of their sexual and gender identity. Ellis spoke eloquently of how both the spaces they were in and the activities and performances they engaged in contributed to their queer becoming.

> I learned how to grow into myself and learned how to take up space and learned how to be stronger and more grounded, and less small. Because of squatting, because of learning how to do shit, learning how to throw men out, learning how to protect yourself and learning how to just have two feet on the ground and a fucking angle grinder in one hand and a crowbar in the other, you know? In that sense, my relationship to my kind of androgynous way of being, that way of being suited my relation to my gender perfectly. And I never really felt gendered, really. And in terms of queer stuff, I had some of the best queer moments of my life, in terms of the underground queer scene and interacting with different people from different generations who are queer ... all of the internalised homophobia I had growing up was exorcised out of me through having more positive queer relationships in the squatting era. I knew so many queer people and just went to so many queer parties and sex parties and it was great. It was great. Everyone was so gay and weird. – Ellis, they/them

This process of becoming, in an embodied and sexual sense, their comfortable and grounded self, was entwined, for Ellis, with squatting, with their gender and sexual identity heavily intertwined. They list different activities which helped them grow more confident, also in their case, contributing to their recognition of their own non-binary and androgynous gender identity. They relate this growing into themselves also with the queer people they met along the way, particularly the inter-generational aspect, something they also touched upon again later on in our conversation. These positive queer relationships helped them become who they are. While Ellis is speaking of how squatting increased their comfort with androgyny, the 'tools' they reference which enabled this are coded masculine – crowbars and angle grinders. This can be liberating for those attempting to escape an imposed femininity but is always suffused with existing hierarchies of acceptable identities and identity performances. Fede commented on how being able to see queer and non-binary people existing confidently in social space, allowed others to explore that side of their identity.

> We've seen it again and again in the communities, these last couple of years, two or three people who never really questioned being a socialised man, and suddenly they're gender questioning or embracing nonbinary-ism. And yeah, that's through representing it, rather than lecturing it. – Fede, they/them

Fede utilised the interconnectedness between gendered performance and discourse in order to destabilise existing binaries or pre-assumed norms. They destabilise prior conceptions of gender norms not just through their words but through their performance (Butler 1990). 'Performativity … involves the saturation of performances and performers with power, with particular subject positions' (Gregson & Rose 2000, 441). Fede does not deny the power dynamics at play in these gendered performances, instead they suggest that through understanding how gendered power dynamics are performed they can subvert them.

> Casey: You're [Fede] actually very useful for this as well, because people can look up to you, but you can also make a point and people will still hear you out. Whereas with me or certain people, or trans comrades, they might not be able to sit down and actually hear that … I remember in [a squat], we both said the exact same thing, but nobody believed me, but they believed you.
>
> Fede: That's gender privilege. I present masc and I have a deep voice, and I'm very tall.

Both Fede and Casey recognise that being read as masculine still gives you and your arguments more credibility, however, they both see gender presentation as something you can play with, enacting different roles in order to send different messages and engage with individuals and groups in different ways (Mavin & Grandy 2013). They see a freedom in that, similarly to the freedom Ellis found through squatting and their lack of need to conform to a particular gendered stereotype. 'Anarchists who treat their sexual identities and practices as sites of resistance are invested in the political value of

queer performance. They believe that representations of the self have the potential to effect changes in power relations, so they use their own bodies as models of resistance' (Portwood-Stacer 2010, 485).

> You can play with the rules and design them yourself and understand the game, what the different dynamics are of these situations, as with property rights or with working with a group or with gender, it's the ability to consciously construct that and use it. – Fede, they/them

Fede refers to the idea of 'the game', neatly evoking the Bordieuan concept of understanding the 'rules of the game' as necessary leverage towards your own authority within a given field. Habitus 'provides a 'practical knowledge' or 'feel for the game' that is drawn upon when negotiating unfamiliar social contexts or fields. Thus, habitus mediates the positions that individuals occupy in new social fields' (Holt 2008, 233). To 'consciously construct … and use' these rules and these dynamics is an important dimension of Fede's educative work, and something that is a product of their sense of place and understanding of the dynamics within the field in which they are operating. Fede not only possesses a 'feel for the game' but also '*knows the game*' within their particular field of squatting, as distinguished here: ''feel for the game' demands or requires invention and improvisation. It is continually in a state of flux, adjusting and changing depending on the given circumstances. However, 'knowing the game' additionally involves a more reflexive understanding of the rules, values, strategies and (positioned limits of) possibilities through practice in particular fields' (France *et al* 2013, 600). This gives them the power to be able to play around with the rules, and to challenge and subvert them when desired.

Layla also highlights a related trend, towards men performing a softness in order to be read as feminist within the squatting scene.

> Women have to prove themselves to be strong, at the same time as we had men competing over just how sensitive they are, which is like, great fine. But we have the pressure to actually be strong ... But Tom never played that game, which I loved. Tom is my ex-partner, who I have a lot of respect for, because I'd say they never felt the need to somehow on purpose demasculinise themselves. They were actually on purpose, he always said to me, almost rebelling against this being like, 'I'll do the washing up if I want to but other than that, yeah, I'm a dude, what are you going to do?' – Layla, she/her

While this quotation is in praise of Tom for bucking against the trend of being judged for masculinity, it also suggests that Tom was aware that he, by and large, partook only in tasks he saw as masculine: "I'll do the washing up if I want to but other than that, yeah, I'm a dude, what are you going to do?". 'Yeah, I'm a dude' could suggest that any further domestic concerns were not the remit of 'a dude'. Or a more generous reading is that he was happy to take on tasks which were read as feminine, such as the washing up, but this in no way impinged on his manliness, perhaps due to his security in himself. Another notable element of this quote from Layla is the subtle distinction she makes, by suggesting that women were being pressured to 'actually *be* strong' she implies that the men she discusses were

merely *performing* sensitivity, rather than it being an actual attribute of theirs. However, she also recognises that this is a hypocritical stance to take:

> We were at the forefront of this idea that men should not necessarily take on the masculine sort of facade, or take it off as such, and then they can be a bit more in touch with their feelings. They can be feminine; they can be queer … they have to give women space ... they have to shut the fuck up … It's kind of bad, it's like a no-win situation for them, right? On one hand, if they open up, they get flak and if they don't, they get flak. But I've just definitely seen so many examples, a trend at the time for men to just sort of take a step back in that sense and to put them not being masculine at the forefront, as an identity almost or a way to not hold responsibility. – Layla, she/her

While Layla sees this as a lose-lose for men, it can also be read differently. Men can get social capital from performing a softness or a femininity, which is read as them subverting or acknowledging their implicit power under patriarchy, while women are less likely to be able to profit from a feminine performance. Queering masculinity, by rebelling against the strictures imposed by general society on gender performance was considered valuable in much the same way that the normative masculinity of hard skills, strength, and practical attributes were considered valuable. However, my evidence suggests that women were only able to capitalise on the latter of these gendered performances, while men, and, according to Fede and Casey, non-binary people could utilise both performances, depending on the target and audience of their performance. Further, Layla suggests that this abdication of masculinity could sometimes be used cynically, to avoid responsibility, which chimes with the analysis of the gendered dynamics of navigating conflict mentioned in the previous chapter.

Cherry and Mellins, in their article on the steampunk subculture, suggest that aesthetic choices, DIY skills, and in their case technological prowess are all linked in the acquisition of subcultural capital (2011). The same is true within the squatting movement, as Layla explains, 'In my squats during that particular time, I'd say being kind of tomboyish, really practical, spending as little time as possible on your own personal appearance, I think there is a certain kudos that comes with that' (Layla, she/her). Within squatting there was an implicit association of masculinity with dedication to 'the struggle' and of femininity with superficiality and a lack of politics, noted by my participants, evident throughout my experiences, and recognised by scholars of similar subcultural fields (Downes 2012, Cherry & Mellins 2011, Coleman & Bassi 2011, Miller 2014). Downes recognises that 'women had to carefully negotiate their identity within the limited positions available to them in punk subcultures: the tomboy or the sex object' (2012, 207). This reflects Layla's experiences of being seen as more feminine than was usual in the squatting movement. This femininity was linked both explicitly and implicitly by her crew to being less practically capable, and also to sexual promiscuity.

> You know 'why are you taking the time to put on the lipstick? Maybe you could spend it, I don't know fucking potting a plant or something' Or sharpening the angle grinder, maybe, you know, 'it just seems

like a waste of time'. It just seems like why would you put attention to anything but the struggle? Also, of course, because as we mentioned, the kind of sexual dynamics were huge during my time anyways ...They just always, you know if you're putting on more sexual clothing or whatnot, it seems like you are perhaps asking- Or, you know, as if you're flirting with someone already inadvertently just by doing that. And then being seen as some sort of slut or whatnot, I don't think it would have been a great look. – Layla, she/her

It is ironic, in a scene which tends to consider itself 'above' the traditional confines of the nuclear family, and which proclaims itself proudly feminist and alternative, that Layla felt that if she were to dress more femininely, she would be considered 'a slut'. This transcends the mere association between tomboy-ishness and practical skills, but instead is suggestive of a moral code, one which mirrors rather than subverts that of broader society. It reifies the dominant narrative that women dressing 'provocatively' means they were 'asking for it' (a sentiment Layla shies away from completing), all the while masking this normative, regressive, viewpoint as radical under the guise of aesthetic choices marking dedication to 'the struggle'. This is an example of slut-shaming, defined by Papp *et al* as 'the act of humiliating a woman based on presumed sexual behaviour and appearance, regardless of whether or not she is sexually active ... the term ''slut'' implies that the target lacks value and morality' (2017, 240).

Beyond slut-shaming, the denigration of femininity - and thus Layla - also extended to their perception of her relationship with her partner, Tom.

> There was pressure for sure to maybe be a bit more tomboyish, but I quite liked, whether it's makeup or heels or dressing up and things like that. But all my cis women housemates were very tomboy-ish and it just seemed like … I think people were like, you know, 'it's just the lust thing between them, Tom will wake up', you know, 'she's got nothing' or whatever. They were quite open about it. – Layla, she/her

Downes recognises that 'these identifications carried high costs: the rejection of conventional femininity effectively alienated women from each other and perpetuated a patriarchal devaluation of the feminine' (2012, 208). This is something Layla struggled with, as she was deemed deliberately provocative through her clothing choices. Further, these suspicions and accusations were propagated by other women, a trend that has been observed by other academics (Mavin & Grandy 2013, Papp *et al* 2017). The idea that Tom might only be with Layla because of her femininity, or perceived promiscuity, is misogynistic, intended to shame women into conformity, and has been decried as such since the 1970s (Fraser 2015, Carr 2013).

Miller argues in her article on gender and symbolic capital in subcultural music scenes that within the metal scene 'femininity is constructed as a marker of low status, while masculinity is a signifier of belonging and authority, leaving women with less 'right to speak' … masculine capital is valuable and exchangeable for symbolic capital; feminine capital is not' (Miller 2014, 463, see also Riach &

Wilson 2007). This reflects Layla's experiences as a feminine woman in the squatting movement, as she felt 'the pressure to be less kind of outwardly feminine than [she] wanted to be' (Layla, she/her). This has significance in terms of achieving and maintaining status within the scene, something necessary for material security. By privileging masculine traits and aesthetics above feminine ones, further boundaries are drawn around acceptable aesthetics, and the assumptions of your disposition those aesthetics suggest. As Miller argued with reference to the masculine-coded metal scene, women in the scene 'must prove that they belong *despite* their femininity, while men are assumed to belong *because of* their masculinity … women can have their authority questioned at any time' (2014, 477 [my italics]). If you do not conform to the aesthetic, you have to put more effort into proving that you do in fact belong (Coleman & Bassi 2011). This perspective is supported, perhaps unknowingly, by several of my male interviewees, who, when I asked about women they respected within the movement, tended to mention women they then went on to attribute with typically masculine or dominant characteristics.

> I used to live with a lot of very savvy women. Flea, she's a Blacksmith. Oh yeah, a lot of very talented women on the scene. Very fucking hardcore as well. – Daniel, he/him

This is a result of the normalisation of masculinity such that it becomes unrecognisable, or 'the wider societal doxa of 'masculine domination' … where masculine behaviour and forms of thinking are afforded a higher status but taken for granted as 'natural' because of how embedded and inscribed in our daily activities and discourses they are' (Craddock 2019, 150). This can have serious gendered repercussions as 'the obscuring and naturalisation of the gendered nature of the 'ideal activist' identity masks the structural causes of women's perceived 'failure' to achieve the identity and instead places full responsibility on the individual, leading women to blame themselves for their perceived personal failure to live up to the identity's criteria' (Ibid, 150). Ambrose explicitly acknowledged how certain forms of masculine dominance were subconsciously justified due to a 'reification of the strong female presence' (Ambrose, he/him).

Ellis, however, found that you could also leverage the perceived weakness that was coded within femininity: 'I definitely did use that all the time, using the way I was gendered and my femininity, or innocent androgyny, or my accent or my whiteness works in my favour. I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for those things' (Ellis, they/them). Ellis is suggesting that femininity or androgyny, coded as 'innocent', could be a tool for achieving their aims and having their opinions and positions respected, playing on implicit weakness, and thus being non-threatening, to make their position safe. They suggest that due to the dominant masculine aesthetic within squatting, to perform femininity can have its own power and challenge, and can disrupt the dominant norms in interesting and powerful ways.

In this section I have argued that the ability to perform femininity, and the impact of that performance, in the squatting scene was conditional upon your social capital and your gender. If you had credibility regarding your stake in the struggle and commitment to shared politics, you had a greater ability to be playful with your identity and gender presentation. Further, if you were male or non-binary you could leverage a feminine performance for educative or liberatory means. While admirable, that this fluidity in presentation was limited only to some suggests that femininity, still, was considered less legitimate than masculinity as a permanent state, rather than a performance. This resonates with the next section where I look at classed performances - who has the ability to step outside of their existing class, and what this means for power dynamics.

5.3. Performing poverty – squat aesthetics and class

> This is an example of the informal hierarchy within the wider scene. Steven never gets that much stick about being an aristocrat. It's because he's the top of the food chain. People who were deemed more useful within the crew or deemed more high status within the crew can be literally the son of a lord. – Oliver, he/him

In 'The Queer Poor Aesthetic', Sevan Mujukian talks about how they did not realise they were the only working-class person in their houseshare for a long time, due to the collective adoption by their housemates of what they termed 'the queer poor aesthetic'. When describing one of their wealthy housemates they wrote that 'they'd participate—openly and loudly—in the shit that poor people routinely have to do for survival (and are shamed and ashamed for). They'd come with me to get free food through public programs or dumpster diving. They'd get stick n' poke tattoos, make zines, complain about money, roll their own cigarettes (it's cheaper), wear 'distressed' clothes, thrift, 'free box,' or steal shit like it was a necessity, not a privilege … as if they actually knew what it meant to live 'the struggle' (Mujukian 2016). Many of the markers Mujukian points to are also prevalent features of the squat aesthetic. Stick and poke tattoos, dumpster diving (or skipping, in British slang), and wearing clothes that either look like they came from a bin, or actually did, are all heavy signifiers of one's participation, and place within, the London squatting movement. This becomes a problem when it is used to obfuscate the very real social, cultural, and economic differences within a movement. Jim and Ellis point to this tendency:

> When everyone adopts the same aesthetic, you can't really tell what people's class backgrounds were. – Jim, he/him

> In terms of economic privilege or economic power, I think that was always hidden ... I think that was hidden more than it should have been… And I know Layla had that issue, we both had that issue of trying really hard to get people to understand what it is to be economically marginalised people living amongst economically privileged people. It's a mindfuck, but they don't see it. They don't see it. It's not talked about. It's not acknowledged. – Ellis, they/them

The danger in hiding your class signifiers is that it is a privilege only afforded to a few, and that it is used to gain cultural capital within a movement that, whilst being a political choice for many, is also a very real and significant form of housing for others, who may lack the ability or desire to conform to the aesthetic of poverty adopted by the majority. Layla spoke of her frustration at being a working-class woman in political squats where this aesthetic prevailed to a level she felt was almost enforced.

> In the more politically charged squats there was a certain attention given to how one sources their food, how they transported themselves and a general rebellion against consumerist culture … You're not meant to buy; you're meant to reuse. This is what we're doing with our housing, and this is what we're meant to do with our clothes, with our transportation systems, with our food …. there was a huge frowning upon anything new. So it's quite conservative in a way. – Layla, she/her

This is an example of what Portwood-Stacer refers to as an expected 'investment in authenticity', the idea that 'you have to adhere to certain cultural practices in order to be a 'real' anarchist' (Portwood-Stacer 2010, 489). Further, working-class people may wish to distance themselves from class signifiers, especially if they for the first time have some money in their pocket, yet are unable to for risk of exclusion from their community, and potentially their home. As Archer *et al* wrote regarding working-class students desiring designer goods, the 'disparaged 'poor' identity was something that the working-class pupils were all trying hard to avoid inhabiting' (Archer *et al* 2007, 227). The adoption of a poverty, punk, or 'chav'/sportswear aesthetic by secure middle-class people, performing their politics is a phenomenon documented also outside of the squatting scene. It is a privilege to be able to dress a certain way and to know that if you have a job interview tomorrow you will have a suitable suit and a clean shower in order to look professional. As Pulp say, 'the chip station grease will come out in the bath'. The adoption of an aesthetic associated with poverty and counter-cultural activity has the dual function of disguising your own class position, in an environment where displays of wealth are looked down upon and being working-class is, superficially, considered a positive, and of demonstrating your activist credentials, through the association of certain kinds of aesthetics with rebellion and other left-wing issues such as environmentalism and recycling.

> Being good at pretending that you are working-class and being very vocal about it… Because from my experience, people who are working-class talk about it far less than people who aren't working-class. So being good at being vocal about it would take you much further than actually being working … It was the posh people who were trying to secure their position by walking into the room and saying, 'my mother was a cleaner'. – Natalia, she/her

It could also have a darker side, when failing to adapt to the collective aesthetic identity had material repercussions for people. Portwood-Stacer acknowledged this risk, arguing that 'investments in 'authentic' expressions of political identity can prove to be divisive within a movement, and can also displace attention away from the material political projects of the movement and onto more

superficial, individualised concerns' (Portwood-Stacer 2010, 480). This was reinforced by my interviewees' experiences:

> A squat crew would not even let in a new girlfriend of someone to just feel comfortable in those squats and to just push them out, because they wouldn't fit an aesthetic or way of talking or just wouldn't even be perhaps particularly engaged in political struggle as they see them. But look, again, as I say, this is just the very sort of pinnacle of very secure middle-class squatters that I encountered. I think this is different from other people that need to squat for necessity and things like that. – Layla, she/her

Layla recalls aesthetics as being a reason people would not be invited to live in squats. Significantly, she attributes this judgement to middle-class squatters, who, due to their own lack of precarity, were able to be choosy about who they lived with, without acknowledging that this may have material consequences. This suggests the safer the class position of the crew, the more boundary-drawing took place in terms of who was in or out of their collective, and for what reasons. They treat it as a game, a clique, a way of securing yourself (Skeggs 2011). Security is fundamental to squatting; your crew determines your safety, therefore inclusion within a crew can make the difference in a material way between homelessness or not. Extending boundary-drawing to aesthetics makes the criteria for inclusion ever stricter. There is a divide between people who choose to squat and people who need to, and my evidence suggests the more rigorous boundaries are drawn by the former groups, gatekeeping access to vital resources.

Another repercussion of middle-class people deciding the squatting aesthetic is that it can invisibilise the working-class people who do squat for material reasons. This has prevailed throughout the last decades, with Mary recalling:

> I worked for the park, and I worked with very working-class men who did a manual job who didn't see themselves as gardeners, they just saw themselves as workers. And when I told them that I was squatting, they related it to poshness thinking it was something that posh arty kids did for the laughs. They had that kind of impression of it ... they thought I was posh because I was better educated than them, even though I was working-class. And so they just put that down as sort of another one of Mary's eccentricities doing this arty thing. It was a little bit of a protest and then I'd go and get a council flat like them. – Mary, she/her

The working-class men that Mary worked with saw squatting as something 'posh arty kids did for the laughs', the same language that Layla uses to describe what she refers to as the political squatters, thirty years later. Both Mary and Layla, as working-class women, had their own experiences of poverty and of being working-class obfuscated by the dominance of those with middle-class identities distorting the symbolic meaning of their aesthetic. Skeggs suggests that 'irony enables the abdication of responsibility for the description while reproducing the historical stereotypes intact' (2003, 17) and this is precisely what middle-class squatters do by performing a working-class aesthetic that they use

to determine access to social and cultural realms, all the while with a negative effect on those who might seek to improve their own class position. There is a danger in adopting working-class aesthetics and then policing access, maintaining boundaries of supposedly working-class spaces.

There has been an increase in criticism of 'homeless chic' in the media in recent years (Duggan 2015, Smilgius 2022, Drury 2020), criticising the fashion industry's callous and superficial engagement with the poverty aesthetic for whitewashing experiences of homelessness and glamourising something deeply harmful to many people. Grzyb (2011) refers to it as 'domestic poverty tourism', a phrase that reflects Mary and Layla's accounts. As the late Dawn Foster wrote in 2017:

> There are thousands of privileged young people in Britain though who spend their days eulogising about going to Greggs and Wetherspoons as if it shows how grounded and open-minded they are. No working-class person I know does the same, because for most people going to McDonalds isn't a notable event in which they're deviating in what is acceptable for their class. They're buying food or ordering a pint, not going on a class-crossing field trip to an alien territory in which they feel comfortable because being middle-class affords you the confidence to feel entitled to enter any space you wish.

Layla was attempting to escape her class position through the pursuit of small luxuries and was demonised for it, whilst others were able to use their adoption of a working-class aesthetic to cement their counter-cultural credibility. 'Effusing about working-class signifiers grates because middle-class people have the cultural privilege to do so without reprisals, while working-class people are still discriminated against openly day in and day out' (Foster 2017).

While the markers of cultural and social capital may differ within the squatting movement to the mainstream this does not necessarily suggest that they are wielded by those with a different *economic* position to those in the mainstream. 'Bourdieu regarded the capacity to playfully appropriate 'vulgar' cultural goods as a socially profitable capacity to transform their social meaning' (Flemmen *et al* 2017, 6). While the aesthetic choices may appear to be those of a working-class community, the decision over which aesthetics are appropriate are not necessarily made by the working-class themselves. 'What gets to count as 'tasteful' is effected by those with the social power to name' (Lawler 2005, 439). The middle-classes then, have the power to name, to cast judgement, and to choose the extent to which they engage with subcultural aesthetics. They can place the labels, such as 'consumerist' or 'posh' and then define themselves, and others, within or outside of them. Skeggs refers to the exclusionary displays and performances of power as 'symbolic boundary-marking … purposefully making mis-recognisable the episteme and power relations that underpin how to accrue the 'right' capitals (in a combination of social, cultural, economic and symbolic' (2011, 501). While she is referring to the exclusionary practices of the middle-classes it could be similarly applied to the internal regulations and norms which condition status and privilege within subcultural fields.

As Lawler discusses in relation to perceptions of the working-class, both 'landscapes and inhabitants are so frequently described in terms of lack. But this is not, primarily, a lack of material resources, but a lack of 'taste', knowledge, and the 'right way of being and doing' (2005, 433), something noted by Alex in the previous chapter. The lack is attributed to working-class people who lack the ability to possess or perform culturally valued attributes. Within the squatting scene the middle-classes are able to turn this lack into a positive commodity - a marker of their belonging. Therefore, this 'lack' or 'taste' can be inverted or flipped in the case of subcultures such as squatting, but only by those who possess the acceptable amounts of economic and cultural capital for it to be purely a performance. Those who hold a middle-class habitus and the associated cultural and social capital and thus an intuitive 'feel for the game' are able to perform the 'correct' form of working-class squatter perhaps better than a working-class squatter themself, who may desire a different aesthetic or cultural landscape. The middle-classes secure their dominance through 'attacks on pretentiousness, reversing dominant symbolic values, defining themselves through difference and distance from the middle-classes, scorning those with pretensions' (Skeggs 2011, 506). The middle-class power is to say: we can pretend to be like you but how dare you endeavour to be like us. While not only middle-class people can turn this working-class aesthetic into an asset, lacking the other forms of capital which enable you to climb the ranks within mainstream society relegates working-class people to accessing only the *subcultural* capital this aesthetic provides them with, with no alternative or safety net. 'Within the dominant symbolic economy, working-class styles may not be recognized as valuable when attached to working-class bodies, but they may accrue value when made available as a resource for the middle-classes' (Archer *et al* 2007, 233). By enforcing this aesthetic, the middle-classes are able to entrench the class position of others, whilst ensuring mobility for themselves.

Fashion is a vital means for performing a class identity, for drawing a distinction between 'us' and 'them'. The issue is when it is only that – a performance. Aesthetics are a means of generating capital. A key difference between the working and middle-classes' adoption of these collective aesthetic identities is that the identities:

> 'are produced from different social locations; that is they occupy a different relationship to the resources required to perform such identities and, in turn, these performances are inevitably differently read and interpreted … It is not the content or nature of particular embodied styles that determine their 'value', but the relations within which they are enacted and embedded. These relations will affect whether the performances have only a limited form of use-value (i.e., they are recognized only locally, e.g., as a form of self-worth) or whether they can generate other forms of value (e.g., economic, symbolic) across contexts and boundaries (exchange-value). (Archer *et al* 2007, 232).

If you have other forms of capital, you are not disadvantaged by adopting working-class symbols of capital, in fact it can act as an advantage – showing how grounded and down to earth you are when

applying for jobs within relevant cultural industries (media pundit, left-wing influencer, Labour party bigwig etc.). Use value within the squatting scene is similar for both working- and middle-class squatters, it is the exchange value where this disparity really comes to fruition.

However, social capital via conformity to the prevailing poverty aesthetic could be circumvented if you had enough social capital from the beginning. Layla pointed to this when describing a particular crew member:

> There is another character that can maybe develop in the squatting scene, which is a little bit funny, we had a well-known left-wing influencer, journalist type, who to be fair is working-class … So they moved into one of the squats we've opened. And they just knew that they have a lot of social capital. So he just wouldn't participate in any house chores or occupying or opening or cleaning- anything. He would just go in and out of the house. Maybe he would bring in his cool friends as well. And, you know, we were starstruck and stuff like that. So we just tolerated it for the longest time **…** This person wore crisp shirts, marks and sparks kind of semi suits, he lifted, he would drink cocktails instead of tinnies, and because we knew he was working-class maybe or something, it was just such a breath of fresh air, having someone with smart clothes and stuff like that to actually be around and oozing confidence because they are different. – Layla, she/her

This person Layla is describing was able to opt out of the socially enforced behaviours expected by a crew member such as occupying, doing chores, or cleaning because the crew were 'starstruck' by his minor celebrity status. Beyond that, he was not pressured to conform aesthetically. He already had the most social capital in the house and so therefore was able to wear smart clothes and be clean and engage in consumerist activities. This once again reinforces the fact that you can gain social capital by conforming to the aesthetic and thus becoming part of a collective identity, but pre-existing social capital gives you the wiggle room to opt out to whichever degree you desire. (Skeggs 2004, Archer *et al* 2007).

Aesthetics could also be adopted defensively. Oliver argues that his crew actively identified as 'scum', perhaps as a way of circumventing that accusation being thrown at them by others.

> Everyone in the squat ... identified as scum. I don't think there was like a class thing necessarily … It's much more like a dropping out of it rather than we are like 'a class'. Do you know what I mean? We weren't part of the working-class. [And was there a pride in that?] In being scum? Yeah. I think so, yeah. This was what I said about living antagonistically, kind of a holistic antagonism, do you know what I mean? Like we're scum, we're getting kicked out of places, we're getting arrested. We're- look, obviously we smell, and we dress dirty, and we wash in the sink, we don't have a shower sometimes, you know, that kind of thing. I think it became incorporated into a collective identity. – Oliver, he/him

Here, material lack is turned into a source of pride and of 'collective identity'. This is one of the major functions of aesthetics – it attributes you to a tribe. And as part of a collective you are stronger, you

are supported, your opinion holds more sway, you are able to 'build a self-contained sub-universe of meaning to manage the anxiety associated with the high-risk of participation' (Summers-Effler 2005, 145). Particularly if you were part of a crew, like Oliver's, which had a reputation for being punk, for being chaotic, for being extreme. While Oliver doesn't relate it explicitly to class, he does relate it to the material conditions they were living in. For him, the economic origins of his crew mates mattered less than the collective experience of being 'scum' together. Cherry and Mellins suggest that punks 'embody a conscious rejection of the norm and signal active dissent through clothing and performance. This outcast status (a status that is literally worn as a badge of honour …) is anarchic and disorderly. It not only rejects society's norms, but also embraces other identities which society has repressed, particularly fetishism and other taboo behaviours' (2011, 13). This 'badge of honour' tallies with Oliver's description of the pride in being 'scum'. In Oliver's case, the collective identity and sense of belonging was drawn from the material reality they found themselves in, rather than an idealised idea of what poverty fashion may entail in theory.

The dominance of middle-class squatters in determining the parameters of use value in terms of aesthetics fundamentally limits working-class people's aesthetic (and therefore cultural) choices which impacts their inclusion within the community, therefore security, especially when the repercussions of failure to adhere are so much more severe. Those who enforce the rule are often also the people who have the option not to squat.

5.4. Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have looked at the different aspects of identity performance which could add to, or detract from, your social capital. I argued that a masculine, working-class performance was the most desirable, as it suggested the possession of highly valued skills. However, this performance was more important than the actual status of being working-class, and was further bolstered by a particular use of language which was more readily available to the educated middle-classes. Further, the masculine performance and aesthetic appears to have been more rigorously enforced against women than against men and non-binary people, who were able to creatively engage in different gendered performances in order to subvert or distort what they saw as dominant expectations of gendered performance. The fact that the ability to explore and perform femininity was largely an option available only to men and non-binary people suggests a normative masculinity and a denigration of femininity in the sense that it was a costume to be put-on, if you already had the prerequisite levels of social capital, rather than something which you inhabited as your only option, whether through the skills you possessed or the aesthetic you presented.

Conclusion to part one

Throughout part one of my analysis, I have explored the main attributes which contribute to a position of authority within the squatting movement. These include: possessing social connections; proximity to those already in positions of power; participation in activist projects; having high-value skills; performing the correct classed and gendered aesthetic; and using the correct terminology. This is a non-exhaustive list, but one which draws on the main criteria which was articulated by my participants, reflected in my experience, and supported by the literature. I wish to end this section by reiterating why it is important to understand the way in which power in subcultural movements is attained and preserved.

It matters that gender presentation standards are upheld differently for men, women, and non-binary people. Inscribing cultural texts which determine who is able to speak and act with authority 'forecloses the possibilities for contestation and re-signification within spaces of 'resistance', reinforcing the tendency to re-iterate those cultural scripts that enhance the status quo' (Coleman & Bassi 2011, 208). It matters because the way in which authority is distributed is not equal and not equally accessible to all, reinforcing the same classed and gendered hierarchies that a community seeking equality ought to reject. It matters because identifying trends allows us to more easily and quickly spot them, manage them, neutralise them. It matters because the way in which people wield their authority can have a material impact on others. It matters because squatting is an extremely unregulated and precarious environment where the goodwill of your crewmates, being liked and considered an asset, can be the difference between a roof over your head and homelessness. It matters because unchecked authority can lead to situations of bullying, abuse, and even more serious outcomes. It matters because domination and hierarchy should matter, particularly among those trying to build a better world.

Squats are a vital way of securing an, albeit often temporary, roof over your head, and creating a space for self-development, empowerment, community action, and solidarity. However, they are also in the shadow of neoliberal social relations and are not exempt from enacting its attributes. 'Despite claims of inclusivity and the adoption of horizontal procedures and structures, such movements continue to reproduce inequalities and exclusionary practices' (Ishkanian & Saavedra 2019, 4). It is vital that these important, political goals are made easier to achieve, and being able to recognise the way insidious behaviours and informal hierarchies infiltrate the movement, means we can more readily point to the causes and nip them in the bud. 'A collective can't remain healthy in the long-term if it depends too much on the contributions of any one person' (Vannucci & Singer 2010, 108) and I want, more than anything, for the squatting movement and those active within it to thrive.

Analysis part two: Gender and class in squat deliberation and decision-making: applications of power

Introduction

'Leadership always occurs but it is not always transparent' (Western 2014, 679)

In part two of my analysis, I answer my second research question:

- How do varying levels of social capital *affect* squat dynamics and how are they informed by gender and class?

To do this I look at several different parts of squatting where decisions were made, focusing on the distinction (or lack thereof) between the informal and the formal processes. I look at the ways in which people navigated rules, both spoken and unspoken. I first look at general decision-making processes and how squats were run, before investigating how these are applied and informed by classed and gendered power dynamics in different significant situations. The situations I look at are joining a crew, leaving a crew, and the handling of intimate partner violence. Finally, I look at how these decisions are affected by the physical space of the squat itself. I argue that the ability to utilise or benefit from informal processes relied upon the degree of social capital you possessed within the squatting movement. This is then reflected in my discussion on the ways in which these informal hierarchies also affect the functioning of formal processes for dealing with the same issues.

6. Running a squat

> I've seen it all, I've seen the prolonged accountability processes, and I've seen someone just storm out screaming and never coming back again, and everything in between. – Layla, she/her

Before looking at specific key moments when the ways in which decisions were made had a significant impact on individuals and social relations, I first explore the general decision-making processes within squats. The ways in which decisions were made in a squat were indicative of who wielded social power and why. Most squats ran on a broadly consensus-based decision-making framework. However, how these processes worked in theory and how outcomes were decided upon in practice did not always overlap and the presence and influence of informal hierarchies was laced throughout these decision-making processes. For my purposes, I use Diefenbach and Sillince's definition of informal hierarchies as 'person-dependent social relationships of dominance and subordination which emerge from social interaction and become persistent over time through repeated social processes (especially routine behaviour)' (2011, 1517). I build upon the previous chapters' interrogation of the attributes you needed to wield social capital within the squatting movement, and how they are informed by gender and class, showing here how the possession (or not) of these attributes conditioned every aspect of living together and conflict negotiation within squats, despite the presence of formal structures at times.

6.1. The rules of the game

> Sometimes tensions got so high … you'd have loads of frantic messages on the notice board bitching about this, or that, and the other. It was generally quite passive aggressive ... so you get like 'right we need a house meeting'. – Daniel, he/him

Whether a squat had house rules or not depended strongly on the ethos of the crew. It was more common to have underlying assumptions about how things would work than to have hard and fast rules that people adhered to - another way in which people could accidentally transgress if they did not understand the culture of the crew.

> There were no rules. No rules. I think there was probably an unspoken rule about not shooting up in the living room. – Oliver, he/him

> [How are rules or guidelines decided or negotiated?] Whoever shouts the loudest. I mean, it's like a negotiation, you know, it's like a balance. And again, partly what are people willing to live with? What are people willing to put up with? What are you going to try and get away with? So it feels like a constant negotiation with people to decide what is acceptable or not. – Fede, they/them

Here both Fede and Oliver suggest that where they lived there were not rules *per se* but there were 'unspoken rules' in Oliver's case and 'a balance' in Fede's. That they had no articulated guidelines but

recognised there were standards of acceptability is an example of the Bordieuan claim that 'by entering any arena, one accepts such 'rules of the game' ... Such norms are dynamic and fluid, making it difficult for new starts to know what is acceptable behaviour' (Riach & Wilson 2007, 90). But squat crews can be made up of a variety of people from different backgrounds and with different ideas about how to use the space, and 'it may take a little time to figure out the unspoken rules, the climate, and the general expectations of the collective.' (Vannucci & Singer 2010, 105). This is something that Alex battled with as he struggled to understand the unspoken climate and rules and he felt this weakened his position in the squat. Casey spoke of this ambiguity:

> It's transient. It's totally relative on particular situations that people are in at any one time, you know, just because some people have limits, situations happen, some really, really fucked up stuff happens. And that's why with meetings and stuff where it's like, 'oh, they should be like du du du du du du'. And then it's like, well, actually different squats have very, very different worlds and planetary systems surrounding them. What's a lot for someone isn't a lot for someone else… it's more how much you can take of what goes on inside! – Casey, they/them

Both Fede and Casey suggest that the process for deciding these limits or boundaries ought to be a collective, ongoing decision, rather than fixed and static. They similarly suggest that the limit should be as broad as possible, respectively suggesting that 'what are people willing to put up with' and 'how much can you take' being the boundary line, rather than something pre-determined. This speaks to an ethos they both share around rules and boundaries being a negotiation between all members of the crew. However, Fede, somewhat light-heartedly, suggests that these negotiations are determined by 'whoever shouts the loudest'. While in this instance they are joking, they are also acknowledging that this tendency exists. For someone with enough status 'it's enough... to display annoyance, irritation, or agitation with the suggested action, generating distrust among others. A persuasive (or feared) individual could destroy a proposal simply by frowning at the right times, sighing in exasperation, or laughing sarcastically' (Vannucci & Singer 2010, 24). The role of individual power to enforce or override decisions is supported by Siobhan's account of a difficult squat she lived in.

> It was a little like: you can do what you can enforce. Or if you don't want somebody to do something that's going to come down to whether you can tell them not to do it and whether they'll not do it. – Siobhan, she/her

Here, the enforcement of boundaries or rules came down to a power struggle, and the suggestion of potential physical conflict. Whether you would feel able to challenge someone's transgression was a subjective matter between two individuals rather than something which the whole crew weighed in on. Like Siobhan, Alex felt that because of his precarious position in the crew, he was less able to weigh in on decisions and felt extremely vulnerable a lot of the time.

It was also just really difficult because I felt so vulnerable in that situation. A lot of these people had parents that lived in London, other places they could go, contacts, varying different forms of safety nets. And I had none of it. Because I was new to London. I had no job. And they have all these safety nets, they're able to get involved in all this sort of stuff. And I'm like, if I don't find a job soon, what am I going to do? And that was my main fear. So, it just felt like such a vulnerable state. I mean, you throw on top of that the fact that it doesn't feel like people even want you there anyway, due to the way they're talking. – Alex, he/him

This quote is illuminating for several reasons. First, Alex once again highlights his 'vulnerability' in this domestic situation. Unlike the middle-class occupants of the squat, he had no safety net, no alternative to living there. Therefore, the risk of making his voice heard was not merely being disliked, but could lead to very real material consequences. The stakes were higher so his ability to participate was inhibited compared to the other members of the crew. He goes on to suggest that their safety nets allow them to 'get involved in all this sort of stuff'. Ability to do activist work is massively conditioned by class, gender, and other intersecting oppressions (Bobel 2007, Cortese 2015, Craddock 2019). You have to have the free time to be able to take on voluntary roles, you have to know where to go and have the appropriate connections, you need to be able to finance yourself while undertaking this activity or at least have the support structures to survive without finances, you need to know how to talk and to whom, you need to understand the theory and practice behind what kind of activism to do and why, you need to, fundamentally, not be in Alex's situation being newly arrived in London, from a non-political background, primarily looking for housing, and to support his injured partner. Alex's lack of prior political environment coupled with his reason for moving into the squat being to care for Layla was compounded by his class position: 'I didn't feel secure there … Also, the only two really working-class people in the house were me and my partner at the time, so it was almost like we were the token working-class people for the house' (Alex, he/him). The phrase 'token working-class people' jumps out at me here as it implies that the other members of the squat were aware of the disparity in class position between the different members of the crew but were (deliberately or not) unable to recognise how this compounded power dynamics within the household. Alex felt insecure in the squat because of his socially unacceptable habitus and his lack of political activity, but also due to his class background and his priority being to care for Layla above attempting to learn to talk-the-talk and formulate an acceptable habitus.

In some situations, people with large amounts of social capital would be able to determine specific rules for their own benefit. Ellis spoke of a housemate who did just this.

Tricia was a bit of a bully and she was very protective and very guarded. She comes from a working-class background too, and she was older, and she was forced into living with a lot of younger people. So, she had very clear hard and fast rules with younger, crusty boys especially. And so, she had a no-

93

nonsense attitude to it. And even though there's many problems with how she behaved, I value that, in a way, because none of us learned how to have boundaries until we were much older. – Ellis, they/them

Ellis here is using the language of boundaries to describe how Tricia enforced a protectiveness of her own possessions. Ellis has a contradictory attitude towards Tricia, describing her at different times both as a bully and as no-nonsense with clear boundaries, attributes that Ellis saw themself as not possessing at that time. Tricia was able to draw these boundaries because of her bullying behaviour, but also because of her seniority and clarity in where she stood on things.

6.2. House meetings

While some squats operated with loose rules and guidelines informed by the relative power different crew members possessed, house meetings were a staple of most squats, as they are in most semi-egalitarian living situations, such as flat shares. House meetings might be set to regular dates, every month or every fortnight, or they might occur on an ad hoc basis whenever something arose that needed to be discussed, such as a new crew member joining, or after you received notice of eviction. The purpose of house meetings also depended on the nature of the squat, with more political squats or squatted social centres' house meetings often oriented towards furthering the political project or social activities, while squats primarily oriented towards housing might discuss food gathering, repairs, legal issues, and other domestic tasks and conflicts. Here I wish to focus on the power relations imbued in such a set-up.

> I actually now do remember how anxious I became about house meetings from those house meetings. Because every month, or however often we had them, something would be brought up and it would be uncomfortable and upsetting and difficult – Ellis, they/them

This anecdote from Ellis is a familiar one for many squatters. One of my motivations for writing this thesis was an attempt to come to terms with the ways in which house meetings made me feel deeply uncomfortable. They were one of the starkest indicators of the power relations within a crew – who felt comfortable and supported in raising an issue, who was the target of the complaint, and who stayed quiet. This is not to say that the complaints were not legitimate, they sometimes were, but the decision to raise an issue in a house meeting, rather than taking someone to one side to discuss a grievance, was not purely one of democratic instinct, it was laced through with the establishment and maintenance of hierarchies.

> You know how it is with meetings, some people have more powers and some people have less powers. The person who decides who lives in the squat is the person who opens the squat. Or if there is some kind of argument with the owner, it will be the person who is in touch with the owner. And depending on how decent or not decent a person you are, you can try to pretend there is some kind of other decision-making process but ultimately these two groups of people will get their way. – Natalia, she/her

Natalia identified the power imbalance in meetings, explicitly relating it to the possession of those hallmarks of social capital described in the previous chapter. The performance of the house meeting as a collective decision-making experience masked the power differentials at play in both the enactment of the decision in the moment of the meeting, but also more longitudinal dynamics and tensions which wove through the whole experience of squatting together, as alliances are formed and reformed. 'Unequal collaborations, with covert power agendas, can coerce participation. Such false collaborations can be used by those more powerful as a way to achieve their unilateral goals without the public appearance of bullying' (Rubinstein *et al* 2018, 114). This points to the necessity of recognising power dynamics and informal hierarchies before they get to the meeting stage, before they are normalised and embedded and far more difficult to recognise and to rail against.

> I don't think we talked about problems at house meetings. I think we did, but I don't think they were ever resolved at house meetings. I don't think we can really resolve stuff in meetings, like interpersonal stuff in meetings anyway. If someone's having a disagreement, if the whole group has a meeting about it, it's not effective. You've got to talk to the person. – Oliver, he/him

> I don't think it's different in squatting than it is in normal houses. House meeting ends and then people go to their rooms and their private meetings in rooms, according to the tribes of the house, of which they always existed, in the bedrooms. And everything gets solved in those. But of course, there's like, 'I'm going to bring this to the house meeting' or 'I'm going to make sure we get consensus over this thing'. – Layla, she/her

Both Layla and Oliver point to the fact that the house meeting is in many ways a charade; as Natalia mentioned above, the real decisions are made, and the problems are solved, behind closed doors. Oliver believes that this is the only effective way to solve interpersonal problems, that the whole crew weighing in on a personal disagreement does not benefit the outcome of the disagreement. Layla more explicitly sees it as a performance, that whilst the problems do get resolved in people's bedrooms according to their 'tribes', they still adhere to the performance of the meeting, the performance of getting 'consensus over this thing'.

6.2.1. Consensus decision-making

> Consensus. Always consensus. There was never a time where there wasn't consensus. – Ellis, they/them

Layla suggests above that squatting is no different to most house shares in adhering to the house meeting format. However, one important distinction is that the majority of squatters engaged in the political squatting *scene*, which is true of most of my interviewees, are influenced either explicitly or implicitly by anarchist ideals. Consensus decision-making has been a staple of most anarchist organisations, as well as many indigenous groups and other communities around the world, for countless years. More recently it has entered the corporate world, in a warped form (Rubinstein *et al*

2018, Diefenbach & Sillince 2011, Kwon *et al* 2009). The idea behind consensus decision-making is that it ensures that everyone in the room has a voice and that decisions are made that most strongly reflect and encompass the views of all present. It is considered a fundamental element of any non-hierarchical form of organising, including in squats. True consensus decision-making is egalitarian and the least laden with unjust outcomes, however, often despite people's best intentions, consensus is often thwarted or subverted by the informal hierarchies and power imbalances in the room while the decisions are being taken. 'Often, an organisation insists on using consensus, which in many activist scenes is treated as the only acceptable form of decision-making for any group that wants to call itself radical-to the point of faddishness-without any real understanding of how consensus functions and what it can and cannot accomplish' (Vannucci & Singer 2010, 81-82).

There are different forms of consensus, more or less formally and rigidly defined and enacted.

> I think there's two different types of consensus. There is the consensus that anarchists use which is very openly thought about and developed and then there's a consensus that a group of people living together use because that's just the default way that human beings make decisions. – Jim, he/him

Here Jim is making a distinction between formalised consensus that you more often see in rigorous left-wing projects and organisations such as social centres that are explicitly committed to consensus as an aspect of their non-hierarchical and anti-capitalist organising methods, and forms of consensus which are inherent or normalised in many ways in which humans organise and live together. One of the central premises of anarchism is that we are all a lot more anarchist than we realise – co-operation, mutual aid, and solidarity are just as ingrained within us as competitiveness and dominance (arguably more so). Therefore, there is an impulse for collaboration that overrides a desire to suppress opposition. Kim made the point that consensus is often engaged with unofficially, when I asked him how one squat he lived in was organised.

> We normally ate together. We had a rota for cooking. All meals were vegan, the kitchen was vegetarian. [And how were these decisions made?] I want to say consensus, but it was more than consensus. It was just that you know, it was 'how do we all live together?' If someone is vegan, then logically, we don't cook something that's not vegan. I think squats, squat centres in those days would serve vegan food. So there was that assumption that that's how things would work. – Kim, he/him

'It was 'how do we all live together?'' perfectly sums up Jim's point, that in some circumstances among some collectives, consensus is a given to the extent that it isn't seen as a particular mode of engaging with each other. However, these 'assumptions' that are taken for granted within much of the political squatting scene are not necessarily assumptions that would be made elsewhere, and indeed, as I have shown previously, an understanding of these shared assumptions and ability to fit into these

ways of living together had to be learned, particularly if you had not come from a background in which this was normalised.

6.2.2. House meetings, perceived harm, and displays of power

> There were definitely the meat pots and not meat pots, the meat chopping board, the not meat chopping board, the meat knife and the not meat knife. And if you fucking fucked with that, that's like you're going to get thrown out of the house kind of dispute. If someone disrespected your chopping board, that's going to be brought up in the house meeting. – Layla, she/her

The inconsistent relationship between the severity of the offence and the sanction doled out is a theme running throughout this chapter, and the entirety of this thesis. I argue that the dynamics at play around the decision-making table, and the respective social capital of the parties within the conflict often contributed more to the outcome than the severity of the misdemeanour under discussion. Further, I suggest that the sanction said more about the values acknowledged as important by the squat, often disregarding classed implications, such as the material reality of homelessness. Ellis acknowledges that it was not always a simple case of the strongest sanctions or condemnation inflicted upon the person who has done the most harm.

> At one of the meetings, it was about how smelly and disgusting this one person is. How he was just a little bit unhygienic. And so the conversation was about how he needs to be cleaner in his body, because he stinks. He was in the meeting. But it was about there just being such huge differences between our personal hygiene and how that was encroaching on the space. Absolutely mortifying. – Ellis, they/them

This story from Ellis illustrates this point. That the issue of someone's personal hygiene was felt to be a legitimate subject for a collective meeting, rather than something raised with that individual in a private capacity is an example of cruelty, or at the very least a dismissal of the emotional nature of the issue, being masked under the guise of collective harm reduction. 'We can't help recalling such bad memories when a member of a collective is gleefully subjected to a campaign of abuse' (Vannucci & Singer 2010, 98). Why is his hygiene a collective issue? Is it to demonstrate that this is not a personal grievance but something that has negatively impacted the whole collective? The framing of the issue as being one of his hygiene 'encroaching on the space' couches it in terms of oppression: his poor hygiene is oppressive to the other users of the space *as a whole* and therefore it is an issue for the entire crew, incidentally, unlike many of the decisions made around intimate partner violence I discuss in chapter eight. In a squat, even the deeply personal is read as political. 'Organisational structures and processes enable activists to transform personal emotions such as anger and hopelessness into 'a collectively defined sense of injustice'' (Reger 2004, 205). I mentioned in part one of my analysis that there is a tendency for women within squats to take on the majority of the

burden of navigating domestic disputes. This is reflected in a peculiar way in this story from Ellis about house meetings.

> So, there was another time where we lived with this guy. He moved in and he was a super sweet guy, who's charming, lovely. Loves having a good time. But doesn't really do any of the reproductive labour, so he would just do none of the cleaning, none of the cooking. He wouldn't propose anything useful in the space. He wouldn't do anything. So in this house meeting, it was again Corrine and all of those people bringing this up, and I just remember him just looking so sad and embarrassed because he's always been such a lovable guy. No one ever has an issue with him. And suddenly there's all these older women who think he's an absolute nightmare to live with. So, yeah, those are the things that we talked about in meetings. – Ellis, they/them

Corrine, mentioned here, is someone who Ellis considered to have a great deal of social capital within the squat. They spoke about how she was older than the other squatters, considered the kitchen her domain, and generally possessed an air of legitimate superiority over the rest of the crew. Now, the complaint that someone does not do enough reproductive labour (especially a man) is absolutely justified, as I argued in chapter four. However, the issue I wish to draw out from this anecdote is that he had no idea that he was disliked for these reasons by the rest of the crew until the house meeting. It had never been raised with him. So the dynamic is not one of asking someone, reasonably, to take on more of their share of the chores. The dynamic is one in which an individual is put on the spot and asked to repent for a crime they did not realise they committed, faced with a jury who has already made up their mind that he is guilty. This is an all-too-common process within collectives:

> The accused may be told about problems that people are having with something he did, but specifics are rarely mentioned, and a fair hearing is never suggested … A closed-door meeting takes place in which it is decided that the accused has caused certain problems or committed certain violations or crimes ... A judgement is made in the accused's absence, and the poor accused individual becomes the last person to know about the conviction and the sentence. (Vannucci & Singer 2010, 85)

The power dynamic here is not simply one of aggrieved women raising an issue with misogyny in the space, it is one of a group of people collectively coming out against an individual and offering no recourse except repentance on the spot. It is no wonder, given the nature of these conversations, that Ellis strongly recalls 'how anxious [they] became about house meetings'. The informal hierarchy undermines the egalitarianism being performed in the house meeting, making it ineffective or, 'in a worst-case scenario ... a coercive tactic to shore up the power of a self-appointed elite' (Vannucci & Singer 2010, 20). As I have mentioned before, the implications of this dynamic depended on the grievance itself, but also on the social capital of the person the grievance was laid against, and who brought up the grievance. Ellis tells a story of how they brought a serious grievance to a house meeting, but how their own social capital and assumed class position assisted in it being taken

seriously. Ellis has been assaulted at a previous house party and did not want another party to take place.

> It was a really controversial thing to raise. But I also had started to develop my own voice a lot more. At this point, I'd started to feel a lot more grounded … I was just a lot more self-aware, and I knew what I wanted a lot more at that point. So, I was a little bit less scared to bring those things up. And also, I think I did have quite a bit of social capital at that point ... And that was partly to do with the fact that I lived in a big social centre where everyone came but it also was because of the fact that I was one of the only English people who lived there … and I could fit in … even though I had been rejected by the middle-class scene and I didn't feel I fit into it, they perceived me as being middle-class, and I perceived myself as being middle-class in this way like a chameleon. I could navigate that a little bit better than they could. So I did have more social capital in some ways. And so it was a lot easier for me to sit in a group meeting and tell this working-class French Parisian man that we're not having a benefit party, than perhaps it would have been for me back in the house with Parsley to say that. – Ellis, they/them

Ellis is here drawing a distinction between their social capital in this squat and their social capital in a previous squat they lived in with Parsley. This squat came later in Ellis' time squatting when they recognised that they had more social capital due to living in a popular social centre, being one of the few native English speakers, and being perceived as middle-class. They compare themselves to a 'working-class French Parisian man', suggesting that he has lower social capital due to lacking these attributes and thus it was fairly easy to have their grievance taken seriously. The anecdote suggests also that these elements were more fundamental to Ellis getting their own way than the seriousness of the issue, or at least helped assist them in getting their position respected and supported.

I noted in chapter four, the role of language use in the ability to create and maintain a position of informal influence and respect, but it had particular implications within house meetings. For one, 'if the individual is to feel secure in speaking up, 'psychological safety' in doing so is required' (Cunha *et al* 2018, 2). But for another, often the fear of using the incorrect language or the inability to put across one's point effectively could prohibit someone from speaking up at all, as Alex noted.

> 'Too often ... members of a collective feel pressured to watch every word they speak for fear that they might unknowingly and unintentionally reveal some connotations of racism or sexism. Unfortunately, this strict kind of political correctness often helps to ensure that the group's true reach remains limited to an extremely narrow range of people, i.e., those who are well-trained regarding what terms, phrases, or methods of speaking are politically fashionable and acceptable' (Vannucci & Singer 2010, 92).

Ellis by this point possessed the psychological safety and the grasp of the correct language use to feel confident in making their point and being taken seriously and with respect. They were able to sidestep the common factors that inhibit people speaking up about their issues, such as 'relevance (a problem is recognized but not perceived as important), identity (the [individual] sees themself as not important

enough to raise the issue) and discourse (the normalisation of an issue via local language games – 'the way we do things around here')' because they possessed an acceptable degree of social capital (Cunha *et al* 2018, 3).

6.3. Conclusion

In this chapter I looked at the standard format and decision-making process within squats: the house meeting. I demonstrated the way in which existing power dynamics could infuse and warp the consensus-based framework, eliding a truly democratic form of decision-making. I showed how this reflects similar processes in other decision-making environments where social capital and implicit hierarchies override formal procedures. Understanding how decisions are made generally is vital for seeing how this is applied to different situations with varying levels of seriousness. Now I have looked at the ways in which pre-existing power dynamics could infuse house meetings, from topics as innocuous as hygiene to as serious as assault, I am going to look at some of the key processes which were determined theoretically through collective decision-making: joining a crew, intimate partner violence, navigating conflictual situations, and kicking someone out.

7. Joining and leaving a crew

Now that I have explored the general decision-making process used within squats, I want to focus on two of the key moments when the efficacy of this process and the role of social capital and hierarchy comes into play the most: joining a crew and being kicked out of a crew. I first look at the process of joining a crew, before looking at the reasons for, and ways in which, you can get kicked out of one. Throughout this chapter's sections I look first at informal processes before focusing on the formal mechanisms, demonstrating the continued effect of hidden hierarchies within decision-making, whether they are decided upon through formal processes or not.

7.1. Joining a crew

> I think if you know someone, it's incredibly easy to break into [the squatting scene], because you get vouched for immediately. – Oliver, he/him

One becomes a squatter in different ways and for different reasons: some of them are pragmatic, such as trying to find somewhere affordable to live whilst on a low income or threatened with homelessness. Some are social, you have friends who squat, you think it seems interesting, political, alternative. Often, it will be a combination of both. One of the first areas in which power imbalances and the importance of possessing social capital becomes immediately clear is joining a crew. The ability, or not, to join a crew depends on lots of elements. Simply knowing the right people at the right time can make the process extremely easy, or extremely difficult. But other dimensions also come into play, such as the economic and cultural make-up of the crew you are joining and the ways in which intimate partners joining a crew could affect and be affected by the crew make-up. There were often official processes that took place when joining a crew but there were also informal methods for joining a crew. I will first take a look at informal methods.

7.1.1. Informal methods of joining a crew

Aside from the official processes, adhered to or not, the importance of knowing the right people was central in informal processes of joining a crew. Callum dissected this pragmatically while discussing the process by which they decided who could remain in their squat from a sister crew who had stayed with them temporarily.

> People picked people they liked ... if we had kept all of them, I think we would have been over 30 people. I mean, also, there's just a social hierarchy, absolutely. Some of the people from that crew were definitely big social movers and shakers, and some of the people in our crew were definitely - me too - I was much more interested in having them live with us than people who I didn't really know, or thought were sketchy. – Callum, he/him

He explicitly points to the 'social hierarchy' at play in who got picked, with preference going to the 'big social movers and shakers', suggesting that your reputation in the squatting movement at large played a significant role in the decision made. Social and cultural capital not only offers access to resources but can be cumulative both within, and between, existing fields (Trott 2018). The field 'has boundaries where entry is blocked by existing holders of power. Within the field, players have positions that have both roles to be enacted and a status carried with them ... How the players are invited to participate, or allowed access, embodies the notion of 'capital.' … Who has what capital, and in what amounts, sets up the hierarchically distributed power structure' (Mutch 2004, 30). If you were an 'asset' (Daniel, he/him), or well-liked and respected you were able to circumvent any formal process and be accepted on the basis of your social capital. It could also be informed by your habitus, when failing to be aesthetically acceptable had material repercussions for people, as mentioned in chapter five, where Layla recalled someone being rejected from a crew due to her aesthetic and lack of commitment to political struggle.

7.1.1.1. Class and gender considerations

Due to the scarcity of squats and the speed in which evictions, and thus crew reformations, occurred, particularly since the 2012 residential squatting ban, the increasingly scarce housing supply intensified tensions and often led to people making decisions to move in together on a material basis, which could lead to negative outcomes. Alex commented on this regarding his decision to move in with his partner, Layla, recognising the immediate cohabitation as potentially a downside to a relationship:

> [Why did you leave?] It just didn't work, really. I mean, partly because of my partner and whatever, living together immediately is probably not the smartest thing a couple can do. – Alex, he/him

Alex acknowledges that he moved in with Layla so soon due to his financial precarity and inability to find affordable housing in London rather than the – at that point – strength of their relationship and that if the situation was different, he would not have moved in with his partner so soon. In times of housing scarcity decisions can rarely be made solely on the basis of love; even for those disavowing the capitalist marketplace, financial viability and practicality almost always play a part. Gillian spoke openly about how in her first squat she felt she had no choice but to move into the room of a man who offered, and this was to do with her extreme vulnerability and lack of alternative housing options.

> Because I had lost my job, I got kicked out of rented accommodation ... And there was a squat nearby where … I was casually friends with the people in the squat. Basically, I went round and said that I'd been kicked out of the house. ... It ended up that they were a bit like 'we're full' and one of the guys was like 'oh, she can crash with me.' And then it got like... – Gillian, she/her

Gillian ended up moving into this man's room through lack of choice rather than through a strong desire to be his partner. This phenomenon has been well documented in regard to women's homelessness and lack of housing options. Women can be forced into living in unsafe or sexually coercive housing situations or to stay with unsafe or undesirable partners through fear of the partner or through fear of street homelessness (Reis 2019, Sakamoto *et al* 2009, Bretherton 2017).

> [So you didn't feel at the time unsafe or coerced in that situation?] I did, yeah, but I didn't know what else to do ... So, this situation with this guy, in a certain way it sounds like one thing, but after getting thrown out of there, I went somewhere else to another squat where I knew some people that was in a different bit of London. And he came with me as well. So you could say it was a bit like 'well you weren't trying exactly to get away from him?' and it was like 'no not exactly'. It was that messy. I mean the whole thing was kind of quite fucked up, I was very young as well. Yeah, definitely. I mean some of the sexual element was definitely like, 'Oh god I really don't want to do this.' – Gillian, she/her

Gillian recognised that this dynamic was in some ways coercive and that the sexual elements were not always welcome but also spoke of the complexity of the situation. It is not always as straightforward as the abusive man and the trapped woman. She was extremely young and extremely vulnerable and made decisions over whether or not to stay with this man within a context that was not at all neutral. Whether that makes this an abusive relationship is not for me to speculate, however, I can point to the gendered and classed elements at play in the framework within which Gillian had to make these decisions. Her agency was restricted by her financial precarity, and her options were conditional upon a gendered sexual power dynamic in which he held all the cards.

Class could also condition whether someone's partner was accepted into a squat in subtler ways. I showed in chapter five the ways in which your status was related to your aesthetic and deportment (your habitus) and several interviewees reflected on how this could impact approval of a partner joining a squat. There were implicit criteria for becoming a member of a crew and partner-status alone did not always mean you qualified.

> The more desperate the situation is, the less criteria there is for joining the house. But with security comes pickiness, I suppose, and I'd also definitely lived in houses where we knew we needed more people as such, but it was very much on an invite basis that we would invite certain people and be like, 'OK, we want more women in the squat', you know? So we'd perhaps invite more of them, or we don't want people that party and things like that. So, yes, the longer-term the squat was, the more we were able to actually think about who we want to live with or not or who we don't want to live with. I mean, also when you are long-term in a house, there's obviously sometimes problems that come with that and people do maybe sometimes become spoilt. – Layla, she/her

Here Layla demonstrates a few of the different criteria that could emerge due to different situations. She recognises that desperation causes people to enforce these criteria less rigorously as feet on the

ground are a necessity for securing a squat in the first few days and weeks, when the risk of a break-in or confrontation by cops, bailiffs, owners, or vigilantes is much higher. In chapter five, Layla attributes these criteria to 'very secure middle-class squatters' who have the luxury to turn people away at the door and have a very specific doxa they wish to maintain. She suggests that in 'squats for necessity' these criteria were less strictly applied. She also suggests that people with a material experience of poverty and homelessness are perhaps more open to different kinds of personalities joining the crew than those who are more comfortable and secure and, in Layla's words, 'spoilt', suggesting a strong class element within these criteria. I have suggested throughout this thesis that people in squats with experience of homelessness are more likely to accept people more easily, both because they take the risk that those they reject will be homeless more seriously and because they see strengthening the squat in a different light to those who have not faced the material risk of homelessness. Strengthening the squat in numbers is a pragmatic measure, whereas strengthening the squat in terms of the relatability of those within it is a luxury measure, often reserved for those who are somewhere longer-term without the immediate risk of losing the space. This indicates a greater understanding of class struggle and of precarity by those who have actually experienced it, suggesting that people from a background of insecure housing and actively attempting to ward off homelessness have a greater understanding of the risks of a refusal to accommodate someone than those to whom squatting is merely an alternative housing choice.

> [Were there ever issues with someone moving their girlfriend or boyfriend into an existing squat?] This happened all the time. It depends if this person was likeable or not and you could be not likeable for all sorts of reasons, including class. – Natalia, she/her

Natalia similarly points to class as a reason that someone may not be considered 'likeable'. If likeability was determined by class position, language use, and involvement in activist projects, among other things, this was an uphill battle for those desperately in need of housing and could lead to people making decisions such as Gillian's out of desperation.

In this section, I have looked at the informal ways in which people might end up joining a crew and the ways in which these decisions were informed by gender and class considerations, both in the decision to accept a situation due to your material precarity, and in the decision to accept a person due to their status. I also touched upon issues of gendered violence and the ways in which this was a specific issue that can emerge in precarious housing situations, something I will look at in more detail in chapter eight.

7.1.2. Formal methods of joining a crew

I now turn to the standard process used by many squats in deciding whether or not to accept a new member. Despite the presence of formal processes, I argue that both who you are, and who you know,

are vital determinants of your ability to be accepted into a crew, and that they are tinged by class and status considerations.

On the face of it, having your 'application' raised by an existing crew member at a house meeting appears to be the standard method of joining a crew. House meetings are the *de jure* site of decision-making within squats, as within many other forms of community and left-wing organising. Unfortunately, much like many other forms of community and left-wing organising, the *de facto* sites of decision-making often rested elsewhere. The theory behind house meetings is that decisions would usually be made using a democratic consensus or vote model, after a discussion among all crew members. The ethos would be that everyone has a right to voice their opinion and a decision that everyone agreed on would be reached. In practice, these meetings were heavily imbued with power dynamics, leveraging the voices of some participants above others, and that the real decisions would often have already been made, elsewhere, behind closed doors, as I suggested in the previous chapter. However, I think it is worth delving into the ways that the formal process functioned, despite its flaws. Oliver explained the usual process in some detail:

> There were house meetings. And when someone wanted to join, there would have to be a discussion about it. The process was: they would probably move in for a couple of weeks, through a friend or something. And then they would ask to join if they wanted to stay longer and then we would have a meeting about it, without them, they would leave the room. I think people who we didn't want would just get quite a hostile reception until they didn't want to come anymore. I can't think of any meeting where we were like, 'no, we do not want you.' – Oliver, he/him

Oliver felt that if you had been a guest for a certain period of time there would be a meeting about it, and you would almost always then be accepted into the crew. However, he also suggests that this process worked through subtler means, the 'hostile reception' towards those the crew were not interested in living with working as an unofficial and yet effective channel towards expulsion, with some departures occurring before the stage of a formal discussion at a house meeting and others occurring despite a positive 'official' decision. In these situations, subtler forces were at play enforcing unspoken decisions, with people being made to feel unwelcome through attitudes and social pressure rather than an explicit 'no'. This mirrors dynamics surrounding kicking people out which I turn to later in this chapter. The tension between the official path of the meeting and the unofficial path of closed-door discussion and unspoken decision-making was also recognised by Natalia: 'You would do a lot of backdoor type of diplomacy. Instead of going to the meeting, you will go to everyone and try to get the majority … Depending on your social position in this or that group, it worked or it didn't work (she/her)'. The decision being ostensibly made in a house meeting but with much 'backdoor diplomacy' contributing to the outcome has parallels with many other forms of

organisation, both formal and informal, as can be seen from the literature on organisational studies I have used to inform my analysis throughout this, and other, chapters.

7.1.2.1. Social capital and formally joining a crew

> I moved because there was no space for me. I asked, they didn't want me. This was the first time where I felt 'wow power and friends and you have to know people'. – Jana, she/her

Jana, Natalia, and Oliver all raised the role of connections to existing members as vital to the outcome of the decision, despite the presence of a formal process, with Natalia noting that the status of the person asking on behalf of someone mattered almost as much as the status of the wannabe crew member themself. This is reinforced by much of the literature on the role of friendship in social dynamics. Trott elaborates on this point, arguing that 'friendship cliques developed because members of such groups ... relate more to each other, listen more attentively, and interrupt less, which works to reinforce the interpersonal power dynamics at play and establish informal communication networks where formal ones have not already been developed' (2018, 118). The importance of ingratiating yourself with the crew in order to join in the future was also raised by several other interviewees. Layla spoke of the benefits of the guest policy system, which Oliver mentioned above:

> I guess whereas with rented accommodation, I suppose there's not really a way to find out whether you're going to live with someone that you like, with squatting we do have that privilege. We are able to invite someone to live for a period of time, a set period of time for us to then have a house meeting and decide whether that person should stay or not. – Layla, she/her

Layla draws a distinction between squatting and rented accommodation in this instance. This is one of the few occasions in which squatters (at least those already accepted into a crew) have more agency than those with ostensibly greater security of tenure – often renters will have to accept fellow housemates either on the basis of an online advert or a brief discussion, especially if they are needing the room to be filled quickly. The fact that squatters can take their time getting to know a potential housemate through the trial period before coming to a conclusion allows them greater familiarity with the person, a stronger sense of whether they would 'fit in', along whichever explicit or implicit criteria that crew has. This, of course, is an enormous power imbalance – the person 'on trial' has to effectively woo the other crewmates, attempting to be liked, to talk the right way, to know the right topics, to dress appropriately or face the prospect of homelessness, or at least having to redo the process all over again elsewhere.

Bourdieu claims that by entering a given field you are implicitly agreeing to the 'rules of the game' (1984). The knowledge of the correct performance, or to use Bourdieu's term, *habitus*, within a given field has a strong correlation to your ability to join a crew. This shared knowledge also acts to disguise the power imbalance between established members and the person asking to join (Riach &

Wilson 2007). What is actually a crucial performance is hidden as merely a perfectly reasonable set of assumed norms. ''Particular subjects and modes of behaviour are produced as normal and natural through the masking of power relations … These established meanings can be thought of as cultural texts that provide a range of scripts guiding social performance' (Coleman & Bassi 2011, 207)

Daniel also recognised that you had to be familiar with the crew in order to get accepted, but suggested that your personal characteristics may also play a part in whether or not you can join the crew. Daniel here suggests that being an 'asset' is a major draw:

> Meetings, basically. You had to be around there. You couldn't just move if you didn't know us … it would be people who are familiar, who are sort of already part of the crew kind of thing. You get people who spend that much time there, or be someone who everyone knew and [were] complete assets to the crew. – Daniel, he/him

Being an asset is something I discussed in part one of my analysis, along with the sentiment, that it is what you know, but also *who* you know, and how well you yourself are known. This was echoed by Jana, who explained that her application to join a crew was rejected in a house meeting where a friend raised it on her behalf:

> I hung around there a bit and then they had a meeting and I asked through a friend if I could stay there ... They were meeting somewhere off, in another room and they were not inviting people who were not part of the place ... And so, she asked for me and they said no, so that was the first power trouble in a way, because you're just like okay. But also, I understood, I was just like well, I don't know them really, I'm just hanging around. I know these people, but it's not like they have known me for a long time. – Jana, she/her

As Daniel suggested is the correct process, she had 'hung around there' for a while, in the hope of being accepted but in the end that was not enough at this time. 'It is expected that activists should put in ample time over a prolonged period and demonstrate their on-going commitment in order to truly be considered 'activists'. They must 'live' and materially embody their commitment to their chosen cause.' (Brown & Pickerill 2009, 4). Her temporal dedication to the cause was not considered adequate. In terms of power imbalances and household dynamics, Jana also raises the fact that this house meeting is occurring without you, something Oliver mentioned above. Jana explicitly recognised that her lack of acceptance in the first instance was to do with 'power trouble'. The power imbalances have potentially stark repercussions here, with your fate being decided behind closed doors and with you awaiting their judgement, hopefully with an advocate in the room who utilises their own social capital to support your application.

Continuing with Jana's anecdote, while she was initially denied due to her lack of social capital, later on when she was dating someone within the squat she was accepted immediately.

> I was going out with somebody who lived in Arsenal, in the squat where I wanted to originally live … so I went there to move with him. We didn't ask anybody because he already lived there. There were no rules basically. [If it's a girlfriend?] Yeah, it was just like you could move if you didn't want a new room ... Maybe he said something in the- there used to be house meetings every Wednesday. – Jana, she/her

When Jana first attempted to join the squat, the existing members deemed it necessary for her application to go through a formal process. However, in the second instance, where she was dating someone who lived there, she suggests that 'there were no rules' if you were a girlfriend. This suggests a transferrable status from an individual onto their partner. You are accepted through association with someone with a lot of social capital rather than through the merits of your own personality, the kudos-by-association we have seen at play multiple times. This is something I explored in chapter four: who you associate with is one of the strongest markers of social hierarchy within the squatting scene.

Interpersonal romantic dynamics between crew members could also impact whether or not somebody could join a crew in other ways. Layla explicitly points to how her own position within a crew was rescinded due to romantic jealousy.

> I myself was uninvited to live with a crew, because I was fancied by someone who was a friend of one of my housemates, but my housemate had a crush on that person. – Layla, she/her

For matters of the heart to impact something as critical as housing suggests a flippancy towards the potential outcome of a negative application. It was assumed that the 'other woman' would always have alternative housing options, this flippancy masking the potential severity of the consequences, a wilful assumption I will show occurred many times in different situations. I use the phrase 'other woman', incidentally, as this is one of two examples where this dynamic plays out, and in both, the person forced to leave the squat was a woman.

> Ruby was staying in the house for a trial period. And so, in a house meeting Tricia says, 'I just don't want to live with Ruby' and we kind of go like, 'yeah, fine, OK, that's all right'. And only after the meeting we find out that actually this whole time, Jonas has been snogging Ruby and never revealed that to anybody. And Jonas had a very strong claim to the hierarchies of the houses. Well, he opened the house, he was the handiest one. You know, he knew all those squatters at the Advisory Service for Squatters. He had all the tools. If you have a good toolset, you were definitely already on the upper echelons of the hierarchy, and he would always be around. He had a law degree. So he would know how to set up all the papers and stuff like this. So he was just very useful, I suppose. And we thought that should have most definitely been disclosed in the meeting for us to make an accurate decision whether Ruby should be allowed or not. And frankly, if we would have had access to that information, we probably wouldn't have been okay with just shunning Ruby like this. – Layla, she/her

There is a lot to unpack in this anecdote. First, the decision not to allow Ruby to join the crew was made in a house meeting, ostensibly democratically, rather than behind closed doors as Natalia

suggested often occurred. However, Layla suggests that if all the relevant information had been given at the meeting that perhaps a different decision would have been reached, suggesting that the sanctity of the house meeting had somehow been tarnished. Second, Ruby was intimate not with just any member of the crew, but with *Jonas*, to whom Layla attributes the highest degree of social capital, for reasons we are now familiar with: practical skills, legal skills, having cracked the building. Therefore, if there had been a situation in which they were forced to choose between Ruby and Jonas, he was in a far stronger position. It is also worth noting the gendered nature of the skills Layla lists, something I analysed previously. This was not merely a choice between two people, it was between a man equipped with all the skills and attributes considered high value by squatters and a woman who was already at the lowest level of the squat hierarchy due to her guest status. And in a situation where a romantic relationship between the two was present, his claim won out.

However, it was not Jonas who asked for Ruby to leave the squat. According to Layla, the opposition came from Tricia alone. I have noted how domestic decisions of a more emotive nature were often left to the women to navigate their way through, with the men, even if heavily implicated, able to sit back and keep their social capital and positive standing intact. What is most of note is that a woman in some form of intimate entanglement was denied access to the crew *despite* this romantic entanglement, and partially because the entanglement remained undisclosed. If Jonas had used his social capital to push for Ruby's inclusion the decision may have gone another way due to the strength of his status. However, Layla suggests it would not have even needed that, the very fact that she was intimate with Jonas would have been enough for Layla, and, she believes, the other members of the crew, to see a rejection of Ruby in these circumstances as unreasonable.

In this section I have shown that despite the existence of a formal structure for joining a crew, with guest policies and trial periods, the importance of existing social networks, being vouched for, and being considered someone worthy of living with still had a large impact on your ability to join a crew, much like with the informal processes. I also showed how romantic dynamics could inhibit women in particular from being welcome to join a crew. While these reasons for rejecting someone's application were not explicitly mentioned, their implicit presence, particularly when compared to the men involved, demonstrate the gendered interpersonal aspects at play despite the formality of the process.

7.2. Getting kicked out of a crew

In the second part of this chapter, I look at the flip side of this process: being forced to leave a crew. I first take a look at the informal methods of kicking someone out, and their classed and gendered implications, before turning to the role of the house meeting once again. Throughout this section I will be pointing to the presence of informal hierarchies in the enacting of decisions, whether through formal frameworks or not.

7.2.1. Informal evictions, class, and boundary-drawing – who gets kicked out and why

> It's probably quite hard to kick someone out and then go to your mum's chalet in France. Bad Optics. – Alex, he/him

I want to look at the subtle mechanisms that can determine an eviction or a kicking out of the crew, without it being raised and agreed upon at a house meeting. Sometimes someone can be persuaded that they are unwelcome to the degree that they simply leave before an 'official' decision has been made, as Oliver recalled in the previous section. Further, it is not always taken for granted that the same crew will move to a new building together. Sometimes people will leave, because they have had an offer to stay elsewhere, sometimes the crew will be invited to stay in a sister squat while they source a new location, sometimes there is not room for everybody so the new squat determines who can and cannot stay with them. And sometimes the crew moves wholesale, but you are made to understand you are not welcome to move with them.

> So much of it happens in whispers. My paranoia that everybody hates me all the time was just on eleven the whole time I was squatting. Because that's the thing, and this is really crucial, I think: when your existence is based on something so fundamental as housing and there isn't with rent, you know, you're just going to pay the money and it's much more difficult for people to get rid of, but then with squatting, you have to be liked by your housemates, because if you're not - and it happened to me more than once - I wasn't liked by my housemates. And they would say, like, 'OK, eviction date comes, all of us are going to move to a new house and you can't come with us'. – Layla, she/her

That the decisions to exclude someone from future plans are made 'in whispers' is a common occurrence within activist spaces: 'not everyone who is driven out of a group is forcibly expelled. Many more merely leave on their own, tired of the abuse or simply disillusioned. When a group allows that to happen, it is no less reprehensible than an outright expulsion … The difference is that the conniving leadership – and the complicit collective – are even less likely to be exposed for what they truly represent: the corruption of egalitarianism and the creation of coercive hierarchy'. (Vannucci & Singer 2010, 57). This further evidences the point I am making throughout this thesis, that 'most (or, at least, crucial) decisions are often made before the actual formal institutions take place, i.e., they are made during informal decision-making processes of politically active members of the organisation.' (Diefenbach & Sillince 2011, 1524-1525). Allegiances are formulated behind closed doors, with the domestic hierarchies already in place suddenly acquiring a vital and material dimension. If you come to the end of the period of living together only to realise the other people in the squat have already decided they are going to move together and there is only you, or perhaps one other person who have been implicitly uninvited to go with, you can end up in serious difficulty. It can also cause emotional distress (Clark *et al* 2020). The informal hierarchies at play when deciding who to live with could affect you even before the decision has been made, leading to the 'paranoia'

that Layla mentions above, and the state of permanent unease, which Alex and Gillian also mentioned.

The issue of rendering someone homeless through deciding to kick someone out of a squat was something raised by several interviewees. For now, I wish to focus on the fact that class and the material repercussions of these decisions were often brushed aside. Layla gives the example of a friend who was asked to leave a squat due to having a full-time job.

> My friend was uninvited to live in a house, because he actually is working-class and would go to his job ... he felt it was a secure house, a secure squat, I should be able to just go to work, but he was perceived to be not in the house enough or also just having a job like, what the fuck? You know, 'so you have a salary. Why don't you go renting?' and whatnot. So that happened. – Layla, she/her

This is a difficult area to navigate as, depending on the situation of the squat, you can sometimes need people to be in and occupying at all times, and there can be tension between those who stay in and occupy and those who go out and earn money, ostensibly for themselves. However, the idea that he should just 'go renting', is one that wilfully ignores the state of the rental market and suggests also that only those experiencing material poverty have the right to squat. This is ironic given the middle-class background of much of the squatting movement and is something I have previously argued strongly against as I believe that squatting as a political project and reclamation of the city ought to be encouraged for everyone (Milligan 2016). Further, this flippancy belies the reality of his situation as a working-class full-time worker, who may not, actually, find it easy to just go rent given the declining state of the housing market in London over the last five decades (Hodkinson 2012, Wills 2016).

Further, this squat was secure, suggesting that the need to occupy at all times may not have been there in this situation, implying an ideological reasoning behind their exclusion of him, rather than a practical one. Layla spoke more about this flippancy elsewhere in our discussion:

> It absolutely reproduces the kind of society that we have here. Where people think, 'well, you know, just get a job, just get some more money, you know, just for the rent' or whatever. The same thing like, 'well, we opened a house. Why can't you open the house? It's so easy. We just opened a house, you know, so you can just fucking open a house'. Nobody thinks that someone's actually now going to be street homeless. They might be. But people always assume they'll just open a house, you know, because it's that easy. Of course it's not that easy. – Layla, she/her

Many squatters are unwilling to acknowledge the severity of the outcomes of the decisions they make as a collective. By engaging in a collective fiction that the excluded person can 'just open a house' they are able to wash their hands of the moral dilemma that ought to be faced when deciding to kick someone out. But it is not that simple. Jim talks of how he 'tried to create a group and tried to break our own squats and just completely failed. It was just really shambolic' (Jim, he/him). Your ability to

open a house relies on you possessing the correct skills, having enough people with you to be able to hold it, and not a small amount of luck. Isolating an individual, away from the collective, and suggesting they open a place on their own ignores all these facts well known within the squatting movement. Indeed, possession of these skills was acknowledged as a key criterion for a desirable crewmate, as I discussed in chapter four, which would not be the case if it was easy. 'Nobody thinks that someone is actually now going to be street homeless,' Layla assumes, whereas I would contend that nobody *wants* to believe this, as then a decision they made for reasons, potentially petty, can be believed to be much lower stakes than the outcome they have actually imposed on another person. This aligns thematically with many of my arguments throughout this thesis around boundary-policing and is summed up nicely by Brown and Pickerill: 'A downside to the creation of these activist spaces of familiarity, solidarity and support is that they can ultimately become cliques which enclose rather than open up the possibilities for political engagement. Not only do we become comfortable within them (and thus struggle when in the unfamiliar) but by definition they exclude others' (2009, 6).

Sometimes, however, there would be an accurate understanding of the material implications of evicting someone from a lower-class position, as Ellis explains, referring to a situation in which three 'Cambridge graduates' wrote an open letter to their squat, and one of the issues they brought up was their desire to evict an 'aggressive' working-class man:

> Part of the reason why those three men left is because they all wanted the French guy to be kicked out because he was a violent, aggressive man and Corrine and a bunch of other people refused to kick him out because he was more vulnerable ... economically, socially. He didn't have as much social capital … It was a class issue. Even though they didn't get on with him so well, they had more in solidarity with him ... that if things weren't working, it was other people who left. And actually, I commended that. I thought that was good because they had to look after themselves. They had nothing to fall back on, squatting was a means through which they survived living in London, and they were very good at protecting themselves. And often it was the more privileged men that left. – Ellis, they/them

In this instance, the squat rallied around the working-class man as they felt more solidarity with him than with those who raised the grievance and possessed a material understanding of the difference in risk for him compared to them if faced with eviction. Ellis says that 'often it was the more privileged men who left', implying that this was not a solo occurrence. This once again reinforces the point that the make-up of the crew, and their class positions, had a strong impact on the rationale behind the decisions being made. A phenomenon I have noticed throughout my time squatting, and reinforced by my interviewees is that middle-class squatters tend to be more protective of boundaries in their squats than working-class, and especially migrant, squatters. This could be for several reasons. A primary reason, which has been suggested to me by Layla and Alex, is that those who have not experienced housing scarcity, or the real risk of street homelessness, are less able to empathise with what this

could mean for people. By creating their middle-class 'political project' squats they disavow the premise of squatting as a result of housing need. Or at least 'not here'. One other proposed reason, which was suggested by Ellis in an informal conversation (summer 2021) was that it could be due to their feelings of inadequacy among themselves. Their right to be there is secured by excluding others. As Phillips argues 'the abjection of others serves to maintain or reinforce boundaries that are threatened' (2014, 19). 'While otherness or foreignness are not synonymous with abjection, both concepts are concerned with boundary, in this case separating the inner and outer and who is to be included/excluded from a given social group' (Fotaki 2019, 52). This tendency is also expressed by Cortese while describing some of the hallmarks of the 'activist identity':

> Movement participants create boundaries of us-versus-them and, in turn, these boundaries can impact when and how one claims an 'activist' identity. It is not unusual or unexpected for activism to follow an 'us-versus-them' model, and construct an identity based on group distancing and border construction … groups define themselves primarily by what they are not versus what they are, creating an identity of 'us' that is intrinsically relational to 'them' so that it is almost impossible to separate the two. (Cortese 2015, 221-222)

Someone who is squatting purely for housing need does not get to automatically claim the 'activist identity' protected and bestowed by the middle-class squatters. However, in some cases this dynamic can be reversed, as in Ellis' anecdote, where the loyalties towards fellow working-class people struggling with housing issues overrode the activist-political preferences of the middle-class squatters.

In this section I have shown the ways in which a lack of clear processes around kicking people out of a crew or reforming a crew without them highlights the degree to which your social capital affects your material security within a crew, with particular gendered and class implications in terms of having a safety net if kicked out. The importance of friendships, fitting in, and being seen as an asset, just as in joining a crew, are vital to maintaining your place within it. Often the process of removing someone from a crew is not explicitly articulated, but instead made understood through whispers and backroom strategising. The formal processes of evicting someone from a crew do not preclude these informal strategies from occurring, often with serious material ramifications, as I turn to now.

7.2.2. Formal evictions and implicit hierarchies

People could be removed from squats for all kinds of reasons, ranging from the egregious (physical or sexual violence) to the mundane (personal dislike). The boundaries of acceptable behaviour also differ between squats with different cultures. In many of these situations social capital and power imbalances within the crew come into play – they are not objective decisions made in a vacuum. There was often a very real sense that the borders of the squat needed to be protected, and a distinction was formed between those within the crew who were responsible for its safety, and those

who posed a 'danger' to its integrity. One of the elements which is particularly visible in these situations is the tension between real and perceived harm, and what is considered the legitimate or most suitable pathway for approaching situations where harm may have been inflicted. All the decisions I discuss below were made collectively in house meetings, unlike the above examples where the pressures to leave were more implicit or informal.

7.2.2.1. Reasonable reasons or an overstatement of harm?

Two of my interviewees recalled that the only time they had kicked someone out was for stealing and in both these situations the decision was made in a house meeting.

> We kicked people out for stealing, basically … There's one time, basically, [a woman] was nicking off one of the people who were selling in there … And that was really harsh because she was still the girlfriend of one of the guys who was very well respected in there. And yeah, all was very fucking awkward, the house meeting for that one was quite spectacular. – Daniel, he/him

Here Daniel considers their decision to be harsh 'because she was still the girlfriend of one of the guys who was well respected', suggesting a valour-by-proxy situation for intimate partners. It suggests that the decision would have been less 'harsh' if she had been completely unattached. It is interesting that Daniel suggests that the 'well respected' man was allowed to continue to stay in the squat, however, as this differs from Siobhan's anecdote below. In this case, the process was decided upon in a very specifically structured way.

> So we had a whole load of people upstairs in another flat, and then we sat down with him. We didn't want to make it aggressive if we didn't have to. So we sat with him, me, another woman, and a couple of other people ... the really big people, they were all upstairs ... And we told them, 'look ok, look basically the thing is that what you have to do is pack, you have to pack and go'. Basically leave straight away. Because the thing is we couldn't have the heavy mob just around us all the time … we had booked them ... So different people from this big crowd of people would pop down to see how they were getting on. And say like 'how's it going with the packing then?' so they became aware that there were a lot of people there. But it wasn't that everyone marched in. Because we weren't happy about the fact that we threw them out. – Siobhan, she/her

The use of the 'heavy mob' as a back-up to the woman-led in person discussion suggests a strongly gendered division of labour in the handling of this particular situation, 'the really big people, they were all upstairs'. They recognised that a threat of violence may be necessary in enforcing their decision and planned accordingly, with the soft-skilled front people being supported by the heavy-skilled back-up, along gendered lines. This is a common phenomenon, as Turner notes in her article on soft skills and gendered dynamics in mediation practices. She demonstrates that 'to justify their inclusion in talks, women are portrayed as being inherently more peaceful, as more willing to be

bridge builders and to seek consensus' (2020, 385). She also acknowledges that this assumption is in direct comparison to men, as 'women mediators are effective in finding entry points as community mediators because they are seen as non-threatening … [which] … gave women significant access and leverage they believed men would not have had in tense situations' (394). While her exploration was on official mediation practices, the same dynamics can be seen at the grassroots level, as demonstrated here by Siobhan.

The process was also a practical measure, Siobhan suggests that they had 'booked' the mob for this particular day, so things had to go according to a pre-decided rhythm. This also means that there was no opportunity for the accused to fight his corner, the decision had already been made. I asked whether they had brought up the theft with him before, and Siobhan said that they had not, but that also there were other reasons behind the decision.

> It was about general sort of issues of behaviour and stuff as well, but the main thing was the thieving. I mean, him and his girlfriend had had a fight at 6am in the kitchen, that had been really loud … I had been asked to put him up because he was somebody who was having a hard time and stuff like that. And that was true he was having a hard time. Also, we kicked out him and a girlfriend and a cousin of his who was staying there. And they didn't have anywhere to go. – Siobhan, she/her

This particular extract is of note, in contrast to Daniel's story, above. First off, Siobhan suggests that the thieving was not the only reason for him to have been asked to leave, after all. It was perhaps the final straw in a list of habits that were seen as antisocial within the squat, such as loud arguments in the middle of the night. Further, she details why they were not comfortable with the decision, as his personal situation was unstable, that he was a vulnerable individual, and that they would be in effect rendering him, and his associates, homeless as 'they didn't have anywhere to go'. Lastly, his girlfriend and cousin were also asked to leave with him. This is in contrast to Daniel's anecdote where the 'well-respected' man was not condemned through association with his thieving girlfriend and was able to remain in the squat. In this instance not only his intimate partner but also another relative were asked to leave along with him, as they did not possess the social capital to stake a claim for residence on their own, nor given the opportunity to argue their own case.

This reinforces the suggestion that guilt by association appears to function along gendered lines. Either they were all equally culpable and deserve to face equal punishment or exclusion, or they made the decision to effectively render a woman homeless through collective punishment for a 'crime' committed by her partner. Was it strictly about the thieving or were the other aspects of unacceptable behaviours the real reason for the eviction, and therefore she was equally culpable? Was the thieving the acceptable front they could put onto a slightly more morally ambiguous decision? Taking Siobhan's story at face value, three people were evicted through a highly structured process, including soft skills of negotiation and hard skills of intimidation, for, primarily, the transgression of one man.

7.2.2.2. 'The theatre happens and the reality happens' - the mis-prioritisation of harm

Sometimes there were occasions where different experiences of oppression and privilege came into conflict with one another. This is an area where I have found that the understanding and prioritisation of harm within a squat minimised classed, material considerations when it came to the decisions made on how to respond to a transgression. Here I wish to specifically look at a situation in which attempting to ensure the security of trans or non-binary squatters led to the expulsion of another squatter.

Both Layla and Oliver spoke of similar occasions where people were kicked out of a squat for misgendering another member of the crew. In both these instances, the misgendering was seen by my interviewees as accidental, however, the harm caused to the target of this misgendering was deemed so great that the solution was for the guilty party to leave the crew. I am going to reproduce their accounts in full before delving into some of the issues that arise from these anecdotes.

> There was actually one time we overreacted to my friend Colin. He's a really nice guy, and I think he had an episode or something. He lost it a little bit and he flipped out a little bit at this trans person who was a guest and in the flipping out, he kind of accidentally misgendered her and she made a big deal out of it. And there was a very clear split in the squat between people who were like 'this doesn't matter'. And people who were like 'this matters'. And I was on the 'this matters' side, and I should have been on 'this doesn't matter', because it was a genuine slip up. It wasn't an expression of a wider bigotry, and it wasn't a deliberate act, in my opinion, looking back on it. But he did end up sleeping outside the squat for a few days, which is horrendous. – Oliver, he/him

> Let's take the example, let's say, of Eva and Maya essentially. Right. OK, so you come into a meeting and the issue is that Eva, a nonbinary person, is a victim of Maya, a cis woman, constantly misgendering Eva. Eva is crying. It's an issue. Maya needs to leave the house. That is how that's presented in the meeting. At the time I think it was Maya's trial period to live with us. That's how it was. And so this is how that is presented in the meeting. And so, me, a person that has to make a decision in this performance, takes the side of Eva because Eva's suffering, and Eva is suffering because someone else is present. Now, you remove yourself from the meeting and you take 15, 20 minutes to think about what's going on is: we have Eva. A middle-class person. English, white, middle-class person without a job, very attractive, living in a house. Whereas Maya is a Spanish migrant that works in care homes and care centres looking after children with disabilities, working-class as heck, is just trying to put some money together and has just moved into the country, speaks quite bad English, but is learning really actively. And every now and then, it's just a bit trickier for Maya to say 'they' instead of 'he', she just finds it a bit tricky. And now Maya is the one that has to leave. And it happened and I was a part of it. And I hate myself for it right now. So the theatre happens and the reality happens. But when you're in that room and when you're in that context... So I think that Maya was very much the victim of actually Eva's fucked up

behaviour. But at the time it was completely the other way around. And there are numerous, numerous examples like this. – Layla, she/her

When I transcribed these anecdotes and put them together, I was struck by the multiple similarities in their accounts. Both Oliver and Layla recognised that the instances of misgendering were genuine slip-ups. In Colin's case, as a result of an 'episode' of poor mental health, in Maya's case, as result of her difficulties in learning English. In both cases, Oliver and Layla were on the side of the person who was misgendered and participated in enforcing the exclusion. And in both cases, Oliver and Layla have since come to regret their participation. There are different ways in which errors can be handled, the distinction between good and bad faith actions and accidents, and the role of education and compassion in resolving these issues, as well as when the line firmly has to be drawn around unacceptable behaviour, as Fede and Casey discussed:

> That's the difference between maliciously deadnaming or misgendering someone and out of just the unknown. Ignorance doesn't have to be malicious; it's about learning. And there's definitely a very clear distinction between people who are willing to get on board and learn and be curious. – Casey, they/them

> We're not excusing it, but we're really trying to allow people space to make mistakes and then grow from it. And then, hopefully, they will be able to champion it for other people as well. – Fede, they/them

Casey suggests that it is usually fairly obvious whether someone is acting in good faith or not and whether to put the energy into educating them, but, like Fede, tends to err on the side of openness and a willingness to learn. This attitude reflects what Operaista refers to as a 'holistic queer praxis, one that examines the conditions of the lives of all queers, and also that locates those lives in the larger context of the struggles of all workers and all the oppressed … it is also the realisation that queer liberation is inextricably tied with the self-emancipation of the working-class.' (2012, 115). The way in which Fede and Casey understand good faith and malicious harm is at odds with the experiences narrated to me by Oliver and Layla. Here I wish to focus specifically on the descriptions of the harm caused, and the punishments meted out.

Layla explicitly talks about the 'theatre' of the expulsion. She suggests that the way in which the issue was presented played a role in the decision that has been made. Emotive actions, 'Eva is crying', and recognitions of certain kinds of privilege, 'Eva, a nonbinary person, is a victim of Maya, a cis woman', create a narrative in which the harm towards the misgendered party is seen as a more egregious action than what is the decided upon sanction for Maya: render her effectively homeless. The role of emotion in influencing decision-making is something recognised by several scholars, both within activist and organisational studies fields. Regar argues that 'organisational structures and processes enable activists to transform personal emotions such as anger and hopelessness into "a collectively defined sense of injustice"' (2004, 205). In contrast, Jasper refers to the role of positive emotions in boundary

maintenance, 'a collective identity is not simply the drawing of a cognitive boundary; most of all, it is an emotion, a positive affect towards other group members on the grounds of that common membership' (1998, 415). The generation of an emotive environment, in Layla's view, contributed greatly towards the outcome of the decision, where the expression of hurt affected the contributions of the other participants in the meeting, who, when left alone afterwards to reflect, regretted their actions. This is a common phenomenon within collectives, as Vannucci and Singer observe, 'many of the members may agree, perhaps out of guilt. But should they go along with a personal vilification and expulsion just to be supportive? Ultimately that sort of strategy will prove to be much more destructive than supportive, assuming people are still concerned about the integrity of the group'. (2010, 55).

I wish to look a little closer at the concept of expulsion as harm reduction. Neither Layla nor Oliver are saying that using the correct pronouns is not important. However, the overstatement of harm and the use of extreme forms of punishment (eviction) in cases such as these illuminates the priorities of the house, and the scene on a broader scale. While we 'should assume that every concern is sincere and treat it as such … when one persons concern involves condemning another individual, everyone in the collective has to make every effort to get to the bottom of the issue without jumping to conclusions … people are usually all too happy to jump on a bandwagon of character assassination' (Vannucci & Singer 2010, 51). This is the attitude which Fede and Casey advocate for:

> OK, you know, you might make a bad joke or whatever, and then we can make bad jokes back, again leveraging my fucking privilege to do it in order to actually, have conversations with people in a way that isn't lecturing, isn't super stern or punishing people for ignorance. – Fede, they/them

The overstatement of harm is a common occurrence among certain wings of the left. The inability to stand up to these performances (authentic or otherwise) is a product of the predominance of discourses of harm and recrimination and of the relative positions of power of those involved in these situations. It is also, as I discuss further in the next chapter, a result of the declining capacity people have for dealing with complicated issues, compounded by the scarcity and fragility of contemporary squatting. You have to have the emotional energy and time to respond to something in a non-carceral manner, you have to be willing to educate and to anticipate good faith rather than bad faith actions and mistakes. It is all too easy to fall into expulsion as a form of washing your hands of the complicated intertwined nature of oppressions, privileges, and harm.

I reflected at the beginning of this chapter on my approach towards conceptualising perceived harm, informed by my own experiences and commitment to anti-carceral justice. Why did nobody stand up for Maya? Because the supposed harm she had done to Eva by misgendering them was taken as a greater ill than the resulting harm of Maya losing her home over what was, by Layla's account, an

accident. Schulman refers to those that use 'solidarity' to mean unblinking support and 'having your back' no matter what as 'bad friends', suggesting that 'because we misunderstand what real loyalty means, we often do the opposite within our groups: exacerbate escalation rather than relieve it' (2016, 149). Further, the harm done to Maya throughout these processes was not acknowledged. 'Even if an ugly situation can be explained away as a misunderstanding, it isn't possible for the victim to have misunderstood his own pain. The hurt that is expressed over and over in situation after situation is undoubtedly real, and it should not be dismissed, regardless of whether or not the person experiencing it was originally (or continues to be) at fault' (Vannucci & Singer 2010, 99-100). The use of such extreme remedies to supposed - or real - harm in this anecdote provides a clear example of where the balance of power and the hierarchy of hurt can have very real consequences – all as a result of the imprecision of language use by a working-class migrant woman.

Now these situations, just or unjust, have serious mental and material consequences for the condemned. Oliver reflects on this in relation to the incident he discussed:

> The judgement was 'you are now homeless. It's just drastic. But then it's a difficult thing to judge as well, because when you're deciding these things. I also think the reason why an accountability process is basically unable - I mean, I think they're useless anyway - why, particularly in squats they're bad times - is that the sanctions are so horrendous. Kicking someone out of a squat is making them homeless, whether they go somewhere else, or not, the act of leaving is a homeless-ifying. And so, if you're going to go down that route and you follow the kind of safe spaces kind of model of 'we value safety', then you have to consider the sanctions which are being imposed. If someone is kicked out of a political group, they've still got a home. if you kick them out of a squat, they don't have a home. So that's a big difference. And also, obviously the whole idea of safety... it's a squat, it's not safe. There's no way it's safe. Everyone's living in a much more extreme way, they're going to act more extremely and you're going to have to navigate that. And I don't think you can hold people to a certain accountable standard. – Oliver, he/him

Something I wish to raise here, in relation to Oliver's point on how 'drastic' these decisions are, is that the situations where an accountability process is recommended and the situations where a direct decision is made do not seem to map straightforwardly onto the degree of harm that is inflicted. Literal, physical violence against another person may lead to an accountability process, with the desire to rehabilitate the wrongdoer, whilst in these anecdotes, accidental mistakes which led to harm of a more intangible nature result in immediate expulsion. It points to a warped prioritisation within the movement, where hierarchies of oppression are adhered to rigidly, and as such, the ramifications of making a working-class cis woman homeless are considered to be a lesser evil than the ramifications of a middle-class non-binary person being misgendered. 'Fixed identity categories are both the basis for oppression and the basis for political power' (Gamson 1995, 391). Within small collectives it is not always so easy to apply broad societal guidelines on the allocation of power as

power imbalances do not necessarily map directly on to systemic oppression (Vannucci & Singer 2010, Chen *et al* 2011). 'A domineering versus a timid personality, a person's personal charisma or lack thereof, and whether or not one has allies or is well-liked within the group can play just as large a role in determining who has any power within the collective and can affect who will exercise the most influence and who will be marginalised or shut out (Vannucci & Singer 2010, 66).

D. Hunter, in his autotheory *Tracksuits, Trauma, and Class Traitors*, exposes and critiques the carceral logics played out in communities ostensibly against state-oriented punishment. He points out that 'the carceral logic of society is, therefore, the practice of punishment within the penal system becoming part of our everyday lives, where not only do the apparatus of state and capital monitor in order to manage our modes of being, but we monitor to manage one another. This monitoring and management is facilitated through power relations and is carried out on the ground by members of the working-class on one another' (2020, 35). Attempting to enact transformative justice is done through community building, not through ostracization. However, one of the issues within squatting is that there are limited sanctions available to you with which to chastise individuals beyond expulsion.

> Well, what would it be? You have to write lines? 'I will not be Transphobic'. Genuinely, what sanctions? ... I don't think you can do it. – Oliver, he/him

A sanction or punishment-based mentality is in opposition to the values proclaimed by most squats, which have a vehemently anti-carceral rhetoric. However, in the haste to protect the person who appears to have been wronged, and without access to rigorous alternative mechanisms, they often fall back on an expulsion-based means of overcorrection.

Oliver also points to the specifics of squatting in terms of the severity of punishment, drawing a distinction between it, and other forms of political organising. I have observed throughout this thesis that one of the particularities of squatting is that it is often seen as both a political project, and a way of having a home, blurring the boundaries between the public and private realms. That is brought to sharp focus here. Being shunned or booted out of an organising group always feels terrible, but it does not usually end up with you on the street. As Oliver says, 'you still have a home'. This again reiterates my reason for writing this thesis and for exposing the errors which I observed in a movement which attempts to create a world different, and more fair, than the one which we currently inhabit.

The final part of Oliver's comment I wish to draw on is his analysis of safety, in terms of harm, real or perceived. He suggests that squats are inherently unsafe and therefore the boundaries of acceptable behaviour ought to be widened, to take into account the unstable ways in which people are living. There should be concurrent recognition that this may make them act in unpredictable or socially unacceptable ways at times. Similarly, in Oliver's anecdote, the person who committed the offence was clearly going through a mental health crisis of some kind, which played a part in his actions.

Where does mental illness fall in the hierarchy of oppression? 'You're going to have to navigate that. And I don't think you can hold people to a certain accountable standard' (Oliver, he/him). Squats in many ways do expand and challenge the norms of acceptability taken for granted in wider society, but if it is convenient, these norms can be reimposed, particularly if the person who perceives harm has been done to them is of a higher status or possesses a greater grasp of political phraseology and how to perform in the theatre of decision-making than the one to whom the sanction (homelessness) is imposed.

Attempting to untangle the intricacies of intersecting oppressions has been a feminist project for over twenty years (Cho *et al* 2013) and I will not attempt to contribute meaningfully to it. However, I have demonstrated that within the squatting movement there has been a tendency to understate the role of class-based oppression compared to others. This can have serious material outcomes for those who are economically disadvantaged yet are perceived to be holding a great deal of privilege due to their gender or sexual identity. As Operaista argues, 'by generalising 'the straights' as a coherent group that hegemonically oppresses 'the queers' … it becomes too easy for us to ignore struggles that do not directly touch the entire queer community … If we assume our commonality lies in our queerness, not only can we be forced to ignore the other ways we are oppressed, we also assume that bourgeois queers are our allies and straight working-class people are our enemies' (2012, 120). The way in which these tendencies have infiltrated many activist and political communities, including the squatting scene, is to overstretch and overuse concepts and processes initially designed as a means for dealing with sexual violence without engaging state agents. The tendency I have observed here, however, is that these concepts and processes have leaked into many different forms of grievance, harm, and conflict. 'This change in the way we use language is known as 'concept creep'. It basically means that terms linked to harm – like 'trauma' or 'bullying' – start getting watered down' (Greig 2022, n.p.). 'The language of psychology has seeped into the rest of our lives; psychology *itself* is entwined with the rest of our lives. Our emotions are social as well as neural phenomena—their expression can be gendered, racialized—and how we talk about them prefigures both what we want for ourselves and for others' (Waldman 2021).

> Using this kind of language can also lead to 'moral typecasting': the idea that the world is split between moral agents (people who do either good or bad) and moral patients (people who have good or bad things done to them) … if you think of yourself as a moral patient and anyone who hurts you as a moral agent, it means that anything you do to them becomes fair game, because you are constitutionally incapable of inflicting harm, and they are constitutionally incapable of experiencing it. (Greig 2022, n.p.)

This has contributed to a carceral mentality where we must expel the harmful party in order to protect, not only the harmed individual, but the integrity of the collective (Phillips 2014). The separating of

the collective into those who are morally right and those who are morally wrong or harmful leads only to an essentialising ethic, at odds with the fluidity and compassion proclaimed.

> There has to be a strong distinction between Good and Evil, with the latter essentialized. Notice the tactics. X has made a remark/ has behaved in a particular way – these remarks/this behaviour might be construed as transphobic/ sexist etc. So far, OK. But it's the next move which is the kicker. X then becomes defined *as* a transphobe/sexist etc. Their whole identity becomes defined by one ill-judged remark or behavioural slip. (Fisher 2013, n.p.)

As I have illustrated throughout this chapter, having the infrastructure of collective decision-making, consensus, and equality, does not necessarily reflect the dynamics at play in practice. For all the will in the world, there are enormous power differentials influencing who speaks the loudest, the most, who feels comfortable raising objections, or going against the majority opinion in the room (Vannucci & Singer 2010). If you are a relative unknown, if you are a guest, if you are unfamiliar with the language (both political and national), if you feel disliked or unsafe or insecure for any reason, you are simply less likely to voice your opinion (Diefenbach & Sillince 2011). It is important to note that I am not claiming that these kinds of evictions based on emotional responses only occurred in recent years. Indeed, George offered an anecdote of a similar occurrence when he was squatting in the 1980s.

> An interesting thing occurred in the house next door to us, which was also a squat. We'd had a feeling someone was living there, but it turned out there was a man squatting in a single room at the top of this really big house. And then these guys arrived and opened up and broke in and made themselves at home in this house, despite this other bloke being there. And at first, he was tolerated, and he would just come and go very intermittently, and then two women also moved into that squat. And they really didn't like the idea that this other man was in the squat as well ... Because they'd gone into his room, and they'd found pornography. And this particular woman really, really objected to this, the fact that this man used pornography. And they evicted him, basically. They kicked him out. It was actually gay porn. [You say they kicked him out, do you know how their decision was made? Did these women approach the men who also moved in?] That's exactly what happened. The woman, she told the other boy she really didn't like him being there so basically, they chucked all his stuff out. And told him he couldn't live there anymore. He was there first. I thought it was really shocking, and really out of order. – George, he/him

Evidently, emotions could govern collective decisions even prior to the current condition of scarcity. The important distinction is that nowadays, both are these emotion-based evictions more common, but that they are governed by a pseudo-liberatory justification, and that due to the increased difficulty in finding an alternative squat, and the decline in the housing market generally, they have a greater material impact on the person being evicted.

Layla is the strongest voice in speaking out against the hypocrisies of a supposed structure for decision-making and the realities of the social power that underlay how decisions were made in practice.

> Essentially, for all of our idyllic dreams for horizontalism … there was a complete inability to really interrogate power structures and power imbalances. And it's heartbreaking. That's the thing and that's something that I've learnt since, I don't necessarily mind hierarchy as long as everybody's aware of the hierarchies in place or the expertise of someone. If someone is an expert in something, I'm more than happy that they take the decision. But I think it was this really false theatre of us pretending that there is some sort of consensus and horizontality in everything that we do. And a complete avoidance of acknowledging that there are cliques, and that there are power structures, and that some people's opinions do matter more than others. And I think that's what hurts. And that's where you begin blaming yourself, because you think 'oh I've read all these anarchist zines, you know, so surely all of these structures are being utilised for whatever is the decision-making process that is taking place here. So I must trust the process. I must trust the process'. But, of course, you're set to lose if you only trust in the process, because you have to perform in a certain way for you to win the process essentially. – Layla, she/her

There is a distinction between expertise which deserves to be listened to and a wholesale authority which does not. 'You have to acknowledge that there are hierarchies and that the hierarchies are not necessarily an extremely bad thing, I gave up on the mission of a non-hierarchical structure because there is always some kind of hierarchy of people who are more experienced or people who have been there the longest and you try to acknowledge them and work with them in a way I would say, rather than say oh, we are non-hierarchical' (Jana, she/her). Allowing the recognition and discussion of these distinctions and how they map onto the power dynamics within a room is vital for understanding collective decision-making and ensuring all voices and opinions have equal respect given to them. Otherwise, it leads to frustration, heartbreak, and often real harm.

> It's the whole theatre of having a structure that's become so painful, and at the time I believed it … at the time I really believed it. And just tried to be better or tried to somehow change myself and be more of how my squat mates were. But I could never keep up. I could never be the purest, the most Forest School-like, or the queerest, or the best and the funniest or the most wholesome. – Layla, she/her

This 'theatre of having a structure' contributes to the sense of betrayal that Layla describes as 'painful'. This emotion is particularly sharp in squats, compared to other organisations or political groups, because it is not only your organisation which feels like it is no longer a safe space in which to share your thoughts and opinions and to be treated with respect, but it is your home. 'Where organisational members are invited to identify with the organisation and to receive back, in turn, a number of positive affective outcomes, namely, belonging to the 'organisational family' … managers have the opportunity to press their claims for love and affection on members of the organisational family that less powerful members may find hard to resist' (Clegg *et al* 2014, 142). Clegg here is

talking about corporate organisations and yet the point made about the claims of a familial or an emotional connection are salient to my point: the stronger the emotional attachment you are encouraged to feel for those you are working or living with, the harder it is to resist the pull toward accord, at the cost of individual expression.

7.3. Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at how imbalances of power can affect the effectiveness of formal processes for making significant decisions around someone's right to be a part of a crew. I first looked at how large quantities of social capital could make you an attractive person to join a crew, allowing you to bypass the formal processes, and how possessing lower social capital would weaken your application, despite adherence to the formal processes. I then looked at the process for getting kicked out of a crew, arguing again that the formal processes were heavily imbued by power dynamics which rendered their efficacy or legitimacy questionable. Throughout the chapter I drew attention to the ways in which gender and class affect the ways in which these processes are run, as well as alter the ramifications of a decision going your way or not. In the next chapter I will look more closely at gender and class in the context of one of the most serious situations a squat has to deal with: gendered sexual violence.

8. Intimate partner violence

Most squats, like the majority of anti-capitalist places, have an aversion to calling on state agencies such as the police or mental health services to help deal with problems that emerge within them. This led to an emphasis on community strategies for dealing with violence such as accountability processes, which I will discuss later on. However, often these issues emerged and were dealt with without processes. I will look first at situations where it was not considered an issue that the crew ought to deal with, before turning to collective responses which were more or less well handled by the crew members. Finally, I look at the formal mechanisms used by squatters for dealing with gendered violence such as accountability processes and transformative justice and how these were often undermined by the implicit power dynamics present in the decision-making environment.

8.1. 'It's between them' - No collective response to intimate violence

> I mean there was definitely clearly violence, as in it would wake you up and everything. – Gillian, she/her

The starkest examples of violence and abuse between partners came from Gillian. She told me of two different squats she lived in where violence occurred, and she was encouraged not to intervene.

> The second place that I lived, there was quite a bit of domestic violence that went on there … one time the guy knocked the woman out and she was out cold, and it was outside on the sort of doorstep. I went out and he was saying to her 'Jane, Jane, open your eyes, open your eyes, Jane.' And was worried. And I sort of spoke to him very nervously and he told me to fuck off and I went back inside, and I didn't know what to do. And then there was quite a bit of that sort of thing going on. I was there under sufferance, so they could have just kicked me out any time. – Gillian, she/her

This extract highlights how Gillian's own vulnerability inhibited her ability to act on behalf of the assaulted woman. Through being there 'under sufferance', Gillian knew the risk to her own housing situation if she intervened, not to mention the not-impossible chance of facing violence herself.

> The first place, where there were things like that, they were really bad. Sometimes I was trying to intervene and being told by other people that, you know not to intervene ... At one time I was stopped intervening by somebody … Somebody had literally put their hand on the door of my room so that I couldn't leave my room. Because I was saying 'Look it's really bad I'm going up there, I'm sorry. It's really bad.' And they were putting their hand on my door and that, 'she can move out any time she wants, she doesn't have to stay with him, so you can't interfere.' And I was like, 'but you can hear.' – Gillian, she/her

In this second instance, Gillian was physically deterred from providing assistance to someone experiencing violence. The excuse that 'she can move out any time she wants' therefore 'you can't

interfere' fails to consider the constraints placed upon the decision-making of vulnerable women, something I discussed earlier in relation to Gillian's own agency and choices. The men made the decision that these occurrences were for the couples to deal with, rather than a matter to be discussed or handled by the squat as a whole. However, Gillian drew upon an age-old method of engaging with vulnerable women and ensuring that they had at least a modicum of support: waiting until the husband isn't at home.

> It might be the thing when you'd go and talk to them when her bloke wasn't around and have a bit of a chat with her about things ... There wasn't feminism, there was the thing where I would try and visit the other women when the blokes weren't around and then we would talk and that. But more in a kind of a bit of a classic working-class popping round to see the neighbours and when the guys are not there. – Gillian, she/her

Gillian explicitly relates this to a working-class disposition. The cup of tea and chat while the husband is away, providing support if not materially but through compassion and tentative discussion. Working-class women have long developed their own networks and methods for dealing with trauma and inequality (Skeggs 2005, 2011), methods that do not necessarily map onto the idealistic political beliefs of the more middle-class and politically active wing of the squatting movement, discussed below, but equally as valid.

> Through the habits of precarity these young women learnt to support each other in the best ways they could, the giving of time, energy and attention was crucial to a supportive sociality. They learnt to 'duck and dive' (surviving on little through various means, passing on useful knowledge and things) and tried to protect each other against the financial, physical and psychic depressions that regularly threatened their already precarious lives. They 'looked out' for each other and developed localised spaces of protection but also fun (Skeggs 2011, 504).

You have to meet people where they are at. Even if 'there wasn't feminism' there was still compassion and collective care.

Jana also spoke at length at the ways in which inter-partner abuse was (mis)handled in the squats she lived in. She explicitly acknowledges that this was something that a lot of people felt ought to be left to the partnership to resolve 'behind closed doors' and that it was not your place to intervene.

> Domestic violence was another big thing. Well, that was something for me like 'where are the borders?' Lots of people take this view that domestic violence is somehow the couple's thing, and we don't really understand because you don't know what's all going on there. But wow, we had some big issues going on in that house as well between a couple of people. People generally stepped away and I started to be more and more angry about this and that made me really furious because I was just like 'we're just replicating the same as society or even worse because we don't call the cops or we don't involve the Social Services or we don't involve anybody, we just kind of look away'. – Jana, she/her

It is worthy of note that Jana felt that in their handling of these situations, squatters were 'even worse' than society at large, because of the reticence to engage with state resources of any kind. This is a reasonable position if rigorous and effective alternatives to carceral methods of managing violence are established, but if, instead, 'we just kind of look away', the repercussions can be just as bad, if not worse, than those faced if you engage in established institutional methods. Mistrust of institutional and state mechanisms for handling personal matters is something that is common among both politically left-wing and working-class communities alike, stemming from well-founded and long-lasting suspicion of the police in particular, but also social and mental health services. This has led to an enormous body of literature and multiple attempts to generate alternative methods for handling interpersonal violence, primarily through accountability processes (Downes 2017, Chen *et al* 2011, Morris 2010, n.p.). I will look at this in part two of this chapter.

8.2. Collective response to intimate violence handled poorly

> Definitely I can think of moments of domestic violence between couples and stuff, particularly in a sort of sister crew. And I didn't think they dealt with it well at the time. And now, as an older person, I think they dealt with it really badly. – Callum, he/him

I will now turn to look at a few situations in which intimate partner violence was attempted to be dealt with by the broader crew, without recourse to an accountability process, but, according to my interviewees, was not handled particularly well. Jana spoke of a few instances where there was violence between crew members due to intimate relationships and she felt they were equally poorly handled. In this situation she was assaulted due to someone's partner mistakenly assuming she was romantically involved with him.

> There were some violent instances. I got kicked in my head by somebody and all this and that's like this conflict resolution. In retrospect, it's just really horrendous.... I went to a house meeting saying, 'guys I don't feel safe here, because this is weird, I'm sleeping and somebody comes and kicks me in my head with heavy boots, with steel-capped boots' and everybody was just like 'oh, this is a personal matter'. So, I was just like 'what the fuck is a personal matter? I don't feel safe in the house we live in!' – Jana, she/her

Jana felt that this issue should have been dealt with by the crew at large, rather than being considered 'a personal matter'. She felt that her personal safety ought to be a collective responsibility among crew members. The assumption to draw from this is that because it was to do with a jealousy issue between a pre-existing couple and an 'other woman' that it was the kind of interpersonal issue that it was not their remit to intervene on, despite the fact that Jana suffered real physical violence as a result. Considering physical assault between a couple, or couple-adjacent, to be less serious and less in need of a collective response suggests a belittling of the violence that can take place within relationships

and is inherently misogynistic as the statistics on domestic abuse strongly correlate towards violence against women being the primarily manifestation (ONS 2022). So many issues within squats are considered to be collective matters that ought to be agreed on consensually and discussed at the house meeting, it is rather stark that in this instance Jana received limited support. 'The dismissal of survivors' experiences of violence as personal vendettas and means of revenge relates to the 'myth of the vengeful victim' that circulates in wider society. This myth demonstrates a deep distrust of survivors' anger and fear of the impact of unrequited demands for accountability on a community' (Downes 2017, 46). Jana also spoke of a different instance where there was a mutually abusive relationship occurring in one of her squats between two, it appears, very troubled individuals. In this situation the house was split on who to support.

> They were driving each other nuts ... once you got into it because I was really protective of her and then I saw some behaviours and I just was like 'wow, I would kill her as well', you know? So, it wasn't that clear in a way. So, it started to be really messy because she divided the house, because obviously, he was doing crazy shit, like really crazy shit, but she would never say what she did and then obviously, you protect the woman. But half of the house…So, we were the north wing and the west wing. That was the problem …. And so then, we had a massive fallout between people ... and wow, they got kicked out. But it was horrendous, and I think nobody ever recovered from it in a way, because some people saw this and this and there was towards the end it was fucked up in a way and I don't know how we were supposed to deal with it and now I don't have an answer. – Jana, she/her

Besides the mishandling of the situation, once again Jana draws attention to how she felt the people she lived with were not equipped to deal with this kind of situation. While she states that 'obviously you protect the woman', the way she goes on to discuss the situation makes it clear that in this case it was not all that simple. She felt that their inability to handle this situation left a permanent scar on the domestic dynamics, causing rifts and wounds that 'nobody ever recovered from'. 'Even when a collective survives such conflicts and ugliness we are left wondering whether it survived with its principles and integrity intact' (Vannucci & Singer 2010, 62). This also suggests that despite the crew's earlier claims that domestic disputes ought to be resolved within the partnership, this was not always possible.

However, that an attempt to collectively resolve a domestic dispute led to such dire and long-lasting consequences could also suggest that this jaded outlook could be a product of experience – if you have been through multiple unsuccessful attempts to collectively manage a personal conflict perhaps the desire to ignore it and hope it goes away stems more from recognising the damage these situations can cause to everyone rather than merely a dispassionate indifference towards an individual's suffering. However, this is not an ethical outcome. 'A desire to reunite the activist community can compel activists to question the credibility of survivors, to collude in a silencing of survivors and their

supporters, and return to business as usual. However, this promise of happiness or a unity that subjugates 'others' is inadequate' (Downes 2017, 47). Unlike in Gillian's situation this was a young, keen, political crew, who were surely aware that domestic abuse was not something to sit back and tolerate. Perhaps instead, they simply realised that some issues were beyond them, but still maintained the unwillingness to engage in institutional methods of conflict resolution as a product of their political bent or unfavourable prior experiences with such institutions.

8.3. Collective response to intimate violence handled well

There were some examples where people considered issues of intimate partner violence to have been handled well.

> If there was an issue of someone being bang out of order, then that would get dealt with. There's barely ever any time that I've been involved, unless it was like a domestic between a couple that they've been kicking off and it's like trying to moderate or mediate it rather than it... you can't just see someone off. But there was never any case of someone being weird in the gaff or to someone who lived there. – Daniel, he/him

Daniel is firm that such occurrences would face opposition. He suggests that the primary method to deal with these cases was to attempt to 'moderate or mediate' rather than 'see someone off', implying a lean towards an accountability framework without engaging with the model specifically. He also draws a distinction between a 'domestic between a couple' and 'someone being weird in the gaff', suggesting that the former was something which occasionally occurred whereas the latter was less common. Conversely, Fede refers explicitly to the latter.

> I've definitely seen it in crews where that shit is challenged. We've had it in our own house as well, where people who were being creeps were given warnings like one, two, three, and then if they couldn't fucking behave themselves, they were asked to leave. And if they wouldn't leave, then they were removed. – Fede, they/them

In their squats there was a system of sorts in place, one which toed the line between compassionate and punitive. By instilling a warning system people were given the opportunity to change and to redeem themselves, much like within the accountability model but without the overarching structure and bureaucracy of that system. They were attempting to 'create a means for people who may have acted badly to make amends' (Vannucci & Singer 2010, 119). But if they refused to change their ways then the solution was to ask them to leave the squat. This suggests that issues of abuse and interpersonal violence were taken seriously in these squats, as even 'being creeps', something downplayed in other anecdotes, was enough to be formally warned and for action to be taken if not rectified. This perspective was mirrored by Casey, who went further to draw a distinction between squats and broader society.

I think it's pulled up and addressed way more in squats than in society, but it isn't always as well received. Because in mainstream social scenarios, in mainstream media, people jump on kind of bandwagons and whatever, but in squats often, because of the anti-authority thing, it's like, 'oh, so you're pulling this group of people up for being sexist', even very subliminally, then maybe they won't react to being told in the same way that people maybe jumping on a societal trend are actually addressing something that is being put into the bigger picture. – Casey, they/them

This perspective suggests that the anti-authoritarianism intrinsic to much squatting culture could sometimes be used against accusations of abuse. While the feminist principles of squatters meant that issues were raised more freely, the idea that 'you're telling us what to do' meant that it wasn't always received in the spirit of the complaint. The ability to use liberatory language or political beliefs for underhand or cynical means is a common tactic of shoring up power and delegitimising critiques, as mentioned in the previous chapter, and those practising non-carceral processes need to be wary of 'the potential for abusers to wield the language of feminism to further control and isolate survivors' (Downes 2017, 49). Casey explicitly compares this to mainstream society, where these issues are not raised as much but if they are, people are more likely to be engaged with them through 'jumping on bandwagons', depending on whether feminist issues are considered 'trendy' at the time. However, squatters are also a product of the society in which we are raised and this, to a greater or lesser extent, informs our practices in alternative spaces. 'Almost all people who come to the movement for social justice were brought up and have been functioning in conventional society … Whether we mean to or not, we bring these biases and expectations with us when we join groups that operate according to equality and collectivism' (Vannucci & Singer 2010, 109). Staying aware of these potential pitfalls, biases, and dimensions of power at play while dealing with highly sensitive and difficult topics is vital for creating a space safe.

In this section I looked at the ways in which crews have – or have not – responded to gendered and intimate partner violence between crew members without recourse to formal processes. Most of my interviewees agree that these instances were not handled well and while some suggest that they would always be dealt with, there was no set procedure in place. Often people would rather 'stay out of it' entirely, either because the issue was considered too complex to handle without relying on state mechanisms or because they felt that intimate partner violence was not the responsibility of the crew to manage. In part two I look at the ways in which formal processes were sometimes used in the handling of these issues and the ways in which they often fall short of the good intentions of the participants.

8.4. Formal processes for dealing with gendered violence

Here I want to look at the ways in which formal processes were used to deal with these issues. I am going to start with a discussion on accountability processes and transformative justice in more detail

to investigate whether these non-carceral mechanisms established among left-wing organisations were effective in dealing with issues of violence. I then take a look at how one's social capital would affect the outcome of the formal process and the degree of seriousness with which it is taken.

8.4.1. Accountability processes and transformative justice

Accountability processes rose in popularity in the UK in the 2010s. Largely considered to be a US import, they were established by Black feminist communities attempting to find non-carceral solutions for dealing with violence in their communities (Chen *et al* 2016). Accountability processes have been one of the more common routes for dealing with violence and conflict in activist communities for the last decade or so, with varied results.

> Community alternatives offer crucial opportunities for activists to challenge gendered violence without recourse to the State. This is important given the antagonistic relationship between social justice movements and the State … Survivors in activist communities may therefore be more likely to seek help and demand accountability within informal community networks rather than formal agencies. However, resistance to the demands for safety and accountability within social justice movements introduces an obstacle for survivors, supporters and antiviolence activists attempting community-based responses to gendered violence in the UK Left. (Downes 2017, 41-42).

It is these tensions that I will be exploring in this section. I spoke to Raz, a member of a transformative justice collective about how they worked and the pitfalls that might occur along the way.

> Restorative justice kind of says that state approaches to dealing with harm generally are not at all interested in dealing with harm, and state incarceration, state policing and sort of state institution stuff, especially stuff like social work tends to perpetuate violence … So restorative justice kind of counters that and says this needs to be dealt with outside of the prison industrial complex state system and, in my view or knowledge of it anyway, is kind of primarily focused on redressing a sort of power imbalance between survivors and perpetrators, or people who've caused harm and people who've experienced harm.
>
> So transformative justice to me feels like a bit of an evolution from that where the idea is not just to deal with the harm for the survivor and listen to their needs and kind of have them addressed directly, but try and do a kind of process which is more holistic and involves a whole community of people with the idea that you not only address the harm that's been done, but you try and take steps to understand all the reasons that this harm exists in the first place and to try and prevent it happening in the same way in the future. – Raz, he/him

By engaging in this kind of community responsibility and recognition that violent behaviours are not an aberration that exists in a vacuum, transformative justice aims to move away from a punishment-oriented response to harm, towards a form of collective education and healing.

Transformative Justice, as far as I understand it and practise it, is not about punishment, it might be about sort of redressing wrongs in some other way. But it's kind of grounded in an understanding that violence is everywhere in our communities. It's not just the sort of totemic men that cause a lot of trouble that are perpetrating this, and it doesn't just come from individuals being bad people. Which is exactly how the state deals with criminal behaviour … So, before the harm was even directly addressed, a lot of the work was looking at class and power dynamics, looking at gender dynamics, looking at the ways in which harm exists almost in potential, just because a relationship is unbalanced. And by the point you get to what is more obvious to everybody as an actual sexual transgression, there's been a huge amount of inappropriate behaviour, but not inappropriate in the sense that kind of you might necessarily think of it in wider society, but inappropriate into a sort of ethics of power. Which I think it's not something we generally have much vocabulary for, but it means that you don't really start thinking about punishment at any point in the process. – Raz, he/him

Here Raz is acknowledging the centrality of existing power dynamics within mechanisms for addressing harm. This is an important aspect of accountability processes as they attempt to undermine the 'normalising power [which] obscures and misnames women's experiences of harassment and hinders access to resources that could provide women with the tools to challenge the prevailing quiet' (Whitley and Page 2015, 46). There are different methods for running transformative justice or accountability processes. Some have a formalised curriculum and are run by those not emotionally tied to the issue they are attempting to resolve; however, this is not always possible and is often where issues can emerge. I asked most of my interviewees about accountability processes, nobody could recall one that worked.

We didn't have any accountability processes. I think we would have thought it dumb to even try … I don't think they work. – Oliver, he/him

We tried to do [an accountability process] but it failed as well, because it's a really difficult process and you need both the victim and the perpetrator or the survivor and the perpetrator to both want it, and they have to have a support network and so on. So, we tried to do it and totally failed. – Jana, she/her

This was one of the emotio-logistical issues that Raz mentioned when I asked him about common pitfalls he had encountered when dealing with accountability and transformative justice.

Quite a few of them have been a process that kind of starts being guided by the survivor and their kind of wishes. But then … especially 'cause a lot of them, they become quite public ... what I've seen is sort of the survivors almost being left behind in the community response and you know to an extent with a sort of drive to punish in some way or maybe not exactly a drive to punish, but a drive to remove or kind of very, very unambiguously deal with this person who is a harmful person ... there's a real advantage to being in some way a little bit neutral on the outside. – Raz, he/him

Here Raz is mentioning a few intersecting issues that commonly occur. The first is that often the survivors' wishes are left behind during the process, with the community often favouring an exclusionary solution which is not necessarily the survivor's desire. 'A distinct self-protective cultural practice of trust that operates within activist communities can lead to an overemphasis on exclusion within community accountability processes. In contrast, some survivors saw community accountability as a practice of care that explicitly offers an abuser an opportunity to learn and change their behaviour with support from their peers'. (Downes 2017, 50). This drive to punish or to exclude has been a recurring theme throughout the different areas under discussion, suggesting its prevalence throughout different squatting arenas. The second issue of note is the desirability of having the process be run by those not emotionally engaged in the issue. Squats and precarious housing projects are particularly susceptible to poorly run processes as the home is the political project, so the repercussions of exclusion are much more severe, as are the potential repercussions of allowing someone potentially likely to cause future harm to remain in the space. They do not possess the luxury of distance when going through the process.

> Especially if it's a place where people are living or spending a lot of their time, that kind of pursuit of safety often ends up in expulsion .... at some point it stops being the accountability process and just becomes a much bigger thing ... more and more people get involved and more and more people feel like they have to know what's happened in order to make judgement calls on whether to include or exclude this person from other things, and then yeah, often there'll be a kind of fairly structured small working group that starts out working on the process but then by the end of it... you get bad communication, you g*et al*l kinds of other very heightened emotional events that kind of drag things off track. – Raz, he/him

Raz's experience of processes getting out of hand when too many members of the community got involved is one recognised in the literature as well as by other interviewees (Downes 2017). Ellis discussed why they found accountability processes to be run poorly.

> I think we were really bad at handling that stuff, grossly bad at handling it. I mean, the stuff that came out about Drew, there's an accountability process that happened then, it was awful, it was atrocious. Everyone wanted to be involved, but no one wanted to do any of the hard work. So, I would say that we were really bad at handling that shit. I think some people tentatively were good at taking it seriously. But, I mean, I was also just too young to really understand how to do that stuff responsibly … we still don't really have the answers about how to deal with that kind of... And it's largely to do with the fact that when someone does something horrible, we don't want to see them again. But the problem with that is that that doesn't help the situation. You have to see the person over and over and over and over again and accept that they probably will change if you support them to do so. So, there was a lot of kicking out, there was always endless kicking out of people. – Ellis, they/them

Interrogating the reasons why you choose to become involved in an accountability process is important. Sincere desires to help those experiencing horrendous situations can become intertwined

133

with a more general attitude of policing boundaries and a desire to be on the inside in significant interventions. As Ellis says, 'everyone wanted to be involved, but noone wanted to do any of the hard work'. This perspective is echoed by Vannucci & Singer, who observed that 'people who feel they have been wronged or mistreated can react badly. Often, one side (or both) has become so overwrought by the conflict that she does not want to resolve the problem but merely crush the perceived offender. It is necessary to create an atmosphere where both sides can come back to the group relatively whole.' (2010, 119). Ellis draws on these two competing motivations in tension with each other when someone commits harm, and you are dedicated to non-carceral solutions: the desire to never engage with them again and the desire to help someone change for the better so they no longer inflict harm. Raz also highlighted this conflict within my interview.

> There's a huge tension between a pragmatic sort of ethics of safety and a kind of longer-term ethics of care for the community more broadly. And yeah, it's terrible if somebody is just exiled and then they pop up in a different city, causing exactly the same harm. 'cause I mean, I imagine being expelled kind of hardens your behaviours rather than softens them … There's not much to be gained from blaming people too much for when there seems like there's no other choice because a lot of the time, we don't have the luxury of stepping back and thinking clearly about what we're doing. We just have to deal with the aftermath … you see time and time again that it just moves the problem somewhere else. – Raz, he/him

Raz related this desire to expel rather than attempt to handle the issue internally to the distinct and particular pressures that squatters and other precarious groups of people are under, reinforcing my key argument that social tensions are exacerbated by insecure environments.

> There's got to be a direct relationship between the pressures that are on people, squatters, for example, from outside, but also from inside and the extent to which it's even possible to do any kind of processes around stuff … Because of capacity, because of, for example, in places where there is just repeated violence, maybe repeated state assaults on a space, where stuff is ongoing. And in the last couple of years, I've seen a lot that kind of like you need to do something quite urgently and immediately, and there just is no time to ever deal with it. You never even talk about it again. It's just somebody is removed. – Raz, he/him

> You can certainly get people to change their behaviours with enough patience and with enough diligence and with a real understanding of why these behaviours take place and how to stop them from taking place again. I think the concept of a broad, transformative justice that is comprehensive and coherent is not something that I've seen in my lifetime. I think it's something that is routinely undermined by the ways in which we grow up and the ways in which we're raised and constantly re-socialised by the society around us … I think that the depth of change and commitment that needs to take place for that to happen is often physically not possible for the movements that are there. – Ambrose, he/him

Raz and Ambrose are drawing on another tension which contributes to boundary-drawing and poor management of serious issues, which is capacity: mental, emotional, material, and temporal. As

squatting becomes increasingly fraught and the stability and longevity of a squatted project lessens, the space and time to run an empathy-based process is similarly limited. Instead, among the frequent changes of location and crew make-up it becomes instead a matter of deciding once again who you want to live with and having a good enough reason not to choose to stay with that person.

The above discussion has pointed to several intersecting elements within the ways in which communities attempt to handle instances of violence using formal mechanisms. The first is the presence of the sincere desire to safeguard both the individual experiencing violence, and the space in which the violence takes place. The second is the tension between wanting to work to change someone's behaviours through non-carceral mechanisms and the desire to expel the offending party, and what this means for the safety of individuals and communities in a broader sense.

8.4.2. The role of social capital in responses to violence

> How dare I question his politics! He was more 'conscious' and more of an activist than I could ever hope to be. Look at how much people respected him. Everyone asked him for advice. (De la Cruz & Gomez, 26)

Sometimes issues of gendered power imbalances would be brought to a house meeting, without leading to an official accountability process. Whether an individual is condemned for their actions is not due only to the matter being discussed. As with many other areas I have touched upon it also has a lot to do with the degree of social capital possessed by the individuals under scrutiny. This can be seen clearly in the following anecdote from Natalia.

> [He] was excelling at this, because he was the only [member of this activist group] who lived there. He lived there and at some point, he brought this girl, she was 17, and they were living in the same room. And it made us feel very uncomfortable, the people who lived in this place, because we always knew he was a creep. And by the way, got away with being a creep for so long, because of social capital, being best friends with Paolo. [Did anyone raise this with him?] We did in a meeting and said, 'we sleep in the same bed, but we don't have sex' and the [activist group] were like, 'okay, fine'. And we're talking about vulnerable… she escaped from home, she was a vulnerable teenager. This kind of shit was happening. – Natalia, she/her

Natalia explicitly uses the phrase 'social capital' to explain how the man she was discussing was able to navigate his way out of a situation. She describes his behaviour as a tendency rather than merely exemplified by the anecdote she singles out here. Further, she suggests that his ability to evade accountability or repercussions for his actions was largely due to his close affiliation with Paolo. Paolo was considered to have a great deal of social capital within the squatting movement, something mentioned in the previous chapter. His social capital enabled those close to him to receive preferential treatment by proxy. 'The ability to achieve and sustain credibility in the activist community … once

an accusation of sexual violence has been made, is more achievable for activists with privilege' (Downes 2017, 45). The situation which Natalia discusses is charged with class and gendered power dynamics, with the young girl in question extremely vulnerable and potentially without alternative housing options to fall back on, much like the situation Gillian described finding herself in earlier. In this instance, the issue was raised in a house meeting, but this did not lead to impartial justice being served, but rather the account given by the person with the highest status being taken as truth (Downes 2017). This is why exposing power dynamics is crucial: by the time issues come to the fore they are often so embedded and taken for granted that they can not be overridden, even in the name of safety. 'In most cases, the unequal; group dynamics that derail a collective during difficult circumstances have been at –play since long before the problems became obvious'. (Vannucci & Singer 2010, 21).

A further element at play in Natalia's situation is that the people casting judgement did not actually reside in the squat. The squat was also a social centre operated by an activist group, however, aside from the accused individual none of them lived there. Yet they were able to make a decision that affected the residents of the squat primarily, from their external vantage point, due to their position as the official 'managers' of the space. This is an example of a common phenomenon within collectives, where 'an unpopular or not highly regarded person who complains about someone who is seen as a leader or a more valued member may find himself alone' (Vannucci & Singer 2010, 75). According to Natalia, the truth was never attempted to be found, but a collective decided in favour of their own despite not residing in the space whatsoever.

That social capital mattered more than the degree of harm inflicted was also outlined by Layla who explicitly referred to the role social power had in the response to decisions, stating that 'It doesn't matter whether you do an accountability process or not. It's about who gets liked more than not (Layla, she/her). Beyond 'who gets liked more', it can also be simply an unwillingness to get your hands dirty at play in whether or not decisions are taken seriously.

In other instances, there were more official rules and guidelines being imposed. Towards the second half of the noughties safer spaces policies were emerging as best practice in radical spaces (Downes 2017, Grohman 2020). Particularly within squatted social centres which were outward facing, 'safer spaces' policies determined the acceptable limits of behaviour within the spaces. Ellis lived in a squatted social centre which was both a domestic home and organised social activities which had a safer spaces policy and described the limitations of their implementation.

> So, we had a big, safer spaces policy and I have loads of opinions on that now. So, the safe spaces
> policies that we had with 'no racism, no sexism. No. ableism no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no'.

> Oh, yeah, yeah, really solved all the problems. It had nothing to do with the drugs or the endless transgression of your personal space. – Ellis, they/them

Ellis suggests that safer spaces policies, and their proclamations of equality and a no tolerance approach towards bigotry, did not actually solve the problems they faced living in a social centre., They say that they have 'loads of opinions on that now' which also implies that at the time they perhaps thought they were a straightforwardly good idea. This has been a running theme with my interviewees who have since stopped squatting and have reflected on their past experiences. Concepts and practices they considered to be valuable they have since come to see as flawed or overly simplistic.

> I've never been a fan of safer spaces policies for the reason that I think that simply saying what you want to happen is irrelevant, it is what you will make happen that actually counts. And more often than not, the kinds of groups that get together with an anarchist ethos will be full of nice middle-class people who aren't prepared to enforce the values that they talk. – Ambrose, he/him

It is all very well having the policies but if you are unwilling to enforce them the collective decision will never be more than a charade and will often lead to the survivor leaving the community of their own accord and for their own safety (Downes 2017). The online blog, Anonymous Refused, wrote of the way in which safe spaces discourse pervaded the anarchist scene, in 2014:

> There are more and more people scared to be involved in political organising ... for fear that they may be excluded or denounced in the name of safer spaces, or for fear of being reminded of previous, deeply upsetting – some might even say 'traumatic' – experiences of exclusion or denunciation ... Through the denunciation of the example, the forcible excision of the unsafe tumour in the communal body, everyone else attempts thereby to purify themselves (Anonymous Refused, 2014).

In this quote, the authors are pointing to a tendency I am also highlighting among squatters, a form of boundary-drawing to protect those within the boundary. The blog argues that the punishments are used as a form of purifying those who remain within the boundary, who's status is preserved through being part of the exclusion, a dynamic I explore in more detail in the next chapter.

8.5. Conclusion

In this chapter on responses to gendered violence I have shown that despite a commitment to accountability processes and non-carceral mechanisms for dealing with intimate violence, squatters often lacked the capacity to effectively carry out these procedures. Two tensions come into play here: the desire to immediately remove the offending person from the home, to draw up boundaries and preserve the integrity of the crew; and the way in which this desire is conditioned by the social capital of the person committing the offence, and the person who has been a victim. Many of my interviewees suggested that they have since become disillusioned of the efficacy of formal processes

for dealing with these incidents, and that despite the best intentions of those who truly care about transformative justice and protecting survivors of violence there is not sufficient infrastructure or desire to respond effectively and to thwart the insidious presence of power dynamics in the smooth running of the processes themselves. In the next chapter I will take a step back from the intimacies of relationships within squats to look at how the act of squatting itself could affect the social relationships which took place within them.

9. Spatial dimensions of social relations

> I think the home kind of comes with you a little bit. – Oliver, he/him

In this last analysis chapter, I examine at how the physical space interacts with the social barriers between people in terms of how people are spatially grouped together and the intimacies and alliances they form. Throughout this thesis I have shown ways in which the social interacts with the spatial, from the social capital gained from cracking open a squat which allows you to have first dibs on bedrooms (4.3.1.), to the ways in which the function of the house meeting is undermined by the subsequent retreat into private bedrooms to determine the real outcome (6.2., 7.1.2.). I frame this chapter around external and internal ways in which the materiality of squatting intersects with social relationships. I first look at responses to external material pressures, namely the eviction. The frequency and violence of evictions could have a significant effect on the squatter's psyche, affecting their feelings of safety or vulnerability, and in turn affecting others. I then look at how the materiality of the spaces people squatted in affected the ways in which allegiances were drawn or tensions exacerbated. I end the chapter with an analysis of how the scarcity of squats contributes to the boundary-drawing within them.

9.1. Species of spaces and squatted places – external material pressures

Due to the increasingly hostile legislative framework and political will, squatting in London has steadily declined over the last 40 years, both in the number of squats and the longevity of individual squats. My interviewees from the 1980s, Mary, George, Suri, and Kim all reflected on times when there would be dozens of squats within a few streets, and squatting communities could be separated by the names of roads or a localised district within a borough. As squatting became less common this became a rarer phenomenon, and it became more common that squatted communities would span whole boroughs or even broader geographic markers, such as north or south of the river Thames. The importance of this infrastructure of community across and between geographic locations came to a fore during squat evictions. Many of my interviewees told harrowing stories of violent eviction and the trauma that resulted from that. I argue in this chapter that this trauma is a constitutive element of the desire to draw up personal and social boundaries, as controlling your environment can help people feel safe in unsafe situations. However, I want to briefly focus on the solidarity and strong sense of community which could result from both the experience and the threat of that trauma and violence. This anecdote from Ellis about a brutal eviction during the weekend of the Royal wedding in 2012 articulates this point:

> So, at 7 o' clock in the morning, I'm sitting in my little, weird shed, panoramic view. And I hear this loud bang … And we all got arrested, and I got dragged out my bed naked, I was just wearing pants, and handcuffed, and we were all taken to a police station ... And then we got out and ... got back to 50 to 100

squatters on Camberwell Green having a huge supportive party waiting for us to arrive … and the following Wednesday, it was so beautiful … We were a mess, an absolute mess. We had to fix every fucking door. And there was so much glass, and everything was so broken. And anyway, loads of people came to the next people's kitchen all bringing their own food … there were just loads and loads of candles and loads of yummy food everywhere. And it was so sweet. It was so nice. – Ellis, they/them

Here Ellis is beautifully demonstrating the possible duality of an eviction – the trauma and brutality that arises from the state violence and the love and solidarity that emerged on the side of the squatting movement. This is not uncommon. It is expected and desired that if one crew is getting evicted then all other crews that are able turn up to attempt to halt the eviction. If the eviction succeeds, then often crews would be invited on the spot to stay with another one while seeking their new home. 'Home extends into neighbourhoods, streets and onto picket lines and stretches across geographical barriers; it is where discoveries and transformations take place and relationships are changed and deepened' (Davies 2023, n.p.). These instances were normalised throughout the squatting movement to a degree and yet my interviewees still recognised how special this culture of *material* support was.

There's also a lot of quite kind of latent mutual aid and mutual solidarity that's built into [squatting] by necessity. Because oftentimes if you get evicted very suddenly you need to go live somewhere, and someone will almost automatically take you in. You just go live there for a few days until you find a new place. – Oliver, he/him

All my interviewees were passionate about the culture of care and solidarity that could be found between squatters, recognising the need for this care in traumatic and vulnerable situations (Osterweil 2020).

I think part of it is the feeling of being under attack. Part of it is the feeling of making a home together. The best bit of most squats, in my opinion, was making the space nice. That was a lot of the ritual of moving in, it wasn't just you claim your room - often very unequally. It wasn't just the making the building secure … I think part of that is making that together. – Oliver, he/him

However, this could have a flip side, with ramifications for both individual mental health and the social relations which occurred within the squat.

There was a huge traumatising eviction that happened … It was horrible. Everyone ended up developing severe mental health issues. – Ellis, they/them

Did I feel safe in the building I was living? No, because it could get evicted at any time. Always that creates a constant state of anxiety, whether you acknowledge it or not, everyone's in a... especially you've got court papers. Obviously, everyone's in a state of emergency and looking for houses and barricading and under siege almost. – Oliver, he/him

It is unsurprising that the lack of permanent secure structures affected squatters' mental health, as well as their interpersonal relationships, again reflecting scholarship on other precariously housed communities. As Casellas and Sala observed in relation to the PAH housing movement in Spain[3]: 'over time the association realised that the problems linked to home eviction extend not only to economic but also to physical and mental health problems, affecting the family and social relationships of members' (2017, 183). Declining mental health and declining social relationships are in a symbiotic relationship. As Layla put it:

> What you don't pay in rent, you pay in mental health. And certainly, the level of personal dynamics became so raw because housing is such a fundamental thing for a person and certainly for a person that doesn't have that many choices. – Layla, she/her

The frequency and violence of squat evictions has a cumulative effect on the strength of your ties and your emotional capacity to support yourself and others, something necessary for effectively dealing with serious issues, as discussed in the previous chapter. 'Precariousness, as a generalised condition of life, is felt when humans are vulnerable, for example, through relationships that may be lost and when exposure to others comes with a risk of violence' (Johnston 2017, 2). This can lead to a 'siege' mentality, as Oliver suggested, which affected interpersonal relationships. I will explore this more in the last section of this chapter.

The traumatic effects of eviction and housing precarity have been well documented (Paton & Cooper 2017, Brickell *et al* 2017, Holl *et al* 2016), with academics arguing that 'the traumatic emotional and wider political implications of the physical demolition of, or forced eviction from, the home should not be underestimated' (Nowicki 2017, 127). Squats are one of the more precarious forms of housing to be evicted from. While the state of the rented sector is dire, the legal processes and procedures that must be followed mean that the immediate vulnerability that a squat eviction could exhibit, as well as the actual physical violence which was a common occurrence during an eviction, are not similarly experiences in other housing.

The specific vulnerability of squatting is an example of the 'embodied, located and grounded phenomenon' of forced evictions, documented thoroughly by Brickell, among others (2014, 1257). To understand the violence and repercussions of these evictions from an emotional and material perspective I draw on Baxter and Brickell's concept of 'home un-making', describing the 'precarious process by which material and/or imaginary components of home are unintentionally or deliberately, temporarily or permanently, divested, damaged or even destroyed' (2014, 134). Lancione develops

---

[3] Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH; Platform for People Affected by Mortgages) is a Spanish grassroots direct action housing movement

this concept, urging an affective understanding of eviction, emphasising the embodied experience beyond, and intertwined with, the material. In discussing evictions of Roma communities, he points to both the solidarity and community, but how they were eventually overtaken by exhaustion, irritability, infighting, and 'durable fractures in the relations between the communities' (2017, 19).

> I was just so sick of making the space nice, then getting kicked out and get back on the street again. You just don't even bother unpacking. Just boxes, moving plastic crates about. – Daniel, he/him

The process of continued vulnerability and material precarity had a serious effect on the strength of the social relationships.

> [There used to be] a chance that you would get a home out of this … when you squat a residential house then you can get your normal bedroom ... When you're in these commercial buildings, you lose that sort of normalcy. You might be multiple people in certain rooms. I don't think it's a long-term way that people could live ... Your quality of life is going to be lower. – Jim, he/him

Jim points to this, making a distinction between how squatting felt before the residential ban and afterwards, suggesting that lacking the 'normalcy' of a building that is designed to be a home affects your everyday life. Once again, the material spaces, and the temporal aspects of continued eviction, affects the relationships at play within them, with the increasing precarity leading to increased strain on social relationships. This also has spatial ramifications on a larger scale as the broader community which Ellis and Oliver pointed to as vital sources of solidarity in times of precarity also dissipated, spreading thinner and wider, as the balance between the need for support and the ability to provide it is thrown off kilter.

9.2. Squatted spaces and social relations – internal material pressures

> This squat was very large, there were 100 rooms there. It was more like a hostel; I never even knew everyone who lives there. It was also a mess, something I've never seen before in my life in terms of drugs and general fuckeries going on there. – Natalia, she/her

Aside from the trauma of eviction and its ramifications, the particularities of a squat could also affect social dynamics, as Jim hinted at above. The physical site of a squat heavily influenced the way in which the social relations which occurred within it were mediated. The number of bedrooms, the quality of the walls, the kudos associated with the space all influenced the social capital of those within it, and the interpersonal relationships which occurred.

> So, it's political in a way, that this is a social experiment to live with so many people and try to kind of, with paper-thin walls and know everything about everyone in a way. But at the same time, you don't know, because once you reach over 12 people, you don't know any more about the people and you are not able to process it and that's when I realised living with that many people, it doesn't necessarily work because you then live through gossip. You don't necessarily know one-on-one what's happening and

To both know everything about everyone and yet to never have the full picture of anything can lead to a 'cloak and daggers' response to incredibly serious issues. Assumptions are made about how and in what ways people interact and for what reasons. Conclusions can be drawn from overheard phrases while the intricacies of a situation remain behind closed doors. The assumed collective nature of squatting denies the right to any real privacy and gives all members of the crew a claim on the individual relationships occurring within the squat. What is yours is mine is ours – including your most intimate feelings and actions. As Jana says, you 'live through gossip'. Jana draws attention to the paper-thin walls as a permeable barrier between one's private life and the public realm of the squat itself. Whether or not others are involved in your personal life is not something you can necessarily decide for yourself when the structural integrity of that privacy is so easily penetrated and locked doors are frowned upon (Layla, she/her).

On the other hand, however, Jana reflects that over a certain population threshold, it becomes impossible to fully know anyone else's situation: 'you don't necessarily know one-on-one what is happening'. This is something that is also conditioned by the spatial reality of the squat: if it is a large building with 20 odd people over several wings the rumour mill operates with greater ease than in a smaller more close-knit collective where a misunderstanding may be corrected or set straight sooner. Yet, despite this inability to comprehend the entirety of a situation, you are still expected to cast judgement on it, to pick a side, and to enforce punishments or directives, as I have explored throughout part two of my analysis. 'The construction of friends and foes is crucial to the political life of activism. It depends on negatively identifying outsiders, ritual participation and mobilising around preinscribed moral arguments and notions of right' (Chatterton 2006, 277).

The 'gossip' that Jana speaks of is not merely contained to one squat. As discussed above, squatters often live in close-knit communities, with all the benefits that entails, but the detriments too. Due to the transient nature of squatting, alliances can reform multiple times, across multiple sites, and occurrences in one squat can easily become popular knowledge throughout the scene, particularly if something is considered to have been handled poorly. This is demonstrated throughout this thesis by different interviewees referencing the same events, bad practice, and bad actors despite having no knowledge of the content of each other's interviews.

Material space could also affect interpersonal relationships in more intimate ways. I want to return to an anecdote I discussed earlier, where Jana was describing a violent intimate relationship and the crew's response to it.

It wasn't that clear in a way. So, it started to be really messy because she divided the house, because obviously, he was doing crazy shit, like really crazy shit, but she would never say what she did and then obviously, you protect the woman. But half of the house…So, we were the north wing and the west wing. That was the problem …. And so then, we had a massive fallout between people ... and wow, they got kicked out. But it was horrendous, and I think nobody ever recovered from it in a way, because some people saw this and this, and there was towards the end it was fucked up in a way and I don't know how we were supposed to deal with it and now I don't have an answer. – Jana, she/her

In the previous chapter I focused on how Jana did not feel that the crew were equipped to deal with an issue of intimate violence. The second element of this anecdote I wish to draw out is the spatial dimension. Jana suggests the house was spatially split between the north wing and the west wing in terms of who they supported. Jana went into some detail about how the structure of the building, and the material conditions in which they lived contributed towards the ways in which they handled conflictual situations. The north and west wing divide could suggest that people supported whichever party they were physically closest to.

The tendency towards drawing lines of inclusion and exclusion for the purposes of security can occur within a single squat, rather than merely between the squat and the rest of the world. Jana mentioned that during a breakup her former partner left their shared bedroom but remained in the building, moving to a different wing. While herd mentality is heavily conditioned by dynamics of social capital and hierarchy, it also has a spatial element. In Jana's case, the responses to the conflict were divided by the *structure* of the building. It is much less likely that all the residents of north wing were in agreement and all the residents of south wing came to the opposite conclusion, than a pressure to agree with your closest neighbours overrode personal beliefs in the matter. The desire to be on the 'correct' team can override the desire to do or say what is morally 'right' or even what you personally believe to be the correct perspective.

> Although teams and projects may be seen by some as 'escape routes' from formal hierarchy, they actually can be worse for the individual since they represent a very demanding combination of formal and informal pressure held together by a team and family rhetoric... which is difficult to challenge and even harder to escape from (Diefenbach & Sillince 2011, 1527).

It is necessary to recognise 'the effect of social settings, local, larger-scale, and historical forces, and the impact of power on decision processes' (Kwon *et al* 2009, 274). Beliefs are formed collectively, contingent on who you speak to, how, in what order, and the social standing they possess. 'Space is emotionally saturated and spatial elements transmit the affects, feelings and emotions that can fuel political activism. Moreover, certain settings are more prone to produce emotions than others: as a result of particular configurations of social scripts, the performance of the actors present, and the 'staging' of that space' (Brown & Pickerill 2009, 5). The setting of the squat, already dealing with the

external pressures of eviction and the potential for violence, plays a significant role in the development of 'tribes' (Layla, she/her) and of a 'siege' mentality (Oliver, he/him) which conditioned social relationships.

9.2.1. Material space and intimate relationships

It is worth taking a specific look at the ways in which the material space of the squat could affect intimate relationships. Often this was the result of a perceived or real lack of space for additional members of the crew.

> The whole bedroom politics is a whole thing … there was one house, there were nine of us living in one room. And you know, that was just horrible. No privacy whatsoever. Two couples and five men, it was just horrific. – Layla, she/her

> There was a lot of relationships in [this crew] and there was a very weird vibe going on … they had the main floor area, it wasn't very big, and they had this bedroom in the back where anyone who was single slept in a giant room, just a mattress room. And then the couples had the basement, the dungeon, the basement downstairs, which is a truly vile, disgusting area, which I never went in, with no natural light. Curtained off, grimy, damp it was horrendous, and all the couples slept down there. – Oliver, he/him

In both of these circumstances, couples were forced to share space with other members of the crew, a situation nobody was happy with. In Oliver's anecdote it appears to go a step further, however, with couples all together in one room, separated from the rest of the crew. These quotes demonstrate the spatial dimensions of intimacy – how the physical structure of the building could affect your intimate life. 'Intimacy is as tactile as it is psychic; a state of mutual vulnerability and desire that requires touch and proximity and the breathing of the same air' (Behrooz 2022, n.p.). The scarcity of resources (number of toilets etc) changed and shifted depending on the building you were squatting within, and thus had a material effect on how tense or otherwise the addition of a partner (or indeed any other member of the crew) would be, as Daniel illustrates:

> there can obviously be quite catty moments. So a lot of people bitching about this and that. Because especially if the resources are now stretched, bathroom times, all these things, has a knock-on effect when you've got more people than you can handle. So every single day you've got 10 bedrooms and 10 people in there, they all got girlfriends, double the amount of people for the gaff kind of thing. It's hard work. Sometimes discussed at meetings and stuff, but it would be already too late by that point. - Daniel, he/him

He suggests that spatial stressors led to 'catty moments' and incidents which needed to be discussed in a house meeting. However, the fact that 'it would already be too late' suggests that the tensions would overflow and lead to conflict before there was a chance for collective decision-making to occur. Everyone being forced into a shared space was not always to do with scarcity of resources or

the structural possibilities of the space, however. Natalia spoke of a very peculiar set up in one of the squats she was affiliated with.

> In [that squat] we had a no sex rule … they chose to live in one room despite having enough rooms for people. They had all sorts of absolutely insane rules like nobody is allowed to have sex because we are dedicated to the revolution, yes. It didn't work, people had sex there. And to be honest, it was enforced by these two guys … We didn't live there, we lived in his flat. He enforced all sorts of other rules. – Natalia, she/her

In Natalia's case, the reason for them all sharing one space was not to do with the spatial possibilities of the building, but to do with supposed political beliefs, and the imposition of such beliefs. Even more egregiously, one of the men enforcing this rule did not even live in the squat, but in fact rented elsewhere. I followed up on this story at a later date (29/07/2022) with Natalia and have reprinted her comments here with her permission:

> No parties, no drugs, no sex: no fun. It was very cultish. I was constantly getting into trouble because I kind of wanted nice fun stuff. I mean I did not come from rural Poland to 7 million town not to have fucking fun! But mainly, if you ask me, these rules were in place to ensure the control of two cis men. – Natalia, she/her

Here, once again, the issue comes back to gender and power. Natalia attributes this decision to a power play by two men who had the authority to enforce their will upon the rest of the house. They were able to control the physical use of space and the social relationships which occurred there. When I asked Natalia what the punishment for disobeying these rules was, she simply said 'shame'. 'Shame' being the punishment for disobeying has strongly religious undertones (Clough 2017). To see this mentality applied to squats, which are in many ways more sexually free and libationary spaces than the mainstream, is surprising, though meshes with Layla's experience of slut-shaming, discussed in part one of my analysis. Any subculture or political movement has a tendency towards creating a bubble of inclusion and exclusion (Brown & Pickerill 2009), enforcing its own specific guidelines and behaviours, but for a wing of this movement to have been swayed so entirely in one direction by two powerful men suggests a level of admiration and deference that transcends the usual social hierarchies and dynamics into something else entirely that does appear, after all, rather 'cultish'.

The description given by Natalia here, and in many of the anecdotes and experiences throughout this thesis, evokes some of the messaging within the late Mark Fisher's highly controversial 2013 article 'Exiting the Vampire Castle', with the vampire castle referring to his experience of left-wing communities. The article was considered by many to be an attack on those attempting to rid left-wing spaces of oppressive or bigoted behaviour, while others saw it as a critique of some of the motivations behind expulsion processes. Within the essay he argues that one of the main tenets of these communities is guilt, with explicit religious overtones.

> The Vampires' Castle specialises in propagating guilt. It is driven by a *priest's desire* to excommunicate and condemn, an *academic-pedant's desire* to be the first to be seen to spot a mistake, and a *hipster's desire* to be one of the in-crowd … The more guilt the better. People must feel bad: it is a sign that they understand the gravity of things. (Fisher 2013, n.p.)

Fisher argues that the use of blame and condemnation shores up the authority of those who have imposed themselves as the arbiters of legitimate thought, criticism, and harm, often in the name of supporting those facing oppression. In Natalia's case they are also the arbiters of how the collective space is used. I posit that this atmosphere and tendency towards surveillance, shame, and condemnation – Fisher's vampire castle – is exacerbated by the current climate of scarcity. Not only scarcity politics as it infuses and interacts with other forms of identity-based political organising and attempts at solidarity, but also scarcity in the material resources and spatial possibilities on offer.

However, there were examples in which sharing space was negotiated with kindness and compassion rather than with demonstrations of authority or a horrific lack of privacy.

> When [my partner] was going to come visit the squat, Lycra gave me her room that she was staying in on her own so we could have a room together. And that wasn't a thing where I was asking people 'can I swap rooms?', Lycra came to me and said, 'we can swap rooms'. It was good. It was nice and it was great because I don't know what we would have done otherwise … And so, I suppose those things, those kinds of little interactions went on quite a lot. – Oliver, he/him

In this instance, it is worth noting that the kindness extended to Oliver was managed on an interpersonal, one-on-one level, not beholden to crew rules or decision-making. He mentions 'these little interactions' occurring regularly in conversations and spaces external to the primacy of the house meeting, a necessary reminder that the tendencies and tensions I have drawn on throughout this thesis do not of course make up the whole picture.

9.3. Boundary-drawing

I close this chapter with a brief investigation into boundary-drawing, as both a social and a spatial concept. Boundary-drawing has cropped up throughout this thesis as a practice informing decisions over joining a crew, changing crews, and evicting people, with the decisions around the boundaries being strongly informed by the informal hierarchies laced throughout the scene. Social-psychological boundaries were made manifest through the erection of physical boundaries, over participation in shared spaces, and were simultaneously affected by the shattering of these physical boundaries through the violence and trauma of eviction.

Boundaries were not always drawn for nefarious reasons, and often resulted from very real feelings of vulnerability, wrought from the insecurity of squatters' housing tenure and scarcity of housing in general. As Grohman put it 'the disputed status of squats often forced their inhabitants to act in

territorial ways whether they wanted to or not' (2020, 41). Inclusive and protected spaces, and exclusion and barriers are often two-sides of the same coin, with the benefits and detriments of inclusion policies operating simultaneously. As seen above, evictions would lead people to welcome fellow crews into their space, as much as they could heighten tensions and increase hostility between crew mates. Boundary-drawing will always necessitate leaving some people out, and defining a space will always foreclose acceptance of certain borderline identities and some vulnerable people in need of access to these spaces will fall through the cracks (Barker & Iantaffi 2019).

Sometimes, communities feel they have to be exclusive; the issues arise when the boundaries are not considered to be just, or are considered to be excluding those worthy of inclusion. The collective identity can be a source of community and pride as well as exclusion and shame.

> You just have this squatter's identity, and you were part of a tribe in a way. You're like 'oh you are from Arsenal' and you got categorised in some way … then you stop doing it and you're just like 'wow, I'm just myself' and suddenly, you have nothing because you spent so much time classifying yourself or your identity in this way. – Jana, she/her

This collective identity as a squatter is established as a response to external factors as much as the internal desire to be part of an in-crowd. If there were more squats with different ideologies and communities and ways of living and loving and organising together, the collective identity would not stifle or restrict people the way it currently does, particularly along gendered and classed lines. As the number of squats diminished, so did the opportunities to find a crew which aligned with your views, rather than assimilating into a single identity. As Gamson argues 'it is as liberating and sensible to demolish a collective identity as it is to establish one' (1995, 402). Collective identities are sometimes necessary to protect individuals, even if they harm others in the making. Oliver speaks to the vulnerability that often guides these kinds of decisions:

> It gets quite difficult to start ascribing levels of vulnerability because everyone is vulnerable, all the time because of the eviction thing, because of the police harassment … I think that because people live much more extremely in many ways, or because people live much more vulnerably in general, I think that women and trans people that are living in those vulnerable ways, live more vulnerably in relation. So everyone's a bit more vulnerable but then people who are more vulnerable, even more. I think the only way to in any way alleviate is to have organising within that scene, to have feminist organising within that scene or trans organising. – Oliver, he/him

Oliver recognises that the same vulnerabilities that women, trans people, and queer people face in the outside world are still present within the squat scene and suggests that one of the key ways to overcome this vulnerability is to have identity-specific organising within the scene. But this vulnerability can be tended to in other ways, as suggested above in relation to the solidarity and care that is taken for granted in the aftermath of a violent eviction, with the sharing of physical space with

an evicted crew, and the camaraderie in setting up a home together. That people are increasingly responding to vulnerability through exclusion and boundary-drawing, I argue, is a response to the increasingly hostile housing environment and the closing down of possibilities and differences within the squatting movement. Kim, who has been involved in squatting for over thirty years, observed the same trend.

> It is about the lack of space that few people can choose to live with people who you have worked out you have an agreement on what it is that you want to do that can give some basis to deciding whether something is good or bad … I think one of the things is that because partly we've been forced into a politics of scarcity that the good times I can talk about, there was abundance. – Kim, he/him

He is arguing not that the tendencies to exclude or the negative personality traits are new, as we saw with George's recollection of an unfair eviction in the 1980s, only that the options for you if you are excluded and the potential repercussions are more severe because of the increasingly hostile material environment you are thrust into if evicted. The same point is made by Layla, who explicitly draws on the classed nature of this precarious environment:

> When push comes to shove, for survival reasons in the Western world, material conditions tend to define your future experience ... that tends to become quite raw in the housing environment. I would argue still, a person with more of a financial backing, when housing is the issue we're talking about, probably has a higher chance of having durability in dealing with something that is not as raw for them, as well as for people that are so close to the edge of falling off completely. – Layla, she/her

As I have illustrated throughout this thesis, the centrality of gendered and classed experiences of housing are incorrectly side-lined within squats, as the repercussions of eviction will always be greater for those without a safety net. Hierarchy, classed power differentials, bullying, and misogyny are not unique to the squatting scene. Nor is the trauma and distress of eviction and precarious housing. What makes them important and relevant is that they *still* exist in an environment which is trying so hard to extinguish them, to be something different, something egalitarian, and often failing.

> Class warfare is everywhere ... [squatting is] intimately connected to the rest of society and exists there. And it exists there perhaps in a more intense way because the boundaries which prevent that kind of warfare are removed. So talking about queerness or with class or with race or with everything the veil is pulled away, you know. You don't have the niceties of society in its wider sense keeping everything civil. – Fede, they/them

The fact that these tensions and power dynamics are so fraught within squats is because, as Fede says here, squats both exhibit the same traits we see everywhere else but lack 'the niceties of society in its wider sense keeping everything civil'. Jana explicitly argues that these issues are so heightened in squats because they occur within the home.

> They are the problems we have in society; you just see them much closer in a way because you live with them. But they exist even if you stop squatting, the same problems exist, anything from drug addiction to domestic abuse to depression, everything. – Jana, she/her

These insidious tendencies are reinforced by outside pressures, both material and interpersonal. As Jana says, 'the same problems exist' and Kim points to the way in which it has both always been the case that boundary-drawing and exclusion exist, but also that they have increased in frequency and severity over time.

> [Back in the day] you could open up a squat with people who you felt you had things in common with on whatever level, you could create your autonomy and yes, you use that as a base for developing things otherwise. And there were problems with that. I mean most of the things that I have been through, including ASS, have had informal hierarchies. ... informal hierarchies need dealing with or need undercutting, and yet structural ways of dealing with them don't necessarily work. But it's also about including and excluding. – Kim, he/him

Fede, Kim, and Jana all point to the ways that societal tendencies and ways of understanding and treating each other are reflected within squats, only that squats make it harder in some ways to deal with these issues. As Brown points out: 'these spaces do not exist outside of capitalist social relations … As a result, there is a danger that, like earlier experiments in autonomy, they will be recuperated and become just one more flexible lifestyle alternative that reinforces rather than challenges hegemonic ideas' (2007, 2697). This is precisely what this thesis aims to highlight and, hopefully, contribute towards undercutting.

9.4. Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at some of the ways in which the social dynamics discussed in the previous chapters could be affected by the material and spatial realities of squatting. I first looked at the external pressures, namely the violence and frequency of eviction, and how that could lead to camaraderie and solidarity but also the fraying of social ties and individual mental health; and I argued that this is partly contingent upon the geographies including in terms of their proximity. I then looked at the internal pressures – the way the physical structure of the squat or spatial decisions such as bedroom allocation could affect the power dynamics within it. I have shown how the material reality of squatting was heavily intertwined with the social relations occurring within squats, and how this tension increased as the number of squats decreased. This contributed to the boundary-drawing and exclusionary aspects of squatting culture which I have drawn attention to throughout my analysis.

Conclusion to part two

Part two of my analysis centred on the social relationships which occur within squats, focusing on the ways in which decisions were made and mediated. I first explored the general processes, emphasising the formal mechanisms of the house meeting and consensus-decision-making. I then looked at several key avenues where decisions were made: joining a crew; getting kicked out; and handling intimate partner violence. I then looked at how the material space of the squat could impact the dynamics which took place within it, from the physical violence of eviction to the number of rooms or the quality of the building, suggesting that the social practice of boundary-drawing was affected by the physical space of the squats themselves as well as the broader-scale precarity of housing in London.

While in some squats there were minimal rules, in others the rules were more extensive but implicit – you were expected to understand the correct habitus without being explicitly informed of it. This is usually what I described in part one of my analysis: a practical self-reliance, familiarity with the relevant activist projects, an unspoken commitment to left-wing values, and a respect (sometimes bordering on fetishism) of working-class experiences and ideals, despite your own class position. The possession of these attributes allowed you to bypass formal decisions, while not possessing them could limit your ability to navigate informal processes. The inconsistency with which decisions were made could have severe repercussions, particularly in the realms of dealing with intimate partner violence and with the prospect of eviction from a squat, where material experiences of gendered and classed vulnerability came to the fore. Further, I suggested that boundary-drawing around the appropriate conduct within a squat is enforced haphazardly, but more frequently by those with greater security, either due to the longevity of their squat or their own socio-economic status. I conclude that the presence of formal structures did not alleviate the role that informal power imbalances had in the outcome of decisions, sometimes functioning to mask the real power dynamics at play under the guise of consensus instead.

Despite ambitions towards direct-democratic or anarchistic forms of decision-making, through consensus decisions being the standard, and most decisions theoretically being made at house meetings, this does not work out in practice. Those who already have authority were able to control the way in which collective decisions are made. Further, despite the function of the house meeting, most decisions are made elsewhere, by friendship groups and behind closed doors. This demonstrates the persistence of informal hierarchies in supposedly egalitarian collectives.

There is also a misrecognition or mishandling of severity. Squatters' understanding of harm could benefit from a stronger classed material analysis and often comes secondary to emotional or identity-political considerations when deciding on the best course of action. It appears that experiencing harm on the basis of gender identity is given greater precedence than the harm experienced by being evicted

from the squat, and responses to sexual violence are inconsistent and sporadic. In worse cases, these decisions are not made along any lines of oppression at all, but merely on the basis of friendship and the level of support each individual in the dispute has. The outcome of a conflict also has the function of shoring up or further depleting the power of the participants, depending on the outcome. Therefore, the presence of a process is undermined by the heavily laden power dynamics already present in such decision-making environments.

Finally, I suggest that the spatial dimensions of squatting affect these social interactions, from the solidarity and camaraderie to the frayed nerves and weakened social relations wrought from continued eviction, violence, and vulnerability. As the ability to squat gets harder, the conditions within the squat are increasingly fraught and attempted to be controlled in order to keep a sense of security in a hostile landscape. I argue that these tensions have increased over time as squatting gets more difficult and positive relations with your crewmates take on a vital dimension. This precarity has particularly dire implications for those already vulnerable due to their class or gender, where the sharp edge of the housing crisis is pressed closest.

10. Thesis Conclusion

> At the end of the day, we were all just abused, abused by the capitalist system. But somehow in that trauma, we somehow managed to find something beautiful, which is wonderful. But none of this should be happening. – Layla, she/her

When I began working on this thesis in 2019, I was interested in processing my thoughts around experiences my friends and I had had while squatting in London. My Master's thesis had investigated the positive sides of squatting: the affective encounters and development of political subjectivity and solidarity between different housing movements. While I maintained, post-masters, that squatting was in many ways the best time of my life, largely to do with these aspects, I began to reflect also on the more challenging elements of this experience: the ways in which I felt out of place, judged, or spoken over. The ways in which people responded to conflict or negative experiences. The ways in which my working-class friends felt overlooked, sidelined, or fetishised. The ways in which my feminine friends found it difficult to express their femininity. The ways in which every social interaction, whether uplifting or degrading, was laced through with power dynamics, both hidden and overt. In attempting to come to terms with these ambivalent experiences and emotions, I began thinking about writing a PhD on gender dynamics within the squatting movement. I initially planned to focus entirely on social reproductive labour and gender – a topic which makes up a part of chapter 4. However, in thinking further about power and the different elements which can give someone such power I began engaging with Bourdieu and post-Bordieuan scholarship, which highlighted to me the many intersecting attributes which can assign someone authority or ascribe them insignificance. I realised I was as interested in how someone *achieves* authority, or is denied it, as in the result of these discrepancies. I realised I wanted to reflect on those ambivalent experiences mentioned above in detail and attempt to untangle the social dynamics at play in different crucial junctures in someone's squatting experience. Around this time, I began my first interviews, where the class discrepancies within the squatting scene were attributed equal value to the gendered ones by my working-class and female interviewees. This gelled with my initial theoretical readings, which heavily encouraged an intersectional reading of power discrepancies and led me to write on these two key research questions:

- In what ways does social capital *manifest* in squats and what roles do gender and class play in its operation?
- How do varying levels of social capital *affect* squat dynamics and how are they informed by gender and class?

I answered these questions with reference to a broad range of literature and theories, particularly informed by Bordieuan analyses of habitus, field, and capital. These tools allowed me to unpick the different elements which contributed to attaining a high-status position, and to maintaining that

position within the social field I was investigating. This body of theory was supplemented by critical housing and squatting studies which helped to situate my case study geographically, both as an example of squatting research and as an underexplored dimension of research into the home. I also drew heavily on researchers who focused on boundary-drawing, performance, and power within subcultural communities and other spheres, with insights also drawn from organisational studies. My research has been laced through with an undercurrent of anarchist and feminist viewpoints which are the result of my own experiences as a squatter, anarchist, and community organiser in London.

In order to conduct my investigation, I was in the field for 1.5 years, from early 2020 to late 2021, spanning much of the Covid-19 pandemic. I conduced participant observation, primarily as a volunteer with the ASS, and interviewed 19 current and former squatters and their associates. This formed the bulk of my evidence-base with which I developed my analysis. My methodology was informed by feminist and militant-ethnographic traditions, with an emphasis on relational and subjective investigation and prioritising the experiences shared with me by my interview participants. My analysis was split into two parts, each answering one of my two research questions.

Part one: 'Gender and class in the creation of squatting hierarchies' explored the different attributes that gained you high or low status within the squatting movement. In the first chapter, 'Creating power – social positioning', I established the importance of social connections, involvement in activist projects, possessing practical skills, and your language use. I argued that these high-status attributes favoured the masculine, with feminised forms of labour largely undervalued. I also showed how certain language use or involvement in some forms of approved activism were difficult to access if you were of a lower-class background. In the second chapter, 'Performance and power', I looked at aesthetic performance and the importance of possessing an approved aesthetic. I argued that femininity was generally looked down upon compared to a masculine expression, although there was space to play with gendered performance depending on the social capital and gender of the performer. Further, I demonstrated that a working-class aesthetic performance was favourable and provided a great degree of social capital, often in contrast to the class position of the performer.

In part two: 'Gender and class in squat deliberation and decision-making: applications of power' I turned to how these hierarchies affected social dynamics, particularly at key moments of crew decision-making. In 'Running a squat', I laid out the general ways in which decisions were made in squats. I outlined how you could bypass formal processes and use informal means for achieving your aims if you had large amounts of social capital. I then looked at several key areas in which hierarchies affect social dynamics, such as joining a crew, getting kicked out, and the ways in which people deal with gendered violence in the subsequent chapters, 'Joining and leaving a crew' and 'Intimate partner violence'. I focused on the dynamic of the house meeting as the location of the largest discrepancy between articulated values and material reality. While I paid attention to the ways in which decisions

were made behind closed doors and in informal conversations, these were used to demonstrate the limited efficacy of the house meeting model, arguing that it is common knowledge – if unadmitted – that this background infrastructure of social relationships and social capital is crucial to the outcome of the formalised meeting. I argued that despite supposedly egalitarian organising structures, the same imbalances of power affected the outcomes of decisions regardless of whether they were made in formalised environments. I showed the ways in which these power imbalances could have serious gendered and classed ramifications, particularly pointing to how class position was unacknowledged when making decisions which could affect someone's material situation, considered of secondary importance compared to other forms of harm.

Finally, I looked at the ways in which these interpersonal dynamics were affected by the material reality and spatiality of living in squats. I looked at how the nature of squatting as inherently precarious led to home-making rituals which built camaraderie, and the solidarity which could emerge from sharing the experience of traumas such as violent evictions. I then looked at how the physical structure of a squat could affect interpersonal relationships in subtler ways, structuring loyalties and contributing to tensions around scarcity of resources. I demonstrated how community could have inverse effects in terms of exclusionary behaviour and boundary-drawing. I suggested that the social practice of boundary-drawing was affected by the physical space of the squats themselves as well as the broader-scale precarity of housing in London.

10.1. Why does this matter? My contribution to studies of squatting

> It took me years and years and years to recognise how he abused me as a younger person and how he used my lack of power, my lack of confidence, and my vulnerability as a way of fuelling his own entitlement, and his own arrogance and narcissism. It took me years to recognise what was happening there. And so, I wasn't safe. I was physically not safe. I was emotionally not safe. But I was too dissociated and too disconnected from my own boundaries to recognise that. It took me years to realise that that had traumatised me. – Ellis, they/them

Squatted spaces offer a unique opportunity for the development of the self and of friendships in an environment unregulated by state or corporate actors. This can lead to political development in your understanding and experience of community and solidarity, the sharing of resources, and your overall self-development as a political actor. Many scholars have beautifully highlighted and examined the various ways in which squatting is an important, powerful dimension of the political and emotional city, showcasing these very same qualities, as I demonstrated in my theory chapter (see Vasudevan 2017, Martinez 2020, Dadusc 2019 among others). A special issue of *City* released in early 2023, in which I had an article, explored critical geographies of occupation, trespass, and squatting, which highlighted the many ways in which squatting and the reclaiming of urban space is a liberatory act (Bergum & Vasudevan 2023). My contribution to this body of literature is to investigate the

ambivalences in a movement which is so important and can be so enriching. To care about a project is to want to see it thrive and that necessitates an exploration of the aspects which do not work so well, and which could be improved upon. To my knowledge, an in-depth analysis of gender, class, and power in the contemporary London squatting scene has not been conducted before, and I hope that this thesis offers some insight into these very ambivalences. By combining a Bordieuan analysis of power with insights from anarchist literature, feminist literature, and work from organisational studies, I attempted to develop a multifaceted account of the tensions and power disparities which undercut a movement which strives for equality – in housing and in organising. My findings will hopefully enrich current analyses of squatting, in London and beyond, encouraging a scholarship which, while supportive, is also critical of the elements within the movement which need undercutting.

The same tensions and impacts of unequal power dynamics are present in squats as in other organising spaces (Vannucci & Singer 2010, Downes 2017, Grohman 2020). I have not claimed that these kinds of hierarchies and conflicts are unique to squatting – indeed, I have drawn on examples from a range of other kinds of organisational and housing environments to demonstrate that they are not. However, I claim that the fact that they occur in squats matters. Squatting, as a free, autonomous, and experimental housing experience should be supported by the public, encouraged through policy, and proliferated throughout our urban landscapes. But people should go into squatting with their eyes open, and with a view of spotting and shutting down insidious hierarchies before they take over and damage the egalitarian vision attempted, and those attempting it.

Unlike in other organising spaces, the collective you may or may not be pushed out of is also your home. There is a blurring of physical and social boundaries as you cannot get respite from the people you are organising with. Further, unlike rented accommodation there is no legal recourse to mistreatment or unfair eviction.

Boundary-drawing within squats has gradually become more severe, mirroring the same dynamics occurring across the left-wing and anarchist traditions (Schulman 2016, Cortese 2015). Increasingly carceral responses to misdemeanours are a result of the scarcity of resources (the decline in squats and increasingly hostile legal framework) and the psychological need to shore up support. Therefore, there is less tolerance for deviant behaviour, particularly by those with low social capital, all the while there are fewer alternative places for those deemed deviant to go, and fewer community resources to engage in the transformative justice-based responses we may desire.

Once again, this matters because squats are homes. The impact is a material one, and one which will affect those already vulnerable the most. Working-class people with no alternatives will suffer greater from exclusion from squats than middle-class squatters with a safety net. This also matters because

squats are lived examples of living outside the total confines of capital. Of exploring new ways of being in common and celebrating difference and creativity and freedom in a space. For all their flaws they are crucial exceptions to the atomisation and isolation creeping into our lives and need to be preserved, protected, and extended.

I am more interested in contributing to knowledge *for* squatters than about them, as I hope has been made clear throughout this thesis, particularly in my positionality section. While I am not convinced that a straight-forward academic published version of this work would be of use to squatters, particularly given the weighty (though important) theory and methodology chapters, I do believe that it could be reworked into a trade publication of some kind, or even a zine or pamphlet. This could be framed as an account and warning of common pitfalls or signs and symptoms of the emergence of hidden hierarchies, much like the work by Vannucci and Singer (2010) which influenced my analysis of collective processes. By writing this kind of guide or 'how to' directly for squatters, and based on the testimony and experiences of current and former squatters, I believe my thesis could authentically offer added value to the movement, supporting rather than undermining their struggle, and potentially offering guidance on ways out of damaging social relationships. This work would ideally be undertaken with consultation and guidance from the Advisory Service for Squatters to help me understand which aspects of the work could be beneficial to the movement, and in what way.

10.2. Why does it matter? Broader significance and contribution to geography

The analysis I have provided throughout this thesis has implications beyond offering a deeper understanding of the inner workings of hierarchy within the squatting movement in London. I feel confident that several of the scenes I have painted throughout this thesis, particularly those which invoke the subtle ways in which hierarchies and power dynamics are enacted, will be familiar to anyone who has worked collectively, from an institution as prestigious as an academy, to groups as benign as a book club. Gendered and classed differences and the ways they affect your behaviour and the way in which you are treated in turn, needs deeper analysis in every social and spatial setting. Therefore, my work speaks to scholarship from organisational studies (e.g., Diefenbach & Sillince 2011, Rubinstein *et al* 2018). That squatting is an arena where these differences can have major repercussions reflects the fact that they need to be recognised and dealt with compassionately in all environments. While the consequences of undermining someone due to their class or gender may differ in particulars, the necessity of challenging it remains.

My positionality as a former squatter and trusted participant in the movement allowed a depth of data and insight into the contemporary London squatting movement that provides a uniquely affective engagement into current forms of alternative urban politics, with implications for critical urban geographic research into the daily lives of activists, city-dwellers, and all of us who struggle to find a

home in this challenging urban landscape (Chatterton & Pickerill 2010, Bobel 2007, Brown & Pickerill 2009, Downes 2017, Wills 2016). Therefore, my research serves a dual role, acting as both a case study for an insufficiently explored 'subculture' and an examination of the intricacies of homemaking and daily social relationships amidst conditions of uncertainty and fragility.

This study also bears relevance for broader investigations into power dynamics within our unstable housing market. Specifically within housing, many of the issues dealt with within this thesis pertain to other living situations, particularly those not governed by the logic of the nuclear family. House meetings and their inherent tensions, cleaning responsibilities, accepted yet unarticulated norms of manner and behaviour afflict the majority of living situations. Drawing attention to the classed, gendered, and hierarchical nature of some of these norms and processes has relevance to all those working on, or living in, these kinds of housing arrangements. My analysis of dynamics of house meetings and implied rules of engagements had implications for the field of critical geographies of the home (Blunt & Dowling 2006), encouraging a deeper engagement with the handling of conflict and tension within non-nuclear domiciles, through an intersectional lens. Scholarship in this field still has some way to go in matching the rich depth of analysis of the nuclear family with an equally rich body of work on the (increasing in age and number) dynamics of flat shares, rentals, and other co-occupancy living arrangements (Clark *et al* 2017 & 2020 are notable exceptions).

Many collective situations rely on assumed norms of practice and behaviour which override or replace entirely the presence of formal structures, and where subtle hierarchies manifest and are difficult to challenge. By demonstrating how these hierarchies persist even within communities actively striving for egalitarian alternatives, I hope not to undermine attempts for more equitable board meetings or quiz teams but to point to the continuing need to actively challenge these hierarchies when they emerge and to pay attention to the subtle, as well as the egregious, displays of power when faced with them. Only then will we be able to create the truly liberatory social, domestic, and organising communities we need to see.

In the previous section I mentioned how I wanted to produce work *for* squatters. If I were to make a scholarly contribution, I feel it would be better suited to sit within critical geographies of the home rather than within squatting literature. This is because my focus is on how people live together, with squatting used to showcase the amplified tensions which emerge under extreme precarity. As I do not claim that the conclusions I have drawn are unique to squatting and I feel could offer insight into a variety of domestic arrangements and conflicts, I may dismantle this thesis into different papers responding to the different areas I feel could be of value. For example, the dynamic of house meetings or the attempts to handle sexual violence informally are topics which may be of interest to scholars engaged with publications such as *The Radical Housing Journal, Progress in Human Geography, Cultural Geographies,* or *Environment and Planning.* Further, along with the smaller publications I

mentioned in the previous section, a monograph of some kind may be possible, though I would firmly stick with an independent trade outlet rather than an academic publisher as affordability and presence in radical bookshops would be a priority for me. This would require reworking some of my ideas into a more readable style, while retaining the broad strokes of the methodological and theoretical basis for my analysis.

10.3. Recommendations for further study

I have several suggestions for areas of further study. First, this thesis does not deal with racism and the intersections of race with class and gender within the London squatting movement. This is an area of huge importance, and is understudied, particularly regarding the contemporary moment (exceptions include Insansa 2021 and Begum 2023). There have been several steps taken by Black and minoritised squatters in recent years to organise themselves separately from white squatters, and there is the continued presence of racism within mixed squats. Literature in this area would enable squatting experience to speak to debates about racial justice (e.g., Meer 2022) and violence withing housing regimes (e.g., Darling 2022, Hodkinson 2020). These environments and social relations deserve attention paid to them as race is a crucial axis of oppression which I felt unequipped to effectively deal with within the confines of this thesis. This was partly due to the limitations I faced in terms of the number of participants. Due to the pandemic, I was unable to immerse myself as fully in the movement as I would have liked and relied more strongly on connections made through my existing networks. Further, I felt it was inappropriate as a white academic to ask for access to those spaces in which Black squatters had chosen to organise separately, as I reflected on in my methodology chapter, and where I did not feel I had adequate trust or reputation to generate authentic exchanges.

Second, the intersections between the squatting and gypsy, Roma, and traveller communities would be a fruitful area of study, particularly since the passing of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, colloquially referred to as the anti-trespass bill. The long-standing solidarity between these communities attained a renewed energy and urgency in the face of this attack on their way of life. GRT and squatter organisations worked together to attempt to amend or block the passing of the bill, particularly the elements which were a direct attack on itinerant communities. This network of solidarity is still ongoing and the next steps for the coalition and ways in which they can (and do) mutually support each other would be a rich and fascinating research project, building on existing scholarship which examines overlaps between activist communities (e.g., Chatterton & Pickerill 2010, Martinez 2017, Novák & Kurík 2020).

Third, there is a lack of attention paid to power dynamics within non-nuclear living (and working) environments in general. While researching this thesis I looked for examples of tensions and conflicts within student accommodation, flat shares, and roommate situations of all kinds and found very little

on the subject, particularly which dealt with tensions wrought by gendered or classed disparities (excepting Clark *et al* 2017 & 2020). As this is a form of tenure that is increasing rapidly in both number of people residing in it and the age in which people remain within it, this would be a fruitful area of continued investigation.

10.4. Concluding remarks

We're basically a compost heap. It might smell but it's going to be alright. – Casey, they/them

Despite their sometimes-harrowing anecdotes of abuse, bullying, mental illness, and trauma, all my interviewees spoke of their time squatting with affection and with a sense that it is politically important. These human relationships and environments which I have attempted to describe and analyse throughout this thesis are the bedrock of why squatting can be so liberatory and at the same time how it holds itself back. The importance of the home, the community, and finally the city as potentially liberatory sites for the creation of the new world mean that they deserve our focus, and those who are trying to make them better, more free, more equal, require support as well as scrutiny. If we are able to recentre class and gender and their intersections and recognise the ways in which they imbue all social relations, even those theoretically external to capitalism, then squatting can truly be the beautiful, necessary, alternative to the ways in which we are oppressed and alienated in the contemporary city. I believe this is possible.

Postscript – March 2024

What should I do with this work? I am still unsure. During my viva I was encouraged to consider different publishing options, different outlets with which to engage, different places that may find value in my work. And yet I remain unsure. Unsure or mistrustful that the care with which I approached my research would be retained. Unsure that what I would be doing would be anything other than bolstering my own academic profile. Unsure whether sharing this work would cause undue interest or even harm to the community I studied.

I spent a lot of the last four years mulling over the ethics of what I was writing, and I am still undecided. I don't really believe that academic-activist research exists. Or at least, it exists a lot less frequently than work labelled as such would lead us to believe. I do not think that merely writing about a subculture is of value to that subculture. I do not think that delivering a lecture on the housing crisis makes you a housing activist. I think a great deal more honesty needs to happen within the 'activist' wing of academia about why we are doing what we are doing and why we are writing about what we are writing about. And if the answer is ever 'I am doing it *because* I am writing about it', then the label of researcher-activist ought to be rescinded immediately.

This is not to say I don't think it is possible to produce academic work which is of value outside of the academy, of course it is, only that it is rarer than the amount which claims to be of value. A great example, in my eyes, of research which had tangible value is the work of Stuart Hodkinson, who worked directly with communities affected by disgraceful housing policies, leveraging the tools at his disposal, and the relative safety of his institutional position to directly advocate for them in support of their struggles and work with *and for* them throughout their campaigns. Only then did he write about what he had experienced and what he had learned, and in a way that could function as inspiration and guidance for those who wished to help in similar ways (2020). This is an excellent blueprint of how to merge the 'activist' and 'researcher' identities if you wish to claim the 'activist' label at all.

More common, however, is work that somewhat troubles me. Work which exposes the secrets and scandals or overexaggerates the solidarity and power of a group or a movement. Neither being treated as salacious not lauded as heroic does a service to the complexity of organising or working or living together. In fact, I feel discomfort with several 'activist' accounts of social movements I have come across. This is a feeling shared with some of the more politically minded ethnographers I have come across such as Juris and Khasnabish (2013) who recognise the importance of 'actively contributing to movements by situating ourselves as activists and researchers within rather than outside movement spaces' and cautioning against 'uncritically celebrating these movements or … denying the tensions and contradictions of such "embedded" positions' (2013, 370, see also Gordon 2007).

Similarly, I grew increasingly uneasy with the whole concept of ethnography or participant observation, during the course of my research. While I received ethical approval for this, consent from the ASS, and justified it in my methodology, I felt that this consent was in and of itself ethically dubious. If I tell someone that I am doing longitudinal research and then a year later they drunkenly embarrass themselves in front of me because I have not mentioned it since, is it really ethical for me to include that? Should I expect my participants to be constantly aware of my presence as a researcher, particularly since I took care to embed myself and ensure my usefulness during my period of observation? This seems a tall order to ask of someone who rightly has more pressing things on their mind. Of course, the other alternative is to repeatedly remind participants upon every meeting of your presence as a researcher, but I am uncertain of both how often this is put into practice and also how it might in and of itself affect the authenticity of your observations. The complex ethics of longitudinal ethnography has been explored by some researchers who emphasise that consent ought to be an ongoing process rather than a tick-box moment (see Guillemin & Gillam 2004, Holland, Thomson and Henderson 2006, Rooney 2015) and I would like to see a greater degree of this ethical understanding applied to ethnographies of 'activist movements'.

When writing my thesis, I did attempt to be respectful and ethical in regard to the community I was studying as far as possible, and have gone further than some scholars, I think, in this way. While I am not convinced this necessarily merits my work receiving the stamp of 'useful' or 'activist', I do think some of the ethical considerations I took could be more widely applied.

For example, despite justifying it in my methodology chapter, I refrained from including any photographs taken during my fieldwork. While this might have added some extra 'colour' for the reader, I do not think that warrants their inclusion. I think there needs to be a very good reason for including a photograph of someone's bedroom in any public document, and my wonderful interviewees were so eloquent in their descriptions, they rendered the need for photographic reinforcement redundant.

Due to my misgivings around longitudinal ethnography and informed consent, I included only one account from my field notes in my thesis, which I ran past the ASS before submission for their approval. This is why the majority of my analysis is derived from my interviews where the time between the obtaining of consent and the gathering of data was minimised.

My other ethical concerns derived from care for my interviewees specifically. Several times while writing this thesis the idea was floated that I include some kind of map of relationships or backstories or increased level of detail about the different squats which I spoke about. While I agree this might have added clarity to some of my descriptions or again add a little colour to some of the analysis, it would also have increased the risk of being identified for my participants. The movement is not large,

and the networks of relationships between squats and individuals are well known. I am still not wholly convinced I have fully protected my participants' identities, but I can confidently say I have not made any steps which I felt would certainly undermine this aim.

Likewise, I wrote, and then deleted, a long section about the kudos which came with the association with the name of certain squats or crews. My interviewees would talk with pride and an expectation of my recognition about this social centre or that crew name. I found it interesting and worthy of analysis, for example, that certain crew names would endure long after they had left the original building from which they were named. However, I felt I could not include this section as it relied heavily on the inclusion of the names of different crews and buildings to the extent that I felt it would be too identifiable for my interviewees.

I hope that some of these thoughts, misgivings, and decisions may be of use to other people studying vulnerable (or really, any) communities and individuals, not only those engaged in informal living arrangements. I may decide to publish some kind of methodological paper where I express these concerns and hesitancies more fully, particularly in conversation with those who are also interested in researching subcultures, political communities, or otherwise vulnerable groups. And particularly those who strive to produce work which matters and will make a difference. Academia *can* make a difference, but it will take continual effort to authentically effect change for those who so generously share their knowledge and experiences with us. I hope soon to figure out how to repay that favour.

11. Bibliography

Abramovich, I., A. (2014). 'Young, Queer and Trans, Homeless, and Besieged: A Critical Action Research Study of How Policy and Culture Create Oppressive Conditions for LGBTQ Youth in Toronto's Shelter System.' PhD diss.

Albert Kennedy Trust. (2015). *LGBT Youth Homelessness: A UK National Scoping of Cause, Prevalence and Outcome,* The Albert Kennedy Trust. Retrieved April 15, 2023, from https://www.akt.org.uk/news/world-homeless-day-2018

Allen, C. 'Bourdieu's habitus, social class and the spatial worlds of visually impaired children.' *Urban Studies* 41.3 (2004): 487-506.

Anonymous Refused. (2014, October 3). *For Your Safety and Security*. Anonymous Refused Tumblr. Retrieved March 13, 2023, from http://anonymousrefused.tumblr.com/post/99047385737/for-your-safety-and-security

Archer, J. (2005). Social Theory of Space: Architecture and the Production of Self, Culture, and Society. *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 64(4), 430–433.

Archer, L., Hollingworth, S., & Halsall, A. (2007). `University's not for Me — I'm a Nike Person': Urban, Working-Class Young People's Negotiations of `Style', Identity and Educational Engagement. *Sociology, 41(2), 219–237.*

Atabinen, İ., & Tekdemi, R, G. (2020). Identity positionings in squatters' framings of don quijote social centre. *Psikoloji Çalışmala*rı, 40(2), 625-62

Ballesteros-Quilez, J., Rivera-Vargas, P., & Jacovkis, J. (2022). Counter hegemony, popular education, and resistances: A systematic literature review on the squatters' movement. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*, 1030379.

Barker, M., J. & Iantaffi, A. (2020). *Life isn't binary: on being both, beyond, and in-between.* Jessica Kingsley publishers.

Barker, A. J., & Pickerill, J. (2012). Radicalizing relationships to and through shared geographies: Why anarchists need to understand indigenous connections to land and place. *Antipode*, *44*(5), 1705-1725.

Baxter, D., & Murphy, L. (2018). 'The case for reforming private renting: interim report', *Institute for Public Policy Research*

Baxter, R., & Brickell, K. (2014). For Home UnMaking, *Home Cultures*, 11:2, 133-143

Begum, S. (2023). *From Sylhet to Spitalfields From Sylhet to Spitalfields Bengali Squatters in 1970s East London.* Lawrence Wishart.

Behrooz, A. (2022, December 15). *Post-lockdown, I've rediscovered domestic intimacy in unexpected ways.* Gal-Dem. https://gal-dem.com/post-lockdown-domestic-intimacy/

Bell, D., Binnie, J., Cream, J., & Valentine, G. (1994). All hyped up and no place to go. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 1(1), 31–47.

Burgum, S., & Vasudevan, A. (2023). Critical geographies of occupation, squatting, and trespass. *City*.

Bhattacharya, T. (Ed.). (2017). *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*. Pluto Press.

Blumen, O., Fenster, T., & Misgav, C. (2013). The body within home and domesticity: Gendered diversity. *Hagar: Studies in Culture, Polities and Identities*, *11*(1), 6-19.

Blunt, A., & Dowling, R. (2006). *Home*. Routledge.

Bobel, C. (2007). ''I'm not an activist, though I've done a lot of it': Doing Activism, Being Activist and the 'Perfect Standard' in a Contemporary Movement'. *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest*, 6:2, 147-159

Bourdieu, P. (1989). Social space and symbolic power. *Sociological theory*, *7*(1), 14-25.

Bourdieu, P. (2011). The forms of capital. (1986). *Cultural theory: An anthology*, *1*, 81-93.

Bourdieu, P. (2010). *Distinction*. Routledge. (original work published 1984)

Bowie, D. (2015). Responses to the Housing Crisis in the UK. In *Conference Presentation, RC21 International Conference on 'The Ideal City: Between Myth and Reality', Urbino*.

Brickell, K. (2011). 'Mapping' and 'doing' critical geographies of home. *Progress in Human Geography, 36(2), 225–244.*

Brickell, K. (2014). 'The whole world is watching': Intimate geopolitics of forced eviction and women's activism in Cambodia. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *104*(6), 1256-1272.

Brickell, K., & Maddrell, A. (2016). Gendered violences. *Dialogues in Human Geography, 6*(2), 206–208.

Brickell, K., Arrigoitia, M. F., & Vasudevan, A. (2017). *Geographies of forced eviction: Dispossession, violence, resistance*. Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Bridge, G. (2001). Bourdieu, rational action and the time-space strategy of gentrification. Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 26(2), 205–216.

Brown, G. (2007). Mutinous Eruptions: Autonomous Spaces of Radical Queer Activism. *Environment and Planning*, 39(11), 2685–2698. doi:10.1068/a38385

Brown, G., & Pickerill, J. (2009). Space for emotion in the spaces of activism. Emotion, space and society, 2(1), 24-35.

Bretherton, J. (2017). 'Reconsidering gender in homelessness.' *European Journal of Homelessness _ Volume* 11, no. 1

Buchholz, K. (2021, August 23). *The most surveilled cities in the world*. Statistica. Retrieved, 28 June 2023 from https://www.statista.com/chart/19256/the-most-surveilled-cities-in-the-world/

Butler, J. (1993). 'Critically Queer'. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies1*.

Caciagli, C. (2021). Generating solidarity in diversity: the case of Housing Struggles in Rome. *Critical Sociology*, *47*(2), 249-263.

Carr, J. L. (2013). The SlutWalk movement: A study in transnational feminist activism.

Carsten, J. and S. Hugh-Jones. (1995). 'Introduction.' *About the House: Lévi-Strauss and Beyond*, 1–46. Cambridge University Press.

Casellas, A., & Sala, E. (2017). Home eviction, grassroots organisations and citizen empowerment in Spain. *Geographies of forced eviction: dispossession, violence, resistance*, 167-190.

Casey, C. (1999). 'Come, join our family': Discipline and integration in corporate organizational culture. *Human relations*, *52*, 155-178.

Cattaneo, C., and Martínez, M. A. (2014). *The squatters' movement in Europe: Commons and autonomy as alternatives to capitalism*. London: Pluto Press. doi: 10.2307/j.ctt183p1wf

Chatterton, P. (2006). 'Give up activism' and change the world in unknown ways: Or, learning to walk with others on uncommon ground. *Antipode*, *38*(2), 259-281.

Chatterton, P., & Pickerill, J. (2010). Everyday activism and transitions towards post-capitalist worlds. *Transactions of the institute of British Geographers*, *35*(4), 475-490.

Chen C.-I., Dulani J., & Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. (2011). *The revolution starts at home : confronting intimate violence within activist communities* (1st ed.). South End Press.

Cherry, B., & Mellins, M. (2011). Negotiating the Punk in Steampunk: Subculture, Fashion & Performative Identity. *Punk & Post Punk*, 1(1), 5–25.

Cho, S., Crenshaw, K. W., & McCall, L. (2013). Toward a field of intersectionality studies: Theory, applications, and praxis. *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*, *38*(4), 785-810.

Clark, V., Tuffin, K., Frewin, K., & Bowker, N. (2017). Shared housing among young adults: Avoiding complications in domestic relationships. *Journal of youth studies,* 20(9), 1191-1207.

Clark, V., Tuffin, K., & Bowker, N. (2020). Managing Conflict in Shared Housing for Young Adults. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology (Online)*, 49(1), 4-13.

Clegg, S., Pina e Cunha, M., Rego, A., & Story, J. (2014). Powers of Romance. *Journal of Management Inquiry,* 24(2), 131–148.

Cloke, P. (2002). Deliver us from evil? Prospects for living ethically and acting politically in human geography. *Progress in human geography* 26, no. 5 (2002): 587-604.

Clough, M. (2017). *Shame, the Church and the Regulation of Female Sexuality* (Vol. 20). Taylor & Francis.

Coleman, L. M., & Bassi, S. A. (2011). Deconstructing Militant Manhood. *International Feminist Journal of Politics,* 13(2), 204–224.

Cook. M. (2013). 'Gay Times': Identity, Locality, Memory, and the Brixton Squats in 1970's London. *20th Century British History* 24 (1): 84-109

Corrigall-Brown, C. (2012). From the Balconies to the Barricades, and Back? Trajectories of Participation in Contentious Politics. *Journal of Civil Society,* 8(1), 17–38.

Cortese, D. K. (2015). I'm a 'good' activist, you're a 'bad' activist, and everything I do is activism: parsing the different types of 'activist' identities in LBGTQ organizing. *Interface*, 7(1), 215-246.

Craddock, E. (2019) .'Doing 'enough' of the 'right' thing: the gendered dimension of the 'ideal activist' identity and its negative emotional consequences'. *Social Movement Studies*, 18:2, 137-153

Cresswell, T. (2002). Bourdieu's geographies: in memorium. *Environment and planning d: society and space*, *20*(4), 379-382.

Cronin, C. (1996). Bourdieu and Foucault on power and modernity. *Philosophy & soc*

Cuomo, D., & Massaro, V. A. (2016). Boundary-making in feminist research: New methodologies for 'intimate insiders'. *Gender, Place & Culture*, *23*(1), 94-106.

Cunha, M. P. E., Simpson, A. V., Clegg, S. R., & Rego, A. (2019). Speak! Paradoxical effects of a managerial culture of 'speaking up'. *British Journal of Management*, *30*(4), 829-846.

Dadusc, D., and Dee, E.T.C. (2014). The criminalisation of squatting: Discourses, moral panics and resistances in the Netherlands and England and Wales. *Moral Rhetoric and the Criminalisation of Squatting*, 108-131. Routledge.

Dadusc, D., Grazioli, M., & Martínez, M. (2019). Introduction: Citizenship as Inhabitance? Migrant Housing Squats versus Institutional Accommodation. *Citizenship Studies* 23 (6): 521–39.

Dadusc, D. (2019). Enclosing autonomy: The politics of tolerance and criminalisation of the Amsterdam squatting movement. *City* 23, no. 2 (2019): 170-188.

Darling, J. (2022) *Systems of Suffering. Dispersal and Denial of Asylum*. Polity Press.

Das, V., Ellen, J. M., & Leonard, L. (2008). On the Modalities of the Domestic. *Home Cultures*, 5(3), 349–371.

Datta, A. (2016). *The illegal city: Space, law and gender in a Delhi squatter settlement*. Routledge.

Davidson, M., & Wyly, E. (2012). Class-ifying London: Questioning social division and space claims in the post-industrial metropolis. *City*, *16*(4), 395-421.

Davies, e. (February 23, 2023). *Radical Domesticity.* Tribune. Retrieved April 14, 2023, from h[ttps://tribunemag.co.uk/2023/02/radical-domesticity](https://tribunemag.co.uk/2023/02/radical-domesticity)

De La Cruz, M., & Gomez, C. (2011). Ending oppression. Building solidarity. Creating community solutions. *The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence in Activist Communities*.

Diefenbach, T., & Sillince, J. A. (2011). Formal and informal hierarchy in different types of organization. *Organization studies,* 32(11), 1515-1537.

Donaghey, J., Boisseau, W., Kaltefleiter, C., eds. (2023). *'DIY or Die!': Anarchism, Punk, and the Do-It-Together ethic in Cultural Production and Autonomous Spaces.* Active Distribution.

Douglas, M. (1991). The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space. *Social Research*, *58*(1), 287–307.

Downes, J. (2012). The Expansion of Punk Rock: Riot Grrrl Challenges to Gender Power Relations in British Indie Music Subcultures. *Women's Studies, 41(2), 204–237.*

Downes, J. (2017). 'It's Not the Abuse That Kills You, It's the Silence': The silencing of sexual violence activism in social justice movements in the UK Left. *Justice, Power and Resistance*, *1*(2), 35-58.

Drury, I. (2021, July 16). *How Working-class Culture Has Become Monetised.* Medium. Retrieved September 30, 2022, from https://medium.com/@isabelle.s.drury/how-the-working-class-aesthetic-has-become-monetised-121ab7c8c900

Duggan, L. (2015, January 29). *Why Fashion Needs To Quit It With 'Homeless Chic.'* Refinery29. Retrieved September 30, 2022, from https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2015/01/81513/homeless-chic

Eschle, C. (2018). Troubling stories of the end of occupy: Feminist narratives of betrayal at occupy Glasgow. *Social Movement Studies* 17, no. 5: 524-540.

European Action Coalition. (2019, September 13). *Why we love squats and why we will defend them*. European Action Coalition. Retrieved April 14, 2023 from https://housingnotprofit.org/why-we-love-squats-and-why-we-will-defend-them/#1

Federici, S., & Linebaugh, P. *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*. PM Press, 2018.

Ferreri, M. (2023). Radical difference in 'transitional commoning': hidden histories of London's squats to co-ops. *City*, 1-17.

Finchett-Maddock, L. (2014). Squatting in London: squatters' rights and legal movement(s). *The City is Ours.* PM Press, Oakland, 207-231.

Fisher, M. (2013, November 24). *Exiting the Vampire Castle.* Open Democracy. Retrieved April 15, 2023, from https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/exiting-vampire-castle/

Flemmen, M., Jarness, V., & Rosenlund, L. (2018). Social space and cultural class divisions: The forms of capital and contemporary lifestyle differentiation. *The British journal of sociology*, *69*(1), 124-153.

Forstie, C. (2020). Disappearing dykes? Post-lesbian discourse and shifting identities and communities. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *67*(12), 1760-1778.

Foster, D. (2019, September 5). *Privileged kids need to stop fetishising working-class culture*. Huck Magazine. Retrieved September 30, 2022, from https://www.huckmag.com/perspectives/opinion-perspectives/hetty-douglas-working-class-dawn-foster/

Fotaki, M. (2013). No Woman is Like a Man (in Academia): The Masculine Symbolic Order and the Unwanted Female Body. *Organization Studies*, 34(9), 1251–1275. doi:10.1177/0170840613483658

France, A., Bottrell, D., & Haddon, E. (2013). Managing everyday life: the conceptualisation and value of cultural capital in navigating everyday life for working-class youth. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 16(5), 597–611.

Fraser, C. (2015). From ladies first to asking for It: Benevolent sexism in the maintenance of rape culture. *Calif. L. Rev.*, *103*, 141.

Freeman, J. (1972) 'The tyranny of structurelessness.' *Berkeley Journal of Sociology,* 151-164.

Friedman, S., O'Brien, D., & McDonald, I. (2021). Deflecting privilege: Class identity and the intergenerational self. *Sociology*, *55*(4), 716-733.

Gamson, J. (1995). Must Identity Movements Self-Destruct? A Queer Dilemma. *Social Problems,* 42(3), 390–407.

García-Lamarca, M. (2017). From Occupying Plazas to Recuperating Housing: Insurgent Practices in Spain. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 41 (1): 37–53.

Gee, J, P. (2014). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. Routledge.

Gillespie, T., Hardy, K., & Watt, P. (2018). Austerity urbanism and Olympic counter-legacies: Gendering, defending and expanding the urban commons in East London. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, *36*(5), 812-830.

Giménez, M, E. (2019). *Marx, Women, and Capitalist Social Reproduction: Marxist Feminist Essays*. Haymarket Press.

Gordon, U. (2007). Practising Anarchist Theory: Towards a participatory political philosophy. *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations/Collective Theorization*, 276-287.

Grazioli, M. (2017). From Citizens to Citadins? Rethinking Right to the City inside Housing Squats in Rome, Italy. *Citizenship Studies* 21 (4): 393–408.

Gregson, N., & Rose, G. (2000). Taking Butler Elsewhere: Performativities, Spatialities and Subjectivities. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* 18(4), 433–452. doi:10.1068/d232

Greig, J. (2022, August 20). *The future of gay sex*. Dazed Digital. Retrieved September 1, 2022 from https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/56794/1/the-future-of-gay-sex

Greig, j. (2022, February 7). *Love bombing, gaslighting, and the problem with pathologising dating talk.* Dazed Digital. Retrieved April 14, 2022, from: https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/55392/1/love-bombing-gaslighting-trauma-pathological-dating-language

Grohmann, S. (2020). *The ethics of space: Homelessness and squatting in urban England*. Hau books.

Grzyb, A. (2011). 'Homeless Chic' as Domestic Poverty Tourism: Street Retreats, Urban Plunges, and North American Class Boundaries. *Expositions*, *5*(1), 55-61.

Guillemin M, Gillam L (2004) Ethics, reflexivity, and 'ethically important moments' in research. *Qualitative Inquiry* 10(2): 261–280.

Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist studies* 14, no. 3, 575-599.
Harding, S, G., (1987). ed. *Feminism and methodology: Social science issues*. Indiana University Press,

Harding, S., & Norberg, K. (2005). New feminist approaches to social science methodologies: An introduction. *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society* 30, no. 4, 2009-2015.

Hardwig, J. (1997). Privacy, Self-knowledge, and the Commune: Toward an Epistemology of the Family. *Feminist reflections on the family.* Routledge.

Heath, S. (2004). Peer-Shared Households, Quasi-Communes and Neo-Tribes. *Current Sociology, 52(2), 161–179.*

Hebdige, D. (2012). *Subculture: The meaning of style*. Routledge.

Hochschild, A. & Machung, A. (2012). *The second shift: Working families and the revolution at home*. Penguin. (Original work published 1989)

Hodkinson, S. (2020). *Safe as houses: Private greed, political negligence and housing policy after Grenfell*. Manchester University Press.

Hodkinson, S. (2012). The new urban enclosures. *City*, *16*(5), 500-518.

Holford, N. (2012). *Making classed sexualities: Investigating gender, power and violence in middle-class teenagers' relationship cultures.* Doctoral dissertation, Cardiff University.

Holl, M., Van Den Dries, L., & Wolf, J. R. (2016). Interventions to prevent tenant evictions: a systematic review. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, *24*(5), 532-546.

Holland J, Thomson R, Henderson S (2006) *Qualitative Longitudinal Research: A Discussion Paper*. Families & Social Capital ESRC Research Group Working Paper No. 21, London South Bank University.

Hollingworth, S., & Williams, K. (2009). Constructions of the working-class 'Other' among urban, white, middle-class youth: 'chavs', subculture and the valuing of education. *Journal of Youth Studies, 12(5), 467–482.*

Holt, L. (2008). Embodied social capital and geographic perspectives: performing the habitus. *Progress in Human Geography, 32(2),* 227–246.

Hugs, R. (2015, December 7). *No, We Won't Calm Down–Tone Policing Is Just Another Way to Protect Privilege.* Everyday Feminism. Retrieved November 21, 2019, from: https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/12/tone-policing-and-privilege/

Hunter, D. (2020). *Tracksuits, Traumas and Class Traitors*. London: Lumpen.

Insansa, L. (2021, April 12). *Our house: why protecting the right to squat is a defence of radical Black history*. Gal-Dem. Retrieved January 15, 2023, from https://gal-dem.com/black-radical-squatters-history/

Ishkanian, A., & Peña Saavedra, A. (2019). The politics and practices of intersectional prefiguration in social movements: The case of Sisters Uncut. *The Sociological Review*, *67*(5), 985-1001.

Jasper, J.M., (1998). The emotions of protest: affective and reactive emotions in and around social movements. *Sociological Forum 13 (*3), 397–424.

Jenkins, K. & Duff, K. (2021, June 1). *More policing won't stop gendered violence.* Verso. Retrieved November 4, 2022 from https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/5094-more-policing-won-t-stop-gendered-violence

Johnston, L. (2017). Gender and sexuality III. P*rogress in Human Geograph*y, 1-9

Juris, J. (2007). Practicing militant ethnography. *Constituent imagination: Militant investigations, collective theorization,* 164-76.

Juris, J. S. (2013). *Insurgent encounters: Transnational activism, ethnography, and the political*. Duke University Press.

Juris, J. S., & Khasnabish, A. (2013). Introduction. Ethnography and activism within networked spaces of transnational encounter. In *Insurgent encounters* (pp. 1-36). Duke University Press.

Kadir, N. (2016). *The autonomous life? Paradoxes of hierarchy and authority in the squatters movement in Amsterdam*. Manchester University Press.

Kaika, M. (2004). Interrogating the geographies of the familiar: domesticating nature and constructing the autonomy of the modern home. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *28*(2), 265-286.

Kaiser, K. (2009). Protecting respondent confidentiality in qualitative research. *Qualitative health research*, *19*(11), 1632-1641.

Karaliotas, L., & Kapsali, M. (2021). Equals in solidarity: Orfanotrofio's housing squat as a site for political subjectification across differences amid the "Greek crisis". *Antipode*, *53*(2), 399-421.

Kennelly, J. (2014). 'It's this pain in my heart that won't let me stop': Gendered affect, webs of relations, and young women's activism. *Feminist Theory,* 15(3), 241-260.

Kwon, W., Clarke, I., & Wodak, R. (2009). Organizational decision-making, discourse, and power: integrating across contexts and scales. *Discourse & Communication*, 3(3), 273–302.

Lancione, M. (2017). Revitalising the uncanny: Challenging inertia in the struggle against forced evictions. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, *35*(6), 1012-1032.

Lancione, M. (2019). Radical housing: on the politics of dwelling as difference. *International Journal of Housing Policy, 1–17.*

Lancione, M. (2019). Caring for the endurance of a collective struggle. *Dialogues in Human Geography*, *9*(2), 216-219.

Laville, S. (2014, August 3). Domestic violence refuge provision at crisis point, warns charities, *The Guardian.* Retrieved September 16, 2004, from https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/aug/03/domestic-violence-refuge-crisis-women-closure-safe-houses

Lawler, S. (2004). Rules of Engagement: Habitus, Power and Resistance. *The Sociological Review*, 52(2_suppl), 110–128.

Lawler, S. (2005). Disgusted subjects: The making of middle-class identities. *The sociological review*, *53*(3), 429-446.

Lila. (2016, March 16). *The pace of queer time*. Autostraddle. Retrieved May 12, 2020 from https://www.autostraddle.com/the-pace-of-queer-time-329459/

Luker, E. (2021, April 26). *Unpoliced and unwashed.* Lugubriations. Retrieved April 15, 2023, from https://lugubriations.substack.com/p/ed-luker-weird

Maffesoli, M. (1996) *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*. London: Sage.

Maiguashca, B., Dean, J., & Keith, D. (2016). Pulling together in a crisis? Anarchism, feminism and the limits of left-wing convergence in austerity Britain. *Capital & Class,* 40(1), 37–57.

March, L. (2020). Queer and trans* geographies of liminality: A literature review. *Progress in Human Geography*, 45(3), 455–471.

Martínez, M. (2011). "The struggle for social autonomy: What have we learnt about urban politics from squatting in Europe?," in Proceeding of the international RC21 conference 'the struggle to belong. Dealing with diversity in 21st century urban settings, Vol. 7, Amsterdam.

Martínez, M. (2016). "Beyond solidarity: Migrants and squatters in Madrid," in *Migration, squatting and radical autonomy, eds* P. Mudu and S. Chattopadhyay (London: Routledge), 189–206. doi: 10.4324/9781315673301-16

Martínez, M. A. (2020). *Squatters in the capitalist city: Housing, justice, and urban politics*. Taylor & Francis.

Martinez Lopez, M. A., & Fernandez, E, L. (2012). Autonomous activist-research: The case of the squatters' movement in Madrid. *Revista Internacional de Sociologia* 70, 165-184.

Martínez, M., & Polanska, D. (2020). Squatting and Urban Commons: Creating Alternatives to Neoliberalism. *PArticipation and COnflic*t 3, no. 13. 1244-1251.

McClenaghan, M, Boutoud, C, Blount, T, & Maher, C. (2019, October 4). Locked out: how Britain keeps people homeless, *Bureau of Investigative Journalism.* Retrieved October 4, 2019, from https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2019-10-04/locked-out-how-britain-keeps-people-homeless

McDowell, L. (1999). *Gender, identity and place: Understanding feminist geographies*. U of Minnesota Press.

McKee, K., Moore, T., Soaita, A., & Crawford, J. (2017). 'Generation rent' and the fallacy of choice. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *41*(2), 318-333.

McNay, L. (2004). Agency and Experience: Gender as a Lived Relation. *The Sociological Review,* 52(2_suppl), 175–190.

Meer, N. (2022) *The Cruel Optimism of Racial Justice*. Policy Press

Miller, M. (2023). "We kind of created our own scene": a geography of the Brixton Rebel Dykes. *City*, 1-15.

Miller, D. L. (2014). Symbolic Capital and Gender: Evidence from Two Cultural Fields. *Cultural Sociology*, 8(4), 462–482.

Milligan, R. T. (2016). The Politics of the Crowbar: Squatting in London, 1968-1977. *Anarchist Studies*, *24*(2).

Milligan, R. T. (2023). Cracking buildings, cracking capitalism: antagonism, affect, and the importance of squatting for housing justice. *City*, *27:3-4, 413-432,* 1-20.

Minton, A. (2017). *Big capital: Who is London for?*. Penguin UK.

Moore, J. (2000). Placing home in context. *Journal of environmental psychology*, *20*(3), 207-217.

Morris, C., D. (2010, July 15). *Why Misogynists Make Great Informants: How Gender Violence on the Left Enables State Violence in Radical Movements*. Incite. Retrieved December 8, 2022 from https://incite-national.org/2010/07/15/why-misogynists-make-great-informants-how-gender-violence-on-the-left-enables-state-violence-in-radical-movements/

Morris, A. D., & Staggenborg, S. (2004). Leadership in social movements. *The Blackwell companion to social movements,* 171-196.

Moskowitz, G. B., Okten, I. O., & Schneid, E. The updating of first impressions. *The Handbook of Impression Formation*, 348-392.

Mujukian, S. (2016, September 10). *The Queer Poor Aesthetic*. Hyphen Mag. Retrieved September 30, 2022, from http://www.thehyephenmag.com/the-queer-poor-aesthetic

Mutch, C. (2004). Curriculum construction as a social field: Mapping the process of the development of the New Zealand social studies curriculum. *Curriculum Perspectives,* 24(3), 22–33.

Naples, N. (2002). Materialist Feminist Discourse Analysis and Social Movement Research: Mapping the Changing Context for 'Community Control.'. *Social movements: Identity, culture, and the state*, 226-46.

Nor, N. F. M., & Aziz, J. (2010). Discourse Analysis of Decision Making Episodes in Meetings: Politeness theory and Critical Discourse Analysis. 3L: *Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studie*s, 16(2).

Novak, A. (2014). Anonymity, confidentiality, privacy, and identity: The ties that bind and break in communication research. *Review of communication*, *14*(1), 36-48.

Novák, A. (2020). Every city needs a Klinika: The struggle for autonomy in the post-political city. *Soc. Mov. Stud.* 20, 1–16.

Novák, A., &Kurík, B. (2020). Rethinking radical activism: Heterogeneity and dynamics of political squatting in Prague after 1989. *J. Urban Aff.* 42, 203–221.

Nowicki, M. (2017). Domicide and the coalition: Austerity, citizenship and moralities of forced eviction in inner London. *Geographies of forced eviction: Dispossession, violence, resistance*, Palgrave Macmillan. 121-143.

Oakley, A. (2018). *The sociology of housework*. Policy Press. (original work published 1974)

Occupato, B., Occupato, E. P., & Landstreicher, W. (1995). *Against the Legalisation of Occupied Spaces.* The Anarchist Library. Retrieved October 13, 2022, from: https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/el-paso-occupato-barocchio-occupato-against-the-legalization-of-occupied-spaces.

Office for National Statistics. (2022). *Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales: year ending March 2022.* *https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusevictimcharacteristicsenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2022*

Office for National Statistics. (2022). *Wealth & Assets survey.*
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/debt/methodo
logies/wealthandassetssurveyqmi

Office for National Statistics. (2023). *Housing in England and Wales: 2021 compared with 2011.*
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/articles/housinginenglandandwales/
2021comparedwith2011

Operaista, G. (2012). Radical queers and class struggle: A match to be made. *Queering Anarchism:*
Addressing and undressing power and desire, 115-127.

Owens, K., & Green, C. (2020). Performing millennial housing precarity: how (not) to live together.
Studies in Theatre and Performance, 40(1), 44–53.

Papp, L. J., Hagerman, C., Gnoleba, M. A., Erchull, M. J., Liss, M., Miles-McLean, H., & Robertson,
C. M. (2015). Exploring perceptions of slut-shaming on Facebook: Evidence for a reverse sexual
double standard. *Gender Issues,* 32(1), 57-76.

Papp, L. J., Erchull, M. J., Liss, M., Waaland-Kreutzer, L., & Godfrey, H. (2017). Slut-shaming on
Facebook: Do social class or clothing affect perceived acceptability?. *Gender Issues,* 34(3), 240-257.

Papadopoulos, D., & Tsianos, V., S. (2013). After Citizenship: Autonomy of Migration,
Organisational Ontology and Mobile Commons. *Citizenship Studies* 17 (2): 178–96.

Paton, K., & Cooper, V. (2017). Domicide, eviction and repossession. *The Violence of Austerity.* Pluto
Press, 164–170.

Perec, G. (1997). *Species of spaces and other pieces*. Penguin.

Phillips, R. (2014). Abjection. *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1(1-2), 19-21.

Pickerill, J., & Chatterton, P. (2006). Notes towards autonomous geographies: creation, resistance and
self-management as survival tactics. *Progress in human geography,* 30(6), 730-746.

Polanska, D. V. (2016). Organizing Social and Spatial Boundaries: Squatting's Material Practices and
Social Relationships. *Human Geography*, *9*(1), 30-45.

Polanska, D. (2017). Reclaiming inclusive politics: Squatting in Sweden 1968-2016. *Trespass: a*
journal about squatting 1, no. 1. 36-72.

Polanska, D. V., & Weldon, T. (2020). In search of Urban commons through squatting: The role of
knowledge sharing in the creation and organization of everyday utopian spaces in Sweden. *Partecip. e*
Conflitto 13, 1355–1372.

Portwood-Stacer, L. (2010). Constructing anarchist sexuality: Queer identity, culture, and politics in
the anarchist movement. *Sexualities,* 13(4), 479–493. doi:10.1177/1363460710370653

Raimondi, V. (2019). For 'common struggles of migrants and locals'. Migrant activism and squatting
in Athens. *Citizsh. Stud. 23,* 559–576. doi: 10.1080/ 13621025.2019.1634373

Reay, D. (2004). Gendering Bourdieu's Concepts of Capitals? Emotional Capital, Women and Social
Class. *The Sociological Review*, 52(2_suppl), 57–74.

Reeve, K. (2009). *The UK Squatters' Movement, 1968-1980*, Unpublished PhD thesis.

Reis, S. (2019). A home of her own: women and housing, *Women's Budget Group.*

Reger, J. (2004). Organizational ''emotion work'' through consciousness-raising: an analysis of a
feminist organization. *Qualitative Sociology 27* (7), 205–222.

Riach, K., & Wilson, F. (2007). Don't screw the crew: Exploring the rules of engagement in organizational romance. *British Journal of Management, 18(1),* 79-92.

Rooney, V. M. (2015). Consent in longitudinal intimacy research: adjusting formal procedure as a means of enhancing reflexivity in ethically important decisions. *Qualitative Research*, *15*(1), 71-84.

Rouhani, F. (2012). Lessons from queertopia. *Queering anarchism.* AK Press

Rubinstein, R. A., Sanchez, S. N., & Lane, S. D. (2018). Coercing consensus?: Notes on power and the hegemony of collaboration. In *Conflict and Collaboration* (pp. 104-119). Routledge.

Sakamoto, I., Chin, M., Chapra, A., & Ricciardi, J. (2009). A 'normative' homeless woman? Marginalisation, emotional injury and social support of transwomen experiencing homelessness. *Gay & Lesbian Issues & Psychology Review* 5, no. 1.

Samudzi, Z. (2020, June 10). *Stealing away in America (interview with Vicky Osterweil).* Jewish Currents. Retrieved April 15, 2023, from https://jewishcurrents.org/stealing-away-in-america

Satchell, L., Jaeger, B., Jones, A., López, B., & Schild, C. (2023). Beyond Reliability in First Impressions Research: Considering Validity and the Need to "Mix It Up With Folks". *Social Psychological Bulletin, 18, 1-21.*

Saunders, B., Kitzinger, J., & Kitzinger, C. (2015). Anonymising interview data: Challenges and compromise in practice. *Qualitative research*, *15*(5), 616-632.

Savage, M. (2012). The Lost Urban Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. *The New Blackwell Companion to the City*, 511–520.

Savage, M., Savage, M., Barlow, J., & Dickens, P. (1995). *Property, bureaucracy and culture: Middle-class formation in contemporary Britain*. Psychology Press.

Schulman, S. (2016). *Conflict is not abuse: Overstating harm, community responsibility, and the duty of repair*. arsenal pulp press.

Sears, A. (2017). Body politics: The social reproduction of sexualities. *Social reproduction theory: Remapping class, recentering oppression*, 171-191.

Silva, E. B. (2005). Gender, home and family in cultural capital theory. *The British journal of sociology*, *56*(1), 83-103.

Skeggs, B. (2004) *Class, Self, Culture.* London: Routledge.

Skeggs, B. (2004). Context and Background: Pierre Bourdieu's Analysis of Class, Gender and Sexuality. *The Sociological Review,* 52(2_suppl), 19–33.

Skeggs, B. (2005). The Making of Class and Gender through Visualizing Moral Subject Formation. *Sociology*, 39(5), 965–982.

Skeggs, B. (2011). Imagining personhood differently: Person value and autonomist working-class value practices. *The Sociological Review*, *59*(3), 496-513.

Smilgius, V. (2022, February 24). *'Poor core' is only an aesthetic for those who have the choice*. The Berkeley Beacon. Retrieved September 30, 2022, from https://berkeleybeacon.com/poor-core-is-only-an-aesthetic-for-those-who-have-the-choice/

Soresina, M. (2020). The housing struggle in Milan in the 1970s: Influences and particularities. J. Urban Hist. 46, 1386–1406. doi: 10.1177/009614421984 9902 Sosa-D

Srinivasan, A. (2018, March 22). *Does anyone have the right to sex?*. London Review of Books. Retrieved April 7, 2019, from https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v40/n06/amia-srinivasan/does-anyone-have-the-right-to-sex

Standing Together. (2023). *Housing*. Standing Together. Retrieved April 20, 2023 from https://www.standingtogether.org.uk/housing

Summers-Effler, E., 2005. The emotional significance of solidarity for social movement communities: sustaining Catholic worker community and service. In: Flam, H., King, D. (Eds.), *Emotions and Social Movements. Routledge,* London, pp. 135–149.

Surmiak, A. (2018). Confidentiality in qualitative research involving vulnerable participants: Researchers' perspectives. *Forum: Qualitative social research* (Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 393-418).

Taylor, J. (2011). The intimate insider: Negotiating the ethics of friendship when doing insider research. *Qualitative research*, *11*(1), 3-22.

Toupin, L. (2018). *Wages for housework: A history of an international feminist movement, 1972–77*. UBC Press.

Trott, V. (2018). Connected feminists: foregrounding the interpersonal in connective action. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 53(1), 116-129.

Turner, C. (2020) 'Soft ways of doing hard things': women mediators and the question of gender in mediation. *Peacebuilding*, 8:4, 383-401,

Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2014). R-words: Refusing research. *Humanizing research: Decolonizing qualitative inquiry with youth and communities*, *223*, 248.

Tunåker, C. (2015). 'No Place Like Home?' *Home Cultures,* 12(2), 241–259.

Tyler, I. (2015). Classificatory struggles: Class, culture and inequality in neoliberal times. *The sociological review*, *63*(2), 493-511.

Tyner, J. (2016). Herding elephants. *Dialogues in Human Geography,* 6(2), 190–197.

Uzman, S. (2020, April 13). *Women, Work and 'Directly Confronting Capitalist Power' - interview with Sue Ferguson*. RS21. Retrieved April 14, 2023, from https://www.rs21.org.uk/2020/04/13/women-work-and-directly-confronting-capitalist-power-interview-with-sue-ferguson/

Valentine, G. (2005). Geography and ethics: moral geographies? Ethical commitment in research and teaching. *Progress in Human Geography*, *29*(4), 483-487.

van Aurich, A., & Hearn, K. (2022). Lesbian separatism and identity development: making space for themselves. *Continuum*, 1-12.

Vannucci, D., & Singer, R. (2010). *Come Hell or High Water: a handbook on collective process gone awry*. AK Press.

Vasudevan, A. (2017). *The Autonomous City: A History of Urban Squatting.* London: Verso.

Waldman, K. (2021, March 26). *The rise of therapy-speak.* The New Yorker. Retrieved October 17, 2021 ,from, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-rise-of-therapy-speak?s=08

Walford, G. (2018). The impossibility of anonymity in ethnographic research. *Qualitative research*, *18*(5), 516-525.

Wall, C. (2017). Sisterhood and Squatting in the 1970s: Feminism, Housing and Urban Change in Hackney. *History Workshop Journal* 83 (1): 79-97.

Wates, N., & Wolmar, C. (1980). *Squatting: The Real Story*. London: Bay Leaf Books.

Watson, S. (1984). Definitions of homelessness: a feminist perspective. *Critical social policy*, *4*(11), 60-73.

Watt, P. (2020). 'Press-ganged' Generation Rent: youth homelessness, precarity and poverty in East London. *People, Place and Policy*, *14*(2), 128-141.

Western, S. (2014). Autonomist leadership in leaderless movements: anarchists leading the way. *Ephemera: Theory & politics in organization,* 14(4).: 673-698

Whitley, L., & Page, T. (2015). Sexism at the centre: Locating the problem of sexual harassment. *New Formations*, *86*(86), 34-53.

Williams, R. H. (2004). The cultural contexts of collective action: Constraints, opportunities, and the symbolic life of social movements. *The Blackwell companion to social movements*, 91-115.

Wills, J. (2016). Building urban power from housing crisis: London's Radical Housing Network. *City*, *20*(2), 292-296.

Wittger, B. (2017). *Squatting in Rio de Janeiro: Constructing Citizenship and Gender from Below (Edition 1)*. transcript Verlag.

Wright, S. (2020, July 6). *Militant care in a time of atrocity*. Overland. Retrieved April 15, 2023, from https://overland.org.au/2020/07/militant-care-in-a-time-of-atrocity/

Alcocer, A. A., & Martella, F. (2020, June 4). *Public house: The city folds into the space of the home*. *T*he Architectural Review. Retrieved July 5, 2020 from: https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/public-house-the-city-folds-into-the-space-of-the-home

Yost, M. R., & Chmielewski, J. F. (2013). Blurring the line between researcher and researched in interview studies: A feminist practice? *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 37(2), 242-250.

12. Appendices

Note: The terms of participants consent do not allow the data to be made publicly available, approved by the University of St Andrews ethics committee and Research Data Management department

12.1. List of tables

Table 1. Ethics guidelines

Table 2. List of interviewees

Table 3. Discourse analysis building tasks

12.2. Ethics approval

27th January 2021

Dear Rowan

Thank you for submitting your ethical application which was considered at the School Ethics Committee meeting on 27th January 2021.

The School of Geography & Sustainable Development Ethics Committee, acting on behalf of the University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC), has approved this application:

Approval Code:	GG15226	Approved on:	27th January 2021	Approval Expiry:	27th March 2028
Project Title:	Gender dynamics, the commons, and the subversive potential of 'the home'				
Researcher(s):	Rowan Milligan				
Supervisor(s):	Dr Antonis Vradis, Dr Sharon Leahy & Dr Nissa Finney				

The following supporting documents are also acknowledged and approved:

1. Participant Information sheet
2. Participant Consent Form
3. Participant debrief form
4. Interview questions/focus group guide

Approval is awarded for 5 years, see the approval expiry data above.

If your project has not commenced within 2 years of approval, you must submit a new and updated ethical application to your School Ethics Committee.

If you are unable to complete your research by the approval expiry date you must request an extension to the approval period. You can write to your School Ethics Committee who may grant a discretionary extension of up to 6 months. For longer extensions, or for any other changes, you must submit an ethical amendment application.

You must report any serious adverse events, or significant changes not covered by this approval, related to this study immediately to the School Ethics Committee.

Approval is given on the following conditions:

- that you conduct your research in line with:
    - the details provided in your ethical application
    - the University's Principles of Good Research Conduct
    - the conditions of any funding associated with your work
- that you obtain all applicable additional documents (see the 'additional documents' webpage for guidance) before research commences.

You should retain this approval letter with your study paperwork.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Antje Brown

SEC Convener

Domestic extremists: gender, the commons, and the subversive potential of "the home"
Rowan Tallis Milligan

University of
St Andrews

Consent Form

The University of St Andrews attaches high priority to the ethical conduct of research. We therefore ask you to consider the following points before signing this form. Your signature confirms that you are willing to participate in this study, however, signing this form does not commit you to anything you do not wish to do and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time.

Please initial box

o   I understand the contents of the Participant Information Sheet   c

o   I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and have had   c
     them answered satisfactorily.

o   I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw at   c
     any time without giving an explanation and with no disbenefit

o   I understand the precautions that will be in place to reduce the risk of coronavirus   c
     and how I can help reduce this risk

o   I understand who will have access to my data, how it will be stored, in what form it   c
     will be shared, and what will happen to it at the end of the project.

o   I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data within two months of   c
     participation and I understand that if my data has been anonymised, it cannot be
     withdrawn

o   I agree to take part in the above study   c

Photographic images / audio recordings / video images

I understand that part of this research may involve recording images/audio/video data. These will be kept securely and stored separately to any identifiable information, i.e. consent forms and questionnaires.

Audio and visual data can be a valuable resource for future studies and therefore we ask for your additional consent to maintain this data for this purpose. You do not have to consent to these records.

- o I agree to have my photo taken / to being audio recorded / to being filmed   c

- o I agree to my image / audio / video material to be published as part of this research.   c
- o I give permission for my image / audio / video material to be used in future studies without further consultation.   c

Contact information to facilitate contact tracing by the NHS

- o I give permission for my contact information to be collected and retained for this purpose and understand that this information can only be withdrawn up until the point we meet in-person but that it will be destroyed 21 days after our last in-person face-to-face contact.   c

I confirm that I am willing to take part in this research

	Print name	Date	**Signature**
Participant			
Person taking consent			

Domestic Extremists: gender, the commons, and the subversive potential of "the home"

Rowan Tallis Milligan

University of St Andrews

Participant Information
What is the project about?

This project is investigating gender dynamics within squats and alternative living arrangements. It aims to explore the relationship between political ideologies (e.g. 'down with patriarchy') and the nature of gender dynamics on the ground. It looks into whether non-traditional spaces of the home subvert of replicate existing societal gender norms.

Why have I been invited to take part?

To make my research as accurate as possible I am inviting squatters, former squatters and those who are involved in the broader community to contribute to the project.

Do I have to take part?

Absolutely not. This infodoc is to help explain the project and give you enough information to decide whether or not you wish to participate. If you decide now or later that you don't want to, that is perfectly fine and won't have any broader repercussions.

What would I be required to do?

I would like to have a conversation with you. It's called a semi-structured interview but that just means that although there are certain topics I'd like to cover, you are also free to ask me questions and I'd like the conversation to evolve as organically as possible.

Are there any risks associated with taking part?

Due to the covid-19 pandemic there are risks, but as far as possible we will endeavour to minimise those risks, by following the government guidelines. Its possible some of the topics might be upsetting or feel personal, in which case we can stop the interview at any time. If you also decide later that you are unhappy or uncomfortable with something we discussed we can address that and remove that extract from the record if desired.

What precautions will you take to help protect me from the coronavirus?

In planning for this research, I have completed a thorough University of St Andrews risk assessment. While there will be risks to all in person engagements these can be mitigated by following the government guidelines of regular hand washing, sitting at least two metres apart where possible, and wearing face coverings where appropriate. Please let us know at any time if there is anything I could do to make you feel safer or if you ever want to reschedule or withdraw your participation.

What can I do to help protect you from the coronavirus?

If appropriate I would ask that we both sit at least two metres apart. If this is not possible we should both wear face coverings if appropriate and if not, reschedule to a time where we can

sit further apart. If you or a household member has developed symptoms of coronavirus in the last 14 days, please do not attend, but get in contact and we will arrange another time to meet. Before you attend, we will explain the safety provisions we have put in place and require you to observe them.

Informed consent

It is important that you are able to give your informed consent before taking part in this study and you will have the opportunity to ask any questions in relation to the research before you provide your consent.

Who is funding the research?

My research is being funded by St Andrews University

What information about me or recordings of me ('my data') will you be collecting?

All my interviews will be anonymous – I will generate pseudonyms. If you like you may come up with your own (within reason). I will be collecting information on gender, sexuality, age, dis/ability and any other protected characteristics where appropriate. If you do not wish to reveal any of this information that is perfectly fine. If you are comfortable I will record the interview to transcribe later, otherwise, with your permission I will take written notes. If I would like to take photographs of you or your setting I will always ask in advance.

How will my data be securely stored, who will have access to it?

Your data will be stored in a **PSEUDONYMISED** form, which means that your data will be edited so that you are referred to by a unique reference such as a code number or different name, and the original data will be accessible only to myself. Your data will be stored in the encrypted institution onedrive, and only myself will be able to access it. Audio recordings will be taken on an encrypted device and transcribed at the earliest opportunity before being destroyed OR archived for future use.

How will my data be used, and in what form will it be shared further?

Your research data will be analysed as part of the research study. If all goes well, the pseudonymised versions may well feature in my PhD dissertation and/or any published work that arises out of this project. The non-anonymised data will be shared with nobody at any time. If it is necessary for my supervisors to access recordings or transcribed interviews they will only have access to the pseudonymised versions. If all goes well my final research project should be completed by August 2022.

When will my data be destroyed?

The data will be held indefinitely.

Will my participation be confidential?

Yes, your [anonymised] participation will only be known to myself and my supervisors.

Use of your personal data for research and data protection rights

The University of St Andrews (the 'Data Controller') is bound by the UK 2018 Data Protection Act and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which require a lawful basis for all processing of personal data (in this case it is the 'performance of a task carried

out in the public interest' – namely, for research purposes) and an additional lawful basis for processing personal data containing special characteristics (in this case it is 'public interest research'). You have a range of rights under data protection legislation. For more information on data protection legislation and your rights visit https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/terms/data-protection/rights/. For any queries, email dataprot@st-andrews.ac.uk.

You will be able to withdraw your data within two months of the interview date.

Ethical Approvals

This research proposal has been granted ethical approval by the University of St Andrews Teaching and Research Ethics Committee.

What should I do if I have concerns about this study?

In the first instance, you are encouraged to raise your concerns with me directly. However, if you do not feel comfortable doing so, then you should contact my Supervisor or School Ethics Contact (contact details below). A full outline of the procedures governed by the University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee is available at https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/research/integrity-ethics/humans/ethical-guidance/complaints/.

Contact details

Researcher (s)	Rowan Tallis Milligan	**Supervisor (s) / School Ethics contact**	Antonis Vradis

12.5. Participant debrief sheet

Domestic Extremists: gender, the commons, and the subversive potential of "the home"

Rowan Tallis Milligan

University of St Andrews

Debrief

Thank you for taking part in my research project; your contribution is very valuable and appreciated.

Nature of study

This project is investigating gender dynamics within squats and alternative living arrangements. It aims to explore the relationship between political ideologies (e.g. 'down with patriarchy') and the nature of gender dynamics on the ground. It looks into whether non-traditional spaces of the home subvert of replicate existing societal gender norms.

Data

As outlined in the Participant Information Sheet (marked '[PIS_23/10/20_v.1_domestic extremists]');

o   The information (data) you have provided will be stored in a pseudonymised form.
o   Your data will be stored in the encrypted institution onedrive, and only I will be able to access it. Audio recordings will be taken on an encrypted device and transcribed at the earliest opportunity before being destroyed OR archived for future use.
o   Your data will be analysed as part of the research study. If all goes well, the pseudonymised versions may well feature in my PhD dissertation and/or any published work that arises out of this project. The non-anonymised data will be shared with nobody at any time. If it is necessary for my supervisors to access recordings or transcribed interviews they will only have access to the pseudonymised versions. If all goes well my final research project should be completed by August 2022.
o   Un- **pseudonymised** data will only be retained until I have **pseudonymised** it. It will be kept on my hard drive until the end of my research as a backup indefinitely. It will be kept in its anonymised form indefinitely. They will be kept in separate folders and reverse coded to ensure extreme difficulty in associating the two data sets.
o   Your data may be used for related research projects in the future without further consultation.
o   If you no longer wish to participate in the research, you are free to withdraw your data within two months of the interview data. If your information (data) is

anonymous at the point of collection or subsequently anonymised, we will not be able to withdraw it after that point because we will no longer know which information (data) is yours.

Sources of support

If you have been affected by participating in this study and you wish to seek support, you can contact:

The Advisory Service for Squatters: advice@squatter.org

Solace Women's Aid offers support in many boroughs of London www.solacewomensaid.org/

The National Domestic Abuse helpline: 0808200247

Women's Aid www.womensaid.org.uk

LGBTQ issues inc. domestic abuse: www.stonewall.org.uk

You can also contact the University of St Andrews geography department ethics committee:

ggethics@st-andrews.ac.uk

Contact

If you have concerns or if you would like to view a summary of the results of my research, please email the researcher or the supervisor detailed below.

Researcher (s)	[Rowan Tallis Milligan]	**Supervisor (s)**	[Antonis Vradis]

12.6. Consent from the Advisory Service for Squatters to conduct participant observation.

From: Advisory Service for Squatters
 Sent: 11 November 2020 20:35
 To: Rowan Milligan
 Subject: Rowan ASS confirmation

We at the Advisory Service for Squatters [ASS] confirm that we are aware of and consent to Rowan Milligan conducting research as part of her PhD at St Andrews while volunteering with us.

The terms of our agreement are:

- that she anonymise/pseudonymise all individuals, locations, and any other personal identifying features

- that ASS have a right to read and if desired to remove or edit extracts which explicitly mention ASS

- has agreed to our client confidentiality policy

All the best,

Advisory Service for Squatters