

Punk and Anarchist Squats in Poland

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Introduction

Anarchism is a multifarious set of ideas which encompasses a myriad of approaches and strategies including strands which are (at least in theory) mutually antagonistic. One such perceived antagonism is between ‘workerism’ and ‘lifestylism’ with their caricatured exclusive emphases on workplace struggles and consumption practices, respectively. Squatting is very often lumped-in with the ‘lifestylist’ pole of this supposed dichotomy, and usually in a derogatory manner.

The zine begins by laying out the connections between anarchism and squatting (and also legally rented ‘social centres’), before moving on to look at how these relationships play out in the context of Poland. Tensions around diverging tactics and approaches between squats are examined, as well as issues around repression of squats through eviction and legalisation. The key argument here is that anarchist and punk squats are a bricks-and-mortar example of anarchism in action, and that while they do perform a cultural and lifestyle’ function, their impact is felt in a wide range of anarchist activisms, including typically ‘workerist’ forms, which complicates the ‘workerist’/‘lifestylist’ dichotomy to the point of redundancy.

The interview and participant observation material which informs this article was carried out in May/June 2013 and October 2014. The research was based around several squats: in Poznan Rozbrat and Od:zysk; in Wroclaw – Wagenburg and CRK; in Warsaw Przychodnia, and also interviews with people from the recently evicted Elba squat (who subsequently opened a new space named ADA Pulawska. One other squat was also visited during the research, but after sending a draft version of the article to the collective there they opted to exercise a veto over content relating to them. This was partly driven by security concerns, and about fears of damaging relations with the squatting community in their area, and while it is disappointing not to be able to include their views and opinions here, their wishes are, of course, respected.

Squatting and anarchism

Squatting has numerous intrinsically anarchistic qualities, which are made explicit in many squatting actions. The autonomist-Marxist writer Geronimo asks (rhetorically) whether ‘squatting demonstrate[s] yet another form of libertarian-anarchist communism?’ In Colin Ward’s view, certainly yes – he viewed the post-World War II squatters’ movement in the UK ‘as an example of the human tendency for direct and cooperative self-help, and thus a key model of “anarchy in action.”’ As Ward puts it: ‘Squatting is an example of direct action applied to the housing problem in a nonrevolutionary situation,’ and Hans Pruijt suggests that this activist mentality and expertise can be transferred into ‘sundry troubled spots in society.’ Ward describes squatting as a political education,’ which has an important ‘effect on the participants’:

it ‘reveals a great deal about the state of mind that is induced by free and independent action, and that which is induced by dependence and inertia: the difference between people who initiate things and act for themselves and people to whom things just happen.’

The Squatters and Homeless Autonomy (SHA) Collective in London argue that squatting engenders an ‘[o]ppositional self-identity ... [which] continues to make squatting a threat to cultural power’ by adding to ‘larger cultures of resistance.’ Pruijt concurs, but notes that:

[i]deology is only loosely coupled to practice... [which] allows for considerable freedom when creating an ideology around squatting such as instant anarchism, i.e. suddenly discovered with little influence from the anarchist tradition, or ideologies with an anti-capitalist or anti-property rights theme.

The Needle Collective and the Bash Street Kids also argue that the squatting/direct action 'scene's politics are not always clear-cut or universal, but they do revolve around such ideas as activism for social change, non-hierarchical decision-making, and a DIY ethos.' The SHA Collective argue that squatting 'has always meant struggle' and that there is a 'permanent need to politicise' these struggles. In a communiqué titled Against Apolitical Squatting they stress that squatting is only viable because it is 'political':

A squatted space not used for politics soon loses the politics of squatted spaces. Creating spaces intolerant to social hierarchy and state surveillance, for organising and consciousness-raising, is integral to the creation of effective resistance in squats and on the streets.

So while the politics of squatting and the political motivation for particular squatting actions might sometimes be hazy in terms of theory, it is possible to recognise squats as 'symbols of anarchist, "autonomous," and "free" spaces,' which are an example of the libertarian way of organising' which has been a constant in European 'radical urban youth movements' since 1968.

Eric Mattocks, a founder and treasurer of the Advisory Service for Squatters, stressed that 'squatting was not merely a demonstration, it was an initiator of social change,' and, as the SHA Collective note, squatting is directly opposed to the underlying hegemonic ideology of capitalism, and as such: 'Squatting continues to prove itself as direct action against power.' This challenge to unequal distribution of property and the concept of private property itself is a crucial aspect, because as Ward argues (quoting Kropotkin): 'Once the principle of the "Divine Right of Property" is shaken, no amount of theorising will prevent its overthrow.' And in fact, state authorities adopting a stringently neoliberal view of private property rights repress squatting on exactly these grounds.

Punk squats in Poland

So squatting has both practical and theoretical connections with anarchism, and in the case of Poland squats are also often associated with punk. Van der Steen, Katzeff, and van Hoogenhuijze emphasise the link between radical politics and subculture, arguing that in both 'squatted houses' and rented social centres ... the focus on ... youth and alternative lifestyles remains a constant' – they identify punk (and hardcore) as key examples of this. Lucy Finchett-Maddock argues that punk 'is automatically connected to the squatting movement through their freeing of space and anti-authoritarian practices.' Indeed, in countries where squatting movements have emerged more recently, such as Spain, punk has been a crucial catalyst. Punks also introduced squatting to Poland, but even in countries with longer squatter histories like the UK or the Netherlands, a 'prevalence of punk squats' developed by the 1980s. Van der Steen *et al.* argue that punk's impact was reciprocated, with the punk subculture [being] nourished by the 1980s squatter movement'

in terms of providing infrastructure for punk gigs while emphasising the political aspects of punk.

In other European countries there are significant parts of the squatting movement with little or no connection to punk, but the overlap appears to be nearly ubiquitous in Poland. Of course, there are at least a few squats in Poland which are not connected to punk, and while squats are extremely important for Polish punk scenes, punk gigs do often occur in commercial venues, such as bars — however, these gigs are likely to be less engaged with anarchist politics. Several interviewees stressed the punk/squat connection: respondent J said, ‘squats in Poland equal punk;’ respondent I likewise stated, ‘all the squats are punk squats;’ respondent H noted that, until very recently, the squatter’s movement was very strictly connected with [the] punk scene.’ Respondent F further backed this up, saying, ‘my first experiences with anarchism and [the] punk scene ... were of course on the squat.’ Grzegorz Piotrowski concurs, writing that the squatting scene which ‘began in the mid-1990s, was limited to anarchist and punk subcultures.’ There are some exceptions to this conflation, but even within such places the relationship between punk and squatting is recognised as near-ubiquitous in Poland, so the connection is understood as being very strong indeed. Squats are where Polish punk most tangibly experiences repression, both in the form of attempts from the state and private landowners to evict them, and in the form of physical attacks from street-level fascist groups. It is impossible to properly understand the relationship between anarchism and punk in Poland without due consideration of the influence of squats.

As Piotrowski notes: ‘[s]quatting in the former communist bloc is a very different phenomenon than its counterparts in Western Europe or in the United States’ with ‘almost no [squatting] tradition in Central and Eastern Europe prior to 1989. Squatting in Poland is shaped by the country’s abrupt transition from centrally (mis)managed socialist economy to rampant neoliberal capitalism. This rupture created the need to squat (since housing was no longer provided by the state), the opportunities to squat (with property ownership often becoming a contested or confused issue. but also created the most significant pressures against squatting (primacy of private-property rights, gentrification. evictions). (Squatting is illegal in Poland, but the law leaves some small leeway.)

Buildings that had come under state control during the socialist regime are being restituted to the descendents of their pre-1945 owners. Regulations around restitution are limited, and even where they do exist are manipulated to the advantage of property developers. Typically, a building might be restituted to, say, the grandchild of the pre-1945 owner, but this person is unlikely to have the resources to maintain the upkeep of the building. At this point the property developers, who are closely informed of these changes in ownership, step in to offer the new owners a lump sum for the property. As far as the new owners are concerned, even if the offer is significantly below market value, this is a good deal — instant cash for a property they may not have known they owned (though of course, many survivors know very well what their families lost), and the relief of the responsibility of owning an old building likely in need of repair, and the rates payable to the state. Once the property developers have control of the building their primary concern is maximising their return, which means gentrification and getting rid of the current tenants. Local squatting activists explained that developers are often ruthless in this regard, forcing the eviction of sitting tenants by raising the rent to extortionate levels, and cutting off the electricity and gas. Piotrowski notes that, despite housing laws stating that ‘current tenants must be given a three-year notice ... companies have been established that specialise in the “cleaning” of such

houses, with workers cutting off electricity and water pipes and using other means to get rid of the people living there.' Opposition to this deliberate gentrification, which is particularly rapid in Warsaw, forms a main political focus for squats in Poland (as elsewhere).

Squats also have political significance beyond the housing issues to which they directly relate. Respondent G, who is involved with the Przychodnia collective, emphasised the propagandistic value of squats:

They are also sending a message, which starts from 'you can live in a different way, and be happy, and you don't have to take a loan which you will have to pay off until you are seventy to have a place to live.' And then they are also sending a message ... to make a campaign against gentrification, make a campaign against animal abuse... [T]hey are more visible, they are more interesting for the media, so it's easier for these places to spread [a] message about state repression, for example.

So squats, in addition to their political value as squats, also provide organising space and a platform for the benefit of other intersectionally related political campaigns or causes. However, as Piotrowski notes, in the 'ideological climate in post-communist Poland,' gaining support from the local community is sometimes a challenge because of neoliberal mind-sets and a suspicion of anything deemed 'leftist.' So the 'political' aspect of squatting is crucial, both for those involved and for those who would seek to repress it.

Hans Pruijt, in his overview of squatting in Western Europe, succinctly identifies the 'unique property' of squatting as: 'combining self-help with demonstrating an alternative and a potential for protest.' He argues that squatting, particularly when identified as an alternative housing strategy:

seems to have everything going for it. It is open to everyone, regardless of social class, it is interesting for resourceful activists but can simultaneously offer a haven for vulnerable people. It allows a wide range of skills to be exercised, empowers and produces fun instead of a display of misery.

The issue of openness is not actually as straightforward as Pruijt suggests, but in general this understanding of squats readily applies in Poland. However, respondent G recognises that squat 'havens' are 'all the time under pressure from the system, from the capitalist system.' In addition to the attempts by the state and private landowners to shut down squats, capitalist economic and social relations still influence these anti-capitalist spaces. As respondent G notes: 'People have to buy stuff, it requires money to run this kind of place. Even if you get food from the dumpster [skip] or as much materials as you can, it's kind of impossible 100%, which produces new kinds of conflicts.' But, even with these limitations, respondent G argued that squatting offers some socially transformative potential:

I would call it like a laboratory or experimental area where we actually get to see which kind of conflicts are generated by this kind of society, plus some extra traditional conflicts from the capitalist society. [Y]ou see how the transition works, you get from the outside world and you get into here, how difficult it is to internalise the local [squat] rules, to follow them You can call it a model of an ideal society. A very early model... a very simple one, and a very narrow one. ...

So while respondent G recognises the limitations placed on squatting by the totalising capitalist system, he values the opportunity to live-out anarchist politics on a practical level.

The manifestations of anarchism within these squats is, of course, not uniform, with divergence in purpose and tactics – tensions which are frequently framed in terms of being ‘more anarchist’ or ‘less anarchist.’ This echoes the supposed ‘lifestylist’/‘workerist’ dichotomy in anarchism more widely – but these tensions play out with some important differences, and the complexities herein completely undermine the dichotomous analysis.

Tensions between punk squats and nonpunk squats

While anarchism has an especially close association with squatting, a range of ideologies motivate different squats and squatters, resulting in tensions between differing approaches. One such point of disagreement is the use and function of squats, e.g.: openness versus subcultural identity; space for activist purposes versus squatting as an end in itself. Compromise (or opposition thereto) with the authorities is another area of disagreement. As Ward makes clear, these tensions go back to the 1960s at least, with disputes between ‘respectable’ and ‘hippy’ squatters. The more common dispute today is between ‘respectable’ squatters and those prepared to employ violence to resist eviction. Ward argues that as time goes by ... it becomes difficult to distinguish between the two categories of squatter,’ but on the contrary, it appears that disagreement and division between different groups of squatters is a recurring theme. Nazima Kadir draws another tension between ‘parasites’ and ‘politicos’ in Amsterdam, differentiating between activists who mainly identified as squatters versus activists who resided in squats but primarily invested their time and energy in other radical left issues.’

Pruijt notes the importance of ‘squatting as an end in itself [as] part of the movement’s identity,’ which he argues ‘offers a barrier against cooptation.’ Respondent G made this point as well: ‘squats, social centres, they still do [have an impact] because ... they cannot be taken by capitalism, because that’s exactly what [squats] are against ... I can’t really imagine a way in which a place like this could be commercialised.’ This sense of a squatting identity or culture that stands apart from, and in opposition to, capitalism raises an important issue, and as Pruijt writes this can result in ‘only attracting members of a highly exclusive “scene.”’ This criticism has been levelled at punk squats in Poland. Pruijt argues that the absence of a particular squatter (i.e. punk) identity can result in ‘becoming culturally mainstream and non-political.’ However, in terms of the tension between punk squats and squats which aim to be accessible to the wider public, Pruijt’s analysis does not fit. In fact, the criticisms against the punk squats is that they are not political enough, because they are overly concerned with culture and identity, while the ‘activist’ squats make every effort to be open to the general public in their political campaigns. As Piotrowski puts it, the tensions centre around:

the question of the openness ... and the balancing between the ‘subcultural ghetto’ model (where the squat mainly serves a counter-cultural function for a specific group) and the social centre’ model (which is more focussed on politics and on mobilising broad coalitions of people).

This tension is observable in the criticisms levelled at Przychodnia in Warsaw by local non-punk squatting activists. Przychodnia is certainly identifiable as a punk squat in terms of its res-

idents, the activities it hosts, and its general aesthetic. The building was first squatted as part of a tenants' movement demonstration in the wake of the high profile eviction of the long-running Elba squat. This was to give a clear statement that if the state evicts one house, the activists would squat 'ten more' in reply. Other people started making use of the space and Przychodnia became the main venue for punk gigs in the city, largely filling the void that had been left by Elba in that respect. Local nonpunk squatting activists were concerned that the noisy gigs at Przychodnia were having a negative impact on relations with the local community.

Respondent E, who is involved in the anarcho-syndicalist group Związek Syndykalistów Polski (ZSP – Association of Polish Syndicalists) and with anti-fascist activities, was dismissive of squatting in general, saying, 'I really don't care about squats,' but offered this analysis of Przychodnia:

Przychodnia is completely punk and not political And [in] Przychodnia, [the] people who started this squat were intelligent and ideological people, but after [a] little time they left and people who stayed are only Jabol punx... Jabol is very cheap wine prepared from apples, and [a] Jabol punk is a punk who only drinks this wine ... [Przychodnia is] only parties. Parties, punk rock, and nothing more.

A damning view, then, but the essential point here is that respondent E described Przychodnia as 'not political' because of its association with punk. This reflects the framing of the supposed dichotomy between 'lifestylist' and 'workerist' anarchisms, but while respondent E's stance is a typically 'workerist' anti-lifestylism, similar critiques have also been levelled at Przychodnia from within the 'lifestylist' activism of squatting. So while the terms of the 'lifestylist'/'workerism' tension are evident, the complexities here defy any simple dichotomy.

The squatters at Przychodnia were conscious of the criticisms levelled at them. Respondent H, who had lived at Elba and was now involved with Przychodnia, summed up the difference: 'Probably you feel it ... here is more like punk and subcultural, and creating the society actually In [other places] it's more about like coming to the neighbours, especially the poor people in the neighbourhood.' He diplomatically assessed that both things are OK, and both things can have problems.' As well as hosting regular punk gigs, Przychodnia is involved in other activities, such as public 'pikniks,' cinema showings, debates, meetings, hosts an anti-fascist group and a queer group. Respondent I defined this function as a 'cultural centre' but asserted that 'you can't call it [a] social centre, absolutely not.' This emphasis on 'culture' is understood to mean less emphasis on 'political' activism. Respondent I continued: 'here is a little bit like it was in Elba. They were just, y'know, creating a small autonomy':

Like we have our own world here and ... we do here what we want. You don't like [it]? You don't have to participate, this is our way of life, right? We like punk rock, we like shows, sometimes we organise some meetings or debates ... or festivals, like this phot pr festival, Resistance Festival ... So it's not like guys W are completely out of politics.

But even the idea of being political' is not straight forward as respondent I explained:

Guys here are ... not really into this political stuff. I mean, if you talk with [them] they're really political. and they have very y'know, straight ideas about life . most of them [laughs] at least ... Because punk rock it's [a] political thing. So it's very difficult to say you are political or you are not political.

So, while Przychodnia is 'political' in a broad sense, it is recognised as being more culturally focussed. Criticisms of this approach from some local nonpunk squatting activists was the source of some tension. Respondent I described the situation as 'completely freaky,' because the divisions between groups meant people don't give a shit,' viewing other groups as 'fuckers' or 'not true squatters, or ... not true anarchists,' as is clearly reflected in the opinion expressed by respondent E, above. Respondent I viewed that nonpunk squatting activists had attempted to interfere in the running of Przychodnia:

Actually it's quite funny because they call themselves anarchists, and sometimes it looks like they're very authoritarian It's like when they come here, for example, and say 'OK, these are the rules and from you have to obey these rules.' Y'know, [the] position of someone who is looking from up to down.

Respondent I continued:

It's weird. Instead of supporting our activities and understand[ing] that people have different needs ... [they're just] building these power-relations ... 'Cause their position is like 'we know better ... what activism is, and what squatting is' and so on. That's why feel strange people here [at Przychodnia] they just about it ... You can imagine that the idea is, 'hey, it would be good if you just move out and we will squat this place, because we know what to do with such [a] great building, right, because what you are doing with this building, this is shit. It's like wasting space and energy and everything.'

Respondent I said that this perceived patronising attitude made relations 'really tense [I]t was [a] really really bad situation. Right now it's kind of better,' so relations were already improving at the time of research (and since that time this improvement has continued). Respondent H defended Przychodnia's activities in terms of outreach and visibility:

Y'know, if 200 people come [here] for the concert, and 10% of them take a look at the posters ... and take this message, and one of them keeps it in mind, and goes vegetarian and ... maybe starts to also build something like this, it's already good.

He also argued that displaying a punk aesthetic was important, because it symbolised a different lifestyle, and undermined the message of mainstream conformity:

We didn't want to paint the walls white to make people come and think that it's a normal place ... Because when the anarchists ... try to ban subculture [in] the movement, I think it's a threat that it [will become] like any other movement We can prove with our lives that it's possible to live in a different way.

This is archetypal 'lifestylism' but also resonates with the importance of a 'squatter identity' vaunted by the SHA Collective and Hans Pruijt, above. Respondent I agreed that 'this is ... [a] very important part of this movement, of punk rock, y'know, this anti-aesthetic stuff,' but was conscious that this could alienate 'people from outside': 'Someone who is from the "normal" world [would think] this [place] is like a shit... It's quite difficult for people just not to think about all this mess and just focus [on] what we want to say.' So, even within the punk squat, they were conscious of the issue of 'respectability' and how their aesthetic might be read by others.

The repeatedly expressed notion of certain activities as marking out proper anarchists' speaks to the (erroneous) dichotomy between 'workerist' and 'lifestylist' anarchisms. Even though all squatters might be considered as engaging in 'lifestylist' politics, there are clearly divisions at work within this form of activism too. Of all the interviewees, respondent E's views are closest to the caricature 'workerist,' and as such felt that squats were largely irrelevant to anarchist politics:

Most tenants don't want to just boycott rent, they want to have flats. Most of them are old people, or single women with little children ... Squatting is the last thing they can do... [ZSP] sometimes COOperate, but we have different groups and different politics.

This explains respondent E's dismissal of squatting, above, but despite his negative view, respondent E had helped with the attempted defence of Elba in 2012 and the successful defence of another squat in 2011, because, said respondent E, 'one of the people who lived there was my comrade from anti-fascist actions... Defending squats, I just learned how to fight with police [laughs], nothing more. For me people who live on the squat are tenants, that's it.' So, even as respondent E appears to subscribe to the 'workerist' stereotype in his dismissal of squatting, he was still motivated to physically defend squats from eviction out of solidarity for his squatter comrade, and because of a shared opposition to state repression.

The tensions between Przychodnia and local nonpunk squatting activists, though both engaged in activism that might be described (or derided) as 'lifestylist,' point towards a wider dismissal of punk by some anarchists — respondent E here included among them. However, the theoretical separation between proper anarchism' and 'bourgeois distractions,' so clearly demarcated in online forum communities, becomes much less clearly defined on the ground, where punk is engaged with a diffuse spectrum of anarchist perspectives — the 'workerist'/'lifestylist' dichotomy simply doesn't stack up in lived experience.

The anarchist politics of punk squats in Poland

Vale: mar awiek the supprend der hvo Rebrat yati en betwers worked a large crempaund fet, e-buildings, DD-bult lving quarters, and on what began life as opportunist housing for a group of punks 1994, who later began putting on ggs Porrow writes due the punk es were complemented by more political public mens the squat became the centre of an emption al activism. The space subsequently became the home of Feiraca Anarchusteczna Anarchist Federation in 1997, and, later, numerous other anarchist political and cu trives, including the syndicalist workers' umon OZZIP Nanonal Union of Workers Initiative Rozbral also houses a bike workshop, martial arts classes and training gym, facilnes for car repair, a library, computer and internet facilities. meeting rooms, and more. It is the longest running squat in Poland, and is widely recognised as an organisational hub for anarchism across the country. Respondent A, a resident of Rozbrat, noted the importance of this.

This place is really like the best example for [the] whole [of] Poland I guess, and everybody says that We really help a lot. like we print posters and send them to all lover] Poland and we have our Anarchist Rezien [journal] So we are like this base One of the guys from the local government, who was really against Razbrat, he was terrified that Poznan (laughs) is like a Mecca of anarchism. It's really funny. I mean, but yeh, maybe it's actually like that.

Respondent C, a squatter at Rozbrat, is an example of the blurred workerist/lifestylist' divide with her involvement in the syndicalist union OZZIP. Respondent C viewed that when Federacja Anarchistyczna began regular weekly meetings at Rozbrat in 1997, it was kind of started in a contrast to the place, suggesting a consciousness of the potential tensions between a punk squat and organised anarchist political groups. However, since then, Rozbrat's importance as a base for anarchist organising has grown, even while it continues to host punk gigs and other culturally focussed initiatives. Respondent C was positive about the mix of activities within the compound:

It really works, like when we for example do a syndicalist demonstration the people who are organising gigs here, they would come and set-up the microphone and speakers for us, like to provide infrastructure. Or, they would invite us to come before some gig to talk about some action ... demonstration, or campaign... So, I think this particular place, it plays a role actually because it is a space for concerts, it's a living space, but it's also a ... political place, with a place for meetings... I think because [of] this place really, it is [a] meeting point, and it mix[es] everything.

Respondent A, whose interests might be described as more lifestylist' than respondent C's, echoed this:

There are a lot of people who [are] involved in different things, but it's actually all mixed together. Like for example, I'm not really involved in the workers' unions stuff, but if we have [a] demonstration, even in the other city, I'm still going there, because I feel like it's the same struggles anyway. And like I'm an anti-fascist and I'm struggling for animal rights and ... for me, it's the same struggle... So I think it's really important to work together.

So respondent A, who describes her own activist focus as anti-fascism and animal rights activism which are often predominantly associated with punk — views anarcho-syndicalist support for workers as part of the same struggle. Respondent C was conscious of the theoretical tension between divergent approaches, but felt that this could be transcended in practice. Piotrowski emphasises the significance of OZZIP's syndicalist organising within Rozbrat squat, pointing to the establishing of connections with workers in a local factory as a turning point, leading to a 'new political agenda' and 'changes in political style.' Typically anarcho-syndicalist activism was (and is) being organised within the squat, with cooperation between squatters and workers. Respondent C emphasised the immediate political significance of squatting: 'We regularly support the tenants' struggles, not only in Pozna but also in other cities... The issue of the houses is a political issue, and squatting is, for me, a political issue.' Respondent C also recognised squatting as an important end in itself, but considered it vital not to succumb to temptations to retreat into an 'anarchist ghetto':

I think it's very important to not sit in here all day, it's nice, and I mean it's an easy way of living of course ... I don't have to pay rent and I don't have to do wage labour, so I can spend my time on supporting the movement... But we are kind of consciously also trying to somehow also include the squatters' movement, tenants' movement and the workers' movement ... we try to put it together on the practical level ... But also we try to write and theorise on connections between work, hous[ing] and ... alternative culture, or squatting as a means of survival in the capitalist economy.

Squatting, then, provides an effective base for organising, in terms of resources and space, and by freeing activists from wage slavery, enabling them to devote more time and energy to their political activities. Respondent C's point about making a conscious effort to bring these strands together, both in practical and theoretical terms, demonstrates that the broad mix of activities at Rozbrat is not just some accidental arrangement. People at Rozbrat are actively challenging divisions within the anarchist movement, such as those typically stereotyped as 'workerists' and 'lifestylists.' Piotrowski writes that because 'Rozbrat was founded by anarchists, anarchism still dominates the collective and has become more visible and vibrant over time.' Respondent A argued that the various initiatives and interests of Rozbrat were held together by this shared anarchist identity:

with every kind of struggle it's the most important to have this political identity, always ... In the end ... if you don't have this political identity then ... usually you lose lose ... It's very important that you ident[ify] yourself as anarchist.

Respondent I, from Przychodnia, expressed admiration for Rozbrat's ability to connect with people from outside of the punk/squatter/anarchist milieu:

With Rozbrat, it's a little bit [of a] different situation, because they are really partners in the city ... [with] local organisations and so on... People started to think, 'hey, this is OK, I mean they look strange, the place is kind of strange, and trashy and whatever, but they are saying... good things. They want to do something good for ... local, people' ... But it took about fifteen, sixteen years for local people to understand that.

This points to the importance of longevity in combination with community engagement, and as Piotrowski notes: *'[a]s a result of eighteen [and now more than twenty] years of continuous activities and actions, Rozbrat is nowadays seen as a counter-example for the neoliberal policies of local authorities.'* In fact, Rozbrat is so much a 'partner in the city' that its location is marked on the tourist information maps distributed by Poznan city council, despite being an illegal squat. However, this 'official' recognition belies the reality of the threat of repression, with Rozbrat recently facing eviction by the city council. State repression is a feature of squatting wherever it exists, and Poland is no exception.

Repression of squatting in Poland — eviction and legalisation

Eviction is the most blatant tool of repression against squats, and against the anarchist and punk communities that reside within and utilise them. As Martínez, Piazza and Pruijt write: 'squatters are in principle quite vulnerable because of the strong legal protection of private property and the virtually unlimited repressive powers of the state. Plus, the squatters who actually live in their squats ... are sitting ducks for the forces of repression.' As discussed above, squats are an affront to the capitalist principle of private property — even where they are not engaged in political activism, their very existence challenges the norms of ownership. The legal frameworks of capitalist (and especially neoliberal) economies are set-up to protect and enforce private property rights, and squats across Europe have come under increased pressure from eviction over the last decade. Elba in Warsaw was one victim of this wave of repression. Respondent H described the eviction:

A lot of police came to support this private bet who came with the security. But the security was #A enough... There was a lot of police including the se ter cannons, and then the firemen [sic] to take us out of the roofs.

Respondent H was critical of the state's role in what was essentially a private ownership disputes

It's only a private business of the guy, but still the peace came to support him, which was actually illegal If we have to leave this place the court should decide not just 'oh, I have a problem, I need a lot of police. [laughs].

Respondent C from Rozbrat described another instance of police violence being used to evict squatters:

The people from the new squat [Odzyk]... tried to squat another building and there was [an] eviction. and fifty cops with machine guns came and then I was teargassed. And one of us now is accused of spitting on the uniform of the cop. And I mean, y'know, bull-shit like this. It's not really repression that's kind of more intimidation or like, y'know, showing there are some limits.

This constant threat of repression against squats creates a vigilant security culture within them, as well as diverting considerable time and effort into fortification of the spaces. Another recognised outcome of this is the closing off of squatted spaces from outsiders. The threat of attacks from fascists further compounds this defensive mindedness and security consciousness.

The evictions of Elba and the first Od:zysk squat were carried out with the weight of state violence. However, in the case of Elba, this heavy handed response 'was also quite good press for us,' said respondent H, because it was [a] very expensive action, y'know, there was 100 policemen or something.' Despite the eviction going ahead, respondent H said that it went good, because it [put]... the press also on our side.' The eviction mobilised significant public support for Elba, as respondent H notes: 'many people came to support us ... We did the big demonstration ... like more than 2,000 people there ... (for Poland [this] is good) against the eviction.' This had an immediate effect in terms of forcing the city council into negotiations over a new space for the evicted Elba collective, but also staved off subsequent eviction attempts at other squats in Warsaw. An eviction attempt at Przychodnia was, again, supported by large numbers of police, but respondent H noted that the squatters were able to resist the eviction because we had the good press, so the city didn't want to make new riots. So... somehow we kept this place.' There is a dual threat to the city government here; negative press coverage of its violent eviction tactics and the threat of highly disruptive (and expensive) riots breaking out in retaliation for evictions. Natalia described the response in Poznan to the threat of eviction against Rozbrat, which in 2009 and 2010 mobilised two:

big demonstration[s]. A lot of people came ... maybe 2,000... We have some support from the other cities, I think that some people wanted to help us They were supporting us all the time. So for us [this] is very important, and we have some ... journalists... that are supporting us and ... a lot of people involved in culture, and some people involved in politics ... and they are supporting us [against] the evict[ion].

ETC Dee focuses on the 'Robin Hood' aspect of squats as a motivation for public support, writing that 'there is a certain public sympathy for those who squat houses worth millions which are standing derelict. The need to protect private property is coming into conflict with a basic belief which frames emptiness as itself criminal when people have a need for housing.' This certainly plays an important role in the examples discussed above, but far more prominent in their defence strategies is what Pruijt describes as the advancing of 'a functionalist frame, emphasising the valuable role of the project in the community, for example as a breeding place for the creative class.' This was particularly the case with Rozbrat, but not just as a plea for clemency from the state. Because of its longevity, and its success in attracting people into the squat for various social, cultural, and political functions, there is a pool of supporters, who might ordinarily have little or no involvement with the squat, that can be called on to defend Rozbrat in times of crisis. Respondent B, another resident of Rozbrat, appreciated the significance of this popular support, but felt that it was fundamentally limited: When Rozbrat was in danger of eviction, then suddenly everyone came for a demonstration ... That's also our problem, we would rather treat Rozbrat as [an] aim to achieve some goals, and still, a lot of people tend to treat it as a goal [in] itself.' Respondent G was more optimistic about mobilisations to defend squats, considering their inherent opposition to state forces as a good introduction to radical politics:

Many people know the place because they went to party here or they went to a meeting here, they went to a lecture here, to a workshop, whatever. So when one of those places is threatened ... those situations always mobilise loads of people... And if people are smart then they can use this for mobilising people for other events, because that's often the first demo people go to, or [the] first kind of struggle or physical struggle where they get involved. It's also less dangerous than, I dunno, going to beat some Nazis in the streets or get[ting] involved into any other conflict where there is 2,000 people and all of them are ready to fight for the place. It also shows people who are already involved in the movement their strength, their possibility of mobilising many, many people to fight for whatever they see as right.

So, as much as squats offer opportunities to expose people to anarchist politics by the fact of their existence, through their cultural roles, and through their political activism, the confrontation generated with the state and with private capital actually creates a further potential point of politicisation. These mobilisations send a clear message to the parties interested in evicting squats, particularly the state, which clearly alters how, or even if, they proceed with eviction attempts. This is, then, a prime concern for squatters, as demonstrated in the repeatedly expressed desire for 'good press.' But as respondent G notes, there is also a beneficial effect from large mobilisations as politicising encounters, and an expression of support which gives the squatter movement (and anarchist movement more widely) increased confidence.

To avoid the potential repercussions of these confrontations, city councils and local governments often attempt negotiation and accommodation as a tactic to neutralise or contain squats. Legalisation can be viewed as a major success for individual squats, offering some level of security against eviction, but the compromises made to reach this kind of agreement are contentious. Respondent D from Od:zysk in Poznan discussed some of the compromises they had made in order to extend the longevity of their squat:

People... from the city administration check[ed] the state of the building, like ... is the building OK for making some gigs and so on [The] bailiff was here too, two times ... So yeh let's say in [an] official way they try to move us.

Respondent D recognised that cooperating with government officials was a compromise, but reasoned that:

by the law these people could come with police fand a locksmith], so in this so in this way the police could go inside [and] we don't want them [to], of course. So we decided to go by the law... and to let [the city officials] in We are thinking that ... behaving in that way we can stay here longer.

As mentioned already, Warsaw city council had been forced into negotiation with the collective from the evicted Elba squat, in large part because of the mass support the squatters had received. At the time of research these protracted negotiations were still ongoing, but a legal 'autonomous non-profit socio-cultural centre' has since been opened, called ADA Pulawska. This move towards legalisation created another area of tension for the Przychodnia squatters, this time with the Elba collective, because one of the proposed conditions for the opening of the legal social centre was the eviction of Przychodnia, meaning that Przychodnia didn't want Elba to sign the agreement which respondent I recognised as being somewhat ironic. Respondent H described the negotiations with the city council as 'bureaucratic shit' and said that he didn't see a point' in running a 'half-legal place.' Pruijt identifies a major issue surrounding squat legalisation as the potential loss of the oppositional edge.' He cites a study of squat legalisation in Amsterdam which 'describes the commonly occurring effects ... as a loss of links to various societal structures, of ties with other free spaces, and a decline in dynamism and political engagement.' As noted already, squats' illegality imbues them with an intrinsic confrontational value, making them politically significant places. A 'half legal squat' might still effectively operate as a space for political organising, but it loses some of its intrinsic political opposition, and as Pruijt notes this can also remove spaces from the networks of support and solidarity that exist around squats. In this sense, legalisation can be understood as a tool of repression, attempting to contain the squat within a legal framework, and cutting off the opportunity for politicising confrontation. Respondent K, who lives at Wagenburg in Wroclaw, identified this issue in the legal status of CRK (Centrum Reanimacji Kultury Centre for the Resuscitation of Culture):

CRK is not, like, 100% squat anymore... [the] city took... [a previous squat] and instead they gave C.RK, they exchange[d] place[s]. So CRK was not squatted, they got this place from the city... like many houses in Europe in a similar situation. That's why it's now ...legal ... it's just [an] 'official alternative culture house' ... And it's, like, y'know, CRK is not centre of the anarchism in Wroclaw. There is [an] anarchist movement in Wroclaw, but it's not CRK.

So in this instance, legalisation meant a loss of connection to the local anarchist movement. During the research, CRK was largely closed for major renovations, being carried out by the city council. Respondent K was worried about this situation, saying, 'no one is really sure if we[re] gonna get this place back,' and felt that the centralised concentration of the movement's energies into CRK has left them vulnerable:

The thing is... of course all the squats have some limit time now [but] if we lost this place then I don't think no one's gonna make [a] new place. Maybe because the place [existed for] too long... and [the] movement [has] concret[ised] somehow, it's like centralised ... They [take] just one direction, like mak[ing] alternative culture, and not so much networking with local people.

So as Pruijt notes, and as may be the case for CRK, legalisation does not necessarily guarantee security or permanence: 'An important factor is the level of control that occupants retain after legalisation.' As stated already, the legal system is heavily biased in favour of private property, and an 'official agreement with squatters can actually provide the state with ammunition, such as written lease agreements, to make a legal case for eviction. So the binary trade-off between the 'oppositional edge' of illegality and the 'security' of legalisation is often a false one. The unrest around the eviction of Elba in Warsaw led to the promise of a new space being opened by the city – legalisation need not mean meek compliance to the demands of the city government. Rather, it can be used as a pragmatic tactic to create further squatting opportunities and to prolong the life of existing spaces. Negotiation and resistance can go together in reality, even while they are contradictory in theory. As Margit Mayer notes:

under specific circumstances, some squatting movements have been able to experiment with double track strategies and been able to go back and forth between (or even apply simultaneously) direct action and negotiation, most often in some kind of division of labour between radical core groups and more moderate supporters, and thereby manage to extend their squats and with them the infrastructures for their collective living, working, and political organising.

So, even while entering into any compromise with the state (even something far short of legalisation) looks like a fatal flaw for the anarchist political grounding of squats, it can in fact be sensibly understood as a tactic of pragmatism.

Legal squats are inevitably embroiled in legal wrangling in the courts anyway, and in this regard are no more able to evade state interference than 'compromising' legally rented social centres. With consideration of the wider squatting movement in Warsaw, this 'double track strategy' has been a particular success. Just a few years ago, Elba was the only remaining squat in the city, but with different collectives employing diverging yet complementary strategies, they now have three spaces two 'illegal' squats in Warsaw one of which is Przychodnia), and the 'half-legal' ADA Pulawska. Negotiation with the city might not be a purist's idea of anarchist politics, but this combination of mobilising popular support, resistance of evictions, and compromise with the city has resulted in significant practical success. This doesn't prevent the theoretical tensions having a real impact, as was the case between Przychodnia and the Elba collective, but it does emphasise the oft-observed gap between theoretical abstraction and practical application. The repression of squatting is where the anarchist movement and punk scene in Poland are most tangibly repressed, so consideration of these dynamics is crucial. But, again, the terms of the 'workerist'/'lifestylist' schism are evident in the identification of strategies and tactics as 'more anarchist' or 'less anarchist' – and, again, that theoretical dichotomy is shown to be false in practice.

Conclusion

Squats in Poland are predominantly associated with punk and anarchism, representing a bricks-and-mortar manifestation of that relationship, but as has been shown here, these overlaps are not straightforward. This examination of squatting in Poland has helped identify some key tensions in the relationship between anarchism and punk, reflecting many of the terms and frames of the supposed ‘lifestylist’ versus ‘workerist’ dichotomy in anarchism more widely. But, crucially, these tensions play-out in more complex forms, and on closer inspection the dichotomy is revealed to be anyway false. Rather, a spectrum of anarchist perspectives is evident in the experience of squatting in Poland.

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- Respondent B (m) – 16/05/2013 – Poznan – Member of Rozbrat squat – Member of hardcore/metal band
- Respondent C (w) – 17/05/2013 – Poznan – Member of Rozbrat squat – Member of Ogólnopolski Związek Zawodowy Inicjatywa Pracownicza
- Respondent (m) – 18/05/2013 – Poznan – Member of Od:zysk squat
- Respondent (m) – 21/05/2013 – Warsaw – Member of Związek Syndykalistów Polski
- Respondent F (m) – 24/05/2013 – Warsaw
- Respondent G (m) – 25/05/2013 – Warsaw – Member of Przychodnia squat
- Respondent H (m) – 27/05/2013 – Warsaw – Member of Przychodnia squat (former member of Elba squat)

Respondent I (m) – 27/05/2013 – Warsaw – Member of Przychodnia squat – Member of post-punk band

Respondent J (m) – 31/05/2013 – Wrocław – Operates DIY label

Respondent K (m) – 02/06/2013 – Wrocław – Member of Wagenburg squat

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