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Photographing Reurbanization in West Berlin, 1977-84

*For generations the Berlin city laboratory has been called Kreuzberg.
-Hardt-Waltherr Hämer, IBA Berlin 1987: Project Report*

In the December of 1979, the amateur photography group *Fotowerkstatt Rotfilter* met every Saturday at 11am to document the West Berlin neighbourhood of Kreuzberg.¹ Here one could see a bricolage of post-war planning policies in the built environment. The northwest corner of the district was particularly green due to the reconstruction efforts of the 1940s and 1950s, but apartment blocks possessed no relationship to existing streets or the characteristic mixture of residential and commercial properties in the area. Further to the east in Kottbusser Tor the cityscape looked very different. Here, from 1963 on, the West Berlin Senate had embraced an almost total demolition and rebuilding of apartments through the policy of clear-cut or area renovation (*Kahlschlag-oder Flächensanierung*).² Construction rates slowed somewhat after May 1976 as the Construction Minister Harry Ristock sought to temper this policy and replace it with a new programme of urban repair (*Stadtreparatur*), creating yet another aesthetic in the streets around the former Görlitzer Bahnhof. It was in this striking built environment that the *Fotowerkstatt Rotfilter* met but as the group wrote, making documentary photographs had, ‘become difficult in recent times because, thanks to the “Strategies for Kreuzberg” hype, hundreds of people with cameras are walking through our neighbourhood (*Kiez*).’³ Tourists had begun to arrive in a steady stream, snapping what they could on foot or from the free bus tours on offer in the vicinity.⁴ So too had professional photographers. Everybody, it seemed, wanted to photograph Kreuzberg’s transformation by 1979.

For the *Fotowerkstatt Rotfilter*, Kreuzberg raised important questions vis-à-vis the moral underpinnings of official planning policies. For whom exactly was the city being reurbanized? How was the Berlin Senate going to deal with the growing occurrences of speculation, increased rent and forced dislocation that accompanied modernization? And what effects were these multifarious planning policies having on local residents? In other words, classic humanist concerns characterized the group’s desire to photograph Kreuzberg and indeed they have preoccupied the work of historians and social scientists interested in reurbanization.⁵ We possess a number of studies that analyse the complex and shifting claims to the city made during this period, as well as the new forms of protest this entailed, especially squatting.⁶ But for all its merits, research on reurbanization in the post-war period has largely done away with the photographic mania in which housing debates occurred. In the case of Kreuzberg, it overlooks the surge of photographs made in the district as debates about housing policies reached national attention. The contemporary faith in the photograph to capture humanist questions in a way that no other medium could seems to be all but forgotten.

This chapter explores the circulation of resident photographs of Kreuzberg in the 1970s and 1980s, thereby illuminating an ethics of seeing developed in the vernacular of a local, neighbourhood setting. Residents found the photograph particularly suited to their cause for two reasons. Firstly, photographs were a simple means of showing the alienating effects of demolitions and the new housing developments being built over historical Kreuzberg, despite the Senate’s commitment to urban repair. Images of rubble, vacant blocks and new housing developments – often abstracted to a series of geometric surfaces – became increasingly common, as did photographs that contrasted these interventions in the built environment with bustling local communities. Such photographs enabled residents to evoke an emotional

connectedness with the old cityscape in the viewer, thereby encouraging a reassessment of planning policies on the part of a wider German public.⁷ And it was not just the local community that recognized this potential. The West Berlin Senate, political parties, citizens' initiatives and the press all acknowledged the importance of the visual to planning debates and circulated images in a conscious effort to shift public opinion.⁸

Secondly, it appears that the residents and the counter-cultural youth that came to occupy Kreuzberg saw in the photograph the means to transform individual, isolated connections to the built environment into a movement of widespread importance. As Elizabeth Edwards outlined in her contribution to this book, photographs play an important role in processes from non-event to event. They help to create significance where traditional hierarchies might overlook it. Although the residents and students never voiced their pursuit in these terms, it is evident that the circulation of photographs in Kreuzberg helped to transform the district into a 'scene'. Photography groups like the Fotowerkstatt Rotfilter followed residents into illegally occupied apartments, where locals had begun to renovate old structures as a form of protest against reurbanization policies.⁹ Likewise, a small amount of film footage gave the public its first or only views inside an occupied apartment where squatters were busy animating the neighbourhood by renovating doors, windows and fixtures. Visual media were especially effective in reproducing this performance of occupation on a broader scale and gathering individuals into social networks of support. Otherwise put, recourse to the photograph in this period seems to suggest a collective impulse towards direct action.¹⁰

Moreover, editors of resident newspapers encouraged participation in the scene by asking readers to send in their own photographs of contemporary or bygone Kreuzberg so as to create a rich visual archive of the district. They used photographs to show how locals fit into the historical evolution of Kreuzberg and involved them in the active construction of its social history. This contextualization of photographs by resident organizations in newspapers and exhibitions became crucial to mounting a defence against reurbanization and they provided a common source of animation for the politics of residents, squatters and sympathetic political parties in the district.

Resident photographers can be seen, therefore, as part of a larger history of humanist photography focused on urban landscapes and the ethics of seeing it generated. Since its inception, photography has been essential for drawing attention to overlooked parts of cities. For intellectuals like Walter Benjamin, the landscape of the subterranean could undermine the appearance of order and completeness in a city.¹¹ Eugène Atget had done this at the turn of the twentieth century through his photographs of Paris's medieval courtyards, streets and outlying areas, and the surrealist photographers of the 1920s and 1930s were heading in the same direction. In a similar manner, photo essays in the Weimar illustrated press provided a popular forum for bringing whole quarters of the city's less salubrious regions into focus.¹² These photographers used a powerful social realism to illuminate the plight of the urban poor. In the post-war years, cultural critics strongly influenced by Benjamin once again became interested in the political potential of urban spaces 'failing' to keep pace with development in a city, and in the late 1970s, groups like the Fotowerkstatt Rotfilter joined this long-standing tradition. Yet of all the moments in the twentieth century in which German photographers produced humanist photographs of urban change, the resident photographs of the period 1977 to 1984 are certainly among the most interesting. Unlike the social realism of the Weimar years, the quarter portraits of Kreuzberg referenced the many social connections and continuities they could find in their suburb in a Benjamin-like manner.¹³ This was not necessarily aesthetically

innovative, but the synthesis of ideas and references opened a new chapter in the way we see the city, as well as initiating a new source of saturation that would come to prevent ethical ways of seeing.

Kreuzberg from the Outside

Photographs of debris by named and unnamed photographers began to appear in Kreuzberg's resident newspapers in the late 1970s. In October 1978, the Citizens' Initiative SO 36 (*BI SO 36*) – one of a handful of citizens' initiatives founded between 1977 and 1979 to energize the turn towards urban repair – published an image of two apartment blocks mid demolition, on which they superimposed a quotation describing the 'deadly excavators' that could destroy thousand-year old cities in a fortnight.¹⁴ The photograph was taken by Bernd Proske of the Rotfilter group and the words were Bertolt Brecht's, except for the term 'excavator' (*Bagger*), which replaced the original 'deadly birds' (*Todesvögel*). Brecht's stanza first appeared in his *Kriegsfibel* (1955) against a photograph of Liverpool harbour but whereas Brecht alluded to the destruction Liverpool endured from German bombers during the war, the new image was, it seemed, drawing on the weight of Brecht's 'photo-epigram' to make the point that reurbanization was now unleashing the same destructive power in the city as aerial bombing had done in World War Two.

Resident broadsheets appeared across Kreuzberg from 1977 on to make exactly this point. The Citizens' Initiative SO 36 provided a detailed coverage of destruction and construction in east Kreuzberg in its monthly *Südst Express*. The editors commissioned their own photographs but they also encouraged residents to send in photographs for publication.¹⁵ By December 1978 – a year after the foundation of the newspaper – the Citizens' Initiative SO 36 was selling 2,000 copies a month at a price of 60 Pfenning.¹⁶ By 1980, circulation stood somewhere between 2,500 and 2,700 copies per month.¹⁷ In west Kreuzberg, the *SüdWest-express* provided the largest dissemination of images of Kreuzberg's transformation. It ran throughout the height of the squatting movement in 1981 and 1982. Likewise, the *Instand-Besetzer-Post* also played an important role in circulating such images for a number of West Berlin districts. This weekly newspaper was founded in March 1981 and ran until the end of that year. It originally cost 50 Pfenning and had a circulation of 3,000 copies. Circulation rose to 4,000 in May.¹⁸ Attributions rarely accompanied photographs in resident papers, meaning that it is very difficult to speak with certainty as to the place of photographers in the political landscape but what is clear is the attitude of the newspapers towards the destruction in the district. The ephemeral broadsheets that circulated between 1977 and 1984 consistently denounced demolitions as a problem caused by the policies of the Senate in general and Harry Ristock in particular, and realized by developers. Prominent personalities such as Peter-Paul Zahl often agreed with the concerns raised by resident newspapers. He claimed that: 'today speculators are managing to do what Hitler and his World War were incapable of bringing about.'¹⁹ Even *Der Spiegel* described how, in past years, building refuse and debris was known to 'fall like bombs' in Kreuzberg.²⁰

Alongside the publication of largely unattributed photographs, a small number of professional photographers sympathetic to resident concerns also began photographing the demolitions in Kreuzberg. Michael Kipp and Manfred Kraft were two such photographers who possessed close links to West Berlin communities and their later squatting scenes. These professionals sold their photographs to Berlin's left-leaning newspapers such as the *TAZ* and magazines like *Zitty*.²¹ Michael Kipp also sold

his photographs to national press organs producing engaged journalism such as the *Stern* and *Der Spiegel*.²² Like resident photographers, Manfred Kraft illuminated the scale and effects of demolition in his images. He often utilized a strong triangular composition to frame rubble in the district – just as Bernd Proske had done – but Kraft’s photographs were livelier, incorporating the movement of smoke and onlookers in the immediate surroundings (Figure 1). This visual technique was effective for drawing attention not only to the scale of destruction in Kreuzberg but also to its impact on life in the district. Kraft gave a human face to his time-series photographs of explosions, portraits of mountainous rubble, or panoramic views of completely levelled blocks of land to make the point that demolition in the post-war period had become a regular event and an intrusion into everyday life on a mass scale.²³

INSERT FIGURES 1 AND 2

Both amateur and professional photographers contrasted this developing visual of a populated Kreuzberg with the new complexes built in the area. Photographs of recently built apartments in resident newspapers deployed oblique angles, surprising vantage points and a foregrounding of the inorganic to make them appear abstract and alienated of social life (Figure 2). Such buildings – known as ‘grey lice’ in common parlance – could be found along the S-Bahn between Kottbusser Tor and Schlesisches Tor.²⁴ Of these, the most salient example was the New Kreuzberg Centre (*Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum, NKZ*), completed in 1974. The directors of this project had promised a residential complex fitted with shops, affordable retail space, car parks and a ‘friendly green’ feel.²⁵ But what resulted was one of the most hideous and dysfunctional buildings in West Berlin. For the residents living in the centre, a sense of anonymity caused serious mistrust and by 1980 it had become a prison of noise, dirt, concrete and steel.²⁶ Some even went so far as to refer to the centre as the ‘new KZ’, the German abbreviation for concentration camp (*Konzentrationslager*).²⁷ A range of photographs and articles depicted other alienating complexes and the ‘dead’ footpaths around them that ‘had nothing to do with Kreuzberg’, making the point that, as the *Südos Express* claimed, modern architecture was destroying city life by, ‘turning lively old quarters into sleepy suburbs’.²⁸

Hence, photographs in resident newspapers over the period 1977 to 1979 drew attention to two new lines of seeing, both of which challenged the Senate’s claim that it was being more sensitive to the Kreuzberg cityscape. Photographs of debris emphasized the trauma reurbanization caused locals, and photographs of new constructions alluded to the eventual destruction of local life. Underpinning these images was the assertion that the Kreuzberg cityscape was supporting a valuable but overlooked social entity. It was supporting, as members of the scene put it, a *Kiez*.²⁹ The term *Kiez* in German conjures up images of conviviality and belonging, much like the term ‘quartier’ in French or ‘neighbourhood’ in English.³⁰ For instance, the *Instand-Besetzer-Post* defined *Kiez* in their ‘Small Scene Dictionary’ as a: ‘*Heimat* or one’s own quarter, district or city precinct full of life and feeling’.³¹ Photographs suggested, in other words, that the administrative area in which building projects were taking place was not neutral space but an inhabited place, imbued with people’s hopes, fears, histories and futures.

Awareness of the Kreuzberg *Kiez* became increasingly widespread with the help of photographs. For example, the *Südos Express* urged residents to make ‘springtime strolls through SO 36’ guided by the photographs published in their newspaper.³² Brief descriptions of the area and its history, such as narratives of the

changing uses of municipal space, accompanied the photographs in these articles. They were also combined stanzas from Bertolt Brecht's *An die Nachgeborenen* to heighten the significance of walking and looking. The very fact that the paper was encouraging readers to engage in discussions about 'trees' or buildings in the Kreuzberg context, to walk among them, to look at them, was tantamount to a transgression according to the quotations they chose. With the help of Brecht, the *Südosst Express* believed themselves to be encouraging a radical activism in the acts of walking and looking. Moreover, the growing recognition of a Kiez in Kreuzberg by resident photographers helps to make sense of the frequent associations of the Senate and speculators with Nazism: the Senate was not just demolishing buildings, resident newspapers claimed, but engaging in the morally egregious destruction of community itself. Its failed attempts at reurbanization were destroying a place rather than an administrative space.

Citizens' initiatives continued to energize the turn towards urban repair during this period, which led to increased resistance among residents and beginning in 1979, a widespread squatting movement. On 3 February 1979, the Citizens' Initiative SO 36 occupied apartment buildings on the Lübbener Straße and Görlitzer Straße. Throughout 1979 and 1980, student, alternative and autonomist groups joined residents in taking over and renovating old apartment blocks rather than seeing them demolished. As the minister Klaus Duntze argued, these young Germans also saw an abiding social value in Kreuzberg that the authorities refused to acknowledge in the debate on reurbanization. 'For them,' he wrote, 'the quarter means...more than just cheap living space. [It offers them] the chance to...try out lifestyles from tomorrow.'³³ In the early months of 1981, squats increased rapidly in Kreuzberg and the surrounding districts so that by the summer, around 165 apartment buildings were occupied in West Berlin. After this dramatic turn of events the scene splintered and by the autumn of 1984 it came to a close, but not before a flood of images came to national attention.³⁴

Kreuzberg from the Inside

During the height of the squatting movement, the number of images produced by citizens' initiatives increased exponentially. So too did those taken and circulated by the local authorities, police and most notably, the press. The West Berlin newspapers, in particular those belonging to the Springer empire, were mainly interested in using photography to portray opponents of reurbanization as dangerous extremists, undermining the very foundations of the Federal Republic. They printed, for instance, images of street rioting, violent evictions and revanchist reoccupations to destabilize the legitimacy of the squatting movement. As the *Alternative Liste* (AL) – the forerunner of the Greens party – wrote, articles in the *Bild*, *BZ* and *Berliner Morgenpost* were whipping up a 'pogrom against squatters and their supporters'.³⁵ However, many resident photographers preferred to turn their cameras back to the question of the Kreuzberg Kiez by profiling civic initiatives and events intertwined in the built environment. In particular, photographers focused on the occupation of Kreuzberg's rental barracks rather than the more violent street protests carried out by some members of the scene.

Views into occupied apartments were slow to appear in 1979 and 1980, but by 1981 they were readily available. The *Südosst Express* first published this style of picture with the occupations of Lübbener Straße 3 and Görlitzer Straße 74.³⁶ On a double page spread, one could see squatters working together, climbing ladders, stripping back wallpaper and painting doors. Renovation images likewise became a fixture in the *Instand-Besetzer-Post* in 1981 and they were not uncommon in *Zitty* and other Berlin

newspapers at this time. *Zitty* sent the journalist Wolfgang Spielhagen into a squat in Bülowstraße 55 where he recorded his experience of spending hours sitting ‘around the table, drinking and talking’.³⁷ In March 1981, *Der Spiegel* sent Hans Halter into an occupation and in September 1981 Jörg Mettke documented the forcible eviction of squatters from an apartment.³⁸

A great deal of the photographs of occupied apartments focused on actions of hard work or motifs that illuminated industriousness. As the editors of the *Südosst Express* stated alongside their photographic reportage: ‘many residents in SO 36 think of longhaired crackheads, punks with buzz cuts, or people fishing for a rent-free apartment when they hear the word maintenance squatting (*Instandbesetzung*). This has, however, nothing to do with crackheads. Rather, as the following images should make clear, it mostly involves lots of work, effort and expenses.’³⁹ Scene photographers chronicled resident and alternative squatters using their hands to saw and join, conjuring up romantic associations of the moral economy of craftwork. At times these images even reproduced stylistic elements characteristic of romantic painters, particularly the *Rückenfigur* or figure shown from the back, to emphasize such an interpretation (Figure 3). To be sure, these photographs provoked detractors to criticize squatters as new romantics.⁴⁰

INSERT FIGURE 3 – I would ideally like this to be a full page image

Such throwbacks to history were important and provided a crucial link for the performative reconstruction of the Kiez. Local broadsheets were aware of the rhetorical power of heritage and deliberately drew upon memories and myths to bolster the virtue of the squatting scene. The *Südosst Express* encouraged, for example, residents to send in photographs of Kreuzberg’s late nineteenth-century and interwar topographies to build a picture of Kreuzberg as the home to generations of workers.⁴¹ The editors created a regular double-page spread, in which they reprinted vintage photographs. At times comparisons to contemporary photographs were made, aligning the same street, square, station or apartment block. But in such cases, the parallels drawn were not crudely political, rather they were designed to educate residents about the rich history of their district.⁴² The *SüdWest-express* mimicked the *Südosst Express* in printing a regular double-page spread of vintage cityscapes and the *Instand-Besetzer-Post* developed histories of this hard-working Kiez.⁴³ The *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Westberlins (SEW)* also printed historical images near squatting articles, arguing that the quarter had long been a bastion for the working class and had always ‘voted red’.⁴⁴

Alongside values of hard work, photographers sought to articulate a sense of conviviality in occupations, similar to that seen in working-class associations. Images of squatters sitting around kitchen tables or in group meetings were ideal for expressing such an idea. As Belinda Davis has argued, ‘kitchen tables were one of the most popular meeting places for activists, offering a highly desired intimacy, requiring no one else’s “permission” to use them, and demanding little outlay of cash.’⁴⁵ In other words, kitchen tables made feelings of belonging and emotional connectedness easily accessible. They also appeared to bring together a range of people, breaking down divisions between the young and old, men and women, and the employed, unemployed and the student. But there were certainly limits to this trope. Despite claims to the contrary, depictions of the kitchen frequently showed women continuing to serve men, rather than sitting themselves at the table, smoking, talking or strategizing. And in other photographs, one can see that a normative gender dynamic often prevailed in the squatting scene.

Nevertheless, editors actively sought a wider sense of conviviality in the visual archive of the past, particularly in kitchens, to bolster the rhetoric of the present. Alongside images of Kreuzberg's existing communities, editors printed photographs alluding to the generations of working-class populations that had lived in the rental barracks. In March 1979, the *Südosst Express* published a double-page photograph of a dilapidated rental barrack with a particularly deep series of courtyards, over which they asked how one could begin to count the: number of feet that had walked through these courtyards; amount of work carried out there; number of nights filled with anxiety; incidence of rage; quantity of schnapps drunk; and number of children born, raised and lost in these apartments.⁴⁶ The *Instand-Besetzer-Post* similarly reprinted this image and the accompanying caption.⁴⁷ Moreover by 1981, photographs of the nineteenth-century inhabitants of the rental barracks had begun to appear in the *Südosst Express* and *SüdWest-express*. Mostly in groups, these portraits created the idea that rental barracks were not simply architectural containers for contemporary social lives; they had acted as the architectural containers for decades.⁴⁸ This observation was important because it bolstered the claim that Kreuzberg's building stock had a redeeming value in the number of social histories it offered to tell, rather than modern apartments, which contained no trace of the past.⁴⁹ Resident newspapers claimed that rental barracks were 'real houses' and on this basis, new futures for the district could be imagined.

In some instances, although this was rare, photographers looked to include marginalized groups in the construction of place in Kreuzberg. For example, a small number photographs illuminated squats that were run entirely by women, for women, to create living arrangements that were rarely tolerated outside the scene. As the *Südosst Express* reported in February 1981, women were often prevented from finding accommodation by themselves or as a group on the grounds that they might be lesbians or would attract conspicuous numbers of men to the house. In order to fight such prejudices, thirteen women established a squat in the Liegnitzer Straße 5, in front of which they hung banners affirming their occupation. Like other squats, this group of women began renovating their apartment alongside their academic or work commitments, and used the squat to support self-help initiatives.⁵⁰ Images of women participating in renovation activities were important for making their presence visible in squatting communities and refuting the traditional gender norms that shaped society and much of the movement (Figure 4).

INSERT FIGURES 4 AND 5

Though this was emphatically less common, at times resident photographers also included the presence of Turkish communities in the construction of place. In both the *Südosst Express* and *Instand-Besetzer-Post* a small number of photographs exist, in which Turkish men and/or women are busy with the work of renovation in joint Turkish-German ventures such as the Regenbogenfabrik. *Der Spiegel* likewise produced an article on the Turkish women in the Kottbusser Straße 8. Here eight women and five children, most of whom were Turkish, sought to renovate the apartment in collaboration with their German neighbours. Two sociologists from the Freie Universität worked with the women and supported the venture as an 'example for integration' between foreign and German families. This was certainly clear to see in the accompanying photographs, the third of which was an archetypical example of community created through work. Moreover, the virtue of the workers in this article brought into stark relief the immorality of contracted labourers and the police. As the author recorded, the women were not treated 'as human beings' and even in one

instance, builders greeted them by banging on the door and yelling, ‘Hitler forgot to gas you all to death’.⁵¹ However, as with images of female activists, these photographs were neither widespread nor did they garner a strong historical underpinning in the visual reconstruction of the Kiez.

What was most common across this corpus of images was the attempt to conflate the human element of Kreuzberg and democratic values, especially as tensions between occupants and the police increased. In December 1980, the violent police eviction of squats in the Admiralstraße and Fraenkelufer hit the headlines and in March 1981, a wave of police evictions began according to the strategy titled the ‘Berlin Line of Reason’ (*Berliner Linie der Vernunft*). It was important for many of the nonviolent protesters and documentary photographers to meet this expression of authority with a distinct moral superiority as they lacked any real legal standing in the face of eviction. As the police drilled through walled-up entrances and windows, squatters sought to show that the world they were entering was one of order, hard work and peaceful equality. Rooms were newly painted and possessed functioning amenities. Furthermore, the photographs taken by Michael Kipp during the evacuation of Hermsdorfer Straße 4 indicated that the order in the built environment was reflected in the inhabitants and in contrast to the disorder of the police. Kipp frequently deployed creative vantage points to make this point (Figure 5). Likewise, the reportage of such events in *Der Spiegel* drew attention to the surprising features of the situation, such as the fact that squatters sat on stairwells, waiting for the police and singing ‘under the paving stones lies the beach’.⁵² These lyrics reproduced the famous slogan of the Situationist International and graffitied across Paris in 1968, and they exemplified the movement of the 1980s: behind Berlin’s rental barracks lay a beach, an exciting new world of authentic social liberation for the individual, squat community and the Kiez.

As images conflating the Kiez with democratic values increased, so too did the attempts of the citizens’ initiatives to contextualize and foster social networks around them. Photographs of the Kreuzberg Kiez past and present increasingly appeared beyond the pages of resident newsletters at community events, popularizing the ways in which resident photographers wanted people to see this place and its history. For example, the *SüdWest-express* published photographs of the street festival of 27 June 1981 in the Eylauer Straße showing older residents and renovation squatters in conversation. According to the article, this sense of integration was aided by an exhibition of photographs and archival materials designed to awaken ‘a community feeling’ (*Kiezgefühl*).⁵³ In a similar manner, the *Instand-Besetzer-Post* published photographs of residents walking, browsing exhibits and talking with one another at the Richardplatz spring festival in Neukölln. Such photographs conveyed a distinct sense of interest and involvement in community matters, as well as a general celebration of the uniqueness of inner-city living. The accompanying article in the *Instand-Besetzer-Post* noted that the festival offered information, drinks, photographs from occupied houses, ‘home-made’ cakes and ‘self-composed’ music.⁵⁴ To be sure, an emphasis on the ‘home-made’ could be seen across numerous photographs, indicating an almost village feel of care and closeness in community projects.

The development of scene networks around photographs and the social heritages they were defending also spread throughout 1981 in the form of photography exhibitions.⁵⁵ In early 1981, squatters held an exhibition on squatting in Amsterdam before Ralph Rieth, Peter Hebler and the *März-Foto-Kollektiv* hosted an exhibition entitled, ‘Squatting in Berlin’ (*Hausbesetzung in Berlin*).⁵⁶ The *März-Foto-Kollektiv* displayed photographs, pamphlets, placards and commentaries from over 160 occupied houses ordered according to their Kiez. Alongside these exhibitions, the show ‘Pictures

of Maintenance Squatters' (*Instandbesetzerbilder*) took place until 28 August in the Galerie am Chamissoplatz. It presented photographs of renovation squatting by Wolfgang Krolow, as well as an overview of the work undertaken by the Chamissoplatz Tenants' Council (*Mieterrat Chamissoplatz*) over the last five years.⁵⁷ On 11 August 1981, the exhibition, 'Happiness Needs a Home: An Exhibition about Housing Shortage, Demolition and Tenant Self-Help in Berlin-Wedding, 1891-1981' (*Das Glück braucht ein Zuhause: eine Ausstellung über Wohnungsnot, Abriß und Mieterselbsthilfe in Berlin-Wedding, 1891-1981*) opened in an occupied house in the Blumenthalerstraße, providing a fascinating view inside apartments past and present (Figure 6).⁵⁸ Other exhibitions also took place in the second half of 1981, including 'A Look into Maintenance Squatted Houses' (*Ein Blick in instandbesetzte Häuser*) and a retrospective of the last ten years of squatting in Berlin.⁵⁹

INSERT FIGURE 6

Taken together, photographs of residents and students restoring authentic, historically embedded cityscapes drew attention to the 'moral protest of the squatters'.⁶⁰ Squatters were, their newspapers and exhibitions claimed, simply continuing a series of traditional, respectable activities that had occurred in this district from time immemorial, unlike the actions of the Senate, which were often depicted as being artificial, immoral and analogous to those of the National Socialists. The work of resident squatters in repairing their quarter was helping to sustain a way of living that was, they claimed, loved by inner-city residents and that supported a valuable urban community. Likewise, the restoration work being carried out by alternative squatters was cultivating, resident papers argued, the democratic values needed for the regeneration of German society. Squatters claimed to support non-hierarchical communities and civic participation, but as we have seen, the reality was that women and marginalized groups only had a limited place in the movement. Nevertheless, photographs of Kreuzberg's built environment sought to evoke a long history associated with the integrity of hard work, as well as providing the impetus for realizing a new future connected to global, democratic movements.

Liminal Kreuzberg

Taking photographs of renovation squatting subsided somewhat during the period 1982 to 1984, but not before they helped to shift reurbanization debates in Kreuzberg. Reports suggest that resident newspapers and exhibitions were reasonably successful in increasing the limited but critical support for the social worth of Kreuzberg. In 1979, the *kulturpolitische Gesellschaft Bonn* – a society run by Deputy Mayors for cultural affairs from a number of large cities, academics, actors, directors and artists – awarded their annual prize to *BI SO 36* and the *Verein SO 36*, including a cash payment of 2,000 DM to the *Südost Express*.⁶¹ Exhibitions too were having some success in capturing public attention. In January 1982, the *SüdWest-express* wrote that, 'only a relative minority of the population' were familiar with the photographs of renovation squatting in the exhibition in the Red Corner but this was not to be derided.⁶² Exhibitions were helping to raise public awareness, so the article went, by virtue of the fact that they illuminated entire themes relevant to contemporary debate – something individual photographs in newspapers could not achieve. Moreover, polls conducted by the Institute for Applied Social Research (*Institut für angewandte Sozialforschung*) in 1981

showed that sixty-three per cent of West Berliners approved of the squats they saw in the press, provided they were nonviolent.⁶³

Photographs in squatter newspapers and exhibitions also helped to confront local political parties with the language of a vibrant social past and present in Kreuzberg and garner important support in these circles. Political discussions were held in association with squatting exhibitions, putting debates about the future of the district in direct relationship to the moral economy of squatting. For example, the podium discussion ‘What’s next for Kreuzberg?’ (*Wie geht es weiter in Kreuzberg?*) took place in association with the exhibition *Instandbesetzerbilder*. Participants included: Heinrich Lummer (CDU), Ulrich Rastenborski (CDU), Werner Orłowski (Baustadtrat Kreuzberg), Peter Ulrich (SPD) und Klaus Dunthe (minister in SO36).⁶⁴ The importance of observing social relations in reurbanization gained the most traction with the SEW and the AL. The AL created their own division for renovation squatting and actively argued against inhumane reurbanization policies. In doing so, they activated the social-historical arguments created by photographs of renovation squatting. ‘Kreuzberg must be preserved,’ one newsletter asserted, ‘– with its front houses, side wings and workshops. Here the history of a city can be felt and experienced. Here social structures came into being that have survived until today.’⁶⁵ To be sure it helped that the founding members of the AL in Kreuzberg included photographers such as Michael Kipp, who had done so much to promote a sense of place in the district.

The public and political pressure created through maintenance squatting and its visualization was sufficient to force municipal authorities to enter into a process of legalization with squatters. Seventy-seven squatted apartments were legalized in 1979 and 1980, before the new CDU-led Senate and its hard-line stance on squatting came into effect in May 1981.⁶⁶ The CDU significantly curbed processes of legalization but it could not undo the real gains secured by renovation squatters. Public opinion helped to ensure a partial continuation of legal integration after May 1981, so that by 1984, 105 of the 165 squatted apartments in West Berlin were secured by rental or purchase agreements.⁶⁷ This was certainly no sweeping victory for the squatting movement but it did show that the conceptualization of place was not without material consequence. Moreover, political pressure from the AL and SPD-controlled borough government in Kreuzberg saw the Senate agree in 1983 to a major shift in policy.⁶⁸ At this time the Senate declared their commitment to the ‘Twelve Principles of Careful Urban Renewal’ – a guide designed to promote a more resident friendly form of development in West Berlin, including a commitment to preserving, ‘Kreuzberg’s special character’.⁶⁹ And these were not just words. As Hardt-Waltherr Hämer reported in 1990, the rate of construction in Kreuzberg sunk dramatically as a result. From an intended 1,600 new residential units planned in 1979, only 360 were actually built after the introduction of the Twelve Principles. 370 courtyards were transformed through planting and most spectacularly, almost 7,000 apartments were renewed instead of the planned 1,500. The authorities also set up a range of community centres, meeting places for young people and sporting facilities.⁷⁰

At the contemporaneous International Building Exhibition (*Internationale Bauausstellung, IBA*), the authorities provided access to the renovated apartments in Kreuzberg, as well as a whole barrage of pamphlets and books in support of careful urban renewal. Not only did this paraphernalia incorporate many of the squatting ideals, but in some instances, it also reprinted original photographs taken by the photographers of the *Südosst Express*.⁷¹ The IBA experience showed that the creation of place by resident photographers had been an integrating force and should be viewed as an important consideration for future planning. Hardt-Waltherr Hämer even went so far as

to suggest that the careless destruction of building stock was now, without question, conflated with, ‘destroying culture and evidence of human history. And this means that we are not just losing homes, jobs and inner-city life, we are also losing our identity and with this the most important foundation of our cultural society.’⁷² A louder echo of the social worlds past and present created by the squatting movement could not have been clearer.

Conclusion

Facing one of the largest urban-renewal projects in post-war history, resident newspapers used photographs to encourage locals and local authorities to see Kreuzberg as a web of valuable social relations, as a Kiez, rather than an administrative district designated for destruction. *Kiezporträts* celebrated the village feel of inner-city living and drew attention to the many authentic, community-based experiences available in occupied apartments. Moreover, the reprinting of vintage photographs in resident newspapers and exhibitions, especially those depicting Kreuzberger of the past, added a rhetorical weight to this idea by suggesting a striking continuity between the Kiez of the 1970s and that of the late nineteenth century. The implication was that Kreuzberg’s tenements created a district identity inflected with strong working-class associations, and the renovation activities undertaken by resident squatters to save their homes acknowledged Kreuzberg’s uniqueness as one of the last tenement quarters of Europe. It created, in other words, a sense of urgency around saving this community and its valuable social heritage.⁷³

Photographs served to evoke empathy for the residents and disaffected youth in Kreuzberg, encouraging a break with contemporary attitudes towards housing policies. They primarily did so by presenting overlooked realities in the district, from continued demolitions to the sense of community generated around maintenance squatting. The contextualization of such photographs was important in resident newspapers, exhibitions and at public discussions, with citizens’ initiatives providing the most important framing for how this line of seeing should be understood. The representational strategies deployed by residents were understandably less innovative and the weakest catalyst to action in the housing debates but they were not overlooked. The abstraction of rubble and new housing developments in the years 1977 to 1979 contrasted with the increasingly humanized images of Kreuzberg produced at the height of the squatting movement. When photographing squats from the inside, residents and professional photographers often relied on montage or allusion in form to invest their humanized images with links to larger social histories and moral economies of work. Here too aesthetics sought the same animation in the view as the subject.

The resident photographs of Kreuzberg over the years 1977 to 1984 had an immediate effect on planning policies. They facilitated the consolidation of social networks of support for squatting and encouraged animation on the part of a range of political actors. In short, they helped to produce a sense that Kreuzberg was facilitating a scene in which future realities were being realized.

This being said, the long-term success of the *Kiezporträt* in the process of reurbanization is more questionable. The subsequent gentrification of the districts of Prenzlauer Berg and Friedrichshain after 1989 suggests that the authorities often continued to deprioritize the social importance of local populations for economic considerations. A second wave of squatting took place in these suburbs in 1990 but here too social and cultural concerns were soon overridden. And in Kreuzberg today a growing gentrification threatens the local community once again, suggesting that there

are now perhaps too many photographs of this order to evoke protest. But photographs of place also had long-term implications for validating the new social worlds developed by squatters and on this level, it seems that values have shifted in a more lasting way. Kreuzberg's old building stock offered many spaces in which social and political experience could be explored away from the march of normalization promoted by the authorities. Here photographs of new forms of communal living helped to challenge the hierarchical forms of interaction that characterized society in the late 1970s. In some instances, as with the case of women and immigrants, the professed radicalism of the squatters was not as progressive as some photographs suggested. Nevertheless, there were a substantial number of areas in which progressive ideals challenged traditional norms and this local political scene provided a clear platform for wider, global movements that have, in bursts, remained part of the political landscape until today.

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³ 'Fotowerkstatt Rotfilter', *Südost Express* 12(1979), 17.

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⁵ There were many notable examples of reurbanization outside the Federal Republic of Germany. Across the Wall, for instance, the construction of the Leninplatz exemplified the German Democratic Republic's commitment to providing, 'better, cheaper, quicker construction' in the city. Beyond the two Germanies in Paris, the French authorities approved the reurbanization of an estimated twenty-four per cent of the city's surface area between 1954 and 1974, causing a displacement of around 550,000 people. See: R. Strobel. 1994. 'Before the Wall Came Tumbling Down: Urban Planning Paradigm Shifts in a Divided Berlin', *Journal of Architectural Education* 48(1), 29-30; D. Pinder. 2005. *Visions of the City: Utopianism, Power and Politics in Twentieth-Century Urbanism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 137.

⁶ See: H. Pruijt. 2013. 'The Logic of Urban Squatting', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 37(1), 19-45; R. Koopmans. 1995. *Democracy from Below: New Social Movements and Political System in West Germany*, Colorado: Westview; R. Karapın. 2007. *Protest Politics in Germany: Movements on the Left and Right since the 1960s*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 61-116; A.

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⁸ As the editors of one resident newspaper wrote: 'every day you can see just how important photographs are to the political debate and to the formation of opinion...if you cast a glance at the Berlin press.' See 'Auf die Tiefenschärfe kommt es an Fotoausstellung im Roten Eck', *SüdWest-express* 9(1982), 20.

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