

Squatters as social ecology practice

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Abstract:

Often analysis around cities as sites of ecological disaster or change focus on how to develop the cities, how to install new mechanisms or institutions that can help to minimise the danger and damaging output of the cities. Rarely do they focus on how to use what is already there. I wish to present my research on squatting as a social movement, focusing on two elements. First, I want to explore how squatting utilises the waste element of cities production, embodying the concept of recycling, whilst providing needed housing to many people. Squatters occupy empty buildings, both directly challenging the state's housing policy through occupation as a political strategy, and providing themselves with an ecological housing solution in the meantime. While much-deserved attention goes towards those practitioners of new, environmental housing solutions, due recognition ought to be given to those utilising the buildings which already exist, and in vast number, globally. Second, squatting as a social movement often demonstrates the qualities that social ecologists endorse in communities: horizontal decision making, communal organising and an attempt towards egalitarianism in every aspect of living. For the purpose of this investigation I will be looking at both my historical research on the 1970s London squatters movement and also the recent, high profile, occupation of the Aylesbury Estate in South London. This is in order to emphasise continuity through time, and also the different ends for which people can turn to squatting, ('political' or personal), emphasising that whichever the end, squatting is an ecological and radical intervention into gentrification, city development and community restructuring and welfare.