JESTERS & FREAKS AGAINST DICTATORS & KINGS, THE MILITARY, THE POLICE AGAINST QUEERS WITH PUNKY BEATS

A Squatting zine, by Harris Georgakopoulos-Tolis

What is Squatting?

According to B.A. Garner's definition in the Black's Law Dictionary "squatting refers to the unauthorized occupation of land or property by individuals or groups seeking shelter or living arrangements" (Rantissi and Gitis 2024).

In a similar and more focused sense, Esposito and Chiodelli refer to "individualistic squatting... as a sheltering practice for marginalized individuals" (2023, 1436).

When considering both of these definitions, one is likely to recognize the common threads, with the aforementioned activist practice understood as a spontaneous action, born out of a need – an urgency for shelter. However, further researching precedents surrounding these occupations, one can realize how squatting can extend beyond the motive of 'securing shelter,' standing as a practice capable of challenging ideologies and power structures, while advocating for social change.

Hans Prujit identifies five key motives underlying such initiatives (2013, 22):

- Deprivation Based Squatting: Engagement in the practice as a reaction to poverty, or even indigence, in an effort to acquire refuge.

- Squatting as an Alternative Housing Strategy: As stated by Geronimo, this tactical form of illegal occupation is fueled by a desire to "live differently" and achieve "autonomy," understanding the inhabited space as a temporary "island-of-retreat" (2014, 13-14).

- Enterpreneurial Squatting: Whether this refers to the informal establishment of community centres, haunts, and hangouts, or small businesses and shops, these 'makeshift pop-ups' can greatly contribute to an area's flourishing.

- Conservational Squatting: Conservation of a structure, building, or landscape, whether due to its history, heritage, importance to the locality, or simply a resistance to reformation, urban renewal, or even gentrification.

- Political Squatting: This form of illegal occupation opens up to urban politics, expressing adverse possession as a "potential radicalization of urban democracy" (Martínez 2020, 1).

Adding on to the above analysis, one could potentially identify a sixth category of 'squatting for solidarity.'

Most importantly, however:

Squatting constitutes a subversion of colonial dynamics and an opposition to authoritarian governance, as it involves the occupation of space by those who have been historically marginalized or excluded.

While this zine cannot encompass the extensive array of forms and 'grounds' behind squatting practices, it recognizes their deep historical roots and ongoing development. The following section centres around the occupation of the Polytechnic School of Athens in 1973, aiming to exemplify some of the spatial, political, social, and cultural impacts of squatting...

The Occupation of the Polytechnic School, Athens, Greece

As one researches squatting (activism), diving further and further into the practice's diverse facets, intricacies, and junctions with sociopolitical movements, its 'non-binary' nature begins to resurface. In this manner, one can begin to recognize the potential for various motives to combine in illegal occupation, bringing about a similar variety of impacts, influences, and effects to the occupied space and its location; a type of 'phenomenon' that nothing seems to illustrate more clearly than the case of the occupation of the Polytechnic School of Athens, Greece (1973).

Following the end of World War II, Greece, like much of Europe, entered a state of disarray. In combination with King George II's return to rule and his death soon after, the country's political climate entered a period of fluctuation, climaxing with the Greek Civil War taking place soon after, as a result of a communist-dominated uprising against the existing political fabric. During these events, and following the end of the war, Greece's armed forces accumulated significant power, gradually recognizing themselves as not only defenders of the country from external threats but also from internal subversion. As these notions gradually manifested, they eventually resulted in the armed forces taking advantage of the overall political crisis that was present at the time, and launching a coup, led by Colonel Georgios Papadopoulos, to overthrow the Greek government and "misrule" the country in its place (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). Greece was now under the rule of a military 'junta' – a dictatorship, that eventually sparked a reaction from citizens, leading to the illegal occupation of the Polytechnic School of Athens (Kritidis 2014, 66-67).

As Kritidis mentions, this adverse possession event was the first time public buildings in Greece were occupied and transformed into centres of social and political mass protest (2014, 67). On November 14th, 1973, a diverse collective, primarily consisting of university students, with varied views and political beliefs, came together in solidarity against 'the state' and the dictatorship ('junta') ruling over the country at the time, and barricaded themselves inside the school. In an effort to maintain contact with the outside world and Greek citizens, a spontaneous independent radio station was created, broadcasting (live) testimonies, news, updates, and informing listeners regarding the occupation and the events that were unfolding. Furthermore, these "pirate-radio transmissions" enabled the flourishing and expansion of a type of counter-culture, primarily in music, as the students' would share 'forbidden songs' from past times of oppression and others created within the context and the time of the occupation; songs that hold great historical significance for Greece to the present day (documenta 14 n.d.; Kritidis 2014, 67). The occupation ended three days later, when a military tank, under orders of the 'junta' and Brigadier General Dimitrios Ioannidis, crashed through the Polytechnic School's gate, igniting an uprising that resulted in the death of many civilians, marking November 17th as a day of commemoration and remembrance of the tragedies that took place (Davison 2010; documenta 14 n.d.).

The Military Tank Crashing Through the Polytechnic School Gate on November 17, 1973, Athens, Greece (Image sourced from Kathimerini Newspaper, https://www.kathimerini.gr/society/561583657/polytechneio-1973-i-exegersi-ton-foititon-stis-17-noemvri/). The uprising that followed the invasion resulted in the death of many civilians of various ages, including several teenagers, and a 5-year-old kid (Mac Con Uladh 2012).

Taking advantage of the overall chaos that he partially incited, Ioannidis eventually launched a new coup attempting to overthrow the 'junta,' in which he succeeded, installing a new president and prime minister, while he operated as an "Invisible Dictator." His rule would soon collapse, however, as his efforts to unite Cyprus, granted independence by Britain in 1960, with Greece, and the eventual Turkish invasion of the island slowly resulted in his losing 'domestic support' and reaching 'diplomatic isolation.' Soon after, Greece managed to restore its democracy and slowly resolve its ravaged state that came as a result of "seven years of brutal and inefficient military rule" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024; Davison 2010). The powerful act by the students to occupy the school and the aforementioned events that resulted as a chain reaction are generally believed to be the main action that ended the military dictatorship (1974) (Kritidis 2014, 67).

Front Façade of the Polytechnic School of Athens Building during the 1973 occupation (Image sourced from inNewspaper, https://www.in.gr/2020/11/16/stories/features/eksegersi-tou-polytexneiou-14-17-noemvriou-1973/). The hanged banner reads 'Bread-Education-Freedom' [in Greek]- a phrase that grew to become a symbol and a chant echoed throughout Greek history in various demonstrations and protests.

Postlude

As Souzas 2015 describes, the occupation of the Polytechnic School of Athens is also considered by many to be what ignited Greece's widespread "squatting movement" - a primary element in the country's counter culture. Following the events of 1973 and the fall of the "junta," occurrences of such "adverse possession practices" can be recognized in various settings from middle schools, high schools, and universities (Harris Georgakopoulos Tolis, personal testimonies), to public buildings (Dimitrakopoulos 2023), addressing a wide range of sociopolitical issues. Unlike other European countries, however, this squatting movement is not a massive housing movement. As explained by Souzas 2015, people in Greece confront such issues in other ways (e.g., due to the country's heightened sense of family values, individuals met with deprivation most often have family members they can turn to or seek shelter from), with "squatting practices" primarily holding a political character, while striving to revitalize communities and aiming to showcase that a non-hierarchical process of self-organization is feasible in practice. Within these environments, one could identify non-vertical social structures and "diffused networks where people act according to their desires" (Souzas 2015).

Thus, one can begin to understand how the 1973 occupation, and Greece's overall "squatting sense" provide a perspective into this form of activism that is quite dense - grasping onto many of the practice's studied "types" and facets -, unconventional - expressing a potentially complete absence of one of the fundamental "motives" behind illegal occupations (ensuring shelter) as understood by many researchers -, and quite unique and powerful - standing as a catalyst for the overturn of a ruling dictatorship - an opposition to authoritarian governance.

Playlist:

"Pirate-Radio Transmissions"

- "Eimaste Dyo" [We are two]
    Mikis Theodorakis & Antonis Kalogiannis
- "Otan Sfigoun To Heri" [When they shake hands]
    Grigoris Bithikotsis
- "o Dromos" [The Street]
    Manos Loizos
- "Ena to Helidoni" [There is one swallow]
    Grigoris Bithikotsis
- "Pote Tha Kani Xasteria" [When Will the Skies Get Clear]
    Nikos Xilouris
- "To Gelasto Paidi" [The Smiling Child]
    Mikis Theodorakis
- "oi Protoi Nekroi" [The First to Die]
    Mikis Theodorakis, & Maria Farantouri
- "Kapia Mana Anastenazi" [A Mother is Sighing]
    Giorgos Dalaras
- "T'Akornteon" [The Accordion]
    Manos Loizos, Haris Alexiou, Nikos Portokaloglou

Listen on Spotify:

Squatting Activist's Toolkit

Now that you're hopefully more educated on the practice of squatting and its potential, the time has come to take matters into your own hands(!)
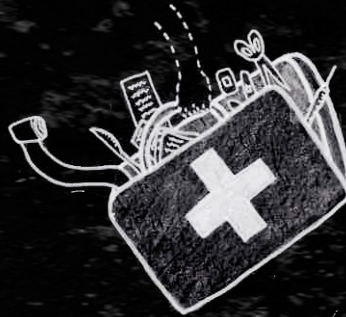
Feel free to use the following guide as a stepping stone to begin your revolution...

Gloves & Hand-Sanitizer
who knows what you'll encounter in there...

Electrical Tape
A type of multi-functional band-aid

First-Aid Kit
Hopefully accpanied by a trained individual (!)

A Comedically-Large Lock
For locking.

@phewww...

Multi-Use Tool
May be illegal in your area...
...but so is squatting...
...both can be quite handy though.
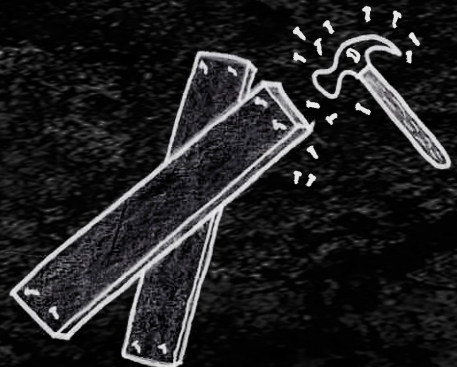
Hammer, Planks, Nails
For barricading.

Snacks & Water
(Preferably dry goods with long 'lifespans')
Who knows how the situation will unfold...
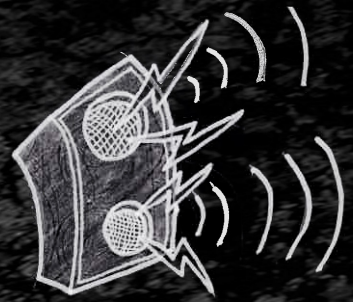
Speaker
To loudly blast all of your favourite 'forbidden' songs...

Paper & Pencils
For scheming.

Friends & Allies
These efforts are always more enjoyable and enriching in solidarity

Your Favourite Book
Night-watch can get quite lonely and boring...

ΨΟΜΙ!
ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑ!
ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΑ!
ΑΥΤΟ ΕΙΝΑΙ ΣΩΣΤΟ
ΑΥΤΟ ΕΙΝΑΙ ΣΩΣΤΟ
ΦΩΤΙΕΣ ΜΕ 12ΠΟΝΤΟ
ΝΑ ΒΑΛΕΤΕ ΜΥΑΛΟ
RISE UP!
EAT THE RICH!!!
MAKE LOVE NOT WAR

An Open Mind
In such environments, many contrasting beliefs can intersect so it is always a good practice to facilitate this and facilitate constructive discussions...

Some Rad Slogans
Whether in (disruptive) writing with gargantuan font sizes or orally expressed, catchphrases can effectively circulate your efforts' aspirations and goals...

MY YEAR OF REST AND RELAXATION
OTTESSA MOSHFEGH

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