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Space Intruders — Analyzing Viennese squats from radical-democratic and biopolitical perspectives

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> Wessen Straße? – Unsere Straße!
> Die Straße gehört uns![1]

Since 2011, we have witnessed a distinct revival of movements, both in the global south and north, appropriating public space in order to re-claim 'democracia real ya!' as it was shouted at Puerta del Sol. The re-clamations of 'real democracy' that emerged in recent years are in most cases not a claim for the western blueprint of liberal constitutional democracies, but rather an actual critique of 'democratic' regimes.

The squatting of public spaces challenges the bourgeois separation of public and private in various ways: On the one hand the neoliberal privatization of the 'public sphere' is addressed, on the other, notions of the 'private sphere' are redefined, as people are organizing various supportive structures (Butler 2011) on these squatted places, like "food, shelter, and the protection from violence" (ibid.6). Both Jacques Rancière (2009) and Judith Butler

(2011) have put their focus of analysis precisely on the re-negotiation of this dichotomy: Rancière emphasizes the re-appropriation of public space from governmental and police logics of privatization, Butler underlines the relation of bodily, spatial and material dimensions of people gathering on the streets. Drawing on both authors, we advocate the need of a joint reading of biopolitical and radical democratic theories in order to emphasize the interplay between the re-appropriation of spaces, a politics of the body and the re-constitution of radical political bodies within squatting movements, potentially leading to a re-negotiation of various borders: spatial, social and human. Hence, we shall underline the constitutive interrelation between various forms of bodies: built environments, human bodies and new radical political bodies in form of movements.

In Vienna the *Occupy*-movement became apparent through a revitalization of squatting movements rather than occupations of public spaces. The *Epizentrum* was its most visible manifestation, held from October to November 2011. At the same time, struggles around the neoliberal restructuring of the city became obvious in the face of the potential shutdown and commercialization of the long-standing cultural and social center, known as the *Amerlinghaus*. The essay goes back and forth between theoretical perspectives and the stories of the two mentioned spaces. As we were both politically active in different ways within the two spaces analyzed, the essay is based on our own experiences as well as drawing on interviews with people engaged in the spaces. In this sense, the analysis also constitutes a reflection of our own political practice. But, before we come to the reclamation of public spaces in the context of squats – challenging the presumably private domain of built environments – let us begin our analysis at a

central point with respect to the constitution of the private-public-dichotomy: the French Revolution.

Constituting public and private space

„[W]oman has the right to mount the scaffold; she must equally have the right to mount the rostrum" (de Gouges 1789). With respect to debates about the public/private distinction, the French Revolution 1789 is crucial as it may be considered the constituting moment of the bourgeois state, accompanied by the emergence of specific race, gender and class relations. However, as de Gouge's quote shows, these relations were contested right from the beginning, re-negotiating the boundary between an apparent private life and a public political one (Habermann 2008:212; Rancière 2009:60).

In the 18th century, perceptions of the 'human' changed dramatically in the face of the emerging 'modern' humanities. Race and gender became biologistically constructed entities, resulting in an exclusion of the Other from the public sphere, as the white, bourgeois (hu)man was constructed as norm. Until the 17th century a one-sex-model had existed, perceiving women as deviant from men. In the 18th century the two-sex-model emerged as "a major organizational principle for the revolution in the perception of nature" (Habermann 2005:13). On basis of apparent 'natural differences', man and woman became two different, but complementary bodies. Hence, it was due to her 'anatomic fate' linked to an 'irrational nature' and her 'reproductive ability' that women were pushed to the private sphere, while men were supposed to represent the public as a result of their apparent 'natural rationality' (Habermann 2008:210ff). According to

Friederike Habermann (2008:213), the ideal of the bourgeois woman can be perceived as a synthesis between two contrasting images dominating the 16th and 17th centuries: the 'nature-mastering' witch versus the 'nature-less' virgin. Accordingly, the bourgeois woman became the domesticated representative of 'nature', but in contrast to the witch she was perceived to be at nature's mercy and thus needing to be controlled.

Yet, the witch did not disappear, rather she re-appeared as working-class woman, as maid or colonized woman. Thus, besides its gendered Other, the constitution of the bourgeois subject also went along with the fostering of other borders. According to polygenetic race theories, a so called "family tree of man" (McClintock 1995:49) was constructed situating white people, especially men in the crown and black people, very much black women, at the roots (McClintock 1995:42). Race theories were then of crucial importance for the legitimization of European imperial expansion and the colonization of those parts of the world inhabited by 'inferior races', especially the so called Sub-Saharan parts of the African continent (Habermann 2008:176ff). The third central border had a class-bound 'nature': the bourgeois subject was to be differentiated both from the aristocracy, which had just been overthrown, and from the emerging working class. In her book *Imperial leather - Race, Gender and Sexuality in the colonial context* (1995), Anne McClintock uses the term "dangerous classes" (McClintock 1995:216) in order to grasp forms of racialization of social inequalities with respect to the working class. Accordingly, social inequalities based on class were racialized; one's class status became the result of one's 'degenerated nature'. With respect to the concept of 'dangerous classes', the intertwining of different forms of inequalities becomes apparent, not lastly due to their joint moment of emergence. However, their interplay is historically

contingent: It has been re-negotiated and is permanently re-constructed within political struggles, notably all those displacing the bourgeois public-private dichotomy.

Transgressing public and private space

Across the outlined historical process, the public-private distinction has been crucial for stabilizing and reproducing multiple and intertwined dimensions of power relations. As Rancière (2009) emphasizes, the public sphere is the space of encounter, where the order-maintaining governmental logic – described as 'logics of police' – collides with the 'logic of politics' – or what he refers to as "the government of anyone and everyone" (ibid.55). Thus, he considers any government that is not an antithesis to itself to be geared towards the confinement and privatization of this public sphere. Set against such an enclosure, democratic struggles are about the enlargement of the public sphere:

> Democracy, then ... is a process of struggle against this privatization, the process of enlarging this sphere. ... It entails struggling against the distribution of the public and the private that shores up the twofold domination of the oligarchy in the State and in society (ibid.).

When people gather on the streets and in public squares in order to struggle for the enlargement of the public sphere, then - according to Hannah Arendt (1958) - they are exercising a right that is political rather than merely legal (296ff). Thus democratic struggles are the exercise of this right to politics, the right of "everybody and anybody", as Rancière (2009:57f) puts it.

In her article *Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street* (2011), Butler draws on the invocation of the right to politics in a more

nuanced way. Through her engagement with the numerous political events of 'the year of protest', she is offering some further perspectives on what exactly is happening when people act, move and speak together, when "they lay claim to a certain space as public space" (ibid.1). She points out that we have to capture the congregation of people on the street and in the square in its bodily, spatial and material dimensions, because it's always concrete bodies, living organisms, that move and act within certain material environments and among other bodies, that provide the space for politics to appear and are not indifferent towards what is happening there.

Drawing on Arendt's notion of the 'space of appearance', Butler conceptualizes public space as one that "predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government, that is, the various forms in which the public realm can be organized" (Arendt in Butler 2011:3). It is the space where bodies appear to each other:

> For politics to take place, the body must appear. I appear to others, and they appear to me, which means that some space between us allows each to appear. ... This happens most clearly when we think about bodies that act together. No one body establishes the space of appearance, but this action, this performative exercise happens only 'between' bodies, in a space that constitutes the gap between my own body and another's. In this way, my body does not act alone, when it acts politically. Indeed, the action emerged from the 'between' (Butler 2011:3).

Thus, my body establishes a perspective that is somehow external to myself, because I cannot give a full account of it as it appears

and arises from an in-between space, always in interaction with others. But this in-between space is never free from power relations, and hence the bodies on the street "are themselves modalities of power, embodied interpretations, engaging in allied action" (Butler 2011:5). In the course of an allied action within a space that is permeated by power relations, the established relation between public space and the regime in power is exposed and severed.

Whilst material environments mold public space, thereby setting the material conditions for the gathering of people on the streets and in the square, they also act as support for public action and are reconfigured and reshaped in this process. The emphasis on the interaction of the bodily, spatial and material dimensions of public protest draws attention to the significance of the seizing and persistent occupation of public space. As long as embodied action is supported action, the very persistence of bodies in alliance against military and police repression is revealed as a political act and the exercise of the right to politics in itself: "To attack the body is to attack rights themselves, since rights are precisely what is exercised by the body on the street ... which, in its resistance to force, articulates its persistence, and its right to persistence" (Butler 2011:5).

This has been shown in numerous recent cases, from the Tahrir Square in Cairo to the Puerta del Sol in Madrid. Yet, it stands in contradiction to the dominant view advocated by Arendt and many subsequent theorizations, wherein the act of speech is the quintessence of public action. In fact, to persist in public space is to act, is supported action, for to solely focus on public speech would mean to re-establish the bourgeois distinction between a masculine, productive and unsupported public sphere and a female, reproductive, supportive and pre-political private domain. Taking

this reading back to the gendered, racialized and classed his_her-stories outlined above, we may say that it is as if the body on the street is split into two. Yet the ”private body ... conditions the public body, and even though they are the same body, the bifurcation is crucial to maintaining the public and private distinction” (ibid.7). Indeed, one of Butler’s strongest arguments says that when bodies persist on the street and in the square, they reclaim and reconfigure the public sphere precisely because of the collective and equal provision of “basic needs” – “food, shelter, and the protection from violence, to name a few” (ibid.6). The social organization of the supportive material environment in public space shows that politics is a lot about the support of life itself:

> [Bodies] ... can only persist and act when they are supported, by environments, by nutrition, by work, by modes of sociality and belonging. And when these supports fall away, they are mobilized in another way, seizing upon the support that exists in order to make a claim that there can be no embodied life without social and institutional support, without ongoing employment, without networks of interdependencies and care (ibid.5).

In this sense, life and politics are not only related, rather they constitute each other. In order to grasp their interrelations, especially with respect to ‘bodies and their supported action’ on the street and, in our case, in the ‘squat’, we now turn to biopolitics.

Biopolitics as processes of immunization

> We are, then, in power that has taken control of both the body and life or that has, if you like, taken control of

> life in general — with the body as one pole and the population as the other (Foucault 2003: 253).

In her book *Figuren des Immunen. Elemente einer politischen Theorie* (2011) Isabell Lorey coins the concept of "biopolitical immunization" (ibid.260ff) in order to analyze the shift in governmental strategies between the 17th and 19th century in western societies, further developing Foucault's concepts of governmentality and biopolitics.

Governmentality, in Foucault (2000:64), constitutes a mode of government techniques emerging in the 16th century, yet only becoming hegemonic in the 18th century. In contrast to former modes of government and sovereignty being defined by the sovereign's power over a territory, governmentality implies a form of governance, having "the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument" (Foucault 2007:108). This change in the 'art of government' further depicts a shift from disciplinary mechanisms of repression to regulatory mechanisms that sustain or even enhance life. In contrast to the sovereign's old right of 'taking life or letting live' it is about the "power to 'make' live and 'let' die" (Foucault 2003:241), described as biopolitics by Foucault (ibid.243). Coming back to the quote at the beginning of this passage, biopolitics perceives the body of the individual and the societal body, the population, as intertwined. On the one hand individual bodies need to be disciplined in schools, hospitals or workshops in order to become useful and docile in relation to an emerging liberal, capitalist system. On the other, populations are meant to be regulated in their 'entirety'. Drawing on 'technologies of security', certain vital characteristics of a population such as morality or birth rates come to be regulated in form of

demographic data, tabulation of resources or statistical censuses. Accordingly, populations are perceived to be in need of 'protection' from 'internal risks', marking a crucial shift as the 'risks' are no longer understood as coming from an assumed 'outside', rather from an apparent 'inside' of a society itself. Therefore a normalizing society is established, which aims to normalize individuals around a specific norm (Lemke 2011:39). As a result, so called 'risk groups' or 'risk persons' are constructed, often going along with biologistic discourses ascribing specific 'degenerated' characteristics to such groups (Lemke 2007:142), hence individualizing the person's 'guilt' for one's unfavorable position. The concept of 'dangerous classes', used by McClintock (1996:216) with respect to the emerging working class in the 18th century, has thus been constantly re-appearing.

Such an internalization of apparent 'threats' from outside as 'risks' within a specific society has been described as biopolitical immunization by Lorey (2011:260ff). Using the analogy of vaccination, where the body is being immunized against dangerous illnesses by taking in small doses of its poison, biopolitical immunization constitutes a mode of political neutralization of discursively constructed 'risks'. Such a neutralization or normalization goes along with a differentiation of 'risky persons' or groups along the spectrum of 'integrable' to 'non-integrable'. While the former become integrated by processes of normalization, the latter need to be excluded. As a result, the body becomes immune to more 'diseases' or in other words, as some 'diseases' become normal, the sphere of normality within a society is constantly being enlarged as some of the others are integrated (Lorey 2007, 2011:266ff). According to Lorey (2012:59ff), welfare state politics then need to be understood as following such an immunizing logic: Those, who could potentially become a 'risk' to an apparent 'stable

society', such as unemployed people, are made 'innoxious' by the means of social benefits.

Despite the various social achievements of the welfare state, also in the context of Austria, their a-social character appears if its immunization logic is addressed. However, immunization processes can also imply situations of instability at the borders of the unacceptable. At these borders normalization processes are still negotiated, opening possibilities to change perceptions of normality (Lorey 2011:268ff). It is within this area of conflict, between the advantages and disadvantages of institutionalization and the danger of being immunized, that the *Amerlinghaus* has been situated for over thirty years now.

The becoming of the Amerlinghaus — a process of biopolitical immunization in Vienna

During the 1970s, European cities like Vienna were confronted by a crisis of the 'Fordist city', as Robert Foltin (2011) describes it. The strict division of living, working and leisure time characterizing the 'Fordist city' were challenged by social and cultural movements emphasizing the need to re-vitalize public space and to link these apparent distinct spheres of life. Vienna has never been a city of squats. Yet a quite active squatting movement developed during the 1970s and 1980s, mainly inspired by similar movements in Germany (Sburny 2011). Well established cultural centers such as the *WUK* (*Werkstätten- und Kulturhaus*), the *Arena* or the queer space *Rosa-Lila-Villa* are the results of this movement. The first space to be squatted, held and turned into an institutionalized cultural and social center was the *Amerlinghaus*. The linking of cultural and social activities was the main focus of the *Amerlinghaus*, or, as one of the *Amerlinghaus* activists states:

“Over the thirty years in which the house has been existing, one thing has never changed: the inseparability of cultural and political work, consisting a still ongoing conscious demand” (Amerlinghaus activists 2011; translated by the authors)[2].

By that time, the area around *Spittelberg*, the seventh district of Vienna – where the old Biedermayer-style building hosting the *Amerlinghaus* is situated – was characterized by run-down old bourgeois houses. Mainly students and artists moved to the area since the cost of living was still cheap in the area, despite its central location. It was amongst them that an advocacy group, the ‘*Interessensgemeinschaft Spittelberg*’, was formed, with the aim of establishing a community center for the neighborhood (Sburny 2011).

The *Amerlinghaus*, constructed around a big yard, seemed well ‘qualified’ for such plans (Reinprecht 1984). A concept was developed by the advocacy group and during the summer months of 1975, via a four-day-event with around 3000 people, the space was squatted. A manifesto demanding a ‘self-governed cultural and communication center’ was handed over to the municipality, which soon offered the space a certain formal status in demanding low rent in return for subsidies. This offer was linked to various conditions: the forming of an association and the establishment of the district museum in one of the largest rooms of the house. Furthermore, a café was established right from the beginning. While initially the idea was that the café should be part of the cultural and social center, it soon became independent and profit-oriented (Sburny 2011).

In his essay *Das Amerlinghaus: Vom Scheitern und Überleben eines Experiments* (1984), Christoph Reinprecht, former employee in the *Amerlinghaus* and until today part of the management board of the

association '*Verein Kulturzentrum Spittelberg*', describes the squatting of the *Amerlinghaus* as a radical-political action, yet, as a "squatting à la Viennoise"[3] (Reinprecht 1984; translated by the authors). The focus on cooperations and negotiations with the municipality of Vienna, a main characteristic of the *Amerlinghaus* constituting a basis for disputes until today (Amerling activists 2011; Foltin 2011; Reinprecht 1984), is central to this 'Viennese style'. From the perspective of biopolitical immunization, the municipality's political strategy of supporting some of the cultural and social projects such as the *Amerlinghaus* resulted into a lowering of the potential threats posed by the squatting movements to the social body of Vienna. Thus some of the 'risks' became normalized as they could now be managed and controlled via the mechanism of subsidies while squatting per se continued to be perceived as 'non-tolerated' and in need of being suppressed. A good example is the violent eviction of the *Arena*, an extensive abandoned factory-area occupied during the summer of 1976. When this squat was vacated, a cultural center was established through the means of municipal subsidies near the original squat, but in a much smaller area (Foltin 2011).

In the case of the *Amerlinghaus,* the formalization process resulted in a 'domestication' of the much more radical character of the movement, which had led to the squatting. Due to the formation of an association with a clear 'management structure' the ideas of basis-democratic self-organization and a low-treshold structure gradually lost their importance. The employees became managers of the house and of the various groups active within. While the interview with two *Amerlinghaus* activists reflects the strong ongoing commitment towards the 'basis' (Amerlinghaus activists 2011), their in-between position — between the interests of the municipality and those of the people using the house — needs to

be critically reflected as it has been playing an important role in a steady biopolitical immunization process by the municipality of Vienna; it needs to be further situated within the specific context of Fordist urban politics in Vienna.

Red Vienna – from co-optation to rent-ability through waste

The 'red' city of Vienna, as the "flagship of a corporatist form of social democratic urban governance intrinsically connected to Fordism" (Novy et.al 2001:131), was marked by the strong engagement of the local state for the provision of cheap public housing and the regulation of rents since the interwar period of the 1920s – with the exception of fascist rule and the preceding time of economic recession. By means of such social-democratic urban policy, rent prices and the profitability of the real estate sector were restricted for more than 60 years – until the 1980s, when liberalization set in. But such efforts were also always characterized by a top-down approach to urban planning, typical of the Austrian form of corporatist social democracy, clearly directed against cooperative approaches of collective self-help in construction and housing (ibid.136f). This is reflected in what Novy et.al. identify as the continuing strategies of social democratic urban governance in Vienna, in line with the logic of immunization exemplified at the *Amerlinghaus*: conflict avoidance, co-optation and selective in-/exclusion (ibid.140). While, according to Novy et.al (2001), this "centralized way of decision-making corresponded to a system of material production [of the city; A/N] that was mainly organized by the local state in coordination with corporatist cooperatives" (ibid.137), it also corresponded to the clientelistic provision of housing in exchange for political support, instead of a rent (ibid. 136). Thus, "[r]eal estate was not a dynamic sector. Lend rent played a minor role in the allocation of housing as well as being a

source of income because of rental regulations in the private housing sector as well as for business" (ibid.137). Consequently, because rent did not play a decisive role in the distribution of urban space, there was a low spatial disparity in the city of Vienna.

This can be described as the mitigation of what Stephen Horton in his article *Value, waste and the built environment: A marxian analysis* (1997) calls "the priority of exchange value over use-value – that lies at the structural heart of pre-consumption capitalist waste" (ibid.132). The built environment in its commodity form entails use-value embodied in built structures and exchange value, most notably in the form of land rent. To summarize in Horton's words: "[In] the built environment of capitalism use value is fixed in the physical landscape to facilitate the production, circulation, exchange, consumption, and, finally, accumulation, of exchange value." (ibid.137) However, the use value entailed in the built structure needs a long period of time in order to be fully realized, and the exchange value of land is strongly depending on its relative location in urban space, "determined by developments in its enveloping physical and social space" (ibid.135). This leads to a tension between the relative stability of use-value in the built structure "and the fluidity of the exchange value of land" (ibid. 136), especially with respect to the uneven development of capitalism, where the transition from one (e.g. Fordist) period of capital accumulation to another (e.g. neoliberal) period of capital accumulation involves a serious amount of what David Harvey (2007) refers to as "creative destruction" (ibid.200ff).

In Vienna, such a transition was introduced by social democracy, starting soon after the *Amerlinghaus* had opened its doors, leading to the re-establishment of the real estate sector as profitable field for private investments through the re-commodification of housing and de-regulation of rent controls – accompanied by an enormous

rise in the level of housing costs (Novy et.al. 2001:136f). This liberalization process was accompanied by the reconfiguration of urban planning in favor of the private real estate business and a newly established urban elite of professionals, engaged in the performance of participatory planning procedures through highly selective public consultation processes – at the expense of the political disenfranchisement of organized labor and many other groups already marginalized by corporatist formations of post-war Austria (ibid.138ff). Urban governance in Vienna has shifted from a logic of political legitimation via the provision of housing to a logic of economic rent-ability (ibid.137), producing a lot of waste in the course of its entrepreneurial endeavor to restructure the city and thus going along with a change in biopolitical governmentality.

When immunization ceases to work … biopolitics of disposability

> The dialectics of life and death, visibility and invisibility, and privilege and lack in social existence that now constitute the biopolitics of modernity have to be understood in terms of their complexities, specificities, and diverse social formations (Giroux 2006:181).

While, according to Lorey (2012:89), biopolitics within Fordist states were shaped by a dispositive of 'liberty and security', post-Fordist states' main concern is insecurity, leading to a strengthening of security discourses and practices (ibid.86). Further, they are often linked to discourses about cultural and racial homogeneity (Giroux 2006:182). Following the discursive construction of 'dangerous classes', politico-economic inequalities are thus reshaped by racist discourses criminalizing certain groups (ibid.). Hence, Dider Fassin also talks about "bio- inequalities"

(Fassin 2009:49) underlining the link of biopolitics with the re-installation of inequalities along structural categories such as race, class, gender, sexuality, ability or age. Accordingly, life is being re-negotiated and re-constructed through "discourses, programmes, decisions, actions" (ibid.48), deciding which lives are worth being 'supported' "in terms of health and social policies, on employment and housing programmes, on education and welfare" (ibid.53).

In his article *Reading Hurricane Katrina: Race, Class, and the Biopolitics of Disposability* (2006), Henry Giroux analyzes how biopolitics changes in the face of neoliberal relations, introducing the concept of a 'biopolitics of disposability'. According to Giroux, neoliberalism, privatization, and militarism have brought forth a new and dangerous version of biopolitics, which hinges on a subjugation of life to capital accumulation, relegating some groups or even "entire populations to 'spaces of invisibility and disposability'" (Giroux 2006:181). Due to the dismantling of the welfare state as a result of neoliberal policies, the state would no longer provide "a safety net for the poor, sick, elderly and homeless" (ibid.175). Instead these groups would be perceived as 'human waste', as Zygmunt Bauman (2004:21) refers to population groups constructed as 'useless' within current capitalist structures as they would no longer be able to make a living, to consume goods and would depend on others for their basic needs. "Weakness is now a sin, punishable by social exclusion" (Giroux 2006:187).

Using Giroux's concept as a reference for our analysis of the *Amerlinghaus* and the *Epizentrum*, we do not want to imply any analogy between Hurricane Katrina and the cases analyzed. However, we want to underline the new forms of biopolitical governmentality, respectively a biopolitics of disposability, which also appears in respect to the two 'free spaces' concerned in Vienna.

Constant underfunding as a biopolitics of disposability

In the context of the *Amerlinghaus* 'support' or a lack of 'support' is manifested in the controversy about the subsidies, reflecting the 'value' given by the municipality to the groups being active in the house.

At the moment there are around 50 groups, initiatives and associations including social, political and cultural groups. The idea of a cross-generational approach has always been of importance, thus there are children's groups, as well as initiatives for elderly people such as the association *Graue Panther* (Amerlinghaus activists 2011). Initiatives and groups like the education programmes provided by the *Flüchtlingsprojekt Ute Bock*, an association working with refugees and asylum seekers; the *initiative drogenkonsum i-dk.org*, promoting rooms for consuming drugs; or *Libertine—Sadomasochismusinitiative Wien*, a platform for people with sadomasochist sexual preferences, particularly reflect the role of the *Amerlinghaus* as a place where people who are 'normally' not 'welcome' due to their race, class, gender, disability, age or sexuality, can meet. There is however one dimension that is 'normally' not included in intersectional approaches: one's political opinion. In this context it needs to be mentioned with respect to constructions of 'risk groups', since, according to the Austrian protection of the constitution (Verfassungsschutzbericht 2010), radical-left groups are among the groups to be observed by the secret service.

Within the last thirty years, the *Amerlinghaus* has thus become an important place for many people, groups and initiatives usually not perceived as 'worth of being supported' in the sense of providing social services, space etc. However, as we have already argued, the

formalized situation of the house also needs to be seen as a political strategy of the municipality of Vienna, aiming to control and manage 'risk groups'. This control mechanism has become very obvious in the face of the high debt of the *Amerlinghaus*. In order to grasp the source of this problem, we need to return to the center's early history: before the cultural and social center opened its doors in 1978, a general restoration was done by the municipality. As a result, the house was handed over to the *GESIBA* (*gemeinnützige Siedlungs- und Bauaktiengesellschaft*), a city-owned, non-profit housing- and construction corporation, which now manages the lease. Whilst the initial subsidies used to be enough to cover the rent, the payment of nine full-time employees, the operating expenses and a budget for cultural activities, today nearly a fifth of the budget is absorbed by rent. This is because since 2004, subsidies have not been adjusted to inflation. Formerly featuring nine full-time employees, the association is currently employing only one full-time and three part-time employees, there is hardly any budget for cultural activities and debts have dramatically increased during the last years. Since summer 2011, the situation has become very critical as the municipality threatened to 'clear' the place due to its high debts. Instead of fulfilling the demands of the *Amerlinghaus* for an adaptation of funding to inflation, a debt-relief or a decrease of rent[4], the municipality has argued the other way around: since the house is no longer be able to continue existing due to the high debts, it needs to be commercialized (Amerlinghaus activists 2011; Sburny 2011).

In the face of an ongoing gentrification process in Vienna (Foltin 2011), the *Amerlinghaus* has gradually become a disturbing factor amidst the by now highly commercialized area of the *Spittelberg*. Two *Amerlinghaus* activists describe the house as "a small absurd

fortress, invaded by consumption already through the window" (Amerlinghaus activists 2011; translated by the authors)[5]. Constant underfunding thus appears as a strategy of a biopolitics of disposability, through which the municipality could legitimize the potential shutdown by pushing responsibility back to the apparent insufficient 'management' of the house.

However, due to active resistance, broad support from various leftist groups and parties (the Green Party and some Social Democrats), subsidies for the immediate future could be secured (Verein Kulturzentrum Spittelberg Amerlinghaus 2011). Furthermore, negotiations about a potential debt relief are going on. Still, there is also an unresolved debate about whether the association would need to restructure in favor of the commercialization of the place (Amerlinghausplenum 2011). While the biopolitics of disposability took a distinct shape in face of the already 'immunized' *Amerlinghaus,* the *Epizentrum*, our next case study, was fully situated within neoliberal urban governance.

The *Epizentrum* – becoming visible

In accordance with repressive neoliberal politics shaped by security discourses, the last years in Vienna were marked by violent evictions of squats and occupations of public spaces, which was also the case with respect to the squat presented in the following passage. In October 2011, a house owned by the *BUWOG* (*Bauen und Wohnen Gesellschaft GmbH*), the biggest over-regional management company of real estate in Austria, was squatted and named *Epizentrum*.

The squatting was clearly related to the ongoing *Occupy*-movement. However, within a communiqué the *Epizentrum* listed

several reasons with respect to why a place was squatted instead of a square: "We decided to occupy a building rather than a square or street for a number of reasons: [...] Since there are no strong movements here these days, we have to ask ourselves why that is and how a growing culture of resistance and self-organization could be facilitated. And we are convinced that a squat is a good means to serve that purpose" (Epizentrum Wien 2011:14). In the context of a biopolitics of disposability the location of the *Epizentrum* needs to be addressed: Lindengasse 60-62, 7th district. Located in one of the bourgeois and highly commercialized neighborhoods in Vienna, the *Epizentrum* constituted a 'space of visibility' for people, groups and initiatives currently pushed to 'spaces of invisibility' by a neoliberal biopolitics of disposability. Thus a number of activities, projects and structures of social reproduction were developed during this month, ranging from a collective kitchen over a media center to a free shop, with the aim of making solidary and deviant ways of living accessible in the midst of the capitalist center of the city.

At the beginning the building was prevented from being destructed, as it was situated in a historically protected area. Yet, after having been sold to the *BUWOG*, its protected status was suspended by the municipal office for architecture and city planning (*MA 19*), referring to the supposed disrepair of the building. The actions taken by the *BUWOG* need to be linked to its power position in Austria with respect to real estate management and ongoing gentrification processes in Vienna. Despite the location of the building within a historically protected zone and the attested good shape of the house, the squat was 'cleared' after one month of squatting. Soon after, the building was finally demolished in order to create space for freehold flats. In this

sense the *Epizentrum* can be perceived as a prime example of capitalist accumulation via gentrification processes in Vienna.

The month of squatting was shaped by the permanent threat of a potential 'cleaning' by the municipality of Vienna. Accordingly, the people living in the house were constantly exposed to potential repression. It was in the context of this precarious situation that sexist and racist structures were reproduced, illustrating the interplay between built environment and the re-construction of existing power relations.

Reproducing sexism

> We take for granted a basic consensus regarding respectful ways of relating to each other, excluding sexist, racist, homo- and transphobic and other discriminating as well as authoritarian attitudes and actions. Yet, as society is shaped by the latter, we need to work on removing these tendencies also within us, also at a place such as the *Epizentrum* (Epizentrum Wien 2011:10; translated by the authors) [6]

The *Epizentrum* was supposed to create a space freed from existing power relations. Yet, as the quote above shows, the attempt to build up non-hegemonic structures in the sense of collective living and working environments cannot be de-linked of the 'world outside'. Hence people were informed in various languages about antisexist, consent-oriented practices, developed by feminist groups with respect to sexualized assault and violence. Further, during the first days a *FLIT*- (Frauen*, Lesben, Inter, Tans only[7])-room was installed and declared as a place of protection and for retreat. Yet, especially by referring to the constant threat of eviction,

discussions on sexism, homo- and transphobia and heteronormativity were delayed and relegated to the *FLIT*-room, re-establishing the gendered private-public-dichotomy. As a result, antisexism and the thematization of gendered and sexualized issues would be again the job of those apparently 'affected' by it. 'Real' politics were reaffirmed as a domain of masculine work. A broad debate on sexism started only after various sexual assaults, leading to a range of discussions among various radical left and autonomous groups. On *Indymedia*, an autonomous online platform, a *Anti-Man(n)ifest zur Vernichtung der Freiräume* was posted asking for more protection spaces instead of free spaces. What does that mean for further political strategies?

Reproducing racism

Who does not know Astrid Lindgren's well-known story of a resistive young girl, stronger than all men and living on her own in a big house with a horse and a monkey? And who does not love it? Looking a bit deeper into the living structures of Pippi, especially into her sleeping room, one can find a big suitcase full of gold coins, brought by her father, a famous seaman and king of Taka-Tuka-Land (Lindgren 2008). Therefore Pippi's position as a radical girl cannot be detached from colonial and imperial structures enabling her lifestyle. What about all the Pippi's in the *Epizentrum*? While the majority of people in the *Epizentrum* would certainly refer to themselves as antiracist, their privileged position as 'white' was hardly discussed.

In this context, the question about accessibility was of crucial importance, a dimension strongly criticized by the authors of the book *Perspektiven Autonomer Politik* (AK Wantok 2010) regarding existing racism within autonomous movements. Yet questions of

accessibility cannot be addressed without mentioning the question of citizenship. While in Austria squatting is normally handled as a civil offence, since the amendment of the Alien‘s Police Act in the year 2011, some forms of regulatory offence such as the violation of the assemblies act or ‘aggressive’ behavior towards executive officers can lead to the deprivation of one‘s residence title or even to a ban on staying in the EU (§ 63 Abs 3 FPG[8]; § 53 FPG). Therefore, again the strong interlink between existing power relations and their reproduction within squats becomes obvious, re-shaping one‘s agency and political possibilities within such places.

As has been shown, the institutionalization of the *Amerlinghaus* opened up political possibilities for many people, including those with insecure residence titles. In contrast the precarious situation at the *Epizentrum* re-produced white, bourgeois and male political agency. The central question is now whether precarious situations like the one in the *Epizentrum* necessarily need to lead to a re-enforcement of existing gendered, racialized and classed power relations.

Gekommen, um zu bleiben[9] … the politics of appearance

You find yourself in the *Epizentrum*. After you have climbed up a big ladder, you see some coffee and cake, dumpstered just from around the corner, provided on a table in the middle of a large room. In front of you, around you, above you, there are people, masked, sitting and standing around; silence. Suddenly a violin starts to play. It is the day of the press conference held by an anonymous collective, with no single, representative voice; rather everybody talks when s_he wants to, poems are read out loudly, paroles are shouted and now and then just sounds come out of some veiled mouth.

They seem to act in concert, as Butler (2011) describes it, apparently giving no room for immunization through representation, negotiation and adaptation to established norms of communication. Drawing on Lorey's (2011:283) terminology, another form of immunization appears: It is about instituting apparent threats through the construction of permanent though unpredictable conditions of a-normalities, described as 'constituting immunization'. Coming back to our short snapshot of the press conference at the *Epizentrum* above, what is at stake is the denial of duties, under conditions of disobedience (ibid.291). Biopolitically spoken, it is about the de-neutralization of inflammatory potential, while at the same time recognizing the precariousness of everyone's body and life. Contrary to the institutionalization of casualization pushed further by a biopolitics of disposability, constituting immunization institutes conditions of collective care in order to withdraw us from technologies of security.

Hence, in accordance with Butler (2011:1) "[w]e cannot act without support, and yet, we must struggle for the support that allows us to act". Squatting movements are a direct answer to the need for establishing supportive environments in order to help radical political bodies to appear and persist in public space. The day of the eviction of the *Epizentrum* made this clear, as the demonstration went directly to the *Amerlinghaus* in order to come to terms with what had happened and to discuss about the further steps.

Accordingly, the *Amerlinghaus* can be perceived as an important support structure for political movements in Vienna. However, our analysis has shown the 'dangerous' aspects of becoming institutionalized and normalized through the logics of biopolitical immunization, nearly until one's radical potential is completely

'neutralized'. Yet, as immunization processes imply constant re-negotiations of apparent normality at the borders of the unacceptable, moments of enclosure are needed as "impetus to new kinds of previously unthinkable emergences" (Dave 2011:4). The *Epizentrum* was an important step, but reflected the current circumstances of the appropriation of urban space under neoliberal politics and the challenges that go along with it with respect to squatting.

In our essay we hope to have shown the importance of the re-appropriation and re-politicization of spaces in the face of neoliberal restructuring of the city. We do not mean to re-produce the public-private dichotomy, rather to re-claim the privacy in public spaces and the public in private domains, so urgently needed in order to create the supportive structures that condition our lives and the very appearance of new radical political bodies. Regarding multiple intertwined power relations, supportive structures have to respect differing needs in order to enable every- and any-body to appear in public. Hence, coming back to the question of a renegotiation of the public-private distinction through squats, we plead for a reconsidering of 'private' within squats as 'spaces of care', always in close relationship with – and thus enabling – a care-full public. Thus, it is about the question of strategic alliances between many and different spaces in order to create a supportive environment, be it material, social and/or emotional, where the right to squat can appear in public.

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Herbert Sburny, interviewed on 25.11.2011, Vienna.

Two activists from the *Amerlinghaus*, interviewed on 10.11.2011, Vienna.

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[1] "Whose streets – our streets!", "The street belongs to us!"

[2] “Über die 33 Jahre in denen es das Haus gibt ist eines gleich geblieben, nämlich dass es die Trennung zwischen Kulturarbeit und sozialer Arbeit nicht gibt, und zwar als ganz bewusste politische Forderung” (Amerlinghaus activistis 2011).

[3] “Besetzung à la Viennoise” (Reinprecht 1984)

[4] In an article written by the Verein Kulturzentrum Spittelberg Amerlinghaus in December 2011, it is stated that the GESIBA has already gained around 100 000 Euro from the rent, a fact which contradicts with its non-profit orientation (Verein Kulturzentrum Spittelberg Amerlinghaus 2011).

[5] “eine kleine absurde Festung, der der Konsum einfach schon beim Fenster hinein wächst” (Amerlinghaus activists 2011).

[6] Ein Grundkonsens des respektvollen Umgangs miteinander wird vorausgesetzt, der sexistische, rassistische, homo- und transphobe und andere diskriminierende sowie autoritäre Haltungen und Handlungen ausschließt. Da die Gesellschaft aber durch eben diese geprägt ist, muss an einem Ort wie dem Epizentrum auch am Abbau dieser Tendenzen in uns selbst gearbeitet werden (Epizentrum Wien 2011:10).

[7] FLIT stands for ‘women, lesbian, inter- and transgender people’

[8] FPG: Abbreviation for the Alien’s Police Act.

[9] Having come in order to stay; based on the title of the same-named song “Gekommen Um Zu Bleiben” by the band *Wir sind Helden*.