Youth as a Political Movement: Development of the Squatters' and Autonomous Movement in Copenhagen, 1981–95

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Introduction

The focus of this paper is movements which were agencies *of* youth rather than *for* youth. Youth has always played a major role in mass movements, but only very occasionally do we come across real youth movements, that is, movements which recruit the vast number of their followers and leaders from among the younger generation, and demand selective goods intended for youth segments. The main purpose of this article is to construct a political theory of urban youth movements and thereby to explain the international setting and transnational commitment of one of the most vigorous movements in Denmark after the second world war. We reject most cultural arguments, postmodernism and theories of social marginalization in favour of concepts of place, organization, interaction and political opportunity. Thus, it is argued that local as well as national and international political opportunities, including relationships to opponents and allies, play a major role in determining the social and political identity of the BZ-movement. The political approach gives us a discerning look at the constraints and opportunities of the movement, and how social interaction, social ties, communication, symbols, ideology and the repertoire of contentious actions became active sites of creation and change.

After the second world war, a basic target of these youth movements was vacant houses. The first wave of squats emerged in developing countries and western urban districts during the late 1960s and early 1970s (Cherki *et al.*, 1978; Castells, 1983: 177–8). The second wave began in the Netherlands or, to be more precise, in Amsterdam during the first months of 1980. From there it spread to Zürich, reaching cities in Germany during the first quarter of 1981 (Koopmans, 1995: 170–3; Kriesi *et al.*, 1995: 195–8; Willems, 1997), whereas young people in Copenhagen began to occupy buildings in the succeeding months (we have examples of squats in cities outside of Copenhagen but they were few). The subsequent history of the BZ-movement, as this group of young people called themselves ('BZ' is a phonetic abridgement of the Danish word for squatting that has turned into a symbol), is depicted in Figure 1.

To begin with the BZ-movement evolved around several occupations of buildings in the inner city of Copenhagen. After 1983, however, squatting became less pronounced, especially during the heyday of the movement from 1986–90, when it was replaced by other forms of action, new encounters and a new political profile. After 1991, the
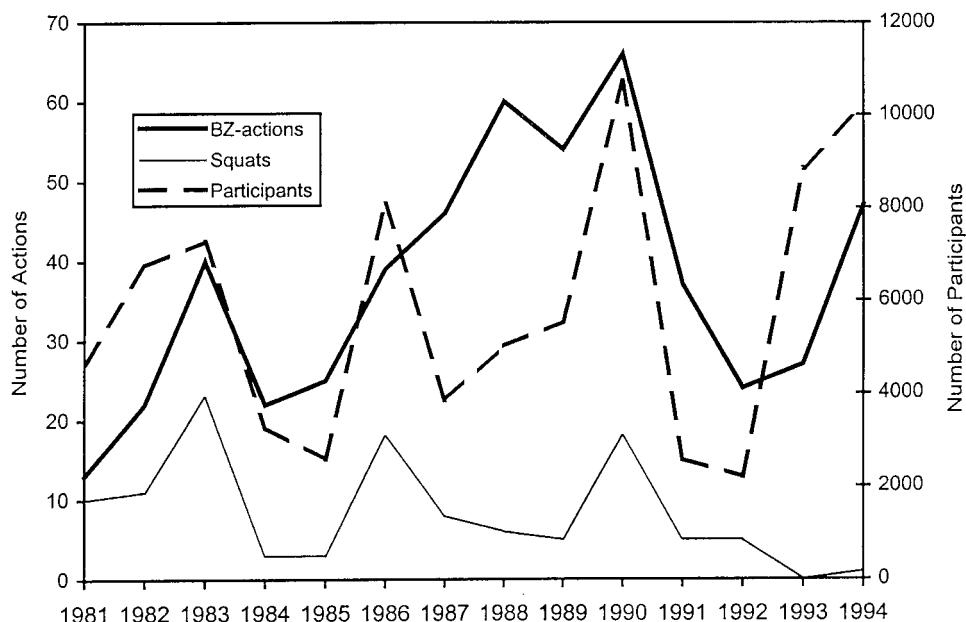
Figure 1 *The BZ-movement in Copenhagen, 1981–94 (source: The BZ-data set, Appendix 1)*

dissolving of the BZ-movement came about as a process of internal demobilization and external mobilization: people left the organization, and new movements emerged on the periphery of the old BZ-movement.

Sources, data and methods

From a methodological point of view, we utilize qualitative sources and quantitative data, and combine a narrative approach with statistical tools in an attempt to integrate structure and actors, the inner expressive social life of the movement with the outward-looking activities. The heuristic framework for this study refers to: (1) the actor and interaction level; (2) the organization level; and (3) the space. We define a social movement as a sustained series of interactions between people with common purposes and the state, elites or opponents (Tilly, 1984: 305–6; Tarrow, 1994: 3–4). The preferred research technique was content analysis of mass media coverage of protest that allows for the collection, processing and quantitative analysis of mass data covering long periods (Olzak, 1989; Rucht and Ohlemacher, 1992; Rucht *et al.*, 1998). We have compiled data on confrontational actions from the BZ-movement's own publications and from leading daily newspapers (see Appendix 1). The data set consists of 522 contentious actions, and allows for a deeper investigation of particular aspects of protest as well as forms of action, issues and claims, actors, organization, strategies and ideology.

   However, extracting information about contentious gatherings is not sufficient to map the formal and informal structure of the movement. Collective discussions and decisions about strategy, ideology, and not least logistics, were carried out at different levels and in collaboration with different actors. Documentation of these activities includes not only internal reporting, but also confidential minutes and personal participation. The last aspect refers to Rene Karpantschof, co-writer of this paper, who himself has been an active member of the BZ-movement. His insight and detailed knowledge will be used alongside documentary material and statistics. The last topic for detailed documentation

concerns the occupied buildings, youth centres, cafés and other common meeting places (Lofland, 1995). It was there that most of the squatters lived, met with others and recruited new members, and it was within those physical surroundings that they built up the organizational basis of the movement. In the beginning, public and private buildings were the main target of the BZ-movement, and throughout the whole period squatted houses were the centres from which all other activities radiated. Therefore, we compiled data on the 'permanent' occupied buildings from 1981–94 (see Appendix 2). The next step will be to outline our causal arguments by introducing some clarifying concepts and theoretical considerations.

Theoretical considerations

A first wave of youth mobilization and house occupations swept across Denmark in 1969–71, since which time squatting has become an essential part of the repertoire of contentious actions (Mikkelsen and Karpantschof, 2000). In 1981, the second generation of squatters joined the movement when the general level of protest in Denmark was still very high (Mikkelsen, 1997; 1999) and many students in higher education and pupils already had experience of campaigns of collective protest (Svensson and Togeby, 1986). Consequently, the squatters' movement of the 1980s could rely on a widespread mobilization of large groups of young people, socialist ideologies, ideas about 'basis democracy' and self-organization, direct action and squatting. The BZ-movement was not just another single-issue grassroots organization. Within the social-movement sector the BZ represented a challenger embedded in the social relations of a community and addressing a high-profile policy domain, i.e. the state's fundamental responsibility for the protection of private property (Kriesi *et al.*, 1995: 95–108). This explains in part the violent confrontations with the authorities, and why it turned into one of the most radical movements.

Having argued that the BZ-movement is a product of past experiences and contemporary encounters and, moreover, should be regarded as a political movement, we distance ourselves from those studies which portray the so-called counter movements of the 1960s and the 1980s as a revolt against the gradual development of a hegemonic consumer and media culture (Karpantschof, 1997). Within this paradigm it is possible to distinguish between those who emphasize either marginalization or progressiveness as the leading structural principle. Borrowing elements from psychology, anthropology and semiology, proponents of the former approach see youth movements as a marginal cultural phenomenon, where groups of youngsters retreat into self-engineered, isolated communities — a sort of tribalism. Through a combination of siege mentality and the realization of postmodern existential needs, they develop strongly symbolic deviant behaviour with elements of irrational violence and terror (Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Paris, 1995; Tzsheetzsch, 1995; Vaskovics, 1995; Maffesoli, 1996; Karpantschof, 1997).

The progressive interpretation emphasizes both a dissociation from, and a continuation of, the political culture of the New Left. On the one hand the new movements break with the revolutionary and totalizing character of the New Left but, on the other, hold on to the emancipating project: at the collective level it is a question of the survival of humanity and nature and the development of a radical democracy; at the individual level it is about the right to be different, to be in control and in contact with one's own body and desires. The goals of the new movements, including youth movements, are to defend and enhance the space for social autonomy against ecological catastrophes, state intervention, consumer and mass media manipulation — i.e. the expansion of civil society at the expense of state and market (Brand *et al.*, 1986; Laclau and Mouffe, 1992; Thomsen, 1992; Cohen, 1985). At the phenomenological and narrative level, both readings catch important aspects of the appearance of youth movements, but
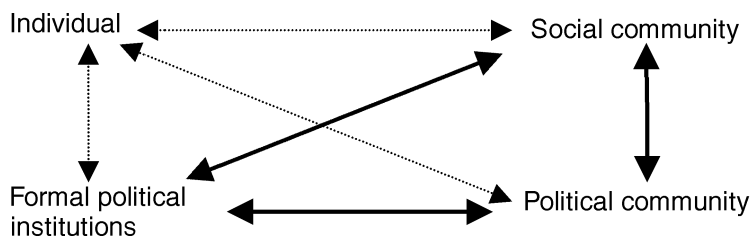
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Figure 2 *A social movement model of communal mobilization*

analytically they mix causal arguments with normative statements and often the source material is weak and biased. As an alternative, we base our study on concepts of community, interaction and opportunity. In a concrete model, a total of twelve possible causal links show up (see Figure 2).

The model allows us to choose between methodological individualism, normative or rational, institutionalism, or a sociological and a social movement perspective (Christensen, 2000). In this article we opt for the sociological and social movement approach — as indicated by the bold arrows in Figure 2 — which maintains that the BZ-movement differed from most other social movements in *not* being institutionalized. Its resources came, not from market exchanges, but from 'commitments embedded in the social relations of a community' (Lo, 1992: 224). The mobilization capacity of the BZ-movement was grounded in the local community or, to be more precise, in the permanent squatted houses. These places constitute, in effect, the 'cell structure' of contentious action (McAdam *et al.*, 1988: 711). They are characterized by: (1) a common identification of problems; (2) proximity and interaction; and (3) equality — consciousness of being subject to the same exploitative conditions and the same authority, and the fact of being in close daily contact with one another, enhances solidarity.

The mobilization capacity of small-scale networks relies first of all on time: it takes time to form and activate mobilization networks, and the longer people anticipate staying in one place the more important fellowship becomes (Lysgaard, 1967: 193; Klandermans, 1997). Second, action networks provide the cognitive basis for collective action in accordance with a 'frame alignment process' that makes people define situations in a new way, integrate their beliefs with those of a larger group and develop a sense of shared injustice (Snow *et al.*, 1986). Third, small networks have the opportunity to generate innovative disruptive collective actions (Piven and Cloward, 1977; 1984; Tarrow, 1994: 105). Finally, small-scale networks provide a solution to the 'free-rider' problem: they give a quick, perceptible return on resources invested in collective action, and they offer selective incentives in the form of friendship, appreciation, security, confidence and status (Olson, 1965; McAdam *et al.*, 1988: 710). In sum, our basic working hypothesis, the *central place* hypothesis, maintains that it was in and around the occupied houses that the squatters formed a tight community and organized actions against authorities and other opponents, in order to defend and enlarge the occupied territories. In the place-oriented analysis, space-time plays a more direct causal role in contentious activities because 'actors attribute meaning to particular objects and relations within textured space-time, while that attribution of meaning affects their interaction' (Tilly, 2000).

Movements are embedded in a multi-organizational field (Klandermans, 1992), and analysing the interactions among social movements and between social movements and political authorities 'is critical to any comprehensive understanding of a movement's rise and fall' (Knoke and Wisely, 1990: 77). Sustained *interaction* with formal political institutions, the police and the public had a profound effect on the BZ-movement, its strongholds and collective social and political identity. It is by the construction of an identifiable challenge that social collective identities are formed and become an essential

part of future mobilization and actions (Klandermans, 1997: 51–2). State repression and strong communal solidarity create injustice frames which delegitimize the state (Gamson *et al.*, 1982). This intensifies the 'us versus them' mentality, and creates myths, heroes, rhetoric, symbols and stories that become part of the collective identity and a political subculture sympathetic to disruptive action and violence (della Porta, 1995).

Together, the *central place* hypothesis and the *interaction* hypothesis explain to a great extent the mobilization capacity and the cyclicity of the BZ-movement, and they also give us a clue to the construction of the partisan identity of the BZ-communities. However, what is missing in this model is the significance of external national and international events and the influence of transnational ties. It has already been noted that the BZ-movement emerged as a continuation of squatting in other European cities, and the following narrative of the BZ-movement shows that links to squatter communities in neighbouring countries, and international as well as national tensions, acted as powerful mobilizers and imposed a collective identity upon those affected. To elucidate this further we may adopt two hypotheses relating to the *cross-national diffusion* of movement ideas and tactics, and the exploitation of *suddenly imposed grievances*.

The transfer of ideas from one movement to another can be either direct or indirect, and involves interpersonal contacts, financial support and flow of information via the mass media. The content of these connections includes forms of organization and action, particular issues, goals and slogans, which have sometimes developed into regular concerted transnational movement campaigns (della Porta *et al.*, 1999). This process of diffusion is facilitated by both spatial and cultural proximity, i.e. when movements with similar goals and constituencies are within short geographical distance (McAdam and Rucht, 1993; Kriesi *et al.*, 1995: Chapter 8). National and international events likewise affect cross-national diffusion and the mobilization capacity of single movements.

Suddenly imposed or unexpected grievances — such as police brutality, political killings, environmental catastrophes, wars and military interventions — particularly raise tensions and create a window of opportunity to be exploited (Walsh, 1988; Klandermans, 1997: 40; Rucht, 1998: 123). We may put forward the argument that social movements will take advantage of 'issue-attention cycles' triggered by tensions in the national and international system (Downs, 1972). Movements can remain passive and utilize the new situation as and when it arises, or they may actively seek opportunities in the external arena. The BZs seem to have made use of both possibilities. They continued a long tradition within the Danish social-movement sector which aimed at international and transnational affairs in order to create mobilization potential and stimulate the motivation to participate, especially when they were going through a period of internal political weakness (Mikkelsen, 1999).

To bring these multifaceted aspects into play, we will endeavour to narrate the history of the BZ-movement. This may illustrate and render probable some of the most important relationships we have suggested, but to be able to advance a step further we first provide quantitative data on the mobilization of the BZ-movement in order to verify our baseline hypotheses. The statistics also make it possible to sketch the major issues of contention that serve as a chronological portrait of the BZ-movement.

Major issues of contention, 1981–94

Table 1 and Figure 3 confirm that the BZ-movement was rooted in squatting and housing problems but also that it developed into a multilateral political organization with a strong international commitment.

In chronological order, non-housing issues took precedence after 1983. In particular, demonstrations and violent assaults on representatives of the apartheid regime in South Africa, their collaborators and commercial partners in Denmark, dominated the agenda

Table 1 *Major issues of contention, 1981–94*

Issues*	Frequency	Percent
Domestic		
Housing	116	21.6
Police	81	15.1
Anti-racism and right-wing groups, migrants	58	10.8
Environment	41	7.6
Women	13	2.4
Other domestic issues	48	8.9
International		
South Africa	76	14.1
West European squatters	41	7.6
The Middle East	19	3.5
EU — the Common Market	17	3.2
South and Central America	9	1.7
Other international issues	19	3.5
Total	538	100.0

* Sixteen CGs have been coded both as a domestic and an international issue.

Source: The BZ-data set (Appendix 1).
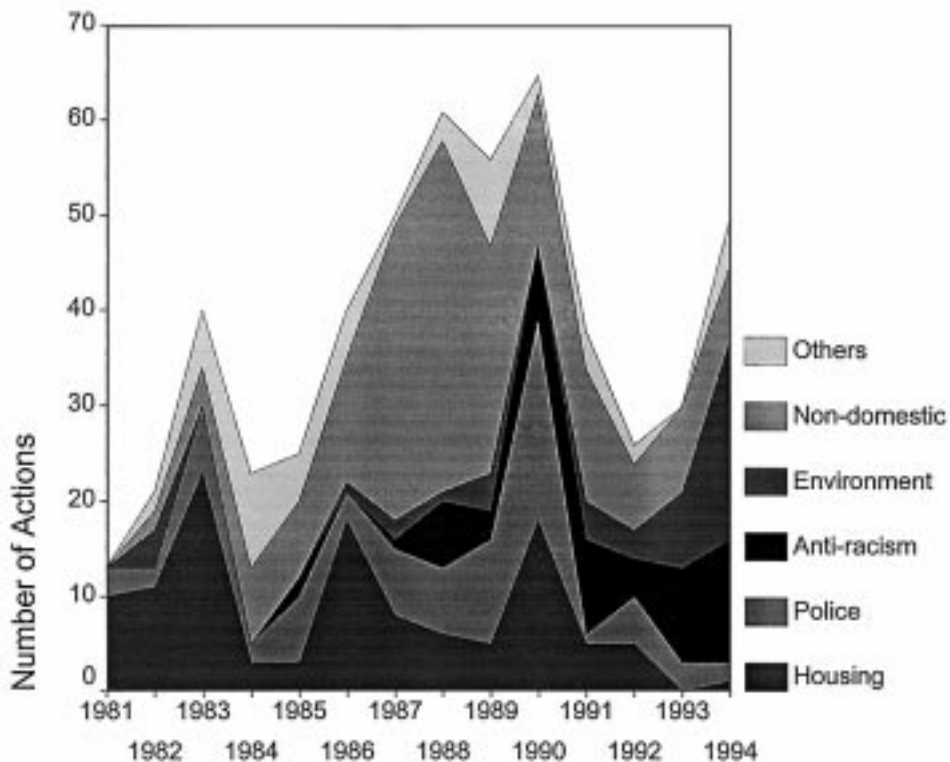
Figure 3 *Major issues of contention, 1981–94 (source: The BZ-data set, Appendix 1)*

until 1990. Manifestations of solidarity with squatters and Autonomous movements in other countries also took place during these years. From 1991, anti-racism, right-wing groups and the plight of immigrants attracted the attention of the BZs who also became involved in environmental problems. It is also worth noting that direct confrontation with the police, and demonstrations against police violence and the authorities' treatment of arrested persons were a constant source of anger and aggression.

Against this background we can divide the entire period into four phases of development. The first cycle, 1981–83, dominated by squatting, peaceful happenings and demonstrations, but also violent confrontations with the police, was succeeded by a more diffused and direct provocative action repertoire from 1984–86. During 1987–90, international issues and small-scale disruptive actions had seized the movement, whereas the repertoire changed once more during the final years from 1991–94, which brought new people to the movement, but also gave rise to the dispersal of the BZ-movement into factions and small independent action groups. But to answer the puzzle of how and why the repertoire of contention changed we will have to place acts of dissent in a national and international context.

The BZ-movement in a national and international context

Emergence and early development of the squatters' movement, 1981–83
On 31 October 1981, a group of young people called 'Initivgruppen' occupied an old disused monastery in central Copenhagen. Initivgruppen consisted of around 30 people from socialist youth organizations, youngsters from Christiania (a large dismantled barracks area in the centre of Copenhagen occupied in 1971), women from the Redstocking movement, some punks and students from the Free Gymnasium. They met for the first time on 25 August in order to ask the city council in Copenhagen for an Autonomous youth centre on their own terms. This was the official date of the founding of the squatters' movement in Denmark (information on the early phase of the movement can be found in Madsen *et al.*, 1980; Thomsen, 1981; Jensen, 1982; Volden *et al.*, 1982; Bryld and Reddersen, 1987; De Autonome, 1994; Heinemann, 1995).

The decision to occupy the old monastery was not spontaneous. The ground had been laid beforehand with meetings with other youth groups, discussions with local residents and exhibitions, but first of all Initivgruppen negotiated with the Municipality. The Social Democratic city council, which for years had supported a heavy-handed reconstruction plan with the deployment of police forces, completely rejected the idea of a youth centre. So, on 15 October a peaceful two-hour occupation of a condemned bakery, Rutana, took place. Two days later a demonstration in front of Rutana resulted in violent confrontation and the first arrests. There followed several demonstrations, police confrontations, heavy use of tear gas, arrests, and on 31 October the old disused monastery, Abel Cathrinesgade, was occupied. Here the squatters built up an open house without rules and leaders and with few guidelines. But after 3 ½ months they voluntarily left; the house had attracted so many outsiders with social problems that it became impossible to manage everyday social life (Madsen *et al.*, 1980).

For some it was a defeat and they left the movement, whereas others had established close social networks and were still possessed by the desire to realize the idea of living together in an Autonomous community (De Autonome, 1994: 8). Thus, the occupation of houses went on, and though the squatters often and very quickly were met by police forces and thrown out, they succeeded in holding quite a few houses for several months (see Appendix 2). These squatted houses became the backbone of the early BZ-movement. Here they experimented with new ways of life, interior design, set up music cafés, pubs and workshops, and from here they organized and mobilized demonstrations, happenings and new occupations (De Autonome, 1994: 10–11).

It was squatting and direct confrontations with the police that delineated the ascending phase of the movement. Sustained confrontations gave rise to a veritable spiral of violence followed by mutual rearmament (Jepsen, 1986; Vestergaard, 1986). The police availed themselves of new equipment and more flexible forms of organization, whereas the BZs also extended their striking power: they learned to build barricades, to mask themselves and to use slingshots. However, they also made use of more subtle actions such as happenings in public places or collective theft from supermarkets, followed by distribution to the poor and passers-by.

A turning point for the BZ-movement occurred in the autumn of 1982, but especially in January 1983, when the police cleared and bulldozed most of the occupied buildings. Deprived of their homes and scattered to the winds, they reacted with frustration and vandalism in a situation that might have been the end of the movement. But during the summer and autumn of 1983, the remaining BZs slowly oozed into a new building, Ryesgade 58.

From demobilization and introspectiveness to new activism, 1984–86
In the occupied house, Ryesgade, and from 1985 in several other squats, the BZs tried out and further developed their idea of an autonomous community. The total absence of any rules, which had characterized the early BZ-movement and especially Abel Cathrines-gade, was replaced by regular house gatherings and a large meeting for the whole movement once a week. Every single person was obliged to take part in cooking, night watch, discussions of common problems and, of course, defence of the house (Hansen, 1986; Karpantschof, 1998).

In 1984 and 1985, the BZs had protracted negotiations with the city council in order to obtain financial assistance and legal rights to the remaining and newly squatted houses (Bryld and Reddersen, 1987). It was during the weekly talks and peaceful encounters with representatives of the city council that the BZs explicitly formulated their idea of basis democracy and principles of syndicalist organizing. However, these could not be reconciled with the interests of the city council and, to forestall the expected demolition, the BZs occupied, barricaded and held a large area around Ryesgade, under the attention of the media, from 14–22 September 1986. After several victorious clashes with the police, the BZs left the barricades in obscurity. Contrary to the situation in 1983, when the BZs were nearly removed from the city-map, they emerged from the battle with renewed strength and courage. They had stood up to the police and received positive press coverage, but the main reason for their success was that hundreds of sympathizers joined the movement and were organized in gangs of barricades. There emerged a spirit of solidarity which was transformed into increased mobilization and renewed activities (for a similar observation see Tarrow, 1994: 44–5). The remaining and newly squatted houses became bases for demonstrations and attacks on foreign embassies and foreign and Danish-owned firms trading with totalitarian regimes, especially South Africa.

Right from the start of the movement there had been personal contacts with squatters and left-wing radicals in Germany and the Netherlands, just as squatters from different countries took part in each other's demonstrations (De Autonome, 1994: 16–7). Besides this, several BZs visited Nicaragua and formed brigades of solidarity which on several occasions demonstrated against representatives of the apartheid regime in South Africa.

BZ-internationalism and anti-imperialism, 1987–90
The decline in movement activities in 1984–85, which we can observe in Figures 1 and 3, gave impetus to the idea that the opening of a new international front would benefit the movement. The anti-imperialist strategy of the German 'Rote Armee Faction' (Red Army Front) — especially as it was formulated in a publication entitled *Guerilla, Wiederstand und anti-imperialistische Front* from 1982 — served as an ideological force

and rallying point. Newly squatted houses and renewed recruitment to the movement, during and in the wake of the Ryesgade-revolt, made it possible to carry these ideas into effect.

Looking at the action repertoire, it appears that only a few actions aimed at occupying buildings, whereas the vast majority attacked foreign embassies, foreign-owned firms, Danish firms, banks and other institutions representing international financial interests in Denmark. The streets were used for demonstrations against apartheid in South Africa, the US, Israel, the EC and other representatives of 'capitalism and imperialism all over the world'. Between 1986 and 1991, the BZ-movement generated two distinct forms of action: the well-organized demonstration and the militant act of sabotage (De Autonome, 1994: 24–9). Many demonstrators were dressed alike with helmets, clubs and maroons. They managed to keep the police away from demonstrations and to release arrested comrades. Sabotage was often conducted by small groups who, under the cover of the darkness, threw molotovs, stones, paint or stink-bombs at embassies or multinational corporations. At other times, it was large well-organized raids and campaigns, as when 27 Shell stations were damaged overnight in November 1986, or when 150 activists completely smashed the South African Consulate in 1989. These and other campaigns were often succeeded by public demonstrations, debates and newspaper articles.

The campaign against apartheid and Shell was part of a larger national and international tide. Many NGOs had long taken a critical attitude towards the South African regime and Shell, and in 1985–86 the Danish government decided on total economic and cultural sanctions (Morgenstiern, 1996: 19). The BZs also cooperated with the national South African Committee, which supported the African National Congress (ANC), through which they acquired respect and gained supporters, especially among young people. In 1988–89, BZ participated in an international campaign involving direct actions against the Shell corporation. The initiative came from squatters in Holland with whom the Danish, German and Swedish Autonomous had joined forces.

In 1985, an assault perpetrated by 350 Danes on a group of Iranian refugees who had been lodging in a hotel in the city of Kalundborg was a major incident that directed the attention of the public towards a new dimension of conflict in Danish society. Since 1980, politicians and the media had been fuelling an increasingly aggressive xenophobia and right-wing populism by focusing on refugees and immigrants as a threat to the maintenance of law and order and welfare in Denmark (Schierup, 1993). At the same time, new types of racist youth gangs and White-Power groups had emerged. Thus, in 1985, a White-Power gang known as the 'Greenjackets' carried out attacks on BZ-houses using arson and a shotgun, and in the late 1980s, Greenjackets and left-wing activists clashed on several occasions. In 1987, the anti-immigration organization, The Danish Association (Den Danske Forening), was founded, and soon became the target for a broad coalition of left-wing organizations (Fællesinitiativet Mod Racisme), including the BZ-movement (Karpantschof, 1999).

The broadening interests and political visual field of the BZs — who began to call themselves the 'Autonomous' after the German example — brought them international and domestic allies. Their isolated position, constant clashes with the police and their denunciation by the general public reinforced these tendencies. The BZs opted for moral and strategic support among like-minded groups in other countries who were exposed to similar police repression (De Autonome, 1994: 29–30). They arranged hearings and meetings with comrades and prominent persons from abroad, including ex-prisoner Roland Meyer from the Rote Armee Faction, just as the annual New Year's meeting in Hamburg and close collaboration with Autonomous from Hafenstrasse, also in Hamburg, became a must for squatters in Copenhagen.

Though the police had given up wholesale arrests after 1984, and were forced onto the defensive after Ryesgade, they did not retreat but, instead, engaged in a war of position. Instead of frontal attacks on occupied houses, the police mounted pinprick

actions. They searched houses and raided organizations with connections to the BZ milieu. Occasional arrests and poorly-founded reasons for solitary confinement were intended to frighten sympathizers away from the movement. The BZs reacted with minor raids on police patrols and police stations and larger demonstrations in public places against police violence, and sometimes they marched to prisons and courthouses in sympathy with arrested comrades. They also arranged some very spectacular and provocative 'action-weeks', such as Week 19 (1988) and Robin Raid-Week (1989), that were met with arrests and police brutality. But the police also developed a more long-term policy after Ryesgade.

A new law ordered owners to make empty buildings unfit for occupancy, if necessary with the help of the police (*BZ-sikring af bygninger*, 1988). The police availed themselves of better equipment, including long-range tear gas guns, but, more importantly, they improved their readiness and logistics. Their ability to quickly mobilize hundreds of riot-equipped forces increased considerably after 1986. The campaign culminated when the police cleared the most active squats, Mekanisk Musik Museum, Sorte Hest, Baghuset and finally Kapaw, in 1990. The BZs retaliated with street fighting, futile attempts at recapturing the houses and demonstrations attracting thousands of sympathizers, but it was of no consequence. The BZ-movement collapsed, primarily because they were deprived of their central places. In short, the political authorities had embarked on a strategy of repression: no negotiations, demolition of potential squats and the ultimate effort of police force.

From backwater resistance to multi-organizational politics — the dissolution of the BZ-movement, 1991–95

The loss of most of the squats and two of the most important outlets to the wider world, the cafés and meeting places at *Kapaw* and *Sorte Hest*, strongly reduced the power and range of the movement. On top of this, the news-worthiness of anti-imperialist actions was diminishing, and everything that smacked of socialism and collective solutions was on the defensive after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Politically isolated, and having lost their homes, some left the movement, whereas others bought into and settled down in communities in the inner-city of Copenhagen, not far from their old bastions. From here they began reconstructing their political network, and were integrated into larger fields of political activities rooted in anti-racism, environmentalism, anti-imperialism, socialist youth networks and resistance to the EC.

On 30 November 1991, several BZs met during a large and successful anti-fascist blockade in Lund (Sweden). These renewed contacts were transformed into concrete organized political activities after the young anti-racist campaigner, Henrik Christensen, was killed by a bomb on 16 March 1992 (Anti fascistisk Aktion, 1997; Karpantschof, 1999). The outcome was the inauguration of Anti-Fascist-Action (AFA), a mix of former BZs and many left-wing groups who reproduced by budding and took part in the formation of the Anti-Racist-Network (ARN) in 1992. Besides several demonstrations against right-wing organizations and neo-Nazis, AFA and the ARN rallied in Sweden and participated in European anti-racist cooperation.

After the forcible evictions in 1990, most BZs refrained from squatting and looked for other alternatives; they also avoided direct confrontations with the police. Together with other young left socialists they founded 'Rebel', and on the first of May 1993 they opened a new centre of activity, *Solidaritetshuset*, on Nørrebro in Copenhagen. But despite the formation of AFA and Rebel, one could speak of a fragmented and bewildered movement, ostensibly on its way towards dissolution. Manifest activities dropped to the same low level as the last time the movement was on its way to break-up after the many clearings in 1983. However, a real turning point occurred on 18 May 1993.

The tide began to turn on 2 June 1992, when a small majority of the Danish people rejected the EC referendum, the so-called Maestricht Treaty, much to the annoyance of

the leading politicians (Heinemann, 1995). In the following months they negotiated a compromise with the other EC countries which was approved by the Danes in a second referendum of 18 May 1993. The same evening, demonstrators blocked a road in the inner city of Copenhagen under the banner 'EC-free zone'. The police responded with tear gas and during the subsequent uproar drew their pistols and shot and wounded 11 demonstrators and bystanders (Jensen, 1994). In a single blow, this incident gave the otherwise languishing movement wide publicity as a militant left-wing opposition force, and in the following months the movement engaged in intense confrontations with the state and in vigorous disputes with left-wing parties and the public. It led to new recruitment and increased internal solidarity and mobilization: the BZs of the 1980s had become the Autonomous of the 1990s.

While anti-racism and anti-Nazism were still growing in importance, other issues were coming to the fore. Prior to 1993 few actions focused on environmental problems, but with the decision of the government to build a bridge over the Sound (Øresund), the anti-capitalism movement acquired a concrete and ideological target. Together with local affected residents and people affiliated with the 'Stop-the-Bridge-Network', groups of BZs blockaded the construction site and demonstrated for a more ecologically sustainable economy. They also levelled their anger against Danish firms working for the Sound consortium, and launched a campaign against the entry of McDonalds in the inner city of Copenhagen. This group of Autonomous environmentalists had their meeting place in Solidaritetshuset and the adjoining anti-Fascist café, Kafa-X, where they gathered with other like-minded youth groups.

Repertoire of contentious actions and transnational commitment

The chronicle of the BZ-movement clearly shows that places, encounters with authorities, police confrontation, and national and international events — in short, community, interaction and opportunity — are key to the development of the BZ-movement, its repertoire of action, cyclicity, and social and political identity. In this and the final section we will proceed to methodically analyse these aspects, the interaction and the central place hypotheses, with a strong regard for external events.

The means and resources the BZs brought into play to defend and advance their interests ranged from peaceful demonstrations with thousands of participants to sabotage and vandalism against banks and firms, carried out by small commando raids under the cover of darkness. Table 2 gives an impression of the most frequently used forms of action, from which it can be seen that occupations, demonstrations and happenings prevailed in the early years, whereas blockades, vandalism and sabotage gained ground in a later phase. This pattern, however, must be understood in relation to changes in the issues of contention.

Besides the obvious fact that occupations and housing coincide, we see from Table 3 that demonstrations were used against right-wing racism and against police violence. Blockades were often brought into play against public or private construction, whereas vandalism and sabotage were reserved for non-domestic issues. Combined with information from Figure 3 and the above narrative, we have a clear picture of a lot of small groups which carried out acts of sabotage against repressive regimes, and in support of suppressed groups and political activists in other countries after 1986. Since 1992, when new aims like right-wing extremism, racism, attacks on immigrants and environmental problems gained ground, large-scale peaceful manifestations such as demonstrations could be used for mobilizing supporters, forming alliances and gaining public sympathy (see Table 2). This indicates that the BZ-movement was not locked into a fixed repertoire of collective violent action, but adjusted its tactics, organization, combat-readiness and symbolic apparatus according to specific campaigns, allies and

Table 2 *Forms of contentious action, 1981–94*

Forms of Action	1981–83	1984–86	1987–89	1990–92	1993–94	Total	Number
Demonstration	22.7	19.8	22.5	25.2	40.5	25.3	132
Happening	13.3	10.5	6.3	8.7	4.1	8.2	43
Occupation	36.0	18.6	7.5	19.7	1.2	15.5	81
Blockade	2.7	3.5	3.8	13.4	25.7	9.0	47
Crowds and riots	6.7	18.6	6.3	5.5	9.5	8.6	45
Vandalism and sabotage	9.3	24.4	51.3	24.4	18.9	29.7	155
Other	9.3	4.7	2.5	3.2	–	3.6	19
Total	100.0	100.1	100.2	100.1	99.9	99.9	
Number	75	86	160	127	74		522

Source: The BZ-data set (Appendix 1).

Table 3 *Forms of action and issues of contention, 1981–94 (observed/expected frequencies)*

	Housing	Police	Women	Racism	Environment	Non-domestic	Number
Demonstration	−8.7	16.2	−1.1	8.8	−1.2	−14.0	116
Happening	1.2	−0.1	2.1	−4.0	1.9	−1.9	35
Occupation	32.5	−7.0	−2.0	1.3	−5.7	−19.2	76
Blockade	−0.4	−6.7	−1.2	4.8	12.0	−8.3	46
Crowds/riots	−2.0	2.4	1.0	0.6	−3.4	1.5	39
Vandalism/sabotage	−23.2	−4.8	1.2	−11.4	−3.6	41.8	144
Number	105	66	12	52	40	181	456

Source: The BZ-data set (Appendix 1).

opponents. In other words, rational strategic considerations performed in interaction with authorities and other actors constituted the driving force behind the changing repertoire (della Porta and Diani, 1999: 184–8).

Right from the start, the BZs had drawn heavily on sympathetic groups in other countries. These connections were gradually extended, and we can observe how issues of contention, forms and targets of action, public debates, discussions in books, pamphlets and periodicals, slogans, all the way down to modes of dress and the use of daily symbols, took on an international aspect, especially after 1985. This change of policy and everyday social life was only possible because the BZs had captured new bastions in 1985, but also because international issues such as apartheid, Shell and Nicaragua had been put on the international-national political agenda. In the following years, the BZs utilized these tendencies by introducing a new and more radical repertoire of contention that attracted public attention, domestic and foreign allies. Together with squatters and Autonomous groups in northern Europe, especially Berlin and Amsterdam, they organized campaigns against apartheid in South Africa, the Shell corporation and nuclear power plants. The eagerness of the BZs to open up a new international frontline was not only motivated by changing opportunities, but also follows the difficulties of the BZ-movement in mobilizing mass attendance for their many actions after 1984 (see Figure 1), and declining support for their left-wing anti-capitalist ideology.

Factors influencing goal displacement also bear heavily upon the mobilization capacity of the BZ-movement, in its ascending, fluctuating and descending phases.

Mobilization and cyclicity of the BZ-movement

In accordance with our central place hypothesis, we presumed that the squatted houses formed the most important mobilization ground for the BZ-movement, its actions and transnational connections, and the above narrative of the BZ-movement seems to support such a connection. To proceed with this idea, we systematically gathered information on squatted houses which had been occupied for more than three months (see Appendix 2). Summing up the number of months over the years 1981–94, we constructed a diagram (Figure 4). This shows a close co-variation between the number of contentious actions and occupations in months, as well as a clear and constant lag structure in the action time series. The computed correlation coefficients bring out the same results:

	Actions
Occupations in months	0.59 ($p = 0.026$)
Occupations in months ($t-1$)	0.90 ($p = 0.000$)

These unambiguous findings place the 'permanent' squatted houses at the centre of the analysis, whether we want to understand the role of organization, recruitment or political identity. We already know that the BZs and the police were locked in serious combat, and Figure 4 demonstrates that major clashes with the police in 1983 and in 1990 were followed by a striking decline in squats and movement activity. In 1986, on the other hand, the BZs won the upper hand and were able to instigate a new offensive from the occupied houses. The reason why the police refrained from clearing the remaining residences and meeting places is first and foremost due to the strong resistance they met with during the battle of Ryesgade, and the perceived public reaction if they tried to
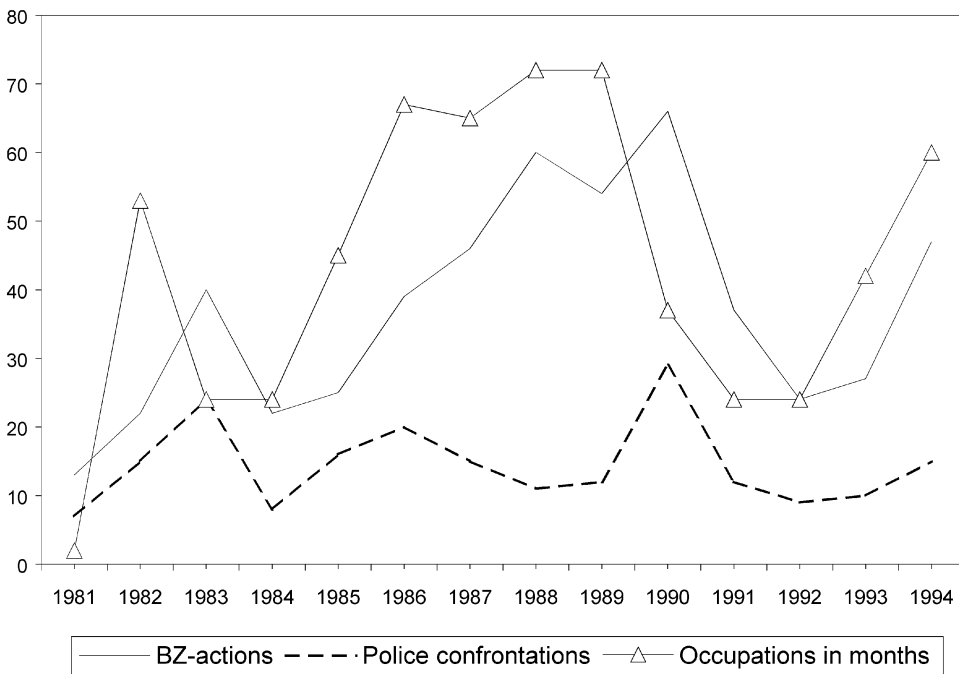

Figure 4 *Squatted houses, BZ-actions and police confrontations 1981–94 (sources: The BZ-data set, Appendix 1; data on occupied houses in Copenhagen, Appendix 2)*

eliminate the remaining occupied houses. Having reorganized and rearmed, the police took the risk in 1990, and the BZ-community was seriously clipped. It lay low for nearly two years, during which time groups of BZ settled down in new places and built up new networks; they also adjusted to the changing political climate.

National and international crises and issues served as a rallying ground and helped to revitalize the movement after the battle of Ryesgade in 1986, but especially in 1992–93, when anti-racism, the European Union and environmental problems took centre stage. The weakened movement, however, was not strong enough to influence the political debate on its own terms; instead it clung to other political groupings and joined more powerful coalitions focusing on anti-racism, environmentalism and foreign issues. This change of orientation and affiliation is also reflected in the repertoire of contentious actions, as the peaceful mass demonstration became the dominant means of expression as a way of attracting new adherents during the final years of the movement (see Table 2). The occupied houses were no longer the sole focus or acted as the main recruiting centre for the network proper and the mobilization of followers often took place in cooperation with other youth movements and organizations. These linkages and joint activities, however, weakened the partisan profile of BZ and contributed to the dissolution of the movement.

Conclusion

The BZs represented a distinct and very disciplined mode of life compared to other youth cultures. Crossing the border from punks, hippies, bohemians, skinheads, hiphops and other subcultures to the BZs was tantamount to a new lifestyle, mutual dependence, extroversion, and an explicit political identity that became even more radical as a function of interaction and solidarity. Political currents were explicit from the beginning of the BZ-movement. Followers were recruited from political youth organizations and from semi-political networks, and squatting was quickly defined and handled as a high-profile policy domain by the authorities. Sustained confrontation with the police reinforced the internal networks, the consciousness of being subject to dominant exploitative conditions and a sense of shared injustice.

Forms of action, goals, slogans, ideology and public appearance were organized and devised within movement networks located in squats and adjacent centres. Small-scale networks and especially durable networks strengthened solidarity, created shared beliefs and provided a common identity. Part of the network consisted of close and lasting connections with similar groups and movements in neighbouring countries, which acted as ideological standard bearers and comrades-in-arms, and gave a strong impetus to the politicization of everyday social life. The main opposition comprised the local authorities which intervened in a decisive way in the activities of the BZ-movement. This moving constellation of allies and enemies by and large explains the mobilization capacity and cyclicity of the BZ-community, and how a process of goal displacement took place. These results confirm the central place and the interaction hypotheses which fill in essential components of the 'resource mobilization' perspective and the concept of 'political opportunities'. The importance of external incidents and the often calculated exploitation of national and international tensions accentuate the opportunity perspective and add a constructivist angle to the explanation.

Our portrait of the BZ-movement differs conclusively from those who see youth movements as a marginal cultural phenomenon characterized by deviant behaviour. First of all, the BZ must be perceived as a left-wing political movement that rebelled against market forces, national and international — to begin with the housing market in Copenhagen, later on big business in the third world and environmentalism. They allied with like-minded groups in Denmark and in other countries against apartheid, racism and

right-wing organizations, especially neo-Nazis. As a consequence of sustained strategic interaction with opponents and allies, the BZs developed a distinct radical ideology and a corresponding lifestyle which meant close social, cultural and political contacts with the outside world — not what we would expect from a deprived and marginalized group. On the other hand, there seems to be more substance in the 'progressive' interpretation, emphasizing the efforts of youth movements to expand civil society and social autonomy at the expense of state and market. This reading, however, underestimates the role of concrete opportunities: repression, facilitation, organizational and strategic skills, and especially the ability of the local authorities to define the rules of the game by means of the police, the media and formal political channels. Past experiences with squatters, the occupation of Christiania and a goal-directed reconstruction plan set aside all other reasons, and reduced the BZs to a permanent challenger.

The study of the BZ-movement and the theoretical considerations do not invalidate the term 'capitalism' as a master variable explaining fundamental tensions in modern globalized urban society. What the analysis does, however, is question the relationship between structure and action, and contest the *structure–consciousness–action* (SCA) theoretical chain (Pahl, 1989). The essence of this argument is that the material or mental state of groups or individuals is predisposed towards a specific consciousness that transforms into a social force. Thus, analysts of urban social movements may, when they observe a contender in action, always trace it back to a common awareness of the exploitation or disadvantage inherent in such structures.

Our inquiry does not support this reasoning. Bringing space, time and interaction into the investigation we suggest an alternative causal chain: *action–consciousness–structure* (ACS). The BZ-movement, or any other social movement, was not a pre-given unit with inherent essential characteristics. It was founded in a process of conditional interplay between other youth organizations, and the unfolding of a radical consciousness and injustice frames was enacted in a series of interactive performances with successive national and international actors. Movements are developmentally dependent on one another and the wider political system, to such an extent that the structural root cause of the movements dwindles or must be treated as exogenous mechanisms. Overall, this indicates that we must ascribe organizational and political factors, and even networks and trans-actions, greater explanatory power than structures, values or identity.

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Appendix 1 — The BZ-data set, 1981–94

Whenever a group, in the name of the BZ-movement, gathered in a public place and made a visible claim or conducted a symbolic act that inflicted on the interests of some other group, person or organization, and when a BZ-group, undercover but with a political purpose, violated or damaged some other group, person or organization, the collective action was registered. This definition covers peaceful demonstrations, happenings and occupations as well as vandalism and sabotage. The data set consists of 522 contentious actions from 15 October 1981 up until 31 December 1994, compiled from the BZ-movement's own publications and daily newspapers. We used the BZ-movement's own publications as a point of reference (the BZs were keen to inform other BZs and the

Appendix 2 — Occupied buildings in Copenhagen, 1981–94

Name*	Address	Period	Café/Pub	No. of Occupants	Remarks	Source
Abel Cathrinesgade	Abel Cathrinesgade	31.10.81–15.02.82	Public kitchen, workshop			Feiring (1982)
Korsgade	Korsgade 25	23.04.82–11.01.83		15		Pol., 24.04.82
Allotria	Korsgade 45	01.05.82–11.01.83	Pub, music house	50		Inf., 11.05.82; Pol. 30.05.82
Gartnergade	Gartnergade 14	09.06.82–22.10.82		15		Inf., 10.06.82
Bazooka	Stengade/Baggesensgade	10.05.82–12.01.83	Accommodation agency	25		Betænkning, nr. 1147
Snehvide	Blågårdsgade 46	15.06.82–16.09.82		15		B.Zætter (1985)
Den Lille Fjer	Korsgade 47	17.09.82–11.01.83		15		Inf., 20.09.82
Safari	Meinungsgade 30	08.10.82–11.01.83		10–15		Betænkning, nr. 1147
Ungdomshuset	Jagtvej 69	31.10.82–ff	Pub, music house, shop, workshop, public kitchen		Semi-legalized	B.Zætter (1985)
46	Nørrebrogade 46	01.03.83–01.12.83		20		Fingeren
Ryesgade	Ryesgade 58	01.06.83–22.09.86	Pub	50–80		B.Zætter (1985)
Mekanisk Musik Museum	Vesterbrogade	01.05.85–02.02.90		20	Gangway to 'Sorte Hest'	Fingeren, 11/86
Kapaw	Viborggade 41	20.08.85–30.10.90	Pub, public kitchen	15–20		Fingeren, 10/85; Ravage, 4/90
Ragnhildsgade	Ragnhildsgade	01.04.85–01.09.85		20–30		Fingeren 10/85
63	Ryesgade 63–65	04.12.85–11.02.86		20		Fingeren 12/86; Betænkning nr. 1147

Appendix 2 — Continued

Name*	Address	Period	Café/Pub	No. of Occupants	Remarks	Source
Bumsen	Baldersgade 20–22	25.01.86–ff	Pub, public kitchen	15–25	Legalized 1990	Fingeren 11/86; 20/89; Ravage 4/90
Gyldenløvsgade	Gyldenløvsgade 12	01.11.85–01.02.86		20		Nyhedsbrev/Støt BZ; B.Zætter
Sorte Hest	Vesterbrogade	25.04.86–02.02.90	Pub, public kitchen	25	Gangway to MMM	BZ-ekstra
Baghuset	Vesterbrogade	01.08.87–02.02.90		15	Behind 'Sorte Hest'	BZ-ekstra
Børnehuset	Skt. Pedersstræde	15.06.93–ff	Public kitchen, workshop		Legalized	De Autonome
Kafa-X	Blågårdsgade	01.10.93–ff	Café/Infoshop		Lease	De Autonome
Solidaritetshuset	Griffenfeldtsgade 41	01.05.93–ff	Shop, workshop		Lease: 'Rebel', a.o.	De Autonome

* Only buildings which have been occupied for more than three months have been registered.

public about their political activities); afterwards they were compared with daily newspapers in order to balance the information.

The BZ-movement's own periodicals cover:

- *Fingeren* 1983–89, BZ-magazine, Copenhagen (expired)
- *Nyhedsbrev* 1984-85, Written by BZs, Copenhagen: Støt BZ (expired)
- *Ravage* 1989–92, BZ newspaper/weekly, Copenhagen (expired)
- *Effekt* 1993, Autonomous newspaper, Copenhagen (expired)
- *Autonomi* 1988 ff, Copenhagen: Autonome revolutionære/Autonomi-kollektivet
- *Courage* 1991 ff, Copenhagen: Autonome Feminister
- *Slamm* 1991 ff, Weekly autonomous info-magazine, Copenhagen
- *Propaganda* 1994 ff, Autonomous magazine, Copenhagen

Books and pamphlets of and on the BZ-movement:

- *Kaos* 1982, BZ-hand out
- *Amok* 1982, BZ-hand out
- Feiring, Birgitte *et al.* (boggruppen), *Ungdomshus NU*, København: Tiderne Skifter 1982
- BZs and students from Den Sociale Højskole, *BZ-brigaden*, København 1982
- B. Zætter, *Knald eller fald*, 2. edt. København: Autonomt Forlag 1985
- Anti-Fascistisk Aktion, *Vi tilstår. Anti-fascistisk Aktion 5 år*, København 1997
- De Autonome, *De Autonome en bog om og af den autonome bevægelse*, København: Autonomt Forlag

Daily newspapers (1981–94)

- *Politiken*
- *BT*
- *Ekstra Bladet*
- *Information*
- *Jyllands Posten*
- *København*
- *Aktuelt*
- *Land & Folk*
- *Dagbladet Arbejderen*

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