RADICALLY LEGAL

Right in the middle of the German constitution, a group of ordinary citizens discovers a forgotten clause that allows them to take 240,000 homes back from multi-billion corporations. In this work of creative non-fiction, scholar-activist and Nine Dots Prize winner Joanna Kusiak tells the story of a grassroots movement that convinced a million Berliners to pop the speculative housing bubble. She offers a vision of urban housing as democratically held commons, legally managed by a radically new institutional model that works through democratic conflicts. Moving between interdisciplinary analysis and the personal story of her becoming a scholar-activist, Kusiak connects the dots between history and presence, the local and the global, and shows the potential of radically legal politics as a means of strengthening our democracies and reviving the rule of law. This title is also available as Open Access on Cambridge Core.

Joanna Kusiak is a Junior Research Fellow at King’s College, University of Cambridge. Her work focuses on urban land, housing crises and the progressive potential of the law. In 2021 she was one of the spokespeople for Deutsche Wohnen & Co. enteignen, Berlin’s successful referendum campaign to expropriate stock-listed landlords. In 2023 she won the Nine Dots Prize.
Radically Legal

Berlin Constitutes the Future

JOANNA KUSIAK
University of Cambridge
To Lisa, my brilliant friend, and to Berlin, the city that brought us together.
Land, natural resources and means of production may, for the purpose of socialisation (*Vergesellschaftung*), be transferred to public ownership (*Gemeineigentum*), or other forms of solidarity economy (*Gemeinwirtschaft*) by a law that determines the nature and extent of compensation.

*Article 15, Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article 15, Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland</th>
<th>page viii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the Nine Dots Prize</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 TAKING THE TRAM HOME: PRELUDE TO CHANGE 1

2 WE ARE ALL STAYING PUT: PROPERTY AND FREEDOM 11

3 BERLIN BECOMES HIGH-RISK CAPITAL: THE LAW AND THE MOVEMENT 41

4 WHO CONSTITUTES POWER? CHECKS AND BALANCES 71

5 BERLIN IS THE GREATEST EXTRAVAGANZA: SEXY AND SOLIDARISTIC 103

6 THE RULE OF LAW IS HAVING A MIDLIFE CRISIS: SHADOW AND DIFFERENCE 137

7 BEFORE THE LAW: FRANZ KAFKA FEAT. DWE 165

Love and Gratitude 171
Soundtrack 175
Notes 177
FIGURES

0.1 Deutsche Wohnen & Co. enteignen’s cheerleading squad dancing in front of the Reichstag page xii
1.1 Berlin S-bahn driver giving his signature in support of DWE’s referendum 2
2.1 Socialisation: Lawful, affordable, good. A pastiche of Ritter Sport advertisement created by Joanna Kusiak as part of the public art exhibition Die Balkone in Berlin Prenzlauer Berg, 2021 12
2.2 Bruno Taut’s Carl Legien Estate in Berlin Prenzlauer Berg 21
2.3 Jabberwock, a powerful fictional creature from Lewis Carroll’s nonsense poem Jabberwocky featured in his book Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There 34
2.4 Wir bleiben Alle – ‘We Are All Staying Put’: An occupied tenement block at Brunnenstrasse 183; occupiers evicted by the police on 27 October 2009 36
3.1 The spectres of expropriation in front of the Deutsche Wohnen Headquarters in Frankfurt, 18 June 2019 42
3.2 Mira on Election Day 45
3.3 Election evening games: Will it be possible to overthrow the rule of corporate landlords? 47
3.4 Collecting signatures in Berlin-Marzahn 52
3.5 DWE announces the second referendum in front of the Rotes Rathaus (Berlin City Hall), 23 September 2023 54
3.6 ‘We have to do everything ourselves’: The spectres of expropriation dancing in front of the Rotes Rathaus 55
3.7 DWE’s organisational structure 66
List of Figures

3.8 Poster for the 1926 referendum to expropriate the property of the former ruling houses 67
4.1 Facsimile of the official signatures on the Grundgesetz 72
4.2 Opening meeting of the Parliamentary Council in Bonn, 1 September 1948 76
4.3 The statue of Elisabeth Selbert in Kassel 79
4.4 ‘CDU fights for the Gemeinwirtschaft’; this 1947 poster shows that the Christian Democrats stood for a socialisation and solidarity economy 81
4.5 Wolfgang Abendroth by Zersetzer.com 86
4.6 Electoral poster of Solidarność on a Warsaw tram 91
5.1 Hermannplatz 2050: An Artwork by Gosia Zmysłowska 104
5.2 Felix’s apartment at Carl Legien Estate 108
5.3 Colourful loggias at Carl Legien Estate 109
5.4 Bruno Taut’s Horseshoe Estate in Berlin-Britz built by GEHAG 111
5.5 ‘Architecture of financialisation’: A housing project by Vonovia in Alt-Tempelhof, completed in 2021 112
5.6 Alpine Architecture: An outlandish utopia by Bruno Taut 114
5.7 Organisational structure of the AöR, a democratic institution that would manage socialised housing 126
5.8 ‘Doughnut economics’ by Kate Raworth 133
6.1 Waiting for the tram 138
7.1 Dancing before the law 166
ABOUT THE NINE DOTS PRIZE

There is no other literary accolade quite like the Nine Dots Prize. It is anonymously judged, for one, and, just as significantly, it is awarded for a book that does not yet exist.

Every two years its Board convenes to decide on a question inspired by a problem or concern of contemporary global importance. We invite writers from all over the world, whether established or aspiring, to respond to that question in no more than 3,000 words. The most compelling response is awarded $100,000, a book deal from Cambridge University Press, and support from the team at the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH) at Cambridge University. The winning applicant therefore has everything they need to develop their idea into a full-length book which is subsequently sold in bookshops and, crucially, made available online for free.

That the Prize is judged anonymously means each applicant can be confident they are judged purely on the merits of their writing and ideas, and not their CV, background or identity. This is essential if we are to realise our ambition of finding and championing the most exciting thinkers in the world.

In 2022, for our fourth cycle, we posed the question ‘Why has the rule of law become so fragile?’ Of the hundreds of submissions we received, there emerged a clear frontrunner. Taking the case of the 2021 Berlin Referendum, in which voters decided to expropriate hundreds of thousands of properties from corporate landlords into public ownership, this was an entry that mixed the urgency of contemporary politics with the complexity of recent history. This combination succeeded in winning over our judges. The resulting book is Radically Legal, in which Dr Joanna Kusiak deploys both her knowledge and experience as a ‘scholar-activist’ to demonstrate the potential of this new
About the Nine Dots Prize

form of politics to deepen our democracies, renew the rule of law and bring about progressive change.

Joanna Kusiak joins an impressive network of winners, in tech strategist turned Oxford philosopher James Williams, writer and journalist Annie Zaidi, and the journalist Trish Lorenz. We hope that this book will succeed in having a similar impact as those of Kusiak’s predecessors, provoking debate, sparking hope and contributing in some part to positive change in our societies.

Professor Simon Goldhill
Professor of Greek Literature and Culture and Fellow of King’s College, Cambridge and Chair of the Nine Dots Prize Board

For more about the Nine Dots Prize, please visit: ninedots-prize.org
Figure 0.1 Deutsche Wohnen & Co. enteignen’s cheerleading squad dancing in front of the Reichstag
(Source: Christian Mang)