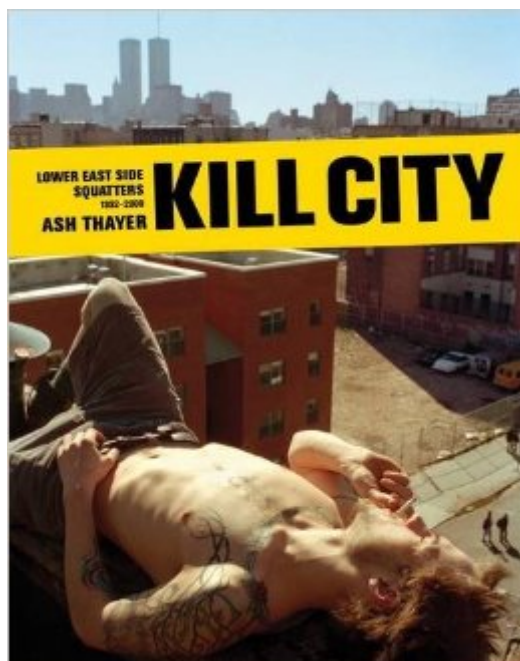


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# Kill City: Lower East Side Squatters 1992-2000



## Synopsis

After being kicked out of her apartment in Brooklyn in 1992, and unable to afford rent anywhere near her school, young art student Ash Thayer found herself with few options. Luckily she was welcomed as a guest into See Skwat. New York City in the '90s saw the streets of the Lower East Side overrun with derelict buildings, junkies huddled in dark corners, and dealers packing guns. People in desperate need of housing, worn down from waiting for years in line on the low-income housing lists, had been moving in and fixing up city-abandoned buildings since the mid-80s in the LES. Squatters took over entire buildings, but these structures were barely habitable. They were overrun with vermin, lacking plumbing, electricity, and even walls, floors, and a roof. Punks and outcasts joined the squatter movement and tackled an epic rebuilding project to create homes for themselves. The squatters were forced to be secretive and exclusive as a result of their poor legal standing in the buildings. Few outsiders were welcome and fewer photographers or journalists. Thayer's camera accompanied her everywhere as she lived at the squats and worked alongside other residents. Ash observed them training each other in these necessary crafts and finding much of their materials in the overflowing bounty that is New York City's refuse and trash. The trust earned from her subjects was unique and her access intimate. *Kill City* is a true untold story of New York's legendary LES squatters.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ash Thayer's *Kill City* is almost a sequel to Ken Schles' *Invisible City*. While Schles' 1988

photo essay portrayed an empty neighborhood, Thayer's photos portray the flowers that bloomed where a tree had died. She lived in and photographed the See Squat on Avenue C and 9th Street, an area known as Alphabet City, one of several buildings in the area inhabited by squatters. The residents fought to stay in the buildings, going all the way to court to have their squatters' rights made permanent. Some succeeded, others were evicted. A little background on the author; Thayer came from Memphis Tennessee, didn't get along with her southern peers, went to SVA, had no money for rent, and found the See Squat via word-of-mouth. The book has an intro by Reverend Fran Morales, where he tells us how the locals, themselves poor and marginalized, didn't want the squatters there. Most of the squatters were young and white, while the locals were mostly Hispanic. Both groups, however, were really in the same dire circumstances, and if it weren't a squat full of young whites, it would've been a squat full of junkies. Take your pick. One of my favorite things about this book is that it documents the clothing styles of the time. Greens and browns predominate, lots of dark blue workman's clothes can be seen too. The author points out that androgynous looks were popular among young people at the time, with Doc Martens being the norm for both genders. Perhaps it's because the boots last a long time? Or maybe these kids came from rural towns where everyone worked in farms or industry? I also surmise that the 1990's Alphabet City, not yet the hipster enclave it is now, wouldn't have been a place to see colorful clothing, worn by socially competitive people.

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