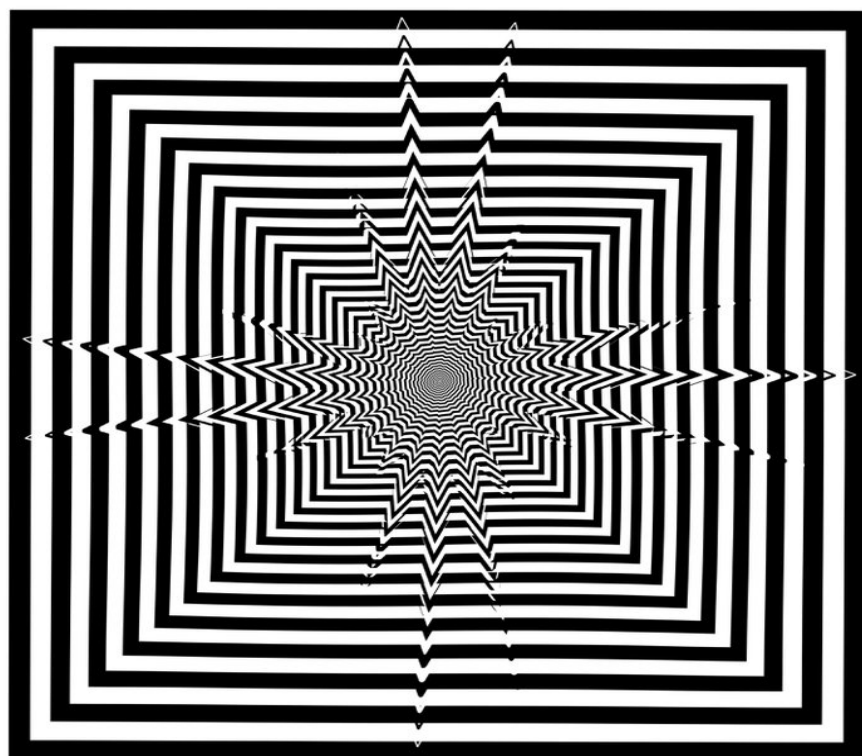


USING SPACE



a zine about squats, social centres and alternative ways of living

Contents

Facing Up to Mike Weatherley's Fearsome Gauntlet	3
A Secret History of the City	6
The CoolTan Arts Centre	9
Watching the value of property melt away	17
The Sacred Law of Private Property	20
Informal Update on Situation in Seattle	22
The Story of Sabotaj	24
Squat Weblinks	29

Issue SIX January 2012

Using Space publishes and republishes stuff worth reading about squatting, social centres and alternative ways of living. It's good to spread the info. This zine will be online in various places including zinelibrary.info. Something not covered? Drop us a line.

BIG UP: Occupy squatters everywhere, Bank of Ideas, Okasional Cafe, Grow Heathrow, Ainsworth House, Turritopsis Nutricula, Bloomsbury Social Centre (RiP), Autonomous Nottingham, Squatters Legal Network, 56A, Discentrum, Citadel of Hope, 3 Bristo Place, Georg von Rauch Haus, Rote Insel, SqEK, the Orange Fence, the Free Factory (RiP), ASS, Squatters Network of Brighton, 1in12 Bradford, Sumac Centre, Cafe Utopia, Southwark Notes, Great Tax Invasion, Forest of Dean Eco-Village, ABC NO RIO, the Bigger Society

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Back issues, more info = <http://mujinga.net/squat.html>

ACAB + GO BADGER!
This issue dedicated to Simon and Mark, gone but not forgotten.

Facing Up To Mike Weatherley's Fearsome Gauntlet



In his usual dim-witted way, [‘Mad Mike’](#) Weatherley has been making fatuous comments regarding (unnamed) homelessness charities endorsing his campaign to criminalise squatters, all squatters being lifestylists or how Brighton police have never convicted squatters in eighteen years. All these remarks are ill-informed, for example the last – there haven’t been any convictions because it’s not a criminal offence (although the police do often make sure to frame squatters for other alleged crimes).

But what really gets my goat is when Weatherley says “show me a squat which has been made better by the squatters”. Mike said he was “laying down the gauntlet” to squatter groups, so here are two responses. Short version, FUCK YOU, long version below:

Weatherley has been [invited](#) by the Squatters Network of Brighton to visit their infoshops. Oddly enough, he didn’t reply. Did the infoshops improve their locations? Well I certainly think the current squat is better than a bankrupt shop and the previous one at Churchill Square is languishing empty still, after a joyful few weeks of use. But maybe Mike prefers emptiness.

The [Brighton Unemployed Centre](#) began thirty years ago as a squat, it’s now still in the same building, paying a peppercorn rent to the Council and supporting many unwaged people with a cheap cafe, a creche, welfare advice and other services. Does that one count, Mike?

Or what about the [Lewes Road Community Garden](#), a reclaimed parking lot turned into a lovely permaculture project before being evicted for Tesco's? There was lots of local support, but that must have passed Mike by as he rocked out to [Alice Cooper](#) in Hove, even if there was plenty of positive coverage in the Argus.



Moving away from Brighton, a great example of what squatters can do is [Grow Heathrow](#), the derelict market garden that was occupied and brought back to life in Sipson. They opened up a successful community garden only to be rewarded with a [heavy-handed raid](#) by 40 police from the Tactical Support Group before the royal wedding. The squatters responded that they were "armed only with vegetables." Unfortunately they may get evicted soon.

Or what about the [Cooltan Arts Centre](#) in Brixton? This inspirational social centre in an old dole office was occupied from 1992 to 1995, providing a cafe, rehearsal rooms, a venue and lots more. It was evicted, resquatted twice and then demolished. Now the site stands [empty](#), almost twenty years on. Happy now Mike?



I could go on, there's so many places to choose from in the UK's wonderful squatting heritage. Just sticking with London, there was the [Spike Surplus](#) project in Deptford. And the [491 Gallery](#) in Leytonstone, where people cleared out a building full of junk and needles to set up an art gallery which is still going ten years later.



Enough yet for you Mike? I could say more. I've only just started really. I didn't mention Bristol, Leeds, Nottingham ... I could start talking about all the fantastic projects I've come across in Europe, like [Kunsthaus Tacheles](#), a huge art project in Berlin, or the [Melkweg](#), a club in Amsterdam, or [Can Masdeu](#), an old hospital outside Barcelona.



All these examples really are just the tip of the iceberg. All through the ages people have squatted places and improved them, providing shelter for those who need it, vital community functions for everyone and many other things besides. This is the real Big Society. But Weatherley is too stupid to look into the matter. He is merely making [political capital](#) out of this as an issue, in much the same way as Simon Kirby (MP for Brighton Kemptown and Peacehaven) is going to attack travellers this month.

Lifestyle politicians. Bah! Who needs 'em?

<http://en.squat.net/2011/11/09/facing-up-to-mike-weatherleys-fearsome-gauntlet/>

A Secret History of the City

I recently picked up a copy of 'On The Lower Frequencies' by Erick Lyle (formerly known as Iggy, who made SCAM zine). It's a tale of his experiences living in the Mission in San Francisco and it's really good! It's inspiring to read about the stuff him and his fellow punks get up to – like doing free generator gigs on the street, reclaim the streets actions, squatting and painting a block-long No More Prisons mural. It's inspiring because they're good actions and because it makes you realise people are doing shit like this all over the place.

I've included a few pages here about the end of the 949 Market squat since it gives a good impression of the writing style and also it cracks me up every time I read it!

HOW 949 MARKET CLOSED

The whole basic theory that Zara and I had about the space was that the more out-in-the-open and completely legitimate the whole operation looked, the longer it would last. The murals, the electricity, the huge amount of work, and the big crowds of people attending events made it all look perfectly normal to be there. As long as we all BELIEVED in it, it would be real. That was why we decided to use the front door on Market Street for events, so the big crowds of kids wouldn't be sneaking around a sketchy back door in the alley. We used the back door though, the rest of the time, for bringing in supplies and going in and out.

Ironically, the beginning of the end was when, one night, the huge steel back door simply FELL OFF the hinges!

The next morning, I got up early and called Kal from Survival Research Laboratories. He came and welded it back on for us for the small fee of a pint of carrot juice. It was a pretty "Proud-to-be-in-SF" moment, I thought.

Need a weld? Just call up the guy who makes weird robots that fight each other! A homeless guy in the back alley told me the cops had been there that morning, taking pictures of the door and asking questions about who broke in. The huge door, hanging awkwardly by one hinge, was the first thing about our involvement in the space that looked completely out of place.

Sure enough, on Monday morning, I woke up to the sound of construction workers talking, out in the space between the theater and our squat. They had, apparently, cut our lock on the back alley door and come inside the courtyard area to investigate.

My friends from New Orleans were staying in the squat, because their bands, County Z and Impractical Cockpit had played the day before at the cafe. We all took turns watching, very quietly, out the lone squat window, while the construction workers tried all the doors. They appeared satisfied that no one had broken into the abandoned building at all. They tried the gate to the back door of the squat and we heard them say, "Okay, THAT'S secure. No one touched that." Of course, they didn't realize it was OUR lock! We had passed the test! We weren't caught!

The bad news was, the construction workers then set about newly securing the huge back door to the alley. We watched as they struggled to erect a massive coil of razor wire on top of the door, repeatedly cutting themselves and getting tangled in it, yelling "Ow! Fuck!" It was pretty funny. But then they started welding the back alley door completely shut!

At this point, the front door on Market was locked from the outside and our only way out was the back door. We quickly took stock of the situation. Though we were apparently being sealed into the squat, it was, at least, a squat CAFE.

We had a hundred pounds of coffee, two hundred bagels, a case of peanut butter, boxes of weird protein bars, and several bowls of fruit salad. We had two bands' worth of musical equipment, we had three bikes, and we had an accordion. Ryan from County Z said, "Okay! We'll drink coffee and ride bikes and write songs all day. Then, we'll just have band practice all night!" It didn't sound so bad, except, maybe, the accordion part, and it actually turned out to be a fun day.

While we waited for the construction workers to leave, Dan and Andy practiced songs. I wrote a letter and Stella sewed up her clothes. It was like, "Okay, we'll just keep doing exactly what we're doing, except ... we can never leave!"

Later, we managed to pry the front door open from the inside and sneak out. We went in and out the front door for a couple days, until we came up with a new plan to open the back. It seemed like we had escaped detection and all we had to do was get the back open again. Zara and Todd from Montreal and I went to work on it. When we got it open with a rented angle grinder, I thought that was going to be the watershed moment of the squat history, but it turned out to probably be what got us busted. They came back AGAIN on the next Monday and saw that it was open. And they came back with the cops.

Around ten that morning, I heard people walking in the squat. I've been kicked out of a lot of squats and there's always that moment when you hear the voice of the person that doesn't belong there and you feel that sinking feeling. They walked in and opened the door to my room. I saw a cop. He says, "Good morning! So, like, what the hell are you doing in here?"

I say, "Well, you know, they're going to tear the building down in a while and we're just kind of using the place for art space. We've got a six-month lease. We have a rental agreement, you know."

The cop says, "Oh, well, that's just GREAT! Can I see it?"

I say, "Uh... RIGHT! You want to SEE it? Of course!" I thought I had a fake rental agreement that my friend, Chris, made up one for me, but I was looking for it with the cop standing there, and I couldn't find it. While I looked, about nine other cops came into the room. They stood around, yelling at me. "You're talking out your ass. What's the landlord's NAME, dude? Can you even give us a phone number?" I keep saying stuff like, "Uh...I'm not really the one in charge."

Finally, the biggest and oldest cop gathered us all in a circle and said, "Well, what now?" I said, "How about I'll just go get my stuff and you guys lock it up, and that's that." He says, "Sounds good to me." All the other cops nod. But the construction worker guys get pissed and start whining. "Aw man, our DOOR, man! The grind! You can't just let him go! I mean, look at our door!" So, the cops took me down to the car.

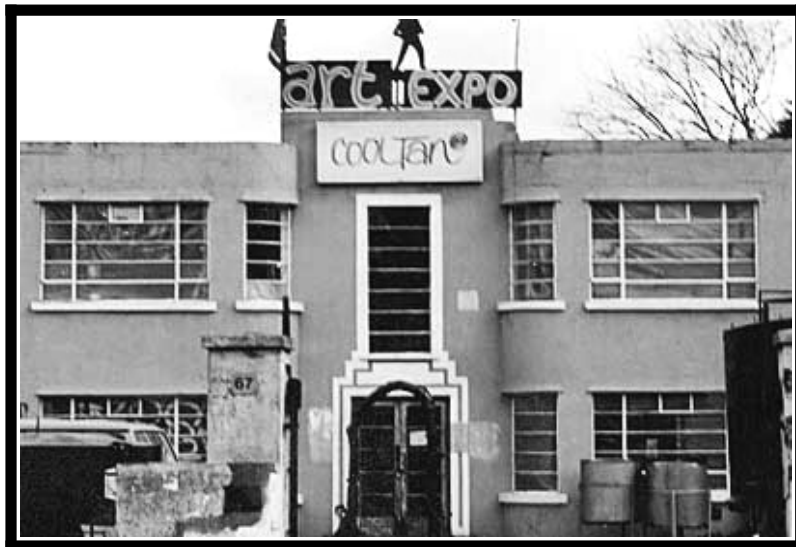
We're going down the stairs and I was just in my underwear and a shirt. The cop says, "You got any ID...?" And I said kind of hopefully, "Yeah, it's in my pants, which are over there. Can I go get it?" And he kind of looks up the stairs, lazily, and shrugs. "Nah, forget it, Let's just go." They took me to 850 Bryant where they just gave me a ticket and let me out in 15 minutes. Then I had to walk really fast, back up to the squat to see if I could get my pants out. I couldn't. I was just another scraggly lone male in his underwear having a little temper tantrum at 6th and Market that day.

The CoolTan Arts centre

Anyone that ever made it to the old CoolTan building in Coldharbour Lane [Brixton, London] will remember its unique and vibrant atmosphere. It was a true co-operative squat that served the local community, offering art space, a café, office space for campaign groups, rehearsals rooms, darkrooms, and - of course - some of the best techno parties we've ever been to!

A history

CoolTan Arts first formed in June 1991, taking their name from the disused CoolTan suntan lotion factory they first squatted in Effra Road, Brixton.



After they were evicted in February 1992 the building was razed to the ground and remained an empty plot of useless land for a decade afterwards.

The CoolTan Arts collective then moved to offices above Brixton Cycles, before squatting the old Unemployment Benefit Office in Coldharbour Lane in Sept 92 (such beautiful irony, eh?!).



The building (known as locally as the 'Old Dolehouse') provided a huge space and opportunity for local people to get involved, and it soon became a strong and important community focus in Brixton.

A thriving café was set up with local jazz bands playing at night, and the buildings provided accommodation for campaign groups such as Reclaim The Streets, Freedom Network, Earth First!, the Green Party, Lambeth Green Party and London Friends and Families of Travellers.

Criminal Justice Act

It also became one of the main focuses in the fight against the Criminal Justice Act, and hosted many tribal get-togethers where ideas and strategies could be discussed and exchanged between the various campaign groups.

Cheap rehearsal, darkroom and gallery space was made available, and a wide selection of cheap weekly workshops offered tuition in anything from yoga to photography.



Last party at Cooltan. Unsound party all-nighter after [Jayday](#), 16th May 2000. Pic: aurora green

Paaaarty!!!

Benefit parties were regularly held for various campaign groups, and these proved to be enormously popular, with DJs such as Mixmaster Morris, Liberators, Offshore, Tribal Energy, Astralasia, Scientist, Timeshard, Megabitch, Evolution etc., all playing out for minimal expenses.

The nights offered far more than your average usual rave and incorporated performance, dance, fire circus, poetry, live shows by bands like Zion Train, Revolutionary Dub Warriors, Grateful Dub and independent films and visuals from The Exploding Cinema, Small World and House of Skin.

Towards the end, these parties were attracting in excess of 1,500 people and proved an invaluable resource for keeping the building and campaign groups afloat - as well as providing what for us was the best rave venue anywhere in the UK. The place kicked!

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in association with **COOLTAN ARTS**
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The people

One of the main movers at CoolTan was Shane Collins, now standing as the Green Party candidate for Lambeth. Shane's commitment was legendary and his organisational skills were an essential part of CoolTan's existence. Like everyone else involved, his contributions were entirely voluntary and his time freely given. He reflects on the success of CoolTan:

"All of us at various times and to varying extents have worked our butts off, not for ourselves, but for the craic, for the benefit of all and for a common and at times cloudy goal. While it is probably easier for us to remember the mistakes, we have also got to check that we did a lot of good and achieved something worthwhile.

To know this, to take comfort and confidence from this and be able to carry the lessons and experiences through into other things is our reward. A bunch of often quite different people on the dole came together and we did it. A totally independent community arts squatted centre. We proved to ourselves and others that it could be done."

But wasn't all plain sailing, of course. Sometimes their enthusiasm to take things on was greater than their ability and the ensuing chaos could prove bewildering to onlookers. Finding enough people to take on the boring, dirty day to day jobs proved a tough challenge.

Like with any collective, they also had to deal with the dreamers, the vacant, the clueless and the spongers, but it's to their credit that they managed to keep it all together for so long.

Evicted!

CoolTan eventually lost their premises in September 1995 at the end of a 'Tenancy at Will' agreement with the Voice newspaper who outbid them for the building.

The Voice had claimed that they were going to move their offices and operations from next door, but soon revealed their true colours by putting the building up for sale. So much for their 'voice of the community' claims.

Meanwhile, Brixton Challenge money funded essential community projects like recobbling the street outside the Ritzy Cinema and draping pretty banners from the market, while the CoolTan building remained empty, boarded up and left to rot, a sad testament to wasted resources and unfulfilled potential.

Shane Collins summed up the achievements of their time at Cooltan:

"We have trod a new path. We have exposed new art in new circumstances; we have been part of the social changes and the cultural rumblings of the last few years. We have provided music, pictures, parties, politics, poetry, food and shelter for many people who might not have otherwise come across it, or been able to afford it. Maybe, and not just in our wildest dreams, we have offered a new perspective for some people on life and other ways of living it."

"To all those who have been a part of CoolTan over the past four years and those who have supported us by coming to events and allowing us to be independent - ta! We made ripples, we all did our part, it's been a laugh and we'll be seeing you around Brixton over the years to come. Lots of ripples make a tidal wave."

The return!

Unexpectedly, the building sprang back to life in February 1997 after being briefly resquatted. Two parties were put on, the café reopened and a host of sound systems filled the place with banging sounds again. Inside, the place looked exactly the same. In all the time the Voice had owned it, they had done absolutely nothing. We found it a strangely unnerving sensation to suddenly find ourselves seemingly transformed back in time and in a thriving CoolTan.

The pulling power and potential of CoolTan was reflected by the fact that both parties were packed solid, even though there had been no advertising and no publicity. Proof indeed that there is still a need for such a place.

After this brief hiatus, the squatters were evicted after a fortnight, the 'for sale' signs went back up along with new security notices and it looks like the lights have gone out for good.

The future

CoolTan hasn't disappeared completely though. The spirit lives on in smaller groups - an art collective currently looking for funding, 'Eco-Trip', a green DIY networking group and 'The Carrot' an organic vegan co-op café in Camberwell (closed in 1998).

Eco-Trip continue to tour the festivals with their potent mixture of politics, culture, DIY and veggieburgers and are nurturing plans to squat another building, opening up an Agenda21 arts green community centre with monthly parties.

As for the Old Dolehouse, it's suffered a sad fate. Despite a seemingly never-ending succession of plans for the site (luxury hotel, backpackers hotel, small business centre, shopping complex) it's still lying empty and quietly rotting away for months.

Renaissance 2: February 1998

Familiar faces resquatted the building on the 6th and after a lot of work reopened the venue for one last party on the 14th Feb 1998.

As usual, there was an eclectic mix of sound systems, poets, political groups, great vibes and excellent food. Word of mouth round Brixton ensured that the place was packed and funds were raised for EcoTrip.

Sadly, it proved to be a very short lived renaissance and the building is once again lying derelict.

Postscript: 1st March 2003 The Cooltan building - and the adjacent Voice building - are still facing demolition, the latest plan being to replace them with two eight story, mixed use buildings. Or maybe a supermarket. Or maybe not (they keep changing their minds). Either way, the building is still rotting away, bereft of the majority of its roof and now surrounded by ever-taller wooden hoardings and ugly billboards.

What a fucking waste....

Update March 2004: Cooltan Arts are a new registered charity helping the Brixton/Camberwell area with arts courses for people with mental distress.



Update May 2007: the entire site is being demolished.

Update Sept 2011: Graffiti and posters decorate the boards surrounding the empty site.

*Text and pix taken from the Urban75 website -
<http://www.urban75.org/brixton/features/cooltan.html>*



Watching the value of property melt away: The increase in squatting across the USA

Introduction

Although it is hard to hear what is really happening on the ground in USA, it appears that recently there has been an increase in squatting in cities across the United States. Obviously, squatting is often a covert activity, but it seems that a few factors have dovetailed to facilitate the emergence of a new, public squatting movement. This short article will provide a background to these events and a report of the actions which we have heard about. Hopefully these are merely the tip of the iceberg....

Beginnings

Over the past few years, it has been apparent that more and more houses are being squatted by a very diverse mixture of people. This mix would include:

- Former homeowners taking back properties repossessed by the banks
- Crafty peeps faking adverse possession claims
- So-called sovereign citizens (“radical-right conservatives who believe that they are exempt from government requirement such as taxes and driver’s licenses”) filing fake property deeds in Georgia
- Housing activists doing very public actions (more on that below)
- The homeless finding shelter themselves Nudists with axes to grind in Ohio,
- Wells Fargo executives illegally living in \$12 million mansions in Malibu
- And finally, even the occasional drunken celebrity liberating their old house (Randy Quaid).

Back in 2008, the Daily Telegraph (UK) observed that Take Back The Land in Miami were helping the homeless to reclaim property, whilst in Atlanta owners were even paying people with nowhere else to go to live in their houses in a sort of brokered antisquat deal which really seemed like it was winwin for everyone. The following year, the New York Times quoted Michael Stoops, executive director of the National Coalition for the Homeless, as saying that about dozen advocacy groups around the country were actively moving homeless people into vacant homes — some working in secret, others, like Take Back the Land, operating openly.

Following in the tradition of San Francisco based Homes Not Jails and the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty up in Canada, these housing groups simply seek to draw attention to the fact that houses are rotting whilst people are on the street. As the economic situation deteriorates, we can expect more dereliction and naturally squatters will take advantage of this state of affairs. The LA Times commented recently: “Given their clandestine lives, it's impossible to say how many people are squatting in this country, but with more than 1.3 million homes in foreclosure and hundreds of thousands of people homeless, advocates say it's safe to assume the number is growing.”

In the same article, a member of the Coalition for the Homeless in New York says "You have these abandoned dwellings that are sitting there vacant, sometimes for many months. It's not an issue of whether squatting is right or wrong. The fact is that people are desperate for places to live, and they're going to do what they need to do.”

As levels of desperation rise, a political movement is emerging to engage with it (much as it did in Amsterdam or London in the 1970s). A discourse which has been cut from the mainstream media is the anarchist one, since in the mainstream media it is no longer allowed to challenge the status quo without being labelled a terrorist. Yet people are constantly attacking the notion of property rights as part of a rational, informed critique of capitalism and its values. The Occupy Movement, with the centrality of anarchist notions such as consensus-based decision-making and horizontality, is finally bringing these ideas into mainstream acceptance (Just to be clear, I don't care if people are closet anarchos or are out and proud, screaming Bakunin from the rooftops, as long as capitalism and property are being put under sustained pressure).

Occupy Now

As temperatures dropped and camps were evicted, it's natural that thoughts turned to buildings. Months ago already, activists took a building in Vienna solidarity with the Global Occupy day back on October 15. Their reasons were both practical and ideological. As they said, "It's cold already in Vienna, and in the next weeks winter will get harsher," but also "a self-organized social centre is desperately needed to overcome the singularization of everyone and the privatization and commercialization of everything." Unfortunately the centre was quickly evicted. But the idea had been launched. In London, a huge empty building was reclaimed and opened up as the Bank of Ideas. It is being used for a whole host of events. And now a court building unused since 1996 has been squatted and requisitioned as a people's court, where such figures of hate as Fred Godwin (former Chief Executive of the Royal Bank of Scotland) and Tony Blair are going to be put on trial.

The recent wave of occupations in the USA began in Denver, back in October. An attempt to squat a building was brutally repressed: "Witnesses report that the raid was very violent, with at least 8 officers repeatedly beating one of the arrestees, and eventually using paramedics to sedate them while they laid face down, bleeding, in the street."

Likewise in Oakland, where the building was evicted. But the occupation was only anticipated to be symbolic and the virus was spreading. Symbolic occupations might still turn into something if enough people turn up and get stuck in. Now Occupy Oakland are planning to squat a large building owned by the city or a bank to use as a social centre for the Occupy movement. The date has been set for this very public action as January 28, 2012.

In New York a coalition of community groups including Occupy and Organise for Occupation marched to Brooklyn and squatted a foreclosed house for homeless people. These squatters are doing it in public, in numbers and with media awareness. One reporter commented "The house is being continually [livestreamed](#) and OWS is there to help the family in numerous ways both to protect them against eviction and to help them in fixing up and cleaning the house." Tellingly s/he added "Seven additional families have already asked OWS for help regarding foreclosure issues."

The Village Voice noted approvingly that compared to motley crews camping out, "the occupied homes present a much clearer narrative: previously homeless families and young children, put into homes that the bankers' broken system had left vacant and rotting for years" and went on to say "There was some indication last week that the banks were rattled by this new tactic. A former subsidiary of Countrywide Financial, now owned by Bank of America, sent an e-mail warning field agents about the home occupations and asking them to check the bank's foreclosed properties to 'ensure they are secured'."

With people power on their side, these squats stand the chance of succeeding. And there is a sense that this is a way for the 99% to take effective action which is both direct and on-violent. There seems to be a confluence of factors – rising repossessions mean more houses are empty every day. The Occupy movement is dripping anarchist ideas into the mainstream. People have had enough and are starting to dig their heels in. And so a new wave of squatting begins....

Back in April 2011, a real estate lawyer in Florida said “We haven’t seen this kind of level of squatters since the Great Depression. There’s a massive inventory of excessive realty.”

Well it's only going to get worse. Perhaps squatting is the silver lining...

Occupy Everything

In Atlanta – Occupy activists have saved a war veteran's house from foreclosure and now are looking to open up a community centre in the same area. “Neighbourhoods have all these empty shells,” says one Occupy participant. “It holds the neighbourhood hostage. Many had windows boarded up. Many have been havens for crime. Many have been empty for five years. They are empty because the banks make a little bit more on the insurance.”

In Seattle there are a growing number of public squats. The Seattle Times records concerning one “They have strung up a banner that says 'Occupy Everything — No Banks No Landlords.' The red and black anarchist flag also decorates the front.” When they asked a squatter what was going on, she replied “Too many homeless. Too many unoccupied buildings. That doesn't make sense.”

In Detroit, there are perhaps the most empty properties anywhere in the States. As the film 'Requiem for Detroit' elegantly suggests, the city is a metaphorical representation of the problems inherent in a boom and bust economy which now spans much of the world. One reporter introduces Squat the Hood – occupying the city one house at a time: “There are a lot of neighbourhoods in Detroit where people squat. The difference here is that this is being done for a larger purpose, not just to exist. It is part of the movement, and the goal is to rebuild.”

The future

George Katsiaficas suggests with his eros effect theory that social movements grow and prosper through the cross-fertilisation of ideas. Hopefully just as the idea to Occupy spaces spread lie wildfire around the world, now the urge to take buildings will memetically replicate.

A movement does seem to be in development. We could add to the lengthening list of places where squats are being opened Santa Cruz and Chapel Hill.

"I wouldn't say it's the new normal yet, but I think it's coming close to that," says a participant in Take Back the Land – Rochester, when asked about people squatting vacant homes, or refusing eviction orders from their own homes.

As in response, a cop in Portland says "The vacant-property issue is of concern in cities nationwide. We'll treat them all as trespassers" but surely it's just a matter of time before that attitude becomes unviable, even in the belly of the beast. For whilst laws are being passed which make commentators fear for the future of the States, people on the streets are taking action.

The Sacred Law of Private Property

Once upon a time, long, long ago, land was not property. It was simply land. At its edges it met the sea. It was a soft, wet rug of leaves underfoot; it was snow-capped and loomed high above the grassy plains. Water wandered through it, sometimes rushing and plunging off cliffs. Animals lived on the land and water, exchanging energy with them in seemingly endless cycles of life and death, creation and destruction.

Some of these animals were humans.

Today, after centuries of brutal warfare, land has been transformed into property. It is bought and sold, excavated, blown-up, built-upon, paved, and irrigated. A few square feet over here is more expensive than an acre over there. Some of it is called “Super Fund Site,” some is “nature preserve”; other parcels are called malls, schools, roads, farms, and houses. It’s all called property. Some of it is called “public property” but people are not really free to use it however they’d like.

“Public property” is really “state property” and the laws of the state delineate its proper use. Sometimes this means: no camping, singing, sleeping, blowing bubbles, writing with chalk, sitting on the ground, gardening, panhandling, smoking, or drinking alcohol. What is and is not allowed can change on a whim and is generally influenced by the desires of the wealthiest businesses and residents nearby.

In general, one must pay to inhabit the space one inhabits. Most exceptions to this rule are illegal and precarious. All liberated or reclaimed space, be it urban or rural, is hemmed in on all sides by private property. The people who occupy these free spaces are under constant threat of violent eviction and imprisonment by the faithful servants of the owning class, the guardians of private property: the police and military forces. Yet land struggles, slum rebellions, and housing occupations erupt and persist every day across the world. They persist because people’s freedom and dignity depend on their unmediated access to their most basic means of survival: our home, the earth.

From medieval heretical sects to the present-day indigenous Mapuche land struggle, instances of the dispossessed fighting like hell for a free life are countless. And when fighting has not been an option, people have struggled to retain the memory of freedom, passing stories and “old wive’s tales” to their children in secret, hoping that one day, the strength will come. In response, the elites have formed various state and proto-state institutions to criminalize the dispossessed and their traditions, to kill those who resist, and to steal whatever they can as fast as possible. Just as there can be no plantation without its slave-catchers and Fugitive Slave Acts, there can be no private property without the law that protects it, the police that enforce that law, the courts that sentence the lawbreakers, and the prisons that contain them.

All over the world and throughout history, people have attempted to create autonomous, egalitarian communities where land is held in common. Wherever this way of life existed before imperial/capitalist invasion, many people fiercely defended what they had in an attempt to avoid the imposition of waged labor or total annihilation. We are told that domination is human nature, but it seems that the urge to struggle against domination is its inseparable, enduring twin.

In Europe, the transition to capitalism saw peasants battling the nascent capitalist class and the enclosure of common lands. Many of these rebels were accused of evil sorcery, and hundreds of thousands of accused witches were murdered in a killing spree that spanned two centuries. “[The killings] spread fear, destroyed networks and resistance and did not stop until the population was

sufficiently subordinated and the emerging state, capitalist social relations, and church had got their claws into the lives and psyches of the people.”*

Later, after the Black Plague, a significant labor shortage occurred, which, coupled with a glut of unoccupied land, led to unprecedented peasant power and better living conditions for the lower classes. This caused a crisis in accumulation for the rich, who then turned their eyes towards the so-called “New World.”

European colonial expansion was a direct response to this crisis. Conquistadors and “explorers” brought to the Americas their own conception of land: as an abundant resource to be exploited and a source of capital to be accumulated. The war on native people was necessary for the privatization of the land, just as the centuries of war against the European peasantry were necessary to ultimately enclose the commons and push the poor into wage labor.

In the Americas, indigenous ways of life were incompatible with the invaders’ desires for greater and greater wealth. Thus, the threat they represented had to be eliminated—first through mass murder, then through cultural genocide and assimilation. This giant land theft project, along with the enslavement of African people and the indentured servitude of poor Europeans, is what this country is built upon. Every nation has a similar history, and though the methods may have evolved, the process of enclosure continues to this day.

Private property is the foundation of capitalism and the state that protects it. It is upon this foundation that wage labor and the entire network of domination find their foothold. Our minds have been colonized for so long that many people accept private property as sacred law, believing it to be the safest harbor for personal freedom. But they are wrong.

To be clear, we are not opposed to personal property, to having personal possessions. We don’t want to share your underwear or your toothbrush. We do want the freedom to choose where and with whom we live, we want free access to what we need to survive, and, most importantly, we don’t want our choices to be limited by the laws of the market or the state. Put simply, we don’t want bosses, cops, prisons, banks, or landlords.

Throughout the history of the United States, the elites have bought off rebels and uncontrollable workers by giving them access to the fruits of plunder—land in the west, a place at the table, pineapples, bananas, the right to vote for their own masters. And when those fruits were rejected and rebels forged bonds of solidarity and multiracial alliances, the hangman climbed the scaffold and the prison cell doors slammed shut.

But they could never snuff us all out.

It seems that something new is happening at last, after these long years of heartbreak, half-measures, and defeat. More and more landless folk are going on the offensive, taking back what has been stolen from us. The roles the police and politicians play in protecting the interests of the rich are becoming clearer by the day. The state is dropping the pretense of taking care of even the middle class, and greater numbers of people are being forced to rely on one another. As such, the idea of stealing back one’s life is catching and spreading like wildfire. May we see the proliferation of free spaces ungoverned by the laws of state and capitalism and ever more daring acts of sabotage and self-defense!

* To learn more about the witch trials, patriarchy, and the birth of capitalism, check out “Burning Women” at ZineLibrary.info or *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* by Silvia Federici.

From Tides of Flame #12 – tidesofflame.wordpress.com

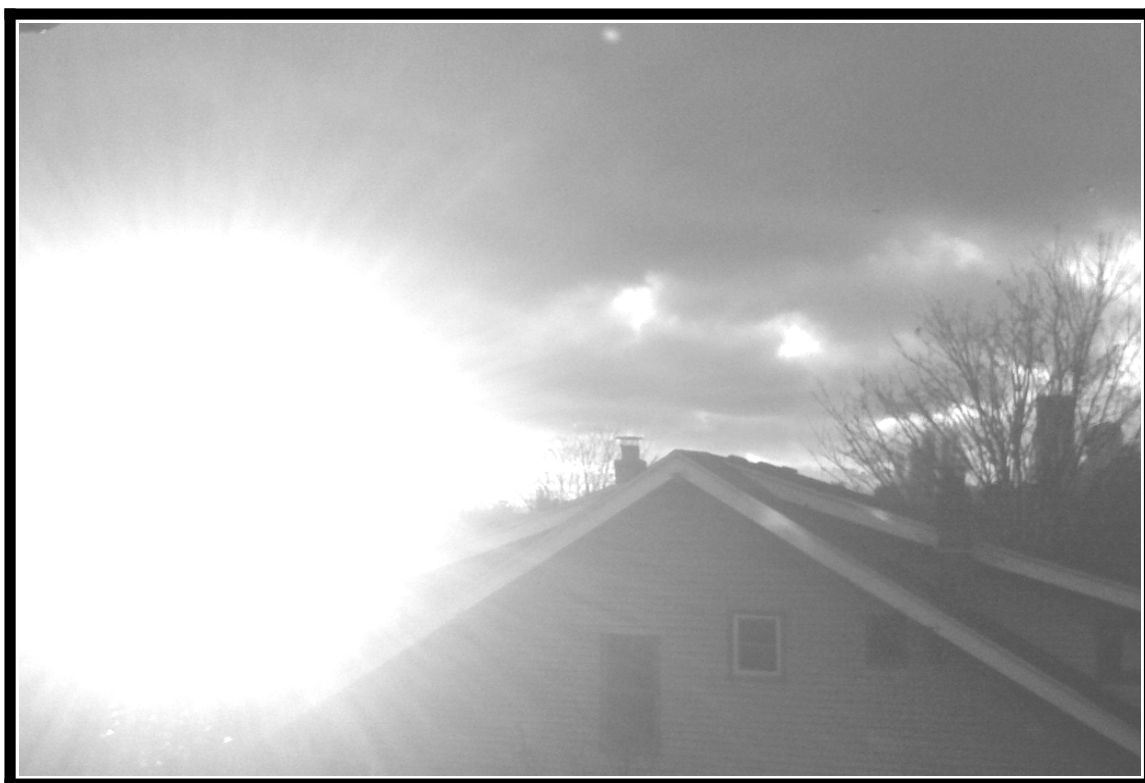
Informal Update On Situation In Seattle

This account is the personal reflections of one irregular resident of the Turritopsis Nutricula house and down not reflect the collective as a whole.

The Turritopsis Nutricula house (named after an immortal jellyfish), located on 23rd and Alder in the Central District of Seattle, has now been in existence for a month. Within the span of that same month, over a dozen squats have also sprung into existence in as diverse places as Bellevue and White Center. One of them has recently set up a screen printing studio. An informal network of people from Occupy Seattle consistently brings food and supplies to the house on 23rd and Alder. The food is free for everyone who comes through the house.

The Turritopsis Nutricula house is the only one of the squats that is public and open. The person who owns the building is a man named Denmark West, current executive at BET and former employee of Goldman Sachs, Microsoft, and MTV. Because of his sympathy for the movement, he has taken his time in starting an eviction. However, the city has now threatened to fine this Harvard graduate 100 to 1000 dollars a day if he does not move to evict the residents of the house. It is unclear how long the next legal process can be drawn out, but regardless of legality, there is a core of over 100 people who would respond to an eviction.

From the upper floors of the house, one can look west and see the towers of Downtown rising up from behind the hills. Below the towers, cresting down the hills, is a view of the Central District. It is this area in particular that has witnessed an invasion of outsiders over the past 15 years. Looking westward from the top floor of the squat, one can see in the expansion of wealth and capital moving over the hills from the financial core of Downtown.



Recently, there has been a high-profile instance of graffiti in the Central District. An ugly cubist-fascist-brutalist style house had the superior wood of its fence tagged with the phrase GENTRIFICATION KILLS. This caused some controversy within the gentrification community. The last time there was graffiti in the neighborhood (several tags giving the time and date of the Port of Seattle shutdown), a scared man went on the news and read a statement of condemnation against Occupy Seattle and the hooligans who would dare to tag on a church. All in all, given the massive success of the port shutdown and the continued existence of the *Turritopsis Nutricula*, the people who throw a tantrum after every instance of graffiti are appearing more absurd to the neighborhood as time goes by. One of the massive banners within the march to the Port of Seattle now hangs on the outside wall of the squat.

Seattle is very wealthy. Just as in all major coastal cities, massive amounts of capital flow through the Port of Seattle every day. Viewing the towers of Downtown as luminous crystallizations of capital (which they are), the view from the top floor of the squat takes on a new meaning. There are multiple squats in existence and each one of them, whether public or clandestine, is an assault against the logic of the economic system that powers the lights of the skyscrapers.

Many have found that simply throwing oneself into an effort at mass-squatting has now born far more fruit than expected. The desire and the intention to squat was there among a diverse group of people that formed its bonds and trust within the chaos of the now imploded and destroyed Capital Hell Commune. The experiences of mass-squatting are now multiplying and the new bonds and trust and skills that will be developed amongst this new group of people during their efforts will be even more powerful. In addition to this, another group connected to Occupy Seattle is starting an anti-gentrification campaign in Capitol Hill against the never ending condos that continue to be built in the bohemian neighborhood. The barricades at the Port of Seattle and the previous takeover of a warehouse are collective experiences that continue to power everyone forward.

This author would like to encourage everyone push for similar efforts and initiatives. The interest is most likely prevalent in cities that have had large occupations. We believe all that is lacking is a committed effort to establish and maintain various squats and building occupations. If more cities make similar efforts, the idea of taking over property will continue to take root in the minds of others and if it becomes generalized, it will be far easier to maintain occupied houses along the west coast. In the meantime, we hope everyone can stumble upon more tactics and innovations that they can spread and share.

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<http://anarchistnews.org/node/19826>

The Sabotaj Story



In Brighton there is a tradition of resistance to the invasion of supermarkets, with squats sometimes being used as a means of community resistance. Examples would be the Locomotive Works (2002) and the Lewes Road Community Garden (2009-2010). The Sabotaj squat (2011) was a short-lived recent action and here one participant in the Squatters Network of Brighton shares some personal thoughts.

When concerned locals found out in December 2010 that Sainsburys intended to muscle in on Kemptown, they were furious. St. James Street already had a Co-operative, a Morrisons and a Tesco's. A Sainsburys coming on the very same street was a step too far in the wrong direction, especially since they wanted to take over Taj, a Brighton institution. Taj was a family owned supermarket with three branches in Brighton selling exotic fruit and veg. Not a truly local, organic shop, but still much better than a cloned supermarket.



A campaign was started to stop Sainsburys taking over the landmark building on the Old Steine at the foot of St. James Street, but unfortunately Taj had gone into administration and Sainsburys had taken on the lease on the shop. What's worse, they did not need to get any planning permission except for minor things like signage since Taj already had all the relevant permissions. This only goes to show the stupidity of planning law, which sees a local shop and a Sainsburys "Local" as the same, and allows Sainsburys to take on previously granted but unused permissions, rather than reviewing them. At Council meetings the common refrain was that councillors did not want another supermarket, but their "hands were tied." The one small victory was that Sainsburys did not get granted an alcohol license, thanks to the campaigners' efforts.



In the absence of anything else happening, what was needed was an occupation, and this [happened](#) in February 2011.

Despite the police doing their utmost to evict illegally by trying to kick the door in and threatening bystanders with arrest, the squatters held it down. An initial meeting in the shop, which was organised at short notice, still drew more than a hundred people. There were a lot of ideas on how to use the space, ranging from art exhibition to people's supermarket. The common theme was that people wanted to hold onto to the building rather than give it into the hands of a multinational corporation. Radical and liberal views could agree at least on that. The name Sabotaj quickly emerged.



There was letter writing to councillors and MPs, and a few petitions, concerning the specific case and planning regulations more generally. For the building there was a make your own space day and a one day art event in the basement which drew about 400 people.

It had been quickly decided that the space should have a safer spaces policy and it was made a drug, alcohol and smoke free zone. In order to deal with any potential problems at the door, an “airlock” system was employed, meaning that there were two locked doors with a hall between them, and only one door was ever unlocked at one time. The two door system gave some protection in case of trouble.

A [press release](#) from the squatters read:

By coming down to the building, signing our petition, lending a hand or creative input, and showing your support in other ways, you will be helping to demonstrate in a practical way that economic crisis is not an excuse for corporate takeover of our city.

But sadly, less than two weeks after being occupied, on February 24, Sabotaj was in court and (as expected) possession was [granted to the claimant](#) (BDO Administrators). Sabotaj’s admittedly shaky legal defence that BDO were not the owners was brushed aside. The Interim Possession Order was served immediately after the court. The bailiffs were expected the next day, so in a show of force the squatters moved their stuff onto the street and gave out free tea and food the whole day. A lot of people stopped by to show solidarity and there was always about sixty people outside. There were also people on the roof. Some shifty bailiff types did turn up but [nothing happened](#).

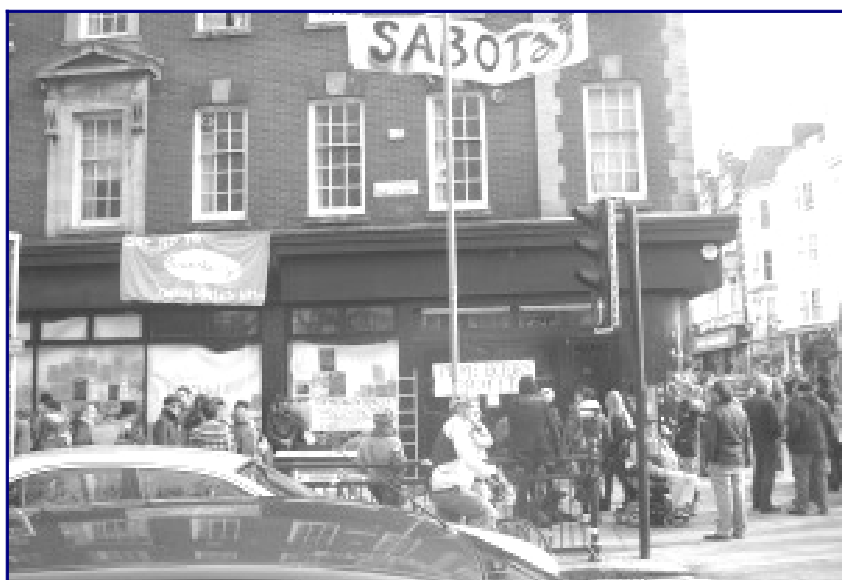


The problem now was that the crew who had been occupying the building were all exhausted and it’s never easy living in a barricaded building which could be raided at any time.

So a decision was made to leave. The building was retaken by the forces of darkness on March 2. [According to the Argus](#): “About 50 officers stormed the former Taj store on St James’s Street, Brighton, at 10 am and arrested one man.” There wasn’t actually anyone left in the building and the feeling was that the police had to make up an arrest to justify such a ludicrously large operation.



Sainsburys was slow to open, yet by July it had, unfortunately. The Source (a local magazine) said: With banner branding that would make most multinationals jealous, SaboTaj occupied the much-loved ethnic supermarket, turning it into an art gallery, but the police arrived early one morning and it was all over. Despite Morrisons being just a few doors up, Kemptown had another new supermarket.



So what had Sabotaj achieved? Well like any short-lived squat project, it had been a burst of energy which both drained the participants most involved and inspired a huge amount of people who visited the activities at the squat or just read the publicity in the window. It was amazing to have such a large, centrally located squatted project happen without any major problems. It certainly gave a boost to the squatting scene in Brighton. As act of resistance it worked well. We won as much as we could. And plenty of other squatted projects have happened since then.



SQUAT WEBLINKS

SQUAT!NET has been updated!

It's now split into language sections – currently Catalan, Czech, German, Spanish, French, Italian, Dutch, Norwegian, Polish, Russian, Turkish and Arabic.

There's a pretty good archive of materials listed at <http://en.squat.net/books/>

<http://planet.squat.net/>

SQUATTING IN THE NEWS

A blog listing media stories on squatting from all over the world

<http://squatworld.blogspot.de/>

KRAKENPOST

A long-lasting list collecting media stories about squatting in Dutch.

<http://krakenpost.nl/archief/>

MEDIA+SQUAT

A new elist collecting UK media stories about squatting.

<https://lists.riseup.net/www/info/squatmedia>

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SQUATTING IN BRIGHTON

The project began with Using Space continues online at <https://network23.org/snob/history/>

USING SPACE

This zine is itself online at <http://mujinga.net/squat.html>

**using space six
january 2012**