



**call for decentralized days of action
for squats and autonomous spaces
11th and 12th of April 2008**



cracking the system

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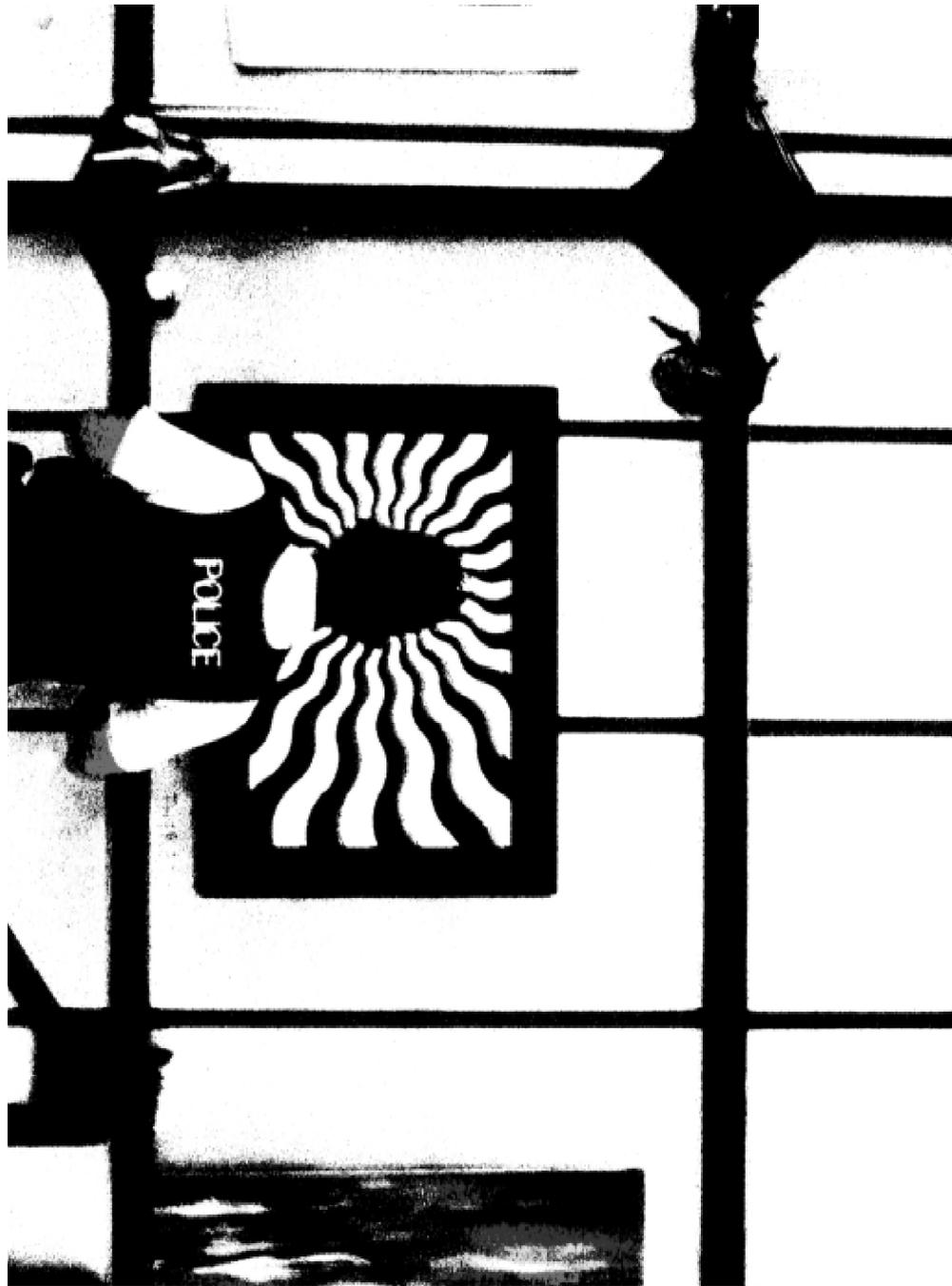
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/45/

**no border
no nation**

intersquat

our struggle is one



/2/

squat life

struggle of the squatters and the people in solidarity. But, contrary to what the bosses wish, repression is not a one-way dead end. It is already evident through the decisiveness and the social influence of the struggle for the defence of Ungdomshuset in Copenhagen, that repression policies against self-organized spaces throughout Europe can't be approached only by the point of view of repressive aggression, but also from the point of view of resistance. While the expression of international solidarity with the struggle in Copenhagen opened the way for a wider solidarity struggle, beyond Ungdomshuset. A struggle that is based on the consciousness that we are facing not just local, but European-wide repression policies, and that it's not enough for each one to defend only their own spaces; we have to defend all spaces, all together.

Facing the intensifying capitalist exploitation, repression and social control, the choice of people who are connected with the self-organized spaces to create opportunities of meeting and communication, collective resistance and solidarity is extremely important at this moment. One such opportunity, with its specific characteristics, is for us the call for decentralised actions for squats and autonomous spaces.

Against repression which is encircling anyone resisting the new terms of exploitation and suppression which the bosses want to establish in the European cities, the matter of the defence of squats and generally the self-organized spaces concerns not only those who are immediately responsible for them but also everyone resisting.

*Comrades from
the Lelas
Karayanni 37
occupied
territory*



http://www.geocities.com/lelas_k

steadily, but also to the solidarity of comrades and friends who recognise that LK37 squat has always acted in solidarity with people who fight and are prosecuted; recognising also that "any attack against one of us, is an attack against all of us".

Today, in Greece, and of course not alone, repression is crucial for the state and the bosses so that they can impose their anti-social projects in every aspect of life without any resistance.

Repression is targeting the whole of society and all those who fight against exploitation and oppression, and especially the radical parts of this resistance, anarchists and antiauthoritarians. It is in this context that squats and self-organized spaces are facing repression, as they represent visible points of reference for the social and class struggle.

Specifically, the last two years, two squats have been violently evicted in Athens (Santa Barbara and Myllerou&Germanikou), and several others in different cities of the country are faced with repressive plans (such as Matsagou in Volos, Delta in Thessaloniki, Villa Amalias in Athens). At the same time, there are often police-inspired scenarios appearing in the Press, targeting squats and self-organised spaces and preparing the ground for their suppression.

For us, the repression policy practiced against the squatted and generally the self-organized social-political spaces throughout Europe, is a part of the totalitarian aggression against the movements of resistance which compete the wider state and capitalist restructuring. The international terminology of "total security" and "zero tolerance" is tested in practice through the repression of the self-organised spaces of resistance as well. Recent and most indicative expressions of this repression against self-organised spaces in Europe were the operations against squats and other spaces in Germany before the mobilizations against G8, and also the straight-forward attack on the radicals and the insubordinate youth of Copenhagen through the evacuation of Ungdomshuset – an attempt to neutralize the

However, it remains an open question whether a creative storm such as the one that swept Amsterdam could revitalize urban wastelands in the US.

I wake up, it smells like coffee. Voices and laughters are coming up from the kitchen. Several people must already be sitting at the breakfast table. I go on and have a shower, grumble a bit. No more hot water. After the third coffee and enlivened conversations around the last newspaper articles, I realize I'm late. I sit astride my bike and meet up several people in the garden. We take care of the potatoes, weed the flowerbeds, harvest beetroots and beans and fight against slugs.

After our gardeners' meal, I go back to the house. This afternoon, I'm the one to take care of Zoe, one of the kids from our house. After her nap I bring her to the collective child-care center. At the time I chose not to have kids, but taking care of other people's ones is nice. And anyway if I have some, I want them to grow up with other kids and other adults. At the child-care center we play dolls with Gustave and trucks with Matilda. I sort out the new bags of baby clothing for the free shop. At 4pm the grown-ups join us and we all go to the park.

On the way back I think about those articles about squatting we read this morning. Once again we're facing a bunch of rubbish and this speech about the illegality of our way of life is really starting to piss me off. As squatting is illegal, everything that comes from it has to be bad. Actually, we keep seeing what we stand for taken over: projects of "ecological neighbourhoods" here, housing co-ops there, agenda 21 and sustainable development everywhere.

A fundraiser for the forthcoming Temporary Autonomous Art project in Brighton was clamped down on heavily on Saturday. Police used violent tactics to attack the building, showing their true face yet again.

Obviously the problem is not living through those criteria but doing it our way without asking for permission. Above all, we always hear about the illegality of squatting, but never about the illegal procedures the owners and the state* are using against us. And, we never hear about the existing laws that allows the state to use its right of pre-emption on empty buildings, and its right to expropriate in case of housing crisis**. And don't you tell me that speculation doesn't exist anymore ! Truth is that you see an owner buying two buildings for 2 millions of francs, and in 5 years the rents will be unrestricted again, all of that "to finally make new housing facilities for people who need them"! When in fact 80 people were living there ! And anyway this debate between legal and illegal is a waste of time. Even if their procedures to evict us are legal, laws are changing all the time, they are made by those who benefit from them. Therefore it won't keep us from claiming our right to live differently, in an autonomous and self-managed way, in the spaces we choose.

Tonight there's a meeting at home and many things to talk about: there's a plumbing problem and a toilet is choked up. Who's gonna take care of that ? There are insulation items that we have to take over from the warehouses where Jerome works. We also have to find a day for Geraldine to come and explain how to fix the oil heater. And we still have to see who we're welcoming while Yvan and Marcia are travelling, and organize the next baking : it's our turn to cook for all the other houses. We have kilos of barley to get rid of, so why not make a giant tabbouleh ? And there's still Isa who has to give us a summary of the last Intersquat meeting. It's going to be a long meeting...

In London, a group called the Advisory Service for Squatters runs a volunteer service helping squatters. It publishes the Squatters' Handbook.

that belong to the University and are rented to corporations and banks).

But it was not only official state repression targeting the squat. It's also the fascists – thugs of the official state who have launched attacks. In January 1992, after the end of a nationalist rally a gang of fascists attacked the squat, causing damages.



More recently, on April 19, 2005 there was a sanguinary attack by fascist thugs, where two comrades were wounded by their knives. In October 7, 2005 they attempted to set the building on fire, and in August 24, 2007 they tried to burn motorbikes that belonged to squatters. The fact that the squat exists for 20 years, is not only due to the decisiveness of the people who live or act through it

The kraakspreekuur is fairly active - this is a weekly meeting point where people can go to get advice on squatting. The kraakspreekuur will not squat a house for you but will help make sure the action is successful.

youth, struggles in factories occupied by workers, prison revolts, solidarity struggles for imprisoned comrades and immigrants, resistance against the capitalist pillage of the nature, the commercialization and control of public urban spaces, mobilizations against globalization of domination and its military excursions, struggles for freedom and dignity in every corner of the earth, from the rebel Indians of the South to the capitalist cities of the North... There are moments from activities in the squat, and others when our words and actions seek a wider social intervention through manifestations and demonstrations.

In a few words, the squat is a ground where people coming from the struggle in the streets meet, and at the same time it is a ground that is constantly renewing this ability to be present in these struggles, in the streets. In modern reality of social and class antagonism, the existence of self-organised anti-authoritarian spaces is crucial, because they consist bases for the expropriation of social space which is being looted by the merchandise, it is being under surveillance by systems of control and is becoming field for racist pogroms and police operations of "zero tolerance", for the sake of the bosses' security. They are a visible part of the wider struggle for a world without bosses, states and borders.

As capitalist ferocity and state repression are intensifying, squats and self-organised spaces in general are more and more often targeted by repressive mechanisms.

LK37 squat has in the past faced many times the owners' demand for an end to the squat, while it has additionally faced three police raids -which were decided by the police and not the owners- where squatters had been arrested, during the 90's. Since 2002 and until today, the owners of the building, three universities, have been trying to find ways to achieve an eviction, so that the building will be either abandoned (as it was for 25 years before the squat) or they can use it for profiteering (something that is already happening with numerous buildings

A housing shortage, combined with abundant empty property, is just the basic condition for squatting.

In the meantime, we find several of us in the kitchen. Stef takes a black radish out of the fridge : "Do you know how to cook this thing ?" We look at each other, laughing. In the end, Emile calls his grand-mother who gives us a recipe. It's cool to re-learn how to cook local vegetables we had forgotten. It doesn't even taste that bad.

I finally go to bed. The meeting was nice and the food really good. My head on my pillow, my thoughts pass by : I will never apologize for not living to pay a rent, for not wasting my life earning a living, for not killing myself through work and having to swallow Prozac. I will keep on spending my days with kids and friends, do what I like to do and not only what I have to do.

Living in a squat is not just an answer to the housing crisis, it's suggesting other ways to organize our lives. As long as we feel like doing it, it is alive. We occupy places and streets to experiment other ways than the ones we're being told to and to realize our desires.

Fuck it, good night and long life to our homes !

** For example, the administrative decision (renovation of the building) that allowed the eviction of the Rhino wasn't published in the FAO (official paper where the administrative and legal decisions have to appear)*

*** The state can apply these laws as soon as the rate of empty buildings is under 2%. It's been way under 2% for several years (0,3% at the moment).*

This will be a turning point where we will blockade the city hall, when the politicians have their weekly meeting. And we won't let them out before we have a key, or a promise for one. .

squatting
in
MOSCOW
2005-2007

Lelas Karayanni 37 squat exists in Athens for 20 years as a space for housing, collective life and social and political action. It is a self-managed space for meeting, communication and expression, which is used by an anarchist collective and which houses a series of activities: assemblies, film shows, open discussions, publications, and a theatre group.



The beginning of the squat, motivated by the searching for collective/movement-based answers against the imposed capitalist model of life, as well as its course during the years, through the choices made by the people acting in and through the squat, render this space unbreakably connected to the participation and intervention of anarchists and anti-authoritarians in social and class struggles.

Every period of these 20 years is full of moments of resistance, through which we met each other. Struggles by school or university students and

Random Artists is a collective, based in London, which has been putting on open access exhibitions in squatted venues for the last 5 years. Tackling at a grassroots level, the need for creative input and the understanding of autonomous responsibility when interacting with our surroundings.

Ik37

In autumn of 2005 we were crazy about the idea to create a squat in Moscow. We searched through quite a number of buildings, and then one of our acquaintances told us about flooded bombshelter in one of Moscow parks. The shelter and the place it was situated in (not overpopulated district close to subway station and to the city center) happened to be so attractive that we decided to pump out the water. In order to do this, one of us dressed in hydro pants, submerged breast-deep in the water and plugged the pump to electric cables protruding from the ceiling. It worked and in one month and a half most of the water was pumped out with only 20 cm layer left. But then frost came and ice gridlock hit the pumping hose. The pump died. We had to wait for spring...

While it was cold, water didn't stop to come from sewer and by spring the shelter was flooded again. It was a blow for us, but we didn't retreat and started pumping water again.

By the end of spring the shelter was completely drained. The root of the flooding was broken sewerage, we didn't manage to fix it and just destroyed it. So we started comforting ourselves. We stopped leakage from sewer, cut off rusty pipes, bought thermocannon to drain and warm the room. But it still was too damp and cold there and draining was very ineffective. That's why nobody tried to inhabit the squat. Though one or two homeless persons lived there for several weeks.



My definition of autonomous would be "as effective as possible in achieving the objectives of the collective whilst subject to as little control from outside as possible"

The bombshelter consisted of three large rooms with total square about 40 m2. But the ceilings were low. Two entrances. Communal services included electricity only. The average temperature was near +4C. That's why we continued bringing various heaters and improved it to be +15C. Humidity was up to 90%.



We spent time communicating and making our squat more comfortable. Sometimes anarchist meetings were held there, banners for street actions were being made as well. We managed to organize 3 gigs, 2 of them hardcore and 1 hip-hop.

In Madrid for example, with an incredible history of social centres (10 years ago there were 40 alone in the centre!) There are now around 10 social centres and half are squatted, half rented.





bilston glen

anti brass protest site

<http://bilstonglen-abs.org.uk>

www.myspace.com/bilstonwoods

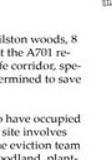
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Since June 2002, there has been a protest site in Bilston woods, 8 miles outside of Edinburgh, campaigning against the A701 re-alignment plans. Bilston Glen is a beautiful wildlife corridor, special site of scientific interest and a community determined to save it.

We are a non-hierarchical autonomous group who have occupied bilston woods for the past five years. Living on site involves working on the defences (making it difficult for the eviction team to remove us) making paths, re-generating the woodland, planting trees, eating wild food, foraging in the countries best skips and doing whatever you feel like!

Over the years we have been campaigning against not just the road, but all of the development in Midlothian; the hundreds of new houses, expansion of biotech and retail parks, which are promoting a culture dependent on car use, creating an infrastructure which is reliant on a new road. We have made direct actions against the bio-technology industry, but one of our main aims is to inform the local community and try to get them involved.

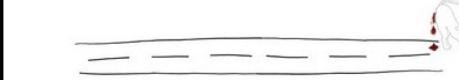




Bilston Glen is a FREE space, open community, please come down for a visit WHENEVER you feel like. Everyone is welcome to stay for as much time as they want, providing they contribute to the community in some way. Bilston Woods is a protest site, but also the closest thing we have to a squatting scene in Edinburgh!

And we always need your help...

How to find us... From Edinburgh, take the 37, 47 or X47 from Princes Street or Bridges/Clerk Street/Nicolson Street, towards PENICUIK. The bus will take you out of the city of Edinburgh, into Midlothian. Get off at the first stop in Bilston, opposite a VW garage. Next to the bus stop is a metal gate, all you have to do is follow the path for a couple of minutes and you will see us and the tree-houses!



months later, the collective has died, people have moved on to other projects in Rotterdam and beyond.

CONCLUSION

A squatted social centre can be many things and when I look on how much we did in one year, I am quite amazed. It is a shame that the eviction came, but hopefully everyone in the collective learnt some lessons and can bring that knowledge to future projects. Right now there is a gap in Rotterdam for a social centre and a public debate is forming over the need for a society to nurture its young artists, particularly since in 2009 Rotterdam has some bullshit 'Creativity' thing going on. The Groene Voltage is/was on the fringe of this debate since artists are more welcome to society than anarchist squatters but it is certainly a part of it. We got a lot of nice feedback from people who visited our events and hopefully we inspired a few folks. Perhaps some brave souls want to take on the task of organising a legalised space for music and cultural activities in Rotterdam along the lines of centres like Vrankrijk or OCCIJ in Amsterdam or the Autonomes Zentra in many German cities. To be legalised and thus have some long term security would be nice but for sure such a space is only likely to come out of the squat scene. We have to create these things ourselves because no-one else will do it for us.

And actually, who would want it any other way?

<http://squat.net/rotterdam>

We are everywhere!

I371

That's how we spent the year. We celebrated New Year 2007 in our shelter.

Troubles came after the celebration when cops ran on the squat (one of our friends was to blame). They got keys and the next day the door to the shelter was locked. When we cut the lock and got into the squat, we saw that it was completely put to the sack. Thermocannon, fridge, computer, tools just vanished... It seems to be the end of the squat. One of the gigs was organized after the sack, but the squatters were not so enthusiastic any more. After that someone used to continuously cut our locks and put theirs on the door. Maybe they were cops, maybe - illegal workers who lived in deserted kindergarten not far away (they bribed cops and we conflicted with them). Some of us did the same (last time it was in the autumn 2007), but activity in this place stopped.

Though we do not have the squat now, it gave us a lot. We mutually acquired some practical skills (like assembling sockets, using electrical appliances, etc), got acquainted with new people who took part in creating the squat, learnt how to work in team. And what is most important, we are sure now that it's possible to create squat even in Moscow. You only must really want it.

You can download a small movie about our squat here:
http://squat.anho.org/media/msc_squat_bomb_shelter_2005-2007.wmv

Photos are here: <http://squat.anho.org/squats/russia/ds/ds.htm>



The idea of squatting is definitely older than the one of private property and even today represents a legitimate and appropriate reaction to a number of problematic mechanisms of contemporary society.

I101

London's secret social centre

the collective would have hardened if it was to survive (although I doubt the people involved would have stayed exactly the same) and in many ways things would have got simpler - everything would have had a space in the kitchen, people would have got used to following the rules we made for cleaning after an event and maybe we would have bitten the bullet and bought a dishwasher! There is a sense then that the problems would have sorted themselves out but also we were kind of reinventing the wheel since for most people it was the first social project they had been involved with and thus they were (quite naturally) unaware of just how much work it takes.

THE NEXT STEPS

It was nice to have some time to prepare to leave, which does not by any means always happen with squatted projects. Thus we put a post on indymedia announcing the eviction and had a final party. We squatted a new place which would have been perfect for our needs - it was an old neighbourhood centre with a gym hall, lots of rooms and loads of potential. Unfortunately it was marked for demolition and the plans were indeed going ahead. We were evicted fast and very soon afterwards it was knocked down (for more yuppy flats). Then some people from the collective squatted a place in the centre and started to do public events. We were in negotiations as to what that meant as regards the Braaksmaak cafe and other projects when this new place was evicted. By now the old Groene Voltage was evicted and naturally energies were at quite a low ebb. Other evictions also meant people were busy finding a new place to live. Six

Autonomous spaces and communities are also an eyesore to the police apparatus, who see them as centres of unsettling ideas and attitudes. Raids by antiterrorist commandos on German squats before last year's G8 summit confirmed that the hysteria of the state structures permit anything.

raise its head often, and I can't say we dealt with the hidden forms very well. There was never a "leader" but some people had louder voices and could have listened more. Certainly there was towards the end of the project a clique developing which probably made newcomers feel a bit like they were walking into someone's lounge rather than a social centre.

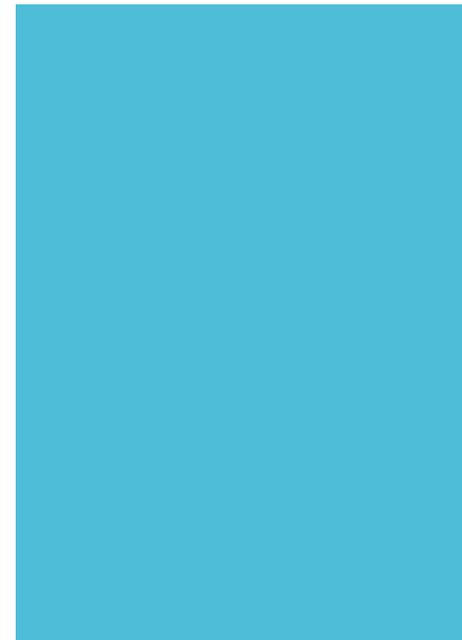
As with pretty much every grassroots volunteer project I have been involved with, money was scarce and people's time commitment fluctuated. This is to be expected, but I think we could have dealt with things better. One person left the collective in a less than positive way, which was a shame.

We had weekly meetings in which the format we developed was to have an emotional round first to see how everyone was doing, then the agenda points, then a space for any extra short points, then an evaluation round. Depending on how many people were there, we held up hands to speak and had a facilitator to guide the meeting and someone else took notes.

This system worked fairly well with tight facilitation but the problem as I see it now was that we spent much too long debating broken commitments. Simply put, people did not do what they said they were going to do. They might well have had good reasons (excuses) for not doing these things, the fact remains that a project built on trust and goodwill can either spiral ever upwards in a glorious happy triumphant explosion of energy or enter the vicious downward spiral into bitter recriminations when the washing up is not done or bills are not paid. If the project had lasted a few years, things I'm sure would have settled down in some way -

Why not get involved and help create something that you feel is autonomous rather than criticising others?

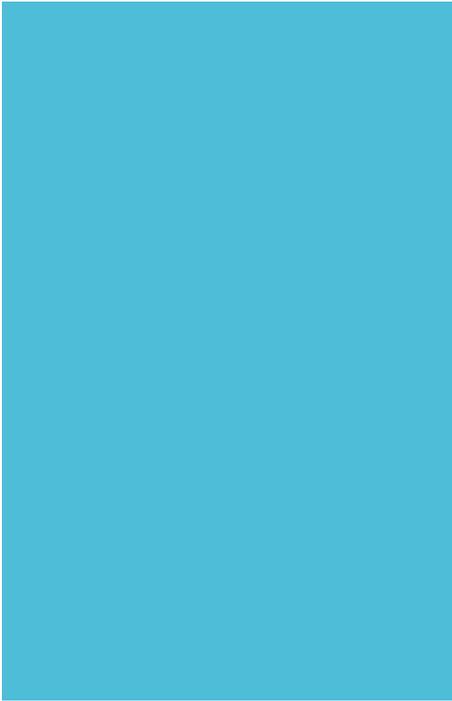
When a possession order was granted to the owners of the squatted block of properties in rampart street which houses the rampART social centre, a scurry of activity began to secure a new building to act as a backup venue during the uncertain period prior to eviction. A suitable property was found and entered for the first time on new years eve and occupied a couple of days later.



Only a short walk from the rampART, the new building was also a commercial premises with three floors. While the area of each floor was only about two thirds of that enjoyed at the rampART, the new building benefited from the addition of a basement which looked like it could make a great gig space. The ground floor had a tiny kitchen but with a bit of work it would clearly make a good space for a cafe and free shop. The first floor was mostly open plan, a good place for large meeting. Meanwhile the upper

Our vision for the Poortgebouw is not only to preserve this important historic property in Rotterdam: this plan for a mix of housing with social and cultural functions offers an increased accessibility to the public and creates a lively and safe place in the neighborhood.

floor had been subdivided into offices and planned to use it for residential accommodation. The most exciting thing about the new space however was the yard which gave us potential to do things we could never do a rampART. Despite all it's potential, the place was a mess. The owners had completely trashed every floor. Wiring had been cut, light switches smashed, false ceiling and lights pulled down, partition walls torn down or holed.



Additionally, the only two toilets in the building had been smashed to pieces. However, we didn't think it would take long to put in shape. We took over a load of bedding and cushions, fold up table and chairs, water, wind up torches, candles, smoke alarms and fire extinguishers and settled in. Now split between occupying two spaces we put a call out for help occupying both

As unaligned and ungovernable islands of uncontrolled freedom we want to continue to act in solidarity, and strengthen our international links, no matter how many kilometres there are between us.

places where people might pick up a flyer and be interested. Sometimes the flyer just sat on the bar in the social centre until the date of the event had gone past. They are certainly not going to come if they don't know the project exists!

We were debating the merits of making a nice colour poster for too long, the printing costs were a problem but we should have just done it. Having said that, it's good we did not make a 3,000 copy run and then get evicted the next month!

Money was a problem. There were too many stupid discussions over the electricity bills, the bank account and foundation we set up. I guess its always like this.

Last but not least, alcohol. Sometimes a friend, sometimes an enemy. We never really had problems with drunk patrons luckily, but we certainly did have problems within the collective. Sadly this is a problem which plagues the activist scene everywhere and for this Rotterdam has no easy answers.

THE COLLECTIVE

The collective was composed of roughly seven people. Some people joined and were welcomed, others left. Some popped up every so often and there were a few regulars. Around the collective there were a few more people, perhaps ten, who were extremely supportive and helped out in various ways, often unseen and unthanked. Without their help, a lot less would have happened. These extra people in the background are pretty essential to any grassroots project.

The people involved were linked by interest rather than strong friendship, although some were friends. The beast of hierarchy did

In 1973 the village was squatted by a group of artists who planned to make a colony there.

munal space. I guess people didnt care enough to make it so and were not really aware of their own messiness. People living above the project really helped in my view, since they were close by to deal with daily matters like post or things left outside the door. It really helps to have someone maintaining the place and I would recommend it for any project. Although we did not catch the people breaking our windows, perhaps more would have happened if there had not been people nearby.

Quite soon after the place had been squatted, the owners (PWS) received a letter threatening them that unless they evicted the squatters, action would be taken. On Stormfront, a Nazi website, people discussed burning the squat down. Then one plate glass window had a brick thrown at it. Who can say if these things are connected? There are a lot of drunken idiots out there. We fixed the window and asked a local grafitti crew to paint something. They did not do what we asked, but it did look nice at least. We had three big plate glass windows in the front, all something like three metres by two metres. Then another one got smashed, which meant more boards. Having less light in the front room made it probably less welcoming to newcomers which was a shame. But whilst dealing with the problems took effort, it also made us stronger in that we realised we were not going to let things like that stop the centre organising events.

Propaganda is important when organising a project. Not everyone reads indymedia or checks radar.squat.net. We made monthly events listings and lots of flyers, but we probably should have tried more to get flyers into the universities, art schools, music venues,

According to author Robert Neuwirth, there may be as many as one billion squatters globally, or about one of every seven people.

buildings and preparing the new building to become a social centre...

Our priorities included sorting out toilet facilities and this led us to consider the use of dry compost toilets and ultimately to deciding that we'd try to implement stuff we'd only talked about doing with the rampART, making the place as eco-friendly and sustainable as possible. As well as setting up dry composting toilets we also planned to do rain water harvesting and install wood burning stoves. More ambitious, we aimed to generate our own electricity using wind, solar and a waste vegetable oil fueled combined heat and power system.

Deep cycle batteries and invertors provided power for our lights and radio while we worked and a white board contained our plans and to do lists. We'd soon expanded the kitchen area massively and replaced one of the smashed flushing toilets. Three 200 litre plastic water butts were obtained and one was prepared for use as a rain water harvesting tank that would provide water for the flush. The basement was opened right up by taking down the partition walls and all the materials taken to the top floor where the first of four bedrooms was constructed. A hidden stairwell was discovered behind a partition wall and a bricked up doorway was reopened to provide access to the outbuilding and yard.

It all seemed to be going great apart from problems maintaining permanent occupation of the rampart street properties and some of us expressed concern that it had been a mistake to commit to work in the new space before we knew when the appeal for the rampART would take place. It was fairly easy to find people to commit to the occupation rota at the new place but not for rampart street and already people were asking about doing events in the new space as the excitement drew energy away from rampART.

This was not what we intended, the new space was simply meant to be a backup to allow things to continue as normal at rampART without the worry

Colin Ward comments: "Squatting is the oldest mode of tenure in the world, and we are all descended from squatters. This is as true of the Queen [of the United Kingdom] with her 176,000 acres as it is of the 54 per cent of householders in Britain who are owner-occupiers. They are all the ultimate recipients of stolen land, for to regard our planet as a commodity offends every conceivable principle of natural rights."



that resources and events there would suddenly be left with nowhere to go. The work that had been done at the new place in the first ten days or so meant that we could open it up as a social centre very quickly when we lost the rampART. It seemed like the pressure was off but then we stumbled across some bad news. Our original research had indicated that there was no planning consent granted and application pending. There had been an application last year but it had been withdrawn. However, whoever did the original research had been unaware that the withdrawn application had been resubmitted and granted in October 2007. The owners had full permission to knock down the building and build a six story block of apartments in it's place! Discussing the bad news we decided we might as well contact the owners and ask when they planned to start work and attempt to negotiate a stay but we never got round to it and later decided not to

In 1973 the village was squatted by a group of artists who planned to make a colony there.

in Amsterdam and hear that in their first year not many people came either. Perhaps Wednesdays was not a good day to be open, maybe a weekend day would have been better. In any case, having a regular time is important.

The internet cafe took a lot longer to set up than expected, both because KPN took months to set up the internet connection and the recycled computers kept on breaking despite getting lots of free source love. And whilst having internet was nice for us and for some kids, most people have internet at home so having free web access is not really as radical as it was ten years ago.

We should probably have done a simple bar night with no activities so as to raise more money for the project. It would have been comparatively easy to run and hopefully profitable. Perhaps we underestimated how important it is to have simply a social space where people can gather and meet. Perhaps we wanted to organise too much for the people, rather than concentrating on providing a hospitable relaxed space where they could organise stuff themselves.

Certainly we had real problems keeping the place clean and tidy. This seems simple but somehow it was not. Plans were drawn up, agreements made but still the place stayed a mess. And of course if one person cleaned up for a few hours only to be faced again with a mess the next day, then that person lost energy to clean again. In the last months of the project, the constant mess in the kitchen led to a problem with mice, which then (left unchecked) became a problem with rats. We had monthly clean up days but these never really seemed to ensure that the place stayed clean, which is of course necessary in a com-

On February 13th, 1990, two months before the planned detonation, the group Kunstlerinitative Tacheles occupied the building.

enough to make the links. Even within the Dutch activist scene, it took months before we started communicating with other social centres and projects such as OCCIF in Amsterdam and the Piraten Bar in Den Haag. One group wanted to use the space at the beginning and we wasted a lot of time listening to their needs and requirements whilst they did nothing to help us build and organise the space. In the end, nothing came of it. Certainly actions speak louder than words.

There were many alternative anticapitalist squatter types living in Rotterdam who never came to the Groene Voltage. Friends of mine never came. This punk guy living a few doors away used to walk past once or twice a week and not even look at the flyers in the window. I'm still a bit baffled why that happened, because I would certainly visit a project like this if I could. I would love to have an infoshop in Rotterdam. But people are into different things. You can only make the project and do it nice and hope people come. In trying to activate the people of Rotterdam we were battling the mentality of a city in which everyone is busy with their own thing. That's why a man can die on the prisonboat in Rotterdam harbour and only twenty people go to the noise demo. Despite there having been previous social centres such as Hang and Storm, and eetcafes such as De Paardenvaal and Heëken, it seems that there is no real culture or awareness of alternative projects and that people are in fact not that interested.

This was also true for the infoshop - although it was used, it could definitely have been used more! But then it was good to visit the infoshop Bollox at the Binnenpret

open negotiation till we were sure the owners knew we were in occupation. Instead, work progressed as before as if nothing had changed. A couple of leaks discovered in the roof were fixed and the damaged ceiling plaster replaced. All the doors and radiators that had been taken off by the owners were refitted and new doors fitted at the bottom of the hidden basement stairwell and out to the outbuilding. In the basement, the waste pipe from the toilet was been boxed up so drunk idiots didn't try to swing on it. By Feb 9th we'd had meetings to discuss our permaculture plan and had been doing lots of work in the yard enjoying the unseasonal warm weather. The massive task of clearing the out building began with all the rubble removed from the brick up doorway now removed and piled up in the yard forming the starting point for raised beds. While working in the outbuilding we also removed the boards from the windows to let in some light and re-glazed them with clear plastic sheeting. One of the 200 litre plastic drums had been converted into a rat proof compost tumbler. The raised beds in the yard had progress well and we'd rescued quite a bit of top soil from skips along with plenty of pigeon shit from the outbuilding. Inside, a four drawer filing cabinet had been converted into a wood burning stove and installed. The kitchen had been freshly painted, along with the basement floor and some of the walls.

The mast for the wind generator we'd last put up at the camp for climate action was bought over from rampART and hoisted up onto the roof. Holes were drilled and chains bolted through roof joists to provide mounting points for the guy wires before the generator was assembled and erected. Solar panel followed shortly after. We purchased a Rayburn wood/oil fired cooking range for just 50 quid off ebay. It had a back boiler so could of been used to heat water/radiators as well. We were going to see if it would run ok off waste veg oil but if not we'd just

revert it to a solid fuel burn and use waste wood dumped in local skips. We also won an ebay auction for a Lister CS stationary diesel engine. These classic water cooled diesels make wonderful veg oil powered combined heat and power system and we calculated it would provide all our electricity and most of our heating needs when run for just 4 hours each evening and use only a gallon of waste veg oil each time.

Everything was progressing really well and then came the bomb shell, a set of papers taped to the front door informing us that we'd been served court notice of a intermin possession hearing on the 21st Feb, just one week away. Ironically, that evening the building was hosting a meeting of a radicle bike group, a spin off from bicycology. They were to look at the outbuilding and discuss using it as a space for a free bike workshop but obviously they dropped.



In Brazil, these squatter communities are called favelas and a famous example is Rocinha in Rio de Janeiro, estimated to be home of 500,000 people.

crap away. Then the good stuff gets lost in between the broken toys and dresses for old ladies.

We hosted meetings from various groups and oneoff events such as the zine evening. There were also the music appreciation nights - when all the music played came from one particular artist, such as Venetian Snares or Bodyscount.

But did we achieve our aims of activating the people of Rotterdam and making links to the local community? Well, in a small way, yes we did. As regarding a space for the local scene, we certainly did that and I still miss it. Further, you can never really judge the full effects of a project, it's like a stone dropped in water - the ripples radiate outwards, whether you want them to or not. More on this below.

WHAT WE COULD HAVE DONE BETTER

There were some people who wanted to use our space. We hosted a few birthday parties and one guy taught capoeira on Sundays. But in truth the people from the collective had to do most things themselves. The local community was not really interested in our project, but the main reason for that is that there is no local community to speak of ... the housing corporations have already broken that down a long time ago with the policy of selling off social housing for profit. The thing is, if we had been there for a longer time, five or ten years, of course more people would have used the space and of course more local people would have taken a look. It takes a long period for people to get involved. This is the problem of many activist projects, they just don't last long

We call for decentralised and autonomous actions of all kinds, depending on what people feel to be the most appropriate to their local context.

but it did not really help. Only when the night was tied to other meetings did it get more people.

The infoshop came quite fast and had about fifty books on various themes such as anarchism, animal rights, peace movements and environmental action. We had lots of magazines and a zine library with over a hundred titles. Every Wednesday we were open from one until six. Someone always came but it was never busy.



The free shop ended up being our main link to the local community, even if in that meant we were the place where they could dump their unwanted stuff (although that is what the free shop is supposed to be for i guess!). Some people stayed for a chat and a drink and that was nice. The nature of a free shop means that it is always a battle to keep tidy, and as it got bigger this became more of a task. In my view we didn't throw enough

In New York City, homeless people squatting in underground spaces such as Freedom Tunnel have come to be known as Mole People. They were the subject of an award-winning documentary called Dark Days.

A few months before a similar thing had happened at rampART. The Bicycology group were having a weekend long gathering, part of which was planned to be them renovating the bike workshop at rampART but just before the weekend we learned about the planning application to demolish the building so they dropped the idea. Seems like the bike workshop is cursed!

All work on the new place came to a halt and our ebay purchases left uncollected and unpaid. It was clear that all our efforts and plans for the place were going to come to nothing and the place never opened as a social centre. We considered a last minute relocation of a party taking place at rampART so we'd at least have had some events at the new place before we lost it but the logistics quickly made us drop that idea.

We visited the Advisory Service for Squatters who drafted a very slim defense for us but we knew there was very little hope. The best we could hope for if that the a normal possession order would be granted instead of the IPO as otherwise we could have just 24 hours to pack up and leave.

<http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2008/02/392529.html>
<http://rampart.co.nr>

ADDENDUM - Following the granting of an Interim Possession Order on Thursday the 20th March 2008, RAMpart2 was left empty by squatters after a final party... as of printing, the original Ramparts remains, but for how much longer???



Squats and autonomous centres are one of the places where this fight is going to take place.

squattek

together as a group.

All of us must have seen the potential of the project and have been interested to see where it would go.

After trying a few variations, we ended up with the free shop (weggeefwinkel) in the backroom and in the front room we had a bar, a computer corner with free internet, the infoshop and zinelibrary and some sofas and tables. On a typical week we were open two or three nights a week and one afternoon.

WHAT WE ACHIEVED

Not counting a summer pause when we stopped activities for a while, every week we had a cafe on Thursdays serving cheap vegan food. It was called Braaksmaak and for six months before had been running nomadically, cooking at a different squat every two weeks. Most times the food was at 7 and at 9 there was a political theme. This took many forms including a talk on sustainability, a G8 Dissent Network infoavond and presentations from various activist groups.

Any profit from the cafe normally went to support the theme of that night, so we gave (some) money to a group campaign for better treatment of immigrants, a countryside squat, an Indymedia film and many other projects. The cafe did not always make money. I'm still not really sure how that happened.

Probably there was money stolen once or twice and also (too many) drinks were given away for free - which was pretty stupid when we sold them so cheap anyways.

The film night showed some great films like Darwin's Nightmare and End of Suburbia but it never really took off. The night was moved from Tuesday to Sunday and then back again.

The parties can be thought of as autonomous zones where all the people present create and enforce the rules...

did not. Hopefully others can be inspired by our successes and learn from our failures.

WHAT WE DID

The space was an old shop. We had at our disposal a front room with plate glass windows looking onto a small paved area beside the busy road, a back room, a storage room and a kitchen. There was also a cellar the size of the whole ground floor, but unfortunately it was flooded by ground water and thus not really functional. We had to pump it out twice.

What we planned to do was to use the front room for events which other people were welcome to organise and from within our collective to organise a cafe, a film night, an infoshop, a free shop and a free internet space.

All of these activities were planned as political, nonprofit activities. Our stance was anticapitalist and our intention was to politicise the people of Rotterdam and make links to the local community. We also wanted to provide a space for our small scene to

meet and socialise. I think our unspoken intentions were to see if we could build something we needed in Rotterdam ourselves and to see if we could work



We are a group of people involved with various autonomous spaces around Europe...

We will not beg you, we will not ask! We will take, we will occupy!

If you go for a walk through the town where you live, you will come upon lots of empty buildings. Most of those properties belong to the council, which does not have enough money to renovate them. Or perhaps there is disputed ownership or the house is not in a fit state to be sold (e.g. damaged foundations). Surely you will not have missed the fact that a considerable amount of housing properties in last few years became offices. And this happens despite the fact that a large percentage of students, workers, families with children and elderly people do not even have a place to live.

Our society is overflowing with different forms of authority, hierarchy and domination, and they force our lives into a routine of bare survival. Instead of everybody taking what they want or need, we are forced to ask for permission, a permission ensured by the majority in a form of economical exchange.

This exchange, while being enforced by private or collective ownership, allows a separation of the individual from the rest of the world which surrounds him/her. This separation comes in all the spheres of our lives. We are bound to, first of all, exchange our time for money (at work) and then exchange money for the satisfaction of our needs. Whatever our need is, be it cultural (a concert, theatre, exhibition, etc.), or existential (housing, clothing, food, etc.), it is inferior to this logic of relations of exchange, and thus makes our lives into a routine of bare survival.

Since we wish to create lives as real lives that belong to us, we think that it is important to struggle against all possible forms of power, hierarchy and authority. We also think that this struggle cannot only exist within "barricades", but first of all, within our everyday lives - in the interaction with other people and nature.

There are many squatted social centres around the world but they exist mainly in countries where squatting is legal. Examples include Ernst-Kirchweiger-Haus in Austria, the RampART Social Centre in England, OT301 in the Netherlands and Ungdomshuset in Denmark (evicted on March 1, 2007 and demolished four days later).

In connection with this, we perceive squatting as a simple, natural reaction of people who cannot, within the frame of a given environment, find a space for their self-fulfillment, who cannot cope with values of the surrounding society. We see squatting as one option in the battle to reject privation issued from the logic of economical ownership, to reject the requirements of this world, which we have not created and to reclaim what we are longing for without asking anybody for permission. We will do so, any time and anywhere we have the opportunity!

During the 1990s, there were several attempts to enliven abandoned buildings and make them into open spaces for self-fulfillment. These spaces were not only about surviving. All of those attempts were more or less a protest against the values and order of the capitalist society, as much of a unique opportunity to develop various forms of alternative culture, encounter of opinions and searching for possibilities of human coexistence on non-hierarchical principles and in roles unconditioned by genders within an open community. All this happened without commercial pressures and in an effort to find the meaning of such concepts as solidarity, self-organisation, cooperation and freedom.

Abandoned buildings were repaired in a DiY fashion and they were reborn. But sooner or later, a violent eviction took place. And most of these buildings stay empty and deteriorating.

Through this action, we do not only want to point out the housing crisis, but we also want to take up the squatting movement, that first appeared here in the Czech Republic in 1991. Squatters, during this short history, tried to create an open space for non-mainstream activities and show that a collective living built upon mutual discussion and roles unconditioned by genders, is a likely alternative to the present hierarchical system of society.

Squat and live!

Police attacked with pepper spray and dogs after surrounding the whole building with a cordon of vehicles, tape, dog and special ops units. There were several arrests and one person was badly mauled by a police dog and had to go to hospital.

The Groene Voltage was a squatted social centre in Rotterdam. It was situated five minutes from Central Station in a residential area, beside a busy road which leads to the ring and the motorway. It stood on the corner of a block and the four floors above it were also squatted separately as residential space for six people.

It lasted for almost exactly one year, from October 2006 to October 2007. The eviction was not contested, but rather the keys were handed back to the owners (a housing corporation called PWS - Patrimoniums Woningstichting) because they had announced their intention to renovate the entire building. We had on the whole a good relationship with PWS and thus when they showed us the building plans we left. It is currently being stripped before being converted into flats.

In this short article, one member of the non-hierarchical collective which ran the centre would like to address some issues raised by the project. As such it can only be read as one person's viewpoint. It is likely that other people from the collective would see things differently. In some ways we achieved a lot, in others we got caught in the traps common to all such DiY projects. I will describe what we did, discuss the collective, mention what we achieved and assess what we



Metelkova is an autonomous social centre in the centre of Ljubljana, Slovenia.

reflections
on the
groene
voltage



squatting action in kampen, netherlands, 2005

After the auction in March 2007, and the following cancellations of the house contracts, the future of Koepi was unclear.

But since then, the situation has changed in some concrete ways - therefore this update.

It came to long and hard negotiations with the new owner of the house to secure the Koepi as a living and cultural project.

The first priority in the negotiations was the idea to bring the whole of the Koepi complex, for an extended length of time, under self-management (eg. in the form of a contract that is continuously passed on i.e. that is linked to the project and not specific people so that it has no ending). We wanted to keep the Koepi for as long as possible out of the capitalist economy.

A possible solution was cancelled by the Commerzbank, who, still officially, has veto rights (and is still using them against the Koepi). Therefore, we have concentrated on maintaining the present

contracts and getting them extended.

On the 18th birthday of Koepi, the owner gave contracts, based on the conditions for the rest of the house, to the whole ground floor, the first floor and the side wing (the concert spaces, some living spaces and the office) for 30 years. The cancellation of the old contracts for the rest of the house for the 31st of May have also been withdrawn. Through this, there are no longer any unclear legal positions for the whole house and the land it sits on, i.e. all rooms, including the yard and the land in front all are covered by contracts.

These contracts allow us a continuous existence for an unforeseeable length of time, without us having to compromise or bring to an end our concept of a non-commercial living and cultural centre.

Our concept: Koepi stays - and the way it is, is and was not negotiable.

This success would not of been possible without the help and support of our thousands of friends from

around the world.

The various acts of support, the demos, solidarity actions, donations, the massive publicity, created a lot of pressure and put us in a strong position with regards to negotiating with the owner to halt his plans for an eviction of the house. To all our supporters, once again, a massive thank you - we could not of done it without you.

Thanks For All The Support,
We Will Never Forget It!

However, even though the threat of eviction has been lifted from the house, this does not mean that we can sit back.

The situation that has existed for a long time with regard to the Koepi Trailer Park is still unclear. There exists at the moment an allowance by the owner but there is still no long-term contractual solution. At the moment there is no danger of eviction but if the owner of the land changes, the next conflict will be foreseeable. We need to stay alert. Please keep your eyes open and

come to the action days at the end of May and show that they cannot push projects like the Koepi out of the life of our city.s so easily. Apart from that, we still need to show solidarity with the other projects in Berlin that are faced with eviction. The situation being faced by Rigaer 94, KB-Liebig, Liebig 14 and Schwarzer Kanal remains critical.

The example of the Koepi shows that through massive public pressure, we can win. We see the saving of the Koepi as just a small step in the struggle for the maintaining of all our free spaces.

Come to the Koepi Action Days from 30th May to 2nd June!

Give the Commerzbank stress!

Rigaer, KB, Schwarzer Kanal - all the rest stay!

Ungdomshuset Will
Rise Again!

Defend and Extend
Autonomous Free Spaces!

<http://www.koepi137.net>