

More Thoughts on Squatting in the San Francisco Bay Area

In the Spring of 2015 I was given a three month internship with Little Black Cart (LBC) to work on a *Slingshot* reader about squatting.

At the time, Hydra House, a squatted Punk House in Ghost Town, Oakland I had been living at on and off for about a year and a half was in its final stages. Also known as the Church of Carl Sagan, sometimes we called ourselves Saganites and greeted each other, "Hail Sagan!" That was in the bright, early months. Matt Derrick from squattheplanet.com visited us around then, and took some great pictures. Bam who cracked open the Hole before the Nomads, who was later murdered lived there. Denalda from Introflirt also lived there at the time. She later died in the



Ghost Ship fire, and this work is dedicated to Bam, Denalda and Tony Longshanks, who I will write more about later.

I was bouncing around between Hydra, a condemned house a couple doors down, and a couple places outside in Berkeley. Part of the internship's deal included housing in what some people called LBC's compound. At least one person from LBC called Bolo'Bolo. The timing couldn't have been better!

In theory, I had been a member of the Slingshot Collective for a year and a half at this point. Since the two main reasons I had moved to the East Bay were to squat in Oakland and join the Slingshot Collective, I had a fair amount of anti-copyrighted or at least not copyrighted materials already gathered together about squatting in the Bay Area.

But I wanted this to be a good process for everyone. I also hoped *Slingshot* readers on various subjects could be sold to make up for declining Slingshot Organizer sales, the Collective's main fund raiser at the time.

Collective meetings about the book started to feel like scenes from *Anthem* by Ayn Rand. Two of my favorite comrades walked out of newspaper production for the issue we were working on at the time. Then, all empty rhetoric aside, one of the only two actual full members of the Collective started to bully me out because he wanted to censor art we had printed by a comrade of mine from Flagstaff.

At the same time, I ran into a comrade I had met at the White Castle Timber Sale Blockade, at a Food Not Bombs serving in People's Park. He invited me to Seattle for protests against Shell's Polar Pioneer oil drill docked there.

Since the book obviously wasn't happening, there was only a month left in my internship, and I wasn't going to be doing anything with Slingshot before the fall newspaper issue, I got together what I

had ready to print, and it was released as *Thoughts on Squatting in the San Francisco Bay Area: from the 1970s-2015*.

I ended up having the best summer of my life up to that point, mostly in Olympia. But I was eager to get away from the rain, and back to flogging the dead horse of *Slingshot*. Two more years in the trenches, and of course nothing changed.

Here I've collected a few more samples of my writing about squatting from *Slingshot*. I think the excerpt from Books not Bombs is extra important because it's also an example of a gap in *Slingshot*'s online archive. I had to find it elsewhere online. I think it's missing a call for submissions, and I know it's missing other people's book reviews which were never posted.

I tried to find the author of *Living in a black hole* to get permission to publish it, but I couldn't. It's a great history of Hellarity, and I think its value for potential lessons goes far beyond that.

Not Our City Anymore and *Break off the boards build our dreams* were both written by Tony Longshanks, who died after being hit by a car while on bike tour.

If you want to see more writing and archival work like this, please contact me at acardweaver@tutanota.com.

Slingshot #119, Fall 2015, Excerpt from Books not Bombs:
Three Books About Squatting

Not For Rent: Conversations with Creative Activists in the U.K. by Stacy Wakefield and Grrrt, Evil Twin Publications, <http://www.eviltwinpublications.com/>

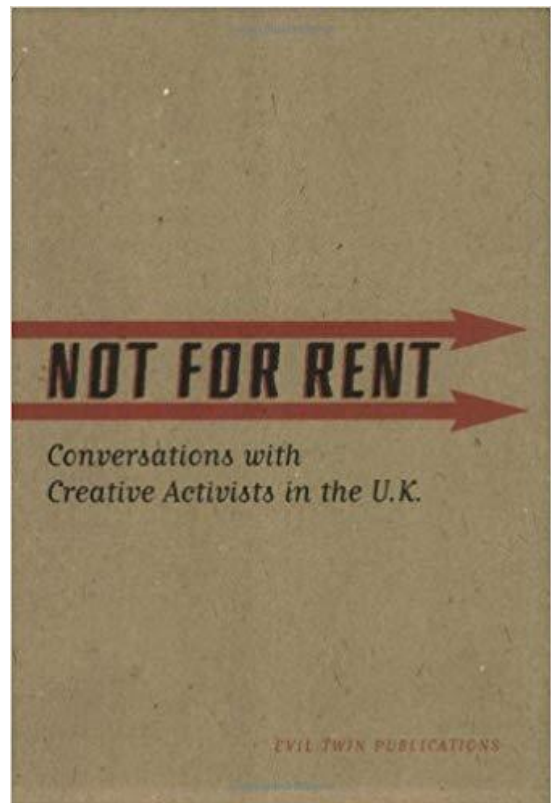
This is an amazing collection of interviews and articles with radicals whose work ranges from anti-poverty to anti-fascism, musicians from many genres and writers. Sharply laid out with high quality photographs and original art

All sorts of different collective uses of space from squatting to pooling resources for cooperative ownership, farming and tree houses; blockading road construction, making different kinds of art, fundraising, providing a place for political meetings or even just hanging out without having to spend money .

Though first published in the 1990s, I was able to read a 2003 edition and enjoyed it both as a snapshot of mid-'90s activism and underground music, and was pleasantly surprised at how many of the organizations and what not are still going, though a bit disappointed at how many of the struggles continue in one form or another.

I think this also serves as a really great template for how to carry out good interviews and write about political work and the arts.

Some of the highlights for me included an interview with Danbert Nobacon from Chumbawamba, and an article about the Luton, England sound system and housing collective, Exodus, which squatted for parties at first but then housing and farming.

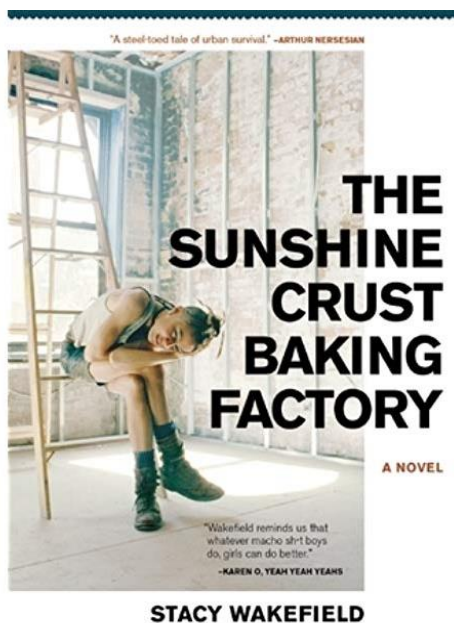
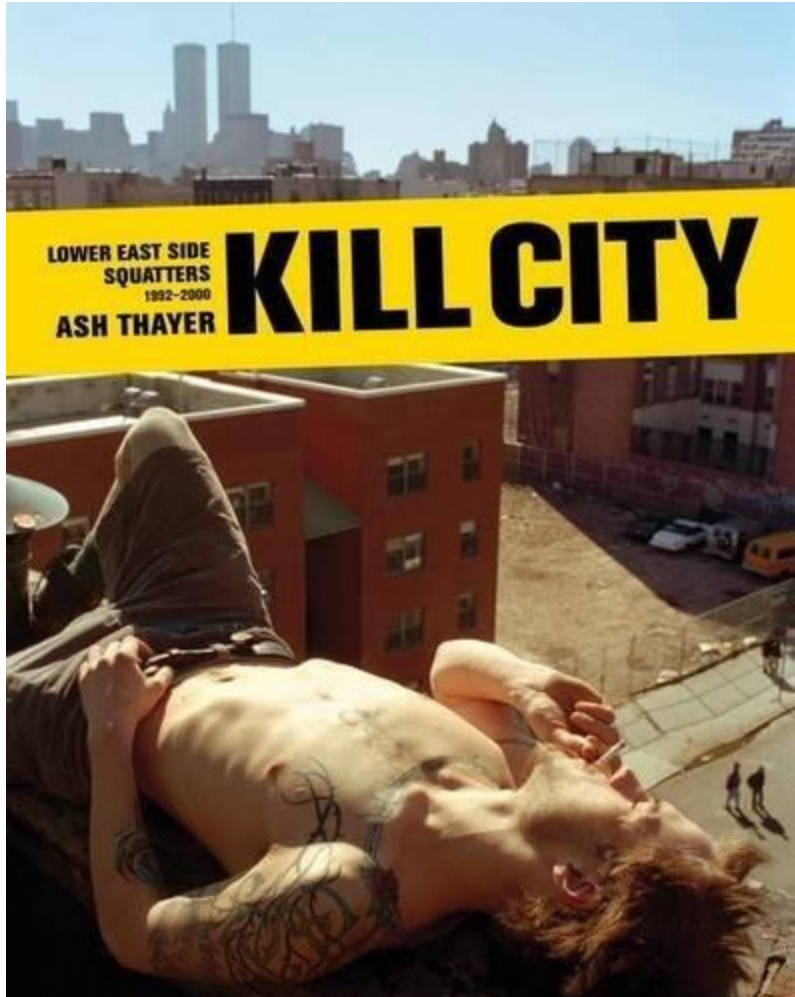


Kill City: Lower East Side Squatters 1992-2000 by Ash Thayer, <http://www.ashthayer.net/home-2>

Mostly really well done pictures, this book includes a bit of great text contextualizing the photographs both as part of squatting in New York at the time in general, and describing who was in the pictures.

The Sunshine Crust Baking Factory by Stacy Wakefield, Akashic Books, <http://www.akashicbooks.com/>

A well written novel about squatting in New York in the 1990s. Radical projects such as Food Not Bombs and ABC No Rio are mentioned, along with the violence and gentrification that can go along with squatting. All the dialog flows well, and stories seem realistic. I think it's clear that Wakefield was a squatter and is a serious writer. I believe all three of these books serve as great examples of how squatting can be written and read about.



San Francisco Bay Area squatting scene report – East Bay Homes Not Jails is back at it again

The decline of squatting in the East Bay has been one of the most heartbreaking signs of its rapid gentrification. I believe, without a doubt, this is a critical time for people to stand up to the moneyed interests by doing things such as squatting. Like Slingshot itself, whose roots are in the land struggle of People's Park and the Haste St. and Barrington Co-op squats, we need to struggle for space or we will surely lose it. East Bay Homes Not Jails (HnJ) can be one of the many ways that we fight.

East Bay HnJ is a collective of squatters and squat supporters that meets Wednesdays at 7PM at the Oakland Omni Commons. Its goal is to open and enter as many vacant houses as possible, and keep them open as long as possible. Its politics are anti-oppression, and those who display

oppressive behaviors such as racism, sexism and/or homophobia will be asked to leave meetings.

I first became aware that a new East Bay HnJ had formed around New Year's Day, 2016. I was living in a rather large "commune" in the Mission District of San Francisco (SF) with two other people, and was so miserable I had taken to an audio book to help me fall asleep at night and get my mental wheels turning in the mornings. I had come to the East Bay to celebrate New Year's Eve by goofing around with comrades, and saw a flyer for HnJ meetings at the Long Haul Infoshop.

Those mental wheels got turning the old fashioned way, and after my reluctant return to SF, I got my final pushes to get back to the serious work of the East Bay between the commune's creepy "guru's" attempts at micro-management, and loose travel plans with a freight train rider I met at Voku, a semi-monthly free meal in SF similar to Food Not Bombs in spirit, the next Friday. I packed up my gear and split for the East Bay.

The deadline for Slingshot #120 was also coming up, so I figured worst case scenario: I wouldn't leave the East Bay after all and would be sleeping out again soon, but I had another newspaper to look forward to helping get out and my living arrangement wasn't worth all the hassle.

Of course I hoped for a best-case scenario: getting back into a great squat with another issue of Slingshot on the horizon and all the East Bay's other happenings. As might be expected, reality was somewhere in the middle.

Frankly, squatting in Oakland and working on Slingshot had been the two reasons I had come to the East Bay in the fall of 2013; having hitchhiked, rode freight trains and walked here from the White Castle Timber Sale Blockade near Myrtle Creek in Oregon.

I had been following the squatting scene in the East Bay for years in the pages of Slingshot, and though I had very mixed feelings about it, I wanted to come see things for myself. Similarly, I felt worst case scenario: I'd still have something to write an article about and then it would be back off to Arizona sooner rather than later, where my year had started.

At that time there had been an East Bay HnJ, but it had folded by the time I got to town. There was also an HnJ in SF, and some of its veterans are the folks who initiated the current East Bay HnJ. Though the squatting scenes in SF and Oakland are very different, the comrades are pretty cool and they are very skilled in the basics of scouting vacant houses, cracking them open and navigating the legal waters of occupying them.

Most of them are tenants now, but have been busy supporting squatters such as the Land Action 4 and other land struggles such as that saving the Gill Tract, supporting the Ohlone re-occupation last year and the civil disobedience earlier this year that stopped construction destroying the farm.

Also they are eager to share the previously mentioned skills; weekly meetings frequently include skill shares such as lock picking and key making.

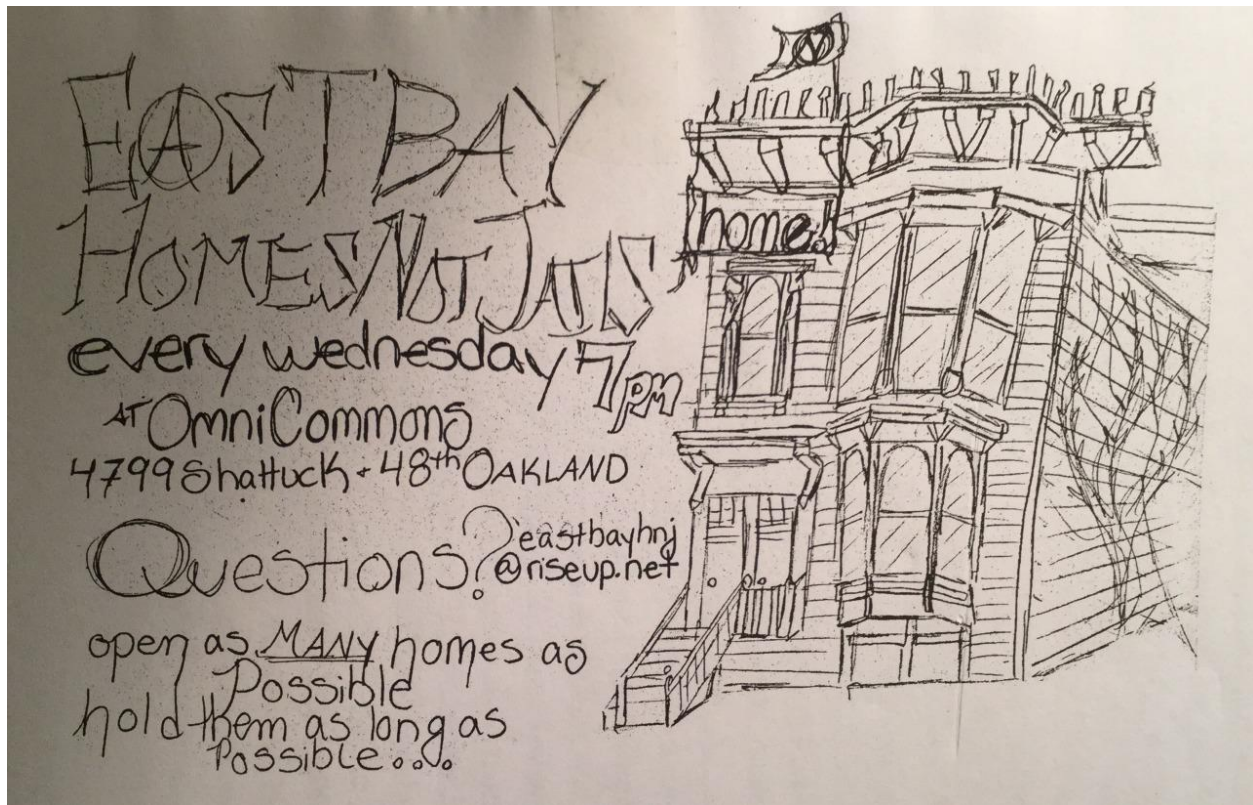
Plus if more people get involved with the meetings and keep coming, we could start having more Away Team Missions where new squats can be scouted and cracked open.

At the check in of every meeting people are asked if they are housed and available for an Away Team Mission that night. The only place I've squatted in the Bay Area this year I was brought to through these meetings.

We also have a strong tendency towards sharing food and goofing around the way comrades can when you actually get along, so participating in HnJ has helped improve my life a great deal even if I'm still mostly homeless.

As one of the comrades told me about HnJ around 2013 in SF, "All I did was crack open houses and cook Food Not Bombs." Sounds like a dream to me! But with the old membership requirements of showing up to three meetings in a row, then half of the subsequent meetings, I'm the only one who has joined the new collective since it started towards the end of last year.

Please consider joining, or starting your own HnJ Collective, and letting us know how things go for you all. eastbayhnj@riseup.net



The City Is Ours: Squatting and Autonomous Movements In Europe From The 1970s to The Present ed.
by Bart Van Der Steen, Ask Katzeff and Leendert Van Hoogenhuijze, PM Press 2014

Reviewed by A. Iwasa

The City is Ours begins with a preface by George Katsiaficas, who I consider to be the next Noam Chomsky. Though he is an academic, I feel like he has long overcome that world's tendency towards dry writing.

The foreword was written by Geronimo, the author of Fire and Flames, a history of the German Autonomist Movement,. Though he is as passionate as he is in his earlier writings, a diatribe against anti-sexism almost completely derailed my train of thought as I read his foreword.

That written, this book starts off strong before calming down to a more nuanced, academic feeling with the introduction.

I was reading the book with a real sense of urgency, having recently become involved with the squatters' and squat supporters' collective, East Bay Homes Not Jails. After living in two squats that had been evicted in Oakland the previous year, I was ready to look just about anywhere for advice. The subtitle of the book should be stressed, this isn't just about squatting, it's also very much about European Autonomist Movements.

But it was well worth working through all the historical context to get to the actual material about squatting.

The chapter on Brighton was one of the major highlights, written by two groups, one explicitly of squatters, the Needle Collective. It's exactly the sort of writing I was hoping for when I got the book. Though the post-



World War II emergence of squatting in Britain and general historical context is touched on, this is mostly a fiery account of squatting in Brighton from 1969-2012.

An interesting side note to the mostly academic writing style of the book was the amount of documentary film footage referenced, much of which I was able to find on the youtube! Taking breaks from reading to watch some of these videos reminded me of history classes in high school big time, but far more interesting. This could make a fun Squatting 101 textbook and study guide! Possibly the best of these films was 69, about a Youth House, Ungdomshuset in Copenhagen.

The chapter on London was written by a Lecturer in Law, Lucy Finchett-Maddock. Though the emphasis on her specialty comes off as dry at first, the flip of it is she also focuses on the political organizations of the squatters, even going back to the Ex-Servicemen's Secret Committee, who were one of the many groups helping homeless families get into squats in the post-World War II wave.

As a participant in East Bay Homes Not Jails, these sort of organizational forms were some of the specific things I was hoping to learn more about.

The next chapter is about the Rozbrat squatted social center in Poznan, Poland. Being the only chapter about what I consider to be Eastern Europe, I particularly enjoyed it on several levels. How the emergence of the Polish squatting movement fit into the post-State Communist era, and how Rozbrat in particular also fit into the Anti-Globalization Movement was fun and exciting to read.

As a participant in the Infoshop Movement with many white relatives of Slovak descent, there was something homey feeling about this chapter for me. There was even a reference to Anarchist Soccer!

The final chapter, Squatting and Autonomous Action in Vienna, 1976-2012, is solid. The whole book, for the most part, should probably be called Autonomous Action and Squatting. In some ways, this book is more like what I had hoped Fire and Flames and The Subversion of Politics would have been like: an exciting, well written and researched history of Autonomists. But it wasn't as full of helpful advice on squatting as I hoped it would be. Still well worth reading and discussing for what it is.

PM Press, PO Box 23912, Oakland, CA 94623

Living in a black hole: Hellarity House

By Lil' Filly

Hellarity House in Oakland, CA, though frequently mistaken for a squat, is actually a house that defies ownership or legal status of any kind. For fifteen years it has been a group living experiment, providing a space where people could live, create art, music, direct action, and filth utterly unfettered by money or the need to pay rent. No one thought it would last as long as it has — all because long-term residents stood up to defend their home when it was threatened by a landlord's bankruptcy and because they consistently ignored the certainty that the legal system would crush them. In so doing they gleaned loads we could all learn from about life in an anarchist collective and life in the court system.

In these days of nationwide foreclosures and evictions, ask yourself: what if everyone facing the loss of their house were to stay and continue to live in their houses despite bank orders? Hellarity



demonstrates that with legal creativity, tenacity, and community, people can go on living in their houses for years. The struggle might be scary and contentious at times — it might make those who stand to profit from your eviction irrationally angry and they might resort to physical intimidation or even arson to try to get you out. But if hundreds or thousands assumed the risks to defend our homes, we could declare independence from the oppressive system and live free, not working a job to be robbed for rent.

The name “Hellarity House” came from a phrase coined by Steve Wingnut, who was playing with a devil puppet while ad-libbing a commercial for a sitcom starring Satan and two lesbians who move into a house together, Three’s Company style. Wingnut, slumped on the couch behind the puppet, had everyone in stitches. The tag line for the made-up sitcom was “... And Hell-arity ensues!” The joke fit the scenario of the house in a way everyone there understood implicitly. The name stuck.

The history of the Hellarity House started in the mid-nineties when an activist known as Sand bought a handful of houses throughout the Bay Area with money from an insurance settlement. He had a vision he called “Green Plan” that involved creating a network of eco-cooperative houses that would be oases of alternative living, gardens, and healthy food in decaying urban landscapes. He even envisioned creating a micro-economy within the movement, and therefore encouraged people to earn their stay by doing work on the houses and in The Little Planet, the cafe he helped start on Adeline Street in Berkeley. He occasionally collected membership dues, but he did not see himself as a landlord and did not collect “rent”.

Sand bargained for eco-minded people who were willing to follow his lead, but what the house bred was anarchy, and with it a myriad of ideologies and critiques of anyone seen to be too much in control. However, Sand could not recoup money loaned by creditors, so eventually, driven deep into debt and disillusioned by his experience as an eco-visionary property owner, he declared bankruptcy, at which point the federal courts took over his properties and sold them off.

The official, court-sanctioned story of Hellarity is that Pradeep Pal, the owner of a Berkeley garage, has been suing named defendants of Hellarity since March 2005 for quiet title, court acknowledgment of his sole ownership of the property, and ejectment of residents.

Pal bought the house in late 2004 at auction by outbidding a group that put money together to buy Hellarity and keep it a cooperative, which it had been for nearly ten years prior. Residents brought protests signs and chants to the auctions, warning everyone who bid what they were threatening to destroy, and successfully got the auctions postponed twice, but in the end the courts, with their “procedural biases” that amount to unapologetic discrimination in favor of the socio-economically powerful and well-connected, allowed Pal to turn in his down payment over a month late instead of disqualifying his bid when it became clear he didn’t even have the money.

The house was united in protest against the bankruptcy court’s attempts to sell the house at auction without considering the rights of the people who lived there. There was a constant feeling that the house was under siege after an incident involving real estate agent, who was barred entrance when he came to show the house to a prospective buyer. He forced his way onto the property and assaulted a housemember, then left, vowing to find someone to buy the house and “make sure you get kicked out.”

Hellarity’s case survived a day in court when Pal failed to appear at the hearing on February 28, 2008 and was denied a civilly uncontested claim to the house. The victory however was followed by someone downstairs discovering a fire upstairs at 3:30 in the morning. Residents started to fight the blaze while the fire department was called, they came with hoses and chainsaws to bust open the doors, walls, and floors.

When the immediate crises was over, remnants of two earlier fires were found. One, under the sink in the bathroom, had melted the flush bucket, still full of water, which had extinguished the fire and dripped through the ceiling downstairs. The other was discovered in a bedroom locked with a padlock. There was a charred broom inside, burnt matches on the floor, and a gas can outside on the lawn. All clear signs of arson.

In the wake of the fire, there may be increased beat cop “awareness” of the existence of Hellarity, and the fact that it is a condemned building, so being seen on the premises is risky. There is reason to fear reprisal from legal authorities who do not appreciate the subtle distinctions between Hellarity and a squat, or the completely unsubtle distinction between people with radical ideas and people who endorse violence and the reckless endangerment of human lives. The cops were cooperative in investigating the possible arson until one such cop saw Hellarity referred to online as a squat and thus had a change of heart. But as ever there is still a collective community struggling to make Hellarity habitable, beautiful and free and clear of legal entanglements.

To this day Sand harbors a special resentment for the residents of Hellarity. Nevertheless, some of Sand’s vision was adopted. People cooked and shared a meal on Tuesday nights and kept the kitchen vegetarian. There has never been a TV in the common areas. There has frequently been a vegetable garden in the back. Hellarity has provided badly-needed greening in the midst of urban decay and personal sanctuary for people with no place else to go, but from the start Hellarity had some particularities that made it less than the stuff of Utopia.

Of the social experiment that was living in the Hellarity House, one long-term resident commented that, “It was inspiring to see that people could exist outside of the capitalist system, because people weren’t paying rent and didn’t own the property and there was an open door where people could show up. On the other hand it was very disillusioning to see people not able to agree to anything, and to see just how parasitic people could be.”

But in the meantime, a flourishing community had developed around the opportunity he was affording people — albeit not the community he had quite envisioned.

Formulating the guest policy was the first of many important learning experiences for the collective. “We made mistakes in the beginning — by assuming everyone would have vegan-friendly skills, were not going to smoke crack in the living room, were going to be quiet after midnight, and were not going to be listening to gangsta rap that says bitch every third word in the common areas,” remembers one former resident. “But that gave me an appreciation for process more than just the end results of things — sometimes things come from process that will have an effect maybe a year down the line — including making mistakes and having to correct them.”

Eventually the house evolved into a community space, a space for forming alliances, working on collaborative projects, and sharing skills. The collective transformed what was zoned to be a private home into a commons.

Almost structurally there was a tension between those living upstairs and those living downstairs, as if the slapdash roof-raising the owner before Sand perpetrated without a permit before he sold it had created two different houses hopelessly entangled in the fact that they had to share a shower, since the only shower was downstairs, and share a stove, since the bottom-story addition project had punctured the gas lines upstairs and gotten them shut off. The guests mostly stayed downstairs, and the upstairs residents could never shake the desire to cloister themselves away from that madness.

But process, according to Nightshade, might be the most positive lesson he has taken away from that tension, too. He remembers when Gnome built a room in the upstairs common space that closed it off from the rest of the house, prompting an epic eight hour meeting at which housemates shared the stories of where they had been before they came to Hellarity House in order to explore more deeply what their underlying assumptions were about the house.

Later, the house faced a more divisive challenge — how to respond to the lawsuit being filed by Pal to get them evicted. There was the argument, both ideological and practical, for not participating in government processes in which your cause seems predetermined to lose. On the other hand, it is only because of the efforts of those who took on the legal fight that Hellarity still has a chance of surviving today.

For the last three years plaintiffs and defendants at Hellarity have been exchanging paperwork. Court documents from the discovery process, all available online, document some extremely brilliant DIY legal work that prevented the suit from succeeding on the grounds of procedural default – e.g. because the defendants failed to file paperwork properly – and the case goes on. The next legal hearing for the suit against Hellarity is set for [May 28]. Come if you want, or if you or someone you know is facing eviction or foreclosure, take all you can from what has ensued at Hellarity and start a *résistance* movement all your own.

Not Our City Anymore

By Longshanks

1967: If you're going to San Francisco, be sure to wear some flowers in your hair.

2015: If you're coming to San Francisco, be sure to bring some dollars for your fare.

Six unforgettable and unforgivable years ago I moved to San Francisco, hoping to flourish in a libertine paradise of limitless self-expression, and ran straight into a wall of disappointment. My naive hopes of hedonistic revelry in a sort of mirror universe where queers ruled and everyone got along were violently shattered. What I found were the glimmering fragments of a fallen utopia usurped by greedy opportunists and conservative reformers, embroiled in a full-scale class and culture war, as various groups of people sharply divided fought for limited resources in a compact space and the cost of rent was outrageous... and rising. I lost my job, house, and direction in life completely, then experienced a radical rebirth, became a squatter and fell in love with life outside the capitalism box, and arrived at a "free living" philosophy that I believe will influence the rest of my life.

Standing presently at a crossroads in my life, I'd like to record my impressions of the City's disturbing transformation, touch on ways I've felt degraded and subhuman due to being homeless, and highlight the consciousness-raising adventures I've had here with shout outs to some people and places with whom I feel connected as well as the profound liberation that grew out of my experience of having no fixed home. I'm permanently changed and a little shellshocked by all that's happened, excited but uncertain about the future, for me and for SF, which is, as Candace Roberts sings in her great new music video that you should definitely find on YouTube (<http://youtu.be/-yoRVJzQAe0>), "Not my City anymore."

During my first two years in the Bay Area I was violently mugged and assaulted in Fruitvale, got a good job with a global hospitality company but then lost it due to PTSD resulting from the Fruitvale incident, shared a house in the Richmond (my first in SF) with a creepy and perverted older man who terrorized me when I couldn't make rent, escaped that nightmare to an SRO, worked for the 2010 Census, learned a lot about SF history, moved into a house atop Mt. Davidson (highest elevation in the City) where one of my housemates was a maniacal con artist living under a false identity who tricked me into giving him money, wrote for SF's main LGBT paper the Bay Area Reporter (now a pale conservative shadow of its radical roots), got a job as a clothing checker at a club called Blow Buddies which had nothing to do with blow dryers, then moved into a flat on Folsom Street with a British witch dominatrix thinking I'd finally found my "Tales of the City" niche, only to lose my job and realize I couldn't make rent. I was burned out by stress and the fruitless quest for employment, which required me to be passionate about brands and advertising (yawn), knowledgeable about technologies I couldn't afford, or willing to go the route of human exploitation. I checked "none of the above," and fell into the abyss.

SF's longrunning and recently revamped Street Sheet asserts that "no one chooses to be homeless" and that "most homeless people in SF were residents before they became homeless." Both are true in my case. I spent the first month in a parking lot. If I didn't leave by 7am, a parking lot worker would wake me up and hustle me out. Still, I was luckier than the people camped out on the sidewalk in front of the lot. City workers came by every morning at 5am and gave them five minutes to clear themselves and all their stuff off the sidewalk or get sprayed with cold water.

Policies like this have earned SF a reputation as, to quote a Food Not Bombs organizer, “one of the nastiest cities toward homeless people.”

Eventually I left the parking lot, wandered the hills and valleys awhile in grim solitude, and started using speed as a way to stay up all night. I got enough to eat thanks to food stamps and the soup kitchens, and only occasionally resorted to stealing to make ends meet, and only from large corporations. (Such as Goodwill, which has grown profitable by taking things freely donated and marketing them at steadily rising rates; I think we should bypass Goodwill completely and set up a free market to give the stuff directly to poor people.)

Occasionally, I showered at the multi-service center in SoMa, but hated the prison-like feel of the place and its depressed and depressing security guards, and my hygiene took an unavoidable plunge. I rented a storage space for my clothes and other valuables, only to lose it and everything I owned later on.

Whether it was courage that drove me, or apathy that made me not care, I defied the police and sensational news stories I’d read about missing people and burned corpses and set out to explore all the parks, devoting the most time to Golden Gate Park of course, bewildered by the sheer size and complexity of that labyrinth, which completed my sense of having entered another world... one that the tourists will never know.

The parks were closed at night, and police were known to raid Golden Gate Park with dogs in the pre-dawn hours (another barbaric policy), but in daytime I could sleep there with less fear of harassment; I became nocturnal, further isolating me from the mainstream. All over I found little forts and hiding places, remnants of camps left by others, and way too much litter. I grew up in national parks and got in the habit of picking up after myself outdoors, no excuses. Perhaps if we all did so, there would be less opposition to drifters crashing in public spaces.

That being said, SCREW the no camping rule, in SF or anywhere else. If a person has no other option, they can spend the night in any park or public space where they feel safe, with or without a tent, end of story. Laws or ordinances to the contrary are inhumane and devoid of compassion, and I do not recognize them. Your inconvenience at having to look at homeless people while you walk your dog in the morning takes a back seat to other people’s basic need for sleep and shelter.

One man let his dog mock-attack me in my tent early in the morning, startling me awake.

Another time I woke early to a woman’s voice calling, “WAKE UP, it’s time to move on, the police have been called!” When I zipped open my tent to ask her why she felt the need to call the police about someone sleeping, she held up the bag of dog shit in her hand and replied, “I’m cleaning up.”

And one afternoon as I was taking a nap on the Civic Center lawn, a surly police officer kicked my foot to wake me up, told me I was too close to the playground, and when I reacted angrily, he gave me a ticket with a court date.

What is wrong with these people? Frankly, I don’t see how parks that are designated public can be closed anyway, it seems like a lawsuit needs to happen at some level to challenge that. Recent attempts to get a “homeless bill of rights” passed are on the right track, but have failed so far in SF and Sacramento. I guess the state’s homeless people lobby doesn’t have deep enough pockets.

Early on I made a friend named Alix who influenced my course, a visionary with a DIY art space called the Big Gay Warehouse, located in gentrification-resistant Bayview. Once I discussed with Alix my surprise at how quickly I’d adapted to this animalesque life of sleeping outside and foraging by night, and how I related more to raccoons than humans at times.

“This should feel strange, since it’s so different from how I was living just two months ago, but for some reason it doesn’t.”

She replied that a lot of people were feeling the same call back to nature, that the future for people like us might be to leave the city to the drones and the corporations and return to the land, like the Radical Faeries at their sanctuary in Wolf Creek, Oregon.

In the short term, she recommended I hook up with Occupy Wall Street, who had just set up camp in a plaza by the waterfront and were making quite a scene.

After the night it rained and I woke up literally lying in a puddle of cold water, I decided to ditch the park and follow up on Alix's lead.

And that's when everything changed.

Many people shit on Occupy later, and veteran activists were occasionally scornful of the "johnny come-latelies" and weekend warriors who emerged from the woodwork with excellent intentions but few clues. But Occupy for me was the gateway to a liberation I had not previously known to be possible, the death of my former self as a round peg in the square wheel of capitalism and the portal to a new life that I have come to view as infinitely more satisfying. How I miss – well, sort of – the golden calamities of the Occupy SF tent camp (occurring nearly nightly), with its police confrontations, clamoring discordians stirring shit up in drunk and hungry rage, and Department of Public Health inspection media storms! It was so nice of DPH to suddenly care about us.

More importantly, through Occupy I hooked up with Homes Not Jails, which became my surrogate squatter family for the next two years (2011 to 2013.) We fought a lot and had personality conflicts, and public drama-filled meetings that ran way too long, and I drifted away from the group eventually into a private escape universe of trauma recovery. When I finally emerged from that solipsism bubble, it seemed everyone had dispersed, so I never got a chance to say it really, but I loved those HNJ kids. When we descended at night on the city like a squad of housing ninjas going about our extralegal but wonderful work, all the drama flew out of the window and we were united. Every time we cracked a new house, I felt like I was 18 years old again, with a whole life of infinite possibility before me.

At first, I used the newfound total freedom of homelessness for self-indulgent reasons. I gravitated away from the HNJ model of organized public actions toward a solitary program of sleeping occasionally in public parks, stairwells, and other weird vacant empty spaces I find during my catlike prowlabouts through the City. But gradually I developed a sense of social responsibility and a wish to re-engage the real world. The resistance movement is under attack, but my recent experiences of volunteering at the Tenants Union and with the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (antievictionmappingproject.net) have convinced me the movement is not dead, but merely changing, as it must in the face of new challenges.

The old SF is shrinking but can still be found in some great places, such as Diamond Dave's radio show at Mutiny Radio (pcrcollective.org, 2781 21st St @ Florida) every Friday 3p to 6p; Eviction Free SF, which holds public meetings every Wednesday 6pm at the Redstone Building (2926 16th St @ Capp in the Mission); and VolxKuche, a veggie/vegan "people's kitchen" that convenes on the 2nd and 4th Fridays of each month at the Episcopal Church of St. John the Evangelist, 110 Julian Ave @ 15th St in the still-radical inner Mission.

Join the movement and protest the proposed installation of a 350-unit luxury condo building at 16th and Mission, and help Station 40 (3030B 16th St) fight its unlawful detainer (a press conference was about to take place just as this article went to press), so Food Not Bombs can continue to prepare and serve food there. Don't let Mission Street become Valencia Street Part II: the Extremely Gentrified Sequel.

As for myself, SF has changed me in some ways that will surely be lasting. Life is exciting when you don't know where you're going to sleep tonight. If severe instability is the price to pay for something approaching true autonomy, for now, I will pay it. I would so much rather live life on my own terms, investing my time and energy in meaningful work and in communities I care about, than spend every morning waiting for a bus that's too crowded to take me somewhere I don't want to go.

Break off the boards build our dreams

By Daddy LongShanks

By the time Nosebleed squat started, I'd been houseless for almost two years and considered myself something of a pro-squatter. The upside of squatting is zero dollars rent and total freedom to spend your days as you please, free of indentured servitude to the corporate ogre; the downside is zero stability, frequent unplanned moves and occasional loss of possessions up to and including all of them. The average life-span of a squat in San Francisco, according to my Homes Not Jails cohorts, is three weeks; my own experience more or less confirms that statistic. Moving more than once a month adds up to plenty of stress on its own, but squatters have more to deal with: periodic confrontations with angry property owners, and police, who invariably take the gentry's side against their ragtag, would-be disseisors.

The first night I stayed there, we agreed to set the roster at five, not to accept any more members (other than overnight guests), and set some loose house rules. (They can only be loose in a household of anarchist cat people.) After lone-wolfing it for so long, I was happy to be part of a group again, building a house with others outside the capitalism box. Safety in numbers, the synergy of human interactions, personality dynamics I'd missed (a little). We all had our failings and foibles and eccentricities, but no one was judging, or hiding in shame. We were all fuck-ups of one kind or another and that was okay. It was some kind of wonderful.

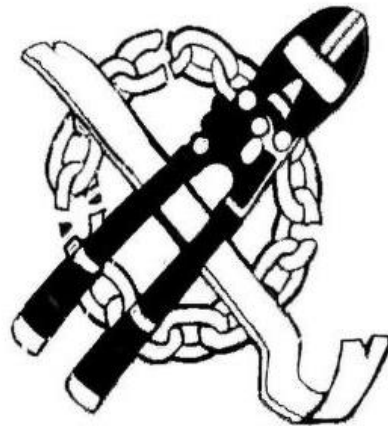
We discussed intelligence gathered so far on the property, over dinner and drinks in the kitchen. From the street, Nosebleed wasn't much to look at, but inside the house was full of retro charm. What it lacked in size it made up with a cozy, finished basement and a fenced backyard with garden. It was an inheritance property. The owners appeared to live in the East Bay. They had major renovations planned that would involve extensive construction, as evidenced by blueprints and other Department of Building Inspection documents we'd intercepted. This dampened any hopes for a long-term tenancy, though not completely: we'd all seen enough construction projects stall for long periods, sometimes indefinitely, for reasons one could only guess: owner moves or sells the property, dies, runs out of money; plans delayed or derailed by permits, Planning Department bureaucracy, complaints from other homeowners, etc. Though hope was further eroded by the fact that The Great Recession was itself receding by this point (early 2013), and construction was starting to pick up again all over the place.

Water and power, at minimum, are considered necessary by self-respecting squatters for decent indoor living. In this respect, Nosebleed was a peach, boasting not only these baseline amenities but also a gas stove and furnace, working washer and dryer, and even hot running water — a rare luxury indeed! That first night, I washed a load of clothes and went to bed earlier than the others, setting up my tent in the basement. Indoor camping! I would have camped outside, but we wanted to maintain a low profile.

To access the basement, one had to go outside. When I did so, I noticed that our clamoring voices were clearly audible to the next-door neighbors, who struck me as the sort of married couple who wake

PAY NO MORE

IT'S VACANT, TAKE IT!



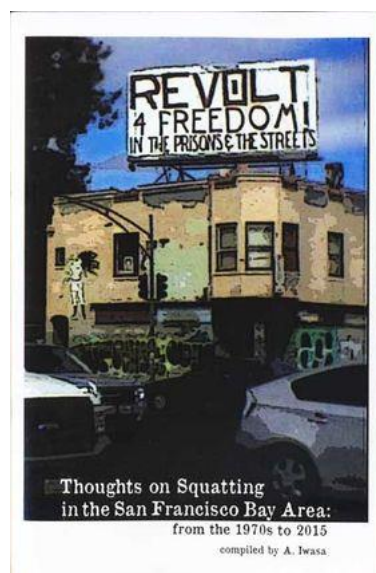
A HOMES NOT JAILS SQUATTING ZINE
3RD EDITION FALL 2013

up early and pack their kids off to school before leaving for work themselves. At that very moment, I could hear talking, loud as day, about strategies for dealing with cops if they showed up, and how we should fabricate and memorize a story so as not to be taken off guard or caught in a lie if owners or others came calling.

I brought this up the next night, my second in the house. Again we stood in the kitchen eating dinner, by dint of no furniture so far. “You guys, we’ve gotta talk quieter,” I exhorted them. The response seemed to be a collective shrug. Not wanting to come off as a fussbudget, I didn’t press the issue. After dinner, I took a hot shower, something I’d anticipated with relish all day. When I emerged a half hour later, steamy and well-scrubbed, I was in congenial spirits, starting to really look forward to this little house adventure and already feeling fondness for my surrogate squatter family. Wicked sugarplums were dancing in my head, of how cool and fun this house could be. Maybe we would make it so cool that the owners, when they got wind of our unauthorized tenancy, wouldn’t even mind! The permission squat of my dreams come true!

But the next day the squat blew up. The owner showed up, found one of us and threatened to call the police. He ran off with a few of his belongings and the rest of us lost everything we had left in the house. We understood. I think we’d all been through our share of squat busts by that point. Nonetheless, I was disappointed. It was a nice house, and we were a fun group. It was too bad the experiment never got to play out. That night, I walked by the house and saw it boarded up, and looked over the fence into the dark, desolate garden we’d hoped to cultivate. That squat, lasting only two days, came to symbolize for me the wasted potential and brusquely shattered daydreams of those attempting to build a better world at this early and subliminal stage of human enlightenment.

When I became homeless and hit the street for the first time in my adult life in San Francisco in mid-2011, I had no conception of how to live outside the prescribed course of mainstream capitalist society, and thought my life was ending. Thanks to Occupy SF, Homes Not Jails, and Noisebridge (as it was then), I discovered another life outside the mainstream that offered total freedom at the heavy cost of constant struggle, insecurity and instability. Unfortunately, I became addicted to crystal meth, which took me away from the larger activist community I’d begun to be involved with. Eventually, after brushes with the law and worsening circumstances, I emerged with a heightened spiritual sense and consciousness level — there is something to be said for the view that suffering leads to enlightenment, I’m afraid! I was determined to plug back into the grassroots communities and make up for lost time as best I could. I still sleep in abandoned houses and explore, but now I don’t need heavy drugs to do so.



Further Reading: *It's Vacant, Take It! A Homes Not Jails Squatting Zine*, Sprout Distro. *Black Eye: pathogenic and perverse*, Little Black Cart. *Scam: The First Four Issues and On the Lower Frequencies: A Secret History of the City* by Erica Dawn Lyle, Microcosm Publishing.

For those interested in reading more about how squatting was at least historically part of the genocidal settler colonial project, please read *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment* by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, City Lights Open Media.

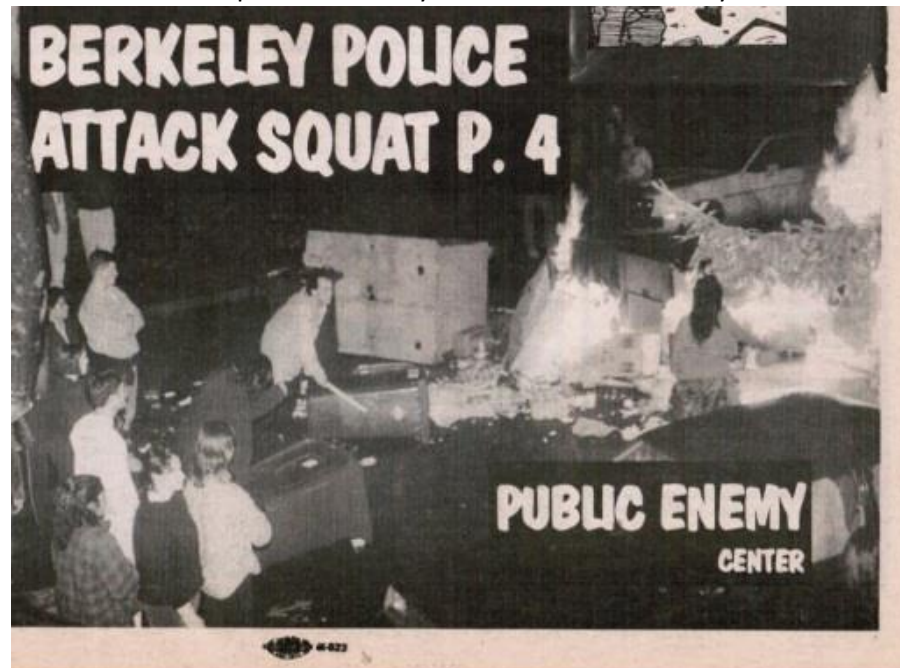
On Barrington Hall: *Gimme Something Better: The Profound, Progressive, and Occasionally Pointless History of Bay Area Punk from Dead Kennedys to Green Day*, quirkyberkeley.com, and even though I've heard Beverly Potter labeled An Enemy of the People, please at least check out animalhouseonacid.com. If no one else can be bothered to get all the old *Love and Rage* material organized in an accessible way, and if the Slingshot Collective refuses to tell its own story, this is what we're left with.

Special thanks to: East Bay HnJ, other Slingshot shit workers, Food Not Bombs especially East Bay and Station 40, the other Saganites, the Nomads, LBC, Earth First! Humboldt, Opal Haus, Jank House, Not A Compound, PM Press, Stacey Wakefield, and the libraries at Humboldt State University and in downtown Olympia.

Critical acclaim for *Thoughts on Squatting in the San Francisco Bay Area*:

Thoughts on Squatting... is an inspiring first step for this project. A. Iwasa not only compiled a lot of thoughts but even more questions on squatting.

In his introduction he lets us participate in his Travels and introduces us to a lot of different squats, collective and co-op houses mainly in the San Francisco Bay Area and some other places. He also draws



our attention to two books: *An Indigenous People's History of the United States* by Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz and *Nine-Tenths of the Law: Property and Resistance* by Hannah Dobbz.

He shares a lot of connecting thoughts, experiences and observations.

The following two articles in this zine are a starting point for the book project. --eoh, *Slingshot* #124: Summer 2017

