

HETEROTOPIC DEVELOPMENT : ADVERSE POSSESSION

"property is the greatest revolutionary force which exists..." Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

Vancouver Vacancy:

6.5% of Vancouver's residential units, outside the DT core, are vacant. 11% of the downtown core is vacant. That translates to 6,800 unoccupied units in the downtown of Vancouver. Meanwhile 1,200 people sleep on the streets every night, and 1 more person is evicted from low income housing every other day. By 2010, the number of homeless people is estimated to triple.

Squatting:

According to author Robert Neuwirth, there may be as many as one billion squatters globally, or about one of every seven people.² Most of those are in developing countries without strict property lines, war torn cities, displaced citizens or natural disaster survivors. By many still are in dense urban first world environments, centers of intense speculative real estate development, vacated industrial sites, buildings intentionally left to rot and be condemned. In many cases landlords disappear forever, defaulting on property taxes.

Much of my GP1 term has been spent researching squat culture in Europe and NYC. The laws regarding vacant, unused property in most Euro countries are very clear and fully exploited by resourceful individuals. Techniques are honed through experiences across the planet; some elements are universal, like how to pick locks or climb safely into windows, how to repair buildings or create ad hoc heaters, while many are regional like what kind of prejudices police will have, which type of police officers will be more friendly, the specific requirements of legal squats are, if there are legal squats, on and on. This information is distributed through all types of networking media. Social Centers post locations of squatted and squat-ready buildings, places to meet people with construction, language or legal experience, host meetings and support legal (as well as physical) defenses, and also in the on-line realms of Internet websites that function as portals to Social Centers, news and media archives, activist libraries, discussion forums, pleas for attention, causes and more. Thousands of zines are made and distributed at Social Centers either for free or purchase. Handbooks are printed describing tactics, legal rights, by-law regulations, and safety concerns, lawyer contact information. Symbols are painted, carved and posted around cities and indicate buildings that are being squatted; some symbols are legal registration papers placed by police, some declare the rights of the squatters, while the international sign for squatting is spray-painted on doors, window curtains or even rooftops.

Social Centres:

Distinguished from Community centers in the particular relationship social centers have toward the state and governmental institutions. While "community center" is a term used to describe any center of "public" activity, occasionally sanctioned by the state or private interests such as a corporation, social centers are characterized by their quasi-legal and sometimes illegal existence, their direct subsistence on the community that supports it and their political vision vis-a-vis the state.

Rotterdam HANG 4- social center

When you enter the Hang the first thing you see is a paper with the following text:

Attention:

No Dogs

No Meat

No Graffiti/Tagging/Stickers

No Hard Drugs or Liquor (Vodka, Whiskey etc.)

No Racist, Sexist, Homophobic behavior, symbols or talk.

No Annoying Drunk behavior

No Physical or Verbal aggression

If you don't agree with this, don't come in !!!

The Hang was a large squat (about 500 square meters) right in the commercial center of Rotterdam. It is located 2 minutes walking from the Blaak marketplace. Hang 4 is the address.

It was squatted on August 2nd, 2004 by the KSU with the help of many people for some students. The initial squatting was very tough since the police were very difficult and had to be talked out of eviction. Luckily it worked out, albeit just. Once again knowledge, preparation, dedication and not giving in made all the difference.

The students and their friends had many plans for the place. After some time however it became very likely there would be a court case. The pressure of having to work on their graduation/thesis combined with the pressure of having to face a legal proceeding made them decide to leave. They had no experience with legal issues nor the time and means needed in order to stand much of a chance in court.

A member of the KSU heard about all this. It seemed like a logical and understandable decision but a waste to give up the squat without a fight. The KSU person then decided to resquat (19-04-2004) the place right after the students left. This way he could go to court and hopefully help out other people with the space. A lot of people helped with both the initial and second squatting.



The Social center served weekly volunteer run events and services.

cheap vegan dinners Cheap vegan food, open every Tuesday from 17:00 to 22:00. The food is usually done at 19:00 and is served until it runs out. It costs about E 2.50 for a simple meal. Juice and Coke is very cheap. The eetcafe ALWAYS needs people to volunteer (cooking/cleaning).

zine store Here you can buy books, fanzines, buttons, patches etc. The topics are diverse but include Anarchism, Squatting, Ecology, Activism, Philosophy and Veganism. The store is only open when the Hangry' is open.

give away shop This is a corner where money is worth nothing, all the items in this corner are given away/are free for anyone who need them. Here you are both customer and store owner since the weggeefwinkel store can only exist if people take and bring items...

semi-permanent art gallery

karate/self defense lessons

Tuesday, 17:30 – 19:00

Thursday, 12:00 - 13:30

All Karate by female 2nd dan Black Belt Teacher

Noteable Social Centers in New York City:

In 2002, eleven squats out of the twelve remaining on the Lower East Side signed a deal with the city council brokered by the Urban Homesteading Assistance Board in which they bought the buildings for \$1 and agreed to undertake essential renovation work. One of the squats is C-Squat another is the social centre ABC No Rio, which was founded in 1980. Under the terms of the homesteading agreement made in 2002, the Urban Homesteading Assistance Board provides a loan for essential renovations, which the squatters perform as much as possible themselves to reduce costs. When the work is finished, the residents own the buildings as limited equity co-operatives. They will pay for maintenance.

C-Squat- When it was first squatted, the building was falling apart and central joists had to be replaced. These were sourced second-hand and as cheaply as possible. All the repairs were performed by the squatters.

ABC No Reo- a social center located at 156 Rivington street in New York City's Lower East Side that was founded in 1980. It features a gallery space, a zine library, a darkroom, a silk-screening studio, and public computer lab. In addition, ABC No Rio plays host to a number of radical projects in New York City, including weekly Hardcore punk matinees and the NYC Food Not Bombs collective. ABC No Rio seeks to be a community center for the Lower East Side, sponsoring projects and benefits for the community, as well as a center of radical activism in New York City, promoting "Do it yourself volunteerism, art and activism, without giving-in or selling-out to corporate sponsors."

Dos Blockos - The building had been empty for twelve years and was stripped of wires and pipes. The squatters renovated the derelict six storey building themselves, funding the venture in part by renting it out as a photography location for \$500 a day.

Squat Restaurants in Amsterdam:

Squat restaurants are inexpensive (often a 3 course meal is around 5 euros), most serve beer and wine, and are run by volunteers. There is no menu. The diner eats what is brought to the table. This keeps the operating costs low, and is also low stress...no more poring over expansive menus. The cooks fix what they know, to the diners benefit. The menus generally consist of soup, bread, salad/or side dish, entrée, and a dessert (which costs extra). It's vegetarian. Whether this is your chosen lifestyle or not, it's healthy. Asian salads pairing dark sesame seed oil with lo mein, as well as pasta with wild mushrooms and mozzarella, along with a hearty lentil soup. Rounding off all meals are homemade bread and the optional dessert.

Meals are served on certain nights only. It's possible to eat at a squat restaurant every night of the week, but not necessarily the restaurant you want on the night you want. If you wait until 6:00 at night to figure out where you want to eat, more than likely, you'll be out of luck.

Gardening-

Shared Backyards is an on-line network that couples people with extra, unused space, with those looking for space to grow gardens in the city. The network utilizes maps and forums to identify where the plots are and where the plots are wanted. Often the land owner asks for a few grown items in exchange.

Guerrilla Gardening is an urban practice of finding unused spaces in the city to grow gardens. This might include traffic circles or median, landscape around condo towers, old train tracks, pretty much anywhere that can sustain functional plant growing. Again there are networks that disseminate tactics, education and good locations. The networking manifests in weekly meet-ups at Rhizome Cafe (among other places, I only mention Rhizome to reference *Thousand Plateaus*) as well as Internet sites that resemble the pop social networking site like Facebook and Myspace. In other words, people are using this type of land appropriation not only to produce some percent of their food, but in a way that builds community. A revolutionary act packaged in popular culture.

Henrando DeSoto- the poor man's capitalist

An economist that formalized black markets and non-legal property ownership. The first step was to title poor squatters in places where there could be no conflicting claims- public land. His theories have been put to practice in many of the worlds poorest slums and developing countries, such as Haiti.

"...because these assets are not "paperized" in the formal documents and legal structures common in the West, they can't function productively as capital. People can't use their homes as collateral for loans to expand businesses, for example. They can't trade things beyond the small circle where they're known and trusted."

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

First self proclaimed anarchist theorist. Proudhon believed that the common conception of property conflated two distinct components which, once identified, demonstrated the difference between property used to further tyranny and property used to protect liberty. He argued that the result of an individual's labor which is currently occupied or used is a legitimate form of property. Thus, he opposed unused land being regarded as property, believing that land can only be rightfully possessed by use or occupation (which he called "possession").

"The liberty and security of the rich do not suffer from the liberty and security of the poor; far from that, they mutually strengthen and sustain each other. The rich man's right of property, on the contrary, has to be continually defended against the poor man's desire for property." He further argued that the right of property contradicted these other rights: "Then if we are associated for the sake of liberty, equality, and security, we are not associated for the sake of property; then if property is a *natural* right, this natural right is not *social*, but *anti-social*. Property and society are utterly irreconcilable institutions."

Into GP2:

I am interested in how the surrealists and situationist internationalists fracture the idea of the city, common regulation and the everyday. I am interested in Foucault's idea of heterotopic sites which "are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted."

Imagine a home spread across the city. A kitchen at the north end, the bedrooms to the south, a living room in the middle, gardens to the left and right. Toilets every few blocks. Showers and couches spread all across the city. As surreal, unreal as that seems, its one way of talking about people without houses.

Imagine all of the unused, discarded, in reserve, spaces of our city being fed into another simultaneous culture. One that need not be judged as adject or desperate but rather passionately defended by socially conscious, idealistic, resourceful, highly organized and networked groups of scavengers, artists, recyclers, cooks, electricians, migrant workers, students, politicians...

My objective is not infinite density, I am not looking to fill in every crack in the sidewalk. I want to address some problems in our current society of commodity, speculative real estate and land use. I am interested in the strategies for forming alternative, heterotopic networks within that framework.

My GP2 will focus on opportunistic, ideological re-readings and alterations of the texts that formulate our city. Those texts include bylaws and commodity brokering. Squatting is in some ways a remapping few of presumptions about property value, exchange, human rights versus commercial rights, the social contract, community networking rather than neighborhood gentrification.

I see two ways my project can go. Either I identify a typological condition in Vancouver to exploit, ie empty Coal Harbor condos, or city owned properties typically converted to heavily subsidized SRO's (or sold to developers ala Woodwards). Or I find a series of discreet situations and design appropriations. The first approach would likely be a rhetorical argument on contemporary real estate in Vancouver. The second would be a series of techniques culminating in an alternative mode of operating within/without the normative structures. I realize I am supposed to put forth one of these right now as my project, but realistically I will continue working on this project through the summer in one way or another and I'll be at a somewhat different place come September.

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