

HOUSE  
MAGIC

7

Spring 2016



# Open the Borders: “Ferries Not Frontex!”

The cover story of *House Magic #7* is an account of the memorial given Adam Purple, a renowned New York City eco-activist best known for a spectacular earthwork he built on squatted land on the Lower East Side. The Garden of Eden was carelessly destroyed by the city government, an act that galvanized a militant community garden movement. After the memorial, dark facts came to light about Purple's past, staining the fundamentalist eco-warrior's green name. As this is written, another important publication casts light on the movement around him in the 1980s. Finally, this is what matters in any hero's story — the collectivity that sustains their ideals and recalls their example. Whatever he did before he became Purple, Adam was an exemplary squatter: brilliant, dogmatic, and inspiring.

Other major texts in this issue tell of the rich practice and unknown lore of squatting in Rome, and the uses of squatting for art exhibitions in London. Conferences are reported, cultural experiments explained, and another inspiring figure, John Trudell, is eulogized as well.

What this issue of *House Magic* does not include is any account of the historic and pitiable exodus of refugees into Europe. The squatting movement has always been on the frontline of calls and actions for a world without borders. This topic will be addressed in a forthcoming book with SqEK members, *Migrations, Squatting and Radical Autonomy*.

Squatters have also always been resolutely anti-fascist. With today's resurgent right, activists have plenty of battles to fight.

*House Magic* missed appearing last year. Instead we made two books during 2015: my own *Occupation Culture: Art and Squatting in the City from Below*, and *Making Room: Cultural Production in Occupied Spaces*, an anthology of texts co-edited with Alan Smart. Both books are available online as free downloads.

Gratitude and congratulations to Other Forms collaborator Jack Henrie Fisher for the spectacular design; and major props to Sam Gould for undertaking the printing.

For a future of ever-expanding direct action citizenship!, and the prominent proliferation of its inspiring stories...



**ADAM  
PURPLE, GRAND-  
FATHER OF  
SUSTAINABLE  
URBANISM AND  
THE GREEN-  
ING OF NEW  
YORK CITY**

Your editor was in town during the memorial for Adam Purple, a hippie artist, philosopher, activist and squatter famous for his Garden of Eden, built on vacant city-owned land in the 1970s and '80s. The activist and author Benjamin Heim Shepard was MCing the event, held in La Plaza Cultural Community Garden. La Plaza itself was one of the first projects of the CHARAS group of activists, who occupied the corner lot in the late 1970s. While their center on the same street, called El Bohio was evicted, the garden of La Plaza remains. The following text is excerpted from Shepard's blog, "Play and Ideas."

Benjamin Heim Shepard

**Best known  
for his incredible  
Garden of Eden, an**

**“eARTh-  
WORK”  
which he  
began  
creating in  
1975 in a  
vacant,  
garbage-  
filled lot  
between  
Forsyth  
and**

## **Eldridge Streets,**

Adam Purple, born David Wilkie in 1930 in Missouri, was a white-bearded and purple-clad fixture of the Lower East Side of Manhattan and Williamsburg, Brooklyn. His Garden of Eden, destroyed in 1986, covered 15,000 square feet with growing beds planted in Taoist, concentric circles featuring a staggering variety of vegetables and 45 trees. It was so luminous, that according to urban legend it was seen by NASA from outer space.

I never saw it. But my neighbor Norman Green did. And he wrote about it in *New York* magazine (“The Purple People,” 27 August 1979). Some time ago, we talked about the old article sitting out on a stoop here in Brooklyn. So I rode my bike up to meet Mr Purple, then residing in a closet in the Brooklyn space of the Times Up! radical bicycle space. I’d spent countless nights there through the years, hanging out, organizing, planning, conspiring, picking up supplies for our own garden down the street. But I never saw Purple. At Norman’s son’s Bar Mitzvah, I met Harvey Wang, who took those majestic photos of Purple and the Garden of Eden.

I finally met Adam Purple in 2012 at the opening of the Museum of Reclaimed Urban Space, located in the storefront of C Squat. During those events, Adam Purple gave a very funny rant about gardening and deep ecology with a Lenny Bruce twist. “Everybody shits,” he explained. “The question is where you shit.” There is a law of return. Take food out of the ground and put it back. Purple told a story explaining that for years, once a week, he would take a bowel movement and bury it in his garden. “No one ever bothered me about that. They were following the squatters bill of rights: LEAVE MY SHIT ALONE!” The room filled with laughter. It was not the only laugh elicited from a man who suggested we read books by looking



**Not an Alternative group, for the “Occupied Real Estate” show at Exit Art, 2012**

“It was what was called an earth work or land art. By definition, it’s subversive because the rich cannot buy it and put it away in a museum. It’s also subversive because it goes in circles, which are anathema to the grid system.

“That’s enough for today. I’ll interview more if we can keep the interview to shit...”

The next week, Purple talked about the ways gardens and libraries are really alike. They both open up ideas and secrets. He asked that I go to the New York public library and find one of his books. Come back when you find the book, he told me. I never found the book. But the connection between the flowering of ideas, from the trees, the ground,

at what is left out.

Two years later, I caught up with Adam Purple at the Brooklyn space of Times Up!. There he was, the man often credited with starting the New York City community gardening movement, dressed simply in a pair of shorts, cleaning out a beer can for recycling. I introduced myself, asking if he had a minute to talk. He said he was busy. A minute later he paused, asking me if I had ever taken my own bowel movement and buried it and watched bugs take it over.

Sure, I told him.

“Good. It’s the law of return,” explained Purple. “You take something from the land, you’d better put something back. It’s a law that you dare not break. Any civilization which compulsively shits in its drinking water will not survive. Some people freak out when I ask them that,” he said. “The City certainly freaked out when they heard that I buried one there once a week. I’m not stupid enough to ride my bike up to Central Park and back, three miles to get horse shit every day and not bury my own.”

This was all part of the efforts to create the wondrous Garden of Eden, which spanned five city blocks in the Lower East Side until it was bulldozed on January 8, 1986.



**“Making Room” exhibition at ABC No Rio, 2015**

the books, the ideas, the dialectic between nature and civilization, our head and the body, intellect and feeling, that always stuck with me.

I loved talking with friends about Purple. The photographer Harvey Wang recognized the importance of Purple's art and documented it for decades. Wang recalled those books and the days in the garden. He also heard about Purple's passing. I had heard from the Times Up! grapevine that he was gone as we rode to a Public Space Party meeting.

"Some sad news... Adam Purple died yesterday; a heart attack while biking across the Williamsburg Bridge. It's hard to imagine NYC without Adam. Most recently, he was working and living at Time's Up Brooklyn, 99 South 6th Street, where there's already a sidewalk memorial."

It doesn't make me sad to think of him gone, said one of the bike mechanics. I was just glad to know him, this legend. It was like seeing a ghost to run into him at Times Up! He was one of the great artists of New York, said another Times Up! volunteer. I remember seeing him when I was a kid in Central Park, recalled Catherine. I was like nine and there he was in his purple tied-died outfit, picking up horse manure. He was like a hundred then and that was 1979. And then I saw him at Times Up! years later.

Everyone had stories about Adam Purple. And we loved to tell them. His commitment to a sustainable lifestyle was unrelenting and



**Children in the garden of the 13th Street squats, NYC, 1990s. Photo by Robert Parker**

all-encompassing. The community garden that he created with his own hands was lush and grandiose. "The gates remained unlocked. It was truly a community garden," recalled Adam.

Today, stories about sustainable urbanism are everywhere. This is the idea that cities can be mutable works of art, as the Garden of Eden demonstrated. They can be places to slow down and just live. Today, as a new mayor plans to sell off gardens to make way for housing few can afford, the story of the Garden of Eden is worth recalling. This garden/ work of art, brought community resilience and care, green space and ideas. It was a place for water to seep back into the

earth, opening a model of cross-class contact, recycling and green community development. It should still be there. But its legacy lingers.

As Sarah Ferguson recalled in her "Brief History of Grassroots Gardening in NYC", "By the early 1990s, some 850 gardens had been established — more than 60 of them on the Lower East Side. Yet these plots were becoming increasingly threatened as the neighborhood gentrified, and the city revived long-standing development plans. Inspired by the destruction of Adam Purple's world-renowned Garden of Eden, in 1994 another Lower East Side woman named Felicia Young began hosting pageants to dramatize the plight of the area's green spaces. Every spring, throngs of glitter-and-gauze wrapped dancers, giant puppets, and



**City College architecture students show at Casa del Sol, squatted apartment building in the South Bronx, 2001**

mud-caked performers wind their way through the neighborhood's eclectic spaces, re-enacting the gardeners struggle to keep their land.

Today, that dance still continues, so does the struggle for the gardens. But we always remember Adam Purple. He reminds us that, cities are more than spaces for accumulation and over development. They can be places to conserve, reuse, and renew.

John Penley: "One of the things I remember about Adam Purple... is that he was recycling things in large quantities before most people had even thought about doing it or even called it recycling. He was a true pioneer in this respect. I remember that after he was evicted from his Forsyth Street building the word got around that there was a party there and people could come and take anything they wanted. I went and was amazed at all the different things he had in the building and it was separated into different rooms. There was a room packed with magazines, a room with bike and other spare parts, a room with bottles, plates, eating utensils and on and on. It was pretty amazing and things were orderly and separated but there was a massive amount of stuff he had collected over the years and people were blown away and

took a lot of the things but it must have been very sad for him to lose his garden and his building and all the things he had collected over many years. One thing for sure there will never be another New Yorker like him. Too bad because he was a visionary and a creative genius. His garden was like no garden I have ever seen before and he used organic garden techniques before any of us had even heard the phrase 'organic gardening' used. Adios, Adam and the cosmos must be spinning faster because you are part of it now."

"People thought he was crazy," Mr. Wang said, recalling Purple. "But Adam was speaking the truth when the truth couldn't be heard."

In between interviews with Purple, I read up on some of the history of the garden and his efforts to create a livable space within the laboratory of the streets of New York City, eschewing electricity or paid work, in favor of a life organized around recycling, reusing wastes, and creating compost. I remember the labyrinth of ideas flowing through his mind as we talked last summer.

Purple talked about the ways gardens and libraries are really alike. They both open up ideas and secrets. "Put down zentences.com,"

he recommended, pointing me to a site full of number games and back histories of the Garden of Eden. As others have noted encountering Purple, knowledge extends across fields from radical ecology to literature, philosophy to conspiracy theories. "Aldous Huxley used the phrase, general enlightenment," explained Purple, referring to a sort of cultural *soma*. "Better than willful ignorance. Keep em ignorant. Keep em sick so they can be exploited." Yet, there are ways to see another world. He points out texts for me to look up: "Go to the Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities and look up under mysteries."

"Look up LIFE with les(s) ego," he counsels, "of separateness of all else expectations." His point is that we, as humans, ask for too much; we hope to have more than we need. We "overshoot. The species overshoots, the environment we live in is caused to die off with our species. Look up homo colossus."

Purple gave supporters poems if they contributed to the garden.

Purple suggested his work had more to do with a view of the world. Frank Lloyd Wright said, "the box puts you in prison; it's square." Yet, you'll find no straight lines in nature, none on the body. Lines are not straight. They are fractured, he suggested. "Consciousness means being aware of the environment. Wright said there is no pillar in the corner of a window. You are at liberty to look at one corner at a time. This is an idea that traveled around the world. You can look in more than one direction at a time. There is another system."

Through composting, reusing waste, and gardening, Purple was pointing to another kind of a system. "Get your shit together. There is meaning in these idioms."

Referring to his "law of return," he said "ignorance of the law is no excuse. It's a parasitic species," humans who take without giving back to the land.

"Our consciousness can expand. We can imagine something else," he mused. That's the only difference between you and I, consciousness. Go the library, see if it's there. LIFE with les(s) ego. You may have to move

the book because the sea is rising, two miles of ice is melting. Gaia principle. The earth takes care of itself."

That interview was the last time I saw Adam. During the Harvest Festival, marching bands romped through the Lower East Side and we remembered lost heroes of the movement. I sat in El Jardin Paraiso and thought of Michael Shenker who died five years before.

I spent weeks wondering why the city was not able to find the heart to save the garden when it could. Sure I know the reasons. Real estate is the permanent government of New York City. But couldn't we see a way to incorporate this majestic testament to sustainable urbanism? And if not, why not? More than a garden, the space felt like a new way of looking at the city, one we're still fighting to achieve today.

That question was on everyone's mind as the memorial speak out began. But so were the poems. While the evening was organized as a memorial, the poems for Purple were many. Adam told me purple was a majestic color. His colors inspired generations of gardeners and urban ecologists.

"It felt like the old times, painting those purple footsteps," Bill and George Bliss mused.

Many had no idea what they meant; others understood completely. We all live in a labyrinth in the city, leading us between ourselves and the unknown, a labyrinth of interconnecting tales.

Timesup Bill asked me to MC the memorial for Mr Purple. The Public Space Party was on hand in the tie dye they'd made the Friday before. [Adam Purple, and his onetime partner Eve, always wore purple tie-died clothing.]

Ray Figueroa of the New York City Garden Coalition welcomed everyone, and set the stage.

"How many of you are feeling good in this garden?" he asked. Everyone raised their hands.

"As you enjoy it, remember, this happened because visionary lovers of the earth were out organizing, getting arrested...we need not forget this history. We need to stay vigilant in the face of those who say affordable housing is at odds with community gardens. Today, we need more sustainable models of development.



**Earth Celebrations' Rites of Spring: Procession to Save Our Gardens on the Lower East Side (1991-2005), from earthcelebrations.com**

If it means anything to you, you have to come out. Thank you for your love and affirmation. This is a romance."

George Bliss groaned thinking about the false debate between housing and gardens. "I am horrified to hear that the same ploy is being used today." When the garden was finally destroyed, Bliss saw Purple standing looking at the last tree.

"We are dealing with reptiles here," he said. "We have to understand that."

He summarized the lesson of Purple's life: "We have to create what is right, not react to it. But create it, connecting with everything... Bringing it here was a gift."

"So I decided to paint footprints to remind the world about the garden," George explained. "They were a metaphor to follow him. The gardens that remain are a testament to his work."

Wendy Brawer of Green Map System noted: "So sad to see this. Adam's purple footprints drew us to the neighborhood in 1986, and he taught deep ecology at the very first Green Map event in 1992. Special thanks to Times Up! for housing him, and helping us all stay in contact with this learned activist."

Howard Branstein [who runs the 6<sup>th</sup> Street Community Center, and was active in land trusts

on the LES in the 1970s] said that Purple insisted, "I'm not going to deal with the city. They stole the land from the Indians in the first place. I'm not going to deal with them." Those listening at La Plaza broke out in applause. Howard pointed out that Purple was not always practical. When he stayed in his building after the owner left, he was unable to organize the remaining tenants, many of whom were vegetarians. Many around him left or were turned away for ideological reasons. "They would not shit in the garden," Purple told him.

"Well that's not helpful," recalled Howard. Still, "He was a messiah and inspiration for the garden movement. In 1984, when beauty died, a stronger garden movement was born. When El Jardin's fate was put up for a vote, the whole community board supported it, as a consequence of the loss" of the Garden of Eden.

"Reclaiming urban land, that was Adam's idea," explained Bill Weinberg, a radical historian and editor of *Avant Gardening* who got to know Purple in 1985. He described the destruction of the garden as a "political hit." The city went after this garden. "There were vacant lots [owned by the City] everywhere. It was chosen for political reasons. Finally, they came in the dead of winter and took the garden. It was a political crime. They tried to do the same thing with La Plaza and the community fought back. We need to keep organic culture here in the Lower East Side."

Father Frank Morales said, "Adam was the most thorough revolutionary that I know. He was all of it, one part Karl, another Groucho Marx. I'm still in denial that he's gone. I keep thinking he'll be coming back on the third day."

"He was an urban survivalist," noted Chris Flash, editor of the *Shadow* newspaper. Flash was frustrated that Purple did not organize more to save his home, but that was for the Michael Shenkers of the garden movement, who helped outline a model for organizing to save

the gardens, connecting direct action and legal advocacy. Countless lawyers who followed this model were there to support these efforts. More Gardens and the Lower East Side Collective, Times Up!, 596 Acres, and Public Space Party were all born of this ethos.

Joel Kupferman, a long time garden lawyer, confessed that people like Purple made it all worth while.

[This editor was also there, and listened to a man speaking quietly among the trees of the garden. He didn't expect to address the assembly, although he'd lived in Purple's squat when he first came to the city. He slept in a back room, just off the garden, and was scared at night someone might come in the building, which was largely abandoned. Purple told him not to worry as long as he could hear the



crickets. When they stopped chirping, then someone might be coming.]

*This text combines and redacts posts from Shepard's blog "Play and Ideas" posted during September of 2015; see benjaminheimshepard.blogspot.com.*

#### REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

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Bill Brown, *Fenced Off, Obscured or Painted Over: Photographs of Murals in Six Community Gardens in the Lower East Side of Manhattan* (2011)

Sarah Ferguson, "A Brief History of Grassroots Greening in NYC," *New Village Journal*, no. 1, n.d.; online at: [newvillage.net](http://newvillage.net).

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Harvey Wang and Amy Brost, *Adam Purple and the Garden of Eden* (Traveling Light Books, 2012); fine essay, extensive bibliography

A short film by Harvey Wang, "Adam Purple and The Garden of Eden," is at <https://vimeo.com/29275235>

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**TELLING**  
**SQUATTING**  
**HISTORY**

**IN**

**NEW**  
**YORK**  
**CITY**  
**(excerpt)**



Artist Fly Orr holds up bolt cutters at opening of MoRUS museum, 2012. Photo by Lincoln Anderson

Amy Starecheski

**MoRUS, the Museum of Reclaimed Urban Space, was formed as**

**a response  
to frustra-  
tion with  
the ways  
in which  
New York  
City's rad-  
ical activ-  
ist history  
was being  
neglected  
in the**

**media and  
in popular  
imagination**

....

One busy year after their first planning meeting, MoRUS opened in the long-vacant storefront of C-Squat, one of the recently legalized squats in the East Village. Combining the history of bicycle activism, community gardens, and squatting into a single narrative of popular struggle to reclaim urban spaces, MoRUS mobilized the archives of this particular community to tell an inspirational story. The tiny storefront exhibit space and basement archive, however, were really just the home base for the walking tours with which the museum initially expected to sustain itself. Like O4O's political education sessions [the Organize for Occupation group], these tours, described in more detail below, fall in the middle of the oral history-telling continuum. They are public and self-consciously historical. However, while recording does happen, it is secondary and not intended for the archive. Tour-goers might record on a cell phone, for example, and on one tour a documentary crew tagged along to collect footage for a video on the neighborhood. The live event itself, however, is the focus and the purpose is to pass on knowledge in the moment, to those who attend. There is a co-constructed and dialogic aspect to the tours, but the oral history telling that happens is not for the most part structured as an interview.

Each walking tour is led by a MoRUS volunteer, also often a former squatter. The tours cost \$20, and tour guides are paid a small amount. The guide provides framing comments before the tour sets off. Here is

Frank Morales, an Episcopal priest, founder of O4O, and longtime outspoken squatter activist, introducing one of the first tours:

Today we're going to visit three or four squat buildings, and you are very fortunate because you are going to be able to go inside and meet some of the people who live there and look at the spaces and so forth. And this is something that we've just really begun to do. Part of the reason being is that, well I guess broadly speaking to humanize the situation of people who are involved with the squats, to make it more real for people. As you know, squatting maybe you're unaware of this, but squatting is often demonized in the press.<sup>1</sup>

Morales highlights the unique aspect of these tours: they involve visits inside squatters' homes, long hidden from the public. The tours are billed on the MoRUS website as "full-access" experiences in which tour goers can "peek inside" tenements. Morales references the negative portrayal of squatters in the media, but he also cues tour goers to see them as everyday people living through extraordinary circumstances. Nonetheless, there is an undeniable element of voyeurism in the tours, as visitors enter the private untidy kitchens and secret palaces of interior design created by members of this community who for so long blacked out their windows to hide their very existence. The tours were instantly popular; they sold out to a mix of tourists, travel writers, activists, scholars, filmmakers, and locals....

Some tour guides and hosts share photos of the buildings in their roughest state, both to intrigue tour goers and to show how much squatters have accomplished and what they endured to create the cozy homes they now open to the public. But the squats are not opened for viewing merely as showcases. Such a purely aesthetic approach to ruins and their rebuilding would not provide the historical and political context necessary to make sense of these spaces. Squatters' intense engagement with abandoned buildings went beyond the aesthetic, both producing and reflecting a

historical narrative in which anticapitalist forces grow in the spaces left vacant by creative destruction. Therefore, voyeurism, exhibitionism, and critical engagement are delicately balanced in the spaces of these tours....

The tour can be analyzed as an essay in which first-person oral narratives are marshaled in the service of an overall argument.<sup>2</sup> The argument is twofold and somewhat paradoxical: First, the squatters are regular people, just like the tour goers. Squatters did this, and so can they.... Second, these spaces, these people, and these achievements are extraordinary, historical, worthy of a special visit. These self-built apartments and the stories of how they came to be are fascinating.

Moreover, the tours aim to convey a political lesson. The authority of these live first-person history tellers and the undeniable power of their self-built homes are skillfully marshaled by MoRUS in the service of their overall goal of showing that direct action works. As a strategy for motivating activism, however, their success remains unclear. Initial feedback from surveys filled out by a dozen attendees of MoRUS's first few tours indicated that most tour goers found the experience exciting and engaging, especially the first-person narratives. One attendee said, "I felt absorbed into their history. It was real in a way reading a history book is not. First-person accounts, though subjective, are the most precious." However, even when responding to survey questions specifically prompting them to identify actions they took in response to the tour experience, no one said they were inspired to act. Of course, developing and mentoring a new generation of direct-action activists is a long-term goal, and the kind of education MoRUS is providing is at most an important step in that process. The short, if intense, encounters of the walking tour are a limited frame in which to develop new political subjectivities. It may be that the dynamic community growing among the people dedicating countless hours to creating and staffing this volunteer-run museum and its walking tours, and not the effect on visitors, will prove one of the most powerful impacts of this project. For those involved, oral history telling was a crucial part of the project

of turning their activist past into history and producing narratives that might compete with versions that erased direct action and struggle from the historical record. Through the museum, and especially through the tours, they crafted a narrative of this history that emphasized the agency and successes of activists.

### **The UnReal Estate Project**

Fly, a squatter and an artist, is one of the most active documentarians in the squatting community. She is a mentor to many younger activists and artists who are spurred and supported to act by her history and the way she shares it. Along with the personal, one-on-one relationships she maintains, she has undertaken a history-telling project for a much wider audience: *UnReal Estate: A Late-20th Century History of Squatting on the Lower East Side....*

[This book project] began in 2011, but it has deep roots. It builds on Fly's previous creation of temporary squatter museum installations in 1995 and 2000:

I did a squatter museum show in the year 2000. Open on New Year's Day; it was the twenty-year anniversary of ABC No Rio and this show was called Dangerous Remains.<sup>3</sup> This was mostly objects squatter objects. My crusty shorts were in the show; there were also things that had been found in the buildings.<sup>4</sup> There were old joist hangers, there were weird antique things like tongs for a wood burning stove and bones of animals that had died in the walls, there was a piss bucket. Brad Will's glasses were in the show, all taped up.<sup>5</sup> Keys to Dos Blocos, there was just a lot of really weird strange stuff.<sup>6</sup> There might have been some police barricades, there were props from various demonstrations. I was really interested in presenting it as an anthropological study so I made little tags for the objects describing them in this way that you would describe ancient artifacts and "these people."

For my crusty shorts I had a little card that described how these people would sew their

patches on with dental floss because what happens with the dental floss is that there's wax on it and when you wear the clothes and they're warm because you've got your body heat and so it kind of fuses the patches to your fabric in a very crusty way—crustaceous way that makes them more permanent, and you'll be warmer somehow with all that wax [laughs]. It was kind of like studying some ancient people. A lot of ways that we were living were kind of ancient: we had wood burning stoves, we had crazy set ups for plumbing and lack thereof, plumbing and peeing in buckets and having the squatter's sink set up. The bucket system and all these pulleys and all this stuff. It kind of is like studying an ancient people.<sup>7</sup>

In creating these ephemeral installations, Fly was self-consciously playing with the tropes of anthropology: of studying and being studied, of explaining and being misunderstood....

Similarly, the UnReal Estate book will both make use of and undermine the tropes of positivist historical inquiry. The oral histories Fly is conducting for the project are audio and video recorded at high quality and transcribed, and they will be archived at Tamiment. They take the form of a focused life history, beginning with an invitation for the narrator to describe his or her origins and moving relatively quickly to "How did you get to the Lower East Side?" More so than other sections of the planned book, these interviews rely on a positivist model of history, focusing on the questions of who, what, and when a bit more than why or how. Moreover, in her analysis of the interviews, Fly emphasizes a process of cross-checking and timeline-building in an attempt to establish an authoritative, factual account of the history of squatting on the Lower East Side. This approach serves an important goal: legitimation of Fly's life's work....<sup>8</sup>

Along with legitimation, another reason for the oral history approach is that, as a deep insider in the squatters' community, Fly already knows many of the stories and details of squatter life.... While Fly might cross-examine her narrators about dates and the details of events, she admits to loving these stories

# 16 House Magic

# MISSING FOUNDATION

1933



**WE WILL NOT  
ACT CIVILIZED  
IN THIS FUCKIN'  
CITY.**

JOHN HEARTFIELD (PHOTO):  
[JUSTITIA] 30 NOVEMBER 1933



YOUR HOUSE IS MINE LP 1988 ©  
PURGE SOUND LEAGUE

and many of the people who tell them.... Fly is connected to a sprawling network of traveling punks, and she conducts interviews on both coasts and with travelers passing through New York City who used to live in the squats. Some of her interviews are with neighborhood residents whom she sees more infrequently than these travelers. While the physical ties of this community weaken people now rarely work on their buildings together and some buildings have lost many residents through the ups and downs of the legalization process the interviews bring them back together.

The recent “emotional turn” in the study of social movements has generated important insights into the affective experience of being recruited into, participating in, and leaving these intense communities. Affect, feelings, and emotions are interrelated terms, variously defined in different literatures. When using the terms affect and affective, I refer specifically to “longer-lasting affects like love or hate, trust or respect, which accompany even help to define enduring social relationships.”<sup>9</sup> New participants in social movements are usually recruited through social networks, networks that are bound and empowered by affective ties.<sup>10</sup> Oral history not only documents (and, in the case of insider interviews, strengthens) these affective ties; in its depth and emotional intensity it can also powerfully convey them to the interview’s secondary audiences, those who listen to recorded interviews or read oral history books, potentially building as well as tracing social networks.

The experience of being a part of a movement community is powerful; it is this social experience, as much as or more than more traditionally political aims, that often pulls people into direct-action activism....<sup>11</sup>

It is true that the moment of history telling is ephemeral, but it is also true that the oral history process allows the “emotional urgency and need” of the interview to resonate beyond the interviewer and interviewee. The thrilling “movement community” enacted and

documented in Fly’s oral histories, like that reproduced by the volunteers working together at MoRUS and its walking tours, has the potential to inspire new action in the present and future.

UnReal Estate, when published, will bring the intimate conversations between squatters, between old friends, into the public eye. This transposed intimacy is one of these oral histories’ greatest strengths. It shows, rather than tells, the experience of being part of the community of squatters.<sup>12</sup> Yet, listening to Fly’s interviews also often feels like eavesdropping: both voyeuristically engaging and potentially alienating. We are, after all, listening to a conversation of which we are only indirectly a part. Even the intimacy of entering someone’s home and hearing them talk in person about their experiences is not the same as the

intimacy of listening in on a conversation between old friends. This mediated intimacy, born in a one-on-one encounter but translated into a public document, is in contrast to the other oral history-telling modes described above, in which former squatters speak directly to a live audience, if only in the delimited spaces of an open meeting or a small group walking tour....



#### NOTES

1 Field Recording of MoRUS Walking Tour, March 17, 2012....

2 Alessandro Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different,” in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 45—58.

3 ABC No Rio is a community arts center with close ties to the squatter community on the Lower East Side.

4 Fly is referring to a style of “crusty punk” clothing in which clothes are covered in hand-sewn, screen-printed patches, usually with the names of bands or political messages on them.

5

Brad Will was an activist, Indymedia journalist, and squatter who was shot and killed by government-aligned paramilitaries while filming the Oaxaca teachers' strike in 2006.

6

Dos Blocos was a squat on East 9th Street, evicted in 1999.

7

Fly Orr, interview by Amy Staracheski, July 23, 2012....

8

As a professional oral historian, anthropologist, and participant in this project, I may be contributing to legitimation as well. However, it is important to note that the book will be published by a radical press and that legitimacy within the academic world is not an important goal for its creators. I contribute labor and funding to the project, but my professional expertise is not particularly needed; this is a community that knows how to record and tell its own stories.

9

Jeff Goodwin, James M Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, "Introduction: Why Emotions Matter," in *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 10.

10

Op. cit., 8.



**Housing march sign by Seth Tobocman**

11

Francesca Polletta, *It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 2007).

12

For more on the emotional and social experience of being part of a social movement, see Deborah Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), especially part two.

*Excerpted from Amy Staracheski, "Squatting History: The Power of Oral History as a History-Making Practice," in Oral History Review, Summer/Fall 2014, 41 (2): 187-216, Oxford University Press, reprinted with permission.*

# SQUATTERS OF ROME

Alan W. Moore

**The SqEK group of researchers and activists met in the Eternal**



Courtyard at Forte Prenestino CSOA, Rome. Photo by Giulia Bassoli, on dudemag.it

**City in May of 2014.  
As we discovered,**

**20 House Magic**

# Rome is full of squats.

We of the Squatting Europe Kollektive (SqEK) had the rare chance to visit some of the largest, most impressive self-organized social centers and housing occupations in Europe, and hear about their work from the people who are doing it.

Our first sleeping place was the Forte Prenestino. The Forte is a huge symmetrically constructed military complex, built at the end of one of Rome's ancient roads during the late 19th century. Approaching the fort through the park-like grounds, the first sign of the place is a large metal sculpture of an over-sized skeleton pope, reaching out a cadaverous hand. After crumbling away for decades, the Forte was occupied in 1986. Some two dozen collectives work there, doing all sorts of work, mostly cultural. There's a big kitchen behind the cafe, a couple of indoor bars, and a few more outside. The Forte is known for giant concerts. It can hold thousands.

Nino, one of a number of Fortean who live in the place and take care of things, was our host in the dormitory. There are some 20-odd beds for visiting groups there. As the evening advanced, I saw I was sharing the room with some nesting swallows. They flew in and out, gathering the evening's insects. The walls were covered with graffiti from the many crews that had come through, musicians, *grafiteros*, political groups, farmers. Later that night, a handful of SqEK folks arrived to join me, and we added our own crew name to the wall.

## **In the Basement of a School**

In the morning we made for the first of our meeting points, the Centocelle center. It's a

cozy basement under a school. Centocelle was squatted in the 1970s by a neighborhood association when the school was abandoned. Because they took care of problems in the neighborhood, the place became well established, and was legalized with a nominal rent. Recently a group from the larger Forte Prenestino started to work there. They changed the orientation of Centocelle away from the purely local, and "it became a social center." The big issue these days is the TAV, a high speed rail link Italy is trying to build from Turin to Lyon. Militants have joined the people of the Valle Susa to defend their mountain agricultural communities which this construction of "useless infrastructure" would destroy. The fight has brought together all the radical elements in Italy, Eliseo told us. "Demonstrations are really articulated." In response, the Italian state has militarized the area. We enjoyed bottles of "No TAVino" for lunch and dinner, gifts from the vintners of the Valle Susa.

At the meeting at Centocelle we heard a progress report on the multi-year Movokeur research project comparing squatting in different European cities. This took the form of a series of poster presentations. The majority of SqEK members are sociologists and geographers who love data, and data looks best in charts and graphs. The results of the Movokeur project, in which many SqEKers participated, are striking. They reveal a rich depth of squatting activity over decades in cities all over Europe. (And then only in the biggest.) ETC Dee showed posters documenting historical squatting activity in Brighton, London, and Rotterdam, all cities where he worked as an activist. Claudio Cattaneo analyzed data from the Barcelona publication *Infousurpa* (est'd 1995) to see the cycles of the squatting movement there. The early ones in the 1980s had long lives. (Even now the average age of a center is 6.3 years.) Then, he said, punks learned from visiting music bands that to make their own concerts they needed to squat a place. In 1995, squatting was criminalized in Spain — and the movement picked up. (This is the seeming paradox Miguel Martinez has pointed out — repression breeds resistance.) The spectacular

eviction of the Cine Princesa in 1995 unified the Barcelona movement. (This story is told in the video by Octavi Royo, "Okupa, Crónica de una Lucha Social" [occupation, chronicle of a social struggle], 1996.) From 1995-96 was the "golden age" of squatting in Barcelona. Those years saw the biggest growth in squats and a well-functioning intersquat assembly. From 2000-08 Claudio calls the mature phase, with 40 to 50 social centers and a high rate of activity. Subsequently the number has decreased, in a phase of "decadence," or "post-maturity."

Only days after our meeting, the long-lived Barcelona social center Can Vies was violently evicted by demolition, a repressive act that touched off days of rioting. If the cyclical theory holds, the city may be on the verge of another golden age of squatting. SqEK's 2015 meeting was held in that city, so we had a chance to take the temperature of the movement, and verify this for ourselves.

Eliseo and Bruno presented on the squats of Rome. (There is a chapter on this in the new SqEK book published by Pluto.) In Rome three big groups are doing squatting for housing. There are big squats, with hundreds involved — "a mass dimension." People in emergency situations go to these groups and put their names on the list. Most are migrants, many are students. Then they are put into a training program, half a year of discussions, construction training, attendance at evictions — "You see what you have to do to protect a squat." The group that is going to squat coheres its identity so that everyone knows each other. Then there is a squatting day for the whole city, with the three groups coordinating occupations. The last one was called "Tsunami Tour." Usually between six and nine buildings are taken. Afterwards there is a negotiation; some are kept, some buildings are given up.

Andre remarked that these groups can be compared with DAL in Paris (Droit Au Logement, or right to housing); and also with PAH, Miguel added (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca, literally, platform of those affected by mortgages, i.e., the evicted).

Most of the Roman squatters are not politicized. They are simply excluded from the

high cost housing market. These groups have clear leaders. The assembly "functions as the place where decisions are made visible," and there is a lot of discussion. The next evening we saw a film, the final cut of a new documentary on one of these groups ("Casa Nostra" by Livia Parisi and Lucilla Castellano). The leader of this group was a woman, a crusty communist, who spoke to us after the screening. Their struggle has been hard. After eviction, dozens of the activists and the squatters they organized were being investigated for criminal conspiracy and extortion, which they saw as a form of legal harassment.

### **Tables at the Forte**

The next morning we awoke in our dormitory at the Forte with the morning swallows rushing in and out. It was time to face the cold showers. Thereafter Edward and I wandered up onto the ramparts of Forte Prenestino, a level above the main courtyards. There are little houses stuck in along a rampart so overgrown it's hard to see the features of the architecture. Some of these arch-fronted dwellings are ramshackle, with dirty yards, and others are neat and nicely planted. Cats played in the sun.

We soon moved to Scup! (for Sport e Cultura Popolare). Housing in a large airy former school, very near the 3rd century Porta Maggiore, this was a social center based on sports and education. (It has since been evicted.) There we had breakout sessions, with different groups concentrating on different problems. Three "tables" formed, one on internal conflict in collective houses, another on repression and eviction, and a third, my group, on institutionalization. Luisa, a Roman studying urban planning, noted that squatting and related practices have generated strategies of urban regeneration. These are being co-opted. Now, even as many squatted places are being shut down, autonomous practices are being aligned with the free market. How do we deal with these strategies of cooptation, and "avoid certain traps of pacification" so that the "antagonistic potential" of occupied spaces can unfold?

The Berliners outlined three main approaches to squatting by governance: First

is selective neglect, to put conflict on the back burner. This happens in Italy. Squatting becomes a problem that doesn't exist because no one talks about it. Second is the repressive strategy — stigmatization, criminalization, waves of eviction. The movements are dealt with like dangerous, subversive conspiracies. The third approach is institutionalization, temporary allocation of space for temporary uses. This entangles the movement in bureaucracy, as licenses are required and regulations applied. The squat is included, but integrated into city branding policies, as an aspect of the creative city or a feature of urban renewal. In Berlin, the recurrent IBA architectural exhibition (Internationale Bauausstellung) became a motor of institutionalization for squats.

In Italy, the squatting movements since



**Poster for Enotica, wine project at Forte Prenestino CSOA, Rome**

the 1970s have generated different policies which repress or include them. After long struggles by the Leon Cavallo center in Milan, 1995 saw the passing of a law which permitted assignment of spaces for social centers. This law was proposed directly from the movement — but they still have to enter into a system of regulation. In the case of squatting for housing, new laws governing social housing and assignment of space for squatters were passed in 2004.

The Teatro Valle occupiers in Rome were raising a new question. They argue that culture is a commons, and that all places for culture should be considered as commons. Coming on the heels of the global Occupy movements, they worked as a kind of action faction for an emergent legal philosophy that contests privatization under capitalism, what Marx called enclosure. Their squat inspired similar actions all over Italy [see House Magic #X]. Teatro Valle Occupato created a Foundation for the Common Good. It is a kind of sister to the Spanish *Fundacion de los Comunes*, which produced the conference in Madrid called “El nuevo rapto de Europa” (new abduction of Europe) in the spring of ‘14 where I first met activists from Teatro Valle and the was Milan-based artists’ squat Macao. TVO’s appropriation of an important

and venerable cultural space generated new questions. Teatro Valle was working with constitutional lawyers, and with other insurgents to find a solution for a self-managed commons in Italy. They drafted model laws about commons.

This commoning approach is related to the work of the Right to the City alliance. The emphasis of activists has been shifting

from the pressuring the state as guarantor of rights, to seeking to affect the discourse on civil society. Later Eliseo spoke again about this tendency in the Italian movements. “The debate today,” he said, “is not on legalization at all. We are in another phase. The debate is on the kind of space you are producing. In the ‘90s we were producing a new public sphere. Now it’s a common. What is a common? How do you define a common?”

Lucrezia stepped us back to 1995, passing out zine copies of a text of those times from the Italian movement — “Against the legalization

of occupied spaces.” She and Claudio had discussed it via email. This argument, he said, is that in a way the best thing a social center can aim for is its own eviction. That is, you should not really aim to get kicked out, but to be antagonistic. In Lucrezia’s summary of this text, legalization is the state’s most effective remedy against subversiveness, against the “autonomous tradition of the totality of existence” from whence political squatting comes. Squatting, those writers argue, is and should be egotistical, so that what is taking place is authentic to the people who are doing it. It shouldn’t devolve into providing welfare

and controlled by the state, they are no longer antagonistic. Ergo, legalized spaces are counter-revolutionary.

This was not received without argument. Edward recalled that in Brighton years ago, the argument was whether or not to go the legal route. But now, after criminalization (in September 2012), the squatting movement is destroyed, everyone’s forgotten the argument, and we are left with the few legal spaces. In the UK, he said, legalized spaces are “driving the scene.” He worked at the Cowley Club, an owned space in a tolerant city. “It’s important for me to go there, to feel strong, to feel part

of the movement.” An emerging problem is people joining who are liberal, and bring their own values to a project. How do we maintain antagonistic values?

Later in the day we returned to Forte Prenestino. We met in a courtyard, under a pavilion. Alan Smart set up his book machine, a metal framework designed to hold and present paper, so that we might visualize the long-running popular book project. After our discussions, we were given the grand tour of the place.

The fortress, built at the end of the 19th century from the tufa

stone of this region is one of a number that lie at the end of the main avenues of Rome to check a feared attack by the French. It is the only one you can visit. It is in the form of two symmetrical squares, in three levels. The level above is bucolic and overgrown. There are houses there, built in the shells of those used by military people in the past. Some houses have staircases inside, we were told, so the residents



**Entrance to Forte Prenestino CSOA, Rome. Photo by Matteo Mueller-Thies, on spottedbylocals.com**

services, and being community organizers. “Occupation arises from the necessity to satisfy real needs.” When squats provide welfare services to the marginalized, add to the image of a creative city, or work as containers of youth culture, the result is the death of subversive activity. Regulated, restructured



**Judith Malina of the Living Theatre at the squatted Teatro Valle, Rome. From teatrovalleoccupato.it**

can go downstairs to the main parts of Forte directly. The large open plazas below were for military training. The labyrinth of underground rooms is called “centocelli” for 100 cells, an allusion to Roman times. Munitions were stored there.

When they took the place in 1986, the occupiers found everything there — boxes, dead bodies, washing machines. They discovered old Nazi uniforms and a lot of military stuff. This went into a giant bonfire in the courtyards. It took 10 years to clean up all the rooms. They still have not explored all the place, especially the underground stuff.

Our group wandered with Francesca, an architect, up a path from the courtyard to the ramparts. We were in a Roman garden under a clouded darkening sky. There are many trees, like mulberries, fruiting when we were there. One tree is tart, another is sweet. Bees are kept, and gardens of vegetables. They had marijuana parties in the past. Now not many events happen upstairs. During anniversary parties at Forte people are everywhere. One time Mano Negra, the band of Manu Chao played and people could not even get in the place. An electro festival that ran for 48 hours had four big stages and two small ones. 7,000 people came each night. They are not sure about the capacity of the place — “maybe 10,000.”

Many Roman squats came out of raves, momentary dance parties held in unusual places. In the 1990s they did raves in gardens and abandoned buildings. This started in 1994, and was mobilized by radio. “If you happen to be in this district tonight...” They went into one factory and danced for hours on a carpet of discarded photocopy toner. They only knew it when the sun rose and they saw each others’ blue faces. On the other side of the Forte is the dormitory, a massage parlor, yoga gym, theater, and van parking. There is a kitchen for the travelers, and a place for camping. Last week there had been a convention of agricultural producers; 50 people needed to sleep, and they overflowed the dormitory. The wood shop makes fixtures for the place, like benches, tables, etc. The auditorium is fitted for jazz music. It is in one of two big bays, while the bay on the other side is a cinema. In the summertime a big screen is set up for an outdoor film festival.

### **Underground Comics**

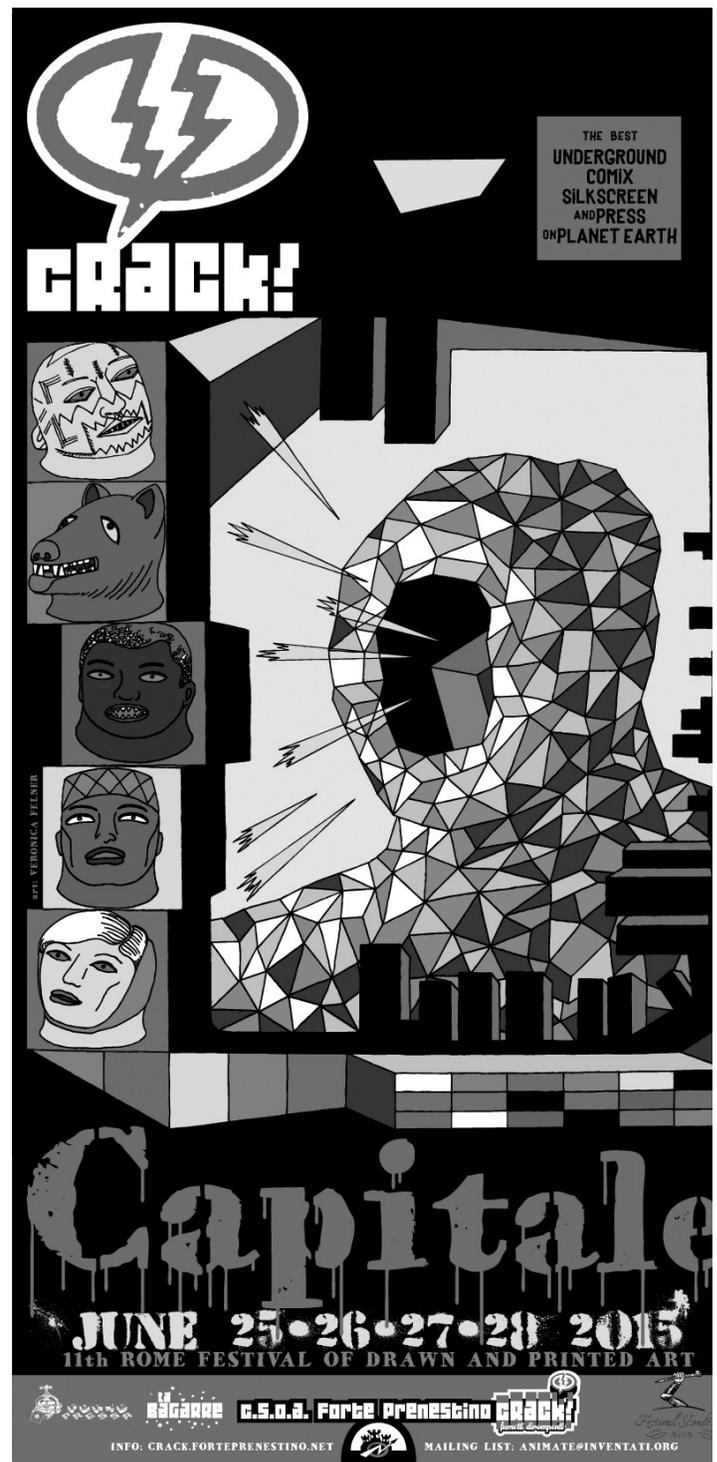
We also ventured underground. A big international comics exhibit in mid-June called CRACK, “fumetti dirompenti,” makes use of the underground centocelli. A few of us explored these earlier, and, by the light of cel phones, we saw many strange mural paintings the artists had made in each room. At the end of the long corridor of cells the space opens out. Here is the underground Enotica, an ecological wine project. (The project produces its own festival,

having its fifth iteration in Spring of '15.) The walls of the corridor leading to the bar are hung with pictures of ecstatic tasting and sexy encounters (an erotic enoteca, hence the typo). The largest of these underground rooms is a two-story barrel vaulted party space with a wooden platform built for the DJ.

After the tour of Forte, we listened to a couple of architects who had worked there for many years. Their group started in university, when they met after an occupation of their school. They chose the Forte as a place to work, and started making installations and other things in wood and iron. They organize a festival called BaBeL, "an independent biennial of critical housing." An activist from Poland is featured on the cover of a recent publication of the festival. She fought against the privatization of social housing. She organized the tenants of her building against the many evictions. She was beaten, then abducted and killed. A reporter investigating her murder was also killed. The organization she built, however, continues to fight. The article was written by people in a social center now evicted. It's the kind of story that is marginalized in universities. The architects are part of the Right to the City alliance. Their website contains texts on this network, as well as conceptions of "creative citizenship" — "using creative power to get our rights." They are working now against a proposed law attacking self-organized housing and social centers. The law would refuse legalization to any squat or social center, and cut off the inhabitants from any public services, basically taking away squatters' right to be in the city.

### Mestizo Squat

Forte Prenestino is an old-line classic social center, a counter-cultural world unto itself built inside an abandoned fortress, which regularly opens to the outside with spectacular festive events. Metropoliz, the "mestizo" complex built inside a disused salami factory, is something else. It seems like an entirely new formation. It's near the highway to Naples in an area called Omo. The factory is big, with many open courtyards and areas to hold the pigs which were to be processed into salami. The Fiorucci



Poster for the 2015 edition of the Crack! art festival at Forte Prenestino, Rome

sausage factory moved away because the cost of upgrading the sewage treatment was too high. At first the place was made into a kind of graffiti museum by artists, and the walls are decorated with many old tags. Some 500 gypsies, Roma people, were encamped on the

adjoining property. They came through a door in a masonry wall to use water from Metropoliz. When the Roma were evicted, the 30-odd squatters invited them to move into the big factory building. (This story is told in a well-made subtitled documentary produced after our visit and posted on YouTube as “Space Metropoliz.”)

In showing us the place, our guide Leroy followed the “route of the pigs” from their holding pens to the salami factory. We saw the

told us he had met a worker from the old plant who lives nearby. The man gave him the same tour he was giving us, pantomiming what he used to do at work. Where was once a yard full of pigs is now a football field. Kids were practicing for the fourth annual intersquat national football festival happening the next week. In a paved courtyard under a pavilion wash was hanging to dry. A man was finishing a tubular welded metal structure. We met an elevator repairman planning to make a basketball court.



**Art in the open air museum at Metropoliz CSOA, Rome.  
Photo by Giuliano Ottaviani, at [piuculture.it](http://piuculture.it)**

time clock, the changing rooms and showers. Now this is a quarter of Moroccan people called the Casbah, home to a group of immigrants who joined the original artist squatters. Leroy

Younger kids were playing around a ramshackle rocket. The squat museum has an outer space theme, and this was one of the larger projects. Combining social housing and an art museum is at the core of the mestizo concept of Metropoliz. Artists who want to make a work in the place come and propose their projects to the assembly which accepts or rejects them. Most conflicts, Leroy said, arise around political and critical art works. The outer space or “cosmic” theme, then, is ecumenical.

Continuing along the route, we came to an elegant house, the onetime home of the guardian and the chemical laboratory of the plant. Near where

the pigs are herded into the factory, there is a cut-out door which goes to the veterinarian’s office if a pig looks sick. We passed the giant boilers, “the most beautiful machines in the factory.... Here the pigs have a shower, then they die.”

### **A Roma Village**

We drifted around the factory area, with its conveyor belt for pig corpses — hams — and a grisly mural. This is the “museum,” full of artworks, mostly wall paintings. This is one of the three levels of Metropoliz, the “museum of industrial archeology and art,” combined with a Roma village. Here there is also a big bar and dance floor, a cinema, and a cafe where we finished up for dinner. In the main factory building, the Roma have built houses inside each of the capacious floors. The corridors between

public square of the first floor,” where they hold parties. “We meet with them and find out what they need. We worked hard to leave this place empty.” They built a “convivial entrance” — like a stoop, out of concrete, where many people could sit by the door. A group working for Roma rights in the camp followed the community into the Metropoliz squat. Many volunteers come to study with the children.

Of the painting projects, I was most impressed by one in French: big letters — “L’espace est a n/vous” — “the space is for us/



**Paintings in a tunnel at Forte Prenestino. Photo by Antonio Ranesi, at [antonioranesi.it](http://antonioranesi.it)**

them are like streets, with people passing continuously. Here and there are artworks painted on the walls.

Leroy talked about how they configured the space. One area of the floor is open, “the

you.” The painting was done by the artist with the people living there. Art is nice, but the main work here is about making living space. One man proudly showed us inside his house, which had been full of solid masonry, cisterns, which he had to demolish to clear the room.

We went to the roof, which looks over a vast

abandoned military barracks next door. It's the biggest in central Italy, Leroy said, unused but held in reserve, and still visited regularly by soldiers. This (de)industrial area is full of gypsy camps and Chinese factories.

When do you think you will be evicted?

Not tomorrow is my guess. Like when you play with cards, you take a risk. You invest time and energy, but you don't pay rent.

After our tour we watched a film and talked with activists of the Metropolitiz. The only way for people to claim their basic right of citizenship in the liberal tradition, we were told, is by violating the law. Most — 80% — are migrants. They have jobs, their kids go to school, but their right to housing is not fulfilled. The state attacks not illegality specifically, but only a part of illegality. Sixty or 70,000 people in Rome are living illegally, but they are attacked when they self-organize to manage things for themselves. In other countries criminals can control the squatted areas. Here people self-organize, and for this reason they are attacked. In Italy, Roma people can only go to camps. Metropolitiz is breaking this logic of segregation.

The migration of today has little to do with colonialism, we were told. People are only seeking work opportunities, or most recently, sheer safety from zones of conflict. These migrants tend to be highly skilled, even PhDs, speaking multiple languages. They have helped to reinvigorate the agricultural sector after the emptying out of the Italian countryside. They contribute to the treasury of an aging population. They take care of the elderly, doing caring functions which are necessary to state. Italy always thought of itself as an out-migration country, sending workers abroad. Now, Italy has become a destination for migrants.

Another activist picked up the thread. Metropolitiz is of the Blocco Metropolitano, she said, a collective formed in 2006. We were precarious workers who organized to satisfy our own needs. We were trying to put a spanner into the works of the neoliberal city, which appropriates through dispossession. The owner of this place is a big construction company. They planned to build condominiums no one would buy. This is part of the neoliberal city.

We are deprivatizing this space. It is part of the history of Rome, its industrial archeology. Now it is a liberated occupied factory. The idea of Metropolitiz is *mestizo* [*mestizaje*] — a coming together of people from different political and ethnic backgrounds to attempt another way of living together based on heterogeneity. The Roma is the most discriminated against minority in Italy. (They are nearly all EU citizens, however, and thus entitled to move from one EU country to another. In practice, they meet much discrimination, and may even be expelled.) Out of diversity and sharing, we are challenging the neoliberal state. The law on housing was advertised as solving the problem of social housing in Italy, but really it favors the big financial interests and criminalizes those who cannot afford to pay a rent. A former communist party operative in the government was responsible for criminalizing squatting.

After these talks and a film, we repaired to the spacious cafe for dinner, then danced to a DJ playing contemporary gypsy rock. Several boys of the community jumped in to dance with us. One of the artist squatters was selling shots of classical absinthe, strained through a sugar cube, so between dances we enjoyed our own "heure verte."

### **Culture and the Commons**

The next day was more sober, with a panel on "Squats and Urban Relationships" convened in the civil and environmental engineering department of Sapienza University. One of the presenters was from the social center Angelo Mai, an important art center very recently under siege by the police. She told us that the housed people, the residents, "are in relation to artists and theater people." Occupation is undertaken not to gain leverage for access to public housing, but as a project of collective self-construction in a commons. Angelo Mai was "one of the first experiences that merged housing and cultural needs." The right to housing and the right to culture are unified. The center runs summer camps for kids in nearby schools, and "thousands of workshops" there and in other housing occupations. There is no city cultural program for artists in Rome. There

are no plans for social housing. “Rome is an open laboratory of occupation.” (A chapter in the 2014 SqEK book from Pluto Press describes the five year development of these new kinds of Roman occupations.)

We heard from workers at the occupied Teatro Valle. [The occupation was soon to be evicted that very summer.] “We are show business workers,” said Mavik, a category not really recognized in Italy. Teatro Valle is a classic Italian theater with a long history, located near the Pantheon, Piazza Navona, and the senate of the Italian republic. Hans and I visited this beautiful old theater later, and spoke with some of the occupiers, among them the dynamic Valeria Colucci who toured a *New Statesman* journalist in ‘13. I had met her in Madrid in April, at the “Rapto de Europa/New Abduction of Europe” conference.

The government closed this historic theater, and was thinking of privatizing it. A group of artists and workers there occupied it. “We entered as a joke,” Mavik said, “a three-day symbolic occupation. Three days became three years. We are still there.” The abandoned theater is a cultural and geographical metaphor. We “rethink this vacuum not in the order of service but the order of need.” Artists in Italy have suffered a void of institutions for a long time. Now we are rethinking the relation between artists and citizens, and that is new. Teatro Valle is open 24 hours a day. We never do shows; we free the stage. We take care of that place, think of it like a home open to everyone, where the public takes on an active role.

Mauro, a television actor, said that the theater was in a heavily gentrified center city area, “once a neighborhood, now no more.” They seek to counter this tendency to “make the center of Rome a museum.” They try to present a model of culture as common. In relation to his craft of acting, Teatro Valle is “like a 24-hour improvisation, doing art and life together.”

I asked if Teatro Valle or any of the other occupations had been supported by institutions. Mauro referenced the work of jurist Ugo Mattei, who has written a manifesto of the commons. A historian responded that Rome has a long

history of occupation: “The catacombs were ancient occupations by the victims of ethnic cleansing” in the early Christian period. The Swiss Institute in Italy has run juridical seminars on the commons, which support their efforts to stake out a legal position based on the Italian constitution. Some cultural institutions have tried to take advantage, he said, using our phrases and making them their own. Then a minority of political people, very minoritarian politicians support us. From time to time in assembly we touch the delicate issue of institutionalization. Our future. “What will we become when we grow up?” But our freedom has allowed rich experimentation. We like to talk about basic rights without institutionalizing our project. We like to compare it with the rights of a child born of a couple that doesn’t want to marry.

That afternoon we visited CSOA ex-Snia, and attended a session about Roman gardens held in a new building in a park. On either side were abandoned squatted factories. Behind one was a complex of gardens. We drifted through after a talk on “renaturalization of the metropolis” introduced us to the history and particulars of some dozen land occupations in the Rome area. These urban gardens on occupied land are “islands of resistance” against speculative urbanization where a “degrowth philosophy” can be put into action. They stimulate “inclusion and solidarity” among cultivators. Rome is the greenest European city with 40% agricultural land. (Architects at Studio UAP recently mapped the “Agro Romano.”)

Among the gardens discussed was the Garbatella, an “anti-speculation” urban garden started in 1992. It came from a popular mobilization against a plan to build nearly 2 million square meters of housing. The area became public and was assigned to a “garden service” agency. At first it was funded, then the money was withdrawn. Citizens’ groups started to occupy the land, in a form of political pressure based on urban agriculture.

Another we heard about was Eutorto, a garden run by former technical workers who lost their jobs in 2010. They wanted to stay together to “protect their political mobilization” and to

provide food for their families. They worked against the “social and productive exclusion” of the unemployed. They protested, but also gardened together.

The speaker concluded that these and other forms of informal urban gardening practices are “profaning devices of power” (the reference is to Giorgio Agamben). The most interesting cases are those that “produce publics.” “Institutions should experiment with insurgent networks.” So far as the question of... (the speaker lost pace on that word, and Martin and Claudio pronounced it for him in unison) “institutionalization,” it should be a “soft targeted intervention.”

Afterwards we toured the gardens and visited the social center next door. We arrived too late to have a discussion with the fellow who was waiting for us. So we visited the bicycle shop in the back. Eliseo explained some things about the history of the place, how it was discovered during a rave. The lovely garden plants came from a rooftop exhibition by an artist at the U.S. embassy which gave them the plants to take away.

### **Costs of Knowledge**

On our last day in Rome we learned that we could not return to the Forte Prenestino. The party on Saturday night had lasted until 6 a.m., and everyone was either sleeping or cleaning up!

In the conference wrap-up, Eliseo explained that the Roman squatting world was so big and so involved it was impossible to give a general framework, only an introduction. We just met some groups. Other important centers we didn't visit. “There are over 160 squats, it's a jungle.” The organizers tried to avoid being identified, manipulated, or incorporated in some groups' agendas. “We could have a Disobedienti briefing, but then we would be identified with them,” and others would be offended.

Andrea — “I wish I slept more” — started with the question what are we?, meaning the SqEK network. Academic researchers in Italy usually don't come from working class backgrounds. Looking at ourselves, there's not much ethnic diversity. All of these questions —

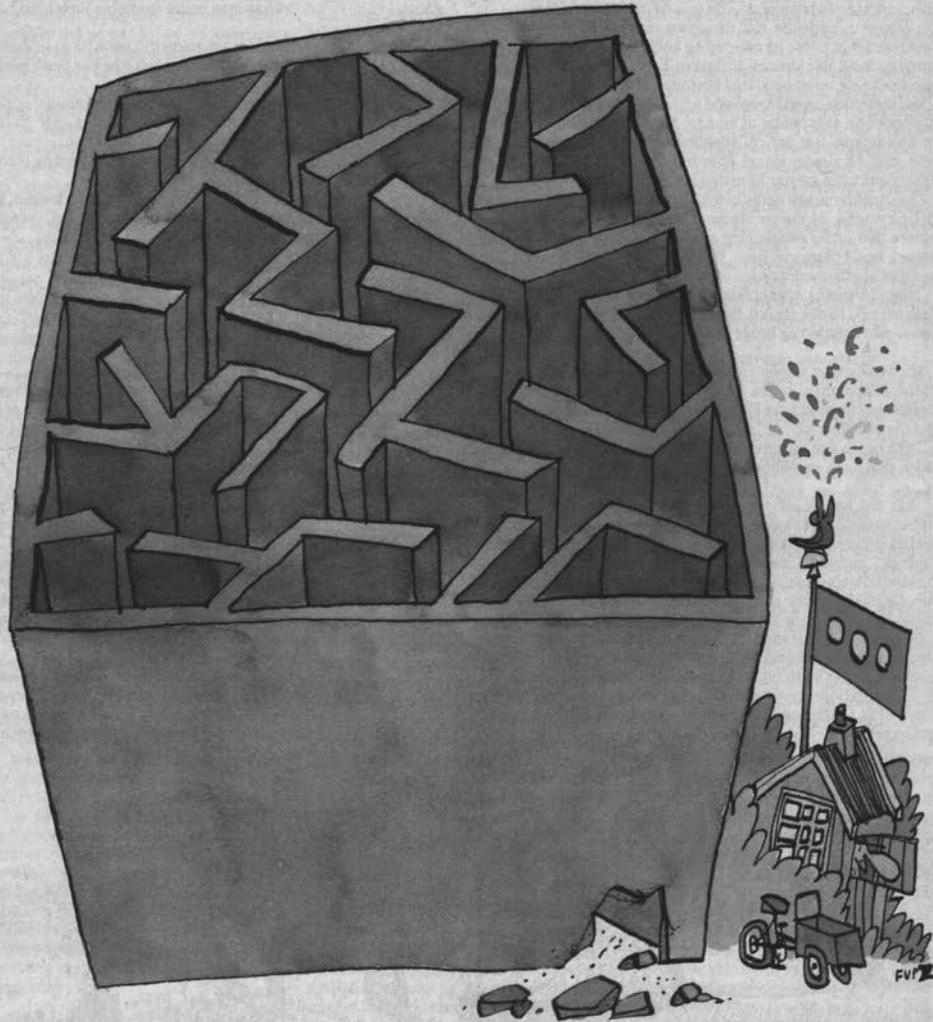
around diversity and class and gender — are expressed in tensions between researchers and activists. There is no way to have a structured meeting in the Roman movement, Eliseo said. It's not a normal situation. You are under eviction. The police can arrive at any moment, and then you have to decide what to do. We do not invite foreigners into these kinds of activities because they don't speak Italian, don't know what the police are doing, the lawyers don't speak English. Also me and Andrea have to survive this meeting. “We are under examination” within the movement. The next time you come to Rome we cannot go with you in a social center. “We cannot put our face in more than we did.”

The Roman movement is dynamic, remarkable, and very little-known. They are constantly producing solutions to urban problems which an idea-poor and corrupted government seems to have simply given up on. We were very lucky to have had this glimpse of it. Nevertheless, the knowledge SqEK is building both individually and collectively, comes at a cost.

*This text has been revised from the original post of June, 2014 at the blog “Occupations & Properties.” It was edited and posted as well at house-magic.net.*

# CHRISTIANIA GUIDE

På DÅN S K • GRATIS ✨ IN • ENGLISH • FREE



KORT PÅ MIDTERSIDEN ✨ MAP ON CENTERFOLD

## 32 House Magic

**FREE CULTURE**  
**TALKS AT**  
**CHRISTIANIA**

Alan Dearing

**Symposium delegate**

**Abraham Vega**

**slightly (mis)**

cover of Christiania Guide,  
in Interference Archive

**quoted:**

**“If you have an  
apple and I have an  
apple and we ex-  
change these apples**

**then you  
and I will  
still each  
have one  
apple. But**



**Alan Dearling (left) and Stephen Shukaitis at the  
Futurological Symposium, Ruigoord, 2014**

**if you  
have an**

**idea and  
I have an  
idea and  
we  
exchange  
these  
ideas, then  
each of  
us will  
have two  
ideas.”**

George Bernard Shaw.

But in lots of ways it sums up what the Free Cultural Spaces Symposium is. It's a place for exchanging ideas. An exploratory for people

to come from around the world and share their stories of growing intentional communities, of squatting, eco-farms, floating cities, artistic and cultural centres.

The 5th Futurological Free Cultural Spaces Symposium in Christiania, Copenhagen took place in the Grey Hall for three days in September 2015. It was also the 44th Birthday party for the now-legal freetown of Christiania. The theme was the individual and the collective. But the spirit was one of imaginative invention. Of fun, music and an exhilarating celebration of different ways of living and of cultural diversity. The pursuit of alternatives. Of playful innovation. A workshop or even a 'Mind-Spring' for alternative counter-cultures.

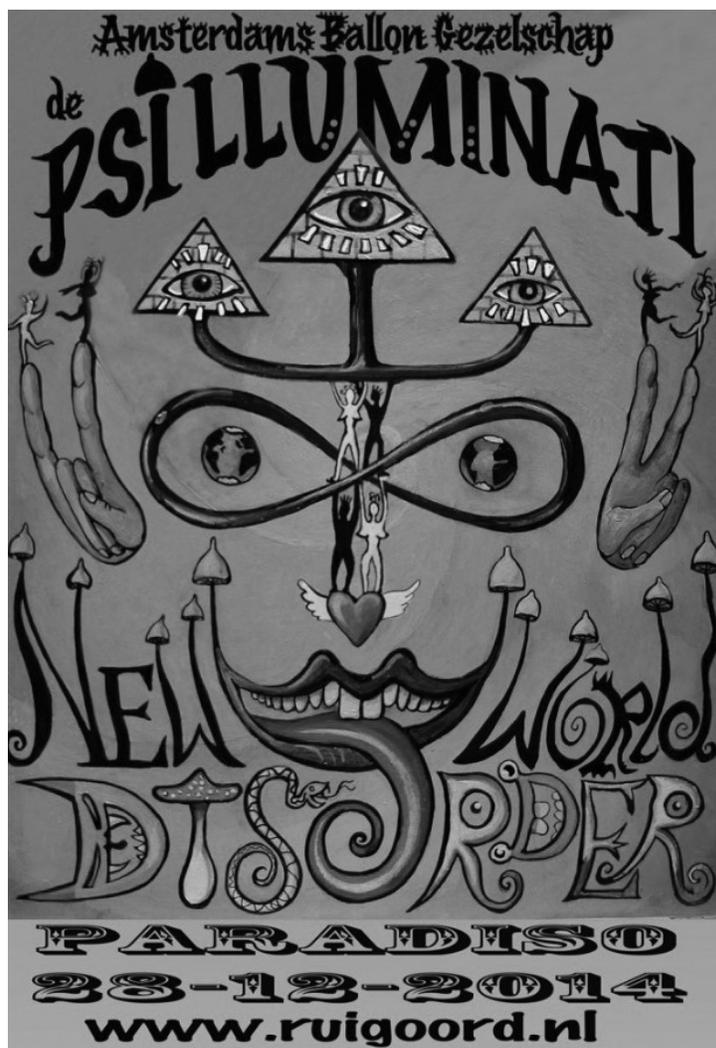
To quote Chiara Baldini from the Boom Festival in Portugal, where the 4th Symposium took place:

“Free Cultural Spaces attempt to create bridges between islands of light”.

They offer new visions and ways of living and organisation – examples of creativity and energy offered to each other and to the rest of the world. In diverse places and spaces ranging from Mongolia to New York; from Ruigoord Cultural Freeport in Amsterdam to the Shiram Community in Russia, Village des Art in Senegal and the Burning Man Festival in the United States; from Thylejren in Denmark to Maastricht Landbouwbelaag in the Netherlands, and many, many more.

The three days allowed time to listen to dozens of presentations from speakers; time to reflect on past histories and struggles; plenty of musical and artistic performances; participation and exchange of experiences and knowledge, and for discussing, and planning towards the future. There was a perhaps predictable focus on the past history of Copenhagen and the original squatting of Christiania and the parallel history of Provos in Amsterdam and the occupation of the village of Ruigoord. We heard about the original, iconic 'white bicycle' scheme of the Provos and the reality of the white bicycles in Copenhagen.

Together, the participants proactively shared their diverse opinions on local and global issues – liberating education – ownership –



Poster for an event at the Ruigoord village

and the effects and realities of 'normalisation' of radical actions and spaces – recycling – green economics and land-use – privacy and collectivity. And finally 'big' global issues like war, migration and freedom (or lack of it) to have adequate homes, to travel, and freedom for creative cultural spaces. Places where lives can be led more communally, and creative and artistic freedom exists.

The Symposium ended on a natural 'high'. Good vibrations. This is a symposium of diggers and dreamers. Of visionaries and activists. There was a lively interchange of views on where future symposia could be held. Shiram in Russia, Maastricht Landbouwbelaag in the Netherlands and the arts community of Skarkall in Sweden were all suggested. In fact, it may be possible for there to be a number of

mini-symposia in addition to a major annual symposia. Good networking between free cultural spaces is a key to the future, with the utilisation of a free cultural spaces 'web of hubs' being a part of that process. A group strength based on diversity. A willingness to allow individuals to hold divergent opinions and live very differently. An agreement that there may be many ways of living.

The 5th Free Cultural Spaces Symposium ended with a procession of participants weaving through the busy birthday party-filled streets of Christiania down to the water's edge for a tree-planting ceremony. Delegates from all round the world had each brought with them an inscribed piece of wood, some water and earth from the homelands. It was communally shared to give life and nurture to the tree and to Christiania.

A theme, or a range of themes, for future symposia have yet to be agreed, but ideas are being shared including: conflict resolution; the power of humour; resolving contradictions, a declaration on the rights of free spaces, or, making and developing connections.

And, we were all privileged to spend time in Christiania freetown with all its vibrancy, lively residents and visitors from all over the world. Our hosts looked after us well in the Grey Hall, and we even managed a little time to explore some of the delights of Copenhagen, a European capital city of considerable grandeur.

*Posted October 2015 at: [freeculturalspaces.net](http://freeculturalspaces.net)*

# OUR AUTONOMOUS LIFE?

Binna Choi, Maiko Tanaka

**On October 1, 2010,**  
**an official**  
**ban on**  
**squatting**  
**(*kraken*)**  
**was put**  
**into effect in the**  
**Netherlands, criminal-**



Still from “Our Autonomous Life?”, a sit-com produced by Casco Projects, Utrecht, based on research of Nazima Kadir. From [ourautonomouslylife.info](http://ourautonomouslylife.info)

**ising a  
practice  
of occupy-  
ing unused  
and empty  
spaces for  
living that  
had been  
tolerated  
by Dutch  
law since  
the 1970s.**

Meanwhile, the decline of the Dutch social housing stock, increasing gentrification, the displacement of low income communities to peripheral zones and growing conservatism towards lifestyle and living space, was revealing that “the social” in relation to housing was at a crucial turning point in the Netherlands. As part of the long-term project, “The Grand Domestic Revolution: User’s Manual” (“GDR”), Casco had been investigating what self-organised, and cooperative social housing experiments remained in this former welfare state landscape including squatting, co-housing (*centraal wonen*) and other communal living groups (*woongroepen*). The goal of this research was to experiment with new forms of social action by making connections between the internal dynamics, spatial forms and concrete practices of living together and how this corresponded with changing housing policy on the one hand, and the broader political context on the other.

At the mid-point of the GDR project Casco presented the forum, “GDR GOES ON: Dwelling in Commons”, where we invited Nazima Kadir, former squatter and researcher at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, to present in-depth case studies from her dissertation, “The Autonomous Life?: Paradoxes of Hierarchy, Authority, and Urban Identity in the Squatters Movement in Amsterdam”. Her evocative cases and vivid “character” profiles, delved into the complex power dynamics existing within the squatter’s movement in Amsterdam revealing the gendered divisions of labour, varying levels of unspoken authority and other hierarchical forms that were not explicitly confronted or discussed within the community. Her presentation implicitly asked whether the movement presented any real alternative to mainstream social structures. During the discussion, one of the Forum panelists admitted that she recognized many of the dynamics in social activist groups she was involved in, and asked whether the making and sharing of this research could be useful to the community and other social movements to critically reflect on itself; an observation that seemed particularly urgent considering the current precarity of the squatting movement.

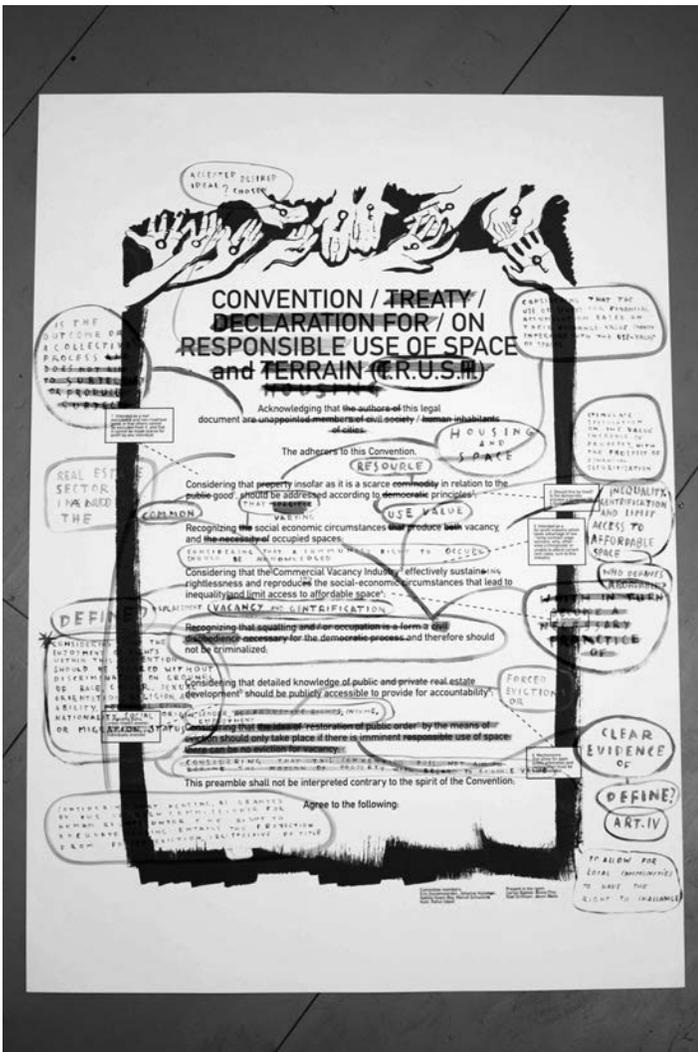
Would the thesis remain as merely an academic exercise of anthropological analysis, or was there indeed potential to transform it into a vehicle for reflection and action?

Challenged by this question we proposed to Nazima to make her research public, commissioning artist Maria Pask to co-develop the concept for what would eventually be titled, “Our Autonomous Life?” The form that we decided to use was a sitcom, the process, cooperative, and the actors, stakeholders in the

intention of making it cooperative was not merely to make reflexive the relation between content and process, but also to undertake the situations of conflicts observed in the thesis as points of departure, to link together different groups and initiatives, and create a tool for a broader public discussion. The project also became a mechanism to continue the research into social housing. We soon came to understand the nature of new housing “co-operations” such as anti-squatting (“*anti-kraak*”) and *broedplaats* (“breeding grounds”) for cultural entrepreneurs that involve varying levels of questionable “co-operation” between residents, housing corporations and the state.

Those who gathered for the sitcom, mostly people working in the cultural sector, embody the experience and challenges of current housing conditions that put them into precarious living situations, as shared here in the following texts. Not exactly a funny matter you could say, but by appropriating the sitcom genre’s capacity to perform comic relief, we aspired to shake up the possible contradictions and ironies one may have in engaging with the above issues from whatever positions, social backgrounds or sensitivities one may carry by using the convivial and subversive tool of humour. The serial quality of sitcoms also turned out to be a remarkable frame by allowing us the continuity, time and space to evolve the format and our own positions on the issues as personal and political contexts change over a season.

At the time of writing, we are producing episode four, the season finale, where in the end the squatters eventually get evicted from their home. It departs from the narrative structures of the previous episodes by resisting a scripted dramatization of events and instead improvising multiple channels into what it means to accept or resist eviction, implicitly asking viewers what position they might take if it was their home. With this final episode experiment, it has never been more clear to us and the cast members that we are not producing a sitcom merely for laughs and filmic representation of research, but rather, “Our Autonomous Life” keeps moving towards becoming an action in itself, generating



**Image of drafting process of Adelita Husni-Bey, “New Proposed Law on Squatting.” Casco Projects, Utrecht**

practice of communal living and social housing rights who would be assembled through an open call to develop the content together, using their differing experiences of social, private and squatted housing as a starting point. The

new relations and alliances, suggesting the further movement of the project collective. Could appropriating this popular form of domestic entertainment produce some kind of germ for the possible spread of new social housing movements? Who out there might undertake this in the form of a new season?

*This text was published online in 2012, at <http://cascoprojects.org/our-autonomous-life-curatorial-introduction>. Project website -- <http://ourautonomouslife.info/news>*

**SQUATTING**  
**EUROPE**  
**KOLLECTIVE**  
**MEETING**

**IN**  
**BARCELO-**  
**NA, MAY**  
**2015**



Carles Garcia O'Dowd presents Beehive Collective printed mural, "Mesoamerica Resiste." Photo by Miguel Martinez

**SqEK Barcelona street-  
side interview project:**



Reading the posters in the window of a squatted bank,  
Barcelona. Photo by Miguel Martínez

# 42 House Magic

# Thoughts on squat- ting and activist re- search by

# the 2015 SqEK-Anti- pode con- ference in Barcelona.



**Burning excavator inside Can Vies, Barcelona. From a video posted at elperiodico.com**

# those who attended

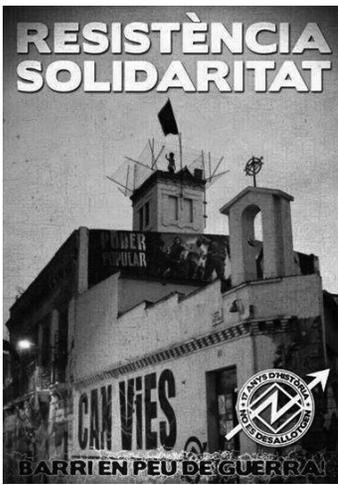
Frank, NYC —When revolutionary change happens, squatting will be in the vanguard of that change. Because squatting signifies and embodies the desanctification of private property, which is the opening round of a revolutionary upsurge. So for me squatting is the great signifier of revolutionary change.

“P. Italy” (speaks in Spanish) —We live in a planet where squatting is the rule for those who are poor. If we’re to see squatting on a world scale, this is the rule.

Miguel, Spain — Well, I think that in the last decade neoliberal policies and capitalism in general are destroying more and more populations, more and more forms of collective living all over the world. So squatting was always important for common people, for the poor, for the homeless, for all those who wanted to fight capitalism.

Marcos, Mexico (in Spanish) — In Latin America, the squatting movement has not developed so much. Maybe because of structural factors, and the dynamics of growth of the cities... But there is a strong movement of economical independence and food sovereignty that is built by and for the communities.

Angela (in Spanish) — ...to break frontiers. From my point of view it is a good way to break frontiers of all kinds, immaterial, imaginary and



virtual frontiers.

Carles (in Spanish) — I think that squatting is, first and foremost, a tool. That is, people all over the world are using it as a tool to overcome precarious situations and obtain housing. But then there is also politicized squatting and squatting as a movement.

Tobi, Germany —

the idea has been we can organize occupied spaces to create social centers. That is to say that we're not the periphery. This is our center. This a central space, not a space located in the periphery. It is from this space that we will attack, defend and do plenty of stuff.

Bueguenvillea, Catalonia (in Catalan)— Squatting is the result of concrete needs that the academy and institutions at large are not able to provide. In this case, dignified housing solutions. So institutions and people share little in common, right?

Luisa, Italy — I think that in the [free market] of public disinvestment and lacking the resources for public administration, for example,

these experiences could be a pivotal elements to develop alternative public policies within cities.

*produced by Liliana López León and Galvão Debelle dos Santos | music "Wasp" by Gadjo | at: <https://sqekbcn.squat.net/interviews/>*



**Galvao interviewing behind Can Masdeu, Barcelona.  
Photo by Miguel Martinez**

I think squatting is a good way of just saying 'stop,' and have rooms or spaces just to meet without all the rules of the free market. And just to create, and have new possibilities, and create just directly and concrete[ly] new ways of living.

P., Italy (in Spanish) — At a European level,



**SqEK participants visit an open air cinema in Barcelona**



**SqEK exhibition at L'Ateneu Popular 9barris, Barcelona**

# SOCIAL BENEFITS: A RURAL SQUAT IN NORTHERN SPAIN

Sophia Rehmus



Caravan from the ZAD rural occupation to Paris during COP 21 talks. From [marchesurlacop.noblogs.org](http://marchesurlacop.noblogs.org)

**October,  
2015, Cal-  
dearanas,  
Spain —**

**Isabel Roy**

**Bodín, age 34, and  
her husband David,**

# 38, offer me crois- sants with honey and infusión



Photo by Sophia Rehmus

## (herbal tea).

The three of us sit conversing in the kitchen of their home. The house is called Heidi, for its position on the mountainside above the rest of

the houses that compose Sieso de Jaca, the rural squat in which I have been staying for the past six days.

“How have you changed personally since coming here?” I want to know. Their response, I hope, will help me understand the ways in which living communally, with shared resources, social groups, and physical space, benefits us socially, how in making the choice to be part of a group, a tribe, we create a sense of identity, purpose, and happiness.

Perhaps I am biased in my worship of close community. I grew up in rural western Massachusetts, in a town of 1,000 inhabitants. My high school had 100 students, about 15 per class. Teachers and neighbors simultaneously served as role models, companions, and mentors (and in my case, bandmates). In part through sheer necessity, and dare I say lack

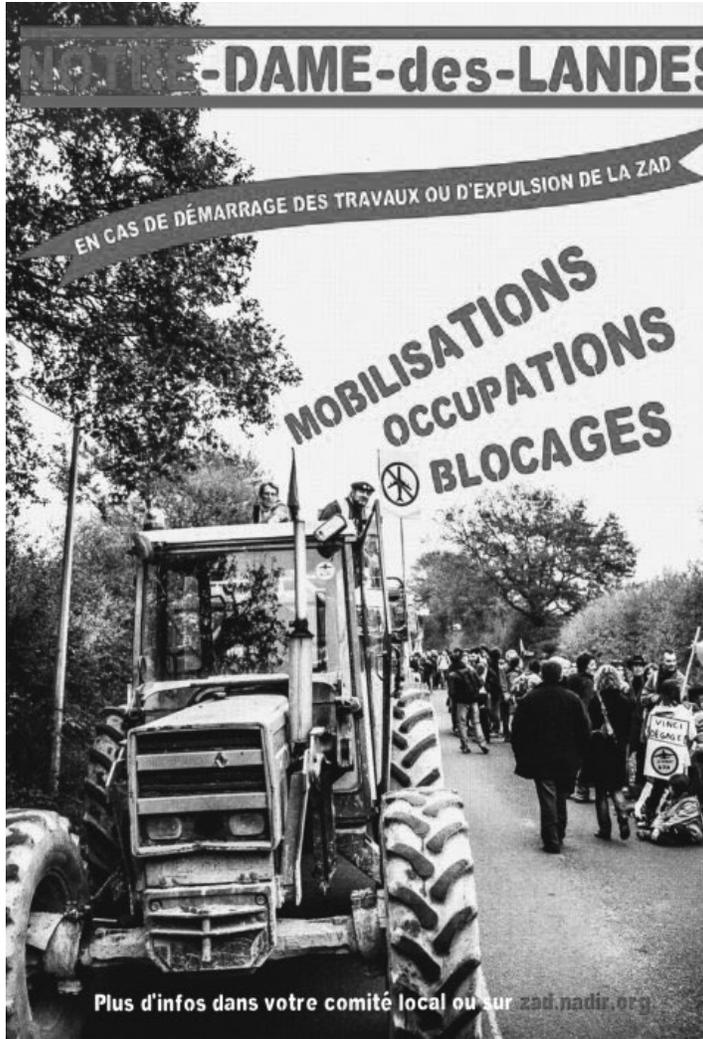
of options, my classmates and I became incredibly close friends, forming lifelong bonds that we cultivated through spending nearly every day together for six years.

Yet my experience in Sieso de Jaca, as well as other communities across the United States, Costa Rica, and other parts of Spain, tells me that happiness through community is universal. Humans respond well to companionship and teamwork. Regardless of our level of intro- or extroversion, we need to know that we are part of a social network that functions as the result of mutual support and love.

The benefits of creating an established social network are evident in Sieso de Jaca. My past six days spent in the community have exemplified rich, satisfying routine. Every day, amidst the partial ruins of the previously abandoned village, the members repeat the same pleasant rotation of cooking, sharing meals, and the kinds of daily tasks that encompass rural life, amongst them gardening, herding sheep, and reconstructing the remaining abandoned properties. Tuesdays are days of collective work, and Thursdays of group *asambleas* (assemblies). Socially, Sieso de Jaca harbors the kinds of daily interactions

that many westerners would normally associate with spending a week in a vacation rental house: unhurried and frivolous.

So, how do people change when they live in community? Based on my interviews and personal observations, the change that members notice in themselves comes principally from an improved understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses, of what they can and cannot change. According to David, he has become “more tolerant and has worked a lot on acceptance.” Isabel has



become “more humble” and “more attentive to what happens around her.” Community, as my experience at Sieso de Jaca consequently suggests, works to discourage both self-judgment and narcissism.

Of course, creating community seldom happens randomly, but rather intentionally, as

the result of careful planning and long-term dedication. Sports teams, music groups, and even college courses are every bit as intentional as they are examples of community. In the case of Sieso de Jaca, a group of people re-inhabited the previously abandoned village in 2004 and 2005, following its de-population in 1965 (the village was also briefly re-inhabited in the ‘80s by an organized group called “Los Campaneros Constructores”). The current residents, or at least those that have been there since the beginning, reconstructed the majority of the ruined buildings over the course of ten years in order to form the type of convivencia, or cohabitation, that they now enjoy.

Being a squat, the members of Sieso de Jaca also fight legal constraints as a regular part of their efforts to maintain their communal lifestyle. On my fifth day, they hosted an “Invitación a Vermouth”, a “celebración de los vecinos de Sieso de Jaca en el ayuntamiento de Caldearanas (a celebration of the neighbors of Sieso de Jaca in the city council of Caldearanas).” The celebration, apart from being a legitimate excuse to eat tortilla española, drink vermouth, and play the accordion in the middle of the afternoon, was the members’ attempt to register on the Caldearanas electoral roll, as well as draw attention to the injustice of their having been denied this right until now.

Several days before interviewing Isabel and David, I spoke with Marta Lopez, 33, about the ways in which living in community has helped her manage depression and anxiety. Having struggled with both illnesses, I was intrigued by the ways Lopez’s process of self-healing mirrored my own. Lopez said, “*Cuando me siento sola, me quedo sola y me doy atención, me doy mensajes. No depender en el exterior para aprobación* (when I feel alone, I stay alone and give myself attention, give myself messages. I don’t depend on the outside for approval).” In sharing the ways she heals herself, Marta identified the co-dependent relationship that intentional communities ultimately cultivate, that between love for others and love for ourselves.

I returned to Barcelona the following week, embracing the onslaught of stimulus that constitutes urban life. Admittedly, I had missed it – the excitement that borders on stress when in constant transit and communication, the overwhelming number of faces and possibilities, the continuous rumble of human activity and culture on a grand scale.

It is a month later however, and I have just gotten off the phone with a friend from college who is lamenting his loss of community since graduation. “I don’t have my people Sophie,” he says. “I don’t have my tribe.” I know what he means. The two of us lived in a shared house

alone.” Sieso de Jaca and communities like it reveal to us the choice we have to create our own tribes, and our own happiness.



**Photo by Sophia Rehmus**

together in Claremont, California, with five other students, in which we shared cleaning and maintenance responsibilities, hosted joint parties and gatherings, and met weekly to discuss issues and check in about our weeks. The affect of living as a group, as we experienced it, is, as Audrey Hepburn says, to “walk with the knowledge that you are never

**INTERVIEW**  
**WITH**  
**RAÚL SÁNCHEZ**  
**CEDILLO**  
**ABOUT THE**  
**UNIVERSIDAD**  
**NÓMADA**

**Interviewer: Today  
we'll start the show  
discussing spaces,  
projects and move-**

# ments that feel the need to build a new para- digm that enables a different cultural interven- tion.

We're talking about critical action and a sort of thought that flows in the margins of traditional institutions. You're going to understand better with the help of today's first guest, Raúl Sánchez Cedillo, good morning. Let's begin

explaining "La Universidad Nómada": what is it, and what is it about?

Raúl Sánchez Cedillo: Universidad Nómada is a project that began in 2001 and which we've called, somewhat ironically, an "intellectual agency", and also a "monster institution". Why monstrous, why monster? Because Universidad Nómada is born in a Centro Social Autogestionado Okupado (self-managed squatted social centre) in Lavapiés, Madrid, from the initiative of activists from the social movements in the city who at the same time were attending university or developing intellectual work, or working in cultural institutions, and therefore in two levels of visibility and legitimacy, of forms of communication, so to speak; but with the will to intervene and lay out problems that exist in social movements with respect to knowledge production —being active in society creates knowledge that gets no visibility or recognition— while at the same time addressing the fact that in educative and cultural institutions, such as the university or the museums, there is a strange and somewhat distorted presence of what emerges from the social field, from the social movements or the metropolis out of those circuits.

I: In that regard, we're talking about quite a pioneering project, since these issues that emerged from the 15M movements were tangible in the streets, therefore this is something that began to arise long before.

RSC: You see this with time, in retrospective; at the time we weren't considering long periods of time but to be able to do what we wanted to do, which basically was to address the issue of how social movements, especially the squatting movement — which entails a large variety; the antimilitarist movement —when the military service existed, "insumisión" (refusal to do it) and so forth—; the feminist movement; the migrant movements, all that. A social centre in Lavapiés, which is a small quarter in Madrid with a large concentration and wide variety of migrant communities, that was, so to speak,



Tote bag from the Madrid bookstore Traficantes de Sueños

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**House Magic**

the environment we were living in. Hence the question: how to produce knowledge inside a social centre and, at the same time, how to bring those procedures, those issues and that relation between knowledge and social life to consolidated, official, public institutions? The university itself, at the time already in crisis, for example. In that period, albeit not anymore, there was a boom in contemporary art museums that, so to speak, were starting to treat social and political innovation as an artistic object, that is, as something that had artistic values. That is interesting, but at the same time problematic, because by means of this treatment as cultural product, to put it like this, the critical thinking, the edge of intervention or social agitation is often lost, it becomes an image, a representation. And obviously, we wanted to set out this problem too: present that world in raw, not as a more or less sanitised product for cultural consumption. And we were able to do that through all those connections.

I: Another pillar is Fundación de los Comunes. What's the relationship with Universidad Nómada? What are their similarities and differences?

RSC: Well, right now it's the (I: Continuation?) mother ship, so to speak. La Universidad Nómada began being "nómada" (nomadic) because it started in Madrid, but then, through knowledge and connection with other groups, new groups were created in Barcelona, Malaga, and other cities, and let's say it was very precarious; that is, nomadic in the sense of the wagon and only with the clothes on their backs. To carry out actions, seminars, book publishing in a very precarious fashion. But that brought connections with other culture production, editorial groups, such as Traficantes de Sueños, an associative bookshop in Lavapiés, Madrid; social centres like the one where Universidad Nómada was born — Laboratorio, in Lavapiés; social centres such as Malaga's La Casa Invisible or Terrassa's Ateneu Candela... We started to function in a circuit that obviously had a much larger potentiality, and for that reason we considered, so to speak,

using the available means, hence the "using monstrous means available", like creating a foundation for beneficial purposes. Therefore, Fundación de los Comunes was created in 2012 and is a sort of first maturity corollary of a project that has developed in a very intermittent and very precarious way throughout all these years.

I: This is the proof that visibility can be achieved. A meeting is going to take place at the Reina Sofía museum, as from 28 next month until March 2. Tell us about this "new abduction".

RSC: The meeting is called "The new abduction of Europe" and is a gathering at Reina Sofía with a network of European museums, or at least the European area, which is sometimes difficult to establish, since there is a museum from Istanbul, in Turkey. This association of museums is called "L'Internationale" and has a program titled "The Uses of Art", whose first action will take place in this meeting. The main purpose of this conference is to address from the perspective of culture and social and political activism, if you will, and also the last experiences you mentioned: 15M, but also the whole "Occupy" phenomenon; in Turkey, Istanbul in particular, we have seen the Gezi park phenomenon; and the demand of these common spaces, and the demand of a real democracy, is the perspective from which we must address the crisis of the European project: the institutional, financial, economic crisis, which obviously is not a minority status — it's something that the mainstream perceives as such. The European project is in serious danger, which in our case, in this country, entails a break-up with 30 years that have been marked first by the attempt of European integration and then by the course of that integration at all levels. This has been determining in the particular case of culture. And the aftermath of this is worrisome, so we want to address it urgently and radically — in the sense of going to the root of the issues and do whatever is necessary.

I: Is the crisis of the cultural industries going to slacken? Or is it something that is absolutely underway?

RSC: No, beyond the financial crisis —we can discuss whether that is going to end—, the problem is that the financial collapse has revealed an institutional crisis, of the relations between cultural institutions and the subjects that work in them. And I believe that the way out or one of the ways out of this institutional crisis is start from who does things. We are precisely called Fundación de los Comunes in order to promote the idea of the “common goods” of culture, of the intellect, or of natural common goods; but it is also the subject who makes these things, a subject that takes the cooperation among singularities as a starting point, in order to produce “common notions”

self-management and from, so to speak, the institutional reinvention is a way to obviously preserve not only cultural heritage but also cultural innovation — a fundamental element for any democratic renewal, such as the one that is absolutely necessary in the current situation.

*La aventura del Saber entrevista a Raúl Sánchez Cedillo on YouTube channel of the Fundación de los Comunes | March 12, 2015 produced as “La Aventura de Aprender” by the Spanish Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte and RTVE*

*Transcription and translation from the Spanish by Milena Ruiz Magaldi*



(*nociones comunes*), and those singularities are what makes culture today. It's made by immigrants who make rap, or precarious individuals who create trends... I mean, this set we're in obviously features many elements of metropolitan culture; they reach a mainstream dimension. We have to draw from that, basically because in precarious conditions it is absolutely necessary to make the right to culture also recognised as the right of participation and self-management of those who make it. And in the absence of big financial means, as is the situation that we are going to face in the upcoming years, to draw from the bottom, from

# THE RISE AND FALL AND RISE OF THE ART SQUAT



Huw Nesbitt

**In the early 2000s,  
something unique**

# happened in Peck- ham.

With nearby Goldsmiths University and Camberwell College of Arts producing a greater number of arts and humanities graduates than at any time in British history, and with many alumni faltering on the job market, something had to give. There were too many highly educated people with too many ideas and not enough places to use them.

“After I left college I lost my job and decided I didn’t want to pay rent anymore,” says former Camberwell graduate and artist, Matthew Stone. “So I researched it and start squatting in Peckham with my friend James Balmforth. That’s how !Wowow! began.”

!WowoW! was the name given to the art group formed out of this squat in 2003. Members included Stone, fellow artist Balmforth and fashion designer, Gareth Pugh, and video artist, Adam Faramawy, who all found fame during its heyday. Its first movements were a performance night at The Joiners Arms in Camberwell, followed by large scale exhibitions and club nights at a squatted four-storey Victorian building in Peckham.

“It was anarchic,” says Stone. “We had private views and parties, and we’d get 400 for the exhibition and 1,200 for the party. It was crazy. There was definitely an opportunistic aspect of wanting to have a studio where we could show things and not have to have a stupid job, but we weren’t doing it to get gallery representation. We did it because it felt amazing. There was this idea that everybody involved was an artist.”

Compared to older squats in Peckham, !WowoW!’s ambitions seem somewhat naïve,

at least on the surface. As a reaction to the political upheaval of the 80s, the squatting scene that emerged in the 90s was attuned to anarchist and environmentalist principles. One such example was The Dole House Crew, a group of activists and anarcho-punks who set up a community arts and social centre in an ex-Department of Health & Social Services building in Collyer Place off Peckham High Street between 1989 and 1990.

“The Dole House was really organised through a Peckham band called Ruff Ruff n Ready,” says Jon Sevink of The Levellers, who played gigs at The Dole House. “We ended up doing a benefit gig there on the same day as the Poll Tax march, actually,” he continues. “It was a good movement. There were a lot of early 80s post-punk bands that drifted into the anarcho scene. But you had to be political, that was the point. For a lot of those bands, the post-punk influence was the root of it all.”

Through a combination of post-punk’s high modernist principles and social deprivation caused by Thatcher’s economic reforms, squatting in south London was less about artists finding free space than it was an attempt at stimulating social change. CoolTan Arts, a registered mental health charity in Brixton, began as a squat around the same time as The Dole House closed its doors. Founder and CEO, Michelle Baharier, remembers it well.

“Peckham Dole House Crew was pretty similar to CoolTan,” she says. “All squats are essentially a social centre for people who don’t fit in, really. CoolTan began when we squatted a disused sun tan lotion factory in Brixton Water Lane in 1990. We used to run meetings, a vegetarian/vegan cafe, and big parties, including one that raised £7,000 for the Lawrence family’s legal fees - today’s equivalent of £60-£70,000. I personally never liked the raves, but it paid our bills. Thousands of people would turn up, but most of them didn’t know what we were doing.”

CoolTan’s outreach work included HIV awareness workshops and was staffed by volunteers, many of whom were homeless. From 1999 to 2009, the Spike in Peckham ran under similar means and ambitions in a previously derelict building used for fly-tipping [illegal

dumping] on Consort Road, until its owners, Southwark Council, evicted its inhabitants.

Stone defends !Wowow! from charges of apoliticism: "It's important to look at the time frame !Wowow! occurred in," he says.

"We weren't politically reactionary because we weren't in the situation that we are in now.



squat" that existed between 2005-2008 and also held exhibitions and parties, feels the same.

"I wouldn't say that any of us were particularly political," he says. "We were more artists than socialists. But I think what we did was a political decision. We went against the normal way of

living, i.e. paying rent and the pursuit of the accumulation of material objects, etc. We rejected all that."

Fellow Lyndhurst Way artist, Shaun McDowell, has stronger views about the legacy of the squat.

"Showing art at Lyndhurst Way had a massive effect on Peckham and the way work was shown there," he says. "Right from the off we didn't want to do what everyone else did by throwing huge parties where the art was irrelevant. So, unlike those squat parties in Kensington that were full of rich kids, we improved the building. This set a serious precedent. Artists in the area started showing their work in alternative spaces. All of a sudden people were showing in squats that had white walls."

Shaun also notes that that the amendment to clause 26 of the legal aid, sentencing and punishment of offenders bill passed in 2011 that effectively bans trespass on residential property – and therefore squatting in domestic buildings – will have a "detrimental effect of the creativity and political mindset of this country." He is undoubtedly correct. Not only is this change in law likely to endanger the lives of vulnerable homeless people for whom squatting is very often a last resort, it is also effectively a way of dispersing centres of potentially radical activity where people live non-conventional lifestyles with regard to the ownership of property, "art-squats" included.

He is also right in suggesting that Lyndhurst Way was the launching pad for



**Adelita Husni-Bey, "Clays Lane Live Archive," installation about the past of the Clays Lane housing co-operative, demolished for the 2012 Olympics in London**

What we were doing was a consciously non-hierarchical exploration of utopian living, but of course, we were living in a pre-crash world. Politics was there, but we were still at a point when society was playing with irony and total disaffection. I'm not trying to argue that we were more political than we were, but while we didn't follow the tradition of angry politics, what we did could be seen as a political example of how things can be done."

Artist Bobby Dowler who lived at 78 Lyndhurst Way, a neighbouring so-called "art

other movements. “It’s interesting that Bold Tendencies and Hannah Barry Gallery both sprang out of what we were doing,” remarks Bobby. A friend of the squat, Hannah Barry helped curate and promote some of their work, including their final show, a rooftop sculpture exhibition called Bold Tendencies. Today, her gallery represents Shaun, Bobby as well as many other associated artists, and Bold Tendencies has grown legs of its own, becoming

organisations) include the art space Area 10 (b. 2002) and Auto Italia South East (b. 2007), another art space that has since moved to rented premises in King Cross after gaining an Arts Council funding. Indeed, Autolitalia, is exceptional, since it bridged the gap between the “art-squats” and radical politics, hosting projects questioning how capitalism shapes our understanding of the world and art such as ‘Immaterial Labour Isn’t Working’ (2013) and



**SqEK exhibition, Barcelona, 2015**

an annual summer event in Peckham.

Elsewhere, other notable contemporary establishment that began as squats in Peckham (but have since become “legitimate”

‘We Have Our Own Concept of Time and Motion’ (2011).

Indeed, this exploration of traditional ideas of art and the gallery has become commonplace in Peckham. This has been partially stimulated by the growth of the digital arts – a practice

that questions notions of what constitutes an art object as well as its process of commodification. Local cross-platform art group, Lucky PDF are good examples of this, creating internet based shows showcasing other artists, and other net-based works, such as the sale of their Facebook contacts in 2011, in a move that satirised digital surveillance and Big Data laws.



**Maxigas, Piratepond installation from Hackney Crack House at Temporary Autonomous Art show, London, 2011**

Other Peckham-based galleries that explore these concepts include Inland Studios, interested in, “thinking about the fundamentals of how art exists in display and how this might be redefined,” FlatTime House, the studio of the late John Latham, which he declared a “living sculpture” in 2003 and is now also a gallery with an interest in time-based media, and Arcadia Missa gallery.

“My best friend and I opened Arcadia Missa in 2011,” says its co-founder, Rózsa Fakras.

“We’d been collaborating at uni[versity] and wanted a space to continue our work. I grew up in Peckham. As a young child I was often between council housing or squats. The people who used to squat from my mum’s generation weren’t doing it to put on projects, but more doing it just to live. My experience of squatting and how precarious it can be is why AM is straight down the line. We pay rent, business rates, the lot. But I’ve also seen the cost of living here rise massively, which is why, as soon as we graduated, we looked into getting somewhere affordable.”

Dedicated to supporting performative digital practices, Arcadia Missa is just one of a number

of arts projects in Peckham that exist legitimately. Considering the rising cost of rent in London combined with a diminished ability to occupy empty properties, does this mean the end for young aspiring artists hoping to eek out an existence in the capital? Matthew Stone doesn’t believe so.

“My belief is that in every generation there will be people who are able to break through these bourgeois constraints,” he says. Fundamentally, that’s what art and creativity is - the triumph over suffering. And I’m not in any way supporting the changes to squatting laws — I think they’re criminal. I just believe that future generations will be able to change this. This isn’t the end for art.”

*Posted 2013 at: [dazeddigital.com](http://dazeddigital.com) | Used by kind permission of the author and the Dazed Group*



**Radical Bank of Brighton and Hove, 2015. From [radicalbank.wordpress.com](http://radicalbank.wordpress.com)**

**TALK:**  
**A CRITIQUE OF**  
**SQUATTED**  
**SOCIAL CENTRES**

**(excerpt)**

Paul Case



**Dublin,**  
**September**  
**28, 2014**

**— ... I**  
**do believe that squat-**  
**ted social centres are**

**60**      **House Magic**

**important.  
All I wish  
to do is  
shed light  
on the  
limits of  
such  
projects,  
particularly  
in the  
context of  
long-term**

**tactics of  
developing  
a radical  
movement**

....

My first points are obvious. A squatted social centre is pretty much a full time job, and they are utterly exhausting in terms of upkeep and organisation, and that's even before you move on to all the regular squatting problems such as repairs, the constant threat of eviction, neighbours getting annoyed, police calling round and so on. What usually happens is that there will be a small dedicated crew of people doing shitloads of work, who will eventually get burnt out. Although this burn out can happen in so many other environments, it has more emphasis in a squat because, more often than not, these people will be living in the environment they are working in. This increases the workload and tension, meaning people become tired and disillusioned, upset and then, sometimes, leave the project. When I was in the collective of a rented radical social centre, obviously there were arguments, personal issues and all the rest, but significantly, at the end of your shift, you could leave the space and go home. This provided much needed respite from the strains of the project.

Another thing which sounds obvious, but may have less obvious consequences, is the fact that they are temporary. While this is accepted by the squatting community, I feel that radical social centres should branch beyond this limited scene

and into whatever community it is a part of. A radical social centre is a local hub for radical activity, and therefore should do its best involve itself in its local environment. In squatted social centres, events are put on, open days, discussion groups, workshops – and sometimes, they are very successful. But the success is always tainted by the fact that the squatters will inevitably get evicted. What happens to the radical hub of the local community then? The squatters must look after their own shelter first,

than connection. With a squatted social centre, there is a heightened sense of security, and for good reason. You don't want anyone leaving the door open, you don't want anyone saying the wrong things to cops, or whatever. The squatting collective then tends to be quite closed to strangers joining it, and therefore closed to many who aren't a part of squatting culture. This can present some problems. Let's say, for example, a squatting collective is made only of white people (which, in my experience, they often



and probably move to a different area, leaving no lasting connections, and one less radical influence within that community....

I don't wish to paint the community as a separate entity to the social centre. But the nature of squatting can create more separation

are anyway). Because it's difficult for anyone from the wider community to join the collective, it would be therefore difficult for a person of colour. This would mean that the perspective of the squatted social centre is limited to a white one. If certain groups, such as people of colour,

queer people, old people, women and so on – are treated differently by society, those groups have a different experience of it. In order to support the community's needs, the social centre would need to include these experiences. The nature of the security-conscious squatted social centre threatens to marginalise these voices.

This lack of representation in squatting culture has effects on a broader scale. The people who run a squatted social centre simply do not represent how a vast majority of others live their lives. The fact they have the time to run one in the first place is a crucial difference. Most people simply do not have this time, whether due to work, looking after kids, or what have you. This creates an unintended divide,

centre becomes politically adrift, temporarily putting on some fun, cheap, interesting things before floating away.

There are arguments saying that a squatted social centre offers a snapshot of how a liberated world would work, a temporary autonomous zone. But temporary autonomy, if it does exist, does not offer anyone much in the long-term. Pretty much everyone, whether squatting, sleeping rough, or a tenant, is subject to oppressive economic and political restrictions on their lives. The squatted social centre becomes a space where people can feel more free, but this feeling is only a short hit, and when evicted the squatting collective moves on rather than helping create more permanent radical structures. The autonomy does not linger or and it does not grow from these temporary spaces....

*Excerpted from a talk given at the International Squatters Convergence in Dublin, September 2014. Posted at : [captainoftherant.wordpress.com](http://captainoftherant.wordpress.com)*



as most squatted social centres are formed from a fringe culture that a lot of people find difficult it to relate to. I feel that radical politics is at its most effective embedded in people's day to day realities, whether that be their workplace, their housing, or their family. Maybe it is more suitable to say that squatted social centres provide a brief shelter from this reality. People from the wider community may enjoy it, and appreciate all the effort, but without a direct connection to wider community, the social

# SQUATTERS IN MEXICO

Sublevarte Colectivo

**LAND (distribution and ownership). In 1915, Article 27 of the Constitution of the United Mexican States provided for the restitution of lands to the communities that**

# had been dispos- sessed and ordered provision for the people who lacked land.

Expropriation with restoration and allocation purposes would respect only legally established properties that would not exceed 50 hectares of prime land. States and territories of the Republic were given the task to fix the maximum extension of land that could be owned by a single individual or legally incorporated company, and divide the surplus that would be acquired by the State, by paying with bonds that would constitute the

agrarian debt. Due to all this, legal foundations for a profound agrarian reform were established.

Land tenure is characterized by two types of property: on the one hand, concentration of private farming lands in the hands of a few owners and on the other, territories in the hands of peasant communities and indigenous or villager groups, not intended for commercial use, nor for sale or distribution of lands of the country's territory.

Communal lands in the hands of peasant and indigenous groups generally follow a pattern of use that combines individual exploitation of arable land and some form of communal control over grazing and forest land.

With the commercialization of agriculture and land titling projects, the form of community property becomes private and individual property.

With the onslaught of neoliberal policies in the countryside, the Mexican government is putting the mechanisms conducive to weaken the social character of the land, by the deregulation of all protective regulations existent for the agrarian centers; stripping the land of its inalienable and not forfeitable character, opening the door to the privatization and concentration of ownership.

## **LABOR COOPERATIVES**

They are a form of social organization composed of individuals based on common interests and the principles of solidarity, self-help and mutual help, in order to meet individual and collective needs, through carrying out economic activities of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services.

## **COOPERATIVA PASCUAL (Pascual Cooperative)**

It is a Mexican cooperative society dedicated to processing fruit pulp and juice for the production, packaging, distribution and marketing of natural beverages.

## **CAFÉ VICTORIA**

(Guadalupe Victoria Street s/n. Mercado de La Paz / Plaza de la Constitución y Madero, Centro de Tlalpan, Mexico City)

## **HOUSING**

Other models of squatting – *Paracaidistas* (parachutists)

### **FRENTE POPULAR FRANCISCO VILLA (Francisco Villa Popular Front)**

It was founded in 1989 as a result of the crisis following the 1985 earthquake, as well as other problems of a social and political character, when several organizations decided to join together to meet the needs ailing the most vulnerable people in Mexico City, mainly in the popular urban areas, “thus began our experience of social struggle, strengthened by dealing with the difficulties of significant growth due to domestic/national/nationwide immigration”.

### **MOVIMIENTO ANTORCHISTA (National Torch Movement)**

The National Torch Movement advocates for change in the economic model in the country in order to create better material conditions for the working majorities. Their job is to organize citizens in solving common good demands, such as paving streets, obtaining housing, introducing basic services/utilities such as drinking/potable water, drainage/ sewage and electricity in urban neighborhoods and rural communities that lack the thereof, etc. Resources for arrangements and general support of the organization come from three sources: donations through popular collections; financial support given by other colleagues with regular jobs; and also small businesses, like grocery stores and small restaurants, that the organization has created over a quarter century of existence. “Antorcha” does not even receive money from its own party, the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional / Institutional Revolutionary Party).

### **CASA OKUPADA (Squat)**

Centro Social CULTURAL (Colonia Roma, Mexico City)

### **ZAM (Autonomous Makhnovist Zone)**

La Zona Autónoma Makhnovtchina (ZAM)

was an autonomous space set up in Mexico City. It began in 2009 as a continuation of the activities certain young groups had been doing for years with different punk and autonomous groups. “We needed a space to carry out the activities for our projects”, said the young people who managed the ZAM. “Just over a year and a half ago we were given this space by some *compas* (short for *compañerxs*) at a printing shop related to Zapatismo and, since then, it has been the place of our activities and projects and we have kept it autonomous within the city”.

Perhaps what’s most striking is the name of the place. Its members explained in this exercise of collective interviewing that the acronym ZAM is a hybrid of a text they liked and were influenced by, entitled ZAT (Zona Temporalmente Autónoma / Temporary Autonomous Zone), written by American anarchist Hakim Bey, and the Makhnovism movement. The text, they say, speaks of the autonomous areas appearing and disappearing in the world by creating “holes” in the control of capitalism, setting a free and creative space anywhere, which then disappears to appear at some other place.

This time, they say with pride, it appeared in Mexico City: “With this name we also reclaim Makhnovism, a Ukrainian anarchist movement that had an army of peasants and workers called the Black Army; a very similar story to that of Emiliano Zapata”. The ZAM group members clarify that, while the project was mostly onset by punk people, “they are not the only ones working here, because the purpose is not to create a ghetto or anything like that”. The idea is to build a wide space and, to put it one way, “a small world with room for many”. They explain that their only principle is “not to give room to political parties or authoritarian groups, or groups with racist, fascist, sexist, homophobic or xenophobic tendencies”.

### **OKUPA CASA NARANJA (the Orange House Squat)**

### **LA FURIA DE LAS CALLES (the Fury of the Streets)**

The organization began with the idea

of creating a distribution and publishing company for music, clothing and texts such as fanzines and scripts. Its purpose is to spread ideas alternative to capitalism and its false democracy oppressing us daily.

We sympathize with punk, anarchism, anti-capitalist autonomy, animal freedom, Zapatismo, free software and other resistance movements.

Due to the amount of published reports, our website became a reference point to many people interested in the above-mentioned topics, and it also gave room to other projects such as Furia Radio and *Comunidad Punk* fanzine (punk community), as well as other activities and concerts that we carry out.

Between 2008 and 2010 we had a place in Revolution Square that worked as a distribution point, right outside the Revolución Metro station. Then we moved the place to the Zona Autónoma Makhnovtchina near the Xola Metro station, until the latter was closed.

We currently do not have a physical location, but we get around by distributing concerts, demonstrations and meetings, and we also organize activities in other *compañerxs'* venues.

## **CHANTI OLLÍN**

Chanti Ollín is a squat that makes the right to housing visible; it verges on the “squatter” and acts as headquarters to productive projects. It is now ten years old, and emerged as a consequence of the 1999-2000 UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico) student movement.

In 2004 a group of students looking for alternative ways of life –not necessarily getting to the vortex of the Earth, inhabited an old building with no life, which they named with a tongue twister: “*Del-adentro-dentro-mentalización-de-la-cuna-del-cayo-heterotópico-visibilizador-ansina-como-en-denantes*”, aka Chanti Ollín.

Dozens of groups have moved around the five stories of the Chanti since then, and several projects have emerged, such as the *bicimáquinas* (bike-machines) workshop, *temazcal* (pre-Hispanic sweat lodge), cooperative bakery, silkscreen printing, dry

toilet (currently organic), music studio, radio booth and the green rooftop, among others.

## **OKUPA CHÉ**

Autonomous Self-Managed Work Space  
1999 – 2015 Ciudad Universitaria (University City), Mexico City

Student “cubicles” are spaces inside universities and colleges where students gather to undertake activities of awareness within the community, in order to solve problems affecting students and to engage with the establishment of the academy, often too academic and uncritical towards the complex reality outside the classroom, and organizations from other social areas.

Student cubicles or “cubos” are spaces where student and social representation can, in a collective and organized way, discuss, propose, plan, and carry out the necessary political work to meeting their objectives.

## **HACKLAB “RANCHO ELECTRÓNICO” (E-Ranch)**

We do what we want and believe in through digital and technological means; we experiment from a self-managed space where knowledge is not a commodity, but free and accessible to all. We maintain that collaborative spirit in the workshops and activities we organize and do not depend/rely on leading experts to tell us what to do, but strive to build and share knowledge and experiences collectively and horizontally. So recognition is for our entire community, living day-to-day and growing *Rancho Electrónico*.

We don't want the Internet to be a monitoring and control tool for States and large corporations. We demand openness, access and freedoms on the Internet. We refuse to accept the limits of an Internet of exclusive platforms such as Facebook, Google, and all those agencies and corporations that retain data and make profit from personal information, infringing people's right to privacy.

## **ECPM-68**

In May 1988, on a Sunday at 8 in the morning, the Escuela de Cultura Popular Revolucionaria Mártires del 68 (The Martyrs of '68 School of

Popular Revolutionary Culture) was created at painter and muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros's house in Polanco. The project arose from the need to establish an educational culture project which was linked to the country's social movements struggling for socialism and liberation.

\*Its founders were Alberto Híjar, Enrique Cisneros and Iseo Noyola, members of the Taller de Arte e Ideología (Art and Ideology Workshop), Centro de Experimentación Teatral y Artística (Center for Experimentation in Drama and Art) and Organización de Arte y Cultura (the dissolving Art and Culture Organization), respectively. The Círculo de Estudios de la Casa del Lago (Lake House Study Group) would later join in.

### **BIBLIOTECA SOCIAL RECONSTRUIR ("Rebuild(ing) Social Library")**

Biblioteca Social Reconstruir is an anarchist space created in 1978 by Ricardo Mestre Ventura, a Spanish anarchist and member of the CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo / National Confederation of Labour) and the FAI (Federación Anarquista Internacional / International of Anarchist Federations) who went in exile to Mexico, as a victim of Franco's victory in the Spanish civil war. It is located in Mexico City and has over 3000 books, more than 850 of which are anarchist; some very old, like Proudhon's *Pornocracia*, published in Spain in 1892; 4700 magazines, with historic examples like the famous *Revista blanca* (white magazine); some published during the 1936 Spanish civil war; and some old Mexican publications such as number 13 of newspaper *Regeneración*, published by the Flores Magón brothers on November 7th 1900.

The library's visitors are researchers, students, professors, and most of all young libertarians who search its collection for inspiration and knowledge in their quest for freedom and justice for all. The BSR is going through a difficult economic situation: the high costs of phone use, electricity, the Internet, and correspondence have put it in an extreme position. It does not have the funds to pay for several months of past due rent and currently

lacks basic utilities on account of non-payment; it needs everyone's support so as to not disappear.

### **CARACOLAS ZAPATISTAS**

*Los Caracoles* are the organizational regions of autonomous Zapatista communities in Chiapas, Mexico. They were created in 2003 to replace the previous form of organization, the *Aguascalientes*, after a period of extensive discussion on the need to change relationships between Zapatista communities, between those and the EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional / Zapatista Army of National Liberation), and with the outside world.

The highest organs in the structure of political and social organization of the Zapatista communities are the Juntas de Buen Gobierno (Councils of Good Government), composed of representatives of the Municipios Autónomos Zapatistas (Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities) in the communities of each "Caracol". Their members are rotating and replaceable at all times, and among their tasks are coordinating the help and support between communities and distributing external aid more appropriately.

### **FREE, COMMUNITY, AUTONOMOUS MEDIA**

#### [TIMELINE OF AUTONOMY IN MEXICO]

1888  
TOPOLOBAMPO  
Rural utopian community  
Texas, Mexico

1854  
LIBERAL PARTY  
Reform War (1857–1861)  
Anticlerical and anti-military

1910  
MEXICAN REVOLUTION  
Land and freedom  
*La tierra es de quien la trabaja* ("The land belongs to he who works it")

1912  
HOUSE OF THE WORLD WORKER (“Casa  
del Obrero Mundial”)  
Anarcho-syndicalism

movement in defense of sacred territory  
Wirikuta  
Yaqui movement in defense of its water and  
territory

1915  
AGRARIAN REFORM

1940s  
Exiles from the Spanish Civil War  
Ricardo Mestre (*Biblioteca Social  
Reconstruir*)  
Culture and anarchism

GUERRILLAS IN MEXICO  
Mexican ‘68

1980s  
Pascual Cooperative  
Premises of the Sindicato Nacional de  
Costureras (seamstresses’ union)  
Popular civil organization in the face of the  
earthquake

1990s  
EZLN (Zapatista Army of National  
Liberation)  
CGH-UNAM strike (Consejo General de  
Huelga / general strike council and Universidad  
Nacional Autónoma de México / National  
Autonomous University of Mexico)

2000s  
Rural Normal School, Mexhe, Hidalgo  
San Salvador Atenco. Resisting forced  
dispossession of land for the construction of the  
airport

2010s  
UACM strike (Universidad Autónoma de la  
Ciudad de México / Autonomous University of  
Mexico City)  
Instituto Politécnico Nacional strike  
(National Polytechnic Institute)  
Cherán. Fight over land resources  
Mazahua. Fight over water  
Xochistlahuaca. Fight over the land against  
the construction of a highway  
Cerro del Quemado (“Quemado” hill),

**REMEMBERING  
THE LIFE  
AND LEGACY OF  
JOHN TRUDELL  
(Excerpt)**

Alex Jacobs

**John Trudell was a  
Santee Dakota  
activist, artist, actor,  
and poet, who led  
a life dedicated  
to indigenous human**

**70 House Magic**

**rights,  
land and  
language  
issues. He  
helped  
spark  
a spoken  
word  
movement  
that is  
a con-  
tinuation**

**of Native  
American  
oral tradi-  
tions. He  
walked on  
December  
8, 2015, at  
the age of  
69....**

In 1969 Native American students and organizers, Trudell among them, occupied Alcatraz Island from November 20, 1969 to June 11, 1970. That group became "Indians of All Tribes," and they issued the manifesto, We Hold the Rock, and eventually the book, Alcatraz is Not an Island. The Alcatraz Occupation became an incubator for the nascent Native American rights movement, including the American Indian Movement (AIM) in Minneapolis. The legal basis for this occupation was the Treaty of Fort Laramie of 1868, which said that any abandoned federal property would revert to the Indian

Nations. This treaty's legality would also inspire many more actions across Indian country. Trudell has always maintained that all these political actions were not just moral, ethical issues but were legal issues, according to Native treaty rights and federal trust responsibilities.

Trudell used his broadcasting experience on the airwaves of "Radio Free Alcatraz" (a clip from the program can be heard on the 2005 documentary *Trudell*). His marriage would end during this period as he became a leading Native spokesman attracting national attention. The negotiations over Alcatraz, the proposed Indian Center and the occupation itself fell apart in 1971, but so many names of Native activists, organizers, artists, writers and actors from that time would become prominent in the ensuing struggles, movement and documentation.

Events would cascade from actions related to the Raymond Yellow Thunder beating in 1972, to the nationally organized cross-country caravan Trail of Broken Treaties in 1972 that ended with the occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs building in Washington, D.C. and the issuance of the 20 Points Manifesto. The scattering of activists after the BIA takeover led to AIM actions at the Custer County Courthouse, followed by the 1973 Liberation/Occupation of Wounded Knee village by AIM and the Oglala Sioux Civil Rights Organization. In 1973, Trudell became the national spokesperson for AIM, a position that he held until 1979....

[Jacobs' text continues, detailing intensive FBI surveillance, tragic events in Trudell's life, and his subsequent career as poet and spoken word artist. He details highlights of his film career.]

Trudell's movie career also created a new generation of fans with feature films like *Thunderheart*, a 1992 Hollywood thriller by director Michael Apted, who also swung a documentary film into the deal, *Incident at Oglala*, produced/narrated by Robert Redford. He was also in the 1998 seminal Native-made film, *Smoke Signals*, written by Sherman Alexie and directed by Chris Eyre. His great line in the

film is, "It's a good day to be indigenous," in which he is again back to NDN radio roots as DJ Randy Peone of K-REZ. He was also in the Steven Seagal thriller, *On Deadly Ground*, and played Coyote in Hallmark's made for TV movie, *Dreamkeeper*. *Incident at Oglala* and *Trudell* were important projects that helped to develop Redford's Sundance Institute's Native American Program, as overseen by Bird Runningwater....

Alex Jacobs, Mohawk, is a visual artist and poet living in Santa Fe.

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