THE OCCUPIED TIMES OF LONDON
#22 AUG2013
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Editorial

"Nothing will change" sounds like a tagline to Francis Fukuyama's End of History, the celebration of 'liberal democracy' as the final evolution of human governance. Perhaps fittingly, these were the words that NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden used to describe his greatest fear after he contributed evidence of the global US/UK surveillance operation that scaffolds western liberal democracy, or empire, as it is understood by those at the receiving end of such an arrangement.

Essentially, what the Snowden files reveal is surveillance technology at a certain stage of historical development, held in the hands of parties with an interest in accelerating this development; the contradiction being that in 'data' form this information is far more susceptible to being hacked and evidenced than in the paper surveillance setting of the Le Carre novel. The governmental line claims that metadata is not private/personal information. However, through its collection and storage, a profile of an individual and their life can easily be built by those who control or share it; organisations like the NSA

or GCHQ who, as Snowden revealed, drink from the same trough.

Various statutes including DPA 1998, RIPA 2000, ACSA 2001, and the proposed Communications Data bill all display the state's attempts to control the wisps of algorithms, identities and data in the global communications databank. The right to the city – the focus of this issue - is another aspect of the same struggle. It is a fight for control over people as 'subjects', the spaces and currents we move between and occupy and the coercive forms of commodity and debt that shape and define our environment.

Communities are fracturing as their inhabitants are flung to the periphery in the name of 'regeneration' and 'redevelopment'. It is plainly apparent that the intention of policymakers is to purge central London, making it into a hub for commercial wealth. A grand supra-geographic terrain is being mapped, ensuring the global reach of national and supranational states of surveillance. In these physical and digital gated communities, free spaces for different identities to meet and create new social relations are limited. Under the guise of 'protection', all space in the city becomes monitored in true panopticon style. But this is not for the 'greatest happiness for the greatest number' as the proposed utility of this operation would have us believe.

Under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, the right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence exists, but not as an absolute right. It is curtailed 'in accordance with the law' and 'where necessary in a democratic society' i.e. by the state in the interests of 'national security', 'public safety or the economic well-being of the country', for 'the prevention of disorder or crime' etc; a very broad range of vague restrictions which are available to public authorities to curb our right to privacy. A form of global sovereign power has emerged, which comprises the dominant nation-states together with supranational institutions and major capitalist corporations with increasingly unlimited access to intelligence, and unhindered powers to usurp rights and property.

Within this global configuration, it becomes incredibly difficult to claim any right or power, especially when you are the one being regenerated - many residents who have fallen foul of 'regeneration' schemes are not given all the information they need, or are purposely misled by public relations representatives. Some are forcibly evicted without any meaningful redress, others face state-sanctioned brutality when protecting their space and communities, like those recently violently evicted from an established community on Rushcroft Road, Brixton. There is no power for people under the market-state duopoly: people have no right to ask how and why they are being dispossessed, how and why they are being surveilled, or for whose benefit, for fear of interfering with 'business sensitivities', revenue-generating streams or the power of the state and its corporate partners.

Various anti-eviction and private renters groups have sprung up in London, joining with already established similar groups - a positive sign that an alternative to the status quo does exist, and the numbers in the multitude are growing. Housing action groups and dedicated campaigns continue to mushroom across the city, challenging the spread of powerful global networks of hierarchy and division. They are signs that an alternative network is slowly being produced whereby difference can be expressed through collaborative means. The common can take root and begin to shape itself.

Recent years have seen cities of differing sizes, histories and fortunes become the key sites of contestation as urbanites have reacted collectively to the different forces imperilling their own notion of what it is to have a right to create and recreate one's own city. Community uprisings in Santiago de Chile and Quebec inspired a remarkable proportion of those populations to join their struggles against the marketisation of education and wider society. The people of Madison, Wisconsin mobilised huge numbers against a newly-elected Republican Governor and his brazenly naked campaign lies, months before Occupy Wall Street existed. Metropolises like Cairo, Alexandria and Tunis were central to the overthrow of dictators in their respective countries, and the building of new political consciousness and coalitions in public urban spaces.

Most recently, Istanbul and megacities like Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro have been thrust into focus by the bravery of their people facing down unrestrained state repression. As with other uprisings mentioned, those in Turkey and Brazil have spread to cities in every region of those countries. #DiranGezi appears to sit upon boiling frustrations with the suffocating effects of the neoliberal urban growth machine combined with dissatisfaction with an Islamist President whose power is situated in the more conservative rural population and the new manufacturing wealth of central Turkey. Rio, meanwhile, is undergoing huge changes with its port being totally redeveloped and its more central constellation of favelas being forcibly "pacified" one at a time. The ultimate driving force at work here is one that Londoners can well understand: the use of global sporting events (in Brazil's case: World Cup 2014 & Rio Olympics 2016) as an excuse to privatise, securitise and cleanse central urban space in order to make it ripe for capital investment and safe for consumption.

A final example is a nod to the future of the neoliberal model for the post-industrial city: Detroit. This great US city of the Fordist age announced in late July that it would file for bankruptcy. The decision was announced by the city's 'Emergency Financial Manager' – a position now common throughout the state of Michigan, appointed directly by the state's Republican governor and granted authority to make economic decisions by decree without even a residual pretense of failed democratic process. This is an American city, 85% African American, being forced to undergo what is essentially structural adjustment i.e unelected individuals deciding to sell off public assets, cut and privatise services, reduce pay and pensions.

The pattern of public austerity coupled with private dispossession, all marshalled by an evermore securitised state, is both a reality for the present and a formula for worsening conditions in the future. With this in mind, the fear of perpetual inertia, despite an ever-increasing stockpile of evidence against the trajectory of injustice upon which we find ourselves, is not so much an implicit comprehension of business-as-usual. Rather, it's a response to the perception of civilisation in a state of active, rapid decay.

The examples of urban resistance explored herein all point to the city being the integral site of present and future anti-capitalist struggle. It is within this concrete domain that any effective hope of change, resistance and transformation must continue to manifest. Let's imagine and pursue a vision of what the city might look like should we subvert our relationship within it against the subjugation of capital and its political preference; to remake a world in which Snowden's fear – "nothing will change" – falls short as the portent of the perpetual end of history scenario, but resonates as the epitaph of a bygone era.

BREAKIN'THE LAW

Feel as though nobody cares if I live or die So I might as well begin to put some action in my life – Judas Priest, Breaking the Law

At midnight on the 1st September 2012 it became a criminal offence to live or intend to live in a residential building having entered as a trespasser, punishable by up to six months in prison and/or a fine of up to £5,000. Section 144 of the LASPO Act meant practically that people already living in squatted residential properties would be committing the offence. Thousands of people went to bed on a Wednesday night and woke up in their beds facing the prospect of arrest and imprisonment.

Though the criminalisation of squatting and other forms of trespass has long been a project of politicians of all hues – it was, after all, a Labour government that attempted to criminalise trespass in the late 70s – previous attempts have fallen short of their aims, largely due to the successful campaigns and opposition mounted against them. This latest attempt has created a criminal offence of squatting in relatively specific circumstances, so squatting is still legal, though several Conservative MPs have expressed intentions to extend the legislation to cover all types of buildings.

The Squatters Legal Network was formed to support squatters and other vulnerably housed people who would be affected by the new law. We have a 24hr emergency phone line to provide legal advice on the new law and other legislation that affects squatters, homeless people and other precariously housed people. We do arrestee and prisoner support, and we try and help people who get charged (with the help of decent solicitors' firms) to ensure the best outcome for defendants. We also track and record the enforcement of the new law and host legal workshops on s144.

The clause that would criminalise squatting in residential buildings was tacked on to a Bill already in its third reading in the Commons: the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill. Our main focus has been on the immediate impacts of s144 – the arrests, charges and court cases of squatters, and dealing with the misuses and abuses of the new law by cops and property owners. It is now becoming clear that there will be other, wider reaching effects of the Act that s144 was appended to, beyond criminalising people for occupying empty properties.

The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act introduced deep cuts to the provision of Legal Aid which will have profound effects on the way that working-class people will experience civil law. Some of these changes have already been made but we will feel its full effects in the autumn, when the Act will effectively remove financial support for most civil cases involving housing, benefits, medical negligence, employment, debt and immigration. The cuts also have dire implications for Law Centres and Citizens Advice Bureau, some of which have had to close already.

Further changes to Legal Aid are being consulted on at the moment that would have implications for criminal courts. The Ministry of Justice plan to reduce the 1,600 solicitors registered to provide legal aid to 400. It will also introduce "competitive tendering" for cases with companies such as G4S and Eddie Stobart competing to contract out cases to barristers – the same "race to the bottom" logic of competition that has seen every public service that has been privatised degraded and devalued. Under the current proposals those that do end up in prison will no longer be entitled to legal aid if they challenge their treatment in jail, and Judicial Reviews will also be harder to bring.

We might say that the right to the city must include the right to legal representation. The city is a constantly contested space and this contestation necessarily involves oppressive apparatuses: the Police, Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service, and Her Majesty's Prison Service. These apparatuses have always been skewed toward the wealthy, white and male, but the cuts to Legal Aid that have already been made, as well as the cuts to come, will further deny access to representation by those who can least afford it. If the right to the city, the "right to change ourselves by changing the city", necessarily involves conflict with power, then by removing our ability to defend ourselves properly in their courts the State is removing an aspect of our right to the city.

We might also articulate the issue in more practical terms - what are we to do? What would a necessary alternative to Legal Aid look like and how would it function? If a defendant is no longer legally aidable how will we secure representation for them? How do we keep ourselves and each other out of prison?

These questions have a particular importance in a time of crisis. As long as the city is a contested space, a site of conflict and contradiction, people will need representation for housing, benefits, immigration, protest and other criminal charges that politicised activity incur. It is in times of crisis that we see a rise in militancy (if the law does not work for us, then we will necessarily defy it) but also a rise in repression and repressive measures; the creation of new criminal laws and the intensification of policing, among others.

There are numerous legal support and defence groups that serve different communities and specialise in different aspects of law. Groups like the Legal Defence and Monitoring Group and Green and Black Cross do invaluable work for those who protest and participate in direct action

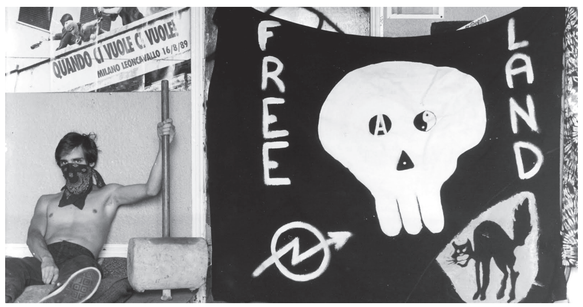
Legal defence groups and networks have a long and rich history in the UK from the early trade union movements, through to the Miners' strikes of the 80s, the Poll Tax rebellion and protest movements of the 90s, the more recent student movement and the August riots of 2011. The issue at hand is that the model these groups follow (as well as organisations like Law Centres) largely relies on Legal Aid to pay the solicitors and barristers to represent people. If the ability to do that is withdrawn, then that model may cease to be financially viable.

The changes to legal aid also present a problem for solicitors and barristers. Apart from the ethics of denying representation to those who cannot afford it, many criminal solicitors and barristers will see a sharp decline in cases and clients and many may even stop practising. How can we retain their skills and knowledge when the financial mechanisms by which they function are withdrawn?

What other forms of support can lay people offer each other if we cannot find professional representation? Could McKenzie Friends organised and trained by legal and defence networks become more widely used? It is also possible for lay volunteers to prepare legal defences - for example, the Advisory Service for Squatters has helped people successfully defend themselves in possession hearings since 1975. Skill shares and workshops on preparing criminal defences and acting as McKenzie Friends may be one way legal support and defence groups can help defendants. Existing legal support and defence groups already rely on the hard work and dedication of too few people, and all could do with extra volunteers and financial aid already, needs that will only increase in the near future.

Where there are courts that we are tried in, there must be structures of mutual aid and solidarity to support those who are in them. As the Social Democratic compromise is withdrawn we must fill the space that is left by it, with all the potential for radical political change and autonomy that comes with it. At the same time, to put it bluntly, if we are to challenge power effectively in a revanchist, repressive political climate then we must be able to keep ourselves and our fellow travellers out of prison. How we do this when Legal Aid is cut is something we must organise and prepare for.

network23.org/squatterslegalnetwork



GROW HEATHROW

INTERVIEW

Occupied Times: What is Grow Heathrow? What's it about and how linked are you to the transition town movement?
Paddy: Grow Heathrow is a squatted market garden in the centre of where the third runway was due to be built. Our project was set up by Transition Heathrow which was a sort of the mother project which aims to create a resilient, sustainable space in the community that can survive many generations, survive any shocks or attacks it might face. Grow Heathrow as a project shares those aims but also has quite particular geographical space in which it does that.
OT: The site we are in is right on the outskirts of London. Do you feel part of the city, or apart from the city?
P: I feel like we're on the edge. Permaculture is a set of principles that we try to use at Grow Heathrow and Transition Heathrow. A Permaculture principle holds that the edge is the most productive space, the space where two worlds meet. In this case, it might be the city and the countryside or our way of running things here and the industrial complexes seen at Heathrow and the M25 and M4. We're on the edge. That's a where a lot of the power comes from, but also a lot of difficulties.
OT: Would you say that's a point from which you can resist? Is it a defensive line to prevent encroachment or that the changing nature of the space makes it less stable?
P: It's all of those things really. Speaking for myself, I'm an urbanite. I grew up in the city. So, if we take me as an example, what happens when someone from the city, or people in the city, meet the countryside? Not just by going out to the country and being overwhelmed, but what happens on the edge space? And that's quite productive. Suddenly, a lot of my ideas can be applied to this space but within the concept of living among wild plants and animals, which is new. It creates a different perspective to everything I've done before. Let's take the building materials for this building. If we lived in the woods in the middle of Wales, we wouldn't have the building materials because we wouldn't be able to go out to all of these skips where people just drop something off from the city; all of it's waste that we're making use of. So, we've knocked this space up, with no money because there's that waste. But we'd not be able to knock it up without this space, and this space is open land. It's a countryside of sorts. That's a productive space.
OT: What does sustainability mean? From going round the camp it seems you are remarkably sustainable in areas of food, energy and housing.
P: Sustainability is a good word, isn't it, because it's much abused nowadays. The word that we've also been using is resilience. The transition movement is quite interested in the idea of resilience. In terms of sustainability and resilience, I personally and somewhat collectively hope that we take the approach of the Native American style of thinking which is that you consider the impact of your decisions seven generations on. And when you're thinking about something and trying to make a decision, you look back seven generations for guidance. Seven generations back in my home, my community, my family, who am I talking about? Where will the seventh generation from me be? For me that's what sustainability really means, and if we're going to have resilient communities, that's how we need to think. It's something I aspire to, I'm learning how to do it because it's such an alien concept.
OT: That word, resilience, is interesting too, as one being used in those glossy, global capitalist conferences where crisis is seen as a systemic norm. 'How do we teach people resilience' etc. Do you see it as a transformative thing that can actually challenge this logic, or is it inevitable?
P: I think the most interesting work on this is being done in the transition movement, where they really focus on resilience and community resilience. On a very basic level, they're saying: how can we plan for a time 30 years from now when, on a very practical level, we're able to operate in a healthy way as a community without fossil fuels and an abundance of oil? How can we do that without a reliance on outside agency and without relying on governments or some giant corporate aid structure? In terms of fossil fuels, I guess that is a certain definition of resilience. But once you start trying to do that then resilience expands, because that's actually really hard. It requires total transformation of how we live, in the West, to ways which we have forgotten and ways which don't yet exist.

And so resilience becomes this massive question. In the three and a half years we've lived on this site whole areas of life opened up to me which I just didn't even begin to factor in. The largest factor has been our Wellbeing Group. We knew we were going to be into using non-fossil fuels and DIY, skill sharing, building and growing food and so on. These ideas were all present at the start of the project. But the idea of having to learn how to cope with living in a collective where one person's emotional trauma from their childhood starts fucking up your life and everyone else's interactions on a daily level... how do you begin to deal with that? You have to learn a whole load of stuff, around psychology, psychotherapy, group dynamics, stuff that none of us who started the project had a clue about. Stuff that we've had to learn in order to survive. So that all becomes part of what it means to be resilient, how do you do that as a collective? For me, this has been the largest area of learning.
OT: So could you say you're developing an infrastructure for a sustainable resistance. Are you anticipating a greater crisis? If you're learning to live and work collectively and build a culture where you have this resistance, does that feedback into the city?
P: I think some people would look at it like that. I suppose I'm more pessimistic. There's a common trope around here of 'getting ready for the apocalypse'. It's a bit post-apocalyptic, the world we've created here. I guess how I see it... if everything unravels just a bit... power structures as they are, resistance movements as they are... then the things that are resilient enough to survive, their politics will be quite powerful, their ways of doing things quite influential. And so, if we can create something strong enough to survive with the political values that we hold, then hopefully that can be recreated in a time of greater need. So, in that sense, it does feed back into the city. But, the pessimistic bit is, I don't know what the city will look like that it will feed back into. I think it's going to unravel in a major way, in the way that cities like Detroit or Liverpool have, where the populations have collapsed and there's large elements of urban decay and securitisation of the centres of wealth and their surrounding areas. That's how I see London developing - increasingly securitised in the centre, the removal of many of the working class / poorer residents to the edges. And then, at some point, the drop off of the income that London brings in. I don't know exactly what that looks like, but I know it's not very nice and I definitely think that people will then be looking to meet their basic needs in more traditional ways i.e. getting back to the land.
OT: How good are your relations with others in the village?
P: Pretty good actually. The wider community here is massively damaged, that's the travesty. When we moved there was a strong community, but it's no longer strong because the airport bought out most of the [home]owners in the villages, so most of the people who have been here the longest and have most invested in the villages, have all been made an offer that they couldn't refuse, which created a critical mass - the more people that accepted, the more people that took it. It was also a time-limited offer as well which created panic: 'shit, if I don't take this now, I might be blighted by this airport for the rest of my life and I'll never be able to get out'. So, the community got ripped out and there are very few long term community people left; replaced by short-term tenants, most of whom work for the airport. Interestingly, some of the only people left are those with long-term social housing. They couldn't sell their houses, didn't want to leave, and are some of our biggest supporters.
OT: Has the council tried to move in and help clear them out
P: The council is opposed to expansion, officially. You could say that they are systematically undermining the community so that there is no one to fight them. If they come back in five years, they might find that they have been successful. As a project that aims to build community and create community links, we have really suffered. Nearly all of our neighbours we had really good relations with in our first year, have now left. They are basically all gone.
OT: So, I just want to talk about your ideas on direct action because I think what you are doing is clearly direct action. Do you conceive it as being something that you think lots of other people should be doing right now and it's something to follow, or do you see it as being something symbolic, talking more about your ideas of the worsening crisis? Do you think it is possible to live alternatively inside of capitalism, or do you think that you are spending most of your time having to struggle to reproduce what you already have and trying to maintain it?
P: Yeah, I think it's possible to live alternatively. I mean, if we assume capitalism is a set of social relations and it's how we relate to each other, if we break those relations down and look at what they really look like, and actually what relations we would like them to be, and we start to relate like that... being a bit forceful about it and really having to struggle with that, or whether it comes naturally... it's possible. And so, maybe it's 'doing alternative' in spite of capitalism, and I would argue it's undermining capitalism and the relations that hold it together. In terms of how possible is it, I think there are lots of interesting non-capitalist legal avenues to exploit, that we don't always exploit. So, for example, here we are trying to set up a community land trust. A community land trust is an old idea – it goes back to the cooperative movement – that land should be held in trust for the benefit of the community. It only recently (in 2009, or 2008) got legal recognition as an established legal ownership structure, but since then, the movement of community land trusts has really taken off in the UK and there's loads that have come into being and there's loads more in planning. That's one avenue: a community land trust is a very real way that we can carve a little bit of legal space out in which we can live in alternative social relations that are non-capitalistic social relations.

And, there are others, such as cooperatives, cooperative businesses and other forms, and lots more. So yes, I think there are lots of avenues open and people should be exploiting them and are exploiting them. Sometimes I wonder if there is a tension between positively living those relationships or positioning oneself as anti-capitalist and almost relying on the thing you're opposing to define yourself. And, I think here, we have walked the line between the two, but we are definitely much more on the end of trying to create positive new forms of social relations and experiment with new forms of social relations which are post-capitalist. Part of being able to do that is about the environmental setting and context... living on the land and seeing that that land and the elements can give you almost everything you need to survive... gives you the belief in an autonomy outside of capitalism. I think it's harder to believe in that when you are living in a squat in central London and you get all of your food out of skips or shoplift, or whatever compromise you have to make - it's harder to believe in it and it's easier to then just define yourself as an anti; as an oppositional force which then reinforces the whole.
OT: The community here seems to work very well, without formal disciplinary structures, do you think this is something applicable to wider and larger communities?
P: There are disciplinary structures, but they are just less explicit because we are a relatively small number of people and we are close-knit. If someone is behaving badly, it then becomes a collective issue and something will have to be done on a pragmatic level. And, on a social level, people will start to let you know in other ways, if not in a straightforward way. It's a live question here, and I can imagine it's harder for places like Occupy. So, when we set up here, at the time there was a project called Kew Eco Village that was next to Kew Bridge, and it was like proto-Occupy; it was open, public... welcoming all comers onto the land, with no clear focus with what they were there for, other than to be, which is cool, but it looked like hard work, fucking hard work. It came from a place of massive idealism, which I guess maybe Occupy did as well, but the difference I guess is that Occupy was performing the spectacular, which also Kew Bridge was to a point. It was cool, but we weren't as idealistic, and we were like, if we do that then our lives will be overrun with crazies and we are already crazy enough ourselves.

I like to think of it as pragmatism. Ideals are your signposts; you try to move towards them as much as is pragmatically possible and it's always going to be more possible the more you work at it. Hopefully, they are good ideals.

We have played a spectacular role, in the sense of we are here and not just quietly somewhere where no one is really paying attention, because of the power of the potential example we might be able to create; we didn't know we would create it but we hoped to create it. And, from the beginning of Transition Heathrow as a concept, that was why we did it here. There is all this attention on this area, there is all this powerful community politics - a community which we can relate to. It is sort of rural as there are distinct villages surrounded by fields, and yet it relates to large numbers of people who live in the city; they can all come here, and do. So, it was us trying to perform that middle ground and as a result of it being next to an international airport, being on the edge of London and being on this contested site, in terms of memes, it has gone all over the world! Travellers come from mad places. People come and say 'yeah, we heard about you in Africa'.

The antecedent is the Climate Camp for us, so Occupy existed after we had already set up, but a lot of how we could even imagine this is because of Climate Camp. A number of us were involved enough in Climate Camp to learn that you can build a compost toilet, have a rocket stove, that you can squat a little bit of land, and 'process' in a major way - working groups that can relate to each other in a non-hierarchical way and so on. And, Climate Camp because of the numbers and the level of skill and organisation that was brought to it, for me, was a real learning experience that made this possible and made it possible to think about how to do this for quite a while.

In some ways, Climate Camp is also the antecedent for Occupy in the UK. And then, I love how ideas travel through movements, if you look at how Climate Camp coalesced a lot of years of good, hard learning experience around the road protests and the camps that lived there and the movement that spun off from that, Climate Camp gathered a lot of that learning and put it together in a really high quality way that people could experience. That all came out again in other movements, and what I loved about Occupy is watching how something I experienced through Climate Camp, was then spread memetically around the whole world through the Occupy movement. Consensus decision making, even the idea of waving your hands, is a known possibility because of Occupy.
OT: How can people get involved and help out?
P: Come and visit and get stuck in. Every Thursday we have an open work day where we just do useful jobs on-site, and everybody who lives here will be here if they can, to show you around and how to get involved. Also, there are specific open times of the week. If you are into bikes, we have a Wednesday afternoon bike workshop where we try to teach people how to fix their own bikes. On a Friday we have a foraging workshop. On a Sunday we run a growing club. And, once a month we have an open arts-based workshop on a Saturday afternoon. Those are our regular things, but we also run one-off events that happen here all the time. Our website or announcement list is a place to learn about that. If people visit and they find that they like it, it is possible for them to become a longer term visitor and get more involved. It is also possible for them to become a resident if it fits for them and the community. We don't have any money, we only have the land and the energy people offer!

On July 3 the Court of Appeal announced its decision regarding the future of Grow Heathrow. The judges failed to reach a unanimous decision on the case but by majority, the appeal was dismissed and permission was granted for the owners to seek a warrant for an eviction.

One of the judges did find that squatters as well as tenants are entitled to respect for their home under article 8 of The European Convention on Human Rights and that the court should consider the individual circumstances of those affected when deciding how soon to make an eviction.

Grow Heathrow are now working with their lawyers on a further appeal to the Supreme Court to define the arguments about whether article 8 is relevant to private landowners.

In the meantime, there is a low risk of imminent eviction. www.transitionheathrow.com

The Writing on the Wall

Mark Kauri

Throughout the course of Mathieu Kassovitz's seminal realist film, La Haine, the writing on a billboard in the streets of Paris is altered. What at first promised "The world is yours" is reappropriated, with spray paint, to counter-propose: "The world is ours."

Our considerations of these statements explore the basic assumptions, ideals and actualities of liberty and our rights to – or within – the world around us. The differing dynamics exposed by these alternate statements are nowhere more visceral than in our considerations of life in the twenty-first century city, where the processes of neoliberal commerce are as entrenched and routine as the route we take to work. From commute to workhouse, there is no delineation; and in a world in which the commodity-form stretches into the "out-of-work" hours, how much of our activity – night, day and weekend - isn't really an extension of this unwavering commute?

Activity in the city is routine, ordained and maintained largely through the coercive 'metadata' of commercial custom and worker relations. Like dead metaphors in language – where all poetic potency has been lost as a result of recurrent use – the signifiers of this metadata are ingrained and unobserved, to the point where behaviour in the city conforms, almost completely. As a consequence, much like the inhabitants of Hotel California, the workforce of the city is technically free to check out anytime, but can never really leave. So what's left to do but to daydream of "Californication" through every 'white market' transaction: at work, within our properties and in the bars, clubs and 'leisure facilities' the city has to offer.

Of course, there are moments when this daydream breaks. Moments when, more than ever before, the world is yours. Remember what the world meant to you the last time you fell in love. How easily the coercive signifiers of the commute fell apart to reveal a city of possibility – of rule-breaking, pursuit and potential. Those encounters and situations in our lives that are caught up in romantic narratives represent moments of potential when the curtain more readily falls on the otherwise orchestrated city before us - when we encounter, first-hand, the scope of our own liberty and when the façade of concrete and commercial currents that otherwise directs our actions is most readily challenged, and disposed of; albeit momentarily. The point here is to evoke the very real refutation of that old adage – "there is no alternative" – when it comes to possibilities for our lives within the world.

The artist and architect Constant Nieuwenhuys went to great depths to explore and document such alternatives in his conception of New Babylon: a series of elevated zones in cities and in the countryside. New Babylon envisions supported landscapes to cater a nomadic species of play-beings. The real value of New Babylon here lies not in our consideration of the potential realisation of Constant's vision, but in the very real – and very possible – illustration of the world of alternatives of our own design.

To alternate further, we may find that we don't need to reimagine the city, so much as reimagine the agents within it. Raoul Vaneigem, Constant's former comrade in the Situationist International, considered the landscapes of late capitalism as near-vacuous, where space between people and things is populated largely by alienating mediations: the city as a labyrinth "in which you are allowed only to lose yourself. No games. No meetings. No living." But rather than return the city to the drawing board, Vaneigem instead proposed the revolution of the self, and by extension, the world. Retracted from the concrete vision of projects such as New Babylon, but rooted more in the organic matter-of-fact world of everyday life, Vaneigem proposed the poetic organisation and practice of creative spontaneity; from commute to workhouse, and to the time we spend in the out-of-hours markets. As with moments of high romance, poetic action must take as its foundation a conception of the world as yours, together with the will to practice experimental activity above and beyond the framework of any theoretical model or alternatively imagined city-space.

The visionary writer JG Ballard believed in the power of the imagination to "remake the world", but this only gets us so far. For Vaneigem, praxis is a necessary component of reconstruction and revolution. Insofar as we tolerate the blueprints of philosophy and the staticity of imagination as nothing more than surrogate daydreams within the confines of our predicament, the writing on the wall will remain the same; the world is theirs. What is required of our relationship with the city is a bridge between Ballard's faith and the reality of an experimental and poetic praxis that may help to transform – or evoke the transformation of – the self; and the world within oneself.

What might such action look like? These kinds of abstract musings won't cut it, as spontaneity and action are a part of the mix, but we can continue to ask ourselves: where, within the world of the perpetual commute, may we make greater efforts to expand our liberties, or to poeticise-in-action? Insofar as the agents of the city exist within the domain of everyday life, there is kindling of potential literally all around us. Poetics, gesture, artistry, vocalisation, cooperation, estrangement, creativity: all the avenues of the self are tools for the re-imagination of world.

In the chimerical cities of the twenty-first century, the only writing of substance is on the fourth wall. To break the grammar of dead metaphors that coerce our activity in the city, a new praxis of poetics is required, together with the will to delineate from the perpetual commute. If the signifiers of the commodified world follow only the grammar of dead metaphors, only then can a new poetics, and a poetry of the living, reappropriate the writing on the wall, to reveal: "the world is yours."

THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

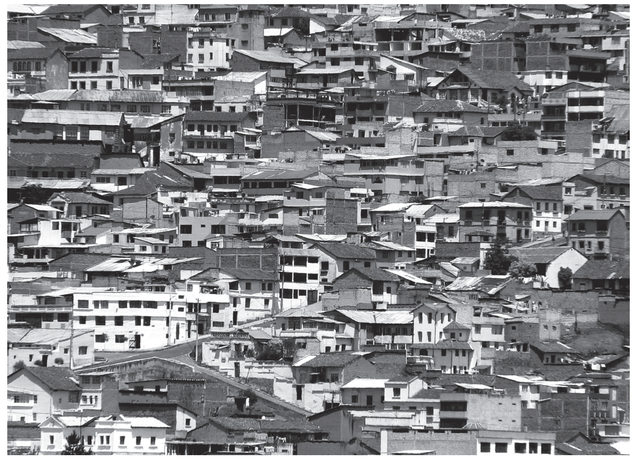
Wine and Cheese

The demand for "the right to the city" addresses the state in two ways. Firstly, it appeals to the state to grant or uphold a right. Secondly, it is concerned with the privatisation of public spaces or housing i.e., places within the state's domain. These provide reason enough to ask what the relationship is between the state - be it in the form of the national government or in the form of the local council - and people that have to, but cannot, make their rents.

A prevailing idea on this relationship, among activists, is that once upon a time city authorities mitigated social suffering with policies such as building social housing. Then, it seems, the city did something for ordinary people, tenants or the poor. Many critics examine these past activities skeptically, asking whether capital got too good a deal nonetheless. Still, here the city is said to have or had a balancing effect, acting for everyone somehow. Today, on the contrary, poor people are – so the idea goes – 'let down'; the doors left wide open to capital. Critics accuse the local councils or the Mayor of London of one-sided attention to capital (or put more crudely, the wealthy). The state or the city used to have a neutral, balancing effect, but those times are long gone in the "neoliberal" era.

However, an error here lies in the mistaken assumption about the city's starting point: the reason why it sometimes puts limits on the pursuit of capitalist interests and 'helps the poor'. The starting point was never that of a city confronted with two opposing interests, simply and only seeking to limit both somewhere in the middle. Rather, local authorities always have, and are, pursuing their own ends. These often align with business interests, but they can also stand in contrast.

For example, on the one hand, the state acknowledges the right of landlords to utilise their properties as a means to make money. They get to ask whatever rent they can get away with. On the other hand, the council provides social housing; it offers cheap housing to those who cannot afford private sector rents. While this leaves the immediate interests of private landlords untouched, it deals with the problem that the economy needs a local workforce, a workforce which might not be able to afford rent in the areas they are needed.



The council attempts to ensure the availability of this workforce by means of social housing – poor people living in central London. Furthermore, if someone becomes unemployed that person should not fall through the cracks completely but be able to get back into a job, perhaps with the help of their social network. Hence, the council might give preference to local people when assigning flats.

Moreover, the state does not simply come across the characters of landlord and tenant, it creates them. Landed property as a source of income is something licensed exclusively by the state. The freedom to decide on the use of the land in question, to the exclusion of everyone else, begins with an entry in the land registry. The state records which parts of its territory fall under the authority of which private individual. In the same process the state creates the inverse figure, that of the tenant, who does not own land and must pay a tribute (rent) to the owners for its use.

Not only when the city promotes economic growth – say with "Tech City" initiatives – or when it privatises public spaces but already when it deals with the confrontation of tenants and landlords, it regards its territory as a means to make money. The local administration has its own interests and it relates to other existing interests on this basis, sometimes conceding more to them and sometimes less. The city is neither a neutral mediator nor simply dependent on money it does not earn itself but must be earned elsewhere. Instead, the state and the city make themselves dependent on a society in which everything revolves around the augmentation of money, and promote this principle. That is their intended political programme and for this programme the state grants and guarantees rights.

An additional, detailed account on the economy of the land and the role of politics in gentrification is available here: antinational.org/en/gentrification-economy-land-and-role-politics.

THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG DISTANCE CITY WORKER

Jemima Hobby

"Sarah" (not her real name) gets ready for work with her normal care and attention. With a last check of her phone she leaves and, closing the door behind her, fixes the special blinkers that mean she can easily avoid catching anyone's eyes (should, for a moment, she forget to keep her eyes downcast). When the law on non-contact of workers came out it had been much harder to not accidently look at others on the commute to the office. Now there were a whole range of blinkers, fashion magazines showing their readers how to accessorise them to match the latest season's trends.

Standing in line for the ticket machine she wondered idly to herself: was everyone really safer this way? The argument had been: if no one could interact and if the cameras could zoom in on anyone who broke the law, then assaults and rapes would be almost impossible. All interaction with other people could be done safely over skype or by phone, and thus women were protected.

Once at the grey, anonymous office building just off Fleet Street, she had to exercise even more care. Making sure to press the right button for the correct floor, finding her way through the maze of cubicles could be tricky. Only last week the tannoy had blared out - apparently two work colleagues had been seen interacting. Once at her workstation Sarah could relax, taking off the blinkers. She was safe now until 5 o'clock. The walls keeping her safe from any transgression, though they did nothing to help the loneliness in her soul.

Sound like a fanciful dystopia? This is the reality for thousands of workers in British cities today, they just happen to be sex workers. Working together for support and protection is illegal. The walk-ins and parlours of Soho, seen as a part of the fabric of the community, are no longer wanted by Westminster council who want a sanitised, community-less London. Once street workers were tolerated in the city, and able to watch out for each other and provide safety and security. Now, we have 'no tolerance zones'; women are pushed into working on dimly lit industrial estates. All this so that the non sex worker community does not have to see sex workers.

Should two independent sex workers simply decide to work together outside of the professional establishments, sharing the same premises to cut the costs - or so there is another person to hear the screams if it all goes wrong - they can be arrested for running a brothel. In a twist worthy of Kafka, both can be prosecuted for controlling the other. If two sex workers work together for what is called in the trade a duo, the same can apply. Apparently it is possible to be a victim and an evil pimp all at the same time.

When Harris published his List of Covent Garden Ladies in the latter half of the 18th century, it was believed that there were almost 50,000 sex workers in London. Their position was not secure. As well as the threat of disease, the job carried other dangers, especially in a society where the rights of women were non-existent. One thing they did have was each other.

Often some of the most vulnerable in our society, street workers have existed since time immemorial, looking out for each other when no one else would. As the tide turned away from tolerance and acceptance, street workers in our cities faced the worst sanctions. This culminated in the Contagious Diseases Act which allowed for the forcible imprisonment of women suspected of having a sexually transmitted disease (STD). We moved from an acceptance of sex workers in our cities, as one of many jobs which constitute urban life, to the idea that they had to be removed from sight to protect the city from them.

The idea of blaming women for the spread of disease still exists today in the attitude towards sex workers, despite them having lower than average rates of STDs. It influences everything from family law to the attitude of sexual health clinics. In law and in language, the sex worker is seen as 'Other' - dangerous, someone who mustn't be seen by decent folk.

Often, sex workers are claimed to endanger other women (also a common belief in Victorian times), but instead of syphilis and gonorrhea, it's rape and child abuse we cause, and of course the worst possible crime: being mistaken for a sex worker. In fact, when sex workers were tolerated in city centres they not only made each other safer, they made any woman on the streets safer. Now, even being mistaken for a sex worker is seen as a form of assault by some.

Today, the aim seems to be Starbucks cities, removed of any trace of life that would jar with a conservative ideal of the city as a commodity instead of a living breathing place to live and work. Melissa Gira Grant writes of the sex workers on the barricades in many demonstrations around the world. This is despite the fact they are often standing with people who use 'whore' as an insult.

There are links with what is happening in Turkey. Gezi park was somewhere that trans* sex workers met, and the same gentrification and sanitation has happened in Times Square in America. Sex workers are removed from somewhere they worked safely and with a sense of community, so that the city can be kept antiseptic for the commuters. In Istanbul, people want their city, not another glittering glass-faced monolith. Be it parks or sex workers, the removal of them from our cities is just another step towards giving faceless capitalism what it wants: workers who work, eat and sleep without ever dreaming.

MASTER *of the* METROPOLIS

Sara Cameron

It's 'business as usual' as glass prisons continue to be constructed in London, encasing the ruins of the 1980s in an attempt to put a gloss on the failings of the system. After all, they say, 'Economic growth is key'. The rest of us have a better handle on reality, largely because we're forced to live in it. Many parts of London, especially on a cloudy day, resemble a dystopian film: derelict spaces amid tall, shiny towers. Neoliberal democracy has been restructured; trapped in the architecture of regenerating capital and investment opportunities, further disenfranchising its urban inhabitants. Our Elysium has arrived, just as it has in Istanbul under the AKP's authoritarian neoliberal strategy, along with countless other cities throughout the world.

Land has always been a valuable commodity, but it has become more profitable as a result of the interest business places in its valuation, and capitalism's treatment of life as business. Space and environment have increasingly become a key source of income, not simply for landowners, who for centuries have already made use of their assets, but for speculators, real estate fund investors and venture capitalists who seek to capitalise land value according to income generation and interest rates. Ventures like The Shard, with its sheer scale and imposing presence, remain largely empty - we can be excused for forgetting that land and commercial buildings are not just for housing enterprise, but also for housing debt in the financial centre of the world.

Green spaces do not escape the capitalist expansion project – they represent prime real estate, ripe and ready for development in 'sought after' localities (I'm not sure what would constitute 'not sought after' as estate agents always pitch everything as 'highly in demand'.) One of the most stark examples of this is Turkey, where activists gathered to occupy Gezi Park near Taksim Square to make a stand against the urban commodification of one of the few green spaces remaining in Istanbul. Although the narrative manifests differently for each city, depending on the values of each government e.g. dictatorship, democracy, monarchy etc., a common plot exists: removing spaces for dissent against the neoliberal project, often via egregious state-sanctioned brutality.

How can we claim the 'Right to The City', our shared space and land, as French sociologist Henri Lefebvre would have it? Are we again, falling passive to another platitude, an academic flight of fancy? Perhaps - we would be foolish to assume that this concept is the answer to the complexity of the intersectional struggles we face. One thing is certain, we need an urban revolution, one that cuts across class, gender, ethnicity and space, and is far removed from centralised, party politicking with its municipal restructuring and innovation schemes.

Scattered across London, you can see the changes declared necessary by government and commercial enterprise. The Heygate Estate, Brixton, Hackney, The Aylesbury Estate and Islington, to name but a few, are all focal points for plans to stimulate the economy and continue the process of gentrification. But it's more than white middle class folk moving in to 'underdeveloped' areas; it's an assault on difference in the pursuit of homogenous zones of effective capital. Our megacities will not elicit prosperity for us all. Just as servants were kept out of sight in the lower part of the landed gentry estates, many workers occupy living quarters akin to back-to-backs, huddled together and away from the money making zones (but close enough to service them out of hours).

Pockets of resistance do exist in London, and in other cities around the world from Paris, Bologna, Istanbul, Daraa and Vienna, to the Reclaim the Streets movement which was heavily influenced by the Situationist International. However, the physical scattering - the distance between work and home, the spread of highly surveilled gated communities, the blurring of public/private space - makes collectivity difficult. The public square, which Bakhtin referred to as the primary platform for the collective, performative nature of all carnivalesque activities, is a disappearing concept – temporarily revived by the Occupy movement which itself was dismantled by neoliberal means: the law.

Although many historical events can be recited from across the globe in relation to urban struggles, many have had limited success given the framework from which they sprung to life. Occupation of space, for which Occupy springs to mind, is all well and good, but Lefebvre's radical notion of the right to the city (and many subsequent interpretations of his theory), is about more than a question of accessibility, mobility and participation. It is the fundamental, collective right to transform, produce and use the city. The commercial world is already doing this, using the city to produce networks of money and collateral, and we can learn something from this. How to remake something which is so entrenched in our culture is difficult, but it should start with the simple yet powerful notion that we, the urban dwellers, want to collectively control and organise our cities, and our lives. Now is the time to experiment!

GOVERNANCE MINUS CONSTITUENTS

THE EVACUATION OF THE INHABITANTS IN THE NEOLIBERAL WORLD-CLASS CITY

Alberto Duman

As I write these words, the London Real Estate Forum is under way in Berkeley Square - within, we are eagerly told 'a 25,000 sq foot pavilion space, bespoke designed by Carmody Groarke'. For the pleasure of partaking in such a prestigious event, delegates are charged £995 +VAT. Clearly, for the 'investors, occupiers, policy makers and professionals' attending, the allure of participating in 'an exhibition of up to 50 major office, retail and residential developments available to let or invest in over the next decade' is just as essential as it might be for art curators, collectors and institutions of art to attend Frieze Art Fair.

In this overtly suggestive spatial connection between pavilions, the exhibition of objects offered for aesthetic engagement in an art fair contrast the exhibition of models of development offered for financial speculation. All are provided as equal manifestations of creative entrepreneurialism across an aesthetic-financial axis. Here, we can read much into the urban condition in which we find ourselves entangled as common citizens of world-class cities: the city understood as a commodity, of urbanism as a form of marketing and the struggle to imagine the collective symbolic capital that we create in our cities, away from speculative value extraction.

It's clearly not a haphazard choice that David Harvey's discussion on how 'uniqueness, authenticity, particularity and speciality underlie the ability to capture monopoly rents' in the contemporary neoliberal city is prefixed by the title 'Art of Rent'. The balance between the appeal of distinction as potentially unlimited added value and the limit to which such value can be extracted before it becomes prey to the homogenising multinational commodification that wipes out the appeal of distinctions, is the 'artistry' of the speculative investor, according to Harvey.

These are accelerated and accelerating processes whose aim is 'to create sufficient synergy within the urbanisation process for monopoly rents to be created and realised by both private interests and state powers'. Here we clearly see that if we are to conceive of a different city than the one that produces and reproduces such mechanisms, we have to first recognise the perceived conflicts between private and public interests as deceptive. We are not in the presence of private theft at the expense of the public, but of a donor-receiver system where the deception, if any, is that of who the beneficiary of such gifts might be.

What is registered at multiple levels is an overt osmosis between markets and state, in the midst of which the citizen ("the inhabitant" for Henri Lefebvre, who coined the concept of the "right to the city") of the world-class city is subjected to the restructuring demands of capital and its hunger for surplus. As Boris Johnson scoffed during his opening speech at the London Real Estate Forum whilst announcing the development of a third financial district for London: 'You are players in one of the most exciting and most important games of Monopoly ever played.' Like a medicine which only works through dosage increases that further indebt its patients, the witch doctors of global real estate are escalating their operations in the only way our undead financially-ruled system seems capable of. On this note, a worthwhile if depressing read is Maurizio Lazzarato's, 'The Making of Indebted Man'.

It is in these terms that the passage from public to private planning and urban development is hardly worthwhile registering with indignation. The main transformations in urban governance over the last 30 years have been the gradual disinvestment of the public authorities from the public role of custodian of the 'commons' (authoritarian as it might have been in the past) and their assimilation of the subjectivities that the market doctrine provided to them as conduits of its directives.

To even begin to think of a 'right to the city' in the contemporary world-class city, means not just redirecting the power from private to public administration and scrutiny but also, and primarily, to demand a reconfigured, reformed notion of the 'public' as a separate actor from the market (the possibility of a redistributive social justice on a total city scale in the current conditions appears unlikely).

The enmeshed relationship between the markets and urban governance becomes clear when looking at the ways in which the exercise of democratically elected bodies in contemporary urban contexts make extensive use of data, gathered using the same marketing tools that inform advertising companies: sophisticated data aggregation software packages and intelligence solutions which mix different data sets to produce effective visual representations called 'Geodemographic segmentations'. Examples include EuroDirect's 'CAMEO' and Pitney Bowes' 'MapInfo', which provide classification system segments for 'billions of consumers in over thirty markets worldwide.'

In short: we are seen as 'customers' even for the public bodies who should see us as 'citizens'. The aversion of markets towards transparent democratic accountability has seeped into the administrative ethos of public bodies who would now dream of delivering social justice as 'customer choice' and governing without public scrutiny by its constituents.

The display of cohesion between competitive developers at the London Real Estate Forum, framed by the support of the Mayor of London, highlights the purpose of this strategic alliance where London's spatial future is presented as an offering to the global market and its parceling of value extraction - orchestrated by a vested interest in bolstering 'city living' as a marketing device.

They might as well have been answering the long call that went out at the Singapore World's Fair in 2010, where swathes of Newham in East London were repackaged and shelved for purchase as a 'Regeneration Supernova' for global investors. The last sentence of a briefly public and now removed document from Newham Council regeneration plans, reads: 'Take your place in the future of London'.

The most disturbing aspect of the subservient and asymmetrical business relationships entertained by private interests and public administrations is the way in which contemporary cities claiming world-class status are shaped by placing its constituents - its citizens - to spectacularise its context: the city is branded as a place of marvel, excitement and wonder, whilst simultaneously marginalising citizens' actual contribution, opinions, needs and their subjective desires (unless they fit into prescribed roles of consumption that fulfill the patterns of growth and investment central to the world-class status). Among others, Anna Minton's Ground Control: Fear and Happiness in the 21st Century City and her recent report for Spinwatch are interesting reads.

In the most cynical formulation we could say that the contemporary urban project as it presents itself to us on the ground, particularly when permeated and guided by mega-events such as the Olympic Games and its long-term effect, is one of a structure that attempts to circumvent the rights of the very people at the core of its value and experience.

No clearer display of such sly value extraction in the city exists than the bankrupted trope of 'urban regeneration'; a suspicious claim for improving people's lives. Such projects are revealed, for the most part, as desires to spatially reorder the city into a consumption arena, but they overlay very different social realities and conflicts for which the market has no solutions. London's 2012 Olympic Games provides an unequivocal example. The project's true ethos was, and remains, that of a brand, but its legacy promised to redistribute the value generated by the public investment into a shortfall of benefits for East London and the city as a whole.

Two sobering pieces of evidence as to the dubious value of such promises are an already existing legacy – that of the 'adiZones' - and the widely known case of the Carpenters Estate in Stratford, whose recent escape from the proposed UCL/Newham plans is only one chapter in an ongoing narrative of Olympic-induced regeneration conflicts.

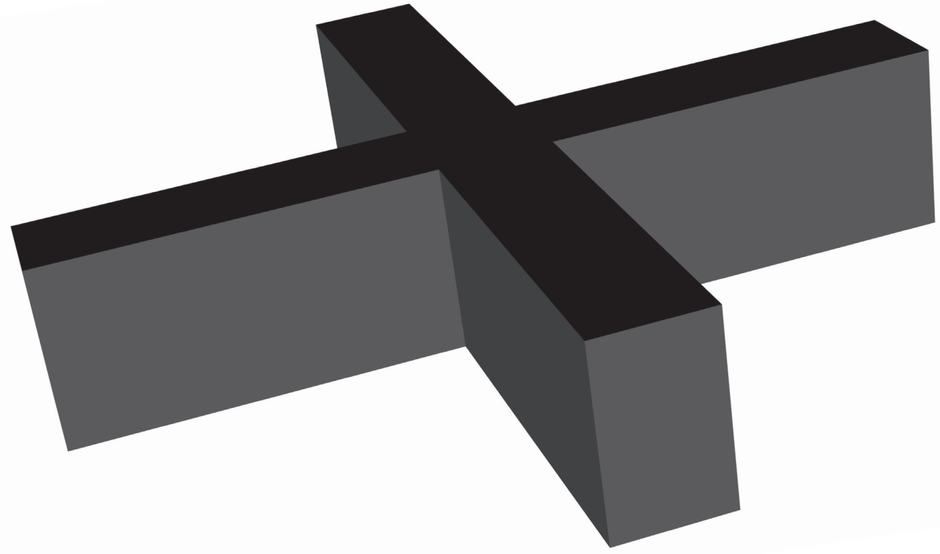
Based on these disconcerting urban realities, where collective symbolic capital is simply pursed as bait for investment rather than a value in itself to be fostered and treasured for the necessary social reproduction of the city as a whole, the proposition of the 'right to the city' ('a cry and a demand' as Lefebvre would see it) as a way of tackling such asymmetrical distribution of wealth in the city and substantially reconfigure the power relations that produce it, remains a precious asset in an overall argument for a 'return to the public', whose voices are multiple and diverse.

As such, the possible formulation of 'right to the city' has gone through several transformations, from a 'radical restructuring of social, political and economic relations' in its original conception of Lefebvre, to a 'more and more fascinating slogan.' In the embrace of institutionalised adoption, it appears that 'a reformist, managerial, and commoditised perspective of the right to the city prevailed.' It remains to be seen whether its usefulness as a valuable tool to resist the increasing power of capital over urban life may already have been exhausted in some forms.

One of the key issues to be resolved is that of public information, which was one of the complementing rights in Lefebvre's original concept of 'right to the city'.

The transformation of spatial realities produced by speculative value extraction and the ensuing conflicts between the parties involved is only the final chapter of a narrative course that begins far away from public knowledge and deliberation. The hidden trajectories of land aggregation and financial dealmaking, which only surface at the planning stages, are often evidenced too late in the process to be confronted with serious forms of opposition. Some of these narratives were on display at the London Real Estate Forum, screened behind the pricey entry fee.

Crucially, a 'right to the city' would mean the provision of a widespread urban pedagogy in which knowledge of the city is available, abundant, free and public. How such urban knowledge might then be articulated into urban practice, and the form and scale of the political communities that might articulate them, will always be a territory of discussion and conflict. At least the landscape ahead of us would be shaped on the basis of horizontally disseminated knowledge across all actors.



Housing profiteers, beware!

Christine Haigh

Last year, after months of paying extortionate rent to live in a cold, damp flat and angry about the impact of the multiple cuts to housing benefit, I decided it was time to do something. It turns out that other people were thinking the same thing. Since then, we've become part of a rapidly-expanding network of private renter's groups across the capital, part of an increasingly linked-up housing movement critiquing the neoliberal housing system and demanding alternatives by which people can access decent and secure housing where and when they need it.

Earlier this year, private tenant's groups from across London organised a coordinated day of action as part of the Let Down campaign. We targeted letting agents, highlighting their extortionate fees, their lack of regulation and the discrimination shown against tenants on housing benefit. Estate agents are a key component in the pushing up of rents and the proliferation of insecure tenancies.

The actions were as varied as their participants. In Herne Hill, an angry tenant organised a letting agent complaints choir. They held a rehearsal in Herne Hill station around a piano donated to the community, and later performed in nearby letting agents. In north London, the Haringey Housing Action Group delivered 'cease and desist' orders to local letting agents, demanding that they bring to an end their anti-social behaviour. Meanwhile, renters groups from Hackney and Tower Hamlets held a giant game of 'housing crisis Monopoly' outside letting agents around Angel.

In Brixton, we carried out a 'community housing inspection', visiting letting agents to grill them about their practices, culminating in the presentation of an award to Brixton's worst agent. By the end of the afternoon, the winner was clear – Brixton's newest letting agent, Foxton's, were so keen to avoid even talking to us that they went to the trouble of employing bouncers to prevent us from entering their offices.

It wasn't the first time that Foxton's latest branch has made the headlines. Due to it being seen by many as a symbol of the accelerating gentrification of Brixton, the branch has found itself the target of paint-fuelled protests on at least two occasions since opening in March. Ever increasing rents and a chronic shortage of social housing is leading many people who have lived here for decades, forming strong and important communities, to find that they or their families can no longer afford to stay.

As usual, the culprit for these cumulative dispossessions can be found in 'the market'. Those who can afford to are free to choose where they want to live, pushing up prices in the areas they choose, leaving the rest to make do. During the period after the Second World War, there were huge levels of investment in state owned housing stock that would provide decent, affordable housing for a broad swathe of the population, free from the demands of the free market. Since then the stock has been dismantled through right-to-buy programs, sell-offs and privatisation through housing associations who increasingly resemble property developers.

The result is that the public purse, which should rightly support those who need help with their housing costs, is lining the pockets of private landlords and mega-housing associations, with housing costs constituting an increasingly unsustainable proportion of households budgets. Even by the logic of supporters of capitalism, the market can never provide the efficiency they suggest forms the basis of a market economy. This is especially true when considering that the housing supply is necessarily limited by the availability of land and due to it's basis as a fundamental need – people can't simply stop 'consuming' it when it gets expensive.

In the short term, some renter's groups are calling for regulation of the market through reforms to control rents, more secure tenancies and properly regulated letting agents, including extending the ban on fees for tenants that currently exists in Scotland to the rest of the UK. But in the long term we need a much more fundamental shift in the housing system, with its removal from the extremes of the market and a much smaller, if any, role for private landlords.

The promising news is that people have had enough and are starting to organise for a better housing system. In South London alone, there are new private renters groups set up to campaign in Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark, complemented by a recently set-up housing action group which acts as a self-help group, supporting people with individual housing problems, from overcrowding to problem landlords or housing benefit changes. That's not to mention the well-established local branches of Defend Council Housing who have been fighting the bedroom tax, and Lambeth United Housing Cooperative who continue to challenge the council's vicious and short-sighted bid to sell-off of their homes.

In May, members of these groups and many others converged at Open House, a week-long space bringing together people to organise and take action around the housing crisis, and pledged to work together more going forward. It's almost certainly the start of bigger things – housing profiteers, beware!

www.letdownblog.wordpress.com

THE CASE FOR PUBLIC HOUSING

Sarah Glynn

A home is such a basic need that the provision of adequate and decent housing should be a fundamental requirement of a fair society. But what do we require of a home beyond sound and safe shelter that can accommodate our household in a reasonably convenient location? Security of tenure is a vital basis for secure lives, and affordability is crucial. We may also need the option to move without penalty as and when circumstances demand. And most of us enjoy the opportunity to personalise our home.

These should be the major considerations behind any housing policy, but increasingly they have become subservient to a free market politics that views housing as a major source of wealth and investment. None of the basic requirements listed above are dependent on home ownership – in fact affordability and moving house can be easier if you are not a homeowner.

Politicians like to claim that homeownership is a 'natural' aspiration, but it has been deliberately cultivated and subsidised by our capitalist society. As successive politicians have argued, homeownership encourages people to identify with conservative ideas about private property, and workers tied to a home and a mortgage are less likely to risk taking part in strike action.

One hundred years ago, almost everyone in the UK rented their homes, but they rented them from private landlords who sought to extract maximum profits. For working-class people, that meant dreadful, overcrowded conditions, insecure tenancies, and extortionate rents. State-subsidised council housing was brought in after the First World War because the private system wasn't working – and because the government feared the growth of revolutionary ideas if they weren't seen to be doing something about it. By the end of the 1970s, one third of households in the UK – and over half in Scotland – lived in publicly-owned, state-subsidised rented housing, and living conditions had undergone a massive improvement. But these developments were not without problems. An emphasis on quantity over quality meant housing estates were often poorly designed, serviced and maintained; and problems were compounded by distant, bureaucratic management.

Meanwhile, homeownership grew even more significantly, becoming associated with higher social standing. Investment in private property took on a growing role in national and household economics. Home owners used their property wealth to climb the economic ladder, leaving renters behind in relative poverty. Three decades of neoliberal free market policies have sold off the best council homes, restricted funding for those that remain, and created a disastrous property bubble. Private renting is again on the rise, along with all the problems that made public housing necessary in the first place. Landlords are amassing easy money as tenants hand over ever higher proportions of their income in rent. Housing benefits only serve to subsidise the landlords.

It needn't have been like this. Public housing can provide everything that we want from a home, and fiscal rules can be drawn up so that homeowners do not gain a financial advantage over those who rent. Well considered and resourced housing policies can make a substantial contribution to a fairer, more equal society. In 1960s Sweden, a combination of regulations and subsidies ensured that tenants were not penalised with respect to owner occupiers; in modern Helsinki, 80% of land is publicly owned and half of homes are subsidised rented houses, which are often indistinguishable from their privately owned neighbours; and even in the UK there have been successful experiments in tenant management.

Public housing in the UK has been given bad press because vested interests did not want it to be too successful. Inadequate funding and bad management ensured its second class status. Its increasingly "safety net" role has led to it being stigmatised as poor housing for poor people. And there have been some spectacular failures. However, despite all this, the majority of schemes provided good homes that made a real difference to working-class living standards. And if we learn from past mistakes, we could see public housing playing an even more significant role in the future. There is no reason why we couldn't plan for good quality, well-subsidised public housing for all who want it. This might seem extravagant, but it would be an investment in better life chances and a more cohesive and equal society. This time we could construct a system of local management, incorporating tenant involvement. Public housing also offers the possibility of co-ordinated planning, taking account of all the other things that make a community, and making efficient use of green technologies.

Public housing satisfies urgent practical needs as well as offering opportunities for a much more holistic approach to creating fairer and more sustainable communities.

www.sarahglynn.net

FIGHT THE BEDROOM TAX

★ HOW-TO ★
GUIDE

YOUR RIGHTS AS A TENANT
WHAT YOUR LANDLORD MIGHT DO
HOW TO RESIST EVICTION

DISCRETIONARY HOUSING BENEFIT

Could temporarily pay shortfall / Apply immediately / Immediately request appeal to an independent tribunal / Challenge legitimacy of lower housing benefit award due to bedroom tax/under occupancy rule / Do this within 4 week deadline of benefits 'notice'

EFFECT OF RENT ARREARS ON TENANCY

Landlords may take legal action to evict tenants in rent arrears / Landlords MUST first serve a legal 'notice seeking possession' on tenants. / Landlords MUST follow strict procedure at all stages of the eviction process – failure may cause delays. / Court will need to grant possession order in landlord's favour.

AROUND 660,000
HOUSEHOLDS NATIONALLY
WILL BE AFFECTED BY THE BEDROOM TAX

STOP THE BENEFIT CUTS!

*This is not a substitute for in depth legal advice and representation. If facing eviction you must, if possible, get advice from a qualified solicitor or advice worker. You may be entitled to free advice and representation under Legal Aid

IN COURT

COUNCIL TENANTS (SECURE TENANTS)

Judge grants possession if reasonable to do so. / Arguments against eviction which should form part of judge's consideration: Cuts in housing benefit make impossible to pay. Lack of suitable alternative accommodation. Proximity of family, schools, medical care etc. / Possession Order should be suspended if tenant has realistic plan to pay arrears in future. / Where council has failed to maintain property – may have counterclaim – could reduce / cancel arrears.

HOUSING ASSOCIATION (ASSURED TENANTS)

Many Housing Associations offer less protection. Sometimes court has to award possession on 'mandatory grounds' / Rent arrears of 2 months+ / With 1 'spare room' takes around 14-15 months for arrears to reach 2 months' worth rent.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER A COURT HEARING?

'possession order' will give deadline for tenants to vacate. / Many tenants simply ignore order. / Landlord then applies for 'bailiff's warrant' / to take physical possession of property, by force where necessary. / Prove you can pay rent, can still apply to court to suspend eviction.

RESIST THE EVICTION

It is not a criminal offence to peacefully resist eviction. / Criminal offence to "obstruct an officer of the court" enforcing a possession order obtained against trespassers (Section 10 of the Criminal Law Act 1977) / Where possession order not obtained under 'trespasser ground' (ie, overstaying tenants) obstructing county court bailiff not offence in itself, other than contempt of court. / Bailiffs allowed to use "reasonable force" to gain access to building they have writ for. May call the police / police may be present, but the Bailiffs that must carry out the eviction. / Each attempted eviction can be argued / resisted at every stage.

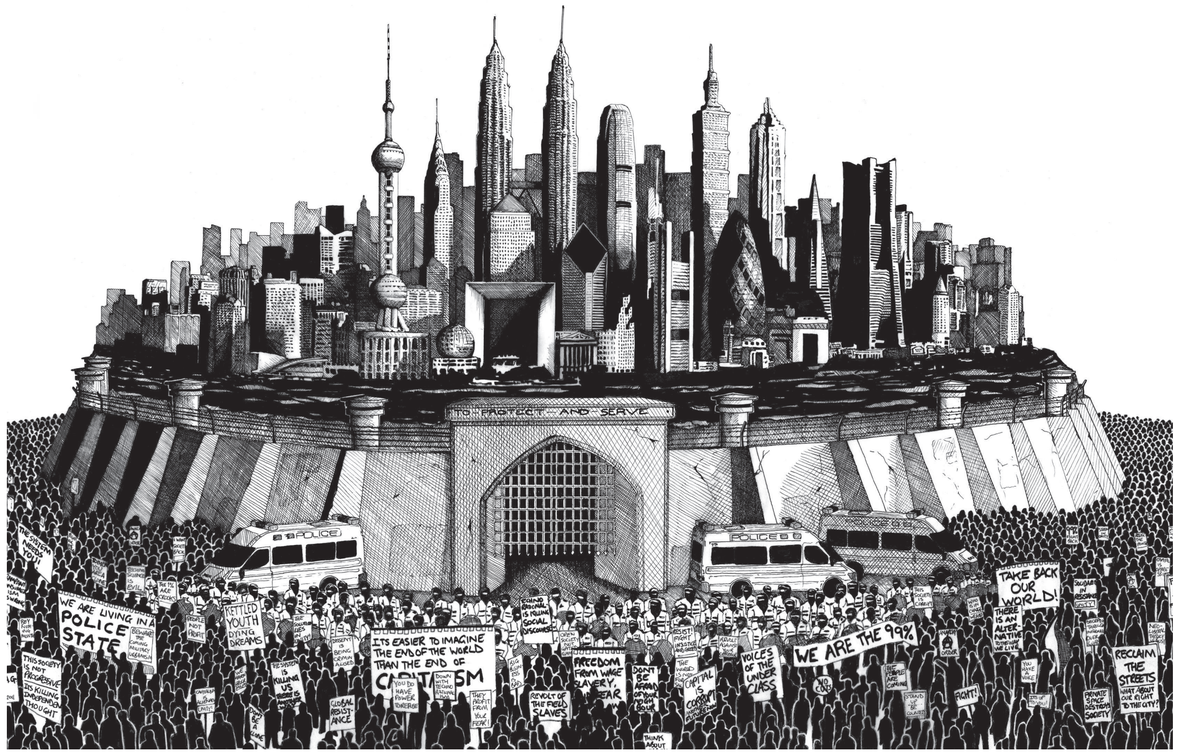
DON'T PANIC / STAY PUT &
FIGHT BACK!

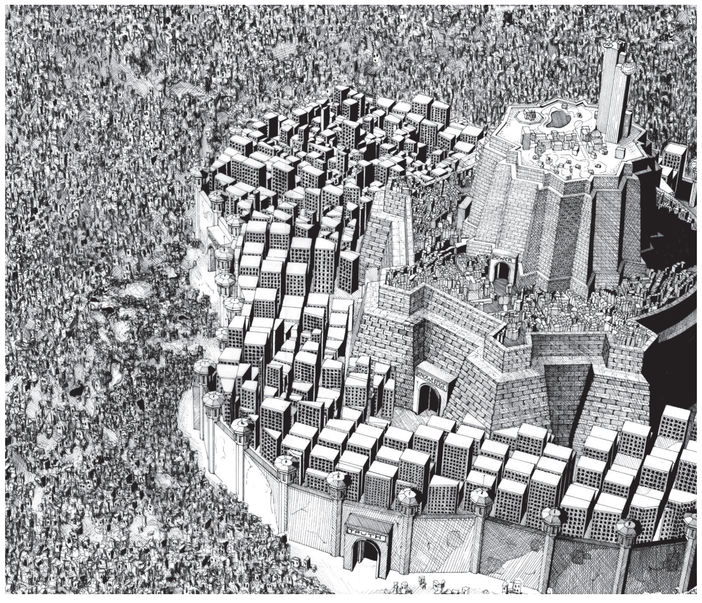
ANTIBEDROOMTAX.ORG.UK

PREOCCUPYING: DAVID HARVEY

David Harvey writes extensively on Marxist geography and the political economy and is the author of a number of books, including *The Urbanization of Capital*, *Rebel Cities*, and *The Enigma of Capital*. He is a Distinguished Professor of Anthropology and Geography at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York as well as a Director of the Center for Place, Culture and Politics. He has been teaching Marx's Capital for almost 40 years; Volumes I and II of his lectures on Marx's Capital are available to download for free on his website.

Illustration: terrapol.com





Occupied Times: In 1968, Henri Lefebvre first introduced the concept of "the right to the city''. He advocated the 'rescue of man as the main protagonist of the city he has built…the meeting point for collective living.' You have referred to this collective right - to remake ourselves and our cities - as 'one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.' In what ways do you think we have neglected this human right in recent years?

David Harvey: If the question of what kind of city gets built depends critically on what kind of people we want to be, then the broad failure to openly discuss this relation means that we have abandoned the reshaping of people and their passions to the requirements of capital accumulation. It was, I think, very well understood by planners and policy makers that the suburbanisation of the United States after 1945 would not only help rescue the US from the prospect of a return to the depression conditions of the 1930s by way of a vast expansion of effective demand, but that it would also serve to create a social and political world devoid of revolutionary consciousness or anti-capitalist sentiment. Small wonder that the feminists of the 1960s saw the suburb as their enemy and that the suburban lifestyle became associated with a certain kind of political subjectivity that was class-prejudiced, exclusionary and racist in the extreme.

OT: London is praised as a multicultural city, and perhaps a significant component of the right to the city is the right to coexist. In re-imagining and remaking cities, how can we ensure that a city remade isn't done so in a way that privileges or discriminates different interests or communities that exist in the city?

DH: There is nothing to ensure it other than social movements, active political engagements and the willingness to fight for one's place. Conflict in and over the city is a healthy thing, not a pathology that state interventions must control and put down.

OT: We live in a digital age. In many cases, people develop more intimate relationships with people thousands of miles away than they do with their neighbours on the same street. If cities have tended, historically, to develop around shared physical space, how will communicative technologies that undermine the preeminence of physical/spatial communities, affect the future configuration of the city?

DH: The new technologies are a double-edge sword. On the one hand they can function as "weapons of mass distraction" and divert people to believing politics is possible solely in some virtual world. Or, they can be used to inspire and coordinate political action on the streets, in the neighbourhoods and throughout the city. There is no substitute for bodies on the street for political action as we have seen in Cairo, Istanbul, Athens, Sao Paulo, etc. Working together with active street politics, the new technologies can be a fabulous resource.

OT: Writing in 'Whose Rebel City?', Neil Grey suggests that in your most recent book, 'Rebel Cities', your analysis neglected the autonomous Marxist tradition first developed during in the urban struggles of 1960s and 1970s Italy - characterised by the 'Take over the City' slogan; feminist debates around social reproduction; the idea of 'the social factory' and so called 'territorial community activism' - instead focusing your theory on the absorption of capital and labour surpluses through urbanisation. How do you respond to this criticism? Do you agree that these political practices can serve as outlining models of how inhabitants might re-organise their cities?

DH: I find this criticism strange. To be sure chapter 2 is about the creation of urbanisation through processes of capital accumulation, but chapter 5 is devoted to class social movements in the cities. I could not cover all such movements of course and so there are many, such as those associated with the autonomista movement in Italy that are, I am sure, certainly worthy of inclusion. But I did look at the way the houses of the people earlier in the century in Italy complemented the factory council movements and of course took a lot of inspiration from the El Alto story as well as from the Paris Commune and other urban uprisings, while trying to theorise in what ways these could all be understood in the framework of class struggle. So, to say I was only concerned with the absorption of surplus capital is pretty weird and suggests Neil Grey either did not get to the end of the book or was dismissive of it because I did not deal with his particular favourite urban social movement.

I wish, by the way, I had cited Gramsci's comment on the importance of supplementing the factory councils with ward committees: "The ward committee should also seek to incorporate delegates from other categories of workers living in the ward: waiters, cab drivers, tramway men, railwaymen, road sweepers, private employees, clerks and others. The ward committee should be an expression of the whole of the working class living in the ward, an expression that is legitimate and authoritative, that can enforce a spontaneously delegated discipline that is backed by powers and can order the immediate and complete cessation of all work in the ward."

OT: On the heels of rapid urbanisation and an ever-inflating property bubble in China, you have spoken of a rising class struggle on the ground that people living in the West just don't hear about. If we were to look more carefully at the situation in China, what could we learn?

DH: There is a lot more now coming out on China and an increasing recognition of the dangers of both urban asset bubbles of gargantuan proportions (particularly in housing) and a chronic problem of overproduction of urbanisation in response to the crash of export markets in 2008. There is now a lot of nervousness about urban overaccumulation. Theoretically, I understand what is happening but when it will come to a halt I cannot say. And we know there is a lot of urban and industrial unrest in China but it is very difficult to judge how much and of what significance.

OT: You place the concept you have termed 'accumulation by dispossession' at the heart of urbanisation under capitalism. Swathes of London are currently being transformed under the guise of 'regeneration', coupled with housing benefit cuts and the new so-called Bedroom Tax. One example of many, would be the hundreds of residents from the Heygate Estate in Elephant & Castle who have lost their homes so that property developers can replace social housing with 'affordable' properties. Grassroots campaigns have sprung up to resist these displacements, but they continually face policy and legal constraints. What are your thoughts on the importance and potential pitfalls of a unified movement across the city, or even wider?

DH: I think it vital to unify as far as possible struggles against dispossession across the whole city. But to do so requires an accurate picture of the forms of dispossession occurring and their roots. For example, there is at this time a need to put together a picture of the predatory practices of the property developers and their financial backers on a citywide basis, and initiate a collective citywide struggle to curb and control their practices. Recently, we have seen urban unrest in Brazil that is about transport costs but also against (and this is remarkable given we are talking about Brazil) the stadium-building for the World Cup and the displacement and waste of public resources that is involved, so citywide and cross-city struggles are not impossible. The danger, as always, is that the struggles may fade as people get tired of the fight. The only answer is to keep the struggles going and build organisations that have the capacity to do that (the MST in Brazil is a good example of this even though it is not a distinctively urban struggle).

OT: There is a distinct lack of commonly-owned space in London. Much of the city is privately owned and caters to the panopticon of surveillance, 'do not trespass' signage, and a dearth of public space free from market interference. Is it important to seek out and grow community spaces, to allow those resisting the depredations of capitalism to find the space not only to work, but to explore new avenues of creative interaction as well?

DH: The question of liberating spaces controlled by the state and turning them into a commons controlled by the people is, in my opinion, crucial. The rolling back of privatisation of public spaces is also vital and I would hope to see many more movements directed towards such ends.

OT: You have talked about the possibility of a "league of socialist cities" as a powerful way of changing the order of the world. Can you expand on what you mean, and how these could work?

DH: It is a bit of a far-out idea at first sight but there is a lot of benchmarking and best practice communication going on between cities and on some issues, like gun control in the USA, there are cooperative links between urban administrations that can have progressive results. I see no reason why such practices cannot build further into organised urban resistance to neoliberal practices. I think a coordinated response across urban administration in the UK to the so-called bedroom tax would be a possibility that would echo the way the struggle over the poll tax unfolded earlier. We have in fact done things of this sort but we don't analyse them fully afterwards and appreciate their possibilities.

OT: Civil unrest is becoming a more recurrent feature of urban life in London, as it is for cities around the world, among them Athens, Madrid, Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Santiago, Bogotá, Rio de Janeiro and, most recently, Stockholm. Are riots (not just protests and organised social movements) now part of a toolkit to reclaim the right to the city? What can those here in the financial capital of the world learn from these struggles in other cities?

DH: Since inviting me to comment on these questions we have Istanbul. When you look at the global situation you sense there is a volcanic situation bubbling beneath the surface of society and you never know when and where it is going to explode next (who would have thought Istanbul, even though it was plain to me on my earlier visit there that there were a lot of discontents). I think we need to prepare ourselves for such eruptions and build as far as we can, infrastructures and organisational forms capable of supporting and developing them into sustainable movements.

OT: Whilst acknowledging the ingrained legitimisation of private property within the concept, what are your views on the efficacy of implementing a land value tax in the UK? Do you think it could achieve any of the equalising effects its proponents advocate?

DH: I think a land value tax could help but it does not, in the end, address the problem of the vast extractions of wealth by a rentier class that has become so very powerful in recent years particularly in major cities like London and New York, for this is a major form of dispossession that needs to be confronted.

BINZ BLEIBT BINZ

Ed Sutton

“We are gone and yet we remain.”

As tensions continue to rise surrounding housing and right-to-the-city issues in Switzerland, one squat’s struggle was derailed at a critical moment by violence. How the Schoch Family of Zurich’s Binz responded, and what we can learn from their equanimity.

May 31st was the expected doomsday for the Schochs, the fifty-some residents of Zurich's Binz squat. Eviction loomed, and tensions between the squatters and city authorities, stirred up by local media, had been increasing since March when a "Reclaim the Streets" demonstration went awry and was branded the "Binz riots" by Swiss newspapers. In early May, the Schochs had distributed posters and flyers exhorting sympathisers to come to Zurich and help out with ‘creative resistance’ to the coming eviction, but otherwise held their cards close to their chests.

It was in this charged atmosphere that I arrived at Binz on May 30th, the day before the planned eviction. Walking down the driveway towards the front entrance of the large complex, it was immediately apparent that the Schochs’ hitherto undivulged preparations were fully in motion. People were hauling material up onto the rooftop terraces; old beat-up trucks chugged along in and out of the alleyway leading to a loading area in the rear of the complex. Power tools and welding torches whined, clanged and hissed from inside the buildings; and, most significantly, the front entrance had been completely barricaded with junk. Piles of bicycle skeletons, sections of scaffolding, kitchen appliances, wooden palettes, shopping carts, oil drums, furniture, and hanging tarps blocked even visual access to the Schoch family home. Converted vehicles used as ‘floats’ in the March demonstration — including a flatbed truck upon which a punk band had played (the drum set still sat dejectedly atop it) — formed the front line of the barricade, and oft-used protest banners adorned the morass. Binz bleibt Binz. Repression macht Aggression.

On entering one of the large hangar-like halls, activity was ebbing. I approached a group gathered in quiet conference, their dust masks and ear protection pulled down around their necks for a break. Their worried, exhausted faces reflected none of the threatening, stubborn rebellion that had characterised the Schoch family in media reports over the preceding months.

Their current struggle was touchingly familiar. Many of them had lived in the Binz complex for nearly seven years, in rooms and arrangements they had built with their own hands. Their stress now was of leaving home: what do I take along, what do I leave behind, what do I throw away? What will become of this place? What will become of us? Needless to say, they weren’t in the mood to chat. There was an impression, seemingly shared by the entire city, that there would be some spectacle at Binz the next day.

But May 31st came and went without any big news. Media outlets reported that the squatters had completely sealed off the premises and left. Deducing that the anticipated police confrontation would not come, and not eager to stand around in the rain, reporters took their cameras and went home with a shiver and a yawn.

Naturally, they missed the significance of the non-event. It doesn’t fit into the media's narrative that these ‘hard-line anarchist provocateurs’ would leave without a fight. Yet leaving without a fight was the most powerful thing they could do.

Over the seven year existence of the Binz squat, the Schoch family made an art of defying expectations. They had fended off a previous eviction threat in 2009/2010 by meeting the local government's demand for a security deposit, delivering eight wheelbarrows full of coins to the government administrative offices. They handed over all of the CHF20,000 (Swiss Francs) required, overpaying by about ten francs. They always paid their water and electric bills promptly, to the tune of CHF3,000 a month. When they were forced to cooperate with the state, the Schochs did so on their own, creative terms.

Ignoring their routine portrayal as layabouts and outcasts, in possession of a militant ideology, they consistently focused on the personal and humane tasks they had set for themselves: establishing and maintaining a self-organised autonomous space free from profit and securitisation - rampant in the rest of the city. Freiraum (space) open to anyone who wanted to contribute to communal life.

But the politics of urban space in Switzerland has heated since the onset of the Eurocrisis, and groups that lack the Schochs' pacifying internal decision-making process have increasingly begun responding to sharpening state repression in more violent ways. In effect, provocative actions have been taken in the Schochs’ name but not on their terms, both in March and, maddeningly, at the annual Tanz Dich Frei demonstration in Bern on May 25th. Blowback from these flare-ups made it impossible for the Binz struggle to continue in its desired form.

The Schochs’ voluntary (though surely agonising) relinquishing of the Binz complex, borne of their insistence on creative resistance and non-escalation, should be a signal to other more quick-tempered urban ‘revolutionaries’ engaged in the same battles. Their community wants nothing to do with juvenile, tit-for-tat fights with authority. They are tired of being seen as part of the problem when it is solutions that they seek.

In short, they want to survive, to continue the struggle, to fight another day. On their terms. As they put it in a statement they posted on their website on June 1st, accompanying the enormous metal sculpture they left behind at the fortified but eerily empty Binz complex: “We are gone and yet we remain…there is still a lot to do.”

BACK TO THE FUTURE?

Matthew Richmond

Urban transformation & public protest in Rio de Janeiro

Rio de Janeiro has arrived. Or at least that’s what the city’s authorities, and most of the international publicity the ‘cidade maravilhosa’ has received in recent years, would have us believe. After decades of economic malaise and social distress Rio’s fortunes appeared to turn in the middle of the last decade. A national economic upturn and the discovery of large offshore oil deposits fuelled steady growth in the city’s dominant business and service sectors. As a result large parts of the population saw their incomes rise and many, including those living in the city’s favelas (informal settlements), were lifted out of poverty. Even the notoriously high murder rate, largely the result of ongoing conflicts between heavily armed drug gangs and a military-style police force, fell from a peak of 70.6 per 100,000 in 1995 to 26.7 in 2010. When Rio was awarded the 2016 Olympics back in 2009, Cariocas (residents of Rio) greeted the news in typically exuberant fashion, seeing it as well-deserved international recognition both for their past suffering and recent progress in turning their city around.

Today the mood is somewhat different. A steady trickle of bad news stories about major transport and infrastructure projects coming in late and grossly over budget have soured public opinion about the Olympics and next year’s World Cup, adding weight to widespread perceptions of government corruption and inefficiency. These failures, at a time when transport and other costs are increasing, have led to mass protests in Rio and other major cities, revealing it to be more than mere grumbling of the kind that often accompanies expensive mega-events. This is because, in the case of Rio, the city council and state government are not treating the events as ends in themselves, but catalysts in a comprehensive strategy to reorder the city socially, spatially and economically. Through their interventions in housing, transport and security, the ‘city project’ has touched every segment of Rio society in some way or other, for better or for worse. Its stated aims of investment, integration and universalism are widely supported, hence the patience with which the delays and setbacks have, until now, been received. However, the way in which the project is now taking shape has led growing numbers to question the true intentions of the authorities and the ultimate consequences for ordinary residents.

Rio’s rising prosperity and improved security in recent years has laid the grounds for a major property boom. While this has meant a windfall for real estate speculators and homeowners, it has squeezed renters and priced younger people, including those from middle-class backgrounds, out of the areas they grew up in. Previously unfashionable neighbourhoods have been subject to rapid speculation and even favourably located favelas are coming under pressure from gentrification. A major regeneration project in the dilapidated port area and promotion of rapid urbanisation in Jacarepaguá (the suburb in which the main Olympic Park will be located) seem designed to open new frontiers for speculative development. In its defence the government has provided much new affordable housing, including through the federal Minha Casa Minha Vida programme, which finances mortgages for low-income households. However, new units have overwhelmingly been located in the distant northwest of the city, where land values are cheap, employment opportunities limited and transport connections poor. The result is to deepen the segregationist tendencies created by the speculative boom in the central and coastal zones.

With the rising cost of living, the poor quality of the city’s transport system (a symbol of broader public service failures) has become a burning political issue. Rio’s metro network is meagre and poorly integrated with other modes of transport, a problem that the costly extension to the wealthy suburb of Barra da Tijuca will do little to address. Similarly, three new Bus Rapid Transit lines will help to facilitate movement between the Olympic venues and the international airport, but given their cost and routing it is not clear that they will have widespread benefit. Meanwhile the general bus system is at breaking point, with overworked, underpaid and poorly trained drivers unable to provide a basic service. The gaps in the bus system are filled by combi vans, typically used by the poor because of their lower rates and ability to navigate winding hillside favela roads. However, after a high profile case earlier this year in which a tourist was raped and robbed in an unlicensed van, Mayor Eduardo Paes unilaterally banned them from tourist areas, thus placing a further squeeze on poor residents who commute there for work.

The favelas, where almost a quarter of Rio’s population and many of its working poor live, have been placed at the heart of the new city strategy. Indeed, the promise of paying a historical debt to these communities after years of endemic neglect and frequent repression was one of the most powerful cases in support of the Olympic bid. Since

2008 a programme of ‘pacification’, or proximity policing, has been pursued, under which police have entered and established a permanent presence in favelas previously controlled by drug traffickers. The policy has been criticised for failing to put an end to trafficking, merely pushing it underground, and for the persistence of tensions between police and residents in some areas. However, it has dramatically reduced violence in and around pacified favelas and seems to have made the open flaunting of heavy weaponry by gangs in these areas a thing of the past.

While the improved security situation retains broad support from favela residents and the population as a whole, the current geographical coverage of the programme and a patchy record on post-pacification social interventions have raised doubts as to its endgame. To date, pacification has been overwhelmingly targeted at the wealthy south zone and the city centre, as well as areas considered strategically important for the delivery of the mega-events. Meanwhile, gang and police violence continue unabated in peripheral suburbs and may be rising in neighbouring municipalities as traffickers are driven out of Rio. The west of the city has increasingly fallen under the control of militias – off-duty and former police officers who have carved out a profitable niche in extortion and violent monopolisation of utilities and other services, often in cahoots with corrupt officials. Of the twenty-four pacification units established so far, only one is in an area previously controlled by militia.

Beyond security, the improvements promised for favela residents have largely failed to materialise: ‘UPP Social’ which was intended to map, upgrade and join up public services post-pacification, has been starved of resources and will now be wound down and replaced with what looks like a less ambitious ombudsman system. The Mayor has also indefinitely shelved the ‘Morar Carioca’ programme – a participatory planning initiative originally planned to be rolled out across Rio’s favelas and once envisaged as the ‘great social legacy’ of the Olympics. High profile interventions, such as the installation of cable-cars in Providência (the city’s oldest favela) and Complexo do Alemão (one of its largest) have been unilateral and of questionable benefit to residents. In the case of Providência, urbanisation works may ultimately result in the removal of approximately one third of its population. The spectre of removal has reared its head in many other areas marked to receive sporting venues and new transport lines, overwhelmingly in highly valued parts of the city. The number of families removed could eventually reach over 10,000.

To date, the city project has delivered rising costs, transport gridlock, highly selective securitisation and favela removals with, as yet, no improvements to public goods and services. Public schools and hospitals remain underfunded and overcrowded. Instead of heralding modernisation and healing old wounds, it is becoming increasingly difficult to discern whether the city is in fact moving forwards or backwards. Uncomfortable parallels can be drawn with the last great attempt to reorder Rio de Janeiro – at the height of Brazil’s military dictatorship in the late-1960s. Then, too many thousands of favela residents were removed from their homes, freeing up valuable land to market speculation and sharpening urban segregation. Then, too public services languished and protest was met with brutal repression.

But Brazil is different today. It is a democracy, albeit an extremely unequal and often dysfunctional one, and there is a genuine reforming spirit within some organs of the state. Civil society is also finding its voice, both online and on the streets. Cariocas want to see their city reformed in the way that has been promised and will support genuine attempts to do so. What they have seen so far has not convinced them, but it is not too late to turn these perceptions around. In order to do that, the authorities must begin by asking themselves the 64k real question: who are the mega events for? Beneath this lies a much larger question that, since democratisation, Brazil has yet to answer: who is the city for? If they don’t know the answer yet, they may be about to find out.

TALES FROM THE GRIND

Leah Borromeo

DROP THE DEAD DONKEY

Newsrooms are fucked up. Everyone watches everyone else to see who will have their Michael Douglas in Falling Down moment. They're waiting for you to snap or get the sack so they can move into your seat. Unlike other corporate environments where you're stabbed in the back, news hacks place a sword in front of you and push you on it.

Having spent over a decade rising from runner to deputy foreign editor (or "desk jockey" as I call it), I've been privy to what happens when insecurity complexes get regular doses of testosterone and Pavlovian dog treats.

Ten years ago I was a broadcast journalist on the lower rungs of Rupert Murdoch's television news empire at Sky News. I was a text producer, writing the words that went on those little "breaking news" straps that dance across your TV screen. I pushed the button that went "whoosh" to tell you all about the bombs that dropped on Baghdad. I translated all the hot air at the UN into two lines of bite-sized information. The "textprod" was Twitter before Twitter. How very hipster.

One morning, I was at my desk preparing a string of rewritten newswires for the next bulletin. Sky's then head of output, John Ryley, stamped over to my station. John isn't very tall. And he's cursed by the same speech affliction Jonathan Ross has of pronouncing his "r"s like "w"s. He listens to punk and has a secret life of liking rather cool things. His manner of dress is less than managerial - preferring comfy, moth-masticated jumpers to the executive suit. He also struck fear into the hearts of the more ruthlessly ambitious news producer (a fact often used by other producers to manipulate their co-workers). His best mate from school is Eddie Izzard and I once caught him humming "Anarchy in the UK" in the corridor outside the edit suites.

I digress. John Ryley stamped towards my desk. He was clutching a fax.

"Can you read this?" he said, depositing three pages on my desk.

"It's in Mandarin, John," I said.

"So you can read it?"

"I'm Filipino, John. We use a different sort of squiggly language."

Some years later I was walking past his office. I'd since moved on to working on the Foreign Desk where I was once jokingly told before entering Gaza that kidnapping would be good for my career. He was in conference with a freshly recruited producer - newsroom plankton with his sights set on greater things.

"Leah!"

"Yes, John?" I said staring at a poster advertising the Sky News Beijing bureau in a Chinese propaganda style.

"Gary Gilmore."

"What about him?"

"Who is he?"

"A murderer executed in America who requested his eyes be used for transplants. Hence the punk song by the Adverts, Looking Through Gary Gilmore's Eyes."

He then shot me a "you can fuck off now, I've proved my point" look. I suspect John made a cultural reference that totally passed by the young producer and needed to show that he wasn't old.

I despaired at the lack of general knowledge from anyone under 30. Plucked from the finest schools and thrust into graduate programmes they still wrote round-robin emails like "Leonard Cohen's version of Hallelujah is on the server under P12345". I replied - with snark - "It's not his version. It's his bloody song."

Let's not get into what I said to the overnight reporter who asked me to tell her "very quickly" the history of the Palestine/Israel conflict. The Middle East reporter was reluctant to send over a breakfast news package so the overnight hack got the job while we tried to persuade them. The overnight hack cobbled together paragraphs from newswires and Wikipedia. Offended that their patch was being sullied by some "Roedean girl with more ponies than sense", our Middle East reporter knuckled down to craft a minute-and-a-half voice track which we laid over agency pictures and archive.

Fast forward to the 2008 Mumbai attacks. The world's media descended on India's largest city with a circus of reporters, producers, researchers and engineers. Sky sent over multiple teams patched together with people from different bureaux around the world, including a new (and our only) reporter who bore Indian heritage. His producer texted me "What the fuck is he doing here? He can't even speak the language!"

Common sense lapses, obvs. The accounts department once sent out the following notice:

"It has been brought to my attention that people have been using the words "bribe" or "fraud" when submitting their expense claims. Whilst in most cases this has arisen because people are covering fraud or bribery cases, please can everybody refrain from using these words in future. Sky doesn't tolerate the use of bribery or fraud in the workplace and has to investigate each case."

In an office where it seemed the primary journalistic concern was one's own position in the corporate structure and not the rose-tinted idealism of telling stories to make people understand the world a bit better, the foreign desk was a haven. It's where you found journalists that still gave a shit - albeit a jaded shit laced with sarcasm. It's also where you found journalists who could care less about court cases and weather stories and seethed resentment when made to cover them. Foreign news requires a macabre sense of humour littered with obscenity. This was the same industry that held an "oh what a lovely war" party after George W Bush declared the Iraq War over in May 2003.

Lebanon. 2006. Another war. I was trying to locate one of our field producers in Tyre to co-ordinate an update and a live feed. The Israelis were flying bomb-laden sorties over our satellite position.

"Nick. Where've you been?"

"I went down to the beach. Some American journos wrote "UN" in the sand. I modified it a little."

"What?"

"I put a "c" in the front of it and a "t" at the end."

I recently texted an old friend reporting from Syria.

"How are you mate?"

"At Syrian border. Mega death."

The key to learning how a newsroom ticks is understanding that everyone resents everybody else. Those at the bottom rungs of the ladder try to kick everyone else off in their upward climb. Those at the top try to saw the rungs in half so the lower orders can't get near them. Somewhere in the middle, common bonds are formed. The sort that you hear braying out of the bar at the American Colony Hotel in Jerusalem where your surname suddenly adopts a public school modification like "Smithy". They're genuine, human bonds. But it's best remembered that these are the people whose words and images determine what you know about the world around you. It's a clusterfuck. A psychotherapist's wet dream..

WE ARE EVERYWHERE