

Once in Motion...

On the Move

At the second resquat of the Vogelstruys in September 1980, a banner reading »Squatting goes on« went up. When the squatters were evicted the next day, those who had gathered in response to the alarm quickly dispersed throughout the city. Small groups of people trekked through the city center, setting a fire here, smashing a window there. Sometimes their paths crossed by chance. The coining of the »goes on« slogan literally coincided with the disintegration of the squat movement.

The move to the city

Michiel: »I think for us the Vondelstraat was the break between neighborhood and city. Till then we were united as a squatters' group, with the same experiences, the same history and because of that the same standpoint. Because of the amazing speed of events people were going through different things, because they were, or chose to be, in different places. In those days I was having so many intense experiences with others from outside my neighborhood, that they ended up being the people I stayed with. I had hardly any contact with my neighbors because I stayed closer to downtown. I saw a lot of opportunities in the city and so I became very removed from the neighborhood. I did keep going to our local squat bar every night. But that was more to tell what was happening in the city and to ask if they wanted to join in.«

What is »the city«? Michiel: »It has to do with switching over to involvement on a daily basis. In one neighborhood you just can't squat day in day out. Neighborhoods were mainly meeting points, control points, with lots of different types. Most people weren't on the dole back then either. Now, in the 1980s, there's a group that lives on it day by day. They all look for projects, for something to hold onto, with people they feel comfortable with.«

What was different about »the city«? Michiel: »I remember we were talking after a Groote Keyser meeting in Cafe De Piepel. I overheard Hein talking to somebody, giving them a brief evaluation, and he was using such military terminology: 'We've thrashed those guys, now we've just got to take these guys out. We'll tell the Indonesian District we've taken the mollies off the roof, that'll shut them up.' We were absolutely naive about thinking in terms of power, idealistic we were. So it was disillusioning to realize others didn't think that way. Our opinion was that the neighborhoods should make the decisions. Right after the Vondelstraat Hein started organizing meetings, where he would unveil his plans for the coming months to about 25 important people from the neighborhoods. They had to discuss it in the neighborhoods, but they couldn't tell us everything because it might get leaked. And then people had to be mobilized. There was a big revolt against this in the neighborhoods; 'Are we just supposed to carry out plans thought up by some vague mastermind?' That secret club did exist, but just before an eviction or a big action, a 'SOK' was also called. We were for discussing plans at the SOK, so everyone would be in accord with it, without any lobbying going on in shady circuits.«

The SOK (City Conference of Squat Groups), an appellation handed down from earlier times, was a name for the irregular and chaotic meetings that all the neighborhoods were invited to via the emergency phone tree. In principle any squat or neighborhood could call a SOK. It was a place for proposing actions to other neighborhoods and dividing tasks: assembling crews for inside and outside a squat under siege, putting together a press group, making a poster, painting banners, rounding up materials, preparing for actions. It was not a central organ where a basic democratic decision process was implemented towards a longterm strategy. The idea was that neighborhoods and individual squats

would make their own decisions in each case how they would defend or attack, and this by definition could not be surrendered to a higher power.

Michiel: »The debates about democracy, the position of the neighborhood, those were actually a bunch of bull, because it didn't matter what anyone said. Opposition to what was done on the city level played no part. Events were so overwhelming, at the neighborhood meeting you couldn't get a grip on what the next 'big action of the squat movement' would be. And that was the illusion. In our experience, in our neighborhood, there was clearly a power center for the city and we weren't it. For a few months it was mainly Hein and his cohorts who determined what the next action of the 'collected Amsterdam squat groups' would be. But they too were overcome by things like April 30th, however hard they had worked towards them. There's no way you could say they directed that or had it under control. But no other organized group had so much power to bring about events.

I thought it was a kick that the events always just swept people away, but not everyone in the neighborhood felt that way. There got to be a rift, because a lot of people were really seduced, fascinated by what was happening, and wanted to be involved every time. After that the neighborhood just fell apart. You had a nonviolent segment who just didn't want fuck-all to do with it anymore. Those situations scared some people to death. And everyone just ended up in them; for a lot of people being a squatter wasn't a choice.«

Back to nature

Michiel: »In our neighborhood we mainly had living cooperatives. From the moment the squatters' bar opened, 60 or 70 of us were there almost every night. Squatting was over for us at the end of 1979, because there were no boarded-up buildings left. The debate that came up afterwards at our neighborhood meetings in the 1980s revolved around the fact that half wanted to make sure city things didn't win out over the neighborhood struggle, while others wanted to work on a city-wide level. The heart of our organization had become city squatters, and because of that we weren't doing all the things we used to in the neighborhood. There was a big group who wanted to get back to that, who kept seeing that as a problem - that you have to do things with the people you live with, with your neighborhood, with your immediate surroundings. That it's natural to organize yourselves as a neighborhood in a city and not as squatters in a city. And if you did things that the neighbors didn't understand, that was wrong, and you had no chance of becoming strong, spreading out in the neighborhood.

Then a house was squatted in the center of our neighborhood, so a neighborhood shop could be opened in it, and this was done by squatters. Afterwards the construction workers and everyone went to stay in the building, while it was still squatted. They cancelled their leases on their own work spaces and all cooperated there with each other.

From '81 on, whole squatted blocks grouped together to search for a house somewhere else, because demolition had begun; the bar was first. We never fought evictions. The neighborhood wanted new buildings, and if you opposed that, there'd instantly be a conflict with the neighbors. It wasn't even discussed.« The neighborhood mystics, who saw the neighborhood as the natural relationship of an urban person with his environment, stayed. The dropouts disappeared from the scene. The rest kept going, wanted to choose, and chose for the unnatural identity of uprooted squatters.

Becoming a squatter

Michiel: »We felt like young pups, fresh, compared to the older ones. They all dressed in dark clothes, were marked by life, all had Palestinian scarves. We still wore long hair, of course.« Karel: »Mine came off after April 30. You'd hear all these stories about plainclothesmen driving through the neighborhood with photo books of easily recognizable rock-throwers. Plus you'd seen that when you got arrested you were pulled into the vans by your hair. You'd see that a lot after big actions, that people's appearance would suddenly change.« The police cameras recorded the haircut you had left over from the 1970s, which gave you the occasion to modernize your personal style. At the same time it became necessary to disguise yourself during public activities with clothing which was as uniform as possible. The nondescriptness in front of the cameras which the squatters were able to achieve in this manner, however, made them that much more conspicuous to onlookers. The print media also picked up this difference and emphasized it in visual design, to label the social problem with clearly identifiable faces. This is how a squatter was constructed and sharply distinguished from other city dwellers. And this while, in neighborhood squatting, domesticity and the normality of the »new residents« was being pushed into the foreground.

Stephan: »When we started up our squat consultation hour at the beginning of 1980, we got a typewriter and some tables right away from the community center. All the information about vacancy and owners they received, they passed along to us.« Karel: »At the consultation hour neighborhood residents came by a lot with that kind of information too. We squatted regularly for families from Surinam who'd just come over, because the situation there was getting more and more uncertain. And that was where I first experienced everyday racism too, in one of those streets full of respectable poverty.« Free swimming in normality bumped up against borders,* once it could no longer be concealed that squatters were involved in very different things than the people down the street, and neither of the two groups were prepared to accommodate in the long term. »They talk about changing the world, but when you realize how difficult it is to change one street...« Neighborhood squatting was thus inclined to withdraw into itself, and the image the neighbors had of it became accepted as one of the boundaries you had to take into account.

The »lightning strike«*

By the end of 1980, a new »means of communication« had been developed. »The lightning strike is not an alternative for a riot, but an opportunity to break out of your own powerlessness on the street by determining your own movements. The ideology of it is not that the police are your most significant enemy, but the network of people who are responsible for property development and speculation. By taking action against a banker, architect or real estate agent you're taking on the guilty parties.«

The »lightning strike« was referred to for the first time as such at the »Close Dodewaard« blockade during the fall holidays of 1980, against the nuclear plant in the city of that name. A month later the threatened eviction of the Groote Wetering squat was completely dominated by this shift. »It's cool. You decide yourself what you're going to do and you choose your own methods. No plainclothesmen-paranoia, no endless bullshit meetings or long preparations. You're elusive and you don't attract attention with a small group of people. In a huge crowd you don't do anything; a few people throw rocks, thousands of people do nothing but yell chants: riot squad go away.«

Something had fundamentally changed in the street. The crowd had released its potential energy and could no longer be whipped up. Insofar as anything still happened, it was done by people who had made the decision in advance and brought their own equipment. This professional attitude inevitably produced an audience which stood and watched, and encouraged a good show with cheering.

»Someone told me very happily that they'd just thrown kilos of tomatoes with a group of people. They used a point system. One point for a riot van (the easiest), to four points for running military police. He was just on his way back to the greengrocer.« From now on passersby were used for the purpose of blending in. The too-slow crowd, unleashed by the lightning strike, could pick up speed again. On a visit to the Friesland-Groningen Mortgage Bank: »The action was so lightning fast (in 30 seconds it was done), even we were surprised. We all walked into the office, left flyers, paint, smoke and bewildered employees behind. We tinkered with the electricity too. Then we went back outside fast and dispersed.« This was not a case of being overcome. The impulse to let yourself be swept away by a grandiose event and radically liberate yourself from your own will was no longer part of the game. This loss was converted into a gain: now you could determine personally what you did and didn't want to do, once it had been established that something had to be done. The action was no longer an occurrence you went along with as a matter of course, but a »choice,« a word never before included in the squatters' vocabulary. The progress of a mass action in the street couldn't be controlled; at most it could be influenced. Too, then, such an action could always turn against you, leading to brawls and arrests. The lightning strike was a reaction to this capricious course of events. The possibility of a catastrophic fragmentation of the crowd through violence from outside was prevented when one fragmented the event oneself. The large-scale confrontation around a symbol was supported by doing economic damage elsewhere: »Let 1000 windows shatter.«

The idea was to bring all possible connections with the casus to light (banks, attorneys, real estate agents, security companies). And this not by bringing charges against them, but by dealing with them in turn. Every strike could be separately controlled, and derived its meaning from the larger context within which it occurred. The lightning strike was introduced as a gimmick to attract attention for the press release. With the lightning strike also came the tendency of making one's own propaganda out of the event, to prod others into doing their own actions. The strike then only made sense if it appeared in the media.

Revenge

This type of lightning strike was devoid of any strategy or tactics. »Once again a visit to Bakker in which his car changes color. In retrospect not so favorable for publicity, because it gives him the opportunity to act pathetic for three-quarters of a page in the newspaper. But we've gotten out some of our tensions and frustrations and that's worth something too.« Revenge needs no legitimation. It can exist without rationality. It can, to be sure, be curbed or delayed, through discussions over the pros and cons of getting someone back, but never prevented. Revenge combined the impulsive character of the lightning strike with the permanence of a scar. It had a better memory and more patience than mere arguments. It was rooted in hard information which had built up around a building or person. Revenge robbed them of the protection of their role in society, it placed the culprits outside their political, economic or social framework and reverted to an elementary form of individual responsibility. Revenge was thus always very specifically aimed; this distinguished it from the economic-damage principle, which was out for quantity.

In addition it ensured that you weren't blocked by the frustration which unavoidably comes up in confrontations with higher powers. Feelings of revenge are a constant source of inventiveness. »After a drink, pissing in a property owner's mailbox, sending bedbugs in an envelope, having a cold buffet for 12 people at fl 28 a head delivered, half an hour later a disco show at fl 1500, followed a day later by a funeral wreath.« Undefendable as revenge was in the context of bigger actions, there were enough justifiable lightning strikes to ensure that it would not ALLEEN KOMEN TE STAAN. The lightning strike must prove that it is not »blind« revenge to head off bad press. To this end it used the press release. Revenge itself was not concerned with media attention. Stronger still, »you try to keep

actions like that out of the press because it's so bad for your good name.« (Frits)

The scene

The fragmentation of the event into the lightning strikes coincided with the appearance of the scenes. What began as a chance meeting under bizarre circumstances during a squat or on the street led gradually to a closer acquaintance in the private sphere. The extraordinary unrepeatable character of the events was set down in a esoteric language, which only the intimate few could enjoy. The many groups, left behind as residue after the wave of squats and evictions in the early 1980s, each cherished their legends about the mass events of times past. They consolidated them by each choosing a project to digest and revise the experiences gained. One chalked it up to »increasing repression,« the other stayed a chaos artist, a third saw it all as the beginning of »the movement« under construction, a fourth remembered it as a meeting of kindred spirits and continued in the women's, dyke, or gay scene. It quickly became inconceivable that there might be a way to interpret events that was different from your own.

When people started running into each other more often in select places, the scene was born. There was enough to drink, closing time was pushed back further every night. Now that you'd quit your studies, there was no longer a daily rhythm the dark hours needed to fit into. Not only did people succeed in memorizing each other's faces, addresses and names in the course of these sessions, they began to know each other well, all too well: »broadening towards the inside.« It was even swiftly forgotten that the acquaintances had once been strangers. What had been anonymous abandon became a common denominator under which one attempted to find oneself again, as soon as the high faded. Those who couldn't find themselves under the denominator stayed away in the end, those who had no need for denominators in the first place disappeared after the first night. The scene resembled an 18th century coffee house, a 19th century salon, the lodge, the groups and schools of artists' circles, bohemia, the debating society, the church congregation; in short, all those (in)formal institutions which combine the memory of events with a lifestyle, in which the promise of recurrence is cultivated.

The scene preserved the memory of the accidental meeting and at the same time made it impossible for it ever to take place that way again. The capacity of a crowd of strangers for spontaneous action was denied, while the formation of the group guaranteed at the same time that outsiders could only look on. In practice, if you wanted to carry out actions at all, it became necessary to organize them carefully in advance since otherwise no one would know what they were supposed to do. The anonymous crowd, written off, was used as a threat to the outside world. And inside the ranks, the promise that it would someday happen again as a result of your own actions was preserved. This inherent contradiction prevented terrorism and/or the action grinding to a halt. Henceforth you got to know only the others in the scene, no one else. Entering a scene is a full-time job, making the particular stories, relationships, codes of behavior and fashions your own.

After 1980, the scenes' fragmentation of the memory of original events made them soon incapable of getting anywhere with each other on the level of personal contact. Everyone was talking about something different. But at the same time these loose fragments were lumped together as historic referents, with the suggestion that everyone's experience had been the same: the* Vondelstraat, the Luik, »Dodewaard,« »Boekel,« »April 30,« and so on. The events lost their reality potential, were converted into imaginary idioms, but that was what made communication between the scenes possible again. One can refer to a historical continuity; the yoke of history creates »unity in diversity.« Though the scene begins its own project, proceeds a step further, the plan cannot succeed, because otherwise the BEDRIJFJE/endeavor will IN DE LUCHT KOMEN HANGEN*.

A scene is only a scene when it is aware of being part of a diffuse whole which legitimizes its existence. Lacking this larger context, it is merely a clique. The scenes nevertheless maintain a distance from each other, in order to guarantee the unfamiliarity that makes it possible to keep doing the most unexpected things at the bigger actions. The artificial preservation of this unfamiliarity guarantees besides that the idea that one is part of a growing movement, and thus the existence of the scenes themselves, keep their appeal: »More and more people are joining the resistance.«

Inside media

To assemble one story out of the lightning-strike snippets, the press media became indispensable. The papers had to condense the scraps afterward into one event. There arose a need for an overview of all the incidents that took place around an eviction. This passion for documentation couldn't have the big media forgetting the little details. The inside media had to inform the outside world, but especially each other, what one had gotten out of it all. And if you discovered that they'd forgotten to mention your action, the indignation was great. In the action consciousness, something had only really happened once it ended up in the media, even if that was only in papers read solely in your own circle.

But at the same time, the memory of earlier events stayed strong enough that they determined the newly developed forms of action. When the crowd in the street is no longer spontaneously gathering and growing, the image of the great solidarity that used to be is evoked time after time by the media which have been called into life by the people themselves: the »movement zines.« These were all projects of specific scenes and the other scenes thus followed them with a certain suspicion. The writing style and choice of subjects clashed with your own approach, but on the other hand it was these papers and broadcasting stations which were responsible for the larger whole which you felt part of. This diffuse framework inside which one's actions and themes were placed made it impossible to distinguish between internal and external use. Friends as well as enemies were listening in. The paper ended up on the desks and tables of municipal strategists, secret services, coffeeshops, common rooms, parental houses, revolutionary salons and in garbage cans.

This vagueness concerning the addressee was intensified by the tendency of all media to target themselves at an imaginary crowd. For whom, exactly, were the inside papers being written? While a paper like bluff! considered itself a »megaphone to the media,« for example by threatening a riot, for this same reason it was challenged by other scenes as a »springboard for careerists.« However small the inside publications' print runs were, their producers always assumed that they had to be readable for all the nation, because they would someday, via medial multiplication, end up in every living room. This was the argument against hanging out all the dirty laundry in the inside media, even if done as initiative for a »dzkzn.« Discussions were published afterward anyway, so there was no influence whatsoever on their outcome. That the inside media focused on potential allies as well as having to function as cement between the scenes gave birth to a language that ironed out all the absurd and grisly sides. The words that couched a press release for the public were detached from the level of the local experience. One's own actions were translated, not told, directly onto an imaginary level. Prehistoric jargons could be brought off the shelf this way too, from Marx to men's group. You were »in the media.«

Squatting is more...

The squat movement, post 1980, could boast of a number of buildings, developed facilities and a series of spectacular events. But it had yielded no ideas which placed the activities in historical perspective. They couldn't even be explained to befriended »movers« in Berlin, Freiburg, or Zürich, who were having their heydays in 1981. At the most, these people could be presented with hard

information on local speculators, housing distribution and urban renewal. The pictures Amsterdammers brought along, however, were valued by the KRAWALLISTEN in foreign parts, and colored in with articulations of the local malaise. The squatters who came home from trips to Central European »action cities« brought back the word »Bewegung,« which was tacked onto the events without hesitation from the first chain reaction.

The acceptance of the »goes on« slogan, after the big squatting wave had reached its end, unavoidably called into question what squatting meant. Until then »squatting« had stood for more squatting and holding onto the squats. This ideology does not answer the question of what to do if your squat isn't being threatened for the time being, or is even about to be legalized. The eventuality of clearance of the entire stock of captured houses, like in foreign cities, was never in question. The self-image of the squat movement as »anti-eviction movement« thereby lost all charm. If a large squat had been evicted, the residents sometimes squatted another adventurous location the same day, just as easily. Plus, you could always start negotiating for legalization, because what you decided to do with your squat was your business, had nothing to do with anyone else. Consequently, the idea of »total confrontation with the state« never really caught on here. But if squatters wanted to choose to go on regardless, then the squatter identity needed substance.

The question was never »why squat?« («Don't ask how, take advantage now!«) Squatting was pure practice; to give squat space a time dimension, an ideology had to be instilled from outside. One was articulated in 1981 in the slogan, »Squatting is more than just living.« The »more« was now filled in by »the movement,« which displaced the accent from squatting to »the action goes on.« What's noteworthy about the more-than-living slogan is that the original Living question was clung to as well as let go of. The newly formed »Beweging,« or movement, could have been the way to a radical metamorphosis of the squat movement. It could have left its own past radically behind and gone to do something completely different. But the movers saw no reason to distance themselves, since newcomers all too often got involved in actions by way of the remaining squat channels and how should they otherwise? Because of this, however, those in the movement affirmed for a long time that the squat movement still existed as usual, even though they had opted not to go through life as squatters any more. This was good for a decade of confusion.

Besides, the introduction of the action ideology was not experienced as a break, because on a personal level it was the full-time city squatters who transformed themselves into »activists«, working hard at it day and night to various ends. All the scenes that switched over to »squatting is more than just living« distilled a common denominator from their original squatting past: the »direct action«. When your group visited some object or other for the purpose of rebuilding it, something else again happened, something different from the meeting of times past. Besides, in a direct action the familiar surroundings could be left behind and you were »unpredictable in the type of action and the place where you show up, surprising in the arguments that are used, not accountable and extremely unreasonable for our opponent, never prepared to compromise and thus make demands, always out to provoke a confrontation in the minds or hearts. We'll never win anyway (and it's a good thing).«

...than just living

There were British miners, the protest against the Borobudur amusement park, 16,000 fake gift certificates for the department store Vroom and Dreesmann, Navajo Indians, dealers in the Staatslieden district, illegal Surinamese, the American consulate, Center Party skins, repression in Belgium, Turkish labor unionists, witches' night, Moroccan Amicales and Turkish Gray Wolves, sisters, ammunition transport, discrimination in Lelystad, NATO's Wintex exercises, an anti-strip-search demo in Arnhem, welfare women, a demo against the visa requirement, Tamil

refugees in Lochem, the pink front, the international nuclear lobby, women in Eritrea, the French total objectors' hunger strike, porn, Rotterdam harbor strikers, the van Bossestraat, Startbahn-west, dictatorship in Uruguay, students' aktions, vigilantes, Dev Sol, mobile home residents, a Whitsun weekend against nuclear energy, axions against German multinationals, the TOTALO-LIJST*, the animal liberation front, arms for El Salvador, NATO's Reforger exercises, criminalization in Switzerland, the PASTORIE of Zwaag, squat-guard agencies, builders for Nicaragua, technology as a weapon, Nolympics, old people's homes under threat, the patriarchy, abolishing apartheid, Kurds, the squatted Hafenstrasse in Hamburg, low intensity conflicts, the straight man syndrome, the Moonies, infiltrants, children, squatting in »Utreg«, Moluccans, WYKTEAMS, the OEVERLANDEN, a demo for the Palestinians, nuclear transport, security services, runaway homes.

The ONBENOEMBAREN/unclassifiables

They kept going on, succeeded in never choosing to. Without exaggerated hassle they managed to keep their radical naiveté. They followed the ideological debates in the squatters' papers, but shrank from the obligation to apply it to themselves. But they were available for any cause. They'd cook for it in their restaurants, set collection pots on the bars of their coffeeshops, watch the videos, go to all the benefits, come help fix a house up here and there, march at all the demonstrations, help refugees find shelter and stand up for European nomads when they happened to be struck down. Everyone was welcome. Their tolerance and acceptance of the other was boundless, till the bomb exploded and gigantic fistfights broke out. But those were forgotten in a couple of days.

They'd been earning honorary membership for years from Social Services, on which they expended too much energy, owing to their aversion to authority and their chaotic nature. With utter abandon they devoted their existence to supporting activities, to which they devoted all their time. The productive sector with its professional mentality inspired great distrust in them, since it drove prices way up. Their distaste for economics made anything above fl 3 suspect. They stayed healthy in connection with the scene through saunas, swimming, massages and tai-chi, but just as easily drank the night away on a line of speed. The apocalyptic variant, out to take self-destruction to melodramatic heights, lived in their midst, but they themselves took it all the way only sporadically. Their capacity for active forgetfulness prevented them from going under in these excesses. They lived in a timeless ambience, which made them immune to the wave of success which washed over the 1980s.

They were the object of the machinations of the strategists, who tried to put the actions that needed doing into a »political« perspective. Their years of consistently living in the present made every argument in which a historical continuity was explained simply a pretty story from which not a single conclusion had to be drawn. Every action stood completely alone; there was nothing to learn from it for a future occasion. The discussion afterwards was simply the cloud released after the clash. They managed to shirk any pressure to become different than they were, by clinging, against all previous agreements, to a behavioral code too amorphous to possibly define. The strategic thinkers claimed they had to reactivate them over and over, to entice them into contributing to the impression »that so much is happening again.« They made up the movement.

The propaganda of the attitude

Michiel got into antimilitarism: »The appeal of Onkruid wasn't so much the hatred of militarism, but the prospect of the uncompromising revolt you can wage against the army. You didn't have to mess with eviction dates and other people interfering. Activism would be much more difficult with, say, men's liberation. Militarism is the perfect area and the military are perfect opponents besides because they do exactly what you want them to do; they're so rigid.« Onkruid was initially a nationally

organized group of »total objectors« who did »pick-up actions« with friends, to make their arrests the most radical and clear-cut events possible. Later the national structure was dissolved, in order to literalize Onkruid's slogan that it was »not an action group but a group of actions« against militarism in general. A brochure stated: »There is a great field of people around Onkruid who are somehow ready for more radical action but who aren't yet doing it. People project their hopes onto Onkruid or write a letter asking how they can join. It isn't like that, it's about forming a group yourself.« The local groups opened a post office box where you could apply to become a member. Total objectors continued to work within the framework of these groups, but others, »with their roots in the squatters' movement,« did their own actions on the side.

Michiel: »With squatting you always had to deal with purchasing, requisitioning and who knows what, a much shadier area. Changing the public housing authority is less insane, is always a little closer to home. We didn't want any changes in the defense budget. Stealing a secret makes it public, destroying something destroys it; that was the kind of change we wanted. There is an essential difference between squat and Onkruid actions, though there's no opposition between them. Throwing a paint bomb at an F-16, the action is the act and everything that comes after it its completion. The police and whatever, that's not part of the action anymore. If you compare it with forcing a riot in the street, there the confrontation with the police is the act. Another attraction was the the combination of illegality, from doing actions at night to stealing secrets, and seeking publicity through the press, exhibitions and schoolrooms.«

By definition, the army cannot be defeated, but that wasn't the point. »We always said, in the 60s and 70s people thought revolution was possible, that society can be fundamentally reformed. That's bullshit. All you can do is what you do yourself, with each other. You shouldn't neglect doing it, because it will make life for you and those around you more pleasant; you're keeping your dignity, you're not just sheep, you're creating something yourself. At Onkruid meetings the obsession was, how do we create another event that will appeal to the imagination? With squatting it was really difficult to plan what was going to happen, there were a lot more things possible than lightning strikes on real estate agents, lawyers and so on.«

Merely pursuing an unattainable goal, by sawing down RTV antennas or breaking into warehouses, did not supply enough motivation. The actions had to be seen as components of a diffuse whole that could be achieved: »We had more ideas than, we're only doing our action. Once a whole lot of people start to do things like us, then a lot will change in Holland. We don't demand that change, but realize it ourselves through our action. Stealing and publishing documents, we thought, that will help a lot of people, give them more self-confidence in their own lives, too. You were showing that you weren't powerless, that you were perfectly capable of doing something, that you didn't always have to bend. For us it was very much about people's attitudes. If lots of groups like Onkruid spring up, if for once people would get up the nerve and directly stand up against what upset them or bugged them, Holland would be a lot nicer place to live; that would be fascinating...and in our wildest fantasies that isn't limited to militarism. If everyone starts to short-circuit electric wires, then you have more than just a counterpower with a whole infrastructure like the squat movement; it's much more an attitude.«

The action was consciously a goal in itself. It was not aimed chiefly at the adversary or the outside world, but attempted to reach potential imitators. The »huge field« of people in Holland who would take over the activism created the feeling that the movement was snowballing, what someone from Onkruid once called »broadening from the inside out.« The media were essential in reaching these people. Michiel: »It wasn't about the act, it was about the registered act. You can define it like this: we considered Onkruid actions a failure if they hadn't played some role in the media. And we always made sure the media were present. Just like with squatting, a lot of time was put into the press groups and press contacts. Your performance had to be good enough that just through a description your ideas

would still come out. Just like it was later: if you just give your activist group a clear name, then at least that gets into the paper.« The media were not used to portray a specific political goal as worth pursuing; they served to disseminate a mentality. Nevertheless, it was first propagated among those who carried out the actions: »If we succeed in obtaining and keeping space for humanity, friendship, initiative and love, then we can carry on indefinitely,« reads an internal article. Furthermore, »Through strong internal involvement, the greater emotional bond and suppressing childish behavior you reduce the chance of stupid leaks and infiltration.« Social control in the group caused the mentality to become a requirement.

Thus, out of the »group of actions,« a small group separated itself, people who knew each other thoroughly and possessed equal amounts of activist savvy. The media, the target of the activism, for they passed news of the group's activities through to the outside world, slowly but surely served to legitimize the group's chosen isolation from then on. The message the group began transmitting said: you can't participate in our kind of actions, but you can copy them, if you've studied our zines to find out how we did them. They legitimized the actions to themselves through the evidence that »more and more people are joining in« to do similar actions. But at the same time they were constantly searching for new modes of action, ones that would speak to the imagination. Besides, reporters stayed home from performances they'd already seen somewhere else.

The inside media served to export behavioral codes to other scenes. The emotional energy released in the group, which was unable to leave it, precipitated in testimonies which illustrated the progress of a heavy action in detail and analyzed its outcome. But propaganda was also consistently made, towards the collective processing of the internal experience at the front: »With churning stomachs, sweaty hands, we got together. Got talking. That conversation was so good because we talked about fear in a really open way. Fearless macho men had no chance at all. It was very difficult at this action to estimate what the results would be for your own life, and that made everyone pretty insecure.« So as not to scare away readers, direct action, after the steel doors of bunkers were burned open, was defined as: »that you say what you think, that you skip down the street if you're happy, that you cry if you're sad. That you trust that you achieve more with honesty and sincerity, by being yourself, than by taking a stand and trying to wake people up.«

The goal of the action was to get »the movement« underway; it had to exploit the media sphere for conveyance of the impulses it released. The crowd it was aiming at was that of the supposed spectators and the scenes. In the crowd in the street, energy broke loose in a chaotic production that made the most remarkable connections possible. The group that combined its energy in the group process of the action could only bring about connections with »the wildest fantasies.« The real crowd, as it appears at evictions, airshows and other spectacles, had become just as foreign to it as the scenes in other squatters' bars. »You keep seeing fewer people and lose interest in other scenes.«

Antimilitarism, which was chosen because there one couldn't get stuck in the red tape of changing governmental policy, ultimately got bogged down in the feedback of the group process. It started with: »The good thing is you can do your own things with your own group. You can keep closest to your feelings and experiences that way. Besides that, for a lot of people being concerned with how you work together, how the labor process runs, how you live with each other, is a revolutionary goal in itself. A point at which more can be achieved in small, safe groups.« And it ended with »the stupid fucking stress in anarchist groups«: »the danger of independent groups' so easily working parallel to each other, the lack of discussion. Initiative just blows away. Politics are no longer made. Some people glorify this, but in fact become locked up in their own groups, and no longer take responsibility for how the action comes across, what it's meant to achieve, how the movement should continue.« Michiel: »At one point we started to really take 'trust in your own power' literally. When you shut yourself off like that and only work with each other, that's limited.« »Going on« got bogged down in

group dynamics.

Tourist at your own action

Big objects demanded big actions. A small group would decide that a nuclear plant or launch site had to be shut down and seek allies to organize this in a couple of days. The Dutch population had declared itself in accord with this in the opinion polls. Enough demonstrations; the activists decided to really go all out for once. The managers of the action were meeting months ahead of time to determine the days' programs and put together the facilities package (KADUKI beans/punk bands/brass bands and puppet theaters/first aid kits)*. Publicity flyers with maps were distributed and the real media were tipped so they could begin the baiting, while the underground papers just had to mess around a bit with the arguments. The activists dropped by to inform the regular clientele and kept their eyes peeled for new market segments for the coming event. The organizers grew into their role, quite happy with their responsibility.

So potential participants wouldn't be scared away, »the violence discussion« was gone over one more time. The fixed outcome was that the principle of nonviolence would, in principle, be upheld. The leaders of the action had to make sure the tour parties of diverse plumage were kept separated so they wouldn't go interfering with each other. Practical experience had taught that mingling of the sitting and running segments of the crowd always worked out to the disadvantage of the sitters. In order to make the blockade attractive to both target groups, a festive or spectacular mood was promised. Registration for the weekend would be open.

And then the chatter began about the deeper purpose of the trek: are we going to experience real things on this outing, or are we just taking a trip inside our own heads? In the motor coach operator' terms, the first variant in the blockade was »effective« and the second »symbolic«. But strangely enough, it was the nonviolent symbolists who wanted to make optimal use of the impending traffic jam; with rosters they made sure the access roads were guarded 24 hours a day. Then the radicals, who actually would have liked to seal off the chosen industrial park, knew it was destined again not to be, because there were too many symbolists hanging around. That was a reason to concentrate on one gate as a symbol for the whole complex. This could be torn down to the ground, should the opportunity present itself.

The day dawned, the day everyone had looked forward to for so long. To really make it complete, a piece of ground, allocated by the authorities, was squatted. Then the third group entered the picture: the action tourists, who would spontaneously provide the necessary broadening. Befitting their touristic attitude, up to now they hadn't concerned themselves with organizing the trip. They knew nothing of the previous arrangements made, and when they made inquiries into it, they were referred through to task groups about which they had no clue. They hadn't read the underground media either, but had apparently been lucky enough to get offered a last-minute ticket since there were still a few places left, with the assurance that the weather forecast was good. They stepped carefree into the coaches and were driven to woods and meadows, where the fully-equipped campsite awaited.

Once there, they took a stroll around to inspect the scenes arranged by gate. Naturally, they ran into acquaintances from previous trips, or were attracted by the relaxed atmosphere to the campfire that the heavies kindled at nightfall. That was often the only place where the unorganized day trippers could get anything to drink. By that time, boredom had noticeably set in. The raised expectations had not been fulfilled, so they decided to provide some action themselves. They started messing with fences or riot vans and refused to be distracted by the reasonable activists, who believed in the effectiveness of keeping agreements. When the other side finally reacted, in a flash the adventurous tourists met the talk-weary radicals, who badly needed to work off the frustration of the preparatory meetings.

The effect of this chain reaction was staggering, in intensity as well as duration. Once the riot broke out the organizers and their sympathizers felt reduced to tourists at their own action. This was what would become the media event. There was no excuse for this. Whole platoons of riot police were put through the meat-grinder. Miles of fence went down. The guests who had appeared out of nowhere threw their own bodies into the fray, for hours on end and blind to the risks, heedless of the amount of violence they unleashed in the process. And they had shrieking fits of laughter... This had no place whatsoever in the painstakingly developed travel ethic. The only thing the leaders could think of was calling a halt to the blockade via communication tolerated by the police. In vain, of course. When they didn't want to distance themselves from the revelers later after all, they were forced to pin the event on the police, who were exercising »more power all the time.« The possibility that »people in the movement« could be using the riot police in a game in which they dictated the rules fell outside the tour guides' scope of vision.

The weekend had been intended to give the term »movement« substance in the eye of the media, in the hope that new groups would join in. The big action was seen as the lowest common denominator of the scenes, but they were already living in completely different worlds. The convergence had been supposed to release new energy, yet, however it was organized, unavoidably took on a touristy character. Therefore, like any vacation, it would remain without any consequence whatsoever. After two weeks the battle would provide fodder for conversation. What remained in the long term was concern over the unpredictable tourists »from outside,« who dared to act. This would manifest itself in even tighter organization at the next three-dayer.

The restorers

More and more people quit bothering with squatting. »These objectors haven't the inclination, the time, the priorities. They discover their studies, femaleness (maleness), work, relationships, unemployment, antimilitarism, antifascism, and so on. In short: after years of subservience to the 'massive and powerful movement,' now they're into their own individuality.« This was an analysis of the squatters' movement three years after the Groote Keyser. A group of veterans appointed themselves about this time to save the squatters' movement from its downfall. They were irritated by the »squatting is more than just living« adherents, who were moreover cocky enough to have an opinion about them. The seniors dismissed this opinion as »delusions of bosses«; that is to say, the ex-squatters saw ghosts who wanted to grab the power within the squatters' movement for themselves. But, said the bosses, we don't exist, we want nothing more than to »coach inexperienced press groups for their radio or TV premiere.« According to them the wrong subjects had been whined about for too long at meetings and in weeklies and squatting had gotten bogged down in »adolescent bickering.« The constructors from day one therefore took it upon themselves to purge the squatters' movement of the »movement.«

»In past years squatters' discussions at the City Conference were screwed up too often by people with frustrations and other interests.« For this reason they called a meeting in the closed sphere for »people of the opinion that the action structures must be restored in any way (squat consultation hours, means of communication, neighborhood gatherings, flyers, alarm lines, squatters' bars, contacts with other action and neighborhood groups, etc.).« When their plans for discussion leaked out, they felt obliged to give the meeting an open character, but »we can't discuss with 400 people at one time.«

In the necessary selection phase beforehand, an oppositional group subsequently formed and started among themselves to »talk and think about the movement in the broadest sense of the word,« in response to the rumor of the »bosses' conference.« The bosses themselves promptly paid the group a visit. »A point of discord that night was the atmosphere, the way people were talking,« the hosts

indignantly stated in their report. »If you wanted to say anything you had to have a well constructed, argued story. This demand, by the way, is also one of the biggest criticisms of them.« After this, the veterans decided to abandon their attempts at reconstruction.

Only a year later did they reappear in the media. They published the legendary discussion piece, »Squatting or GRUTTEN,« which would be talked and written to death for years to come in the squat papers. It was meant as a manifesto for the resurrection of the City Conference of Squat Groups, known as SOK '84. In contrast to before, this was to be a closed meeting, for which a number of people from each neighborhood would be specifically invited to meet weekly. In Squatting or GRUTTEN the restoration was no longer seen as merely a daring technical exploit of organizational science; squatting was provided with content, which subsequently had to be cleansed of weird stains.

To »restore and strengthen the skeleton of the organization,« history first had to be reinterpreted, to make it clear that squatting had essentially been »confrontation politics« and had to become so again. Around the bare bones of the action structures, according to the diagnosis, were »squat activities.« Considered thus, they made up the flesh of the squatting body. This body had originally put up a playful resistance, but »in 1978-79 came a turning point in response to a massacre in the Kinker district, where squatters, en masse but defenseless, got their asses kicked. The mood swung into a consistent defensive attitude, which was to determine the face of the Groote Keyser and of 1980.«

From the outside world, this armored body with the defensive face took toward itself only substances which would strengthen it: »Large groups of sympathizers outside the squat movement were mobilized by ceaseless confrontations, without (as now) making concessions to them first. Press and politicians came to us, not the other way around.« In the body, the organs - the neighborhoods - functioned in harmony inside the armor; internally it had »its own legal system«: »The squat structure built up then was recognized in the whole squat movement and did not have to be completely destroyed to depose an authoritarian boss. Criticism was aimed at the adversaries; self-criticism was not limited to destructive soul-searching.« The flesh wounds in the chest area came later, in the form of boss delusions. In the beginning the squatting body was still sound, pure, it trusted in its own strength and it knew no »undigested fear, dejection, passivity and surrender.« Until something went wrong: it »slid back to theater, fun and kicks which belied the gravity of the situation.« »The fight was, as regards content, displaced more and more to the swampy provinces of work, justice, publicity and debate.« The body weakened on this slippery ground; »We let our weapons slip out of our hands.« Nonetheless, with our hands free, we went unexpectedly back to work: »Tool lending services, studio, bicycle repair shop, carpentry workshop, printing press: under the protection of the squat movement(s), commerce and the alternative work ethic gradually grow rampant.«

Once stripped of its protection, through contact with the outside world, the disintegrating squat body became susceptible to the cancer of work. Other malignant diseases were bound to appear: »In the work culture you can work yourself to fuck to earn back the welfare payment you turned in. And then you have to go legal.« Owing to this last, the ravaged body was besieged by »hordes of attorneys who make a career out of squat cases« and »undermine quite a bit of fighting spirit.«

After so many attacks on its health the body was bound to become emotionally insecure: »The unpleasant feeling creeps over many a squatter that he or she isn't liked anymore.« According to the doctors of the movement, however, this emotion was downright disgraceful: »As if the press hasn't always been whiny and evil! (and correspondingly more evil the vaguer we got).« The cure for this corruption followed logically from this: the squat body needed to find clear boundaries again which would not be muddled by »collaboration,« and the squat media would be the mouth of this new body («megaphone and serving hatch.«). Confrontation politics as the squat movement ought to practice them were intended to transfer the emotional difficulties onto the adversary, by »making the

politicians physically feel our stress.« Making deals with them, as the »work-shy instant bosses are now doing, is rank treason.«

Surprisingly enough, this term was not applied to the successful negotiation for legalization of the Grote Keyser, but only to failed discussions over a number of later squats. The old guard, which had conferred with Labor Party leaders over the Keyser in late 1980, was even praised, as »the vanguard who worked hard and steady for four long years to build up the squat movement.« But by the end of the 1980 season these pioneers »had bitten off more than they could chew, got tired and partially pulled out.« The intent behind Squatting or GRUTTEN was not to help this old guard back into power, and »just as little do we disapprove of the alternative business activity, the use of legal aid and the publicity-seeking. It can only happen through politics!« These magic words would also restore the sharp borders to the squat body; »We have to try to throw out political lines that people and groups can orient themselves to.« Then the organs would be able to strengthen each other again: »No reciprocal ban on action, but solidarity! But also: no internal lovers' spats, but militant cooperation.«

After all this body language, the »Amsterdam squatters,« as the restoration group had modestly designated itself, ended with the closing text: »We don't stop with these words.« They announced the incorporation of their practical work, discussions and contributions in »a new practical squatters' handbook.« This never appeared. They also announced a black book: »It will settle the score with the old boy network, deals with property owners, speculators and police, betrayal, misuse of the squatters' media for silly, apolitical things, commercial abuse of the squat movement. The statement will be harsh but just.« The black book never came. This restoration never got beyond the first impulse either.

The failed attempt »to kind of start fresh« saw »going on« in squatting as a cyclical movement: once every few years the body of the squat movement had to go through a regeneration, otherwise it would become sick, weak, sluggish. The work on the body necessary for the periodic reconstruction, however, had to be strictly distinguished from working for others, for money. It was no accident that the restorers' fury focused on squatters' coffeshop »The Piggy,« which did pay taxes but did not provide activists with free coffee: money was the sludge in which the swines wallowed. The »aggressive combat« of confrontation politics had to be directed at this mud, against everything revolving around money: »bureaucracy, capital, corruption, speculation, you name it.« But the sludge appeared in another form: anti-money aggression was impeded by the »introverted living cultures in the closed circuit of anti-active squatters.« These too were muddy: sludge was anything which made physical contact, which passed from hand to hand, whether it was money or snuggling up.

It was the restoration group who had already come up with the slogan »Squatting goes on« in 1980. Years later they wanted to purify this slogan of contamination through the »Squatting is more than just living« credo. To that end, everything done in squats was associated with squalor. To let squatting go on it had to be detached from comfortable living, which led to treacherous softening. Whatever was screwed around with behind a pried-open front door, it could not take center stage, or it would constitute a threat to ongoing squatting. In order to make possible the separation of squatting and living, the restorers had to turn back to the time before people squatted en masse, when only »right to live« existed, and virgin houses to be penetrated. The moment at which squatting began was by them proclaimed to be its essence. Actually squatting couldn't go on at all, because it couldn't help turning into living. To preclude this, it had to repeatedly start over. The term »squatting« had to remain vacant, and the restorers named that vacancy »politics.«