

1. What will history say about the squat? (Dan).

The significance of the squat will depend upon the larger narrative within which it is placed. (a) In the case of the City of Vancouver government (COV), after they purchased the property they wrote "The Story of Woodward's" [1] which gave a chronology of business transactions and redevelopment applications but it wasn't until we reminded them about the squat did they mention it. So they added: "Meanwhile, a number of homeless people and community groups occupied the building in September 2002, demanding more social housing. They later formed a tent city on the sidewalk around the perimeter of Woodward's. The protest became known as the Woodward's Squat." COV then used the chance to portray themselves as the heroes that saved helpless squatters: "In December 2002, the City of Vancouver found alternative, temporary accommodation for most of the Woodward's squatters. The City of Vancouver rented 53 rooms from the Dominion Hotel at 210 Abbott Street for a four-month period. Roughly 58 people found housing at the hotel, while another 25 people were placed in other hotels or in shelter beds. Funding for the short-term lease with the Dominion Hotel came from the City's Affordable Housing Fund and was supplemented by federal funding." [2] End of cameo until the landlord commenced his "squatters trashed my hotel" campaign. This is and will probably be the official story. (b) The squat will continue to hold a more prominent place when the story is told from the standpoint of poor people's resistance (as narrated by *The Carnegie Newsletter* or CCAP or Anti-Poverty Committee where the squat may be seen as a proud moment of neighbourhood defiance and practical temporary housing within an ongoing community struggle) or a peculiar but fruitful example of an autonomous initiative within Vancouver or Canadian squatting history [3] (compared to the Frances Street Squats in Vancouver in 1990—see Bruce Gongola [4]—and the Pope Squat in Toronto in 2002 which inspired and provided a model for the W-squat demands [5]).

2. What's happening at Woodward's now? (Janice)

Not much. The building is gone except for the oldest bits, as we talked about on Tuesday. Resistance seems to have shifted away from the site itself and activists are focusing on the defense of SRO hotel rooms while tying demands for social housing to the 2010 Olympics [6]. Wikipedia: "In 2003, the City of Vancouver led by Jim Green purchased the building from the province for \$5 million, and began a unique public consultation process, asking the community what they wanted from the redevelopment. After a two stage competition between three developers, in September 2004 the city selected Westbank Projects/Peterson Investment Group to develop and Gregory Henriquez of Henriquez Partners Architects to lead the design of the new buildings. The 300 million dollar project, includes 536 market housing units, 125 singles non-market housing units to be operated by PHS Community Services, 75 family non-market housing units to be operated by Affordable Housing Society, anchor food store and drugstore, shops, community and public green space, federal and civic offices, a daycare, and a new addition to the SFU downtown campus: the 130,000 SF School for Contemporary Arts. The oldest part of the complex (built 1903-1908) will be restored, and will serve as non-profit community space which will include space for AIDS Vancouver among many others. Construction began in winter of 2006, with a completion scheduled for the fall of 2009." [7] At present there does not seem to be any challenges to these plans. Should there be?

3. How do you measure the success of the squat? (Phil)

I myself measure the success not primarily in terms of the number of non-market units that will appear in the redevelopment but rather in terms of how much autonomy was experienced by the participants and to what extent that autonomy enhanced their quality of life. If measured in this way the squat had moments of success when, for instance, the participants created their own kitchen and protected it from the raids of drug dealers or take-over by social service agencies that attempted to manage it *for* them. The greatest moments of failure were, in my view: (i) the internal violence at the squat; (ii) the abandonment of solidarity from activists after the civic election; and (iii) the inability to maintain the integrity and coherence of the squat after people were forced into the hotel rooms (which I interpret as a form of punishment not just for embarrassing the city for three months but because the authorities, like everyone else, knew how powerful and unheteronomous the squat had become). I'm looking forward to reading Susan Pell's PhD dissertation on the squat (she's just starting) which I think will, among other things, look at the success of the squat as an achievement in "insurgent citizenship". [8]

4. Were there infiltrators or provocateurs at the squat? (Michael)

Sort of. We'll never know the scope of the involvement of these creeps. From the police documents we can distinguish a number of types of agents: (i) those who deliberately went to VPD to provoke a police response against one or another element at the squat (the best example is the case of the pair who disapproved of APC so they created a rumour about them giving drugs and weapons to squatters in anticipation of an armed conflict); (ii) undercover VPD officers and private security (from Woodward's) who were on the inside trying to mingle and on the outside attended meetings on the sidewalk but were not competent at either disguising themselves or obtaining intelligence (the Crime Surveillance Unit peephole across the street was more effective for this); (iii) people from the squat who casually chatted with COV/VPD officials, thinking they might speak to them "as human beings", say, rather than officials in search of intelligence, and unwittingly divulged information that may have helped the enemies of the squat fill in the picture a little bit; (iv) "sources" mentioned in the police files (these may be more figures in the imagination of eager officers, eg., PC Arsenault claims to have information that "activists maybe [sic] planning to occupy the Rainier Hotel" [9]). One of the ways in which the squat was able to repel infiltrators in general was through a decentralized administrative structure with task-based groups (kitchen, security, maintenance, donations, blankets and clothes, legal, medical, counter-surveillance) that would form and dissolve as needed. COV engineers kept coming down to speak with a man-in-charge and either nobody knew who that was supposed to be or several different people stood up and each said that they were each in charge. Very hard to infiltrate because of that.

5. What was the worst damage caused by infiltrators or provocateurs? (Yvette)

The worst damage caused by infiltrators came *after* the squat. It was important to divide people up as soon as possible and this was done through a two-fold strategy (the second of which involved infiltrators). First, people were transported to *different* hotels and shelter beds and a fence erected around the sidewalk by PHS. Second, a nearby hotel was secured and presented as a short-term housing solution for people from the squat (as we all know from the PR). However, it was necessary to place individuals in the hotel who were *not* from the squat because the type of informal social organization (which I characterize in terms of autonomy) would become *even more* of a threat if it was permitted to flourish on the inside. Almost nothing has been written about the consequences of the

anti-squat operation. "Many involved with the Woodward's squat believe this was an intentional move to disrupt the bonds and solidarity created during the protest. Intentional or not, that is what happened. Once a force powerful enough to wrest a vacant city block from the hands of the provincial government, those I spoke to say the community of the Woodward's squat is scattered geographically and fragmented." [10] That's Olive Dempsey who wrote the only article that I know of that touches on the topic.

Note: I don't have an answer to Margot's question about the current state of global squatting. It seems to flourish. Tomorrow the Decentralized Days of Action for Squats and Autonomous Spaces commence in Greece, Poland, Lithuania, Finland, Italy, Austria, Portugal, France, Germany, Denmark, Czech Republic, The Netherlands, England and Ireland. [11] Squatting in North America is primarily a hidden activity (a private arrangement where one hopes to avoid detection rather than flaunt it). It's pretty well unhideable in the rest of the world. [12]

- [1] "The Story of Woodward's", <<http://vancouver.ca/corpsvcs/realestate/woodwards/story.htm>>.
- [2] The "Story" contains a link to Catherine Clement's "City Funds Housing for Woodward's Homeless" press release, <<http://vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/newsreleases2002/NRwoodwards.htm>>. The COV Corporate Communications Department was central to the squat endgame strategy (censored under S.13 of the FOI act) and subsequent PR maintenance.
- [3] "Squatting in Vancouver" <<http://www.geocities.com/emithsilas/vansquat.html>>.
- [4] Bruce Gongola, "Frances to Woody", *Woodsquat*: 206-207.
- [5] The Pope Squat <http://www.ocap.ca/ocapnews/pope_squat.html>.
- [6] See Raise the Rates coalition <<http://raisetherates.org>>, Poverty Olympics <<http://raisetherates.org>> and No 2010 <<http://no2010.com>>.
- [7] "Woodward's Building" <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woodward's_building>.
- [8] See a preview in Susan Pell, "Woodsquat: A Public for Citizens", talk at SFU (06/11/09). <http://www.sfu.ca/humanities-institute/pdf/Pell_woodsquat.pdf>
- [9] Scott Thompson, "Rainer Hotel—Squatters Target", GO#2002-221553 Miscellaneous Notes, Vancouver Police Department (02/12/13). FWS VPD 0791.
- [10] Olive Dempsey, "The Cost of Forgetting: Lessons from Canada's 'Worst' Neighbourhood", *Canadian Dimension* (September/October 2004). <<http://canadiandimension.com/articles/2004/09/01/122>>.
- [11] "Call for Decentralized Days of Action for Squats and Autonomous Spaces" <<http://april2008.squat.net:8080>>.
- [12] See Anders Corr, *No Trespassing! Squatting, Rent Strikes and Land Struggles Worldwide* (South End Press 1999). Some chapters are available free online: <<http://squat.net/archiv/nottrespassing/index.html>>.

See also: Photographs and scans of squat documents <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/vidaver/collections>>. Electronic version of *Woodsquat* (forthcoming) and links to reviews: <<http://www.woodsquat.net>>. FOI legislation <http://www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/stat/F/96165_00.htm>.