

LIEBIG 14 EVICTED

Two Pieces on the Eviction of Liebig 14 in Berlin

LIEBIG 14
.. IST ÜBERALL!!!
RÄUMUNG SABOTIEREN
UND VERHINDERN



1. Some notes on the eviction of a former squatted house from Berlin

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2. Reflections on an Eviction - For the Joyful Militants

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When we act as creators of values, socialities and worlds, the destruction of oppressive forces is always already underway. For those who choose to struggle, capitalism resides in the trail of our emancipatory collective aggression.

The philosopher Deleuze writes that “only affirmation subsists as an independent power; the negative shoots out from it like lightning, but also becomes absorbed into it, disappearing into it like soluble fire”.

When we refuse to join with the nihilism of capitalism, we refuse to become creatures of resentment, hate and revenge.

Instead we can absorb moments of loss and repression such as evictions into our collective revolutionary desires, like lightning bolts to the thunder of our affirmations for other worlds, like soluble fire which lights and then disappears into our burning joyful rage.

- Former inhabitants of Liebig 14
Berlin, February 2013.

1. The city attempted to evict the refugee squat in the summer of 2014, in a siege that went on for over a week before the police ultimately retreated in failure. For more information on the situation, look up the Ohlauer Straße standoff.

Living in cities predominantly organized by capitalism we must take precautions to not share in its nihilist fate, to fight falling into paralyzing despair as we apprehend a world gone dystopian, where our sense of alienation is a measure of our estrangement from capitalist interest.

Collectively we must combat our desires for freedom-for-all being mutated into a will-to-nothingness; into nihilism. As Guerre au Paradis tell us:

“Sometimes the line between rage and despair is very fine, very fragile. The abyss of nihilism awaits every sincere rebel who ceases to be critical, to listen to their heart, stifling their dreams of mutual aid and solidarity, saying that all of this is useless, since no one gives a fuck anymore”

Our capacities to act are disabled when sadness and fear are successfully deployed as part of the states’s matrix of repression. To think and act against the intolerable core of the present means not succumbing to the negativity and refusing that the suicidal nihilism of late capitalism becomes our own.

Militant Joy

Against this nihilism we can continue to fight against all forms of oppression, inequality, and authority through a militancy that is joyful. This does not equate with an unthinking positivity or optimism, which fits too easily with the positivity of liberal democracy and so-called capitalist freedom. Things may just not get better. A certainty that they will would be unstable grounds on which to built emancipatory desires. We can unburden ourselves from this disillusionment while at the same time grow more resolved in our commitment to struggle for freedom.

Militant joy is based on a belief in the world. It is a feeling of intense connection with the world which breaks the senses of alienation; from ourselves, from each other, from the spaces we live in and from the creations of our bodies, though which capitalism keeps isolated and enchained. Militant joy seeks the negation of capitalism through affirmation.

The philosopher Spinoza understands joy as a disposition of openness to connections which increase our capacity to act, while sadness brings closure and a reduction in a body’s ability to affect and be affected. In this way militant joy derives its force from relations of love and friendship and as Colectivo Situaciones, a group of militant researchers from Argentina, write “love and friendship tell us about the value of quantity over quality; the collective body composed of other bodies does not increase its power according to the mere quantity of its individual components, but in relation to the intensity of the tie that unites them.”

Some notes on the eviction of a former squatted house from Berlin

This article comes from the Italian anarchist monthly Invece (Instead of) of March 2011. Some months after the eviction of the Liebig 14, the house is still empty and the attempts done by the landlord to restructure it have been combated by several acts of sabotage, keeping the house still a wreck.

“When everyday monotony gets shaken...” - that was the title of one of the leaflets which was distributed in Berlin right after the eviction of a former squatted house in the German capital, the Liebig 14, sited in the eastern district of Friedrichshain. And honestly speaking, one cannot really contradict the anonymous authors, since the first week of February offered some images and situations to Berlin’s inhabitants to reflect about. Thanks to their radicalism, they succeeded in breaking for some moments in time, the daily grind of a life based on the pursuit of profit and the respect for the rules dictated by a Capitalism system which renders us more and more indifferent to what happens around us. After all, we are constantly told that what remains important is to not get involved and to defend the pettiness of our miserable daily life. But let’s proceed with order. Since a few years ago Berlin’s housing situation changed quite a lot. The city began to attract speculators of a different nature because of the low building costs - causing the creation of different temples of Capital: posh houses for those who can afford them, which is not the majority of the population of a city which sees an unemployment rate of 14%.

At the same time, the rents - which have been historically low - began to rise together with the growing international prestige of the city, making it almost impossible to find a flat in the inner city, since it became trendy nowadays, inviting a younger, flexible ‘yuppie’ demographic which has fanciful artistic ambitions and is dedicated to the futile inhabitation of some neighborhoods which in the past have been characterized by a mix of second and third generation immigrants, comrades and proletarians. Such a mix gave rise also to some interesting conflicts during the past years. After all, the housing struggle has here a long tradition which knew its last big flame after the fall of the Berlin wall, when hundreds of houses have been squatted in the eastern part of the town.

Due to a zero-tolerance policy called the “Berlin Line” (eviction within 24 hours), the squatting movement has been divided between those who chose legalization and those who refused it - the last squatted house has been evicted back in 1997 (I am not talking here about apartments squatted “silently”, a phenomena which still persists). Any attempt to occupy gets

brought down after a few hours from hundreds of robo-cops, generating frustration in the ones who, during the years, tried to open up new spaces taking them away from the logic of legality and speculation. A militant defense of the spaces became impracticable - especially after the historical eviction of the houses in the Mainzerstraße back in 1990, where hundreds fought 3000 cops with the sound of molotov cocktails for several days.

Therefore, if one excludes a successful occupation in 2005 - which took place following another eviction and which was legalized a few years later - it becomes clear how, because of the difficulty of expropriating new space, the defense of the old ones gained a central and symbolical role within the framework of the city's struggles.

Their defense inscribed themselves within a larger contest of struggle against speculation and urban development - the so-called "gentrification" - creating interconnections among different subjects in struggle and enlarging the view of many, who, as it often happens, did not want to narrow their view, or limit their perspective to the mere conservation of a miserable status-quo - in this case, the defense of a few self-organized structures, with all the limits of which we all know very well. Within recent times there has been a blossoming of self-organized initiatives, by comrades and also by tenants, which tried to become sand inside urban development's cogs through different forms and moments of protest, which made it unavoidable for all the others to not take a stand on such developments: indeed, all the city is forced to talk about it.

And this happened mostly due to the continuous work of anonymous lovers of direct action, who attacked construction sites of luxury apartments, offices of architects and speculators, symbols of Capital, government structures and inflamed the nights with hundreds of burning cars, either expensive ones or those belonging to different companies which exploit the situation. This has been a phenomenon which put the police and the city on their knees during the last couple of years.

That is why the eviction of a simple self-organized house became the fuse which massively exploded the dissatisfaction felt by many.

It was simply a catalyst, since the disappearing of a house surely did not trouble the dreams of all those who took the streets during those days.

As one can read in the different claims which appeared on the internet, one never forgets to underline how the actions have been undertaken within the larger context of the struggle against State and Capital, "against the theft of our lives, the attack against everything which does not allow us to fully enjoy them", that is what "some friends of the uncontrolled extension of

2012 in Berlin saw some impressive successes in the struggle against oppression. Twice the "Berlin Line" on squatting has been broken, and by groups which are apart of the most marginalized and shut out by society. In June a group of pensioners squatted a senior person's recreational house in Stillerstraße which had been shut down due to cuts in welfare spending. In December a powerful movement of refugees fighting for freedom of movement occupied an empty school in Kreuzberg.¹ Several times this year, activists and neighborhood groups have successfully prevented the eviction of people from their homes in Kreuzberg; a district which is currently experiencing the violent consequences of neoliberal urban development.

At the same time, in Europe and around the world the capitalist apparatus grows more aggressive in its repression, the brutality of its force a measure of how desperately it tries to uphold a crumbling system.

In Greece this is taking the form of a full-on attack by the state on the emancipatory movements in the country. Anti-fascist activists are tortured in prison while the state turns a blind eye to the murder of migrants by members of a fascist political party. Acting like a military oppressor, the state's mode of attack is also territorial: in recent weeks squats across Greece have face eviction and raids, part of an apparent plan to evict 42 emancipatory spaces. Our struggles are united.

On the anniversary of the eviction of Liebig 14 and in the context of the current cycle of struggles and repression, of the formation of new emancipatory movements as well as the re-emergence of fascism in some places, this text would like to offer a few thoughts on confronting the nihilism of capitalist society, lest it suffocate us. Because alongside the many threats to the actualization of the emancipatory worlds in the here and now, the prevailing mood of nihilism and the despair that can follow the seeming defeat of an eviction risks breaking our passion and reducing our rage to bitterness and disillusionment.

Against Cities of Nihilism

When we say that we want cities for people not for profit, we are saying that we don't want cities of nihilism. Cities are increasingly nihilistic places in so far as the motivation of always-more financial gains leads to the "creative destruction" of our living places in the form of evictions, demolitions, renovation, and a hollowing out of the meaning we attach to the environments we live in. The spaces we inhabit are extensions of our living, breathing, creative selves and communities. Making them in objects of capitalist value alienates us not only from the city we live in but also from ourselves.

Reflections on an Eviction For the Joyful Militants

On the second anniversary of the eviction of Liebig 14

“An event can be turned around, repressed, co-opted, betrayed, but there is still something in it that cannot be outdated. Only renegades would say: it’s outdated. But even if the event is ancient, it can never be outdated: it is an opening onto the possible. It passes as much into the interior of individuals as into the depths of society” -Gilles Deleuze

Struggle and Repression

The second of February 2011: a Berlin house project is evicted by several thousand cops. This event paradoxically marks a moment that is both a recent high-point of struggle in Berlin, as well as a highpoint of repression. Thousands take to the streets to demonstrate a collective refusal: we do not accept this eviction, nor the eviction of any other emancipatory space, nor the eviction of any individual or family from their home as a result of a city politics that is so clearly rotten, twisted in its pursuit of financial gain. We refuse the power of this city politics, and its neoliberal yea-sayers, have over urban space. We will continue to fight for this space – the city we live in – to be a collective creation and not an object of financial speculation.

The struggle against the eviction of Liebig 14 pushed our movements further: new connections were made; solidarities strengthened; at times we broke out of the limits of subcultural identity. We tasted once again the force of collective uprising: not a unified vision nor a consensus on how to act but rather collective singularities; a multiplicity.

Those who worked on building solidarity networks between neighbors smiled at the sight of ATMs others had smashed. Those who took to the streets were later given food and warm drinks in one of Berlin’s free spaces, where we saw the adeptness of those spaces, of our radical infrastructure in mobilizing for a brief moment of urban unrest...we look to the future! And then, as now, it is in this multiplicity, this cacophony of perspectives, voices and acts that we locate our strength and our advantages against the hierarchical organization of the state and capital.

We may have lost a house and space of resistance on the second of February 2011 but we kept our dignity. This cannot be said of the landlords driven to gain more value from their property, the politicians who gave the eviction the go ahead and the cops who, outnumbering us in numbers beyond ridiculous, and armed to the teeth, with axes and chainsaws attacked a community’s building because those were the orders.

the fire” will write afterward.

On the 10th of January 2011, the Liebig 14 receives an eviction note for the 2nd of February 2011. After years of trials and several procrastinations, it seems as if the landlord (who owns different houses in the neighborhood, like another house-project, the Rigaer 94, which underwent several evictions during the previous years) managed to get what he wanted.

Now the interesting novelty of this eviction has been the choice of not wanting to play on the terrain where the cops are stronger and have no problems - i.e. the one of the classic gathering in front of the house on the eviction’s morning.

“To say what the enemy does not expect and to be where he does not wait for us. That is the new poetry” - this has been written a few years ago, and the actuality of such a consideration has been experimented again in Berlin. After all, one cannot really joke with 2500 cops and special forces units called especially for the occasion, as one learned in the past, and the confrontation on such a level can only be lost by us (or at least within the local context here). Therefore one opted for decentralized actions on the full city terrain, following the motto “every eviction will have its price”.

And the price of this eviction has been over a million of euros, only for what concerns the property damages created by the enrages, as reported by an informal note of the police chief.

A twitter-ticker was set up in order to coordinate the different actions, where one was able to send action reports in real time and to see where it “burns” and help is needed. Also this instrument proved to be quite important for coordinating movements of different nature.

On the 29th of January one gets a first taste. A demonstration of over 4000 comrades moves from Kreuzberg towards Friedrichshain. Some scuffles accompany the march, which ends up spontaneously in front of the Liebig 14, where for half an hour the cops are taken by surprise and attacked on two fronts with cobblestones while barricades are erected. An interesting episode is the use of laser devices in order to confuse the police. The police appeared extremely unhappy by this move. On the day of the eviction, the classic prowling helicopter won’t fly over before night comes, exactly because of a possible use of laser against the pilot, say the police on some newspapers.

During the days preceding the eviction there are several attacks undertaken against symbols of Capital. Among others, the bailiff’s office was attacked with stones and paint. But the real showdown will come on the 2nd of February. The tactic of decentralizing works well. From the morning there

are dozens of claimed actions. One of the positive things which strikes out is the variety of the targets chosen.

One begins from those who make theirs the logic of the blockade and chose to hit the transport infrastructure - through the sabotage of several traffic lights in knot-points of the city, the classical barricades in flames on high-traffic streets to the nowadays "normal" sabotage of railway lines (a tactical method which is well spread, for example, in order to block the transport of the Neo-Nazis whenever they have their demonstrations or against the nuclear-waste trains) by the arson of cables and signals. Also savage mobs which attack in large numbers banks or luxury apartments during the day, and also attack government building or those of political parties, or to even to destroy the tickets machines of the underground, supermarket outlets and much more, all in different parts of town. This is finished by those who will concentrate in Friedrichshain blocking the traffic and attacking the police and posh cars, giving life to spontaneous demonstrations of several hundred people. Different squatting actions will also contribute to keep the police busy on different fronts.

Meanwhile the police will spend several hours before managing to evict Liebig 14, since the barricades are quite strong and some surprises will make the operation quite difficult for them. In the end, they will be forced to destroy some walls to gain access to the different floors. The actions will keep up during all afternoon with a demonstration in the district of Neukölln, attended by 800 people taking the streets of a district which struggles between the conservation of its popular character and the growing urban development.

At night, several thousands people meet up in Friedrichshain to smash the plan of the police: the latter, present in huge numbers, also with water cannons, will try to stop the demonstrators shortly after the march began. But the people are enraged and they take a different path from the official one, creating a short-circuit among the cops.

The police are attacked with stones and bottles, and also with fire extinguishers, some banks are demolished and the police attempt to bring the demonstration to a halt before it takes the streets of Kreuzberg will reveal itself as an own goal: hundreds of people will keep on moving, taking again an unexpected route and attacking some targets which until that very moment were known as "untouchable", such as the O2-arena, a gigantic commercial concert room built two years ago and a symbol of urban development in the neighborhood, and also a police station is attacked, an important shopping mall and a couple of others.

In a different part of the district, groups undertake their direct actions and

are not intimidated by columns of dozens of riot vans who do not know where to head to, since chaos reigns all around.

So much that meanwhile another group will decide to attack another police station in the district of Treptow and another one attacks a consumer street which is a temple of shopping in the neighborhood of Steglitz, in the south part of Berlin, just to contribute a bit more to the ongoing decentralization. The actions endure through the following days and nights: even two days after, while a few hundred people gather again in Friedrichshain for a non-authorized rally - some fifty unpredictable individuals will go to one of Berlin's main shopping streets to destroy some thirty luxury shops within a few minutes, leaving the police with open mouth and without any arrests in their pockets.

People remain in movement.

At the same time, dozens of German towns respond to the call (but also on an international level): from big cities like Hamburg to small unknown villages, everywhere there will be some people in solidarity who will take to the streets releasing their discontent and attacking police and symbols of Capital, no matter if with 20 or 500 people.

In Hamburg, where the historical occupied self-organized building "Rote Flora" is at risk of an eviction again, during three days two spontaneous demonstrations consisting of several hundred take back the streets, succeeding in ravaging the posh city center, which remained "untouched" since almost twenty years and showing how if you want you can.

And this seems to be one of the legacies of these days.

Showing how, if one trusts his/her own creativity, refuses to be fixed on dusty traditional plans, and remains in movement, decided and determined, even a well organized army such the thousands of German robo-cops can be taken by surprise, so that we - and only we - can decide how and where to give life to moments of subversive force.

Now all this it is not a novelty, neither on a theoretical nor on a practical level, since it has been shown more than once during the history of uprisings, revolts, insurrections and scuffles undertaken by discontent people everywhere.

But sometimes one needs to learn again to remember which ones might be our possibilities. In Germany as elsewhere.

- One of the many