



# QUEERS, FAMILIES AND THE SQUAT COMMUNITY

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# introduction

i'm kathleen. i'm a queer lady from washington, DC and have been living in a\*dam for about 4 months. this zine is a journey of my exploration of queer culture, squats, community and family building here. while here, i researched queer perspectives of squat communities.

from this project i learned that communal living is a lot more complicated than it seems from the outside, that queer visibility is very different in the Netherlands than in the US, and that squatters eat a lot of soup!

the people i interviewed over the course of the semesters have helped me to define queer, to challenge my ideas of family and community and opened my eyes to many of the challenges of group living.

this zine won't tell you how to break a lock or install plumbing. instead, it will attempt to sum up what i've learned this semester from all of the wonderful people i've had the opportunity to meet here. enjoy.

The Netherlands is recognized around the world as a nation of acceptance, a liberal flagship in the Western world. Upon arriving in the Netherlands—however—it became clear that the *acceptance* broadcast around the world is actually thinly veiled tolerance, an unspoken knowledge that everything is okay as long as it happens behind closed curtains. With the legalization of gay marriage, progressive non-discrimination laws and tolerant leaders, activism in the LGBT community is nearly invisible, as there is no clear battle to fight.

As an idealistic queer activist from the United States, I was shocked when I struggled to find any queer organizing. In searching for community, I stumbled upon the squatters' movement. These radical groups and collectives market themselves as anarchist, anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-sexist and—quite often—queer. The queer community *is* alive in Amsterdam, hidden behind graffitied walls, in dimly lit bars offering up organic beers and tiny restaurants dishing out vegan food with discussions of worker's rights and property ownership.

It seemed to me that squats were safe spaces and havens for queer kids when I arrived, but perhaps I was just naive. As many people who tell me there is not a queer squatter presence can also list five people I should talk to...

Maybe squats aren't queer, but it seems that squats are where the queers are. Or at least where I found them. And where you can find me.

# S is for Squat

A **squat** is an empty, vacant, or neglected structure that someone has decided to turn into a living space.



What makes a house or apartment a home?

How do you think the very first people bought property, and from whom did they buy it?

from Brian Heagney's  
*ABC's of Anarchy*



# squatting: a (really) brief history\*

**1649** In England, a group of farmers called the Diggers use abandoned farmland in opposition to property ownership.

\*this history is Eurocentric. Squatting takes place all over the world!

**WWII** Abandoned buildings become homes during the housing crisis throughout Europe.

**1960s** Property owners keep buildings empty as property values climb. The baby-boom brings with it a housing crisis and a new wave of squatting in Europe.

**1971** The Dutch Supreme Court rules entering an unused building is NOT trespassing.

**80s** Squatting movement is at its largest. At least 20,000 squatters in Amsterdam alone.

**2010** The VVD and the freedom Party control the Dutch government. On Oct. 1, 2010 squatting becomes illegal.

**now** Too many empty homes, too many homeless. Squatting continues, but at risk of eviction.

**I'm no lesbian**

**we're here,  
we're queer,  
get used to it.**

**but really...**

**what is queer?**

for me it means some degree of being gay. and it's nice in that it doesn't confirm how much either way, which allows for fluidity and for more interest in one direction than another.

-student, philadelphia

I'm queer means I'm different, rather than I'm this or that. To say I'm queer is less of a dissociation (not sure if this is the English term for the German 'Abgrenzung') from the person I'm talking to – everybody has their queer sides, if conscious of it or not.

part of the whole idea of queer for me is that you are refusing labels, so then if you choose queer as a label it's again, it's a little bit, uh, apposing.

-queer squatter,  
maastricht

-anonymous squatter,  
maastricht

queer is a way of saying NO to mainstream gay while still retaining a non-hetero identity. i

don't need your magazines and your parades, i do need to feel safe and have my rights acknowledged. it doesn't matter who i sleep with. treat me like a person.

-kathleen, DC

**gay means happy,**

**queer means**

**fuck you!**

-unknown





# is squatting queer?

When I asked one individual to participate in this research, she turned me down citing the identity politics of my research question. She lived in a squat and was a member of a queer activist organization, but identified neither as squatter nor as queer. The more people I talked to who were heavily involved in both communities, but did not identify with either label, made me wonder whether this queer squatters even existed. I was told by one individual that there are no longer any queer squats in Amsterdam. This begs the question, what makes a squat queer? Is it the presence of one queer person? A majority of queer people? Only queers? Does anyone even need to identify as queer to transform a space? Jack Halberstam defines queer space—in addition to places where queer people are—as “the new understanding of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics” (2003: 6). Squatting—as a counterculture—has created a counterpublic, a network of people and places that operate outside of the dominant public sphere. Even if squats are not inhabited by people who identify with the word queer, they *are* queering space itself, by redefining how spaces can be used.

As a counterculture, squatting allows individuals to rethink how space should be used. Femke lived for over a year in a half in a squatted hotel in Maastricht, a space with many small rooms, a large hall, a bar and a little backyard (2011). Though she was the only queer person in the squat until Noa later moved in, the space can still be understood as queer. A hotel—a space created to profit for providing temporary shelter—became free shelter for, at first, fifteen people (2011). Because the space challenged cultural norms, people outside of the original squat group viewed it as a free space where they could do as they pleased. “In the beginning many homeless people and junkies tried to become our flat mates. By many it was seen as a rule-free zone in which things could arbitrarily be destroyed – doors be broken, walls be sprayed,” Femke remembers. Squatting gave a space created for profit—then abandoned—a new purpose. It became a center for parties, for community, and for free living. A

space associated with a greater counterpublic, a space with “nonnormative logics and organizations of community” (Halberstam 2005: 6), a truly queer space.

These spaces have been queered not only through radically redefining what a space can be, but also by operating outside normative societal practices. Halberstam’s idea of *queer time*, “a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance,” helps explain the queer nature of inhabiting a squatting space. Squatting radically challenges the ideas of property ownership and constantly places the inhabitants at risk for eviction. Taking this idea a step further, squatting allows individuals to redefine the way they live outside of a capitalist construct. Squatting makes spaces that would only be available to the wealthy—music studios and dancing rooms (Marijka 2011), party spaces and bars (Femke 2011)—accessible to anyone who enters the space. Squatting breaks down the door to the spaces that only the bourgeoisie could occupy.

In claiming these spaces, squatters not only have access to the physical space, but also to the possibilities that are provided by communal living and a rent free existence. Noa, Femka, and Marijka all discussed the importance of making art or music, and how the integration of these creative activities strengthened the squat group. In making a space their own, these squatters were also able to define how that space is to be used. In occupying non-normative spaces, these individuals are able to live their lives outside of cultural norms.

Halberstam, J. 2003. “What’s that Smell?: Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives.” *Public Sentiments*. Vol. 2(1) (Retrieved from *The Scholar and Feminist Online: The Barnard Center for Research on Women*).

\*names of squatters have been changed

## **what's a family?**

Family is a social institution that is most commonly understood to be comprised of people joined by blood or marriage. This definition of family, however, excludes thousands of relations that are just as valuable but do not look traditional. Family, more inclusively, is understood to include:

Networks of people who share their lives over long periods of time bound by marriage, blood, or commitment, legal or otherwise, who consider themselves as family or who share a significant history and anticipated futures of functioning in a family relationship

(Braithwaite et. al. 2010: 389).

This definition allows for those who are not romantically involved, legally partnered, or biologically connected to be understood as family.

The interviewees all understood family differently, but similar themes were described within their definitions. Femke described familial relationships as “unconditional” and felt like she was a part of a family when she could relax or not be pressured to ascribe to certain roles (2011). Marijka, too, described familial love as “unconditional,” and while sharing meals and living together sometimes felt like a family, the lack of shared history prevented these relationships from forming (2011). Noa called a family “a community of people who are mutually affectionate toward each other in a very significant way...” adding, “the difference between family and friendship is that in family you go a step further in depending on each other... and taking responsibility for each other” (2011). As each individual has a different family history, creating a unified definition of what family means is difficult. Each person agreed that families love unconditionally and share a future together. “If it's truly a family then it's meant to last. You don't just quit your family...” (Noa 2011).

Braithwaite, Dawn O., et al. 2010. “Constructing Family: A Typology of Voluntary Kin.” *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 27(388): 389—407.

Do queer families only  
come from living together?  
of course not!

Families form in all sorts  
of situations. Like dating--

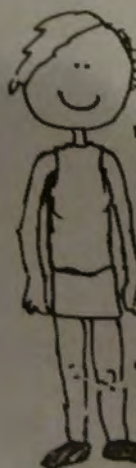


My first relationship  
came with a really  
cool family. They cooked  
vegetarian just for me,  
invited me for Hanukkah  
and showed me slide  
shows of family photos  
from the 40s.

Unfortunately my boy-  
friend was not as nice...

My first  
girl friend's  
family hated  
me. They thought  
I made her gay.  
Still, I emotionally  
adopted them,  
worrying every  
time she called me  
late at night that  
her brother attempted  
suicide again...





My current gf  
is super cool, but  
probably won't like  
me any more once  
she sees this picture.  
hehehe. Her little  
sister talks to me  
on facebook every-  
day and even sends  
me mail. Her parents  
invited me for thanks-  
giving this year. I  
even went with them  
to pick out a christmas  
tree.

Some people consider their  
queer friends to be  
family. There are so  
many possibilities!

Do you have a  
different kind of  
family? What does your  
family look like?



# Functional Collectives

I've been fortunate to work in some pretty awesome collectives in Washington, DC and in Amsterdam. Though living and working in non-hierarchical spaces is great, it can be challenging to negotiate since most of us grew up answering to authority.

Here's some things I've learned from working with the DC Trans Coalition and QueerNL....

**one diva, one mic** — everyone's voice is valuable, so make sure you can hear it. try not to talk over each other, if you have a comment or a follow up, wait until the first person is done talking.

**step-up step-back** — if you're not saying much, think about adding to the conversation. if you're saying a lot, think about giving other people room to talk. it's important to consider who is given a voice in your collective. are women, trans folks, and people of color being heard? are people with more privilege dominating the discussion? think critically about why you are or aren't talking and make sure people who aren't given a voice in society are given a voice in your group!

**take a round** — this is a good way to make sure everyone has room to speak. go around the room and give everyone an opportunity to add to the conversation or pass. People who wouldn't typically share might in this context.

**respect time** — collective work takes time. when everyone speaks, discussions can go for hours. setting agendas and sticking to them is important. add everything that doesn't get accomplished to the next meeting's agenda to make sure everything gets the discussion time it deserves, and people don't need to take too much time away from their other responsibilities

**rotate facilitators** — let everyone who wants to have an opportunity facilitating. the facilitator should try to make sure each voice is heard and try to stick to the agenda.

**no assumptions** — don't assume everyone knows what you're talking about. LGBT or BDS might make sense to you, but explain acronyms or concepts for people who might not know!

don't assume you know someone's preferred pronouns. if you don't know ask politely.

**DISCIPLINE YOUR VISION**



I could  
smash patriarchy  
with this!



# the good, the bad, & the manarchists

a major complaint in the squat community—as well as in a lot of anarchist and radical spaces—is misogyny. there may be no masters and no gods, but at the end of the day, who's doing the cooking and the dishes?

every squatter i talked to agreed that bad squats have hierarchy, and hierarchy often stems for patriarchy.

## look around and check your privilege!

who's doing the dishes, cleaning and child care?

who is included in decision making?

do you ever ask women for help?

do you ever show a woman how to do something instead of just doing it for her?

do you blame women's attitudes on hormones or pms?

## working to end sexism is working to end oppression!



## **what makes an ideal squat:** **local squatters tell it like it is.**

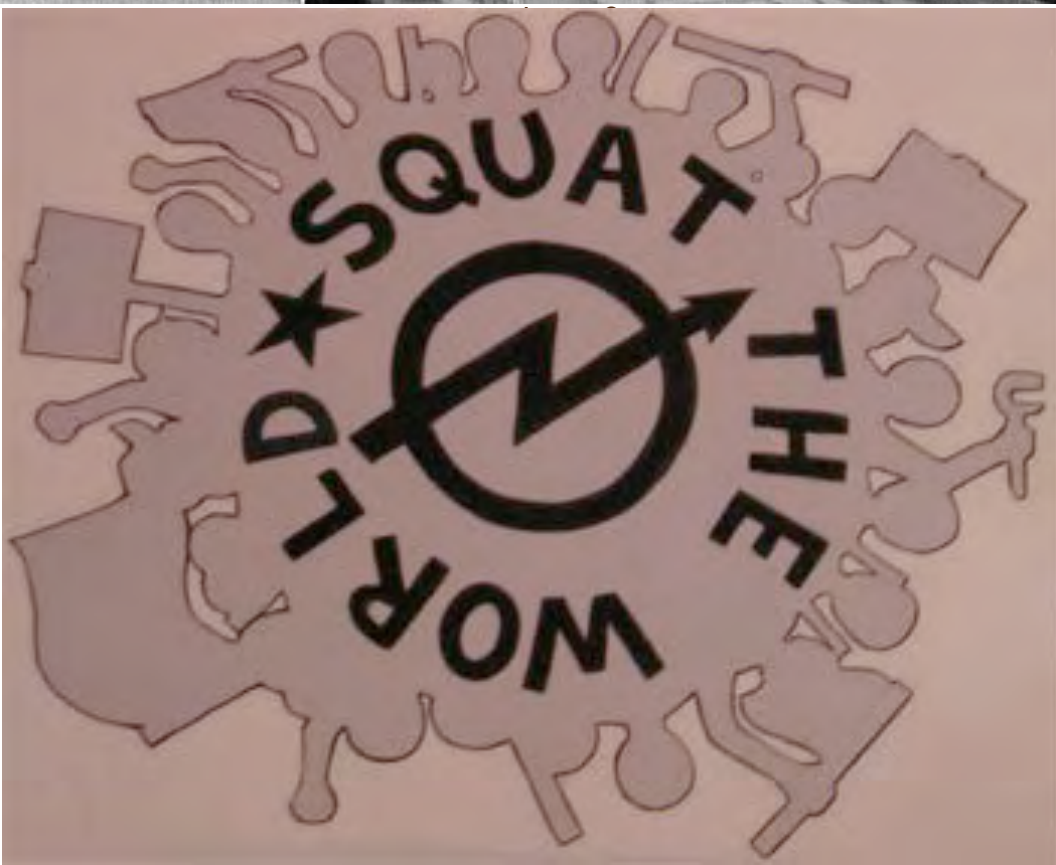
the ideal situation is that we had understanding with each other. we had good vibes... it was just really affectionate, you know, it was very good. there was lots of hanging out together and making music and cooking and when i was crying, i also was consoled by the person who was there, and vise versa. it was very open. it was very, very affectionate place.

**it was always pleasant and very communal living, in that we cooked together, went out together, had many of the same friends etc.**

I got very close - sharing meals, sleeping space (just for sleeping :) ) and lots of words, giving me some feeling of being 'home' in the squat.

It was sometimes a relief to get home and see the others, not having to play some kind of role in front of them.







**nothing says  
home...**

**...more than cooking  
together!**

**if there is no soup,  
i don't want to be a part of your revolution!**



## **Pumpkin & Sweet Potato Soup**

### **ingredients**

- **1 tablespoon** vegan margarine
- **1** onion
- **2** celery stalks, diced
- **250 ml** white wine
- **2 tablespoons** thyme
- **3/4 kilo** pumpkin, peeled and chopped
- **3** sweet potatoes, chopped
- **1.5 liters** vegetable broth

In a big pot, heat the onion and celery in the margarine for 2 minutes. Lower heat and add wine. Let simmer for 5 minutes.

Add everything else and bring to simmer. Let it cook for at least 30 minutes, or the veggies are soft.

Then mash or blend it! Yum!

## oh the places you will go!

visiting amsterdam? think of checking out the squat scene. a\*dam squats are great places for coffee with friends, cheap beer, delicious vegan meals, art shows, movies, book stores and parties. here are a few of my favorites:

### **Joe's Garage**

go for: vegan dinner, give away shop, films, drinks, internet access.  
Pretoriusstraat 43, 1092 EZ Amsterdam

[www.joesgarage.nl](http://www.joesgarage.nl)

### **Molli Chaoot.**

go for: vegan dinner (call ahead!), bar nights, internet access.  
Van Ostadestraat 55 hs, 1072SN Amsterdam

[www.molli.nl](http://www.molli.nl)

### **De Nieuwe Anita**

go for: music, films, haircuts, massages, beer.  
Frederik Hendrikstaat 111, Amsterdam

[www.denieweanita.nl](http://www.denieweanita.nl)

### **Het Fort van Sjakoo (info shop)**

go for: zines, book, records, cds  
Jodenbreesstraat 24, 1011 NK Amsterdam

[www.sjakoo.nl](http://www.sjakoo.nl)

### **de Trut**

go for: queer party on Sunday night  
Bilderdijkstraat, look for the line

[www.trutfonds.nl](http://www.trutfonds.nl)

because of the squatting ban, the city of amsterdam is trying to close down many squatting centers. some of these spaces are legalized, but others may be evicted or relocated in the future. it is always good to call or look online before going to a squat.

# Things to read

*ABC's of Anarchy* by Brian Heagney's

**"Beyond Squat or Rot: Anarchist Approaches to Housing"** by Chuck Munson 2000

**"Cracking the System"** edited by Luther Blisset, 2008

**"Home"** by Olympia's Burgeoning Squatting Community

**"Kansas City Squatter's Handbook"** by Feral Kat Collective

**"Living Without Permission"** by NYC squatters

**"Mutiny: A Paper of Anarchistic Ideas & Actions"** by Mutiny Anarchist Collective in Sydney

**"Opening Doors: A Primer"** by Portland Squatting

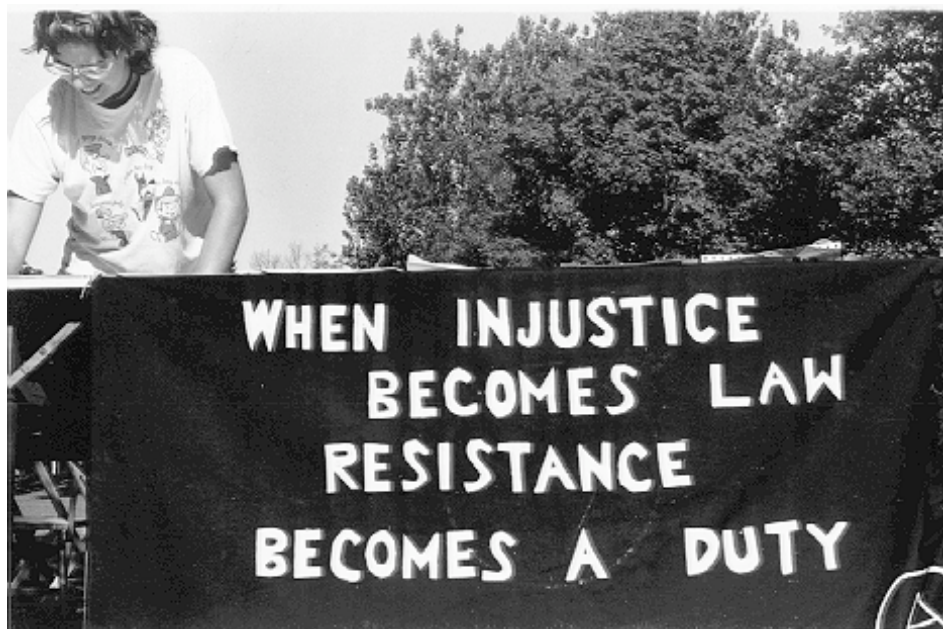
**"Resistance"** Bulletin of the Anarchist Federation

**"Squat"** by NYC Squatters

**"Squatters Handbook: 'Political' Squatting Tips"** by Homes Not Jails of San Francisco

**"Using Space"** by Mujinga

**"We House, You are Housed, They are Homeless"** by Colin Ward





Q.M.D.

King B.I.V

WHO CARES?

WHO CARES?

WHO CARES?

WHO CARES?

WHO CARES?

WHO CARES?

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