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a homes not jails  
and occupy the farm  
occupation guide  
1st edition 2015

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food security and access to healthy, eco-harmonious food options.

And since then, knowing the power and potential of liberated spaces we have watched the adjacent property, with three, large vacant buildings and decried their wasted potential. It is with deep sadness and disappointment that we have now seen our new neighbors evicted.

Liberate all property! Long live the SF Commune!

With revolutionary fury,  
The Farm's "resident anarchist"

# homes not jails building occupation guide



I am a regular and long-time participant at The Free Farm in San Francisco, a collectively worked farm which grows food to be distributed as a gift in low-income neighborhoods of San Francisco. The Farm is located on the same block of Gough St. as 888 Turk, formerly and forever the SF Commune. I am not speaking for the entire Free Farm community, only myself and those who have communicated their support.

On April 1st, when Occupy San Francisco liberated two of the neighboring long-vacant buildings at 888 Turk St, many within the farm were excited about the development. We welcomed our new neighbors and the great possibilities of collaboration between the two projects. Occupy SF asked for and received permission to access to The Farm shortly after the group occupied the building. The occupiers treated The Farm with respect and were our welcomed guests.

On April 2nd, when SFPD violently evicted the SF commune, they destroyed the lock and chain that secured our front gate and invaded The Farm to prevent our comrades from reaching the offered sanctuary. The Free Farm has a different address and is owned by a different church, St. Paulus Lutheran Church. SFPD did not have the permission of any member of the Free Farm community nor any member of St. Paulus to enter. Myself and others have I spoken with are deeply hurt that SFPD destroyed our resources and violated our space, bringing their violence and terror into a peaceful, spiritual urban oasis. Because the lock had to be replaced for the farm to be secure, The Farm is temporarily inaccessible to the community members who work there, plants cannot be watered, food cannot be harvested, compost cannot be sifted.

The Free Farm broke ground in January of 2010 was built on the site of a church which had been destroyed by fire and lay vacant for 15 years prior. Since then, we have grown and gifted thousands of pounds of hecka local produce to our hungry friends and neighbors.

Since then, we have shared our visions and our knowledge of food production with hundreds, if not thousands of people, including folks from other community gardens, school groups of all ages from around the world and the residents of the surrounding neighborhood.

Since then, we have shown what can be done with vacant spaces, we have shown communities can self organize to increase their

# appendix i letter of solidarity from a free farmer

## introduction

As the #Occupy movement started a “second phase,” the occupation of vacant and unused buildings became an increasingly popular tactic with notable building occupations happening in San Francisco, Oakland, Santa Cruz, and Raleigh, NC. My intention here is to describe how Homes Not Jails (HnJ) San Francisco plans and executes their public housing takeovers/building occupations, based on their public actions that I observed over the course of 2011.

All information contained herein is only intended for academic and informational purposes only and should not be taken as legal advice or encouragement to violate any law(s). Building occupations are illegal everywhere in the US.

Your results may vary. In planning any kind of political action, it is important to consider local conditions; what works in San Francisco doesn't even work in Oakland the same way. San Francisco's law enforcement, justice system and political climate are unique within the United States.

## planning and preparations security culture and legal considerations

Almost all of the planning is conducted in public HnJ meetings, everything except location, method of breaching, and preoccupation can be discussed openly and publicly. The number of people who know the location of any occupation in advance should be kept as small as possible. For HnJ, this has usually meant five or fewer people. Code names are given to potential sites, so that they can be safely referred to by the group, without disclosing its location. Standard security culture practices are observed regarding digital forms of communication.

There are three general working-groups that bottom line, or take responsibility for making sure that the tasks necessary for a suc



successful occupation are completed: Propaganda, Logistics, and Breaching.

## arts, propaganda and media

One of the most basic tasks that deserves attention is the fabrication of banners and placards for the march and to be dropped/hung at/on the occupation site. Flags are fun, festive, make for powerful imagery, and can be used to direct the march.

This working group is also responsible for booking speakers and musicians and arranging mobile sound amplification. Speakers help to 'message' the event, get people excited and start the march on a good foot. Having music, live or recorded makes a rally more upbeat and creates a more energetic march. Spoken word performances are another possibility.

Both physical fliers and digital event notices need to be made, detailing time, place and message of the rally. Digital copies are posted/sent to local Indymedia pages, social networking sites, listservs, etc. Fliers should be made in both quarter sheets for handing out, and full sheets or bigger for wheat pasting, posting in the windows of

## ix. resources

I will only recommend one book for anyone interested in farm occupation, and that is 'Earth Repair, A Grassroots Guide to Bioremediation' By Leila Darwish. This one book has more information about how to work with damaged lands and folks doing direct work than any other I know of. It has great questions within its pages that will help anyone figure out what are the best steps for any type of presence on land, and provides further resources for any aspect of damaged lands.

The struggle at Occupy the Farm is notable in one particular sense, the soil. The land has been farmed for 100 years, and is the result of alluvial sands washed from the Berkeley hills. In this sense, there wasn't a need, at least on the North side of the Gill Tract, to do an immediate battery of soil testing before we planted crops. In urban areas which have had even moderate construction, where the soils are likely compacted, or industrial areas, where the soil is likely toxic, the optimal conditions we had are not present. I bring this up because there is an understandable enthusiasm around urban farming, and a necessity for it. When we begin to look though at how damaged most urban soils are, and what it takes to remediate them, to make them vital again, we begin to see that what is needed is not an initial rupture of excitement, but a slow, sustained, informed effort, which will take years to accomplish. This feels daunting, and slightly unromantic, but the work that is performed with bioremediation is the most necessary work of our time. Our ability to heal the land will be our token of trust that we hand back to our dear Mother Earth to ask for forgiveness to remain on the land. There is a lot of work to do.

options flexible, and make sure your organizers, even if its only a few of you, know the history of your site, your reasons for occupying, and have the support they need, and make sure you keep telling your stories, allow them to grow, but tell your stories from your perspective, and do your best not to ‘respond’ to criticisms that are raised. Keep your stories about the work you are doing, not about ideology directly.

## vii. water

A brief few words about the most sacred element on planet Earth. When planning any occupation for farming or gardening, as with our everyday lives, water is the most vital element. If you are planning a presence on the land which will be above-ground, where you talk with neighbors beforehand and perhaps even reach out to sympathetic city officials, get a good handle on whom you can receive water from, how you might be able to compensate them and work hard to develop a good relationship with them. Sometimes you can occupy a piece of land and then speak with neighbors about water afterward, as friendly neighbors will likely approach you to talk about your project and vision. Remember that if there is a neighbor, even if you live nearby, the neighbors concerns are of absolute priority and must be taken into account.

## viii. celebrate

Some of the most successful garden and farm projects throw regular potlucks and parties to bring in neighbors. Let neighbors know about your parties beforehand, ask them about their concerns and be flexible in ensuring that parties end early or have a minimum of amplified music, for example. Invite them, provide a space for them to speak, especially if they have knowledge of the neighborhood and its history. Gardens and farms are today serving as places of neighborhood education, where folks can relearn about histories of the places they live.

newspaper boxes (no tape or paste required), etc.

Several press releases can be prepared, with different versions released over time. The first press release can let the media know of the march and the intent to occupy a building. Once the building is occupied, a press release about the actual site can be sent out. It may be useful to have a media contact, somebody in a safe place outside of occupation to take media calls and distribute press releases as events unfold.

## logistics and resource coordination

This is another public function of an occupation, the acquisition and transportation of materials and resources. The transporters should be told the general neighborhood the day of the occupation and the location once the building has been occupied. This working group needs to coordinate with the breaching team, specifically the pre-occupiers in order to stage “shelf-stable” materials at the occupation site in advance. Resources that have been found to be useful by HnJ include:

### food

Homes not Jails usually brings some dumpster-dived food but also enlists the help of Food Not Bombs to serve hot food on the street in front of the occupation. In San Francisco, public building occupations rarely last longer than 24 hours but people deciding to be stay the night will need to eat. Keep occupiers well-fed and happy to keep spirits up. Bring coffee or means for making it, hot coffee is a great way to wake up for an early or late-night occupation.

### water

Potable water needed to drink and clean, also to flush toilets if the plumbing is out of service.

### medical

Some form of med-kit, the most common ailments I have

seen are muscle pains, headaches and lacerations. Most recently, with the rise of Occupy, it is very likely that the occupiers may face pepper spray and/or tear gas, so plan medical supplies accordingly. A good zine with instructions for treatment and defence of “less than lethals” can be found at [natogipfel2009.blogspot.de/images/zineenglisch.pdf](http://natogipfel2009.blogspot.de/images/zineenglisch.pdf)

## sanitation

Somewhere to wash hands and/or hand sanitizer. Somewhere to poop and toilet paper.

## legal support

Contact the National Lawyer’s Guild in advance to set up legal support, including a legal hotline to call if arrested. If NLG is not available, have a comrade with a local landline phone on standby to record the names and birthdates of arrestees, in any so they can be tracked within the jail system by comrades.

# breaching team

## selecting a location

Home not Jails selects sites for demos that are unsuitable to house people due to security or access issues. The group doesn’t wish to “blow up” potential space where people could be housed. Residential properties are preferable because HnJ is a housing advocacy group, but office and other commercial properties may be suitable for other groups with different goals. In my opinion, the bigger, the more expensive the property being occupied, the better; one purpose of public demos is to highlight the extent of wasted properties, large properties do this better. Although it should be noted that larger building also means a less cohesive and more chaotic occupation as people naturally want to explore, run around etc. and not remain as a group and function accordingly.

## casing and researching

Extensive research and surveillance needs to be done on a building both before and after you secure access. You want to establish who owns the building and any other information or history

portrait for the Gill Tract farm. Every word counts.

With Occupy the Farm, a significant portion of our organizing worked to make sure that we had a single, clear message, ‘Farmland is for Farming’, and that all the lead organizers were aligned both with the message, and could explain the reasons and history behind our occupation. Once the occupation started, we continued to meet regularly and discuss how our messaging was or was not being effective, and which allies we might continue to reach out towards. All of the lead organizers felt comfortable talking with the media, but only a few were tasked specifically as media leads. We all went over what we felt were the points we were going to reiterate to the media and amongst ourselves, and we worked towards these points in every meeting we had. That is, our meetings, either before or during the occupation, were rarely a forum for ‘discussion’ as it were, or if they were, each discussion had specific parameters of scope and time, which the facilitator would reign in if the group got too broad in the questions it was asking, rather, our meetings would mold group understanding into clear, coherent stories. When the lead organizers would meet and attempt to respond to or proactively draw attention to something that had arisen, we already had a solid set of protocols which kept our meetings generating press responses, ways we would interact with the public, or would defer questions to folks off site, our legal team, media spokesperson, etc.

News coverage of Occupy the Farm was overwhelmingly positive. Crucial to that was having a team of media point people on site and accessible by phone at all times, ready to smile for the cameras and deliver concise talking points about the action. Many activist groups resist engaging with mainstream media (for good reason), but our collective decided spinning the media in our favor was crucial to keeping us safe and posing a serious threat to the power structure.

Keep in mind, what I’m describing is what was helpful for a large scale farming occupation. For a small scale occupation, it might make less sense to ‘blow it up’ as it were. Perhaps you have neighbors who are very sympathetic to your using a vacant lot for farming and gardening. Creating a media spectacle might be helpful in some sense, or might be a distraction from the work you wish to perform. There are a variety of methods which help in different situations. Keep your



In preparation for taking back the Gill Tract, we organized ourselves into working groups, which had bottom liners responsible for making sure everyone followed through with the tasks they took on. The roles that need to be filled are many, but possible roles could include: media/outreach, police liaison/copwatch, logistics/food, medic/mental wellbeing.

If the purpose of your occupation is to solely draw attention to a piece of land, then your priority will be to make sure that the media is notified. This involves hours usually of calling and informing the local and regional media specifically as to a press release you have issued around your reasons or intentions for occupying. We developed a long list of local and national news reporters who covered topics like ecology, food, social justice. A few days before a public action and at the moment of a covert action, we would send out press releases to these writers detailing the action plans and quoting from people we hoped could begin to demonstrate the diverse interests involved in Occupy the Farm. Writing press releases took hours as we poured over every single word, working to cultivate a glowing, sunny,

about it; this helps determine its viability and visibility as a demo site as well as providing the substance of your messaging.

Does the building have security guards or a property manager who regularly inspect the building? The number, area of operation and frequency/time of visits all need to be determined. Use a small piece of tape that connects the door and the door frame to determine if people are accessing the building and when; if the door is opened, the contact will be broken. By continuously checking and re-taping, one can determine the best time to breach and pre-occupy (more on that later).

Does the building have functioning security camera? Note where the cameras are and which areas are not covered by them; exploit the weakness during surveillance and entry.

## gaining entry

The method of entry will vary by building. Choose the path of least resistance. For detailed information about scouting and entering vacant buildings, see our first zine *Its Vacant Take It* at [LINK](#).

First, check if any ground-level windows or doors are open. It may be necessary to get into the backyard or parking lot to try back doors and windows.

If nothing at ground level is accessible, climbing may be required. Google Maps and/or on the ground scouting can be used to determine if there is roof access to the building; to get to the roof either climb up a fire escape/pipes or gain access an adjacent roof and hop over. It is surprisingly common to find upper story windows unlocked. Higher windows may be accessed via fire escape or other means of creative climbing. If the building is boarded up, you may have to unscrew a board to get access to a window.

If you have the skill, pick the lock, either on a door or a gate to gain required access. A good way to secure continuous access to a property is by replacing the padlock or door lock with an identical lock of your own. Remove the old lock by means of bolt cutters, sledge, picking, etc.

'Storming the Castle' is a somewhat less finessed method, but in some ways more effective politically due to bravado involved. If you are not able to secure covert entry, you simply lead a march to

the target and forcefully breach it. This tactic was used during Homes not Jails on World Homeless Action Day (10/10/11) on the Cathedral Hill Hotel, a vacant 600+ room hotel with two 24-hour on-site security guards, who didn't know what hit them as the march ran past them while they were distracted by one person.

## preoccupation

If possible, the night before the action a team of 2-4 people should covertly enter the building and start preparing it for the occupation by cleaning, de-fortifying, etc. This eliminates uncertainty on the day of the occupation and allows march participants to enter an already opened building, potentially giving them additional legal protection and making for a more comfortable and welcoming occupation experience. The preoccupation group can also stage bulky/heavy occupation materials such as water, food, and banners in advance. Nothing is better than seeing pre-secured banners dropped from the roof of the occupied building as the march arrives.

## the day of the action

The basic form is a rally, march and occupation. The rally and meeting point should be a large, open public area such as a park or plaza. This is a good time for music/performances and speeches to build morale and allow for the size of the crowd to grow.

The march should be guided by somebody who knows the route to the not-yet-publicly-known target, as well as a banner which sets a reasonable pace. Megaphones can lead chants to build morale and gather participants from the neighborhood. The doors should be open when the march arrives and enters the building. Occupiers should be welcomed inside and can be given a tour of their 'new home,' and a common food and assembly area established. At this point it may be possible and helpful for people who do not enter the building to provide a buffer against police approaching or entering the building.

## during the occupation

Educate people as much as you can on what to expect in advance of the occupation, it will reduce chaos during the occupation

## iv. feed the people

Whether you are having a small scale land occupation, or one with several hundred people, make sure you find a way to provide food for the people attending. This may sound trivial, but the people who plan and provide the food for farmers, as with any gathering, are vital. Perhaps it serves to have a potluck style for a small event, but if you are planning a more large occupation, make sure you have people who are specifically tasked with making sure that there are at least 2 meals a day, or one very good sized meal if you are performing a one day planting. I state it here only because I've seen from my own experience how this task handled well can bring people very much together.

## v. seasons

Seasons as well play a part. A successful land occupation does not necessarily happen in the spring or summertime, but these seasons are certainly more exciting for groups of folks to get involved with a farm occupation. Know that there are times when a certain struggle can succeed beyond even your own wildest intentions. Know that if you wish to walk the road of struggle you will be rewarded with confusion, that reality will get ever more complex, more nuanced, and in so doing, your living will become more rich, more varied, more subtle and more lovely with each breath. The seeds of our time are the treasures, and the ones we pass to our children will become the future we all wish to live in.

## vi. diversify and specialize

Occupy the Farm was conceived in order to support one action: farming the Gill Tract. Of course everyone involved had very different motivations. Some of us were interested in challenging the notion of private property, some of us wanted to stop the privatization of UC Berkeley, some of us just wanted to farm. But that one action allowed us to focus our efforts, see past our differences, and work together.

are destined for the landfill which can help plants get closer to maturity. The more you actively engage with your current community, the more you'll likely be surprised that there are already many resources that might assist you as well as people who can serve as mentors and knowledge bases.

## ii. considerations

Once you get seeds, the next step is figuring out where to put them. It can be a bit tricky to get greenhouse space, particularly in colder climates. You can build a hoophouse for little cost and minimal installation time. Perhaps you know farmers who might be sympathetic to your cause, though perhaps its better for interested parties to have less information rather than full disclosure. Security culture is up next, but for the time being, as with other local resources, seek allies and understand where others' threshold of risk places them. Land occupation can put assets at risk and personal freedom in jeopardy. Know that not everyone can assume these risks, either owing to temperament or fear of loss of material possessions.

## iii. security culture

One aspect of occupying land which is often overlooked is that of security culture. This boils down to an essence of 'need to know', but at root, security culture is a series of practices which attempt to decrease risk for persons engaging in what the establishment views as illegal activity as well as mitigating group paranoia. In an era of supposed information and other freedoms, security culture can be viewed by some as unnecessary, or perhaps even an affront to 'open source' society. Perhaps this is so. My experience with security culture is that it helps build rapport and trust among comrades, while allowing persons to gauge their own levels of engagement, what they genuinely feel comfortable with, instead of presuming that all parties are comfortable with the same level of risk. If you are serious about performing a land occupation, find out as much about security culture as you can and practice it.



and increase likelihood of success. Specifically it is helpful to educate folks on the potential legal ramifications, if they will have a chance to leave building before 'lockdown', the general format of the occupation and how occupations have gone in the past. It is useful to know the specificities of trespassing and burglary laws in your area to gauge expectations for a first time occupation.

Have fun! Building occupations are incredible and liberating, enjoy and explore the building and spending time with your fellow occupants. Play magic cards, or whatever.

The building is your new home, treat it accordingly. Personally, I would advise that you don't be destructive, it helps maintain good public image and limits potential legal consequences for all of the occupiers. Additionally it seems that over time SFPD came to understand that HnJ was not there to vandalize, and started to treat actions with more restraint. Although that restraint went right out the window with the rise of #occupy, more on that later.

Over the period of time I observed HnJ actions, they began experimenting with having people in charge of Safety and situational awareness. This has included keeping at least one person on the door. Additionally, HnJ members have started taking up observation posts (OPs) during occupations to watch from windows or roof tops in order to monitor police presence and numbers. The signing of

the trespassing complaint by the property owner or agent can be an important sign of an oncoming police raid. In my experience these functions are important and useful, but are not a required element of an occupation.

## dealing with the cops

Inevitably the police will show up and swat/tactical units may be used to breach and enter the building to evict the occupants. Cops like to bring out all their toys and practice group tactics when they have to clear a large number of occupiers. Constructing barricades of any sort will not prevent the police from breaching if they so desire. Ergo, make attempting to enter the building an undesirable situation for the cops by other means. For example, police do not like to enter dark buildings at night, so staging occupation a little before the sun sets improves the chances that the occupation will last until morning.

“Blocking” entrance with people who don’t want to enter the building, a semi-tight crowd in front of the door is a good way to keep the police at bay. It might be helpful or necessary to post a guard at the entrance to keep access open but secure; if the police approach the guard can pull the door shut and lock it, if they leave the person can reopen the door.

In theory, the property owner has to sign off on a trespassing complaint to give the police authorization to enter the premises. This can take some time, the property owner may be hard to locate. This can be used to your advantage in keeping the building open and/or free of police for as long as possible. They can also show up in 15 minutes.

Although not a tactic employed by HnJ, for folks doing an eviction-defence occupation, Sheriffs typically execute evictions, regardless of location. Sheriffs will mostly arrive in small numbers (two or three) and if outnumbered will leave for a short time. Sometimes they will not come back until the next day, other times they will come back in an hour.

## what's next?

There are three ways I have seen building occupations end.



farm-related activities (e.g. workshops). Campers are committed to the Farm and Farming.

Look around you at your comrades, the people you organize with. Seizing land doesn’t have to look like an occupation. But if it does, we would like to pass along a few lessons of how to prepare a land occupation.

## i. buy in bulk

Modern society is contemptible in some regards because it produces excess of a great many things. In farming, this logic is helpful though, in the sense that one can get started with a very good sized farm project for very little financial investment. 50 bulk seed trays, wherein each seed tray contains 200 seed containers, yields 10,000 plants. 50 seed trays costs around \$50. A good soil mix for this many seeds costs around \$60, when purchased in half cubic yard quantities. Seeds from bulk seed providers for well over this many plants could cost less than \$100. So, for around \$200, one could have the basic necessities of a large scale farming occupation. Oftentimes local nurseries or community gardens have six-pack containers which

was the proper tactic for this struggle specifically. As a group, we had worked together on other struggles, practiced consensus for all our internal decisions and so had a very good amount to trust in each other.

As we were preparing to occupy the Gill Tract, concerns arose about how to balance our desire to organize horizontally with a recognition that in order for a farm to function, our actions had to be more important than our words. We decided to leave the governance structure for the occupation up to the people who showed up every night to protect the farm, and in order to ensure that those people were committed to using their bodies to support farming, we introduced the cornerstones of our movement on the first day of camp. Everything else developed organically.

## cornerstones

1. This is a FARM. We practice and promote sustainable urban agriculture for the benefit of the greater San Francisco Bay Area with a commitment to equity and justice.
2. This is public land and we want it preserved as FARM-LAND. The UC has demonstrated a history of mismanagement, chopping it up and selling this land off for development. The UC is not trustworthy or capable steward for this land: we want to see it preserved through a form of commons.
3. This is a collective FARM. It is an integrated system, not individual gardens or personal plots; but a communal effort. We will adopt a horizontal decision-making process that will take our principles into account and allow those putting in the work to decide how to farm this land, and how to distribute the food.
4. This is a community FARM. The Camp culture, as part of the Farm, is committed to hard work, being inclusive, family friendly, and respectful of the neighbors, including the University Village, the local elementary school and other nearby residents.
5. The encampment is temporary: it exists to protect the FARM from forced seizure. Infrastructure is here to sustain farm work and

1) Everybody leaves voluntarily when given the options by police or security. At one time, the SFPD almost always gave Homes not Jails the option to leave willingly and freely before sending officers to clear the building and arrest the remaining occupants. This option may have to be negotiated for, and is happens less frequently now in the wake of the rise of the building occupation tactic with #Occupy.

2) Folks take a symbolic, “voluntary” arrest. Those inclined towards this option should keep in mind the consequences of building occupation arrest charges on those with warrants, precarious immigration status, or kids.

3) All the occupiers leave covertly before the police enter the building, under the assumption there are people to arrest inside. This makes the police look foolish; SFPD sent multiple tactical squads into an empty building that HnJ occupied and spent the day clearing the entire building floor by floor, looking for occupiers who were not there.

Because of its illegal nature, squats are most often covert endeavors; personal property rights are one the most dearly held legal rights in the Western legal tradition (“life, liberty and property”) and as such vacant properties are vehemently defended against use by non-legal entities. Long-term, overt occupation of a large building, especially by an social/political movement with as much potential as #occupy is, at this point in time, a pipe dream. The state will do anything in their power to squash any attempt to establish permanent liberated zones by any radical social movement.

I have not yet seen or read about any way to hold a building in the long term using non-violent tactics; the state has incredibly powerful methods of breaching buildings, from armored vehicles to pneumatic devices to explosives and no amount of feasible fortification will delay this from happening. If they want to enter a building, they will do so and it may not be pretty.

#OccupySantaCruz held an abandoned bank, re-named 72 River for around 72 hours, a record for overt occupations under the banner of Occupy. HnJ public actions have typically lasted between



twelve and twenty hours before police serve trespassing notices.

## postscript: lessons of #J20 and #J28

The majority of this article was written and informed by occupations before Occupy San Francisco's occupation of the Cathedral Hill Hotel on January 20th and the much publicized attempted occupations of buildings by Occupy Oakland's Move In Day action on January 28th. Having observed both of these actions, it is clear that the game has changed in terms of building occupations. That is, the occupations that informed the bulk of this article, occurred in a different socio-political climate than the one we currently find ourselves in.

Both of these days were incredible learning moments in many ways. Relevant here is what we can learn about planning and carrying out public building occupations. To begin with it is clear that the state, its corporate masters and their forces of repression are talking any attempt at liberating buildings by the Occupy movement much more seriously than those conducted by other groups prior to September 17th. They seem dead set against allowing the Occupy move-

*“Coming from the country where you learn to do things, where you learn to depend on family and all of that. You go out and you plant your own corn and you watch the corn grow. When the corn grow you pick your own corn, you know what I mean?”* ~Robert Nesta Marley

Farming is patience practiced. Farming is a way to listen to the weather, the seasons. Farming listens to some of the smallest organisms among us, to soil, and so doing, tends to our most basic needs, food. Our modern age abounds with reasons for people to be in a hurry. Farming is a way to slow down. In this way, it can be seen as subversive. To the extent that its practice can help divest citizens from a food system which depends on fossil fuels, farming can be seen as revolutionary.

The purpose of these words though is not to point to either the necessity of communal resiliency through farming, or point out the evils of large scale corporations. There are many writers who carry these tasks, and perform them well. The purpose of this paper is to try to provide a brief and tactical guide to seizing and winning land, primarily through farming practices.

As with any task, its important to ask what is the scale, what is the purpose, what are the goals and intentions of attempting to seize land. If you live in an urban area, then there is very likely vacant land nearby where you live. In evaluating the need to seize land, ask what is your connection to the community which is around the land, to the land itself. Do you know the history of the land? Has there been struggle for it before? Is the land damaged or toxic? Will it take time to remediate the soil? That is, are there heavy metals or chemicals present? Each time you answer a question in relation to a specific piece of land, you answer how you intend to relate to that land. Each time you answer a question, you get closer to finding out what tactic, legal or extralegal, best fits your situation.

With Occupy the Farm, we spent a little over 3 months asking these questions, attempting to understand whether occupation



ment to move inside or re-establish itself outside. Federal law enforcement was coordinating with SFPD on #J20 at the staging ground near the hotel.

The interest of law enforcement in these types of actions have made a higher level of operational security culture necessary for planning successful building occupations. On #J20, the police knew the occupation was going to happen and the intended target and planned a detailed defence of the building. These defences were thwarted by the protesters' ingenuity and Occupy San Francisco occupied the building. However, it would have been a completely different occupation had the original march arrived at an open building not protected by mace-spraying riot cops.

On #J28, my understanding is that the intended targets were widely known throughout the ranks of Occupy Oakland as far as a month in advance of the action. As such, the police were able to plan a response and stage police at the Kaiser Convention Center and repel the occupation march.

It is clear that simply large numbers of determined protesters is no longer enough to ensure a tactical advantage versus the police when attempting a building occupation. Tactical prowess, effective security culture and experienced and capable participants are now more than ever vital in planning and conducting semi-clandestine building occupations.

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lack of discipline amongst the security crew was also noted. Despite having lookouts stationed on the roof of the building when it was clear that a raid by the police was imminent, they did not sound any alarm or alert the people inside that the police were approaching.

As with any action, this occupation occurred in a specific time and place. The political climate and attitudes and policies of the San Francisco Police regarding handling protests and protesters have changed significantly since the SF Commune. Tactics should not take precedence over strategy and both should be constantly evolving. “

sf commune  
at 888 turk:  
a model  
occupation



groups would have eliminated a lot of confusion and avoided needless duplication of effort.

Perhaps the most neglected area, as is often the case with radical organizing, was media and public relations. There was no media alert, press release or media statement prepared, no spokespersons designated to talk to media, no media team of any sort, no over-the-top communique posted to Indymedia. Given that the action logic and messaging was pretty simple and clear, this was not so much of an issue. However a person tripping on mushrooms giving a statement to the media outside of the occupation in lieu of a media liaison is clearly not ideal. I'm still not sure exactly what "the second French Revolution all over again" is supposed to mean.

While folks working on security concerns did many things right, there are notable areas that could have been improved upon. To begin with, again a manifestation of the occupiers not knowing each other, there were multiple groups of people working on security. Had they all been working together, facilitated a bottom liner, it could have been a much more streamlined and effective effort. A certain

# police response

The police response was decidedly different from previous building occupations in SF, where occupiers were notified to vacate to building and allowed those who didn't want to be arrested to leave before police raided the building.

The first step in the police response was to establish a radius of control around the building. Police had the full run of the surrounding buildings and established elevated surveillance posts on roofs and fire escapes. As quickly as possibly, all traffic on Turk on the 800 block was diverted, including foot and bicycle. This caused the number of occupiers to slowly dwindle as people were allowed to leave but reinforcements were prevented from entering. The raid came unannounced and despite internal fortification, police eventually breached the barricades with brute force and fancy tools, making their way to the top floor where they arrested all present.

# lessons learned

Despite many successes, both by design and luck, retrospect reveals a number of different areas that could have significantly contributed to further success of the action, had more effort been devoted to them.

The weather that fine spring day demonstrates how important something you cannot control nor properly account for in planning is. Weather is a very determinant factor in the success of an action because of its effect on the morale of a March or occupation and number of participants; rain will both keep people home and cause others to leave early.

In the opinion of this author, the action would have run much more smoothly had their been predetermined bottom-liners, or point people to coordinate folks into some basic working groups: media/propaganda, security, food, logistics. Because the action brought together so many people from different areas and organizing crews, there was a fair amount of chaos that stemmed from people not knowing who else was working on the same tasks as them. One or two people to facilitate/bottom-line the above named working

# introduction

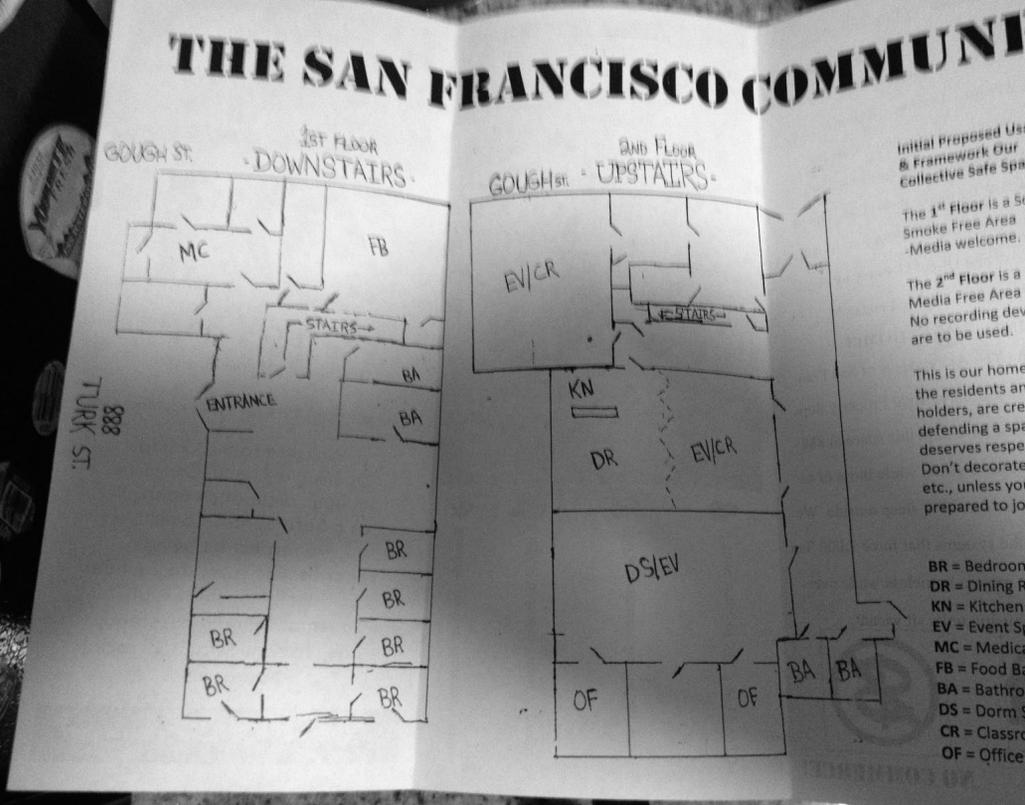
The SF Commune was the name given to two separate occupations of a complex of buildings, including a former low-income mental health clinic, located at 888 Turk St. in San Francisco on April 1st and May 1st, 2012. This article is written solely about the first occupation. The actions were planned by an affinity group in solidarity with Occupy San Francisco.

This is my analysis as a participant and organizer who had previously observed a number of public occupations. From the beginning, it was clear to me that the SF Commune was different, that the organizers had learned from previous occupations, especially Occupy SF's Reclaim the Commons action and Occupy Oakland's Move In Day, both in January of that year. This direct action represented the continuing evolution of the tactic of building occupations by radical direct action groups in the Bay Area. My purpose here is not to give a full or narrative account, but merely to describe the notable aspects of the occupation, both positive and negative.

# before the occupation

Recognizing their autonomy, a small affinity group formed to organize the occupation intended to provide Occupy SF with a building to organize and provide the same social services that were provided at their encampment in downtown. The decision to organize outside of the general assembly of Occupy SF was in-part to bypass the limitations of the process but mostly as a security culture consideration; in order to keep the action off the radar of the police, the number of people who knew the specifics of the action was kept to a minimum. This effort was so successful that some within the local Occupy movement speculated that it was an April Fools Day joke, as it had seemingly come out of nowhere.

Partially as an experiment, organizers spread disinformation in the weeks leading up to the occupation. The vacant Cathedral Hill Hotel, owned by healthcare conglomerate Sutter Health/California Pacific Medical Center had been occupied twice in the last six months, so it's was a believable fake target. The disinformation was created to confuse SFPD and their Department of Homeland



Security handlers and to punk Sutter Health into spending even more money protecting their empty building. The methodology was simple: spamming @sutterhealth on Twitter with pictures of the hotel and messages suggesting that it was going to be occupied again on April 1st.

Additionally, the march route, which began at Union Square and passed the hotel at Geary and Van Ness, was planned in order to suggest to the police the hotel was the target. Between the use of disinformation and effective security culture, the police did not know the location of the action and therefore was unable to prepare a defense of the building against occupation. Sutter health also took the bait and spent even more money reinforcing the fences around the hotel in the week prior to the occupation and hired additional security to be onsite the day of.

The pre-occupation team prepared the building by cleaning and posting signage to designate suggested uses to different areas. A floor plan, site map, and some guidelines were included in a pamphlet that was distributed to people as they entered the front door. Notably

the first floor was designated was a smoke-free and media friendly space, while the second floor allowed smoking and banning photography and reporters or livestreamers who were actively reporting.

The fact that the buildings were owned by the Catholic Archdiocese of San Francisco was an deliberate and strategic action on the part of the organizers as the action to effectively message itself. The contradictions in a church keeping property vacant while people sleep in the streets in front did not require much explanation. This strong action logic made explanation of why we occupied the building more or less unnecessary.

Extensive barricades were assembled by the occupiers to secure the rear courtyard from vehicle access and all but one entrance to the building itself. The goal was to keep the occupation open but secure. This allowed the second floor to be secured by shutting two doors, temporarily keeping the police in the rear courtyard and first floor.

## intent of organizers

In sharp contrast to many previous Occupy gatherings and actions, the occupation of 888 Turk was almost completely devoid of conflict between different factions and ideologies. People who had previously stood in opposition to each other with regards to tactical and strategic considerations were now working together on an illegal direct action. The action also served to bring together members of not only Bay Area Occupies but also occupiers from portland, seattle and elsewhere. Additionally it was the most well attended building occupation San Francisco had seen in recent memory.

In lieu of organizers who cared to assert their will and vision over others, participants organically self-organized in order to complete necessary tasks, from barricade construction to sanitation concerns. The action was also designed as to allow several different levels of participation with various degrees of risk associated: standing in the park across the street, on the sidewalk in front, or inside of the compound.