

The Grootte Keyser and the Vogelstruys

The Grootte Keyser and the Vogelstruys

»Spring was coming. The most beautiful houses were being squatted everywhere, sometimes for the biggest idiots. We'd come back to the Grootte Keyser after one of those squats, and there we were staring at those steel plates again. Cozy, you know, outside the sun's shining. So we conceived a plan to squat one of those nice canal houses ourselves, with more or less the whole Keyser group and a few people from the city center around the canals, just from the neighborhood. We found a place on the Herengracht that turned out to go through to the Singel. And that was the Vogelstruys.«

The Grootte Keyser consisted of six offices on Amsterdam's Keizersgracht, squatted on November 1, 1978, and was named »grootte« (big) in contrast to the Little Keyser across the water. In December 1979, the squats had in a very short time become national symbols of revolt against Amsterdam's »betrayal of the 53,000 homeless and complicity in development, vacancy and luxury apartments.« An eviction order was pronounced on October 26, 1979, with which the 50 squatters had to comply within a month. This was enough for the majority of the residents, and they slowly but surely abandoned the complex.

Right then, in fact, the squatters' neighborhoods, which had been blossoming up all over the city, had gotten mature enough for a city-wide search for a place where everyone could collectively go onto the offensive. It was time for a speculator's property that could be used to make the step between passive resistance and active defense. The Keyser was big and empty, and everyone fit inside it.

To the surprise of the canal-area group, it was the drooping Keyser which was now barricaded shut and stamped by the city. It was not strange in itself that a big squat should be adopted by another squatters' neighborhood; that had been known to happen. But why should those houses whose front-door keys had been handed around by tourists just last summer, houses that had had Israelis barbecuing on the floor, start to function as a symbol of the people's will? The Keyser owed its notoriety in squatters' circles to the paranoia surrounding Harry Gouwswaard's gang, and from resident Paul van Wissen, who was a spy for the owner. Beyond that there was nothing special about it.

Two months later, in mid-December 1979, it had still not been evicted, and rumors flew about »a big squad of riot police« that was preparing for combat. Then the city council was assailed by fireworks, smoke bombs and 100 demonstrators. »They were people from all over the city, making their first effort in a long time to transfer the misery they suffer daily because of their living situation to those who so willingly take political responsibility for it.« The action lasted no more than fifteen minutes, but was dubbed »D-Day« because it amounted to a declaration of war on politics. The wait was over and momentum was picking up. But eviction day just wouldn't come, though barricading and acquisition of weapons were stepped up to ever-greater heights. The ammunition room was filling up, the radio station The Free Keyser was set up and went on the air from the squat, and the bedsprings were replaced by welded-together steel planking, supported by builders' props. A whole counterintelligence system was set up. By posting people at police stations and riot police training grounds, the squatters could find out in time when the eviction would take place. The neighborhoods also divided up the bridges surrounding the Keyser, each to defend one by its own devices. Hundreds of people were on constant standby. In a demonstration at the end of January 1980, 3000 people marched past the houses as those inside waved flags decorated with squat symbols from the roof. But January's second big threat was survived.

The tension built up around the symbol was released in February in a series of incidents with the police: skirmishes, raids, smaller evictions, arrests. This, it was decided, had to be stopped, and some people resquatted a previously evicted house in the Vondelstraat at about 5 p.m. on Friday, February 29. The head-on street clash with the riot police which had been expected at the Keyser finally happened. The squatters won the battle on the corner of the van Baerlestraat and Vondelstraat, and the intersection in front of the recaptured building stayed barricaded all weekend. When tanks came to wipe the streets clean the following Monday morning, an energetic riot spread across the city. But there was no action from out of the house itself, and it was otherwise left alone. On practically the same day came the announcement that Queen Beatrix was to be crowned in Amsterdam on April 30th. April was proclaimed action month, which opened with the squatting of 52 luxury apartments on the Prins Hendrikkade. The squatting wave was reaching its crest. Everyone was up and at it day in day out, and new squatting groups appeared in neighborhood after neighborhood. Attention for the Groote Keyser ebbed away amid the storm of events.

Throughout this time a group was hovering between occupying and living in the Keyser. Barricade materials had overrun the house; the one small kitchen was a wreck. No daylight got through to the bottom floors. »It wasn't a question of living then, but of surviving, around electric heaters,« wrote a paper a year later. »Experimentally living together at its most extreme, you might say; the threat of eviction hanging constantly over your head, working on the house however you could. Trying to clean up a bit, going out for a good action or a drink, freaking out over the cold and there always being so little to eat, having fun with a little shoplifting, anarchistic eating, and so forth.« More or less vague characters were constantly walking in, making the place a sort of open institution. »The people who helped with the barricading just stayed there. I was living somewhere on the canals, I came there, and in a rush of 'this is where it's happening' I sort of lived there from then on. I never moved in. You were just there.« This is Max. »Since they just wouldn't evict us, we stayed on watch on the roof kind of like faithful dogs, and we set up a scanner team to sit in a house in the neighborhood in case of an unexpected eviction, so everything could be defended. The people who were kind of trying to keep the Keyser running, about ten or twenty - more and more kept dropping out, it was driving them crazy - stayed with it pretty consistently until about April 30.« Until then there were countless meetings about the Keyser. Max: »After a while no one knew what to do next. It was so falling apart at the seams and so heavily barricaded that you couldn't do anything with the building anymore, publicity-wise either. Then we were like: that's great, hang onto that Groote Keyser, but we're leaving.« The indoor crew broke into the basement, barricaded the inside stairs to the living area and organized a six months' threat party with bands and flat boats on the canal. »That long hall in the basement looked great after the punks had stood there spray painting the hell out of it all day.« A week later, on May 31, they squatted the Vogelstruys.

When tension builds up around a point, it will always discharge itself, there or elsewhere. The Groote Keyser, on rational grounds, was declared a symbolic squat: it was to be the first big eviction of »1990: Year of the Eviction?« when many other houses would follow. To fulfill its function as pioneer, the house was sacrificed to a series of military measures, from heavy barricading of the house itself (for the first time so thoroughly), and stoning teams with ammunition galore at their disposal, to a comprehensive defense strategy for the surrounding streets, and a network of sentry posts reaching far beyond the city. Without anyone studying for it, the squatters discovered the three central principles of fortification formulated by Maarschalk van Vauban at the end of the 17th century and put them into practice. Vauban proposed, first of all, that defense should take place on a number of lines placed one behind the other; in the second place, that the particular characteristics of the place where a fortress is planned are employed in entrenchment and the eventuality of sorties; and in the third place, that an imbalance is created between the entrance and the exit: it must be difficult to get in and easy to get out. Normal social life in the houses had come to an end; at the most, people camped, awaiting coming events. From the moment of fortification, the tension was fed from two sides: the other

squatters in the city attached their fate to that of the Keyser, and the inside crew prepared to go to all extremes in the defense of the houses. The Keyser, in contrast to nuclear plants or army bases, was a symbol you were for*, one that summed up your whole story. That story could not be told to completion, because the authorities were afraid to take up such an extreme challenge. The Vogelstruys was to redeem the promise of the Keyser - an active defense from the inside out. By mid-1980 the squatters had gotten acquainted with street confrontation, but where such active defense would lead to, no one could say.

Frits was hanging around a lot with the Keyser group. »I had heard which house they wanted to squat and it was in the middle of Amsterdam South. You drive by a real estate agency, those photos are hanging there and you always check if anything in the neighborhood's still empty. The Vogelstruys happened to be up there too.« So it was definitely for sale. The Vogelstruys consisted of two houses, Herengracht 329 and Singel 370, connected to each other by a passageway. On the day of the squat, May 31, 1980, it was in possession of the Bischen family, »black marketeers from World War I,« who were trying to make a speculation profit of fl 360,000 on it. »We assembled that Saturday afternoon in the Spuistraat. A crew went on ahead to break in, but didn't have any luck. Crowbars didn't work. I happened to have this heavy straight one-and-a-half-meter bar with me, not subtle in the least, and we rammed the door open with that and then the alarm went off. That shut us up; the barricading was passed along and the hammering began. Along with the bedsprings, we used boards. It all took a bit longer than usual.« Max: »Then we were inside; the police were already arriving too, but there were so many people, it was OK. It was really cozy too - finally a familiar downtown squat again. Lots of people you knew; it had its atmosphere. As 50 squatters were ramming in a door, with leather jackets and all, an angry little man came running out of the neighboring house and said, 'You can't do that, that's not your property!' He was pushed away, like, you go play somewhere else.« A banner with »RETEKETET we've squatted« on it was hung on the front of the house. Some musicians happened to be walking down the Raadhuisstraat in riot police uniform and came to blow their tune at the door.

»When you came in on the Herengracht, it was all street level, no stairs or anything. There was an elevator to a sort of fake apartment on the second and third floors. The elevator had been installed for the previous owner's mother, an invalid lady. There was a telephone in the elevator and it worked at first too. The funny thing was that the detectives from the Lijnbaansgracht police station who'd been by had gotten hold of the number. They called up in the evening to tell us the recommendation they'd given, that they had established vacancy, and so we wouldn't be evicted for breaking the domestic peace. I stood in that elevator with the telephone and said, 'Well, that's great, but could you maybe tell me what my number is?' A few days later it was disconnected. After a while we deactivated the elevator. When there was an emergency, an 'alarm', and we used the phone tree, and a lot of people came, there were punks who would play with the elevator. It had one of those trap doors in it and those guys would climb through it. You can't have one of them accidentally getting squashed.«

The building was quickly inspected. Frits: »There were some old books; other than that it was empty. Except for an apartment on the second floor on the Herengracht side with some pseudo-antique furniture, a bath, a built-in kitchen, plus a little room with a big bed, all to suggest that it was lived in. And there was a mysterious room on the ground floor that you could only get to with the elevator. That was pitch, pitch black, a gigantic black hole, without windows or doors, creepy.« Max: »It was really one of those old mystical Amsterdam houses. Downstairs there was this old kitchen with a hearth and those little tiles. Underneath was a vaulted cellar with a cesspit. Then another basement went to the Singel side. No one had ever lived on that side; there was nothing there but centuries-old dust. It was a very ghostly, romantic house. It had a beautiful attic, and I decided to live up there. It had a door that opened onto a flat roof between the two houses. There was a door to the Herengracht side, where you could walk along to a back part of the house with an annex, all built onto each other with different levels. Underneath you had more passages connected to each other.« And he continues:

»I and several others moved all our stuff to the Vogelstruys. We'd never done that in the Keyser. There you just slept on a mattress somewhere behind the armorplate. But now we thought: This is it, we're going to live here.«

»Around 11:00 some vague guy came by, a Czech, Michael Schmaus, who claimed he worked for the owner. He said, 'Bschen is busy getting together a gang and they're coming tonight around 12:00.' We said, sure, always those panic stories...And at exactly 12:00 they started to hack in the front door with axes, while we were sitting there kind of stoned drinking beers.« Frits was alone upstairs. »There were a lot of bricks by the windows. Suddenly there's a huge racket. I see the thugs coming in. They were builders, not martial arts school types. They were on the street. First I threw a big brick down, but missed on purpose. Next a small rock, missed by accident. Sietze and a few other people went running up to them yelling and then they ran like hell. For me that was important, because all three times that I'd stayed overnight after a squat before, a gang had come. I was scared to death, but here, just throwing stuff and seeing them running away, my fear was immediately gone.« That same night the windows of the owner's house, almost on the same canal, were smashed. »That didn't need much discussion.«

An threat existed unabated the first few weeks. There was talk of the formation of a gang of 60, accompanied by still heavier barricading, squatters sleeping over, keeping watch, and actions against Bischen. Right after the squat he'd filed a report of a breach of domestic peace, which was still being dealt with despite the report from detective Erhard, who had established vacancy on his visit. Frits: »I went again with Max to the Palace of Justice on the Prinsengracht, in search of Asser, the acting District Attorney. There were rumors that there would be an eviction that day. We were going to ask what was going on with that breach of the peace and to tell them they really couldn't do that. Because meanwhile two ads had appeared in the newspaper offering the Struys for sale. That was also evidence that there was no breach of domestic peace. Plus my story that I'd seen it for sale at the real estate agent's.« Max: »At one point we got to speak to Fehmers, the DA who had had weekend duty during the squat and had to decide whether to adjudge breach of the peace. He seemed hurried and accepted the information. Nothing more happened that day.«

There were indications that police or thugs would come over the roof by way of one of the neighboring houses. On the landing from the roof to the Singel side a fort in the round was built out of bedsprings and barbed wire. Two canal searchlights were set on both corners, in case the thugs came at night. Frits: »I'd taken one of those nice big lamps that light up the trees along the water from in front of the house. An annoying guy lived next door, one of those subservient geranium specialist types, and he'd seen this. The next day I was carrying the lamp away with a carrier bike, right out in the open, and he saw that too and warned the police. But they were too late.« The whole house was full of bricks and clubs. »The tension was good.«

For Max it was the season of the Duvels. »We stayed home a lot to look after things and someone would go pick up some beers at the Ace of Cups; we had a deal with them. We mostly sat in that apartment on the third floor, where there was also a fireplace. There was also a panel that made a sort of closet. It was June, but pretty cold despite that. So we set that whole wooden board on fire, drinking a Duvel, watching the fire and just talking a bit about how things were. I was also quite in love in those days, with Claar, and she was living there too.« Frits: »We played a lot of Doors, smoked joints, lit fires, that atmosphere. We ate light brown sliced bread in plastic bags, with a hunk of cheese from the Albert Heijn supermarket; we stole everything there. Now and then someone would cook. You were on watch the whole night on group duty, and that went on for weeks in a row. That's all you do then. Those weren't the type of people to have meetings; except for one they weren't intellectual types. I knew those people very well and the neighborhood group feeling was very strong. It was your neighborhood, your block. You were there and you helped them. And you spent as much time as it

took.«

Max: »We had brought along an idea with us from the Groote Keyser like: if anything happens we'll fight. That was like an unwritten rule; we all knew it of each other. In those days we were sick to death of all those meetings, at the Keyser too, where no one could agree with each other. And then at the Vogelstruys it was suddenly: this is how it is. Everyone was on the same wavelength. It was extremely clear. People did talk about it, but everyone adjusted to each other; it happened pretty automatically. And besides, around the canals and the Jordaan, the Vogelstruys was something more personal. It was on a somewhat smaller scale. It was also a breather for a lot of people - that we didn't discuss what would or wouldn't happen. The press never wrote about it either before the riot.«

Yet a number of residents left, not wanting to end up in the whirl of actions and guard duty again. »When we were out of the Keyser, Hein from the Staatslieden district took charge of the house, to get the whole thing back on its feet, with new residents and all. He got a couple of us involved and worked on their feelings. He appointed them sort of lieutenants whose task was the reconstruction of the Groote Keyser. Hein paid no attention at all to the fact that there was much more going on in other places in the city at the time. At the Keyser there was actually nothing going on at all. In the first few days, for example, we had picked up gas masks, fireworks and some smoke bombs from the Keyser. Hein insisted that the stuff go back. What a misconception. If gas masks were useful anywhere, it was at the Vogelstruys. We argued like hell about that. A kind of half animosity developed.«

The stenciled brochure which presented »The Groote Keyser Kampaign« of Hein and consorts to the neighborhoods put it this way: »Having to sit amid the debris did not benefit the residents' psychological condition. This caused a few old residents to temporarily drop out. These people coming back again, as well as enthusiastic new residents coming along, has ensured that motivation is optimal once more.« They began by emptying the fort and setting up an info center in the basement of the Keyser. The radio continued broadcasting out of the squat: »The Free Keyser is really* free. For Christ's sake, let's not lose this, but expand it. It's one more reason to do our extreme best to keep the Groote Keyser.«

At about 11:00 on the morning of Thursday, July 3rd, Max was lying in his bed in the attic of the Struys. »Suddenly I heard shuffling and thumping on the roof. So I get up and I see all these big fat guys, taking down the barricades bit by bit. We'd set glass plates in the gutter on the roof and they were stealthily passing them through to each other. I thought at first they were the owner's gang.« Max fled through trapdoors and hallways to the Herengracht side, where there was a walkie-talkie in the living room. It was there for an emergency call to someone on the outside who'd sprained his knee and was always home. But on this particular day he was visiting his mother in Friesland. »I went in the bathroom with that thing, locked the door and called him, 'Sietze, a gang! God damn it, come on! Aren't there any batteries in this thing?' After a few minutes I hid the walkie-talkie behind the toilet. I'd grabbed some kind of iron bar, and I went out of the bathroom and snuck downstairs to warn the others. I went around a corner and there was a cop. And then you think: oh, a cop, better than a gang. So I throw the bar away and say: let's just talk about this. Then it turned out that plainclothesmen had come in over the roof and had opened the door downstairs. Now there were vans, and cops in the hallway.«

Chief District Attorney Messchaert, after returning from his vacation, had ignored the report of the detectives who'd visited the Vogelstruys after the squat and adjudged the Bischens' breach of the peace. Besides, Commissioner Toorenaar had just been demoted from Narcotics to the Lijnbaansgracht station and he wanted to prove that he was still good for something. So for the eviction, he chose the day when the court case was to come up against the residents of the luxury apartments on the PH-kade («because important people from the squat movement were at the trial,«

according to a newspaper). Max: »Six of us were in the house, and when we were brought outside handcuffed, there were people standing there yelling. They'd been to warn everyone at the courthouse on the Prinsengracht.« Karel: »Judge Borgerhoff Mulder was only just getting started when someone ran into the courtroom with the announcement that the Vogelstruys was being evicted. We dashed out of the courtroom to the Herengracht. There we ran into Toorenaar who was strolling back to the station by himself. So we yelled, 'Asshole, you can't do this!' He answered, 'Go squat in the red light district, then I'll have some respect for you.'«

Frits: »That morning I was standing with Patrice at police headquarters, waiting with paint bombs for the police vans filled with the people who'd been picked up for smashing in an owner's windows in Landsmeer. First we went to go get Max, because he was always late. The doorbell must not have worked. Anyway, they didn't open the door, they just wouldn't wake up. We threw rocks against the window. Time was running out, so the two of us went to the police station to wait for the vans. They never came and when we were back home we heard that the Struys had been cleared. It turned out everyone really had been sleeping when it happened. They must have really had a lot to drink. I was standing on the Northern bridge on the Singel side. It was already blocked off by cops. I was furious because not a damn thing was happening. The alarm call started to work, but very slowly. No one dared to break through. There were too few of us.«

The police had let in some builders cum* thugs, and left themselves after an hour. The squatters walked around both sides of the house to assess the situation and heard loud hammering going on inside. Joep had never heard anything about the Vogelstruys: »I was home alone and I'd just handed in my last paper for my history studies that morning before I quit, when I got the alarm call. I went there on my bike, without any preparation. Everyone was gathering in front of the house. There were no meetings or discussions, there was no flyer or banner. The question was when there were enough people.«

More people came gradually biking up, and it began to sink in that they were completely among their own, with the police nowhere in sight. The last riot had been April 30th, when thousands of people had thrown rocks and had a blast and every connection with squatting had seemed far away. There had been every indication beforehand that the coronation day would end in a general assault on authority; the call to the front during »April Action Month« had been a great success. Having been afraid of this, the squat groups had opted for a defensive gesture and redubbed the coronation day national squatting day. Buildings were to be squatted outside the city center, and other squatters were organizing a party in the Sarphatipark. A poster also went up calling for a demonstration against the coronation spectacle. In the midst of a media war squatters seemed to be internally divided about what should be done with the slogan »No accommodations, no coronation:« simply do some squatting, or actively disturb the ceremony.

The police, led by Commissioner De Rhodes, launched a frontal attack that morning on a neighborhood party organized by squatters in the Bilderdijkstraat in the Kinker district in celebration of the squat of an empty office building. The crowd of squatters realized that the large-scale brawl they had feared for was coming. But shortly after the riot broke out, the police, with horses, water cannons and all, suddenly pulled out. This got everyone in the mood for the festivities that had been planned for the rest of the day. That afternoon the police attacked again, at the incipient anti-coronation demonstration on the Waterlooplein. When the police were driven away here too, there was a run down the streets Damstraat and Rokin on the church where the coronation was being held. Most of the squatters went along with abandon, angry and relieved that the police had given them their riot that day after all. But the street fights, in which a large part of the police equipment was helped to the scrapheap, had attained such proportions that the squatters felt the riot wasn't theirs any longer. »It was just harrassment, drinking a beer and then back on the street going after the ME, and

then back in a bar watching them going by through the window.« (Max) »That wasn't squatting any more, that was a wholesale movement where everyone could blow off steam about whatever they wanted.« (Joep) The driving force behind April 30 came from more than just the squatters' corner; it was all getting too big for them. After the holiday this led to intense and persistent infighting, which was unloaded specifically on an NRC resident, who, according to a press organ, had distanced herself from the riots »on behalf of the squat movement« (she said, »We think what happened was senseless.«).

Now, on the street in front of the Vogelstruys, the squatters found each other suddenly back on a surveyable playing field, in a small but familiar group and with a clear goal: a house. The local experience was functioning again. »It was just about squatting and speculation again and we were completely within our rights.« (Joep) They were moving collectively through the familiar squat space once again and they knew it. The obvious thing seemed to be to resquat.

A resquat is an extreme squat. When a gang of thugs is driven out, there is the air of a civil war; »taking justice into one's own hands« calls up images from the 1930s. The opinion processors like to present it as a sign that democracy will soon go under. Furthermore, the recapture of a building emptied by police is the farthest-reaching form of denying »their legal system.« You can't claim a single right anymore; you've lost or given up on all your trials. You've been thrown out on more or less legal grounds and have only the moral right of the strongest still on your side. The resquat instantly makes a building a highly intense symbol. The Vondelstraat was one of these resquats. It led to great riots, but the house itself played a less important role. The occupation of the intersection had overshadowed the entire resquat and the building did not ultimately need to be defended from inside. The Groote Keyser had created the prospect of a terrible battle, but it got too convoluted to ever be realized. The Vogelstruys offered the same promise, but on a practical scale. The whole story about speculation and thugs was so obvious here that it no longer needed to be told. The house was worth more than a quiet eviction with a few cops; it had been established that there would be a violent defense. Now that, thanks to Toorenaar's sly moves, this had failed to happen, they wanted to give themselves a second chance. What was more, after having seen each other in an argumentative atmosphere for two months, Amsterdam squatters met each other again without feeling any need of debate, and consequently they could surrender themselves completely to the event. It took them up on the offer.

At 1:00, when there were enough people and the police were still nowhere in sight, there turned out to be too little equipment to go into action. Helmets and crowbars were fetched, and on the Singel side the first windows went in. A group hesitantly formed and tried to yank open the cellar door there with a crowbar. Frits: »That door opened outwards, so it was pointless. We'd even barricaded it. The thugs started to fling things down from the third floor, rocks, a piece of sewer pipe, and a chair. Some people had helmets on and pieces of wood in their hands, but it was too dangerous and we quit. I walked around to the Herengracht and there was a big group of people there too. Rocks were thrown back and forth. There was no way to get to the door; their aim was right on the mark. Since we knew we couldn't get to it that way, a couple of us rushed to the Keyser with a carrier bike. Because we knew how much material there was inside the Struys. On the way we picked up a big door from a trash container. It had a round hole in it and we wanted to set legs under it at the Keyser and lay a bedspring on top, so heavy things would sort of bounce back. A nice construction, but there were no tools at all in the Keyser. It had gotten so desolate there that we couldn't even find any nails. Time, time, time, hurry. It got really rickety. It could just take the weight if we stood right under it, but that was it. With a lot of trouble we got the thing onto the bike and pushed it to the Herengracht. There with united strength we got it on its feet, then under it and shuffle, shuffle, shuffle forward.«

Karel was also on the Herengracht side. »We were hiding behind trees and cars; we were standing in a group hurling sharp street rocks that were being beat with a hammer to a handy size a little way away. When the door on legs started moving, a tremendous rain of rocks flew from the street at the house to keep the heavies at a distance. While the windows clattered down in shards they threw back just as hard. We inched to the right-hand window where there was already the beginning of a hole in the barricading. Thugs were standing behind it ready to let loose. Then all of a sudden it started going really fast. The gang just disappeared and within a minute the front door was rammed in with beams and traffic signs.« By 3:00 the people were streaming inside one after the other.

Frits: »We'd made a big trap door between the ground floor and the second floor and it was closed. We were standing packed together under it. I knew that there were refrigerators and washing machines upstairs waiting to be set on top of the trap door; we'd put them there. It was highly probable that the thugs had shoved them onto the trap door by now. Suddenly there was someone with a circular saw, and the person just started sawing into that trap door. I mean, who would have something like that with them? Maybe it was just lying there. I was scared because a huge mass of people was standing on the stairway. We yelled to the thugs that they had to leave, over the rooftops, and they should avoid a confrontation. Because they were lynched. Finally the trap door did break, and thank god, there was nothing standing on it.«

They ran from the Herengracht to the Singel side to throw open the door. There Joep entered the house: »I was astounded by a mess of Italians from the Oosterpark who came in a bit later and - I'd never seen it before - had iron catapults with them. Amid screaming and yelling we fired lead shot in the round, narrow stairwell towards the upstairs, where some of the thugs were still sitting. They escaped by way of the roof. We wondered for a while whether everyone was really gone. We'd only find out later. The owner had a crippled stepson. One of those amazing stories that came out during the trial was that we had held him hostage in some dark little room by the elevator. I heard he was outside and we'd had telephone contact with him. Those were the kind of things we didn't know for sure. After that the alarm call was repeated several times and some tools were sent for.«

After the euphoria, the event went into a lull, and after its mass attack on the building the group fell apart. People like Karel and Joep, who hadn't been inside before, sprinted through the house and paid a speedy visit to the roof to inspect the escape routes. Joep pulled off the barbed wire that was stretched over the roof escape route, »but I didn't look further than the end of my nose on that.« Frits went with a friend to drink coffee on the Spui. Those inside busied themselves with fortification. The door that had served as a shield was nailed provisionally behind the smashed window. Bedsprings were brought in through the Singel side. Word came that the riot police were approaching. The squatters inside the Vogelstruys realized that the moment had finally come to defend the house from inside, and begin to inwardly prepare, to get their nerves under control. Across the Herengracht canal a whole crowd had gathered and stood watching, and the tourist boats kept going by.

Max was still in the cell on the Lijnbaansgracht. »At one point the PA in the station said all riot police personnel had to go and report. Then I thought: hey, wait a minute, who knows. Then at about 3:00 was my interrogation. 'Do you have anything to state?' 'No.' 'Then hurry up and fuck off to your buddies.' I didn't know what was going on, so I just walked back to the Vogelstruys and I see all these people throwing rocks...I got there right when the riot police were standing pressed up against the house.« 120 riot cops had been rounded up posthaste and sent without any briefing or knowledge of the situation to the Herengracht address. A vanful of riot trainees were first, tearing up from the Raadhuisstraat; they blazed a trail through the surge of rubberneckers on the other side of the water, turned onto the Huidenstraat bridge, drove blindly up the piece of canal in front of the Struys, piled out and started a 200-meter-long charge.

Joep and Karel were still inside. Joep: »The minute the police come you have to decide: stay in or go out. For me the main reason to stay was, once you start something you have to finish it, no bitching. But of course you also have this vague feeling inside you do have a bigger chance of getting busted. But it was mainly to be consistent. They were your buddies, you stuck by them. They were squatters, but also people who knew each other well from these situations. The tourists and Italians just gave it an extra dimension. There were also some people busy collecting household stuff that had been left behind. That might have been a reason for them to stay inside too. Of course there are also people who stay to make sure it doesn't all get out of hand, take care of the wounded and all that. There were 30 or 40 people. When the fighting got really hefty on the Herengracht, the door on the Singel side just stayed open. Fantastic.«

Max was busy on the Herengracht. »There was a fight every meter. There were relatively few people, or they were pretty spread out over all those bridges and corners. Five of you stood there with rocks, and then throwing as hard as you can and the cops PAF! And then they charged again, and then someone came forward and scared the shit out of 12 riot cops all by himself with a steel bar. The cops started throwing rocks too. Then I heard that you could still get in on the Singel and that's what I did.« Karel: »I had decided to stay inside, but I suddenly lost the people from my neighborhood. I walk outside onto the Singel to tell them that I'm staying inside and see them all just then running to the corner. I run after them, but I think again that I want to be inside. As I run up the steps to the house, I see Joep just pushing a beam behind the door. He says sorry anyway. I ran around the northern side to the Herengracht.«

Frits came walking up from the Spui and landed in the middle of the fray. »It drove me crazy that I wasn't inside. We knew for sure 30 or 40 people were in the building. You couldn't get through anymore. It was sealed shut and they were like mice in a trap. Only the Singel side wasn't blocked off yet with cops. First I was on the corner of the Herengracht and the Oude Spiegelstraat. A row of cops was standing on the canal. We ran forward, around the corner, threw rocks and ran straight back. Preferably bouncing off the ground, because they had shields, but if they bounced they couldn't tell where they were coming from anymore. That was the only time I saw a woman throwing rocks non-stop, too. The cops couldn't take it; they were standing there jumping and throwing back. They came tearing at us on the bridge in a van. In a split second a rock's coming straight at me. I see it just a meter away in front of my face and duck away. A minute later they sprayed tear gas behind me, huge clouds, as the riot squad was charging in front of me. I held my breath and ran straight through it. That'll make you sick.« In the meantime the rest of the riot squad arrived, including the tear gas unit, which sprayed - instead of the CS gas which the squatters had gotten acquainted with on April 30 - the old CN gas which had been banned since May that year. Karel: »The gas came into the alley where we were standing. We didn't worry about it because we had scarves on. It suddenly turned out to be much stronger than we'd thought, and we ran back retching over the Singel. In one of the streets we went to a greengrocer's to buy lemons, which we had cut and then squirted into each other's eyes to get the gas out. When we'd gotten over it, we found everything blocked off.«

Inside the house, Joep and Max ended up on the third floor. Joep: »You couldn't see out very well. We mostly heard what was going on on the canal. Crashing, rock-throwing, yelling. When the street had been cleared you could see bunches of riot cops standing by trees with shields. We opened the windows and started throwing stuff. There were three or four of us. And the Free Keyser was on the air. We had a radio and they were playing the eviction tape, 'Street Fighting Man' and 'Anarchy in the U.K.' - that added to the festivity. I was like, 'They always play the same thing! Can't I make a request?' The material to be hurled outside were at the ready. Whole bedsprings were going down, chairs, tables and heaters, really everything. Finally it just couldn't be heavy enough; it didn't matter for shit anymore. I do remember I said to Max, 'Should we do that?' But he said, 'What does it matter if you throw a one-pound rock or a six-pound bed?' He's completely right, of course.«

In principle, the police followed the same tactic during this second eviction as the squatters had applied that afternoon. At the water's edge, behind the trees, stood tear gas marksmen who shot as many tear gas grenades as possible inside, to keep the crew inside away from the windows. At the same time, a group inched forward with the shields over their heads, in order to get back inside the house through the right-hand window. Max: »It was really pretty Asterix and Obelix (like a cartoon)* with those shields. On the second floor they managed to shoot gas inside, because there were large windows. But we were behind a pretty small window and we were holding a mattress in front of it, which we pushed aside every now and then to throw stuff.« Joep: »It wasn't worth it to push that mattress aside for just a rock, so at one point we chucked a whole box of bricks down and finally a bedspring when we left. It's also a question of efficiency, optimal use of gravity. You have no time at all for crazy schemes. The only thing you stop to think about is, how do I survive this?« Max: »I sat there yanking on the washbasin since there was nothing left to throw. The thugs had already dumped half of the throwing material out on the resquatters, so the ammunition was just used up. It got pretty quiet. From the second floor we heard nothing more; we got the feeling that the people there had fled. No tear gas had come in where we were yet, although you could smell it. There fumes got so bad we couldn't take it anymore. Then it was like, we're going to have to try to get away; this isn't going to work.«

Michiel and about 15 other people were throwing rocks down from the second floor on the Herengracht side when tear gas was shot in from the street. »We ran out of the room and stood in the marble hallway on the third floor. From the room on the Herengracht we saw big yellowish-white clouds drifting towards us, but we couldn't smell it yet. Then we decided to leave via the Singel. We took the barricades away from the front door, which took a long time. Things were really quiet on the canal, a strange contrast with inside. There were lines of cops left and right with their backs to us. It took at least another minute before they saw us. 'Let's break through the lines,' someone yelled. We went to the right, it was about a 100-meter walk. When we were halfway the line turned around and rushed at us. We ran back but there we came up against the line from the other side. Then almost everyone either jumped or was knocked into the water. I got hit right as I jumped into the canal. On the other side were flat barges with lots of people standing on them cussing at the police and they hauled us out.« The ones who didn't jump into the water passed Commissioner Toorenaar on the bridge, standing there encouraging his men with a »beautiful, beautiful!« to lay into the passersby some more.

Max and Joep were still in the third-floor apartment. They heard nothing more from below and went to have a look in the hallway. Max: »We open that door - a white fog of tear gas. And through that onto the flat roof.« Joep: »On the roof we hiked to the attic on the Singel side, and there we ran into people from other parts of the house who'd also come onto the roof. I stayed in the stairwell a minute to check where the rest were. We didn't know for sure when the police had gotten inside. Before that we'd seen them busy outside, but when you suddenly realize they're inside, there's sort of a moment of panic. Because it makes a whole different sound. An riot cop standing outside is very different from a riot cop in your own house. The space is different, the acoustics are different. You don't see people from above under their shields and helmets, but on the stairs face to face. Then it's suddenly about your own ass, whereas if you're outside or throwing stones from above, then it's about the building. When they're inside you're not thinking anymore about attacking or defending, just about saving your own ass, that was how it was for me. Getting into hand-to-hand combat with the riot police was out of the question.«

To get onto the neighbors' roof the group had to jump over an alley one meter wide and twelve meters deep. »So we had to get over that and that went OK because the ones who still more or less had their cool hung onto those who were really wobbling. Two stayed behind on the roof.« Joep: »We stepped inside the neighbors' house through a kitchen window. It wasn't open; I believe we had to use some

force there. But it was also necessary, because we were pretty dazed. That gas really affected our breathing, everyone had red sweaty faces. We were kind of dizzy, groggy, couldn't make it any further. We needed to drink water in the kitchen, dry off. Then a little old lady appeared out of a bedroom; she was all upset, but she was sweet.«

Claar had come onto the roof out of the Singel house and jumped with the others over the alley. She told a newspaper later: »When I was half inside the window of the neighbors' house and glanced backward, I saw that the police had reached the roof by then too and were grouped around the two who'd stayed behind. When I was inside I sat for a minute to get over the gas. Then we all went into a living room on the first floor. No one was there; as compensation for the use of the room a few people laid money on the table plus an apologetic note.« Max: »We ended up right in the house of that guy who had rushed outside during the squat and was totally against it. That guy came running outside and said to the chief of the riot squad, 'There they are!'« Joep: »We saw the police there on the street running back and forth. We went to the john, washed up and checked if there was anything to eat or drink. We discussed what we should do, break out or stay there. What could they do to us if we were in there? We were going to explain to whoever lived there what our situation was. I took my jacket off and stuck it under a bed. I waited there about 20 minutes - an amazing silence, very relaxed, that alternation between intensity and calm. Until the cops came with Wagenaar, the resident. They hammered on the door and I opened it with the story that they had to understand our difficult situation - wham bam, out. 'This is my house!' He already thought he'd lost his house. The cops went crazy and hammered us down the stairs, out of the house. They were whacking us on the head. I kind of lurched up the street and saw cops with long batons coming towards us, they thought, 'Hey, where did those squatters come from?' Running the cop gauntlet, maybe I'll get away; but it didn't work.« Max: »Claar was walking in front of me. The cops were pushing so hard that everyone tumbled off the stairs; she fell and then she was taken inside by the downstairs neighbor and didn't get arrested. She knew the woman because her dog, who she'd had in the squat for awhile, had been bitten by this neighbor's dog, and the woman had paid the veterinary bill. In the chaos no one noticed that she rescued her.« A reporter saw the rest staggering up the street. »'Kill them, kill them, those scum,' yells a man from a neighboring house. On the street corner a boy lies crying, as a group of eight riot police beat on him: 'Mercy, mercy, oh please.' A girl with bleeding head wounds is kicked into a police car. Others are dragged down the street by their hair.« Despite heavy head wounds, a number of people managed to escape in between the police into the crowd of onlookers standing further down in the Nieuwe Spiegelstraat. Others were arrested and transported to police headquarters. The two stragglers on the roof were smacked across the roof and back into the house by the police. One was so seriously injured that he lost consciousness. He was dragged unconscious from the hall behind the Singel door into a room. The woman, who had also been kicked, had to lie next to him on her stomach with her hands behind her neck. »After about 45 minutes we were pulled up by our hair. In the hall they put handcuffs on us and tightened them very painfully. We were dragged out the window by our hair and pulled into a riot van.« Two hours later they were already free. A total of 16 people were arrested in and around the building, of whom ten were quickly released.

In the meantime, someone took the people who'd been fished out of the water to the NRC building. Michiel: »But no one there wanted to let us in, because they didn't want anything to do with the riot, an aftereffect from April 30. Finally they did let us take a cold shower. We borrowed clean clothes somewhere else and went back to the riot, where we ran into lots of people we knew who were surprised we hadn't been picked up.« During the eviction the riot in the street carried on with great ferocity. The offices had let out and City Radio had come on the air, so lots of people came to get a look. Frits: »We roamed around for hours. On the other side of the Herengracht, we, this bad-ass group in black going on an expedition, terribly conspicuous among all those onlookers, walked to the Boschen* house to smash windows. We stopped to rest on the Spuistraat. You couldn't get to the house anymore, the cops were still standing there. A couple of days later I went on vacation.« Karel

was standing by one of the Singel bridges where a platoon was being pelted from two sides. »Then the group to the right of us attacked, at which the police rushed forward, so that we could bombard them from the side. There were lots of misses, by us as well as by them. All the stores, coffee shops, cars, and just about everything got smashed to smithereens in the process. Plus the riot vans had already smashed up the bikes that had been locked to the bridge. The police were covered from head to toe in paint. The audience was sitting in the cafes there on the canal, beer in hand, cheering us on and cussing us out: 'Where are those 50,000 homeless anyway? I've never seen them.' When one of them started to take a picture we threw a rock into the bar. Eventually you couldn't tell bystanders and squatters apart anymore and there were also lots of plainclothesmen. We went home then.« Late that night Claar snuck out of the neighbor's house. She walked to the Grootte Keyser, the closest squat, and was refused entry. Max: »One of Hein's new policy lines was that only residents and people who had a temporary duty in the building could be walking around. I heard that from Claar later when I was in the can. You really start hating someone like that.«

The squatters were evicted and the riot was won. The monotony of the months of waiting for the Keyser's eviction had been broken. The squatters had proven to themselves that what they had endlessly been talking about was no bluff: they really were crazy enough to stake their lives on defending a building and unleash an unheard-of amount of violence in the process. That they lost the house in question did nothing to alter that. Without any preparation or discussion among themselves, everyone let the event carry them away. It had been waiting for them for a while already and was now unexpectedly being kicked off by the radical naivete of one Toorenaar, clueless as to the trip he was interfering in. The pretension of spontaneous rage over housing was made good here without a sound about media, symbolization or advance planning. The squatters broke through their fears and entered into total confrontation, without hesitations regarding goal, feasibility, purpose or future perspective. Vacancy, chaos, violence and fun: »You really got away from it all.«

On July 3, 1980, a terminus was reached; in their minds the squatters had crossed the boundary separating civilization from wilderness. It had not been a game, but not an embittered final battle either. The break with the everyday legal order that had made squatting possible in the first place had been taken to its most extreme consequences. Many wanted no part of it anyway. Others, who had experienced the extremity and survived, knew now what it meant. They had no reason to go so far ever again. At the same time, the outside world thought that from now on squatters were prepared to defend their houses like this forever. That made them able to keep this shadow up their sleeves in future evictions.

The six remaining Vogelstruys arrestees were taken into custody. Joep: »At that point it started to happen rationally. The high and the haze, the automatism and the mechanism were over and I thought, now I have to start thinking strictly legally, or strategically. It was a different level. The cell was the next step in the struggle, continue consistently, stay militant and prepare for what's coming. Don't say your name, be a nuisance and make things pleasant for yourself.« The arrestees' group sent mail and packages and organized »noise demos« outside the jail for the people inside. The »Struysvogel Politiek [Ostrich Attitude] Work Group« declared the building contaminated and sent out a communiqué: »People fighting against the housing shortage are being abused in a fascist way and arrested.« The Bischens fled to Germany, »scared to death of reprisals.« The Free Keyser made jailhouse radio and Max got a visit. »Some total hippie came into my cell, who I couldn't tell if he was looking at me or not. And that was my attorney. Then the guards came to bring something every hour, a magazine or a bunch of grapes with notes. It was driving them crazy. Sunday my attorney comes back to go over the arraignment, and that stupid guard suddenly brings in another package. Claar had baked a cake, it was still warm. The pan wasn't allowed in the cell, so the guard starts to pick the cake out of it. And he actually manages to get the damn cake out in one piece. So I say to my attorney, you want a bite? and he says, must be a hash cake, but what the hell, it's Sunday. So I break a piece off,

and they've baked a file in there, an old rusty wood file. We were falling down laughing. I was transferred to the jail in Haarlem, I was standing there with all my bags and everything was searched. That pan was in one of the bags and I'd stuffed the file in a sweater. The guy says, what's this? How...how...or what? I go, don't ask me.« The arrestees were scattered all over the country and remained in custody for six weeks. Squatters had never been locked up for so long. Joep designed the trial strategy in letters to the others: »It would be ideal if we could make a combined play among us, the attorneys and the audience - testimonies, expert witnesses, pleadings and supporting theater in the gallery. If the judge should start being difficult, then of course we will too: keep talking and talking, retract our statements, argue, swear. I think it would be good to pull a good joke when the verdict is announced, like Bas and Max have suggested (puking, shitting, standing on your head, fainting, pointing out a zit to the judge, etc.).« »That to me is the essence of a political trial. Not so much the testimony you give, but that you see it as a fight: who's determining the order here?«

At their arraignment on August 14th their temporary remand is suspended until the 18th. When they are released that day, the first thing they do is to liberate fellow arrestee Bas from a hospital in Haarlem where he's in for his appendix. Two days later, the first day of the trial is scheduled, but none of them shows up, since they are suffering from »collective appendicitis«. They do show up in the club Paradiso the same day, at the squatters' court, pronouncing judgment on speculators, the city, the police and the law (with demonstration afterwards).

In the six intervening weeks of city-wide meetings a change in course was decided for in reaction to the Vogelstruys, among other things. A direct confrontation with the riot police could be prevented by placing evictions in an economic context; from now on they had to start costing the authorities as much money as possible. The strategy was two-pronged: on one hand the house had to pose enough of a threat that the police would be forced to deploy the maximum amount of personnel and equipment. On the other, the riot had to be got under way in order to do as much damage as possible to banks, the city, real estate agents and other nasties. Thus the concept of the scripted riot was born, a logically planned havoc under their own control. It would speculate on police strategy, involve the media in the game and dictate to the people who respond to the emergency alarm what they had to do. The squatters needed to go through a learning process to stop hanging around the squat; they had to cut the tie to the local experience and spread throughout the city.

In a long series of city and neighborhood meetings they talked over what ought to be done, and when, about the next approaching eviction: the PH-kade. At the same time, however, it stayed unclear whether the house was actually going to be defended from the inside. This was used as a threat, but no one could determine whether it was intended for media agents or fellow squatters. The PH-kade's having been set up as a »political squat« was now taking its toll. In preparing for the squat in April no one had worried about putting together a stable group of residents, and this did much to divide the discussion over the manner of defense. Some raised the issue of the loss of public support, while others prepared a military response and started training programs in order to be better able to fight on the street with the riot police.

The result of the confusion was that the first gauge of the new strategy was a smashing success, and the second a complete failure. The barricades inside and the ammunition on the edge of the roof made all the papers, and the police turned out that afternoon with »2000 men, armored cars, armored bulldozers, mechanical shovels, three hydraulic cranes, two tower wagons, two water cannons, and dozens of vehicles, marksmen armed with automatic rifles equipped with telescopic sights, and a military police unit equipped with batons, shields, pistols and bulletproof vests.« The squatters disappeared at the last minute through a hole in the wall to the church next door and had a toast in the parsonage. At the PHK at the moment of the eviction only one squatter was inside. He read out a statement with a megaphone: »We will keep our struggle in our own hands and determine ourselves

how and when it will take place.« But then, on the street, all the interested parties who had responded en masse to the media reports, expecting the squat to be defended inside and out, were run over and beaten up by a line of motorcycle cops. The panic was further heightened by the new police tactic of arrest squads who suddenly appeared out of the crowd of everyday people and drove vans into passersby, mostly tourists. In the squat the function of the indoor crew was taken over by select delegates from the mainstream Dutch media. A newspaper: »With Johan van der Keuken and two sound people were a reporter from the VARA, three people from Veronica, one from the Nieuwe Revu, an editor from the Nieuwe Linie and a reporter from the Haarlems Dagblad. Other media, according to the squatters, are unreliable.« The media they'd wanted to use to make fools of the police had taken over the situation and could now be deployed by the authorities in an advertising campaign for their equipment. The group who'd been beat up in front of the house, according to plan, should have marched through the city to go after the real culprits. But the fact that you could lure the police into such a spectacle by means of a squat was so amazing that everyone stayed to watch, while according to the agreement they were allowed to do almost nothing. Unknown rioters took over the enterprise from the squatters, who were merely wandering around in frustration, forced to acknowledge that the riot was going according to the police's script.

The ex-Vogelstruys arrestees were there that day. »When I got out I went straight over to the Keyser,« Max recalls. »I'm back! But everyone there was stressing out getting ready for the PH eviction. Actually I could better have left. The day of the PH kade I was walking around in the middle of all those events, but I was more like a zombie there, I just didn't get it anymore, forget it.« Joep: »For the first time I threw something again at a riot van - a banana. But that PH eviction kind of went over my head. It all seemed artificial. It was completely different from the Struys.«

After none of them showed up on August 20, the first day of the trial was set for Monday, September 8th. The night before, a small group squatted the Vogelstruys for the third time.

There was a meeting in the basement of the Groote Keyser on Sunday the 7th. Frits: »The people were very diverse. We arranged everything in a couple of hours, mainly ladders. We couldn't alert anyone before it happened. That was because sometime in June Herengracht 242 was evicted and the resquat failed, because it turned out the plan had leaked after a long meeting and the building was full of police. We just boarded the front door shut with boards and nails straight through the frame. Then we held a spontaneous demonstration. It was a first, hesitant foray. Max, I believe, smashed in windows at the Greek airline because he'd had bad experiences with them, and at the South African VERKEERS office. Hein thought we shouldn't have discussed it, that the six of us who went out for some fresh air during the meeting could have just retaken it. That was why for the second resquat of the Vogelstruys a select company was called for, though pretty broad, from Hein to Michiel, about 30 people.«

The resquat of the Vogelstruys was to be a political squat, the option of occupancy really played no role, and it wasn't organized by a residents' group. The chance of a speedy eviction was too great for that. »We got in three ways on the Singel side, with two ladders and through the front door. Smashed in a windowpane, that was easy, and the front door just opened, but it was chained. Hein was standing there pounding on it dazedly, while others were very simply unhooking it from inside. On the first floor on the Singel we discovered a squat interior, but somewhat neater, the house owner's equivalent of the minimal table, chair and bed.« Michiel found it bizarre that plastic sheets had been hung up as walls. Frits: »Three people were sitting in there. They were taken outside. Then the alarm was phoned out, but the response wasn't too good. That night was damn scary and tense, not fun at all. I was afraid.« The police blocked off the canal, but received instructions from above at 11:45 that they were not allowed to take action and had to withdraw. Frits: »That night for the first time I heard people say that they felt abused during the action like livestock. In Paper for the Spiderweb #7 a few people wrote of their frustrations: »We were drummed into action for something when we hadn't been involved in

the planning or decision-making; we didn't really know what the goal of the action actually was, when we'd achieved anything, or when to end the action.«

Max, Joep and the others were just having a preparatory meeting with their attorneys when a phone call informed them that the Struys had been resquatted. Max: »Later that night I climbed the ladder inside. It was already a different house than it was in my memory. That whole resquat was sort of unreal. It was strange too, because the two people who'd gone back to the Keyser after the first squat did a whole lot this time. They wanted to make up for it. The resquat was a great starting point for a riot, no more and no less. And that's what it turned out to be, a festive day out.« For Joep it was more a bonus. »It wasn't that serious, but symbolic.«

The trial, which began at 9:00 a.m. the next day, September 8th, only took a few hours. Because the case was so complicated, it was sent on to full court. This was the first of a series of days in court which, on up through appeals, would last two years. Joep: »At the trial we were going to ignore all the accusations and permanently prevent any questions from being directed at us. This DA can't prosecute us! There was an illegal eviction, you guys tried to kill us with lethal tear gas, B-schen is a speculator and this whole trial can't go on! We weren't going to deny the charge either. We'd walk away if we didn't like it. Who's determining the order here, that was the issue. We tried to be a step ahead of the normal process every time, by telling the DA before he started, hold it! You can't have the floor here. They couldn't stand us continually enforcing those things. The attorneys just had to make sure that we could keep the floor if the DA protested. Or like when Toorenaar was subpoenaed. When he finally showed up, I asked him questions till the judge said I shouldn't interrogate him so harshly, because it was making the guy so nervous.« About the conclusion of one arbitrary session that had lasted eight hours, a paper said, »B. packed up his colorful knitting, eliciting Mr. Slagter's remark that 'Bas may be the only one who did anything useful today.'«

Max: »The trials were a mixture of kind of being concerned with the political background and making a gigantic chaos out of it. The last day was brilliant. I had made a flyer that was distributed in the courtroom: 'Vogelstruys almost done for...? If the main culprits aren't nailed now, something's gonna blow.' Gerrit could puke anytime he wanted to. In the afternoon break we stuffed him with tons of fast food. Then he went back up to the gallery. When it became clear that they weren't complying with our demands, we stood up and Joep started to tear up old law books and throw them across the courtroom. It was full of security, they suspected something was going to happen. Suddenly - Bwah! this stream of vomit spews from the gallery into the room. The presiding judge turns bright red, grabs his gavel and thud! The session is closed. They didn't get Gerrit. When we came outside we saw that Bas had taken the judge's gavel. I went back again a lot later to watch during the appeal, but then the Bischens had finally shown up as witnesses after all and those guys sitting there made me so sick that I left. I wasn't into it anymore.« Joep would finally be acquitted and get back the jacket he'd stuck under the neighbor's bed (his comment: »That was class justice.«). Max and the others got two months, Bas four.

After that first morning of the trial, September 8th, the Vogelstruys was still resquatted. Max: »After the trial we were sitting on the Rozengracht in the sun drinking wine. Suddenly someone from the Staatslieden district comes biking by: 'They're evicting the Vogelstruys.' Gradually I was back in the mood and we walked over there just wearing t-shirts.« Frits: »I'd gone to the university for coffee and a sandwich, because at the squat we had plenty of ladders, but no coffee. I came biking back on the Singel side and right at that moment I see a guy falling down, jumping. He landed OK, but was in a total panic. They were being evicted from the roof again. I sprinted away to phone through the alarm. Four people were picked up inside the squat; the remaining four escaped from the second floor with the ladder. Max: »It was very spontaneous. People came running from the Singel. We had taken a beam off a flat boat, beat in the basement door and in with the smoke bombs. It wasn't so clear exactly

what we were trying to do.« The alarm was quickly spread, and on Singel and Herengracht the police, who were in the minority, were forced back in charges and hand-to-hand combat. Riot vans started driving into rock-throwers and lots of tear gas was fired. Once again, the police had misassessed things, and only prepared 200 riot police. City Radio had come on the air at 5:00 as usual and was reporting live from the riot. Home from work, Karel turned on the radio: »I hear a description of a big fight and I'm wondering, which was this, the PHK, April 30? Turns out it's live. I jumped right on my bike and rushed on over.«

The riot script for which had been developed in the abstract for the PH kade was suddenly brought into practice with great success, to the surprise of the gathered squatters. They said farewell to the place without difficulty and began a trek through the city. They spontaneously let go of the battle in and around the fortress of la Vauban and switched over effortlessly to the principles of movement war. These date back even further than Vauban's fort-based defense; Sun Tzu had already described them in 500 B.C. in his handbook, »The Art of Making War,« with the central thesis, »Keep your army in constant movement. In war it all comes down to speed.«

Frits: »It became an expedition. The group in front was yelling 'Right to live!' We'd yell that and then we'd go in a certain direction and the others would follow. It was eerily quiet in the group. Except for that 'right to live' there was no yelling or slogans. It wasn't a demonstration, either; you were doing it for yourself. At one point the group got surrounded and had to go straight through an office building to the next canal.« Max: »Right after the eviction a bunch of people went to Bischen. Windows out, smoke bombs in. Turned out it was his son's birthday. He was having a kiddie party. So all the little kids come out, with party hats and everything. Huh? What the hell is this? Oh well, guess we'll just keep walking.«

The Free Keyser came on the air and sowed confusion among the police by reporting that another house had been squatted somewhere else. On the Rokin, a barricade was built out of three builder's huts and set on fire. Karel: »When I got there the group was already long gone. I watched the fire for a while and the huge bulldozer that came to push away the barricade. Then I finally ran into people I knew and went into the little streets behind the Spui and around the Struys, catching tear gas grenades and throwing them back. In those days I always had a bag ready with riot accessories, scarf, gloves, gas mask, poker, and I had that with me. In between we went back to the Spui to watch the news and then we just kept going.«

As the Rokin was being swept clear, the windows of the Bijenkorf department store a few hundred meters away went in; the group then hiked onward to resquat the PH-kade, »but a column of riot police foiled the march on the luxury apartments.« On the Dam, meanwhile, the different groups that had been dispersed were getting back together. It was dark by now; in the Damstraat all the garbage cans were on fire and a line of motorcycle cops who had been drummed up in great haste stood before the Rokin. The windows went in at the Royal Palace and the display windows at department store Peek en Cloppenburg were plundered; not just the suede jackets but also the mannequins, disrobed, were brought outside. Press voices: »Members of the squatters' movement who witnessed the looting tried to limit the damage by throwing as many things as they could back into the broken windows. The windows of the Deuschle-Benger lingerie shop in the Paleisstraat were completely demolished. The owner had to dismantle a clothing rack to barricade his shop. Even the Amsterdam Diamond Center's bulletproof glass was damaged by a rain of small stones.«

Max: »It was really one of those nights, set a dumpster on fire somewhere and then back into the bar. If you lost people, or there were too few of you, you'd go by the Too Narrow bar to have a look, you'd run into a couple of people there. A Duvel, and then, here we go again. The Black Helmet Brigade from the Staatslieden district was around by then, you'd run into them every now and then in the city.

They were geared up for a riot. But it was just a bunch of fragments that spread out.« The motorcycle cops started to drive into the crowd, and people who got cornered against a wall or in a doorway were beat up. It started to drizzle. After the motorcycle cops were lured into a trap in the Kalverstraat and crashed into a dumpster that had been rolled into the street, everyone went home to bed, tired but satisfied. The destruction had been worthwhile; heavy economic damage had been caused.

STOPPED HERE Frits: »After the second Vogelstruys riot, for me it just turned into a game, or a way to blow off steam; it was never serious again. At the PH-kade they said, 'We won't leave'; everyone kept yelling that, but the people did leave, so the phrase instantly became hollow. For me, the Struys was the apotheosis of what had been built up with the Keyser and the Vondelstraat, that determination. In the Vondelstraat and the Keyser it was still very (open)/BLANKO; we didn't know what defense meant. It was big in our minds, but the Struys was where it happened.« The Vogelstruys, which had managed to reunite the squatters who had been driven apart after April 30th in the resquat and defense of the houses on July 3rd, was now, two months later, the point from which the squatters dispersed once more, this time consciously and willfully, in a night of a »GOEIE PUINHOOP.« By the next eviction, the bank expedition strategy was preferred over a scuffle in and around the squat. But to this end, the squat groups had to steamroller over the neighborhood- and house bound local experience that had started it all. The houses themselves, stripped of their excess value of being part of one's »own« space, could be staked in negotiations over purchase, renovation and rent settlements. Threats and use of violence during evictions and other ways of getting into the media were meant to secure a strong position in current or future negotiations. Amidst the realpolitik surrounding the retention of living accommodations, however, some persisted in clinging stubbornly to the local experience, to the mystique of »our« squat.

Max: »It got to be a sort of tradition to go after the Vogelstruys. For years July 3rd has been the date for all kinds of actions. People ran into each other the night before in the neighborhood near the house, with plastic bags and even a molotov cocktail once: 'Oh, you too? Shall we do it together then?' That new owner Cutts was always really the dupe. Demonstrations for arrestees went from the Palace of Justice through the Leidsestraat to the Vogelstruys. Hey, Cutts' car! Bam. Wrecking the video camera was another challenge. Whoever could take that would get to drink free one night in the squat bar.« Frits: »It was endless revenge. Paint was constantly being thrown at it, the locks glued shut. And with a butane gas burner we tried to get through the plastic windows. For five minutes, but it didn't really work. Once we stripped a heavy expensive car parked outside the door. You'd always bike by the Struys, that's what we did then, always keeping an eye on it. One night I saw Cutts getting out of a yellow deux-chevaux. I went to a squat bar and afterward we were going to go throw that car in the canal. We'd already arranged to meet on the doorstep of the Vogelstruys, Joep and I were standing there waiting for the third person, but he didn't show up, he had to discuss his relationship. After a half hour wait the two of us just pushed it in the canal. That was already the second time?*.«

Max: »And then that one neighbor. One time some people rang his doorbell to give him a good punch in the nose. His wife opens the door, and then it's like, aw, forget it. Better luck next time. That guy always got away. Cutts was interviewed: over the years there were 80 attacks on his house, he'd kept count. The Vogelstruys is so central, you almost can't help going past it. All those actions were on the edge between bitterness and playfulness, they're intertwined. A lot of people had trouble with that for a long time, like - they're not rid of us yet. They haven't had it all yet.«

A month after the third Vogelstruys eviction, on October 6, 1980, the city unexpectedly purchased the Groote Keyser. By then the info center in the basement was already open. On September 20 a »protest demonstration« was held. The basement always tried to give the impression that it was developing a multitude of activities: »We give information to the schools, go to the schools, there's a stand with all the new and latest squat information, newspapers, posters, leaflets. There's also what I like to call the

squat museum, the photo exhibitions on evictions and riots. These days there's a reading table with all the weeklies.«

On October 21, two weeks after the purchase, there was to be an official meeting between city and »residents«. Questions like, who will live there, what do we want to do with the basement, and »do we let the radio stay in the G.K.?« were discussed at length beforehand in neighborhood periodicals and other stencilwork. At the city conference (SOK) about the purchase on October 16th, »for the first time, the radio finally came up for discussion,« the Free Keyser wrote later in the squat news. »And how! The meeting was run by a group of hotheads who demanded the instantaneous departure of the transmitter: 'After all, Messchaert could be at the door any minute!' « There was a fear that the squats, now that they were in the hands of the city, still wouldn't be allotted for »young people's housing«, if the radio kept clinging obstinately to its illegal broadcasts out of the Keyser. The neighborhood's discussion piece for the SOK says, »The transmitter will be used as an argument for eviction. The existence of the Free Keyser must be detached from the existence of the Groote Keyser.«

The radio responded to this by broadcasting out of the Keyser for the last time on October 26th, '80, under the motto »Let a thousand antennas bloom«, to become mobile thereafter and transmit from a new neighborhood every day. In their final statement they addressed the lack of a radio culture among squatters: »Criticism of the radio stays limited to catchphrases like: there's too much freaking going on during shows, they blindly encourage violence against the police, there's too much intellectual crap.« They felt that most squatters had risen to the baiting of the press campaign which had been waged against the Groote Keyser since April 30, but »the smear campaign against the radio is in fact a smear campaign against the squat movement, under the pretense that there are good and bad squatters.«

On October 21st, during the talks, which took place on neutral ground, Hein and his people reached an agreement with the city that living cooperatives would move into the Keyser, and the Labor Party was informed that the radio would soon be gone. Max: »There was already a lot of resentment about Hein and the Staatslieden district, how they walked all over people in order to live out their obsession against the Labor Party. And it was them of all people that you saw in the paper sitting at one table with the city officials. It gave us a pretty bad feeling.«

In the final week of October the very last of the campers departed. The cooperative groups had been organized, but hadn't moved into the building yet. The Keyser was empty again. Max: »Then we were like, HET IS MOOI GEWEEST, let's resquat it. A good joke, we'll have a party or something for all the people that were involved before and then we'll leave again, or we'll see what happens. For me it was also a kick (in Hein's leg/poke in ribs): OK, DAN WEET JE DAT.«

A party was planned for the night of October 31 in the basement. In a supplement to the kraakkant (squatters' paper) entitled »Garbage man, can this mess go too?!« one of the party guests wrote later, »The resquat was a counteraction, a punch in the shoulder for the squat movement. The plan was to give a party inside (fun), on the occasion of the fact that the Keyser had been squatted two years on that day (why hadn't that occurred to anyone else, anyway), and to emotionally say farewell to the Keyser, which to us was in fact dead.«

At half past midnight the resquat group of about 25 people rang the front doorbell of the Groote Keyser. A boy they'd never seen before opened the door. The kraakkant version: »He closes the door behind him and tries to run down the street to a nearby house on the Prinsengracht to warn people. On the way the 25 people surround him and push him up against the wall, and under the threat that he'll be beat up if he doesn't, he hands over the front door key.« One of the partygoers wondered, »How is that possible - that guy comes out of the Keyser, sees us standing there and starts to yell, 'The

neo-fascists are here' ...? It was because he didn't know anyone.« The kraakkraant report continues, »The group enters the residential part of the Keyser. The door of the ammunition room is kicked in and it is looted. Walls are splattered with paint (including insults to certain individuals). Others go down to the basement. The entry from the residential part is forced. Then the door to the radio room is destroyed.«

Some people from the radio group had stolen the transmitter earlier that week, unbeknownst to the rest, and had brought it along tonight so they could broadcast again. »Unfortunately we couldn't because the antenna had already been removed from the roof,« explains one of the swipers. »Apparently they wanted to assure the police that there couldn't be any more broadcasting.« The original Keyser-Struys group which had helped organize the resquat/party knew nothing of the internal differences in the radio and was busy somewhere else at the moment. The kraakkraant: »After breaking into the liquor cabinet in the basement, they begin to construct a music system. One of the 'squatters' goes to phone the squat cafes and other such places with the message that there's a big party in the Keyser. Around 3:00 the 'party' begins. The atmosphere is pretty quiet, a little music, some drinking. The people who come because of the phone calls don't notice anything right away either. Maybe it's because they know most of the people there and don't expect anything. People who sense that something is wrong leave without realizing what has actually happened. One more smoke bomb explodes; around four the party dies down.« Max had gotten a bit drunk and went home too.

But then it happened. While a good number of people went to visit the building in a farewell mood and called the party a »resquat« to show that they had made the Keyser's history and wanted to round it off as well, other visitors went much further. A few among them wanted the radio to go on the air that night by hook or by crook. If there was a reason to start transmitting at that hour, it was to force the police into an eviction. They were unable to broadcast, the police stayed out of the picture, and no gang of raging fellow squatters showed up to bounce out the resquatters either, so the energy directed itself at the info center. Says the garbage can supplement, »There was no advance plan to destroy things. In retrospect, however, it had to happen, in light of the discontentment of various people, the way people blow off that kind of steam, and the situation at the end of the average party.« The kraakkraant summarizes: »Doors kicked in, paint all over everything, poster exhibition totally destroyed, photography exhibition half demolished, the arrestees' archive mixed up on the floor and partly ruined, fire extinguishers emptied of their contents, kitchen stuff spread all over the floor. The exterior of the Keyser was covered in slogans too ('resquatted', 'the Groote Keyser is ours', 'Frankenstein free«).« In addition quite a few things were taken from the house.

There was no way the chapter of total determination could noiselessly segue into practical living. They wanted to say farewell to the border-crossing chaos, fun and vacancy in their own way. When the Vogelstruys group left the Keyser at the end of May, ready to plunge into the next adventure, the Hein group had started a reverse movement to bring the fort back within the bounds of civilization. »Enthusiastic new groups are taking over the HANDEL and beginning the seemingly endless cleanup. Moldy dogshit from the previous inhabitants, bedsprings solidly anchored in even the smallest room, and trash, lots of trash. Anyone who wanders through the desolate halls can see the kind of injuries that were inflicted. Only in a few places can you call it a house; mostly it reminds me of the cold bunkers in the dunes.« (from: Keyser's newest KLEREBENDE). The intensive wilderness-living of the early months of 1980 was banished in the summer so people could concentrate on filling the spaces politically. One of the revelers vented his spleen about this later in the kraakkraant: »What's become of the Keyser now? The political face of 'the squat movement' for the bourgeois. The basement's been neatly painted white, all the great graffiti's gone! They're displaying to the outside world, in a tidy way, what squatting and everything means, what it's about! Who really knows?«

By negotiation time in mid-October, a vacuum had arisen between occupation and ordinary occupancy. This was the squatters' last chance to make the squat movement disappear, under their own direction, in the same place where it had begun. But at the same time the Keyser had become the symbol of the power squatters had managed to build up by thwarting eviction for so long. The squat spokespeople arrived at the negotiations table with this air of invulnerability (to the surprise of both parties, everyone was satisfied with the outcome, and both were able to claim it as a victory). It became apparent that power, once obtained, could be used only to return comfortably to organized boredom. The resquat and demolition were the group's failed attempt to throw off the power which they couldn't avoid building up with a symbol like the Keyser. The slightly foggy rationale behind it was that »JE DIREKT AFZETTEN against something« should not be aimed at going on as long as possible - the goal is »getting away from it all«. In that case, you still end up back in the same daily grind, but something has changed.

The resquatters wrote: »The differences between us have existed a long time. Since April 30th, actually. Some people live for the future. For what's necessary, what's good for the outside world. Proving yourself, showing you can do something. This is manifested in material things (the project movement). Everyone knows the people who were there on Friday at the resquat were people who have done a whole lot for the Keyser. But they don't want to adapt to the future.« These people feel misused by »a small group of REGELNEVEN«: »That manipulation, calculation, organizing different groups to achieve your own goal, they're good at that, you have to give them that.« A later kraakkrant explained the original endeavor this way: »From out of the situation created by the Keyser, leading a life that's more focused on yourself, dealing with things in a different way, discovering new things. Not living according to the activism you're doing, but activism according the life you lead, or want to lead. Not living and working based on the future, but just seeing every day if the sun's come up or if the bomb's dropped!« Don't create conflicts, meet them.«

The group that cleans up and refurbishes the Keyser under Hein's leadership for the second time the day after the resquat turns out a precise inventory of the total economic damage (fl 4883,25). For a full year, the symbol Groote Keyser had derived its intensity from the fact that people had attached their own fate to that of the building. From now on that was over. It acquired another value, which was expressed in guilders. A sample from the list: »Destroyed: chest, swinging door panes, tool room pane, coat rack (fl 35), burlap, a steel cabinet, a wooden cabinet (fl 50), radio, typewriter, fluorescent tubes, box of spoons (fl 50), 30 packages of cups.« And stolen, among other things, were »three hammers, acetylene torch and hose, 15 spotlights (fl 150), two extension reels, five cans of paint, gas tank, at least 70 lps, speakers (fl 100), six beer crates (three full, three empty), four containers of juice, six packages of sugar, coffee creamer (fl 10), cleaning supplies, five Vondelstraat riot brochures (fl 37,50).«