## Woodsquat: A Public for Citizens

**Introduction**

The idea that political apathy and lack of democratic participation poses a concern to Canadian society is a common message in mainstream media, as we hear reports that at all levels of government elections voter turnouts are less than before, political party memberships are on the decline, and volunteerism within civil society is waning. Within this prognosis of democratic participation the official spaces of politics seem to be emptying, or at least, they appear to be less meaningful in a popular sense. However, if we were to shift our view of democracy a little away from government political institutions we might see many people engaged in practices of citizenship. This of course, depends on our definition of citizenship. Current literature in the area of citizenship studies has argued that citizenship is a process and it is multiple, as well as the more common assumption that it is a formal status within a political community, which includes certain rights and responsibilities (Brodie 2000, 2002; Siltanen 2002; Staisulus 2002). In particular, it has been argued that citizenship be seen as a relationship between the status of citizenship and the practice of citizenship (Isin and Wood 1999). This theorizing on citizenship comes in the wake of changes brought about by a global political economy that has transformed the relationships between states, citizens, and territories, while the consolidation of

neo-liberal governance practices have altered assumptions of rights and responsibilities within nation-states. In such a context, teasing out the practices and statuses of citizenship is crucial to understanding the limits and possibilities of democracy.

In this paper I propose to take up this theoretical debate of citizenship and democratic participation through the analysis of an urban social housing movement. In 2002 a housing squat in Vancouver, BC, called Woodsquat, was used as a tactic to publicize poverty and homelessness, as well to fight for the social rights of housing and challenge changes to the social welfare state. In analyzing this squat as situated within the contested grounds of declining social rights in Canada, I argue that Woodsquat was a practice of citizenship created within a public sphere where questions of democratic inclusion were raised. Further, analysis of the squat demonstrates the current limits of citizenship in terms of the relationship between status and practice, as well as points to future possibilities of citizenship as a practice and status that expresses democratic participation in Canada. In the end, I argue that when analyzed through the activities of social movements, an intimate relationship between democracy, citizenship, and the public sphere can be seen, and that these concepts take on a dynamic and contested character.

The framework of the paper is as follows: first, I contextual Woodsquat within the history of the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, after which I outline Woodsquat as a practice of citizenship within the context of changing citizenship rights, particularly social rights, within Canada. Next, I turn to theoretical

literature to further elaborate citizenship as a relationship between practice and status, and to suggest that Woodsquat was an example of 'insurgent citizenship'. Lastly, I link the concepts of democracy, citizenship, and the public sphere to argue that Woodsquat was an example of a counter-public sphere, and as such a site of democratic citizenship. However, before getting to the meat and bones, there issues of sources and method to clarify. First, the source of my reading of the squat at Woodward's is taken from the *West Coast Line* edition *Woodsquat*, edited by Aaron Vidaver (2003-4). This is a collection of over 60 pieces written by squatters, mostly during the time of the squat. While the internal dynamic of the squat could be analyzed, my interest is the external appearance of its common messages, rhetorical practices, and political actions. Consequently, I present a cohesive picture of Woodsquat within the context of citizenship, where the squat is the unit of analysis, not the individuals within it. Further, while Woodsquat is open to many perspectives and means of analysis,[1] I approach this event as a discursive site, highlighting the ways in which the actions of the squat and the identity of the squatters are discussed and elaborated upon within the written texts of the Woodsquat. For this paper, then, it is public words that matter.

**Contextualizing Woodsquat**

*"This movement is a positive rebellion. The acts of destruction waged upon the poor must be met with equal force. We have tried these tactics of peaceful demonstration. We have tried the participatory act of voting and asking for change. We have tried all idealistic forms of resistance but to no avail. This monster of capitalist imperialism must be stopped now. Gordon Campbell is your local representative of a system that wants you dead if it means a little more dollar in his pocket. We need to show Gordon and all his aging white male bosses that British Columbia will not be dominated for foreign profit. We must act directly in equal proportion to the acts of*

---

[1] It should also be noted that while contrasting views of the squat can be found in the mainstream press and government responses, this paper is intent on understanding citizenship from the perspective of the squat, the squatters, and their supporters – that is, citizenship as it is seen from a view looking up, not down. Again, fuller comparative analysis is needed, but it awaits another paper.

*domination and degradation to our bodies and environment. We need to put our bodies on the line as the most useful tool we have in defense of what is right. When the earth is attacked you are attacked. When someone attacks you, you have the right to defend yourself. The best defense against a system that attacks from behind a wall is an offense of breaking down their wall and reclaiming the power over our lives that is rightfully ours. We must act before all forms of resistance are restricted even more. …*
*We must fight the battle in the streets for real justice and eventual peace."*
*(Nathan 2003-4: 34)*

This part of a speech made at a demonstration during *Woodsquat*, and is worth considering for a moment. It condenses the issues explored in this paper. It situates the squat in terms of a transforming global economy where the governments appear as accomplices to 'capitalist imperialism', rather than as defenders of national boundaries or protectors of their populations. It discusses tactics used to determine and defend one's way of life, such as peaceful demonstrations, voting, and resistance. It suggests participatory spaces where one can claim the power over one's life is shrinking, and points to the street as the place where struggles for justice and peace are waged. It stresses that these are issues of survival, where the environment and the bodies of the poor are at stake. In a political game of domination such as this, what are the options available? The squat was obviously not performed or participated in lightly, and the consequences of not participating were as dire as those for participating. The history of struggles over citizenship has always been this serious.

So what is the history surrounding Woodsquat? While all facts are open to interpretation, a brief outline of the events can contextualize the squat for those who may not have been present. First, the building. Woodward's is an iconic building in the neighbourhood of the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. It opened as a department store in 1903, closed in 1993, and gained heritage status

in 1996. Woodward's was slated for social housing by the provincial NDP government in the 1990s; however, because of a series of unsuccessful attempts to secure private sector partnership for its redevelopment the building remained empty for just under a decade. In the spring of 2001 the Liberal party won the B.C. provincial election. This government put a freeze on many social housing development projects, with Woodward's being one such building.[2]

During the week of September 14th, 2002 a series of protests were organized against 'the Liberal/Corporate coalition' and their 'cuts and inhumane agenda' (Leyden 2003-4: 30). Squatters entered the Woodward's building on September 14th. A week later the police evicted some 100 odd squatters, forcibly arresting 54 people who remained in the building. These people appeared in court the following day. On September 22nd a tent-city was erected on the sidewalk surrounding the perimeter of the Woodward's building. That night the police cleared the squatters off the sidewalks, confiscated or destroyed the property that was not quickly claimed, and arrested 10 people. Another tent-city was erected, which stayed in place until December 14th, 2002 – 92 days after the building was first entered. During this time a more socially progressive municipal government was elected.[3] The squat ended with the city helping to temporarily shelter some

---

[2] This part of the history is taken from the City of Vancouver's webpage, "The Story of Woodward's," (http://vancouver.ca/corpsvcs/realestate/woodwards/story.htm). Being such a large building, the redevelopment of Woodward's has always proposed a mix of commercial and residential components. The following sequence of events is taken from *Woodsquat*, and while the history of events does not conflict with that of the city, the interpretation or emphasis does. Again, I am more concerned to tell the story from the squatters' perspective, though much would be gained from an analysis comparing these two conflicting understandings of the Woodward's squat. This, however, is beyond the scope of this paper.

[3] The municipal election was held in November 2002, with the Coalition of Progressive Electors (COPE) forming the majority on council. Social issues, such as a proposed safe-injection site and social housing in the Downtown Eastside, topped election debates during the campaigning period.

of the squatters and promising meaningful community participation in a consultation process for the redevelopment of the Woodward's building.

During the tenure of Woodsquat, squatters comprised of social housing activists and homeless persons lived on the sidewalks of the Woodward's building. Large demonstrations of support were held. A communal kitchen was in operation. At organizational meetings committees were established to address such common issues as security, cleaning, and food preparation. As much as possible, the group ran on non-hierarchical and consensus based decisions. Spokespersons were elected, though they were not assumed to be the leaders in the squat. The principles and actions of the squat adhered to non-violent protest, though many of the squatters experienced police brutality and harassment. Reading through the accounts in *Woodsquat*, one is struck by the diversity of opinions, experiences, and interests of the writers. While consensus was a principle, there was some disagreement about tactics, roles, and expectations; however attempts were made to work through issues of difference and present a common front to the attacks on the poor by the Liberal provincial government. The message presented was unanimous: 'social housing now'.

While Woodsquat was a significant social action, it is just one point in a long story of the Downtown Eastside. There is no end to the narratives of Woodward's (its rise and fall), social activism and radicalism in the neighbourhood, or the intersection of these two. Many of these stories have involved themes such as (un)employment, social housing, capitalist development, poverty, vice, gentrification, and a community struggling to define

itself beyond its externally imposed stereotypes and assumed pathologies (Sommers and Blomely 2002).[4] These themes found continuity at Woodsquat, and continue to within the neighbourhood, as the land and cityscape dramatically transforms. I analyze the story of Woodsquat keeping in mind the long history of the neighbourhood and the changing political climate of the province. More specifically, I think through this event in order to understand the limits and possibilities of citizenship in the contemporary moment.

## Contesting Citizenship(s): Social rights of membership and neo-liberal times

*"With the Campbell government viciously attacking the poor it is crucial that we stand up for the rights of people to be housed. Squatting is one way that we can engage in this fight."*
*(Wulwik 2003-4: 19)*

*"The fight for social housing is also a fight for social justice. The squat in the Woodwards building is only one example of actions that will be taken to ensure and restore the integrity of public services like social housing BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY."*
*(Learn 2003-4: 38)*

Woodsquat is among many protests against the reorganization of the welfare state within Canada. The squatters' attempt at restoring (if not extending) social rights to housing, welfare, and social services administered within a public infrastructure are ideologically grounded in the legacy of the 'postwar consensus', where the economic, political and social were negotiated together through the state. Though this was always a source of contention and struggle, the nation-state managed the national economy in order to stabilize the financial environment, redistribute income, and ensure a safety net for citizens (Brodie 2000: 111; Siltanen 2002). However, privileges of the nation have declined as "The balance of responsibility among states, markets and communities is being

---

[4] Assumed pathologies would include drug addiction, mental disabilities, physical disabilities, and generally being poor.

reconfigured in the face of pressures from, among others things, processes of globalization and ideological realignment" (Jensen 1997: 628). Janine Brodie argues that with globalization, "The foundational building blocks of the Keynesian welfare state have been 'hollowed out', stripped of their promise of political emancipation and collective well-being, while the very spaces for liberal democratic politics are no longer particularly apparent or efficacious" (Brodie 2000: 110). Not only has the role of the welfare state changed, the role of nation-states have been 'unsettled' as states, territories, and citizens have been reconfigured by "economic, political, technological, and cultural transformations," that have brought with them "the decline of social rights, and the hegemony of neo-liberal governance" (Stasiulis 2002: 365). States no longer necessarily secure the nation, as their political power has been dispersed, moving 'up to the transnational, out to the private sector and down to the local' (Brodie 2000: 110). Within such an environment, the language of social rights has been disconnected from the status of citizenship within the nation-state.

While for a time in the postwar period there appeared to be a more equitable balance between social, economic, and political rights, this has been neither natural nor universal. T.H. Marshall distinguishes between civil, political and social rights, suggesting that the latter is the last to develop and often remains subordinate to the other two elements of citizenship (Marshall 1992 [1950]: 17). The difficulty in reconciling social rights with civil and political rights is due in part to the oppositional character of the principles of equality (in terms of rights and duties entitled by membership within a polity) and inequality that is inherent in a system based on class. As such, "in the twentieth century,

citizenship and the capitalist class system have been at war" (Marshall 1992 [1950]: 18). This articulation of the rights of citizenship is tied to a conception of the modern nation-state, which we are seeing now as vulnerable to the forces of globalizing economies and governance. Under such conditions, the (neo-) liberal citizenship regime in Canada has intensified, becoming 'meaner and leaner' (Siltanen 2002: 405), with social welfare sacrificed (Brodie 2002). Securing the entitlement of social rights within the nation-state, therefore, requires political struggle not only to extend the privilege of rights but also struggles to recover losses that have already occurred, and a concerted effort to defend rights currently held. Such was the intent at Woodsquat.

*The Six Demands of the Coalition of Woodwards Squatters and Supporters*
*1. Develop Woodwards as social housing immediately.*
*(There must be an allotment of housing in the building for aboriginal people equal to or greater than the percentage of aboriginal people in the Downtown Eastside.)*
*2. Reverse the cuts to social housing and all social services.*
*3. Draft a civic anti-vacancy by-law to seize and convert empty, abandoned buildings into social housing.*
*4. Full disclosure of all information regarding the proposed sale and development of the building.*
*5. The Federal government must fund and support the development of aboriginal business in the proposed commercial storefronts on the ground floor of Woodwards. These storefronts must also include an urban native self-governing office with drop-in / support services and culturally sensitive native liaison workers from the community.*
*6. Decent and dignified immediate shelter for all homeless squatters forced from Woodwards and asked to leave the sidewalk in front of the building.*
*(Krebs 2003-4:42-43)*

The stakes involved at the Woodward's squat were rights to affordable social housing. What was less clear was whose responsibility this was. In line with trends in neo-liberal governance, the provincial government stepped back from a redistributive and administrative role within social services and programs. It froze social housing projects. It cut welfare rates. The state appeared set against providing assistance for the poor in the province. Yet, the demands issued by the

squatters suggest that they believed it was at least partially the state's responsibility to assist in the welfare of its citizens. They demanded that social housing be provided, that social services be restored, and that they be made aware of proposed sales of the Woodward's building. Further, the squatters demanded that the federal government recognize its responsibility to Aboriginal people, many of whom were homeless in the Downtown Eastside. The squatters took responsibility upon themselves to directly and publicly pressure the government to play its part within a social democracy.[5] The primary point of these demands was the status of social rights. The squatters asserted that citizenship entailed the right to housing. Yet, this appeal to social rights held no resonance within the neo-liberal agenda. The government made housing a private problem, offloading social responsibility to the municipality, neighbourhood, and individuals.

> *"The Woodwards Squat was, and is, both about challenging the depletion of personal and community building resources by the demands of wage labour and business profit. And Woodwards is about healing the damage this insidious dynamic has created in our lives. The basic unit of this healing process is space; land.*
> *Denying us access to a land base, to house ourselves, is to deny us the rest of our lives.*
> *If we have no place to lay down in safety to rest and no food to nourish our bodies and no community to build our spirits, we have no ground to work from.*
> *… And it must be recognized that we are not asking the affluent sectors of society to give us charity to help us fix our own mistakes, we are demanding that the affluent sectors of society take responsibility for the detrimental effects their affluence has on our lives,*
> *and to compensate us for the losses we and our families and our communities have suffered.*
> *We are taking responsibility for our own needs using the only resources left available to us: waste spaces, garbage materials and our creativity."*
> *(Tooley 2003-4: 151)*

---

[5] By 'social democracy' I mean a democratic nation-state, with a redistributive element, which includes provisions for social security and welfare (that is, social rights) such as public education, healthcare, and so on, which would have been more characteristic of Canada in the postwar period.

As a tactic[6] in a fairly popular movement for social housing, Woodsquat's alternative mode of political participation posed a challenge to the Liberal government in B.C. The squat made the issue of homelessness a public matter, exposing the exclusion of the poor from conventional political and social processes and institutions. In terms of participation, the use of direct actions to address the issues of poverty and need that affected individuals, neighbourhoods, and communities demonstrated an interested, creative, and capable public that could look after its own. In establishing a squat to shelter homeless people, the squatters assumed a position of responsibility that further put under question the legitimacy of the government. The squat was a 24 hour message of opposition to the policies of the Liberals. It publicized the effects of Liberal cuts to welfare and social housing. Further, the squat publicly charged the government with complicity in foreign interests that left communities vulnerable throughout the province. They also accused it of enacting policies that paved the way for the gentrification of the Downtown Eastside.[7] These direct actions and public messages of the squat clashed with official understandings of citizenship, which preferred private voters to speaking participants.

---

[6] It should be noted that there are at least two types of squat: those that are movements unto themselves, such has been in case in the Netherlands, and those that are used as a strategy within social housing movements (Pruijt 2003). Woodsquat, while a longer lasting squat, identified itself as a political tactic within a larger movement for social housing.

[7] Of particular concern during the squat was the money the provincial government was putting into a bid for the 2010 Olympic winter games to be held in Vancouver. Such policies suggest a relationship between globalizing political economy in B.C., Liberal policies of social housing in the Downtown Eastside, and gentrification. I only point to this relationship as its analysis is beyond the scope of this paper; however, intersections of this relationship in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver have been thoughtfully argued elsewhere. See in particular articles by Sommers and Blomley and Smith and Derksen in *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* (2002), as well as Sommers' piece in *Woodsquat* (20-28). For a discussion of globalization and the transformation of a different (wealthier) neighbourhood in Vancouver, see Mitchell (1997).

Woodsquat was a concentrated and highly visible political opposition to the social policies of the Liberal government. As such, the squat was exposed to police brutality, harassment and state ambivalence even as public support grew. A squatter states,

> the Liberal Government sent the cops in after us because we challenged their stronghold on the political situation in British Columbia. … The opposition to the Liberal Government was in Woodwards. Even more important to Campbell, the opposition was rising in the streets, the city and the province around the Woodwards Squat. Unable to break the squat with threats and unwilling to meet to negotiate because they underestimated the power of the people in the squat, the Liberals had no choice but to attack the squatters with force. They tried to scare people away from the budding movement for social housing, tried to alienate the squatters from the people in the rest of the province, but they failed (Drury 2003-4: 55).

The message of the squat was indeed having an effect locally and beyond. However, as the squatters were trying to act in proportion to the violence against the poor by government policy (Nathan 2003-4: 34), the Liberals were more than matching the squatters' actions with the forces of the state. With the squat's popularity came police presence. With their victories in some areas came defeats in others. Though in no way can one say that the squatters' political power was equal to the government, the attention with which the government addressed the squatters suggests a perceived threat to the neo-liberal hegemony.

Whether or not Woodsquat was successful in having the specifics of its demands met, it was a powerful demonstration of citizenship within the context of a transforming environment of social rights and state responsibilities. The squatters engaged in political practices as they provided make-shift housing and voiced their opposition to the political practices of the government. They struggled to have their say in what the entitlements would be in the political

communities in which they lived. They demanded social rights and claimed a building for social housing. A relationship between citizenship as a practice and citizenship as a status with particular rights and responsibilities is evident in these actions at Woodsquat. Citizenship was practiced through direct action, voicing demands, and challenging exclusions to state politics based on class biases. The status under question was the entitlements of social and political membership in Vancouver, B.C., Canada. The entitlements of membership within a political community, which is to say the rights of citizenship, are the results of practices by those involved in struggles to define, alter, and expand what it means to be a citizen. Such is the meaning and activity of democratic citizenship.

**Dialectic Movements of Citizenship**

> *"The rich in this society don't want to see the poverty they create.*
> *They don't want to face the consequences of their privilege.*
> *They don't want to see the clear cuts through old-growth forests that make their furniture and their mansions. They don't want to see the people starving, while their grocer throws unsaleable food in the trash. They don't want to squeegee kids washing the windows on their SUVs.*
> *They want to ignore their problems.*
> *The time when they could get away with their ignorance with impunity is over.*
> *The class war is just beginning, and poor people will fight back.*
> *We will rub our poverty in their faces and on their windows,*
> *we will not let them get away with this brutality any longer.*
> *The retreat is over."*
> *(Forsythe 2003-4: 145)*

> *"This is your neighbourhood.*
> *Be Bold or Move to Suburbia."*
> *(Rennie Marketing System)[8]*

The redevelopment of Woodward's was highly contested within the community of the Downtown Eastside, the city of Vancouver, and to some extent, in the

---

[8] These are two advertising slogans for the marketing of Woodward's condos, by Rennie Marketing Systems (2005-2006), http://www.woodwardsdistrict.com/. The first appears on the homepage of its website, while 'Be bold or move to the suburbia' was on signs on the building. Two other slogans have been: 'Intellectual property' which is on both the website and the building and 'Community' which was only on the building for a period of time.

province of B.C. The future of the site, felt many, would indicate the direction that the neighbourhood would take. As well, the development of Woodward's revealed larger commitments to the economy, politics, history, and culture of the neighbourhood. There were the proponents of 'revitalization' and the opponents of 'gentrification' (Blomley 2004; Smith and Derksen 2002). Beyond the specific politics of the squat and the issue of social housing, the fate of the Woodward's building pointed to a struggle amongst local residents, business owners, and prospective buyers over the possible influx of a different class of folks to the area. As such, many groups were voicing their reasonings and desires for the future development of Woodward's, both within and outside democratic channels. The squatters were concerned about the displacement of poor people in the community due to a lack of social housing. Engaged in political tactics to make audible these marginalized voices, Woodsquat was everywhere – in the courts, in meetings of the municipal government, and in the streets. They sought out anywhere that they could effectively participate as democratic citizens.

To invoke 'democratic citizenship' is to highlight an individual's participation and identity within a group, usually assumed to be the nation-state, though as in the case of Woodsquat, it may also involve a city and a community. As an active identity, citizenship is connected with issues of belonging to a particular group, the rights and responsibility of belonging, and the way in which people and actions are deemed legitimate (or judged) within and beyond that group. Within a legal-political understanding of citizenship (i.e. equality under the law and the franchise), belonging and legitimacy find their most powerful judge within the nation-state. People apply for citizenship, and are accepted or denied. Some are

jailed for failing to act as proper citizens, while others are rewarded with official appointments and other forms of recognition. However, when membership within a nation-state is regarded as the epitome of citizenship it gives the appearance of citizenship as a stable status and a passive practice. It obscures other forms of political, cultural, and social actions and relationships, through containing them within the gaze of the nation-state's institutionalized understandings of the political, cultural, and social.

A static conception of citizenship erases the history of struggles to be citizens of the state and to have the state reflect the desires of the people. It also ignores how group identities leads to new claims for citizenship. Engin Isin and Patricia Wood (1999) argue that "There is certainly a tension between the universal aspirations of citizenship and particularistic claims of identity. Nevertheless, since citizenship has never been universal, it is more appropriate to interpret different formation of group identities as claims for recognition of citizenship rights" (Isin and Wood 1999: 20). Here lies the tension between citizenship as a status and a practice, where citizenship is not only granted (by the state), it is also claimed (by the people). When viewed solely as a legal-political status under a nation-state system, the historical and dynamic aspects of citizenship are overlooked, and struggles like the one over the fate of Woodward's and the Downtown Eastside are muted.

If democracy is to be a dynamic and participatory concept found in the activities of members of a democratic body, then, the concept of citizenship needs to be broad enough to include the relationship it has with the politics of identity and

difference. Between the issues of identity and difference, democracy as a matter of exclusion and inclusion are contested. Further, this concept needs to incorporate the politics of social movements that push the limits of citizenship in order to acknowledge practices and statuses. This should not be radical, if we consider democracy to be rule by the people. Isin and Wood argue for such a nuanced understanding of citizenship:

> Citizenship can be described as *both* a set of practices (cultural, symbolic and economic) and a bundle of rights and duties (civil, political and social) that define an individual's membership in a polity. It is important to recognize both aspects of citizenship—as practice and status—while also recognizing that without the latter modern individuals cannot hold civil, political and social rights. In the same vein, many rights often first arise as practices and then become embodied in law as status. Citizenship is therefore neither a purely sociological concept nor purely a legal concept but a *relationship* between the two (Isin and Wood 1999: 4, italics in the original).

To see citizenship as anything other than a relationship between practice and status runs the risk of being essentialist and ahistorical. They continue,

> It is very important to recognize that the status and practice of citizenship emerged in specific places in response to specific struggles and conflicts. It is a contested and contingent *field* that allowed for the mediation of conflict, redistribution of wealth and recognition of various individual and groups rights throughout history (Isin and Wood 1999: 5, italics in the original).

Citizenship is now, has always been, and continues to be, dynamic and particular. It emerges in the active, historical process whereby different groups seek to define the membership and meanings of citizenship within a polity. Citizenship then is located in people's negotiation (peacefully and violently) of the issues of collective existence, which are the questions of how we will govern ourselves and how will we live together in this space. Citizenship is therefore more than ID cards and periodic voting. It is a process in which people engage in

order that democratic processes and institutions resemble (represent) their reasonings, values, and wishes.

This active and relational concept also makes visible the multiplicity of citizenship. If citizenship is the oscillation between practice (possibilities) and status (limits), then at any given moment we are members of many different groups to which we have duties and rights. We are also involved (actively or passively) in the meaning of membership through our participation and the directing of our energies. Consequently, we can speak of ecological citizens, consumer citizens, diasporic citizens, cosmopolitan citizens, technological citizens, sexual citizens, and radical citizens, alongside of national citizens and citizens of a city.[9] These different sites of identity and belonging interact with other such fields and zones, at times complimenting one another and at other times clashing and contradicting. Daiva Stasiulus, summarizing scholarship of citizenship in Canada, offers a geological metaphor. She writes, "Like so many tectonic plates, the different citizenships sometimes move horizontally past each other, sometimes diverge, sometimes converge, and when they collide, may throw up new material (ideas, discourses, conflicts, forms of exclusion) for citizenship" (Stasiulis 2002: 367). In this way citizenship arises as and through a multiplicity of actions, actors, and sites where the questions of how we will live together are addressed and negotiated.

---

[9] This list of citizenship forms is taken from Isin and Wood (1999), to which were added the obvious ones of the nation-state and, from a much earlier time, the city. For a discussion of the relationship between democracy, citizenship and cities see Isin (2002), as well as the collection of essays he edits, *Democracy, Citizenship and the Global City* (2000).

In trying to capture the radical and emergent aspects of citizenship, in both its multiple and process-based forms, James Holston (1998) suggests the term 'insurgent'. Insurgent citizenship is an analytical concept and investigative approach of practices in, and use of, space by people. He conceived of spaces of insurgent citizenship as a means in which to inform those in positions of planning to seek and make places in the city (or other locations) open to social imaginaries of an alternative future. He explains it as such:

> By insurgent, I mean to emphasize the opposition of these spaces of citizenship to the modernist spaces that physically dominate so many cities today. I also use it to emphasize an opposition to the modernist political project that absorbs citizenship into a plan of state building and that, in the process, generates a certain concept and practice of planning itself. At the heart of this modernist political project is the doctrine—also clearly expressed in the tradition of civil or positivist law—that the state is the only legitimate source of citizenship rights, meanings, and practices. I use the notion of insurgent to refer to new and other sources and to their assertion of legitimacy (Holston 1998: 39).

Again in this conceptualization, practices of actors in physical space serve as means to understand citizenship. It also pluralizes the sources and sites of legitimacy for practices of citizenship. As such, the state as judge and grantor of citizenship is exploded and dispersed into the many sites from which citizenship emerges and from which it seeks legitimacy and authority. He further explains,

> Citizenship changes as new members emerge to advance their claims, expanding its realm, and as new forms of segregation and violence counter these advances, eroding it. The sites of insurgent citizenship are found at the intersection of these processes of expansion and erosion (Holston 1998: 48).

Holston is careful to note that insurgent citizenship comes from any social group, 'elite or subaltern' (Holston 1998: 49), calling attention to both progressive and regressive movements of citizenship. By placing citizenship in the spaces where people live and interact, one is able to analyze political, social, cultural, and

economic participation as it manifests, rather than in abstracted and normative claims of what citizenship should entail and how it should be practiced.[10] It also attunes one to the many possibilities for participation that are always already occurring, and leaves space open to the contestation of participants where authority and legitimacy reside.

Woodsquat is an instance of insurgent citizenship. Interests, both of the elite and subaltern, in the redevelopment of Woodward's competed to define the direction of the Downtown Eastside. This struggle amongst the citizens of and beyond the area caused the politicization of different identities through the various acts of claiming rights to be heard in the decision-making processes over the future of the area. Focusing on the side of the squat, the legitimacy of its politics resided in public opinion and community solidarity, not solely in the response of the state, which was, as expected, one of repression and police brutality. The squatters used the spaces of the city as a field in which to stake their claims. To them, meaningful citizenship in Vancouver, B.C., Canada meant housing for all, a belief they declared and defended in their actions and words, in the courts and on the streets. Citizenship, in this case, was an assertion of rights (ex. housing), identities (ex. homeless/squatter), a sense of belonging within a community, and a demand for recognition of the state's responsibility in creating or alleviating

---

[10] Holston is writing to an audience of planners and architects, urging that they approach the city like an ethnographer (1998: 54), not detached or with unrealistic ideals about the uses and possibilities of space. He thus urges, "To reengage the social after the debacles of modernism's utopian attempts, however, requires expanding the idea of planning and architecture beyond this preoccupation with execution and design. It requires looking into, caring for, and teaching about lived experience as lived. To plan the possible is, in this sense, to begin from an ethnographic conception of the social and its spaces of insurgence" (Holston 1998: 55). I would suggest that a similar approach needs to be taken by social scientists and other academics in the search for liveable future of peace and justice.

poverty. In other words, citizenship in the Woodsquat was practiced, not granted.

In exposing issues of poor and homeless people's exclusion from decision-making processes in their political communities, Woodsquat raises the problem of limited access to meaningful democratic participation in the Downtown Eastside. The silencing of its claims and demands in official channels required the use of different strategies to be heard. The squat raised its collective voice in the streets. The case of citizenship at Woodsquat begs the question about the relationship between social movements and democracy. If social rights, like housing, are not natural or universal, they are the product of social movements, who fought for their inclusion alongside of civil and political rights. Citizens form these social movements in order to affect political decisions and create political institutions and processes that reflect their needs and desires (Angus 2001). In cases where rights are claimed, then, democracy is actualized through people's participation in shaping the political culture of which they are part. Democracy, when thought in terms of social movements, is the active participation of individual and collectively organized citizens in the politics of everyday life as they contest and negotiate the rules, rights, and responsibilities of belonging within their various communities, including cities and countries. And if this is the case, it is also true that public spaces are required for democratic participation.

**Public Citizenship**

Citizenship within a democracy is tied to the public sphere. Being distinct from the private world of family and marketplace and public institutions of government, a public sphere is a site in which people form public identities, define political issues, and pursue political projects through debating issues of the common good with other people (Habermas 1989; Fraser 1990). While the public sphere was first articulated as an ideal form of public reason and deliberation (Habermas 1989), in practice, there are many such spheres. Often these are formed as counter-public spheres that oppose the dominance of an overarching public sphere, and as such, serve both as a site of retreat where members develop a collective identity and invent common understandings of the world, as well as a space from which to circulate counter-discourses and project alternative practices into larger political communities (Fraser 1990). These diverse public spheres then differ in scale, scope, organizational structure, forms of membership, identities invoked, audiences reached, modes of participation, projects pursued, places of importance, and spaces of activity. This list should seem familiar. It overlaps with citizenship. Public spheres are where citizens appear, becoming both visible in their acts as citizens and in their commitment to particular group identities and ideals. Further, a public sphere is a site of publicity where citizens communicate with other citizens to consider, develop, and pursue collective projects. This suggests that public spheres and citizenship

are intimately connected: citizenship is practiced within public spheres, and public spheres emerge and transform with the practices of citizens. In other words, public spheres form around citizens. This is particularly so in democracies, where people are responsible for the decisions of how to live together.

Woodsquat was a counter-public sphere in which the squatters were practicing citizenship. Following Fraser's concept of the counter-public as an internalizing space for the group to retreat and reflect, and also as an externalizing space in which the participants learn, articulate, and practice (political and social) strategies that can then be launched into the wider public (Fraser 1990: 68), Woodsquat can be understood as serving these dual purposes. At Woodsquat, these purposes reinforced and perpetuated each other. Squatters acted against Liberal social service cuts by publicizing the lack of social housing. In doing so, they developed politicized social identities, as well as a shared and common sense of reality – one where poverty was not a reason for exclusion from politics or housing and where one should not be displaced from a neighbourhood because of economic 'revitalization'. Working together within this community was both to provide for the necessities of life, as well as to contribute to decisions of how to live together and be governed. Woodsquat, as a counter-public, enabled democratic practices of citizenship to emerge and be publicized to the larger political community.

As a counterpublic, Woodsquat points to the limits of the dominant liberal public sphere and also the possibilities of a radicalized public. The liberal public sphere

in many ways represents the commonly held values and expectations of our contemporary political field; that is, rational deliberation within a defined set of procedures and institutions. The squat, if anything, demonstrates the exclusion of many forms of speech, actions, values, reasonings, and appearance (in a very literal sense) from the liberal public sphere. In conventional sites of political and social action, such as legislatures, courts, and mainstream media (not to mention corporate boardrooms), the squatters were unable to be seen or heard as legitimate actors. As previously mentioned, the squatters' demand for social rights did not hold sway with the ideological orientation of the government's social agenda, even when it captured aspects of the popular social imaginary and public opinion. The views of the squatters were unrepresented, if not, unrepresentable within neo-liberalized culture.

The squatters radicalized the public sphere. Through their actions new actors were inserted into the public sphere (squatters), and equally important, the community itself became an actor in the politics of the Woodsquat. Further, the squat brought the seemingly private (or taken for granted) issues of housing and the provision of the necessities of life into the public. The squat refused to allow the issues of housing to be solely a private and individual's problem. It defined a lack of social housing as a public issue that needed to be openly debated and solved. Woodsquat also provided an alternative mode of communication based on informal and affective communication that included non-textual and graphic representations, as well as demonstrations and dialogues outside of officially sanctioned 'political' spaces. And finally, it made primary the active participation and responsibility of the individual within and to the community.

Here community was not just the localized neighbourhood of the Downtown Eastside. Their actions intended to publicize poverty in communities across the province, which was exacerbated by Liberal social policies. In acting themselves, the squatters acted for others. The domination involved in popularly conceived politics was exposed as Woodsquat countered the public.

**Conclusion**

*"The Coalition targets the government and business to pressure them to meet the needs of poor and working people in the province, as stated in the demands. The Coalition creates educational material and strives to use and generate statistics to expose the anti-poor, pro-business nature of the Liberal government's policies and to create informed social pressure for positive legislative reforms. We defend ourselves from attacks by the government and business community through positive, constructive initiatives (like opening empty buildings as homes and sustaining tent-cities) as well as through direct actions and mass mobilizations of people to disrupt and agitate the existing situation that kills people. We seek to fight alongside the diverse groups who have stepped forward to support the Woodwards Squat.*
*The Coalition believes that the only way to change this desperate situation for the better is to stand together and fight alongside each other."*
*(Coalition of Woodwards Squatters and Supporter 2003-4: 95)*

There are a few general theoretical themes that this paper intended to outline. These are: 1. Citizenship is a relationship between the practices and statuses; 2. the actions of social movements point to current limits of citizenship and the possibilities to go beyond these limits; and, 3. an active conception of democratic citizenship requires space for the emergence of public spheres where citizenship can be practiced and contested. This theoretical sketch framed the analysis of Woodsquat. At, and in Woodsquat, citizenship was practiced in order to shape the rights and duties of membership in the political community of Vancouver, B.C., Canada.

As such, the squat at Woodward's illustrates a struggle by a particular community for social rights within a national context. It demonstrates how the

rights of citizens and the roles of nation-states have been transformed by globalization and the strengthened hegemony of neo-liberal governance. In this context, the squatters sought to restore, preserve and extend social housing (and welfare) as a right of membership within the Canadian polity, which they saw rescinded by the B.C. Liberals. In the battle for social rights, the squatters challenged the limits of legitimated political practices as they acted to expand the meaning of inclusion within the processes of citizenship. In this regard, Woodsquat was read as a practice of citizenship contesting the reorganization of Canada's social welfare system under globalization and the decline of social rights in B.C. under neo-Liberal policies.

Secondly, the struggle of the squatters substantiates emerging studies of citizenship. These theories and studies have argued citizenship to be a dynamic process formed in the claims and practices of actors within a contested, contingent, and historically specific field. Citizens engage in activities (political-social-economic-cultural) that expand (or restrict) the meanings and entitlements of citizenship, while the state of membership defines and recognizes (certain) practices as legitimate. In other words, there is a movement between possibilities and limits of citizenship – an oscillation between citizenship as stabilized, and practices seeking to challenge, alter, and transform the status quo. In light of these theories of citizenship, Woodsquat was argued to be a space of insurgent citizenship, where the street was used to claim new political identities and to expand the concept of rights in the city.

Lastly, Woodsquat demonstrated a counter-public sphere that provided a space for the appearance of citizens. The notion of counter-public sphere(s) highlights that there are multiple and competing publics that have both internal and external functions of providing space to create and expand identities and common projects within larger political communities that are highly complex, diverse, and divided. Woodsquat served as a site for squatters to form identities as political actors, and from which they fought for housing and inclusion within the processes of citizenship. As a counter-public sphere, Woodsquat shows the limits, or the exclusive nature, of the dominant liberal public sphere. However, Woodsquat also shows the possibilities and potential for a radicalized public space in which democratic citizenship can be practiced and alternative futures can be imagined for the contemporary moment and beyond.

Although I have said much about the squat at Woodward's, much more could be said, and in time needs telling. In creating meaningful memories of the radical side of the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, Woodsquat lends a different interpretation to the limits of the public, citizenship, and democracy as understood in conventional terms of social and political participation and it also offers different imaginations of the possibilities of the public, citizenship and participation. For now, I leave the final conclusion of Woodsquat open. I only hope it is apparent that in the squatters' actions democratic citizenship appeared before the public, and radically so.

Works Cited

Angus, Ian. 2001. *Emergent Publics: An Essay on Social Movements and Democracy*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing.

Anti-Poverty Committee. 2003-4. "Call for Support Demonstration." *Woodsquat, West Coast Line*. Edited by Aaron Vidaver. No. 41, 37/2-3 (fall/winter): 33.

Blomley, Nicholas. 2004. *Unsettling the City: Urban Land and the Politics of Property*. New York: Routledge.

Brodie, Janine. 2000. "Imagining Democratic Urban Citizenship." In *Democracy and Citizenship and the Global City*. Edited by Engin Isin, 110-128. New York: Routledge.

_____. 2002. "Citizenship and Solidarity: Reflections on the Canadian Way." *Citizenship Studies* 6 (4): 377-394.

Coalition of Woodwards Squatters and Supporters. 2003-4. "Call for Second Support Demo." *Woodsquat, West Coast Line*. Edited by Aaron Vidaver. No. 41, 37/2-3 (fall/winter): 37.

Drury, Ivan. 2003-4. "The First Two Evictions of the Woodwards Squat." *Woodsquat, West Coast Line*. Edited by Aaron Vidaver. No. 41, 37/2-3 (fall/winter): 52-57.

Forsythe, T. 2003-4. "On the Politics, On Addiction, On Prisons and Pigs, On Class War," *Woodsquat, West Coast Line*. Edited by Aaron Vidaver. No. 41, 37/2-3 (fall/winter): 143-145.

Fraser, Nancy. 1990. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text* 25/26: 56-80.

Gongola, Bruce. 2003-4. "France to Woody." *Woodsquat, West Coast Line*. Edited by Aaron Vidaver. No. 41, 37/2-3 (fall/winter): 206-207.

Habermas, Jurgen. 1989 [1962]. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by Thomas Burger, with assistance by Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Holston, James. 1998. "Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship." In *Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History*. Edited by Leonie Sandercock, 37-56. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Isin, Engin F. and Patricia K. Wood. 1999. "Redistribution, Recognition, Representation." In *Citizenship and Identity*. London: Sage Publications.

Isin, Engin, editor. 2000. *Democracy and Citizenship and the Global City*. New York: Routledge.

Isin, Engin. 2002. "City, Democracy and Citizenship: Historical Images, Contemporary Practices." In *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*. Edited by Engin F. Isin and Bryan S. Turner. London: Sage.

Jensen, Jane. 1997. "Fated to Live in Interesting Times: Canada's Changing Citizenship Regimes." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 30 (4, December): 627-644.

Krebs, Mike. 2003-4. "Demands," *Woodsquat, West Coast Line*. Edited by Aaron Vidaver. No. 41, 37/2-3 (fall/winter): 41-44.

Learn, Kaspar. 2003-4. "In the Courts or in the Streets" *Woodsquat, West Coast Line*. Edited by Aaron Vidaver. No. 41, 37/2-3 (fall/winter): 38.

Leyden, Jim. 2003-4. "Community Actions Letter," *Woodsquat, West Coast Line*. Edited by Aaron Vidaver. No. 41, 37/2-3 (fall/winter): 30.

Marshall, T.H. 1992 [1950]. *Citizenship and Social Class*. London: Pluto Press.

Mitchell, Katharyne. 1997. "Conflicting Geographies of Democracy and the Public Sphere in Vancouver BC." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, 22 (2): 162-179.

Nathan. 2003-4. "We Will Not Submit to Corporate Domination," *Woodsquat*, *West Coast Line*. Edited by Aaron Vidaver. No. 41, 37/2-3 (fall/winter): 34.

Pruijt, Hans. 2003. "Is the Institutionalization of Urban Movements Inevitable? A Comparison of the Opportunities for Sustained Squatting in New York City and Amsterdam." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27 (1, March): 133-157.

Siltanen, Janet. 2002. "Paradise Paved? Reflections on the Fate of Social Citizenship in Canada." *Citizenship Studies* 6 (4): 395-414.

Smith, Neil and Jeff Derksen. 2002. "Urban Regeneration: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy." In *Stan Douglas: Every Building on 100 West Hastings*. Edited by Reid Shier, 62-92. Vancouver, BC: Contemporary Art Gallery and Arsenal Pulp Press.

Sommers, Jeff. 2003-4. "Beyond the Collar of Blight," *Woodsquat*, *West Coast Line*. Edited by Aaron Vidaver. No. 41, 37/2-3 (fall/winter): 20-28.

Sommers, Jeff and Nick Blomley. 2002. "The Worst Block in Vancouver." In *Stan Douglas: Every Building on 100 West Hastings*. Edited by Reid Shier, 62-92. Vancouver, BC: Contemporary Art Gallery and Arsenal Pulp Press.

Stasiulis, Daiva. 2002. "Introduction: Reconfiguring Canadian Citizenship." *Citizenship Studies* 6 (4): 365-375.

Tooley, Lyn. 2003-4. "We Need To Be Left Alone," *Woodsquat*, *West Coast Line*. Edited by Aaron Vidaver. No. 41, 37/2-3 (fall/winter): 150-151.

Vidaver, Aaron, editor. 2003-2004. "Woodsquat." *West Coast Line* 37 (2-3, fall/winter).

Wulwick, Lisa. 2003-4. "Squatting as an Organizing Tool" *Woodsquat*, *West Coast Line*. Edited by Aaron Vidaver. No. 41, 37/2-3 (fall/winter): 18-19.