



**Austerity Urbanism and Olympic Counter-legacies:  
Gendering, Defending and Expanding the Urban Commons in  
East London**

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## **Austerity Urbanism and Olympic Counter-legacies: Gendering, Defending and Expanding the Urban Commons in East London**

### **Abstract**

This article reflects on an occupation led by single mothers to contest the destruction of social housing in post-Olympics East London. In the process, it argues for a more gendered theorisation of the urban commons. Drawing on auto-ethnography, participant observation and qualitative interviews, the article argues three central points: First, that the occupation demonstrates the gendered nature of the urban commons and the leadership of women in defending them from enclosure; second that the defence of an existing urban commons enabled the creation of a new temporary commons characterised by the collectivisation of gendered socially reproductive activities; and third that this commoning has had a lasting impact on housing activism at the city scale and beyond. This impact is conceptualised as an ‘Olympic counter-legacy’ that is characterised by the forging of new relationships and affinities, the strengthening of networked activism and circulation of tactics between campaign groups.

### **Keywords**

Housing crisis; urban commons; austerity; gender; social reproduction; occupation

### **Introduction**

In September 2014, a housing campaign headed by single mothers occupied two empty social housing units on the Carpenters Estate in Newham, East London. Newham Council had previously emptied the flats with a view to “regenerating” the estate as part of their strategy to gentrify the area following the 2012 Olympic Games. The occupation by the Focus E15 campaign lasted for two weeks, before being evicted by the council. Local residents and people travelling from all over London attended workshops, comedy shows, film screenings, music gigs and meetings to discuss the city’s housing crisis. The occupation attracted attention across print, radio and TV media, with the women appearing on the

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3 front page of the online edition of *The Guardian* newspaper and featuring on  
4 Channel 4's evening news programme.  
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8 This article draws on auto-ethnography and participant observation by three  
9 people involved in the ongoing Focus E15 campaign before, during and after the  
10 occupation. This experience is combined with 12 qualitative interviews with core  
11 members of the group and residents of the Carpenters Estate. It argues three  
12 central points about the significance of the occupation: first, that the occupation  
13 demonstrates the gendered nature of the urban commons and the leadership of  
14 women in defending them from enclosure; second, that the defence of existing  
15 commons provided the basis for the creation of a new temporary commons  
16 characterised by the collectivisation of gendered socially reproductive activities;  
17 and third, that this act of urban commoning has had a lasting legacy, evident in  
18 the circulation of tactics and strengthening of networked activism at the city  
19 scale and beyond. As such, we propose the notion of an 'Olympic counter-legacy'  
20 to conceptualise the sustained influence of the occupation on housing struggles  
21 in the context of austerity urbanism.  
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32 To begin, we examine existing research relating to gender, austerity and the  
33 urban commons, arguing that while austerity policies have been identified as  
34 having outcomes that specifically disadvantage women, the literature on urban  
35 commoning as a form of resistance to these policies has rarely reflected this.  
36 Next, we provide some background to the context of the study, outlining the way  
37 in which the housing crisis in London has unfolded and its relationship to the  
38 Olympic Games. Following this, we develop the three arguments outlined above  
39 and propose that an 'Olympic counter-legacy' has emerged through efforts to  
40 contest the processes of dispossession and displacement that have occurred in  
41 the wake of this mega-event.  
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### 50 **Austerity, gender and the urban commons**

51 'Austerity urbanism', as Jamie Peck (2012) has called the post-2008 round of  
52 public service cuts and welfare retrenchment, is alive and well in UK cities. It  
53 effects, however, are spatially uneven, with the greatest impacts being felt in the  
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3 most deprived urban areas (Fitzgerald and Lupton, 2015; Greer Murphy, 2016),  
4 and its excesses most visible in the housing crisis (Vickery, 2012; Hodgkinson and  
5 Robbins, 2013), a crisis that is deepest and most extensive in London. If austerity  
6 has a geography, it also has intensely gendered consequences (Greer Murphy,  
7 2016). This is multifaceted across women's disproportionate roles as public  
8 sector workers, service users and welfare recipients (Abromovitz, 2012), and  
9 has an intensified impact on single parents (Gingerbread, 2015) the majority of  
10 whom are women. In the UK, the impact on women has adopted a dizzying  
11 variety of forms (Unison, 2014). A full inventory of the cuts is too extensive for  
12 inclusion here (see Jensen and Tyler 2015 for an overview). Overall, austerity  
13 increases the amounts of labour women must perform to plug the gaps left by  
14 state withdrawal (cf Feminist Fightback, 2011); and dispossesses women of their  
15 means of the reproduction of life. As such, the on-going economic crisis,  
16 characterised by the persistence of austerity policies, should be understood in  
17 gendered terms as a 'crisis of social reproduction' (Barbagallo and Beuret, 2012;  
18 Brown et al., 2013).

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31 Importantly, such a crisis must be understood not only in terms of gender, but  
32 also in relation to its raced and classed effects. Its implications are not evenly  
33 distributed, but instead fall more heavily on the shoulders of those already facing  
34 oppressions based on class, gender and race (amongst others). In this context,  
35 white single-parent working-class women are amongst those who are most  
36 materially disadvantaged by austerity and most vilified as 'revolting subjects'  
37 (Tyler 2013) in the hegemonic 'anti-welfare common-sense' (Jensen and Tyler  
38 2015). The long running pathologisation of working-class parenting has led to  
39 the discursive construction of working-class single mothers as abject and outside  
40 the confines of respectable working-class femininities (Skeggs 2005: Mannay  
41 2014). Tyler (2015: 16) has pointed to the 'new vocabulary of social class' in  
42 which the figure of the 'female chav' has meant the mass vilification of 'young  
43 *white* working-class mothers' [own emphasis]. While not disavowing the clear  
44 structural disadvantage faced by working-class women of colour, this demonised  
45 figure has been specifically constituted racially as white. Such discourses,  
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3 circulating around the figure of the 'chav mum', mark 'a new outpouring of sexist  
4 class disgust' (Tyler 2015: 26).  
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8 It should of course be noted that austerity alone has not plunged working-class  
9 women into poverty, but has instead merely intensified the position that women  
10 have always occupied within capitalist regimes of accumulation. The on-going  
11 crisis has compounded working-class women's labour market disadvantage with  
12 rising levels of underemployment and the growth of poor quality feminised jobs  
13 including 'zero-hours' contracts (ONS 2016). Austerity, then, constitutes 'a form  
14 of additional, rather than novel hardship' (Evans, 2015: 146). Since women are  
15 'being pulled in two directions at once', both out of the home to sell their labour  
16 on the market while also being 'pushed back into the home through job losses  
17 and unemployment' (Feminist Fightback 2011: 75), the home thus becomes a  
18 central site for women's struggle as unpaid reproductive labourers (Federici  
19 2012).  
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29 Austerity urbanism can be understood as the latest phase of neoliberal urban  
30 restructuring which has taken place globally since the 1980s (Peck 2012). This  
31 restructuring has been theorised as a new round of the 'enclosure of the  
32 commons' as it involves the privatisation and dispossession of public and  
33 collective goods (Harvey, 2003; De Angelis, 2007). Within the literature on  
34 contemporary commons and enclosures, there is a growing interest in the notion  
35 of the urban commons. Urban commons exist in opposition to the commodity  
36 logic (Gidwani and Baviskar, 2011), although 'they are never complete and  
37 perfect and may even have components that contradict the ideal type'  
38 (Eizenberg, 2012: 765). Such commons can include streets and public spaces  
39 (Harvey, 2012); public and cooperative housing (Hodkinson, 2012a; 2012b);  
40 community gardens (Eizenberg, 2012); protest camps and occupied universities  
41 (Vasudevan, 2015; Stavrides, 2016); and informal squatter settlements (Gillespie  
42 2016). Hardt and Negri (2009: 137) argue that even the city itself should be  
43 understood as 'vast reservoir of the common'.  
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3 Rather than static spaces or resources, urban commons are created, maintained  
4 and defended through the everyday activities of city dwellers. According to  
5 Harvey (2012), public goods and spaces become commons when city dwellers  
6 take collective action to appropriate them. Legitimate collective property claims  
7 are established through 'sustained patterns of local use and collective habitation  
8 (and) ingrained practices of appropriation' (Blomley, 2008: 320). The word  
9 'common', therefore, 'is as much a verb as a noun' (Chatterton, 2010: 626). Urban  
10 commons, such as social housing, decommodify urban goods and offer a degree  
11 of protection from market forces and autonomy from wage labour (Hodkinson,  
12 2012a). However, since commons are constantly threatened with enclosure  
13 through processes of privatisation, gentrification and the exclusionary policing of  
14 urban space (Harvey, 2012; Hodkinson, 2012a; Gillespie 2016), they require  
15 communities to maintain and defend them (Gidwani and Baviskar, 2011). As  
16 Hodkinson (2012b) argues, actions to *defend existing* and *produce new* urban  
17 commons are intrinsically linked and often reinforce one another.  
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29 To date, theorisation of the urban commons has largely been gender neutral.  
30 However, autonomist Marxist feminism provides a conceptual framework for a  
31 gendered understanding of the commons. Emerging from the international  
32 women's movements of the 1970s, and influenced by Italian autonomist  
33 Marxism, writers such as Mariosa Dalla Costa and Selma James argued that  
34 women's unpaid housework, such as childcare, was essential to the reproduction  
35 of labour power, and therefore to the creation of surplus value under capitalism.  
36 This line of argument drew attention to the importance of the sphere of social  
37 reproduction for Marxist analyses of capitalism (Dalla Costa and James 1975).  
38 Where neither state nor market can guarantee the reproduction of human  
39 beings, Barbagallo and Federici (2012) argue, commons form the basis of more  
40 autonomous and collective forms of reproduction. Since women have historically  
41 and contemporaneously been responsible for the majority of socially  
42 reproductive labour, it follows that they are more dependent than men on  
43 common resources, such as communal kitchens in Latin America and urban  
44 farms in Africa (Federici 2012). As such, due to their reliance on the commons, as  
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3 well as their key role in their production, women have also typically been at the  
4 forefront of efforts to defend them from enclosure (Federici, 2012).  
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8 Richard Pithouse (2014) explores the gender dimension of urban commoning in  
9 his discussion of the threatened Motala Heights informal settlement in Durban,  
10 where eviction resistance was based on solidarities between people of Indian  
11 and African descent. These solidarities, he argues, were strengthened by the  
12 collective experience of washing clothes together in the river (Pithouse, 2014).  
13 Despite this notable example, however, there is a lack of scholarship that builds  
14 on the autonomist Marxist feminist canon to develop a gendered theorisation of  
15 the urban commons. This article seeks to address this by exploring the  
16 importance of gendered socially reproductive labour for understanding the  
17 political significance of urban commoning in the context of austerity urbanism. It  
18 does so by considering the example of an occupation of two social housing units  
19 in the East London Borough of Newham.  
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29 Urban occupations have emerged as a key resistive act since the 2008 financial  
30 crisis and the subsequent imposition of austerity policies. In 2011, temporary  
31 protest camps proliferated in cities across the world under the banner of the  
32 'Occupy' movement. Although primarily a means of protesting against the  
33 extreme inequalities of 21st century capitalism, an emerging literature explores  
34 how these urban occupations create spaces for the production of new social  
35 relations, enabling the materialisation of non-capitalist imaginaries of urban life  
36 (Halvorsen, 2015a, 2015b; Stavrides, 2016; Vasudevan, 2015). Reflecting on the  
37 problems encountered by the Occupy movement, this literature raises two  
38 important questions about the emancipatory potential of urban occupations.  
39 First, the dominance of a macho activist culture at some protest camps raises the  
40 question of whether the collectivisation of socially reproductive activities tends  
41 to be marginalised from what is considered 'politics' proper (Halvorsen, 2015a).  
42 Second, the short-lived character of the Occupy movement raises the question as  
43 to what extent the new social relations created within these temporary spaces  
44 can be sustained and scaled up to enable long-term movement building  
45 (Halvorsen, 2015b; Srnicek and Williams, 2015). This article explores these  
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3 questions through the case study of the Carpenters Estate occupation, paying  
4 particular attention to the importance of reproductive labour and the lasting  
5 legacy of the action.  
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## 8 **Methods**

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11 Our involvement in the Carpenters Estate occupation and campaign preceded  
12 any intention to write about it. Gillespie heard about Focus E15 through a local  
13 tenants' organisation and Hardy by attending the street stall with members of  
14 Feminist Fightback, an anti-capitalist feminist collective based in East London.  
15 She helped co-organise an open campaign meeting at the Common House social  
16 centre in Bethnal Green, East London, which was attended by Gillespie and many  
17 others (see below). Both Gillespie and Hardy engaged in practical support for the  
18 Carpenters Estate occupation by collecting furniture and other resources for the  
19 flats, preparing the family fun day and setting up and maintaining up the  
20 campaign website ([focuse15.org](http://focuse15.org)), writing press releases, calling journalists and  
21 knocking on doors on the estate. Prior to the occupation, Watt had met some of  
22 the Focus E15 campaigners as part of previous research projects undertaken in  
23 Newham. He attended the occupation on several occasions, as well as the post-  
24 occupation meeting held at the Docklands Community Centre on the estate  
25 (Watt, 2016). All three authors have subsequently remained involved in Focus  
26 E15 projects in various ways, by attending the regular weekly street stall,  
27 demonstrations, open meetings and social events, as well as through a campaign-  
28 led action research project examining the experiences of homeless Newham  
29 residents (Hardy and Gillespie 2016). Essentially, we have been guided by  
30 Taylor's (2014) notion of 'being useful' by practicing reciprocity in terms of  
31 providing forms of labour or information needed by the campaign and also by  
32 producing research of interest and utility to the movement.  
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49 The three authors met each other through their involvement in the campaign  
50 and research questions emerged retrospectively through thinking about the  
51 significance of the occupation in dialogue with other campaign members. We  
52 were thus inspired to reflect on this action through our own direct experience as  
53 part of the campaign. Activist-scholar research has a long-standing place in  
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3 geography (Fox-Piven 2010; The Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010),  
4 enabling authors to explore and develop methods for bridging the artificial gap  
5 between the academy and activism. The auto-ethnographic technique used here  
6 was developed in the tradition of feminist research (Farrow et al 1995). Auto-  
7 ethnography is a retrospective research practice and is often incidental to  
8 research, rather than pre-planned as 'the author does not live through these  
9 experiences solely to make them part of a published document; rather, these  
10 experiences are assembled using hindsight' (Ellis et al. 2011: no page). As we  
11 have done here, this is often combined with further textual sources including  
12 photographs and qualitative interviews. In many ways, the recorded interviews  
13 were part of ongoing conversations, rather than standalone products of the  
14 research process. As such, our analysis is definitively shaped by our relational  
15 ties to the event itself and, importantly, to the other members of the occupation.  
16 In what follows we hope to have produced 'meaningful, accessible, and evocative  
17 research grounded in personal experience' (Ellis et al., 2011: no page), both our  
18 own and that of other occupiers.  
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### 31 **Housing, homelessness and social cleansing in post-Olympics East London**

32 The UK's nation-wide housing crisis has its intensive epicentre in London  
33 (Edwards, 2016; Watt and Minton, 2016). The underlying causes of London's  
34 housing crisis are well-rehearsed. They include a complex convergence of  
35 housing policies which have facilitated the treatment of homes as exchange,  
36 rather than use values. This has combined the 'Right-to-Buy' council housing, the  
37 reduction of funds for new building new social housing (Edwards, 2016)  
38 alongside the Coalition Government's (2011-2015) welfare and housing  
39 'reforms' - the housing benefit (HB) cap, the 'bedroom tax', changes to housing  
40 allocations (Hodkinson and Robbins, 2013) and cuts to local housing allowance  
41 (LHA) (Powell, 2015). The result is compounded unaffordability in all rental  
42 tenures. Given the worsening shortages of social rental housing, London councils  
43 are increasingly turning to the private rental sector (PRS) to provide temporary  
44 accommodation for their homeless populations (Rugg, 2016). Simultaneously,  
45 private landlords in London are increasingly unwilling to house individuals and  
46 families dependent on LHA as it no longer covers the escalating rental prices in  
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3 the PRS (Powell, 2015; Rugg, 2016). The result is the expulsion of homeless  
4 families by councils to temporary accommodation in cheaper areas either within  
5 or increasingly *outside* London (Powell, 2015; Hardy and Gillespie 2016; Watt,  
6 2017).  
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11 These displacement flows form part of wider processes of what housing  
12 campaigners have dubbed 'social cleansing', whereby London councils remove  
13 the 'undeserving poor' from their areas (Watt and Minton, 2016). Such social  
14 cleansing processes are well underway in East London (Watt, 2017; Watt and  
15 Bernstock, 2017). The overarching *raison d'être* for the 2012 Olympic Games was  
16 to 'regenerate' East London and to establish 'Olympic Legacies' in the city. These  
17 'legacies' have been subject to fierce debate, particularly regarding the effects on  
18 low-income East Londoners (Kennelly, 2016; LLDC, 2016; Cohen and Watt,  
19 2017). The housing 'legacy' – which included providing 'homes for all' (Host  
20 Boroughs Unit, 2009) – has come in for particular criticism given that problems  
21 such as homelessness and overcrowding have worsened while the supply of  
22 social housing has not markedly expanded in the six Olympics' 'Host Boroughs'  
23 (Bernstock, 2014; Thompson et al., 2017; Watt and Bernstock, 2017).  
24 Furthermore, this worsening housing legacy contains a gendered dimension via  
25 its negative impacts on female-headed lone parent households (Watt 2017).  
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38 The Carpenters Estate is located in Stratford in Newham, the Host Borough  
39 where 60% of the 2012 Games facilities were located. Central government cuts  
40 are particularly impacting upon deprived East London boroughs, with Newham  
41 experiencing the largest (26%) reduction in per capita local government  
42 spending power in London from 2010/11-2013/14 (Fitzgerald and Lupton,  
43 2015). However, austerity urbanism must be understood not simply by the  
44 extent of overall funding cuts, but also from an examination of the actions of local  
45 state agents. Newham Council has had a long-standing antipathy towards social  
46 housing estates as creating 'ghettos of worklessness' (LBN, 2012: 1) and high  
47 levels of 'benefit dependency'. This has manifested itself in a reluctance to  
48 maximise social housing provision as part of new development schemes  
49 (Bernstock, 2014) and greater housing-related insecurity than the rest of the city  
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3 in terms of mortgage and landlord evictions (Shelter, 2014), as well as high  
4 levels of temporary accommodation and housing waiting lists (Bernstock, 2014;  
5 Watt and Bernstock, 2017). By any measure of housing need, housing is in crisis  
6 in Newham in the post-2012 period (Thompson et al., 2017), despite the spin  
7 that is all too frequently put on a 'successful' Games legacy (LLDC, 2016).  
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### 10 11 12 **The Focus E15 campaign**

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14 In September 2013, 29 young mothers living in the Focus E15 hostel in Stratford,  
15 Newham, received eviction letters from their housing association informing  
16 them that they would have to leave due to government cuts (Butler 2013). Focus  
17 was a 'foyer' designed to provide housing and social support for young homeless  
18 people, including women with children. When the women approached Newham  
19 Council for help, they were advised that, due to cuts to housing benefit and the  
20 lack of affordable housing in London, they might have to accept private rented  
21 accommodation as far away as Manchester if they wanted to be rehoused (ibid).  
22 A comprehensive overview of the history of the Focus E15 campaign has already  
23 been presented elsewhere (Watt, 2016). As such, here we offer only a brief  
24 history to orientate the reader before focusing more closely on the occupation of  
25 the Carpenters Estate.  
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36 Following a chance encounter between two of the Focus E15 residents and the  
37 Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG), who ran a street stall in Stratford, the  
38 mothers asked if the group would help them design a petition to take to the  
39 Council. Over the following year, this relationship developed into a campaign  
40 which saw the women seek help from the Mayor of Newham, Robin Wales, only  
41 to be told: 'if you can't afford to live in Newham, you can't afford to live in  
42 Newham' (Jasmin).<sup>1</sup> Sensing that the campaign needed to become more  
43 combative, the tactics changed to include picketing the Mayor's Show, marching  
44 to Newham Town Hall, and temporary occupations of the Council's housing  
45 office and the housing association's showroom. This article explores in detail one  
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56 <sup>1</sup> Some names of interviewees have been anonymised while others have been retained, in line  
57 with the wishes of the campaigners and residents.

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3 specific temporary occupation of space – that of empty social housing units on  
4 the Carpenters Estate in September 2014.  
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### 9 **The Carpenters Estate**

10 The Carpenters Estate is located in Stratford, Newham, adjacent to the Olympic  
11 Park. It is a 1960s-built council housing estate, consisting of three high-rise  
12 tower blocks, low-rise blocks of flats and houses. At its peak, it had over 700  
13 homes, but since 2005 many of these have been emptied – ‘decanted’ – as a  
14 result of an inconclusive and seemingly never-ending ‘regeneration’ programme  
15 (Watt, 2013). The estate is currently around two-thirds empty, despite the  
16 profound set of housing problems in the borough. As such it has come to  
17 symbolise one of the key contradictions of the housing crisis: hundreds of homes  
18 lie empty while homeless people are being threatened with expulsion from the  
19 city. Through their occupation, Focus E15 captured this contradiction with the  
20 twin banners they displayed outside the occupied flats: “These People Need  
21 Homes” and “These Homes Need People”.  
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32 Carpenters’ residents have their own long history of campaigning, first via the  
33 Tower Block Action Group to pressurise Newham Council into properly  
34 maintaining the estate, and latterly via Carpenters Against Regeneration Plans  
35 (CARP!) and Carpenters Residents’ Steering Group, who opposed the wholesale  
36 demolition of the estate and its sale to University College London (Watt, 2013).  
37 The estate also became a focus for the Focus E15 campaign during its first year.  
38 As with the Occupy camps in the City of London and Wall Street in 2011  
39 (Vasudevan, 2015), the location of the Carpenters Estate was highly symbolic.  
40 Jasmin, one of the original Focus mothers explained that ‘it was important it was  
41 the Carpenters Estate rather than anywhere else’ because ‘in the background you  
42 see the Olympic stadium...you can see the brand new luxury apartments that  
43 have gone up. And you see all the council homes’.  
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54 In early summer 2014, artists became involved in the campaign, performing a  
55 visual stunt by pasting blown-up photographs of displaced residents from the  
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3 hostel onto the boarded up windows of the flats, stating 'We could live here'.<sup>2</sup>  
4 While putting up the posters, Fred, a resident of the estate, arrived and asked  
5 what they were doing. They explained that they wanted to draw attention to the  
6 injustice and irrationality of empty social homes alongside growing numbers of  
7 homeless people. The activists were worried that he might criticize the action.  
8 Instead, he said: 'Great idea, but if you don't get them up onto the first floor  
9 windows they'll just come down tomorrow' (Laura, Focus E15 campaign  
10 member). When the campaigners told Fred that they were unable to reach the  
11 windows, 'he went away and about 20 minutes later came back with this massive  
12 ladder' (Laura).

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21 Cooperating with the Carpenters Estate residents was central to Focus E15's  
22 strategy. Support from the local community was to become instrumental -  
23 although not uncomplicatedly so - to the success of the occupation. In the run up  
24 to the occupation, Focus E15 worked closely with the residents, who 'all  
25 expressed the fact that they were really upset to see the estate empty and quiet  
26 and not having any neighbours' (Jasmin). According to campaign member and  
27 communist Andrew, 'the idea of this was to get people from the local estate  
28 involved, so there was postering, there were door knocks'. He explicitly contrasts  
29 this with his experience of some other occupations:  
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38 ... They haven't done the work locally sometimes. So they're like intruders  
39 on someone else's estate. And they don't reach out to the estate, whereas  
40 this followed a year of conversations with people on the estate. We knew  
41 many people on the estate [or] who'd been cleansed out. And they were  
42 happy to support it.  
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48 In addition to building relationships with the residents on the estate, Focus E15  
49 began to meet up and network with communists, socialists, feminists, squatters  
50 and housing activists from across the city. Open meetings were organized at the  
51 Common House centre in Bethnal Green and participants began to discuss  
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56 <sup>2</sup> This was inspired by the 'I am here' photographic project by Fugitive Images (2010) at the now-  
57 demolished Haggerston Estate in Hackney.

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3 possible responses to the deepening housing crisis. A decision was made to try  
4 and occupy one of the empty flats. At the time this seemed ambitious: squatting  
5 is not a mainstream response to housing problems in the UK. Squatting has  
6 become increasingly difficult in Europe since the 1980s – and in the UK  
7 particularly following the introduction of Section 144 of the Legal Aid,  
8 Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 which made it a criminal  
9 offence to trespass in residential properties with the intention of living there.  
10 Nevertheless, Vasudevan (2015: 326) has pointed to ‘other occupation-based  
11 practices’ which remain popular as a means to ‘imagine new possibilities for a  
12 renewed right to the city’.  
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### 21 **The occupation**

22 On 21 September 2014, a ‘family fun day’ with music and games was held in the  
23 square on the estate to celebrate the 1<sup>st</sup> birthday of the campaign. The event was  
24 advertised on social media, including a statement that the Fun Day would be  
25 ‘followed by [a] secret housing action at a secret location’. This was a tactic  
26 inspired by anti-austerity campaign UK Uncut, who would announce that an  
27 action would take place without providing details, enabling them to evade police  
28 interception. On a warm autumn afternoon the campaign group decorated the  
29 square, not knowing if anyone would turn up or whether it would be possible to  
30 occupy the two flats. Before too long, people began to arrive and the square came  
31 to life as children played fairground games and had their faces painted by  
32 campaign members. Meanwhile, only a small group of people involved in the  
33 campaign knew about intention to occupy. After a few hours, when around a  
34 hundred people had gathered, a samba band began to play. Then,  
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45 as the party reached its crescendo to the sound of live samba drumming,  
46 the metal security grating was removed from one of the windows of an  
47 empty block of flats to reveal several of the mothers inside. As the crowd  
48 below cheered, a banner was hung from the window that read: ‘Social  
49 Housing not Social Cleansing (Gillespie 2014).  
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3 The scene was extraordinarily emotional. Amongst the cheering crowds, tears  
4 gathered in the eyes of many closest to the campaign. A joyful affect swept  
5 through the square. Laura reflected that it was:  
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9           one of the most phenomenal memorable moments of my entire life... It  
10 brought complete tears to my eyes, and nearly does when I even say it,  
11 because ... There they are, two ... young vulnerable women with  
12 nowhere, no future, nowhere to live, about to be sent out of London, and  
13 suddenly ... there they were waving majestically at the window to the  
14 crowd below.  
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21 Attendees were then invited into the 'Open House'. To their surprise they found  
22 the flats in pristine condition. One flat had a brand new (seemingly unused)  
23 bathroom and kitchen. This flat became the occupied building's 'Show Home',  
24 and a sign was erected outside announcing 'Council Flats Available: Enquire  
25 Here'.  
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31 Once the block of flats was open, those present sat down and began discussing  
32 how the occupied space would be managed. The building was to be transformed  
33 into a social centre, open all day for two weeks. A press release had been  
34 prepared in advance and occupiers were given tasks such as answering phone  
35 enquiries from the media and using social media to request visitors and  
36 donations of essentials. The response was overwhelming, with huge numbers of  
37 people from all over London and beyond visiting to take part in the occupation.  
38 So many well-wishers donated food, books and clothes that a free shop and food  
39 bank were established. A busy timetable of activities emerged, including various  
40 workshops and skill-shares, discussions about the housing crisis, film screenings,  
41 'open mic' nights and a free gig by comedian Josie Long.  
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51 Despite having already established connections on the estate, campaigners  
52 continued to do outreach with local residents, doing 'door knocking and just  
53 invit[ing] people down to barbecues' (Emer). Residents from the estate very  
54 quickly joined the occupation and contributed their skills and labour to carry out  
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3 repairs and decorate the flats. In addition, former residents who had been  
4 evicted from the estate returned to participate, including homeless people who  
5 showered and ate at the occupation each day. As a result of careful planning and  
6 outreach by the campaign, Emer explained, the residents were supportive and  
7 said that 'the estate felt alive again'. This assessment was reiterated by Molly, a  
8 Carpenters resident who had lived on the estate since it was first built: 'It was  
9 lovely to see the flats open! Windows open, nets up'. She continued,  
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16 they were very good, they weren't rowdy... [you] could have joined in if  
17 you wanted. It was like part of the community really [and], they would  
18 come round here and have a cup of tea and a cake.  
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23 Newham Council went to various lengths to make the occupiers leave, including  
24 divide-and-rule tactics between those in the flats and the other residents on the  
25 estate; destroying water pipes into the building; and delivering an eviction notice  
26 by stealth. Two weeks after the occupation started, the occupiers came to an out-  
27 of-court settlement: having always intended the occupation to be temporary,  
28 Focus E15 agreed to leave. Despite the best efforts of Newham Council to paint  
29 the occupiers in a negative light in the local press (Newham Recorder, 2014), the  
30 occupation was generally well received by the public. As a result of mounting  
31 public pressure, the Mayor issued a statement apologising for the way the  
32 mothers had been treated and Newham agreed to house 40 individuals and  
33 families on the estate on a temporary basis (Wales, 2014).  
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### 43 **"Repopulate the Carpenters Estate": *defending the gendered urban*** 44 **commons**

45 Hodkinson (2012a) argues that public housing built in Britain during the post-  
46 war period can be understood as an urban commons. He acknowledges that the  
47 'top-down, paternalistic and bureaucratic treatment of tenants by municipal  
48 landlords' has historically undermined the commons character of public housing  
49 (Ibid, p. 512). However, he argues that it is a commons in the sense that it  
50 partially decommodifies shelter and offers an alternative to exploitative private  
51 landlords by offering below-market rents and secure tenancies (Hodkinson  
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3 2012a). As such, public housing is an example of a contradictory ‘actually  
4 existing commons’ (Eizenberg 2012). It follows, therefore, that the privatization  
5 of public housing, including the “regeneration” of estates such as the Carpenters,  
6 is a form of enclosure that dispossesses city dwellers of this commons. As such,  
7 whereas the post-war British state played an important role in creating urban  
8 commons, ‘enclosure is the modus operandi’ of the neoliberal state (Hodkinson  
9 2012a, p. 505). In this context, the occupation of the Carpenters Estate can first  
10 be understood as an attempt to *defend* a public housing commons from  
11 enclosure.  
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19 The enclosure of the public housing commons disproportionately affects women  
20 and mothers (Hardy and Gillespie 2016). Since social housing provides a form of  
21 income to those who perform unpaid reproductive labour, cuts to this ‘social  
22 wage’ fall particularly heavily on women (Barbagallo and Beuret, 2012; Vickery,  
23 2012). If we understand London’s housing crisis in terms of a crisis of social  
24 reproduction, therefore, it is not surprising that a campaign led by women chose  
25 to occupy a council estate in order to defend this public housing commons from  
26 enclosure. Women have also played a leading role in other housing campaigns,  
27 such as the successful defence of Hackney’s New Era estate from privatisation  
28 (BBC News, 2014). According to Jasmin, ‘the people that seem to be... most  
29 militant about it are definitely mothers of children. Because obviously they’ve  
30 got to fight for their children as well as for themselves’. The demand of the  
31 occupation to ‘Repopulate the Carpenters Estate’ should therefore be understood  
32 as a demand for the redistribution of the means of social reproduction by those  
33 dispossessed of the social wage.  
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45 The stigmatized figure of the white working-class single mother has historically  
46 and contemporaneously been associated with council housing in the anti-welfare  
47 imaginary. Yet despite their vulnerability to pathologised representations, the  
48 occupiers received very little negative press. Emer argues that mothers fronting  
49 the campaign helped to win public support for the occupation:  
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3 [As] mothers having children, who just want to have a roof over their  
4 head for their child to be secure, that is something that people can  
5 understand. It's something that gets people.  
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9 Jasmin argues that the 'Mums' visible leadership disrupted increasingly  
10 prevalent stereotypical preconceptions about single mothers:  
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14 Before the occupation we had a lot of people... saying things about us  
15 being on benefits, taking from the system, things like that. But I think the  
16 occupation showed that we were really dedicated... and it's not about us,  
17 it's about everybody (Jasmin).  
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23 This leadership contested popular representations of single mothers as passive  
24 recipients of welfare. As Emer states 'it just offered a totally different narrative to  
25 what we're fed everyday about who people are who occupy council estates or  
26 hostels'. However, the demand for 'Social Housing not Social Cleansing' is not  
27 merely a demand to meet the shelter needs of the mothers evicted from the  
28 Focus E15 hostel. Rather, beginning from the particular experience of the  
29 mothers, it has shifted register to become a broadened out demand to provide  
30 social housing for all who need it, making the mothers champions of social  
31 justice far beyond their own specific interests. This is evident in the occupiers'  
32 simple demand that Newham Council 'Repopulate the Carpenters Estate'.  
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41 To what extent was the occupation successful in defending a public housing  
42 commons from enclosure? As discussed above, a small number of homes on the  
43 estate were re-opened as a result of the occupation. However, this turned out to  
44 be a somewhat pyrrhic victory. First, the temporary nature of the tenancies  
45 means that 'it's not re-populating the Carpenters Estate in any way because they  
46 can get them out in a second' (Laura). Second, Melissa, an ex-resident of  
47 Carpenter's (whose mother still lives on the estate) told us that the council had  
48 placed vulnerable people and particularly those with mental health problems on  
49 the estate. She stated that:  
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3 some of them are causing a lot of problems, so the estate looks very  
4 rough... [Newham Council want to] make it look like what they believe  
5 estates are like, make it look run down and then [Newham Council] have  
6 got a good excuse to pull it down.  
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11 Melissa and other residents have interpreted this as an attempt to ‘territorially  
12 stigmatise’ the estate (Kallin and Slater 2014) in order to justify further  
13 decanting and ultimately demolishing it. As such, the occupation achieved only  
14 limited in success in its attempt to defend this public housing commons from  
15 enclosure. As will be discussed below, however, the occupation had a broader  
16 significance beyond simply defending an existing urban commons.  
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### 22 23 **“A lot of love and joy and looking after each other”:** *creating a new urban* 24 **commons**

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26 Vasudevan (2015) argues that urban occupations are not simply acts of protest  
27 but are prefigurative of an alternative urban reality. Beyond *defending* an  
28 existing public housing commons, the further significance of the Carpenters  
29 Estate occupation can be found in the creation of a new, temporary urban  
30 commons. This new temporary commons was characterized by ‘diverse  
31 singularities’ (Hardt and Negri 2009) encountering each other and cooperating  
32 to create a joyful and celebratory space in which socially reproductive activities  
33 became collectivized.  
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41 Although the occupation was carefully planned by a small group of campaigners,  
42 it was impossible to know who would turn up and what would happen within  
43 the space. Emer, a theatre practitioner as well as a campaigner, described the  
44 occupation as a ‘live, collective creative experience’ and compared it to  
45 improvised theatre:  
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51 You don’t go in somewhere and say ‘this is what needs to happen’... You  
52 get a space to explore artistically, creatively, politically... It allows you to  
53 play out different political possibilities for the real world.  
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3 According to Jasmin, 'the best thing about it was [that]... anybody of any age, of  
4 any position of life, doing anything, was welcome to come along and get  
5 involved'. As such, when people from outside the core campaign group  
6 participated and took ownership of the space it became a collective improvised  
7 creative process. In this sense, unpredictable encounters between diverse  
8 singularities enabled the production of the common.  
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14 An example of how the occupation brought people together through acts of  
15 cooperation and creation can be found in the collective response to the Council  
16 cutting off the water supply to the house on September 26th, damaging the water  
17 pipe in the process. Within a few hours, numerous supporters had brought  
18 gallons of bottled water to the occupation. Echoing research on 'people as  
19 infrastructure' in African cities, this episode demonstrates how the continuation  
20 of the occupation was enabled through people collaborating to replace the vital  
21 reproductive infrastructure that was vandalised by the local state (Simone,  
22 2004).  
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31 Chatterton (2006) argues that spaces of direct action are often premised on an  
32 'activist' identity that is set apart from the rest of society. In order to overcome  
33 this, he calls for encounters that blur activist-public identities. Those involved in  
34 planning the Carpenters Estate occupation were aware of the danger of  
35 reproducing this activist-public divide and consciously spent time building  
36 relationships with and involving residents on the estate. The boundary between  
37 occupiers and residents began to blur almost immediately when the latter  
38 brought a kettle and vacuum cleaner to help make the occupied flats more  
39 homely. Emer recounts how residents became involved and invested in repairing  
40 and decorating the flats. Robert, an estate resident, suggested renovating the  
41 downstairs flats which were in a significantly worse state of repair:  
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51 he took time off work, he just came and like worked really hard, as did  
52 other residents... that came along to kind of do up these places... people  
53 really wanted to make it the best it could be.  
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3 Through careful planning, relationship building and listening to the perspectives  
4 of residents, therefore, the occupation created what Stavrides (2016) calls a  
5 'threshold space' with porous boundaries rather than an activist enclave. This  
6 threshold space enabled the blurring and reconfiguring of identities. As a result,  
7 some individuals who became involved during the occupation have since become  
8 key members of the campaign.  
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14 The occupation was notable for the central role that socially reproductive  
15 activities, particularly childcare, were afforded in the space. The role of social  
16 reproduction in temporary occupations is a key issue raised by the literature on  
17 the Occupy movement. Halvorsen (2015a) argues that, due to masculinist  
18 activist culture, social reproduction and care was under-valued by London's  
19 Occupy movement. Reproductive activity became marginalised and separated  
20 from activity considered 'political', with this binary materialising in the  
21 emergence of two separate camps. By contrast, Jaleel (2012, no page) argues that  
22 Occupy camps in the US 'fitfully enabled' the commoning of socially reproductive  
23 labour as they provided food, books and entertainment and became  
24 'in the words of many, home'.  
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34 Watt (2016, p. 313) has noted that Focus E15's weekly street stall differs from  
35 the events of many housing campaigns as 'a space where children have a  
36 prominent presence, not only the mothers' children but also those of supporters  
37 and visitors'. Children had a similarly prominent presence at the occupation. The  
38 Fun Day that launched the occupation was explicitly aimed at families and once  
39 the occupation began, a whole room became a dedicated children's playroom.  
40 Due to the high level of media interest, the mothers spent up to seven hours a  
41 day conducting interviews. As a result, occupiers took it in turns to look after and  
42 play with the children. This collectivisation of childcare resonated with  
43 residents' historical memory of life on the estate:  
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52 [Residents] talked about bringing up their children, letting them run  
53 around that square, looking after each other's kids. The sort of life that  
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3 existed on Carpenters that was brought back to it for a short period of  
4 time (Laura).  
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8 In addition to childcare, reproductive activities such as cooking became  
9 collectivised. Cooking meals for everybody at the occupation became an  
10 important part of the daily routine and visitors were often invited to participate  
11 in food preparation. Emer claims that these roles were an important mechanism  
12 for inclusion, simply because 'people like to be useful'. As such, the  
13 collectivisation of reproductive activities, usually confined to the private sphere  
14 of the nuclear family home, enabled the occupation to function as a porous space  
15 in which the distinction between activists and the public was blurred (Stavrides,  
16 2016).  
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24 This collectivisation of social reproduction was also fundamental to the affective  
25 atmosphere of the occupation. Emer describes the tone of the occupation as  
26 'celebratory' and argues that the Focus E15 campaign is characterised by fun, joy  
27 and care, with children playing a central role in setting this tone. Andrew reflects  
28 on the political importance of creating alternative spaces for reproduction and  
29 for fun in a context of austerity urbanism:  
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36 We can resist a hundred evictions... but we're not creating a culture  
37 alongside it where people can feel included... we're just sweeping up all  
38 the mess that the government's causing.... [it is important to have a space  
39 for] culture... music, theatre... all the things that we're not supposed to be  
40 doing because they don't produce surplus value. We need to reclaim that,  
41 we need to produce *surplus that's for enjoyment*...  
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47 An anonymous account of an Occupy camp in an unspecified UK city argued that  
48 the camp was characterised by problems with drugs and alcohol leading to poor  
49 relations with the public. In addition, the female author reported that male  
50 occupiers were dismissive of women's safety concerns (Anonymous 2012).  
51 Andrew recounted his experience of other occupations that were not inclusive or  
52 family-friendly, as there had been a lot of 'speed doing the rounds' and 'squatter  
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3 men who are really misogynistic'. Citing an occupation at another London  
4 council estate, he explained that an unsafe environment with 'bits of wiring  
5 loose, and... debris everywhere' made the space inaccessible to disabled or older  
6  
7 people.  
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11 By contrast, Emer explains how the centrality of children and childcare created a  
12 fun, playful and relaxed atmosphere at the Carpenters Estate, but also that the  
13 materiality of 'children need[ing] to be fed, and entertained, and played with...  
14 [stopped] things getting displaced from reality and [overly] ideological'.  
15 Building on Vasudevan's (2015) conceptualisation of urban occupations,  
16 therefore, the Carpenters Estate occupation cannot be understood simply as a  
17 *defensive* act of protest grounded in making demands of the state. Rather, it was  
18 also a prefigurative exercise in *creating* new social relations. Diverse  
19 singularities encountered one another and cooperated to create an urban  
20 commons characterised by the collectivisation of social reproduction and the  
21 production of 'surplus for enjoyment'.  
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### 31 **Olympic-counter legacies: urban commoning as the basis of new waves of** 32 **struggle** 33

34 Urban occupations create spaces for unexpected encounters and the production  
35 of new social relations (Vasudevan, 2015; Stavrides, 2016). However, the  
36 temporary nature of many occupations means that these relations may be  
37 ephemeral and difficult to sustain beyond the duration of the action (Halvorsen,  
38 2015b). Hardt and Negri (2009, pp. 254-5) warn that spontaneous encounters in  
39 the metropolis are not, in themselves, sufficient to 'create social bodies with ever  
40 greater capacities', but instead the city 'must be a site not only of encounter but  
41 also of organization and politics'. To what extent, then, can a temporary  
42 occupation form the basis of enduring relationships and sustained movement  
43 building in the city? Over three years have passed since the occupation of the  
44 Carpenters Estate at time of writing, enabling a tentative response to this  
45 question.  
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3 The extensive coverage of the occupation in the mainstream press helped raise  
4 the public profile of the campaign, attracting the attention of other established  
5 and nascent housing movements. For the duration of the occupation, the  
6 Carpenters Estate 'became a hub for people concerned with London's housing  
7 crisis from all over the city' (Watt, 2016, p. 311). On Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> September, a  
8 public meeting was held in the front garden of the occupied building, in which  
9 people discussed their personal experiences of, and possible solutions to, the  
10 housing crisis. Campaigners commented on how the occupation inspired a  
11 subsequent wave of action across the city, including a series of occupations at the  
12 Guinness Trust Estate in Brixton, the Sweets Way estate in Barnet, and the  
13 Aylesbury Estate in Southwark. Jasmin explained that:

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23 A lot of people came along and they were inspired by the occupation and  
24 the campaign and went back to their areas and their groups and wanted  
25 to do something similar.  
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29 Emer makes a similar argument about how the Carpenters Estate 'sparked off' a  
30 new wave of activism, inspiring people from across the city to take action:

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34 I remember people talking about the housing crisis before, but not on the  
35 same scale... I think this did really set something off for people... people  
36 living on housing estates themselves [had] dreamt of it, but they were like  
37 'you're actually doing it! Let's open them all up'  
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42 Another legacy of the occupation has been the increased involvement of Focus  
43 E15 in networked activism at the city scale. This increased cooperation was  
44 facilitated by the establishment of the Radical Housing Network (RHN) in early  
45 2014. RHN is a horizontal network that links together groups campaigning for  
46 housing justice across tenure types in London, enabling housing campaigns to  
47 support each other and coordinate actions at the neighbourhood, borough and  
48 city scales (Wills, 2016). Although it was established before the Carpenters  
49 Estate occupation, Emer, herself an active member of RHN, argued that the  
50 occupation energised and gave momentum to the nascent network.  
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Following the Carpenters Estate occupation, members of the Focus E15 campaign have played an active role in supporting other occupations, such as at the Sweets Way estate in Barnet, north London in 2015. In addition, in 2016 a group of women and non-binary people called Sisters Uncut occupied an empty council home in the London Borough of Hackney. Their action was a protest against the gendered effects of social housing shortages, which they argue trap women within abusive relationships. Members of Sisters Uncut were involved in the Carpenters Estate occupation and the influence is clear: the occupied flat hosted family-friendly events including art, writing and puppetry workshops and collectivised social reproduction by providing free breakfasts for local children.

As such, the lasting 'legacy' of the Carpenters Estate occupation has been the forging of new relationships and affinities, the strengthening of networked housing activism and the circulation of tactics between campaign groups at the city scale. As RHN activist Jacob Wills (2016) argues, therefore, actions to defend communities from dispossession and displacement lead to the creation of new communities through co-operation and shared experience of struggle. In the context of austerity London, we conceptualise the deepening of a city-wide community of struggle following the occupation as an 'Olympic counter-legacy' that has emerged in opposition to the processes of dispossession and displacement that are the real legacy of the 2012 Games for all too many working-class inhabitants (Kennelly, 2016; Watt, 2017; Watt and Bernstock, 2017).

Beyond the city scale, an important legacy of the Carpenters Estate occupation has been to raise the national and international profile of the Focus E15 campaign. Campaigners are regularly invited to talk at events across the UK and continental Europe. Following an appearance by Focus E15 and RHN campaigners at a public event in Manchester in October 2015, local activists established a network called Greater Manchester Housing Action in order to coordinate campaigning at the city scale. In addition, the international non-governmental organisation Oxfam has sought advice from Focus E15 on how to

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3 get more people involved in grassroots campaigning. The occupation has also  
4 inspired artwork, with two plays 'E15' and 'Land of the Three Towers' staged  
5 around the UK. It is evident that the occupation has resonance beyond the  
6 particular context of London.  
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11 Unsurprisingly none of this is to say that the Carpenters' occupation or the  
12 campaign as a whole has not experienced problems and even setbacks, for  
13 example via the rehousing of vulnerable people on the estate as discussed above.  
14 There is also a sense among campaign members that the occupation occurred at  
15 just 'the right time when people [were] looking for answers about the London  
16 housing crisis and looking for examples, and there it all was [...]. [Since then]  
17 there's been occupations and it's not new anymore' (Eileen). The campaign has  
18 also been subject to police and council intimidation, including arresting  
19 members and harassing them during the action research project.  
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28 Focus members are themselves only too well aware of how building a  
29 sustainable campaign is far from easy. This is highlighted in the dozens of people  
30 who Focus have assisted with their housing problems through advocacy and  
31 protest, who have not - with some exceptions - stayed engaged once their own  
32 individual circumstances have been resolved:  
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38 What we want is people who have been helped by collective action to stay  
39 around and help others. But a lot of people are struggling [and] not  
40 everyone wants to be... on the street... petitioning and leafleting (Laura).  
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43 Nevertheless, Focus E15's weekly street stall has now entered its fourth year of  
44 operation, a testimony to the campaigners' dedication. The campaign has also  
45 received funding to establish an office and social hub in Stratford called 'Sylvia's  
46 Corner', whose name 'is a nod to Sylvia Pankhurst who was a suffragette and  
47 socialist organiser in the East End of London' (Focus E15 website), the sister-  
48 ancestor in struggle of the women of Focus E15.  
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## 56 **Conclusion**

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3 London's housing crisis is perhaps the most visible manifestation of the crisis of  
4 social reproduction in austerity Britain. The Carpenter's Estate occupation lays  
5 bare the gendered nature of this crisis, as well as the gendered nature of the  
6 urban commons and the struggles to defend them. Since urban commons are  
7 feminised, occupation can be considered a key strategy for current women's  
8 resistance to austerity and enclosure. If capitalism's inherent tendency is to  
9 dispossess people of resources and annihilate public space, occupation can be  
10 seen as a counter-movement to re-create it 'in common'. Such acts embody both  
11 symbolic *and* physical interruptions to processes of accumulation by  
12 dispossession in the austerity city.  
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21 There are also significant wider implications. The visibility of white working-  
22 class single mothers at the forefront of this struggle should be understood as a  
23 symbolic fracture in the aggressive anti-welfarism of which these subjects have  
24 become constituted as a key signifier. Far from the mediated abject figure  
25 represented in mass media and political discourses, the women of Focus E15  
26 have become figures of hope and resistance against austerity. The very subjects  
27 who have faced the most hostility re-emerge as the lead protagonists in  
28 fracturing the hegemonic anti-welfare common sense and generating alternative  
29 narratives around housing, austerity and the welfare state.  
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38 The Carpenters Estate occupation demonstrates how the creation of a temporary  
39 urban commons can have an enduring legacy in terms of the forging and  
40 deepening of relationships and the circulation of ideas and tactics. Urban  
41 commons, however temporary, are grounded in particular places within which  
42 people can encounter one another, cooperate and create together. This enables  
43 city dwellers to go beyond 'abstract solidarity' to create concrete networks of  
44 solidarity, grounded in specific places (Federici 2010: 144). As such, urban  
45 commoning is fundamental to the process of movement building in the city. The  
46 Carpenters Estate was not simply a symbolic backdrop. Rather, the materiality  
47 and specificity of the site was foundational for building a wider housing  
48 movement across London.  
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3 In the process of defending a public housing commons, the occupation  
4 simultaneously created a new commons characterized by the collectivization of  
5 social reproduction. This process of commoning provided the basis for the  
6 forging of enduring relationships, the strengthening of existing networks and the  
7 circulation of ideas and tactics. As such, the temporary urban commons created  
8 on the Carpenters Estate has enabled the reproduction and expansion of  
9 struggles for the right to the city on a more ongoing basis. We conceptualise this  
10 as an Olympic 'counter-legacy' that exists in opposition to the legacy of the 2012  
11 Games, which has in reality meant dispossession and displacement for many  
12 local working-class residents. The counter-legacy produced by Focus E15 is,  
13 instead, one of renewed power and agency amongst low-income inhabitants of  
14 austerity London. This counter-legacy breaks through the negative mediated  
15 representations of their lives and offers alternative visions for life in the city.  
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### 26 **Acknowledgements**

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