

# Tatting Down

July 11, 2005

"Tat" is a word I'd never heard until a few weeks ago, that has dominated my life throughout this action. "Tat" means "stuff", material resources, generally of a low but useful quality, and often acquired from 'skips', which at home we call 'dumpsters', by a process known as 'skipping' (tr. 'dumpster diving') or sometimes by 'blagging', which means talking people into or out of something. Hopefully not by 'nicking', that is, stealing, although 'getting nicked' also means 'getting arrested.' We spent weeks tatting, or acquiring tat, in order to create the ecovillage—from old bathtubs to plumbing parts to wood, and now we are 'tatting down', or taking the ecovillage apart. It's sad to see it go, sad to see all the social fabric deconstruct itself, the coaches turn back into pumpkins. Before it goes away entirely, I want to write something about the last few days.

Thursday was a muted day. The bombings in London and the fact that we were blocked in by lines of riot cops made it impossible to mount any major actions. We focused on cleaning up the camp and on prisoner support. By Friday, the last day of the G8 meetings, the police presence was lessened and many people went off to Glasgow to take over a bridge and protest the extension of the M74 motorway through a low-income neighborhood, where earlier in the month we had built the Cre8 Summit Community Garden. Others went to petrol stations and did climate change actions, the clowns bringing swimming pools and setting up tropical beaches.

In camp, we had an emergency meeting to deal with the toilet crisis. Our diversity of toilets included nine composting toilets built around wheely bins (wheeled garbage cans) which would be sealed and stored for two years, and the resulting compost then used on trees and ornamentals. It also included many trench toilets dug along the edges of the field, which would simply be filled in and left to compost in place. And it was supposed to include forty porta-loos (porta-potties, honey huts, chemical toilets), required by the Council for the license and which we were counting on for capacity.

Due to many circumstances beyond anyone's control, we never had more than fifteen, and for days the company had been unable to come in and clean them. First this was due to the police lines, but by Friday, a truck had managed to come through, only to be mounted by an exuberant and possibly drunk crowd who danced on top of it and reputedly threatened the driver. When his boss phoned for help, someone on the phone allegedly swore at him, and now the company was refusing to come back.

The incident illustrated some of the wild contradictions in the camp. While the vast majority of people were there to mount and support actions against the G8, there was a small but significant group of the festival/party crowd, who drank heavily, imbibed, I'm sure, in other consciousness altering substances, and caused an immense amount of

trouble to the rest of us. Overall Scottish and British culture is much more alcohol-focused than us U.S. puritans are used to, at least in action situations, and even the most serious activists like their beer and some loud disco music to unwind with at night. There were multiple sound systems in camp, and the thundering bass vied with the thrum of helicopters to disturb any possibility of sleeping.

By setting up an encampment, where we all had to live together for a week, we were constantly faced with the real life, practical implications of our politics. Does anarchism simply mean that no one can ever tell me what to do, whatever state of consciousness I'm in or however I'm affecting the good of the whole? How do we respect the individual freedom of those who are in no state to make rational decisions or listen to the needs of others, and who gets to decide? And at what point does the good of the whole override the absolute freedom of the individual? It's one thing to consider these issues in the abstract, another to spend half an hour at 2:30 AM trying to get a drunk to move back from the police lines.

And there were also many moments of wondrous beauty. At night, before the disco music started, groups would gather in the eddies of the meandering path through camp and play African drums or Scottish pipes. The Irish barrio, each night, would be gathered around the campfire, playing fiddle, singing songs, or listening to each others' poetry as their ancestors have done for centuries. One night the Infernal Noise Brigade, a radical marching band from Seattle, led us all in a procession around camp, joined by a samba band and challenged by the disco block. Another night, a midnight candlelit vigil walked from the gate to the police lines, carrying with it a palpable blanket of silence, and placed its candles at the feet of the riot cops. We had rituals around the faery hawthorne tree at the edge of camp, and deep conversations around the kitchens and campfires. We had meetings where people listened to each other and let their opinions change, where we brought our best collective thinking to a problem and went away heartened by the experience,

Saturday night, we were taking apart our improvised road, made of softboard laid over sticks that were milling waste from a local timber company. There was no practical way to re-use or recycle the sticks, so we pulled the boards off, piled up the sticks into pyramids, and burned them. One by one, bonfires came alight: five, eight, thirteen, seventeen, dancing beacons of flame under a new moon. A woman told me that this was one of the fields where William Wallace, Scotland's great hero, had called people to fight against the English invaders by lighting beacons in the field. We were all feeling sad at the ending of the camp, but the fires cheered our hearts and seemed to burn away any stuck or negative energies. John, the Irish fiddler, Brice, who is an expert at both renewable power and psychic energies, and I stood in the center, playing music, singing, and drumming, with an abundance of fire all around us, beacons calling us all to the ongoing fights for freedom. The faeries were very pleased. And now the camp is gone, the field is bare again, the experiment is done. But because it existed for a short time, in some realm of being it exists for all time, complete with all its problems and promise, a seed of what is possible.

-- *Starhawk*

Donations to help support Starhawk's trainings and work can be sent to:

ACT  
1405 Hillmount St.  
Austin, Texas  
78704  
U.S.A.

The G8, the annual agenda setting meeting of the heads of state of the eight most powerful countries in the world, occurred in Gleneagles, Scotland, July 6-8. The website for the action: [www.dissent.org.uk](http://www.dissent.org.uk)

Indymedia Scotland page [scotland.indymedia.org](http://scotland.indymedia.org)

Feel free to post, forward, and reprint this article for non-commercial purposes. All other rights reserved.

**Starhawk** is an activist, organizer, and author of *The Earth Path, Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising*, *The Fifth Sacred Thing* and other books on feminism, politics and earth-based spirituality. She teaches [Earth Activist Trainings](#) that combine permaculture design and activist skills, and works with the [RANT trainer's collective](#), that offers training and support for mobilizations around global justice and peace issues.