

**A Brief History
of Squatting
in Brighton**



using space five

Over at [mybrightonandhove](#) someone claims that the bombs were planted by Special Branch. As ever, it is a mystery as to what really happened but we can certainly take this as an example of a time when the dominant discourse triumphed. Squatters were painted as the bad guys, using violence, even though the state always maintains the monopoly on violence, whether threatened or implemented. Certainly, in terms of the nascent squatting movement, the public had up to that point been quite sympathetic towards squatters who resisted eviction by any means necessary (for example in Redbridge and Fulham).

Two articles published in editions 18 and 19 of the Brighton Voice (a radical left wing newspaper published from 1973 to 1989) in 1974 spread a bit more light on the 1969 events. The anonymous author, who was clearly involved with the squatting actions, comments that the Brighton Rents Project was backed up the May Day Manifesto group of socialists, young socialists, international socialists, anarchists and communists. Students were involved.

The group campaigned on homelessness, surveying rented accommodation, keeping lists of empties and supporting rent registration by tenants. The Council appears to have dismissed the group and called the police when the project attempted to present a petition (eleven people were arrested). Beginning in May 1969 the group moved towards direct action, with two token occupations of houses which were later demolished. There were then two occupations in Terminus Road, two council-owned properties in Queen Square were squatted and the Drill Hall (stated to be now the Sussex Sports Centre) was cracked.



Then came Wykeham Terrace. It seems clear from this account that Steve Prior was an infiltrator who did indeed firebomb the Army Recruitment office only to smear the squat. It is also interesting to hear that the group eventually fell apart as a result of lack of support from the left generally and because of political factionalism between anarchists, socialists and communists.

In assessing the whole experience the author claims victory, contending that fifteen families were rehoused, the council was pressured into spending £700 renovating houses and the matter was kept in the public eye for month.

Regarding lessons learnt, these seem useful words:

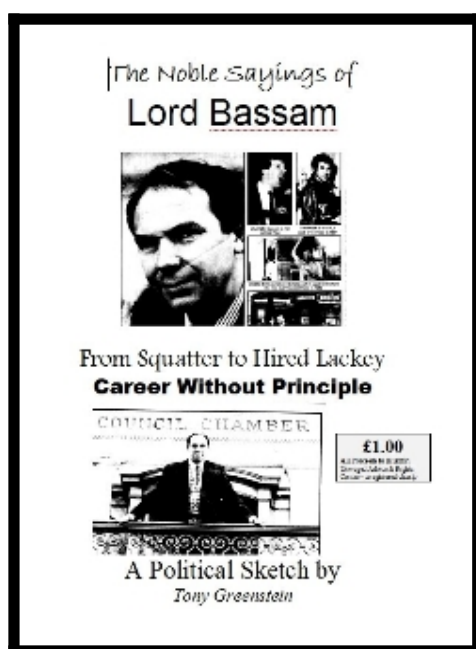
On the press – "the degree of press hostility depends on a leader writer's stomach condition rather than logic, so don't bother about press publicity, get your own"

On the public - "a large section of the public will not be swayed by either logical argument or humanitarian appeal to support you. they believe that homelessness (and by extension joblessness) arises from people being feckless layabouts. show them any contrary evidence you like but they won't believe you. so don't waste your time trying to get them on your side: just be as truthful as possible as often as possible, but once you sense their belonging to this group, move on"

Three people involved in this went on to become well known figures in Brighton, all for rather different reasons:

[Tony Greenstein](#), who is now secretary of Brighton & Hove TUC Unemployed Workers Centre, a member of the trade union Unison and also a founding member of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

[Steve Bassam](#), who led Brighton and Hove Council from 1987 to 1999 and is now Lord Bassam of Brighton, a Labour peer! In the introduction to a pamphlet which he wrote on the sayings of 'Lord Brownnose', Greenstein observes that Bassam is "an example of the corruption at the heart of New Labour. It is a corruption that isn't merely financial, although there is plenty of that but a corruption of the political process itself, which hides behind the soundbite and verbal chaff". However, "those who live by spin and the soundbite will also die by them".



Also active in the Brighton Squatters Union was Bruno Crosby, called 'king of the squatters' by the Argus in his [2002 obituary](#). By all accounts a charmer, 'Big Bruno' even managed to get the Tory Council Leader round to his Argyle Road squat for tea. This house had been empty for five years and was completely renovated by Crosby. In one copy of the Voice there's a listing for the Brighton Squatters Union which says simply 'Find Bruno in the Norfolk most nights'.

However, things could change pretty fast. Perhaps the squatters were the victims of their own success sine the next mention of squatters in the Voice (issue 25) declares on the front page – 'Squatters under Attack':

All over Britain in the last month, the squatting movement has been under attack. Not from the armed bailiffs of five years ago but from the worthless articulate hacks of many newspapers. The Sunday People recently carried out a four week group-probe into the London Squatters, during which reporters infiltrated squats and then wrote stories portraying them as the next cell of the revolution.

In the July 15 Argus an article written by Gorringe entitled 'Throwing out squatters' advocated using thugs "indemnified against possible court action" and this might have had something to do

with the Argus applying to the County Court for a possession order on 20 Granville Road, which belonged to the Southern Publishing Company and had been empty since some Argus journalists lived there.

BRIGHTON VOICE

April 76

No.29

10p

Temple Gardens Squat

INNOCENTS CONVICTED

GRAND BUMPER ISSUE

20 pages

JOHN JORDAN - 6 months suspended for 2 years + £15 fine.

PAUL MAYNARD - 6 months suspended for 2 years + £50 fine.

FRANK McCAZE - 6 months suspended for 2 years + £50 fine.

Last week, at Lewes Crown Court these three squatters were shamefully subjected to a blatantly political trial and found guilty of an offence which two of the convicted also's even see.

It was an offence which would never have taken place if their spouses, a gang of crooks and hired thugs, hadn't staged a brutal assault on them in the first place.

As most of our readers will recall from Issue 26, the trial followed events at 2 Temple Gardens on Sep 8 when Joseph Norton (self-made millionaire) and his cronies tried to throw 7 squatters and 2 children out of their home.

A string of lampright lies were accepted in evidence by an 'ambitious' judge. For there was no other way these innocent men could have been convicted on the testimony of hired thugs, one with 14 convictions for violence, possessing a gun and theft - the fourteen stone David Silver.

As the week long trial dragged on it became obvious that the affair of 2 Temple Gardens was a sly issue and that the men were really standing trial for being squatters.

And they were found guilty of being squatters. How else could 3 men get such vicious sentences for causing ONE TINY CIVIL to their illegal stayers.


ESPECIALLY WHEN THE REAL 'SQUATTER', JIMMY GREENWICH, HAS COME FORWARD AND ADMITTED HE STUCK THE 'GREENWOOD' BLOW.

cut

The prosecution couldn't even tell the fair haired, bespectacled Jordan with the dark haired McCabe. In his various statements, Joseph Norton the property speculator who arrived in a Rolls-Royce was at different times the buyer, the seller and the agent for 2 Temple Gardens where the incident took place. According to the hysterical George Swenton his cut needed stitches at hospital, but the doctor who saw him said nothing about any stitches, and according to the record treatment consisted of a sticking plaster.

When the jury queried this 'seemingly evidence', the judge made no effort to establish the truth.

(cont. on page 5)



VOICE IS 3 YRS OLD

What! TEN pence.

We are very sorry but there are compelling reasons. For a start it's bigger; 20 pages cost more than 12 or 14. Then for many reasons now we have been running on donations from supporters and friends and we feel that we must now try to break even on each issue. Be top of that the printing press broke and now that half of this issue has been printed in London, Essex 10p. But we will still be making no profit whatsoever, and if future issues are less than 20 pages we will reduce the price accordingly.

In issue 26 (Oct/Nov 1975) the front page screams 'Hired thugs in action again'. The squat at 2 Temple Gardens was attacked by heavies in one of SIX attempts to get them out before the court order was granted. A writer in the Voice opined "there is no issue about whether squatting is right or wrong. Homelessness is wrong and squatting is one way of doing something about it". Students were encouraged to squat to free up property for those in need and also to stop rent prices rocketing (since landlords were able to charge £30 a week for 6 students in a house).

The article finishes up:

Of course squatting is an attack on private property: it should be. Not an attack on the houses themselves or a destruction of walls, windows or floors, but a principled attack on the iron law of property which rules our society, making it lawful for some people to have two, three or twenty houses and others to have none at all. It may be the law but it is not justice. Squatting is one way of bringing a little bit of justice into this ruthless society. MORE PEOPLE SHOULD SQUAT.

On August 12 1975, a big debate on squatting (100 people) was organised by the Young Conservatives at the Marlborough and there were estimated to be 150 squats in Brighton.

In 1976, a motion by Brighton Council calling on the Government to criminalise squatting was passed by 39 to 12. The Campaign Against the Criminal Trespass Law fought an ultimately successful struggle to protect squatters rights.

And the Squatters Union had a first birthday party – on November 6 1976 at the Art College, on Grand Parade. Admission was 40p, or 30p for members 30p.

In June the following year, Britannia House on Queens Road was squatted as a ‘Stuff the Jubilee’ action (Voice, issue 38).

As an indication of the impact which squatters had on urban planning and local politics, we have a quote from a Voice interview with Michael Elbro, Brighton’s new Housing Manager, who said in 1979:

I think that squatting is a symptom of the problem, it’s not a problem in itself, it is only so because of the laws of our land. as squatting becomes more vociferous then we need to sit up and think that there’s a lot wrong with the housing situation as it is. (issue 44 feb 1978).

That bastion of truth [the Argus](#) recorded in 2007 that “The former Astoria Bingo Hall in Gloucester Place, the old court house and register office in Princes Street and the Madeira Café in Kemp Town were all wrecked as squatters descended on the city in the late Nineties”.

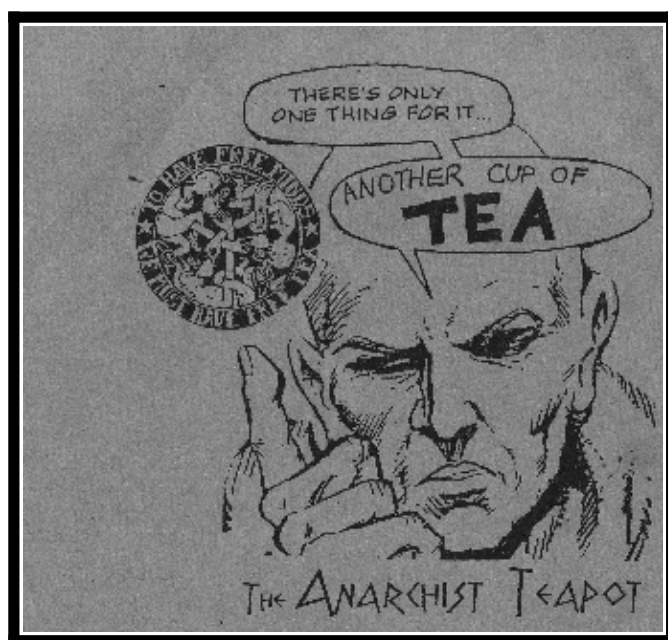
From 1993-5 some abandoned beach chalets were squatted near the West Pier. You can get a picture of just how much Brighton has changed when you go down the seafront and stop to observe that now these chalets are all now occupied by nightclubs, artists shops and tourist emporia.

Amusingly, when the squatters were evicted in 1996, half of them moved on to the abandoned West Pier, a wreck which could only be reached over water. You can find two local news clips on youtube (below) called ‘West Pier Squatters’ (with Bassam popping up but scrupulously ignoring his squatter past).

In 1994, the group Justice? was formed out of opposition to the [Criminal Justice Bill](#), which amongst other things criminalised raves. The old court house was squatted. And [Schnews](#) was born.

In 1996, Justice? set up a Squatters Estate Agency to publicise the large amount of empty properties remaining in Brighton. You can also find a local news report about that on youtube...

Other groups active in Brighton were SPOR and Anarchist Teapot. Both deserve a mention.




From 1996-9 the [Anarchist Teapot](#) collective squatted a variety of shops and organised vegan cafes in Brighton and Worthing in something like eight locations. There was always free tea apparently.

At one stage a Burger King was squatted on the London Road. The collective then shifted towards being a mobile soup kitchen, catering at activist events.


From 2000, a building on London Road was purchased which would later become the [Cowley Club](#), a self-organised social centre. Around this time there was a huge debate over whether legal spaces where a good alternative to squatted projects. In this particular case, it seems the move to a space which plays the legal game yet remains oppositional was extremely wise since public squats tend to last a few months at most in Brighton and the Cowley has been open now for eight years.

SPOR were a loose grouping of artists and musicians who put on a couple of high profile art events. In 1999, they opened up some buildings at York Place, near to St Peters church, for a month long art exhibition which culminated in a party. In Jan/Feb 2001, SPOR took the disused Co-operative Bank, on Ship Street. The place was worked on intensively and then opened up as a family-friendly

art space. A film called [Rhizomatic#1](#) documents some of the philosophy behind the project. When the time came to evict, confused bailiffs met sock puppets talking to them through the letterbox and then [broke in to find an empty building](#). The squatters had barricaded the building and then escaped from the roof.



underground networks in resonance



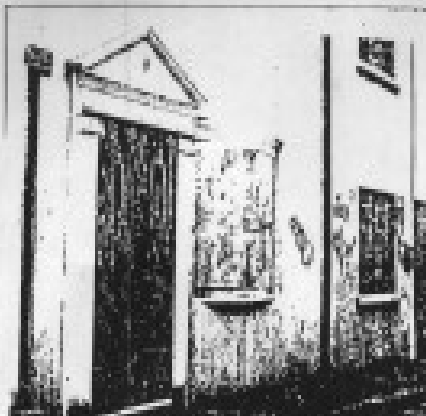
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CLOSING DOORS ON THE HOMELESS



In October the Government announced plans to criminalize squatting. The proposals, which could mean up to 6 months in prison or a £5,000 fine will have serious repercussions on the homeless.

There are an estimated 600,000 empty properties in this country, while there are nearly 1 million families and individuals without a home. Squatting therefore is a valuable and effective way of solving housing problems.

To make squatting illegal means:

- more pressure on local councils, who already have long waiting lists for houses
- instant criminalization of the 65,000 people (including many families) who squat
- a burden on local people who will foot the bill for the extra police and court time used in dealing with squats

It will also increase the likelihood of violence being used against those who continue to squat rather than be left homeless.

The proposals will be put to Parliament in March '92. They offer no solutions to the problems faced by homeless people, but in fact make the situation worse.

WHY ARE HOUSES EMPTY WHEN PEOPLE ARE HOMELESS?

*Squatting is a positive answer. Please take action
to preserve the right to a home.*

Information and support for anyone who is, or wants to squat, and information for anyone who wants to get involved is available from:

Squatting Support Group
c/o Unemployed Centre, Prior House,
Tilbury Place, Brighton BN2 2GY
☎ 671213 (daytime) or 622791 (eves)

In 2006, Home Farmhouse in Stanmer Park was [squatted](#). It was squatted again for a blissful few weeks in the [summer of 2010](#).

Also in 2006, the Ray Tindle Centre on Upper Gardner Street was squatted as a social centre. The full tale of despicable speculation is told at [Rough Music](#). There's also film on youtube...

Rough Music also covered in a few short articles the zero-tolerance policy on squatting. "Top cop" Nev Kemp stated in the Argus that "[we won't tolerate squats in Brighton](#)". [RM responded](#):

Clued-up Rough Music readers will surely be aware that squatting is sensible and legal. Unfortunately, reliably thick and corrupt Sussex Police don't seem to be so clear about it, and treat squatting as one of those things that aren't quite actually illegal but should be – like protesting, cycling and tofu.

In April 2008, to tie in with the [days of action in support of squats and autonomous spaces across Europe](#), a church was squatted on London Road. It lasted a few months and resisted eviction before being forcibly taken. It features in a film called [Takeover](#) and was briefly resquatted as a SmashEDO convergence space in 2009. The front of the church has now been converted into living space and the rest (ie the hall and a large back room) are presumably still standing empty.



The screenshot shows the Mail Online website interface. At the top, the 'Mail Online' logo is visible. Below it is a navigation bar with links for Home, News, Sport, TV&Showbiz, Femail, Health, Science&Tech, Money, Debate, and Coffee Break. A secondary navigation bar includes News Home, World news, Arts, Headlines, Pictures, Most read, and News Board. The main content area features a sidebar on the left with an advertisement for 'This Month's Top Card Offers' for 'TOP FOR POOR CREDIT' featuring a Visa card. The main article headline is 'The £1.75m freeloaders: Squatters take over King Edward VII's Brighton mansion'. The byline reads 'By DAILY MAIL REPORTER' and 'Last updated at 12:29 AM on 11th December 2008'. There are links for 'Comments (0)' and 'Add to My Stories'. The article text begins with 'In the 179 years since it was built, Fife House has been the home of dukes and princesses, and a refuge for a king. But on Wednesday a motley band of squatters were writing a new chapter in the Regency mansion's illustrious history. Up to 12 of them have moved into the Grade 1 listed property and pinned a notice in the porch declaring their legal rights under Section 6 of the Criminal Law Act 1977.'

The same year saw people squatting Fife House, an opulent property on Lewes Crescent, adjacent to Sussex Square. This got quite a lot of press and formed part of a whole string of stories (mainly London based) of so-called 'millionaire squats'. Interestingly, the media (until recently at least) have been quite sympathetic to these occupations, presumably since it involves the ultrarich being punished for leaving [expensive properties](#) empty (as second or even third or even tenth houses!).

And [Temporary Autonomous Art](#) took place in Brighton for the first time, in a squatted warehouse in Portslade, in 2008. TAAs (inspired by Hakim Bey's notion of the Temporary Autonomous Zone) have been taking place all over the country recently – in Manchester, London, Sheffield and Bristol. What began as a tactic to release creativity from the underground free party movement in London has evolved slowly into an art exhibition taking place in a squatted warehouse environment. Sadly this means that most of the interesting elements have been lost, since the events have retreated into

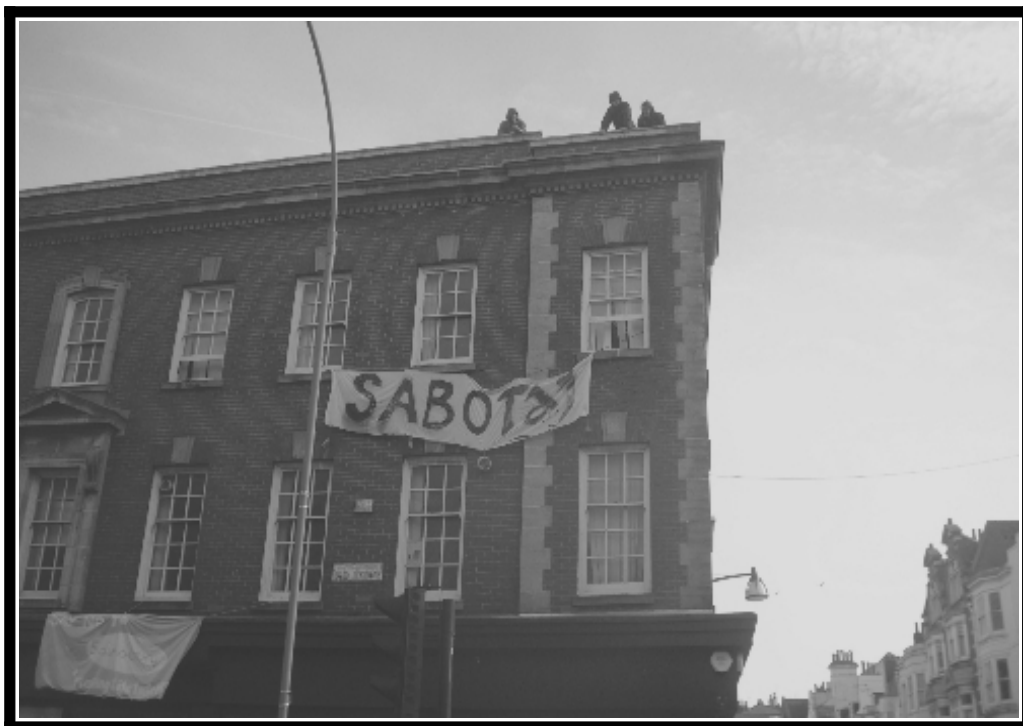
the industrial areas of towns rather than being in confrontational yet accessible venues, such as the early London TAAs in Farringdon, Hackney and Stoke Newington.

The 2009 version could have gone better, with a warehouse venue in [Moulsecoomb](#) being squatted. This meant that the event catered to friends and friends of friends rather than the public. The 2010 version ended before it began, with the venue getting illegally evicted on the Thursday.

The [Freespace collective](#) occupied the former Gamer Heaven, a shop under a block of offices near to Preston Circus in 2009. They organised some cafes and gigs.



Recently there have been some positive stories for example the [Taj occupation](#) (below), the [Lewes Road Community Garden](#) (above, now sadly evicted, [Schmovies](#) made a great film about it), the InItOnIt parties and the School on Old Shoreham Road. The latter had widespread [local support](#) since residents are united in their outrage at developers leaving buildings to rot and fall down so they can then build new yuppy houses.



And this is by no means the end, lately we've had a straight-edge social centre in a shop on North Road, the Ainsworth House Christmas eviction resistance and more active squats than in recent memory! More on that in revisions to come, no doubt....

The Argus

The 12 shows of Christmas

This month brings you the holiday entertainment highlights PLUS the pick of the best festive films



Group refuses to leave building before Christmas

SQUATTERS FIGHT BACK

By Jennifer Pugh
A group of squatters has refused to leave a building before Christmas. The group, known as the Brighton Squatters, has been occupying the building since last year. They claim that the building is unsafe and that they have no other options. The council has been asked to evict them but has refused. The squatters are now facing a court case. They are determined to stay in the building until they are evicted.

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ride the Section 6 and kick the door in. Let's get this straight – the police regularly intimidate squatters with spurious charges (eg criminal damage for taking off a lock) which never end up in court. What a waste of taxpayers' money!

The flipside of the coin here is that cops have also got used to being able to blag or kick their way into buildings. If people were more on it and knew their rights the police would not be able to do this (or at least it would happen less). Brighton has changed a lot in the last 15 years. It's now a place where the centre is patrolled by private security (SASS), you have to pay for parking pretty much everywhere in the centre, traveller vehicles are hassled out of town and (most outrageous of all) the cops are planning to put a police station on the Level ('for the community'!?). A previous version said squats in the Laines might now be hard to pull off, but in fact there have been social centres at Churchill Square and North Road recently.

But nowadays it is hard to squat here, not impossible but difficult. Sussex Street, Shaftesbury Place, Rugby Place, Southdown Road, College Terrace, St. James Street, Argyll Road, York Place, Richmond Place and Albion Road have all seen squats which lasted at the most a few months, sometimes just days. There are other squats, better off anonymous, which have existed for years, but these are certainly the exceptions rather than the rule. However, things do seem to be on the up, as proven by the recent Taj occupation and the social centre projects. It was amazing that a building in central Brighton could be held until eviction through the court process without descending into a mess. The main reason for that was presumably the safer spaces policy which ensured that no-one in the building was using alcohol or other drugs.

In its brief lifetime the Sabotaj project attracted a lot of people and energy. Despite squatting being legal (for now!) and despite there being plenty of positive stories about squatting if you care to look for them, it seems that mainstream opinion is massively against squatting. This is in some degree shaped by (and indeed shapes) the appalling coverage given to the comparatively few instances of squatting horror stories. But you don't ban alcohol because some people occasionally get too drunk.

Whatever happens, squatting will continue.

Don't believe the hype...

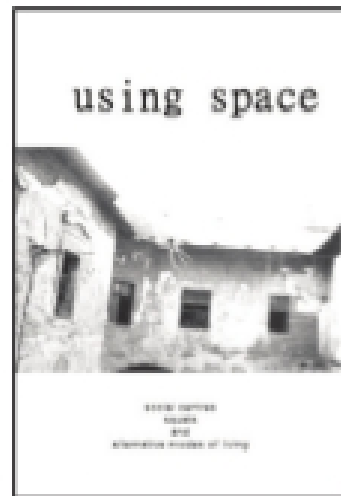
Squat the world!

Email additions to snobaha@gmail.com



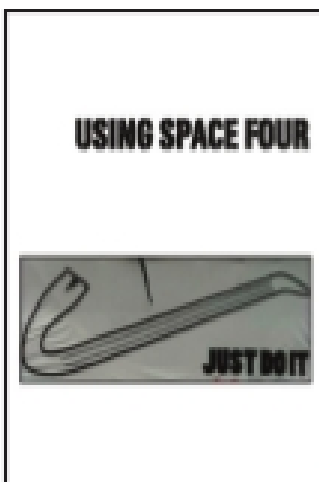
BACK ISSUES OF USING SPACE

using space one introduces a zine about social centres, squats and alternative modes of living .. you get a long rant about various social centres i have visited or lived in around europe, as well as a profile of the poortgebouw in rotterdam, the netherlands.



using space two focuses on a squatted street in rotterdam. two long articles and some fotos from the now-evicted project are included. the second article is in dutch, the first in english.

- thoughts about the future of squatting
- report on the progress of the now defunct Maelstrom social centre in Leeds
- a personal history of the ELF squat in Amsterdam



- visit to a squatted land project in central Amsterdam
- the UK national squat meet in Bristol
- rumination on social centres
- large squatting action in Sweden
- fotoreport from the Dutch national squatting day
- recycled newspaper reports

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