

**one day in  
london**

**using space**

**I4**



# ONE DAY IN LONDON

**I have to say one of the things I like most about not squatting offgrid anymore is being able to have a bath easily. So there I was sitting in the bath reading a book on Saturday morning and at a certain point I felt like becoming aquatic and never moving again, yet in the end I'm glad I hauled myself out and went into London.**

**The 'anti-university' were doing a series of events to commemorate the original anti-university of 1968, whatever that was. The only thing that had caught my eye was a social centre tour, so I headed up to Bethnal Green, to the Common House.**

**I had never been there before, it was interesting to see that it's basically a rented room in a building used for meetings and they pay 20 grand a year in rent?! I'm not sure if that fits to my idea of what a social centre is (not that it matters what I think if people are self-organising and doing cool stuff).**

**We heard short presentations about the Feminist Library and DeCentre. Feminist Library is currently in negotiations with Southwark Council for a new building on a 25 year lease and I hope that works out for them! DeCentre is a small room above Freedom Bookshop which hosts occasional events and functions as a communal space for local anarchists.**

**So what does a social centre mean to people? I guess I was expecting the people on the tour to be**

**involved with spaces themselves but out of the 20 or so peeps, the ones I spoke to were mostly new to social centres and wanting to find out more, which is also good! There were even three Germans in London for 2 weeks whose professor had done something at the original anti-university and who had ordered them to drop by! I think they had fun, especially when we were set exercises to do by megaphone as we walked/trained it through London! Different perspectives are always welcome, for example one person asked why the social centre network isn't connected to Kurdish community centres and that really brings to the forefront the invisible lines dividing struggles.**

**Actually, our old Dutch social centre did have some links between our anarchist space and Kurdish groups, but they were hard to maintain, since they didn't understand our wish for a vegan kitchen and our levels of (kitchen?) cleanliness routinely disappointed them. Also in NL Kurdish groups can easily get state funding (often as a way to negate their radicality). This makes me think about it the other way round, since self-organised spaces almost never ask for funding as a point of pride but maybe they should, like for example doing the old EYFA scam where you got a volunteer from a different EU country to come work for 6 months and then got loads of money for the project. And if the person was already known to the group, well then all the better they could even be a ghost volunteer and all the money could go to good causes.**

**Anyway I digress. I did have a fascinating discussion with someone involved with a group using Common House about how they needed a local meeting space at times convenient for them, which felt safe and**

**which everyone could get to easily. I guess this explains the need for Common House, as a space to be used for meetings, for me to be honest it didn't seem much like a social centre since it didn't seem to be ever open for public events and there's a limited possibility of sociality when it's a room behind two locked doors. Also for me a social centre is multifunctional whereas this in fact seemed better described as a meeting place. However, that's just a superficial opinion, I'm sure I don't know the full story, there was an offhand remark about a sex workers radio station which sounded cool. And that demonstrates well the need to be locally sited, even if I'm still a bit stuck on the 'paying 20 grand a year in rent' thing.**

**Paying rent is always going to be hard without having something to bring in the money, whether that be creative funding or other income streams. The Cowley Club has a housing co-operative living above it which pays rent and also has the private members bar, so that's two fairly reliable income sources. There have been projects which tried to make money as a dry vegan cafe but they don't tend to last long. And that's the brutal truth.**

**We then walked down to LARC, a lovely stroll in the sunshine. Now LARC is also a funny one, I haven't really been there much since it was bought and setup in the late 1990s and we used to have meetings in the cold cellar. It doesn't seem very embedded in its local scene (whatever that would mean in practice) but people say it's well used by activist groups so maybe it is working out, I must say to me it seems a bit tired and unused. Again just an outside opinion. Good that it's there I guess. And anyway it does define itself as an action resource centre, not a social centre...**

**At LARC we got a presentation about social centres from the early 2000s onwards, starting with Grand Banks and moving forward through squatted social centres (Spike, Russell Square, Offmarket, Non Commercial House, 195 Mare Street, Social Centre Plus etc). There was a definite East London focus since there used to be so much going on (RiP Hackney).**

**You can check the clusters on [maps.squat.net](http://maps.squat.net)**

**Grand Banks and maybe Russell Square too were WOMBLES projects (or had WOMBLES involvement, or however you want to put it). This anarchist group was influenced by Italian social centres of the YABASTA / White Overalls persuasion, doing some large Mayday events and organising a string of social centres. For the person who made the speech it was cool to just rock up as a young local and hang out at Grand Banks without needing to spend money or justify their presence. I can see that being a great formative experience in the same way that squat raves taught me about autonomy and freedom. For this person the open door aspect of a social centre was really important, so that anyone could just appear and start chatting. As I write this now I see maybe this could also be a comment on LARC and Common House, which are both far from having an opendoor. I don't know about this, I don't think it's necessary, of course it depends on local context, but in squats I'm more used to keeping the door shut to keep the cops out.**

**Furthermore, if you are going to do it legally and have a bar, then you probably want to have a private members club and the door needs to be shut as a licencing condition. And I have to say, this then also becomes a useful control mechanism since it's easier to keep out people at the door than kick them**

**out when they are already inside and trying to hit someone else over the head with a bar stool. This may sound harsh, but these things happen and please remember context, if you are there long enough as a project there will be people you want to keep out of the centre whether that be cops, trouble-making kids, drunk violent knobs or whatever. I'm worried this makes me sound harsh, but I'm thinking right now about social centres functioning as bars or venues. Other places I've been involved with, like bike repair workshops or infoshops, yeah sure by all means keep the door wide open.**

**Funnily enough my experience of London social centres pretty much ended where the talk began. I lived in London something like 1995 to 1999 and it was actually a bit of a lull. When I arrived, Cooltan had just been evicted in Brixton :( There was the Rainbow Church in Kentish Town. Squat parties got me into the scene, and there were sometimes midweek squatcafes in Hackney. 121 was still going, it was evicted in 1999, I went there a couple of times for meetings and to be honest it seemed very worn down. Dead by Dawn did excellent weird noise and speedcore parties though. I'm trying to think what else there was. It feels like most activisty meetings at that time took place in pubs and universities.**

**Sadly I never went to Spike, it sounds like an amazing project. I also never went to 491. Too late now! As an infoline once said "Big parties happen because people attend them."**

**We did do TAA, Temporary Autonomous Art, a series of squatted art events put on by free party folks who wanted to do something else as well as**

**full-on parties. Funnily enough I went to a TAA after the social centre tour which was awesome and explains why I had such a great day overall. More on that below.**

**After LARC we took the “new” overland train down to New Cross Gate to go to the Field. When we got there, the person on the tour repping the Field wasn’t able to get us in since the code on the door had been changed. It didn’t really matter, we could still sit in the front garden, although it would have been cool to see it. I was expecting something like a garage from what I had read about it online, but actually it’s bigger than that. It’s like the annex to a house. Strange it was standing empty, now apparently they’ve got it rentfree for 5 years before it will be demolished. Let’s hope it goes longer!**

**Now I did say it’s bigger than I thought, but it’s still tiny:) It is noticeable that all the radical spaces in London are quite small. Aside from the ones previously mentioned, 56a, Mayday Rooms and Freedom are all pretty small.**

**So then the question is why are the social spaces in London so small? Well, the obvious answer is that property prices dictate that we can only carve out small pockets of resistance. Even a bought space like LARC is small. Even a place like Mayday Rooms rented with Sainsbury money is small (also it’s an archive, it doesn’t need to be crazy big). For sure that’s a “big” part of it, but still in other European cities we have massive freespaces. And it’s not even like we have any huge legalised venues that survived from back when property prices weren’t insane. Rome’s got shitloads of spaces, like Forte Prenestino, SCUP, Metropoliz, exSnia, squatted cinemas etc, Paris had Transfo,**



**Copenhagen's got fricken Christinia and Ungdomshus and the Volketshus, Amsterdam had ADM and has OCCII, OT301, Vrankrijk, Maastricht's got Landbouwbelang, Cologne's got the AZ. I could go on... Les Tanneries, Leoncavallo, Bike Wars, Arena, Kemika, Metelkova, Rozbrat, Uzipis, Ruigoord, Grangegorman, ORKZ, Köpi, Black Triangle, Auro...**

**Most of these began squatted and maybe that's another factor, nowadays it's hard to imagine a big longterm squat in London (yet by no means impossible, a city the size of London you can still get lucky and Grow Heathrow shows it is possible). Big buildings get squatted pretty much every weekend for parties, and sometimes they end up not being hit and run but residential for a while, I can think of a couple in Tottenham and Hackney Wick that went that way. What a bummer one of them didn't turn into a solid longterm venue. I guess the thing is something about the English mentality means the authorities here don't turn a blind eye, like they (used to) do in other countries. But I think it's also really a sign of our weakness as a movement and that's a fucking shame.**

**Obviously, holding down a big squat is loads of work don't get me wrong. However I do miss them in the UK. And also the feeling of strength you get from participating in them. So maybe I do have to face the facts and admit it's all now a bit impossible in the UK. Anyway it seems the new styles are different. Someone told me about Make Your Own Shift, a communal bike repair project and it all seemed a bit popup hipster shizzle to me, but then apparently they have a creche and a bar and stuff, so maybe they are providing social centre functions in a new form.**

**What do people actually want? Maybe people just want hit-n-run parties to get smashed at. Maybe people don't want infoshops. I mean, who wants zines that have to be printed out nowadays amirite?**

## **WHO WANTS ZINES ANYWAY!?**

**I should point out at this point that DiY Space for London exists! I can't say I have been there (yet - I haven't been living in England since it opened). I've got to say I am dubious about the longevity of a rented venue, but at the same time they would have bought a space if they could have and at least they have already got further than many projects (such as Emmaz).**

**I guess what I would like to see are more self-organised projects of any form. It's difficult to decide how much capitalism to bring into a project. Renting for me is a killer resource drain to be avoided but of course that's not always possible. And owning / meanwhile leasing / whatever doesn't in any way exempt you from all the day-to-day problems of running a space. Places like Brighton and Bristol have all this "alternative" stuff going on, but it never seems to end up in longterm radical spaces. I do wonder why.**

---

## **PAUSE FOR BREATH**

**From the Field we led a vanguardist revolutionary (and hungry) brigade (of three) on to TAA (Temporary Autonomous Arts). Wow there's lot to say about TAA as well, I even wrote a zine about TAA a couple of years back which I never finished, I should dig that out since it had an awesome title (*TAA very much*).**

**This was a *Tiny TAA* and it was actually in the same building as the Pokora rave two weeks before, very close to Old Street roundabout. This area used to get partied a lot before it got gentrified in the late 1990s, early 2000s. I remember an Immersion party in a building just off Kingsland Road which didn't even have an exterior wall, we were literally partying looking out on the City of London. I mentioned the name of the street to an old head and they immediately said Insanity used to do parties there. I remembered nearby Curtain Road as well. And of course the Foundry with the rotating dancefloor in the basement.**

**So it felt sort of familiar to be partying there but actually nowadays to be so central is quite unusual. I can understand why they wanted to hold onto it for TAA, it's a great building. Would be cool if it stays longer, but of course it won't. It'll just get taken to court and evicted. Pff!**

**Also for TAA it was an oldskool venue. In the beginnings TAA was in places like Farringdon and Stokeley, then it moved further out to Hackney Wick and Tottenham. This suited the travelling culture of the scene, people could rock up in their vans from other cities, but it lost the interventional side of things, where anyone could enter because they were walking past and be like "wow oh shit what's this?" To be honest that was always one of the most interesting aspects for me, although i wouldn't have thought we got much passing traffic in Old Street, it was down a sidestreet and anyway there wasn't an open door.**

**TAA was really cool, props to the people who made the mad scaffolding hammock thing on the roof!**



**Also it was good that nobody fell off the roof. It was funny at the party when we were all up there scaring the neighbours and someone started raging and my buddy who was blitzed on K started wobbling then tumbled over for no reason and we got a bollocking from Pokora party crew for not being careful :]**

**BIG LOVE POKORA for actually looking after their ravers, that doesn't happen enough any more (I'm wearing my hoody as I write this ... and listening to speedcore obv)**

# CERTIFICATE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

*proclaiming to all and sundry*

*This 'ere toilet you be shitting on*

*...was successfully prepared one week ago for ye olde ~~Parkara~~ rave  
And there was much rejoicing. After, the good people who did hold it  
down all week were often here doing their essential business.*

*Now this humble porcelain pot greets you to the TAA  
It wishes you a wonderful piss.*

**SEE YOU AGAIN IN ABOUT AN HOUR**

*Saturday, 22 June 2019*

DATE

*Thomas J. Crapper*

SECRETARY

**When I went back to the same building for the TAA, I certificated the toilet (see previous page). I was just so impressed when I went to the rave that they had plumbed in one toilet an hour before and it didn't get trashed!? That's surely unheard of for a squat party. And more than that, it was still there and functioning for the TAA. What a trooper.**

**I got dragged along to a street party under a bridge right by Shoreditch High Street station. It was awesome! There was this sick 12volt sound chariot thing pumping out dirty music and people cycling around on crazy bikes nearly crashing into all the normies wandering past no doubt asking themselves what the fuck was going on. It really cheers me up to be in zones like the street party or TAA when the people present are the ones who are controlling how the space functions, not the CCTV or the cops in our heads. It makes me feel strong and part of something which isn't bullshit. It doesn't happen often, but it's the same feeling as when I drove into Köpi's wagenplatz or when I hitched onto a teknival terrain or when you walk around the echoing floors of a massive squat.**

**...**

**I loves freespaces! What else is there really?**

**That's it for now, maybe see you at the next TAA in September, check <http://taaexhibitions.org/> nearer the time for updates...**

## **CURRENT (2019) LONDON SOCIAL SPACES**

### **East:**

**Common House**

**DeCentre**

**LARC**

**Sylvia's Corner**

### **South:**

**56a Infoshop**

**DIY Space**

**Feminist Library**

**Field**

### **North:**

**Make Your Own Shift**

### **Central:**

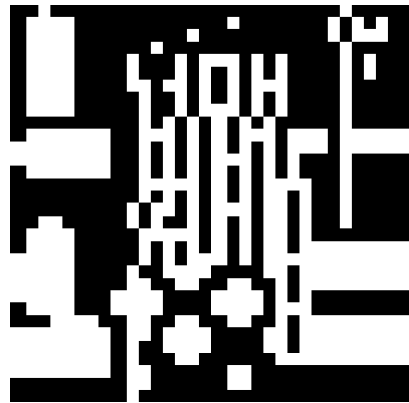
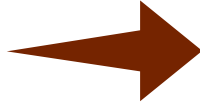
**Mayday Rooms**

## **UK SOCIAL CENTRES**

**[organisemagazine.org.uk/social-centres](http://organisemagazine.org.uk/social-centres)**

## **WORLDWIDE SOCIAL CENTRES**

**[radar.squat.net](http://radar.squat.net)**



**using space 14**  
**summer 2019**

