

Westminster University – Christine Wall

Interview – Julia Dwyer

Transcribed by www.premiertyping.com, alison.mcpherson@premiertyping.com

Interviewer – Italics

Interviewee – Normal

[?/word] – denotes audio inaudible/unclear

...that's one of the things we're going to start with.

Oh, I'm bona fide [laughing].

You mean, you're British [laughing]?

I am, indeed.

So, I mean, what I'm going to do, I'll introduce myself onto the tape so we locate it, but what I'm going to start to do is to start off by asking you when and where you were born, and then asking you to sort of tell me as much or as little about your past, up until you started to squat, so, basically, the story leading up to squatting.

Right.

But I'm just going to say, this is Chris Wall interviewing Julia Dwyer in Brixton on February 15th 2017. So, the very first thing to ask you is when and where you were born...

So, I was born in 1953 in Oxford, and I, eh, then must have travelled to Australia when I was one, sailed from Tilbury, I believe, so round about one, I don't really know, I can't get it out of my mother, and so I grew up in Sydney, only in two different houses in Sydney, and I went to the University of Sydney to study Architecture. And there was, you know, quite a lot of young women going to architect school, or certainly in Sydney University then, em, and it was a very kind of...they said "arty" but it didn't mean that really. It was quite a radical course, at the time, and so we were involved in all kinds of direct action. When we first arrived, there was a sort of teach-in for two weeks. We were in first year, and the third-years educated us about the school. They changed the course, so that was a bit of a baptism of fire. It was a very creative place, and we also got involved, via the staff, in building shelters for the first ever outdoor music festival in Australia, up in Nimbin in Northern New South Wales.

Who were your tutors then? Were there any that stood out as being particularly radical?

There was a guy called Colin James who was exceptional, who worked, I think... He was quite...he was quite academic – he'd been to Harvard and stuff, but I think he worked for the government housing office or had commissions to do work for them. There was a lot of...you know, there's a big government housing...government architects' department, as in the UK, and he was also very, very caught up with aboriginal housing in the city, in Sydney. So, he was really radical, and the aboriginal housing – aboriginal people had, for generations, come to live right near where the University of Sydney was, em, not people from Sydney originally but people who came in from the Bush, from... So, he was very much involved with them, for many, many, many years, and he also got involved in this big festival and went and built toilets and lean-tos and, you know, things like that. We went down

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to an architecture student thing down in Melbourne, and we built a lean-to – this was all in second year. Then, in third year, we built our own autonomous house, a group of us out of the year. It was quite a big year, so there must have been-

So, this is really hands-on stuff with materials...

Yeah. Yeah. So, we had a term of researching different parts of it. There were 15 people, I think, and then we built it in the second term, up to a stage, and then it was finished off the following year after I'd left. Em...yeah, I've got photographs you can see – somebody's posted them, hilarious.

[Laughter]

You know, and there were lots of pretty strong women in that...in that group of builders. I mean, it was really very much sort of...em...not overtly and not in a...not in an articulate way, but it was covertly completely challenging of gender and stereotypes in that group. We wouldn't have any of it. But, you know, I'm sure that there were lots of things that went unchallenged. But I think there must have been five or six out of the 15, maybe more, maybe six or seven, seven or eight... In fact, one of them was just teaching at Westminster this morning. She came to do a session for me – Michelle, fantastic. Anyway, so we did that and then I left the...I left and travelled, was in Africa for a year, travelling. I stayed still for quite a long time and got jobs teaching English as a Foreign Language, and then carried on, and came to England, and within about two weeks, I was squatting.

How come? How did that happen?

Well, because...I met somebody in...oh, I can't remember where I met them. I think we met them in Lamu in Kenya, em, and they said, "Oh yeah, when you come to London, come and stay with us," so we did, so we went straight, got the 38 bus to Farley Road in Dalston and stayed there until...until it became clear that we should leave. And we went to the AA because we knew about the AA from people who'd been there who'd come to the University and talked, eh, older students who'd come back to talk about stuff to do with, eh, em, eco-housing, autonomous housing stuff, the stuff that was going on in...at the AA. So, we went to the AA, em, and there was a huge noticeboard, covered with notices for people to come and, you know, people to stay, and one of the notices said "Squatters needed" to squat this house down in Camberwell, and when we went down to Camberwell, we went to the church, the Flodden Road Church, and everyone at that time went, "Oh my God, you went to the Flodden Road Church!" which was...I'm not sure if it was squatted or licensed but it was taken on by the street farmers, who were the people at the AA who were doing all this alternative energy stuff, so Graham [Kane] and the street farmers. So, they all lived in the church, and this guy, one of the people who rocked up, found his way there, had squatted another house round the corner and so we went and helped him squat it. And then, within a few days, the London & Quadrant Housing Association came round and said "Sorry, but we need this house." We'd put in a toilet and done all this stuff, and we said "Okay then." And then we, by then, found out from other people Union Place, which was a community print-shop down in...on Camberwell New Road, with lots of...it was a real sort of centre for activist groups who'd come in and get their newsletters, you know, Roneo-ed or their posters silk-screened. Anyway, they...some of them were squatting in St Agnes Place, and they said, "Oh, there's a new one opening up next to us," so we said, okay, so we went.

What year was this?

Eh, 1975 I think.

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Uh-ha.

Yeah, mid-1975, early-1975.

So, St Agnes Place was already established?

It was already...for about a year or so, it had started maybe, I'm not quite sure. There were certainly some houses that felt pretty well ensconced, but things were so rapid then that they already were comfortable. It was started by, em, sculptors, eh, stone-carvers, who were studying stone-carving at City & Guilds, and they went on and became stone-carvers and went to live in Wales and places like that. They started it, and then this just completely random, ragbag group of people then started to come in, and councils emptying the houses and so people were following the people out, then following them in through the back way.

So, what...so you took over a house that had already been squatted...?

No.

...or you opened up a new one?

No, they were all...they were all, em, they were all council houses. The Council probably CPO-ed the street.

Yeah.

Or it had actually – it had been GLC and they had demolished some of the houses years before so there was a group of empty houses in the middle, quite miserable, but there were lots of really good houses in both ends of the street, and they were gradually emptying out and people were just going in there after, afterwards, and there wasn't much, you know, attempt to do anything for the first...for quite a...for the first year or so. Lots of decent houses got, em, you know, housed people at that stage, and then it got a bit nasty after that. Eh, the Council, which was quite a right-wing Labour Council, started to organise, that when the tenants left, on that day, they would send in crews to smash the toilets and cut joists and so on. And so, we...we just watched the... There were a few tenants still left, not...I think maybe even one or two only by the time I arrived, and we kind of were watching...we kind of watched – we became quite organised. There were lots of street meetings. It was very, very well-organised and there were lots of different skills. There were builders and there were lawyers and...yeah, various people. One person worked in a Coop. She worked in the bacon section of the Coop up the road, so this person would come in there all the time and rant about squatters, so she found out when she was leaving and...

[Laughter]

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Inside information!

So, we were out the back and she was in the front and we followed her in. But the Council still went in, and all of those parts of the building-

I understand what you mean now – as the tenants left, the squatters came in.

Yes, came in the back.

I misunderstood, yeah.

Literally came in the back.

This was Lambeth Council?

Yeah, it was Lambeth Council. The street is a street that divides a sort of...a very old park, Kennington Park, which used to be Kennington Common, from an appropriated bit of open ground that had probably been, em, housing and factories and things years ago but had been bombed, and when I arrived, it was maybe a third covered with prefabs, and then there's this huge housing estate behind it called the Brandon Estate, which is quite famous. So, the Brandon Estate is an absolutely enormous estate, and then this open space, and then this street, so it was kind of...this halfway appropriated, and they said, the Council, that they wanted to close the street to make it into a park. That was the idea. It might have been a vestige of the Great – I don't think it was a vestige of [Abercrombie's] plan, I really don't, I can't imagine it was, because it's too...it's too close to the centre. But they had these grand ideas, and the GLC or Lambeth had already smashed about...de-roofed about six or seven houses, and were gradually moving people out of the rest, who were GLC tenants and then bought over by Lambeth. Anyway, so, ultimately, by about, I don't know, '76, it was all squatted, over a hundred squatters, more probably – well, kind of [sat down to]...in the group that met, and then there were the Rastas. There were a really famous three houses that were squatted by the Rastas, the London Rastas, and, famously, Bob Marley lived...stayed there for a while when he was going a rainbow and stuff like that. So, there were the Rastas and then there were the others [laughing], all the others, and yeah...

So, if you had street meetings, did everybody – were there representatives of every part...?

No. No.

The Rastas were separate?

The Rastas would come sometimes. There'd be nice stand-offs in other times, being quite sort of... It was a fractious relationship. Some people got to know some Rastas really well. There were some rejected Rastas who became ordinary squatters [laughing]. It was the usual mess.

Yeah.

So, yeah, and anyway, yeah, street meetings...

Can I ask you a bit about your own house?

Yeah.

What was it like when you first moved in? What state was it in?

It was...it was...it was pretty good actually. We...I mean, I didn't...you know, it was just a sort of...muted...it was pretty clean, and it had a little...tiny-weeny little bathroom with a, you know, everything jammed into a little old scullery. It had an Ascot water heater above – ah, no, it was down in the kitchen, whew, wasn't in the same place as the bathroom. No, it was down in the kitchen. It was a cut above the places in Fulham Road in that respect, and it had this tiny kitchen underneath it in the scullery, and then it was, eh, three-floored, so there was a terrace of...three-floored, three-floored terraces.

So, they were, what...?

There were semi-basements and steps up and, you know...

19th Century, mid...?

They were...

Early-19th Century?

No, no, mid to late, would have been built by Dutch builders in theory. They all had these quite lovely figures, heads, gothic heads on the arches. They were pretty dull though really. I mean, they're pretty phugh [makes noise]. They weren't grand like the [Villiers] Road houses that were really grand. But they weren't miserable like the...all the Stockwell houses.

Yeah, those low terraces of artisan...

They were shocking, depressing. Well, there were some over in...off, eh, Stockwell Road, that were...South Lambeth Road, that have all gone. They were quite...quite poor houses, and they weren't late as the Strathleven Road houses, or those Brixton houses. They weren't as...they were older and a bit grander. So, they were...so, so, you would have about...you would have a person a room, sometimes a couple, and you would have about six people, five people, five people in those houses, five to six people in those houses.

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Mm.

Yeah.

And you lived communally...?

Yeah.

...or separately or...?

Every – well, most people in those houses lived communally but not all. We knocked a wall down. That was a really good idea. We knocked the basement cross-wall down, and then we realised it was brick and that it was holding up...so we had to go and get an acro really – no, we got an RSJ! We went and got an RSJ off a building site that the Council had going over on the Brandon Estate.

What, and did you leave two brick piers or what?

It was a bit short, so we acro-ed it in, and then we built a brick pier around the acro.

[Laughter]

So, it was quite sturdy, and the guy who built the start of the brick, he got a bit bored halfway, maybe a third of the way up, and he showed me how to do it – it was this guy next-door called [Yinka]. He's called [Yinka] now, used to be called [Chalky Watts], and he learned how to, apparently, lay bricks in reform school, so he showed how to lay bricks [laughing]. So, I got really interested in bricklaying then and I went and did a bricklaying course at, eh, Brixton College, Brixton College of Building.

Was that City & Guilds?

No, I didn't follow – no, it was an evening class, sort of... I don't know what it was, it was...anyway, but they would do them, you know, and it was a branch of Vauxhall College so they had a...

Brixton School of Building?

Yeah.

It's very...well, Lethaby set it up, William Lethaby.

Ah yeah, yeah.

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So, it's quite-

Yeah, and it had a great big premises in Fentiman – not Fentiman Road, in...oh, that road between Brixton and Clapham North.

Yeah, yes, I know where it is.

Yeah.

It's...yeah, it's very [grand], it used to be, yeah, a very good reputation. It's great that you went there. That's quite a pedigree really, isn't it?!

Yeah.

Lethaby and [arts and crafts].

Yeah, yeah, it is.

So, but when you arrived, you must have...from the work that you said you did in Sydney while you were a student, you must have been pretty confident about just getting things done.

I suppose so, yeah, and there were lots of people, other people who were... One of the people next-door, there was [Chalky], who was a bricklayer – he didn't really...he wasn't into bricklaying though, but then there was a guy called Steve who was a well and true... He was earning quite a lot of money as a builder and I think he did James Hunt's – do you remember the horrible racing driver?

Yes, I do.

I think he did his bathroom. He came back with this bag of amazing spangly stuff that he'd put all over their bathroom [laughing]. They had quite...next-door had quite a sort of chic layout. I think they took the wall down between the bathroom and the stairwell and had it sort of sculpted and stuff.

Oh.

Yeah. I mean, we were a bit more prosaic than that. We took all the walls, the fences down between the back yards. Somebody built a shed at the back of the house next-door so that you could watch Wimbledon in the garden and then he...and it was like really horrible, so he sprayed "I never promised you a rose garden" and [he'd] just get in there and really grumpily watch Wimbledon [laughing]. So, it was quite...Nobody, I don't think anybody knocked through the party walls in our street.

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Between houses?

No.

Just within houses?

Yes. Yes, we didn't... We did...we kind of got it...we painted a lot. We did a lot of painting and we did a lot of [care], you know, and we got...I think we fixed the water heaters and we did a lot of fixing.

Roof repairing and stuff?

There wasn't much roof repairing to be done in ours. But then, when the Council went very vicious, which was very...actually, wasn't that soon after we...wasn't that sort of... It was only a few months after we moved in, the house next-door got well and truly, eh, well and truly destroyed in the interior by the Council. They chopped through the joists on every floor. So, we got really angry at that point because it had kept on happening, and a whole lot of people, 20 or 30 people, got together and just spent two weeks sweeping all the rubble down to the basement and then taking all the rubble out and joining up the joists, and we got some people in and they sort of started to help as well. I mean, they sort of came around the same time and stuff, and we got that house back and running, and it...it was housing until about, I don't know, six years ago.

Wow.

Because there was a young girl called Jane, four years old, who was there, and she [laughing] stayed on and became old Jane, 28, or probably older now, who was...who set up a blog about St Agnes Place.

Yeah, I've seen it, yeah.

Yeah, well, that's Jane. So, she grew up in that house that we all...people all fixed because they got so angry, you know. So, there was quite a lot of organisation around, practical things like that.

Yeah. So, by that time, you must have had some sort of relationship with Lambeth Council in terms of licensing?

Yes, shocking. No.

No? There wasn't one?

Well, they were just adamant! They hated the squatters because they had hundreds of...street, hundreds of squatters, they had hundreds of houses that were squatted because they were out of control. They'd got a huge – they'd got [Villiers] Road, which is a really big street, with both sides of

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houses. They had the [Malby Bruff] area, which I never really understood, which was half of that area of South Lambeth. They had us. They had...

Railton Road?

Railton Road, to an extent, was squatted, wasn't it?

Yes, some of it, yeah.

Yeah. And...oh, Gypsy Hill, there were squatters all the way up Gypsy Hill before it goes into Southwark. There were squatters in, em, Vauxhall, where those guys, em, Bonnington Square, before [they had a coop], they squatted. That was LEA though. And there were...oh, Strathleven Road, up there, em, and people of course on housing estates who were much more hidden. So, there were just so many squatters and they didn't know what to do with all these streets as well. They had all these grandiose plans and didn't have the money to do anything with them, and they had a huge waiting list, you know, 10 or 15 thousand people on their waiting list, em, and they were putting people into bed and breakfasts for homelessness. So, they were out of control, and angry, and really, really angry, and we would go up to the Housing Committee meetings [all the time]. We knew everybody on the Housing Committee meetings – not Tories because they were beside the point, but Ken Livingstone was one of them and, em, and we formed relationships with councillors who were seen as maverick and...

So who do you mean by "we"?

Meaning...All-Lambeth Squatters.

Yeah. So there was the All-Lambeth Squatters group, yeah...

The All-Lambeth Squatters, which had of course [a Gestetnered cycle] that delivered newsletters to 600 people. And yeah, all Lambeth Squatters, that was Charlie...what was his name again...Charlie Foreman, and then he set up a short-live housing association called Lambeth Self-Help Housing Association. So, there was that, and each of the streets had a reasonable degree of – quite a lot of the streets had good organisation, but not the...not...not so much the, em, independent squatters on estates, who were much more likely to be just tipped off by family and stuff. Yeah. So, there was lots of...there was a huge amount to do, somehow. And then there were associations would also warn you about the big London, em, things, like, you know, the sort of squatters...what was it called again...the Squatters' Newsletter, wasn't it, or something?

Yeah, there was the...ASA, was it?

Yeah, Association of...

I can't remember what it was... I've written it down.

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Yeah.

There were various sort of attempts at sort of... It was quite loose though, wasn't it, this sort of...?

Mm.

It didn't quite [hold] together in terms of a London-wide organisation. It seemed very localised, the way things were...

There seemed to be a lot of... Well, the contact between people was absolutely face-to-face. Cycle delivery... There would be phones shared, you know, one phone every few houses, and we were always using next-door's phone. They would get really shirty with us, but, you know [laughing], and so there were phone trees and things like that, and cycling, cycling and stuff. So...600 was already enough, somehow, and... But you knew about – we knew about Elgin Avenue a lot. We knew about Huntley Street. We knew about the big campaigns. Of course, Piers Corbyn of course lived nearby, didn't he, and so he'd rock up every time there was a...there was a, you know... The time that tenant left and we came in the back, we already had the press – we were onto the press as well, big-time. So, he was already there with all them, with his...what was it...Squatters' Action Council, that's right, banner, and we were going, "Oh, fuck off!" [laughing], going "We don't have leaders! We're St Agnes Place! We're doing it ourselves!" you know. But we did one – I mean, the thing, the big thing that happened for St Agnes Place, the big point in its history, was at the end of '75/'76 when the Council organised with the services to cut off the services to all the houses, but particularly the houses, to be honest, that had already been demolished, and they did a... They organised... The Leader of the Council got the gas and the water and the police and the demolition crews, because they wanted to demolish those houses, to flatten them, together and organised a kind of dawn raid, and the first we knew of it was, em, that we woke up and we looked down and there were 200 police. So, police had cut the street off at either end, and they were all the way along the...on the roads, and they were coming in the back [laughing], and we could see these little stars, and you'd think, "What are those stars?" and they were the tops of bobbies' helmets. And then the services people were coming – it was dark because it January, must have been January '76. They...the services people were coming in and beginning to dig up the roads and cut off gas and water, but not...mainly not to occupied houses actually, to be fair, but we said they were [laughing]. And so, we had already got wind that they were going to do something and had already put our lawyers in Brixton Law Centre, who worked for Brixton Law Centre, who lived next-door, the ones with the phone, em, and they... We'd already gone to...we'd already organised a sort of a meeting with a QC, and also North Lambeth Law Centre, who were planning experts, and the QC got a judge in chambers, by about 9.30, to put a, em, to block any further action because he said the Council was acting beyond its laws, ultra vires, so... And that was taken out by three women who lived outside of St Agnes Place, as rate-payers, who said the Council was acting beyond its remit, because it didn't have the money to do anything with the houses once they'd knocked them down.

Yeah, so why take this action...?

So, he blocked them at 9.30. So, it went from 6.30 to 9.30. By 9.30, all of [Villiers] Road was down beyond the police barricades, at either end, and the other...whoever else, but mainly [Villiers] Road, and maybe Strathleven and people like that, and...and the press, massively, and so it was on the front page of the Sunday Times and Guardian and the Evening Standard and the Evening News and just about every newspaper.

Yeah. And were they largely sympathetic accounts?

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Massively sympathetic, and it was fantastic footage because, of course, we'd organised... So, people, mainly men, got up on the roofs of the houses that were being smashed and they just put ropes round their waists and walked along the ridges, and held onto the chimney pots as these huge balls were kind of coming in. So, you know [laughing], so kind of...! And all the people on the street, who a lot of them were women, were just running towards the police lines and trying to surround the...you know, the big machines.

The diggers, yeah.

The diggers and slow them down and everything. So, it was very hairy.

Yeah.

And em...and by...was it the end of that day or the end of that week, the Leader of the Council resigned...? And so who was the guy who came in...Ted Knight? Do you remember there was a guy called Ted Knight?

I do know the name, mm, yeah, I do.

So, the left-wing of the Labour Party, the beginning of the Looney Left – this was the beginning, early days, started in Lambeth [laughing], and Ken Livingstone, I think, would have been Chair of the Housing Committee by then. I think he...he didn't...he stayed with...stayed with the left really.

Yeah. So, did it calm down a bit by the late-'70s in terms of aggressively trying to get you out all the time?

Yeah. That was...that was kind of...that was it. So, it had been really heavy and we'd occupied the Housing Department twice and had manifestations, you know, every time there was – there were two or three things with the police and stuff in St Agnes Place. And then it kind of settled down into, you know, trying to...set up a housing coop and, em, get licences, which of course was a stupid thing to do, in the end.

Why was that stupid?

Because the Council wasn't interested in, em, any kind of permanent housing there or any kind of housing coop there, and there was no money that came to any of – and maybe, in the end, there was some money that came to the more picturesque houses, which were two-storey, at the end of St Agnes Place, up the tube end of the street, some quite nice houses there, and they got a bit of a fix-up, and the Rasta houses got fixed up.

Yeah. So, you never got any short-life funds or anything like that?

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No. No, they did. There were some where it happened in the end, but most people just did it themselves.

Yeah. How long did you stay there?

I stayed there for about 10 years.

Wow.

I got sick of it in the end. I mean, the houses...our houses had big, you know, cracks. There had been some subsidence or something, so there were cracks. I don't know if that was the case along the terrace but...in the party walls, em, and there were things that needed to be...doing, but they were kind of okay, you know, and they were quite sort of liveable, because it was, you know, people would sit out on the front steps of course [laughing]. There were hardly any cars [laughing].

Because you didn't...yeah...

We'd just hang out and say "Hi, how are you doing?"

Yeah. So, did that mix of sort of, I don't know, artisans and...plus middle-class professionals, did the lawyers stay or did they move on?

Oh, the lawyers stayed for a while and then went back to Australia.

Oh right, okay.

One of them became an extremely eminent journalist, TV journalist. No, I mean, people passed through because they were young and they were... But some people stayed quite a while. There were kids. There were, em, you know, it was a really good home for lots of people. And there were some pretty troubled people as well, you know? There were [laughing] the junkies, there were the junkies, and then there was the...the mad axe-man who... There were various, you know, these streets that, you know...

Yes, I do.

And then there was Levi, the...the rejected Rasta, who really didn't go for being a Rasta but played his music really loud.

[Laughter]

Yeah, I have memories of that, yeah!

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But was our friend...was our friend, but, on the other hand, you know, you had to...you had to, em, take...take, eh...stuck with him.

[Someone interrupts briefly]

So, em, yeah, this is...

We've missed one bit, which is to do with whether – was there a women-only house?

Yes, so we did it.

It was your house, was it?

That was our house, so we did that.

So why?

Why did we do that? We got...we kind of thought we'd do it. I don't know. We just all got into the idea – we got sick of [laughing] [having guys]. I think the last bloke who... They were sort of not particularly great guys...they really weren't, and...there was one guy, who was a South Londoner, was from Kennington, and his wife lived next-door, and their kids, and they'd moved. They were early...early there, but then, you know, they'd split up and... He was just useless, pretty useless - entertaining, but useless. And then, there was another guy, Ronnie, who...decided to grow dope out on the...put the plant on the back window, and then the police decided to, you know...poor old Ronnie. He's a nice guy – I still see him around, but, you know... And he, anyway, he got together with somebody up in Brixton so he left. And we just thought, you know, and there were...I think that... at least...yeah, three out of the five, if not...actually, I was probably the only one who didn't, were really into growth movement stuff, so they were into co-counselling and all of that, and eh... One was a printer – oh, two were printers, actually, Women in Print, [?] Women in Print. One of them might have worked for [CUN] because that was just up the road. And then they...there was a...they were at Union Place and they were Women in Print and then they were at that printing company up in Brixton – I've forgotten their name, the coop, forgotten their name. So, they were quite connected with political things. There was a lot of polity. There was a lot of, em, Trotskyist stuff in St Agnes Place, not that that was conducive to having a women's house, but there was a lot of ideas in the air. So, the WRP was very big, in the house next-door, a bit in our house...I can't remember [laughing], probably, and then there was a [Revolutionary] Communist, RCP, was it...? Who were the first, the T or the P? Anyway, the first one, who were very...

I think it was RCP first.

RCP, two doors down. He got me a job at Solon. He was an architect. And then, across the road, they were in the RCP. And were there any IS-ers? No, they were all in [Villiers] Road because they were so middle-class in [Villiers] Road, so we didn't like them because they were... And there were no SWPs because they were just headbangers. They weren't there. There were no Communists, I don't think. But anyway, em, there was a lot of politics. There was a lot of feminism. There weren't

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very many, eh, gay people in St Agnes, just in our house, and most women were...were not lesbians, em, but they were just very...women into women, you know, very much so, and would still be that now, and [are] all like that now.

Yeah.

Very good.

So, are you talking about the late-'70s now or into the '80s?

Yeah – no, late-'70s, I think, we made a women's house, and of course everyone on the street got very annoyed with us, a women's house.

They did?

Yeah, they got a bit sort of...well, a little bit, because the street was just full of different kinds of people. So, there were junkies, but they were just out of it so they weren't really – they were just a pain in the neck, but then there were the dealers, who were more rarefied [laughing] and had money and, em... They were Irish, very charming. They sort of made their way round various women up the road and then... They were a bit – I don't seem to remember they were very happy about the idea of a women's house, and we had women's parties of course. So, the Strathlevens would all come down to our parties, and vice versa, so we knew all those people very well. That would have been... I remember...I could date that by the fact that the first Brixton Riots happened when I was in Strathleven Road one time, so that was 1980 I think.

Yeah.

So, I mean, I think we were sort of into a lot then, yeah, late-'70s, early-'80s, yeah, it was round then. And I don't think anybody...any other houses did that, actually, but they were quite sort of into it. The women in...the politicos next-door on one side, the Aussies, they were really into it, and then, on the other side, the quite posh English lefties were a bit...I don't know... But I think, actually, they probably came round to it in the end and things [have changed] [laughing].

Yeah. But the other thing I'm interested in is what you were doing while you were squatting – so were you working?

So, I, eh, I did...six months of, em, doing that building labouring work. I mean, I didn't work I suppose for a few months and then...

Yeah, and that was on a scheme, an employment scheme?

No, unemployment scheme.

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Yeah.

So, I must have signed-on in order to have got that, and that was in Paddington. So, I...that was amazing because I – it was just labouring, was just sort of...oh! It was just chipping off all the plaster in this basement [laughing], hauling it out to skips, up the steps, and then re-plastering it, and the guy who was the supervisor, Pete, was a plasterer, so I learnt a little bit about plastering, and we did...we did a job for Release upstairs. You know Paul Crane – you remember Paul Crane? He wrote “Gays and the Law” back then.

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

He was our Release sort of supervisor, and we were in there on a Saturday and he was going, “Are you alright?” and we were all going “Fine!” but actually, it was the day of the huge anti-Nazi League march in Lewisham against – do you remember that, the anti-Fascist march in Lewisham?

Yeah.

It was horrible, and we were listening to the radio and I was going “Oh God, [?] – I would have been there otherwise [laughing]!” and I was learning to plaster at the same time. A very strong memory of doing that... And then I got – and that was for Paddington Print Shop, who have become Paddington...London Print Centre, and they got proper buildings and everything, and they were great people! And they somehow helped me to get into the AA – well, I applied to get into the AA and they helped me with funds.

To do...?

Architecture, to do Architecture at the AA.

But I thought you'd already done an Architecture...?

I did three years at Sydney and got my degree, and then of course the RIBA didn't recognise the Sydney degree as being Part I because they hadn't visited Sydney, and they had to visit Sydney in order to pass it!

Oh God!

I tell you, the course was...it was...it was like...it was just absolutely on par with places like Newcastle and Bath and all those very technically-oriented, straightforward Architecture Schools, like Sheffield, just like that, really high staff to student ratio, fantastic access, best school in the country at the time, best university in the country, la-la-la...

Of course, but the RIBA...

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So, I went to the AA and did my degree again, but in a Diploma unit, in Tom and Hugo's unit, and the first... I think where we ended up was in Paddington again, North Paddington, so I was with my old mates [laughing], doing stuff with the North Paddington.... I don't know if I had put them in touch with them or they knew already, but anyway, doing sort of community-type architecture there. So, I did that for a year and then I worked for Solon in Lambeth.

By then, you were...?

I'd got Part I, yeah, I'd got Part I, so I went to work for Solon for two years.

Between...? Yeah, yeah.

Yeah, I just, you know, and that was...it was a great place.

Which Solon, which bit of Solon?

Lambeth. So, they were the first one.

Ah right.

They were the one – that's where it all began.

Oh, before they moved up to Kentish Town?

They – no, so Kentish Town is quite late. I mean, the first Solon was in Lambeth, was Robin Sutcliffe who set it up - he was an AA guy, and it was a worker...equal pay, and they had a kind of... philosophy, which was that, if it got past a certain size, it would split and devolve. So, the next Solon was Southwark, Peckham, and the next Solon was Wandsworth, and then the next one was these secondary coops in Kentish Town and...there was another one...oh, and there's Bristol, because Robin Sutcliffe I think went to Bristol. They were older than Kentish Town.

Okay – I didn't realise that was its history.

Yeah. So, it was Southwark and Lambeth, and then probably Bristol and Wandsworth, and then the secondary coops.

What did you work on?

So, I was just being [an architect], doing...em...you know, house by house architecture improvements. In fact, I was the first – the first job...I did the first job that Brixton Housing Coop ever had. So, I did two Brixton Housing Coop jobs, and it was a really early coop, and they were a coop –

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they had Railton Road. So, there was Brixton Gay Community that Solon did, but I didn't do that. Mark did that because he was...gay, but [laughing], I mean... But one of the most famous gay men at the time was a guy called...Julian, that's his name, and he was a...for two years, he was a clippie, he was a conductor on the buses, and he used to get up, dressed up in full gay – well, I think when they told him off for wearing a frock, no, a skirt, a bus conductor's skirt... But he was my first client anyway – extremely demanding.

[Laughter]

What, his own flat, do you mean, you were designing his...?

Yeah, for Brixton – but, you know, Brixton Housing Coop, I mean, our philosophy was that we would try and do as much as we could to work it around what they wanted.

Yeah.

So, he had...

So this was permanent housing, this was the full works, was it?

Yeah, these were formal – and the first jobs were done by a guy called by Stuart...Stuart...Case. Stuart Case had been an architect for Solon Lambeth and then Solon Southwark, and the people working on Stuart Case's job in [Wilton] Road, which was the other guy's I did, Morris Mitchell, and Pete Silva, apparently [laughing]. So, I'd sort of go...I'd go to these building sites, and Stuart Case was like really angry and scary, and I'd go, what, you know...I don't think...and he'd go, [woah] [loudly], and then [these sort of blokes would come down] from the roof and... They were all, you know, I mean, Morris was an architect. He'd been at the [NEA] as well. Pete's just a hard-case so, you know... So, em, I didn't know Morris and Pete at that stage, but apparently they were working on that job, or Pete – I've never talked about it with him, but I've talked about it with Morris, who I then set up a practice with, later, a long way down the line from that, but coincidentally.

Yeah.

So, there were these big sort of personalities around and about, and they were amazing people. John [Knipler] and...do you know those guys, Solon Southwark, and Elsie, Elsie [Worcester] was there, and...

Yes, I know, yeah.

They're all doing quite amazing things as well.

Yeah.

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So, I worked there for two years, very intense years, and then I went back to...I went back to study, and I studied, finished at North London.

Uh-ha?

Yeah.

I didn't even know you'd been there.

Yeah. So, I did my diploma there, two years.

Who were your tutors?

Yvonne in the end [laughing], but by...not actually...originally, there were just these...these blokes, and I just thought these guys are... I was a shocking student actually. I just would go, my God, it's so terrible, you know [laughing], oh! You know, and I was old by then, you know, I was 30, or 29 or 30, I was a really...and I'd done, I'd done a lot of things, and I was very confident, over-confident, and I just thought, my God, these people...! So, I went and talked to Florian a lot. I'd go and say, "Florian, please, can you please help me with this?!"

[Laughter]

Otherwise, I just did it myself.

Yeah.

And then Yvonne was my tutor the following [year] and I did a women's centre, a women's building for the Central London-

What, for your final project, your dissertation?

Yeah, for my final project [laughing]. I can show you the clipping. It was in Building Design.

Yeah, you got published?!

Yeah, I got published, yeah – only three times, that [Nasser's] paper called [?].

Oh yeah, I remember that.

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And then, em, in...in sort of best of the shows kind of thing in the Architects' Journal. Yeah.

And from there, you went on to...?

Matrix.

Uh-ha, that's another big thing...

Yeah. Oh no, somewhere along the line, actually, somewhere [gasps], actually, I had a whole year, a whole year after the AA, didn't I, where I was at Haringey [Bow] Architects' Service, as a year-out student, 10 months actually, and very boring, em...

Doing new-build, maintenance, what?

Doing, no, I mean, I was just a sort of trainee, so I think they were just telling me how to working drawings and I think I was doing something called scattered properties and they were – I didn't know where I was, oh, so lost, you know! They'd send you off to places up near the North Circular [laughing]. They'd have sort of...they had this scattered properties thing, with about five properties within about a mile of each other, and they'd try and put them into the one contract, because they didn't have their heads round refurbishment. They were just doing the new-build estates up till then, and so they didn't know what to do now that they'd finally got to do up individual Victorian houses. And I had a look at the drawings – when I was searching for this conference, and I thought I have to do my thing now of looking through the archives, I pulled out these drawings of these actually... these...of these scattered properties, thinking "Shall I keep these?" [laughing]! Oh God, look where they were, my God, miles away!

Yeah.

I know. So, I had to do stuff like that, and I didn't really know what I was doing, but I think that's... that's right, so that gave me the ability to get a job at Solon.

Yeah.

I probably wouldn't have had that otherwise.

So, in this sort of [long] narrative, in a way, you know, you coming to London and all these things that happened, when did the feminism start to become part of, you know, the way you thought about the built environment, in both activism and design really?

Well, I think, eh, the feminism thing, it's always...I've always been a feminist, you know, and I've always read feminist books, as all...most of the women around me who were left-wing were doing that and sharing books and talking about things and going on marches. I went to the first Women's Liberation – not the first. I went to a Women's Liberation Conference somewhere along the line –

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can't remember when it was – up in North London. I know! It was in Highbury...Highbury... I remember where it was now, it was in Highbury. You know, we'd go to these events, all the time.

Yeah. When did that start to sort of get sort of...become integral to thinking about the building environment?

Well, I think it's integral to thinking about the world. So, if you're an architect, then it becomes integral to thinking about the built environment. I think it's that really – it's just a world view. And, you know, so...so...when people were trying to do different things, firstly... The first thing that interested me was of course the idea of breaking down barriers with builders and doing things in a much more integrated way. I mean, that interested me...a lot...and...and then also participation, community participation stuff, and then, eh, also, feminism. So, I was in a Trotskyist group for a year. When was that? Really in the '70s, and I just...the thing, the absolutely definite thing that made me think this is absolutely outrageous was their attitude to women. So, that was a sort of very clear thing, where I just thought, you know, this is just not on, and I tried arguing the toss and I got slung out [laughs] because that's what they did. And that...so in that sort of left politics thing, I was already...very...you know, very aware of things. But I was never... And there was, at that – we subscribed in our house, as did everybody, to the, em, what was it called...the women's...the newsletter, what was it called...?

London Women's Liberation Workshop Newsletter?

No, no, no the feminist...the Women's Newsletter. It wasn't the London...it wasn't... It was just the...

Was it WIRES, Women's Information [&] Research-

No, it was just a – it came round, rolled like that...

Yeah, yeah, I know.

It was Roneo-ed on brightly coloured or not so brightly coloured...

Yeah, it came out of Earlham Street Workshop.

Yeah.

The Women's Liberation Workshop.

But it was...

It was called maybe just the Women's Liberation Newsletter, maybe.

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Yes, it was the Women's Newsletter, it was the Women's Newsletter, would come through our door, and we'd open it like this, [gasping], "Oh, what are they going to say next?! Oh no! We're all the enemy! Oh!" and you know...

Yeah, lots of in-fighting, yeah.

Oh God! So, we were, all of us, and all the people around us, most of whom – I didn't know any other women architects, I don't think. There were printers. There were three printers, at least. There were...oh, there were builders. There was a plasterer, Anne, and...what the hell did the others do [laughing]? I don't know what they did. They did various... Oh, one worked for a band, I don't know, but everybody was just incredibly...involved in all of those things, particularly the printers and the builders. [Anna Matthews] was a friend, but she never lived there, but Anne – do you know...? There were two – she knew the person in my house, who was a little woman, who was a plasterer, called [Anne Barham], and she...she did...she worked...she joined a coop called Being in Nothingness.

[Laughter]

Lovely!

Yeah! Anyway! And then they split into two and I think... What was the other guy...? The Road to Oblivion, I think he wanted to call it, so they thought, right, that's it [laughing]! Stupid! We thought [Nausea] would have been better.

[Laughter]

But em, no, I mean, they were really great, the plasterers, and they all worked...did a lot of work for short-life, women's short-life coops.

Yeah.

And...I don't know, everybody was just involved in sort of housing stuff, and there were lots of women's houses. There were the guys in [Villiers] Road as well, Sue [Shearer] and people like that.

Yeah.

Oh, that's right, and there were the Nursery Road people, yeah.

Yeah, I'd forgotten about them.

Yeah. They were a very big deal.

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Yeah. So, by the time you'd finished training and were working for Solon, were you still squatting at that point?

Yeah. So, Solon was very early, and then I was squatting all the way through.

Oh right.

So, I was squatting while I was at Haringey, while I was at the AA, eh...

Diploma?

While I was doing my Diploma...

North London, you were still squatting?

Yeah. And then I finally, after I'd done my Diploma, somewhere down the road after that, I left, and I was working at Matrix by then.

Okay.

And I was on the support group – while I was doing my Diploma... I met Sue Frances and Mary Lou at the AA and got really interested in what they were doing, obviously, and...because of all of those things, I mean, because I didn't know anything about architecture and feminism. I didn't...and I was... you know, I didn't know of people doing things about it, put it that way, and I had – there was no literature. There was the [Doris Cult], which I've got there, the [Doris Cult], which I'd never come across in any way – if I had, I've had thought oh God! Or, you know, I mean, it was okay, but, you know, em... I didn't know about the Americans and what they were doing. So, there was nothing, there was no articulation about anything, and I didn't know about Matrix – I think I met Sue and Mary Lou after Home Truths, the exhibition. So, very quickly, I was on the support group for Matrix because I'd been an architect for two years at Solon [laughing], so I had loads of experience – just ridiculous! Anyway, so I was on that support group while I was at the university, in the second year of my...my diploma, and so I just moved from that into working, fairly quickly, I think moved from graduating to working at Matrix, possibly part-time... I can't remember whether I started full-time, whether we could do that or not. But yes, that sort of shift, like that...

Yeah. So, if you've had a chance to reflect or if you could reflect rapidly for this recording [laughing], where do you...how do you think squatting informed your later work as a feminist architect? Did it have any resonances later on?

Yeah. I think that...

How important was it?

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I think some of the things that you do, if you're organised as a squatter, is...you know, you become really, really good at meetings, and you get really good at...at incredibly different opinions and really different – people who weren't...weren't all one class. We were all – the one thing we were all was young. That is for sure. The age thing, eh, was there. But...and the youngest were...there were some stray kids that we tried not...we tried to get them off back into proper housing, so there were some sort of...one or two teenagers had ended up there, kids in trouble, but most of the people were, you know, young adults, young to...yeah, I mean, young adults. But anyway, they were quite diverse and so the meetings involved lots of, em, I don't know, thought and...you know...

Yeah.

And then organising in a...em...self-generating way was absolutely core to the whole thing. And one of the...I think that what a lot of squatters are proud about is the fact that they could do this and do that and do that and do that, and they weren't waiting around for anyone to tell them to do it, and it was that, maybe the thing of youth, where you could say, "Right, well, let's go and fix that house!" "Oh, let's go and do it!" "Okay, shall we get blah and blah and blah?" Yeah, let's start." "Okay, we'll start now, shall we?" "Yes, okay." And, you know, just do it! So, I think a lot of that self-generating ethic and that voluntary ethic as well, you know, well, nobody's going to...you know, you're just doing it because it's the right thing to do I think is...that pervaded early squatting.

Yeah.

And I think that comes through. So, it's those kinds of things, plus also one of the "just doing" is...that sort of confidence around wanting to make the houses better, really hating the way they were.

What about the way you lived in the houses – did that actually affect the way you thought about how people could live in design terms?

Yeah. We had very strong – everyone had very strong ethics in the different houses about how you should live. We couldn't believe the idea that people would have their own section of the fridge. There probably were some houses that had those, that way of living, or little...and when you had to design, later on, as an architect, em, coop housing or vaguely sort of housing where there might be shared adults, and the housing association would ask for sort of lockable cupboards, you know, and you'd think, oh my God, this is so wrong, you know, because that was a complete no-no. And we had, in our house, we had income-sharing, we had, oh [sighing], food kitties of course. We went...we also had a...there was a food coop that we'd go to Spitalfields – that's how old it was – and get, you know, stuff and bring it back and divvy it up.

But the income thing was pretty profound. That lasted for quite a few years, where you had...if you could pay, you paid, and if you couldn't pay, you couldn't, and you paid a proportion of your income, so, so that you would cover the other people on the household bills, you know, and people just did that, for years. And I did that. And I did that and I was earning at Solon. I wasn't earning big and I wasn't earning as little as some of the people, but the band member, the roadie person, she'd sometimes earn massive amounts and then not earn anything, and she would uncomplainingly just slice her...slice a great wedge off her wages and put it in, you know. So, we all, you know, we negotiated that. So, there were negotiations within the house, and of course, they were also absolutely massive and riven and difficult and also quite positive in some ways, you know...

Yeah.

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So...

So a lot of talking...

A lot of talking [laughing], my God, yes! Lots of talking went on, and lots of deciding and doing, you know, deciding what was right and wrong and...

Yeah. Yeah. That's partly to do with youth, I think.

Yes, it is, very much so.

It's working through things, but then of course, you then have to revisit that as an architect who works in community architecture [like you first did], so...

Yeah. Yeah. You certainly do, and also, if you're an architect working in a coop, how are you going to deal with that? So, the coop is like, you know, you're learning to have the sorts of discussions you had as a household and the sorts of creative ideas around participation, not the architect-specific ones but more the ones about how you were in meetings and how you learned to listen, came out of the street meetings, I think.

Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah.

So many strongly held opinions as well...

Yeah, and dealing with, yeah, what was right and wrong. But, yeah, I think that, on reflection, we had no idea that we were one particular age group and that things were possible for us that weren't possible for other people, absolutely no idea, not really, and em...that went on a bit too long for me, I think, that... I think, on reflection, I could have probably done with getting out a bit earlier really because it just...the endless... After a certain time, the endless talking is just...slows you right down and...compromises you.

Yeah. And also, it becomes repetitive as well, you know, sometimes.

Yeah. Yeah.

When people don't give ground and you find yourself reiterating the same arguments...

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There's that, and there's also I suppose the...the echo chamber – I finally worked out what that means, when somebody said about Donald Trump maybe having 30 people that he...he sees their Twitters and they're all in his organisation, and I thought, mm... So, that's...and [he said that's negative], and there is the thing where your own opinions are getting...your shared opinions, your consensual opinions are just getting fed back at you all the time and you're not really stepping outside of that enough, and it becomes, eh, a self-congratulatory group. It became...I think it could...or was in danger of doing that.

Yeah. You're talking about your squatting group?

The squatting group, not the house. The house was changed...changed a lot. There was another builder, Pam Rathbone and she – do you know her?

I've heard of her.

She was WEC, Women's Electrical, and then I think she went and...she's running or was running Willesden School of Building because I bumped – yeah, anyway, there were lots of them. That's how I knew the Electricals, because she was friends with that group.

Yeah, the Electricals, yeah...

The Electricals, the Charmaine and...

Oh, I remember Charmaine...

Plumbers, Charmaine and...Collette?

And there was Liam [Ponk], set it up...

Yes, that's right, there were those...those two.

And then they moved on, and Charmaine...

In fact, I saw...was it [Ponk] or...?

She's in Sydney, I think.

No, the other one.

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Lee?

Lee, at Wimbledon. Did I see her? She'd done Fine Art...?

No, not Lee.

That's not her, somebody else, who was a carpenter...

Ginny, Ginny [Duncombe], no?

No, somebody...absolutely recognisable, I've forgotten! Anyway!

Oh right. I'm fascinated by this box...

Oh yes, so this was...this was all the stuff about St Agnes, quite hilarious really, but it's all general squatting, it's not feminist squatting.

Yeah, but, you know-

You should get hold of this if you...

I've seen it.

You've seen it? Take a photo or something. But yeah...

It's in the University Library. It's pretty good.

It's in the University Library? That's good.

Well, yeah, Cambridge has got everything but...

So...

There wasn't anything really published by feminist squatters, as far as I know.

No, there wasn't, no.

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That's why it's quite important to talk to them.

That's right, you're absolutely...!

Because they didn't write anything in particular, although we..

That's me occupying the Housing Department. There's Russell, there's me, stripey, two women...
The women were...she was...they were doctors, trainee doctors. He was to Australia.

Where's you?

There...

Holding that...?

You can really tell, can't you?

Can I take a copy?

Yeah.

There's absolutely no copyright problems.

Oh look, there's loads – you can have it.

Really?!

Yeah.

Oh my goodness, how wonderful!

Gosh, there's loads, I don't know why. We must have...

This is fantastic.

Westminster University – Christine Wall

Interview – Julia Dwyer

Transcribed by www.premiertyping.com, alison.mcpherson@premiertyping.com

...decided that they should be – oh, there's loads of them [laughing]! So, that's when we occupied – that was horrible.

'76.

That was really scary.

Yeah.

Oh my God, I really hated that. So Lambeth Self-Help, yeah...

This is...is this Central or Lambeth? It seems as if it's a Central...

No, this was [Piers], wasn't it?

Yeah, I think so.

Look, it's [Piers] because it's SE5.

Rest Square...

St Paul's Road. Yeah. So, that's [Piers]. And look at that, all these different...

That's right, St Paul's Advisory Service for Squatting...

Yeah, that's right, they were...

That's what I was...ASS, ASS, yeah, because that was up near us.

That's right. So, there's Vining Street which is in...it was next to Nursery Road, wasn't it, Vining Street?

I don't know.

But that's what they were doing – bastards! They were so awful. And there's St Agnes Place again, the road... It was all happening. So, that's all those.

Westminster University – Christine Wall

Interview – Julia Dwyer

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Your relationship with the press is quite interesting because...

Very, very strong.

And it's so different from the women-only and lesbian-only sort of communities that I know about, because there was a real reluctance to be that visible, so people lived in all these streets but they didn't...they weren't... They were living openly, these lesbians, but there was no graffiti, there was no... They were trying very hard to sort of just keep, you know, living as a community, rather than...

Mm. Mm.

I mean, there were lots and lots of battles to do with keeping the houses, but they were never... It's funny how they didn't...we didn't use the press in the same way at all, and I think there was...more...I don't know, less confidence I suppose.

We...there were some people there, you know, who were pretty together – I mean, the Aussie lawyers were amazing! And, you know, Liz became a journalist, I mean, she became a journalist, a really, really famous journalist in Australia, and she had just got so much balls really or sort of, you know, to take them on and... There were others as well. The medics were amazing. They were all really young. They were 20, 21, but they were really amazing, and people were absolutely fearless, and they thought, well, stuff it, we're going to, you know... So, we had telephone lists of all the journalists. We had telephone lists for all the councillors. We were really taking Lambeth Council on, head to head.

The other difference was that we were left alone, that we weren't threatened with eviction...

Ah, yes, you weren't pushed.

We weren't pushed, and we basically carried on quietly expanding and hoped they didn't do anything, and the GLC didn't do anything, so it was a completely different scenario.

Yeah. The GLC were very benign, [as I remember].

They were, yeah. But this is completely different, Lambeth...

Yeah. It was really aggressive and horrible, actually.

Yeah.

Huntley – you can have this one, look, I've got two – there's Huntley's [group]. That was Piers. [We thought that was stupid].

That's Camden though, isn't it?

Yeah, it was. "Council bungs again", there you go...

Yeah.

What's...? Anyway, I don't know... Heathrow, [?], just off Wandsworth Road. There were loads of [?] stuff there.

Yeah.

Scabs...

Patchwork...

Patchwork Housing Association.

Oh, I remember Patchwork, yeah.

Yeah. Here's another one... Lambeth and GLC Scab on [Villiers] Road...

[Laughter]

Did you see Squatting, the, em, doco, documentary? Oh, well, there were three documentaries, amazing documentaries, done about, what, eight years ago? One was feminism, one was squatting, and one was the stupid...the...the newspaper, called...Democrat or something. But those two ones are essential viewing.

Where can you find them?

Google "squatting". It's on YouTube. And it focused on [Villiers] Road.

I think I know. I think I...

It is worth seeing because there were lots of women.

Westminster University – Christine Wall
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I think I've seen it actually. Yeah.

Caroline, do you know Caroline [?]?

I remember Caroline because she worked with us at the Southwark Women's [Training] Workshop in...

Yeah. She would have known.

She was in it.

No, she wasn't in it.

No? Well, I share a room with Colin Gleeson of course...

Colin? He will have it. He might even be on it, for all I...

No. He...he...

He left?

No, no, he's still there. He still lives in [Villiers] Road [laughing]!

Did he go to Cambridge or was it Oxford? They were all at Oxford.

Who?

The [Villiers] Road people.

They all went to...

We were so snotty about them, we really [were].

They all had been in Oxford. Sophie...whatever it is, Sophie something...

Sophie...

Sophie Watson and Sophie...

Had she lived in [Villiers] Road?

No, maybe not, no.

No, I don't think so.

But people passed through, didn't they?

Yeah. Well, Charlie [Foreman] is [?] Lambeth [?], but he's an Oxford man. His father was...ran Granada TV [laughing]. He didn't live in our street, but he was a friend, he was a good...

Yeah, I did share a squat with a Right Honourable once, a lesbian....

[Laughter]

There you go, properties, theft...so that's all this stuff.

Shall I turn this off?

Yeah.

For a while...

[End of Recording 1]

[Recording 2]

So, you were invited to contribute to this book?

Yeah.

So, why didn't you?

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Interview – Julia Dwyer

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Because I couldn't...didn't want to really. I don't know, I didn't really like the tone of the book.

Specifically about Agnes Place or...?

But I should have, and Tom did it, in the end.

Because this is all about St Agnes Place...

Yes. We had a look. Yeah, this was the one about St Agnes Place. So, that's the photograph that a guy...that a guy called Dave did, who was from Union Place, a fantastic photographer, and that's on the cover of Cynthia Cockburn's book. Do you know that book, called "The Local State"?

I've got it on my bookshelf – it's a fantastic book.

That's what...that's us.

I wondered what that was, right.

It's [in] my house, it's [near me], going "Stop, stop now, please!" So, yeah...

And that's the wrecking ball?

That's the wrecking ball, and you can...you might just... No, there's no guys up there at that point. We were, God, passing cups of tea, would you believe it?!

And they carried on?!

And there's Anna, and that's Sue...the women...getting really angry...and there's a local going, "Ere, what the fuck are you doing?!" He's now...oh, anyway, [he's grown up]. And remember that...remember that, em, [Lewis Helman]?

Yeah.

That was in the AJ. That was about St Agnes Place.

It's such a pity that you didn't write an account, because there isn't – there are some women here contributed to this...

Westminster University – Christine Wall
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Yeah, Jill did, from [Villiers] Road.

Yeah. There we are, Jill Simpson...

Jill Simpson, yeah.

I don't know...and somebody called Celia Brown.

And Anne Petit, who is a housing writer, isn't she? Caroline...

Oh yeah...

Celia Brown, I remember her. Yeah, anyway, that's some of the things that...

I'll have to get a copy.

Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Take some pictures as an aide memoire anyway.

I will. I'm going to take a picture of that one, that wrecking...

That's not us. That can't be us. I must have stopped... [Hackney]... Was it very verbose? Yeah, that's [Villiers] Road, "A Memory of the South Side". I thought it was so beautiful...

[Prestonia], this is something else...

[Prestonia], that's in Notting Hill.

West London, yeah. Yeah, Latimer Road, that was.

Yeah.

In fact, Tom, who wrote this thing, I don't understand that this is... Somebody's actually – oh, this isn't about... This is not about St Agnes Place. This is just using all the images. Oh, in fact...it goes on and on, St Agnes Place, blah, blah, blah, and then it puts it into context. And I don't know who wrote this...or did Tom write it? He was quite... He was a lot older than me. He was the only old person [there]...old...

That usually means he's about, what, 26?

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Forty.

Forty?! Really old [laughing]!

Yes. So...eh...yeah... Oh, that's from St Agnes Place. I know the woman who did that.

"I thought Home was an ex-Prime Minister until I discovered squatting." That's very witty [laughing]!

Yeah. Dwelling unit, sweet dwelling unit, I think was...

That's a very architectural...

Yeah, that might have been [Villiers] Road, that one. That was Paddington Print Shop, that...

Ah...

Poster... Yeah. Oh, this is the...this is St Agnes. This is Jill at [Villiers] Road, going la-la-la-la-ranty-ranty-ranty... Oh, and this is us! "People need homes, not fenced off wasteland!" In fact, I wonder if I've still got it. I've got the poster. We had an amazing poster that me and [Dan] did, yeah, which said that. It was our slogan – we made that one up. But that's definitely Lambeth, [?], and that's St Agnes because...and that's what we were getting... I can't remember – I just want to see who wrote it... It's just...why is it so weird? But that...there's our poster...

Ah...

So, I did the middle drawing and Dan did the outside bit, and we printed it at Union Place.

Beautiful.

That's [Villiers] Road. There's Jill. Oh, this is all [Villiers] Road. Yeah. I don't know. I don't know...

There's...

There's a thing at the beginning.

A written [?], here we are...

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Doesn't say. I think it's sort of like...looks like...oh, there's Tom, yeah, that would be... You see, I'd have thought...no...not interested in that. Yes, there we go, okay. So, there's St Agnes. That's on the day of the...the Jubilee in the '70s, when it was really hot. There's Tom – old man, you see, he's got [woosy] hair and... And that's my friend, [Sara], she's still around, and that's Anne, who was the plasterer, and they're all doing – I was meanwhile cycling to Stroud to stay in some commune [laughing].

Cycling to Stroud – long way!

Yes, I cycled to Stroud, and it poured with rain all the way. So, Tom took all these pictures. There are the blokes on the top...

Oh yeah!

That's Anne's brother... That's Andy, that guy. Strange guy! And they all did that, you know, very ironic, but at the same time, they had a good time, messing about way...

Yeah, yeah, that's very much of a spectacle...

There you are. So, that's Tom writing about St Agnes.

Is this...? No, that's not St Agnes.

That's Covent Garden...and stuff...so that's other things he would have...

I spoke to Jos the weekend before and that was interesting to...

Yeah.

She was in Covent Garden briefly as well.

Yeah.

But she didn't – I don't know if she's got this book.

This is fantastic.

But this is the only one – it's a lovely book but it sort of leaves out quite a lot.

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Interview – Julia Dwyer

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Yeah, the only one. Well, there's the Ron...there was a guy called...

Oh, yeah, no, I know the...

Ron what's-his-name...

Yeah, he's the family squatting movement...

Yeah, and he did the whole thing...

The Redbridge....

Oh, in Tottenham Court Road, you know.

Yeah.

That's it, again. So, Cynthia lived just up the road.

Cynthia Cockburn?

Yeah. She was mates with Union Place. That's... I don't know what happened to her.

What's that one? Oh yes, I've got it.

It's a great book.

I haven't got-

I love it.

Yeah, it's a really, really good book, actually, yeah. I'm going to take your front cover because, in fact, my front cover is a different edition, which does not have that famous... And it's funny, that's actually come out better...

So, she was very supportive of us, and also, you remember there was a group called Support, that Tom and Hugo set up, and that Tony do-da at Westminster...Tony...who is planning, you know...

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[Mansi]?

No. Tony do-da Jones, no...?

Oh, Tony Lloyd-Jones.

Lloyd-Jones, he was in Support.

Was he?

And their very, very, very first job was to do a feasibility study on St Agnes Place, which was when I was living there, before I'd gone to the AA. So, it's worth having...

I found also that Tom Woolley wrote about squatting in...AD actually.

Right.

There were quite a few architects...

[There was a huge] interest, you know, in...

That's the 46...

Yeah. Yeah, it's good stuff, this book, actually. The photography is just great.

It's beautifully illustrated. You can get it second-hand – I will get myself a copy actually.

Yeah, I think you need it, I really do. I think it just...the little [?] and things, you know, the little moments when you just see something, I think, just worthwhile...

Yeah, I will get that.

[And ?] remember...?

Yeah, I remember [?]... Oh, and look at these lovely drawings!

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Yeah! Exactly! And everyone was doing the sort of... Who was the great guru of those drawings? There was a...he's still...Cliff Harper, Cliff Harper's drawings...

No, I don't know about Cliff Harper.

So...

This is em... No, this is...this is [Villiers] Road, cutaway drawings of [Villiers] Road. That's wonderful.

And then that guy...he's still there. And in that squatting, em, documentary, you know, the Dutch guy?

The Dutch guy? Oh, that's right, the Dutch film, yeah.

Pill?

Pim.

Pim, he's still there.

Yeah, because Liz Milner [was] close to Pim.

Yeah.

I heard about him. I never met him. Oh yes, and there it is... Wow... Yes, I'll have to get it.

So, anyway... Minutes of meetings... Synopsis received... Tom Woolley, right, okay...

Where was Tom Woolley then? Where is he...where is his...?

I think he must have been writing about this kind of [award], yeah. Maybe he's in it. Let's have a look. Tom was everywhere.

Andy Friend, you see, he was a [Villiers] Road guy, posh [guy].

Oh, Colin Ward is in it.

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Yeah. Andy Friend was an academic. [?] and Jill Simpson, yeah. [He] was a journalist.

Ah!

Yeah! That's an acronym as well, sorry, a [pseudonym].

Yeah, it is. She's Australian, yeah, actually, I didn't know she was in here. This is interesting. I've been trying to track her down.

Photograph it...

What?

The page...

Yeah, I know, I just want to...if there's...what...180... She was, em, squatted with us in Hackney.

Yeah.

I always thought she was an Aussie.

Charteris Road, Islington...

Yeah.

Remember them, vaguely...

Some of this is Hackney....

Yeah.

Right. I'm going to have to [laughing]...first published in...

You're going to have to get this book [laughing].

Yeah.

Yeah, definitely going to have to get that. Mm, David Watkinson... Right. Amsterdam Squatters...

Oh God...

What [laughing]...?!

Penny...

Can I photograph this?

Yeah.

Because...I really should [laughing]. Thank you.

And you know I've got it as well.

Yeah.

Oh God, I was on the list at that stage to do St Agnes Place and I just couldn't be arsed.

What, to write it, to write it up?

Yeah. I don't know...

It's okay, I've got this one.

Mark [?], I remember him, he was at uni...

Mark [Kimpson]?

Yeah.

That rings a bell.

Albany Square... I don't think he did it in the end either. Phil Jefferies – he was a politician.

Westminster University – Christine Wall

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[End of Recording 2]

[Recording 3]

The difference with you is that, because you were an architect, you carried on working in the whole... Look at that, lovely! A bibliography on squatting and self-help [squatting]...

Oh, brilliant! Yeah. I found that when I was doing that thing at the AA last year with Sue and Kate Heron. Sue and I decided to contextualise our period at the AA rather than go on about the AA because I was just there for a year, so I found what the AA was doing at the time, which was this kind of thing, which was fantastic.

Amazing!

Yeah!

That absolutely deserves its own...photograph... It's just incredible.

Yeah.

Yeah, that's just...

I'm completely involved in things like that, you know.

[Laughter]

Knuckle! I've never even heard of Knuckle! Who was Knuckle?

Well, it's very cryptic, isn't it? Union Place, [Russell] Road, and I think it was just [my mates]. I don't know who they were. It's blokes, they're blokes, so... This is a good one. So, that's what they were doing. That's exactly right, so that's talking about how all the houses got...

How they smashed up... Oh, that's a graphic of council workmen smashing...Lambeth Council workmen smashing up the...

Yeah.

That's incredible.

Yeah, it's a good one.

I mean, I'll have to write another paper that's much longer than [?].

Yeah.

That's amazing.

Isn't that just so...?

It's brilliant.

Yeah. That was all those [?].

Quite a...!

Yeah!

You've got an amazing collection of stuff.

Wow...that's quite...

And I can't possibly use it all...

No.

...but it just makes me think that it needs to be saved.

That's the AJ...

Yeah.

So, that's the little piece...and they pick out the little heads on the doors [laughing].

Oh yes, of course.

Of course!

Architectural details...

Yeah.

Animals [have fawn] heads, yes.

Vauxhall Society [laughing]...a tiny little thing, I mean hilarious really!

Oh, yes...

I mean, it was everywhere really. Some of these are shockingly...

I'm just going to get the AJ reference...which is...AJ...

Terrible!

I can't actually use these without getting permission from the AJ so...

Yeah.

But it's good that-

Oh, that's just...I love that.

That's just fantastic.

I loved it.

Isn't it great?

And you couldn't believe that he would have spent that time doing that, but obviously, it was just a really big thing. This was the Sun, and that's just my only copy, isn't that terrible, but what a beauty...

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Mm.

And...Sun...that's Dave, who took that photograph, and that's the maverick councillor who came down.

Megaphones, remember them! Megaphones!

[Laughter]

Anna and Sam. She used to wheel him out at every opportunity. "Quick, get Sam out!" Okay"

And then, this, this is when they're smashing up the – oh no, that was the main event, that's right, so that's...what we were up to...

Margaret [Dolly]! She was so tough. She chained herself to the railings.

Outside St Agnes Place?

Outside one of the houses that was being demolished. She was so brave. She was very Belfast. She was fearless. Can you imagine? Really posh, the poshest person on the street. She was 19 and she was a medical student, but she just couldn't give a shit!

And that's an aerial view, which is a shockingly bad one. So sad, isn't it?

And that's from the...

The Evening Standard, yeah.

There will be an archive of all these photographs somewhere.

Yeah, there will be, exactly.

But you have to find out who the photographer was.

The Evening Standard – "The Rape of St Agnes Place". I'm in that picture somewhere – I can't tell you where. There's Dave [laughing], and Russell! They were both from – this is [Villiers] Road coming to try and get in, past the police lines. And we're on the other side.

Westminster University – Christine Wall
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[Laughter]

The same...

So...

So, a lot of coverage...

A lot of coverage – I mean, it was quite incredible. And one of the biggest things was actually the long pieces-

They're great photographs, aren't they?

Fantastic. The fact that they were down there... That...could have been me there, actually, going "What...?" I mean, we were so sleepy and we were kind of...

And so on... And Newline, [?] don't smash. That was the Workers' Revolutionary Party.

Oh yes, I remember Newline, yeah, yeah.

You remember Newline, yes. Ron Bailey...

That's right, Ron Bailey squatted the squatters...

[?] Lane. [Mr Stimpson], he's going for it, absolutely, in detail.

That was the situation where we went in the back while Ruby moved out, and we got sort of very mixed press then, and there's Ruby's son, who was slightly...learning disabilities, Reg, and that was our house, just there... "St Agnes Place is Free"... Oh no! This is weird. No, we were there next to him...anyway, hoo!

She lives in Cuba now [laughing]!

Wow!

My friend...

Westminster University – Christine Wall

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Oh, look at that, shocking! I mean, it's quite hilarious, all this! So, she, this feature writer, took us up and was coming down a lot.

From the Sunday Times...

Yeah, and writing big feature...

Anti-Council stuff...

Anti-Council, yeah, all of this stuff, you know, was going on, because we were putting it their way...

And South London Press...

Yeah, we were putting it – that was, all this stuff, this stuff-

So this is all 1977.

We'd put this stuff and we'd say, "Look, look, look what they're doing, look!" I loved that one.

[?] a million bricks!

Yeah, Lambeth Council, yeah! And look, the Times, "The Lambeth Clearances"...

Wow!

I know!

21st of the 1st '77...

Yeah. And [unfortunately], Kennington Plan was all [?] that period in planning, you know.

Grassing over a street between two moderate-sized pieces of open space...

Yeah.

...very handsome on the map but, mm...

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“There’s no chance of turning St Agnes Place parkland into years. GLC has not even announced permission to close the road.” That’s what we got them in court on, you see.

Ah-ha...

And then the Daily Telegraph, you see...

Mm. So, there must have been partly some anti-Labour Council sort of...

There was. There was mixed – there was libertarian right. There was...the Sunday Times were Liberal at that point anyway.

Yeah, they were good, yeah.

But these guys had mixed feelings. [?] St Agnes Place... So, Daily Telegraph... So, it really...but, do you know, the glorious Newsline, that’s it...[felt] such an idiot... [Laughing] Well, I was, you know, I mean, Newsline, we could just get so easily...

There you are, a big photo...

Yeah. The difficulty was actually getting the Times because they were the business, especially the Sunday Times.

Mm.

“A Resounding Defeat”.... And there it goes...there’s [Sharon], who comes from...came from...you know, a few streets away. So, she was a local person.

And so on, so there you go, it just went on, and we worked really hard to get this...the story out – that’s what we did. It was funny really. It’s not a contemporary thing about the media. We were at it, on the case, feeding them, and making, yeah.... And so on... So, I don’t know what else I’ve got...

What’s this about the vanishing bricks then?

You can have it, if you like.

The mystery of...

Well, it just one – because the building, the...what was it called...Direct Labour Force...

Oh yeah.

...was really bent in Lambeth...

Yeah.

Really bent, and everybody knew it! And they would, you know, they were doing all this stupidity with the squatting, but at the same time, they were just incredibly, ugh, cavalier with their own...with their own money, and you know, it was just an Administration that had to change.

The Daily Mail...as the national scandal of St Agnes Place reaches its climax, and that's from Shaq – remember Shaq?

Oh yeah.

Yeah. I mean, we couldn't believe how every – I mean, even the Daily Mail...it's incredible. You can have that one too, if you like...

This one? Oh, this one, is this the Guardian?

[Laughter]

I don't know who it is!

And the Times, yeah.

The Guardian and the Times.

Lots of...this is wonderful!

Oh, look!

Actually, I mustn't take that – that's yours.

Okay.

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The Morning Star...

Yeah! That's right.

Yeah, it's these photos though, they're such...it's such good...

The photos are just great, yeah.

And that is the headline...

Yeah.

It's amazing.

Well, it was the headline...

The 20th of January '77.

That's right. And so on.... And this was the Leader, Bernard Levin...

Oh gosh...

I know.

In the Sunday Times?

In the Times, I think.

Yeah, in the Times, oh yes, Tuesday...

Yeah, huge paper...

Amazing.

I don't think he was – I think he-

Westminster University – Christine Wall

Interview – Julia Dwyer

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[End of Recording 3]

[Recording 4]

Ah, introverted compared with more inclusive politics. So, I couldn't...you know, we couldn't [sighing] ...and it felt quite old-fashioned. I'd never...it felt, well, essentialist, was one of the things. It seemed to...

Radical feminism...

Yeah.

But also, doesn't that mean that you didn't actually then ever do any politics around being a lesbian either?

Oh, apart from, you know, Gay Pride in Kennington Park, conveniently – we'd just nip round the corner and "Hello!" No, I mean, that, Gay Pride really, but yes.

But as an architect, you worked with [Gay Cops], didn't you?

Eh...

Maybe you didn't.

Yes, Pluto, yeah, I did, they were my clients, yeah. Yeah, they were...yeah, yeah.

Was that while you were with Matrix?

Yeah.

Yeah. So, when you said that you didn't have much truck with radical feminism, that was a on a personal-

It was during that time when we were in St Agnes Place and all those, you know, women's newsletters were coming through, and there was so much... And, you know, in our neck of the woods, it was about class and race - they were the divisions, as opposed to separatism, and I think a lot of the people I was around, who were black women and, em, working-class women and stuff, wouldn't have any truck with, eh, separatism, you know. They didn't see it as a thing they wanted to get worked up about. There were other things they wanted to get worked up about [laughing], you know, and it just seemed... It didn't... I mean, there were plenty of separatist houses. Ours was, but we weren't separatist in [a tall worked through] way or anything.

Westminster University – Christine Wall

Interview – Julia Dwyer

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Mm. So, there was no sort of rules about men visiting or...?

No.

So, it was women who happened to live together and preferred it that way.

Oh, we talked about it a lot, no, we were...we were not... We worked out why we were doing it and what...that it, you know, in the sense it was an experiment. So, the experiment of Matrix had already sort of, in a way, we'd quite consciously said that's what we were going to try and do, em, and...you know, of the five of us, three were heterosexual, and plenty of people had – but people were actually, I mean, in a more contemporary way, much more interested in all kinds of sexualities, to be honest, really, much more open, and didn't want – would have hated to have been entirely into that box. And actually weren't, didn't actually practise being heterosexual all the time [laughing], did quite a lot of different things at different times, so...

Yeah.

No, but really worked out what they thought about having a women's house, but didn't have a big thing – no, didn't go on about... No, because one of the people in the house was in the WRP for a lot longer than I was, and she was a black woman as well and, you know, she doesn't...she couldn't be going on about feminism as such. She was much more troubled by [her] situations. It was assumed and...assumed as part of what...how we breathed, rather than being articulated and debated. We were more going to be articulating and debating how we treated each other, not from a feminist perspective but from a, I don't know, a sort of [sighing], oh, I don't know...a perspective that recognised racism, that recognised class distinction, and also was sort of humanist, also touched by growth movement stuff. That's where we were, to be honest. [I've never tried] to define, em, that position, but I don't remember us going on about...lots about... I think probably people did actually talk about...probably we did talk about separatism and we did talk about radical feminism, and we did probably have ding-dongs in the actual... You know, we were a very discursive and argumentative group, actually... Nobody was short of a word or two, and some very smart people in the house.

Mm, yeah, but you were living in...in, you know, Brixton...

Yeah.

And race is...is a defining sort of thing, I would think, about this particular bit.

Yeah.

Whereas, the thing in Hackney, it was class.

Class was big too, in the house, and in, you know, because there were the builders and... I mean, no, it was a big thing. People talked about that all the time, all the time. It was an education for me,

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coming from Australia. You know, people were absolutely precise about... I mean, I thought it was fantastic, the way people talked about where they came from, in class terms, like “My Mum was this and my Father was this...” and then di-di-di-di and then we ended up living in, you know, Dorking, but, you know, **but** [laughing]! Okay! Dorking?! Yeah, that’s [laughing]. But you know, but, you know, very, very aware, let’s say, you know.

Yeah.

And also, amongst lesbians, amongst those [travelling road dykes] and everything, all the women and stuff – there was lots and lots of open discussion about class too, wasn’t there?

Yeah.

More...confront – because we were having relationships with each other, it was more...direct, I think, that discussion.

Yeah.

And race.

And race, yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah, they became defining sort of conversations in Women’s Liberation...

Yeah.

...by the early-’80s, definitely.

Yeah.

Yeah. And I think that, actually, people grappled with them. I mean, that’s what was so interesting I think about all those intense conversations, is that people didn’t shy away.

Really did, yeah.

They did really try very hard to confront, you know, their own pasts and behaviours and...

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Yeah.

Yeah, but it was difficult. It was also very aggressive sometimes.

Very aggressive, and some of it was really unacceptable.

Yeah.

And bullying, you know, there was a lot of that.

Yeah. Well, yeah, [?] and [?] split, and I was in the non-separatist bit, so I split away from the women who wanted to remain separatist. I just couldn't be...doing with it.

Mm. And the whole lesbian scene as well, remember, it already had a whole history of groupings, self, you know, very defensive groupings from way back. I mean, I did...I am old enough to have just gone to Gateway as the last couple of, you know, probably in the last two years of its existence. It's hilarious. And I met those...those women from West London, all those women that lived, you know, that were really posh and looked like Princess Diana and worked in new, burgeoning sort of tech companies and things, and drove open-top sports-cars, all those lesbians. I'd think...fuck, you know...and it was like so...I mean, such a step away from Brixton and...

Yeah, yeah, another world...

They were, but lots and lots and lots and lots of them out, you know...

Yeah, they were.

...interesting, eccentric types.

And they certainly weren't...they weren't feminist, and they didn't have any politics, but they were, at the same time, they were living quite openly as lesbians.

Yeah.

Which took a bit of courage...

Yeah, they were bolshy.

Yeah.

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And I think they did have politics, of a kind...

Yeah.

I think they did, and I...I also think that they also had a similarly diverse class background, to be honest. I think they just took life in a different direction, for various reasons. But I think the...the one thing I remember, I mean, I think some of them would probably have been quite, you know, would have defined themselves as feminist and all that, but the thing that was amazing about them was that they were, em... They didn't know anybody – you know, they weren't in any kind of larger community. They were really cut off from, you know... So, they had these very close social circles that... I remember falling into one of those circles, going a few times to parties and things, and they were, you know... But they weren't political circles and those sorts of things, and they didn't seem to have just as much large a community, and it was harder for them in that respect – well, they just did it differently but... And they're...it's not past tense either.

No, no, still there.

Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

Yeah. Yeah, probably more so.

I think so.

We're the smaller...

Yeah.

Now, that sort of...yeah, what we used to call "straight lesbians"...

Yeah. Yeah.

...in many ways, but... Different conversation but...

Well, quite shocking, but yeah, but interesting anyway.

But, great, I mean, I'm just going to have to wind up because I have to leave...

Yes, you have to go.

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But you've...you have made it clear, actually, how all this informed later feminist practice.

Have I? Good.

Yeah, you have, in both the material aspects of it, you know, shaping houses, but actually, it seems, from what you were saying earlier about what was really important, was this ability to communicate across very big divides, so you could get through to people, and of course, that's what Matrix was... well, renowned for, when it was successful.

Well, it's what-

And also, within the group itself...

Yeah. Yeah, that's right. And also I think, the other thing is, the other thing about all of this sort of stuff, all this stuff here, all this writing about papers, about, you know, principles of things and...oh, Dan Monk... Did you know Dan?

No.

He was at North London. Dan... There we go... But all this stuff that we were doing within feminism and within squatting, you know, look at this...media workshop...

Yeah.

Em, helped, eh, inform...made the sorts of discussions that would happen at Matrix about applying to the GLC for funding and being part of those big GLC policy documents, em, part of the continuum, and that wasn't to do with squatting. That was maybe to do, in general, with activism, I think, is that people were...they were in left-wing parties or groups, or they were... And if squatting was one of those activisms, they might have also been active about, you know, women's aid or something or, you know, building or something, but it meant that there was a whole discussion that was bigger than the daily life and consumerism and stuff.

Mm.

And the engagement of the press and the law as well meant you had to go right back to organising political arguments really, really clearly, in an extroverted way, in a way that communicated to other people.

So can you then argue that that encouraged...it enabled you to make design arguments?

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No.

No?

No. It enabled us to apply to the GLC – that sort of enabled us (a) to articulate who we were in a wider language, it...from all the different Matrix people, I mean, you know, Fran, you know, fantastically sort of...wide resource of people, but it also made it native, if you like, to be able to apply to the GLC for...make the case for getting technical aid funding. So, something like 40% of Matrix's income, for a few years, not...for two or three years, was doing technical aid work for women's groups and groups that benefited women. We saw massive numbers of groups to help them to put feasibility studies together to apply for funding.

For buildings?

Yeah, for buildings or for improvements to buildings, so, you know, nurseries...all up and down, all around London, from Dagenham through to Earl's Court, and the case had to be made to the Women's Committee to get that, and so, it's that kind of thing, where you're talking to councils and policymakers, you know...

Yeah, you're right.

And that, I think that, that also, yeah...

Writing funding bids, yeah.

So, the communication is... I hadn't really appreciated how engaged we were with dealing with the press and dealing with the law and so on – that's as a squatting group. It wasn't a feminist thing. It was...the squatting group. There were lots of women in there, being quite, you know, smart and doing lots of writing and stuff, and, em, eh, that is also a form of communication.

Yeah.

And Matrix needed that too. And there were plenty of people able to do it. I mean, Sue Frances was fantastic at those things, you know, writing those sorts of applications and things. But, you know, we were all able to be part of that discussion.

Yeah.

There you go!

Do you want to finish there? Do you feel that that...or do you feel...?

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Well...

If there's any loose ends, just write them down and send them to me, if you think this...

Em, Black Flag, on my God... The history of the...

No, I mean, there's more than enough, isn't there?

Yeah, absolutely.

And I think the main problem for you is, in a way... Brixton Women's Centre...oh my God... I don't know what this is...

Bob Kindred...

Yeah, he was...that was in Railton Road.

A councillor?

No. He was an activist in Brixton. Yeah. This is all these... Anyway! Em, yeah, no, I think if anything comes back – I know you haven't got much time now, you've got to just do it really, but it'll resonate, won't it?

I think it will. Thank you.

And if you want any of these images-

[End of Recording 4]

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[End of Recording]