# ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

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**INTERVIEWEE: Ian Milliss**

**INTERVIEWER: Virginia Macleod**

**PLACE: Town Hall House**

**DATE: 29 March 2012**

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## TRANSCRIPT

0.00 **VM:** **I'm speaking today with Ian Milliss, artist, at the Town Hall of the City of Sydney Council. Today is Thursday, the 29th of March 2012 and this interview is for the City of Sydney Oral History Project, 'Shelter'. My name is Virginia Macleod.**

**Ian, what year were you born?**

IM: 1950.

**VM:** **1950, thanks. And where were you born and where did you grow up?**

IM: I was actually born in Sydney at Crown Street Hospital but in fact my parents had just moved down from living up in Portland, which is a bit west of Lithgow over the Blue Mountains, a cement town. That's one of those single industry towns: all there is is a big hole in the ground and a cement works.

**VM: And you lived there right until you left school?**

IM: No, no, no. My parents were divorced when I was about five. So I lived in Petersham till I was about five and then went to live with my grandmother back up in the country.

**VM: In Portland?**

IM: Well, between Portland and Wallerawang, yes, a place called Blackmans Flat, which is now a notoriously appalling place. It's about to be buried under the ash dam of a power station. Basically, it's a truly horrifying, apocalyptic place now.

**VM: It must feel strange.**

IM: Yes, it is very strange to go there. So I lived there and went to school at Wallerawang School till I was about ten or eleven or something like that and then came back down to Sydney to live with my mother who by that stage managed to basically get a Housing Commission house. So, I mean, it had been very hard for her because apart from she had my brother who was basically a baby when my parents split up and in those days women, even if they could get a job only got paid about two thirds of what men got paid.

2.09 And so she'd had a very hard time, so it was a couple of years before I could come back and live with her again and then we lived first at Kingsford and then at Matraville, out along Anzac Parade.

**VM: What sort of job did your mother manage to get?**

IM: She worked as a bookkeeper basically, so it was office, basically an office job. And around that time she got remarried as well so sort of life in general improved a bit for her. And so I lived then out of Matraville until I was about eighteen or nineteen and then I left home. But even though I was living out of Matraville, for the last couple of years of my schooling I was actually going to school at Marist Brothers Darlinghurst, so I was actually in the inner city all day, every day – just used to go backwards and forwards on the bus. And as soon as I left school that's actually where I went to live was just Darlinghurst, just nearby there.

**VM: What, you felt at home in that area?**

IM: Oh, yes, yes, that was my area very quickly. And for years before that it wasn't just for going to school there but I'd got really interested and involved in art and stuff so from about the age of about thirteen or so I spent every Saturday at least basically in the inner city there.

I'd just catch the bus into town first thing in the morning and go around art galleries and things which there were even then quite a few and so I'd just spend Saturday going around art galleries.

**VM: Looking at art?**

IM: Yes. And so by the time I even went to school in there I already knew that whole area really well; I'd been wandering around it for a couple of years already.

**VM: And was art a big subject for you at school?**

IM: Oh, God, no. I don't think our school even had art lessons and the only ones I can ever having, I think I failed or got thrown out of because I kept producing the wrong result.

**VM: Not what was expected?**

IM: Well, it wasn't quite what was expected, yes. Although I did have one wonderful moment, actually, when I was about sixteen when one of my teachers at school sort of said to me did I know that there was an artist whose name is Ian Milliss because he'd read about him in the paper and I'm "Well, actually it's me" and he absolutely refused, thought I was just - - -

4.14 **VM: Pulling his leg.**

IM: - - - I nearly got into trouble over it.

**VM: Thought you were lying.**

IM: It looked as though I was lying, yes.

**VM: So when you left school what did you do?**

IM: I went to work for the Mitchell Library but, I mean, I'd already been exhibiting for about two years or something like that in one of the best galleries in Sydney, a gallery called Central Street, which was very famous avant garde gallery in Sydney and I used to go to Central Street all the time and the artists who were there sort of took me under their wing basically and so in a sense it was my art school. They used to give me books to read and make sure I went to see certain things and basically cross-questioning.

**VM: They taught you - - -**

IM: Yes.

**VM: - - - your technique?**

IM: Yes, to a degree but the sort of work I was doing, I mean the reason they were interested in me was by the time I met them I was already doing these big sort of shaped canvases and monochrome flat-shaped canvas which was the sort of stuff they were doing and they couldn't quite figure out how I'd learnt to do this artwork but I learned a lot of technical stuff from them and basically a lot more about art history and what I should be looking at, what I should know and basically got introduced to sort of highest levels of the art world, to the curators and so I'd done all that stuff when I was still at school basically. And so when I left school I, like everyone, tended to do a lot in those days. I did the sort of public service type thing, you know you apply to go in the public service - it was a nice, easy job – and they let you pick where you wanted to go and so I said the art gallery, the library or the Australian Museum, which were the three cultural institutions basically and I ended up in the library. And I ended up in this really crappy part of the library, as you do, but Daniel Thomas who was the curator at the Art Gallery of New South Wales rang up Suzie Moreau who was the Mitchell librarian and told her that I was there and said "You have to get him and put him somewhere else" and so I got put over into the Mitchell Library where I worked with photographs and paintings and the Mitchell Collection, which you probably know is a really amazing collection.

6.16 And so I spent the next eighteen months or so before I left basically getting one of the best educations you could get, probably, in early Australian art and European art of that early colonial and exploratory sort of period. I mean, the collection is just extraordinary. And so handling all this stuff, handling the actual watercolours from Cook's exhibitions gives you a good and really quite in-depth sort of understanding of stuff, especially because you don't select it. You see what everybody else is pulling out and looking at and suddenly you get this extraordinary cross-section of stuff you probably would never have got if you just actually - - -

**VM: Chose it yourself what to look at.**

IM: Yes. So I got some very good art education and cultural education and historical education but not in the ways you would normally get it: I didn't go to university to get it, I didn't go to art school to get it.

**VM: But you learnt, working alongside a lot of people who knew how to direct your interest - - -**

IM: People who really knew.

**VM: - - - as well as how to point things out.**

IM: And so like the people I was working with, I was working with Warren Horton who was later the National Librarian and he and I were really good friends. I was eighteen and he was thirty five or something but again Warren was really supportive and taught me a lot of stuff. So I had this bunch of people who always would mentor me basically from a very early age and so I can't thank them enough, really.

**VM: That was very lucky.**

IM: Well, I was extremely lucky, I was really, really lucky and it's only in retrospect you realise how lucky you actually were.

**VM: Yes. You probably just ……it all down at the time and enjoyed it, yes. So where were you living while you were doing all this work in the city?**

8.10 IM: Well, at first I was still living with my parents out at Matraville but eventually I moved to Denham Street which is behind Taylor Square – it's just behind Taylor Square there – and I lived there for about a year or so and then I moved over to St Neot Avenue in Potts Point, which is off the end of Victoria Street – it's right on the very, very tail end of Victoria Street.

**VM: And were you living on your own or in a shared house?**

IM: No, I had a girlfriend by this stage who in fact I'd met at the library and she and I were living there together.

**VM: So you were living in Potts Point and I was going to ask you particularly today about the squats that happened in Victoria Street. Were you living there at that point?**

IM: Yes, yes, and in fact what had happened – I mean, it probably seems odd to other people but it ties in very closely with my art history – is that I was definitely one of the very earliest people in Australia doing conceptual art, like stuff that was not painting, was starting to actually develop into sort of actions and slowly the physical artwork was sort of disappearing a bit and being art about ideas and presenting ideas and discussing ideas in some way and this was just starting to ……. up all 'round the world at this point but particularly in Australia and I was one of the first people doing this. And one of the things I started thinking about quite a lot – and I can see now how it came straight out of the experiences I'd been having, like at the library and things like that – was I started thinking about simply the idea that art isn't necessarily about making certain sorts of artifacts, it's about culture in the broader sense and that artists are just actors within this wider culture.

10.16 And I slowly through 1970, ’71, ’72 when I was living in that area, I stopped making actual things to be exhibited. But first I went through games and things like that and then I became really interested in the way people interact and obviously how that in a sense people’s interaction is what generates culture, you know, all the complexity of people’s interactions. And I became also interested in the way people interact with physical spaces which means the more I thought about it I started to realise at a certain point - and it was basically Kelly’s Bush [bushland saved from development in the 1970s] that did it – it suddenly hit me that if what I was doing was about playing around with physical spaces and people’s interactions in them, that something like the Builders Labourers were doing that on a grand scale, with political content and social content way beyond anything I could actually dream of and in actual fact they were the artists, they were artists, that in actual fact both in a corporate sense as an organisation but also all the individuals, all those anonymous migrant workers who were builders labourers and stuff were actually artists in the sense they were making decisions about how their city worked, how people could interact with the physical spaces, with the architecture, whatever, and rather than just being these mere mechanicals who did what they were told they were actually thinking about their own society and their own culture and making decisions about it and actually affecting what happened and transforming it in a very real way. And so I started to get very interested in what they were doing.

**VM: So you saw their intervention to preserve a piece of bushland in Hunters Hill as a kind of cultural artistic expression - - -**

12.04 IM: A cultural act, yes.

**VM: - - - of how people should have space and enjoy it?**

IM: Yes, exactly. It’s a cultural act, right. And every way you come at it, it has so many ramifications, social, political, aesthetic. All those things that you might apply to an analysis of a physical work of art like a painting you could apply to their action in actual fact and you could actually see what they’ve done, the implications of it, and that fitted very well with the thinking that was going on around conceptual art as well, so it all sort of meshed together and made sense.

**VM: And so were you doing work of this sort already? You said you’d stopped making physical paintings.**

IM: Well, the very last things I started doing like that were things where I was actually sending people sort of letters and messages about how

they could actually change the space they lived in. So rather than, say, doing an installation in a gallery I was sending people I knew things about their own living spaces and how you can change it by doing this and this and this. And they were very carefully written to look like letters rather than as indicators saying "This is a work of art". And funnily enough I thought they'd all disappeared and then I discovered recently that there are several of them in the National Gallery of Australia, which was interesting, except they'd filed them away as correspondence.

**VM: I was going to say are they on display?**

IM: Yes.

**VM: They're not?**

IM: Well, they are now. Well, they're not on display but they've all been photographed and you can see the in their database on line but for something like twenty years they'd been filed away as correspondence and it was only later on that someone looking at them twigged to the fact that "Hang on, that isn't quite right" and then they contacted me about them.

**VM: And clarified that the thoughts were - - -**

IM: And clarified the …….. yes. It was interesting because I thought they'd all disappeared but, no, they are.

**VM: And what prompted you to do that? When you said you were writing to friends did you go to their house?**

14.01 IM: They were people I knew, yes.

**VM: People you knew?**

IM: Yes. Well, there was a sort of transition. I started doing works which were like these paintings which were made of lots of bits distributed all over the wall and when you looked at them you suddenly looked at the wall, really, as much as the painting, the physical thing. It wasn't like a flat, square thing with an illusionistic space inside it, it was a series of things distributed over a wall so you looked at the wall, you looked at the gallery space. And so then I started doing works which just played around with the gallery space and marked out bits of the gallery space and sometimes made artificial spaces by drawing a line on the floor. Like, you know, you could create a cube by just stringing out bits of rope or chalk or whatever.

**VM: Cordon it off in some way?**

IM: Yes, cordoned off, yes. And so I started doing things like that. Then once I was doing things like that I noticed the way people moved around them and behaved in relation to them, so I started actually doing things which channelled the way people reacted and tried to set up interactions between people so they'd be forced to confront each other or negotiate with each other in some way or other to do something with it, right. And from that it just became a fairly simple step forward to then just start - sort of I was doing things which just were games or had instructions or whatever – to just actually doing things about people which weren't in the gallery space, were outside the gallery space and in people's homes. In particular Daniel Thomas - the crucial one here is Daniel Thomas – who was the curator of the Art Gallery of New South Wales actually commissioned me to do one of these works for his flat where we created this sort of artificial floor at one end of the room by outlining it with little strips of aluminium and stuff like that. And from that I started thinking "Well, we could just do other things with that" so the first things I said to Daniel about other things he could do, how if he slept in this room instead of that room and just sort of things like that.

**VM: And did it involve radically changing furniture and things or did you work very much with what people had in their houses?**

IM: No, it was a case of working with what people had because also I actually did works in galleries where I just rearranged the furniture inside the gallery and so I actually created spaces inside the gallery where people were sort of forced to interact differently.

16.09 Like I did a thing in 1970 at Farmers Blaxland Gallery where I got the benches and some of the partitions that they hung paintings on and actually created an artificial room inside the main room with the benches laid out in a sort of pattern inside the room, basically a conversation pit inside the gallery with nothing on the walls so it was like a separate space inside.

**VM: And how did people react?**

IM: Well, someone wrote a review saying I hadn't put anything in which was one of those, you know, "This is one of those real artist jokes or something, the artist who doesn't show anything". Well, no, that's not true at all, I just rearranged what was there and I did other works where I rearranged the lights, I made patterns using the existing gallery lights on the walls, using the gallery lights and stuff like that, so I was really interested in how you actually basically adapt the world to be something else. What I said later on is what artists

should do is create cultural change, right. Now, the difference between cultural change and political change – and they're very closely related – is that cultural change is about changing your understanding of how the world is and how it works as opposed to then enshrining that in some other social structures or policy, right. But first you have to create cultural change, make people read the world differently. In this case was to use what was already in the gallery to make the things that you looked at in the gallery rather than bringing things in.

**VM: And did you sit there and just quietly observe people when they came in?**

IM: Oh, yes, yes. And that's how I started doing games and things like that and things where people had to count how many other people there were in the room because they wouldn't be allowed into a certain area. And some of them were completely possible: if you can't enter a room until someone leaves it, no one enters the room because there's no first person, you know, things like that. So a lot of them had things where you had to break the rules in order to actually play the rules and stuff like that.

18.03 **VM: And did people take a long time to break the rules?**

IM: No, no, no.

**VM: The got the idea?**

IM: No, in fact I got into a lot of trouble in 1971 with a thing which was like a circular tug o' war which was like this big round strip of fabric; we had this set of instructions, so you had to recruit someone else and kids played with it. And it went to the National Gallery of Victoria and it just caused chaos because it kept being stolen, it kept turning up in other parts of the gallery and it kept being wrapped around sculptures and things and the guards actually put in formal complaints and wanted it removed.

**VM: And you felt that was a cultural expression?**

IM: Yes, yes, yes. And no one used it like a tug o' war – well, occasionally they did but then the kids got overexcited - like adults didn't tend to do it, although adults did but kids tended more – but you'd get three or four kids all pulling in a different direction and careering around the room, bumping into things - - -

**VM: Making noise and not doing what's expected in an art gallery.**

IM: - - - and screaming and carrying on, so basically it just created chaos which was sort of what I wanted, that was exactly the result I wanted.

**VM: It sounds like people were very creative with it, doing all these sort of things.**

IM: Yes, well they were and they were actually more creative than they tend to be now; they've developed a different attitude to stuff these days but back then it seemed to be this unleashing. But since this is the first time that people were starting to make art that you participated in, now it's not uncommon but no one was - - -

**VM: It was very new.**

IM: It was a very new thing then and so people were a bit excited by it. And the guards hated it and the curators hated it in the end too. I got some really whinging letters from them about it. Basically it was like "Don't do this again" sort of letters.

**VM: Anyway - - -**

IM: Yes, that's all a bit of a diversion - - -

**VM: No, that's interesting.**

IM: - - - but you can see how that funnels into my understanding about - - -

**VM: Your interest in space and ……. ……**

IM: Yes. And as soon as you start thinking about that you suddenly just make one further step and you suddenly start thinking "Actually, other people do this too and it doesn't get called art" and so I've started thinking about like definitions of art and what gets called art and basically sort of slowly came to a conclusion which was that people who create cultural change should be regarded as artists.

20.14 Later on I had a different language for this, I must say - it didn't come along till the mid '80s – which is about social memes, cultural memes and so people who adapt cultural memes and innovate in terms of cultural memes, they're artists, right. And most of the people in the art world in fact aren't artists at all, they're actually artisans who just are manufacturing to preexisting means of one sort of another, right. So there are some people in the art world who are innovating but there are a lot of other people outside the art world who are innovating as well but don't get called artists and the ones who should be called artists is that group. The people at this end who call

themselves artists simply because they paint paintings aren't really artists at all.

**VM: A different group, yes.**

IM: They're just craftpeople, that's it, yes.

**VM: But coming back to Victoria Street – and we might come into that about the use of space again – but you were living there and at this time there was a big political standoff …… ……. ……**

IM: Well, I began to get interested in the Builders Labourers, right, and actually one of the issues that came up was the – what was it, the Theatre Royal, what's in the MLC Centre? – it was actually on the site of where the MLC Centre is and it was the first, one of the first green bans that came along which was a specifically cultural one, right, it was about saving a theatre. And I was on the committee of the Contemporary Art Society at that stage, which was the only artists' sort of society and so we all ploughed in to help back the theatre and theatre people to try and save that and there was actually this committee set up of a variety of different arts and theatre related people. And so I was on this committee with Neville Wran as it happens and a bunch of other people, John Tasker, various people like that, and we were involved in all these negotiations with Harry Seidler about what happened with the MLC Centre and eventually they built the theatre again, it is part of the development, but in the process I met Mundey and I met Joe Owens and Bob Pringle and basically all the Builders Labourers people and got to know them a little bit.

22.18 That slowly wound up but within about a year or so Victoria Street suddenly happened because there'd been a developer buying up Victoria Street and suddenly just pushed out most of the people living there within a couple of weeks basically.

**VM: A couple of weeks?**

IM: Yes, a very short period of time the whole lot were all evicted and I was, as I say, just living virtually - - -

**VM: You were walking down Victoria Street every day.**

IM: Yes, yes, I was only fifty metres away, I was just straight 'round the corner from the end of it so I saw all this going on but also I had a lot of friends who were actually living directly in that actual area. One of them was a woman called Bonnie McDougall who was an academic – she taught Chinese – and Joe Szabo and Joe Szabo was a painter

who showed at the same gallery, showed at Central Street Gallery like I did. And living below them was Arthur King and they were friends of Arthur King's and they'd all been involved in the Sydney Push, the libertarians and stuff, which I was also a little bit involved in and Arthur started organising some resistance to all of this, right. And Bonnie rang me up because she knew I already knew the Builders Labourers and stuff like that, so I went to the first couple of meetings with Arthur and also to the Coalition of Resident Action Group meetings and stuff like that while I was just …….. ……. but strangely enough I didn't get terribly involved in it but within about a month or six weeks or something like that Arthur was kidnapped, the whole famous episode of what went on with Arthur, which was basically he was just kidnapped and gone for several days and then suddenly reappeared.

24.09 And one of the reasons he probably reappeared was because the Builders Labourers said "If Arthur doesn't come back alive basically nothing will ever be built in Victoria Street ever. There will be an eternal ban on the street, no building union will ever touch it" and so suddenly Arthur was like dumped back out on the street, looking slightly dazed and absolutely terrified and he just went home, packed up his bag and went into hiding. But understandably, given what we know happened to him afterwards [was locked in a car boot for several days].

**VM: And you say within a month. Could you see it when you walked up and down the street – was everything boarded up or more that you were aware?**

IM: Not so much boarded up as wide open. There were doors wide open, there were windows smashed. They would just turf people out and leave the door flapping, that sort of thing. They'd smash them up a bit but as we later discovered when we really got in there and started squatting, I mean they were just flats where all the stuff was just thrown all over the ground. People had just been bundled up and pushed out.

**VM: Their places were trashed when they left?**

IM: All the places were trashed, yes.

**VM: So a lot of these would have been furnished places or people hadn't been able to get their stuff?**

IM: Yes, and a lot of them were protected tenants and so people who were really quite old and really not in much of a position to defend

themselves and most of them were gone within about the first one or two weeks. It wasn't that they just sort of got an eviction notice. They got a thug kicking in their door, saying "O.K, you've got to be out of here. Get out" and they'd have these sort of documents shoved in their hands, saying "Here, sign this". And some of the tenants ended up, protected, ended up in boarding houses and things like that, you know "Oh, we've got an alternate place for you" and they'd find themselves dumped in this boarding house or somewhere, I don't know.

**VM: And was there anybody you knew personally that was evicted in this way?**

26.05 IM: Well, no, not really. There were people I knew personally who were under pressure but if they went they managed to hold on and go in a slightly more orderly way. I mean, Joe and Bonnie moved in the end.

**VM: And Arthur King moved?**

IM: Arthur King. Well, Arthur's girlfriend, Mary Jane Townsend, she held on as long as she could but she eventually had to move too. So there were a bunch of people and there were people like Mick Fowler who was moved in his absence and we moved him back in again later on – that's another whole episode – but he basically came back – he was a seaman – he came back and discovered that his flat had just been emptied out and without any sort of legal agreement at all, though they said they'd given money to his mother which they had and Mick's mother basically pocketed it.

**VM: No help for him.**

IM: No help for him, no help for Mick, yes.

**VM: So when did the idea of squatting start then?**

IM: Well, what happened after Arthur came back is a whole bunch of people basically appeared out of nowhere basically to rescue Arthur initially. Like I ended up there very quickly, within a day, but a lot of Arthur's friends, particularly people from 'round the Sydney Push – so there were people like Wendy Bacon and Darcy Waters and Roelof Smilde and a whole bunch of people and that was the bohemian group of Sydney but they were very well connected to lawyers and all sorts of people and so basically they all appeared as well because they were all good friends of Arthur's and a whole lot of other people just appeared as well, a whole lot of people just turned up, and we basically formed this much more expanded Victoria Street Resident

Action Group than the sort of fairly smallish one Arthur had had going at first.

28.05 And we just really dug our toes in. First off, we were in a building called the Stables. I can't remember why we were in the Stables. It probably had been rented by one of the earlier people who were there and we just took it over.

**VM: So it was empty and you moved in?**

IM: Yes. Well, I'm not quite sure to tell you the truth. It might have actually been rented by someone who was a member of the group initially but I just can't remember.

**VM: So there were still some places in the area that were not moved out?**

IM: There were still a lot of places but slowly over the next couple of weeks they just got forced out.

**VM: Got moved out, yes.**

IM: But we had the Stables and we held onto it.

**VM: Where were the Stables, whereabouts?**

IM: There's a set of stairs which still run up the back of Victoria Street and come out in the middle of the development. The Stables were more or less at the top of the stairs, in between the house which was Mick Fowler's house and the top of the stairs and it overlooked back towards the city and had fantastic views.

**VM: So was it big – a house or a block?**

IM: No, it was probably about twice the size of this room which is about, what, four or five metres long. It was maybe like ten metres by about three metres and it was two stories and so it was big enough to hold meetings in there and things like that.

**VM: So it was your headquarters?**

IM: So it was our sort of headquarters. And we always had people there; there was always half a dozen people there from that point on.

**VM: What, sleeping over the night?**

IM: Yes, yes, and basically working out of there. And right next door there was one of the people who held on for a long time. Mick only came back a little bit later and Mick was a bit further up the street but

right next door to the Stables there was Marcel and Diane Cleymans and they were amazing, really amazing.

30.02 Marcel was Belgian and I don't know whether he'd been a seaman or what he'd been. I think he actually worked at Garden Island, he was some sort of tradesman of some sort. And they had two kids and they held on right through the whole thing. In actual fact they're real unsung heroes though Mick gets a lot of publicity but the Cleymans held in just as long but they were in a more difficult position because Mick had a better sort of tenancy than they had. They were just basically 5A lease sort of things.

**VM: Which means what?**

IM: Well, theoretically their tenancy could have been just terminated at any time and it was - they just refused to go, that's all – but they had no very strong legal position. Mick had a much better legal position; Mick was a protected tenant. But they hung on the whole time and they were right next to the Stables, in the building right next to us, so they were there. There were other bits and pieces of people up and down the street who all slowly got forced out. I mean, you couldn't resist this thing. These were very nasty, scary thugs basically and they were up and down the street the whole time, attacking anyone, putting pressure on, banging on your door, smashing windows, basically being as terrifying and violent as they could without actually hitting anyone.

**VM: And did they come and bang on your office a lot?**

IM: Oh, yes, yes. Well, yes and no. I mean, very quickly they just had the sort of hands-off thing with us because we managed to generate a lot of publicity, a lot of very bad publicity.

**VM: Bad in what sense?**

IM: Well, bad for the developer. Even though newspapers in the way *The Telegraph* would treat it today, would try and treat us like we were terrorists or something, it didn't wash because there was an overall social sympathy for what had been happening.

32.02 All through the '60s people had seen the inner city of Sydney being destroyed and really not very interesting architecture replacing it and there was no heritage legislation just in terms of even the physical fabric, saving the physical fabric but there were also communities being destroyed all the time. And these were often really long-term communities, Woolloomooloo and Kings Cross and The Rocks, where communities had been there for a hundred, a hundred and fifty

years, there were people who'd been there for three, four generations, so they weren't going to just get up and walk away that easily. With their city they loved it, they were going to defend it, they really were going to defend it.

**VM: And did any of the ones who got evicted come back to squat?**

IM: I think a very small number did.

**VM: I was thinking about those community relations. You know, if they felt this was their place did they want to come back, were they able to even squat or not really?**

IM: You have to remember that it was really scary. No one wanted to come back in lots of ways. If you'd been forced out you weren't that keen to come back; it was really scary. It was warfare, it was actually warfare. And it was after several months of this that we finally started squatting because our ability to generate publicity was slowly petering out as it became an older story. We were still just hanging on on one end of it; there was almost no one else left there. The only thing we could do was to basically try and repopulate the street but you weren't going to get many of the people who'd actually been forced out coming back because they'd been terrified and a lot of them were really quite old. There was a real mix, from very old people to very young people. The very young people tended to be transient. Victoria Street had a slightly different social mix to, say, Woolloomooloo and the young people tended to be transient, the old people tended to be protected tenants who weren't up for a fight and a range of other people in between but mostly they weren't going to come back, really.

34.13 On the other hand, it wasn't that hard to round up a whole other bunch of people who were very similar to them to actually come in and so that's really what happened once we started squatting. We had several hundred people, we had about a hundred people fairly quickly.

**VM: And did you have to recruit them or they just appeared?**

IM: They just started to appear and they were good, sympathetic, smart, tough people of one sort or another.

**VM: And what were they like mostly? Were they young or mixed with others?**

IM: They were mostly young because, like I say, you weren't going to be there unless you were really up for a bit of a fight. In a sense they

were naïve, by which I mean we were all naïve because I don't think we really – well, we had some sense of what we were up against but it was only after a period of time. And those of us who'd been there for a while already knew we were up against thugs and we were up against organised crime, in fact, and we'd actually started to do more and more research about the companies involved and things like that and we kept digging up more and more and more information which was a bit like one of those weird conspiracy theory sort of films where you suddenly keep finding "Oh, my God".

**VM: There's more conspiracy than you thought.**

IM: Yes, yes, and then into "Oh, my God" you know, and just more and more stories would come out and "Oh, my God. Do you know who the head of security is? He's the former police officer who shot another police officer in Police Headquarters, oh, my God, and got away with it", like "Oh, my God".

**VM: So it was getting deeper and deeper, yes.**

IM: It sort of just got scarier and scarier the more you got into it. And so it was not for the faint-hearted really and by the time we realised how much it wasn't for the faint-hearted we were too far involved to get out.

36.07 **VM: Yes. And you were working meanwhile, while you're doing this?**

IM: By this stage I wasn't. What I had been doing before that was actually doing a lot of stuff with the Contemporary Art Society and lots of casual labouring and stuff like that and I'd pretty much stopped working.

**VM: So you were pretty much your own master then?**

IM: Yes, yes, and so I'd pretty much stopped working to some degree, I'd stopped all my Contemporary Art Society stuff – my girlfriend was still working and so basically we managed to survive with that.

**VM: There was this office and the Stables but did you actually live in any of the former - - -**

IM: Well, once we moved from the Stables and we started – I'm just thinking exactly what the date was we started squatting – I could probably find it out – but it's somewhere in July or something like that, June/July '73, yes, somewhere around there, right, and I think that's about three or four months after Arthur's kidnapping. This is guesswork but I think it's something like that. Once we'd started

moving into other houses – the first ones we moved to were 57 and 59, I think, right down the end near the steps.

**VM: Near the steps to Woolloomooloo?**

IM: Yes. Well, there's several different lots of steps to Woolloomooloo but there's the ones right down the Garden Island end, the very last lot, the McElhone Steps, and these buildings were about two or three buildings up from there. We chose it because it was actually quite a defensible sort of building and it wasn't in terribly bad condition all told.

**VM: Was it apartments?**

IM: It had been originally a big, probably some sort of Georgian mansion or something but it then had other bits built onto it and it had been split up into apartments and things like that.

38.04 It actually had huge big cedar windows and cedar woodwork and stuff like that but it had this sort of big concrete verandah built on the front of it which was probably built in the '20s or '30s and it had probably about six flats or something like that in it but it had a lot of rooms and they were very big rooms and, like I say, it was a fairly defensible sort of building.

**VM: It had a solid front door or …… ……. get in?**

IM: Well, not just that. The front verandah thing had a gap between it and the street. Like there was a basement level, right, and so to get even to the front door you had to go over almost like a moat, really - - -

**VM: Bridge.**

IM: - - - you had to go over a bridge to get to the front door and you could basically seal off that top two floors and stuff like that. The basement not so much but it was such a solid building that even if they could get into the basement they couldn't do anything about us, really. So the whole top part of it was self-contained and could be locked up and like just through this one entrance.

**VM: And how many of you moved in there?**

IM: About twenty or so, I think, on the first day or so and then we started to just spread up and down the street and recruit other people and whatever. But we've made our first entrance a big public event so what happened is Roelof Smilde and I, we went down the back stairs and we went right 'round, we came up McElhone Steps and we

sneaked into that building and we basically got in there and secured it and we locked up the doors and made sure everything was secure and then the others had basically called like a press conference up the other end of the street and so like they marched down the street with banners and things like that and we opened the door and in they came.

**VM: Let them in.**

IM: Yes, and we hung banners off the front of the building and so we managed to make this big public media event out of it.

**VM: ……. ……**

IM: And very quickly, within about another week or two, we had another three or four buildings up and down the street and then as more people came in slowly the thugs, the developers' thugs or security people basically sort of were a bit powerless as to what to do because they didn't want the publicity of launching a full-out physical attack on us or anything.

40.14 We knew how to manipulate the legalities of it all as well and so we actually did various things like set up bank accounts and paid money into trust accounts and stuff like that as if we were paying rent, right.

**VM: So you'd set up an account in his name, just you, and what, rent ……. …….. was the landlord?**

IM: Yes, but recorded the rent account so that then in a sense they had to prove that we couldn't do that and we weren't renting it from them but we got a lot of very good legal advice as to how to play the game.

**VM: How much rent did you pay?**

IM: I can't remember now to tell you the truth.

**VM: Sort of peppercorn or a realistic?**

IM: No, no, it was a bit more but, yes, I can't remember really.

**VM: So you were in this building, you personally were in 57 to 59?**

IM: 57 to 59, yes, yes.

**VM: And tell me about the apartment you were in.**

IM: Well, we just picked a room and set up a bit of a bed, slept in there.

**VM: So there was nothing in there, no furniture?**

IM: Well, there was a lot of furniture in there and in fact a lot of what we did was clean stuff out and things like that and, I mean, they were really quite depressing and poignant things. I've still got two things from that very first day which were from a flat which obviously belonged to someone who was one of the protected tenants and one of them's like a little coin, a little leather coin wallet thing, but it has a little engraved silver thing on it saying, you know, given to someone or other for their service and the other thing I've got is a Georgian silver teaspoon which I just picked up off the floor. Just there was all this cutlery thrown across the floor and I was just looking at it and I thought "That's a bit odd" and I picked it up and it's a Georgian silver spoon.

42.01 **VM: Beautiful silver teaspoon.**

IM: Yes. And I've still got both of those but that was the sort of thing you'd find like in this mess and detritus and that stuff had been lying on the floor, being trampled, for months.

**VM: So it had been empty for a long time and been trashed?**

IM: Yes, just been thrown out all over the floor and completely trashed and stuff like that. I just picked them up but it was sort of really just these destroyed lives and all of the flats were like that. So we sort of actually cleaned them out and kept furniture if it was sort of like chairs and tables, if there was anything there like that.

**VM: And what about the sort of personal stuff?**

IM: There was nothing you could do about it.

**VM: You didn't know who it belonged to?**

IM: Didn't know who it belonged to, it was destroyed.

**VM: So you just threw it away?**

IM: Yes, we just bundled it all up and threw it away. There was just nothing you could do. It really was like a war scene.

**VM: And as far as things like living there, did it have gas and water connected or did you do it?**

IM: Well, it did pretty quickly.

**VM: You got that organised?**

IM: We got that organised. Well, you've got to remember we had the Builders Labourers on tap.

**VM: Nothing was too easy, yes.**

IM: I mean, they came around connecting up water and helped. We pirated electricity and things like that although a lot of the places never had electricity ever. We just had candles and things like that which was dangerous but we did and for heating we actually had fireplaces because there was plenty of rubble around and wood - - -

**VM: They had fireplaces to burn, yes.**

IM: - - - there was plenty of wood lying around. But we had water and we had toilets and we had kitchens and stuff like that.

**VM: And so how did you organise life there? Was there communal cooking or anything?**

IM: Well, it's interesting because there was another squat later on, a couple of years later, which was all communal where we actually had almost like an industrial size cooking thing going on, right. But in these places, no, this was a much more precarious sort of place and so, yes, there's a little bit of basic cooking and stuff went on.

44.02 **VM: Did the flats actually have kitchens or were they more like a bedsit?**

IM: No, no, a lot of them had kitchens. A lot of them were bedsits; a lot of them had kitchens. There's a real mix of things there. The one thing there wasn't much of was single houses but even what had been single houses once were all divided up into bedsits or two or three room flats or something like that. And so there was usually a kitchen which you could make work in some way or another, especially if you got some little camping stove type thing or something like that and you could heat water and all that stuff so it was basically a bit like camping out inside a building.

**VM: And did you have like a roster? Because presumably you couldn't leave the building empty.**

IM: We had rosters to make sure there were people there all the time. One of the things we somewhat cruelly but fairly said about Juanita getting killed was that one of the reasons it never happened to any of us was because none of us ever went to a meeting on our own ever, ever, ever, ever. I mean, we understood probably much better than she did. You know, she had this sort of "I'm an heiress and I'm exempt from everything" sort of attitude whereas we didn't and we never went anywhere on our own. We never went to meetings on our

own and even if we went to meetings we'd actually make sure not everyone went into the meeting, that some people were outside.

**VM: Waiting.**

IM: Yes, which everybody thought was sort of crazy paranoid except as it turned out it wasn't crazy paranoid at all, it was quite realistic about what we were doing. And that mightn't have gone on all the time but it went on. We knew we were up against something pretty worrying.

**VM: And at night was there a feeling of like someone needed to keep watch?**

IM: Yes, only to a degree. Look, after a while we had a pretty good idea – we were betting on it a bit but there was a limit to how far they'd go in a really public sense and so they sort of left us alone.

46.00 But we did actually have this sort of patrol. We had our own street patrols just like they had their street patrols and there were these sort of like different groups of people wandering up and down the street. The cops would come around and harass people all the time because cops were not at all supportive and not only were they not supportive even in any general sense but you've also got to remember the cops were completely corrupt. They were actually working with not just the developers but with the developers' thugs who were like the bouncers from the strip clubs and things like that and so they were all working hand in glove and so they were more than happy to harass us a bit if they thought they could and so you were always in danger of being accosted in the street and roughed up as happened from time to time. So there was all of that sort of stuff going on and we did as much as we could. We tried to actually adopt these sort of constant security things of one sort or another but they were often a bit informal and a bit sloppy and after a while, even within a couple of months we were a bit complacent about it because after a while there were so many of us we had the street, they didn't. They were wandering up and down the street, looking at us, sort of wondering what the hell's going on.

**VM: So how many were there of you by then would you say? ……. ……**

IM: Well, I'm not absolutely certain. I mean, I think at various times there wouldn't have been a hundred people living there but there were probably about a hundred people around the whole overall general group. In terms of people who were living there, there was probably about forty or fifty, something like that, but that's a fair number of

people when they're all talking to each other all the time and all acting as a big group.

**VM: In touch, yes. And how many buildings do you think you were in?**

IM: We probably had about six or seven buildings at least. We were limited because some parts of the street were really far more trashed than other parts, some were really badly damaged.

**VM: So you couldn't live there.**

IM: Other buildings were just sort of indefensible and so you couldn't really do much with them. So it was all narrowed down a bit too to the big, stand-alone mansiony sort of buildings.

48.06 So the building Mick Fowler was in we had, the building next door to that we had, 57 to 59 down that end of the street we had, we had people in other ones. Marcel Cleyman's building which was sort of like a block of flats, there were people in that. So that's four, the Stables are five, and there were people dotted in other buildings up and down the street. And there were also other buildings which weren't very livable but we virtually made a childcare centre in one of them for instance and so there were kids, there were kids around. So we had this range of different buildings being used in different ways all over the place.

**VM: Different activities, yes.**

IM: Yes, yes.

**VM: And did you stay there all the time? I mean, did people move in and that was it, that was their home?**

IM: My girlfriend, Rebecca and I, at this stage we'd moved out to a house that my parents owned out at Kensington and so that was - - -

**VM: Your base.**

IM: Yes, that was our base and then we just came in and spent time there and that was probably true of most people because everybody knew this couldn't last and so even though we tried to normalise it in various ways it was very sensible to have another base of some sort or another and especially because a lot of the people who'd come in - like most of the original people in Victoria Street had gone so there were all people who'd come in from outside and so they often would come in just to join in the overall action rather than to see it as a permanent place they were going to come and try and live. What it

did but was set the groundwork for later ones which were permanent like at Glebe, for instance, which was a very permanent squat but Victoria Street itself was a very precarious one as events proved because it was all over by January, so it only lasted six months.

**VM: Six months, yes.**

IM: Yes.

**VM: And how did it end – were you evicted?**

49.57 IM: Yes. Well, they began this series of legal things to just prove that, no, we didn't really have any legal thing, rah, rah, rah, and all this sort of stuff, argy-bargy went on. They chose one particular person to target, to build the legal stuff around – it was a guy called John Cox – he was Eva Cox's husband at the time in fact or former husband even by then, I think – but he was the centre of the legal stuff, right. We'd got Mick back in, Mick Fowler back in, but they began this series of legal moves to evict John Cox from whichever building he was in and we knew by late December, that all went through by late December and so that was pretty much lost and they had court orders and stuff like that, right, so we knew it couldn't last too much longer. So by that stage we actually started systematically barricading the place, we built all these barricades.

**VM: What did you use?**

IM: We used scaffolding which as I always said we "borrowed", courtesy of the Builders Labourers from various big building sites in Sydney, lots of scaffolding and hoardings and stuff like that. So we got a whole heap of material from the Builders Labourers. There was also a lot of stuff lying around the place and places had been trashed so you'd just pull up joists and use them as big bits of wood and stuff like that, floor joists and floorboards and stuff like that from buildings other than the ones we were in – you know, there were other buildings. So we had no shortage of materials and basically we built this whole series, we boarded up about two thirds of the buildings to a greater or lesser degree. A couple of them we just had to abandon as sort of indefensible but those big main ones we bolstered them and we had about a week or so to do it in and so we built some fairly substantial barricades.

52.05 And later on when we did a newspaper about our things I actually wrote an art review of the barricades because as I said at the time they were more aesthetic than utilitarian, lots of them.

**VM: You mean they crumbled at the lightest touch?**

IM: Well, not so much that, no, they didn't crumble at the lightest touch but it would have been better if they had in some cases; they became a danger in themselves. So we knew, we knew, we knew it was on and we had our own sort of people on guard around the place, so we knew for instance when these buses pulled up in front of Darlinghurst Police Station one night and sat there all night that it was on, you know, and so we had about five or six hours' warning at least, overnight, and we knew that there were hundreds of cops basically gathering.

**VM: And so there was a physical standoff, was there?**

IM: No. Well, we were in the buildings. No, it wasn't a standoff, it was like a siege. So they turned up about seven o'clock in the morning, I suppose, from memory – I'm not quite sure, it was very early in the morning anyway – and all these police, paddywagons and things arrived and the whole street was filled from end to end with police buses and paddywagons and also these buses full of goons basically and the cops just stood back while the goons just came and systematically smashed their way in, right, they just smashed everything. If they couldn't get through the door they just went through the wall. They went through the roof of one house; they actually just cut their way through the roof and just came down through the roof.

**VM: And were you standing there inside, were you?**

IM: We were all inside and I tell you it's a rather chastening experience to be inside a building where you've built a really good barricade so it takes them an hour to axe their way through it. I mean it's sort of like "Oh, God, wish it was over. Hey, just stop. I'll pull it down from this side".

**VM: "Let's get it over quickly".**

IM: And then the minute they got in they proceeded to just smash everything. They didn't touch us, they just went straight around as the cops came in and got us but they just then proceeded to smash everything to bits in front of us. They ripped every door off its hinges, they ripped every window out of its window frame, they smashed every toilet, everything, pipes.

54.25 **VM: And what did you feel while that was going on?**

IM: It was just horrifying, it was just horrifying. I mean, what can you say? The thing you have to remember about this is that we were fighting for several different things. We were fighting for the

architecture but we weren't fighting for the architecture as an end in itself, we were fighting for the architecture as a thing which made a certain type of social mix and a certain type of community possible and they were systematically destroying that. They'd already destroyed the existing community as such but it could have always in a sense been recreated over time.

**VM: While the building form was there, the architecture?**

IM: Yes, that's right. I mean, the community and the architecture are interacting functions of each other and so the actual destruction of the buildings which was tragic in itself was also the final symbolic destruction of the community as well. It was gone, you knew from this point that it was gone and nothing like it's ever existed there again and so that was really the end. But it was also just plain scary because these were not nice people, even though they'd been obviously very carefully instructed never to touch any of us or whatever, I mean it wasn't nice what was going on. And it took them quite a while to get us all out, it took over a day to get us all.

56.01 I mean, I was out very early, I was one of the first lots out and basically I spent the next twelve hours or more in Central Police lockup but there were some people in one of the buildings up the road, they got up on the roof and they actually were up in the chimneys and they were there for a whole day; it was the middle of the next morning before they finally managed to get them down. And meanwhile the street was flooded with people, hundreds of people came in, like not just all the other resident action groups around Sydney. The Builders Labourers went out, all sorts of people. My mother heard it on the radio and just jumped in her car and came in. All sorts of people just were out there, standing in the street while it's all going on.

**VM: What was their mood - were they just watching or cheering?**

IM: Well, fairly angry but you couldn't take on what was happening there, right. But it did have its sort of funny moments. I must say I slept through a lot of it because I'd gone for about forty eight hours without any sleep by the time they finally got me; I slept half the day in the police cells because I'd been working non-stop for the whole of the two days before.

**VM: What, building the barricades?**

IM: From building stuff, yes, yes, and just getting all that sort of stuff done. But when these guys were still stuck up on the roofs overnight

there was this huge mob of people out in the street and they started singing them songs. So there was actually this whole big street thing, singing them songs. One of the people who is a really close friend of mine, Teresa Brennan, was the person who was driving Marcus Einfeld's car three years after she was dead.

**VM: …….. ……**

57.58 IM: Well, Teresa was a very close friend of mine and I'd actually brought her into the whole thing and she, in amongst her very many wonderful skills, was she used to actually write scripts for Barry Humphries and stuff like that and she was a very funny person and she actually got there in the street and actually started giving people lessons in operetta and so they were singing things like the Gendarmes' Duet and a series of sort of operetta about police.

**VM: …….. …… So it became a ……. ……..**

IM: And there were these very puzzled-looking police standing there, thinking "What the hell's going on here?" So it was partly sort of songs about Green Bans and political songs but also like the Gendarmes' Duet. So the whole thing had a certain degree – but Victoria Street, despite its violence always had a real degree of wit about it. I mean, it was the artists' area and so the people involved were artists and it had a degree of humour and creativity that a lot of the other ones didn't have, a lot of the other resident action groups didn't have, even though they were all very good in their own ways.

**VM: So was it a stimulating group to be amongst them?**

IM: Oh, it was a great group to be amongst, yes, yes. I mean, I think in the end it became seen as the really crucial resident action group. The others were really important in different ways but Victoria Street was the one that went the furthest, it was the one that suffered the most, that actually had the most long-term consequences, not just physically in terms of what happened there and stuff like that but it was from stuff that we started there, talk about cultural change, the whole understanding of police corruption and political corruption that is now taken as accepted did not exist in the '60s. There were plenty of people who knew there was corruption but no one talked about it, the papers never had it.

60.13 **VM: So that brought it out in the open?**

IM: Victoria Street brought it out in the open and what brought it out in the open was the research that we did and the way all of that happened, right. I mean, the connections between the Askin government, the

police and organised crime and developers which is now tacitly accepted really.

**VM: Joining of dots.**

IM: Yes, yes. Well, we're the ones who joined the dots, we went out and did the research. There had been bits of research before us but we went out and did much more research and our actions exposed it anyway. By the time you get a thing where you can see the police protecting a bunch of thugs who are clearly thugs supplied by organised crime to do the work of a developer you've got the whole thing being played out before your very eyes. And so it's sort of like the situationists: we created a public spectacle which exposed the nature of the society in a very real and a way that was impossible to argue with and impossible to deny that that was actually what happened.

**VM: And I know there were squats in Woolloomooloo but was this the one that set the tone?**

IM: Yes, yes. Look, the Woolloomooloo ones were just sort of slight overflow. The real serious one that happened next was Glebe, Glebe and Pyrmont, where in the area that had been set aside for the expressway the Eastern Distributor was meant to cut straight across the top of Pyrmont and go from where it ends around William Henry Street now, well it was meant to cut straight across through Harold Park, through Glebe and head west through there and that whole area above Harold Park – Harold Park, Wentworth Park, I keep forgetting which one's which – but above the fish markets and over that.

**VM: Wentworth Park, that's near the fish markets.**

IM: That side, Wentworth Park, yes. There was a whole big strip through there that was all squats and those squats lasted ten years because all that housing had been bought up and cleared for the expressway but once it was taken over by squats – eventually it was all sold back to people again later on.

60.24 **VM: And did you live at those too?**

IM: No but Elvis Kipman and a bunch of other people who'd been at Victoria Street squats, they were there.

**VM: They were there.**

IM: And they were the people who got it up and going pretty much or were amongst the people who got up and …….

**VM: And when you were finally driven out in January '74 or thereabouts, did the group disintegrate?**

IM: Well, no, no, not at all.

**VM: There must have been incredible cohesion in a way?**

IM: Yes, yes.

**VM: What happened next?**

IM: What happened then was there wasn't a lot we could do about Victoria Street any more, although what we did was we did a big publication called 'The City Squatter' which was sort of a twenty four page newspaper where we actually documented what had happened to us - that's why I was saying I wrote an art review of the barricades. Like the first article was 'Treasure' and I wrote an article which was like a sort of atmospheric sort of history of the last couple of weeks, right. Then there was a thing by Wendy [Bacon] which documented all the company connections. So she had this sort of big two-page spread where she and Anne Summers and Liz Fell and a whole bunch of others that all sort of like have done all these company searches and stuff and so this documented all the things between the different companies and things that were involved. Then there was a thing about the long term history of Victoria Street, how it had come to be from the nineteenth century onwards. And there was another thing about living in the street and there were a bunch of stories, just like short stories and things like that about life in the street and people they'd met in the street.

64.02 **VM: This was life during the squat or before?**

IM: Yes, yes, during the squat and also a bit of stuff about life before as well and basically just page after page of just all these different aspects of Victoria Street in that period and life and some of them were really hardcore political things, others were just like short stories, funny things that happened. There were cartoons and illustrations, there was just a whole series of different things. So effectively in a sense this is our work of art, really, about Victoria Street, this is our summary of everything. I mean, during the course of the street we put out hundreds of newsletters and press releases and things like that and they're whole interesting things in themselves but this is our summary thing, like this is our sort of goodbye to Victoria Street.

**VM: Yes, pulling together the whole event, yes.**

IM: Yes.

**VM: And did the press come into the actual squats and see you living there?**

IM: Not really. The press just didn't – like now the press is about defending the status quo, it always is. They only stop defending the status quo when there's something in it for them to not defend the status quo but basically on the whole they defended the status quo. But, like I say, the atmosphere of the time had changed: people were really pretty sick of what was happening and so even though we failed the long term fallout – and the Builders Labourers were eventually to fail as well – the long term fallout was heritage protection legislation, consultative processes, a whole range of things - which I would add have now all been taken away again over time - but they all came to pass through Wran in the 1970s, through Wran and the Labor government after Askin was finally pushed out.

65.58 But Askin was the highest level and the key to the overall corruption and Askin was the political thing to the organised crime stuff as came to be well documented, really pretty well documented as also was links to various city councillors and various dodgy development deals all came to be very well documented through the next part of the '70s. So from '74 to about '80 there became really detailed – just like the National Times was set up and basically the National Times was an investigative journalism newspaper and it really targeted this stuff and the people who had been in Victoria Street, like Wendy Bacon and Anne Summers and Jenny Coopes, the cartoonist, they became star journalists and star investigative reporters who then basically proceeded to expose the stuff that we'd actually lived through together but in depth. Now, what happened to the group from 1974 onwards after we did the city squatter thing is first we set up a tenants' union, right, but what had really happened through all of this is we'd all been arrested or popped in gaol or whatever, we actually all got interested in prison reform and police corruption and so then we actually then set up the Prisoners Action Group and Women Behind Bars and spent the next couple of years working on prison reform. And so we eventually helped bring about a royal commission into prisons which temporarily at least actually reformed the prison system until the screws managed to wrench it back out of our hands again.

**VM: How long were you in prison? I mean you said you were put in - - -**

IM: I was never in for more than about a day or two, right, but other people like Wendy actually spent a couple of weeks in there at one stage out at Mulawa.

**VM: So they had a real insight into prison?**

IM: So they had insight, yes, yes, and a lot of the people that we were connected who even if they weren't directly involved in Victoria Street but who we were connected with otherwise were young lawyers of one sort or another.

68.08 That includes ones who now are High Court and Supreme Court judges. So they've come a long way since then but they were actually then law students and stuff like that and they worked with us.

**VM: Used their skills, yes.**

IM: Yes, yes. I mean, that's apart from the fact we had a lot of friends who were QCs and stuff like that. So we had a range of legal assistance and stuff like that, ranging from people who were students through to people who were lawyers and judges in fact. So we did have a lot of support and a lot of friends in high places of one sort or another and they in particular were the ones who actually understood and knew about corruption and hadn't been able to do anything about it ever.

**VM: And just coming back a bit to when you were actually evicted, did it feel like you were losing a home? I mean, had you identified with this place you were staying?**

IM: Well, it was worse than losing a home. I mean, it was like losing your community. See, it wasn't just those physical things, it was Victoria Street, it was the whole street, right. See, for me, coming from the art world, Victoria Street had actually been one of the art world's streets, the art world owned Victoria Street. Like that part of the Cross, even though it had changed a lot during the R&R era from the late '60s onwards it was sort of bohemia, this was Sydney bohemia and that was where the art world lived, really, there or around there or whatever, through there and the bottom of Paddington and whatever. And so through Rushcutters Bay and whatever, that was where the art world lived and sort of Victoria Street was the art world's street and so it was sort of like the end of a whole era in all sorts of ways, it could never be quite the same again and it never has been quite the same again.

70.06 **VM: Was it also very multicultural then in a lot of European migrants?**

IM: Multicultural, it was more than that.

**VM: And you mentioned sailors.**

IM: We were really upfront about what we were fighting for. We kept saying "We're fighting for the community. Yes, we want the buildings saved but we're fighting for the community and what we're fighting for is social mix". And we kept saying "Social mix, social mix, social mix". Social mix meant people of different ages, people of different occupations so that you had sailors and seamen and you had prostitutes and you had artists and you had all sorts, basically the protected tenants, all sorts of old people, from people who were very rich to people who weren't very rich. Like you had a whole mixture of all sorts of different people in that place, you had everything. You did have the rich and the poor, you did have the employed and the unemployed, you had single mothers, you had drug addicts and alcoholics and you had sailors and you had tradesmen from down at Garden Island and you had everything under the sun, you really did have this extraordinary mix. You had people of all sorts: there were Italians and Greeks and Belgians like Marcel and people of all sorts of different, you know. It really was an extraordinary, extraordinary like melting pot.

**VM: And now does it have any of that vestige left, bohemia or artistic?**

IM: No, not really. That's in Marrickville now, seriously. I mean, if you want to get some sense of it Marrickville is probably the most - - -

**VM: So if you go back to Victoria Street now, what do you feel?**

IM: What I feel is I'm in a street of bloody Forex bankers trying to capitalise on their real estate is what I feel. You look at that building that replaced the thing and, look, the façade, I mean eventually our big win was, yes, we managed to keep the facades, which is, of course, useless.

72.03 **VM: This is number 59?**

IM: This is that strip of the street. So between the two stairways, between McElhone and Brougham because that's really the strip we're talking about. There's now this big building on a podium or several buildings on a podium. They are that classic thing: you get out of the lift and there's a long corridor of doorways and all of these

flats are just the same and, yes, they've got a view of the city but they're just boxes. And basically there is no social mix; the people in those are pretty consistently the same sort of people, the same sort of income, they probably work around the city. You've not got the range you had in the original thing which was this jumbled up mixture of adaptively reused buildings effectively, which is what you had before. Now you just have this sort of monoculture of certain sized flats all exactly the same and there are hundreds of them.

**VM: From the same era too, yes.**

IM: Yes, all exactly the same era, all the same. Yes, everything about them's just consistently the same and it's uninteresting, it's really uninteresting. Look, I'm sure there's some lovely people there but my point is it doesn't have that variety and richness that it had originally. No one is there working, which there was in the original Victoria Street because there were artists with studios, there were even people with little workshops and stuff hidden away behind things. That's not what you've got. Now you've got dormitories, you've just got dormitories, rows and rows of dormitories and so it doesn't have that feeling that the original had; it's just lost it. And there are a smattering of arty - - -

**VM: Do you think if the buildings had been retained, would that have done it? I mean, what's your feeling about the relationship between having a mix of type of buildings?**

IM: Well, gentrification is a real interesting issue because we talk about gentrification a lot. I mean, it's hard to know how you hold back – when there is demographic pressure, how do you hold back gentrification?

74.08 **VM: What, you mean even if the buildings have stayed the same but the sort of people that are living in that area now would have moved in and done them up?**

IM: And, yes, there were richer people and whatever.

**VM: Tradespeople and artists would have been forced out because of cost.**

IM: Been forced out anyway, yes. And, sure, it's now a truism, we all know that pattern which starts to happen which is when a place hits rock bottom the artists arrive and when the artists arrive the place livens up and suddenly it's got a life and a culture and suddenly it's worth more money and then the artists get forced out again because they can't afford to live there and they move to the next place that's

rock bottom and in a sense Victoria Street was at rock bottom, as was Woolloomooloo and whatever.

**VM: What, the housing stock was getting very rundown?**

IM: The housing stock was getting run down. The wealthier middle class had either moved further out into the eastern suburbs or out into the North Shore, to places like that. So they were either between, say, Rushcutters Bay and the coast or Woollahra or whatever. Paddington was just starting, from the early '60s Paddington started to be gentrified and moved up but the Woolloomooloo/Kings Cross area hadn't really. On the other hand, along Macleay Street you had very wealthy people and Elizabeth Bay you had very wealthy people. And that was again one of the interesting things about the area was both rich and poor people very cheek by jowl. And so that, I think, is a real social good in every possible way: the rich cannot pretend the poor don't exist and they can't pretend that they don't know who they are and what they're like and what their lives are when they are quite literally only a street or two away - - -

**VM: Living there, yes.**

76.01 IM: - - - yes. And in fact in some cases even in the same buildings and that was the sort of thing that was happening there. You would have some places that had actually been done up but over time the reason the development happened was because that much land right in the centre of the city with water views and basically really quite a beautiful street by anyone's measure; the value's going to go up so there's going to be pressure on it.

**VM: You just mentioned about how the artists moved to the new area and I wondered what you thought about squatting today because now there are areas, like old factories and there's a form of squatting. I mean, maybe it's a bit different from political action squatting anyway where artists move in and it's all very negotiated, they get a month's lease in a studio.**

IM: Well, that's what I mean about it. It's now become a bit of a truism almost; I mean developers want it.

**VM: Do they?**

IM: The smarter developers have worked out.

**VM: They're looking, what, for squatters?**

IM: Well, I suppose the most structured version of it was what Leon Fink did on Glebe Point where in those sort of waterfront factories and things along there he divided them up into studios and workplaces.

**VM: At Blackwattle Bay, the artists' studios, yes.**

IM: Yes, and left them like that for several years while he got 'round to basically eventually knocking the whole lot down and building apartments there. But in the meantime he created this whole community which actually livened up the end of Glebe Point Road, so by the time he knocked it down and built apartments that end of Glebe Point Road had become fairly fashionable when it hadn't been fashionable at all and I'm sure that quite a lot of the more successful people who'd been in these studios went and bought flats there. So again you generate a type of social change there by playing a game with all of this rather than simply opposing it.

78.10 There's a much greater subtlety of people's understanding of the processes involved now than there was then in the '60s, which was what? "It's just a block of land. Knock it down and build whatever we want to build there, to squeeze the maximum number of people in as cheaply as possible". People realise now that even that doesn't quite work and can actually fail even if you do have open slather to do that because if the place is a horrible area no one's going to want to live there. You need a livelier thing; people expect a café culture and a street life and things like that now. And you generate that, only a certain sort of person generates that, quite frankly, and so you need to have those people there.

**VM: So the artists are like the trailblazers for the new community?**

IM: The artists are the trailblazers, exactly; they're the free workers basically because they don't get anything for it except a bit of cheap accommodation.

**VM: Space briefly, yes.**

IM: Yes, briefly, yes. And you can have a really long debate about the nature of that but it happens all over the world now; it's a quite recognised phenomenon.

**VM: And then there's also sort of movement of squatting to find somewhere to live because you have nowhere to live and I don't know if you've been involved with that at all.**

IM: Yes. Well, there was also another squat which people tend to want to forget about in the late '70s in Victoria Street which was in the

building right next to Juanita's, Juanita's building, right up the other end of the street and this was in this big old hotel building and it was horrifying, really. I mean, we did it to try and block the development that was going there but it was a different time, even five or six years later it was a different time, and the building very quickly filled up with junkies and homeless people, right.

80.12 And there was always a few homeless people and stuff around the original Victoria Street and in fact the people who died there when the house burnt down were basically homeless people who had just camped in one of the houses which we thought was unlivable and they accidentally set fire to it. Well, there's been a debate whether it was done on purpose and whether they were targeted to try and scare us, which is a distinct possibility, quite frankly.

**VM: So the building next door?**

IM: Well, this is going back to the first Victoria Street squat. One of the other buildings was burnt down while we were there.

**VM: In the first squat?**

IM: Yes, and people died in the fire, right, and there's been a bit of debate about whether it was just purely accidental burning or whether it was actually set on fire and it was meant to scare us off, right. But this other, later, building in the late '70s we went to, it just ended up full of junkies and homeless people and by this stage there was starting to be these sort of people being pressured out of mental institutions and stuff like that, the beginning of that whole deinstitutionalisation, which meant they were just living on the streets, there were far more people with mental health problems living on the streets. They all ended up in there and it became this sort of bedlam. It was just really weird, weird, weird experience and completely different experience to the first one.

**VM: And were you living in there?**

IM: Yes, I was but I had an accident during the same period. There was a big anti-uranium demo and we tried to break into White Bay Container Terminal and I actually fell off a cliff and broke my leg and my arm and stuff like that and so I didn't actually last in there very long at all because I was actually sort of in plaster and sort of had to pull out but I was there at the start of it but then basically couldn't really stay there for very long, just because I was too incapacitated to do that.

82.06 **VM: But it sounds like you'd already appreciated that it was a very different sort of situation.**

IM: The whole different atmosphere, yes, whereas interestingly the Glebe squat started in between that and the Glebe squat was just so domestic. It was all hippie domestic but it was hippie domestic. People had backyard gardens and collectives and food collectives and it was all that real touchy-feely hippie stuff, it was a whole different world but that was where Victoria Street was obviously leaning to. Later squats again like say the Broadway squats and Squat Space and all of that, they were artists and young people looking for space to basically live and work in the city that they couldn't get it anywhere else and in fact the people who run that are very good friends of mine – or some of the people like Lucas Zini[?] and Mickey Quick[?] and Diego Bonetto and there are a whole bunch of other people as well as them who are all really involved in it. Well, they are a different bunch again but their motives are the same in a way, I mean, the impossibility of actually getting workable living and working spaces in the inner city and seeing empty spaces just sitting there for forever.

**VM: So it's a kind of opportunism, really, that you see a space, you might as well use it.**

IM: Yes, indeed, but you can tie that in with something else which has gone on which is really a bit nefarious which is sort of land banking, like people buying up buildings and just sitting on them empty and basically going for capital gains and ……

**VM: In order to sell it later at a bigger price?**

IM: Yes, yes. And there are a bunch of those around Sydney. I could name about three or four.

**VM: And do they accept squatters?**

IM: No, no, they try to keep the places locked up …… but a lot of those places have secret squatters in them, people who are living in them and stuff like that.

**VM: What, so a load of people just hiding in the corner?**

83.59 IM: Yes, and you just sneak in. But there are a bunch of those around the city and that's a sort of social crime in my book, especially at a time when you have got all sorts of high prices and housing isn't easy to get, whatever and yet there are people doing that. It's just they can't be bothered going to the effort of renting them and all of that,

especially if they're not in particularly good condition to start with, so they just solve the problem by just sealing them up and leaving them sit there for another ten, fifteen, twenty years.

**VM: That's a long time.**

IM: It is a long time but then at the end of that the building's probably worth four or five times what it was when they bought it and they haven't had any expenses other than security.

**VM: And rates, yes.**

IM: Yes. So presumably it's worthwhile.

**VM: So if there were a squat today, would you be moved to go and join it again?**

IM: Well, I'd be sympathetic, I'd certainly be sympathetic. I don't think I'd physically be capable of it but I'd certainly be sympathetic.

**VM: It sounds, just from what you've said and what I've read that it's kind of a young person's activity, really.**

IM: It is a young person's game.

**VM: Maybe because of the lifestyle of it, it's unpredictable?**

IM: It's strenuous and it's unpredictable and it's physically hard, it is. And when you're young you feel a bit more invulnerable so you're more likely to do it, probably. But that doesn't mean I'd be unsympathetic to it; I'd be totally sympathetic to it. Well, it's interesting. The global financial crisis hasn't hit Australia in the way it's hit other parts of the world. I really think that in other parts of the world there should be a large scale organised squatting movement. I mean, the sort of stuff that's going on in America is appalling and there really should be a large scale movement fighting against it. And there probably is and we don't hear so much about it. It's probably hidden away.

**VM: In some countries, like in Britain, I think it's much more tolerated or at least it's certainly not deemed criminal.**

IM: Yes. Or there've just become processes for dealing with it.

**VM: It's become institutionalised and accepted, perhaps.**

IM: It's become almost institutionalised. Yes, yes, and to some degree even the squatters go "Yeah, you're there till you're thrown out", so you're there and then you're thrown out, like "We just went to the next one". And that almost happened to a degree in Sydney but not quite.

That's a bit what Squat Space Broadway was like. You know, they just stayed there until they couldn't stay there.

**VM: Yes, that went on for many years, didn't it?**

IM: Oh, quite a few years, yes, yes.

**VM: Was that leading up to the Olympics, is that the one? Because they cleared Broadway because it was the route to the Olympics.**

IM: Yes, I think they lasted even a bit longer than that but I think they institutionalised them a bit. They actually sort of said "Well, O.K, yeah, you can have this bit and if you do you behave" and so they actually had a gallery and they had all sorts of things happening.

**VM: Activities, yes.**

IM: Yes, yes. I mean, you'd need to talk to Lucas to find out more about it because I don't know all of the details about it but, yes, it was there for quite a while and then when its time was up it was up, its time was up, that was the end of it. And I don't think any of them, they didn't have anything like the confrontations we had or the violence.

**VM: And do you think there'll be more squats?**

IM: I think it's inevitable.

**VM: So it's become a political tool as well finding a home?**

IM: Yes. Well, it was a political tool right from the start but you have to remember intrinsic to squats is empty buildings. If there aren't empty buildings there's no squats.

88.05 So it depends on what's going on, really. See, I think one of the things – and again this is a sign of something else – Australia's population has hugely increased from what it was in the '70s, probably almost double what it was in the '70s, right. There isn't on the whole, even notwithstanding what I said about people banking buildings, that it doesn't quite operate in the same sort of way. I mean, the dynamics of those sort of housing problems are a bit different now to what they were then and so it's not necessarily the best solution, it's not even an available solution; unless you've got empty buildings you can't squat so it's not even an available solution in that sort of way. I'm not quite sure.

**VM: So you're not aware recently of any squats in sites that are going to be developed like the Victoria Street squat?**

IM: Well, no, because all the sites I know where things like that are going on the developers have actually opened them up to people.

**VM: They've done this ……. …….**

IM: Like I've had friends who for instance have had studios for three to six months, things all around Sydney in different places; you know, "Here you are. You've got it for six months until we do the redevelopment and then you're out". And I think that in itself has become an institutionalised ……. It's interesting because you talk about artists. I mean, artists have come under a lot of pressure in the inner city because the sort of spaces that they use, which were backyard workshops or industrial spaces of one sort or another, warehouses, all that sort of stuff, all sorts of multi-use type buildings, have become less and less and less available to them. Particularly the big warehouse buildings have been turned into apartments of one sort or another.

90.00 Even the backyard workshop type spaces have often been built on or houses have been extended or whatever. I mean slowly they have all disappeared.

**VM: ……. ……. ……**

IM: Yes. Most of the artists I know who live in the inner city basically bought their place in maybe the '80s at the latest and they've rebuilt them and rebuilt them and rebuilt them. No one can afford to buy them now and rebuild them like that because you're talking about a million to a million and a half dollars and young artists do not have that sort of money. It's that simple. Young artists exist in a ring a hundred to a hundred and fifty Ks out of Sydney, they're a big circle around Sydney. And that's even people like me, that's why I live two hours away from the centre.

**VM: What, in order to get enough space to work?**

IM: To get the space to work at some sort of reasonable price. And so they're the only options that are available to you and I think there are interesting implications for this because genuine face to face communities of artists for instance don't exist any more. There are areas where there are almost communities as lively as Victoria Street and Oxford Street were in those days, which they're Marrickville and they're places like that or they're those really ethnic communities further out – they're Auburn or somewhere like that – they're the really lively communities.

**VM: …….. ……. ……..**

IM: Yes, they're not in the inner city. And the artist communities now exist on line rather than existing. They're virtual communities, they're not actual physical face to face communities and online communities change the nature of the physical community, right, and they overlay a sort of intellectual structure over the physical thing and that intellectual structure can extend for much greater ranges than what would exist in an inner city community.

**VM: In the city, yes. So for you as an artist, do you mind that you're not in the city? I mean, you were in the inner city for quite some time now.**

92.05 IM: No. Well, I was in the inner city right up till the late '90s, so it's only in the last ten years that I haven't been, but by the end of it I was starting to find it really pretty uncomfortable. I mean, it was expensive and difficult - it was also physically difficult. It's not as nice any more. I hate to say it but - - -

**VM: What, just getting around the city?**

IM: Getting around, you can't park and not only that, the sort of people who have moved into the inner city aren't nice people. I hate to say it but these are people who are there for their real estate values. These are not people there who actually are very – let's be really rude about it – they're sociopaths.

**VM: Not appreciating.**

IM: I mean, they're people who really don't form communities, you know, they are there to basically exploit what's there and they don't form communities - - -

**VM: Sort of society there.**

IM: - - - and they don't relate to other people. And there's just become more and more and more of that and I've actually had places in the inner city since then and it's very hard to find the same level of comfort, like community interaction that you did twenty years ago. And I don't think that's just getting old and not feeling part of the communities or something like that because that was never a criteria of those communities. They just - - -

**VM: They just were.**

IM: Yes, yes, and they're really not very comfortable feeling communities any more. There's been a real breakdown in the community structure and the community interactions and stuff and I do think it's what

happens when people are just concerned about their real estate. They get there, they buy their thing, then they start complaining because the garbage compactor thing goes outside their window in the middle of the night and then they start complaining because derros sleep on their doorstep even though derros have been sleeping on that doorstep for fifty years. You get all this sort of stuff. These are people who should not live in the inner city but they're living in the inner city because they think they can make money out of the real estate.

**VM: They don't understand its nature.**

94.01 IM: They don't understand its nature, yes, and I think there's been an increase in that sort of behaviour. And things like Victoria Street were the beginning of that type of takeover and that sort of change. The replacement of a really complex small community by a monoculture of flats which is what replaced it was one of those things that led to this increasing profitisation, effectively, of the communities.

**VM: So you think those kind of communities like there was in Victoria Street they've had their day are you saying?**

IM: Well, I mean, there's still complex inner city communities but the demographic and financial pressure has changed the nature of them. But, see, one of the things I think that we were on – this wasn't the language we used then but it was certainly an underlying feeling – was the notion of the city as a type of commons, that it's the commons that belongs to everybody who's there, not just to the people who happen to own the real estate. And what we were asserting was the right of everybody who was there to have some say about the city and to have some control over it and to have some participation in the way it's happened, right and I think what's happened over time has been exactly that slow stealing of the commons. I mean, over time the commons of the city has been stolen away from all of us residents; we don't have as much control or say in it as we did in the past, right. On the other hand, other commons have opened up and I mean virtual spaces are a different sort of commons which again are trying to be stolen from us in various ways because people want to profit from them and they don't like the fact that anything exists that they're not making a profit out of.

96.05 I mean, there is a sort of virtual urbanism exists out there in which people can use the city in different ways because of the web and because of a whole range of tools that are available to us now, online tools of various sorts, right, and I think that sort of stuff in all sorts of

very subtle ways is where the fightback against a dehumanised city is going to happen. It's going to happen by the control and the flows of information rather than the controls of the physical space for instance, right.

**VM: So you think people through the internet and that sort of communication create a community? I mean, in a way it can be global but you're also saying they'll create a community that's not exactly spatial but it'll be say Australian or Sydney.**

IM: Yes, yes. Well, look, I could use another art example, right. While on the one hand art institutions have taken exactly that same logic of the developer city and created bigger art institutions, they've created huge exhibitions like the Biennale which are types of big entertainment spectacles and whatever, meanwhile slowly artists themselves have been slowly abandoning this, right, and leaving it as this sort of corporate monstrosity.

**VM: Showpiece.**

IM: Yes. And in fact what's happening more in the art world are all sorts of really low level things which happened outside of the institutions and which are distributed through the web or communicated through the web. And so it's like there's these two worlds which are sort of overlaid on top of each other but one's entirely different to the other one.

98.05 And I can't quite define this exactly and pin it down except I think that urban life is going to play itself out differently like that, that all sorts of small scale things which aren't huge in their size but are much more huge in their scope will happen within the interstices of this other city. And the two things aren't exactly in conflict, they're partly in conflict but I think one's the past and the other's the future basically. And the past gets bigger and bigger and bigger, these institutions get bigger, the buildings get bigger, the developers get more control and when things fall down is when they're at their biggest. They don't fall down when they're little, they fall down when they've got too big and these things have got too big to be sustainable, these sort of cities increasingly don't work, right. Meanwhile, you have the people operating inside them and the way people are starting to live and relate to each other is quite differently. And, I mean, I can't really pin down exactly how I think this is going to play out or even in some ways what I mean by it except I have this inkling of it all happening and you can see it happening in the art world. In some ways it was the sort of thing I was arguing for in the art world thirty years ago but

the way it's played itself out is differently to whatever I could have imagined but it's beginning to sort of play itself out and work differently.

**VM: So we can't know exactly how it will be - - -**

IM: No, you can't.

**VM: - - - but you've got this feeling that it's taking itself in that direction?**

IM: Yes, yes, and the type of communities and relationships people are going to have. See, in a sense what we're talking about here is the relationship between the built environment and the way people live in it and the cultural memes that are enacted within it, right, the way people live there and how they relate to each other.

100.00 And we were fighting for one set of them in Victoria Street but the way those cultural movements will play themselves out now in those physical spaces is really different. That's why I don't think squatting's – I would never rule squatting out or criticise it, I just don't think it's a viable thing now. On the other hand, a flash mob could be just as – flash mobs are a bit old fashioned already but flash mobs can create just as much - - -

**VM: You mean when you - - -**

IM: Where suddenly all of a sudden there are several thousand - - -

**VM: - - - SMS everyone and a thousand people turn up?**

IM: - - - and several thousand people in the one spot at the same time. And that's why the Occupy Sydney thing, you know, the Occupy movements in general all over the world are very interesting examples of that. It doesn't matter how many times the police clear them out, they can always be recreated in an hour. So this is a very different thing. They don't have to defend their physical territory, you don't even have to occupy the physical territory, you just have to get there time to time or move out of it.

**VM: Yes, the mere appearance of enough people is a statement.**

IM: Yes, yes, and then disappear again.

**VM: It's ephemeral but effective.**

IM: Yes, yes. And so these things are going to play themselves out in different sorts of ways, I think. Combined with other things you're

going to have pressure to have things like gardens and stuff like that. I mean, I always tell people "Look, go and look at Havana. You want to know what the world's going to be like in the future, go and look at Havana" because Havana's already had its oil crisis, Havana's already had its resource crisis of every sort and within a number of years they completely rebuilt the way people feed themselves, the way the city is managed, the way transport systems work, all that. That's probably a better model of what the city'll be like in fifty years and anything you're ever going to see because it's had all its apocalyptic crises that we haven't had yet and which we know are coming down the turnpike there and so it's going to be a very different sort or urbanism basically.

102.11 **VM: But you think people will still have the urge for some sort of spatial physical - - -**

IM: Yes, space will just work itself out differently.

**VM: But through things like gardens or community gardens?**

IM: Yes, through gardens, yes, all sorts of things like that. And the thing about having space is the thing about feeling some control and ownership of your life, that's the real thing, and people who want to exploit the city and want to exploit the people there will always be trying to take away the control and ownership of life. So if you go to a place like say some of the really horrifying bits of America – and I don't mean the obvious ones, I mean the ones like Florida, right – where everything is privatised, there is no public space, even the space which looks like a public space is not a public space, the malls look like public spaces unless of course you're poor and black and then suddenly you've got a security guy hustling you out of there. The beach, well actually you can't go on the beach because the wall, the state behind it owns the beach. Like there are no public spaces except the middle of the highway, there is no public spaces. Well, that's one extreme, right. Sydney physically still has parks, it still has all sorts of public spaces.

**VM: Public space.**

IM: It actually has footpaths, unlike Florida which doesn't have footpaths, so you can't even walk up the street in Florida. These are the sort of extremes of certain things but people basically want some control over their space of some sort or other and some control over their lives, some sense of security about their lives, right. But that sense of security comes from being part of a community and the way the

community's going to work is not just going to be the physical community around you.

104.05 **VM: No, there'll be this overlay.**

IM: It's going to be a much more extended community which can go all the way to the other side of the world in actual fact because you're talking to those people every day on Facebook or something like that. So it's a different, really different ballgame. I hope that makes sense.

**VM: Yes, no, it does. Well, thank you very much. I don't know if there's anything else you wanted to add?**

IM: No, I think that's – it probably didn't go where you were thinking, where you were expecting it to.

**VM: You were just going to tell me about living in Elizabeth Bay.**

IM: Well, I lived in Elizabeth Bay for a long time - - -

**VM: It was a community.**

IM: - - - about ten or fifteen years from the mid '80s, whatever. I lived in Darlinghurst from about the late '70s till the mid to late '80s, then from the mid to the late '80s till about 2002 or so I lived in or around Elizabeth Bay and Elizabeth Bay on the one hand has this sort of reputation as a very wealthy community, which it is, there are some very wealthy people there, but they aren't all like that. And again it's actually got quite a good social mix to some degree or other, not like Victoria Street had but it does have a community, it has a genuine community, and it's extraordinary how much of a genuine community it has. As I was saying to you, once the people in the corner shop got to know you and knew who you were and you'd been around for a while then basically couriers would just drop stuff in to them. Couriers must have learned this over time, that they could drop things in to the corner shop and the corner shop would hand them on, the corner shop and the bottle shop that are side by side down there. And there was all of the good things about community: people looked after each other, people kept an eye on what was happening to people, the corner shop was a communication thing, fortunately because the people who ran both those shops were nice people, but they related to the other people there.

106.10 And so they kept an eye on things, they did things for you way beyond what you'd expect just your corner grocery shop to do and you tried to repay them as you could. It worked, it simply was a working village, a small working village.

**VM: Was it a sort of geographic thing to do with the terrain?**

IM: Well, again like the way the building's condition stuff in Victoria Street, in the way that all of the streets basically coming in and out of Rushcutters Bay on one hand, the point at Elizabeth Bay and then back up the other way towards Elizabeth Bay House and towards Garden Island, all of those streets are like a sort of flower opening off this sort of core which is the little strip which goes down Greenknowe Avenue basically, where Elizabeth Bay Road hits Greenknowe Avenue and then down to the bottom of the dip there and in that strip that's the couple of shops that are there or whatever - - -

**VM: Are there. So it's like the centre of the flower.**

IM: - - - there, everything funnels in, yes, everything funnels into that area. And so one way or another people are forced to see each other, at least recognise each other in some sense or another. And maybe one of the real points about community is that you can't pretend the other people aren't there. You know they are there, you see they are there, whether they're richer than you, poorer than you, healthier or unhealthier, younger or older, you see them and you know they're there. You don't have to relate to them greatly but you know them by sight and everybody in Elizabeth Bay to some greater or lesser degree gets to know each other by sight after a while, once you've been there for a few years. And so it functions, you feel connected in some way or another, even if you just …… …….

**VM: Did you miss it when you left?**

IM: Yes.

**VM: Or were you ready to go?**

107.55 IM: It's true. I do, actually, I really do. I've never lived in anywhere since that had quite that sense. Victoria Street and Elizabeth Bay have been the two best like that, even though now I live in a small country village where we all sort of know each other but strangely enough it doesn't actually have the community pride or community awareness even. Pride's not the right word for it, it's just simply a community awareness that Victoria Street and Elizabeth Bay both had. And it's interesting that both of those communities are part, I think they're the remnants of this community that built up along that whole Darlinghurst ridge in the early twentieth century and so there are people there who probably moved there in the 1930s and '40s and have lived out most of their life there and now they're old people so it's actually got a history like that and a stability. The same thing was

true of along Macleay Street was like that as well to some degree. And those sort of things are very difficult to create artificially but I would add that one of the things that does create them artificially or creates them full-stop is a wide range of types of buildings, a wide range of availability of a building stock that's available to people in all sorts of income levels so that everybody's forced to grow up together in some way or another. So they're very impressive little communities in their own ways. Well, Victoria Street's not there any more but Elizabeth Bay at least should be greatly respected and celebrated.

**VM: Let's hope it survives, yes.**

IM: Yes.

**VM: Well, thanks very much, Ian. That's been a really interesting afternoon talking with you, thank you.**

**Interview ends**