

A Riot from Heaven

*»After you have achieved everything, you must give up; you must destroy yourself.«
D'Annunzio*

A Riot from Heaven

»There was a big terrace on the roof of the Mariënburcht. You could see out over the whole city. When it snowed you could look down on all those white roofs. And across the Waal was the white polder. It was beautiful.«

The Mariënburcht is part of a massive new block of movie theaters, banks, shopping arcades, a national police station, and a parking garage complex with offices on top. It is situated in the center of downtown Nijmegen, on a hill along the river. The Mariënburcht mall is dead at night, like the entire center of Nijmegen, gray concrete walls in a sea of orange-yellow lamplight. 1960s city planning has left its mark. To get to the offices you have to climb up past eight levels of parking, where four stories tower over it all. In September 1986 they had been empty for a year. From the Grote Broek, a large squat nearby, the bare offices were easily observable. They would become the Mariënburcht.

»We'd been looking for a place to live for a while. Nothing anonymous, but a nice building, where we could do other things too. Finally we had a choice between two buildings. One promised more comfortable living, but the Mariënburcht was a bigger challenge. It's a kick to take over a building like that, in that spot.« Wim is still enthusiastic. The entrance to the parking garage from the street is wedged between a bank branch and the Arsenal, the municipal records office. Across this street, surrounding two large parking lots, are several more banks, the social security building, a nightclub, police headquarters and a little church. »What clinched the squat was the fact that the Mariënburcht is owned by the Shell retirement fund. The squat would be a good way to keep Shell's involvement in South Africa in the news.«

In the fall of 1986 total calm pervaded Nijmegen. »A lot of people have left the city.« The local squat identity, »which people call the squatters' movement,« began in early '81 behind barricades in the Piersonstraat. Until then the activist segment of the townspeople had been divided according to a series of themes: feminism, nuclear power and anti-militarism. It was the last of these groups which decided to go into local politics. The impetus was the impending demolition of a squatted block of houses and a factory, which were supposed to make way for a parking garage: »Cars in the living room, people on the street.« After months of activism people decided to speed up events and take control by provoking eviction. On the night of Sunday, February 15th, 1981, barricades were erected at each end of the street. To the great surprise of those present, the police failed to show up. The only ones who reacted were half-smashed bargoers, who threw the first bricks. The police didn't come on Monday either, but the schoolchildren gathered in their place to hurl bricks at the squatters. After the barricades had survived that first exciting day, more and more reasons for hanging onto the squat were found. For seven days, hundreds of people lived in the liberated area, »the Unicorn Free State«. Squatters, people from the grassroots groups, passersby, Belgians and other tourists, everyone came by. They dug anti-tank ditches; barricades rose to a height of three meters. The week culminated in clouds of tear gas, armored vehicles and 2000 police troops. Nonviolent defenders got beaten up in front of the barricades, and after a heavy battle, the violent ones behind got free passage. The Piersonstraat was demolished, but the parking garage was never to be. Many a barricade-builder later got the chance to move into a new apartment on the street, and can look down nowadays at an untitled sculpture »in memory of events.«

After the Pierson, a local pattern arose: for a long time the activists only saw each other in the pub, except on special occasions when, to everyone's surprise, they would generate an immense explosion: the bank spree after the riot in Amsterdam over the Lucky Luyck squat, the eviction of the Sterreschans squat, discontent over the tax increases for people sharing apartments, and the arrival of cruise missiles. Some took part in actions against the Center Party and turned back from Boekel and Kedichem full of doubts. Squatting had changed into a live/work culture, with a particular identity to accompany it which was fixed after long debates. What was more, vacant buildings were running out. Time after time, Nijmegen's activist culture was forced to acknowledge that it did not form a continuous movement, but a wave-like one.

Then, on September 16th, 1986, the Mariënburcht was squatted. The day of the Queen's annual address is a recurring peak on the action curve; it is »a golden oldie, a bit worn out, but something always happens.« A surprising number of people were mobilized for the squat, planned for 2:00 a.m. on this third Tuesday. The squat was sold as a protest against the Lubbers government's demolition policy, the announcement of the vacant building law, and Shell's support for the racist regime in South Africa. »And of course also so we could live in a nice building in the center of the city,« laughs Theo.

In the Grote Broek, 150 people were waiting for a sign from the »pre-squatters.« This first group, the doorbreakers, were sturdily clothed, so as to absorb any initial response to their actions. Henk had been in the Nijmegen scene for a while: »With two of those police stations nearby, of course you have to be extra careful. Their strategy is nipping squats in the bud. We mostly squat at night, because then they have a small crew. We also like to do it with as many people as possible. It went fine that night.« The offices above were just a bit narrower than the parking garage below. A van could drive up to the stairs leading to the entrance to the offices. »We climbed inside, not only through the door, but also through a huge pane that came down in shatters. Someone did open up an arm on the glass. They had to go straight to the hospital. Across the street at the police station they didn't notice a thing.« The others were warned with a flashlight signal. The usual sprint was omitted; everyone was too busy exchanging bits of news - people didn't get to see each other so much anymore - and eight floors of garage were a bit much. Then everyone disappeared into the gigantic offices.

»With those big windows it looked like an aquarium, with the sleeping city outside. The heating was on low, nice carpeting everywhere, big staircases. There was a completely furnished canteen on the top floor for parties. Beautiful facilities and modern gadgets you could never use, but it was terrific that they were there. People were roaming all over the building; the transient who always slept in the doorway was sucked inside with the rest. It was a chaotic situation. I think I even thought the place was too big. All those cold rooms, with thin walls; it was difficult to imagine making them at all livable.« Two weeks before the squat there were only five residents, says Wim. »But when the rumors got around about a nice new squat in the center, people streamed in from all kinds of places. Some of them I only vaguely knew. A few days before the squat there was a residents' group of twelve people.«

The squat was received warmly in the city. Political parties came to express their support. »They thought it was really different, the combination of students and squatters. The majority of residents were students, or ex-students. We were helped by a few squatters.« Theo found the support essential. »Those guys knew how to set up that kind of squat. Kind of what the problems were and how you could respond to them. The first few days we got a lot of interest. The squat cop came by to establish vacancy and to get acquainted. He would be our contact with the police, he told us. That was nice. It surprised us that we were allowed to stay. It had become our house, of course, but we hadn't expected the DA to think so too.« Articles appeared in various newspapers. The size of the building and the unexpected character of the squat struck the right chord with the media. A journalist reported from a reliable source that there had long been plans inside the Nijmegen squatters' movement to breathe new

life into the movement by means of a spectacular squat. Wim knew nothing of those plans. »When we decided to squat we went looking for the squat consultation hour, but it had been gone for a long time. There were a couple of people who wanted to help us. They had before, for an action against the reduction of student grants. Tires and smoke bombs for a demonstration. We arranged the squat together. But I didn't notice any movement, just some folks who came to help now and then.«

In the first few weeks, the Mariënburcht became a meeting point for new enterprises. Three floors were reserved for residency, the uppermost for community business. Students met, antimilitarists prepared for new actions in the Mariënburcht. The squat consultation hour was set back on its feet; a new movement paper saw the light of day. New buildings were squatted. Parties were repeatedly held. Big fires burned on the roof on those nights, to mark the spot. All over the city, circled A's with arrows pointed in the direction of the squat, like new traffic signs. An three-day anarchists' gathering in November made the city nervous. Shopkeepers were asked not to leave their Christmas trees standing on the street, lest they should spontaneously combust. In the Mariënburcht strange forces were at work.

When it became clear that people wanted to live in the squat too, the first supporters dropped out. Horizontal communists distanced themselves. They gave the old slogan »The worst of all are the rightists disguised as leftists« a new twist: »Beware of individuals who only want to use activities, actions and others for their own benefit.« Wim: »I was looking for a different way to live. Not that cramped room in student housing anymore. I wanted to resist in a different way, not playfully or nonviolently anymore. I made the decision after we occupied the Ministry of Education in Zoetermeer. They drove us out with lots of force and I got really bashed up. That wasn't going to happen to me anymore. A few other people felt the same way. There wasn't much else happening in the city. The only things that appealed to me were in the areas of squatting and antimilitarism. Then we moved into the Mariënburcht together, where I think we were the most fanatical residents.«

Once a week there was a house meeting in the squat. People did as much as possible together. In principle someone cooked for everyone every day. It was fun, but there wasn't a lot of peace and quiet. The residents had never had to work so hard at living. The Mariënburcht had great appeal. A girl who left the squat due to inadequate comforts came back now and then to show it to all her friends. This was often at night, after closing time in the bar. Others came to visit too, taking along the windowpane of a bank or a newspaper on the way. »Chaotic situations.« All this quickly gave the Mariënburcht the image of an active squat with busy residents. The onset of winter could not temper the enthusiasm. Owner Shell did indeed disconnect the heating, but breaking into the central boiler room solved that problem temporarily. Newspapers did their bit for the high spirits in the form of a Dutch Christmas poem:

»High above the city and the shopping center, descendents of the squatters' guild have built their nest.
High and dry.

A legacy from the day of the Queen's address. And as the cuckoo displays deviant behavior, So too these children feel the need to deposit their egg in someone else's nest.

Our cuckoo children.

Ah.

Years ago there would have been an uproar, but nowadays hardly anyone looks at a squatters' nest.«

In mid-December big fires blazed again on the roof of the Mariënburcht. Not party fires this time, but a signal. They were there to alert the darkened city to a threat to the squat. The spectacularly equipped fire department was refused admittance. By the time the extension ladder reached the roof the fire was out. »What did they think? It was our house. We'd told Shell so in a letter, too.« A flyer explained:

»When Shell failed to get the residents and users out voluntarily, the rats switched to nastier practices. They installed a voyeur/photographer, who photographed three random people at the anarchist three-day.« With these photographs an anonymous subpoena was written, with which a court action was begun in an attempt to wangle an eviction order. A »bus full of Nijmegen squatters and sympathizers« paid a visit to the Arnhem Palace of Justice where the case was proceeding »without a hitch.« The paper M'urcht reports afterwards: »Shell came up with two rats who could only submit three oral witness statements. It was all too clear to us that the subpoena and the way it had come about didn't add up at all. Yet the judge attached more value to Shell's story (does he have shares...?).« This nameless subpoena, according to the Burcht, jumped the gun on the institution of the vacant building law a few weeks later. In a »playful protest«, the squatters made this clear by »subpoenaing bailiff Mink on the basis of a photograph of a pig sitting behind a desk in a striped suit.« It was also made clear to the police and media delegates: »A squatter: as far as squatting is concerned, anything goes, apparently. In the future we'll all have to go through life camouflaged. Otherwise we'll be photographed by some twit and have to answer for things we have nothing to do with. Starting January 1, 1987, people can be subpoenaed anonymously. No name, no photo, you just have to exist,« said a report in a local newspaper.

The vacant building law had been bouncing around the squats for 17 years already, but it had never been experienced as a real threat. Interest among squatters was lacking - it was part of »their legal system.« In Fall 1986 things changed. The fresh squatters of the Mariënburcht succeeded in presenting the vacant building law as a direct attack on their lives, though the grounds for eviction had nothing legally to do with it. By making the connection anyway, they could adopt old slogans like »vacant building law = war« and »tens of thousands thrown out on the street.« A national info campaign, meant to breathe new life into these slogans, had already been started. »The authorities are making an extremely sick and inadmissible contribution to the UN Year of the Homeless 1987,« said a press statement. »December: a month for reflection, not because of Christmas, but about this scary law that's already making us see stars.« »There are rumors that 40 buildings or flats will have problems quickly once it's instituted.« »They want to hit the jackpot in the new year, and gauge our strength that way.« It was repeated for years: this would never be allowed to happen. It would be strongly resisted. The shit would hit the fan. Discussions and compromises were not possible. The vacant building law would set off the powder keg. Whether it would really start to burn, no one knew. The Mariënburcht was to become the first symbol for the proclaimed intransigence, and plugged into an end-of-an-era mood among squatters.

Theo: »Everywhere in the country we went to tell about the impending eviction, people were furious. Everyone was going to come help. The institution of the vacant building law certainly added to the squat's national notoriety. That was great for our mobilization. Yet I also got the impression that lots of people were thinking of revenge. Too many blows had come down on their heads in the past few years. It was time to even all the scores. A lot was going to depend on our plan for the eviction.«

Barely three months after the squat, the Mariënburcht had become a household word. »The subpoena came sooner than we expected. We had counted on getting an anonymous subpoena on January 2nd or 3rd. But we didn't expect those photographs. The Mariënburcht was going to be the first eviction in the year of the vacant building law. It was a good thing that the problems there were in the house at the time were over with straight away.«

Wim was afraid the squat would gradually empty. »It was cold. People wanted to get on with studying or had other plans. Studying in the Mariënburcht? Forget it. In a sense that subpoena came at the right time. When everyone was home we talked about it and it was obvious that we were going to resist the eviction. But we didn't know how. It was almost everyone's first time going through something like this. Some were more fanatical than others. One group of people wanted to put up a strong resistance

and the others didn't. The people who weren't for strong resistance also tended not to have much time. That meant their voice in the matter was limited. But on the other hand - after all, it was our house, and if people didn't want to defend it...that's not right. Soon it was the most fanatical people on our side and some people who came by to help who were discussing how it should go. Part of the old guard, folks from other cities.«

Thus the Mariënburcht managed to reach a radical tension. A large group was preparing itself for a first confrontation with authority. For Wim and Theo such a confrontation was a break with their past. Others were tempted to balance on the fault line. For people like Henk, who had been on the scene longer, it was »just a new mobilization point« which fit into a nationally evoked mood which was about to kick off the final battle around the last squats. »We have a lot to lose; we'll put up a good fight.«

After the verdict on December 24th everything went at a rapid pace. Theo: »It was like a high you got into. We tried to devise a perfect plan, one where you don't take any knocks yourself but cause the other a lot of damage. The words and the action kept going faster. People thought about it all, but a lot of times only afterwards. You didn't think about the consequences for yourself. And nobody asked many questions about what it meant for other squats and activities in the city.«

For a while, the city and Shell appeared to be hoping the cold would do the job. Life in the squat got more and more difficult. If it was really going to freeze, the four radiators wouldn't be able to heat everything. Tents were hung up in the empty rooms to keep out the cold. A room jammed full of heaters and couches functioned as a living room. Everyone was always there. The bastion was barricaded and took on a medieval air. The Mariënburcht was a vacuum cleaner, drawing everything toward itself. Stairways and elevator shafts were filled with things from the street. Walls disappeared, only to pop up elsewhere, braced. »It was never any problem finding someone to go get barricade material somewhere. The van we used was sometimes so full of people, there really wasn't any room for materials,« according to Henk. Wim is still surprised that they managed to do it all, as the police calmly looked on. »Someone did occasionally get picked up, but there were never any real problems. One time after the pub we went to sing a song at the police station. After all, they were our neighbors. Two people were arrested, because it was prohibited there. Or, no, they were arrested because they tore up the citation, and that was public littering.« Naturally, the squatters tried to get as much publicity as possible. Old contacts with the media were strengthened. Various smaller actions set a trend inside and outside, according to Theo. They were not meant for the newspapers, but the latter usually picked up on them. »On the way home from the pub, you'd walk by a real estate agent's or a bank and break some windows. Or later at night you'd go visit a councilperson. It all just happened. You didn't have to do any organizing or talk about it for a long time.« One day there was an attempt to switch off the giro bank's computers. The electric switches for the entire complex were inside the squat. The effect of that action remains unknown - except at the greengrocer's, where the refrigeration went out.

To prevent the cold from slowly doing its work, the squatters decided to provoke the eviction. There was hardly a chance that the city would legalize the squat. The mayor - the same one as in the time of the Piersonstraat - would have rather not had this problem dumped in his lap in his last days. In the newspaper the deputy mayor and a councilman acknowledged the difficult situation, »but they've done enough in the last few years towards solving the housing problem.« Then the burgomeester* suddenly trotted out some »(young) beginning entrepreneurs«: the new occupants of the Mariënburcht! Eleven in number, they were a lot fresher-faced than those people who had spoiled his nice reception last New Year's by going overboard on the drinks and refreshments. He was prepared to hear out their arguments once, which he had already been advised to do in the evaluation report from the Piersonstraat. As a first argument, right before the discussion, the »HOMPE* proletariat«

starts a small fire in the town hall. »The stuff we were going to use at a possible eviction was floating all around the building. Smoke bombs, scaffolding pipes, tires, the strangest things. When some of those things disappeared I doubt anyone missed them.« Theo cannot explain how they materialized again later, aflame, at an entrance to the town hall. A brick decorated with a pretty bow, left behind on the mayor's table after the discussion, had no consequence in the policy sphere. The police had learned from »unidentifiable sources« that this resistance will be nothing to worry about. In other places people thought differently on this matter. And so a group of Groningers came to Nijmegen when a rumor went around that the Mariënburcht was about to be evicted. »That was a false alarm we didn't know a thing about,« Wim says. »That used to happen. We sat waiting a whole afternoon once with helmets and clubs, because someone had told us that the Special Assignments Team from the Arnhem police was going to come evict us. We looked heavy, but I was scared to death anyway. In those days the tension kept rising and so did the exhaustion. It was sort of a continuous process. Finally we decided to provoke the eviction ourselves. That way we could call the rules of the game and the timing.«

The plan for the eviction was simple. A group would withdraw into a heavily barricaded room inside, and there would be barricades outside. The expectation was that the barricades would force the police to start an eviction. Theo: »It looked like a good idea and we worked hard the last few days to get everything ready. It was well-received in other cities. It was a clear-cut plan no one had many questions about. Everywhere in the city people were busy making smoke bombs, crow's feet, anything we could think of. We were consciously choosing for a provocation. But no one knew how it would all turn out. Of course that depended on the moment, and on the number of people who would come.«

»The bear is loose.« The voice over the police scanner sounded almost relieved. The night of observation in the cold had paid off. On Saturday evening information had come through to the police that »the squatters' movement is planning actions on the night of Sunday, January 18, possibly with the intention of forcing an eviction.« Contacts with informants, kept up for years, were finally paying off. Important pieces of information, however, seemed to be missing. Henk: »The nationwide mobilization had escaped them! The police report afterwards shows that they had prepared for the same kind of eviction as at NUTS*. That one had happened a couple of years before. After all this talk about hard resistance and all that, the riot police took care of it fast in peacetime dress. The resistance had been symbolic.« All through the night people gathered all over the city. Well-known bars bulged with people. After closing time, many buildings were mobbed. Wim was in the Mariënburcht. »A group of nine of us was going to stay inside and try to do something there. A journalist was going to stay in the house too. The idea was for everyone else to be out of the building around midnight. But it was a bit later. By 2:00 only the inside group was left. We made the last barricades, tore out the kitchen block, ate and drank and then it was just waiting.« By around 4:00 at least 400 people were assembled in buildings in the city. Various vans from other cities were searched by the police, but their presence brought the latter to no conclusion regarding their own mobilization. »The vans that did shuttle service with Amsterdam were the suckers,« Henk says. »The plan was that everyone would come to the Mariënburcht all at once. We had agreed to start the barricades at 4:15. There was a tool room in the Grote Broek. Crammed full of stuff, garbage dumpsters for the barricades and pickaxes, shovels, crowbars were in neat rows. Anyone could take something. On the way to the Mariënburcht a big window at the Postbank blew apart.« Wim had already been sitting on the roof for half an hour. »At 3:45 we went upstairs. On every corner were barrels we'd made out of an air conditioning system, filled with tires, gasoline and oil so they'd burn for a long time. It was dead quiet at that point; you couldn't hear a thing. When we saw the different groups arriving, we lit the fires and stuck scaffolding pipes over the edge against tower wagons. From that moment on there was a fucking racket, enormous. Windows smashing, lots of fireworks left over from New Year's going into the air. Because of the height that was about all you could see. From above it looked like they were having a lot of fun. A swarm.«

An avalanche of stuff came out of the squat for building barricades. Grocery carts, tires, scaffolding pipes, wood, washing machines, the kitchen block, bikes, filing cabinets, all disappeared into a great heap. »I don't know how the barricade went at the beginning. I ran with a group up to the fifth floor of the parking garage to keep the cops at a distance with slingshots.« The first barricade progressed slowly, says Henk, because the ground was frozen. »Soon a riot van drove up. They thought they could manage with ten men. It was easy to keep the first small charge at bay with rocks. This was at about 4:30. The water in the squat was shut off during the night, only they forgot that in a garage like that there are more connections. And since there had been a good freeze, soon the street in front of the first barricade was a beautiful slide.« The barricade was on the driveway between the bank and the Arsenal, so that all access to the Mariënburcht was closed off. »We had left an escape route open for ourselves at the side of the barricades, towards downtown, away from the police station. A little side street along the Postbank had been left open; there they could come closer. But they could forget it, with those slingshots. The windows of the bank were in smithereens in no time and I saw a couple of people working on a door.«

From the roof, Wim saw a long column of riot vans heading towards the city center with searchlights. »Their movements were easy to follow from the roof, but when they came closer they disappeared behind the houses. We yelled down till we were hoarse. Something was wrong with the walkie-talkies.« But it was on the side of the defenders of order that many things were going amiss that morning. The riot police had to change into battle dress outside in the cold. The antenna at Headquarters was iced up and useless. Queries of who was in charge sounded over the police scanner with regularity in the first few hours. Many riot police were angry because they were allowed to do nothing but stand and be hit by rocks. At 5:10, an hour after the actions had begun, the first big charge was launched.

The riot police came running up from the right-hand side, curved to storm the barricades, and landed on the icy slope. »That charge was an unforgettable sight. They looked like penguins as they slid down. And a fleeing line was a pretty sight. We did a countercharge after them,« recalls Henk. »Someone was picked up during that by a complete arrest squad. We'd seen them driving around, but till then they'd stayed at a distance, not too sure of their job. A little later a line of riot police tried to close off our escape route on the left side. A big group ran over and drove them back. The windows at Social Services perished in battle. After that it was quiet for a while. I sat down to rest on a tire, smoked a cig.« Among the riot police, doubt prevailed. The commander of a newly arrived unit refused to deploy his troops. »We have been attacked from behind. The situation here is deadly.« Radio connections were not functioning. A bulldozer called in to help popped its tires on the crowd's feet in front of the barricade. Tear gas, the oft-used panacea, could not be put into use because the gas masks had been forgotten. The chaos lasted for hours.

Theo: »Meanwhile a big group of us went into the bank. There was great barricade material in there. Office furniture, an aquarium, everything went into the second barricade. The first was already burning by then. Outside the chairs were being tried out, and people were sitting reading the bank papers. A couple went upstairs to stone the cops. They broke the windows and someone threw a mollie at the art work in front of the bank. On the way out we turned on all the faucets. Other people were working on the door of a bank nearby. No one really had any influence on what was happening anymore. I stood yelling for a while about where the second barricade should go, but everyone was much too busy to listen. We had organized a lot of things beforehand, but at the moment it was all such a terrific chaos.«

By 7:00, the various platoon commanders and the crisis management seemed more or less to agree. Meanwhile, the mayor had arrived at the office, three hours after the start of it all. As a first action, he approved the use of tear gas. The preparations for this were visible from the roof. »We put gas masks

on and drew back on the fourth floor. The barricade to the roof was sealed. In one of the two stairwells we'd made a space to withdraw into. A few people were going at it with smoke bombs, fireworks and oil that we were going to use when they were inside.« Outside, the second barricade was burning too now, full of typewriters and monitor screens. Big, black clouds of smoke hung over the city. Henk: »We had understood that they wanted to use tear gas and to us that seemed like a good moment to disappear. We left along the barricades, past the Arsenal. On the Koningsplein where we came out there was a line of cops with an arrest squad. We chased them away. Unfortunately the windows went in at a few shops. First everyone walked to the Grote Broek. Some went inside. The rest went on into the city. I was needing some coffee myself, so I went into the Broek too.« The riot police did not notice that everyone on the street had disappeared. The bulldozer carefully tried to drive through the barricades. Then the parking garage was searched, meter by meter, for anyone left. »I think they came upstairs at about 7:30. At least on the first floor. We kept them busy a few more hours with all that barricade material and the oil, before we withdrew into the last room. Unfortunately a can of insulation foam had frozen, so we couldn't close the last chinks, and the smoke we'd filled the whole building with came in where we were too.« A reporter: »The police break-in crew had to break through thick concrete several times, with crowbar and circular saw. There were whole steel constructions, made of scaffolding poles and central heating radiators, anchored to the walls with rawls, so that the police had to break away a piece of wall to get any further.« »It was 11:00 before they got to us. I still know exactly because that was when the news came over the radio that the RSV Co. had withdrawn from South Africa. A strange moment. Then we were taken away one by one. In the stairwell I had trouble staying standing up with all that oil. The riot surpassed everything we'd expected. You do plan some things, but you never know exactly how it's going to go. When I came out of the Mariënburcht and saw that street, I had to look twice. We were all arrested on grounds of public violence. A few days later everyone was out again.«

Theo walked through the city with a group. »More bank windows were still getting broken in different places. And barricades were set up later in a few spots in the city. But from then on the riot was out of our hands. Riot cops and arrest squads were tearing all over the place. Then I went inside somewhere for breakfast too.«

What had announced itself as a final battle turned out to be a catastrophic riot in the series of one-time events Nijmegen is rich with. Someone simply turned up at a chosen place, sought an arbitrary context for the purpose of attracting a crowd and then creating high-speed energy, and after it's over only surprise and legends were left behind. The following day a fire was set at the national police station. The total damage amounted to fl 4 million. Then things in Nijmegen quieted down again. A few days after the outburst no trace of a Nijmegen squatters' movement was to be seen. The riot seemed destined to stay completely without consequence. After appearing out of a vacuum inside of four months, it disappeared again in no time flat. It was not an expression of an upcoming or dying movement, but a pure materialization, sheer entertainment, escapism in its most elementary form. They had gotten away from it all one more time.

The visit to the bank next door summed up the riot as a media event. A paper: »Furniture demolished and hurled outside onto a pyre. Wrecked 'beepers' and smashed monitors. Splotted walls and uprooted flower boxes. But especially, shattered windows. You can see the tracks where the squatter-vandals steamrollered through the bank building on their spree of destruction. Confidential mail is found on the Koningsplein and the Ziekerstraat.« A squatters' statement followed: the squat De Tien Zilverlingen had been evicted almost two years ago in Wageningen, and the squatters had suffered the necessary damage. »We limited ourselves then to 2-1/2 instead of 300,000 guilders. Much too little. We promised the bank we'd repeat that damage someday. And nothing ever came of that until yesterday. Now we've collected our huge debt in one go. De Tien Zilverlingen, with all the nasty games surrounding it, has now been revenged at last.«

The symbol of the event was a TV news picture of a fish gasping for air on the floor of the bank. A media review stated: »The cameras did their job and zoomed in flawlessly on the enchanting symbol of a dead fish from out of the smashed aquarium, inspiring the riot reporters once more to squeeze original images out of their word processors, and clarifying everything for the average newspaper reader: the riot was the work of the frustrated unemployed, violent good-for-nothings, spoiled children. Supported by like-minded hooligans from all over the country, naturally.«