

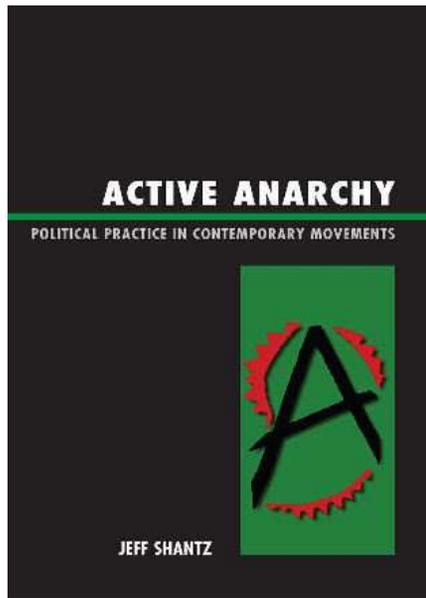
Heterotopias of Toronto: The 'Anarchist Free Space' & 'Who's Emma?'

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next day removal calls went out to mobilize enough people to make it impossible for them to do their work. OCAP was asked to get involved and they put pressure on the union to do a little education with their members. The guys hung out at the space and sold their wonderful array of used goods in front of and alongside the Free Space. For a couple of months it was like a real street bazaar. Shoppers loved the piles of stuff and there was always serious bargaining going on. They sold more in those two months than the AFS ever did. And the small business gentrifiers hated it.

These are battles which will continue some time as successive Provincial and Municipal governments step up attacks on the poor in Toronto. Armed with their anti-panhandling "Safe Streets Act" and their racist targeted policing programs the gentrifiers and law and order petty bourgeoisie are clearly out for blood. No matter how many people die on the streets they remain unmoved. Who's Emma? and the Free Space offered some resistance in Kensington. Fighting the gentrification which is preying upon so many areas of Toronto remains a crucial task for anarchists in the city.

CONCLUSION

The @-zones of the inner cities of hypercapitalism are "actual" heterotopias, new forms for the conception of social space, hidden in the recognized landscape of urban life. They present to the sociologist emergent spatial and temporal transformations of everyday life.

While heterotopias usually appear either outside of time (as in museums) or in transitory spaces (as in festivals or vacations) these forms often converge in compressed environments which both abolish and preserve time, appearing to be both temporary and permanent (Soja 16). These new heterotopias simultaneously destroy culture and history while creating them anew in the other spaces.

Anarchist heterotopias exhibit a collapsing of time in which the future is already existing simultaneously with the past and present. Traditional time is ruptured. The anarchist futures present bring the future into the heterochrony (the time to which specific heterotopias are linked) of the present.

Finally, heterotopias, because they are "counter-sites" or spaces of opposition, bear specific relations to all remaining spaces "outside" of them. @-zones stand as "counter-sites" in which other "real sites within the synchronous culture are 'simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted'" (Soja 20). Anarchist heterotopias never arrive at the moment of a complete break from their traditional time, which Foucault saw as necessary for their full functioning, because anarchists are deeply grounded in the present day concerns, worries and struggles of those who suffer under capitalism. In the end this may speak to the impossibility of any absolutely discontinuous space; an impossibility which Foucault (1967) acknowledged. Unlike many other anarchist infoshops, Who's Emma? and especially the Free Space did manage to bring people from the neighbourhood into the spaces. Most just dropped by to chat but some took part in classes and a few even joined the collective. The Free Space and Who's Emma? were open for participation by anyone who had a general agreement with non-authoritarian and non-oppressive perspectives and practices. Anyone who agreed to these basic principles could take part in membership meetings and involve themselves in decision-making processes. The egalitarianism and participatory democracy of the relatively small collective should allow developing inequalities and grievances to be more readily identified and more immediately dealt with, as many anarchists historically have argued (Hartung, 1983: 96). At both the Free Space and, especially, Who's Emma? this was generally, if imperfectly, the case. A promising beginning though it never grew in the way needed to forge an organic connection with other communities.

Heterotopias of Toronto: The 'Anarchist Free Space' & 'Who's Emma?'

In a brief 1967 lecture, "Of Other Spaces," social theorist Michel Foucault introduced one of the more obscure concepts in his vast, and otherwise over-studied, body of work – the "heterotopia." Foucault meant by a heterotopia a counter-site, sort of an actually existing utopia. Unlike the nowhere lands of utopias, heterotopias are located in reality, though they contest and invert that reality. They are spaces of difference. Among them Foucault counted sacred and forbidden spaces which are sites of personal transition.

Foucault's notion of heterotopias found an echo in a 1985 book by anarchist writer Peter Lamborn Wilson (using the pen name Hakim Bey). The book, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, became something of an underground classic. In it Wilson/Bey outlines, in often exhilarating flourishes, his version of anarchist heterotopias. These heterotopias, now called TAZ, are the anarchist society in miniature – and in the here and now. In them structures of authority are suspended, replaced by relations of friendship and celebration. They are characterized by what the anarchist Peter Kropotkin termed "mutual aid."

Despite the novel twists Bey applies, and the controversy his ideas engendered in some anarchist circles, TAZ, or something very much like them, have long been a part of anarchist culture and politics. Examples include the culturally raucous and politically charged Wobbly union halls of the 1910s and 1920s, the revolutionary community centres of Spain in the 1930s and the numerous squatted cultural centres of Europe from the 1960s to the present. Indeed Wilson/Bey's inspiration is drawn from the many heterotopias and intentional communities of history – pirate utopias, the Munich Soviet of 1919, Paris 1968, autonomist uprisings in Italy during the 1970s.

Whether aware of this history or not many young anarchists, punks and artists took Bey's message to heart. During the 1980s and 1990s numerous TAZ, usually taking the form of community spaces or infoshops, sprung up in cities across North America, including Toronto.

Intended as something a bit more permanent than the temporary autonomous zone, these anarchist spaces provide the support structures for oppositional cultures. They are parts of the broader do-it-yourself (DIY) movements which provide alternative community and economic infrastructures in music, publishing, video, radio, food and education. Anarchist heterotopias are places for skills development, for learning those skills which are undeveloped in authoritarian social relations.

The existence of TAZ allows for some autonomy from the markets of capital. Their *ethos* is counter to capitalist consumerism: play rather than work, gifts rather than commodities, needs rather than profits. In theory, they offer means for undermining state and capital relations and authorities both ideological and material. Practice often settles for something much less than that.

The following provides a glimpse into the experiences of two anarchist heterotopias in Toronto – Who's Emma? and the Anarchist Free Space (AFS) – over the last years of their lives. For more than a year I was the only person who was both a staff person and member of both collectives. Hopefully the images reveal both the promise and problems which face people trying to create room outside of the confining structures of the permitted.

WHO'S EMMA?

Toronto's Kensington Market has a history of housing anarchists. Emma Goldman lived in the Market neighbourhood in the 1920s and 1930s during her years of exile from the US. It was in Kensington Market that she died. In the 1980s Market punks brought the anarchy back. When Who's Emma? opened in 1996 Emma's spirit had a home again.

The first Who's Emma? space opened in June 1996 and the very first collective meeting was held that July with 29 people participating. Eventually participation increased and more people got involved. Soon there were enough volunteers to staff four-hour shifts from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and from 3 to 7 every day of the week. Committees were formed to select and order records, zines and books, to deal with finances and to put on shows. Committees had autonomy to make decisions regarding their areas and reported regularly to the collective as a whole at regular monthly meetings.

Right from the start punk was the thing at Who's Emma? The first members were involved in hardcore and punk scenes. The space came about largely from the need for a regular place to hold punk gigs, especially "all-ages" shows, which were mostly happening in people's basements. The lack of a regular venue had made it difficult for the scene to grow and to get other people involved. Over its lifetime, Who's Emma? existed in a space between politics and culture with music being the strongest ongoing connection.

Who's Emma? was known, for awhile anyway, for its great selection of hardcore, punk and ska. Major label bands were not stocked, nor were bands whose labels had distribution deals with majors. Emma also carried far and away the best selection of zines in the city including fantastic local zines like *Spit* and *Poseur Grrrl*. Zines, records, shows and occasional donations pretty much kept the place alive for a few years.

Perhaps most importantly, Who's Emma? offered a space where alternatives to the male-centred and overly straight character of much of the political left could flourish. It also provided some alternative to the male aggression of much of hardcore and punk.

At Who's Emma? women were encouraged to participate and indeed women always played a leading part in making Who's Emma? a creative and vibrant place. Zine grrrls held workshops regularly throughout Emma's existence. Monday was set up as a women's space with only women volunteering on those shifts. Eventually some infighting emerged when there was a move to extend Monday's women-only days to customers as well as volunteers but after much discussion the women-only hours were secured.

In addition there was a strong supply of records by women, a section of feminist books, and postings of events for women. Sexist album covers or lyrics and records by straight edge bands that opposed reproductive choice were not accepted. A seller of popular buttons was asked to remove his stuff from the store after several members of the collective raised concerns about sexist images and slogans on some of his buttons.

By most accounts, the first two years of Who's Emma? were the most invigorated and invigorating. Volunteer energies were up, the project was still novel and full of hope, there was a certain clarity of purpose and the deep fractures between people and perspectives had yet to form.

This energy continued until just after the Active Resistance '98 anarchist conference. Planning for AR '98 and the work of pulling it off created much animosity among Toronto anarchists. The rifts that developed have yet to be healed. All of this had an impact on Who's Emma? After AR it became more and more difficult to fill volunteer shifts. From two people per shift, it became difficult to find one person for many shifts. Towards the end the space was only open reliably for about four shifts per week (out of fourteen). Customers also began to stay away.

While collective meetings during the first year regularly drew around 20 people by the end it was difficult to get ten people to come out. Membership hovered around 75 people but most had little real

the subcultural arguments a voice beyond their numbers or persuasive powers. A huge and angry debate went on for weeks after one member put a sign reading "Lastman's Thugs Off Our Streets" (referring of course to the Toronto mayor's support for the police and such programs as targeted policing and the harassment of panhandlers and squeegeers) in the AFS window. The funder/boss complained that the sign was upsetting business-owners in the Market – the same business-owners who are leading the gentrification drive and the attacks upon homeless people in the neighbourhood.

A realization emerged that the AFS had things a bit backwards. Instead of opening a space and hoping that collectives would use it, the crucial work still required was to build the collectives which could use the resources which the space offered.

Finally many of the class war activists decided that their organizing energies would be much better spent helping out elsewhere. Not, however, before making crucial contributions in one of the major battles raging in the Market.

WHOSE MARKET?: FIGHTING THE GENTRIFIERS

Almost everything I've ever read about autonomous zones or infoshops raises the nasty business of gentrification in North American cities. This story is no exception. Members of the Who's Emma? and Free Space collectives took leading parts in the battle against gentrification in the Kensington Market area over several years.

During a Who's Emma? general meeting a member alerted us to a petition which had begun circulation against plans by St. Stephen's Community House for a soup kitchen and hostel for homeless people to be opened on Augusta Avenue just north of the Free Space. The viciously worded petition openly attacked poor people saying they were unwelcome in the Market. At the same meeting the collective decided without delay to interview every store-owner or manager in the Market to see who was carrying the petition and who supported the attacks on homeless people and the poor. Enlisting support from the AFS, teams of two spent the next few days talking to people throughout the Market. Where petitions were found, and thankfully very few places had accepted them, it was made clear that such anti-poor propaganda was unacceptable and that those businesses which persisted would be targeted. A boycott of a trendy cafe previously frequented by activists was begun and perhaps coincidentally it closed by the end of the summer.

At the end of June a leaflet was distributed in the Market which asked: "Do you want Kensington Market to become just one more run-down neighbourhood with no hope for its future?" A second leaflet, circulated by the Kensington Market Working Group hysterically raged against the planned soup kitchen suggesting that feeding and sheltering homeless people was simply cover for the real "goal of destroying the family shopping atmosphere that is Kensington." Members of the AFS organized a campaign to attend the City's Committee of Adjustment hearing and brought letters of support for the soup kitchen. Eventually the plans were approved though the Kensington business association has promised to keep up the attacks.

Later that Summer another more directly aggressive battle developed over harassment by City of Toronto workers of a few homeless men living in the Market. The situation came to a head when one of the men asked a couple of us at the Free Space for help in keeping city workers from taking his stuff to the dump. When we confronted the workers they refused to tell us which by-law they were citing when removing the stuff but implied that they were under pressure from the business association. Unionized workers doing the bidding of the business association to harass homeless men – not a pleasant sight. After rather heated arguments and several tense confrontations a deal was worked out where the city workers promised not to touch anything left in the area fronting the Free Space. Free Space members always made sure there was a presence in the space to deal with the city workers and whenever they threatened to do a

anarchism is about require a process which allows each vision to be expressed without either limiting or implicating the other members of the larger group. In practice this is very difficult to negotiate and to realize. Free Space meetings often bogged down in hours of heated discussion over whether activist posters could be placed in the windows because some of the artists found the postings to be unsightly and aesthetically displeasing. Needless to say the activists thought it more important to publicize important events regardless of aesthetic considerations.

The persistent lack of analysis and vision along with a failure to assess the political context for action and develop useful strategies for meeting stated goals consistently undermined the collectives' capacities to do political work. Clearly good intentions were not enough.

When one member of the Free Space tried to initiate a serious discussion over a statement of principles and some sense of purpose for the space he was met with surprisingly stiff opposition. Just getting agreement on the position that the collective opposed capitalism took several meetings and heated argument. It turned out that some of the subculturists and, of course, the funder thought that capitalism was alright. The person who raised the motion was so shocked that members of a collective which purported to be anarchist would defend capitalism that he eventually quit – taking his considerable energies and talents with him. Fighting over what should have been basics for anarchists – the authoritarianism of police and bosses, the oppressive character of capitalism – too often dominated Free Space meetings and in the end led many of the most spirited activists to leave in frustration.

FROM CLASSES TO CLASS STRUGGLE

In political terms the AFS was at its liveliest, and indeed its most relevant, during the spring and summer of 2000 when a number of members managed to bring a class struggle perspective to the space. Tired of what many saw as the seemingly endless drift into pedantic debates and mystical dreaming the class struggle anarchists tried to develop the AFS as a useful community resource. Importantly, the class struggle activists, unlike others in the collective, had a clear vision and strategies they wanted to pursue. Taking the view that the AFS could (and should) be a worthwhile organizing centre the class warriors reached out to serious activists in the city. OCAP was invited to hold their movie nights at the space every Saturday and held several successful large "screenings." Several members of the space participated in the OCAP-initiated protest at Queen's Park on June 15 which ended in a full-scale police riot.

A majority of members joined the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) with hopes of eventually forming a Wobbly job shop. Partly this was seen as a possible way of dealing, as workers, with the increasingly intrusive and domineering behaviour of the AFS funder. At one point almost everyone doing a shift carried a Wobbly red card.

The class struggle anarchist zine *Sabcat* was produced out of the AFS and from its first appearance met with tremendous enthusiasm locally and abroad. *Sabcat* presented original artwork, reviews and articles on such topics as "green syndicalism," "OCAP," and "police violence."

A Books to Prisoners program was started and became quite successful. Poetry readings and hardcore punk shows brought in hundreds of book donations along with the help of some independent publishers and distributors. Before long the first shipments went out from the Free Space to inmates in both a women's and men's prison.

Unfortunately, the influx of mystics, would-be philosophers and general subculturists into the space continued as did the distinctly un-anarchist behaviour of a few members. Some of the mystics reacted against any class struggle ideas, arguing incredibly that "bosses are necessary," "workers are just greedy," and "the police aren't necessarily our enemies." Unfortunately, the funder sided with these arguments which gave

involvement in keeping Emma alive and active. Planned workshops on zines and silkscreening never came together. Potluck dinners were planned but no one bothered to cook anything.

Lack of sales meant that few new orders could be placed which left people with little reason to come by, especially since fewer activities such as workshops and shows were being held. Over the last year, unfortunately, Who's Emma? operated as little more than an under-staffed, under-stocked, under-funded and under-attended store. If not for the tireless efforts of the punk crews who held regular benefit shows Emma would have died months before it did.

Who's Emma? collapsed primarily because the underlying community networks out of which it had emerged and which gave it a reason for being eventually disintegrated in Toronto. For a collective to last it has to have a reason for coming together. Once that reason dissolves the collective will soon follow. At Who's Emma? too much time passed without a clear sense of why the collective was still holding together. As we will see, the ongoing uncertainty over its purpose and direction eventually undermined the AFS as well, leading many of its most active and aware members to leave for other established projects, such as the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) or Anti-Racist Action (ARA), which were more rooted in communities.

Apart from a generally strong commitment to feminism, overall political awareness was always a bit of a mixed bag at Who's Emma? Some members had little opposition to capitalism and saw nothing wrong with major record corporations. Many participants were not anarchists and there was usually more interest in punk music and DIY culture than radical politics. Lack of a specifically anarchist space was one of the main reasons for the founding of the Anarchist Free Space and Free Skool (AFS).

THE ANARCHIST FREE SPACE AND FREE SKOOL

The Anarchist Free Space (AFS) was begun in April 1999 by artists and activists who had organized a fairly lively freeskoool at a soon-to-be-closed hangout, the Community Cafe. When the Cafe shut down some of the freeskoool participants, looking to keep things going, set up shop in a roomy storefront location in Kensington Market right around the corner from Who's Emma? Two anarchist spaces within a block of each other! The prospects seemed quite exhilarating. Sadly, instead of heralding an anarchist renaissance in Toronto, within a year both spaces would be on the brink of closure.

The Free Space was intended as a venue for committed anarchists, novices and non-anarchists alike to come together and share ideas about the prospects, difficulties and strategies for creating new, anti-authoritarian social relations. The primary vehicle for this was an ambitious schedule of classes on diverse issues. The hopefulness of the new collective was expressed in a statement on the front page of its course calendar:

Education is a political act. By deepening our knowledge of ourselves and the world around us, sharing skills and exchanging experiences in an egalitarian, non-hierarchical setting free of prejudice, we challenge disempowering habits and broaden our awareness of alternatives to the inequalities of a capitalist society. The Anarchist Free School is a counter-community dedicated to effecting social change through the application of anarchist principles in every sphere of life. This Space represents and opportunity for the community at large to come together and explore these alternatives. The Anarchist Free Space welcomes all applications for use of the Space.

Courses reflected the desire for openness – they weren't all about anarchists talking to anarchists about anarchy (though a few of them were just that). Some of the courses included "Love Songs of the 20s and 30s," "Street Art," "Understanding Violence Against Women" and "Alternative Economics." Not just the mind but the body was taken care of in a yoga class and in shiatsu workshops. For most of the year at least one class was running every weekday evening. Far and away the most successful and long running were "Introduction to Anarchism" and "Class Struggle Anarchism, Syndicalism and Libertarian Socialism." The course descriptions for the most popular courses at the Anarchist Free Skool:

CLASS STRUGGLE ANARCHISM, SYNDICALISM AND LIBERTARIAN SOCIALISM

Anarchism, as a political movement, emerged as part of broader workers' struggles for socialism and communism and contributed greatly to those struggles. Contemporary anarchists in North America, however, have generally forgotten this important connection as anarchism has become a largely subcultural phenomenon. Similarly distinctions between authoritarian and anti-authoritarian traditions within the diverse history of socialism have been obliterated by the horrors of state capitalist regimes calling themselves "socialist." This course seeks to reconnect anarchism with the struggles of working people to build a better world beyond capitalism of any type. The course is initiated by activists concerned with class analysis and day-to-day organizing and is not intended simply as a study group.

INTRODUCTION TO ANARCHISM

This course will be a broad introduction to anarchist theory and practice, as well as a look at the history of anarchism and anarchist struggles. There will be readings taken from some of the major anarchist thinkers such as: Bakunin, Kropotkin, Goldman and others. Also, the class will be structured in such a way that the participants may suggest the focus and direction of the readings and discussion topics.

For me, some of the most interesting courses weren't courses at all but more like events. Every Tuesday at 9:23 p.m. sharp the International Bureau of Recordist Investigation gathered for excursions in their particular type of mayhem. The Recordists promised and often delivered "A weekly meeting, open to those with an interest in Recordism, Surrealism, and other currents of the Fantastic and the Absurd in contemporary art and culture (and spirituality, and politics, etc., etc.), for the exploration of those topics via discussion, presentations, game-playing and other collective activities, and general nonsense and tomfoolery." One Recordist evening consisted entirely of a fellow cutting his way out of a cardboard box. Eyebrows were raised throughout the space when one of the Recordists' mummies turned up in the basement. The mummy proved popular, however, eventually garnering its own wardrobe and securing a privileged place in the front window.

Another interesting event-class was the ponderously titled and sadly short-lived "Drifting as Foundation for a Unitary Urbanism." Inspired by the Situationists' *derivé* (or creating spontaneous pathways through the city), "The Drift," as it became known, brought people together to wander through the nighttime city exploring the hidden, unseen, out-of-the-way places of an alter-Toronto.

In addition to classes the AFS tried to revive the anarchist salon tradition. As the course booklet noted: "Salons have a colourful history throughout the world and in particular within Anarchist Communities. Salons are intentional conversational forums where people engage in passionate discourse about what they

think is important." At the AFS the third Friday of every month was reserved for lively discussions on various topics decided upon by participants. Often the salons included a potluck dinner and performance. By all accounts the salons were enjoyable and engaging affairs drawing upwards of forty people.

Other memorable happenings ranging from the wacky to the profound included the infamous Satanic Ritual Party which brought the cops and almost made one of our pagan members quit; the Go Guerrilla performances and zine launch; a couple afternoon punk shows organized after Who's Emma? closed; and (on the profound side) the Books to Prisoners poetry readings by ex-lifer John Rives.

Some projects never did come together and others suffered a lack of attention. The lending library suffered regular neglect as no-one seemed interested in taking care of it. Eventually it fell into complete disrepair. A proposed free table for used goods never really got started. Neither did the Revolutionary Anarchist Bowling League (RABL). More positively Anti-Racist Action and the Toronto Video Activist Collective (TVAC) made use of the space for meetings and video showings. Others such as Food Not Bombs and the Recordists pulled out before dissolving completely.

While Who's Emma? tried, more or less successfully, to develop an open and inclusive venue, the AFS never overcame the perception, at many times accurate, that it was a male-dominated space. Despite the involvement, at various points, of serious and creative women, the Free Space was usually staffed by men and classes were often dominated (and not just in numbers) by guys.

VISION TROUBLE

Both Emma and the Free Space found it difficult to develop ongoing political projects. Even agreement on short-term actions was difficult to come by. There was often little sense of why either space was even kept open.

Who's Emma? did without a statement of principles while the Free Space vision, as reproduced above, was a rather vague commitment to "deepening our knowledge of ourselves and the world around us, sharing skills and exchanging experiences." While promising a dedication "to effecting social change through the application of anarchist principles in every sphere of life" there was little agreement on what these principles were and even less sense of what strategies might be necessary to "effect social change" or even to "challenge disempowering habits."

Both collectives took as their model of decision-making process the consensus approach outlined by the Public Interest Research Groups. Consensus, whereby decisions are based upon lengthy discussions and much compromise of positions, is an article of faith for many anarchist groups who believe it to be more participatory, more open and more likely to lead to better and more satisfactory decisions.

While consensus worked relatively well for Who's Emma? it was a real disaster at the Free Space. The reasons for this were many. First, the Free Space was more fractious throughout its history, never quite sure if it was a counter-cultural "hang out," an artist colony or an activist resource centre; never certain whether its politics were "lifestylist," petty bourgeois market socialist or class war anarchist. Art, intellectualism and/or activism? The AFS suffered from a failure to bring these approaches together

Secondly, the Free Space could never overcome the large and unequal presence of its primary funder who often behaved very much like a boss. Such power differentials almost ensure that consensus cannot work. Eventually the Free Space did away with consensus in a desperate attempt to save any sort of working relations.

Consensus, because of the long time involved in making decisions and because it always tends towards compromise answers, is in many ways unsuited to a lively activist group which must take quick decisions and may not be able to compromise on principles. Diverse groups with vastly divergent notions of what