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Off the Streets and into the Fortress: Experiments in Hip Separatism at Toronto's Rochdale College, 1968–1975

Abstract: *Toronto's Rochdale College (1968–1975) represented something much more than simply a new venue for countercultural experimentation and identity in the centre of English Canada's biggest city. It served as a bridge between the hip emphasis on public performativity that characterized the Yorkville scene of the mid-1960s and the more private hip separatism of the early 1970s. The symbolic association between Rochdale and impenetrability was central to both Rochdalians' self-identification and its perception by outsiders; there also were connections between Rochdale and the broader trend toward hip separatism in the years after 1968.*

Keywords: counterculture, 1960s, separatism, drugs, Rochdale College, free schools

Résumé : *Le Collège Rochdale de Toronto (1968–75) fut bien plus qu'un nouveau lieu d'expérimentation et d'identité contre-culturelles au cœur de la plus grande ville du Canada anglais. Il fit le pont entre les accents hippies mis sur la performativité publique, qui caractérisent la scène yorkvillienne du milieu des années 1960, et le séparatisme hippie, plus privé, du début des années 1970. L'association symbolique entre Rochdale et l'impénétrabilité fut au cœur de l'auto-identification des rochdaliens comme de leur perception par les autres. Rochdale fut aussi en lien avec la tendance plus globale du séparatisme hippie après 1968.*

Mots clés : contreculture, années 1960, séparatisme, drogues, Collège Rochdale, écoles libres

> The community is not interested in the outside world and resents intrusions even from well-meaning sympathetic tourists.
> – Kent Gooderham[1]

1 'Come Live with Us,' *There Can Be No Light without Shadow*, ed. Peter Turner (Toronto: Rochdale, 1971), 357. This very rare, self-published photocopied book is effectively a compendium of legal and internal documents, media reports, briefs to legislative and other bodies, Turner's first-person reflections on

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In mid-summer, 1969, the *Toronto Telegram* ran a curious and attention-grabbing article. 'The hippies,' it declared, 'are gone.'[2]

This was, of course, preposterous. Toronto's streets still teemed with young people in 'hippie' garb, its schools still struggled with marijuana concerns, and its parents still fulminated against their daughters' or sons' choice of music, friends, and haircuts. But this conservative daily pointed to a new development: the expected venue for Toronto's hip scene – the famous Yorkville Village – had ceased to be its primary gathering place.[3] *Those* streets were quieter, their usual denizens dispersed, this 'hippie ghetto' of years past apparently abandoned by the thousands who had claimed it as their territory.[4] In the wake of 1968, Yorkville Village had turned a corner, and a new scene had sprung up in its place. To find it, all you had to do was take a five-minute walk west of the Village along Bloor Street, negotiate your way past the burly bouncers running security, and enter the concrete high-rise called Rochdale College. Once inside, you could disappear into a maelstrom of drug-fuelled partying, rub elbows with draft dodgers and intellectuals and artists and bikers and 'Jesus freaks,' crash on a friendly stranger's couch, try out some of that 'free love' you'd been hearing about, and open up your mind to the possibility of living otherwise.[5] This eighteen-storey apartment complex was now, for

Rochdale while he was president, and Kent Gooderham's lengthy anthropological study of the college ('Come Live with Us'). It was compiled out of a fear that Rochdale's history needed to be laid down. The turnover rate was so high that people like Turner (who had been a resident since December 1968) felt they needed to do something for posterity. David Sharpe, *Rochdale: The Runaway College* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1987), 156.

2 'Yorkville Re-Visited,' *Toronto Telegram*, 22 July 1969.

3 I employ the word *hip* as an umbrella term for particular forms of popular dissent in the postwar period. As a term, it is *politicized*, without being overtly *political*; and, as an expression contemporary to the era, it is both historically appropriate and theoretically useful. Since the more common term *counter-culture* suggests a broad-based and deliberate activity/movement, it feels inappropriate to the discussion of identity performance.

4 Yorkville was examined in two studies (one in 1966 and one in 1968–9) as a distinct anthropological curiosity deserving analysis. Frank Longstaff, 'Yorkville: An Observational Report' (unpublished, Sept. 1966), author's private collection, thanks to James Harshman; Reginald G. Smart and David Jackson, 'The Yorkville Subculture' (Toronto: Addiction Research Foundation, 1969). See also William L. Partridge, *The Hippie Ghetto: The Natural History of a Subculture* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1973).

5 This article is part of a book project on Rochdale College and hip separatism funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Thanks to Craig Heron for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

all practical purposes, Toronto's answer to the *Telegram*'s provocative article. The 'hippies' weren't gone; they were just inside a self-contained space that was, for the uninvited (the unwelcome), opaque and inscrutable. Unlike Yorkville's clearly identifiable street scene, Rochdale was a tantalizing and perhaps even terrifying unknown.[6]

This paper has two main purposes: while it demonstrates that the symbolic association between Rochdale and impenetrability was central to both Rochdalians' self-identification and outsider perceptions of the building, it also aims to draw connections between Rochdale and what I see as a broader trend toward hip separatism in the years following 1968.[7]

THE VANISHING STREET SCENE

In order to understand Rochdale's role as Toronto's 'hippie' ground zero in the first half of the 1970s, one first has to consider its sixties-era forebear.[8] Yorkville, a tiny square kilometre of prime real estate east of the intersection of Avenue and Bloor in midtown Toronto, had

6 This article emphasizes the internal and external voices that seem to have been the most deeply considered by Rochdalians themselves. The major media (especially newspapers) constitute the key outsider source base. Internal memoranda, oral histories, the underground newspaper *Tuesdaily*, and filmed testimonials from the early 1970s help to illuminate the insider views.

7 *Hip separatism* is a way of describing the post-1967 upsurge in communes (both urban and rural) peopled by individuals who had previously been active in 'hippie ghettos' such as Haight-Ashbury, Yorkville, Kitsilano, and the East Village. The definition is my own, and its elaboration as a concept forms the basis of my current research project. However, it draws on insights from Sam Binkley's *Getting Loose: Lifestyle Consumption in the 1970s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Frederic Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005); Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999); Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Phillip Wegner, *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

8 Indeed, Yorkville (though largely forgotten outside of Canada today) was understood to be a site in a continuum of hip centres across North America by the mid-1960s, occasioning visits from such (American) hip luminaries as Allen Ginsberg, Bob Dylan, Paul Krassner, Ralph Metzner, and Baba Ram Dass. It was also a primary destination for draft resisters and deserters as they arrived in the new city.

spent the five years prior to 1968 squarely in the sights of all the major Toronto-based media outlets. It was featured nearly every day in reportage in the local big three newspapers, the *Daily Star*, the *Globe and Mail*, and the *Telegram*. Much of this coverage was sympathetic, as all of these newspapers hired youthful writers, such as Michael Valpy, Martin Barber, and Michael Enright, to help them interpret the scene. But even in their considerate reports, Yorkville was portrayed in metaphorical terms, as a local-foreign space within the wider cityscape. In this frame, Yorkville became a de facto alien land; its hangers-on were cast as performers or actors playing the role of Yorkville's 'Villagers.' Meanwhile, because it was generally agreed among conservatives that these Villagers had little to offer the wider community, the value of this foreign land was made the subject of debate; what good (apart from a little voyeuristic thrill) did this weird territory, characterized by youth, music, drug use, and sex, offer Torontonians?[9]

As the summer of 1968 wound down, two successive events conspired to hobble the Yorkville scene. First, a devastating panic over a hepatitis outbreak raged to the extent that Yorkville was actually quarantined for two weeks in mid-August. Shops were closed, restaurants and bars were shut. Villagers scattered after being admonished to report to hospitals for screening for what the *Globe and Mail* unhelpfully referred to as 'hippie hepatitis.'[10] For many conservative Torontonians, then, the figurative assumption that Yorkville's 'hippie ghetto' represented a pox on the face of Toronto had become a weird reality.[11] The next morning, above-the-fold headlines warned that Yorkville was the epicentre for a contagious, mutable form of the fatal disease. Within days, 'hippies,' and anyone who might be associated with them, were even being denied service at restaurants and shops outside of the Village. Throughout the month of August 1968, what were variously referred to as 'Villagers,' 'hippies,' and 'Yorkville youth' were like the lepers of midtown Toronto. Even after all available evidence showed that the hepatitis rate in Yorkville was neither dangerous nor even exceptional, the damage was done. And so, as municipal and popular fears over the depravity of the Yorkville scene reached their

9 For detailed information on the foregoing, see Stuart Henderson, 'Making the Scene: Yorkville and Hip Toronto, 1960–1970' (PhD diss., Queen's University, 2007).

10 'Hippies Get Needle in Hepatitis Scare,' *Globe and Mail*, 3 Aug. 1968.

11 Worthy comparisons are Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875–1980* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995); Jennifer Nelson, *Razing Africville: A Geography of Racism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

apotheosis, it was delivered a killing stroke by this specious, media-exaggerated, hepatitis 'epidemic.'[12]

Coincidentally, this phony plague was immediately followed by the inception of Rochdale College a few blocks west along Bloor Street.[13] While the ostensible intention of the college was to act as a combination of much-needed student housing and a brave and innovative 'free school,' this eighteen-storey apartment bloc almost immediately became something more like an enormous complex for counter-cultural experiments in living otherwise. Despite the somewhat strait-laced intentions of the original developers, students, and professors behind the project, from the moment the doors were opened the influx of displaced Villagers began. As one original Rochdale resident recalled, 'We simply didn't have the wit to see that, by this single action [letting them in], we were radically changing the type of person who would be entering the building, from the moment we opened. We were sealing the fate of the Rochdale that most of us had wanted to experiment with.'[14] The hepatitis scare in Yorkville thus cut both ways. In the wake of the panic, Rochdale College served as a broom, sweeping up these dispersed Villagers and gathering them inside the still-unfinished structure.[15]

Most ominously, Yorkville's shop-owners were also noting the exodus of many of the local drug dealers, amphetamine addicts, and teenage runaways as they headed to the security of Rochdale's apartments. As the building began to fill up with eager students interested in mingling experiential education with casual seminars, they were joined by a throng of young people who 'weren't interested in rediscovering values' but were more into 'learning from experience – whatever that meant.'[16]

This confluence of events allowed for an extraordinarily rapid re-articulation of Yorkville from 'hippie ghetto' to a centre for urban

12 Stuart Henderson, 'Toronto's Hippie Disease: End Days in the Yorkville Scene, August 1968,' *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 17, no. 1 (2006): 205–34.

13 This building is now Senator David A. Croll Apartments, part of Toronto's Community Housing network.

14 Quoted in Henry Mietkiewicz and Bob Mackowycz, *Dream Tower: The Life and Legacy of Rochdale College* (Scarborough: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1988), 23.

15 The fact that the building was still unfinished was surely a contributing factor to the generally discombobulated nature of the space. 'This was not an insignificant point … Live wires hung from gaping holes in ceilings, cardboard boxes and rubbish were everywhere.' Barrie Zwicker, 'Rochdale: The Ultimate Freedom', in Turner, *There Can Be No Light without Shadow*, 284.

16 Mietkiewicz and Mackowycz, *Dream Tower*, 22.

chic. Indeed, while Yorkville could still be spoken of as a 'foreign country taken over by teenagers' before 1968,[17] by the time summer rolled around in 1969, the *Toronto Telegram* could run that lengthy and decidedly upbeat requiem for the former Village, previously quoted. Rochdale College, for better and for worse, had become Toronto's vertical 'hippie ghetto.' The 'hippies' weren't gone so much as they were hidden in plain sight.[18]

FROM HIP EVANGELISM TO HIP SEPARATISM

Very little has been written on Rochdale, and that omission is surprising, given its central role in Toronto youth, drug, and activist culture from 1968 to 1975. Indeed, there is no sustained academic work on the building, its residents, or its implications. Two books about Rochdale were compiled in the mid-1980s: Henry Mietkiewicz and Bob Mackowycz's film *Dream Tower: The Life and Legacy of Rochdale College* and David Sharpe's *Rochdale: The Runaway College*. Both offer some very helpful and fascinating information, but both also suffer from a lack of thoroughgoing analysis of the broader issues at work in the development of Rochdale as a site defined by a search for parallel freedoms.[19] Only two memoirs have been published that focus on Rochdale in any sustained way: Brian J. Grieveson's self-published *Rochdale* and Ralph Osborne's *From Someplace Else*.[20] While indispensable, both books are concerned with subjective experience and recollection, and neither of them claims to provide an authoritative history.[21]

Each of these respective works makes the point that Rochdale College owed its existence to the convergence of transformative social, political, and cultural events, liberal idealism, and a nearly panoptical obsession with youth that was the North American 1960s. The baby

17 Alderman Horace Brown, quoted in 'Purge Urged of Yorkville's Dives,' *Toronto Daily Star*, 27 May 1965.

18 1968 is a pivotal year in this story, but also in the development of the postwar countercultural imaginary. The major student-centred events of the year suggested to many young people that their identity was politically significant and oppositionally constructed against the 'establishment.' Peter Braunstein, 'Forever Young: Insurgent Youth and the Sixties Culture of Rejuvenation' in *Imagine Nation*, ed. Peter Braunstein (New York: Routledge, 2002), 243–74.

19 Mietkiewicz and Mackowycz, *Dream Tower*; Sharpe, *Rochdale*.

20 Brian J. Grieveson, *Rochdale* (Hamilton: Charasee, 1991); and Ralph Osborne, *From Someplace Else: A Memoir* (Toronto: ECW, 2003).

21 The National Film Board of Canada produced a film about Rochdale in 1994. At just 30 minutes in length, and focusing only on the first two years of the building's existence (1968–69), it is frustratingly inconclusive.

boom of, roughly, 1946–60, combined with widespread postwar prosperity, had produced a generation of middle-class teenagers who would soon need to be housed and educated in universities – a situation that presented enormous physical and institutional challenges. Across Canada, waves of shovels went into the ground; Trent, Lethbridge, Simon Fraser, Brock, Guelph, and York Universities, for example, all date from this busy period. The inevitable shortage of student residence space at older, more established schools led their administrators to bemoan their inability to accommodate the approaching throng. It wasn't just beds and residence rooms, but it was also classrooms and other facilities that needed upgrading. There was a significant political anxiety at work here, as a massive and diverse generation of poorly educated and undertrained youth could spell disaster for Canada's future.[22]

At most universities, such as the downtown campus of the University of Toronto, there was an opportunity for ventures that could offer solutions to the housing and facilities crunch. In 1958, a nineteen-year-old philosophy student named Howard Adelman managed to find work with the Campus Co-operative organization, a housing outfit operating in the vicinity of the UofT campus. He soon found himself asked to develop the co-op's plan to take advantage of the housing problem. Adelman and his colleagues worked to expand the co-op's holdings and 'before we knew it,' Adelman recalls, 'we jumped to seven houses, then to ten houses.' Adelman also found that there might be a way around some property taxes by claiming education as the purpose of the endeavour.[23] In anticipation of the housing crunch, the National Housing Act had been amended in 1960 to give considerable tax and interest rate breaks to universities in need of expanded student residence facilities, and in 1964 Adelman took a delegation to Ottawa to see these incentives extended to residences built by co-ops. Now able to secure inexpensive federal mortgages, and armed with artificially low interest rates, they soon acquired an impressive number of properties around Toronto. By 1964 seventeen were owned and six were rented. They chose to name these the 'Rochdale Houses' after the English birthplace of a pioneering co-operative movement from the mid-nineteenth century. (Adelman, who had become enamoured of the co-operative ideal through his experiences with Campus Co-op, had been studying this historical reference

22 Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 180–2.

23 Mietkiewicz and Mackowycz, *Dream Tower*, 7–9.

point.[24]) But the houses were just a stop on the road to the bigger goal: the establishment of one great Rochdale residential building.

The site for this building was found at the southeast corner of Huron and Bloor, up the street from some already-established co-op residences and the University of Toronto campus; Revenue Properties, the development firm that owned the lot, was amenable to the idea of building an apartment complex for the co-op. The Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (or CMHC, a federal body) put up a mortgage covering fully 90 per cent of the cost of the project, reasoning that the Campus Co-op was merely planning to take their already successful housing operation and refigure it into something more vertical.[25] By mid-1966, the construction of Rochdale College had been given the green light, and heavy machines were cutting into the dirt. The Rochdale building, then, was designed out of the twinned needs to fill a gap in available housing and to expand the Campus Co-op into a larger-scale operation. But the educational side of the project was, at least up to this point, an unknown quantity. Rochdale College was being built, and the task was now to develop a program that would justify the name.[26]

If it wasn't exactly destiny that the Campus Co-op turned to a brilliant but disillusioned aspiring poet to help them develop the education program for the new college, then it was something like it. Dennis Lee, both a young instructor at the U of T and a representative of the federally funded Company of Young Canadians, was asked to devise a guiding philosophy and a curricular approach for the new college. From the beginning, then, there should have been little question as to which way the education program would be headed. Lee was already on record as a vocal critic of the lecture-seminar system and was part of a growing chorus of frustrated professors. Seminars and lectures in the university system, Lee had come to believe, were 'without meaning for me.' He even feared that his 'entire undergraduate and high school education had been mainly a sham.' The overcrowded classes, the superficiality of assignments, 'the piecemeal life of the mind' were supplanting 'classical university ideals.'[27]

24 Sharpe, *Rochdale*, 15.

25 'CMHC Financial Notes', box T-10 00013, Toronto Fisher Rare Book Library (TFRB), Toronto.

26 Howard Adelman, *The Beds of Academe* (Toronto: Praxis, 1969), 187–260.

27 Howard Adelman and Dennis Lee, eds., *The University Game* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1968), 69–76.

As an alternative to the incoherent multiversity system – the arrangement that sees a number of institutions such as separate colleges, campuses, and research centres all connected to the university proper – he argued that the college should provide a more satisfying environment for learning. This hybridized space would be both home and classroom, offering a stirring form of personalized education based on student need and desire rather than curriculum and grades. This was to be a mutable site in which the needs of the individual student would be paramount.[28] Indeed, rather than following the traditional goal-oriented model of the university with its grades, assignments, and prerequisites, Rochdale College would put the focus on plain old learning-as-goal.[29] Lee believed that what this represented was nothing short of a radical return to an authentic liberal arts education.[30]

This lofty (and laudable) goal was, it is widely conceded, never realized at 'the Rock.'[31] While some early students managed to gain access to rousing seminar-style discussions with professors and other teachers, most found they were unable or even, finally, *unwilling* to seek out their own educational path. Dennis Lee, for his part, would give up on his creation before the end of 1969, and what remained in his wake bore little resemblance to the vision he had laid out in 1966. Dissonant, heterogeneous, and rudderless, the Rochdale education program ceded into a nebulous vision of its former self. 'At Rochdale,' went a popular refrain, a playful dig at the formlessness of the education program therein, 'we feel more like we do now than

28 Lee's views were echoed (and perhaps given added weight) by the influential Hall-Dennis report on education in Ontario (1968). E. M. Hall and L. A. Dennis, *Living and Learning: The Report of the Provincial Committee on Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario* (Toronto: Ontario Department of Education, 1968).

29 'What has been abandoned in the daily process of education is not something that is peripheral to the university's purpose; it is what the university has professed as its reason for being.' Ibid., 74–5. The venerable Toronto-based *This Magazine Is about Schools* covered the free schools movements and featured articles from Lee and other Rochdalians.

30 Lee was part of a swath of international visionaries who sought to reimagine education along humanist lines. Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1968); Jonathan Kozol, *Free Schools* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972); A.S. Neill, *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing* (New York: Hart, 1960). For a contemporary account, see Ron Miller, *Free Schools Free People* (Albany: State University of New York, 2002).

31 Gooderham summarized the opinions of his fellow residents toward the concrete mass: '[The Rochdalian] hated the building ... which he considered to be anti-human in every respect.' Sharpe, *Rochdale*, 30.

we did before we came.'[32] Instead of developing an alternative community of students, it seemed that Rochdale College was developing a culture of Otherness, an unaccountable space in which the pursuit of random experience was the preferred ambition. A self-referential ironic distance and a deliberately fostered inscrutability seemed to have become defining attributes of the endeavour. Perhaps this is why questions about 'the Rochdalians' – who were they? where did they come from? what drew them to Rochdale? – are so difficult to answer. Rochdale attracted a wildly heterogeneous collection of people, for reasons as diverse as utopianism, homelessness, boredom, and mere convenience. The space pulled from every direction, for every conceivable reason. As one resident told a CBC radio reporter in 1969, 'Rochdale is about as much of what it is as anything else. Rochdale very much represents *itself*, almost more than anything I have ever seen.'[33]

THEORIZING 'SPACE' IN ROCHDALE COLLEGE

During the mid-to-late 1960s the common practice of equating Yorkville with 'hippie' – despite the fact that this category was mutable and frequently externally conferred – had offered Torontonians, including those who identified themselves through the space, a means of understanding the Village as a synecdoche for the broader counterculture. In other words, hegemonic distrust and fear of cultural and social dissent fostered a popularized treatment of Yorkville as a distinct, local-foreign land – a view that served both as a warning to some to stay away, and, critically, as an invitation to the curious to come and partake. This process, in turn, helped to instill the characterization of the Yorkville youth culture as somehow unfathomable, alien, dangerous, and insane. By 1965, the 'cars full of Sunday gawkers drove past slowly,' recalls an observer of the Village. 'People were, essentially, watching the antics of their own children as if they were another species.'[34]

However, with the advent of Rochdale most of the Villagers who would otherwise have been spending their days and nights very visibly

32 This refrain can be overheard in a student film from 1969. Reproduced in *Dream Tower* (film), 1994.

33 My emphasis. Overheard in 'Rochdale College: Organized Anarchy,' CBC Radio: *Comment*, CBC Online Archives, 8 Jan. 1969, http://archives.cbc.ca/society/youth/topics/580-3204/.

34 Osborne, *From Someplace Else*, 133.

on Yorkville Avenue and Cumberland Street had gone dark. Off the streets, for all practical purposes erased from the public eye, and concentrated into one inscrutable symbol in the form of a great grey brutalist building, Rochdale's hip scene operated as a mostly self-contained, even self-reflexive unit. Throughout the 1960s the Village may have been *metaphorically* cut off from Toronto, tied to a map of meaning that treated it as an island within the wider cityscape; Rochdale, though, actually *was* cut off in key ways.[35] Many of its inhabitants cloistered themselves (legend suggests that a few rarely ever left the building);[36] many lived under a kind of self-imposed exile from the wider community, condemning the outside world for its hypocrisy, its sterility, and its warmongering, as though the outside world were a monolith.[37] 'Even though I've lived in Toronto – I've lived in Rochdale – for almost two years,' explained a resident in 1972, 'I don't really know anybody outside. There is nothing outside the building that is especially conducive to my getting on with it.'[38] These residents turned inward, developing initiatives designed to serve Rochdalians who would rather not engage with the outside world. One resident concluded in 1972 that 'the mere physical structure of the building made it a fortress … The people going here were living an alternate culture.'[39] A cinema, theatre troupes, a succession of restaurants and food delivery services, a health clinic, two literary presses, unlicensed bars, community newspapers, and a science fiction–themed library all grew up in the building, underlining the idea of a parallel Rochdale society and culture. If the inclusiveness and community activism of 1960s-era countercultural identities gave way to

35 'It is difficult to live in the heart of a major city and to maintain an isolation as complete as would be desirable … Although the ideal may be a rural community "totally" independent and removed from present society, an acceptable alternate is an urban community of artists or craftsmen who can benefit everyone best by remaining in the city. There should be a constant exchange between these two types of communities.' Gooderham, 'Come Live with Us,' in Turner, *There Can Be No Light without Shadow*, 357.

36 'It was like living in a village in the heart of a city. It had all the advantages of a city, being in the centre of Toronto … It had all the advantages of a village, in a sense. You formed lasting friendships and relationships. You knew who your next door neighbour was, you met him frequently, you gossiped with him. Being outside of the building again is being back in the cold city.' Unknown man #1, *The Rochdale Tapes: Interviews with the Residents of Rochdale College in 1972*, dir. Bruce Emilson, A Space Productions, 1972.

37 'At Rochdale they learn to conduct themselves in that other world.' Kent Gooderham, qtd in Peter Turner, *There Can Be No Light*, 360.

38 Unknown man #3, *Rochdale Tapes*.

39 Unknown man #1, *Rochdale Tapes*.

the emphasis on self-improvement and subjectivity in subsequent decades – a crucial shift away from hip evangelism and toward separatism that recent academic work has only begun to explore – Rochdale can be understood as a bridge between these era-defining approaches.[40]

Its very impenetrability made Rochdale inherently fascinating. Whereas one could take a quick stroll through Yorkville and see for oneself just what was happening there, Rochdale remained obscured by concrete and glass, fearsome security guards who often were local bikers in full regalia, and the milky veil of the unknown.[41] If one learned solely through media reportage about Rochdale, one came away with the distinct impression that the place was basically defined by drug abuse, venereal disease, and desperate alienation. Much of the press coverage served as a kind of hip advertisement for young people who sought exactly such a place: the allure of an authentic countercultural experience. As one Rochdalian put it, 'Rochdale has been a focal point for the alternate culture. It's been a mecca – through its buildup in the press as well – for thousands of people that were alienated from society, that were looking for something different.'[42] Although some of the reportage continued to be sympathetic – at least one editorial in the *Globe and Mail* lamented the continued emphasis on negative stories about Rochdale[43] – these newspaper reports tended to offer their sympathy alongside lurid tales of drug use, the extent of the recent marijuana seizures, or the dangers faced by police if they attempted to enter the 'fortress' of Rochdale.[44]

Although the occasional letter to the editor defending Rochdale's other, more positive and less newsworthy attributes made it into the op-ed pages, the general tenor of the reportage in major newspapers was sensationalist: police raids, overdoses, 'near-riots,' co-ed naked

40 If by 1966 many 'hippies' can be said to have been actively working to 'convert' the uninitiated to their line of thinking – from the Merry Pranksters to Timothy Leary there were scores of visible efforts along these lines. Such 'evangelism' faded by the end of the decade. I borrow the phrase from Sidney Bernard's description of the 1967 Human Be-In as 'a kind of instant hippie evangelism.' *This Way to the Apocalypse: The Sixties* (New York: Horizon, 1968), 58.

41 Rochdale's security guards were, for years, a burly force of fearsome young men in black T-shirts who appeared more like bouncers at a rock concert than any apartment security guard you've ever seen.

42 Unknown man #1, *Rochdale Tapes*.

43 'Rochdale (I),' *Globe and Mail*, 13 Mar. 1972.

44 'Axes Smash Doors at Rochdale: 10 Held in Drug Raid,' *Toronto Daily Star*, 12 Sept. 1970.

parties, and, eventually, suicide.[45] Moreover, as a result of the secretive and near paranoiac nature of many Rochdalians who, even if they were not actively engaged in the drug trade, might have come to identify with the drug scene, most reportage was based on outsider perspectives and observations.[46] Reporters tended to be unable to gain access to the building, so they generally relied on hearsay and anecdotal information alongside police and other outsider reports. In one memorable instance, Tom Clark, then a twenty-one-year-old CFTO television reporter, managed to sneak inside for almost two weeks posing as lineman for Ontario Hydro. When he was found out, he is said to have run from the building in fear for his life.[47] Unlike Yorkville, where reporters had occupied the position of insider/outsider (*Globe* reporter Michael Valpy, for example, was good friends with a number of well-respected Village activists such as David DePoe and Brian 'Blues' Chapman), Rochdale remained inaccessible to most media representatives. Their frames, perhaps as a result of this distance, tended to emphasize Rochdale as sensational symbol rather than living space, reinforcing the trope of separateness. And no issue was more instrumental to this construction than that of drugs.

DRUGS AND DEALERS IN THE FORTRESS

Mietkiewicz and Mackowycz rightly point out in their oral history of the college that 'with its starkly visible location' Rochdale was both 'a focal point for Metro Toronto's drug culture' and 'for the outraged authorities and citizenry' alike.[48] By the end of 1969, as the drug culture within became common knowledge without, Rochdale was indeed raising the ire of more than a few observers. The issue of illicit drugs was certainly volatile, and it was the matter that garnered the most persistent interest in newspapers.[49] Like Yorkville before it, Rochdale was emerging as the great emblem of Toronto's youthful criminality and hip depravity. Michael Valpy's famous editorial

45 'The Fate of a Flop-House,' *Globe and Mail*, 29 Oct. 1970; 'Policemen Cornered, Pelted with Eggs in Rochdale,' *Globe and Mail*, 23 Apr. 1973; 'Mob Injures 3 Policemen Following Rochdale Drug Raid,' *Toronto Daily Star*, 17 Aug. 1970; etc.

46 David Farber, 'The Intoxicated State / Illegal Nation: Drugs in the Sixties Counterculture,' in *Imagine Nation*, 17–40.

47 Mietkiewicz and Mackowycz, *Dream Tower*, 140–1.

48 Ibid., 105.

49 Marcel Martel, *Not This Time: Canadians, Public Policy, and the Marijuana Question, 1961–1975* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

from late 1968 had already asked the crucial and telling question: 'Is [Rochdale] Yorkville gone high-rise? The connection cannot be avoided. Yorkville had become not so much a district in Toronto as a word in Toronto's argot. It has only to be uttered. It requires no adjectives, no expanded narration to conjure all sorts of repugnant images in the public mind.'[50]

Indeed, prior to mid-1970, Rochdale was a drug dealer's dream. 'It was a great advantage to deal out of a building that was essentially a fortress,' complains former general manager Ralph Osborne. What he found especially frustrating was that Rochdale was supposed to have been separate from the wider society 'to protect a fledgling culture' and not so that it could 'act as a front for large trafficking operations.'[51] Taking advantage of the permissive environment and almost total absence of police supervision, drug dealers had taken to establishing mini-communes in the building as a steady stream of customers poured into the place.[52] To the consternation of the police stuck outside, every person walking out of the building might have just bought a bag, and every person walking in the door might have been a mule. Short of stopping and searching everyone – and hundreds of people were coming in and out, all the time, every day and night – there was little to be done. Worse, any attempt to catch a supposed drug dealer sitting on his contraband at his apartment had predictably negligible results, since it was the unwritten rule that residents should pull the fire alarms if they saw police officers gearing up for a raid, thus alerting any dealer to flush and run. According to a frustrated police report of mid-1971, 'The fire alarm in Rochdale will ring each time the police enter and especially so when a drug investigation is underway … The elevators suddenly quit working when the police enter.'[53] In the face of this, the police appeared to be flummoxed while the drug dealers consolidated their businesses.

The common practice for the bigger dealer operations was to take over three rooms.[54] The first would be home and would remain

50 'Rochdale's Reality Is Something Else,' *Globe and Mail*, 16 Dec. 1968.

51 Osborne, *From Someplace Else*, 210.

52 Sharpe, *Rochdale*, 219–25.

53 John R. Wilson, 'Rochdale College (Police Report),' 13 April 1971, quoted in Sharpe, *Rochdale*, 112.

54 Reliable information on drug dealer operations is, for obvious reasons, hard to come by. The following sketch is compiled from information gleaned in (especially) *Tuesdaily* (various); Grieveson, *Rochdale*; Mietkiewicz and Mackowycz, *Dream Tower*; Osborne, *From Someplace Else*; and Sharpe, *Rochdale*.

drug-free at all times. The second room, in which little furniture beyond a scale and a table could be found, was used for dealing and other transactions, but would contain only the drugs being used in the immediate deal. The third apartment was the 'stash room' in which, according to one memoirist, 'several hundred lbs of hashish could be lying in crates and one person would be hired as a security guard to watch over it 24 hours a day.'[55] Such major operations were few but, especially prior to the summer of 1970, they were the stuff of considerable internal debate among the residents who made up the Rochdale Governing Council (Gov Con).[56] What was crucial to the discussion was the obvious fact that these dealers were not simply in the business to supply the Rochdale community, but rather to sell their stuff to outsiders. This meant that outsiders – especially suburban teenagers – were coming into the building in ever greater numbers to buy and then to use their drugs in what was understood to be complete sanctuary. One casual visitor recalled Rochdale as 'the island of lawlessness.'[57] As word spread that Rochdale represented a free space in which dope was plentiful, sex was easy to come by, and the party was perpetual, the dealers saw their businesses grow substantially. But the simultaneous effect was that Rochdale residents found their building turned into a litter-strewn confusion, rife with drug-addled visitors and underage neophytes.[58]

The infamous sixth-floor dope commune, the most spectacular instance of drug dealing at the college, was essentially a gangster's paradise populated by hardcore pushers, toughs, and assorted hangers-on.[59] It came together in 1969 and only grew stronger and more influential, both among residents and with members of the Gov Con, until the summer of 1970. 'To gain access,' recalls a former Rochdalian, 'one had to knock on a steel reinforced door. A small screen slid open and you had to state your business. If everything was cool, the

55 Grieveson, *Rochdale*, 29. To my knowledge, all of the major drug dealers in Rochdale were male (see below).

56 The Rochdale Governing Council (Gov Con) was a highly fractious, mutable, and shambling democratically elected body. At times it was able to get things accomplished, but it was also prone to crippling debate and indecisiveness.

57 'Few Regret Having Time Spent in the "Island of Lawlessness,"' *Globe and Mail*, 22 Aug. 1981.

58 See P. Turner, *There Can Be No Light*, 25–7.

59 This ersatz 'commune' is the subject of entire chapters in both Sharpe, *Rochdale*, 219–25, and Mietkiewicz and Mackowycz, *Dream Tower*, 105–28.

door was opened by a burly guard with shotgun and dogs.'[60] Many Rochdalians detested this type of intimidating presence, and by the end of the summer of 1970 considerable noise was raised about having them evicted.[61]

Prominent feminist resident Pat Shafer wrote in the Daily newspaper, an internally produced photocopy also known as the Daily Planet and Tuesdaily, that 'Rochdale seems to be divided into two categories, the pushers and the pushed.' She argued that the fierce, hypermasculine pushers were dominating the rest of the community, using intimidation and threats of violence to get their way.[62] In this, she reasoned, they were not different from any other 'pigs' (a common slang term for police). It was just that 'at Rochdale [the Pig] lives in an armed fortress on the 6th floor.'[63]

As the police gave notice that they were planning a concerted push against the major dealers, this explosive situation fostered widespread debate in the Rochdale community. The libertarians among them tended to see any eviction of residents as an unfair and even repressive response, while the more pragmatic Rochdalians argued for a utilitarian justification for such repression. Eventually the latter group, by far the majority, won, developing a guiding philosophy for Rochdale that would define it, for better or worse, for the remainder of its existence. The approach was straightforward: rather than feigning innocence in the face of accusations that it tolerated drug use, the Gov Con maintained that Rochdale was a free zone in which the expectations of the outside world didn't apply.[64]

Following the final removal of the sixth-floor dealers by a combination of internal pressure and a police raid-cum-riot in mid-August 1970, the Gov Con turned to a philosophy of preference and isolationism.[65]

60 Grieveson, *Rochdale*, 33.

61 P. Turner, *There Can Be No Light*, 26.

62 This article does not emphasize the gender, racial, or class dimensions of the Rochdale communit(ies) in the interest of space. My future writing on Rochdale will be focused on these more directly lived aspects of Rochdale identities.

63 *Tuesdaily*, 25 Aug. 1970, box T-10 0009, TFRB.

64 Turner would later argue (rather disingenuously) that 'Rochdale at no time had or pretended to have a complete and separate law unto itself. It was part of Canada and therefore subject to Canadian law. The only thing Rochdale is guilty of is the same thing community relations officers … are guilty of and that is to remain silent at times to retain credibility with the 'kids.' P. Turner, *There Can Be No Light*, 28.

65 This raid is legendary in the Rochdale mythology: '1500 People Confront 150 Policemen at Rochdale in Near-Riot After Arrest,' was offered by the *Globe and Mail*. Sharpe, *Rochdale*, 196–7.

Some drugs were to be allowed – marijuana, hashish, and LSD – and the rest, especially speed and heroin, were outlawed. This, it was reckoned, would help to keep Rochdale free of the hardcore gangsters and their thronging teenage clientele, while promoting an open and healthy situation for residents without descending into hypocrisy. 'Rochdale does not suffer from a [drug] problem any different from the one on the outside,' declared a Gov Con brief to the LeDain Commission on recreational drug use in Canada. 'We do not encourage drug use nor do we discourage it except when it becomes a clear danger to the health and well-being of the community in general.'[66] In other words, young people enjoy marijuana, Rochdale's population is mostly comprises young people, and the Gov Con doesn't have a problem with it. What's more, predicted the brief, since 'chocolate and alcohol became legal because of the inability of the government to control its [*sic*] use[,] the laws governing marijuana will change by the same token within the next five years.'[67] Since they could see the absurdity of prohibiting a relatively safe drug like marijuana while keeping legal the vastly more dangerous methamphetamine narcotics, Rochdale's denizens knew better than to pay mind to these laws. Indeed, Gov Con took considerable pride in reporting that amphetamines and speed dealers had been outlawed and evicted. In their view, Rochdale had the drug laws the right way around.

Rather than slipping into the ineffective legal order of the outside world, Gov Con 'developed our own resources to deal with the problems in our environment.' Throughout 1970 they worked to establish a series of on-site resources for hard drug users designed to provide aid and counselling and generally to keep Rochdale free from the kinds of problems associated with addiction. Of these resources, the Rochdale Clinic was surely the most successful, but matters such as security, conflict resolution, and the enforcement of health codes were all now considered to be strictly internal concerns.[68]

The very idea that Rochdale constituted an 'environment,' containing its own separate realities, was now crucial to Rochdale's self-identification. As one resident explained in 1972, 'It wasn't a matter of your apartment and the rest of the building. It was like your

66 Martel provides in-depth discussions of the role of the LeDain Commission and mentions the Rochdale brief. *Not This Time*, 140.

67 Brief by Rochdale College, 9 June 1970. Reproduced in P. Turner, *There Can Be No Light*, 256–7.

68 See the discussion in P. Turner, *There Can Be No Light*, 252.

bedroom in the biggest bejesus house in the world!'[69] Inhabitants had, for example, begun to refer to Rochdale as 'the Rock,' an ironic riff on the old nickname for the island prison at Alcatraz, famous for its symbolic separation from the mainland and, more recently, for ongoing Native American protests regarding land and self-determination rights.[70] But clearly the persistent construction of Rochdale as a separate space, cut off from the outside world, was reinforced both ways. While it was framed from the outside as a kind of interzone in which Canada's drug laws were not or perhaps could not be enforced, it was argued from the inside that yes, this was precisely the case, thank you very much.

By the fall of 1970 the Rochdale community comprised a fluctuating collection of mostly young people who shared similar alternative values regarding mainstream society and established structures. To be sure, Rochdale represented much more than merely 'Yorkville gone high-rise.' It was an integral part of a widespread blossoming of alternative living arrangements among young people who were turning away from conventional living structures; its exceptionalism stemmed from its vast and unwieldy vertical geography and symbolic resonance.[71] Far more of what went on in the building had to do with working out alternative living arrangements than with the sex/drugs/rock 'n' roll culture that comprised the expected narrative of the space.[72] Political and religious groups operated within and outside the building, including the Black Liberation Front, the M4M (or May

69 Unknown man #2, *Rochdale Tapes*.

70 Rochdale's relationship with Aboriginal activism is complex. Wilf Pelletier, an Odawa musician and philosopher, ran the Institute for Indian Studies on the seventeenth floor of Rochdale starting in 1968. The institute operated as a kind of think tank for Aboriginal identity studies, offering instruction in Native languages, industrial techniques, and cultural practices.

71 Across Toronto and far beyond by the late 1960s, many homes were running on concepts of utopian communalism, shared responsibilities, pooled food, alternative sexual and familial relationships, and consensus decision making. Communication historian Fred Turner has termed the unorganized movement of people out of mainstream living arrangements the *New Communalists*. *Counterculture to Cyberculture*, 4. See also Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

72 It is important to bear in mind, however, that while the noisy debates surrounding the drugs and 'crashers' and suicides raged on, many Rochdalians were unconvinced that such issues were pertinent to their own experiences. Separatism has many forms. While some residents were interested in building the 'environment' of Rochdale, others found the 'environment' of their floor, their own apartments, their own rooms, enough.

Fourth Movement), the Institute for Indian Studies, a Hare Krishna community, and various Christian communes. Such groups were decidedly interested in the outside world and used Rochdale primarily as an organizational base. But there were also political groups that arose within the building whose main interests were to help to improve the internal life of the building. To take an important example, Rochdale Women, a significant feminist group, came together to dismantle the male-centric Rochdale environment not long after Bruce Maxwell explained in an inadvertently sexist editorial in the *Daily* that there were only two kinds of women at Rochdale: 'One kind view themselves as sexual objects. They hang around the restaurant, the lobby, the patios, and the elevators … The second group are quiet and keep to their rooms a lot. They are the victims of Rochdale's pronounced male chauvinism.'[73] Pat Shafer, one of the key architects of Rochdale Women, argued that a consciousness-raising group was crucial for a community given over to threats of violence, unscrupulous dealers, and macho masculinity. 'Some of the problems' she pointed to included 'women who are economically dependent on Rochdale men, women who are socially isolated from other woman [*sic*], women and violence, women and new kinds of marriage, and women as chicks and sex objects.'[74] Indeed, in Kent Gooderham's description of the 'ideal person to which Rochdalians aspire,' women were explicitly reduced to hangers-on. The ideal Rochdalian 'is male,' he declared. 'Rochdale is a man's world and many women play a role quite accurately described by the term Chick' (a term that he helpfully defines in his Glossary as 'girl').[75] Like so many other alternative communities in the period, the supposedly liberated and egalitarian Rochdale community relied on similar expectations about gender roles as did the outside world.[76]

In his anecdotal history of the college, Brian Grieveson avows that following the eviction of the major dealers, 'there were only four character types deemed undesirable' at Rochdale: 'heroin addicts, previously evicted dealers, violent psychopaths, and narcs [undercover police].'[77] (We might supplement this list by including users of injectable drugs of any kind.) Still, excluding these 'types' didn't exactly

73 *Tuesdaily*, 18 Aug. 1970, box T-10 0009, TFRB.
74 *Tuesdaily*, 1 Sept. 1970, box T-10 0009, TFRB.
75 Gooderham, 'Come Live with Us', 349.
76 Alice Echols, *Shaky Ground: The Sixties and Its Aftershocks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), esp. 35; Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009).
77 Grieveson, *Rochdale*, 7.

mean that the tide of crashers, visitors, and vandals was stemmed. Across Canada, such 'transylvaniants' were hearing the news that Toronto was host to an entire apartment complex that had been given over to the post-Yorkville hip scene.[78] According to the persistent media reports, at Rochdale there were no police, no rules to speak of, and drug-fuelled orgies were essentially ongoing.[79] The direct result was that Rochdale's status as both destination and party spot was still unparalleled and, just as had occurred with Yorkville a few years before, it was a magnet for disturbed, alienated, homeless, and otherwise troubled young people. 'Nobody wanted to see a homeless street person turned away on a cold winter night … However, not even Rochdale could cope with the hundreds of street people who wandered through Yorkville by day and slept in the library, hallways, elevators, laundrymat [*sic*] and broom closets of Rochdale by night.'[80] This, in turn, led to a growing problem of teenage girls falling into exploitative relationships with Rochdale men – another serious issue for Rochdale Women and the Gov Con to contend with.[81]

THERE IT WAS ON THE WAY DOWN

It is not at all clear that Rochdale would have been left to its own devices if it had simply kept to itself. What *is* clear is that the supposedly self-contained symbol that was Rochdale began to literally spill over in spectacular, treacherous, and gruesome ways.

By mid-1970, police began referring to the streets surrounding the building as 'missile alley.' When they'd try to approach, residents would heave objects at them from the anonymity of their upper-floor windows. This action was dubbed 'dropping,' a very literal play on hip shorthand for taking LSD. As historian David Sharpe has explained, 'Once the police began attacking Rochdale, from August '70 on, dropping graduated from negligence to a crude, sporadic line of

78 *Tuesdaily*, 23 June 1969, box T-10 0009, TFRB.

79 For example, 'Dropping Acid, Smoking Dope in Grade Six, and Then …' *Globe and Mail*, 14 Apr. 1973. This article consisted of an interview with a very young, very experienced, occasional Rochdalian.

80 Grieveson, *Rochdale*, 39.

81 'I mean, one fourteen-year-old girl having sex with different guys every night is a form of abuse. We had this one girl in our Ashram [a suite for eight to twelve people], she went from room to room, staying a few days in each one. When the guy got tired of her he'd send her packing and she'd show up at the next guy's door – that's abuse.' Quoted in Mietkiewicz and Mackowycz, *Dream Tower*, 98.

defence.'[82] In one graphic article in the relatively new tabloid the *Toronto Sun*, a police spokesman referred to the kind of sixth sense necessary for police who dared approach 'missile alley': 'You'd sense something was about to fall on you,' he explained, 'and when you'd look up, there it was on the way down – a fridge, a stove, a cat, anything they could get their hands on.'[83] Gov Con made a variety of attempts to curb the practice of bombarding the police when they appeared, especially following the street battles that accompanied police actions throughout August and early September 1970. The most poetic of these ideas was explained in the *Daily* as a 'Bustday Party' at which 'cops will be showered with confetti, streamers, and balloons. Cake and ice cream will be served with party favours for the cops. "Pig is Beautiful" t-shirts will be sold with the proceeds going to the police college.'[84] This approach took the practice of 'dropping' and softened its impact (literally) without sacrificing the Rochdale-as-stronghold symbolism.[85]

Then there were the cases of people – perhaps drug fuelled, perhaps merely sadistic – who took to 'dropping' as an amusement. The inception of the 'Rochdale Space Programme,' for example, consisted of a hare-brained experiment in which one uncooked egg was placed in two water-filled garbage bags, one larger than the other, and was then launched off the top of the building. To the delight of the theorist behind the experiment, Peter Judd, the egg survived the fall. 'The egg was taken back to the building, fried, then eaten,' it was happily reported.[86] On the much, much darker side, Ralph Osborne has written of the horror of finding his card game interrupted by 'a weird, high-pitched wail like a muffled two-second siren burst. This was followed immediately by a thud and a strangled cry of pain coming from the patio … we walked out to see a white cat lying at an odd angle on the concrete.'[87] As a response to the growing trend, a concerned letter to the *Daily* warned fellow Rochdalians that dropping even an egg could have dramatic consequences. 'An egg *dropped* from

82 Sharpe, *Rochdale*, 206.
83 *Toronto Sun*, 8 June 1975, qtd in Sharpe, *Rochdale*, 205.
84 *Tuesdaily*, 29 Sept. 1970, box T-10 0009, TFRB.
85 'If [the police] had warrants and business to attend to, they would call and we would provide an escort. This was to curb the habit of building residents throwing debris of all sorts out the windows every time they saw more than one cop car parked outside.' Osborne, *From Someplace Else*, 211.
86 Sharpe, *Rochdale*, 205.
87 Osborne, *From Someplace Else*, 150.

the top of the building will reach a falling speed of over 70 miles per hour by the time it reaches the sidewalk – so I would suggest that if people must use this sort of diversion to entertain themselves, that they at least go to the other side of the building where people etc are not likely to walk under the falling debris, or better still find a more constructive pastime like riding a motorcycle up and down the stairs or something. Besides, we don't need any more people pissed off at us right now.'[88]

'Dropping,' then, had symbolic as well as physical effects. Observers who might otherwise have been able to countenance the existence of this aberrant apartment complex were unable to avoid the tangible evidence that fell from its windows. Defenestrated objects and unfortunate pets were one thing, perhaps, but the anxiety surrounding Rochdale increased considerably in the wake of revelations that *people* were falling onto the streets below. Indeed, the association between Rochdale and suicide came to animate many conservative responses to the building and its residents. Even former prime minister of Canada John Diefenbaker used Rochdale's supposed suicide epidemic as a talking point: 'Who would ever have dreamed,' he teased, 'that in Toronto the Good in 1972 the Rochdale College would be in existence, [with] more suicides than graduates?'[89] But Diefenbaker reflected a popular perception, fuelled by media coverage and municipal common sense, that Rochdale was causing youngsters to leap to their doom.[90] Although no more than seven people had actually committed suicide at Rochdale between its inception in 1968 and Diefenbaker's infamous 1972 remark – a period that saw perhaps two thousand different on-the-books residents, and a dozen times that number of casual visitors spend time in the building – a shorthand arose that drew an explicit association between the building and jumping.[91]

88 *Tuesdaily*, 24 Mar. 1972, box T-10 00062, TFRB.

89 John Diefenbaker, 'Those Things We Treasure,' Empire Club address, 9 Mar. 1972. The Empire Club of Canada speeches, http://speeches.empireclub.org/details.asp?r=vs&ID=61942&number=6.

90 Mietkiewicz and Mackowycz gauge the total number of Rochdale suicides at around eleven, not including one probable murder (*Dream Tower*, 131). 'Whether accidental or deliberate, caused or self-inflicted, the deaths came to be summarized as suicides.' Sharpe, *Rochdale*, 207.

91 The statistic on the number of suicides at Rochdale comes from 'Is Rochdale the Victim of a Stereotyped, Negative View?,' *Globe and Mail*, 28 Mar. 1972. The second figure is my own estimation, based on the legal occupancy (840) with significant turnover over four years, while assuming a few thousand casual

Since they tended to use the police and municipal authorities as sources, Toronto newspapers framed suicide at Rochdale as the manifestation of drug-fuelled alienation, facilitated by the anarchistic and morally bankrupt Rochdale separatist culture.[92] 'The first signs of the deterioration of Rochdale,' reported the sensationalist *Tab International* in October 1970, 'came when the hippies started to jump out of the top-floor windows.'[93] Indeed, 'Rochdale-Drugs-Suicide was the kind of sensationalism that sold papers,' summarizes Brian Grieveson.[94] While the occasional editorial might point out that suicides happen in every high-rise apartment complex and that Rochdale's tragedies just tended to be more public, many reports on Rochdale suicides lazily suggest that there was some kind of epidemic connected to this particular address.[95] This was accomplished through the repeated use of prominently placed sensational and hyperbolic quotations in otherwise credible articles.[96] One Rochdalian complained in 1972,

If you were to take the majority of the really bad problems in Rochdale, you can most probably attribute it to just that: the press. They've used Rochdale as such a sensationalism type of thing that they've bloody advertized all over the world – and I mean all over the world – that, number one, this is the place to jump off if you're going to end it all. Because like if you took a consensus of the residents of this building who've ever flipped out and done their flying acts out the window versus the people who've just come here because this was the place to do it, you'd find one hell of a big difference.[97]

visitors. The Rochdale living environment was unruly, so as a result of its inconsistent rent-collection (residents regularly fell far behind in their payments) and the persistent problem of uninvited 'crashers,' it will never be possible to come to an accurate figure for the number of people who actually spent time in the building.

92 In 1970 both the national and provincial (Ontario) figures were roughly thirteen suicides per hundred thousand people. Thus, Rochdale had a higher rate (at roughly three per thousand people). 'Suicide in Canada,' Public Health Agency in Canada, 1994, http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/mh-sm/pdf/suicid_e.pdf.

93 'Blow the Joint UP! Phony College Spreads Dread Asian VD!,' *Tab International*, 3 Oct. 1970, box T-10 0009 TFRB.

94 Grieveson, *Rochdale*, 50.

95 'Rochdale (I),' *Globe and Mail*, 13 Mar. 1972: 'The incidence of suicide is small but it is public whereas suicides in other high-rises go unreported.'

96 A front-page article in the *Toronto Daily Star* from 29 January 1972 claims, under a heading 'Fifth Person,' that 'police said he was the fifth person to commit suicide at the college in the last 13 months.' A similar headline ran on 20 July 1973, which read 'Coroner Probing Fatal Fall Urges "Close Rochdale Now."'

97 Unknown man #2, *Rochdale Tapes*.

'Unfortunately,' agrees Grieveson, media coverage 'had a feedback effect. Rochdale became Toronto's equivalent to the Empire State Building.'[98] Whereas suicides are deeply painful and very private affairs, suicides at Rochdale were made very public through the unwritten rule that local press would cover them all.[99]

After the significant attention that accompanied the jumping death of resident David Allen Cameron in mid-August 1970, and then again following the 14 October 1970 suicide of a resident draft resister named Thomas Kelpe, people on all sides of the issue began to make the connection between Rochdale and suicide. As one former security guard explained, after these first awful incidents 'people heard that it was the place to take a leap ... They had no place else to go so they [came here and] took the big jump.' Another former Rochdalian explains that almost none of the 'people who died in there [were] from the building. They had heard it was a good place to kill themselves, so they went there to die. They went there because they knew that they could go to the eighteenth floor or the roof and jump off.'[100]

No doubt the most sensational incident involving jumping occurred in early 1972 when a fourteen-year-old girl, stoned on LSD, stripped naked and dove from a fourth-floor window, hoping to bounce off the ragtop of a convertible parked below. Apparently she thought it would work 'like a trampoline.' When a security guard ran to her aid, he found her lying on the pavement, still laughing.[101] This event

98 Grieveson, *Rochdale*, 50. Researchers have tied this phenomenon to the wider trend of 'suicide tourism' wherein people seek 'opportunities to commit suicide outside of their own environment,' explaining that highly utilized jumping locations 'act as magnets for people from far away.' Moreover, it is widely accepted by mental health experts that 'graphic, sensationalized or romanticized descriptions of suicide deaths in the news media can contribute to suicide contagion, popularly referred to as 'copycat' suicides.' See Charles Gross, Tinka Markham Piper, Angela Bucciarelli, Kenneth Tardiff, David Vlahov, and Sandro Galea, 'Suicide Tourism in Manhattan, New York City, 1990–2004,' *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 84, no. 6 (2007): 756; American Foundation for Suicide Prevention website, http://www.afsp.org; E. Etzersdorfer and G. Sonneck, 'Preventing Suicide by Influencing Mass-Media Reporting: The Viennese Experience, 1980–1996,' *Archives of Suicide Research* 4 (1998): 67–74.

99 It's worth noting that the Prince Edward Viaduct (a bridge two kilometres east of Rochdale) was a far more significant site for suicide tourism than Rochdale ever was, and for a much longer period of time before it was finally dealt with. Some five hundred people are estimated to have killed themselves there prior to the erection of a preventative barrier in 2003 following an outcry.

100 Mietkiewicz and Mackowycz, *Dream Tower*, 132–4.

101 Ibid., 138–9.

harmonizes the three main public concerns regarding Rochdale's alternative environment: naked teenagers, wild and uninhibited drug experiences, and suicide. The widespread understanding of the 'hippie' archetype as a man, reinforced both within and without Rochdale, and the corresponding assumption that hip women were merely objects of the hip male subject – again, doubly reinforced – is carried over here.[102] Collapsing all manner of social anxiety surrounding female sexuality, youth alienation, and the wilful insanity of recreational hallucinogenic drug-taking, this particular incident got a lot of mileage in the press. The *Toronto Sun*, for example, ran a Hemmingway-esque narrative version of the events leading up to the accident: 'She was only fourteen years old. A youth in the room said the girl was whipped up on acid. She started laughing, then crying. Finally she stripped off all her clothes and dove naked out the window.'[103] This event was even used in an editorial in the *Globe and Mail* as proof that a previous and generally positive column on Rochdale by another writer at the same newspaper had been thoughtless and, apparently, hazardous.[104]

To their credit, the *Globe and Mail* also chose to print a long and detailed rebuttal of this negative editorial in a subsequent issue. 'There have been five suicides, not "at least six" [as you report],' explained Mary Anne Carswell, external affairs co-ordinator of Rochdale College. 'The salient point is that two of this number actually resided in Rochdale College. The others came here to commit suicide, much as many people jump in front of a TTC [Toronto Transit Commission] train. Newspapers are highly selective in reporting suicides. They have reported *all* suicides from Rochdale, however.'[105]

CONCLUSIONS

'Philosophy does not begin in an experience of wonder,' argues philosopher Simon Critchley, 'but rather, I think, with the indeterminate but palpable sense that something desired has not been

102 Beth Bailey has demonstrated the persistence of this construction of the hip man as the centre around which female 'hippie girls' were said to revolve. 'Sex as a Weapon,' in *Imagine Nation*, 305–24.

103 Quoted in Mietkiewicz and Mackowycz, *Dream Tower*, 138.

104 'The Rochdale Record,' *Globe and Mail*, 15 Mar. 1972. 'There have been at least six suicides and four attempted ones. In what recently has been described as a quiet period – or is it just that frequency wears off news value? – a naked 14-year-old girl high on drugs plunged out of a window in the belief she could fly.'

105 'Rochdale the Victim of a Stereotyped, Negative View?,' *Globe and Mail*, 28 Mar. 1972.

fulfilled, that a fantastic effort has failed. Philosophy begins in disappointment.'[106] This disappointment, whether religious or political, pushes us to the point of a crisis that we must think, and eventually act, our way out of. The alternative is retreat, escapism, the ever-attractive palliative of nihilism. Critchley's premise, so helpfully radical, asks us to consider the idea that the shock of disappointment, not excitement about the possibility of improvement, motivates us either to perform or to recoil.

If the public Yorkville scene was a question, for many observers the private Rochdale environment was an answer. Rochdale's experiment in parallelism, characterized by Rochdalians' efforts to foster a functional alternative society within the wider cityscape, stands as a significant example of a wider turn toward hip separatism in the wake of the disappointments of the late 1960s. The huge proliferation of intentional communities across North America in these years – both rural and urban – speaks to the growing magnetism of notions of escape and disengagement. Indeed, so many young people who had, until recently, been deliberate about the political dimensions of the public performances of their identities as 'freaks' and 'hippies' and even 'revolutionaries' were increasingly turning away from the 'mainstream' and toward more local, even insular, scenes. Moreover, the 1970s saw the rise of a variety of individualistic rejoinders to the community-minded activism of the sixties – consider the rise of self-help, the inner child, est, Zen, New Age, Born Again Christianity, all of which achieved widespread popularity in the shadow of the greatest disappointment for left activists since the collapse of the popular front. In today's era of pervasive disappointment and widespread escapism among young people, what can we learn from this? Much work remains to be done in this area, and examining Rochdale provokes, as much as responds to, such questions.

Under the glare of media scrutiny, which did as much to advertise Rochdale as a zone of difference as it did to decry it as such, any efforts to maintain this odd experiment in alternative living must have felt like climbing a greased pole. The insider and outsider constructions of the Rochdale 'environment' as a fortress, a separate zone in which the 'outside world' was refused, undergirded public disapproval of the building. Police incursions, the spectre of large-scale drug operations, reports of violence, and the apparent rise of spectacular suicides were made public, resounding, and complex

106 Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), 1.

concerns. As it had been with Yorkville and its hepatitis scare, so it was with Rochdale seven years on: the media's exaggerated conflation of hip youth with death and danger would play a decisive role in the end of the affair. Although financial negligence would be the overriding justification for shutting down the college by 1975, Rochdale's symbolic weight as a youthful fortress rendered its dissolution inevitable. Rochdale's supposed separateness offered the metaphorical framework for both the internal and external constructions of Rochdale's identity and meaning. For those on the inside, this framework offered the very justification for Rochdale's existence; for those on the outside, it constituted the case in point that the building had to be reclaimed. The image of a young person jumping from inside the figurative foreign space of the building to the literal public space of the street below seems to have been the very kind of sensational image to which people felt compelled to respond. Rochdale would be finally emptied in the spring of 1975, its last residents dragged and carried from the building, before its doors were welded shut.

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