
Beyond the Historic Facade: Skyscrapers, Scapegoats, and the Digital Reclamation of Toronto's Queer Streetscapes

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Gentrification takes many forms, ranging from whole scale bulldozing and forced relocations, to skyrocketing rents and dominion of multinational corporations over entire neighbourhoods. In Toronto, gentrification is facadist: the hollowed brick skins of Victorian storefronts are preserved in orderly rows, with great glass office buildings or condos sprouting up through their once-solid roofs and porticos. Luxury boutiques and art galleries take over the spaces once held by convenience stores and leave the original, rusting signage above the door, urging pedestrians to drink Coke. A local diner closes one night and reopens the next as a cocktail lounge - the interior and exterior remain untouched. The same 1960s banquets that once served \$5 burgers to an impoverished and marginalized local population now serve burgers that cost \$17, even though the name advertised on the now-vintage neon sign outside remains the same.

Most city dwellers are familiar with these external signs of gentrification. Gentrification, however, does not just shape the streetscape, it shapes the outlook of city dwellers in a way that obliterates urban history, especially the history of marginalized communities, even though it is these diverse populations of people of colour, immigrants, queers, and the working poor that gave cities the dynamic qualities that made them initially so attractive to new residents. In Toronto, the building boom of the last decade has left only the facade of much of the city's diverse history. What is behind the facade - luxury condos and chain stores - represents a completely different model for a city, one

that prioritizes neoliberalism, conservative values, and the homogenization of thought.

In the traditional narrative of gentrification, gentrification begins with the influx of white gay and artistic communities, the so-called "creative class," into economically disadvantaged areas. These "shock troops" of gentrification clear the way for yuppies with their preference for boutique coffee shops and organic vegetables. Rents rise and the original low-income or minority population of the neighbourhood is displaced, pushed further and further to the margins as the initial hot spot of gentrification rapidly expands. According to Sarah Schulman, Distinguished Professor of the Humanities at the College of Staten Island, this traditional narrative does not get to the heart of gentrification. The gay community has become a convenient straw man for an outcome that is shaped by much more powerful forces in municipal government, and the changing tenor of city life is due not to the introduction of artists spaces, but to the "gentrification of the mind" or the suburbanization of our understanding of city space.

In her book, *The Gentrification of the Mind*, Schulman quotes the artist Penny Arcade's piece "New York Values": "There is a gentrification that happens to buildings and neighborhoods and there is a gentrification that happens to ideas." Gentrification, according to Schulman's theory, is caused not simply by the influx of new people, but when those people come to cities "not to join in or to learn and evolve, but to homogenize," bringing "the values of the gated community and a willingness to trade freedom for security" (30). Gentrification "replaces most people's experiences with the perceptions of the privileged and calls that reality" and as a result "gentrified happiness is often available to us in return for collusion with injustice" (161, 166).

In the remaking of Toronto as a city of facades, are we not only erasing our history, but permanently altering the idea of what our city is, who it is for, and what purpose it serves?

And is there a way the digital humanities scholars in particular can fight these forces to a halt? Drawing on Schulman's argument and using the Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada project's spatial model of the Toronto gay scene as a case study, the short paper proposed here will argue that the freely accessible publication of digital models of historical communities can be used to push back against the gentrification of the mind. The presentation that will accompany the paper will mark the launch of the Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada map, built from the 17,000+

person, place, and event entity records in the LGLC database.

The Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada project reconfigures Donald McLeod's remarkable two-volume work, *Lesbian and Gay Liberation In Canada: A Selected Annotated Chronology, 1964-1981* as a TEI-encoded resource and graph database. The prototype database, available at <http://lgc.ca> consists of event, publication, person, and place records spanning from the founding of the first homophile associations in Canada through to the start of the AIDS crisis. The LGLC project extends McLeod's codex form in order to data mine and represent queer history spatially and temporally. The project not only makes a much-neglected part of Canadian history available for mainstream scholarly use, it also provides a foundation for modeling identity and representing time and space in TEI.

There is much to model spatially and temporally. In the 1960s, the Toronto's gay scene was located on Yonge Street and by the 1970s the bars had migrated north along Yonge from Queen Street towards Wellesley Street. Two of the most famous bars on this strip were the Parkside at 530 Yonge Street and the St. Charles Tavern at 488 Yonge Street, both owned by Norman Bolter. The neighbourhood surrounding the former sites of the Parkside and the St. Charles is currently a site of massive development. Gone are the seedy bars and massage parlours. Large glass condos are rising from bulldozed lots and from the tops of heritage buildings.

The building that housed the St. Charles Tavern still stands above Yonge Street at Wellesley. It is slated to become a condo in 2017, the iconic clock tower that served for decades as a meeting spot for the gay community will be preserved at the base of a proposed 153 metre glass spire. The incorporation of this piece of gay history into a shining skyscraper only furthers serves the ideology that scapegoats the gay community as the root cause of gentrification, making the million dollar condos imagined by a developer seem like an inevitability, rather than just one potential future amongst many. What is lost in this new instance of facadism is the history of the St. Charles Tavern, a violent history neither the city nor developers seem keen to acknowledge or commemorate.

For example, tracing the events outside the St. Charles Tavern on Halloween from 1968 to 1981 reveals Toronto's violently homophobic history, and the inadequate policy and police response to that

violence. In the 1960s it was illegal for men to wear clothing of the opposite sex in Toronto, a rule that was relaxed at Halloween. Every Halloween St. Charles Tavern hosted a drag show, and every year a homophobic mob congregated outside the bar to throw eggs and rotten vegetables as the queens arrived. In 1968, police found gasoline bombs behind the tavern, and yet in the following years police still permitted crowds to hurl insults shout slogans such as "kill the queers", and throw debris at the patrons. It took a decade for the police to start arresting people in the mob; in the meantime a volunteer gay defense patrol, Operation Jack O'Lantern, escorted patrons through the neighbourhood and in through the back door of the tavern. Between 1975 and 1978, 14 patrons of Toronto's gay bar scene were murdered. Eight of those murders went unsolved amid accusations of police homophobia, which were only exacerbated by homophobic articles published in the Toronto Police Association Journal. Publishing this history online, not only in text, but in map form, will make it accessible to an audience that will include not just scholars, but the citizens of Toronto. By developing accompanying pedagogical tools to guide users through the map, we hope to engage local residents, as well as the thousands of students at nearby universities and schools, in working to reclaim that lost history, and undoing some of the effects of the gentrification of the mind.