

London Calling

John Zerzan in London, but not for the Olympics

John Zerzan

2013

The first half of August 2012 found my wife Alice and I in London, but not for the Olympic Games. The nonprofit contemporary art gallery Raven Row invited me to participate in a series of talks and displays titled “The Real Truth: A World’s Fair.”

The talks took place on successive weekends at the gallery on Artillery Lane in the East End just north of Whitechapel. We arrived too late to take in the first one on the history of wor

ld fairs, and were back in the States by the time of the fourth presentation, by an ex-CIA operative.

The third speaker, Jim Channon, of Men Who Stare at Goats fame, held forth on August 11 and proved to be a rather classic New Age airhead. All is going well, create your own reality, e.g., even the military can be the biggest possible force for good(!). Some of us blasted him in no uncertain terms and people in the audience weren’t buying what he was selling.

My turn was second in the series on August 4. The Raven Row auditorium (about 150 capacity) filled up and some people were turned away at the door. More important was the very high level of discussion after I spoke and the conversations that continued at length.

The title of my talk was “The Murderous Idolatry of the Future: Anarcho-Primitivism and the End of Technology.” In it, I discussed the pathologies created by the disappearance of community and its roots with its culmination of mass society in the techno-sphere and the results such as the rising wave of mass shootings and drug epidemics.

Also, a room was given over to issues of the *Fifth Estate* from each of the years it has published since the 1960s; forty-seven issues in total. Raven Row requested these from the Detroit archive and following their display are now stored at MayDay Rooms, also in London.

MayDay Rooms describes itself as “a safe house for vulnerable archives and historical material linked to social movements, experimental culture, and marginalized figures and groups. A site for gathering, holding, and animating documents and idioms of dissent which continue to offer a critically productive and emancipatory relation to the turbulent present.” maydayrooms.org

Several videos were screened, including the excellent 2003 high tech survey *Das Netz: The Unabomber, LSD and the Internet*. We brought books, posters, and t-shirts that were prominently displayed.



John Zerzan, London, 2012

The whole encounter was a marvelous glimpse into the possibilities and range of visions in the arena of art today. "The Real Truth," curated by the very talented Suzanne Treister, was one such example, and Raven Row overall has been a stand-out venue for contemporary explorations. Its director, Alex Sainsbury, is dedicated to providing an important center for pushing limits in general.

We made day trips to the Birmingham area and to Oxford, but spent most of our time walking all over London from our East End (Spitalfields) base, a lovely flat above Raven Row's gallery spaces.

Several anarchists I'm in touch with showed up, including Keith from Transitions Chichester who'd biked 70 miles from Sussex the morning of my talk, Ed from Wales, Steve from Cumbria's Dark Mountain Project in north-west England, former Green Anarchist editor John Connor from Oxford, and Harsheek, a young Londoner.

There are various anarchist projects afoot, but my impression was that communication among them was fairly minimal. However, given a high level of antipathy toward the dominant order that I was hearing, there are definitely radical possibilities. Anarcho-primitivism is something of a presence and I was gratified to learn there were English listeners to my Anarchy Radio program broadcast from Eugene.

All in all, a wonderful 2 to 3 weeks made possible by our Raven Row friends.

The gallery web site is ravenrow.org; the Fifth Estates are archived at maydayrooms.org.

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John Zerzan is an American anarchist and primitivist philosopher and author of several books on the subject. His articles which began the introduction of primitivist and anti-civilization ideas to the anarchist milieu first appeared in the Fifth Estate in the late 1970s. His web site is johnzerzan.net

Zerzan's one hour live radio show, "AnarchyRadio" airs Tuesday, 7:00pm, PST, and is available by audio streaming at KWVA 88.1 FM.



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