

Jordan Arseneault

FILM IS NOT, AND NEVER HAS BEEN, about mere entertainment. Like the two modes of creation that the moving image stands between—the still image and the theatre—“films” are a product of lenses, makers, and collaborators working in a context that is always more than meets the eye. As a performer, translator, drag artist, activist, and the coordinator of MediaQueer.ca, I argue this is triply so for films made by and about LGBTQ2S+ people, whose social and political context was, for so long, inhospitable, despite our unrelenting ability to infiltrate systems of production and visual languages that have left their mark on art history in Canada and around the world.

The mission of the Queer Media Database Canada-Québec Project is to study, catalogue, and promote the exhibition potential of queer Canadian and Québécois moving-image art at home and abroad. We have worked with over twenty festivals and co-presenters to show little-known and canonical works by and about LGBTQ2S+ people. We do this out of a shared belief that there is something radically informative about the queer lens—both in its distortions and its representational precisions.

Camp, drama, performance-as-community, sex work, Indigenous struggles, drag (kings!), Internet romance, feminist politics, and affect history are all embedded in the film programs we curate. While we are known for our durational

short programs, *Still Not Over It*, a program of films about queer temporality, clocked in at over two hours and required an intermission. We curate from the perspective of political and aesthetic whiplash that is the “resting affect” of queer people: we live in an era of stark contrasts, between expanded rights and freedoms for queer and transgender people—namely in Canada, the European Union, Nepal, and parts of Latin America—and massive setbacks occurring in the countries that brought us Sergei Eisenstein and John Waters. Aesthetically wedged between Eurocentric art traditions and American commercial giants, queer Canadian filmmakers have had the benefit of almost fifty years since the decriminalization of homosexuality, as well as sixty years of federal arts funding, not to mention the queer, pan-cultural phenomenon of film festivals, those always-political watching parties that let us see where the medium is going, and the bodies and stories behind the images that move us.

Two other great formal modes characterize the Canadian queer film wedge: the lust to make a commercially successful narrative feature (Big Fictions) and the need to show our truth in experimental shorts where form and content can be married (Little Truths). Between Big Fictions (society, money, romance, utopia/sex) and Little Truths (subjectivity, precarity, loneliness, sex/dreams) lies that great Canuck and Québécois tradition of the documentary feature, a mode in which we have always, and continue to, excel. On the cusp of our year-long critical commemoration of the decriminalization of homosexuality (and abortion) in 2019, I have made it my mission to show these works in their complexity, their genre-busting, musical, eccentric, tragicomic, glitchy, vhs-to-digital glory. ¶

Jordan Arseneault is currently Coordinator of the moving-image encyclopedia www.mediaqueer.ca, which is the online home of the Queer Media Database Canada-Québec Project.

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Launch of the online platform of the Queer Media Database Canada-Québec. © MediaQueer. Photo: Greg Wong, Toronto.

