

learning from the local

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Introduction

LISA STEELE

THIS YEAR'S CURATORIAL Incubator — a co-presentation between Vtape and Niagara Artists Centre in St. Catherine's Ontario — is the result of an earlier initiative by NAC. In the fall of 2021, NAC Film Programmer Kasia Smuga reached out to Vtape about curated programs that NAC might show from October through December 2021, in their newly created film / media screening room. We were thrilled when the Programming Committee at NAC selected several individual titles as well as four of the 2021 Curatorial Incubator v.16 *Living In Hope* programs to screen. In November 2021, Kim Tomczak and I went to NAC to meet with Stephen Remus, Minister of Energy, Minds, and Resources, and Kasia Smuga and see their set-up and presentation. We were very impressed with the outreach that NAC does within the community of Niagara and St. Catherine's and the thoughtful arrangement of their gallery space to become a screening room, complete with comfortable couches and chairs, side tables, rugs, potted plants and excellent sound and projection. We had already heard about the response of the teachers at Brock University who were bringing classes to view the work at NAC and loved their informative one-sheets produced for each program screened.

With this very positive experience as a backdrop, I approached NAC about

co-presenting the 2022 Curatorial Incubator v.18 *Learning From the Local*. Stephen Remus, Kasia Smuga, joined by NAC Ambassador Natasha Pedros, all agreed so we were off and running in the spring of 2022. Both organizations put out a call and received their applications. Seeing as this was my last Curatorial Incubator (more on this later), and given that the application numbers were manageable, I decided to consider them myself. In the end, I selected two Incubatees and NAC selected one.

Both Vtape's and NAC's participants approach "the local" in distinct ways. **Marvin Veloso's** program for Vtape entitled *Cruising Circuits, and Other Slippery Landscapes: Queer(ing) Resistance in Toronto Video Art*, considers the city as a site of alternative actions and attitudes. *Across the Escarpment*, Niagara-based **Connor Wilkes'** program for NAC, investigates the role played by Sheridan College in the development of non-fiction and experimental non-fiction filmmaking

In Canada. In Vtape's final program, **Delilah Rosier's** *What Do You Mean You Don't Love Me? Or, How to Stop Worrying and Get in the Tub* features a selection of works exploring the invisible parts of the city to find memories of what is missing.

In the summer of 2022, the Incubatees attended workshops that with how

to make the most of their full access to the resources at Vtape. I gave an overview of the Incubator, talked about the fees they would receive for their writing and curatorial work, and discussed their budget for rental fees for the works in their program. **Wanda vanderStoop** introduced them to the Preview Site. Both of us made it clear that if they wanted to view a title and it wasn't on the Preview Site, they were to tell one of us immediately and we would get it digitized and onto the site as soon as possible. She also went through the steps that they were to follow when they had arrived at the list of titles in their program. They also were invited to the Vtape office to work in the Research Centre, viewing titles and reading articles in the Critical Writing Index. Finally Curator, writer, and artist, **Emelie Chhangur**, Director and Curator of the Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queens University, gave them an amazing tour through some of her most recent curatorial projects that spoke to the idea of "the local". In 2019, Chhangur won the Ontario Association of Art Galleries' inaugural BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) Change-maker Award. In 2020, she won the prestigious The Hnatyshyn Foundation Award for Curatorial Excellence.

Throughout the writing phase of *The Curatorial Incubator*, participants were each assigned an editor for their essay. I extend my deepest appreciation to each of these professionals who took time from their already busy schedules to contribute to the advancement of each of their writer's projects. **Oliver Husain**, filmmaker and artist based in

Toronto founded two collectives, the performance troupe Da Group and the music video production company Husain Klofkorn, worked with Marvin Veloso. Writer, director, video artist, producer, and political activist **John Greyson** whose work frequently deals with queer characters and themes and whose films have achieved critical success, notably *Zero Patience* and *Lilies*, worked with Connor Wilkes. And finally, Montréal artist **Nelson Henricks** whose immersive artworks create a unique musical dynamic, worked with Delilah Rosier.

I extend my appreciation to all the staff at Vtape who each contribute their expertise and encouragement: Distribution Director Wanda vanderStoop, Kim Tomczak, Restoration & Collections Management Director, Distribution Assistant Dustin Lawrence, and Kiera Boulton, Submissions & Communications Coordinator, who each work directly with the Incubatees to make sure they have access to the titles they want to preview when they are in the research phase of their project. And many thanks to Chris Gehmanm Director of Administration and Deirdre Logue Development Director who make sure that all fees are paid in a timely manner to the Incubatees and their artists. And many thanks to Philip Jonlin Lee and all at Linseed Projects — especially Charlene Lo — for giving us this handsome publication.

Finally I thank the three 2022 Curatorial Incubator participants for their focused research that had them looking at scores of titles in both the Vtape holdings and those of our sister

organization CFMDC to find just the right works for their programs.

As I mentioned before, this is to be my final Curatorial Incubator. August 1, 2023, will see my Vtape co-founder Kim Tomczak and I depart the organization after 40 years. The Incubator has been one of my most fulfilling programming roles here. Since its beginning in 2002, the Incubator has introduced me to scores of fascinating and creative individuals, many of whom have gone

on to prestigious positions in institutions across the country. But I leave the Incubator in very capable hands.

Kiera Boulton is an interdisciplinary artist and performer whose current role at Vtape is morphing to include aspects of programming and publications. Best of luck, Kiera. I know you will enjoy the Incubator as much as I have.

Lisa Steele

Creative Director, Vtape



Cruising Circuits, and Other Slippery Landscapes: Queer(ing) Resistance in Toronto Video Art

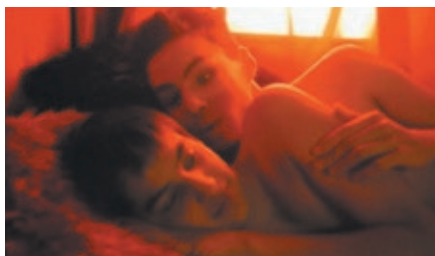
MARVIN VELOSO

IN REANIMATING the Vtape holdings toward a sense of *Toronto-ness* this curatorial selection reflects upon the relationships embedded within space and place, and on the acts of revealing alternatives. By turning to video works situated within Toronto and by Toronto-based artists, I consider performances that gesture toward a mode of navigating the city and which emerge from contending with dominant systems of power. As depicted in Kent Monkman's *Future Nation* (2005), queer nightlife in the city serves as a site of salvation, particularly within a hostile, heteropatriarchal society. The site-specific video performance *Cooling Reactors* by soJin chun and alexandra gelis prompts a turn to counter-archival knowledge, pointing to the ongoing resistance of LGBTQ+ identities against state violence. *Sounds of pain paint a slippery landscape* Juana Awad reminds us in *In DEEP Skin* (2004), sensing the contradictions and entanglements of the city's past and present manifestations.

That complicated legacy necessitates keeping each other safe, which is the purpose of the community networks explored in *School Fag* (1998) by Richard Fung and Tim McCaskell. As a tool allowing one to navigate the city, *Toronto-ness* initiates meaningful relationships, intervenes in public space, and anticipates transformative conditions. Though comprising of video of the last two decades, this sensibility and the responses to situated struggles permeating throughout this selection continue to shape, reflect, and redefine cultural production in the city.

Depicting Toronto against the backdrop of an apocalyptic crises, *Future Nation* presents a cautionary account while suggesting possibilities for better conditions in the future. Amidst a "megapox outbreak" that intensifies food insecurity and social instability, the story follows Brian, a Native teen coming to terms with identity, intimacy, and urban life. Monkman's prescience in 2005, almost two decades before the Covid-19 pandemic shut down

the world, bears resemblance to how during moments of crises, mutual-aid entails community venues to flourish. While at a gay nightclub, Brian answers an anonymous phone-call leading him to an apartment decorated with dildos and other erotica. Here he meets Tonya/James, a charismatic drag-queen, whose fearless attitude, and willingness to face opposition animates an intimate relationship despite distance. When returning home, Brian is called out for having a lover. Unlike his sister Faith who is supportive of him, his homophobic brother Charles remarks: "My brother's a fag!"



Future Nation, 2005

With a quick cut to a shimmering disco-ball flashing on screen, the video calls upon memories of queer nightlife as a site where self-expression and sexual desire frees itself from shame and societal norms understood as stubborn binaries. Yet, when the family travels to the city — which for Brian feels "surreal" — it is Tonya who, amidst a decaying urban centre, acquires food by unlocking an abandoned market. In the closing scene Brian's voiceover from the future wonders whether him and Tonya, who fades out of screen, will ever meet again. Whereas the streets of Toronto decay as bodies lie on the ground, the lively scenes within the nightclub, as well as Tonya's apartment, exemplify opportunities to cast alternative economies, relationships, and ways of belonging.

That image of bodies lying on the ground is magnified in *Cooling Reactors* (2011) by soJin Chun and Alexandra Gelis, where Cherry Beach serves as a pivotal site of *Toronto-ness*. In this performance video onlookers on the beach in the background stare into the camera, or continue obliviously wind surfing in the lake; while five bodies are lying inanimate in the foreground of the frame. Though ambiguous, they seem to represent a diversity of racialized and gendered persons. It's unclear whether the bodies, tightly wrapped in bright pastel-coloured blankets, are enjoying a day on the beach or a catastrophe has swept them to shore; the video uses abrupt hard cuts to make them appear and then vanish. The ability of media technologies to document



Cooling Reactors, 2011

events demands a careful look into unofficial archives, those often siloed from dominant, mainstream outlets. Chun and Gelis conceptualized this piece to bring attention to nuclear infrastructures surrounding Lake Ontario and the disregard of environmental conditions from Toronto locals who use the lake for recreation. But another

meaning unfolds when considering a 2006 article from *Xtra*, which reports on state violence against LGBTQ+ Identified people and those unhoused and points to the brutal legacies embedded within the city, claiming "the fact that the [police] beatings at Cherry Beach are one of the city's worst kept secrets."¹

1 <https://xtramagazine.com/power/cherry-beachs-conflicted-history-17863>

The act of showing up is enough of a gesture for reclaiming space in *Cooling Reactors*. Here, the intervening into and unsettling of everyday logics signifies existence as resistance, provoking viewers to witness histories often made invisible by force. Especially in a city haunted by ongoing struggles against violence, authority is often met and remembered with collective mobilization. Cherry Beach continues to be an active venue along Toronto's queer cruising circuits, where the tune of seagulls squawking and of flowing waves, remixed with club beats, render a soundscape reminiscent of the transforming urban ecology.



In DEEP Skin, 2004

Weaving music, narrative and non-narrative scenes, with experimental visuals of light and movement, *In DEEP Skin* (2004) presents a video poem following lesbian lovers on the subway, navigating fractured landscapes of memory, pain, and pleasure. Visualizing an assemblage of spatial and temporal settings, the melodic performance echoes over a montage of transit systems, ice storms, and tropical climates. Through video effects an opaque light dances over the image of a performer walking blind folded along the edge of icy waters, then transitioning to a furious ice storm outside a speeding train. In a later scene the camera captures an actor peering out of a moving vehicle at palm trees aligning the sunny beachside, while a caption at the bottom of the screen reads: *by the sea I long not to be alone*. *Toronto-ness* emerges from these different settings, linking everyday urban architectures to diasporic memories. Awad visualizes this corporeal desire, holding open a site to reflect upon loneliness. *In DEEP Skin* reimagines the destination which these trains might be bound for, imbued with an intense rush; fused with vulnerability, rhythm, and fervor that grasps the urban fabric in its diverse textures. Like the body of water represented in *Cooling Reactors*, the slippery landscape Awad edges, anticipates a plunge into deep intimacy with oneself.

Toronto-ness is like an awareness, a feeling of cruising within and along urban entanglements. *School Fag* (1998), by Richard Fung and Tim McCaskell, centres the experience of Shawn Fuller, a self-proclaimed “queenly little faggot” as he reflects on the memory of high school trauma and the whole experience that comes with it. Shawn’s detailed account of the efforts of local organizations like the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Youth of Toronto (LGBYT), as well as the Triangle Program, Canada’s only 2SLGBTQ+ high school, point to the ongoing mobilization within the city. These community programs remind us of the necessity of keeping each other safe. The significance of queer nightlife is emphasized through his stories of his high school prom, where the joy, reciprocity, and play come to the fore. Whereas the derogative ‘fag’ appears as a hateful utterance from Charles in *Future Nation*, *School Fag* redefines the terms of the slur toward a point of difference that embraces its ambivalence in disrupting heteronormative ideals. Shawn explores alternative ways of being by putting on an ironic shirt reading ‘White Trash’ and embodying the superhero of Wonder Woman, to then finally, donning a black PVC latex dress — one of ‘Supermodel’ — as RuPaul reminds us in the video’s closing soundtrack. Shawn’s obsession with the queer icon emanates a source of hope,



School Fag, 1998

like that disco-ball emerging earlier, illuminating possible futures. Likewise, the video work and extensive writing on queer representations by Fung and many of the artists included in this selection continue to put forth alternatives to the city’s mainstream. As the selection concludes, I hope to call attention to the continuity and necessity of video art, cultural production, and community building in Toronto — reminding the viewer of an unfinished projects in which *Toronto-ness* requires work-as-play; and so — to say it within the terms of queer vernacular — *You better work!*

Cruising Circuits, and Other Slippery Landscapes: Queer(ing) Resistance in Toronto Video Art

Curated by Marvin Veloso

1 Kent Monkman *Future Nation*, 2005, 16:27

Against the backdrop of a biological apocalypse, Brian, a Native teenager comes to terms with his identity, family, and futurity. His relationship with his lover Tonya/James evolves as the “megapox” epidemic quickly devastates urban populations across North America. Through a surreal journey in search of food, new relationships and acceptance emerge when the youth face down their fears.

2 soJin chun and alexandra gelis *Cooling Reactors*, 2011, 2:01

Cooling Reactors is a site-specific performance at Cherry Beach, confronting social and ecological conditions surrounding Lake Ontario and the impending potential of nuclear infrastructures. Mixing audio, visual, and embodied elements, the video lays claim to modes of reflection and resistance, offering viewers a site to consider the local and global implications of climate change.

3 Juana Awad *In DEEP Skin*, 2004, 6:51

Juana Awad is an experimental video travelling through fractured scenes while presenting a lesbian encounter. The visual and musical entanglements explore desire, identity, and geography, inviting viewers along the edges of icy waters, tropical climates, and to the lonely body within an emerging urban centre.

4 Richard Fung and Tim McCaskell *School Fag*, 1998, 16:35

Richard Fung and Tim McCaskell capture the trauma, joy, and flamboyance of Shawn Fowler. Offering a fresh account of homophobia and resistance through an up-close interview, the stories alternately hilarious, biting and poignant illustrate early yearnings to play Wonder Woman in preschool neighborhood games, to the efforts of community organizations in the city, and to losing the much publicized prom competition at his high school.

Across the Escarpment

CONNOR WILKES

THE ESCARPMENT SCHOOL was a loose group of filmmakers emerging from the Media Arts program at Sheridan College in the late 1970s through to the early 1980s. These filmmakers were taught by Richard Hancox and Jeffery Paull, who have also become part of this nebulous film group. While practitioners of the Escarpment School have established themselves as individual artists (Richard Kerr, Mike Hoolboom, Phillip Hoffman etc.), they began by drawing inspiration from the NFB and other non-fiction filmmakers, while paving the way for other artists and filmmakers in the region. The films of the Escarpment School practitioners are steeped in Canadian nonfiction filmmaking and experimental non-fiction often with a personal home movie aesthetic. Many of these films attempt to capture a certain time and place, memories of the filmmaker’s childhood, products of the geographic area they come from: The Niagara Escarpment and its surrounding towns and communities.

The new Media Arts program at Sheridan College in Oakville Ontario grew out of the cultural zeitgeist of the time. Drawing inspiration from the

counterculture and hippie movement of the 1960s as well as the technological and cinematic zeal from Expo 67 in Montreal. In the classrooms there were no desks, instead students attended lectures on couches and beanbag chairs.¹ The instructors at Sheridan approached teaching filmmaking with experimentation, DIY processing techniques as well as the incorporation of new video equipment and expanded cinema processes. At its inception the program was well funded which afforded the coordinators the ability to purchase high-end filmmaking and video equipment. Jeffery Paull, who taught at Sheridan from 1972 to 2005 was given permission to convert a faculty washroom into a functioning darkroom for processing photographic and motion picture film. Paull’s classes on hand processing film would be carried on at Phil Hoffman’s Film Farm and in Gary Popovich’s *Bathtub Film Processing and Toning*.² In lectures, the students were fed a diet of avant-garde film, experimental non-fiction and NFB films. This curriculum, especially the experimental work from the NFB would go on to inform much of

1 Brett Kashmere “Chemistry Class: Jeffery Paull, the Escarpment School, and the Legacy of Process Cinema at Sheridan College” in *Process Cinema: Handmade Film in the Digital Age* edited by Janine Marchessault and Scott Mackenzie (McGill-Queens University Montreal & Kingston, 2019). 300

2 Kashmere. 299



Canal, 1981

the students work while at Sheridan and beyond.

Canadian cinema has long been defined by its documentary roots. Early Canadian films were produced to promote European immigration, and tourism from the United States.³ These early films also included industrial films and government produced war propaganda films. Often, these films would present their subject matter in a cold and informative mode of documentary production, this was symptom of little synced sound and inclusion of voiceover narration. The work produced by the NFB in the post WW-II era was marked by being much more experimental, pushing the boundaries of non-fiction filmmaking. This movement was spearheaded by the practitioners of Unit B. Unit B was formed to complement the more formal documentaries being produced at NFB. This included allowing filmmakers more artistic freedom to produce films as well as diversifying hiring practices to include more women and people from First Nation's communities. This in turn lead to ground-breaking non-fiction and experimental filmmaking from the likes of Norman McLaren, Arthur Lipsett, Claude Jutra, Julian Biggs, Bonnie Klein and others. The work of these filmmakers would go on to inspire juggernauts of Hollywood like George Lucas and Stanley Kubrick. However, the roots of Canadian documentary and experimental non-fiction film would sprout up in the work of



Waterworx (A Clear Day and No Memories), 1982

the Escarpment School practitioners who would take the non-fiction genre and transform it something more personal. "the Escarpment School progeny have helped to inaugurate Canada's first-person cinema, reinvent documentary as a mode of self-expression and formal-materials exploration, extend and deepen the rich landscape of Canadian art."⁴ The filmmakers often put the region and landscape of Southern Ontario itself on display this includes: industry in *Canal* (Kerr 1981) and in *Waterworx (A Clear Day and No Memories)* (Hancox 1982) and regional identity in *Kitchener-Berlin* (Hoffman 1990).

³ Richard Barsam "Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History" (Indiana University Press, 1992). 197

⁴ Kashmere. 295

Early films of the Escarpment School take a direct cinema approach to non-fiction filmmaking. The films are very reminiscent of *Lonely Boy* (Koenig, Kroiter 1962) and other direct cinema approaches from the NFB. Films like Richard Kerr's *Vesta Lunch* (Kerr 1978), which is a continuous take from the end of a diner's counter as patrons come and go, or Kerr's *Hawksville to Wallenstein* (Kerr 1976) which observes a winter day in a small town. Sheridan graduates Holly Dale and Janis Cole's films *Cream Soda* (Cole, Dale 1976) and *Minimum Charge No Cover* (Cole, Dale 1976) use a similar stylistic approach to highlight sex workers in Toronto. These early Escarpment School films put on display the teachings the students received in the Sheridan Media Arts program. These films also emphasized what was to come as these students began to develop more experimental techniques.

Experimentation with autobiography and film can be seen throughout the work of Philip Hoffman. One of his earliest films *On the Pond* (Hoffman 1978), contains photos from Hoffman's childhood at a family cottage, while a recreation of Hoffman as a young boy is playing hockey on a frozen pond. Over top of the images are the sounds of Hoffman's family responding to a 35mm slide show off screen. As the family's dialogue grows louder the boy playing hockey falls. As the film continues the boy can be heard breathing heavily, he is shown doing push ups as a myriad of trophies and team pictures go across the screen. As the film grows silent a grown-up Hoffman



Hawksville to Wallenstein, 1976

leaves his bed and begins playing hockey on the pond with the boy. The film is a personal study for Hoffman, he is reaching back into his own childhood and family to capture a moment where he grew up. The film blurs the lines of non-fiction and fiction, while incorporating a home movie quality to the work. Hoffman's next film *The Road Ended at the Beach* (Hoffmann 1983) is a diary film shot over six years in various locations. The bulk of the film follows Hoffman, Richard Kerr and Jim McMurray as they travel east to Cape Breton Nova Scotia to meet with Robert Frank. The film features scenes of the group meeting with various people along the way and shots of the landscapes, reminiscent of a road trip home movie. The film builds up to the meeting with Frank,



On the Pond, 1978



Plein Air Etude, 1991

Hoffman inserting items he wishes to talk to Frank about like certain photographs, the Beatniks and Jack Kerouac. However, the meeting with Frank does not go as planned, Frank dismisses the Beat movement as being over and Kerouac long dead. Again, Hoffman blends home movie aesthetic with experimental filmmaking techniques. Like Hoffman, Richard Kerr's films often revisit locations from childhood, locations close by or documents from road trips. Kerr's film *Canal* takes the viewer to the Welland Canal, which cuts through Kerr's hometown of St. Catharines, Ontario. The film features rusty and beat up hulls of ships moving slowly through the canal and shots of the overgrown old canal. The film is Kerr's love letter to his childhood stomping grounds, exploring the geography of the region and what it means to him. *The Last Days of Contrition* (Kerr 1988), much like *The Road Ended at the Beach*, is a compilation road movie done by Kerr, instead of heading east

Kerr heads south, through the United States ending in the desert. The film is an investigation of American militarism and features dystopic images of decaying locations. The finale of the film is a shot of a camera spinning in the desert with a superimposition of a fighter jet flying overhead. This dizzying sequence as well as *Plein Air Etude* (Kerr 1991) are some of Kerr's forays into Arthur Lipsett like experimentation.

The Escarpment School and its practitioners are deeply entrenched in Canadian cinema. The students were taught cinema as art and studied the non-fiction films of the NFB and American avantgarde. These teachings can be seen throughout their individual bodies of work as influences of Lipsett, McLaren, Jutra and Brault continue to be observed. However, the Escarpment School has been able to develop its own personal style of experimental non-fiction and has added a creative chapter to the expanding history of Canadian cinema.

Across the Escarpment

Curated by Connor Wilkes

1 Richard Kerr *Hawkesville to Wallenstein, 1976, 6:00*

Scenes from a winter day in Hawkesville and Wallenstein in Ontario, north of Kitchener. Kerr focuses on the horse drawn carriages and sleighs; automobiles seem outnumbered here. The film then takes us to a farmers' market and a shed where a man works on crafting components of carriages.

2 Phillip Hoffman *On the Pond, 1978, 9:40*

Hoffman recreates scenes from his childhood, practicing hockey on a frozen pond at the family cottage. The soundtrack interweaves sounds of skates cutting through the ice and Hoffman's family responding to family photos on a 35mm slide projector.

3 Richard Kerr *Canal, 1982, 22:00*

In this film Richard Kerr takes the camera to his hometown St. Catharines, Ontario. Kerr's film was shot on the Welland Canal, featuring rusty ships as they traverse the waterway, dock workers and the overgrown landscape around the canal.

4 Rick Hancox *Waterworx (A Clear Day No Memories), 1982, 5:35*

This film was shot at the R.C. Harris Water Treatment Plant in Toronto. The area was a frequent haunt in childhood for Hancox. The text featured is from Wallace Stevens' poem of the same name, evoking feelings of another time. The eerie audio mixed with images of this seemingly abandoned plant suggest apocalyptic feelings.

5 Richard Kerr *Plein Air Étude, 1991, 5:35*

Featuring frenetic shots of a stone beach, a lake, trees and the sun. This film contains shots taken from his earlier film *Plein Air*, and features some of Kerr's experimental camera techniques. The spinning camera and double exposures add an unsettling effect to the natural elements being filmed.

What Do You Mean You Don't Love Me? Or, How to Stop Worrying and Get in the Tub

DELILAH ROSIER

THROUGHOUT MY RESEARCH, scrubbing through the beautiful, complicated holdings of Vtape, I was led by feeling and intuition. This process allowed me to meditate on my longing for a city at times when I was both in it and absent from it. I remember how Kalale and I wandered along Queen Street West and played a favourite game of *Name-What-Was-Once-There*. This Toronto-ness, intangible, fleeting, is it invisible? Or who is it visible to? You'd know it when you see it, a pride in pointing to storefronts and noting what she used to be, gone now. Clocking the evil eye of developers focused on buildings and businesses shuttered.

I settled early on this lineup; it felt right. I searched for the beauty in the indistinguishability of this city. A back alley here, a café there, an apartment long leased or demolished. To recover memories out of reach. In this program, water bleeds through, penetrating the domestic and leading us back to nature. All the films offer solutions (albeit odd ones): pauses, stillness, absurdity.

My first approach to writing this text involved seeking, sorting, and hoarding

the theory relevant to this program, thirsty for a footnote or two. But I chose to step away from theory and let my feelings guide this process, this writing. Let's imagine those sources waterlogged, rendered illegible. Approaching this form of expression differently than I would have when inside the walls of the institutions where I wrote for many years, might allow for a greater vulnerability and openness.

Michael Achtman's 1996 film *Cool* lets us witness the misadventures of one heartbroken queen and a ripe young cruiser, all backed by a thumping bassline. Familiar: my Toronto was cigarettes on a kitchen table that you don't need to ask to smoke. "What do you mean you don't love me?" Give this cruiser a break. I want to tell her, to yell to her from across the platform, "I've been a queen on a ledge just like you! I'll give you the romance he won't feed you. Wouldn't that be cool?" I want to ask her if those are my punk alley-cruising queens, and places where I bearded and loved and feared, all going down behind what's now an overpriced fast furniture paradise. So solemn, blue feathers shedding from her boa.

Now here's a queen who knows how to smoke, how to pull. She's at her station. The glamour, the romance! She won't be toeing that yellow line. Now, we can't all be shooting up like a queen in the 1990s, so let's get a few things straight. It isn't cool to be afraid of woke people. It is cool to be intersectional, depending on who you talk to.

A wise woman, who would skip school to eat donuts and watch court

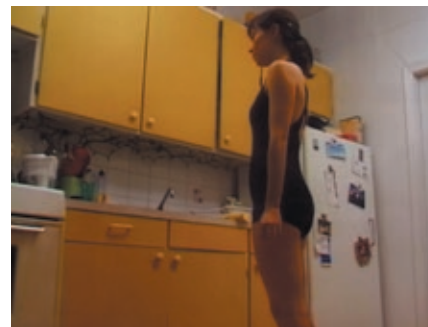


Cool, 1996

cases, once told me it was cool in the 1990s to wear red lipstick, a black beret, and post up at the Rivoli. Wait, speaking of intersectionality, did she say that was cool or was that just what every white woman did? Wait, did she say that was cool, or just how she was trying to score off the queen in the alley? Wait, who taught her to do that? An older man, a musician, who she anonymously, classily, bought draft beer for, who would laugh at her impressions. What's cool is to shut the fuck up and watch this city in all its glory. Roll the Vtapes, stay for the credits. Watch our queen, heeled and boa-ed in the tub. Watch her single lash, floating, and see if it turns up in the sink.

Bath still running, Yudi Sewraj's 2001 video *Apartment Theory* opens on a pie tin in the sink, a foreshadowing of a taste for sugar or starch. The booted clunk up the stairs, winter in this city. On the exterior, we see snow on a roof, a grey sky. My superintendent who lived in my building for 25 years was kicked out by developers. We lived above her. She claims she still hears us: her phantom neighbours. When a psychic asks me if I meditate, I tell her only in natural bodies of water. What's more natural than the body of water from your very own domesticity? Your neglect floats by and catches in your hair.

Watching my program, Fraser reads this act as serenity. I thought of it as surrender. Openness to suffocation on your own dime, on the sponge of your own choosing. She is tending to the belongings, making avant-garde



Apartment Theory, 2001

leaf clippings. Our soon-to-be bather mixes flour and water to make paste. My mother often made me play dough. I imagine the smell. No need for salt if it's caulking we're after; one could use intuition to knead and roll out the tendrils.

Note the iconography of the interior: a familiar Five Roses flour bag turned upside-down. Have you seen the sign? On the Toronto-to-Montreal Mega Bus?

No smell of it like our dirty sugar factory (on the water.) Draw a bath. Fill the holes, lather. Leave the dishes, it will all come out in the wash. These kitchen cupboards are nearly identical to my own. After painting them, I slapped a Kraft single to them. (Theirs are more of a mustard colour.) Submerge in a big, domestic bath: water therapies. When do you fall out of love with the only city you know? When do you decide to paste up the windows and call it a night?

In Blake Williams 2009 *Ladybug Video* I wonder: do we hear the breath of the filmmaker or am I just anxious for her pace, her fragility? The soundtrack, almost borrowed from our friends in their soak. Is their sound system okay? Check the CD for scratches, I hear toothpaste does the trick. Williams' fingers move across a smooth grey round egg-like rock. Our spotted star. She, so glam, moves with small, quick rotations. Get our girl a blue boa to match. Have you heard the male bugs come in blue? Watch his cuticles as she's getting her steps in at the beach. She tries some fancy footwork, a sidestep. A dramatic pause. *Who is following who?* Williams asks. She falls between his fingers as her final act. Curtain call. The ladybug that climbs, while the artist's lent hand moves and changes. Do you remember the great aphid infestation one summer in Toronto? I look up leads and proof, ask Ella if it happened on the island, too. They brought the ladybugs in to feast.

Lesley Loksi Chan's 2007 film *Traveling to Tuesday* leads us through Jonathan's routine, an absurd day in the life.

Habits of comfort and duty. Find him in his undies, tending to the dirt, taking calls. Now that's the makings of a superintendent! On that same island, how I'd like to tell our king in *Cool* about the bushes and the dirt that Jonathan watches, just to be a kind and thoughtful hag. Just to let him know his time will come. And so will he. Moonlight, moonlighting as a bag maker. A passion project, he is drawn to the craft, and they cry for him. Blessed be brother Z, seeking a good time, reaching out in T9. Find dad in the library on a Tuesday, our protagonist thinks he's seen him since. Distracted by the red-eyed fox. Sockless wade into the waters. Dirt surfing. Perusing the bolts, asking after parts. Borrowing to build. His time machine, stationed lakeside, a winged elliptical. Defeated? He smokes, blowing lifeblood and ash into his bags.

My father always wanted me to learn to juggle. As a child, I accidentally

burst a bag and secretly deposited the proof (seeds) into a potted plant. Witnessed them sprout. Fertile evidence. Cicadas ringing on the Island. Commuting back to Tuesday, from island dirt to office. What a modest request, but which Tuesday? When I spent some summers sweating and serving and slinging on the patio of the since-closed Leslieville institution *Stratengers* (1989-2021). Johnny Hicks, a beloved regular was asked where he would like to travel back to, anywhere, at any time. He replied with a similar modesty, "I'd go back to when you could smoke at the bank!"

Rachel Echenberg's *Conversation with My Adult Daughter* (2020) features a mother, still and rooted on a concrete stage. She's in sneakers in the middle of a forest of young skinny trees. A gentle sway, a rock. Daughter's arms around mother's neck. Head resting in the crook. Shifting, knees bent. Can we catch some likeness in



Ladybug Video, 2009



Traveling to Tuesday, 2007

the crouch or the profile or the musculature, the bending of the limbs? So gentle, so dear: we barely see the movements. Begin with a sway. Cradled high, holding. Held, carrying. I want to know if participation was willing, bribed, questioned, or happily accepted. I want to look away, in jealousy, power, and bond in their silence.

My mother died in her apartment in Toronto in April. She died in an apartment that gave her grief. Since becoming a woman (of sorts), whenever I find myself alone, carrying, heavy bags of groceries, I become her.



I summon her and her strength. In other ways, too, of course, like turning up the music too loud for a good song or laughing before the punch line. But in my physicality, the way I straighten my back and hold my chest high, Olympian stance. She used to say that I could transform into anyone I wanted to, with the aid of some drag and by twisting my grin, changing my stance. She would look me in the eye and cackle. Her personal jester. A queen without a boa, catch us laughing too soon to a tune in the tub again, sometime.



My Adult Daughter, 2020

What Do You Mean You Don't Love Me? Or, How to Stop Worrying and Get in the Tub

Curated by Delilah Rosier

1

Michael Achtman
Cool, 1996, 9:39

A poetic monologue on longing, loneliness, vulnerability, desperation, old habits, and new ways. Through Toronto subway platforms and back alleys, *Cool* takes turns following the solo adventures of a newly single drag queen and a young gay man.

2

Yudi Sewraj
Apartment Theory, 2001, 6:30

Pick up a culinary or home improvement hack while witnessing an anonymous duo prepare for a plunge into isolation, privacy, release, and absurdity on a grey winter day. Scored with white noise, *Apartment Theory* offers an entrance into a domestic landscape with a twist.

3

Blake Williams
Ladybug Video, 2009, 1:50

While at the beach in the summer of 2009, filmmaker Blake Williams encountered a ladybug. With an ambient soundtrack of crashing waves and calling gulls, *Ladybug Video* features care and curiosity and leads us in an intimate and gentle dance with a new friend.

4

Lesley Loksi Chan
Traveling To Tuesday, 2007, 23:13

Weaving through rituals, routines, and time, from the office to the lake and the shops in between, *Traveling To Tuesday* offers viewers a slice of the life of a dutiful, crafty young man with an ambitious plan.

5

Rachel Echenberg
Conversation with my Adult Daughter, 2020, 3:00

From the video series *Conversations with my Family*, *Conversation with my Adult Daughter* is a durational performance in which a daughter is held by her mother. Insects and birds inhabiting the lush forest immerse us in a soundscape of chirps and calls.

Artists' Biographies

Michael Achtman is a Toronto born, London based theatre maker, writer, director, audio describer and access consultant. He holds an A.B. from Harvard University and is a graduate of Ryerson University's Acting Program. Achtman has delivered workshops on accessible practice internationally.

Juana Awad is a Canadian Colombian media artist, curator, and cultural catalyst, interested in personal and political histories. Her work ranges from video installation, to music, and performance. Her video works have been widely screened internationally in film festivals including Rio Short Film Festival Brazil, Germany, and Inside-Out Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in Toronto.

Richard Kerr, born in St. Catharines, Ontario 1952, is a Montreal based filmmaker. He teaches experimental cinema at Concordia University. Kerr's large body of work consists of digital and analog film and pushes the materiality of image making process being used.

Lesley Loksi Chan is a Hamilton, Ontario born artist, filmmaker, and educator. She holds a BA in Anthropology and Women's Studies from McMaster University and a BFA and MFA in Film from York University. She is the artistic director of Hamilton artist run center Centre[3].

soJin Chun is a Toronto-based artist, curator, and facilitator exploring alternative dialogues that emerge in-between cultures and disciplines. Her work examines identity, space, and narratives outside of dominant representations to decolonize the process of image-making. Collaboration is essential to her process as she has worked extensively with BIPOC and LGBTQ2S+ communities across Canada and South America.

Rachel Echenberg is a visual artist and educator based in Montreal. Echenberg holds a BFA from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, and an MA in Visual Performance from Dartington College of Arts. From 2011 to 2020 she was a member of the board and programming of VIVA! Art Action. Echenberg is the chairperson of the Fine Arts Department at Dawson College in Westmount, Quebec.

Richard Fung is an artist, educator, and writer born in Trinidad and based in Toronto. His work explores the intersection of race, sexuality, and representation which have been internationally screened and collected; and his essays on cultural politics have been widely published in numerous journals. He is recognized for a substantive body of work that has had a significant influence on the field of LGBTQ Studies and the Bonham Centre Award from Sexual Diversity Studies at the University of

Toronto for distinguished contribution to the public understanding of sexual diversity in Canada.

Alexandra Gelis is a Colombian-Venezuelan artist living and working in Toronto. Her studio practice combines new media, installation, and photography to investigate the ecologies of various landscapes, and examine the traces left by various socio-political interventions. She has exhibited internationally in North America and South America as well as Europe and Ethiopia.

Rick Hancox was born in Toronto in 1946, grew up in Saskatchewan, Prince Edward Island and Ontario. Hancox studied photography and film in New York and Ohio. He began teaching at Sheridan College in the early 1970s and would teach many prominent non-fiction filmmakers. He is both a teacher and practitioner for the Escarpment School.

Phillip Hoffman was born in Kitchener, Ontario, in 1955. Hoffman is a filmmaker and teacher, whose work is focused on personal memory and regional memory. Hoffman's work often incorporates found footage and home movie images. In 2016, Hoffman was awarded the Governor General's Award for Visual and Media Arts.

Tim McCaskell is often referred to as a granddaddy of gay activism in Canada, though he's suggested he prefers the term "dinosaur." In his exhaustive

history of LGBT politics in Toronto and beyond, McCaskell tracks the shifts and shake-ups that transformed the ferocious gay liberation and radical feminism of the 1970s into a mainstream gay politics of assimilation, normativity, and perverse nationalism.

Kent Monkman is an interdisciplinary Cree visual artist, who lives and works in Dish With One Spoon Territory (Toronto, Canada). He is widely known for his thought-provoking interventions, exploring themes of colonization, sexuality, loss and resilience — the complexities of historic and contemporary Indigenous experiences — across painting, film/video, performance, and installation. Monkman's short film and video works have screened at festivals such as the Berlinale and the Toronto International Film Festival.

Yudi Sewraj is a Guyanese interdisciplinary artist and educator living and working in Montreal. He teaches in the Filmmaking and Media Studies department at John Abbot College in Saint Anne de Bellevue, Quebec. His work *A Box of his Own* (1997) is in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada.

Blake Williams is a Houston born, Toronto based artist, filmmaker, programmer, and writer. He holds a BFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts University and a MVS from The University of Toronto. His work has been shown internationally.

Curators' Biographies

Delilah Rosier is an artist and writer born, raised, and based in Tkaronto/Toronto. Her work concerns performance, popular and visual culture through a lens of queer theory, race politics and intersectional feminism. She holds a BA from OCAD U's Criticism and Curatorial Practice program, an MA from York University's Theatre and Performance Studies program, and an MA from OCAD U's Contemporary Art, Design and New Media Histories. During the program, she wrote an autoethnographic major research paper about the cultural production and lived experiences of her best friends/chosen family.

Marvin Veloso is an interdisciplinary artist, researcher, and organizer based in Toronto. His practice explores the intersection of urban ecology, queer identity, and cultural resilience through moving images, installation, writing, and performance. He holds an Honours BA from York University in Culture and Expression; a certificate in Cultural and Artistic Practices for Environmental and Social Change (YorkU); and an advanced diploma in graphic design.

Hailing from Hamilton, **Connor Wilkes** is a recent graduate from the Film and Photography Preservation+Collections Management (MA) program at Toronto Metropolitan University. He currently lives and works in St. Catharines, where he received his undergraduate degree in Film Studies and Interactive Arts and Science at Brock University. Connor is interested in studying the history of Canadian Art Cinema, regional television and early video collectives. Connor's artistic practice involves analog film, video and experimental projection techniques.

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