



# Digital Now— Responses to Spring 2023 Screenings

With contributions from

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# Response to Reimagining Queer Liberation

Renata Azevedo Moreira

*Renata Azevedo Moreira, humbly borrowing statements and reflections from the April 26th screening and its following discussion with artists and audience.*

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The reflex on the water burns like flames of fire  
Ardent flares float within the surface, violent, relentless  
Like survivors,  
Ubiquitous to those who opt to see  
Hiding in redness, observers stand still  
Trying to save themselves like rain drops in a pond

Sparkles of calm sprouting from havoc  
Hoping someone will hear them

In fact, if you pay attention  
You'll end up noticing the cage  
As there isn't enough room to scream in this city  
Not enough sites where one may yell in peace

So the air becomes rarefied  
Buildings make the sound bounce back  
When walking away is not an option,  
"I wanna be the warm place you return to"

I do wonder what became of that happiness  
If that was "closer to what it is like to exist"  
"I never got to be a boy", but as a child  
I honored the person I was able to be

Not knowing we were acting queerly,  
We found a spot full of light  
A delicious box of berries  
And to celebrate, we sighed

And then we sat down, frankly fulfilled  
Or as close to that as we'd ever be  
Finally accepting the stately fact  
That "to be vulnerable is to be free"  
Because some things are so hard to admit

Like that your "desires were born with trauma"  
Or that "your favourite gift would be a pile of dirt"  
That discomfort is the only way forward

And liberation demands you to sit  
With uneasiness

Overcoming can sometimes mean  
Living with it  
And “finding movement in places that are Stagnate”  
Or expressing your loneliness  
To the crowd  
Takes an amount of believing  
And insisting, and resisting  
That only queer dreams  
Can allow.

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A few disparate  
notes on watching  
Reimagining Queer  
Liberation, curated  
by Jacob Crepault

Dhvani Ramanujam

On April 26th, Pleasure Dome screened Reimagining Queer Liberation, curated by Jacob Crepault. This was the organization's first in-person program in a few years, and it was screened at the Artscape Youngplace building near Queen and Shaw.

A cluster of 10 short experimental films, each of them plays on our expectations of what counts as 'queer liberation' in personal and intimate ways. A recurring theme perhaps is not so much a 'reimagining' of liberation as much as it is a wrestling--a wrestling with conflicting sexual and romantic desires, and a wrestling with our own bodies and their drive to find a place in an increasingly inhospitable world that is often



cruel to marginalized bodies that fail to abide by heterosexual norms.

“What can you tell from the bones?”

“I think I did like being violated in hindsight...”

“This body should never have been mine”

“There are so few places to scream in this city”

“Do I like to be made an object...or is that all I’ve ever known?”

“This gift makes me feel like I am not known by her”

“Could I have made you fall for me...do you think?”

“It’s just queer heartbreak.”

Like an underlying current, how we contend with heartbreak--by other people, by the (increasingly) unlivable cities we inhabit, and by how our own bodies seem to fail us--reverberates across the program.

Here, queer liberation finds a home in the abstract and the experimental which cannot be easily rationalized, consumed, or translated. There is no totalizing answer to the question of what queer liberation is to each of these filmmakers but the films are nonetheless political, locating the political in disparate fragments of queer experience, through particular objects, colours, sounds, textures, limbs...

“Can a hand ever replace a face?”<sup>1</sup>

If queer bodies are also fragmentary, constantly in a state of transition and flux, zones of touch emerge as the site of the political in the everyday. Hands in particular appear as a recurring vessel for seeking intimacies that language fails to grasp: a hand creeps through the dirt, a hand rolls an apple around in its palm, a hand washes strawberries in the sink,

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<sup>1</sup> Aaditya Aggarwal, “HANDMADE CINEMA: The Tactile Autofictions of Lesley Loksi Chan,” in *Imagining Futures of Experimental Media*, ed. Aaditya Aggarwal et al., (Ontario: Pleasure Dome, 2023), 115.

a hand slowly caresses a glittering chest of hair.

Here, queer liberation is framed as an ache, a yearning, a constant search for answers to questions that remain unresolved.

### Works Cited

Aggarwal, Aaditya. "HANDMADE CINEMA: The Tactile Autofictions of Lesley Loksi Chan." *In Imagining Futures of Experimental Media*, edited by Aaditya Aggarwal et al., 113-127. Ontario: Pleasure Dome, 2023.



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# What is Queer Liberation?

Cody Rooney

What is Queer Liberation? Is there such a thing? What are the constraints and inhibitions which keep queer people hidden, trapped, or defined by socio-cultural imperatives, gender constructs, hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy, and the like? Reimagining Queer Liberation, presented by PleasureDome, guest programmed by Jacob Crepeault, and featuring new works by 2SLGBTQIA+ Canadian artists, reminds us that liberation is an evasive concept at best. Amorphous, ephemeral, and fleeting, but also ecstatic, visceral, and embodied. The screening, composed of 9 consecutive works, probes concepts of self-expression, adolescence, memory, trauma, corporeality, kink, religious ideology, transness, banality, intimacy, menstruation, and



queerness as a socio-historical construct. What emerges is a new media spectacle, a cacophony of hypermediation marked by a palpable abstraction throughout; discordant sounds, textures, and visuals congeal to form narrative and thematic pulses throughout the works, each film contorting the contours of realism, imbuing a sense of embodied, considered catharsis. These are films that do not shy away from surrealism.

Sam Gurry's *Up Close* ruminates on loneliness, sexual desire, and tactilities through a frenetic montage of haptic visuals, paintings, and textures that beckon the spectator towards touch; a proxy for the longing intrinsic to queer bodies. Meanwhile, Trâm Anh Nguyễn's *To Boyhood, I Never Knew Him* meditates, through found footage and poesis, on the artist's grappling with their own transness, their loss of adolescence, and the uncanny discordance between personal memory and documented reality. In a similar vein, Lina Wu's *Rain To Eaves*, an animated short, provides a tale of searching and longing for intimacy. "I am a bug beneath your upturned rock," they opine. Here, the power of intimacy and the intensity of desire are palpable in the artist's approximation of themselves at the behest of their lover's omniscience. These films at once evoke the longing for innocence, intimacy, nostalgia, and the palpable trauma that in some ways becomes intrinsic to queer identity.

Similarly, liberation for Yace Sula in *Ele of the Dark* exists, perhaps, in grappling with this trauma. The work, a meditation on blackness and existing outside of the gender binary, is replete with frenetic imagery and hyper-mediated visuals layered in abstraction. The artist's face, rendered in high contrast colors, provides the backdrop for their accompanied silhouettes, a juxtaposition that calls to mind the longing for oneself in the wake of enduring pain and confusion. Here, liberation exists in mining the depths of



one's history and subjectivity; incorporating and processing traumatic memory through hallucinatory abstraction.

Where Nguyen, Sula, and Gurry probe longing, identity, and trauma, M.O Guzman's *Is This Liberation?* problematizes the concept of queer liberation in its entirety. What characterizes queer liberation, and how do we define liberatory practice? Guzman mulls over sexuality, religious ideology, and self-destruction, all within a tongue-in-cheek bawdy sensibility which ultimately proposes that queer liberation is yet to be defined for the artist and perhaps exists in the muddy and expansive practices of attempting to reach it.

Elsewhere, For Madi Piller and Sina Awsémoon's *Anymore*, queerness is interrogated through the distinct tactilities of the body, wrestling with the artist's own connection to their body hair. The piece, a montage of trees, leaves, textures, drone shots, and celluloid images, is punctuated by an eerily discordant and meandering digital soundscape, juxtaposing the synthetic with the organic and deconstructing conceptions of binaries in the process.

Madeleine Scott interrogates the banality of queerness, connection, and intimacy, examining the pedestrian details of connection that become so paramount in creating a genuine and authentic knowing of the other. Her spoken word tale recounting receiving Aesop Handsoap as a gift becomes an absurdist intimation of the slippery experience of becoming vulnerable. In doing so, Scott's piece connects queer intimacy to larger conceptions of the human condition, calling into question those wholly ordinary moments which become essential in fostering intimacy.

Where perhaps queer liberation for Scott arrives in the mundane, Channelle Lajoie's *Grand Mother Tongue*



proposes a culturally based interpretation. The artist pairs poetry, spoken in Plains Cree, with visceral images detailing the affective experience of eating fruit, evoking a sense of consumption in the vein of Bell Hooks' 'Eating the Other.' Here, however, colonial consumption is reversed, being replaced by pleasure and connection. The work calls to mind desire, sensuality, the loss of culture and language, and the power in resilience, pleasure, and cultural memory. In this sense, queer liberation becomes expansive, intersecting with self and community to form spaces of resistance and connection.

Reimagining Queer Liberation, perhaps in all of its frenzied abstraction, proposes that Queer Liberation is inherently kaleidoscopic. In the surrealist frenzy of queer lived experience, in the fleshy embodied spaces of shame and acceptance, intimacy and longing, memory and presence, bliss and carnal pleasure we find emancipation.



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Water Thicker Than  
Water On Pleasure  
Dome's Blood Ties:  
Reimagining  
Interconnection

Fan Wu

*I would be a falcon and go free.  
I tread her wrist and wear the hood,  
talking to myself, and would draw blood.*

– Robert Duncan, “My Mother Would Be a Falconress”

*Conundrum of our asymmetry.*

Must it be that the family tree, in motions of stroke-and-strangulation, always gets the last word? For those of us for whom blood is thin, we dream of dissolving ourselves as animals do like water in water; of rejoining the immanence of a world in which we are no longer distinguished from our surround. Duncan's falcon flies beyond the sane horizon,

loses his sense of the Human, and returns with a feral taste for his falconress Mother's blood, so eating what he's made of. I want the thrum of a cosmic ecology to drown out the noise of family. But we are cursed with the burden of knowing just enough about where we came from to bet unwisely on our inherited proportions of pain to freedom.

*When do you things with your hands,  
you heal from places lower than you cry from.*

Even after she dies you return to the same perch, re-adopting the same blind spots, pacing the same short corner of a world. Time laps(e), same as in gym class when you're fifty times around the track and about to puke from your lungs. Alveoli dilates and the air you take – ranked last of all the boys – turns to stone in the mouth, like how grief is the paradox of a growing fossil. I'm thirsty for an oasis in which only water is thicker than water, and all arbitrary bonds evaporate, and we live only by lines of passion. But maybe that's just because my mama left me behind when I was two years old, so all those old scars have had time to stew. Blood, sputum, sweetmeats in the beak. A wingbeat then folded flight muted by snow.

*He's selfish, but generous enough to placate you so he can get what he wants.*

Companionship ought to be an inventory of affection, not hole & funnel into one other alone. What happens when it buckles under the weight of an asymmetry that can no longer be ignored? "I'm always the one making the calls, giving the care, leaving the best of myself behind so nothing obstructs his desire from taking slutty flight." The best of us masochists succumb to the callous-hearted, because we enjoy the intensity of squeezing ourselves real small to fit into their unbending worlds. In traces it's the remnants of love that carve seismic fissures in two lives tenuously held



together. “I could not possibly have returned to friendship, to even countenance the possibility of fellow feelings.” All that’s left, then, is a space between, and perhaps one last desperate plea: oh do not sow the bitterer seed...

*Qualms wash over me.*

# CONTRIBUTORS

**Renata Azevedo Moreira** is a Brazilian author, researcher, and curator based in Toronto. She holds a Ph.D in Communication Studies from the University of Montreal, with a research focused on the exhibition of media arts, in particular the dialogue established between the curatorial gesture and the processual creation of the artwork. Aside from her independent curatorial work, Renata has held curatorial positions at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, Ada X feminist artist-run centre, and gallery Arts Visuels Émergents in Montréal. Her exhibition reviews have been published in magazines such as *Border Crossings* and *Esse arts+opinions*, and she has presented at conferences such as the Association of Art Museum Curators in NYC and the University Arts Association of Canada in Toronto. Renata currently sits on the Board and is a member of the Programming Committee at the media art centre Trinity Square Video.

**Dhvani Ramanujam** is an emerging curator, writer, and PhD student in Cinema and Media Studies at York University. Her current research and curatorial practice focuses on the materiality of experimental moving image and sound art, particularly attuned to queer, feminist, and speculative archival practices in contemporary exhibitions.

**Cody Rooney** is a PhD candidate in Communication and Culture at Toronto Metropolitan University. As a writer and multimedia artist, Cody's research and work in film, photography, and digital culture explores concepts of post-digital visibility, memory, nostalgia, post-structuralism, and critical theory. He is the Founder/Editor-In-Chief of *Liminul Magazine* ([www.liminul.xyz](http://www.liminul.xyz)), a digital arts and culture publication based in Toronto.

**Fan Wu** is an entity composed of the woman crying on a bench in *Vive L'amour* mixed with the dimming of universal light upon raw potatoes in *The Turin Horse*. His current practice explores the expansiveness of intuition through the guidance of Zhuangzi, Georges Bataille, Mei-meï Berssenbrugge, and many other practitioners of what he calls a *poethics of immanence*. You can read him online in *Pleasure Dome's* new ebook, *C Magazine*, and *MICE Magazine*. Get in touch with him for play or business at [fanwu4u@gmail.com](mailto:fanwu4u@gmail.com).



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