

**QUEERING THE CABLE AIRWAVES: THE EVOLUTION OF LGBTQ2+
COMMUNITY TELEVISION IN ONTARIO, CANADA (1977-2001)**

AXELLE DEMUS

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on archival research, oral history interviews, and close reading, this dissertation develops a history of LGBTQ2+ cable access television programming in the province of Ontario, Canada from 1977 to 2001. In particular, this dissertation traces cable access's entanglements with local LGBTQ2+ groups and movements, as well as with other forms of media dedicated to amplifying LGBTQ2+ causes in the province. I argue that LGBTQ2+ community television programming was guided by what I conceptualize as queer access mobilization, a process through which queer individuals and groups mobilize to increase access to media and information, as well as access to social, cultural, and/or political networks. In other words, I show that local queer groups and individuals took to the platform with hopes of reaching out to wider constituencies, building solidarity with other groups and individuals at a time when the LGBTQ2+ movement was gaining ground in the province and in Canada as a whole, and communicating information that was not readily available via the mainstream media. I further posit that queer access mobilizations are deeply rooted in an ethics of care and a praxis of connection, as I attend to the relational and affective dimensions of cable access programming. This dissertation, therefore, tells both the story of the LGBTQ2+ movement in Ontario through the lens of cable access television, and the story of the medium of cable access television through the eyes of the LGBTQ2+ movement. It proposes an innovative way of doing media history and queer history, while foregrounding the voices of individuals who were often not included in official histories of LGBTQ2+ activism in the province. It also tells the story of LGBTQ2+ cable access archives, how they came to be, how they can be recovered, and how they can be mobilized in the digital age.

DEDICATION

To Chris Bearchell.

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Much like the programs discussed in this study, this dissertation was, in many, many, ways, a collaborative endeavour. I will, however, keep this brief. This dissertation would not have been possible without:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBC Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

C(L)GRO Coalition for (Lesbian and) Gay Rights in Ontario

CRTC Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission

CSAB Coalition to Stop Anita Bryant

GNV Gay News and Views

GO Gays of/d'Ottawa

GOC Gay Offensive Collective

GTB Gays of Thunder Bay

GTC Gay TV Collective

LGL Lakehead Gay Liberation

LGBTQ2+ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two-Spirit

LOON Lesbians of Ottawa Now

NGRC National Gay Rights Coalition

NFB National Film Board of Canada

TGM Thunder Gay Magazine

TSMBOH This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION: “A MEDIUM FOR EVERYBODY”

“We must insist upon the fact that only homosexuals can speak knowledgably about homosexuality, we must insist there is nothing “offensive” about – for example – casual instances of same-sex affection. When we reach out to our community, it must be on *our* terms, with *our* message. Not theirs.”¹

“All cable television systems will be required to provide as a matter of priority, certain basic services to the community...to enrich community life by fostering communication among individuals and community groups...This is a process which involves direct citizen participation in programme planning and production. Access to the community channel is the responsibility of the cable television licensee, but the means which are employed to best further the use of a channel for the local citizenry, to establish fair access, and to facilitate production, can be as varied as necessary to satisfy local needs.”²

Accessing the Media, Empowering Communities: The Rise of Cable Access Television in Canada

In the early 1970s, Canadians equipped with a cable television system were able to tune in to their local community channel for the first time. Now available to viewers were programs made by people *like them* on topics that spoke *to them*. These cable access programs, indeed, were meant to reflect the growing diversity of Canadian society and the rich local lives of its citizens. Cable access channels aired programs about local cultural events, such as figure skating competitions, as well as religious and multicultural programming, and broke new ground by broadcasting shows made by and for gays and lesbians at a time when LGBTQ2+ lives were often relegated to the margins of television and society (Figures 1 and 2). Cable access, therefore, not only allowed viewers to see themselves on the screen, but also constituted an

¹ “On Our Terms,” Editorial, *The Body Politic*, no. 38, November 1977, 2.

² CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission), “Canadian Broadcasting ‘A Single System,’” Policy Statement on Cable Television, July 16, 1971, 18.

important means of production and distribution for people from historically excluded communities.³ Such community programs developed following a policy statement by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) which encouraged Canadian cable companies to provide equipment, training, and transmission for “citizen-produced programming” in 1971.⁴ A year later, over a hundred cable systems in Canada were offering a community channel, and in 1975, the CRTC started requiring large cable companies to allocate 10% of their revenues to community channels, as they declared that the community channel should “become a primary social commitment of the cable television licensee.”⁵ Eventually, in 1991, “community” was recognized as one of the three pillars of the Canadian Broadcasting Act, alongside private and public broadcasting.⁶ Taking an interdisciplinary approach to the study of cable access in Canada, this dissertation looks back to community television’s beginnings in the 1970s, tracing its evolution in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, to examine how LGBTQ2+ people, in particular, interacted with cable access in the province of Ontario.

Programs made by and for LGBTQ2+ communities in Ontario form a powerful archive of social history and are a testament of the struggles and victories of queer people during key decades of the movement in the region. Upon viewing queer cable access programs for the first time, one cannot help but feel profoundly moved by the efforts of those who made this kind of

³ Marusya Bociurkiw, “Big Affect: The Ephemeral Archive of Second-Wave Feminist Video Collectives in Canada,” *Camera Obscura* 31, no. 3 (2016): 5–33; John Downing, *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001), 39; Douglas Kellner, *Television and The Crisis of Democracy* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1990), 208.

⁴ Kim Goldberg, *The Barefoot Channel: Community Television as a Tool for Social Change* (Vancouver: New Star Book, 1990), 10.

⁵ Goldberg, 15-17; Michael Lithgow, “Transformations of Practice, Policy, and Cultural Citizenships in Community Television” in *Alternative Media in Canada*, ed. Kristen Kozolanka, Patricia Mazepa, and David Skinner (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012), 129.

⁶ Christopher Ali, *Media Localism: The Policies of Place* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 85.

programming possible. The ability to *see* and *hear* the stories of people who have made tremendous contributions to local and national Canadian queer histories, as opposed to accessing them solely through the printed word, cannot be understated. The sensory experience of watching LGBTQ2+ cable access tapes—which is at once intimate and communal, familiar and alienating—is both a testimony of what was and of “a future time and place, a not-yet-here.”⁷ Revisiting the (queer) archives of cable access also makes evident the value of the medium, as community cable gave ordinary and underrepresented people the opportunity to express and perform themselves on screen. In a sense, then, cable access was a precursor to YouTube or TikTok— although more community oriented.



Figure 1. Opening Credits for Toronto Here and Now on Rogers Cable 10 (1978).

The ArQuives, Documentary Moving Image Collection, 2003-108/01F.

⁷ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 149.



Figure 2. The three hosts of the Ice Show on Rogers Cable TV (1978).
The ArQuives, Documentary Moving Image Collection, 2003-108/01F.

Much like these contemporary media platforms, cable access was part of a movement to make mass media more accessible, as new audiovisual technologies became increasingly available. In Canada, efforts to include ordinary citizens and marginalized voices in the film and video-making process can be traced back to the National Film Board (NFB) of Canada's initiative, *Challenge for Change/Société Nouvelle* (1967-1980).⁸ Informed by optimistic views about citizen access to and political use of mass media technologies, the project meant for documentary filmmakers to collaborate with various communities instead of merely documenting them.⁹ While most of these NFB films were shot on 16mm film, *Challenge for Change/Société Nouvelle* also took advantage of the advent of portable video and its playback

⁸ Deirdre Boyle, *Subject to Change: Guerrilla Television Revisited* (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1997); Peggy Gale, and Lisa Steele, *Video Re/View: The (Best) Source Book for Canadian Artists and Video* (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1996); Goldberg, *The Barefoot Channel*; Margaret Munro, *Public Access Cable Television in the United States and Canada: With an Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Praeger, 1975); Thomas Waugh et. al. *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2010).

⁹ Waugh et. al., *Challenge for Change*, 4.

abilities, which allowed for “instantaneous discussions with the documentary subjects.”¹⁰ In the late 1960s, for instance, the Sony PortaPak was introduced to a consumer market. The subsequent launch of the Video Cassette Recorder (VCR) in the 1970s, as well as the commercialization of the camcorder in the 1980s, brought media production “to the neighborhoods: the playgrounds and garages, the town councils and the local dumps.”¹¹

Challenge for Change/Société Nouvelle thus operated according to a simple, yet compelling principle: that the active participation of people in the media making process went hand in hand with their empowerment.¹²

The NFB project set precedents for horizontal ways of making media in Canada; in emphasizing the importance of citizen communication via film and video, Challenge for Change/Société Nouvelle served as an inspiration for the creation of audiovisual works made by and for ordinary, sometimes marginalized, people. Combined with the advent of new and relatively affordable video technologies, Challenge for Change/Société Nouvelle sparked the development of a rich community media infrastructure in Canada which included activist video collectives, as well as alternative media hubs and artist-run centres that provided access to media equipment, training, production and distribution facilities, and established networks for film/video makers—such as the Metro Media Society (Vancouver), the Satellite Video Exchange Society (also known as Video Inn, Vancouver), or Trinity Square Video (Toronto).¹³

¹⁰ Sara Diamond, “Daring Documents: The Practical Aesthetics of Early Vancouver Video,” in *Video Re/View*, *Video Re/view: The (best) Source Book for Critical Writings on Canadian Artists’ Video*, ed. Peggy Gale and Lisa Steele (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1996), 176.

¹¹ DeeDee Halleck, *Hand-Held Visions: The Impossible Possibilities of Community Media* (Bronx, New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 7.

¹² Goldberg, *The Barefoot Channel*, 13.

¹³ Peggy Gale and Lisa Steele, *Video Re/View*; Jennifer Abbott, *Making Video “In”: The Contested Ground of Alternative Video on the West Coast* (Vancouver: Video In Studios, 2000).

The creation of cable access television coincided with these technological and infrastructural developments, as the medium of television, too, took on different dimensions and meanings in the early 1970s. Television, often seen as the lowbrow counterpart of cinema, was beginning to be understood as a useful, even democratic, medium.¹⁴ In 1970, Dorothy Todd Hénaut, an early participant in Challenge for Change/Société Nouvelle, announced in the U.S.-based video journal *Radical Software* that “[t]elevision ha[d] the potential for being a technological town meeting, an important instrument in re-democratization.”¹⁵ Hénaut optimistically thought of the emerging medium of cable television as an opportunity for communication to become “a two-way street” in Canada:¹⁶

Broadcast TV has the advantage of being in every home...but it also has the weighty disadvantage of being tied into network demands and commercial imperatives...Cable, on the other hand, has the inestimable advantage of being underdeveloped. Alternatives are still possible.¹⁷

Cable TV, therefore, was to be “the forum through which the many segments of the community will be able to talk to each other, a medium for everybody.”¹⁸ With the advent of community cable channels, “ordinary citizens” now had access to cameras, editing suites, and production vehicles, and received help from cable company staff who provided training and volunteer opportunities to produce their very own television shows.¹⁹ Canada was a pioneer in the

¹⁴ Ralph M. Negrine, *Cable Television and the Future of Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 1985), 9.

¹⁵ Dorothy Todd Hénaut, “A Report from Canada: Television as Town Meeting,” *Radical Software* 1, no. 2 (Autumn 1970): 17.

¹⁶ Cable television first appeared in Canada in 1952 as “community antenna television,” or CATV. In the mid-1960s, cable systems spread rapidly and became included in the Canadian broadcasting system. See: André H. Caron and James R. Taylor, “Cable at the Crossroads: An Analysis of the Canadian Cable Industry,” in *Cable Television and the Future of Broadcasting*, ed. Ralph M. Negrine (London: Routledge, 1985), 47-73.

¹⁷ Hénaut, “A Report from Canada”: 17.

¹⁸ Goldberg, *The Barefoot Channel*, 7.

¹⁹ Lithgow, “Transformations of Practice,” 129.

development of cable access, with the world's first community television centre opening in Thunder Bay, Ontario, in 1970, a year before the official CRTC policy was announced.²⁰

In addition, the creation of community media and television coincided with the development of various social movements across the country, following the Long Sixties and the waves of protests that spilled over from the United States. In fact, even before the advent of video and cable access television, the availability of media technologies had created new conduits and possibilities for communities that were struggling to have their voices heard in the public sphere. As Angela Phillips notes, the alternative press, with its accompanying venues for publishing and distribution, historically provided “a voice to those on the social or political margins.”²¹ Film, too, was used for political ends, even prior to the NFB's Challenge for Change/Société Nouvelle, through revolutionary filmmaking movements like the Latin America-based Third Cinema movement.²²

Canadian second-wave feminists, for instance, took to using video and cable access early on. In 1974, the NFB, pressured by women within the organization, carried on with its efforts to connect communities via film and video by launching the feminist film production unit Studio D.²³ Feminists also formed various media production collectives across the country—Reelfeelings, Women in Focus, Amelia Productions, Isis Women and Film—to address issues that mattered to the women's movement. They created trailblazing works that documented the various feminist protests that were taking place in the country at the time, and discussed topics

²⁰ Ali, *Media Localism*, 85.

²¹ Angela Phillips, “The Alternative Press,” in *The Alternative Media Handbook*, ed. Kate Coyer, Tony Downmunt, and Alan Fountain (London: Routledge, 2007), 47.

²² Chris Robé, “Autonomous Rebellion: The Twilight of Leninism, Film, and Unions,” in *Breaking the Spell: A History of Anarchist Filmmakers, Videotape Guerrillas, and Digital Ninjas* (Oakland, California: PM Press, 2017), 21-66.

²³ Elizabeth Anderson, “Studio D's Imagined Community: From Development (1974) to Realignment (1986-1990),” in *Gendering the Nation: Canadian Women's Cinema*, ed. Brenda Longfellow, Kass Banting, Kay Armatage, and Janine Marchessault (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 41-61.

such as sexism, education, sexual assault, ageing, motherhood, Indigenous rights, and sexual orientation.²⁴ As feminist scholar and media activist Marusya Bociurkiw argues: “While Canadians were consuming U.S. television programs like never before, the artists and activists involved in women’s collectives were creating social issue documentaries, experimental works and sometimes cable television series that archived a vibrant era of political and social change.”²⁵ Additionally, these collectives were often a place for lesbian feminists, who may have felt alienated from gay men’s concerns, to discuss and represent their lives.

Parallel to and following these first feminist endeavours, gays and lesbians who had been mobilizing and gathering strength under the banner of the Gay Liberation Movement also saw video and cable access as valuable tools. As the editorial from the *Body Politic* quoted earlier suggests, gay and lesbian communities across Canada were eager to “reach out to [the] community on [their] terms, with [their] message.”²⁶ While gays and lesbians, like feminists, had already started communicating with others like themselves through the creation of newspapers, magazines, newsletters, and phone lines, with the advent of cable access, queer communities also hoped to respond to negative mainstream media portrayals and misinformation by reaching larger audiences—whether gay or straight. No longer would lesbians and gays solely be the object, often ridiculed, silenced, or stereotyped, of the mass media. Tuning into your community channel now meant seeing, as one *Globe and Mail* article put it in 1977, “the real thing”—or at least, what the community wanted viewers to see.²⁷ Across various provinces, teams of highly

²⁴ Bociurkiw, “Big Affect;” Diamond, “Daring Documents.”

²⁵ Bociurkiw, 6.

²⁶ David Mole, “Rights of Access: Cable, FM and the Dailies. One Foot in the Door, Two Doors in the Face,” *The Body Politic*, no. 38, November 1977, 2.

²⁷ “Backstage,” *Globe and Mail*, September 17, 1977, 29.

creative and passionate individuals mobilized behind and in front of the camera to bring never-before-seen images of queerness on Canadian television sets.

Community television programming in Canada was very much local in nature; what Darren Ingram calls the “hyperlocal” focus of cable access television can be explained, partly, by the highly regionalized character of Canada and its division into semi-independent provinces and territories.²⁸ As the CRTC highlighted in its 1971 policy statement, “in Canada’s hugeness, regional situations vary greatly; and broadcasting policy must take this into account.”²⁹ Parallel to this political emphasis on regionalism, the structure of cable communications systems itself restricted the geographical scope of cable access, as the reach of community cable stations would be set up to serve specific local markets, or “licenced areas.” The CRTC insisted that the community channel should be “the channel of a distribution undertaking that is used by a licensee or by a community programming undertaking for the distribution of community programming *within a licensed area of the distribution undertaking* (my emphasis).”³⁰ The CRTC further stressed that the programming produced had to be relevant to and reflective of “the community served in the licensed area.”³¹

While programs by and for queer communities were broadcast in large Canadian cities like Vancouver (British Columbia), Winnipeg (Manitoba), and Calgary (Alberta), the province of Ontario has a particularly rich history of LGBTQ2+ programming, which spans the beginning of the 1970s to the early 2000s. From Toronto to Thunder Bay via Ottawa, LGBTQ2+ people embraced cable access to televise their experiences both for local queer individuals and for the

²⁸ Darren Ingram, “Culture Under Threat: Minority Hyperlocal Television in Finland,” *View: Journal of European Television History and Culture* 7, no. 15 (2019).

²⁹ CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission), “Canadian Broadcasting: A Single System,” Policy Statement on Cable Television, July 16, 1971, 3.

³⁰ “Broadcasting Distribution Regulations,” Broadcasting Act, December 8, 1997, SOR/97-555, <https://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/SOR-97-555/FullText.html>

³¹ “Broadcasting Distribution Regulations.”

broader public watching on their cable-connected televisions at home. For these reasons, this dissertation grounds itself primarily in the English Canadian context through a focus on programs which were broadcast on Skyline Cablevision, Ottawa Cablevision, Rogers Cable, Maclean Hunter, and Metro Cable in the province of Ontario.

Argument and Theoretical Framework: Queer Access Mobilization

In tracing cable access's entanglements with gay and lesbian organizations and other forms of queer media, I argue that LGBTQ2+ community television programming was guided by what I conceptualize as queer access mobilization. Queer access mobilization denotes a process through which queer individuals mobilize to increase access to media and information, as well as access to social, cultural, and/or political networks. Queer access mobilization is thus primarily motivated by desires for both knowledge circulation and sociality, as desires to access and distribute information go hand in hand with desires to access, build, and sustain local communities. By using cable access television, local queer groups and individuals were able to, in various capacities, reach out to wider constituencies, build solidarity with other groups and individuals at a time when the LGBTQ2+ movement was gaining ground in the province and in Canada as a whole, and communicate information that was not readily available via the mainstream media.

I further posit that queer access mobilizations are deeply rooted in an ethics of care and a praxis of connection. In that sense, my work aligns with communications scholar Alessandra Renzi's study of "connective activism," which she defines as "modes of struggle for justice that keep social connection and an ethics of care at the core of political organizing...through

collaborative media production and distribution.”³² It also aligns with media historian Cait McKinney’s analysis of “information activism,” a concept which “brings together people, their visions of justice, and the media they use to organize, store, and provide access to information.”³³ However, my approach differs in various and significant ways. First, although the word “mobilization” can be used as a substitute for “activism” and certainly has political connotations, I suggest that not all queer access mobilizations are inherently “activist.” While some cable access shows, for instance, were explicitly connected to activist circles, others were not so expressly political or radical—despite desires to communicate and share information. Then, I argue that, in the case of queer cable access programs, care happened both behind, on, and in front of the screen: from the cumulative hours it took to make such programs, to the topics discussed on the television screen, and the impulses that motivated viewers to watch the programs and to keep tuning in. Furthermore, by focusing on the social aspect of media making, I also attend to the affective dimensions of community media work and its accompanying feelings of joy, pleasure, frustration, and disappointment, as well as to the relational dimensions, both positive and negative, which made these cable access programs possible—and, at times, utterly impossible.

From early print media to today’s digital environment, it can be argued that other types of media used by queer people over time embody, in one way or other, a form of queer access mobilization. Yet, and without falling into the pitfalls of technological determinism, I see cable access television as a rather unique experiment. Through collaborative uses of the media anchored in an ethos of relationality and mutuality, LGBTQ2+ people involved in community

³² Alessandra Renzi, *Hacked Transmissions: Technology and Connective Activism in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 2.

³³ Cait McKinney, *Information Activism: A Queer History of Lesbian Media Technologies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 2.

television production were also able to engage in community building practices and find a sense of belonging which, to some extent, countered the dominant capitalist uses of audiovisual technologies and communication systems.³⁴ Community television programs were also experiments in transmediality, which built on and brought together various media genres and formats, such as newsletters, zines, and phone lines. As such, community television, as suggested earlier, foreshadowed contemporary forms of media expression and platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, or TikTok and pointed to a more interconnected media future—a “network society.”

“A Place to Stand, a Place to Grow”: Why Ontario?

I have chosen to focus on LGBTQ2+ cable access programs in Ontario for several reasons. First, due to the highly local nature of both cable access and the queer movement Canada, focusing on Ontario-based shows allows for an in-depth exploration of their significance and impacts on the LGBTQ2+ communities located there. Focusing on the regional level also means looking outside of the province’s capital city, Toronto, to offer a more balanced account of cable access and its histories. My hope is that, by proposing a multi-city analysis of queer activism in Toronto, Ottawa, and Thunder Bay through the lens of community television, this dissertation enriches our understanding of queer histories in Ontario—although I remain aware that Ontario is a vast region, which encompasses much more than just these three cities.

Furthermore, scholarship on cable access in the province—and in Canada in general—is largely lacking, as discussed in further detail in the following sections of this dissertation.

LGBTQ2+ community TV shows in Ontario may have Wikipedia entries or brief mentions in academic works on queer activism in Canada, but there have been few efforts to connect them—

³⁴ Donna L. King and Christopher Mele, “Making Public Access Television: Community Participation, Media Literacy and the Public Sphere,” *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 43, no. 4 (1999): 619.

as well as the people who made these shows possible—together; in other words, there have been very few attempts at exploring the relations between these programs, their creators, and the larger waves of mobilizations happening in the province and/or in the country, and it is only recently that sustained attention has started to be paid to some individual shows, such as the *Toronto Living With AIDS* series (1990-1991).³⁵ Therefore, much work remains to be done to historicize these programs in their local setting.

While most existing accounts of cable access deal with the American context, my analysis of cable access television does not purport to be a comparison between cable access in the U.S. and cable access in Canada. Nor does it purport to treat the two systems as effectively similar and transpose existing analyses of cable access TV in the U.S to the Canadian context—despite undeniable similarities between Canadian programs and American ones. Although both cable access systems started roughly at the same time, they developed and took hold quite differently in both countries. Therefore, by looking at community TV in Ontario, I treat cable access in Canada as distinct from its American neighbour. At the same time, I also deliberately devote much less attention to the policies which regulated cable access television in Canada throughout its early existence; instead, I prioritize the content of the televisual programs under study, as well as the experiences of the people behind them.

Last but not least, the decision to focus specifically on Ontario has been motivated by my existing knowledge of and affection for the province, where I have been living for six years, and inspired by Rebecka Sheffield’s study of gay and lesbian archives where she uses her personal experience as a starting point to her study, choosing to begin with the principle of “starting

³⁵ Ryan Conrad, “Cable Access Queer: Revisiting *Toronto Living With AIDS* 1990-91,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 60 (Spring 2021):1-5.

where you are.”³⁶ Since my arrival in Toronto, I have forged crucial relationships with community members, scholars, and archivists which have enabled me to better understand the complexities and nuances of queer media histories and infrastructures in the province. For instance, I became a researcher for Archive/Counter-Archive (A/CA), a seven-year SSHRC-funded research creation project based at York University dedicated to activating and remediating audiovisual archives created by Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis, Inuit), Black communities and People of Colour, women, LGBTQ2+ and immigrant communities in Canada. Through my work with A/CA, I have been able to witness firsthand the efforts that various institutions and researchers have made to recover, digitize, and historicize local media works and community cable television series. I have been involved in various dissemination efforts, co-authoring and designing educational guides for these collections to make them accessible to the broader public and ensure that their legacies are not forgotten.³⁷

While being involved in A/CA, I have found myself reflecting on how relationships, both professional and personal, as well as ethics and practices of care impact such remediation and dissemination projects as well as the very works that they are seeking to reactivate. Likewise, it is necessary for me to position myself regarding the personal relationships which I have built since settling in Toronto. Over the years, I have become part of a nexus of artists, academics, and activists who have helped grow and maintain various queer scenes in the city and beyond, and who have taught me much about the history of the community here. It is with this relational praxis in mind that I have embarked on this project.

³⁶ Rebecka Taves Sheffield, *Documenting Rebellions: A Study of Four Lesbian and Gay Archives in Queer Times* (Sacramento: Litwin Books, 2020), 17.

³⁷ See for instance: Axelle Demus and Chloë Brushwood Rose, “Toronto Living with AIDS Cable Access Video Series (1990-1991): A Guide for Postsecondary Education,” Archive/Counter-Archive Educational Guide Series, 2022, <https://counterarchive.ca/educational-guides-vtape-case-study>.

To provide a dynamic cross-decade study of the ways in which cable access television was mobilized by various local queer communities in Ontario, I have chosen to focus on the following five television programs: *Gay News and Views* (Toronto, 1977); *Out of the Closets/Gais de l'Outaouais* (Ottawa, 1977-1980); *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals* (Toronto, 1978-1979); *Thunder Gay Magazine* (Thunder Bay, 1987-1991); *Cable 10%/10% QTV* (Toronto, 1995-2001). These programs were selected, in part, because their participants have left behind records of their work. For instance, while the very first gay cable access show in Toronto was *Coming Out*, a thirteen-week documentary and interview series broadcast on Toronto's Metro Cable Community Channel 10 and hosted by Paul Pierce and Sandra Dick of the Community Homophile Association of Toronto (CHAT) in 1972, no traces remain of the program.³⁸ *Gay News and Views*, on the other hand, constitutes the first sustained effort to both create and *preserve* a gay and lesbian cable access show in the city of Toronto. It is important to note, however, that while two of the selected programs possess complete or near complete archival video records—*TGM* and *10% QTV*—, other records are incomplete or mostly exist in paper form (a more detailed discussion of the programs' archives is provided in the third chapter of this dissertation).

Despite these existing gaps, the shows under study are representative of the breadth of queer televisual programs that used to exist in Ontario, spanning across many genres—from newsmagazines to entertainment and lifestyle, variety, and activist television. Moreover, these shows were created and ran by volunteers, who, for the most part, had little to no experience with audiovisual media prior to joining the programs and received no compensation for their work on cable access. As a result, although a complete digitized archive of this series exists, I purposely

³⁸ "Gay Television Series," *The Body Politic*, no. 6, (Autumn 1972), 22; Rick Bébout, "1972," *Promiscuous Affections*, <http://www.rbebout.com/bar/1972.htm>.

excluded the cable access program *Toronto Living With AIDS* (1990-1991) from this study, precisely because it was spearheaded by two experienced video artists, John Greyson and Michael Balsler, who commissioned other video artists to produce episodes for the series. *Toronto Living With AIDS* additionally received funding from various granting bodies, while the programs included in this study did not.

Each of the selected programs could easily have their own in-depth study. Yet, I have chosen to draw comparisons across different programs, locations, and time periods to enrich the project with multiple perspectives, and to explore the various contexts that affected each program to trace both the evolution of cable access and of the LGBTQ2+ movement in Ontario. Within this large corpus of work, therefore, I have selected each show carefully; I made the decision to include three shows from the 1970s because of their mandate to experiment with emergent forms of media to bring visibility to the budding Gay Liberation Movement—although they took diverging paths toward accomplishing this goal. I selected *Thunder Gay Magazine* because of its goal of educating various constituencies about HIV/AIDS in a city which has traditionally been neglected from popular accounts of the epidemic in Canada. Finally, *10% QTV* represents an interesting turning point in both the history of community cable television and the history of the LGBTQ+ movement in the province, as the program aimed to make queerness mainstream (and marketable) at the turn of the millennium while the popularization of the World Wide Web, as well as the advent of *PrideVision* TV, the first channel entirely dedicated to LGBTQ2+ media in Canada/North America, started offering new avenues for queer people to express themselves and find each other. Thus, besides tracing the beginnings, shifts, and eventual decline of cable access television in Canada, the start date of this study marks the beginnings of gay and lesbian liberation, allowing me to explore its aftermaths and the challenges posed by the HIV/AIDS

crisis and the turn to rights-oriented activism—all of which are reflected in the cable access programs under study.

On Identity and Its Limitations

In many regards, this dissertation is a reflection of my experiences with the programs and their archives, as I write about these shows with both intellect and affect. This work is shaped by my location and positionality as a white, queer/lesbian, (temporary) resident of the city of Toronto. It is also shaped by the time period during which this dissertation was written, marked by the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in a number of archival institutions closing their doors to the public. This work calls for others to build upon it, in the hope that it can be enriched by a multitude of viewpoints and interpretations. At the same time, this dissertation purports to be an archive itself, documenting and preserving the histories of understudied yet tremendously influential television programs.

Through an analysis of community television in the Canadian context, I am engaging in research that recognizes the potential of television as a technology of identity formation. Yet, I am also aware of the complexities surrounding identity as a multifaceted and intersectional concept. First, although it is firmly rooted in the Canadian context, my study does not purport to define “Canadianness” as a tangible marker—much less one that is defined through and against Americanness, which has been the dominant trend of Canadian television studies and policy, as shown in the next section of this dissertation. Neither does it purport to analyze the ways in which cable access maintained and reified a national sense of identity. The idea of “national identity” is especially fraught in the Canadian context since the country’s identity is the product of settler colonialism. As Lowman and Barker note, “Canadian” is a “notoriously hard-to-pin-

down concept.” They continue: “[It] may not have a clear definition, but for some it refers to an invasive people, a nation that violently displaces others for its own wants and desires, a state that break treaties and uses police and starvation to clear the land.”³⁹ Ojibwe journalist Jesse Wenté further emphasizes that this process has resulted in an “identity crisis” for Canada, a country that refuses to acknowledge the truths that are part and parcel of its very foundation in its attempts to define its national identity.⁴⁰ Over the years, television has been instrumental in conveying this sense of a “Canadian” identity, one that actively negates Indigenous peoples’ sovereignty and reinforces colonial mentalities and structures. With this in mind, I take a more nuanced approach to identity in the Canadian context.

It is also important to highlight the selective aspects of the programming under study. As Martin Meeker notes, race, class, and gender, “enter into and sometimes help structure sexual communications networks.”⁴¹ The history of queer cable access television programming remains predominantly a history of white queer settlers in Ontario, as most of the shows discussed were mainly produced by and tended to feature white, cisgender, educated, able-bodied people, reflecting existing structures of power in Canadian society and within queer communities. These absences also testify to the ongoing erasure of Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (QTBIPOC) communities from mainstream queer history and from memory institutions. I concur with Lauren Herold’s remark that “the vast majority of institutionally archived and digitized LGBTQ cable access shows...are those created by white queer people. This is not to say that queer people of color did not create their own alternate film, television, and video

³⁹ Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker, *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada* (Black Point, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 2015), 1.

⁴⁰ Jesse Wenté, *Unreconciled* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 2022), 51.

⁴¹ Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 12.

programming.”⁴² Wherever possible, this dissertation does provide glimpses of QTBIPOC organizations and individuals and moments where race, gender, and sexuality intersect on screen. However, much work remains to be done to recover the media histories of QTBIPOC communities in Canada. In this dissertation, therefore, I remain aware that these absences are not only historical but are also reflective of contemporary structures which still privilege certain voices and bodies over others, despite claims that queer rights have made tremendous “progress” in the country. I am committed to “continu[ing] to think rigorously about what is gained and what is lost (in terms of queer political praxis and utopian visions for more radical futures) when queerness is rendered through the narratives and operations of the state.”⁴³

I also hope to remind the reader, however, that there is also much to learn from our histories, specifically in the ways in which queer liberation has been conceived and enacted both behind and on the screen. I refrain from studying—and perhaps, judging—such histories from what Ramzi Fawaz sees as a “a present-day ideal of intersectional, fluid, universally inclusive, and social justice-oriented values.”⁴⁴ Rather, I am encouraged to think through the *potential* of these cultural objects and through our ability to make meaning out of these programs, instead of focusing on their shortcomings. In that sense, I am not so much interested in evaluating the successes or failures of queer public access programs as I am in exploring how queer individuals and groups have used cable access to address political, cultural, and social issues that they cared about and felt were relevant to their communities, and how they imagined queer(er) worlds. This feels especially important as the rights of queer and trans people are, as I am writing this

⁴² Lauren Herold, “Cable Comes Out: LGBTQ Community Television on New York Public Access Stations” (PhD dissertation, Chicago: Northwestern University, 2021), 55.

⁴³ Ronald Cummings and Sharlee Cranston-Reimer, “Introduction: Queer Formations and Horizons: Rethinking Queer Canadian Studies,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 54, 2-3 (Spring-Fall 2020): 215.

⁴⁴ Ramzi Fawaz, *Queer Forms* (New York: New York University Press, 2022), 49.

dissertation, under renewed attack in North America. This dissertation is thus a history of the people who experimented with the technology of cable access television as much as it is a history of the programs themselves. This history features a variety of protagonists, some of whom have been written about, and others whose important part they played in local queer histories have been overlooked in narratives of the Canadian LGBTQ2+ movement.

Notes on Terminology

Throughout this dissertation, I mobilize concepts such as “community,” “localism,” and “access,” which merit further clarification. Although proponents of “alternative,” “radical” and other kinds of media have analyzed cable access through these lenses, these concepts fall short for the purposes of this study. For example, well-circulated definitions of alternative media usually demand that such media uses alternative sites for distribution; Canadian cable access television, being closely affiliated with cable companies, does not quite meet the criteria to be qualified as “alternative.”⁴⁵ The content of cable access television may not be entirely “radical” either, due to the restrictions imposed on the shows by the same cable companies. As Lauren Herold points out, “public access may differ from commercial programming, but as an institutional facet of cable that relies upon cooperation from cable executives and operators, it is not as alternative or independent as those concepts might suggest.”⁴⁶

On the one hand, like Herold, I approach cable access television through the lens of “community media,” as defined by media scholar Kevin Howley, because it seems to better describe the process and output of cable access television as opposed to other forms of “alternative” media. “Community media,” Howley explains, refers to “grassroots or locally

⁴⁵ See for instance: Chris Atton, *Alternative Media* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 4.

⁴⁶ Herold, “Cable Comes Out,” 32.

oriented media access initiatives predicated on a profound sense of dissatisfaction with mainstream media form and content, dedicated to the principles of free expression and participatory democracy, and committed to enhancing community relations and promoting community solidarity.”⁴⁷ Howley’s attention to the local aspect of community media, which he sees as a response to the “felt need of local populations to create media systems that are relevant to their everyday lives,” is especially pertinent to my understanding of cable access television.⁴⁸

On the other hand, I am also invested in thinking through and about media forms as part of an ecology rather than as a dichotomy between mainstream and “non-mainstream.” As Alexandra Juhasz writes: “When we explore the...media landscape through the lens of an ecology rather than a monolith or even a binary, we make space for more people to be seen, more work to be acknowledged, and a greater variety of strategies.”⁴⁹ Cable access was a part of a variety of strategies used by queer people to gain visibility. Consequently, when I think of “community media” in relation to cable access, I do not think of it as totally opposite to the mainstream, but rather, as part of a broader ecology of media.

Because of cable access’s intimate relationship with local communities, community television also represents a form of media localism, as implied by the definition given by the CRTC mentioned above. In this dissertation, I conceive the local as both a spatially and socially constructed site, following media scholar Christopher Ali’s assertion that “our relationship with the local and with related concepts such as ‘community’ and ‘place’ are contingent upon individual subjectivities, experiences, histories, politics, cultures, and discourses, as well as

⁴⁷ Kevin Howley, *Community Media: People, Places, and Communication Technologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.

⁴⁸ Howley, 2.

⁴⁹ Alexandra Juhasz and Theodore Kerr, *We Are Having This Conversation Now: The Times of AIDS Cultural Production* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), 39.

being mediated by technology.”⁵⁰ Ali further argues that “media localism can be loosely defined as the belief that broadcasters should be responsive to the local, geographic communities to which they are licensed... This generally includes the airing of community responsive programming, particularly local news and information programming, and being engaged with the local community”—a definition which aptly fits community programming.⁵¹ To this end, I define media/TV localism as programming that is produced by local communities whose content is of interest to a specific—or several—locally and socially situated communities, and which is circulated within these communities, emphasizing that the “local” is not simply a spatial concept but also a place which is socially informed. Finally, while I acknowledge that today’s “network society” challenges our relationships to communities and place, I concur with Kevin Howley’s assertion that “place [still] matters,” although this sense of place may be constructed and “mediated within and through communication and culture.”⁵²

Since I am using “community media” as a framework to conceptualize of cable access television, I also wish to briefly address what radical media scholar John Downing calls the “fuzzy concept” of “community.”⁵³ Early notions of community, as alternative media scholars Bailey, Carpentier, and Cammaerts highlight, tend to refer to geography and ethnicity as “structuring notions of the collective identity or group relations.”⁵⁴ Community, scholars have noted, can also emerge beyond geography or ethnicity and out of common interests—creating “communities of interest”—a phrase used in the 1971 CRTC policy statement on community television. As Peter Lewis remarks, for example, a community of interest is not bound by

⁵⁰ Ali, *Media Localism*, 6.

⁵¹ Ali, 7.

⁵² Howley, *Understanding Community Media* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2010), 9.

⁵³ Downing, *Radical Media*, 39.

⁵⁴ Olga G. Bailey, Nico Carpentier, and Bart Cammaerts, *Understanding Alternative Media* (Maidenhead: McGraw Hill/Open University Press, 2008), 8.

geography but can extend “across conurbations, nations and continents.”⁵⁵ As a response to the notion of “communities of interest,” Etienne Wenger has reflected on the presence of “shared practice” within communities, developing the related notion of “communities of practice”—defined as a joint enterprise, with mutual engagement of the members involved and with a shared repertoire of communal resources.⁵⁶ Benedict Anderson, on the other hand, emphasizes the imaginary nature of the community, “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”⁵⁷ Building on Anderson’s research, Bailey, Carpentier, and Cammaerts assert that “a community is actively constructed by its members and those members derive an identity from this construction. This perspective also allows defining community as fluid and contingent, where the feeling of belonging to a community does not necessarily exclude affinities towards other communities or social structures.”⁵⁸ Finally, Howley’s analysis of community media relies on Raymond Williams’s 1973 notion of “knowable communities,” which he applies to media studies to explain the social nature of community media. He writes: “[W]hile dominant media tend to conceal the interconnected and mutually dependent character of social relations, community media work to reveal this fundamental aspect of human communities.”⁵⁹ For the purpose of this dissertation, therefore, the concept of “community” is used in a localist sense, as well as to designate groups who share common traits, identifying features, and cultural markers such as sexual orientation and racial and gender identities, who share similar interests or who share common practices, such as involvement in political events

⁵⁵ Peter Lewis, *Alternative Media: Linking Global and Local* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1993), 13.

⁵⁶ Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 45.

⁵⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Editions, 1983), 15.

⁵⁸ Bailey, Carpentier, and Cammaerts, *Understanding Alternative Media*, 10.

⁵⁹ Howley, *Understanding Community Media*, 9.

and/or shared sexual practices. I also understand “community” to be shifting and changeable, as one’s affinity toward particular communities may evolve over time. I do not presume either that “community” means that the people who constitute that community speak in one voice.

Communities, as Valerie Korinek highlights in her study of queer history in the Canadian Prairies, are often stratified by “issues of class, gender, race, and educational attainment.” She writes that the notion of “community” is often “fiction, whether we are historicizing an ethnic, racial, classist, urban, regional, or national community.”⁶⁰ Yet, Korinek asserts that, despite differences, we can nonetheless conceive of a “community” of “individuals who were [LGBTQ2+], participated in community events, had lovers and partners, identified in some fashion as [LGBTQ2+].”⁶¹

It is also crucial to underline that, as Downing points out, “community” has been mobilized towards restrictive ends to express “a politics of sexual frankness usage” with the application of “community standards.”⁶² The “myth of community standards,” as philosopher L.W Sumner puts it, uses the notoriously vague aspect of “community”—and in the Canadian case, the “national community”—as an exclusionary mechanism that determines what is obscene or indecent.⁶³ In her work on media arts censorship in Ontario, Taryn Sirove explains that “the rhetorical tool of community standards – and their administrative method of discovery – works to reify possible subjectivities and the boundaries of sexual citizenship.”⁶⁴ As such, the limits

⁶⁰ Valerie Korinek, *Prairie Fairies: A History of Queer Communities and People in Western Canada, 1930-1985* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 15-16.

⁶¹ Korinek, 15-16.

⁶² Downing, *Radical Media*, 39.

⁶³ L. W Sumner, *The Hateful and the Obscene: Studies in the Limits of Free Expression* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 93.

⁶⁴ Taryn Sirove, *Ruling Out Art: Media Art Meets Law in Ontario’s Censor Wars* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2019), 39.

imposed in the name of the “community,” as I discuss in the following chapters, also curtailed the possibility of free expression supposedly afforded through cable access.

“Access” is an equally nebulous term, used by a variety of disciplines. In a broad sense, I am deeply indebted to Disability studies’ conception of access. A disability theory framework, indeed, helps understand access as a way of “perceiving and orienting to the world,” a way that “people have of relating to the ways they are embodied as beings in the particular places where they find themselves.”⁶⁵ Such framework helps denaturalize things that we take for granted and understand that access is a process, one that is “tied to the social organization of participation, even to belonging.”⁶⁶ As Titchkosky highlights, “Every single instance of life can be regarded as tied to access—that is, to do anything is to have some form of access.”⁶⁷ Disability studies go beyond physical access to include the rights to equal participation and its broader social and intellectual implications—such as access to ideas and information.⁶⁸ My conceptualization of “access” also borrows from Critical Information studies in that I am also invested in the process through which technologies and institutions provide or restrict access to information, thereby facilitating or hindering the circulation of knowledges. People who made queer community television, then, used the platform not only to gain access to media making technologies that were not usually available to them, but also to facilitate access to information to other members of the LGBTQ2+ community and build stronger social, cultural, and political networks.⁶⁹ Finally, in a Media and Communications sense, access commonly refers to “the availability of

⁶⁵ Tanya Titchkosky, *The Question of Access: Disability, Space, Meaning* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 4.

⁶⁶ Titchkosky, 4.

⁶⁷ Titchkosky, 13.

⁶⁸ Cynthia Ann Bowman and Paul T. Jaeger. *Understanding Disability: Inclusion, Access, Diversity, and Civil Rights* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 63.

⁶⁹ See for instance: Angela L. DiVeglia, “Accessibility, Accountability, and Activism,” in *Make Your Own History: Documenting Feminist and Queer Activism in the 21st Century*, ed. Lyz Bly and Kelly Wooten (Los Angeles: Litwin Books, 2012), 69–88.

communication tools and resources for members of the local community.”⁷⁰ As Howley underlines, access to the media means that “community members have a platform for all manner of individual and collective self-expression, from news and opinion to entertainment and education.”⁷¹ Access is thus closely linked to the idea of “participation,” as access to the means of media making means involvement in media production and distribution processes. Discussions of media access have been particularly prominent in the digital age, notably around the question of “digital divides.”⁷² Media studies scholars have also understood access as an aesthetics; Lucas Hilderbrand, for instance, considers videotapes as a “means of accessing the world” upon their larger dissemination in the 1980s, and as a way to enable access to preservation through reproducibility. First and foremost, however, Hilderbrand argues that the aesthetics of the VHS tape—its grainy texture and subsequent deterioration—embody the idea of access.⁷³ Participation, expression, and aesthetics all inform the ways in which I think of “access” throughout this dissertation.

Finally, terminology surrounding queer politics must also be addressed in this introduction. As Meredith Batt and Dusty Green note:

The language we use to talk about same-sex desire today is the result of a long and complex history of terminology being invented and reinvented to meet the specific needs of those who wanted to discuss it. From the invention of the word homosexual to the reclamation of the word queer, different communities and cultures have used various signifiers to present and portray same-sex desire.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Howley, *Understanding Community Media*, 16.

⁷¹ Howley, 16.

⁷² See for instance: Pippa Norris, *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide* (West Nyack: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Mark Warschauer, *Technology and Social Inclusion: Rethinking the Digital Divide* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004).

⁷³ Lucas Hilderbrand, *Inherent Vice: Bootleg Histories of Videotape and Copyright* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), xiv-xvii.

⁷⁴ Meredith J. Batt and Dusty Green, *Len & Cub: A Queer History* (New Brunswick: Goose Lane 2022), 21.

As such, the terms and acronyms used throughout the following chapters “reflect the identifying terms for sexual and gender minorities as they existed during various time periods.”⁷⁵ In western Anglo-Saxon countries, “homosexual” is by and large considered to be an antiquated term, due to its legal and medical connotations. However, while for the most part I refrain using the word “homosexual,” unless it is in a direct quotation, the term “homosexuality” is sometimes mentioned in this study—especially when dealing with earlier historical contexts. In the 1970s, the terms “gay” and “lesbian” were embraced by the gay and lesbian liberation movement and have continued to be used. So, when talking about programming that was created in the 1970s and 1980s, I privilege the historical terms that were used at the time in Canada, despite the appearance of new signifiers later. Furthermore, the terms “gay and lesbian” were consistently emphasized by my participants during the interview process to identify themselves or the programming that they were a part of. For instance, when discussing the relevance of the program *Gay News and Views* (1977-1978) today, Robert Wallace, who served as the producer of the show, explained:

I think the biggest achievement was...simply getting on the air with the first word of the title of the show being “gay”...It sounds so silly today because you read “gay” all over the place, and nobody even wants to use the word anymore...All those words are so marked by the period.⁷⁶

The word “queer” began to take hold in the aftermath of the radical activism of the 1980s and 1990s which emerged as a response to the HIV/AIDS crisis. “Queer” was embraced by North American activist groups such as ACT UP! and Queer Nation, serving as a political reclamation and an umbrella term for individuals who did not wish to subscribe to prescribed gender roles and heteronormativity. As Tom Warner explains, these activists “advocated more

⁷⁵ Batt and Green, *Len & Cub*, 21.

⁷⁶ Robert Wallace, Interview with the author, August 2022.

fluid concepts of sexuality and identity that rejected both the necessity of labelling and the attempts to achieve a new, respectable identity that too frequently sought to impose stifling conformity.”⁷⁷ Today, in Canada, “queer” is still being widely used to embrace fluidity and nonconformity; although, as Batt and Green highlight, many people choose to not identify as queer as the term can bring up painful memories or they simply do not feel comfortable with this particular moniker.⁷⁸ For instance, most of my participants did not use the word “queer” to refer to themselves and still overwhelmingly privileged the terms “gay” or “lesbian.” Others—myself included—have deplored the loss of meaning behind the term “queer” as it began to be adopted by mainstream institutions, and by the media in particular. “Queer” sometimes seems to have become an empty signifier, devoid of political significance.⁷⁹ Yet, because of its ability to serve as an umbrella term for gender and sexual expressions, as well as because of its radical roots, I am using the term “queer” throughout this dissertation to convey the vast range of identities that exist within the community. I also use “queer” as a verb to denote a shifting and/or disrupting of norms and hegemonic systems. For instance, I understand the medium of cable access as being inherently “queer” in the sense that it provided “a forum for social deviants...and losers.”⁸⁰ Cable access, in its beginnings, was an oddity in the Canadian media landscape, representing a moment in broadcasting history when cable companies were mandated by the CRTC to provide community as a condition of their broadcasting license.

⁷⁷ Tom Warner, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 248.

⁷⁸ Batt and Green, *Len & Cub*, 25

⁷⁹ At the same time, I am also mindful of conservative trends within the LGBTQ2+ community whereby some people who identify as gay and lesbian reject the word “queer” in a bid for conformity and assimilation and to purposely exclude trans people.

⁸⁰ Bill Kirkpatrick, “Rethinking ‘Access’ Cultural Barriers to Public Access Television,” *Community Media Review* 25, no. 2 (2002): 5.

The term “LGBT”—which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender—was also coined in the 1990s in an effort to include bisexual and transgender people. It has now evolved in Canada into the term 2SLGBTQ+ or LGBTQ2+ to embrace other sexual and gender expressions such as Two-Spirit identities.⁸¹ While “LGBTQ2+” is an umbrella to encompass the many identities present in the shows, it also signals a desire for assimilation due to being adopted by the systems in place—whereas “queer” often gestures toward more radical politics. Following the historical shifts in identification that occurred when the shows were produced, I thus alternate between “gay,” “gay and lesbian,” “LGTBQ2+,” and “queer,” as I discuss this programming.

Although I do occasionally use them in my dissertation, I am wary of terms like “minority” and “marginalized.” Because I am part of the queer community, and because I interact almost exclusively with LGBTQ2+ people, I do not feel like I belong to a “minority.” In my day-to-day life, queers are the majority, and heterosexuals are the minority. Queer people are not at the margin; to me, they are at the centre of everything. Likewise, I prefer the term “historically excluded” or “systematically excluded” to “marginalized,” to highlight the systems in place which create a “margin” and a “centre.” As someone whose gender identity feels subjective rather than entrenched within the existing (and exhausting!) Western gender binary, I also feel that it is important to highlight gender identities in my dissertation. I often use the word “cisgender”—and its diminutive, “cis”—to refer to people whose gender identity aligns with the one they have been assigned at birth, even though these terms may appear to some as being ahistorical.

⁸¹ The term Two-Spirit was coined by activist Albert McLeod at the Third Annual Inter-tribal “Native American, First Nations, Gay and Lesbian American Conference” held in Winnipeg in 1990, to broadly reference Indigenous peoples in the LGBTQ community. See: Michelle Filice, “Two-Spirit,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, October 2015, last edited July 2020, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/two-spirit>.

Chapter Overview

Of lesbian and gay archives, Rebecka Sheffield writes: “Because these archives are both outgrowths of and apparatuses for the mobilization of queer social movements, broadly conceived, they are...affected by changes to the goals and ideology of these movements.”⁸² Following the premise that LGTBQ2+ community television programs, too, are “outgrowths of and apparatuses for the mobilization of queer social movements,” each chapter in this dissertation moves chronologically and thematically to discuss LGBTQ2+ cable access shows and their relationship to major events that marked the development of the LGBTQ2+ movement in Ontario. Drawing from archival research and oral history interviews, the main chapters of this study focus on how specific shows came to exist, how they—both the programs and their participants—positioned themselves within the movements happening in the province, and what challenges they experienced.

The next two chapters, however, further help position my research within the larger body of literature in which this dissertation resides. Recognizing the interdisciplinary space within which my work is situated, I follow this introduction by reviewing the larger currents of thoughts that merged and collided in order for this dissertation to exist. I then expand this reflection on the multidisciplinary nature of this project, delving into the methods that I used for data collection and the sources on which I have relied to craft this study. I also include reflections on the ways in which these histories can best be recovered when faced with the absence or deterioration of audiovisual material, and argue that collaborative and intergenerational archival methods are needed to ensure the preservation, restoration, and remembrance of fragile and ephemeral queer media objects such as cable access television—in other words, I propose that some of the same

⁸² Sheffield, *Documenting Rebellions*, 9.

impulses behind the creation of community television need to be mobilized to ensure their recovery and survival. At the same time, this section delves into some of the ethical concerns which arise when thinking about issues of digitization and online access regarding queer histories and ephemeral media works, as well as online collection of queer oral histories. Since this is a history of movements, I divide the rest of this dissertation into major chronological phases. Two of these movements are introduced by a prologue, which serves as context to the main chapters.

Chapter 4 sets the stage for the analysis of several community television programs by surveying the context during which LGBTQ2+ cable access shows first appeared, paying specific attention to the creation of community institutions and services dedicated to the lesbian and gay community, as well as to the various battles between the mainstream media and gay activist organizations in the post-war period. In Chapter 5, I explore the rise of gay and lesbian programming in Ontario in the late 1970s, focusing on three shows that had short runs on cable access TV—*Out of the Closets/Gais de l'Outaouais* (1977-1980), *Gay News and Views* (1977-1978), and *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals* (1978-1979). I show that cable access television programs in the 1970s were intimately linked to activist circles and were committed to transmitting visions of gay and lesbian liberation on the Ontarian airwaves. In the words of Gays of Ottawa, cable access television was to be used as an “an instrument of liberation.” In doing so, I consider and attend to the various meanings of “liberation” for groups and individuals who participated in such programs. For instance, some of these shows were characterized by a dual and perhaps contradictory push—on the one hand, a desire to assert normalcy vis-à-vis the rest of the population, and a defiant desire to assert the right to difference, relevance, and rights. In this chapter, I also demonstrate how cable access in the 1970s served as a site of experimentation, as

gay and lesbian groups mobilized the technology in various ways in their attempts to translate complex and novel political ideas onto the screen.

In Chapter 6, I look more closely at the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, which represents a major turning point in Canadian gay and lesbian activism. Framing community television no longer solely as an instrument of liberation but also as a technology of care and education, I investigate how cable access became a critical avenue to share vital information in response to HIV/AIDS, as access to the media was key to responding to the urgency of the epidemic. Looking at *Thunder Gay Magazine* (1987-1991), I argue that the program relied on three main pedagogical modes to circulate crucial and culturally specific information about LGBTQ2+ issues and HIV/AIDS in the Northwestern city of Thunder Bay: a pedagogy of repetition, a pedagogy of participation, and a pedagogy of compassion. This chapter further analyzes how Thunder Bay's location, as a smaller, peripheral Canadian city—although the largest city in Northwestern Ontario—impacted the kind of activism that existed there and the kinds of images that circulated on *Thunder Gay Magazine*.

The last major phase grapples with the ways in which the goals of the LGBTQ2+ movement in Ontario seemingly shifted at the turn of the millennium, centering my analysis on *Cable 10%/10% QTV* (1995-2001). Chapter 7 explores the ways in which the show addressed a homonormative subject, one interested and motivated by consumption, right-based activism, and assimilation within mainstream society. Particularly, I investigate the show's coverage of the 1998 Pride Parade and of HIV/AIDS issues to highlight this turn toward "homonormativity." However, I simultaneously warn against a reductive reading of the show—and by extension, of the LGBTQ2+ movement—as inevitably shifting from advocating liberation to embracing assimilation. The program, I show, simultaneously upheld a distinct queer identity through its

forays into local queer life, and its showcase of various local LGBTQ2+ cultural initiatives. Additionally, the program often looked and “felt backward”⁸³ in that it regularly featured segments on organizations, individuals, and events that impacted the LGBTQ2+ movement over the years—representing a form of “temporal drag” which further called into question the idea of “progress” otherwise advocated by the show.⁸⁴

Throughout these chapters, there are inevitably repetitions, similarities, and patterns. One of the fascinating threads that unfolds between all of them is one that is weaved around feelings of disappointment and frustration in the face of perceived failure. On the one hand, these programs are testaments to the incredible resilience of queer people and their determination to use the medium of television to strengthen and care for their communities. On the other hand, many of these shows had to deal with restrictions, even censorship, from the cable companies with which they worked. The archives of LGBTQ2+ cable access are also, in many ways, archives of the dead. The specter of AIDS and disease looms over these programs, as many participants and guests have passed away during the height of the epidemic or shortly after. Bearing in mind, then, both the limitations of cable access and the memory component of the shows, the epilogue of this dissertation raises key questions about these programs’ relevance, legacy, and value in the digital age, and their potential to forge intergenerational networks.

In short, this dissertation tells the stories of influential yet often overlooked cable television programs. The aim of this work is to advance the scholarship on both local histories of Canadian community television and of the LGBTQ2+ movement in the country. It hopes to 1) contribute a framework for apprehending local LGBTQ2+ and media histories and 2)

⁸³ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, USA: Harvard University Press, 2022).

⁸⁴ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), xxii.

demonstrate, through a series of case studies, that cable access television archives are objects worth looking at to better understand how the local citizenry has historically interacted with one another through the media 3) present examples of queer access mobilizations that have been neglected in Canadian scholarship and to encourage researchers to expand on and build on this work.

I am motivated by the tremendous courage of these individuals who, at a time when very few queer people were accurately portrayed on television or portrayed at all, put the interest of their communities first by daringly being their authentic selves on the small screen. The diverse programming that was broadcast in Ontario throughout the years reveals much about the development of the LGBTQ2+ movement and the people who fought on the frontlines, but also about those who tried to change things—big and small—at the local level and intervene in their immediate communities. In the next two sections, I explore the literature that provides a framework for understanding these cable television shows, and the methodology that I chose to best tell these stories.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW: FRAMING LGBTQ2+ COMMUNITY TELEVISION

The study of LGBTQ2+ cable access necessitates an understanding of queer history and politics combined with a historical approach to media and television. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of this study, I divide my literature review into several parts. In the first part, I devote my attention to television studies and alternative media studies, focusing specifically—but not exclusively—on the Canadian context, to explain how these two fields are complementary yet sometimes insufficient to frame the study of queer cable access television. I then turn to the lenses through which the histories of the LGBTQ2+ movement in Canada have been traced and told. In this part, I also think through the ways in which media and the movement have intersected in the literature, while paying particular attention to work on HIV/AIDS media because of the prominent place the HIV/AIDS crisis occupies in this dissertation. Finally, I set the stage for the discussion of my methodological approach by briefly reviewing the literature on television archives and discussing the problems media historians in Canada may encounter when undertaking such research.

Before I begin, I wish to note that I consider this literature review as a form of “acknowledgments” or “thank you” section; I am indebted to all the scholars mentioned below, whose questions, thoughts, and critiques have deeply informed my own thinking and growth throughout this work. As such, the reader will find that my study “builds on,” “borrows,” and “expands upon” more than it attempts to “fill the gaps” and respond to critical “weaknesses.” My relationship to this scholarship is one of appreciation, inspiration, and collaboration, rather than one that is marked by competition or extraction.

Approaches to Television Studies in Canada

Although work on cable access does not neatly fit the paradigm of television studies nor that of alternative media, these two fields are nonetheless essential to frame the historical study of queer cable access television, as Eric Freedman notes.¹ First, the framework of television studies, and in particular, the absences that exist within the field in Canada, is helpful to understand the academic context within which this dissertation is situated. The study of television came about around the late 1960s, when television emerged as an “identifiable entity;” by the 1990s, television had become a legitimate field of study.² Since then, the field has developed its own canon and theories, as television scholars have sought to understand the medium’s many facets: its history, economy, politics, cultures, and the ways in which viewers experience it.³ These various approaches to studying television have also been defined by particular social, historical, and national contexts. The United Kingdom and the United States, for instance, have developed robust traditions of television studies.⁴

By comparison, the field of Canadian television studies is, to some extent, limited. As Marian Bredin, Scott Henderson, and Sarah A. Matheson note, the field of Canadian television studies did not fully take hold until the 1990s and was developed in relative isolation from research that was taking place in Europe or the U.S.⁵ From the emergence of British Cultural

¹ Eric Mark Freedman, “Producing (Queer) Communities: The Politics of Public Access Cable Television” (PhD dissertation, Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1998), 14.

² Jonathan Gray and Amanda Lotz, *Television Studies* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 5; Robert C. Allen, *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1992), 11.

³ Joseph Kispal-Kovacs and Tanner Mirrlees, *The Television Reader: Critical Perspectives in Canadian and US Television Studies* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2013), xi; Gray and Lotz, *Television Studies*, 24.

⁴ Allen, *Channels of Discourse*, 8; Gray and Lotz, *Television Studies*, 24.

⁵ Marian Bredin, Scott Henderson, and Sarah A. Matheson, *Canadian Television: Text and Context* (Waterloo: Wilfried Laurier University Press, 2012), 6.

Studies to the development of Audience studies in the U.S, Canada lagged behind.⁶ In 2009, Canadian scholar Paul Atallah even wrote, rather sarcastically, that Canada had no strong tradition of television study. Instead, he claimed that television in Canada was framed by “royal commissions, Senate inquiries, and bureaucratic investigations.”⁷ In the eyes of Canadian researchers, to use Atallah’s phrase, television was a “phobic object.”⁸ While it is true that Canada does not possess as strong a tradition of television studies as its U.K and U.S counterparts, television scholars, influenced by the specificities of Canada’s broadcasting ecology, did develop specific ways of studying the medium over time.

Historically, as Bredin, Henderson, and Matheson remark, television scholars have been motivated by a “uniquely Canadian approach to communication history and technological change.”⁹ François Demers further explains that one can trace the emergence of this approach to Toronto school thinkers Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis, who “are foundational in thinking about the ‘cultural effects’ of media in formations of community and, of particularly significance within the ‘Canadian context,’ the historical and rhetorical relevance of the nation.”¹⁰ The first strand of Canadian television research, as a result, heavily focuses on the impact of media technologies on national social and cultural processes, issues of regulation, media ownership, and telecommunications and broadcasting policy.¹¹ The predominance of the communication studies and political economy approaches to studying television has meant that the field,

⁶ See for instance: John Fiske, *Reading Television* (London: Routledge, 1978); Stuart Hall, “Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse,” in *Essential Essays, Volume 1* (New York: Duke University Press, 2020), 257–276; David Morley, *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁷ Paul Atallah, “Review Essay: Reading Television,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 34 (2009): 163-170.

⁸ Atallah, 163.

⁹ Bredin, Henderson, and Matheson, *Canadian Television*, 8.

¹⁰ François Demers, “Canadian Television: The Exhaustion of a Domestic Paradigm?” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic media* 47, no. 4 (2003): 658.

¹¹ Bredin, Henderson, and Matheson, *Canadian Television*, 8; Zoë Druick and Aspa Kotsopoulos, *Programming Reality: Perspectives on English-Canadian Television* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), 2.

especially in its early stages, has tended to focus less on the content of televisual productions or on programming itself; initial studies in the field demonstrate little overlap with film studies and cultural studies methodologies dedicated to the study of media texts, as television scholars Marusya Bociurkiw and Liz Czach point out.¹²

These policy-oriented studies are characterized by a strong preoccupation for identity and nationalism. For instance, Richard Collins's text, *Culture, Communication, and National Identity: The Case of Canadian Television* (1990)—which Bociurkiw calls the “urtext of Canadian television”¹³—set the tone for the study of Canadian television written from a political economy perspective. Reviewing television policy in Canada, from the Broadcast Act of 1968 to the late 1980s, Collins also analyzes what he sees as “the central objective” of these policies: the strengthening of Canadian identity at a time when the United States was becoming the “dominant force in the internationalization of culture.”¹⁴ Canada's proximity to the United States, combined with the need to define Canadian identity as distinct from that of its neighbour, has indeed strongly informed both Canadian television policy and Canadian television studies. As Joseph Kispal-Kovacs and Tanner Mirrlees explain, “the English Canadian experience of watching scheduled TV began with the United States. Before the CBC had a TV division or Canadian private TV networks existed, Canadian viewers were consuming American TV programs.”¹⁵ This influx of media content from the U.S. has led to a growing interest in defining a distinct “Canadian” identity through broadcast media—resulting in national(ist) television policies such as the establishment of a national public broadcaster, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

¹² Marusya Bociurkiw, *Feeling Canadian: Television, Nationalism, Affect* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2011), 6; Liz Czach, “The ‘Turn’ in Canadian Television Studies,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 44, no. 3 (2010): 174.

¹³ Bociurkiw, 7.

¹⁴ Richard Collins, *Culture, Communication, and National Identity the Case of Canadian Television* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 1-4.

¹⁵ Kispal-Kovacs and Mirrlees, *The Television Reader*, xiii.

(CBC). Recognizing the importance of using communication technologies to promote national identity, television policy in Canada—and by extension, television studies—has affirmed the potential of televisual images to work as a form of what Michael Billig and Maurice Charland have termed, respectively, “banal nationalism”¹⁶ and “technological nationalism.”¹⁷ As a result, the early literature on Canadian television reflects these concerns with national identity.

Pioneering studies of television narratives, which steer away from predominantly focusing on policy, also spend considerable time discussing television’s relation to Canadian identity and its associated conflicts over American cultural influence in Canada.¹⁸ Mary Jane Miller’s ambitious analysis of CBC-produced dramas from 1952 to 1987, for instance, written at a time when no one had taken a systematic look at Canadian television drama, looks for representations of what she calls, in rather monolithic terms, “Canadian identity,” in CBC television programming. At the time of publication, however, Miller’s volume set a hopeful tone for the future of television studies in Canada by establishing a methodology for the analysis of televisual content, genre, and aesthetics, and encouraging other Canadian scholars to further the study of “their remarkable heritage.”¹⁹

The Turn in Canadian TV Studies

In an essay published in 2003, media scholar François Demers argued that Canadian television scholarship was in crisis as television, now an “old” medium in the age of the Internet,

¹⁶ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, quoted in Druick and Kostopoulos, *Programming Reality*, 8.

¹⁷ Maurice Charland, “Technological Nationalism,” *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 10, no. 1/2 (1986): 196-220.

¹⁸ Bredin, Henderson, and Matheson, *Canadian Television*, 8.

¹⁹ Mary Jane Miller, *Turn up the Contrast: CBC Television Drama Since 1952* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), 4. Another outstanding volume in English-Canadian broadcasting history published around that time period is Paul Rutherford, *When Television Was Young: Primetime Canada, 1952-1967* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990) which also combines program analysis with audience response.

was “no longer the fascinating object it once was in daily life.”²⁰ Demers further suggested that the new fragmented nature of the televised environment had led researchers to “shied away” from studying Canadian television.²¹ Therefore, the paradigm of cultural sovereignty which dominated the scholarly discourse on television and through which scholars understood television as a tool to promote Canadian identity, Demers claimed, was “showing severe signs of fatigue.”²² The field thus experienced a turn in the early and mid-2000s, as noted by Liz Czach in her response to Demers’s article.²³

This revival, which is still ongoing, is characterized by a diversity of new approaches and methodologies; however, Czach explains, “the single most promising, and long overdue, shift has been...the examination of the content of television shows [which] is finally taking its rightful place as a necessary component of Canadian television study.”²⁴ Echoing Czach, in his ambivalent review of Bart Beaty and Rebecca Sullivan’s 2006 book, *Canadian Television Today*, Paul Atallah writes that one of the book’s “pleasures” is its examination of popular television shows, suggesting that this analytic approach “points plainly and abundantly to the potential renewal of Canadian television scholarship.”²⁵ Following this “turn,” Canadian TV scholarship started taking into account aesthetics and texts, as well as technology, policy and institutions, whilst paying attention to a diverse range of programs—from dramas and reality shows to youth programs, news parody shows, and historical miniseries such as the CBC’s *Heritage Minutes*.²⁶

²⁰ Demers, “Canadian Television,” 660.

²¹ Demers, 658.

²² Demers, 660.

²³ Czach, “‘The ‘Turn’ in Canadian Television Studies,” 174-180.

²⁴ Czach, 175, my emphasis.

²⁵ Atallah, “Review Essay,” 164.

²⁶ See for instance: Bart Beaty and Rebecca Sullivan, *Canadian Television Today* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006); Bredin, Henderson, and Matheson, *Canadian Television*; Druick and Kotsopoulos, *Programming Reality*.

Specific genres have also become the objects of monographs and articles, demonstrating an engagement with the medium of television as an object worthy of the same attention as film.²⁷

Studies on regionalism have emerged out of this turn as well, complicating the concept of “national identity.” As Jennifer VanderBurgh indeed insists: “Using a national model to understand television’s histories and lived experiences in Canada obscures the uneven and complex ways that TV has actually functioned.”²⁸ These analyses, for example, acknowledge that, in spite of the hold nationalism has in the Canadian context, regionalism, too, is a central factor in the Canadian experience.²⁹ As TV scholar Serra Tinic highlights: “Nation-states do not emanate monolithic, unified identities that are easily translatable into media narratives. Rather, every nation contains competing cultural definitions of collective identity—regional, transnational, ethnic, linguistic—vying for inclusion and representation on the national stage.”³⁰ By exploring the relationship between the regional, the national, and the global through analyses of programs that feature and/or originate from specific regions, such studies demonstrate an understanding of broadcasting as a “social technology through which concepts of place and space, or of margin and centre, are produced and negotiated,” as Darrell Varga points out.³¹

Despite the emergence of studies on Canadian media regionalism, academic scholarship on localism and media in Canada remains few and far between; as Christopher Ali notes, “substantive discussions about Canadian local media have been noticeably absent. A dearth of scholarship specifically on Canadian local television further underscores this national malaise

²⁷ See for instance: David Hogarth, *Documentary Television in Canada: From National Public Service to Global Marketplace* (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014).

²⁸ Jennifer VanderBurgh, *What Television Remembers: Artifacts and Footprints of TV in Toronto* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2023), 9.

²⁹ Christopher Ali, *Media Localism: The Policies of Place* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 11.

³⁰ Serra Tinic, *On Location: Canada’s Television Industry in a Global Market* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), viii.

³¹ Darrell Varga, *Rain, Drizzle, Fog: Film and Television in Atlantic Canada* (Calgary: University of Calgary, 2009), xi.

vis-à-vis the local.”³² Ali’s complaint, in fact, echoes earlier critiques made by community television scholar Kim Goldberg, who bemoaned the lack of critical interest in cable access—although, according to her, the medium represented “a safe haven of purely Canadian cultural expression,” thus making it an ideal object of study for scholars interested in the ways in which television defines and shapes a cultural and local identity for Canadians.³³ Jennifer VanderBurgh’s 2023 analysis of the relationship between television and the city of Toronto, however, marks a necessary step in this direction.³⁴

Other trends have begun to arise from the turn in Canadian television studies; what characterizes these newer works is a desire to historicize Canadian television—and television scholarship—and put it in conversation with our media-saturated present, as well as a desire to understand how viewers engage or have engaged with televisual content.³⁵ Andrew Burke, for instance, in looking to the televisual past of 1970s Canada, is interested in the conjunction of memory and media, and how the “residues” of the past illuminate and influence our present. In addition, Burke is interested in the “unexpectedly intense attachments” that people feel toward these televisual traces.³⁶ Burke’s study follows Marusya Bociurkiw’s introduction of affect theory to the analysis of Canadian television, in which she theorizes the relationship between television and national identity.³⁷ As such, affect theory—broadly understood here as the study

³² Ali, *Media Localism*, 12.

³³ Kim Goldberg, *The Barefoot Channel: Community Television as a Tool for Social Change* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1990), 71-74.

³⁴ VanderBurgh, *What Television Remembers*.

³⁵ See for instance: Matthew Hayday, “Variety Show as National Identity: CBC Television and Dominion Day Celebrations, 1958-1980” in *Communicating in Canada’s Past: Essays in Media History* ed. Daniel Robinson and Gene Allen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 168-193; Mary Vipond, “The Historiography of Canadian Broadcasting,” in *Communicating in Canada’s Past*, 233-256; Pat Bonner, “If the Goo Sticks: Streamlining Slime with *Goosebumps* on Canada’s YTV Network,” *Studies in the Fantastic* 7, no. 1 (2019): 64–75.

³⁶ Andrew Burke, *Hinterland Remixed: Media, Memory, and the Canadian 1970s* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2019).

³⁷ Bociurkiw, *Feeling Canadian*, 4.

of feelings and emotions as legitimate modes of knowledge production and mobilization—expands upon the notion of one-way flow that characterizes the earlier Canadian TV studies canon through an exploration of the relational dimensions of television, in addition to enabling us to think about the various feelings which emerge when looking at Canada’s televisual past.

However, as Paul Atallah observes, studies that have come out of the so-called turn may lapse “into the very same habits beyond which [they] point”—the shows have to be measured for their *Canadianness*.³⁸ While it is certainly true that these accounts are predominantly preoccupied with questions of Canadian nationalism and cultural identity, they also point to “the potential in moving beyond conventional discourses of cultural nationalism.”³⁹ In fact, analyses that emerged from this turn tend to offer more critical accounts of “Canadianness,” as they examine and interrogate absences in Canadian television programming, like that of Indigenous peoples as well as racial and religious communities. These accounts complicate the notion of cultural and national identity by bringing in, for instance, analyses of colonialism and multiculturalism and their effects on television.

One should nonetheless be wary of Liz Czach’s assertion that this turn “acts as a necessary corrective.”⁴⁰ Even though these new voices mark a promising turn in TV scholarship, there are still persistent absences in the Canadian literature. As Serra Tinic aptly notes, “[t]he Canadian television story is the antithesis of the British and American...examples. It is a narrative of absence.”⁴¹ For instance, while some scholars have devoted their attention to television shows that feature queerness or analyze the relationship between gender and television in the Canadian context, there exists no comprehensive study of sexuality on the small screen in

³⁸ Atallah, “Review Essay,” 164.

³⁹ Bredin, Henderson, and Matheson, *Canadian Television*, 15.

⁴⁰ Czach, “The ‘Turn’ in Canadian Television Studies,” 175.

⁴¹ Serra Tinic, “No Rerun Nation: Canadian Television and Cultural Amnesia,” *FlowTV* 10, no. 1 (2009).

the Canadian television studies canon, as such studies overwhelmingly still privilege American narratives over Canadian ones.⁴² Ryan Conrad's forthcoming study of HIV/AIDS media in Canada, which includes analyses of mainstream and community television, is a welcome and anticipated addition to the literature, although the field certainly would benefit from more perspectives on gender and sexuality as displayed on Canada's television sets and digital screens.⁴³

LGBTQ2+ Televisual Representations

Such studies do exist in the American context, however, and examine media texts which have been circulating across the border to Canada. Numerous accounts analyze the absence of representation on American network programming from the 1950s to the 1990s, noting that when queer people *did* appear on the screen, they were often stereotypically portrayed. These studies also tend to identify the 1990s as a turning point which initiated a shift in representations, marked, for instance, by comedian Ellen DeGeneres's coming out.⁴⁴ Other studies follow this trend by paying attention to how LGBTQ2+ people further became mainstream as legacy

⁴² See for instance: Victoria Kannen, "Loving and Loathing on Schitt's Creek: How Representations of Emotion, Identities, and Nation Matter," in *The Spaces and Places of Canadian Popular Culture*, ed. Victoria Kannen and Neil Shyminsky (Toronto: Canadian Scholars, 2019), 56-66; Wendy Gay Pearson, "Not in the Hardware Aisle, Please: Same-Sex Marriage, Anti-Gay Activism and *My Fabulous Gay Wedding*," *Ethnologies (Québec)* 28, no. 2 (2006): 185-211; Wendy Peters, "'It Feels More Like a Parody': Canadian *Queer as Folk* Viewers and the Show They Love to Complain About," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 13, no. 1 (2009): 15-24; Julie Ravary-Pilon, "Entre Prized Content et Lesbian Multicasting: Etude Comparative Entre la Saison 1 et la Saison 2 de la Serie Web Quebecoise Feminin/Feminin," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 29, no. 2 (2020): 52-74. Among the few articles related to gender and Canadian television, one can cite: Sarah A. Matheson, "Feminist Television or Television for Women? Revisiting the Launch of Canada's Women's Television Network," in Rachel Moseley, Helen Wheatley, and Helen Wood, *Television for Women: New Directions* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 151-166.

⁴³ Forthcoming: Ryan Conrad, *Radical VIHsions* (publisher TBD).

⁴⁴ See for instance: Ron Becker, "Prime-Time Television in the Gay Nineties: Network Television, Quality Audiences, and Gay Politics," in *Television Studies Reader*, ed. Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill (New York: Routledge, 2004), 389-403; Larry Gross, "Out of the Mainstream: Sexual Minorities and the Mass Media," *Journal of Homosexuality* 21 (1-2) (1991): 19-46; Stephen Tropiano, *The Prime Time Closet: A History of Gays and Lesbians on TV* (New York: Applause Theatre & Cinema, 2002); Suzanna D. Walters, *All the Rage: the Story of Gay Visibility in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

television gave to specialty networks, and eventually, streaming.⁴⁵ Another stance has also come to take hold in the field, however. Amy Villarejo’s history of early television programs that “isolate particular rhythms of television and queer time,” for instance, works to challenge “the hermetic, quasi-literary, and often precious approaches to television texts that seem at times to dominate academic protocols”— approaches that follow teleological narratives of “progress.”⁴⁶ Following Villarejo’s footsteps, Tison Pugh and Quinlan Miller’s queer readings of American sitcoms, too, complicate and nuance the popularized idea that queerness on television is recent phenomenon by arguing that queer and trans representation was always-already present on screen.⁴⁷

This is a stance that Lauren Herold also espouses in her recent study of LGBTQ2+ public access television in New York, as she argues that a “closer look at the history of cable access programming” indeed proves the existence of queer content on television before the 1990s, despite the fact that the existing literature on LGBTQ2+ representations tends to gloss over more expressly activist or “amateur” forms of television such as public access programming.⁴⁸ Considering cable access television as one of many vehicles for queer representations also helps generate much needed and nuanced conversations between the field of television studies, which tends to look at commercial television in isolation from other forms of television, and that of alternative media studies, which, on the other hand, often praises alternative media at the

⁴⁵ Eve Ng, *Mainstreaming Gays: Critical Convergence of Queer Media, Fan Cultures, and Commercial Television* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2023).

⁴⁶ Amy Villarejo, *Ethereal Queer: Television, Historicity, Desire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 284-674.

⁴⁷ Quinlan Miller, *Camp TV: Trans Gender Queer Sitcom History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019); Tison Pugh, *The Queer Fantasies of the American Family Sitcom* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018). Recent collections such as Hollis Griffin, *Television Studies in Queer Times* (New York: Routledge, 2023) also provide more expansive understandings of the temporalities of queer television.

⁴⁸ Lauren Herold, “Cable Comes Out: LGBTQ Community Television on New York Public Access Stations” (PhD dissertation, Chicago: Northwestern University, 2021). See similar argumentation in: Rebecca Beirne, *Televising Queer Women a Reader* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 13; Phylis Johnson and Michael C. Keith, *Queer Airwaves: The Story of Gay and Lesbian Broadcasting* (Florence: Routledge, 2001), ix.

expense of efforts to infiltrate the mainstream. Because cable access television is sitting at a critical juncture between mainstream/commercial television and alternative/community media, I now turn to how scholars have approached cable access television in a variety of contexts.

Alternatives, Publics, and Networks: Debates Around Cable Access Television

Much like the literature on Canadian mainstream television, the scholarship on Canadian alternative media or cable access television is generally lacking.⁴⁹ Due to Canada's ties to the U.S and the U.K., however, it is once again helpful to draw from other scholarly contexts to survey the existing literature on cable access television. Cable access, as suggested previously, has predominantly been theorized through the prism of alternative media, or community media. Eric Freedman, for instance, observes that "the producers of many access programs... [were]...making alternative media which directly counter[ed] and interfer[ed] with dominant media assumptions."⁵⁰ Kevin Howley, on the other hand, theorizes cable access television as a form of "community-based media," giving voice to "community members who [were] misrepresented, marginalized, and otherwise ignored by the mainstream media."⁵¹ In Canada in general, it seems that "community television" has been the preferred moniker for cable access, indicating a preference for conceptualizing of cable access as a form of community media. Beyond thinking about cable access as "alternative" or "community" media, many of the early studies of cable access emphasize the medium's relationship to the public sphere, theorizing

⁴⁹ The main volume on Canadian alternative was published a decade ago and contains one article about cable access: Kirsten Kozolanka, Patricia Mazepa, and David Skinner, *Alternative Media in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012).

⁵⁰ Eric Freedman, "From Excess to Access: Televising the Subculture," in *Spectatorship: Shifting Theories of Gender, Sexuality, and Media*, ed. Rox Samer and William Whittington (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2017), 169.

⁵¹ Kevin Howley, "Manhattan Neighborhood Network: Community Access Television and the Public Sphere in the 1990s," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 25, no. 1 (2005): 131.

community television as a platform for public discussion “uncontrolled by government and not conditioned by commercial messages.”⁵²

Cable Access Television as (Counter-)Public Sphere

The public sphere, as a democratic space for the free exchange of ideas by individuals, is strongly associated with the work of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas and his landmark publication, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). Habermas’s premise is based on the shifts that occurred in Europe during the late 17th and 18th century which led to the emergence of a representative public sphere “in which critical public discussion of matters of general interest was institutionally guaranteed.”⁵³ The public sphere existed between the private realm, composed of civil society (i.e., the “realm of commodity exchange and social labour”) and the family on the one hand, and the sphere of public authority (i.e., “the state and the court”) on the other.⁵⁴ In this sphere, private individuals constituted themselves as a public and exerted the political task of regulating civil society and check state power through the “rational-critical debate” of issues of public concern.⁵⁵ The creation of the public sphere was also facilitated by the development of institutions that enabled critical discussion and the circulation of public discourse, such as coffee houses and literary salons, where political and cultural discussion could take place, free from both state and market intervention.⁵⁶

While these forms of rational debate were mainly made possible through face-to-face communication, Habermas underlines the crucial role of print media—specifically, the rise of the

⁵² Patricia Aufderheide, *The Daily Planet: A Critic on the Capitalist Culture Beat* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 139-140.

⁵³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1991), xi.

⁵⁴ Habermas, 30.

⁵⁵ Habermas, 52-55.

⁵⁶ Habermas, 33.

press and the circulation of periodicals, opinion pieces, art criticism, literary journals—in contributing to the vitality of the public sphere in the 18th century.⁵⁷ However, in the late 19th century, Habermas posits, the bourgeois public sphere eventually disintegrated.⁵⁸ This transformation was marked by the disappearance of the liberal model and the advent of the welfare state, as well as changes in family life which resulted in “the loss of the private sphere and of ensured access to the public sphere.”⁵⁹ The advent of mass communication and consumer culture, Habermas further argues, led to a shift from a “culture-debating” to a “culture-consuming” public.⁶⁰ The downfall of the public sphere therefore came about “as private organizations began increasingly to assume public power on the one hand, while the state penetrated the private realm on the other.”⁶¹

Jürgen Habermas’s discussion of the public sphere provides a model of deliberation, debate, and discussion, based on reason, consensus, and democratic decision-making, which empowers citizens, is facilitated by media institutions, and contains emancipatory potential. As a result, in the early decades of cable access, scholars and enthusiasts saw in the medium a new democratic possibility marked by the removal of institutional and technological barriers which prevented citizens’ access to the media and their participation in public discourse. Cable access, in its heyday, was perceived as having the potential to reignite a dying public sphere to counter the prevalence of mass media and consumer culture.⁶²

For example, echoing Habermas’s concerns about the mass media and the decline of the public sphere, Laura Linder writes in her 1999 study of American public access: “As ownership

⁵⁷ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 41-43.

⁵⁸ Habermas, 142.

⁵⁹ Habermas, 151-157.

⁶⁰ Habermas, 160.

⁶¹ Craig Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 21.

⁶² Brian Caterino, *The Decline of Public Access and Neo-Liberal Media Regimes* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020) 46.

of the mass media has become increasingly concentrated...problems have emerged[:] a...narrowing and homogenization of the range of opinions that are disseminated by the mass media; [and]...decreasing coverage of local issues. A potential counterforce to both these problems is public access.”⁶³ From this standpoint, cable access was not simply an alternative to mainstream television, but a challenge to monopolistic mass media systems.⁶⁴ Early studies of cable access television describe the medium as “an electronic forum where all interested citizens [could] appear before their community to share information, discuss ideas, record local events,” thus constituting the “ideal vehicle of communication for a truly pluralistic, participatory society”—much like the “cable version of the town square or the electronic town hall.”⁶⁵ Cable access, it was argued, was “the last best hope for a public sphere and for an active and enlightened polity.”⁶⁶ In 1975, Gilbert Gillespie even went as far as arguing that cable access was “an intelligent way to mobilize socioeconomic revolution without violence.”⁶⁷

However, these optimistic or “blue skies” visions of access quickly faded as the medium took hold. For example, while media scholar Patricia Aufderheide praises the potential of cable access in her 1990s study, she also asks: “But what if everybody can speak but nobody cares?”⁶⁸ To function as a true public sphere, Aufderheide argues that cable access required “professional craftsmanship,” and programs focused on “serious” programming and arenas of concerns such as “educational and health policy, multicultural questions, environmental and workplace issues.”⁶⁹

⁶³ Laura R. Linder, *Public Access Television: America's Electronic Soapbox* (Westport: Praeger, 1999), xxiii.

⁶⁴ Donna L. King and Christopher Mele, “Making Public Access Television: Community Participation, Media Literacy and the Public Sphere,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 43, no. 4 (1999): 604.

⁶⁵ Patrick R. Parsons, *Blue Skies: A History of Cable Television* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 256; Laura Linder, *Public Access Television*, 15.

⁶⁶ King and Mele, “Making Public Access Television,” 606.

⁶⁷ Gilbert Gillespie and Margaret Munro, *Public Access Cable Television in the United States and Canada with an Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Praeger, 1975), 83.

⁶⁸ Aufderheide, *The Daily Planet*, 127.

⁶⁹ Aufderheide, *The Daily Planet*, 131-132.

By contrast, so-called “fringe” programs made by amateurs—which Aufderheide dubs “garbage can programming”—were perceived to be severely undermining cable access television’s potential.⁷⁰ Some proponents of cable access, therefore, valued particular kinds of political and cultural discourses and certain notions of “quality” over others, in order to bring about a Habermasian ideal of the public sphere where rational critical discourse and consensus would dominate the airwaves.⁷¹

Other scholars noted that, if the ideal public sphere was to be entirely separate from the market and the state, economic and governmental obstacles to cable access television further inhibited the realization of its potential. In her study of Canadian community television published in the 1990s, Kim Goldberg observes that public access could not fulfill its democratic goal because of a fundamental contradiction between community television’s ideals and the way it was being operated in Canada. Noting that cable companies and not “ordinary” citizens controlled public access and noticing a trend towards the homogenization cable access programming due to these companies’ policies, Goldberg concludes: “The pluralistic democratic ideals of community access television can never be realized as long as the licence and legal control over the programming is in private hands.”⁷²

Against these critiques, defenders of cable access’s ability to bring a voice to the voiceless, however, strongly suggested redefining traditional notions of the public sphere by shifting the emphasis from the *product* (i.e. cable access programs) to the critical possibilities inherent to the *production* of cable access programming (i.e. participation in public access

⁷⁰ Aufderheide, 140.

⁷¹ Bill Kirkpatrick, “Rethinking ‘Access’ Cultural Barriers to Public Access Television,” *Community Media Review* 25, no. 2 (2002): 20-21.

⁷² Goldberg, *The Barefoot Channel*, 21.

programs).⁷³ By that logic, cable access programming enabled the formation of “counterpublic” spheres, as opposed to a single and exclusionary liberal public sphere.⁷⁴ In her influential feminist response to Habermas, Nancy Fraser indeed argues that members of subordinated social groups—such as women, workers, people of colour, and queer folks— “have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics.”⁷⁵ These “subaltern counterpublics” form “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.”⁷⁶

Analyses of community television, therefore, have used counterpublic theory to complicate and nuance the relationship between cable access and the public sphere, arguing that community television functioned as a resource for counterpublics to articulate their concerns, perspectives, and interests—thus offering more inclusive alternatives to the existing social order and presenting real possibilities for social change. As Bill Kirkpatrick indeed asserts, cable access was “valuable because it foster[ed] democratic participation, but it [was] also valuable precisely because it [was] divisive, disruptive, and transgressive and even because it [was] trivial, banal, and inane.”⁷⁷ This position is further emphasized by Eric Freedman, who sees the democratizing and liberatory potential of cable access as lying not in the fact that “it simply allow[ed] more people to speak” but in the possibility of allowing people to speak “about the ability to speak.”⁷⁸ Therefore, in many ways, LGBTQ2+ community television shows from the

⁷³ Kirkpatrick, “Rethinking ‘Access’ Cultural Barriers,” 20-23; King and Mele, “Making Public Access Television,” 603-623.

⁷⁴ King and Mele, 607.

⁷⁵ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text*, no. 25/26 (1990): 67.

⁷⁶ Fraser, 67.

⁷⁷ Kirkpatrick, “Rethinking ‘Access’ Cultural Barriers,” 22.

⁷⁸ Eric Freedman, “Public Access/Private Confession: Home Video as (Queer) Community Television,” *Television and New Media* 1, no. 2 (2000): 187.

1970s to the 2000s functioned as queer counterpublic spheres which were “freed from heteronormative speech protocols” and in which “no one [was] in the closet.”⁷⁹ While their presence on the cable airwaves meant that they were addressing “indefinite strangers,” queer programs nonetheless addressed and provided access to the media to a group of individuals who occupied a shared space at the margins and shared sensibilities and values.

Cable Access Television Beyond Publics

Aside from assessing cable television’s impact on the public sphere and its relationship to mainstream and commercial television, as Lauren Herold argues, scholarship on cable access television has often tended to prioritize its regulatory history, rather than the content, aesthetics, and sociopolitical inclinations of particular programs.⁸⁰ Some recent studies of American community cable shows, however, have gone beyond this regulatory context and provide interesting insights for the historical study of cable access TV that this dissertation builds and expands upon. Specifically, these studies mobilize various theoretical frameworks—from infrastructure studies to production studies, affect theory, and sociology—to investigate the *uses* of cable access television and its relationship to social, political, and cultural change.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 120; Kara Carmack, for instance, mobilizes counterpublic theory to analyze the NYC-based, queer public access shows *Anton Perich Presents* and *TV party*. See: “Anton Perich Presents and TV Party: Queering Television via Manhattan Public Access Channels, 1973-1982.” (MA Thesis, Austin: The University of Texas at Austin, 2010).

⁸⁰ Herold, “Cable Comes Out,” 19; see for instance, Christopher Ali, “The Last PEG or Community Media 2.0? Negotiating Place and Placelessness at PhillyCAM,” *Media, Culture & Society* 36, no. 1 (January 2014): 69–86; Michael Lithgow, “Transformation of Practice, Policy, and Cultural Citizenships in Community Television,” in *Alternative Media in Canada*, ed. Patricia Mazepa, David Skinner, and Kirsten Kozolanka (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012), 125-144.

⁸¹ See for instance: Charlotte E. Howell “Symbolic Capital and the Production Discourse of ‘The American Music Show’: A Microhistory of Atlanta Cable Access,” *Cinema Journal* 57, no. 1 (2017): 1–24; Annie Laurie Sullivan, “WGPR-TV Detroit: Building Black Media Infrastructure in the Postrebellion City,” *The Velvet Light trap* 83, no. 83 (2019): 32-45; Brad Stiffler, “Punk Subculture and the Queer Critique of Community on 1980s Cable TV: The Case of New Wave Theatre,” *Television & New Media* 19, no.1 (2017): 42-58. Herold, “Cable Comes Out.” Herold’s study also follows in the footsteps of Eric Freedman’s work on queer cable access in New York City, and Alexandra Juhasz’s pioneering study of HIV/AIDS video in the U.S, which includes analyses of community TV.

Although Canadian scholarship on cable access television is sparse, recent contributions demonstrate exciting engagements with the medium through analyses of the ways in which queers and feminists, in particular, have appropriated the technology and the affective impulses that motivated the creation of such programs in Canada.⁸² Ryan Conrad's historical analysis of the cable show *Toronto Living With AIDS* is especially pertinent in its insistence that cable access television in Canada, as well as the history of HIV/AIDS video, should be read as part and parcel of the larger debates which occurred over freedom of expression in Canada.⁸³ Yet, despite hinting at the ways in which specific cable access shows are embedded in larger infrastructures, these studies do not really account for how these programs were embedded within various social, activist, and cultural networks.

Communication and Information Networks

Scholars such as Manuel Castells have argued that, around the end of the millennium, a new society—a “network society”—, was brought about by a number of social, cultural, technological, and economic changes; this network society, they argued, was also facilitated by

⁸² See for instance: Marusya Bociurkiw, “Big Affect: The Ephemeral Archive of Second-Wave Feminist Video Collectives in Canada,” *Camera Obscura* 31, no. 3 (2016): 5–33; Anna Rebecca Leventhal, “From Garbage to Garbage Hill: Public Culture, Memory, and Community Access Television in Winnipeg,” (MA Thesis, Montreal: McGill University, 2008); Canadian artist Daniel Barrow's curatorial program, performance, and documentary project, “Winnipeg Babysitter,” which archives a variety of Winnipeg-based cable access programs also contributes to the scholarship—although not in a strict sense—on cable television in Canada. See: <https://danielbarrow.com/>

⁸³ Ryan Conrad, “Cable Access Queer: Revisiting *Toronto Living With AIDS* 1990-91,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 60 (Spring 2021). Conrad's account also constitutes one of the first retrospective analysis of the various videos that made up the *TLWA* broadcast, thus providing a blueprint for the historical study of queer cable access TV in Canada—although Conrad himself builds on the work of his predecessors, notably the work of Thomas Waugh, Tom Folland, and Cindy Patton, who were among the first to write about *TLWA* in the 1990s. See: Thomas Waugh, “Anti-Retroviral: 'A Test of Who We Are',” in *Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 277-326; Tom Folland, “Deregulating Identity: Video and AIDS Activism,” in *Mirror Machine: Video and Identity*, ed. Janine Marchessault (Toronto, ON: YYZ Books, 1995), 227-237; Cindy Patton, “Bugging John Greyson,” in *The Perils of Pedagogy: the Works of John Greyson*, ed. Brenda Longfellow, Scott MacKenzie, and Thomas Waugh (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 69-80.

new communication patterns that are characteristic of “a shift from traditional mass media to a system of horizontal communication networks organized around the Internet and wireless communication.”⁸⁴ While the idea of the “network” seems to have been popularized with the advent of the World Wide Web and digital media platforms, scholars of media history have shown that such horizontal communications networks actually predate contemporary models.⁸⁵

For instance, Cait McKinney argues that print media, such as newsletters, used by lesbian feminists in the 1980s are “communication infrastructures that are different from contemporary communications networks, but also model in many ways what online networks would become using “pre-web” media and technology such as mimeographs, telephones, and letter mail.”⁸⁶

Martin Meeker, too, sees in gay and lesbian print media of the 1960s and 1970s as having built “a complex and extensive subcultural network” in the United States.⁸⁷ In a similar vein, Lucas Hilderbrand analyzes video chainletters as pre-dating and anticipating peer-to-peer online distribution models as well as enabling the formation of “feminist community networks,” while Kristen Hogan understands the informational relational practices of feminist bookwomen and bookstores as essential to the formation of a transnational feminist network of communication.⁸⁸

Networks are indeed often intimately tied to social movements and their use of media.

Drawing upon the work of Castells, communication scholar Joshua D. Atkinson, for example,

⁸⁴ Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), xviii.

⁸⁵ Relevant studies of the relationship between Internet networks and queer and trans communities include: Cait McKinney, “Printing the Network: AIDS Activism and Online Access in the 1980s,” *Continuum: Journal of media & Cultural Studies* 32, no. 1 (2018): 7–17; Avery Dame Griff, *The Two Revolutions: A History of the Transgender Internet* (New York: New York University Press, 2023).

⁸⁶ Cait McKinney, “Feminist Information Activism: Newsletters, Index Cards, and the 21st Century Archive,” PhD Dissertation, Toronto: York University (2015), 32.

⁸⁷ Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 3.

⁸⁸ Lucas Hilderbrand, “Joanie and Jackie and Everyone They Know: Video Chainletters as Feminist Community Network,” in *Inherent Vice: Bootleg Histories of Videotape and Copyright* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 195-224; Kristen Hogan, *The Feminist Bookstore Movement: Lesbian Antiracism and Feminist Accountability* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

explains that activist networks are “comprised of organizations or individual activists that constitute nodes, interconnected by communication and communicative action...communication and action includes the transmission of information, the construction of relationships, [and] the mobilization of resources and bodies.”⁸⁹ Ray Brescia, too, examines the link between innovations in communications technology and the social movements that have emerged in their wakes, striving “not just to understand the many ways in which communications and social movements are connected, but also to identify the components of the successes and failures of these same movements that seem to have a symbiotic relationship to the technology that fuels them.”⁹⁰ In doing so, Brescia focuses on what he terms “the social change matrix”: the ways in which communications technology, translocal networks, and messages coalesce to create an environment ripe for social change.⁹¹

Looking specifically at television, Alessandra Renzi uses the example of *Telestreet*, a cluster of pirate television channels in Italy, to analyze its network of activists “whose trajectories and work straddl[e] media making and political organizing,” probing “its connective activist practices as they change with the environment and networks that engendered them.” Renzi also attends to an ethics of connection and care by analyzing how *Telestreet*’s infrastructure and networks “prefigure different ways of being together.”⁹² It is not surprising, therefore, that queer and feminist scholars, too, have been mobilizing the idea of the network to investigate the ways in which these movements communicate and build communities.

⁸⁹ Joshua D. Atkinson, *Journey into Social Activism: Qualitative Approaches* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 126).

⁹⁰ Ray Brescia, *The Future of Change: How Technology Shapes Social Revolutions* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020), 3.

⁹¹ Brescia, 9-10.

⁹² Alessandra Renzi, *Hacked Transmissions: Technology and Connective Activism in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 3.

Histories of the Canadian LGBTQ2+ Movement

As I embark on the task of surveying the literature on Canada's queer movement and its histories, I want to start by highlighting the following quote from Anamarija Horvat, which prefaces her study on queer representations in contemporary television and cinema: "The question of LGBTQ histories is a complex one, as queer people were often forced to stay hidden and to deliberately destroy the evidence of their existence in order to survive...[T]he history of discrimination and persecution that marks both the LGBT past and present has often meant that queer histories have been deliberately erased and removed from official narratives."⁹³ Writers of queer histories have had to contend with gaps and absences, and, as a result, as Manon Tremblay notes, much of Canada's long history of queer organizing remains untold.⁹⁴

Despite these absences, there is still a rich literature on LGBTQ2+ history in Canada, from the homophile groups of the 1950s and 1960s and security campaigns against queers,⁹⁵ to the creation of gay and lesbian liberation organizations,⁹⁶ the HIV/AIDS pandemic,⁹⁷ lesbian

⁹³ Anamarija Horvat, *Screening Queer Memory: LGBTQ Pasts in Contemporary Film and Television* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 3.

⁹⁴ Manon Tremblay, *Queer Mobilizations: Social Movement Activism and Canadian Public Policy* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2015), vii.

⁹⁵ Gary Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile, *The Canadian War on Queers: National Security as Sexual Regulation* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

⁹⁶ Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Homo and Hetero Sexualities* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1996); Tom Warner, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020)

⁹⁷ Richard Fung and Tim McCaskell, "Continental Drift: The Imaging of AIDS," in *Queerly Canadian: An Introductory Reader in Sexuality Studies, Second Edition*, ed. Scott Rayter, Laine Halpern Zisman (Toronto: Women's Press, 2022); Ann Silversides, *AIDS Activist: Michael Lynch and the Politics of Community* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2000).

invisibility and scene-making,⁹⁸ the fight for LGBTQ2+ rights and the shifts to homonationalism,⁹⁹ and trans activism.¹⁰⁰

On the one hand, scholars have taken a national approach to the history of the LGBTQ2+ movement in Canada. These comprehensive studies use different strategies to narrate this history but have mainly endeavoured to chart the beginnings of the Gay Liberation Movement to contemporary demands for rights—which, according to this narrative, have often superseded earlier liberationist tendencies in favour of assimilation into the fabric of the nation. Other approaches within this national historiographic trend challenge this two-stage model by arguing that the goals of gay liberationism are alive and well today and critiquing the narrative of “queer progress” commonly used by the Canadian state to herald the country as a beacon of queer rights.¹⁰¹ This narrative usually begins with the 1969 Criminal Code reforms (Bill C-150)—which, in fact, did not decriminalize homosexuality but simply decriminalized homosexual relationships between two consenting adults (over 21) in private—and culminates with the legalization of “same-sex” marriage, to promote an account in which, as Ryan Conrad notes, “gays and lesbians flock towards marriage, military service, hate crime legislation, and the

⁹⁸ Line Chamberland, *Mémoires lesbiennes: Le Lesbianisme à Montréal entre 1950 et 1972* (Montréal: Éditions du Remue-ménage, 1996); Cameron Duder, *Awfully Devoted Women: Lesbian Lives in Canada, 1900-65* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010); Sharon Dale Stone, *Lesbians in Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1990); Becki Ross, *The House That Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

⁹⁹ Peter Knecht, *Queer Rights* (Halifax: Fernwood Pub., 2011); Tim McCaskell, *Queer Progress: From Homophobia to Homonationalism* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016); David Rayside, *On the Fringe: Gays and Lesbians in Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); David Rayside, *Queer Inclusions, Continental Divisions: Recognition of Sexual Diversity in Canada and the United States* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Miriam Smith, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada Social Movements and Equality-Seeking, 1971-1995* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Manon Tremblay, *Queer Mobilizations: Social Movement Activism and Canadian Public Policy* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2015).

¹⁰⁰ Dan Irving and Rupert Raj, *Trans Activism in Canada: A Reader* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., 2014); Vivian Namaste, *C'était du spectacle! L'histoire des artistes transsexuelles à Montréal* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).

¹⁰¹ Warner, *Never Going Back*; Ronald Cummings and Sharlee Cranston-Reimer, “Introduction Queer Formations and Horizons: Rethinking Queer Canadian Studies,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 54, no. 2 (2020): 213-227; Patrizia Gentile, Gary Kinsman, and L. Pauline Rankin, *We Still Demand! Redefining Resistance in Sex and Gender Struggles* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2017).

prison industrial complex.”¹⁰² Specifically, the 2019 commemorations of the fiftieth anniversary of the “decriminalization” of homosexuality in the country have led a to renewed scholarly interest in the 1969 bill. In denouncing the myth of decriminalization, historian Tom Hooper, for instance, argues that in fact, 1969 marks the *recriminalization* of homosexuality in Canada, expanding the “role of the criminal justice system in the everyday lives of queer people.”¹⁰³ Laura Hall, noting that the 2019 celebrations of “decriminalization” coincided with the release of the Missing and Murder Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIGW) inquiry report, connects queer assimilation into the nation with the settler colonialist impulses of the Canadian state and the policies imposed on Indigenous peoples in Canada.¹⁰⁴

The responses to the 1969 commemoration are situated within a larger development in the field of Canadian queer studies, which has seen a foregrounding of QTBIPOC histories to reframe the narratives that have come to dominate the field. These accounts grapple with questions of belonging in settler colonial contexts and how homonationalism—a process through which some formerly marginalized subjects have access to forms of citizenship and belonging at the expense of racialized others—has influenced queer politics in Canada.¹⁰⁵ They centre the experiences and histories of queer people of colour to propose new and imaginative ways of bringing them to life when these perspectives have not been “documented, stored, and preserved.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Ryan Conrad, *Against Equality: Queer Revolution, Not Mere Inclusion* (Oakland: AK Press, 2014).

¹⁰³ Tom Hooper, “Queering ’69: The Recriminalization of Homosexuality in Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 100, no. 2 (June 2019): 258.

¹⁰⁴ Laura Hall, “Revisiting ’69 Celebrations and Challenging Settler Homonationalism in the (Un)Just Society,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 54, no. 2 (2020): 228-244.

¹⁰⁵ See for instance: OmiSoore Dryden and Suzanne Lenon, *Disrupting Queer Inclusion: Canadian Homonationalisms and the Politics of Belonging* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2015).

¹⁰⁶ See for instance: Robert Diaz, Marissa Largo, and Fritz Pino, *Diasporic Intimacies: Queer Filipinos and Canadian Imaginaries* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2018); Rinaldo Walcott, *Queer Returns: Essays on Multiculturalism, Diaspora, and Black Studies* (London: Insomniac Press, 2016); Syrus Marcus Ware,

On the other hand, what also characterizes the literature on the Canadian LGBTQ2+ movement is its penchant for localism and regionalism. This can be explained, as El Chenier suggests, by the fact that “seeing Canada as a series of regions stitched together rather than as a unified whole is an approach to Canadian history established in the early 1970s.”¹⁰⁷ And, indeed, Miriam Smith concurs, “the national” LGBTQ2+ movement was never more than a “set a of loose networks...rather than a coherent actor,” positing that “local queer organizations were the source of most activities.”¹⁰⁸ Following a pattern that locates urban centres at the core of queer community formation, cities have been the central preoccupation of Canadian queer histories. Because of its status as the country’s largest city, Toronto has often been the locus of scholarly interest;¹⁰⁹ yet, the literature has also expanded beyond Toronto, in an effort to showcase the diversity of the movement, focusing on other metropolitan cities, like Vancouver or Montréal.¹¹⁰

Regionally, while Manon Tremblay argues, rightfully, that the field of Canadian queer studies has tended to reflect the concerns of Quebec and Ontario, with the West and the East less represented—and, indeed, Tremblay’s volume itself omits Saskatchewan and Manitoba—the literature has slowly been evolving in an effort to “diversify the locational mappings of queer life in Canada.”¹¹¹ Valerie Korinek and Jonathan Petrychyn, for instance, offer multicity, regional

Ghaida Moussa, and Jinhana Haritaworn, *Marvellous Grounds: Queer of Colour Histories in Toronto* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2018).

¹⁰⁷ El Chenier, “Foreword,” in *Queer Mobilizations: Social Movement Activism and Canadian Public Policy*, edited by Manon Tremblay (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2015), vii.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada*, 27.

¹⁰⁹ See for instance: Stephanie Chambers et. al., *Any Other Way: How Toronto Got Queer* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2017).

¹¹⁰ See for instance: Jenny Lo, and Theresa Healy, “Flagrantly Flaunting It?: Contesting Perceptions of Locational Identity among Urban Vancouver Lesbians,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 4, no. 1 (2000): 29–44; Irène Demczuk and Frank W. Remiggi, *Sortir de l’ombre: Histoires des communautés lesbienne et gaie de Montréal* (Montréal: VLB éditeur, 1998).

¹¹¹ Tremblay, *Queer Mobilizations*, vii.

studies of aspects of queer history in the Prairies region.¹¹² Similarly, queer histories of Canada's Atlantic provinces have begun to emerge, giving readers a glimpse of 20th century queer life in the Maritimes.¹¹³ These studies are just the beginning, and demonstrate the increased need to expand the literature on queerness in Canadian beyond major cities and beyond "the nation."

Memoirs and (auto-)biographies also historicize queer activism in various Canadian provinces, revealing much about the formation and evolution of queer Canada through their protagonists' eyes, often from a local standpoint.¹¹⁴ Oral histories and community histories further add to the literature while diversifying the methods used to recover these histories; engaging with queer pasts through the use of interviews, for instance, testifies to the affective and unmediated ties the various interviewees have towards these histories.¹¹⁵ Finally, since queer histories have often been neglected by "official" histories, some have thought to preserve their experiences via the Internet, in the form of personal blogs that double as archival repositories.¹¹⁶ Canadian queer history is thus a patchwork history, made of various voices, perspectives, and experiences that are deeply embedded within the politics of place.

¹¹² Valerie J. Korinek, *Prairie Fairies: A History of Queer Communities and People in Western Canada, 1930-1985* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018); Jonathan Petrychyn, "Networks of Feeling: Affective Economies of Queer & Feminist Film Festivals on the Canadian Prairies" (PhD Dissertation, Toronto: York University, 2019).

¹¹³ See for instance: Rebecca Rose, *Before the Parade: A History of Halifax's Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Communities, 1972-1984* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing Limited, 2019); Meredith J. Batt, and Dusty Green, *Len & Cub: A Queer History* (Fredericton, New Brunswick: Goose Lane Editions, 2022)

¹¹⁴ See for instance: David Belrose, *Answering A Different Call: My Queer Thunder Bay Life* (Thunder Bay: David Belrose, 2016); Ma-Nee Chacaby and Mary Louisa Plummer, *A Two-Spirit Journey: the Autobiography of a Lesbian Ojibwa-Cree Elder* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2016); Jim Egan and Donald W. McLeod, *Challenging the Conspiracy of Silence: My Life as a Canadian Gay Activist* (Toronto: Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives, 1998); Gerald Hannon, *Immoral, Indecent & Scurrilous: The Making of an Unrepentant Sex Radical* (Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2022).

¹¹⁵ See for instance: Sarah Liss, *Army of Lovers: A Community History of Will Munro* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2013); Marilyn R. Schuster, Jane Rule, and Rick Bébout, *A Queer Love Story: The Letters of Jane Rule and Rick Bébout* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017); Liam Warfield, Walter Crasshole, and Yony Leyser, *Queercore: How to Punk a Revolution: An Oral History* (Oakland: PM Press, 2021).

¹¹⁶ See for instance: Peter Zorzi and Charlie Dobie's website, "Queer Catharsis" (<https://onthebookshelves.com/>), which serves as a personal and photographic archive of Toronto's queer history, covering "the intersection of [their] lives...with gay liberation and the Canadian gay movement of the 1970's." Similarly, Rick Bébout's website (<http://www.rbebout.com/>)—which has remained active despite Bébout's death—serves as a "memoir of [his] times in Toronto."

Most, if not all, of these works do make use of the media in some form—in particular, print media—to tell the queer stories that they set out to tell. Although media is rarely the main subject of these histories in the Canadian context, some studies have endeavoured to historicize how queer newspapers, tabloids, cinema, film festivals, and radio have propelled the movement in the country, thus engaging with queer history from a media history perspective.¹¹⁷ Despite these efforts, there is scant mention of cable access television the literature on queer Canadian histories, which testifies to the ongoing need to engage critically, and in an interdisciplinary manner, with the ways in which cable access, as well as a range of media forms, have been mobilized as tools by LGBTQ2+ people throughout the emergence and development of the movement.

Revisiting the HIV/AIDS Crisis

The HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, which is still, in many ways, ongoing, is a watershed moment in North American queer activism. As a result, Chapter 5 and 6 in this dissertation deal with the HIV/AIDS epidemic, in order to fully grasp the scope and impact of the virus on queer communities in Ontario and Canada at large. Although scholarship on HIV/AIDS exists in the Canadian context, much of what has been written about the epidemic has emerged from the United States, with many of these accounts providing analyses of the relationship between media, culture, and HIV/AIDS going back to the late 1980s. This period

¹¹⁷ See for instance: Stacey Copeland, “Broadcasting Queer Feminisms: Lesbian and Queer Women Programming in Transnational, Local, and Community Radio,” *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 25, no. 2 (2018): 209-223; Ed Jackson and Stan Persky, *Flaunting It! a Decade of Gay Journalism from The Body Politic* (Vancouver, BC: New Star Books, 1982); Cait McKinney, “‘Finding the Lines to My People’: Media History and Queer Bibliographic Encounter,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 24, no. 1 (February 16, 2018): 55-83; Donald W. McLeod, *A Brief History of GAY: Canada’s First Gay Tabloid, 1964-1966*: Toronto: Homewood Books, 2003; Jonathan Petrychyn, “Networks of Feeling”; Thomas Waugh, *The Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006).

coincided with what Ted Kerr and Alexandra Juhasz call “AIDS Crisis Culture,” a period of “mass cultural production and discourse about HIV/AIDS, leading to social, political, and medical breakthroughs.”¹¹⁸ These early cultural critiques, as Marika Cifor notes, were often written by people and academics who were themselves deeply involved in HIV/AIDS activism.¹¹⁹ *AIDS TV: Identity, Community and Alternative Video* (1995), written by activist scholar Alexandra Juhasz, for example, laid the groundwork for future studies of AIDS video activism by providing an account stemming from the author’s involvement in a women’s video collective and AIDS activism.

Although there was a marked decline in AIDS activism and media production in the late 1990s, since the mid-2000s scholars from various disciplines—ranging from cultural studies, gender and sexuality studies, history, and art history—media makers, and art curators have been engaging with archival material to give it continued meaning in the present—a phenomenon which Kerr and Juhasz have called the “AIDS Crisis Revisitation.”¹²⁰ Yet, this recent surge of interest has also been framed as being New York-centric and representing AIDS activism as predominantly revolving around white, middle class, gay men, thus transmitting a whitewashed, patrimonial version of AIDS history.¹²¹ Furthermore, these works have also been framed as engaging with AIDS activism in a nostalgic way and as seeing AIDS as an epidemic of the past with no ramifications in the present.

Emergent critical HIV/AIDS scholarship responds to these absences and misrepresentations by centering “minoritized activists, cultural workers and communities’

¹¹⁸ Alexandra Juhasz and Theodore Kerr, *We Are Having This Conversation Now: The Times of AIDS Cultural Production* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), xiii.

¹¹⁹ Marika Cifor, *Viral Cultures: Activist Archiving in the Age of AIDS* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 16.

¹²⁰ Juhasz and Kerr, *We Are Having This Conversation Now*, xiv.

¹²¹ Juhasz and Kerr, 172.

stories” and articulating “the twenty-first century stakes of these histories.”¹²² Some of these studies engage with AIDS’s temporality by disrupting the crisis’s popular chronology, proposing that there are multiple “AIDS crises” instead of a singular “crisis”—crises which are ongoing, racialized, global, “and without beginning or end.”¹²³ Through the examination of several, sometimes coexisting, HIV/AIDS timelines, these studies seek to “understand how AIDS can be experienced and has changed over its decades long history, and whenever [we] encounter it in the present.”¹²⁴

Others have returned to the archive and its omissions to propose new modes of engaging with the AIDS past. For example, Marty Fink looks to the HIV archives of the 1980s and 1990s and traces connections between early HIV/AIDS activism and current disability kinship and caregiving practices. Fink’s cross-generational analysis does not treat HIV/AIDS as a thing of the past, but as carrying legacies that support “ongoing sexual and gender self-determination within contemporary...movements.”¹²⁵ Marika Cifor addresses critiques of nostalgia by proposing the concept of “vital nostalgia” as a generative way to engage with AIDS activist archives, by drawing “on the AIDS past, real or imagined, to conceptualize and to construct a different, more just present and future.”¹²⁶

Information and media also take centre stage in these recent accounts, building and expanding on previous studies which emerged during the period of AIDS Crisis Culture. These studies, however, move away from a focus on analogue media and video in particular to focus on how HIV left an “imprint on emerging communication technologies and how

¹²² Cifor, *Viral Cultures*, 16.

¹²³ Jih-Fei Cheng, Alexandra Juhasz, and Nishant Shanani. *AIDS and the Distribution of Crises* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 3.

¹²⁴ Juhasz and Kerr, *We Are Having This Conversation Now*, 5.

¹²⁵ Marty Fink, *Forget Burial: HIV Kinship, Disability, and Queer/Trans Narratives of Care* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 161.

¹²⁶ Cifor, *Viral Cultures*, 29.

sexuality...factor[s] in technological cultures.”¹²⁷ Despite their productive frameworks and important contributions to the fields of media studies, queer studies, and information studies, these accounts rarely touch upon the Canadian context; it is imperative, therefore, that HIV/AIDS in Canada—particularly its related media interventions and archives—be contextualized not through an American lens, but through a Canadian one which takes into account the specificities of the country’s sociopolitical, archival, and media landscape.

Queer Desire, Care, and Kinship

Since much emphasis in this study is laid on the social aspect of queer cable access television, this short section examines how queer theorists have thought through concepts such as relationality, belonging, desire, care, and kinship. One of the most important debates in the field of queer theory, indeed, has been centered around relationality. The “anti-social thesis,” put forth by theorists such as Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman, posits that queerness is, in fact, marked by negation and unbelonging, desires to disrupt the social order, and a refusal of any forms of futurity—in the form of the Child or the Family. Embracing a politics of the death drive, the anti-social thesis, as its name indicates, thus embraces queerness’s association with the antisocial.¹²⁸ As a response to the anti-social thesis, José Esteban Muñoz actually sees possibility and potentiality in queerness—something that is “not yet there”—in his queer of colour critique of

¹²⁷ See for instance: Cait McKinney, “Crisis Infrastructures: AIDS Activism Meets Internet Regulation,” In *AIDS and the Distribution of Crises*, ed. Jih-Fei Cheng, Alexandra Juhasz, and Nishant Shahani, Durham: Duke University Press, 2020, 162-182; Cait McKinney, “Printing the Network: AIDS Activism and Online Access in the 1980s.” *Continuum* 32, no. 1 (2018): 7–17; Joan Lubin and Jeanne Vaccaro, “AIDS Infrastructures, Queer Networks: Architecting the Critical Path,” *First Monday* 25 no.10 (2020); Kathryn Brewster and Bonnie Ruberg, “SURVIVORS: Archiving the History of Bulletin Board Systems and the AIDS Crisis,” *First Monday* 25, no. 10 (2020); Marika Cifor and Claire McDonald, “‘I Hope We Leave More of a Record:’ Radical Queer Care within and for the AIDS INFO BBS’s Caregivers Mailing List,” *Feminist Media Histories* 9, no. 1 (2023): 78-97.

¹²⁸ Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave?: and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

Edelman's argument.¹²⁹ Beyond Edelman and Muñoz's contributions, work on kinship and care also demonstrate concerns with queer sociality. As Tyler Bradway and Elizabeth Freeman underline in *Queer Kinship*, "queerness leaks out on all sides rearranging and recalibrating the social in frequently surprising and always richly embodied ways."¹³⁰ By focusing on queer relationships formed through friendship, sex, or activism, Bradway and Freeman argue that kinship theory "contests structuralist accounts of kinship, particularly as the latter naturalize the mutual imbrications of heteronormativity, patriarchy, white supremacy, and Western imperialism."¹³¹ Queer kinship, therefore, "points beyond heteronormative organizations of intimacy, care, desire, and even reproduction."¹³² Trans, disability, and critical race theory have heavily contributed to the literature on kinship.¹³³ In her work on disability justice centering queerness, for example, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha writes about *care webs*, mapping the ways in which collective care creates new ways of being in the world for disabled QTBIPOC folks, framing access and care as worldmaking tools.¹³⁴

With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and the social shifts that ensued, work on kinship and care has built on disabled, feminist, and queer of colour critiques, as well as on work that has emerged out of the HIV/AIDS crisis. These accounts identify "crises of care" which have taken hold in our contemporary neoliberal capitalist societies, where "uncaring communities" and "careless kinships" have eroded our sense of responsibility to our

¹²⁹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

¹³⁰ Tyler Bradway and Elizabeth Freeman, *Queer Kinship: Race, Sex, Belonging, Form* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), 11.

¹³¹ Bradway and Freeman, 1.

¹³² Bradway and Freeman, 2.

¹³³ See for instance: David L. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

¹³⁴ Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018), 108.

communities—thus calling for rebuilding our social, political, and economic infrastructures based on solidarity, care, and mutual aid.¹³⁵ By exploring ways in which caring communities can lead to improved societies, these works put queer kinship and sociality front and centre to provide new models of being together.

Theories of queer kinship are also heavily invested in desire. As Bradway and Freeman argue: “there is no theory of kinship without desire.”¹³⁶ Desire, in fact, is at the heart of queer theory in general, in its interests in investigating human sexuality—desire as the act of wanting, desire as lack, and desire as potentiality. Carolyn Dinshaw’s phrase, “the queer desire for history” also expresses a desire to recover a past that would have relevance in the present, “touching across time.”¹³⁷ Dinshaw further sees “queer histories [as] made of affective relations.”¹³⁸ José Muñoz reminds us that queerness is a means for building relations; it is that “thing that tells us that the world is not enough, that indeed something is missing.”¹³⁹ The ephemerality of queer life is also intimately linked to archives, the artefacts that remain and those that, are, as Muñoz puts it so eloquently, missing.

Remembering and Archiving Canadian Tele/Audiovisual Pasts

In this closing section, I return to the study of television; specifically, I engage with televisual pasts and their archives to explore the “slippery endeavour” that is researching

¹³⁵ See for instance: Andreas Chatzidakis, Jamie Hakim, Jo Littler, Catherine Rottenberg, and Lynne Segal, *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence* (London: Verso Books, 2020), 3; Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)* (London: Verso, 2020); Hi‘ilei Julia, Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart and Tamara Kneese, “Radical Care: Survival Strategies for Uncertain Times,” *Social Text* 38, no. 1 (2020): 1–16.

¹³⁶ Bradway and Freeman, *Queer Kinships*, 3.

¹³⁷ Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 40

¹³⁸ Dinshaw, 12.

¹³⁹ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

televisual history, especially in the Canadian context, setting the stage for the next section of this dissertation.¹⁴⁰ As the archival turn has shown, archives provide evidence of history for individuals, communities, and states, while maintaining and defining memory.¹⁴¹ Television, as an object, is also strongly associated with memory—national, collective, and personal.¹⁴² Televisual recordings, therefore, constitute “technologies of attachment,” which contain both larger histories and personal pasts.¹⁴³ These recordings, in other words, can help sustain affective personal and cultural memories by saving texts that would otherwise be forgotten.¹⁴⁴ At the same time, television is also a “bad memory object.” Scottish television researcher Amy Holdsworth, indeed, claims that television is often seen as a “metaphor for forgetting.”¹⁴⁵

Television’s conceptualization as a bad memory object stems partly from the “live” quality of (analogue) television. Television, indeed, has often been characterized by its “transience” or “ephemerality,” and this inherent ephemeral character has acted as an obstacle to collecting and archiving televisual content.¹⁴⁶ Models for evaluating television’s “essence” have long been dominated by the twin concepts of “liveness”—meaning presence, immediacy, actuality—and “flow.”¹⁴⁷ As the late Jane Feuer writes in her influential and much-cited critical

¹⁴⁰ Pamela Wilson, “Stalking the Wild Evidence: Capturing Media History Through Elusive and Ephemeral Archives,” in Janet Staiger and Sabine Hake, *Convergence Media History* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2009), 182.

¹⁴¹ If archives and archiving had been the domain of archivists since the 19th century, a surge of theoretical interest in archives took place in the 1990s and the early 2000s, now commonly known as the “archival turn,” which expanded conceptions of archives as mere historical repositories by repositioning the archive as a site of power and knowledge. Scholars started adopting a fluid definition of “the archive” to offer a postmodern, post-structural, and/or postcolonial take on the relationship between records, archival spaces, and memory practices.

¹⁴² Kate Darian-Smith and Sue Turnbull, *Remembering Television: Histories, Technologies, Memories* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 1.

¹⁴³ Darian-Smith and Turnbull, 11; Lynn Spigel, “Housing Television: Architectures of the Archive.” *The Communication Review* 13, no. 1 (2010): 62.

¹⁴⁴ Hilderband, *Inherent Vice*, xiv.

¹⁴⁵ Amy Holdsworth, *Television, Memory, and Nostalgia* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1.

¹⁴⁶ Holdsworth, *Television, Memory, and Nostalgia*, 1.

¹⁴⁷ Jane Feuer, “The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology” in *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches*, ed. Ann E. Kaplan (The American Film Institute, 1983), 2-21; Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (Schocken Books, 1975).

account of television's liveness: "Unlike film, which freezes events in frames, television in its very essence...consists of process. The ontology of the television image thus consists in movement, process, 'liveness' and 'presence.'"¹⁴⁸ Perhaps even more notable than that of "liveness," the concept of "flow," popularized by British cultural critic Raymond Williams, has been considered the "defining characteristic of broadcasting."¹⁴⁹ Television's "flow" represents how viewers experience television through a sense of immediacy and presence. Liveness and flow, as properties considered essentially televisual, serve as conceptual anchors for the study of the medium. As such, television has been theorized as an object which defies historical consciousness, bringing about a "perpetual present."¹⁵⁰

These early concerns with flow and liveness (concerns with *how* we watch television) superseded the preoccupation with content (*what* we watch). Yet, the question of whether to archive television, as TV historian Lynn Spigel underlines, is also rooted in "cultural and material struggles over television's cultural worth, both as a document and as an art form."¹⁵¹ Ephemerality, in other words, is not simply "inherent" to television; it is also tied to the value we attach to objects. As a popular medium and mass communication technology, television was first perceived as being "unsophisticated, simplistic, and...crassly commercial."¹⁵² Television's "positioning as a popular medium" was crucial to how television was archived (or not archived). The "ordinariness" of the object, exacerbated by anti-TV rhetoric, resulted in a lack of preservation of early television programs, which are now "only accessible in remembered form."¹⁵³ The collection of broadcasting materials, therefore, is a relatively new phenomenon, as

¹⁴⁸ Feuer, 13.

¹⁴⁹ Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, 86.

¹⁵⁰ Holdsworth, *Television, Memory, and Nostalgia*, 131.

¹⁵¹ Spigel, "Housing Television," 55.

¹⁵² Gray and Lotz. *Television Studies*, 9.

¹⁵³ Darian-Smith and Turnbull, *Remembering Television*, 6.

broadcasters, scholars, archivists, and librarians typically did not consider television programs worthy of consideration and preservation.¹⁵⁴

When television materials started to be collected, the same system of values determined which programs were preserved and which ones were left out. Echoing Michel Foucault's conceptualization of archives as the "law of what can be said," Lynn Spigel claims: "[W]hat remains of TV today belies a set of strategies and statements made by groups that had particular investments in the medium. These strategies and statements are bound up in a complex web of belief systems and prevailing discourses about television's value as an object."¹⁵⁵ Cultural distinctions between the ordinary and the exceptional, the everyday and the newsworthy, the serious and the frivolous, influenced what remains of the television archive.¹⁵⁶ Adding to this discussion, feminist television scholars have also argued that television's particular position as a domestic object has influenced preservation practices.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, in addition to its non-permanent—thus, non-archival—character, these fundamental assumptions about the value of television and its programs have resulted in television becoming a "bad memory object." Because of its preoccupations with the ordinary and the mundane, cable access, then, by extension, is a *very bad* memory object.

More than simply being tied to concerns about the "essence" of television, the medium's "liveness" and ephemeral quality also created barriers to its preservation, as archiving television presents technological challenges. If television is characterized by its immateriality, its traces,

¹⁵⁴ Julia Noordegraaf, "Who Knows Television? Online Access and the Gatekeepers of Knowledge," *Critical Studies in Television: Scholarly Studies in Small Screen Fictions* 5, no. 2 (2010): 5; Lynn Spigel, "Our TV Heritage: Television, the Archive, and the Reasons for Preservation," *A Companion to Television*, ed. by Janet Wasko (Wiley Blackwell, 2005): 67-91.

¹⁵⁵ Spigel, "Our TV Heritage," 70.

¹⁵⁶ Rachel Moseley and Helen Wheatley, "Is Archiving a Feminist Issue? Historical Research and the Past, Present and Future of Television Studies," *Cinema Journal* 47, no. 3 (2008): 153.

¹⁵⁷ Moseley and Wheatley, 154; Noordegraaf, 6.

are, on the contrary, very much linked to material concerns. As Julia Noordegraaf reminds us, early television programs were lost for purely technological reasons: there was no way of recording them.¹⁵⁸ The distribution of the Videocassette Recorder (VCR) and VHS tapes on the marketplace in the 1970s and 1980s, however, changed the economy of television viewing and allowed for television to be recorded by “armchair archivists.”¹⁵⁹ Yet, tapes were of low quality and intended for short-term storage.¹⁶⁰ In his study of video, Lucas Hilderbrand contends that decay, degeneration, and obsolescence are characteristic of analogue VHS tapes.¹⁶¹ Since videotapes were the primary medium to record television programs and we have now entered the era of digital recording and online streaming, VHS tapes which hold televisual memories are slowly but surely deteriorating. And, while Hilderbrand offers a self-proclaimed nostalgic and romanticized account of the “white noise, the jittery image, the unnatural colors, the grain, the momentary loss of signal that triggers the blank blue TV screen or the flash of tracking,” magnetic media’s obsolescence, despite its visual appeal, puts our existing television heritage at risk of disappearing.¹⁶² Therefore, the archives of televisual materials—when they exist—are often incomplete, and encounters with television history are highly serendipitous.

These issues are further exacerbated in the Canadian audiovisual landscape, where regulations created a specific context for the archiving of television programming. The United States and the United Kingdom—both countries with robust TV studies traditions, as mentioned earlier—eventually built national and accessible television archives. Similar institutions do not exist in Canada, however. Because there is no official and accessible national archive of

¹⁵⁸ Noordegraaf, 6.

¹⁵⁹ Spigel, “Housing Television,” 62.

¹⁶⁰ Hilderbrand, *Inherent Vice*, 12; Jennifer VanderBurgh, “Considering Todd’s Tape: The Textual Transition of Videotape Miscellany,” *Public* 29, no. 57 (2018): 155.

¹⁶¹ Hilderbrand, 5.

¹⁶² Hilderbrand, 65.

television, Canada has been described as an “archival wasteland.”¹⁶³ Canadian television theorists, such as Jennifer VanderBurgh, Michele Byers, Andrew Burke, and Marusya Bociurkiw, underline that there are “spotty repositories here and there,” but no “systematic cataloguing of [TV], or spaces in which such archival materials could be made available to the public, scholarly or otherwise.”¹⁶⁴ This lack of accessible televisual heritage is especially at odds with the fact that television is largely publicly funded and dedicated to promoting Canadian identity, as Jennifer VanderBurgh points out.¹⁶⁵ While this newer generation of scholars is grappling with the effects of having no major institutional TV archive, the late Canadian television scholar Mary Jane Miller, who pioneered the analysis of televisual content in the country, already bemoaned the “rudimentary records” of the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) in the 1980s and 1990s, when television studies were starting to take hold as a discipline in Canada.¹⁶⁶ Instead, Miller imagined “a national [TV] archive, complete with helpful archivist, exists for the scholarly seeker.”¹⁶⁷ In lieu of this utopian archive, however, scholars doing research on English Canadian television will predominantly find scattered televisual materials at the National Library and Archives of Canada (LAC) and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). Lack of accessibility is a major barrier to these archives; what scholars consider to be public domain, in fact, is not, as much of the literature points out.¹⁶⁸ Further, while LAC and CBC are institutions that, to some extent, possess the financial means and expertise to preserve,

¹⁶³ Michele Byers and Jennifer VanderBurgh, “What Was Canada? Locating the Language of an Empty National Archive,” *Critical Studies in Television* 5, no. 2 (2010): 106.

¹⁶⁴ Michele Byers, “The Empty Archive: Canadian Television and the Erasure of History,” *FlowTV*, June 2007, <https://www.flowjournal.org/2007/06/the-empty-archive-canadian-television-and-the-erasure-of-history/>.

¹⁶⁵ Jennifer VanderBurgh, *What Television Remembers*, 3.

¹⁶⁶ Miller, *Turn up the Contrast*, 6.

¹⁶⁷ Byers, “The Empty Archive.”

¹⁶⁸ Bociurkiw, *Feeling Canadian*; Burke, *Hinterland Remixed*; Jennifer VanderBurgh, “(Who Knows?) What Remains to Be Seen: Archives, Access, and Other Practical Problems for the Study of Canadian “National” Television,” in *Canadian Television: Text and Context*, ed. Marian Bredin, Scott Henderson, and Sarah A. Matheson (WLU Press, 2011), 39-56.

maintain, and digitize parts of their collections, other institutions which house television materials might be poorly equipped to preserve and adequately care for them; deteriorating videotapes and other televisual residues are accumulating dust in several institutions, each with their own knowledge and financial means when it comes to handling, managing, storing, and making televisual pasts accessible—as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Much of what remains of our disposable TV past is found largely through (somewhat purposeful) accidents—what happens to be recorded and kept somewhere, as Lynn Spigel remarks.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, as a properly accessible television archive is yet to come, researchers and television aficionados have become increasingly reliant upon the illicit flow of television content. This illicit flow takes the shape of “rogue” or “Do-It Yourself” archives compiled by “armchair archivists”: personal collections, pirated sources, Internet uploads.¹⁷⁰ As Kim Bjarkman notes, these collections are highly valuable as they build countercanons to rival the “classic” television canon.¹⁷¹ Jennifer VanderBurgh further highlights the value of these amateur recordings, as this kind of archival material disrupts the idea that Canadian television “is somehow homogeneous in nature or experienced in a uniform way.”¹⁷²

In today’s digital world, “rogue archivists” have been building online repositories of analogue television by remediating VHS tapes. YouTube channels such as Retrontario, RetroNewfoundland, and RetroWinnipeg, for instance, document the televisual content of local and regional stations in Canada.¹⁷³ These repositories function as community archives of sorts, and exhibit “counter-archiving”—“anarchiving”—practices. In other words, the exclusion of

¹⁶⁹ Spigel, “Our Television Heritage,” 92.

¹⁷⁰ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Boston: MIT Press, 2016); Spigel, “Housing Television.”

¹⁷¹ Kim Bjarkman, “To Have and to Hold: The Video Collector’s Relationship with an Ethereal Medium,” *Television and New Media* 5, no. 3 (2004): 226.

¹⁷² VanderBurgh, “Considering Todd’s Tape,” 161.

¹⁷³ Burke, *Hinterland Remixed*, 23.

television programs as part of the imagined community of the nation in the form of national television archives is behind the urge to create “renegade and insurgent forms of knowledge.”¹⁷⁴ As such, these repositories can be understood as queer strategies of preserving audiovisual memory. As Regina Kunzel further notes, creating oppositional approaches to safekeeping and reading history is often “the key methodological strategy of queer history, as it is for other histories of marginalization.”¹⁷⁵

Yet, while these online digital archives are useful in the absence of national/regional television archives and create the impression that televisual pasts are now available, deteriorating private collections and incomplete digital repositories are inadequate substitutes for proper archives in which Canadian television would be valued, preserved, and made accessible to Canadian and international television lovers alike. More than to please television lovers however, it seems urgent that what remains of Canadian television, including cable access television, be made available to further and strengthen the tradition of Canadian TV studies and prevent cultural amnesia. The next chapter puts theory into practice by analyzing the methods through which cable access television archives can be recovered and mobilized.

¹⁷⁴ Amy L. Stone and Jaime Cantrell, *Out of the Closet, into the Archives: Researching Sexual Histories* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), xvii.

¹⁷⁵ Anjali Arondekar et al., “Queering Archives: A Roundtable Discussion,” *Radical History Review* 2015, no. 122 (2015): 214.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS FOR RECOVERING (QUEER) CABLE ACCESS HISTORIES

The seeds of dissertation began germinating in the Summer of 2019; however, in early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a succession of lockdowns and travel restrictions which severely impeded my ability to bring this project to fruition—as this research mobilizes historical methods of inquiry, namely archival research and oral history. Understandably, as COVID took hold, memory institutions swiftly closed their doors the public, putting my research on hold for an indefinite amount of time. Although some institutions offered on-demand digitization, mostly of paper-based documents, others could not do so or had long waitlists due to increased demand. A year and a half and many email exchanges later, I was finally able to access brick-and-mortar archives, as COVID-19 restrictions were slowly beginning to be lifted in the province.

In this chapter, I start by narrating my experiences working with two institutions, whose holdings are valuable for the study of cable access television in Ontario: The ArQuives and The Lakehead University Archives. The story of queer cable access television programs is, indeed, as suggested in the last section of the previous chapter, very much linked to the story of their archives—what has been preserved, and, more potently, what has been lost. I then discuss how I dealt with the gaps and absences present in the archives and expand on the methods and ethics of care and connection which I used to develop this dissertation.

The ArQuives

The ArQuives—formerly known as the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives—a Toronto-based community archives dedicated to preserving and circulating material related to LGBTQ2+ history in Canada, contain expansive, albeit selective, records of LGBTQ2+ cable access

programs.¹ In particular, the ArQuives possess a total of about 75 VHS episodes of *10% QTV*—a cable program which aired from 1995 to 2001—ranging from Season 1 to Season 4, all of which are in excellent condition. During the course of my first visit, I painstakingly engaged in a kind of frantic archival binge-watching experience, viewing all of the episodes on a small television monitor equipped with a VCR in the audiovisual room of the ArQuives, in a span of a couple of days. When discussing the tapes with Lucie Handley Girard, the ArQuives’ Senior Archivist, I was informed that they had been donated to the ArQuives by the production studios, as Ian Ross, *QTV 10%*’s executive producer, was listed as the collection’s donor—making these VHS the master tapes.² Individuals who participated in the program, however, have also recorded and kept videotapes of the show. Aware of the obsolescence of videocassettes in the digital era, some have even digitized them, and uploaded some clips on YouTube. The collection at the ArQuives, unfortunately, has not been digitized; to date, the institution does not have digitization plans for the program.³ Because the ArQuives are run independently and staffed almost entirely by volunteers, they cannot digitize all of their holdings—more fragile audiovisual materials take priority in terms of digitization.

¹ Following the wave of protests that took place in the United States and spilled over to Canada in the 1960s, community archiving initiatives boomed from the 1970s onwards and provoked a reconsideration of the authority of the archive and of what the archive contains. Community archives, designated, as their name suggests, to serve specific communities, often operate outside of government or academic institutions, and tend to collect archival objects that hold special meaning for the community. For more on community archives see: Rebecka Taves Sheffield “Community Archives,” in *Currents of Archival Thinking*, ed. Heather MacNeil and Terry Eastwood, Second edition (Santa Barbara, California: Libraries Unlimited, 2016), 351-376; Jeannette A. Bastian and Andrew Flinn, *Community Archives, Community Spaces: Heritage, Memory and Identity* (London: Facet Publishing, 2020).

² However, when conducting my interviews, I also found out that Brian Hardy, one of the *10%* producers, donated tapes and documents pertaining to the show’s development in “a salmon tin can” to the ArQuives. To this day, the documents have not been located.

³ Interestingly, when they still operated under the banner of the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives and before upgrading their website, the ArQuives had made available *10%*’s former website via in the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine. However, even though the website contains digital versions of the episodes, they are now obsolete.

Case in point: The ArQuives also possess six video reels of *Gay News and Views* and *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals*, two cable access shows which aired in the late 1970s (Figure 3). As I expressed interest in viewing the reels, the ArQuives and I explored various options so that I would be able to watch them. The reels, which were donated by lesbian activist Heather Ramsay on behalf of the Gay Offensive Collective, were sitting on the ArQuives' shelves, in their "heavy and awkward to carry blue cases," as Ramsay describes them.⁴ No one had seen the reels, or even opened the blue cases, since their original donation. Their condition was therefore even more precarious than that of the VHS tapes, and begged several questions: What and who was on the footage? Were the reels in good condition or were they damaged? Could they even be played? If so, what kind of equipment was needed?

The first challenge was to identify the exact format of these reels and find a facility which would be able to play, and, eventually, digitize them. Fortunately, around the same time that we started investigating, the Archive/Counter-Archive project launched Cinemobilia, a mobile media digitization lab tailored to "the unique archival and presentation needs of marginalized communities in Canada, specifically community collections that represent an underserved or underrepresented group or community."⁵ Because the ArQuives are an Archive/Counter-Archive community partner and because the shows are rare representations of LGBTQ2+ life in the 1970s in Toronto, the tapes were ideal candidates for Cinemobilia's digitization program. Two reels were sent to the mobile lab for a trial run in June 2022; a few weeks later, Cinemobilia informed the ArQuives and I that, although the tapes were described as "1 inch Type-C" reels in the ArQuives' finding aid, the equipment purchased by Cinemobilia was not actually able to play them—suggesting that the reels might be in a different format than originally assumed. The reels

⁴ Heather Ramsay, Email Message to Author, December 5, 2022.

⁵ "Welcome to Cinemobilia," Cinemobilia, 2022, <http://cinemobilia.ca>.

were then brought to the Toronto-based media arts centre Vtape for further inspection, as the centre also doubles as a media restoration facility. The institution, however, was not able to play the reels either, confirming that their format was something other than Type-C. Since the Type-C format originated in 1978 and the reels were from 1979, Vtape hypothesized, maybe the broadcast companies had not made the switch from Type-C's predecessor, Type-B, over to Type-C—especially as the cost of updating the equipment could have been prohibitive. The Cinemobilia team subsequently checked with yet another media preservation institution for a second opinion, the University of Toronto Media Commons Archive, which made the case that the reels could be Type-A one-inch tapes, because the Type-B format was mostly used in Europe in the 1970s and was actually quite rare in North America. The plot thickened: if the tapes were Type-B, why would Toronto-based cable companies have been using a European format? And, if they were Type-A, then, were the shows broadcast in black-and-white, which was characteristic of Type-A reels, even though they aired in 1978?

The Media Commons Archives suggested contacting DC Video, a California-based organization which specializes in recovering hard-to-play magnetic media, to obtain more answers. Further investigation revealed that the reels' format was, in fact, IVC.⁶ While Type-C was a format popular in television production in the 1970s, IVC is much rarer, and, as a result, much more difficult to digitize than Type-C. Since the tapes could not be played on any kind of equipment that the ArQuives or Cinemobilia had access to, the institution made the decision to find ways to digitize the reels as soon as possible to save them from extinction. With no facility available to digitize this format in Canada, the tapes were sent south of the border, to Media Preserve in Pennsylvania, one of a handful of audiovisual preservation facilities in North

⁶ IVC was a high-end broadcast analogue format developed by International Video Corporation and introduced in 1975.

America able to transfer the IVC reels to a digital format. Four months later, six digitized versions made their way back to the ArQuives.



Figure 3. The six IVC reels on the ArQuives shelves.
Photograph taken by the author, December 2021.

Until the end of October 2022, then, no one had seen *Gay News and Views* or *This Show May be Offensive to Heterosexuals* since the 1970s—not even the shows’ participants. Upon receiving a digital link to view the tapes, Heather Ramsay expressed a sentiment of relief, combined with a feeling of overdue recognition: “I have waited 44 years to finally see these tapes and to have [people] take interest in the two shows as a part of LGBTQ+ history.”⁷ From their original donation to their digitization and re-activation, a variety of actors had to come together, at various moments in time, to ensure these tapes’ survival and recovery. Collaborative

⁷ Heather Ramsay, Email Message to Author, December 5, 2022.

and intergenerational initiatives are therefore urgently needed for the preservation, restoration, and remembrance of fragile, ephemeral, and marginalized media objects, in Canada and elsewhere; no archive is an island.⁸

Yet, and without negating the incredible significance of these digitization efforts, “digital storage” does not equal “memory,” as Wendy Chun argues, nor does it equal totalizing or finite histories.⁹ These reels represent a small sample of the programs; only two episodes of *Gay News and Views* are available, while the show ran for two seasons. In fact, cable companies often re-used and recycled the tapes for other community programs that would air on their stations. Other community shows were erased and disappeared from circulation completely; for instance, only one tape of *Out of the Closets* is listed in the ArQuives’ online search engine, which describes the tape as a “colour video cassette, produced by Gays of Ottawa and broadcast on Skyline Cablevision on 2nd June 1977.”¹⁰ After several requests and inquiries, the VHS tape, however, could not be found—although a DVCAM tape by Toronto filmmaker Nancy Nicol held at the ArQuives miraculously contained half an episode of *Out of the Closets*, which I was able to draw from. In addition to the already precarious status of cable television tapes and reels, it is significant to add that the archives of Gays of Ottawa burned down in a fire in 1979. It is likely, then, that the lost tape held at the ArQuives was the only full copy in existence.¹¹ The trials and tribulations of *Gay News and Views* and *This Show May be Offensive to Heterosexuals*, as well

⁸ Incidentally, “No Archive is An Island” was the title of the 2008 conference of the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives, which aimed to explore how archives exist within interconnected networks of communication.

⁹ Wendy Chun, “The Enduring Ephemeral, or the Future is a Memory,” *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 1 (2008): 148.

¹⁰ “Out of the Closets video 1977,” The ArQuives, <https://collections.arquives.ca/link/descriptions15104>.

¹¹ As Donald McLeod notes, on February 16, 1979, a fire “destroyed the GO Centre and several other offices and small stores at 378 Elgin Street.” As a result of the fire, “GO lost all of its books, furniture, files, and some of its archives.” See: Donald W. McLeod, *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada: A Selected Annotated Chronology, 1976-1981* (Toronto: Homewood Books, 2017), 366.

as the lack of material related to *Out of the Closets*, thus testify to the difficulties of accessing Canada's televisual pasts, as argued in the previous chapter.

At the same time, focusing solely on loss might erase the efforts made to ensure that information about these television programs would circulate, not only at the time during which they aired but, perhaps, in the future. Individuals who contributed to these programs often left behind paper records that enable researchers to historicize cable access television, many of which were donated to the ArQuives. For example, complete and digitized records of Canada's leading gay newsmagazine, *The Body Politic*, are accessible both at the ArQuives and online through the Internet Archive thanks to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. The pages of *The Body Politic* are themselves archives of the larger debates happening in the community from 1971 to 1987, providing many insights into the discussions surrounding queer cable access shows in those years. In addition to *The Body Politic* collection, episode transcripts, personal journals, letters, photographs, and flyers advertising specific cable shows are available at the ArQuives and have helped me reconstruct the history of cable access television in the province. Former program participants, as mentioned earlier, have also been keen on preserving this history, while not necessarily wanting to donate them to an institution, either for personal or accessibility reasons; some of the participants, for instance, have held on to memorabilia and ephemera such as tee-shirts, photographs, program scripts, and newspaper articles related to their program, which they generously shared with me.

The paper archive of queer cable access television therefore constitutes an important source of community heritage which documents local queer media histories. Paper, as Cait McKinney notes, shapes "historiography focused on twentieth-century LGBTQ histories," precisely because, unlike other kinds of media, it is "a stable format that lends itself to

archiving.”¹² McKinney explains that: “Paperwork is designed to be kept, as files can be ordered and stored away for future access, without taking up too much space.”¹³ Beyond its practical implications, this paper archive also tells us about the economy of care that permeated the production of the cable access shows under study; the fact that participants preserved these paper files later to be donated to archival institutions or shared with others is indicative of their affective relationship to the programs and of how important they deemed this work to be. Therefore, the ‘elsewhere’ of television archives may become indispensable and even central to historical reconstructions of television in Canada in the absence of accessible audiovisual archives. When considering the challenges of navigating audiovisual archival research, one must not bemoan the dominance of print culture, but, rather, consider paper traces as part of an ecology of media and cultural forms which work together and complement one another. At the same time, paper traces become not just context but, in the immediate absence of audiovisual material, become the text itself from which scholars must draw upon to trace local cable access television histories.

The Lakehead University Archives

Located in Thunder Bay in Northwestern Ontario, the Lakehead University Archives (LU Archives) were built to predominantly serve the academic community of Lakehead and preserve university-related records, such as documents about “the history, governance, and administration of Lakehead University,” “faculty research and teaching,” or “student life and the university

¹² Cait McKinney, *Information Activism: A Queer History of Lesbian Feminist Technologies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 75.

¹³ McKinney, 75. For more on the history of paper from a media history angle, see: Lisa Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

experience.”¹⁴ For example, their collection of digitized videos, which has been made available on YouTube, consists mainly of promotional videos and ads for the University from the 1990s.¹⁵ However, the LU Archives are also home to many documents pertaining to the Indigenous communities living in and around Thunder Bay, the local Finnish community—since the city is home to the largest community of people of Finnish heritage living outside of Finland—, the French-speaking community, and, of particular interest to this dissertation, the local LGBTQ2+ community. Although the Lakehead University Archives are not a community-based archives in a traditional sense, they nonetheless fulfill the needs of the population of Thunder Bay and surrounding Northwestern Ontarian communities and, as such, complicate and expand our understanding of “community archives.”

Since the archives’ website indicated that they had a complete run of the local cable access show *Thunder Gay Magazine* recorded on VHS tapes, as well as a variety of materials related to LGBTQ2+ history in the city, I flew from Toronto to Thunder Bay to do a deep dive into these documents and watch the videos. However, the VHS tapes were in much worse condition than the ArQuives’ tapes and appeared to have severely deteriorated. In fact, it looked like most of the 70 episodes held at the LU Archives had eventually become unwatchable over time. The sound was quasi-inaudible, and the only way to make sense of the content of the videotapes was to fast forward them to get a glimpse of the images (this fast-forwarding technique was accompanied by a crippling fear of damaging the tapes further). People whose voices had once been so important to the community were suddenly voiceless, slowly returning to invisibility. It became apparent that the institution to which the collection had been donated,

¹⁴ “Archival Records,” Lakehead University Archives, 2022.
<https://libguides.lakeheadu.ca/c.php?g=412994&p=2813865>

¹⁵ “Lakehead University Archives,” Playlist, YouTube, 2022.
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLDAjrcZQG9cC7b-JC8qE9iAKSpsZkgIT6>

like most archives in Canada, did not possess the means to appropriately preserve audiovisual material. The precarity of the tapes reflected the precarity of the institution at large, as evidenced by the various leaks in the ceiling that I spotted during my trip which required the archives' shelves to be entirely covered in plastic—a setting eerily reminiscent of television show *Dexter* (Showtime, 2006-2013), where the main serial killer protagonist wraps the room in plastic before murdering his victims (Figure 4). These archives were neither “living” nor “dead,” but in a process of decaying. Despite the existence of theoretical texts about the allure of the archives, these archives had no allure at all.¹⁶ I even found a dead fly in one of the tape's cardboard sleeves. If archive fever there was, it was the fever that was caused by my lack of sleep, which turned into a frenetic impulse to document everything before it was gone, especially in the face of COVID-19's constant threat to shut down archival institutions.

Devastated by the thought of the tapes deteriorating further, I turned my feelings of care towards the queer past into action; I proceeded to catalogue all the tapes and documented their condition for future researchers. This process was quite draining: how does one appropriately document loss? This feeling of loss was also compounded by the fact that the show aired at the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis in Canada. I thought of Jean Carlomusto, an American AIDS activist and videomaker, who, in *Fast Trip Long Drop* (1994), a documentary by fellow videomaker Gregg Bordowitz, speaks about AIDS videotapes becoming a record of loss over time, since these tapes hold images of people who died of the virus—friends, lovers, family. What to make, then, of the loss of the record of loss? In addition to cataloguing all of the episodes in a spreadsheet—something that I did for all the shows featured in this dissertation and which I later shared with these archival institutions—, I also meticulously filmed all of the

¹⁶ Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013 [1989]).

episodes on my smartphone, with the archivist's permission. Once again, the archives, at the time of my visit, had no immediate plan for digitization or preservation. In the archives, therefore, boundaries between researcher and archivist became blurred, as I was pushed to undertake a rather desperate kind of Do-It-Yourself cataloguing and preservation work.

David Belrose, fortunately, donated more than just the videotapes to the LU archives; an avid collector, Belrose also bequeathed several print issues of the *Thunder Gay Magazine* newsletter, organizational documents and pamphlets pertaining to the organization behind the program, Gays of Thunder Bay, as well as newspaper and magazine clippings, and other print ephemera. Much like the aforementioned documents related to *Out of the Closets*, *Gay News and Views*, and *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals*, these paper traces were invaluable during the research process to situate the program in the context of what was happening in Thunder Bay and Canada at the time, as well as to better understand the circumstances surrounding the show's creation, therefore further highlighting the importance of the paper archive of cable access television.

In August 2022, almost a year after that initial visit, I received a rather unexpected email from Sara Janes, the University's Head Archivist, informing me of the Lakehead University Archives' plan to digitize all of *Thunder Gay Magazine*. The University had purchased new equipment to play the VHS tapes, which turned out to be in better condition than we had thought during my initial visit; the issues with the audio and image, therefore, were mainly due to decaying equipment. An undergraduate student researcher had been hired by the archives to digitize the episodes, which were made available to me upon request, and I was informed of plans to make the tapes available to the public through online access. This meant that my sample, as well as the conclusions I drew from my first visit, inevitably shifted, as I was suddenly able to

conduct in-depth viewings of the episodes that were transferred digitally.



Figure 4. The Lakehead University Archives.

Photograph taken by the author, November 2021

Outside of my own research, the digitization of *Thunder Gay Magazine* also meant increased access to the series, which had been kept away in boxes, away from the public eye, only existing the memories of the people who had contributed to the program. As I was inquiring about the digital episodes, the student researcher who digitized the tapes sent me a link to a thread on the website Reddit.com, in which he had informed people about the existence of the show as he was in the process of digitizing the tapes. The thread, clumsily entitled “What are some true facts about Thunder Bay that sound fake?” features a post which reads: “Thunder Gay Magazine, which was a local tv show broadcast on public access back in the 80s was I believe the first LGBT-focused tv show broadcast in Canada.” The post received 20 upvotes, with one

user commenting “colour me intrigued.”¹⁷ This exchange testifies to the increased—and intergenerational—possibilities of dissemination that accompany digitization.

Not only was the student researcher motivated to share “his find” as he was participating in the digitization efforts, but through sharing this “discovery” with other Reddit users and indicating that the show was in the process of being digitized in the comments, the post aimed to increase interest and access to a piece of local community heritage. This is especially significant as younger generations have come to experience media objects solely through the digital. When the Lakehead University Archives find a suitable online platform to upload the tapes and share them with the wider public—copyright permitting—they will also be able to circulate beyond the local and, hopefully, generate an interest in them as well as interest in other forms of local media works like *Thunder Gay Magazine*. The current digitizing impulse, to borrow Alexandra Juhasz’s phrasing, must not simply be to “save and care, but also animate and share: to do with and from the things.”¹⁸

The digitized versions of *Thunder Gay Magazine*, however, are an imperfect substitute for the analogue ones. A key element of the physical collection, for instance, is the fact that the title, year of production, and, sometimes, topic(s) of discussion, were handwritten on the tapes by David Belrose. That the videotapes were annotated by hand, for instance, evidences the care that Belrose put into videotaping each episode for posterity. Since the digitized versions do not include pictures of the tapes’ boxes or of the tapes themselves, this affective element, which is inseparable from the materiality of home recordings, is lost in the digitization process. Thus, viewing the digitized tapes does not allow for the kind of unexpected discoveries that can happen

¹⁷ “What are some true facts about Thunder Bay that sound fake?,” Reddit, 2022, https://www.reddit.com/r/ThunderBay/comments/wzprcw/what_are_some_true_facts_about_thunder_bay_that/

¹⁸ Alexandra Juhasz and Theodore Kerr, *We Are Having This Conversation Now: The Times of AIDS Cultural Production* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), 113.

in a brick-and-mortar archive. As Liz Czach notes, “happenstance finds and fortuitous coincidences are some of the supreme pleasures of archival research. One enters the depository looking for one thing and finds something different, but no less eye-opening.”¹⁹ This experience of serendipity, combined with the physical labour of *doing* archival research, cannot be readily reproduced when browsing online databases.

For instance, because they were recorded by David Belrose on his own television set at home and not by the cable company/production studio, a great many of the tapes also contain what Andrew Burke calls “paratelevisual elements”—remnants of television that were captured on video such as “rare local commercials, station identifications, and sign-off notices.”²⁰ These paratelevisual elements are essential to the study of television, in that they preserve the flow of the medium as it was at a certain time period. As Burke further notes, these often overlooked and disregarded elements are in and of themselves “historical records of audiences’ interactions with the media objects...what was taped is of interest, as are the signs that what was taped was watched,” thus echoing Jennifer VanderBurgh’s assertion that VHS tapes are “idiosyncratic, non-systematic, haphazard collections of television that reflect the recorder’s personal taste and/or the time when the recording happened to occur.”²¹ The *Thunder Gay Magazine* tapes recorded by Belrose contain commercials, such as *MuchMusic* promotional videos and ads for the cable station, as well as bits and pieces of other programs: from religious cable programs and made-for-TV movies to popular series like *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. As such, as VanderBurgh and Burke suggest, the physical tapes are simultaneously a record of the period

¹⁹ Liz Czach, “Researching as Searching: Refusing the Archival Lacunae,” *Feminist Media Histories* 8, no. 2 (2022): 208.

²⁰ Andrew Burke, *Hinterland Remixed: Media, Memory, and the Canadian 1970s* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2019), 123.

²¹ Burke, 126; Jennifer VanderBurgh, “Considering Todd’s Tape: The Textual Transition of Videotape Miscellany,” *Public* 29, no. 57 (2018): 155.

during which they were made, a record of Belrose's viewing practices, and a record of the technologies of video and of cable access. Yet, these paratelevisual elements are absent from the digitized versions. By leaving out these crucial and intimate traces of the televisual experience, the digital records, then, become records of loss, too. The digitization of the videotapes was thus unable to ensure that *everything* on these tapes would be saved.

Furthermore, during one of my discussions with Michael Sobota, an activist who was a recurring speaker on *Thunder Gay Magazine*, Sobota insisted that one of the digitized episodes was missing a segment, which he felt needed to be recovered to fully understand the tape and its context.²² The tape, often described as the program's "swan song" by *Thunder Gay Magazine* participants, was indeed so controversial upon airing that a rebuttal was created by the AIDS Committee of Thunder Bay (ACT-B) and subsequently appended to the program to provide a "balanced" view of the topic. After inquiring about the missing segment, I received the following reply from Sara Janes: "The broadcast was April 9, 1991. The rebuttal by ACT-B is present ... but it has no audio available. The audio quality of the tape is pretty degraded as the end of the broadcast approaches, and the rebuttal appears silent."²³ And, indeed, the segment's image is jittery and the audio silent, save for a low buzzing sound in the background. If digitization, as mentioned earlier, does not equal memory, nor does it equal restoration.

And, of course, digitization cannot ensure preservation, since the new transfers may become themselves unusable in the future and the Lakehead University Archives (and the ArQuives) may not be able to ensure ongoing access.²⁴ For instance, in the Reddit thread mentioned previously, another user replied: "...what the hell." At first glance, the reply suggests

²² Michael Sobota, Interview with the author, August 2022.

²³ Sara Janes, Email Message to Author, October 13, 2022.

²⁴ Linda M. Morra, *Moving Archives* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2020), 9.

that the user is having a negative reaction to the mention of a program like *Thunder Gay Magazine*. The user, however, clarified his response in a next post: “I was once hired to digitize all of the episodes of Thunder Gay Magazine. They are on a hard drive somewhere.” In yet another reply, the same user added: “For some context, back in the mid 2000s, I was hired by the AIDS Committee to transfer all of their tapes, not just Thunder Gay Magazine. I don’t recall a lot about the show, but I remember it has a great opening sequence.”²⁵ The fact that the tapes were digitized in the mid-2010s by another institution, which left them “on a hard drive somewhere” presciently highlights some of the pressing issues related to archives and digitization, such as *access* (Were these digitized versions made available to anyone outside of the AIDS Committee? Where is the hard drive now?), *selection* (Which episodes are on this hard drive? Are there episodes on this drive that are not part of the Lakehead University Archives collection?) and *preservation* (What is the format of these digitized versions? Are they still readable by current software or have they become obsolete? If so, could they perhaps in better condition than the new LU transfers?). These issues with digitization, therefore, serve as an important reminder that “the fantasy of preservation and unlimited access through digitization is neither realistic nor...desirable.”²⁶

Important questions around issues of archival ethics and responsibility also arise when considering the digitization of the *Thunder Gay Magazine* and the ArQuives tapes. If, as Kim Bjarkman suggests, “[t]apes become traces of a common cultural heritage that is ‘ours’ to archive,” whose responsibility is it to preserve, digitize, and facilitate access to these shows?²⁷

²⁵ “What are some true facts about Thunder Bay that sound fake?,” Reddit, 2022.

²⁶ Morra, *Moving Archives*, 10; T.L. Cowan, “Don’t You Know that Digitization is Not Enough? Digitization is not Enough! Building Accountable Archives and the Digital Dilemma of the Cabaret Commons,” in *Moving Archives*, ed. Linda M. Morra, 43-56.

²⁷ Kim Bjarkman, “To Have and to Hold: The Video Collector’s Relationship with an Ethereal Medium,” *Television & New Media* 5, no. 3 (2004): 225.

For instance, David Belrose informed me of his previous intentions to digitize the material himself, since he had held on to the tapes that he had recorded. Yet, Belrose felt guilty for not pursuing these efforts further: “That’s one of my regrets. I managed to digitize myself a few of the shows from *Thunder Gay Magazine*, but most of them sat in. I hope that not too many of them were destroyed. I just didn’t have the time or the energy and technical skills to digitize all those tapes, so they sat there.”²⁸ After his donation to the archives in May 2017, however, the tapes also “sat there,” as the archives did not have sufficient funds to access the technology that would ensure the tapes’ survival—until recently. Belrose, however, had no knowledge of the digitization efforts undertaken by the Lakehead University Archives, which begs several questions: Since the archives emerged out of the queer community of Thunder Bay, should the digitization efforts have been conducted in partnership with the donor and former participants and in consultation with local members of the LGBTQ2+ community? Finally, if the program was broadcast by Maclean Hunter, should the cable company have a say in whether these can be uploaded online? As Pamela Wilson notes, writing about the challenges of doing media history, “Copyright and other legal issues often keep key historical texts and documents inaccessible (or make access challenging).”²⁹

To my knowledge, neither were the participants consulted about uploading the collection online. While the show has undeniable historical significance, especially given its relationship to queer history, ethical concerns emerge around the issue of online access, as highlighted in Rachel Mattson’s reflection on the ethics on digitization, cable access, and queer histories. Mattson posits that queer cable access shows were typically broadcast to a small population, at a set time

²⁸ David Belrose, Interview with the author, June 2022.

²⁹ Pamela Wilson, “Stalking the Wild Evidence: Capturing Media History Through Elusive and Ephemeral Archives,” in Janet Staiger and Sabine Hake, *Convergence Media History* (London: Routledge, 2009), 186.

and date. Through digitization and online access, these shows become “accessible to an entirely new and unintended audience,” thus transforming “their viewership, their context, and their affordances.”³⁰ She writes: “A show that was originally designed to be seen only by a few living souls on a specific date and time in a specific location would suddenly be available to anyone with an internet connection, anywhere, at any time.”³¹ Information that was presented in a specific context, therefore, was meant to exist in the set parameters of cable access—not the Internet and its almost infinite possibilities of viewership.

These ethical concerns are all the more important in light of Belrose’s personal decision to keep the collection local. When I asked Belrose why he had decided to donate his collection to the Lakehead University Archives, as opposed to the ArQuives or other institutions which would have more expertise in preserving audiovisual material, Belrose told me that it was important to him that the collection be passed on to a local institution. Mainly, it was important to him that people in and around Thunder Bay could have access to their own history without having to travel South and rely on institutions which he felt would have been “outsiders,” strangers to the histories the archives contain.³² It is also critical to contextualize Belrose’s decision through his personal ties to the University; having been a student there back in the 1970s swayed his choice to donate to this specific institution. Uploading the material online means sacrificing, to a certain extent, the local, affective, and community-based aspects of the fonds. I have also often questioned my own responsibility and legitimacy as an outsider (geographically and temporally) interacting with and narrating a history which was not meant for me in the first place. These

³⁰ Rachel Mattson, “Queer Histories, Videotape, and the Ethics of Reuse, The Blog of the Center for Humanities at the City University of New York (December 2017), <https://www.centerforthehumanities.org/distributaries/queer-histories-videotape-and-the-ethics-of-reuse>

³¹ Mattson, “Queer Histories.”

³² David Belrose, Interview with the author, June 2022.

ethical concerns, therefore, are inseparable from the way in which I approached these archives, as well as my relationships with this study's participants—as discussed in a later section of this chapter.

Finally, experiencing these episodes through a digital screen offers much different affordances than in-person explorations of the archival material. If the experience of watching *Thunder Gay Magazine* at the LU archives felt somewhat alienating due to the deterioration of the tapes, the material relationship between the object—the tape—and the researcher—myself—nonetheless provided a sensory experience, a bodily investment in the material. This material involvement was much less palpable when watching the digitized episodes in the comfort of my own home. This proved similarly alienating, but, this time, because I felt that I had no tangible connection to the material provided by physical touch. The experience of in-person archival research is a highly embodied one; in the archives, bodies touch, smell, feel. Bodies are tired, thirsty, sore, often high on caffeine and adrenaline.³³ Aside from the occasional backache that comes from sitting long hours in front of a computer screen, the experience of archival research does not translate digitally.³⁴

Each of these institutions, their holdings, and the ways in which these holdings were preserved and presented, therefore, impacted the ways in which archival research was conducted for the purpose of this dissertation as well as how this study was devised. In many ways, the challenges of the archives shaped my sample and methods of analysis.

³³ For more on the body and archives, see: Jamie A. Lee, *Producing the Archival Body* (London: Routledge, 2020).

³⁴ Yet, as an able-bodied person, I also recognize my privilege in being able to access and experience physical archival collections.

Study Population and Sample Analysis: Close Reading and Speculation

The main sample for this study is an eclectic mix of archival videotapes as well as paper ephemera and documents. Because of the restrictions outlined earlier, this sample was obtained through non-random accidental sampling of the archives of the cable access programs that constitute the population of this study: *Gay News and Views* (2 episodes), *Out of the Closets!* (0.5 episodes), *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals* (4 episodes), *Thunder Gay Magazine* (≈70 episodes), and *10% QTV* (≈75 episodes). Since the goal of this research project is to focus on the intricacies of the population through an analysis of the chosen samples, using a random sampling technique would have likely yielded incorrect data, while non-random accidental sampling allowed me to obtain the largest amount of information possible for the purpose of this study.

Although audiovisual and paper archives tell us a lot about the programs' histories, they remain fragmented and incomplete. An important aspect of working with fragile audiovisual materials, then, seems to be speculation. To a certain extent, speculation is inseparable from the archival and historical experience. First, researchers often speculate about the evidential and cultural value of a document. Hypotheses and deductions, too, are forms of speculations. Yet, queer media history almost seems to *demand* speculation. Allyson Nadia Field notes the urgency for media historians to “challenge the empirical” and to lean “into the unverifiable,” engage “the absent,” and train “a lens on the unseeable” as speculation becomes “a key method for thinking about questions of material loss and inaccessibility in new ways.”³⁵

More importantly, perhaps, speculation as a methodological and historiographical strategy has been used by feminists, queer, and trans people to make sense of our history in the

³⁵ Allyson Nadia Field, “Editor’s Introduction: Sites of Speculative Encounter.” *Feminist Media Histories* 8, no. 2 (2022): 1.

face of erasure. Julianne Pidduck’s curational and academic work, for instance, uses the speculative method of research-creation to critique “established narratives where lesbian and gay activism is understood to galvanize relatively benevolent state legislation” in Canada.³⁶ Much like cable access television served as a tool to imagine communities and a queer future, speculation can be mobilized as a generative tool to reconstruct ephemeral queer audiovisual histories.³⁷ Speculation also contains affective dimensions; for example, Heather Love explains that “the longing for community across time is a crucial feature of queer historical experience, one produced by...the damaged quality of the historical archive.”³⁸ This longing, Love shows, can be remedied through acts of “emotional rescue” of queer subjects of the past.

Speculation, of course, is insufficient on its own. I also mobilize a close reading method to analyze key documents that illuminate the histories of queer cable access television, as well as to examine individual episodes of each of the programs. Close reading is a significant research strategy in the humanities, including in Film and Media studies. N. Katherine Hayles, for example, emphasize the importance of close reading to (new) media studies. Hayles defines it as the “detailed and precise attention to rhetoric, style, language choice,” and other features of texts.³⁹ Close reading analysis of media texts enabled me to excavate how LGBTQ2+ people were represented in the shows and the ways in which they discussed specific issues.

³⁶ Julianne Pidduck, “Lesbian Bars, Archival Media Bricolage and Research-Creation: Revisiting After Hours Chez Madame Arthur,” *Feminist Media Histories* 8, no. 2 (2022): 132.

³⁷ See for instance: Benjamin Nothwehr, “Trans(formative) Historiographies and Speculative Worlds: Archival Imaginaries in the Work of Contemporary Transgender Artists,” (MA Thesis, Montreal: McGill University, 2021); Genevieve Flavelle, “Erotic Fever in the ArQuives: Imagining a Queer Porn Paradise in Cait McKinney and Hazel Meyer’s Exhibition Tape Condition: degraded,” *Journal of Feminist Scholarship* (Fall 2021): 42-65.

³⁸ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007): 37.

³⁹ N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012).

Absences and How to Fill Them: Mobilizing Oral History

Although speculation and close readings can be effective archival and historiographical tools, they still might not capture complex aspects of LGBTQ+ cable access, as well the more personal stories surrounding the creation and circulation of these programs. To supplement these methods, in-depth, semi-structured interviews form a substantive part of the rich corpus that I draw on in this dissertation. As Becki Ross aptly points out in her history of the Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT), the ups and downs of collective work as well as the processes of memory and remembrance are more likely to be communicated via oral histories.⁴⁰ Nan Alamilla Boyd further insists that the methodology of oral history “functions as a collaborative and recuperative enterprise that makes visible...what might otherwise be lost.”⁴¹ Because LGBTQ2+ cable access television programs often emerged out of relationships, professional and personal, the oral history process was also essential to understand how these programs were connected to wider social, political, and cultural networks.

I spoke with show creators and producers, camera persons, program hosts, as well as guests—although I found that these roles were often interchangeable. Participants were selected after a preliminary analysis of the archival material through non-random, purposive sampling; I also used a snowball interview method to mitigate bias, and each person I spoke with referred me to other people to interview. In total, I interviewed 11 individuals for this project, with interviews typically lasting between 1 to 3 hours. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, these interviews were primarily conducted remotely, from Toronto, over videoconference software and/or the

⁴⁰ Becki Ross, *The House That Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 17.

⁴¹ Nan Alamilla Boyd, “Foreword,” in *New Directions in Queer Oral History: Archives of Disruption*, ed. Clare Summerskill, Amy Tooth Murphy, and Emma Vickers (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2022), xxi.

phone. Each of these interviews, therefore, is also dependent on the conditions in which they were conducted.

Although videoconference software such as Zoom may have afforded new means of reaching people during the pandemic and expanded research horizons, it also presents a set of challenges which merit some careful reflection. First, Zoom might not be as accessible as it may seem. In fact, a lot of my participants, which could be described as queer “elders,” did not use the platform—either out of concern for their privacy or because their devices and/or broadband Internet connection did not enable them to use the software. Others simply did not know how to navigate Zoom, or other videoconference software such as Facebook Video Messenger or Skype. Therefore, some of my participants did express the desire to meet in person. Because COVID-19 restrictions were ever-changing, I had to amend my ethics protocol in the middle of the study and adapt the parameters according to new public health recommendations. I was eventually able to give my participants the choice to meet in person, if they were in Toronto, or via phone/Zoom.

Secondly, remote interview methods present an additional set of ethical challenges when engaging in, as Tula Brannelly and Marian Barnes call it, care-full research.⁴² In their 2012 study on queer oral history, *Bodies of Evidence*, Boyd and Ramirez highlight the material aspect of doing oral history work and insist that the queer practice of oral history is a form of “body-based knowing.” Furthermore, they propose that “[b]ecause queer oral histories are intense interactions, as the oral history collaboration proceeds the contract between narrator and researcher often evolves into something more: a bond, a friendship, or political commitment...[I]n the social space of the queer oral history, something transformative seems to occur as new knowledge is

⁴² Tula Brannelly and Marian Barnes, *Researching with Care: Applying Feminist Care Ethics to Research Practice* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2022), 10.

produced.”⁴³ For instance, it would have been customary to meet with participants before the interview to familiarize them with the interview process and to build rapport between myself and the participants, but this was not possible. Phone and video’s disembodied interactions not only impeded the process of creating trust and intimacy, but also limited our ability to pick up on nonverbal, bodily cues during the interview process. Some participants—especially when the interviews were conducted on the phone—spoke at length, sometimes unprompted and unable to engage in a natural conversation due to the lack of visual cues and access to body language. Moreover, the act of disclosing personal details as they relate to the memory and experience of a person can bring about many feelings. One of my interview participants, for instance, started tearing up while reminiscing about a dear friend who had died of AIDS. Even though they assured me that they were fine and did not need a break, the online mediation of the software did not afford for the kind of comforting gestures that may have taken place in real life—which could have translated in a longer break, a glass of water, or even physical touch. In other words, the act of disclosure through the screen presented unforeseen ethical challenges. Similarly, in-person interviews were conducted at a distance, with face coverings on, again limiting the ability of participants and myself to pick up on nonverbal cues.

All of the participants were nonetheless incredibly generous with their time and with the information that they provided, which resulted in tender, moving, sometimes funny, moments of knowledge-sharing. Because the interviews were semi-structured, each participant was able to talk at length about their experience, highlighting details that were not readily available when sitting down in front of the screen. These interviews were illuminating, although sometimes difficult and emotional, as mentioned earlier. I concur with Lauren Herold’s assertion that, “for

⁴³ Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2.

many LGBTQ cable access producers, creating television was a deeply affecting experience.”⁴⁴ Feelings of pride, but also loss and longing, emerged during our conversations. Some participants vividly remembered disagreements with former colleagues as well. Each person shared different aspects of the shows, conveying the sense that the experience, as well as the memories, of queer television production varied from one individual to another. For example, while some participants expressed excitement and gratitude at the thought of being interviewed about television shows that they thought should be talked about more, one of my participants wished that I had chosen a “better research project” as they saw cable access television as being rather trivial—and unsuccessful— compared to other activist histories that they had been a part of in Toronto.

This dissertation, therefore, is largely the product of intergenerational exchanges. I draw and cite extensively from the participants’ interviews to make sure that their voices are prioritized. In that sense, I follow a feminist mode of ethical citational praxis, not just through the scholars I endeavour to cite, but also through the voices that are put forward in this project. As Sarah Ahmed writes, “citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured.”⁴⁵

Who Watches Cable Access? Reception and Local Television

Studying the reception of local cable access television is difficult; there exists no quantifiable data to measure audiences of cable access, although the audience is generally assumed to be small. While it is therefore challenging to obtain accurate data on who and how

⁴⁴ Lauren Herold, “Cable Comes Out: LGBTQ Community Television on New York Public Access Stations” (PhD Dissertation, Chicago: Northwestern University 2021), 49.

⁴⁵ Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 15.

many people watched these shows, there are many indications that people *did* watch the shows and responded to them. Many programs received feedback through letters and telephone calls directed to the cable station. Others benefited from the advent of the World Wide Web, through which viewers were able to submit comments about the program. These letters, e-mails, and phone calls, which were either read on the air or preserved in the archives, demonstrate high levels of engagement with the shows. Some television shows also involved audience participation with the inclusion of live phone-in episodes which enabled viewers to communicate directly with the programs' volunteers. The numerous calls are indicative of a substantial audience—whether they were actually genuinely interested in the shows or simply stumbled upon the program as they were switching channels.

Participants also received feedback at the community level, through in-person interaction or via increased participation in events and groups advertised in the programs. For instance, a *Body Politic* article on gay and lesbian programs in the 1970s records that, upon organizing a fundraising event for *Gay News and Views*, a participant of the show said: “We...finally got to see some of the viewers, we found out we *have* some viewers.”⁴⁶ Other shows were broadcast in public spaces, such as gay bars, on a regular basis, allowing them to build an audience of committed viewers—or as one of my interviewees put it, “a community of viewers.”⁴⁷ In turn, participants in these shows would sometimes interview their viewers directly, on location, during one of the screenings, testifying to the importance of the programs for the community.

Advertisements and commentaries in popular gay and mainstream publications also demonstrate

⁴⁶ Michael Riordon, “Proselytizing or Protecting your Ass on the Boob Tube,” *The Body Politic* no. 39, December 1977/January 1978, 16.

⁴⁷ Robert Wallace, Interview with the author, August 2022.

continued engagement with the programs, in addition to complaint letters sent to cable companies which were used as reasons to cancel some of the programs under study.

Furthermore, one can speculate about audience sizes by looking at government statistics regarding cable subscriptions throughout the years. In 1977, when *Gay News and Views* started airing, there were 3,417,223 cable television subscribers across Canada—with 1,518,253 of these subscribers located in Ontario.⁴⁸ In a *Body Politic* article published in 1977/1978, the author also attempted to analyze the reach of gay and lesbian cable access programs, noting that:

Of 6,403,200 “households” in Canada, 6,185,600 have television, altogether 7,296,000 “idiot boxes.” Over 50% are in colour. French and English outlets cover between them more than 98% of the population... Over 400 cable systems “serve” over half of all Canadian households. Cable service in urban areas being upward of 70% and rising.⁴⁹

And indeed, Statistics Canada reported that there were 527 cable systems licenced by the CRTC in 1978, and a total of 3,775,633 cable subscribers (1,652,397 in Ontario).⁵⁰ When *Thunder Gay Magazine* launched its program on the Maclean Hunter airwaves in 1987, the number of subscribers had nearly doubled, with 6,309,689 subscribers (2,478,922 in Ontario). That year, the number of cable systems licenced also doubled, as the CRTC licenced 1,103 cable systems in 1987.⁵¹ By the time *10% QTV* was first broadcast in 1995, the number of total subscribers in Canada rose slightly compared to 1987, to 7,791,106 in Canada and 2,954,703 in Ontario, but declining by 0.5% compared to the previous year—signalling that cable had perhaps peaked at

⁴⁸ “Cable television,” Statistics Canada, 1977, https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2016/statcan/56-205/CS56-205-1977.pdf

⁴⁹ Michael Riordon, “Proselytizing or Protecting your Ass on the Boob Tube,” 16.

⁵⁰ “Cable television,” Statistics Canada, 1978, https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2016/statcan/56-205/CS56-205-1978.pdf

⁵¹ “Cable television,” Statistics Canada, 1987, https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2016/statcan/56-205/CS56-205-1987.pdf

this time.⁵² In fact, after 1995, no data is available regarding cable subscriptions via the government's website.

Although the audience size of cable access programs remains indeterminate within these statistics, these numbers nonetheless indicate the *potential* for a sizeable audience. Secondly, they demonstrate that Ontario was one of the provinces with the largest numbers of subscribers, confirming that the province was indeed a “hub” for cable access television programming. Finally, they also illustrate trends in cable television viewership, indicating that cable television in Canada peaked in the 1980s and 1990s, before the advent of the Internet. Although the focus of this dissertation is not on reception, it is important to highlight that people did watch cable access television, especially in light of cancellations which ended some of these shows prematurely. In Chapter 5, I explore some of these cancellations through an analysis of gay and lesbian programming on cable access television in the 1970s. First, however, I contextualize the rise of gay and lesbian community television by looking at efforts to bring the community together before and during the Gay Liberation Movement.

⁵² “Cable television,” Statistics Canada, 1995, https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2016/statcan/56-205/CS56-205-1995.pdf

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CHALLENGE OF VISIBILITY: QUEER LIVES IN THE POSTWAR PERIOD (1969-1979)

This chapter offers a necessary overview of Canadian gay and lesbian activism from the late 1960s to the late 1970s, emphasizing how and why visibility, communication, and information were pillars of gay liberation politics in Canada. As Tom Warner notes, Canadian gay liberationists were actively engaged in tactics of “visibility, confrontation, and constant education,” which I explore here within the province of Ontario in particular.¹ First, I delve into the formation of organizations, groups, and cultural forums in the aftermath of the Second World War that were committed to amplifying the voices of gay and lesbian people in Ontario. These groups and services, as shown in the next chapters, would be intimately connected to cable access programming in the 1970s and in the 1980s. Then, I map out the complicated relationship between the mainstream media and lesbians and gays during that time period. Specifically, I pay attention to both the portrayals of gay people on screen, and to the way information about them—including information about gay organizations and services—was conveyed by private and publicly funded media outlets. I argue that this challenging, often negative, relationship between the media and gay organizations led some gay and lesbian groups and individuals to turn to the medium of cable access, which seemingly offered new possibilities to communicate about issues facing LGBTQ2+ people on their own terms, while accessing larger audiences.

¹ Tom Warner, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 72.

Charting the Growth of Gay and Lesbian Organizations and Cultural Forums in Ontario

In the aftermath of the Second World War, which precipitated a wave of geopolitical and sociological shifts, major cities in Canada saw the development of public spaces, such as bars, where gay people could congregate. Parallel to this, demands for rights were beginning to be made by disparate Homophile organizations, such as the Association for Social Knowledge (ASK), created in Vancouver in April 1964. Homosexual men and women not only partook in activism and the underground bar culture, but also created and circulated magazines, newsletters, and tabloid newspapers which were “key to germinating a sense of belonging.”² And, already in the 1950s, these media activities were attempting to circulate outward; gay activist Jim Egan, for instance, was writing columns in mainstream newspapers critiquing the sensationalistic tone of their coverage of LGBTQ+ issues and asking for recognition from the broader society.³

In 1969, Pierre Elliot Trudeau’s Liberal government adopted Bill C-150, partially decriminalizing homosexual relationships between consenting adults in the privacy of their own homes. The Canadian government followed the lead of Britain’s Wolfenden Report, published in 1957, which recommended the partial discrimination of homosexuality between two consenting adults in private.⁴ Yet, the passing of Bill C-150 did not mean that same-gender relationships had suddenly and officially become legal. Other sections of the Criminal code regarding gay sexuality, specifically around questions of obscenity and public sex, were maintained.⁵

² Manon Tremblay, “Introduction,” in *Queer Mobilizations: Social Movement Activism and Canadian Public Policy*, ed. Manon Tremblay (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2015), 13; David Rayside, “Queer Advocacy in Ontario,” in *Queer Mobilizations: Social Movement Activism and Canadian Public Policy*, ed. Manon Tremblay (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2015), 85-86.

³ Jim Egan and Donald W. McLeod, *Challenging the Conspiracy of Silence: My Life as a Canadian Gay Activist* (Toronto: Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives, 1998).

⁴ Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Homo and Hetero Sexualities in Canada* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1996), 213-287.

⁵ Gary Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile, *The Canadian War on Queers: National Security as Sexual Regulation* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 221.

Furthermore, as Giovanni Porfido writes: “The decriminalization of homosexuality relied on a notion of negative freedom, that is, on the State’s inability to interfere in the private lives of citizens, rather than on the recognition of the human worth of queer lives or loves.”⁶ That same year, south of the border, the patrons of the Stonewall Inn in New York City rioted against the frequent police raids of the bar, an event often credited for having launched the Gay Liberation Movement in the United States.

These events had reverberations throughout the province of Ontario, leading to the emergence of various groups that started advocating for gay liberation and rights. In the late 1969, the University of Toronto Homophile Association (UTHA) was established. Although identified with the Homophile movement, UTHA represented the “first Canadian manifestation of the radical liberationism that was surfacing in the United States and elsewhere.”⁷ UTHA was followed by the Community Homophile Association of Toronto (CHAT), which was launched in 1970, the Toronto Gay Action (TGA), an offshoot of CHAT formed in 1971, and the Gay Alliance Toward Equality (GATE), in 1972.⁸ On August 28, 1971, the We Demand Rally, now largely understood to be the first large scale gay rights demonstration in Canada, took place in Ottawa. Organized by both TGA and CHAT to protest ongoing discrimination against gays and lesbians and the shortcomings of Bill C-150, the rally resulted in a ground-breaking 13-page document containing a list of 10 demands to the Canadian Parliament. By the mid-70s, gay and lesbian groups had sprung up in London, Waterloo, Guelph, Windsor, Hamilton, Kingston, Ottawa, Thunder Bay, and Sudbury. University campuses were particularly conducive grounds

⁶ Giovanni Porfido, “Queering the Small Screen: Homosexuality and Televisual Citizenship in Spectacular Societies,” *Sexualities* 12, no. 2 (2009): 169.

⁷ Rayside, “Queer Advocacy in Ontario,” 86.

⁸ Rayside, 86.

for the creation of these groups.⁹ Their goals were varied, emphasizing, for instance, equal rights and anti-discrimination initiatives, the end of excessive policing of LGBTQ2+ individuals, family rights, sociality, and visibility.

To that end, the gay and lesbian movement called upon people to “come out” of the closet to be visible. In addition to creating services and institutions for the gay and lesbian community, they also relied on emerging communications and information infrastructures that built on the Homophile movement’s previous efforts to heighten gay people’s visibility. These cultural and informational forums—which took the form, not only of print media, but also of bookstores, coffeehouses, theatres, film festivals, phone lines, community calendars, drop-in services—were meant to advance the goals of activist groups, share resources about LGBTQ2+ struggles and victories in the province, provide alternatives to negative portrayals of queerness, and help individuals as they faced the challenge of “locating others.”¹⁰ Writing about *Gay Directions*, a community guide published by CHAT in 1973, long-time Toronto-based gay activist Tim McCaskell explains: “*Gay Directions* was meant to orient those just entering a new community—a community that was in early formation. This was outreach to people like me, emerging from isolation, struggling with fear and self-loathing, in desperate need of information about who we were supposed to be.”¹¹ The need to “emerge from isolation” was all the more salient in smaller Ontarian communities; David Belrose, who was involved with the Lakehead Gay Liberation (LGL) group in Thunder Bay, avidly collected newspaper clippings—both from mainstream and gay publications—throughout his early life. Admitting to gathering “anything

⁹ Rayside, “Queer Advocacy in Ontario,” 87.

¹⁰ Valerie J. Korinek, *Prairie Fairies: A History of Queer Communities and People in Western Canada, 1930-1985*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 5.

¹¹ Tim McCaskell, *Queer Progress: From Homophobia to Homonationalism* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016), 21.

that [he] could find related to LGBT issues,” Belrose told me: “I wanted to know as much as I could about what was going on elsewhere because there wasn’t a lot here. We were pretty isolated. So, being able to draw on information from elsewhere was important.”¹²

Print media was especially key to circulating information about the nascent movement. In 1971—the same year that cable access TV was first regulated by the CRTC—a collective of volunteers associated with the Toronto Gay Action Network launched *The Body Politic* in Toronto, which quickly became one of the most important LGBTQ2+ magazines of the time, circulating widely in Ontario and beyond.¹³ In addition to magazines, newsletters also proliferated on university campuses and throughout Ontarian cities. Gays of Ottawa, a gay liberation organization founded in 1971 in Canada’s capital, started publishing their monthly newsletter, *Go Info*, in July 1972. The newsletter would, in fact, last until September 1995, and Gays of Ottawa would continue to use media formats to circulate information about LGBTQ2+ events, issues, and resources through the creation of their community access show, *Out of the Closets/Gais de l’Outaouais* in 1977; likewise, some of the *Body Politic* contributors would be featured on and involved in cable access in the years that followed.

These publications, which were essential for movement building, drew on practices of networking, as well as practices of care.¹⁴ Writing about the history of lesbian feminist newsletters, Cait McKinney explains that these newsletters operated within an economy of care, which “exceed[ed] pragmatic, individual moments of information exchange.”¹⁵ The same can be said of publications like the *Body Politic*, which was founded partly due to gay activist Jearld

¹² David Belrose, Interview with the author, June 2022.

¹³ Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire*, 291.

¹⁴ Cait McKinney, *Information Activism: A Queer History of Lesbian Technologies* (Duke University Press, 2020), 35.

¹⁵ McKinney, 46.

Moldenhauer's dissatisfaction with the lack of publications that dealt with gay culture, even among other forms of community media. The magazine operated primarily out of Moldenhauer's own home, while the staff the *Body Politic* worked as a collective composed of mostly unpaid volunteers. Publications like the *Body Politic* and other gay and lesbian newsletters were therefore often a labour of love, setting precedents for and prefiguring the collective work of care that enabled the production and distribution of LGBTQ2+ cable access television programs.

As technologies continued to be made more accessible and the gay and lesbian movement continued to grow, gay and lesbians took to the airwaves—both television and radio. Community radio in Canada began in the mid-1970s after being licensed by the CRTC under the mandate of reflecting “the diversity of the communities served.” Gay and lesbian community radio shows, according to Stacey Copeland, created “unique sonic spaces produced by queer people for queer people.”¹⁶ Community television was thus embedded in the wider constellation of queer community media, art, and activism. Communicating via the media became essential to the formation of a community identity, but also utilized and reinforced existing activist and social networks in Ontarian cities. As Joshua D. Atkinson argues, as “activists developed and employed technologies for communication, they were able to build and link networks.”¹⁷ The creation of media outlets by and for the lesbian and gay community thus went hand in hand with the advent of the Gay Liberation Movement and concurrent technological developments.

¹⁶ Stacey Copeland, “Broadcasting Queer Feminisms: Lesbian and Queer Women Programming in Transnational, Local, and Community Radio,” *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 25, no. 2 (2018): 211. The first gay radio program to broadcast regularly in Canada, *Gay News & Views*, was launched in Waterloo, Ontario, in August of 1978 by the Kitchener-Waterloo Gay Media Collective. The show was broadcast on CKMS-FM, which at the time was the University of Waterloo campus radio station.

¹⁷ Joshua D. Atkinson, *Journey Into Social Activism: Qualitative Approaches* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), x.

Monitoring Mainstream Media's Portrayal and Coverage of Gays and Lesbians

Gay and lesbian organizations in the 1970s were also busy monitoring, engaging with, and countering mainstream representations of queerness, as they refused to be passive receptors of media images. *The Body Politic's* "Monitor" and "Our Image" columns, which were published for most of the periodical's existence, featured several contributors who closely analyzed and critiqued mainstream media objects. Robert Wallace, who would go on to produce the cable access show *Gay News and Views* in 1977, remembers writing one of these columns in 1976, and "keeping his eye out" for "any play, any television program, any film, any sort of performative event that represented queer identities."¹⁸ Likewise, Harvey Hamburg, who was also involved in *Gay News and Views*, scanned for media representations which he would then advertise through 923-GAYS, a Toronto-based phone-in community calendar for the gay and lesbian community which he had launched in September of 1977: "At 923-GAYS, I spent a lot of time going through the TV Guide and finding programs that had homosexual content in the listings. 923-GAYS would say where a gay group was meeting, but it would also say 'on channels such and such you can watch *All in the Family*, which is dealing with homosexuality.'"¹⁹ Individuals, too, paid close attention to what was shown on the small screen. Heather Ramsay, another *Gay News and Views* participant, recalls being "hungry for homo representation" on television.²⁰

In the Canadian TV-scape of the time, depictions of homosexuality were ambivalent, at best, even if mainstream publications touted the 1970s as the decade during which "television ha[d] taken a delight in discovering the 'gay' community."²¹ Joe Wlodarz indeed argues that

¹⁸ Robert Wallace, Interview with the author, August 2022.

¹⁹ Harvey Hamburg, Interview with the author, August 2022.

²⁰ Heather Ramsay, Interview with the author, September 2022.

²¹ "Backstage," *Globe and Mail* (1936-), 17 September 1977, 29.

“network television of the 1970s provides the crucial site for exploring the emergence, expansion, and development of denotative gay imagery in mainstream American media,” as a few American network television programs began showing gay and lesbian characters, such as *All in the Family* (CBS, 1971-1979) and *Soap* (ABC, 1977-1981), and made their way to Canadian television screens.²² Yet, these network representations were often flawed, frequently resorting to stereotyping for comic relief.²³

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation fared no better; nicknamed “the Canadian Broadcasting Closet” by gay activists, as Michael Riordon noted in a *Body Politic* article, the Corporation faced criticism for its portrayal—or lack thereof—of homosexuality: “The image of gay people has not been good at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation...It is a record of silence and offence not uncommon in North American media in general.”²⁴ In 1977, however, the CBC aired its first gay film, *Friday Night Adventure* (dir. Frank Vitale), which was written by Richard Benner, a gay man. Although the CBC did not do much to promote the film, the broadcaster reported later that “at least 187,000 viewers across Canada watched [it].” Gay critics noted that the story was “an astonishingly bold piece of work,” because of its depictions of gay bars, cruising, and pick-up culture, despite the film’s insistence on portraying a romance that fit heterosexual standards.²⁵ In Ontario, the publicly funded educational television network, TVOntario (TVO), was also targeted by activists for not featuring gay and lesbian voices and sensationalizing their issues.²⁶

²² Joe Wlodarz, “We’re Not All So Obvious: Masculinity and Queer (in)Visibility in American Network Television of the 1970s,” in *Queer TV: Theories, Histories, Politics*, ed. Glyn Davis and Gary Needham (London: Routledge, 2009), 91.

²³ Elana Levine, *Wallowing in Sex: The New Sexual Culture of 1970s American Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 187-188; Wendy Hilton-Morrow, and Kathleen Battles, *Sexual Identities and the Media: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 60.

²⁴ Michael Riordon, “Review of Friday Night Adventure,” *The Body Politic*, no. 30, 1977, 19.

²⁵ Riordon, 19.

²⁶ “Monitor,” *The Body Politic*, no. 42, 1978, 18.

Canadian cinematic works from the 1960s and 1970s, too, addressed homosexuality in more or less overt ways, with Claude Jutra's 1963 film *A tout prendre*, David Secter's Toronto-based film *Winter Kept Us Warm* (dir. David Secter, 1965), *Once Upon a Time in the East* (dir. André Bassard, 1974), and *Outrageous!* (dir. Richard Benner, 1977).²⁷ Yet, homosexuality remained a controversial topic for the silver screen, too. For example, on February 3, 1978, the Body Politic Free the Press Fund (BPFPPF) and the Mariposa Film Group co-sponsored the Canadian premiere of the U.S documentary *Word is Out: Stories of Some of Our Lives* (dir. Peter Adair, 1977). The screening, held at the University of Toronto Education auditorium, was well attended, but when the film was officially released in Ontario theatres later in the year, the Ontario Board of Film Censors gave it a Restricted Rating, thereby limiting its viewership in the province.²⁸ And, although plays such as Mart Crowley's *The Boys in the Band* (US, 1968) and Lindsey Kemp's *Flowers* (UK, 1974) had successful runs in Canada, both getting attention from the mainstream press, gay Canadian playwrights had difficulty getting their plays performed on national and local stages.²⁹

Visibility may have been important, but the right to deliver and access accurate information equally mattered to gays and lesbians. As gay-related news became more prominent thanks to the efforts of activists in the 1970s, they also reached the ears and eyes of mainstream radio listeners and television viewers. Gay activist Harvey Hamburg, for instance, recalls being able to think through his own homosexuality upon hearing a segment on CBC radio's popular program *As It Happens*. The segment dealt with the case of Chris Vogel and Richard North, who,

²⁷ Thomas Waugh, *The Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 81-95.

²⁸ Donald W. McLeod, *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada: A Selected Annotated Chronology, 1976-1981* (Toronto: Homewood Books, 2017), 238-239.

²⁹ Robert Wallace, Interview with the author, August 2022.

in 1974, became the first gay couple to get married in a Canadian church in the province of Manitoba—although their marriage was not recognized legally by governmental institutions.³⁰

Hamburg remembers:

I was standing making supper in my kitchen in the courts of St. James, an apartment building in Winnipeg, and I was listening to *As It Happens*. Barbara Frum was interviewing Chris Vogel...She was asking him about their fight, which had started with the government of Manitoba. And I thought, “Geez, that guy sounds normal.” So, I caught the name, I looked it up in the phone book, and I called him. He reminded me subsequently that my first words were, “I think I might be gay.”³¹

It would, therefore, be inaccurate to assert that the representation and coverage of gay issues in the 1970s in Canada was entirely negative. As Amy Villarejo insists, “There is a lot more going on in this history than the oft-repeated triad of ‘ignoring, marginalizing, or stereotyping’ gay characters.”³² At the same time, it would be equally inaccurate to downplay the gay and lesbian movement’s struggles for representational justice, which often led gay and lesbians to take direct action to interrogate, contest, and sometimes, subvert, media representations of homosexuality.

In 1977, the *Globe and Mail* published an article in its *Weekend Magazine* entitled “Gay in the Seventies.” The *Globe*’s goal was to portray “average” gay people who were willing to be out in a major national publication. The periodical was indeed adamant that it would not feature people “who worked with an exclusively gay business” or who were “unemployed,” and that it certainly would not feature anyone who was a “professional homosexual.”³³ The result was a picture of “respectable” gay people—engineers, professors, psychologists, civil servants, clerks, and others. Yet, what the *Globe* did not know was that everyone on the picture, was in fact, a gay

³⁰ The original interview, which aired on February 21, 1974, is available here: <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1767216803>. Both Chris Vogel and Richard North were interviewed by Barbara Frum, for 10:30 minutes.

³¹ Harvey Hamburg, Interview with the author, August 2022.

³² Amy Villarejo, *Ethereal Queer: Television, Historicity, Desire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 12.

³³ “Monitor,” *The Body Politic*, no. 40, 1978, 18.

liberationist or a lesbian feminist, as stated in the February 1978 issue of *The Body Politic*, which republished the photograph from the *Weekend* with a revised caption. The *Body Politic* article revealed that the photo, in fact, *only* featured well-known figures of the movement—or “professional homosexuals”—such as Ian Young, co-founder of UTHA, Ed Jackson of the *Body Politic*, and Chris Bearchell of the Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT). The resulting image, in its subversion of the *Globe and Mail*’s original intent, playfully interrogated the meaning of “respectability” and the media’s assimilationist goals, signalling the increasing need to address gay and lesbian issues on their own terms.

Several campaigns and forums were also launched in the 1970s to protest and critique negative media depictions, and courageous individuals personally confronted homophobia by appearing in the media themselves.³⁴ Two years after stumbling upon the *As It Happens* segment, which was his first positive media experience of gayness, Harvey Hamburg would be the victim of the homophobic attacks of David Scott-Atkinson, a publicist and columnist for the *Mississauga News*, on Toronto’s Citytv’s Talk Show *Free for All*. After hearing Hamburg on CBC radio expressing his displeasure with the use of the word “queer”—which, although used predominantly now, was still a slur in the 1970s—and requesting to be called “gay” instead, Scott-Atkinson responded with an inflammatory *Mississauga News* column called “Fags, Fruits, Fairies.” Later on, Scott-Atkinson phoned Citytv asking to host the talk show, with Hamburg as his guest. On October 14, 1976, the two met on the *Free for All* set, where Scott-Atkinson spewed anti-gay remarks. Most notably, Scott-Atkinson told Hamburg that “if somebody gassed

³⁴ On March 24, 1976, for instance, a forum called “Gay People in the News” was organized by the Gay Alliance Toward Equality (GATE)’s education coordinator, Michael Riordon, drawing activists and media representatives to discuss the simultaneous sensationalized coverage of gay individuals and the ignorance of the gay movement. See Ken Popert, “Public Forum Castigates Media’s Picture of Gays,” *The Body Politic*, no. 24, 1976, 8.

your lot, I wouldn't pause...for a moment."³⁵ Activists consequently urged people to write or phone Scott-Atkinson, Citytv, and the *Mississauga News*, and the show was re-taped with a different interviewer.³⁶ When I asked Harvey Hamburg about this particular interaction, although he could not recall much, he conveyed to me the necessity of confronting homophobic media commentators: "I knew what I was opening myself to, and I was willing to do it. I liked to put up my dukes and get into it. I could manage."³⁷

"Do You Consider Yourself Controversial?": The CBC and The Battle for Public Service Announcements

Gays and lesbians in the 1970s also had to confront Canadian mainstream media outlets that consistently refused to publicize information about gay and lesbian groups and services.³⁸ In January 1976, when the Toronto Area Gays (TAG) launched their telephone counselling service for gay men and lesbians, the *Toronto Star* and the *Toronto Sun* refused to advertise the phone line.³⁹ Print media was not the only offender; in August 1977, Toronto-based radio station Q107 refused to broadcast a *Body Politic* advertisement, arguing that "at the present time, public sensitivity to gay-oriented advertising would be negative and not in the best interest of either the advertiser or the radio station."⁴⁰ This decision came only a month after the station had rescinded an agreement with the *Body Politic* about airing a thirty-second spot advertisement for the publication, which led the magazine to file a complaint with the CRTC—who declared they had

³⁵ Michael Lynch, "PR for Hate," *The Body Politic*, no. 29, 1976–77, 5-6.

³⁶ Lynch, "PR for Hate," 5-6.

³⁷ Harvey Hamburg, Interview with the author, August 2022.

³⁸ In fact, such discrimination led to one of the first ever Supreme Court cases regarding gay rights in Canada, as the *Vancouver Sun* refused to print an ad for GATE Vancouver in 1973. See: *Smith, Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada*, 54.

³⁹ McLeod, *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada*, 8.

⁴⁰ David Mole, "Rights of Access: Cable, FM and the Dailies. One Foot in the Door, Two Doors in the Face," *The Body Politic*, no. 38, November 1977, 1-4.

no power to influence Q107's decision.⁴¹ These controversies did not simply occur at the local level, nor were they strictly the purview of private media outlets; Canada's national public broadcaster, the CBC, also found itself at the heart of a bitter battle for the recognition of the rights of gays and lesbians across the country to advertise their services through the Corporation.

In November 1975, the Gay Alliance for Equality (GAE) in Halifax contacted their local CBC radio station, CBH, to air a Public Service Announcement. The advertisement read:

The Gay Alliance for Equality inc. is operating a counselling phonenumber for male and female homosexuals. The phone-line is for problem solving, giving out information, and for referrals. The hours to call are from 7 to 10pm. Thursday, Friday and Saturday. All calls are strictly confidential. The number is 429-6969.⁴²

Although the CBC did air news segments which discussed gay and lesbian issues and would become the first Canadian crown corporation to include protection based on sexual orientation in its employment policies in 1978,⁴³ it refused to air the ad on the grounds that "the CBC had a national policy against accepting announcements from homophile organizations"—despite the fact that other gay groups had successfully managed to air their PSAs on the CBC.⁴⁴ After hearing about the CBC's response, the National Gay Rights Coalition (NGRC), a coalition of gay organizations across the country based in Ottawa, sent not one, but three letters to CBC president Al Johnson inquiring about the existence of such a policy.⁴⁵ After months of silence, the CBC Audience and Public Affairs Vice-President, Peter Meggs, eventually responded to the NGRC's query asserting that the CBC, in fact, did not have a policy against accepting Public Service

⁴¹ Rick Bebout, "Radio Station Vetos [sic] Gay Ad," *The Body Politic*, no. 37, October 1977, 5; Mole, "Rights of Access," 1-4.

⁴² Gay Alliance for Equality, Newsletter, November 16, 1976, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, F0039, Series 2, File 38.

⁴³ McLeod, *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada*, 190.

⁴⁴ "CBC Bans Gay Announcements," *The Body Politic*, no. 24, 1976, 4-5.

⁴⁵ David Garmaise, "Letter to Mr A. Johnson," April 5, 1976, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, Box 6, F0039, Series 2, File 37; David Garmaise, "Letter to Mr. A. Johnson," May 7, 1976, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, Box 6, F0039, Series 2, File 37; David Garmaise, "Letter to Mr. A. Johnston," 25 June 1976, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, Box 6, F0039, Series 2, File 37.

Announcements from homophile organizations. However, Meggs's letter proceeded to state that the Corporation still could not accept the announcements since a number of criteria needed to be met to air PSAs, including the requirement that "any announcement must not promote or comment on any controversial issue."⁴⁶

On October 5, 1976, the GAE, accusing the CBC of discriminating against gay people, presented an Intervention in the application of CBH for renewal of its broadcasting licence at a public hearing of the CRTC in Halifax. As a response, the CBC promised to initiate "a corporate policy study of how CBC's Program Policy on Public Service Announcements should be applied to requests from homophile organizations," stating that the Corporation's decision in this case would be a precedent which would have "equal application in all CBC production centres."⁴⁷ At the same time, the rebuttal from the CBC highlighted that gay liberation as whole—not just the PSAs—was controversial in Canadian society. The document from the CRTC hearing reads: "[There is an] element of controversy inherent in the Gay Liberation Movement. To say this is not to make a judgement; it is merely to record the fact that strongly differing opinions on the subject of homosexuality are widely held in our society. This element of controversy has been an inhibiting factor for the Corporation."⁴⁸

The CBC's response raised important concerns about the right to free expression and access to information in the country, and about who was entitled to use a public service funded by taxpayers' money—including gays and lesbians' taxes. The GAE and the NGRC, seeing in this rebuttal "the possibility of a change in policy," encouraged lesbian and gay groups across

⁴⁶ Peter Meggs, "Letter to David Garmaise," July 6, 1976, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, Box 6, F0039, Series 2, File 37; Robin Metcalfe, "CBC Bureaucrat Imposes Ban on Gay Ads," *The Body Politic*, no. 27, 1976, 4-5.

⁴⁷ "CRTC Hearing, "Rebuttal to Intervention by GAE re: CBH License Renewal," Halifax, October 5, 1976, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, The ArQuives, F0039, Series 2, File 38.

⁴⁸ "CRTC Hearing, "Rebuttal to Intervention by GAE re: CBH License Renewal."

Canada to put pressure on the CBC, noting that: “Whatever policy decision is made will be applied nationally and will thus affect all groups, especially groups in smaller centres where the media are uncooperative, publicity is difficult to obtain, and the CBC is the principal mass medium.”⁴⁹ The response of the CBC also provided further impetus for gay groups across Canada to include sexual orientation in the Canadian Human Rights Act, which had recently been introduced into Parliament.⁵⁰ If sexual orientation protections were enshrined into law, the Federal Human Rights Commission would have been able to intervene during the CBC controversy and protect the GAE and other gay organizations from further discrimination by corporations based on sexual orientation.⁵¹

Both the GAE and the NGRC encouraged gay groups across the country to test the current policy by sending in PSAs to their local CBC station, in addition to writing letters to the CBC, the CRTC, and Members of Parliament (MPs). Should their PSAs be rejected, the NGRC encouraged groups to file in an Intervention with the CRTC in the licence renewal application of their local station to demand that the licence be denied until a change in the CBC policy was made.⁵² Various organizations, including many in Ontario, subsequently sent out letters to the CBC asking to air PSAs for their groups. For instance, the Gay Alliance at York University in Toronto mailed a letter to CBL Radio, their local CBC outlet, requesting them to “consider broadcasting such an announcement for [their] group...a recognized organization of York University [that] ha[d] been providing services to the York University and North York

⁴⁹ Gay Alliance for Equality, Newsletter, November 16, 1976, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, F0039, Series 2, File 38.

⁵⁰ Smith, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada*, 42.

⁵¹ Gays of Ottawa, “On Behalf of the National Gay Rights Coalition,” Newsletter, January 24, 1977, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, Box 6, F0039, Series 2, File 37.

⁵² Gay Alliance for Equality, Newsletter, November 16, 1976.

communities of Toronto since 1971.”⁵³ However, the letter remained unanswered. In December 1976, the Canadian University Press, which serviced about 70 university newspapers in the country, also voted in favour of boycotting radio and television advertising from the CBC in their publications.⁵⁴

Eventually, in January 1977, the GAE received a letter confirming the CBC’s refusal to air PSAs advertising gay groups altogether because of the Corporation’s Public Service Programs Policy concerning Controversial and Opinion Broadcasting. In the letter, Peter Meggs wrote: “The Corporation’s policy on Public Service Announcements clearly excludes subjects deemed controversial. It is still felt that the request of your organization represents a subject matter which is still considered controversial by our audiences and therefore we must continue to apply the policy and refuse your request in the area of public service announcements.”⁵⁵ Feeling that Public Service Announcements for gay and lesbian services did not fall under the provision of the Corporation because of their factual nature, the NGRC subsequently launched another letter campaign, this time sending letters to Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau and the then-Secretary of State, John Roberts, condemning the “patronizing” and “Victorian” attitude of the CBC at a time when Canada was taking steps toward becoming a more “pluralistic” country.⁵⁶

In both cases, the NGRC received lukewarm replies which indicated that the federal government did not consider the case to be discriminatory, preferring to shift the blame onto

⁵³ Gay Alliance at York, “Letter to CBL Radio,” 7 February 1977, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, Box 6, F0039, Series 2, File 37.; Gay Alliance at York, “Letter to CBL Radio,” March 1977, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, Box 6, F0039, Series 2, File 37.

⁵⁴ Gay Alliance for Equality, Newsletter, “Canadian University Press Boycotts CBC,” January 13, 1976, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, F0039, Series 2, File 38; Robin Metcalfe, “University Papers Call National CBC Boycott,” *The Body Politic*, no. 30, 1977, 8.

⁵⁵ Peter Meggs, “Letter to Robin Metcalfe of the Gay Alliance for Equality,” January 7, 1977, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, Box 6, F0039, Series 2, File 37.

⁵⁶ National Gay Rights Coalition, “Letter to Pierre Elliot Trudeau,” January 25, 1977, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, Box 6, F0039, Series 2, File 37; National Gay Rights Coalition, “Letter to John Roberts,” February 7, 1977, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, Box 6, F0039, Series 2, File 37.

other agencies. The Prime Minister's office, indeed, reiterated the commitment of the CBC not to air topics of "a controversial nature," highlighting that the government could not interfere with the operations of the CBC since the terms of the Broadcasting Act specified the CBC was an independent agency. They suggested, instead, reaching out to the Office of the Secretary of State since the CBC reported directly to his agency.⁵⁷ The Secretary of State's office, however, asserted that it was evident that the policy was not "being applied uniformly by the Corporation's radio outlets," and that the matter should be taken up with the CBC instead of with the Secretary of State.⁵⁸ Other letters sent by members of the House of Commons and local politicians in response to the NRGc letter campaign likewise expressed little to no desire to support the NRGc and GAE's efforts; in a letter addressed to Robin Metcalfe, then GAE director, the M.P. for East Hants, Nova Scotia, replied curtly: "Can't support you and won't. Unless you can point to me examples of CBC advertising for heterosexuals."⁵⁹

Faced with a lack of immediate response, the NRGc organized national protests against the CBC between February 17th and February 19th, 1977, encouraging various groups across the country to gather and picket their local CBC headquarters.⁶⁰ Protests took place in Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Vancouver, which were intended to revert the CBC's policy and push the federal government to include sexual orientation in the Canadian Human Rights Act. This became the first nationally coordinated gay and lesbian demonstration in the

⁵⁷ Hellie Wilson, Assistant Correspondence Secretary, "Letter to John Duggan and the National Gay Rights Coalition," February 10, 1977, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, Box 6, F0039, Series 2, File 37.

⁵⁸ Benton Jackson, Correspondence Secretary, "Letter to John Duggan of the National Gay Rights Coalition," February 2, 1977, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, Box 6, F0039, Series 2, File 37.

⁵⁹ MP Halifax, East Hants, "Letter to Robin Metcalfe of the Gay Alliance for Equality," February 1977, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, Box 6, F0039, Series 02, File 38.

⁶⁰ Gays of Ottawa, "Gays Picket CBC Discrimination," News Release, February 15, 1977, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, Box 6, F0039, Series 2, File 37.

country, with protests well attended in all six cities, testifying to the importance of visibility and media access for the Gay Liberation Movement.⁶¹

Energized by the success of the protests, the NRGC lodged a formal complaint with the CRTC, asking them to intervene with the CBC regarding its policy and deny the application for CBH's licence renewal.⁶² Yet, despite repeated complaints, the CRTC decided to renew their licence until March 31, 1980. The NRGC, however, remained committed to fighting the CBC policy on the basis that it was in violation of the mandate given to the CBC by Parliament in the Broadcasting Act of 1968, as the latter clearly required "that the national broadcasting service be a balanced service of information, enlightenment and entertainment for people of different ages, interests and tastes covering the whole range of programming in fair proportion."⁶³ The NRGC sent further letters and protested the licence renewal of multiple CBC stations throughout the country. Eventually, in August and October 1978, the CBC reiterated its policy of refusing to air Public Service Announcements from gay groups, leading the CRTC to renew all CBC licences for three and a half years in April 1979, a decision which clearly disregarded the numerous grievances that had been aired during the public hearings.⁶⁴ It is also worth noting that the CBC battles took place at the same time as the offices of *The Body Politic* were raided by the police in 1977 due to alleged possession of "obscene material," which would lead the publication to be put on trial in the Ontario courts.⁶⁵

These stories are a testament to the climate of timid acceptance mixed with outward hostility that gays and lesbians faced in the 1970s as they were beginning to be visible in the

⁶¹ McLeod, *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada*, 107.

⁶² National Gay Rights Coalition, "News Release: NRG Files Complaint with CRTC," April 4, 1977, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, F0039, Series 02, File 39.

⁶³ Gays of Ottawa, "Letter to the Programme Manager of CBO Radio," March 17, 1977, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, F0039-Series 02, File 39.

⁶⁴ McLeod, *Gay and Lesbian Liberation in Canada*, 318.

⁶⁵ McLeod, 210.

public sphere. They show that politics and culture were intimately linked, with the media being a highly contested terrain. The acrimonious conflicts between the gay and lesbian community and mainstream media outlets also underline why being in control of the media became all the more important in the late 1970s. Control of the media, free of the economic and political injunctions of the mainstream, indeed, was thought to ensure that accurate information about the movement and “realistic” depictions of gay and lesbian people could be circulated. Cable access, with its promises of community expression and control over a mass communication medium, seemed like an ideal channel to realize these impulses.

Further, television was a particularly desirable medium for the budding gay and lesbian community. Lauren Herold, for instance, notes that television represented “a new frontier for media activism in the 1970s.”⁶⁶ Indeed, if magazines and newsletters created spaces by queer people for queer people, television could reach just about anyone who had a subscription to cable television—thus expanding the range and radius of queer media. Although, retrospectively, cable access may not have been the great democratic tool that it advertised itself to be, the excitement surrounding citizens’ access to a (relatively) new visual medium cannot be understated. Heather Ramsay, a participant in both *Gay News and Views* and *This Show May be Offensive to Heterosexuals*, underlines the importance of being in control of television images in the 1970s: “I had an innate awareness that any kind of visual medium [was]...important. It’s really important, because [queer] people need to see themselves as they really are—not as somebody else sees them, someone who demonizes them—and other people need to see them for [queer

⁶⁶ Lauren Herold, “Cable Comes Out: LGBTQ Community Television on New York Public Access Stations” (PhD Dissertation, Chicago: Northwestern University, 2021), 78. As Larry Gross further highlights, “Unlike print, television does not require literacy...Unlike radio, television can show as well as tell. Unlike the... movies...television does not require mobility. It comes into the home and reaches individuals directly.” See: Larry Gross, *Up from Invisibility: Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Media in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 6.

people] to be accepted.”⁶⁷ Michael Riordon, who joined Ramsay on *This Show May Be Offensive* in 1978, echoes this sentiment: “The...opportunity was just like a bolt from heaven. It really just was huge, and irresistible, because the CRTC sort of forced the cable companies to open to the community... Until the Internet came along, [television] was the most powerful single outlet that we could have.”⁶⁸ While contemporary discourses may be critical of the limits of the politics of representation or even, as Ramzi Fawaz underlines, be too rigid in their demands for “accurate” queer representation, many activists in the 1970s believed that being visible was a small step toward changing people’s perception of gay people and even changing the world.⁶⁹ Visibility, therefore, was one of the pillars of gay liberation, often taking on worldmaking properties that were thought to be realizable through cable access, as shown in the next chapter.

⁶⁷ Heather Ramsay, Interview with the author, September 2022.

⁶⁸ Michael Riordon, Interview with the author, February 5, 2022.

⁶⁹ Ramzi Fawaz, *Queer Forms* (New York: New York University Press, 2022), 41.

CHAPTER FIVE: BROADCASTING VISIONS OF LIBERATION: THE RISE OF GAY AND LESBIAN CABLE ACCESS PROGRAMMING (1977-1980)

“I want to connect with people who are isolated, connect them not under imposed bullshit mass fantasies that conspire to keep us down, but in a shared sense of the power in each of us and even more in all of us together.”

“All I’ve had to measure my own experiences against were the larger-than-life heterosexist icons of commercial and so-called educational television. Now I have people *like me*.”

“I’m doing it because it’s fun!”

Anonymous cable access television participants
in *The Body Politic* (December 1977/January 1978 issue).¹

The 1970s were fertile grounds for many political projects and a time during which queer people experimented with new ways of being in the world—when the closet had previously been the only option for most. Gay and lesbian activists in various Ontarian cities and across Canada created social, political, and cultural groups, as well as media outlets and information services, to demand public recognition and provide ways for queer people to find one another. In this chapter, I compare several cable access programs in Ontario—*Out of the Closets/Gais de l’Outaouais* (1977-1980), *Gay News and Views* (1977-1978), and *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals* (1978-1979)—to explore how gay and lesbian activists of the 1970s attempted, with varying degrees of success, to use community television as an “instrument of liberation.”²

“Liberation,” however, as this chapter shows, meant different things to different groups. Gay and lesbian activism in the 1970s, indeed, was characterized by ambivalence, with the quest

¹ Michael Riordon, “Proselytizing or Protecting your Ass on the Boob Tube,” *The Body Politic* no. 39, December 1977/January 1978, 15-18.

² Jean-François Sylvestre, “Emission Homophile A La Chaine Communautaire,” 8 September 1977, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, F0039, Series 02, File 43.

for radical liberation coexisting with demands for equal rights and mainstream acceptance—what Martin Meeker terms “the politics of reform and revolution.”³ As Craig Griffiths indeed argues about gay liberation: “[N]owhere did the politics of confrontation totally eclipse the politics of recognition. Shame was not vanquished by pride. The pushes of revolt and resistance sat uneasily alongside the pulls of convention and the desire to be accepted.”⁴ In addition, local contexts deeply impacted the kinds of political interventions that were possible at the time.

Consequently, I understand community television in the 1970s as a space of public visibility and ideological confrontation, as well as a site of experimentation. Not only did gay and lesbian groups and individuals have a variety of motives for accessing the cable airwaves, as the above quotes suggest, but they also had to find ways to translate novel and complex political ideas onto the screen. However, as this chapter demonstrates, these televisual experiments faced barriers from cable company managers who, despite the CRTC mandate, were often reluctant to broadcast programs that dealt with gay and lesbian topics, thus limiting the potential of cable access to be a truly liberatory medium for gay and lesbian activists of the 1970s.

Effectively, this chapter demonstrates that there was no “one-size-fits-all” approach to gay liberation or to making television about the gay and lesbian movement of the 1970s, but that activists had to improvise, adjust, and experiment as the movement took hold in Canada and in the province of Ontario in particular. As such, these programs are important reminders that “gay and lesbian liberation” must be thought of in capacious terms, allowing the movement to be remembered for its multidimensionality.

³ Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 2

⁴ Craig Griffiths, *The Ambivalence of Gay Liberation: Make Homosexual Politics in 1970s West Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 2.

From Parliament Hill to the Capital's Television Screens: Out of the Closets/Gais de l'Outaouais (1977-1980)

In June of 1977, gay and lesbian activists of Ottawa launched their own half-hour community television show, *Out of the Closets*. Three months later, a Francophone version of *Out of the Closets*, called *Gais de l'Outaouais*, reached the cable TV airwaves. The groundbreaking programs were created by an established gay rights organization, which had been operating in the nation's capital since 1972: Gays of/d'Ottawa. Consequently, *Out of the Closets/Gais de l'Outaouais* constituted a direct extension of GO, reflecting the organizing strategies specific to Ottawa's gay and lesbian liberation movement. As this section shows, *Out of the Closets/Gais de l'Outaouais* had to address and adapt to these organizational circumstances, which were, in many ways, as this chapter demonstrates later on, quite distinct from other activist scenes in Ontario—from Toronto in particular.

The context in which gay and lesbian activism developed in the nation's capital in the 1970s, indeed, is important to fully understand *Out of the Closets/Gais de l'Outaouais*. On August 28, 1971, Ottawa became the site of the largest public demonstration held by gays and lesbians in Canada up to that point: the “We Demand” rally, held on Parliament Hill.⁵ Among the demands made were calls to reform to the Criminal Code and to end anti-gay discrimination, both in everyday life and within the federal public service.⁶ As sociologist Michael Graydon highlights, although lesbians and gay men faced discrimination throughout the country, queer people in Ottawa “experienced an additional level of scrutiny.”⁷ Beginning in the late 1950s, the federal government had engaged in a campaign to identify and dismiss gays and lesbians from

⁵ Michael E. Graydon, “‘We Had Become a Community’: Gays of Ottawa (GO) and the Birth of Community, 1971–7,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 99, no. 4 (2018): 595.

⁶ Graydon, 595.

⁷ Graydon, 596.

the civil service and the army.⁸ Ottawa, home to many federal employees and Canadian military personnel, had felt the brunt of the campaign, resulting in an ongoing and pervasive fear of being publicly out, even as the gay and lesbian movement was taking hold in neighbouring cities like Toronto and Montreal. Therefore, as Graydon further emphasizes, “Ottawa, as the nation’s capital, presented the local gay movement with some unique challenges.”⁹ Under these circumstances, the 1971 rally was the impetus to form an official gay organization in Ottawa. Shortly after the protest, a group of gay men—Michael Black, Maurice Bélanger, Paul Wise, Reg Turcotte, Terrance Reichey, Charlie Hill, Phillip Bianco, Jacques Hoffman, and Lawrence Browne—gathered at Black and Bélanger’s home and founded Gays of/d’Ottawa.¹⁰ Later on, key members of the organization would include Denis LeBlanc (1951-2019), David Garmaise (1947-2020), and John Duggan (1949-2023)—who would all come to participate in *Out of the Closets* in 1977.

Like many organizations of its time, GO was dominated by white, cisgender, gay men. Lesbians, in the 1970s, had a different relationship to visibility and activism than gay men; in the absence of protections against discrimination, being “out” could lead one to be fired for one’s job, losing one’s house, or losing custody of one’s children. These risks were greater for women, who were already marginalized in Canada’s heterosexist society.¹¹ Gay men and lesbians were also often divided in their politics—while some lesbians were supportive of the project of gay liberation, others felt more aligned with feminist politics and preferred to work separately from men altogether. Women were always welcome to join GO, however, and some effectively did

⁸ Gary Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile, *The Canadian War on Queers: National Security as Sexual Regulation* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 3.

⁹ Graydon, ““We Had Become a Community,”” 597.

¹⁰ Graydon, 596.

¹¹ Rose Stanton, Interview with the author, March 2023; Miriam Smith, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada: Social Movements and Equality Seeking, 1971-1995* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018 [1999]), 30-35.

participate in the organization, like Rose Stanton, Marie Robertson, and Bea Barker. Stanton specifically remembers working closely with LeBlanc, Duggan, and Garmaise, whom she described as “the driving force of GO” and “really great guys to work with.”¹² At the same time, five years after GO was founded, Robertson and Stanton formed a separate organization, Lesbians of Ottawa Now (LOON), to address the needs of lesbians in the city—although they themselves remained a part of GO. LOON, however, would disband in 1979 due to internal disagreements about whether lesbians should work together with gay men.

Because of Ottawa’s specific social and political context and because of the background of its members, many of whom were civil servants, GO refrained from embracing radical gay liberation politics. In a *Body Politic* article which announced the formation of the organization, the group was adamant that, since their goal was to “dispel the fear that permeate[d] the very fibre of gays in Ottawa,” they could not “run a radical, quasi-revolutionary, militant organization.”¹³ GO operated according to hierarchical principles, creating a constitution, an elected board, and bylaws. As Denis LeBlanc explained in an interview: “We weren’t so left in Ottawa at that time to even consider becoming a collective.”¹⁴ This approach would later be reflected in *Out of the Closets/Gais de l’Outouais*’s choice of tone and content.

At their first general meeting on December 14th, 1971, GO set out to establish various committees to oversee the organization’s activities, which aimed to facilitate education, political action, and community services.¹⁵ One of these committees, launched in May of 1972, was the Media Committee—later to become the Education committee—which was dedicated to

¹² Rose Stanton, Interview with the author, March 2023.

¹³ “Gays d’Ottawa,” *The Body Politic*, no. 2, January/February 1972, 19.

¹⁴ Graydon, “We Had Become a Community,” 601.

¹⁵ “Gays of Ottawa/Gais de l’Outouais Pamphlet,” February 1978, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, F0039, Series 04, File 15.

“inform[ing] gays and the community at large about homosexuality and gay liberation.”¹⁶ In July 1972, the committee started publishing *GO Info*, a monthly bilingual newsletter. Indeed, from the beginning, GO insisted that the organization’s operations and programming should be bilingual.¹⁷ Two years prior to GO’s creation, in 1969, the Canadian government had passed the Official Languages Act, making French and English the official languages of the country. Federal employees, as a result, were encouraged—if not required—to speak both languages. Furthermore, Ottawa’s proximity to the city of Hull, Quebec, meant that Ottawa was also home to a sizeable Francophone population and had close contact with French-speaking people in Quebec. It was important to GO, therefore, to try and appeal to both the Anglophone and Francophone gay populations of Ottawa and its surrounding areas.

The newsletter shared information on legal, political, and health issues that affected gays and lesbians, cultural and artistic reviews, and information about upcoming events. In essence, *GO Info* contained the blueprint for what *Out of the Closets/Gais de l’Outaouais* would become. Making and publishing *GO Info* also demonstrated GO’s willingness to use any and every resource available to get their message out. Since many members of GO were civil servants, the early issues of *GO Info* were printed through government offices, using federal photocopiers and paper.¹⁸ This resourcefulness would manifest itself through GO’s desire to use another tool at their disposal to reach bigger audiences: cable access television.

¹⁶ “Minutes of the Media Committee, May 4th 1972,” The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, F0039, Series 01, File 24.

¹⁷ “Gays d’Ottawa,” *The Body Politic*, 19.

¹⁸ Michael E. Graydon, “(Out)standing in their field: A Qualitative Study of Gays of Ottawa, 1971-1984,” (PhD dissertation, Ottawa: Carleton University, 2011), 117.

From its inception, GO's Media/Education Committee was interested in accessing the cable airwaves and mobilizing television's visual appeal.¹⁹ On September 10, 1972, a member of the committee, Gaston Charpentier, wrote a letter to the chairman of the CRTC, Pierre Juneau. The letter asked Juneau several questions about the rules and regulations of radio and television programming containing gay and lesbian content. Such questions included, for instance, "are there regulations controlling and/or preventing radio, television or community cable systems from broadcasting and/or telecasting educational programs dealing with homosexuality and/or gay liberation?" and "are there restrictions as to the time of day and/or night that programs on homosexuality may be aired by the electronic media?" Anticipating that there might be restrictions to circulating gay and lesbian content, the remainder of the letter encouraged the CRTC to explain why such restrictions would be in place, were the CRTC to answer "yes" to the previous two questions: "If regulations do exist; why and when were they instituted?" and "what legal and moral rights does the CRTC feel it has to control information?"²⁰ Finally, Charpentier asked the CRTC to provide examples of any cases of programs about homosexuality that would have been restricted by potential CRTC regulations. GO received an answer a week later, on September 19, 1972. The letter from the CRTC was short and to the point: "There are no Broadcasting Regulations referring to homosexuality."²¹

¹⁹ "Dealing with the Media," The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, F0039, Series 03, File 36.

²⁰ Letter from GO to Pierre Juneau, September 10, 1972, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, F0039, Series 1, File 24.

²¹ Letter from Jean-Marc Demers to Gaston Charpentier, September 19, 1972, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, F0039-01-24.

Out of the Closets/Gais de l'Outaouais's Rocky Start

It took an additional five years for GO to launch *Out of the Closets/Gais de l'Outaouais*. On June 3, 1977, the first episode of English series *Out of the Closets* aired on Skyline Cable and Ottawa Cablevision, which had both been approached by the organization to broadcast their newly conceived program.²² The first episode of *Out of the Closets*, however, was a trial run for the show. GO had to pre-tape the pilot and submit it for approval before it could air. In addition, the pilot needed to be well received by audiences for the series to be allowed to proceed. Indeed, despite the CRTC's assurance that there were no regulations that would impede the creation and circulation of gay and lesbian content on community television, cable stations managers were nonetheless "nervous about public reaction" and had to be "convinced" of the value of the program before committing to a full monthly series.²³ Fortunately for GO, upon airing the first episode, the audience's response was overwhelmingly positive; *Out of the Closets* was officially on the air (Figure 5).

Skyline and Ottawa Cablevision, however, still imposed certain restrictions on the program after approving its full launch.²⁴ For instance, when GO expressed the wish to change the title of the program from *Out of the Closets* to *Gayvisions* so that they could have "the word 'gay' in the title," the companies refused.²⁵ Cable managers also insisted that GO's programming had to be directed at a "general audience," and that there be no "propagandizing" and "no attempt to 'recruit' for gay organizations."²⁶ Nor could the program "give the gay lifestyle any

²² "GO on TV/GO En Ondes," *Go Info*, vol 4, no.4 (July 1977): 5.

²³ "Ottawa: Gay TV Starts on Cable," *The Body Politic*, vol. 35, July-August 1977, 8.

²⁴ David Mole, "Rights of Access, Cable, FM, and the Dailies: One foot in the door, two doors in the face," *The Body Politic*, no 38, November 1977, 1-4.

²⁵ Mole, "Rights of Access," 1. It is unclear, however, why "Gais de l'Outaouais" was allowed to have the word "gai" in its title.

²⁶ Mole, 1-4.

undue enhancement.”²⁷ This meant, for instance, that showing gay dances on the program was prohibited. In addition, the guidelines imposed by the cable companies stipulated that at least one person “not identified with the gay community” had to be on each show to “add credibility” to the program.²⁸ *Out of the Closets* had to navigate this set of restrictive guidelines without compromising their desire to use cable access television as, in the words of GO member Paul-François Sylvestre, “an instrument of...liberation/un instrument de...libération.”²⁹

Additionally, in its efforts to appeal to both the English and French-speaking populations of Ottawa and its vicinity, GO was determined to air a French version of *Out of the Closets*. On September 8, 1977, the organization concluded arrangements with a third cable company in Hull, Laurentian Cablevision, to produce the monthly half-hour show in French; *Gais de l’Outaouais* was set to debut on September 14, 1977.³⁰ The agreement with Laurentian cable also included provisions to air the English production, two weeks after broadcasting the French version. However, the logistics of having to work with three different cable companies proved difficult to manage for GO.

²⁷ Mole, “Rights of Access,” 1-4.

²⁸ Mole, 1-4.

²⁹ Jean-François Sylvestre, “Emission Homophile A La Chaine Communautaire,” 8 September 1977, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, F0039, Series 02, File 43.

³⁰ “GO A La Television Communautaire de Hull,” *GO Info*, vol. 6, no. 5 (September 1977): 5; David Garmaise, “Letter to R.H Black, Director of Programming, “Skyline Cablevision, 8 September 1977, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, F0039, Series 02, File 43.

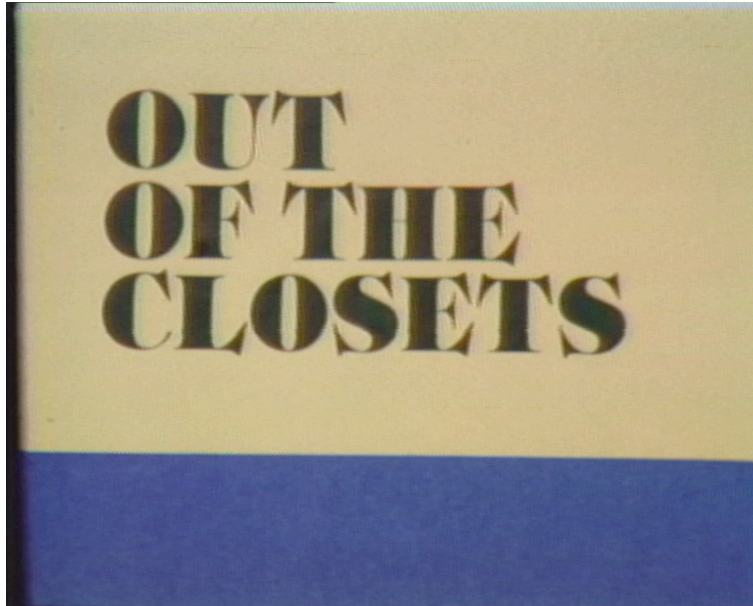


Figure 5. Out of the Closets (1977-1980), opening sequence.

“Gays of Ottawa – Various Cable Television Shows done by Gays of Ottawa,” The ArQuives, Nancy Nicol Fonds, F0051-03-369.

First, the tapes had to be transported back and forth between the different studio locations so that they could be aired. On two occasions, the tapes were not delivered on time to Skyline and Ottawa Cablevision. In one case, the showing of *Out of the Closets* had to be cancelled; in another, it was replaced by a different community program.³¹ In a detailed and heated letter to the Laurentian cable manager, David Garmaise attributed these mistakes to Laurentian’s lack of professionalism, blaming the station for damaging GO’s credibility. Garmaise added that the station had caused them “considerable embarrassment” since the organization had taken advertisements in two newspapers to promote the program: “Our centre was flooded from angry listeners when the show did not come on at the scheduled time...Many people in the gay

³¹ David Garmaise, “Letter to René Ouellette,” 3 November 1977, The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, F0039, Series 02, File 43.

community began to wonder why Gays of Ottawa was so incompetent.”³² Furthermore, Laurentian also reneged on an agreement they had made with Skyline on airing a shortened version of the French program produced by Laurentian. GO’s dealings with Laurentian impacted GO’s relationship with the community, as well their relationship with the other two cable companies—thereby threatening the existence of *Out of the Closets/Gais de l’Outaouais* and thwarting GO’s desire to offer a bilingual program that would fit the mandate of their organization.³³

In addition, GO ran into scheduling conflicts between Skyline, Ottawa, and Laurentian Cablevision, as the Ottawa companies worked on a monthly schedule, while Laurentian worked on a 4-week schedule. As a result, there were issues with taping and airing both the French and English shows on these three channels at the scheduled times—especially since the channels still previewed the episodes ahead of their broadcast. It also made it difficult for GO to advertise the programs. In the same letter to Laurentian, Garmaise explained, in a rather convoluted way:

Still another problem created by your 4-week schedule: It becomes impossible to advertise a regular time slot for the program. In Ottawa, we can say “the fourth Thursday of each month” and people will become familiar with that time slot. We cannot say this for the program on Laurentian...We cannot expect people to remember ‘every fourth Tuesday and Thursday.’”³⁴

Consequently, two months after reaching an agreement with Laurentian to air both *Gais de l’Outaouais* and *Out of the Closets*, GO made the decision to pull the English version from the cable channel, despite the fact that this decision might have “endanger[ed] the showing of the French program.”³⁵ Eventually, it appears that GO ended their agreement with Laurentian altogether and that *Gais de l’Outaouais* found a new home on Skyline’s community channel. As

³² David Garmaise, “Letter to René Ouellette.”

³³ David Garmaise, “Letter to René Ouellette.”

³⁴ David Garmaise, “Letter to René Ouellette.”

³⁵ David Garmaise, “Letter to René Ouellette.”

a result, although *Gais de l'Outaouais* reached the Francophone population of Ottawa, it is difficult to know whether the program circulated beyond the Ottawa river. The show, however, still made sure to regularly address and publicize events that were happening in the neighbouring province of Quebec.³⁶ And, despite the difficulties initially encountered by the organization, GO nonetheless managed to occupy the cable access airwaves until 1980—making it one of the longest-running gay and lesbian community television programs in Ontario at the time.

Reform, not Revolution: Advocating for Equal Rights on the Television Screen

Key participants in the English program included: Rose Stanton, Marie Robertson, Debbie Parent, Ann Lawrence, John Duggan, David Garmaise, Paul Wise, Jamie Starks, Greg Spurgeon, Lloyd Plunkett, and Claude Jutras—all of them GO members. On the French side, Denis LeBlanc, Pierre Huot, Serge Gauthier, Elizabeth LaCroix, and Roger Galipeau were regular volunteers on the show (Figure 6). *Out of the Closets/Gais de l'Outaouais*, which ran for 30 minutes, featured news items, information about community activities, and an arts and entertainment section. Overtly concerned with institutional change, legal issues, and mainstream political parties, *Out of the Closets/Gais de l'Outaouais*'s programming, overall, reflected GO's preoccupations. News on the program, for example, provided regular updates on the battles for the rights of gay organizations to air Public Service Announcements on the CBC, as well as on other current debates regarding human rights.

Indeed, the show spent considerable time advocating for equality in the form of legal rights. As gay activist and historian Tom Warner explains: "Amending human rights laws to prohibit sexual orientation discrimination was irrevocably embedded in the public agenda in the

³⁶ For example, on March 27 and 28, 1978, *Out of the Closets* and *Gais de l'Outaouais* aired a special documentary on the Montreal police raids of the Truxx bar. See: "Gay TV Show," *The Ottawa Citizen*, March 24, 1979, 80.

period between 1975 to 1984.”³⁷ The show’s guests, therefore, included lead figures of the fight against discrimination at the local, provincial, and federal level, such as John Damien. A horse racing professional, Damien was fired without notice in February 1975 after news of his sexual orientation reached the Ontario Racing Commission, an independent agency of the Ontario provincial government. Damien’s plight became an central element of the Gay Liberation Movement’s campaign for the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Ontario Human Rights Code, as it was believed Damien’s case could sway public opinion regarding anti-gay discrimination.³⁸ His story was immediately taken up by gay groups across Ontario, including Gays of/d’Ottawa, leading to the establishment of the Committee to Defend John Damien and his case being submitted to the Ontario Human Rights Commission—which resulted in an 11-year-long legal battle. Although Damien’s story made it to the mainstream media in its early days, coverage of the case stated waning in 1976 following a defamation lawsuit on the part of Damien’s former employer.³⁹ Having Damien on the show in 1977, then, indicated to the public that the campaign was far from being over and that gay people still needed to mobilize to bring justice to Damien and to amend the Ontario Human Rights Code (Figure 7).

Out of the Closets/Gais de l’Outaouais also interviewed former private Barbara Thornborrow, who, in 1977, was investigated by the Canadian Forces’ Special Investigations Unit about her sexuality for reasons of “national security.” After being given the choice to either admit to her homosexuality and be discharged from the Canadian Armed Forces or undergo psychiatric treatment, Thornborrow contacted Marie Robertson of LOON, whom she knew prior

³⁷ Tom Warner, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2002), 144.

³⁸ Smith, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada*, 50-52; Warner, 144; Patrizia Gentile, Gary Kinsman, and L. Pauline Rankin, *We Still Demand!: Redefining Resistance in Sex and Gender Struggles* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017), 66.

³⁹ Warner, 145.

to joining the armed forces through her involvement in the Hamilton-McMaster gay liberation organization. Together with GO, LOON propelled Thornborrow's story to the national stage—leading to Thornborrow's eventual dismissal from the armed forces. In the process, however, Thornborrow became, like Damien, a key figure in the provincial and federal fight to obtain legal protections for gays and lesbians.⁴⁰

To supplement these interviews, the program regularly featured members of GO, who would intervene on various topics pertaining to civil rights and discrimination in sectors such as housing, healthcare, or employment.⁴¹ Because of the mandate of the cable companies to provide “balance,” additional interviews were also conducted with, for instance, police officers and lawyers (who publicly identified as heterosexual) who provided an additional point of view on these issues. Through these interventions, *Out of the Closets/Gais de l'Outaouais* intended to present gays and lesbians as human beings worthy of rights and inclusion within the fabric of society. As Rose Stanton explains:

It was about showing anybody who was watching that we aren't that different...It was normalizing. It was political to do it, but the goal was to have ourselves be seen as members of the community. As opposed to some fringe group that's coming after your children.⁴²

⁴⁰ Kinsman and Gentile, *We Still Demand!*, 232–33, 236–38, 327–29, 368–69.

⁴¹ “Gais de l'Outaouais - Run downs,” The ArQuives, Gays of Ottawa Fonds, Box 7, F0039, Series 02, File 43.

⁴² Rose Stanton, Interview with the author, March 2023.



Figure 6. Marie Robertson (left) and John Duggan (right) hosting *Out of the Closets*.
“Gays of Ottawa – Various Cable Television Shows done by Gays of Ottawa,” The ArQuives,
Nancy Nicol Fonds, F0051-03-369.



Figure 7. David Garmaise’s “Updates” section featuring John Damien.
“Gays of Ottawa – Various Cable Television Shows done by Gays of Ottawa,” The ArQuives,
Nancy Nicol Fonds, F0051-03-369.

Owing to Ottawa's local conditions, GO's television programs, therefore, embraced reform, not revolution. In that sense, *Out of the Closets/Gais de l'Outaouais* captured one of the main political currents of the Canadian gay liberation movement, designed to repeal anti-gay legislation and secure human rights protection for lesbians and gay men on the basis that they were a minority group deserving of equality: "the human rights strategy."⁴³ By foregrounding the fight for equal rights, *Out of the Closets/Gais de l'Outaouais* believed that 1. Civil rights would "serve as a rallying cry and point of unity for the community."⁴⁴ 2. The human rights strategy would not only change the laws but raise awareness of and support for the gay and lesbian community. Ken Popert, a Toronto gay liberationist, indeed pointed out in *The Body Politic* in 1975 that: "Of all the questions raised by gay liberation, the issue of civil rights is the one which attracts the greatest support, from gays and straights alike. By a campaign for civil rights, we can penetrate the media and advance the reeducation of the public on the subject of homosexuality."⁴⁵

Moreover, GO's reformist, middle-of-the-road approach was needed to ensure that their viewers would not feel alienated by the programs. On the one hand, GO did not wish to tarnish the credibility of their organization by being too radical, as the latter "hop[ed] that the series [would] become a major channel of communication between GO and the larger community."⁴⁶ On the other hand, GO was aware that gay rights were a highly contentious topic in Canadian society in the 1970s—and the cable companies had made sure to remind them of that fact when they imposed guidelines on the program. For some viewers, the show would be "their first

⁴³ Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Homo and Hetero Sexualities* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1996), 292-300.

⁴⁴ Smith, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada*, 46-47.

⁴⁵ Ken Popert, "Gay Rights Now!" *The Body Politic*, no. 19, July-August 1975, 16.

⁴⁶ "Ottawa: Gay TV Starts on Cable," *The Body Politic*, no. 35, July-August 1977, 8.

contact with a gay person.”⁴⁷ As a result, the organization tried to garner support and sympathy by focusing predominantly on the question of civil rights, and by ensuring that the tone of the programs was also palatable for a variety of audiences. For instance, the guests and hosts of *Out of the Closets/Gais de l’Outaouais* refrained from voicing their personal opinions on the show, adopting a “neutral” point of view, and delivering information about gay and lesbian issues in a detached, matter-of-fact manner.

Out of the Closets/Gais de l’Outaouais also deliberately balanced out political content with community announcements—such as socials—as well as lighter segments to accommodate their heterogeneous audiences. This decision, too, emerged out of the specificities of Ottawa as a locale. Given the climate surrounding queerness in the city, some lesbians and gay men averted identifying with anything explicitly political, living quasi-closeted lives. GO thus knew that these gay and lesbian viewers would not necessarily be ready to fully embrace the politics of gay liberation—even its reformist side.⁴⁸ As Rose Stanton explains:

[T]hey were not necessarily comfortable with being around people who were very political. They just wanted to live their life quietly, and they didn’t want to call attention to themselves. They were okay with being perceived as being good friends...So, those people wouldn’t...have stayed and watched it if it was all about...fighting for political change or human rights.⁴⁹

In blending together entertainment with information about gay rights and social events, GO, therefore, hoped to reach these apolitical individuals. At the same time, *Out of the Closets/Gais de l’Outaouais*’s lighter segments were not entirely devoid of political intent. For instance, *Out of the Closets* aired a short skit between Rose Stanton and Mary Harvey of LOON, which they had originally performed at the National Lesbian Conference held at the University of Ottawa in

⁴⁷ Michael Riordon, “Proselytizing,” 17.

⁴⁸ Graydon, “(Out)standing in Their Field,” 116.

⁴⁹ Rose Stanton, Interview with the author, March 2023.

1976. In the skit, Harvey played a “heterosexual researcher,” whose expertise about heterosexuality was solicited by Stanton:

It was reversing the roles and asking the kinds of questions about straight people that people ask about gays and lesbians all the time. You know, “which one of you is the man?” ... I remember asking about, “but what [do] they do?”—which is one of the questions that people would often ask... It was just very silly.⁵⁰

Through role reversal, *Out of the Closets* destabilized existing stereotypes about gays and lesbians and delivered an important message about how heteronormativity circulated through media and scientific discourses—while remaining accessible—and acceptable—for all audiences (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Mary Harvey as a “heterosexual researcher” (left) and Rose Stanton (right).

Courtesy of Rose Stanton and Mary Harvey.

⁵⁰ Rose Stanton, Interview with the author, March 2023.

Out of the Closets/Gais de l'Outaouais additionally had to navigate how to reach deeply closeted gays and lesbians who felt that there was simply too much risk being associated with anything remotely related to homosexuality. Indeed, when *Out of the Closets/Gais de l'Outaouais* started airing in 1977, an in-depth inquiry published by the *Globe and Mail* revealed that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) kept files on “known homosexuals” in the Public Service, labelling those files “character weakness” and “potential security risks,” thus perpetuating the climate of fear which had existed in the nation’s capital since the 1950s.⁵¹ Consequently, *Out of the Closets/Gais de l'Outaouais* also aimed to be “a safe way for people to connect with the community without putting themselves at risk.”⁵²

Stanton, who worked for the Department of Agriculture at the time, remembers passing a co-worker of hers in the hallway who muttered, “I saw you on TV last night,” and kept walking. To Stanton, this a giveaway from the woman that she, too, was probably a lesbian, which was “a risky thing for someone to say” due to the consequences one could face for being openly gay in Ottawa. As Stanton admitted, she herself “could have been fired” for participating in *Out of the Closets*.⁵³ The dangers of being out, however, were not entirely exclusive to Ottawa—despite the specific circumstances which surrounded homosexuality in the city. This feeling of fear was echoed by Heather Ramsay, who participated in *Gay News and Views*, a Toronto-based program which started airing a few months after *Out of the Closets*:

Several years after the...cable show had aired, I was at a party when an older lesbian couple approached to tell me how much they had enjoyed snippets of the show...They also told me that they never watched the show on their own TV because they were too afraid that somehow this *transgressive*...act could be traced back to them and that they would be outed. [Today], it’s hard to imagine that kind of fear and lack of freedom, that the very possibility of community access itself was something to be afraid of.⁵⁴

⁵¹ “RCMP Files on Gays/ Dossiers “Gais” de la G.R.C.,” *GO Info*, vol. 6, no. 5, September 1977, 2.

⁵² Rose Stanton, Interview with the author, March 2023.

⁵³ Rose Stanton, Interview with the author, March 2023.

⁵⁴ Heather Ramsay, Email Message to the author, August 8, 2022.

Out of the Closets/Gais de l'Outaouais adopted a moderate, reform-oriented approach to gay liberation which was overwhelmingly preoccupied with legal and political change at the institutional level to appeal to heterogenous audiences and secure broader support for civil rights as the Gay Liberation Movement was gaining ground in Ottawa and beyond. At the same time, GO's programming also had the difficult task of trying to activate a gay community at the local level when fear and persecution affected the gay and lesbian residents of the nation's capital and threatened their livelihood. *Gay News and Views*, on the other hand, also attempted to garner support for the movement by making claims for equality and human rights but was able to draw from a wider and stronger network of Toronto-based gay and lesbian organizations and individuals. As such, *Gay News and Views*'s claims to equality were supplemented by claims to cultural difference as the show attempted to broadcast a broader, more far-reaching vision of gay and lesbian liberation.

Gay News and Views: Evening News with a Gay Consciousness

A thirteen-week television series which began airing on September of 1977 in Toronto, the program was the brainchild of the Gay TV Collective (GTC), whose members included Gordon Montador, Heather Ramsay, Richard Sutton, Harvey Hamburg, Robert Wallace, Alex Turner, Frank Hutchings, and Charlie Dobie. Montador, who died of AIDS in 1991, was the principal instigator behind *Gay News and Views*. A towering figure in the Toronto gay literary world, Montador was an editor and publisher, working at Glad Day Bookshop, Canada's first bookstore dedicated to serving the queer community, and eventually launching his own publishing company, Summerhill Press. He also contributed to *The Body Politic*, and, in 1978, Montador

was co-chairman of Toronto's Gay Days, the city's first lesbian and gay arts and pride festival.⁵⁵ All participants in the show were friends—or at least, friendly—with Montador, having been personally contacted, almost hand-picked, to join him on the *Gay News and Views* venture.

Like Montador himself, each of the individuals who would be involved in *Gay News and Views* had social and/or political ties to Toronto's gay and lesbian community. Heather Ramsay, who co-hosted the show, was a founding member of the University of Guelph Homophile Association, subsequently moving to Toronto and becoming involved in various gay liberation and lesbian feminist projects in the city throughout the mid-to late 1970s. She recalls Montador approaching her to become co-host, despite not particularly feeling comfortable in this role:

I was really a very shy person. There was an expectation that I would do all sorts of things, which I really couldn't do. But if you give me a costume, that would be a whole other thing...that's how I got involved with *Gay News and Views*. There was a perception that I could read, and I could present stuff. And I could smile.⁵⁶

By the time the show started airing, Harvey Hamburg, a lawyer, had also been an active member of the Toronto gay community, having founded various key organizations in the city, such as the gay Jewish group Ha Mishpacha, 923-GAYS, and Toronto Area Gays. Because of his participation in these various activities, Hamburg's political savviness, in addition to his personal friendship with Montador, was mobilized to publicize the show and garner support. For instance, while Hamburg does not entirely recall how he came to be involved in the show, he is listed as the program coordinator in a *Body Politic* article announcing that a tentative agreement had been reached with a cable company to produce *Gay News and Views* and that volunteers were needed

⁵⁵ Stephen Smith, "Gordon Montador: Publisher Headed Summerhill," *Globe and Mail*, May 28, 1991; Jearld Moldenhauer, "Canadian Gay Movement Leaders." <https://www.jearldmoldenhauer.com/canadian-gay-movement-leaders/>

⁵⁶ Heather Ramsay, Interview with the author, September 2022.

to put together a crew. The ad reads: “Men and women who wish to be involved in this venture are urged to call Harvey Hamburg...for further detail.”⁵⁷

Montador also felt that he needed gay people who were familiar with television production and video technology to make the show a success—especially if the personnel both behind and before the cameras were to be gay.⁵⁸ Montador thus reached out to Robert Wallace. Although Wallace was a playwright and an academic, having written popular gay plays throughout the 1960s and 1970s and teaching at York University’s Glendon Campus, he had acquired considerable first-hand experience working for the CBC in Vancouver, where he was hired as studio director shortly after graduating university. Though Wallace admits to not having been involved in the Toronto gay activist scene to the same extent as his *Gay News and Views* colleagues, he was active in the commercial gay community, cruising the streets and bars of Toronto, living in a gay commune on Ontario Street, and occasionally writing for *The Body Politic*—a platform which enabled him not only to have a political voice, but to befriend a number of other gay people in the Toronto community. At the same time, when discussing his involvement in the Toronto gay scene, Wallace was quick to remind me that, in the 1970s, “just to be out, gay, visible, and vocal was to be seen as an activist, whether one considered oneself or not.”⁵⁹

Wallace remembers getting a call from Montador about participating in *Gay News and Views*: “It was out of the blue saying something like, ‘Is it true that you used to work in TV?’ And I said, ‘Yeah!’ and we started talking about me. I said, ‘What’s this all about?’ And it was *Gay News and Views*... We were all friends—Harvey, Gordon, and I. We connected through

⁵⁷ “Cable Tube to do Gay News,” *The Body Politic*, no. 34, June 1977, 8.

⁵⁸ “TV series on the Air,” *The Body Politic*, no. 37, October 77, 7.

⁵⁹ Robert Wallace, Interview with the author, August 2022.

parties, but we also connected through organizations.”⁶⁰ Although Wallace was enthusiastic at the idea of collaborating on a project with his friends, his previous experience in television had also taught him that making a television show required a considerable amount of work. Wallace was therefore reluctant to participate in *Gay News and Views* at first, knowing that, although Maclean Hunter would provide a studio and equipment, the other participants’ relative lack of experience in television would mean that he would probably have to work twice as hard to make the program sustainable—especially since Montador wanted him to work as the show’s producer.

Wallace nonetheless quickly committed to the program, realizing that, despite the shortcomings of cable access television that he foresaw at the time, *Gay News and Views* would be able to provide considerable outreach. Wallace told me: “I wouldn’t have to monitor other people’s representation. I could be involved in the direct representation of ourselves, and it was a gift, really.”⁶¹ Other members of the collective included Frank Hutchings, who owned a stereo and television repair company called Frank Hutchings electronics, Alex Turner, an artist and close friend of Robert Wallace, Charlie Dobie, a gay liberationist and photographer, and Richard Sutton, a data processing instructor and community theatre aficionado who would eventually would go on to replace Montador as co-host.

Like *Out of the Closets/Gais de l’Outaouais*, the show was the product of personal relationships between its participants, who were all intimately connected to Toronto’s burgeoning gay and lesbian scene. Yet, *Gay News and Views* participants did not follow a traditional model of organizing. Instead, they gathered under the umbrella of the “Gay TV Collective” (GTC). During the gay and lesbian movement of the 1970s, indeed, collectivity

⁶⁰ Robert Wallace, Interview with the author, August 2022.

⁶¹ Robert Wallace, Interview with the author, August 2022.

provided a social and political alternative, a new way of working, creating, thinking, and living together. The collective model of television making, in particular, reimagined television production as a non-hierarchical and organic process, which ran opposite to the competitive and capitalist model of network TV. The collective aspect of the production is also what appealed to some of its members; Harvey Hamburg, for instance, recalls being interested in getting involved in the show specifically because it advertised itself as a collective venture.⁶² Through organizing as a collective and collaborating on bringing a vision of the community to life via the media-making process, cable access was therefore seen by some as a way to facilitate the experience of gay liberation both in front and behind the camera. At the same time, other members remember this collective endeavour being somewhat limited by the requirements of the televisual format; because the show had to follow a specific structure, each member of GTC oversaw their own segment, without having much discussion with or input from the other members.

The collective's membership included both (cisgender) men and women, demonstrating a commitment to showcasing gender equality in both its programming and membership. However, although behind-the-scenes photographs of the program indicate that women were in the control room and behind the cameras, the show still counted more gay men than lesbians who wanted to appear on camera or be an integral part of the collective. During our interview, Ramsay bemoaned being the only official lesbian member of GTC: "I was always kind of kind of sad that there weren't more lesbians involved...I wasn't comfortable being the only lesbian doing all this stuff."⁶³ However, Ramsay also appreciated the political energy of gay men, who had been formative to her development as a lesbian activist since her involvement in the Guelph

⁶² Harvey Hamburg, Interview with the author, August 2022.

⁶³ Heather Ramsay, Interview with the author, September 2022.

Homophile Association. In fact, like Stanton and Robertson in Ottawa, Ramsay understood the necessity of cross-political work to achieve gay and lesbian liberation.

The collective collaborated with various Toronto-based gay organizations to build their programming. The news segment of the show was coordinated with *The Body Politic*, due to the personal connections that the members of GTC had with the periodical. For example, Harvey Hamburg went the *Body Politic*'s offices to gather news items, which he would then proceed to individually type and sometimes read out on the show. For their community calendar section, GTC collaborated with 923-GAYS, the local recorded calendar of gay community events that Harvey Hamburg had founded the same year *Gay News and Views* started airing.⁶⁴ In other words, the show was part of an intermedial network of media and communication technologies that included magazines and phone lines, which the Toronto gay and lesbian community utilized to build their movement throughout the 1970s, in addition to being at the centre of various overlapping social networks.

Because GTC members were already politicized and connected to the tight-knit Toronto-based gay and lesbian community, the collective had immediate access to various organizations, groups, and openly gay individuals who were invited to the *Gay News and Views* set. As a result, interviewers and guests often displayed a kind of familiarity with one another. Hamburg, for instance, recalls interviewing a member of Ha Mishpacha during one of the show's episodes:

I have this clear memory of a funny incident, interviewing one of the guys who helped start the Gay Jewish group...He knew, and I knew, and...the audience knew, that I was part of the Jewish group, too. At some point, I asked if the members of the group socialized and if people would meet people to have relationships. And, his immediate response was, "Oh, no. I wouldn't date somebody who is Jewish!" It was [a] joke, which, in context of the group, was okay to say.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ "TV Series on The Air," 7.

⁶⁵ Harvey Hamburg, Interview with the author, August 2022.

Likewise, funding for the show also came from within the community. Indeed, even though the cable company provided the Gay TV Collective with airtime and equipment, the show required additional expenses which were covered through fundraisers. GTC raised money through organizing dances at local LGBTQ2+ community spots, such as the 519 Community Centre on Church Street, or the Masonic Temple at the corner of Davenport and Yonge Street.⁶⁶ *Gay News and Views*, therefore, was a collective and community-based initiative from start to finish, which heavily relied on Toronto's already-established gay and lesbian networks.

“It Wasn’t Like the Body Politic on TV”: Injecting Gay Liberation Ideologies into Familiar Structures

The goal of *Gay News and Views* was simple: to put “real” gay people on Canadian television screens and appeal to gay and lesbian viewers. However, like *Gays of/d’Ottawa* before them, the Gay TV Collective knew that, by virtue of being broadcast on cable television, the show was likely to reach both gay and straight audiences. As Robert Wallace said of *Gay News and Views*: “It wasn’t like the *Body Politic* on TV. But the *Body Politic* would never get on TV... We wanted something that we could make and keep alive. Something that was positive, and that was upfront, and gay, and entertaining, and newsworthy.”⁶⁷ Therefore, the show was committed to normalizing gay and lesbian people for its viewers, positioning its gay and lesbian subjects as universally legible and rejecting the “notions of sin, sickness, and criminality that previously defined homosexuality.”⁶⁸ Remembering a violent verbal exchange with a family member, who equated her coming out as a lesbian with committing a murder, Heather Ramsay

⁶⁶ Robert Wallace, Interview with the author, August 2022.

⁶⁷ Robert Wallace, Interview with the author, August 2022.

⁶⁸ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 61.

explained that one of the reasons why she got involved with the show was so that she could prove that she was, in fact, “normal”: “That’s always stuck with me...I was on a kind of a conscious or unconscious mission to show that lesbians and gay men were not [the same as murderers].”⁶⁹ Similarly, Harvey Hamburg declared that one of the show’s main accomplishments was that it suggested normalcy to a straight audience. He told me: “If you’re giving news items that just are saying ‘this is what’s going on and gay people were involved in it’ or ‘this is the struggle in that place.’ It [has] consequences which are normalizing.”⁷⁰ The show clearly communicated to its viewers that, if gays and lesbians were more visible in Canadian society, then, equal rights would be more easily obtained, thus following the steps of *Out of the Closets/Gais de l’Outaouais* and embracing the human rights strategy of the Gay Liberation Movement.

At the same time, however, for *Gay News and Views*, the human rights strategy was not an end in itself, but a “means of moving toward liberation.”⁷¹ In that sense, the Gay TV Collective’s objectives also aligned with radical liberationists, who argued that there was “no contradiction between the present focus of the struggle, civil rights, and the final object, the full liberation of the human personality, straight and gay alike.”⁷² Furthermore, equality, as conveyed by GTC, did not mean uniformity, or sameness. Consequently, *Gay News and Views*’ programming made a case for equal humanity while promoting cultural uniqueness by injecting gay liberation ideologies into seemingly “traditional” structures.

The show’s title cleverly encapsulates the spirit of the program. Robert Wallace, indeed, recalls being skeptical of the title when he and Gordon Montador were first discussing Wallace’s

⁶⁹ Heather Ramsay, Interview with the author, September 2022.

⁷⁰ Harvey Hamburg, Interview with the author, August 2022.

⁷¹ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 71; Smith, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada*, 46-48.

⁷² Body Politic Collective, “Editorial: Never Going Back,” *The Body Politic*, no. 8, Spring 1972, 1-2.

involvement in the show: “I remember him saying ‘Yeah, it’s not very good. But that’s exactly what we’re going to be’... In 1977, that was really upfront. Nobody could ask... ‘What is this show about?’... You couldn’t be more blunt.”⁷³ Considering that some cable station managers were against the word “gay” being used in the name of cable access programs altogether, as was the case for *Out of the Closets* in Ottawa, it was especially important for the program to be called “*Gay News and Views*.” “Gay” also reflected the preoccupations of the Gay Liberation Movement at large: circulating the word “gay” was a way to be visible, of “letting brothers and sisters know they were not alone.”⁷⁴ In naming their show “*Gay News and Views*,” the Gay TV Collective added a gay spin to traditional “news and views,” indicating to their viewers that the show would be influenced by gay liberation ideologies.

Furthermore, the *Gay News and Views* set mirrored that of a traditional newsmagazine which audiences would have been familiar with, with the two hosts sitting behind a desk, script in hand, reading the news and introducing the various guests and segments of the show. Yet, *Gay News and Views* did not shy away from asserting its difference vis-à-vis “regular” programming: in the background, behind the two hosts, was a pink triangle (Figure 9). Formerly used by Nazi Germany to identify homosexuals in concentration camps and reclaimed as a symbol of pride by gay liberationists, the significance of the triangle would have been readily recognizable to a politicized gay audience.⁷⁵ The show’s catchphrase, “Be good, be gay, goodnight,” also gestured at gay liberationist discourse, as it conjured up the popular slogan of the 1970s: “Gay is Good.”⁷⁶

⁷³ Robert Wallace, Interview with the author, August 2022.

⁷⁴ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 71-72.

⁷⁵ For a detailed and recent history of how the pink triangle was reclaimed by gay liberation groups and became a transnational symbol of gay liberation, see: Jake W. Newsome, *Pink Triangle Legacies: Coming Out in the Shadow of the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 2022.

⁷⁶ Smith, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada*, 47.



Figure 9. Heather Ramsay (left) and Richard Sutton (right) with a pink triangle in the background.

Gay News and Views, Episode 7, June 1, 1978, The ArQuives, Documentary Moving Image Collection, 2003-108/02F.

The show's opening credits, likewise, conveyed a sense of familiarity mixed with gay elements. Consisting of a montage of pictures of *Gay News and Views* participants and guests set to the song "Your Starter For" (1976) by openly gay musician Elton John, the title sequence depicts men embracing and people attending political meetings; in other words, images of gay activism. The credits also display individuals, some of whom are recognizable members of the community, engaging in mundane activities, such as reading a newspaper, sitting on a bench, having a cup of coffee—even peeling potatoes (Figures 10-11). By featuring gay people partaking in "ordinary" activities, *Gay News and Views* demonstrated that not only were gay people "good," but they were also *everywhere*—another gay liberation slogan—including in public spaces, kitchens, living rooms, and on people's television screens. Additionally, the show's title sequence is reminiscent of a familiar and popular television genre: the sitcom. The

upbeat montage, indeed, is strongly evocative of a slide show of family members or of beloved television characters. *Gay News and Views* was therefore determined to insert the “unfamiliar” (i.e., gay people, gay symbols, gay politics) into familiar structures (i.e., the television, the evening news, the sitcom, the home, the family).

In addition to subverting traditional structures by injecting elements of difference within them, such as the pink triangle, the Gay TV Collective expressed pride in gay and lesbian cultural elements, as shown through the various artistic acts that were part of the program and its curation of guests.⁷⁷ Although it is difficult to assert with certainty who appeared as a guest on *Gay News and Views* because of the lack of archival material related to the program, interview participants recalled that lesbian singer-songwriter Ferron performed on the *Gay News and Views* set. Other musical performers included, for instance, American musician Maxine Feldman (1945-2007)—as suggested by *Gay News and Views*’ opening credits. Both Feldman and Ferron were important figures of the women’s music movement and wrote songs which were unabashedly queer, often attracting and catering to an audience of lesbian feminists.⁷⁸ One of the two digitized *Gay News and Views* reels also contains a moving and eloquent interview with gay British playwright, choreographer, mime, and iconoclast Lindsay Kemp (1938-2018)—who mentored the likes of Kate Bush and David Bowie—discussing the success of his theatrical

⁷⁷ A similar argument is made in Herold’s analysis of the 1977 New-York-based cable show *Emerald City*. She writes: “[G]ay pride hinged upon ‘acceptance and assimilation, as well as the right to be different.’ Interviews on *The Emerald City* display this polarity. Some, like those with white gay male cultural producers invested in appealing to the mainstream, embrace “acceptance and assimilation;” others, particularly those featuring the work of LGBTQ activists, experimental artists, and trans performers, pursue “the right to be different” (87). The similarities between *Emerald City* and *Gay News and Views*, however, are not surprising, given the crosspollination of strategies and ideas that occurred between the U.S and Canada at the time.

⁷⁸ Keith Maillard, “Don’t They Listen to The Words? To Understand Ferron’s Music You Have to Listen,” *The Body Politic*, no. 38, November 1977, 11-13.

works, such as *Salome* and *Flowers: A Pantomime for Jean Genet*, as well as upcoming projects.⁷⁹

By giving a platform to gay and lesbian artists where they could promote their work and their ideas, *Gay News and Views* expressed pride in gay and lesbian culture and conveyed a sense of belonging to their viewers. Programs like *Gay News and Views* were therefore “critical to the development of a sense of positive identity that nurtured the growth of the more visible gay and lesbian communities that we see today.”⁸⁰ At the same time, these televised cultural interventions were meant to open the eyes of their viewers towards difference; as Ben Shepard highlights, “cultural production, from music to poetry to storytelling, makes social breakthroughs possible.”⁸¹ Kemp’s interview, for instance, affirms the importance of difference as a way of working toward liberation, as the playwright explains, on camera, viewing his role as “an attempt to free everyone from themselves, from their own limitations, from the prisons they were shut into from the moment they were born.”⁸²

The artists and performers featured on *Gay News and Views* also embodied difference in the form of non-normative gender presentations and “queer” aesthetics. Both Feldman and Ferron, for example, were butch, working-class women, who subverted traditional expectations of femininity (Figure 12). Kemp, on the other hand, transgressed established ideas of masculinity through his penchant for gender bending (Figure 13). In his interview, Kemp establishes clear parallels between his life and Divine’s, the main drag queen protagonist of Jean Genet’s *Our Lady of the Flowers*, whom Kemp embodied on stage: “I play Divine in everything I do. Divine

⁷⁹ *Gay News and Views*, Episode 7, June 1, 1978, The ArQuives, Documentary Moving Image Collection, 2003-108/02F.

⁸⁰ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 86.

⁸¹ Ben Shepard, “The Use of Joyfulness as a Community Organizing Strategy,” *Peace and Change* 30, no. 4 (2005): 448.

⁸² *Gay News and Views*, Episode 7, June 1, 1978, The ArQuives, Documentary Moving Image Collection, 2003-108/02F.

is my own life. It's aspects of my own life that I don't live quite as fully off the stage." *Gay News and Views* thus questioned the kind of "aesthetics of respectability" sought after by mainstream media and publications like the *Globe and Mail* by showcasing individuals whose gender presentation, in addition to their discourse and their work, disrupted conventional gender roles and expectations—while affirming, once again, that these differences did not take away from their humanity.

Gay News and Views, furthermore, used cable access to communicate the dangers associated with a society which kept trying to reject difference. For example, the show publicized the murder of 32-year-old "gay Toronto 'transvestite,'"⁸³ John Wesley Douglas, who was brutally beaten and stabbed to death in Windsor, Ontario, on May 9, 1978, attesting to the life-threatening risks that were associated with being "different" and subverting gender roles.⁸⁴ In addition to promoting gay culture and arts, the Gay TV Collective was therefore committed to openly talking about the political and social issues gays and lesbians were facing in Canadian society, especially in the province of Ontario, using television as a platform for consciousness-raising to obtain further support for equal rights.

⁸³ The term "transvestite" was coined by German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld in 1910. Initially, as Susan Stryker underlines, the term was used in "much the way that 'transgender' is used now, to convey a wide range of gender-variant identities and behaviours." However, she also notes that "during the course of the last century,...it refers primarily to people who were gender atypical clothing but do not engage in other kinds of body modification." The individual mentioned in *Gay News and Views*, therefore, could have therefore either engaged in cross-dressing for pleasure or would have been somewhere on the trans spectrum. See: Susan, Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2008), 16-17.

⁸⁴ *Gay News and Views*, Episode 7, June 1, 1978, The ArQuives, Documentary Moving Image Collection, 2003-108/02F.



Figure 10. Two gay men lounging together in *Gay News and Views*' opening credits.
Gay News and Views, Episode 7, June 1, 1978, The ArQuives, Documentary Moving Image Collection, 2003-108/02F.



Figure 11. A man peeling potatoes in *Gay News and Views*' title sequence.
Gay News and Views, Episode 7, June 1, 1978, The ArQuives, Documentary Moving Image Collection, 2003-108/02F.



Figure 12. Lesbian feminist musician Maxine Feldman on *Gay News and Views*
Gay News and Views, Episode 7, June 1, 1978, The ArQuives, Documentary Moving Image
Collection, 2003-108/02F.



Figure 13. Lindsey Kemp being his fabulous self on *Gay News and Views*.
Gay News and Views, Episode 7, June 1, 1978, The ArQuives, Documentary Moving
Image Collection, 2003-108/02F.

Raising Consciousness Through the Television Screen

As Tom Warner notes, “the success of gay liberation also required winning the support of gays and lesbians as a whole.”⁸⁵ *Gay News and Views* wanted to make potential activists out of their viewers—or, at least, encourage gay and lesbian viewers to support the community in any way they felt comfortable doing, if they were not already involved. A *Body Politic* article on the program reads: “*Gay News and Views* is designed to serve gay people, to provide information and discussion that will help gays be aware of what’s going on in their community and *of the ways they might become involved in it* (my emphasis).”⁸⁶ *GNV* dealt with a variety of issues happening in Ontario and beyond, such as violence against gays and lesbians, police entrapment of gay men, and the plight of gay youth and lesbian mothers, to raise consciousness through the television screen.

One of the key issues that *Gay News and Views* wished to rally viewers around was the fight to entrench sexual orientation protections within the Ontario Human Rights Code. On May 25, 1978, for instance, Harvey Hamburg interviewed Tom Warner, then-president of the Coalition for Gay Rights in Ontario (CGRO), an alliance of various gay organizations founded in January 1975 to amend the provincial code.⁸⁷ By the time Warner appeared on the show, the battle for gay rights in Ontario had reached a crucial point: Quebec had become the first provincial legislature to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and cities like Ottawa, Windsor, and Toronto had just passed ordinances banning discrimination against municipal employees. Yet, the Progressive Conservative government of Ontario refused to

⁸⁵ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 69.

⁸⁶ Mole, “Rights of Access,” 1.

⁸⁷ Smith, *Lesbian and Gay Rights*, 50.

implement changes at the provincial level.⁸⁸ Before coming on to the show, CGRO had submitted their fourth brief to the legislature to push for the inclusion of sexual orientation.

The Gay TV Collective did more than simply publicize the fight for civil rights in Ontario, however; they used specific modes of address to entice their viewers to sympathize with and rally behind the movement. For example, in a vivid exchange between Harvey Hamburg and Tom Warner, Hamburg, in direct address to the audience, shares his thoughts on effective tactics that the viewers can use to lobby Members of the Provincial Government (MPPs). Looking straight into the camera, Hamburg announces:

Let me suggest a really useful tactic that can be used in lobbying the legislature and getting the message through to MPPs. If they are contacted by people who they know personally, maybe from sometime in their past—high school chums, work associates, people that lived down the street, whatever...If just a few gay people, on a personal basis, contact these MPPs and suggest they reconsider their position on the gay issue, then that, I think, can have impact. I guess I am saying this to the audience out there because there are bound to be gay people who know an MPP out there in our viewing audience so if you do consider making use of that “in” that you have, the gay community would really appreciate it.

At the end of the interview, Hamburg, once again looking straight into the camera, calls on the audience to support CGRO, telling them where to contact the organization and how to become involved in the provincial fight for civil rights (Figure 14).⁸⁹

These kinds of exchanges suggest that the Gay TV Collective understood how to mobilize media techniques efficiently to get the attention of their viewers and move them to join the movement. In this case, they understood how direct address to the camera could give legitimacy to the *Gay News and Views* speakers. As Roger Hallas notes, “[d]irect address is deployed in broadcast news as a structure of power” because it “produces a sense of the

⁸⁸ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 148-150; “Would You Pledge \$10 A Month During the Most Crucial Year of John Damien’s Legal Case?,” Advertisement, *The Body Politic*, no. 42, April 1978, 12.

⁸⁹ *Gay News and Views*, Episode 6, May 1978, The ArQuives, Documentary Moving Image Collection, 2003-108/01F.

broadcast's liveness and an impression of the anchor's discursive authority."⁹⁰ Through direct address, Hamburg accessed what Lauren Herold describes as an "authoritative speaking position through which [he] can articulate [his] marginalization," as well as the needs of his community.⁹¹

Secondly, by urging viewers to "connect" on a personal level with MPPs, the segment suggested that the same networking methods which had allowed for the creation of *Gay News and Views* and the formation of the Gay TV Collective could be mobilized: someone, who knew someone through the grapevine, through the networks, could effect social and political change in the province. And, indeed, *Gay News and Views* seemed to have very tangible effects on community building in Toronto. Harvey Hamburg, for instance, remembers that 923-GAYS started receiving more phone calls after the show began to air: "923-GAYS used to get about 3,000 calls a week. That was probably a significant part of the marketing of *Gay News and Views*."⁹² An editorial in the *Body Politic* corroborates Hamburg's claim: "We grow and strengthen as...we speak for ourselves...[and] tell our own story...You can see it in the number of calls that come into every organization in town after each program. You can see it in the numbers of new faces that turn up at meetings of local gay organizations."⁹³ Connection, too, became a way to generate direct action.

⁹⁰ Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 80-81.

⁹¹ Herold, "Cable Comes Out," 128.

⁹² Harvey Hamburg, Interview with the author, August 2022.

⁹³ "On Our Terms," Editorial, *The Body Politic*, no. 38, November 1977, 2.



Figure 14. Harvey Hamburg, speaking in direct address to the audience.

Gay News and Views, Episode 6, May 1978, The ArQuives, Documentary Moving Image Collection, 2003-108/01F.

Hamburg's televised interview with Tom Warner captured a moment in Canadian LGBTQ2+ history marked by unbridled optimism and faith in the ability of a presumably unified gay community to effect change at the political level. As Tom Warner himself proclaimed to the camera: "The gay community is stronger now, our presence is stronger, we have more confidence in what we're doing and how to proceed."⁹⁴ Yet, because the community was becoming a growing political force, conservative backlash ensued. When *Gay News and Views* started airing, gay liberation and feminism were increasingly becoming the target of social and religious conservatives. First, the murder of Emanuel Jaques, a 12-year-old shoeshine boy who was sexually assaulted and killed by four men in Toronto in August 1977, made headlines in the mainstream media and provoked outcry in the city of Toronto.⁹⁵ That same year, religious

⁹⁴ *Gay News and Views*, Episode 6, May 1978, The ArQuives, Documentary Moving Image Collection, 2003-108/01F.

⁹⁵ Smith, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada*, 67-68.

conservatives in the U.S launched a particularly virulent attack against gay rights which reverberated in Canada. A former singer, Miss Oklahoma beauty pageant winner, and brand ambassador for the Florida Citrus Commission, Anita Bryant created the “Save Our Children” campaign to repeal ordinances that prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation. Bryant exported her crusades up North, with the help of Reverend Ken Campbell and the fundamentalist Christian group Renaissance International, campaigning in various Canadian cities to undermine gay rights and using fears of children being recruited to homosexuality and expertly using the media—television, in particular—to spread her message.⁹⁶ In Canada, like in the U.S, Bryant drew extensive media attention.⁹⁷ An article from *The Body Politic* charged: “Gay people got more attention in the mass media in 1977 than in any other year in history. But it was mostly our enemies who served as the focus. Gay people were made visible as the other side of Anita Bryant, as the slightly silly opponents of a citrus queen turned religious fanatic.”⁹⁸ Canadian gays and lesbians retaliated by creating the Coalition to Stop Anita Bryant (CSAB), who organized Toronto’s largest gay demonstration to date on July 22, 1977, where people marched from City Hall up Yonge Street to hold a candlelight rally in Queen’s Park to protest Anita Bryant’s anti-gay crusade.⁹⁹ In January 1978, Bryant visited Toronto, attracting even bigger crowds who attended a rally at the St. Lawrence Market in opposition to her visit.¹⁰⁰ Bryant would go on to tour several cities in Ontario, which all drew crowds of protesters.

Building on the energy of these protests, *Gay News and Views* was marked by a strong desire to respond to Bryant’s campaign. The show regularly brought up Anita Bryant’s Canadian

⁹⁶ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 136; McLeod, *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada*, 250; “Bigots Import Bryant,” *The Body Politic*, no. 40, January 1978, 6-7.

⁹⁷ Warner, 136.

⁹⁸ Michael Riordon, “Proselytizing,” 15.

⁹⁹ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 136; McLeod, *Gay and Lesbian Liberation in Canada*, 181.

¹⁰⁰ McLeod, 250.

visits, informing their viewers of the various protests that were planned by gays and lesbians across Ontario, and strongly encouraging them to attend. By publicizing the news of Bryant's crusades in the country, *Gay News and Views* once again pushed their audiences to become invested in the struggles of the Gay Liberation Movement beyond simply watching the show. However, gay and lesbian cable access programming itself was not immune to the conservative tendencies of the late 1970s, and *Gay News and Views'* attempts to generate more support for the movement would be thwarted by cable company managers who deemed the show "offensive."

"Gay People Censored! Will You Stand for It?": Conflicts, Controversies, and Cancellations

Despite its optimistic mandate, community television remained an imperfect medium to bring *Gay News and Views'* visions of gay liberation to life, as the Gay TV Collective faced barriers which severely limited the show's potential. Originally produced by Maclean Hunter Cable TV, the program was shown on the community cable channels of three major cable television systems in the Toronto area: Maclean Hunter, Rogers Cable, and Metro Cable. Each of these companies serviced different areas of the city and broadcast the show at different dates and times. Like *Gays of/d'Ottawa*, the collective had a difficult time working with the three cable access outlets; Harvey Hamburg, for example, bemoaned this lack of programming centralization, as it made it difficult to advertise the *Gay News and Views* and attract more viewers:

At the time, a person could only subscribe to one particular cable. It was imposed... different geographic boundaries—which were not necessarily consistent with anything otherwise—determin[ed] what the contours of that particular cable system were... We would have loved for it to be scheduled at the same time. Because if you're going to be trying to promote watching it, you'd have to ask people, as you're passing out

pamphlets outside of gay bars, where they lived.¹⁰¹

Further, cable access studios were located in various parts of the city, which were not always accessible to GTC members. After producing the show's first season, Maclean Hunter handed the program to Metro Cable, thus forcing the Gay TV Collective to change studios midway through the production of the show. While the Maclean Hunter studios were located in Mississauga, by the airport, the Metro Cable studios were on the opposite side, in the Don Mills/North York area.¹⁰² Both locations were, therefore, quite remote from the downtown core. Because the GTC had no control over which cable company would run the show, they remained at the mercy of the cable companies and had to find ways to access various inconveniently located studios across the city to keep the show afloat. Finally, while Maclean Hunter and Metro provided the Gay TV Collective with equipment and training through a four-week course program, participants remarked that "funding was a laugh," thereby limiting the program's reach and possibilities.¹⁰³ These material obstacles, which call into question the extent to which cable access was truly "accessible"—both for its audiences and its participants—however, were not enough to deter the Gay TV Collective from pursuing their television ventures. It was, in fact, the rigid moral rules of the cable companies which marked the show's demise.

Two days after the show premiered on all three cable access stations on September 20, 1977, the president of Toronto's Rogers Cable TV, Robert C. Short, decided to stop airing *Gay News and Views* on their community channel on the grounds that they had received complaints about the program's content. In fact, all three cable companies carrying the programs received complaints in the aftermath of that first broadcast, but Rogers was, initially, the only cable

¹⁰¹ Harvey Hamburg, Interview with the author, August 2022.

¹⁰² "Cable Tube to do Gay News," 8.

¹⁰³ Robert Wallace, Interview with the author, August 2022.

company which expressed the desire to cease broadcasting the program. Refusing to admit that anti-gay feelings were the reason for cancellation, Short claimed that in addition to viewers complaints, the CRTC “discouraged cable companies from filling the community channel with the programs of other stations, rather than producing their own.”¹⁰⁴ Short added that, since the company was in the process of producing their own show in partnership with another gay group—which happened to be *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals*—, the station would no longer be providing balanced coverage if it were to air two gay-themed TV shows.¹⁰⁵ In the aftermath of the program’s abrupt cancellation by Rogers, the Gay TV collective sent several written protests to the CRTC claiming that Rogers’s decision was in violation of the obligation to provide a channel specifically dedicated to community programming. The GTC also put pressure on Rogers directly by calling the cable company and threatening court action, as well as leafletting Toronto gay bars and encouraging the community to follow suit. The GTC emerged partially victorious when Rogers decided to reverse its decision and to continue airing *Gay News and Views*.

Yet, the fact that one of the carriers had expressed concerns about airing the show had ripple effects onto the program. First, Maclean Hunter attempted to establish a code, independent from CRTC rules, to regulate *Gay News and Views*—although, as the *Body Politic* claimed, no such codes of conduct were used for community programs that were not created by and for gay people. Maclean Hunter’s management insisted that the tone of the programs had to be “informational and educative,” and that “common sense and good taste” should prevail. Material

¹⁰⁴ Mole, “Rights of Access,” 1.

¹⁰⁵ Mole, 1.

that would be deemed “controversial” or “unusual” had to be pre-screened, and the program could not be aired before 10PM—whereas it was previously generally scheduled around 6PM.¹⁰⁶

Then, in June 1978, *Gay News and Views* host Heather Ramsay made the following announcement at the beginning of the broadcast:

Maclean Hunter Cable Television, under orders from their parent company Maclean Hunter Limited, has dropped *Gay News and Views* from its viewing schedule. The show, which is still presented on Metro and Rogers Cable Systems, will no longer be seen in either Etobicoke or Parkdale. The reason given for the decision was that the series was considered offensive by Maclean Hunter, after they had received complaints from a number of viewers and various religious groups who threatened legal action unless Maclean Hunter discontinued the series.¹⁰⁷

In a letter to Frank Hutchings, Maclean Hunter’s Program Director, John K. Haynes, wrote that the decision to cancel the show was initially prompted, as pointed out in Ramsay’s announcement, by more subscriber complaints regarding some of the material presented in the program. However, the *Body Politic* later revealed that the decision had been made based on a survey of 5,000 homes, and that, out of these 5,000 homes, only 12 had found the program offensive.¹⁰⁸ Haynes’ letter further explained that “after evaluating the material in question, it was determined that in fact, it [did] contravene our community standard of decency.”¹⁰⁹ The “material in question” was devoid of explicit content, sexual or otherwise: a slide of two clothed men kissing taken at a Gay Alliance Toward Equality (GATE) dance, a poster of Queen Victoria advertising a San Francisco V.D clinic with the words “Even a Queen can get the Clap!” accompanied by a segment on a Hassle-Free Clinic offering STI testing.

¹⁰⁶ Robin Hardy, “Maclean Hunter Cancels Gay TV,” *The Body Politic*, no. 44, July 1978, 7.

¹⁰⁷ *Gay News and Views*, Episode 7, June 1, 1978, The ArQuives, Documentary Moving Image Collection, 2003-108/02F.

¹⁰⁸ Hardy, “Maclean Hunter Cancels Gay TV,” 7.

¹⁰⁹ John K. Haynes, “Letter to Frank Hutchings,” June 5, 1978. <https://onthebookshelves.com/gaynews.htm>

Haynes complained that the show has also taken “an air of militancy and what seems to be a general contempt for the establishment,” and judged the “snide remarks...regarding government officials, officers of the law, and some public figures” to be “in poor taste”—a comment no doubt directed at the show’s use of the image of the Queen of England to promote STI testing. Although Haynes also stated that the material was “disrespectful to the heterosexual community,” Haynes, like Rogers’ cable manager, was quick to defend his position as not being homophobic, writing that “[i]t should be obvious that the decision to cancel the program has nothing to do with anti-gay sentiments, since we were the cable company that encouraged and facilitated the...series.”¹¹⁰

Gay News and Views’ conflicts with cable station managers, combined with the restrictions faced earlier on by *Gays of/d’Ottawa*, reveal that community cable in Canada was not so much in the hands of the CRTC, but that control of the programming was the purview of cable station managers and owners. What this means is that, despite a relatively open mandate to broadcast programs that would not only serve the community but also “turn the passive viewer of TV into an active participant,” providing the “widest possibility for self-expression,” the arbitrariness of the decisions made by cable managers, then, restricted the gay community’s ability to produce and air content on the Canadian cable airwaves in the 1970s.¹¹¹ Moreover, in making decisions based on “common sense,” “good taste,” and “community standards of decency,” the personal judgements of these cable managers dangerously delineated who was meant to be part of the imagined audience of cable access television, and who was not. Erased from the abstract idea of “the general public” was the gay community for whom the show was made. Just like community television was part of an apparatus of media and cultural institutions

¹¹⁰ Haynes, Letter to Frank Hutchings.

¹¹¹ Mole, “Rights of Access,” 1.

that were used to further the goal of the Gay Liberation Movement, these conflicts must not be read in isolation from the larger conservative forces at play in Ontario at the time which affected gays and lesbians' access to information. At the same time as community cable managers were restricting access to television, we need to bear in mind that the CBC, in addition to several mainstream publications, were under fire for not allowing gay advertisements on their networks, and gay publications and bookstores were likewise facing censorship.¹¹²

Whereas the show was set to continue airing on Metro and Rogers, as it had proven quite popular despite the various attempts to terminate the program, *GNV* eventually ended shortly after Maclean Hunter decided to stop carrying the program.¹¹³ Although the reasons behind the *GNV*'s termination are unclear, an article published by the Metropolitan Community Church indicates that the show may have ended because of CRTC guidelines "regarding the duration of community programming."¹¹⁴ However, as Heather Ramsay announced Maclean Hunter's decision in what would be one of the last *Gay News and Views* episodes, she also made a hopeful statement: another gay community television program, called *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals*, which also happened to be hosted by Sutton and Ramsay, would soon be on the air via Rogers' community channel.

¹¹² For instance, in February 1977, Canada Customs seized books at the U.S border that were ordered by Glad Day Bookshop, such as *Loving Man and Men Loving Men*. In March, Canada Customs informed Glad Day that the books were "immoral and indecent." See McLeod, *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada*, 106.

¹¹³ A *Body Politic* article reports that when the show was aired in a "crowded gay bar," people applauded and shushed other bar patrons. See: Riordon, "Proselytizing," 17.

¹¹⁴ "Gay News and Views," *Metro Community News*, vol. 4, no. 10, December 1977, 10.

Play, Performance, and (Radical) Politics: This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals (1978-1979)

This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals (TSMBOH) started airing on September of 1978, and was divided into six, one-hour-long episodes that were broadcast on Rogers Cable TV in Toronto. Created by a “delightfully anarchistic” coalition of lesbians and gay men known as the Gay Offensive Collective (GOC), the program was a campy, cheeky, in-your-face television show, which vowed to tell “the gay story like it is” by showing “real dykes, at last” and detonating the nuclear family.¹¹⁵ The goal of the show was not to offend per se; rather, the Gay Offensive Collective sought to go beyond having to defend queer existence as “legitimate” to be allowed to have a voice in the media.¹¹⁶ Instead of claiming normalcy, offensive “dykes,” or “faggots,” the collective proclaimed, flaunted their sexuality, demanded rights, and maintained that it was the closet, not gays and lesbians, that was unnatural.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, in the aftermath of *Gay News and Views*’ cancellation, it was clear that any televised portrayal of gay and lesbian issues would inevitably “offend some, and delight others.”¹¹⁸ Presciently, the program’s advertising poster depicted a shattered television screen—a clear indication of the collective’s desire both “engineer a new kind of television,” as well as a new kind of society that would no longer consider homosexuality offensive (Figure 15).¹¹⁹

Although the GOC’s membership included gay men—such *Gay News and Views* alumnus Richard Sutton, who reprised his role as co-host, as well as gay liberation activists like

¹¹⁵ Heather Ramsay and Michael Riordon, Interview with the author, February 2023; *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals* Promo Poster, *This Program May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals*,” The ArQuives, Vertical Files.

¹¹⁶ “Notebook: Collective Discussion, Heather Bishop Interview, Edmonton Outlets, Addresses, Gay Offensive Collective,” The ArQuives, Chris Bearchell Fonds, Box 6, F0117, Series 03, File 60.

¹¹⁷ “Notebook: Collective Discussion.”

¹¹⁸ *Gay News and Views*, Episode 7, June 1, 1978, The ArQuives, Documentary Moving Image Collection, 2003-108/02F.

¹¹⁹ Riordon, “Proselytizing,” 18.

Michael Riordon, a member of GATE and columnist for the *Body Politic*—lesbians, this time, made up two-thirds of the collective’s membership. Heather Ramsay co-hosted the program alongside influential figures of Toronto’s lesbian feminist scene, such as Lorna Weir, Fiona Rattray, and, perhaps most notably, Chris Bearchell (1952-2007). Involved both in gay liberation and lesbian feminist efforts—joining GATE, CSAB, CGRO, the Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT), the Committee to Defend John Damien, and Lesbian Against the Right (LAR)—Bearchell espoused staunch radical liberationist ideologies, such as anti-censorship, anti-police, and sex-positive stances. She also understood the importance of and the intersections between media and activism, which she saw as complementary tools for queer liberation. In 1975, for instance, Bearchell joined the ranks of the *Body Politic*, at the time becoming the first and only lesbian member of the governing collective. She even created her own 8mm pornographic films as a response to the absence of sexually explicit material made by and for lesbians.¹²⁰ It seems only logical, then, that Bearchell would be attracted to “proselytizing on the boob tube,” as a *Body Politic* article on community access television put it.¹²¹

Consequently, because of this strong lesbian presence, *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals* was not “gay male show with a token lesbian segment,” but a show “built on radical lesbian feminist consciousness.”¹²² According to Miriam Smith, while some gay men tended to see civil rights as the primary means of “political mobilization for social transformation,” lesbians, on the other hand, considered civil rights in and of themselves to be insufficient, and “a less important strategy” in their quest to create a new society altogether.¹²³

¹²⁰ Genevieve Flavelle, “Erotic Fever in The ArQuives: Imagining a Queer Porn Paradise in Cait McKinney and Hazel Meyer’s Exhibition Tape Condition: degraded,” *Journal of Feminist Scholarship* 19 (Fall 2021): 42-65.

¹²¹ Riordon, “Proselytizing,” 17.

¹²² Riordon, 17.

¹²³ Smith, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada*, 62.

As a result, whereas both *Out of the Closets/Gais de l'Outaouais* and *Gay News and Views* were committed to inclusion within the sociopolitical and legal fabric of Canadian society, *TSMBOH* was deeply critical of the heteronormative structures which created and reinforced inequalities in the first place. The GOC, indeed, was determined to convey “the shortcomings of how the world was organized” through television.¹²⁴

“If We Don’t Help Ourselves, Who Will?”: Promoting Mutual Aid and Community Care

The Gay Offensive Collective actively promoted organizations created by and for the lesbian and gay community on *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals*. Specifically, the program strongly advocated for initiatives which emphasized community care and mutual aid in the absence of protections from the state or institutions like the medical profession, the education system, and law enforcement. As Ramsay and Sutton potently told their viewers: “When we need help, we find we’d rather do it ourselves.”¹²⁵ As explained earlier on, gays and lesbians in the 1970s created a wealth of local groups and projects dedicated to providing support services to the community—especially in large cities like Toronto. Such initiatives worked to create “systems of care and generosity” meant to address and redress harm while fostering the well-being of communities whose needs were not met by heteronormative institutions.¹²⁶

For instance, *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals* showcased the work of the Lesbian Organization of Toronto’s Counselling Collective and of the Toronto Area Gay’s over-the-phone services, and took viewers to Toronto bookstores catering to a gay and lesbian clientele, such as Glad Day Bookshop and the Women’s Bookstore, presenting these institutions

¹²⁴ Smith, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada*, 62.

¹²⁵ *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals*, Episode 3, Date unknown, The ArQuives, Documentary and Moving Image Collection, 1988-024/03F.

¹²⁶ Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)* (London: Verso, 2020), 2.

as welcoming and alternative support and education providers—a role that was not unlike the one *TSMBOH* hoped to play in the lives of their viewers. These segments emphasized the necessity of such projects and institutions, while simultaneously conveying to the program’s audiences why “basic services taken for granted within heteronormative frameworks” were not available to the gay and lesbian community (Figure 16).¹²⁷

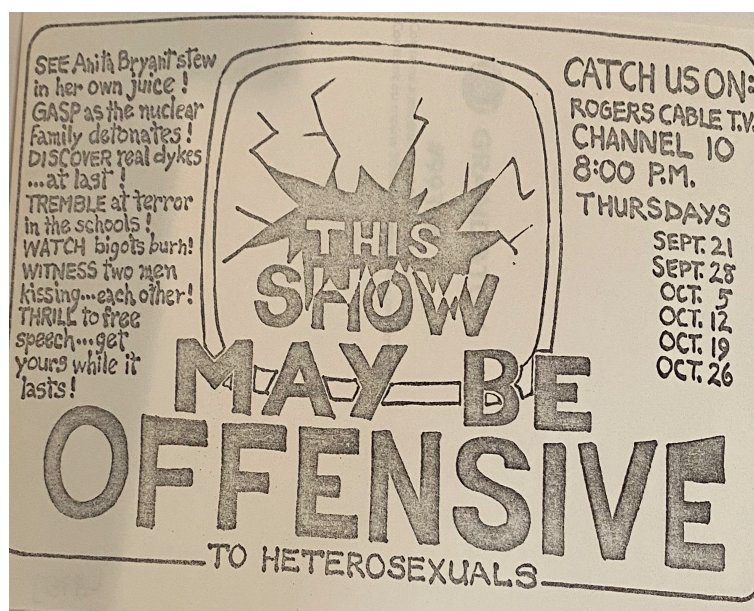


Figure 15. This Show May be Offensive to Heterosexuals, Promo Poster.

The ArQuives, “This Program May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals,” Vertical Files.

¹²⁷ Cait McKinney, *Information Activism: A Queer History of Lesbian Technologies* (Duke University Press, 2020), 84.



Figure 16. Richard Sutton (left) and Gordon Montador (right) at Glad Day Bookshop.

This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals, Episode 3, Date unknown, The ArQuives, Documentary and Moving Image Collection, 1988-024/03F.

In addition to promoting initiatives that addressed the symbolic violence that gays and lesbians encountered daily, *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals* encouraged the development of projects which sought to end the onslaught of physical violence faced by the community. In a poignant interview conducted by Heather Ramsay, for example, activist and GOC member Michael Riordon reported on his participation in Operation Jack O’Lantern, a safety project and non-violent operation organized by GATE and the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) set up to respond to the attacks faced by gay people on Halloween Day in Toronto, especially as police seemed unwilling to intervene or even contributed to the violence themselves.¹²⁸ Riordon’s intervention provides an insider point of view on the Jack O’Lantern

¹²⁸ Gay people in Toronto faced violence from the locals on Halloween Night, as they would often take advantage of the night to circumvent laws that prevented cross-dressing. Onlookers would gather outside gay bars on Yonge Street and verbally harass or throw eggs and various objects at patrons. The purposes of Operation Jack O’Lantern, as detailed by Riordon during the interview, were fourfold: 1. “Provide surveillance in case there should be any

operation, as he offers a comprehensive and heartfelt testimony of how the night unfolded as he and other gay people carefully patrolled the area where the Halloween celebrations took place.¹²⁹ The televised interview, by presenting the operation as successful, encouraged viewers to continue setting up initiatives dedicated to community defence so that the nascent Toronto gay and lesbian community could not only survive, but thrive.

Creating separate institutions, sharing resources, and relying on caring individuals and organizations for mutual support, however, were temporary solutions that only met the basic needs of the gay and lesbian community. As Riordon powerfully explained in his exchange with Ramsay, the climate of violence against queer people was “maintained systematically” and therefore “much more difficult to interfere with.” *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals*, then, wanted to demonstrate that Canadian society drastically needed to change for gays and lesbians to truly be liberated.

Performing Lesbian and Gay Liberation on Television

A few months before *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals* went on the air, on January 14, 1978, Heather Ramsay, Michael Riordon, Chris Bearchell, and other members of the GOC met at the St. Lawrence Market in Toronto, where about 1,000 lesbians and gay men had gathered to protest Anita Bryant’s visit to the city. The market was equally rife with anger and joy; energized protesters gave speeches, sang songs, and performed skits. Together, Riordon and Ramsay dazzled the crowds:

violence against gay people.” 2. “Provide accurate information for charges and trial.” 3. “Effective surveillance of the police so that they would have incentive to ‘serve and protect.’” 4. “Provide a paramedical presence in case there were any injuries to gay people.”

¹²⁹ *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals*, Episode 2, Date unknown, The ArQuives, Documentary and Moving Image Collection, 1988-024/02F.

Michael and I wrote a skit...using an interview she'd done for *Penthouse*—of all magazines! I was able to take what she'd written in that interview and paste it into the script of our bit... I was wearing a wig and glasses, and I might have had a feather boa ... Michael was dressed in lederhosen to...represent the kind of Hitler-like fascism of the whole religious movement of that time...My first lines were a direct quote from Bryant. I did the stupid southern accent like, “Ah am against cunnilingus.” I thought it was Southern, anyway.¹³⁰

Influenced by Riordon and Ramsay's skit, the GOC would subsequently bring gay liberation theatrics onto the television screen to make gay liberation ideologies legible for their audiences. As the GOC explained in the show's introduction: “The show is composed of six one-hour programs. The first five contain skits, interviews, drama, humour, anger, and realism through which Gay people present to you, the viewer, how we feel about ourselves – how we, as Lesbians and Gay Men, feel about our families, our children, our sexuality, our churches, our laws, our government and other institutions which presently oppress us and deny us our equality.”¹³¹ In turn, they hoped to elicit the same feelings in their viewers. At the same time as the GOC was influenced by gay liberation street theatre, Heather Ramsay also remembers being strongly inspired by *Second City Television* (SCTV), a Canadian television sketch comedy show known for starting the careers of Catherine O'Hara and Eugene Levy:¹³²

I was a big fan of *SCTV*. I thought what they were doing was comic, but it also had an edge to it as well. So, when I was writing skits, I felt like I was learning from what they were doing. I was learning how you can make a point and make it look like it was just something light and funny.¹³³

¹³⁰ Heather Ramsay, Interview with the author, December 2022.

¹³¹ “This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals Outline,” The Gay Offensive Collective Papers, Courtesy of Heather Ramsay.

¹³² Second City Television (SCTV) was a “satire of television programming presented in the format of a broadcast day from a low-budget TV station” which premiered in the fall of 1976 and aired until 1984. For more on SCTV see: Jeff Robbins, *Second City Television: A History and Episode Guide* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2008) and Dave Thomas, Robert David Crane, and Susan Carney, *SCTV: Behind the Scenes* (Toronto: M&S, 1996).

¹³³ Heather Ramsay, Interview with the author, August 2022.

TSMBOH episodes were often interspersed with mock, satirical commercials and Public Service Announcements, which were used to interrupt the flow of programming with “important messages.” In one commercial, for instance, two lesbians, Jane and Mary, portrayed by Chris Bearchell and Fiona Rattray, are shown discussing anti-queer violence. After Jane shares her experience of being punched in the stomach and being called “a dirty queer” the night before, Mary explains that “some days [she] feel[s] like giving up,” too. Another character in voice-over suddenly interrupts their conversation, hands them a brick, and encourages her to try a dose of “HETLAX” instead, “for instant relief from heterosexist oppression” (Figure 17).¹³⁴ Other commercials and PSAs dealt with topics like censorship, oppressive gender roles, and media distortion of gay and lesbian issues. Throughout its existence, therefore, *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals* satirized institutions which were harmful to the gay and lesbian community—such as the media, religion, education, and psychiatry. By turning these institutions into objects of ridicule, the GOC reversed the familiar televisual gaze; instead of being mocked, poked, and prodded on television, gay people were now the ones dissecting the systems that kept them oppressed.

Conservative figures, in particular, were often the targets of the Gay Offensive Collective’s satire; after all, the show’s advertising poster promised viewers that they would be seeing Anita Bryant “stewing in her own juice.” For instance, the “Recruitment Centre” PSA parodied the idea, popularized by anti-gay rights activists like Bryant, that gays and lesbians were actively recruiting members—a discourse which has unfortunately resurfaced in the 2020s, as conservatives across Canada and the United States have been accusing drag queens and queer-

¹³⁴ *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals*, Episode 2, Date unknown, The ArQuives, Documentary and Moving Image Collection, 1988-024/02F.

affirming teachers of “grooming” children. In the skit, Peter Proselytizer, a friendly “neighbourhood gay liberation recruiting officer” played by Michael Riordon, exposes the hypocrisy of such claims by promising future recruits “special laws, just for us,” “churches and synagogues by the hundreds...itching to save you from yourself,” and even “good old fashioned street fights.” Proselytizer also advertises a “limited time only” offer, which includes “insurance against electric shocks,” as well as special benefits for lesbian mothers: a “children’s program,” which guaranteed that the courts would take their kids away. In poking fun at the idea of homosexuals “recruiting” others, the commercial thus denounced heterosexual privilege and its pernicious effects (Figure 18).¹³⁵

Whereas the Recruitment Centre skit only hinted at Bryant’s campaign, several performances on the show directly attacked the American religious crusader. In one segment, “The Orange Juice Taste Test Testimonial,” Heather Ramsay reprises her role as Anita Bryant. Visiting the home of a heterosexual family and bringing the “juice of life” to what she calls “the state of Ontario,” Bryant wishes to demonstrate to her “television audience” that heterosexual families would and should be able to distinguish between orange juice “squeezed by heterosexual hands” and orange juice “squeezed by [choking]...*their* hands.” The family, however, is unable to tell the difference, which sends Bryant into a frenzy, chugging both glasses of orange juice and cursing the camera until the television segment is eventually cut. This skit further denounced the hypocrisy and sensationalism of Bryant’s arguments, while audiences were simultaneously made to realize that there were no noticeable distinctions between gay people and straight people—except for the way they were treated in Canadian society.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals*, Episode 1, Date unknown, The ArQuives, Documentary and Moving Image Collection, 1988-024/01F.

¹³⁶ “Commercial: Orange Juice Taste Testimonial,” Script, The Gay Offensive Collective Papers, Courtesy of Heather Ramsay; *Gay News and Views* also aired the skit to promote the launch of *This Show May Be Offensive to*

However, the GOC also showed that Bryant—and by extension, other homophobic conservatives—were not beyond redemption. Education (and disco!), a mock Public Service Announcement proposed, could help people like Bryant overcome homophobia:

Hello, my name is Anita Bryant. I am the world's oldest living heterosexual. Actually, I am only 42; I just look old, the victim of too much hatred and vitamin C. But one day ... I asked myself why? Why do I hate these lesbeens (sic) and homosexual men? The answer was: BOOGIE. I had no BOOGIE and I wanted BOOGIE.... So, I threw away my dried up orange peels; I squeezed out my unhealthy homophobia and I took a community college course in "disco."...And I was re-born again, and again, and again, and again. Now that I have BOOGIE, I don't have time to hate anymore. I am too busy bumping and grinding to the beat. So, remember you too can re-educate yourself: it's good for your health!¹³⁷

Although the tone of the program was often playful, *TSMBOH* also aired serious, immersive show-and-tell-like segments in which viewers were encouraged to empathize with the daily struggles of lesbians and gays. These included "word for word" dramatic re-enactments of transcripts of child custody cases where lesbian mothers fought to keep their children in homophobic courts, as well as fictional interviews with overtly anti-gay individuals such as employers, psychiatrists, or journalists. One segment included a multi-character solo performance on the importance of informing children about homosexuality in the Ontario education system, in which the actor, GOC member David Marriage, performed various roles—from the homophobic dad to the concerned school principal—in succession. These immersive televisual scenes appealed to individual feelings while conveying a sense that oppression based on sexuality took place in a broader sociopolitical and sociocultural context. As Ben Shepard highlights, these forms of intervention, whether humorous or serious, "make tactical use of play

Heterosexuals. See: *Gay News and Views*, Episode 6, May 1978, The ArQuives, Documentary Moving Image Collection, 2003-108/01F.

¹³⁷ "Boogie," Script, The Gay Offensive Collective Papers, Courtesy of Heather Ramsay.

as a tool to engage and intrigue. Such forms of performance situate play as a form of free expression, a liberatory impulse contending with a stark cold realm of necessity.”¹³⁸

Additionally, GOC members performed themselves on screen at the end of several episodes of *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals*. Huddled together on a couch and on the studio floors, members took turn sharing experiences of gender and sexual oppression—evoking gay liberation and lesbian feminist consciousness-raising circles (Figure 19). In these segments, viewers were privy to GOC members engaging in authentic, vulnerable conversations, in which they “formulate[d] judgements about their relationship to structures of...inequality” and spoke candidly about their experiences as out gays and lesbians in the 1970s.¹³⁹ *TSMBOH*, however, refuted the premise that consciousness-raising circles had to take place in non-judgmental spaces, by displacing the space of consciousness raising to the judgmental space of television.

In making consciousness-raising circles public and offering multiple standpoints and experiences, the viewers, too, were implicitly asked to participate and encouraged to take a stance on the topics discussed by the GOC. By performing consciousness-raising on screen, the GOC additionally presented TV as “as a place to fantasize how peace and justice, equality and truly participatory democracy might take hold sometime in a near or distant future.”¹⁴⁰ As Michael Riordon noted in the *Body Politic*, “the challenge to ‘activist’ television is to encourage or provoke response, then action.”¹⁴¹ What these various performances underline is that change

¹³⁸ Shepard, “The Use of Joyfulness as a Community Organizing Strategy,” 239.

¹³⁹ Ramzi Fawaz, *Queer Forms* (New York: New York University Press, 2022), 160.

¹⁴⁰ Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 90.

¹⁴¹ Riordon, “Proselytizing,” 16.

could and would occur through positive education and relentless dialogue. The Gay Offensive Collective thus often gave Torontonians as well as their viewers a chance to talk back.



Figure 17. The HETLAX commercial with Fiona Rattray (left) and Chris Bearchell (right).

This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals, Episode 2, Date unknown, The ArQuives, Documentary and Moving Image Collection, 1988-024/02F.



Figure 18. Michael Riordon performing the Recruitment Centre PSA.

This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals, Episode 1, Date unknown, The ArQuives, Documentary and Moving Image Collection, 1988-024/01F.



Figure 19. The GOC forming a consciousness-raising circle on the screen.

This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals, Episode 1, Date unknown, The ArQuives, Documentary and Moving Image Collection, 1988-024/01F.

Talking Back to the Television: Dialogue as Social Change

This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals included an interactive, participatory aspect to promote dialogue about gay and lesbian issues. In the first episode of *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals*, which explored myths and stereotypes surrounding homosexuality in the 70s, members of the Gay Offensive Collective are shown canvassing the streets of Toronto, conducting interviews about various aspects of homosexuality. Interview questions include: “How do you feel about homosexuals?”; “What do you think lesbians/homosexuals look like?”; “Should gay people have more rights than they do now, or less?”; “How do you think society should act toward gay people?” While some interviewees do express somewhat positive—or, at least, indifferent—feelings towards gays and lesbians, the majority of the responses aired on the episode are overwhelmingly negative and homophobic: people gagging at the mention of lesbians, calling homosexuality a “sickness” or a “sin,” and expressing that gay people should “be put away,” or that the police “should beat these people up.”¹⁴²

Using these interviews as a launching pad, *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals* became an opportunity to respond to these comments, as each subsequent *TSMBOH* episode addressed a particular theme which was raised in the pilot’s interviews. In turn, the last episode was a live phone-in program which gave viewers the option to react to what the GOC presented throughout the show’s various episodes. As Heather Ramsay announced as she promoted the phone-in show on the air: “If you’ve been offended, for us or against us, it will be your chance to get it out of the open.”¹⁴³ Although there exists no audiovisual record of that

¹⁴² *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals*, Episode 1, Date unknown, The ArQuives, Documentary and Moving Image Collection, 1988-024/01F.

¹⁴³ *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals*, Episode 2, Date unknown, The ArQuives, Documentary and Moving Image Collection, 1988-024/02F.

last episode, paper remnants give us an indication of what the finale may have been like. One document, for instance, a list of 20 questions, shows that, before going on the air, the GOC anticipated the feedback that they might receive during the phone-in episode. Some of the questions listed indicate that the collective expected backlash from conservative heterosexual viewers, such as “I don’t believe that you can raise a healthy (normal) child in an abnormal and unnatural environment”; “Why do you have to be so obvious blatant?” Other questions, however, imagined the gay and lesbian community’s response to the show: “Why was the show so political? Don’t any of you have a good time?”; “How come you didn’t deal with issues like bisexuality, drag, S&M, transsexuals?”¹⁴⁴ What these questions effectively demonstrate is the GOC’s willingness to embrace dialogue and participation as a means of furthering gay liberation, as well as the collective’s commitment to thinking critically about the shortcomings of their program and the segments of the community they may have failed to reach.

An article in *The Body Politic* penned by Chris Bearchell provides further insights into the audience’s response on the day of the broadcast. The article reveals that “a few well-wishing heterosexual women and men phoned in,” indicating that the responses of straight viewers were not as negative as anticipated—although “a few hostile straights” did manage to get on the air, one of whom expressed being disturbed by the lesbian presence on the show. While Bearchell notes that it “came as no surprise to GOC that anti-gay caller would also be anti-woman and anti-feminist,” she also reports that a few gay men who called were also “disturbed about the Lesbian bias.”¹⁴⁵ This last comment implies that, despite the GOC’s best efforts, the gay and lesbian community in Toronto and beyond remained divided in the 1970s, even in the face of growing

¹⁴⁴ “Questions,” Script, The Gay Offensive Collective Papers, Courtesy of Heather Ramsay.

¹⁴⁵ Chris Bearchell, “This is the Last Dyke Column,” *The Body Politic*, no. 49, December 1978/January 1979, 32.

conservative backlash, and despite *TSMBOH*'s efforts to promote a strong lesbian feminist vision.

Nevertheless, through its showcase of activist efforts and of community building, as well as through its commitment to performing for its audiences while simultaneously involving them to participate in the program, *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals* projected its own lesbian-centered, feminist, revolutionary (and cheeky!) vision of gay liberation onto the screen—a vision which echoed, but also differed from its predecessors and contemporaries. *TSMBOH*, indeed, showed that, as Nick Mulé explains, “human claims [were] but one tool in the fight for recognition, but human rights alone [would] not achieve liberation.”¹⁴⁶ *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals*, *Gay News and Views*, and *Out of the Closets/Gais de l’Outaouais*, however, all made a mark on their local televisual landscape by creating programming that spoke directly to and about their community. The archives of these programs tell us about the shows’ intimate connections to various activist circles in Ottawa and Toronto, and how these groups and individuals engaged in liberatory experimentations within and outside the space of television. What emerges from these 1970s shows, then, is also a sense of potentiality, as conceptualized by Rox Samer, as they exceeded the mere desire for representation by conceptualizing of television as a site of gay and lesbian liberation and worldmaking.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, in their insistence on denouncing and interrogating conservative right-wing rhetoric, “parental rights” and educational systems, as well as problematic dynamics within the gay and lesbian community, these programs still carry deep resonances to this day.

¹⁴⁶ Nick Mulé, “Human Rights Questioned: A Queer Perspective,” *Canadian Social Work Review* 35, no. 1 (2018): 145.

¹⁴⁷ Rox Samer, *Lesbian Potentiality and Feminist Media in the 1970s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), 4-5.

At the same time, although these activists were emboldened by community television's potential to be a platform to communicate about various political projects, the emancipatory possibilities of community cable in Canada's specific media context were clearly limited, as the subjective decisions of local cable managers superseded the CRTC's mandate. *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals* may have benefitted from the ongoing support of the manager at Rogers cable in 1978, but a year prior, *Gay News and Views* did not, while *Gays of/d'Ottawa* faced obstacles from its very beginnings. Yet, as the AIDS crisis decimated the Canadian gay community in the 1980s, gay and lesbian individuals and groups across Ontario persisted in using cable access to educate various constituents about the epidemic and save lives.

PROLOGUE: RESPONDING TO THE HIV/AIDS CRISIS

Towards the end of the 1970s and in the early 1980s, gays and lesbians in Ontario and in Canada at large faced growing conservative backlash marked by the murder of Emanuel Jaques, Anita Bryant's religious crusades, increasing censorship toward gay and lesbian print and audiovisual material, and frequent police raids of gay bathhouses.¹ Mainstream television portrayals of gays and lesbians continued to offend: in January of 1981, for instance, the CBC aired *Sharing the Secret: Selected Gay Stories* (dir. John Kastner), a documentary following six, mostly closeted, gay men. The film was poorly received by the community, as Chris Bearchell remarked in the *Body Politic*: "The film was the focus of attention and controversy in the media, in all those Canadian homes, in many work places, and above all, in the Toronto gay community where the film was made."² Specifically, the film was critiqued for its portrayal of gay men as exclusively leading "secretive, troubled, fearful lives."³

Yet, as highlighted in the earlier chapters of this dissertation, when there is oppression, there is also resistance. In the wake of gay liberation, gay and lesbian communities in large metropolitan cities—like Toronto and Ottawa—developed robust networks and organizations dedicated to fighting for the rights of LGBTQ2+ people and providing services to their communities. Gays and lesbians further rallied *en masse* to protest police brutality in 1981 after Operation Soap, Toronto police's coordinated attack on gay bathhouses which resulted in the largest mass arrest in Canadian history since the 1970 October Crisis in Quebec.⁴ New

¹ Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Homo and Hetero Sexualities in Canada* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1996), 330-347.

² Chris Bearchell, "Trading on Secrets," *The Body Politic* no. 71, March 1981, 21.

³ Bearchell, "Trading on Secrets," 24.

⁴ Tim McCaskell, *Queer Progress: from Homophobia to Homonationalism* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016), 140.

organizations were created in response to the police raids, such as the Right to Privacy Committee, which consolidated the gay and lesbian community's growing political status.⁵ As activist Tim McCaskell underlines, the issue of police brutality against the patrons of gay bathhouses also managed to unite disparate segments of the community.⁶ And, as Ann Silversides highlights, “having just survived a major attack by the authorities, the gay community had a heightened resistance to any attempts to attack or disparage gay men.”⁷ This momentum would prove useful against the next threat facing the LGBTQ2+ community: the AIDS epidemic.⁸

The first public cases of HIV/AIDS were reported among gay men in the U.S in the Summer of 1981; as early as September 1981, the *Body Politic* skeptically reported on the supposedly new “gay cancer,” berating the sensationalist and homophobic link between what would soon be known as AIDS and gay sexuality made by the mainstream media.⁹ The article stated: “Three recent news reports carried by major newspapers and news media throughout North America have demonstrated a persistent capacity for major distortions in their coverage of gay-related issues.”¹⁰ Furthermore, after reports of a new disease were made public, AIDS was seen as an American affliction—not a Canadian one.¹¹ The first official Canadian case of AIDS was reported in March 1982, however; by the Fall of 1982, fourteen cases would be reported in

⁵ Ann Silversides, *AIDS Activist: Michael Lynch and the Politics of Community* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2000), 14.

⁶ McCaskell, *Queer Progress*, 154.

⁷ Silversides, *AIDS Activist*, 14.

⁸ Silversides, 14.

⁹ Silversides, 15.

¹⁰ “‘Gay’ Cancer and Burning Flesh: The Media Didn’t Investigate,” *The Body Politic*, no. 76, September 1981, 19.

¹¹ Thomas Waugh, “Anti-Retroviral: ‘A Test of Who We Are,’” in *Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas* (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 279.

Canada.¹² By then, skepticism gave way to urgency, especially as the gay community seemed to be disproportionately affected by the new illness.

If the number of cases in Canada in the early 1980s was quite low in comparison to the rapidly growing U.S. cases, medical institutions and public health departments were still not adequately prepared to manage the epidemic. The Progressive Conservative federal government, headed by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, was also accused of not taking HIV/AIDS seriously, failing to implement strategies to appropriately fight the virus, such as education policies and research funding.¹³ As a result, fear gradually took hold in the country, resulting in widespread prejudice against people with AIDS—and people who were thought to have AIDS.¹⁴ As David Rayside and Evert Lindquist further argue, the spread of HIV/AIDS not only “provided a new vehicle for morally conservative homophobia and heterosexism,” but “the relative neglect of state health agencies in the early years of the epidemic placed burdens on local gay networks that could have easily overwhelmed them.”¹⁵

Indeed, in the face of ongoing discrimination, misinformation, sexual moralism, and inadequate health care provisions, LGBTQ2+ people in Ontario mobilized to respond to the epidemic and support people living with HIV/AIDS.¹⁶ AIDS service organizations—such as the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT), which was founded in 1983 and modelled on the Right to Privacy Committee—were formed across the province. Ultimately, these organizations would

¹² Silversides, *AIDS Activist*, 20; McCaskell, *Queer Progress*, 181.

¹³ Ryan Conrad, “Cable Access Queer: Revisiting Toronto Living with AIDS (1990-1991),” *Jump Cut*, no 60 (Spring 2021): 2.

¹⁴ Silversides, *AIDS Activist*, 23-25; McCaskell, *Queer Progress*, 243.

¹⁵ David Rayside and Evert Lindquist, “AIDS Activism and the State in Canada,” *Studies in Political Economy*, no. 39, 1992, pp. 37-76.

¹⁶ Michael Orsini, Marilou Gagnon, and Suzanne Hindmarch, *Seeing Red: HIV/AIDS and Public Policy in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 3.

work together, leading to the formation of the Ontario AIDS Network in 1986.¹⁷ Beyond providing assistance to people with AIDS, AIDS service organizations also focused on fundraising and HIV/AIDS education by pioneering ground-breaking safer sex practices.¹⁸ Gay and lesbian publications tackled the issue of HIV/AIDS as well; by 1983, as Tim McCaskell notes, “half of *The Body Politic*’s world news was dedicated to AIDS.”¹⁹ In fact, all over Ontario, LGBTQ2+ publications spent considerable time covering the issue of AIDS and circulating information about HIV transmission and prevention—such as the Toronto-based magazines *Xtra* and *Rites*, which had been launched in the early 1980s, as well as Gays of/d’ Ottawa’s *GO Info*.

Parallel to the work of AIDS service organizations and LGBTQ2+ media outlets, and in the face of the growing number of AIDS cases and deaths across the country, radical activist groups resorted to civil disobedience to put pressure on the Canadian government and demand that more steps be taken to address the HIV/AIDS crisis and end the epidemic.²⁰ Inspired by the actions of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), which had been launched in 1987 in New York, AIDS Action Now! (AAN!) was created in 1988 in Toronto.²¹ AAN’s activism coalesced at the Fifth International AIDS Conference, which took place in Montreal in June of 1989. Carrying signs and banners that read “Silence=Death,” AAN!, accompanied by members of ACT UP-NY and activists from the Montreal-based organization Réaction-Sida, descended on the conference to protest general government inaction regarding HIV/AIDS. The protesters

¹⁷ David Belrose, *Answering a Different Call: My (Queer) Thunder Bay Life* (Thunder Bay: David Belrose, 2016), 129.

¹⁸ Catherine J. Nash, “Gay and Lesbian Political Mobilization in Urban Spaces: Toronto,” in Manon Tremblay, *Queer Mobilizations: Social Movement Activism and Canadian Public Policy* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2015), 211.

¹⁹ McCaskell, *Queer Progress* 191.

²⁰ McCaskell, 247; Tom Warner, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 253.

²¹ McCaskell, 247.

famously stormed the stage, disrupting Prime Minister Mulroney's speech and opening the conference "on behalf of people with AIDS from Canada and around the world."²²

In conjunction with these efforts, a myriad of films and videos about HIV/AIDS were created to educate people about the virus, respond to ongoing discrimination against LGBTQ2+ people and people with HIV/AIDS, counter media misinformation, and portray experiences of the virus that were usually left out of mainstream discussions of HIV/AIDS. On the one hand, this constellation of cultural responses was made possible thanks to the concurrent development of consumer media technologies, like the camcorder, which was launched on North American markets in the mid-1980s. The increased availability of these technologies facilitated the creation of audiovisual work by and about specific communities, as discussed in this dissertation's introduction. On the other hand, these responses were also deeply influenced by the sociopolitical context in which the HIV/AIDS crisis unfolded, which pushed concerned citizens, artists, and media makers to reach communities directly through the media in order to save lives.²³

Works by Ontario-based filmmakers John Greyson, Richard Fung, or Mike Hoolboom, for instance, have left a long-lasting imprint on the Canadian audiovisual landscape.²⁴ Yet, it is also critical to remember that while *No Sad Song* (1985), directed by Nik Sheehan and co-produced by ACT, is often credited as being the first audiovisual work about HIV/AIDS in Canada, it was in fact *Gayblevision*, a community cable show which aired in Vancouver from 1980 to 1986, which first tackled the question of HIV/AIDS on the screen in 1983. Additionally, video artists like Greyson and Fung would also mobilize cable access to draw attention to the

²² McCaskell, *Queer Progress*, 257-260.

²³ Conrad, "Cable Access Queer," 1.

²⁴ Waugh, "Anti-Retroviral," 310-311.

issue of AIDS in the series *Toronto Living With AIDS* (1990-1991). As the following chapter demonstrates, cable access television became an important vehicle to transmit lifesaving information about HIV/AIDS to locally specific communities.

Harnessing both the radical and pedagogical possibilities associated with community television, LGBTQ2+ people in the 1980s followed the footsteps of their liberationist predecessors and took advantage of the existing cable access laws to stop the spread of the epidemic. Cable access's limited geographical reach, in particular, allowed smaller Ontarian communities to communicate relevant information that dealt with the particular needs of their audiences, which could be broadcast directly into their homes.

**CHAPTER SIX: “AIDS IS IN THUNDER BAY”:
EDUCATING NORTHWESTERN ONTARIANS ABOUT HIV/AIDS ON
THUNDER GAY MAGAZINE (1987-1991)**

I was proud to go present that little poster presentation in 1989. Our really primitive audience survey research that showed that the majority of gay men in Thunder Bay got their HIV/AIDS information from community-based television. Not from the government, not from elsewhere, but essentially from *Thunder Gay Magazine*. I can’t underestimate the power of that. I can’t say how meaningful that is. It’s tremendous. It’s truly tremendous.¹

In June 1989, Michael Sobota of the AIDS Committee of Thunder Bay (ACT-B) flew to the Fifth International AIDS Conference in Montreal to attend a poster session entitled “AIDS, Society, and Behaviour” and present the results of a survey. Conducted by members of ACT-B and Gays of Thunder Bay (GTB), a local LGBTQ2+ organization, the study revealed that most gay and bisexual men in Thunder Bay were receiving lifesaving information about HIV/AIDS from a cable access television program: *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TGM). As Sobota further recalls, “It was something in the 70-percentile range. That annoyed me a little bit, because [ACT-B] had an office, and we were handing out endless pamphlets and education materials on the street, etc. But most guys, at least gay men, were hearing about it from *Thunder Gay Magazine*.”² While the Fifth International AIDS Conference of 1989 is now largely remembered for AIDS Action’s Now! and ACT UP’s disruption of the event, aside from the AAN/ACT UP

¹ Michael Sobota, Interview with the author, August 30, 2022.

² Michael Sobota, Interview with the author, August 30, 2022.

contingent, other Canadian activists were determined to attend the Conference to showcase their efforts to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS at the local level.³

First published as a print newsletter from 1979 to 1987, *Thunder Gay Magazine* was broadcast on cable access television from 1987 to 1991 to discuss various issues affecting the LGBTQ2+ community of Thunder Bay. Because the show aired at the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis in Canada, a large part of *TGM*'s programming was dedicated to the epidemic—featuring several safe sex workshops, in addition to episodes about various AIDS-related issues, such as AIDS and grief, sex positivity in the age of AIDS, living with AIDS, AIDS and religion, and supporting people with AIDS. As Doug Broman (1949-2021), the show's creator and producer, explained in the *Thunder Bay Chronicle-Journal*, a local newspaper: "We want to talk about ways in which we are discriminated against and how we dealt with it. We want to talk about AIDS blatantly, and about safe sex."⁴

In investigating how and why the 1989 survey results were able to claim that *Thunder Gay Magazine* had become the main provider of HIV/AIDS education in the city of Thunder Bay for gay and bisexual men, I propose that the domestic nature of the medium of television made the program a safe space to openly discuss HIV/AIDS and its effects on various communities in the city. Put simply, community television was a "good way to reach people in their own home," as Broman himself explained to his viewers, and educate them about HIV/AIDS.⁵ In the age of AIDS in Thunder Bay, community television truly became a "technology of care," which

³ For documentation and commentary on the event, see John Greyson's video, *The World is Sick* (sic) 1989, which he produced as part of the cable access series *Toronto Living With AIDS* (1990-1991).

⁴ "TV Program Focuses on Gay Community," *Thunder Bay Chronicle-Journal*, October 27, 1987, 29, David Belrose Fonds, Lakehead University Archives, Thunder Bay, Ontario.

⁵ Episode title/number unknown, *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), February 4, 1988, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

contained possibilities for lifesaving connections through information dissemination and outreach.⁶ As Sobota claims:

You could watch it and be completely closeted. You could watch it at home, and no one else would know. You could watch it in your family home, if you were in your own room. Your mom and dad, brothers and sisters, anybody else, wouldn't know. So, that's why a lot of those programs featured a lot of HIV/AIDS information or indoctrination.⁷

Such framing demands a recognition of the specificities of Thunder Bay as a locale. Located on the shores of Lake Superior in Northwestern Ontario, the city of Thunder Bay is the product of the amalgamation of two towns, Port Arthur and Fort William.⁸ In 1971, a year after the amalgamation, Thunder Bay counted 112,093 inhabitants, while Toronto had a population of 2,628,043.⁹ When Gays of Thunder Bay began broadcasting *Thunder Gay Magazine* in 1987, 122,217 people lived in Thunder Bay and Toronto boasted 3,431,981 residents.¹⁰ And, while other Northern Ontarian cities like North Bay or Sudbury are a relatively short drive away from Toronto, Thunder Bay is a long way from most large North American metropolises: 16 hours and 8 hours by car from Toronto and Winnipeg, respectively, and a 4 four-hour drive to Duluth, Minnesota.

Consequently, Thunder Bay's isolation from Canada's main cities has had an impact on the development of its queer community. For instance, although the Gay Liberation Movement had been underway in Toronto and Ottawa since the 1970s, in the 1980s, queer people in Thunder Bay did not have as many outlets as they did in the South. Therefore, "there was a need

⁶ Amy Holdsworth, *On Living with Television* (Durham and London: Duke University Press 2021), 25-29.

⁷ Michael Sobota, Interview with the author, August 30, 2022.

⁸ "History of Amalgamation," City of Thunder Bay Website, <https://www.thunderbay.ca/en/city-hall/history-of-amalgamation.aspx>.

⁹ "1971 Census of Canada: Population," vol. 1, part 1, Statistics Canada, https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2017/statcan/CS92-708-1971.pdf

¹⁰ "1991 Census Highlights," Statistics Canada, 1994. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2013/statcan/rh-hc/CS96-304-1994-eng.pdf

for those kinds of services and support groups in Thunder Bay.”¹¹ Gwen O’Reilly, a participant in *Thunder Gay Magazine*, remarked:

There was a big community. But nobody was out, right? It was a time where most people were closeted, in at least some area of their lives. The people you see on the screen in *Thunder Gay Magazine* were probably the only out people in Thunder Bay. For most people, it was either only known in social circles or not known at all. Or people weren’t out at work. That was the context, then.¹²

Yet, despite the dearth of services catering to LGBTQ2+ people at the time, many local gay men and lesbians did not want to leave Thunder Bay. Instead, they wished to make the city livable for themselves and other LGBTQ2+ people, without having to go through the oft-undertaken queer exodus to major metropolises—thereby disrupting and even reversing the narrative of the rural and of smaller, peripheral cities as “backward and hostile.”¹³ For instance, David Belrose, an important figure in the gay activist scene in Thunder Bay, left town in his early twenties to attend university in Toronto but moved back North shortly after: “I found myself at Yonge and Bloor at five o’clock in the afternoon one day and I said, “What the hell am I doing? This is not a civilized way to live.”¹⁴ The limitations and disappointments of the “big city” as perceived by Thunder Bay’s gay inhabitants like Belrose would become more salient with the arrival of HIV/AIDS, which decimated large urban queer communities in Canada.

At the same time, as the AIDS epidemic took hold, it also became important for people from cities like Thunder Bay to speak openly about queer sexuality and inform viewers of the risks HIV posed to their local community. If Canadians had previously judged HIV/AIDS to be an American problem in the aftermath of the announcement of the first official cases in Canada,

¹¹ Gwen O’Reilly, Interview with the author, August 11, 2022.

¹² Gwen O’Reilly, Interview with the author, August 11, 2022.

¹³ Mary L. Gray, Brian J. Gilley, and Colin R. Johnson (eds), *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2017), 11.

¹⁴ Julia Garro, “Priscilla’s Northern Tour: Thunder Bay’s Isolation,” *Xtra! Toronto’s Gay and Lesbian News*, August 26, 1999.

the epidemic now seemed to be a big city problem which did not affect smaller cities and towns. In a *Thunder Gay Magazine* episode which aired on May 26, 1988, Michael Sobota commented on the situation in Thunder Bay: “There are still people who have heard the message but feel it’s not relevant to them, [that] it’s not that serious here in Thunder Bay [because they] don’t go off and do things in Toronto or Montreal. That really scares me.”¹⁵ It is worth noting, too, that the show debuted two years after the first official diagnosis of AIDS in Thunder Bay was made, in 1985, leading to a sense of urgency to inform the people of Thunder Bay about the epidemic.¹⁶ This chapter thus takes the reader away from Toronto and Ottawa by foregrounding the work of a smaller Northwestern Ontarian community and the ways in which cable access was used there to circulate vital information about queer life, and, more specifically, about HIV/AIDS.

In thinking about how queer people in Thunder Bay accessed and created community, as well as about the kind of information which circulated on *Thunder Gay Magazine* and who benefited from it, this chapter also interrogates and perhaps complicates the results of the survey presented at the Montreal conference. The core of *TGM* volunteers were white, cisgender men—with the exception of a few (white, cisgender) women. In many regards, like its Toronto and Ottawa predecessors, *Thunder Gay Magazine* upheld the stories of white, cisgender people at the expense of others. Yet, the show also distinguished itself from its precursors as it sought to expand its target audience by, for example, featuring stories about trans people in the city.

Noting that “transsexuality” was “seldom discussed as a serious issue” and was a subject usually dealt with “lurid distaste” in daytime talk shows, in November 1988, *Thunder Gay*

¹⁵ Episode title/number unknown, *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), May 26, 1988, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

¹⁶ David Belrose, *Answering a Different Call: My (Queer) Thunder Bay Life* (Thunder Bay: David Belrose, 2016), 129.

Magazine aired a trailblazing interview with a transgender woman named Candy.¹⁷ Although the questions asked by Broman throughout the interview are sometimes insensitive, Candy readily shares her experience of coming out and living as trans in Thunder Bay—delving into the support groups that she belongs to, as well as into the various discriminatory instances she has encountered, notably in the health care system—in the hope of both reaching potential trans viewers and educating cis audience members. Noting that there has been gradual acceptance of trans people in the community of Thunder Bay, the exchange also testifies to the changing climate of the late 1980s, which pushed the gay and lesbian community, and the local community at large, to become more inclusive. Candy notes:

I do go out in public a lot and I really do stress the fact to a lot of people that I am transsexual... You expect the bad reactions, but people are really interested... When I first started doing it, I did get a lot of guff, but nowadays it's very acceptable... [people] think I got a lot of nerves.

Unlike most of the community television shows under study, *Thunder Gay Magazine* also worked diligently to try and address the concerns of Two-Spirit/Queer Indigenous peoples, emphasizing how Indigenous peoples were being affected by HIV/AIDS in the city of Thunder Bay and beyond. A look at the city's demographics partially helps understand why the show was committed to addressing the concerns of Indigenous peoples. According to the 1996 Canadian Census Survey, at the time, 6,510 people living in Thunder Bay identified as Indigenous, making Thunder Bay one of the cities with the highest proportion of Indigenous residents among major cities in Canada.¹⁸ This also meant that there was a high proportion of Two-Spirit/Queer Indigenous peoples in and around Thunder Bay. Furthermore, the first publicly identified person

¹⁷ "Transsexual," *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), November 15, 1988, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

¹⁸ Statistics Canada, "1996 Census of Population," 1996.
<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/english/census01/info/census96.cfm>

with AIDS in the city was a young Indigenous man, who passed away during the winter of 1985.¹⁹ As a result, David Belrose explains, cross-political work felt like a necessity for gay and lesbian groups, as well as AIDS organizations, especially in light of Thunder Bay's geographical position:

There's a large Indigenous population in Northwestern Ontario, and part of that Indigenous population is LGBT. We just worked together right from the beginning... People would come from the reserves and outlying communities to Thunder Bay. It became this kind of metropolitan hub for Northwestern Ontario. During all the dances and everything, we always had a significant Indigenous component to that. I never thought about it as much at the time, it was just part of the way things were... Perhaps because we're isolated, it was necessary for us to work together.²⁰

And, as former *TGM* participant Gwen O'Reilly further notes, it was paramount for the program to address the concerns of Indigenous peoples in Thunder Bay in the face of their erasure from mainstream media: "That's the other interesting thing about the show. Mainstream media was not interviewing Indigenous people at that time, and yet they were part of the community."²¹

To fill in the gaps, *TGM* aired a variety of segments featuring Indigenous peoples both in and outside of Thunder Bay; for instance, the series dedicated several episodes to Gay and Lesbians of the First Nations (GLFN), an organization formed in Toronto in 1989 to provide support and advocacy for community members living with HIV/AIDS. At the same time, being openly out as an Indigenous queer person on *Thunder Bay Magazine* presented a different set of risks than being out on the program as a middle-class, educated, white person. For example, Ma-Nee Chacaby, now a Two-Spirit Elder, faced violence from the local population and her family after appearing as an out Anishinaabe lesbian on *Thunder Gay Magazine*. In her memoir, she expresses that, although she felt the need to speak out against injustices on TV, at the moment of

¹⁹ Michael Sobota, Interview with the author, August 30, 2022.

²⁰ David Belrose, Interview with the author, June 1, 2022.

²¹ Gwen O'Reilly, Interview with the author, August 11, 2022.

the interview, “[she] was worried, because [she] knew people might give [her] a hard time about it later.” She continues:

Still, I was not prepared for the hostility I experienced after the interview aired. Before 1988, very few people had come out publicly in Thunder Bay, and none of them were Anishinaabe. Afterward, a lot of people recognized me... Some turned and walked away when they saw me, while others spit on the sidewalk when I went by... Most people in my family also shunned me.... In the months following my TV interview, I was attacked three times when people recognized me on the streets of Thunder Bay.²²

This chapter thus also takes into account *Thunder Gay Magazine*'s numerous—and sometimes imperfect—attempts at coalitional work through television.

To begin, I situate the inception of *Thunder Gay Magazine* within the development of Thunder Bay's LGBTQ2+ community. As I show in the next sections, people who worked on *Thunder Gay Magazine*—whom Gwen O'Reilly describes as the “only out people in Thunder Bay”—were at the front and centre of gay, feminist, and AIDS activism in Thunder Bay throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Because they were heavily involved in the work of educating both gay and straight people about these issues even prior to becoming a part of *Thunder Gay Magazine*, I understand the television program to be a continuation of this educational work. Looking specifically at the show's treatment of HIV/AIDS, I then argue that *Thunder Gay Magazine* relied mainly on three pedagogical modes, which enabled *Thunder Gay Magazine* to successfully educate its viewers about HIV/AIDS: a pedagogy of repetition, a pedagogy of participation, and a pedagogy of compassion. I focus the bulk of this analysis on safe-sex demonstrations performed on the program, as well as on three short documentaries which aired on *Thunder Gay Magazine*: *Ken* (1989), *Her Giveaway* (1990), and *Keewaywin (Journeys): AIDS in the First Nations* (1990). In its insistence on the relevance of *Thunder Gay*

²² Ma-Nee Chacaby and Mary Louisa Plummer, *A Two-Spirit Journey: The Autobiography of a Lesbian Ojibwa-Cree Elder* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 2016), 144-145.

Magazine's archive, this chapter simultaneously constitutes an expansive record of how members of a local Canadian community in Northwestern Ontario mobilized to care for one another by preventing the spread of the epidemic.

“’Tis Not Toronto”: Galvanizing Thunder Bay’s Gay Community in the 1970s and 1980s

The very first gay liberation organization in Thunder Bay emerged out of the city’s main university campus, Lakehead University. Founded in 1974, Lakehead Gay Liberation (LGL), was the “result of three years of effort on the part of a very small number of concerned gay people.”²³ At its highest, the organization counted between eight and twelve members.²⁴ As Michael Sobota underlines, “the campus wasn’t all that swarming with people willing to be out and open.”²⁵ Nonetheless, LGL’s main objective was to “raise the levels of consciousness” for both gay and straight people in Thunder Bay.²⁶ Quickly, the group saw the media as a way to accomplish this goal. In 1974, shortly after being created, two founding members of LGL, Michael Farewell and David Belrose, appeared on CBQ, their local CBC radio station. In the twelve-minute live interview with CBQ host Margie Taylor, Belrose and Farewell discussed the goals of North American Gay Liberation Movement, defining concepts such as coming out, homosexuality, and homophobia, in a way that was clear and informative for the audience. In the words of LGL, gay liberation was “all about education.”²⁷

²³ “Thunder Bay Group Organizes,” *The Body Politic*, no. 13, May-June 1974, 6.

²⁴ Donald W. McLeod, *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada: A Selected Annotated Chronology, 1964-1975* (Toronto: ECW Press/Homewood Books, 1996), 149.

²⁵ Michael Sobota, Interview with the author, August 30, 2022.

²⁶ Margie Taylor, “Interview with Michael Farewell and David Belrose,” *CBQ Radio*, 1974, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

²⁷ Taylor, “Interview with Michael Farewell and David Belrose.”

LGL was only active for six months, however. As David Belrose explains: “After the Summer break, everybody else moved to Toronto.”²⁸ Gay activities in Thunder Bay would then be coordinated through the members-only Backstreet Athletic Club, from 1975 to 1980.²⁹ Yet, even in the absence of official gay and lesbian groups, queer people kept on mobilizing the media to educate the population of Thunder Bay about homosexuality. In May 1977, CBQ aired a twenty-minute documentary on the gay community in Thunder Bay which featured interviews with several individuals who shared their experiences of coming to terms with their sexuality in the city. Although the radio documentary highlighted the heightened feelings of isolation that came with living in a peripheral Canadian city which, in their own words, was “not ready for gay liberation,” it also shared relevant information on how gay people could find each other in Thunder Bay. For instance, the segment began by promoting the Backstreet Athletic Club, which, through interviews with owners and patrons, was portrayed as being “comparable to a lot of the [gay] clubs down in Toronto.”³⁰ Despite the lack of sustained gay and lesbian organizations in the city, the interviews conveyed a sense that Thunder Bay possessed an emerging, yet robust, community scene. Understanding information sharing as a form of care, some courageous queer people in Thunder Bay broke the silence on homosexuality in the hopes of reaching others who might be grappling with their own sexual orientation.

The creation of Gays of Thunder Bay (GTB) in 1980—later known as “Gays and Lesbians of Thunder Bay” and, subsequently, “Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals of Thunder Bay” to better reflect the growing community—generated a new sense of possibility for LGBTQ2+

²⁸ David Belrose, Interview with the author, June 1, 2021

²⁹ Belrose, *Answering a Different Call*, 119.

³⁰ Margie Taylor, “Thunder Bay Gay Life,” *CBQ Radio*, 1977, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

people in Thunder Bay. As the first community-wide gay and lesbian organization in the city, its objectives were threefold:

- a. to provide services and facilities, including a social club, to meet the social, cultural, psychological, educational and spiritual needs of the gay community; b. to act as an information and referral source to members of the community and the community at large; c. to strive for legal equality and for social acceptance of individuals of differing sexual orientations.³¹

To facilitate these goals, members of Gays of Thunder Bay kept on appearing on local radio stations such as CBQ and CKPR. Yet, GTB also felt that these goals would be better achieved through the creation of their own social services as well as their own media outlets.

Thunder Gay Magazine: From Community Newsletter to Cable Access Television Show

Within one year of operation, GTB had begun their campaign to “inform and educate—to tell gays in the Northwestern Ontario region that there are other gay persons out there.”³² First, GTB established a telephone line, located in their office atop of the local Zellers; as Michael Sobota recalls, the phone line was an important way for closeted or newly out gay people to find out about each other:

On Wednesday evenings, we held an open phone line. You could call in for information. Most of the calls were not about information or education, however. They were about ‘Where do we meet?’ ‘Are there any gay bars in town?’... ‘Where can we get together?’³³

To that end, Gays of Thunder Bay also organized monthly dances at the local Ukrainian Labour Temple to meet the needs of their own—and neighbouring—communities and connect gays and

³¹ Gays of Thunder Bay Constitution, Article 2, “Objects,” November 18, 1980, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

³² Gays of Thunder Bay, “Thunder Bay Gays Reach Out,” Press Release, 1981, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

³³ Michael Sobota, Interview with the author, August 30, 2022.

lesbians locally.³⁴ The location of the dance was not outwardly disclosed but advertised as “the usual Fort William location.” Interested parties would have to call GTB to find out the exact location or would know about it by word of mouth. As Sobota explains:

If you knew, you knew. But if you didn’t know, we weren’t going to be harassed by the general public. Once in a while, someone would show up and harass us. They would discover where we were. And there were a couple of bars who were amenable to serving the gay and lesbian population, and they were occasionally harassed as well. There was a Blue Hall on an old Fort William Road in Thunder Bay that had its windows smashed by homophobic harassers in the city...[T]hose events...engendered an atmosphere of fear, but it didn’t stop us, for whatever reason. In our youth, in our energy, in our willingness to be out, we persisted.³⁵

Parallel to these social endeavours, GTB launched *Thunder Gay Magazine*, at the time a print newsletter, with the goal of sharing “information, news, interviews and stories” (Figure 20).³⁶ The newsletter, which was spearheaded by GTB’s secretary, Doug Broman, had a smaller circulation radius than that afforded by mainstream radio appearances. *Thunder Gay Magazine*, however, did enable Thunder Bay’s gay and lesbian community to consolidate its own ranks. It became a forum to debate issues of significance to the community, free of the heteronormative judgement of the wider public and the mainstream media, which, despite having provided a platform for early gay and lesbian groups, often misunderstood and misrepresented Thunder Bay’s budding LGBTQ2+ community. In 1982, for instance, *Thunder Gay Magazine* published an article regarding problems the organization had been having with two local media outlets—*Lakehead Living*, a local weekly, which refused to publish an article about GTB, and CBQ, which wrongly portrayed GTB as a “local homosexual group” wanting “access to Thunder Bay schools.” *TGM*’s article argued that both incidents pointed to “a seeming lack of concern”

³⁴ Chris Bearehell, “Gays from Toronto to Thunder Bay,” *The Body Politic*, no.66, September 1980, 13.

³⁵ Michael Sobota, Interview with the author, August 30, 2022.

³⁶“TV Program Focuses on Gay Community,” *Thunder Bay Chronicle-Journal*, October 27, 1987, 29.

toward GTB and the local gay community, as well as “insensitivity toward handling gay issues.”³⁷ As a result, in a 1983 editorial, Broman wrote about the importance of being able to exist and communicate in a space of shared experiences:

In our relative isolation, northern communities must have an organized group of lesbians and gay men not only to provide basic and needed services such as social activities, phonline counselling, information referral, sharing and so on, but to provide the other essential – the spirit of our common experience. It’s hard to put a label on that or pinpoint the exact source – just, we know when it’s there and miss it when it isn’t.³⁸

³⁷ Michael Sobota, “Flaunting It,” *Thunder Gay Magazine* (Newsletter), August-September 1982, 7, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

³⁸ Doug Broman, “Editorial,” *Thunder Gay Magazine* (Newsletter), February-March 1983, 3, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

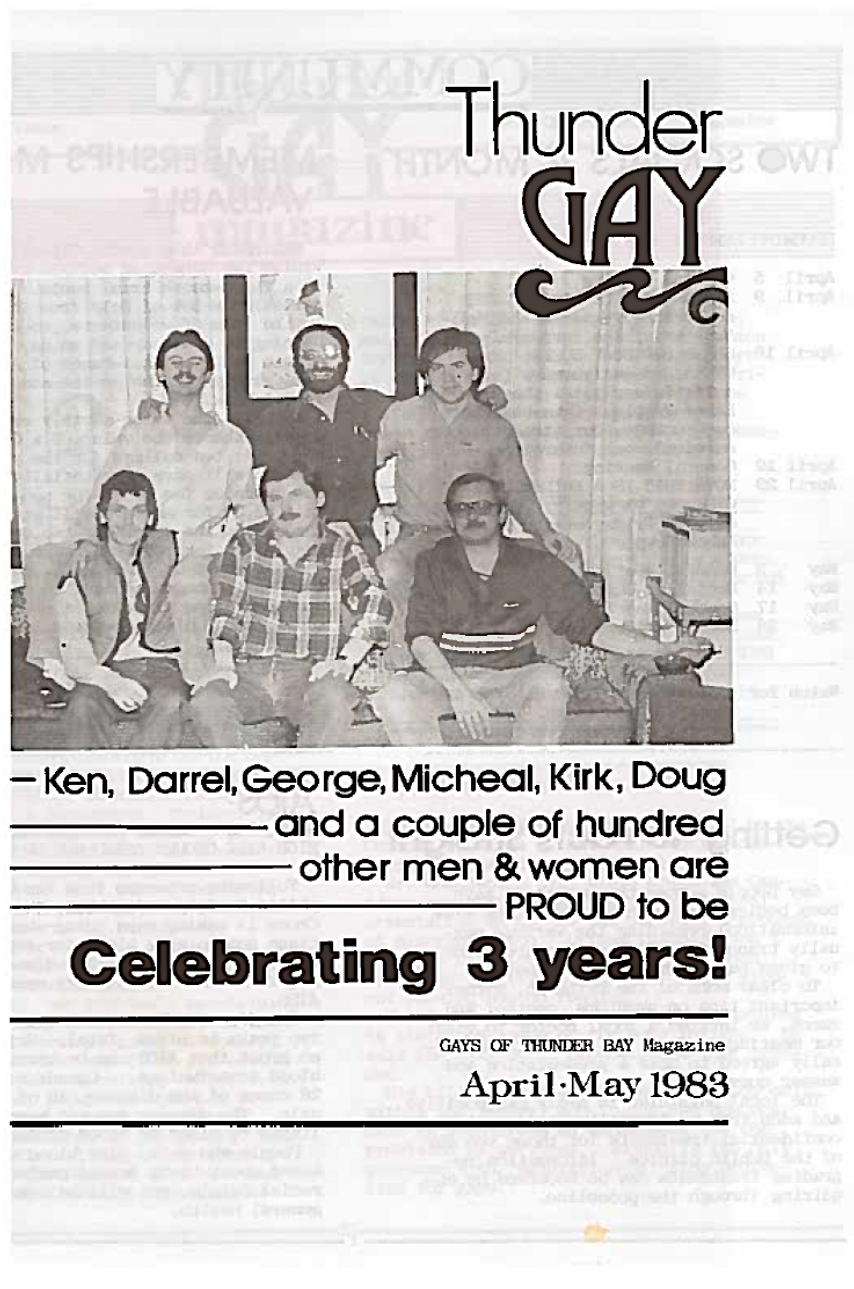


Figure 20. Cover of Thunder Gay Magazine (Newsletter), April-May 1983.

Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

Behind the newsletter was the same triumvirate of gay men who had been responsible for the development of Gays of Thunder Bay: Doug Broman, David Belrose, and Michael Sobota. Born in Fort Frances, Broman was a writer for various local newspapers such as the *Fort Frances Times*, as well as his own newspaper, the *District Sun*. After starting out in Fort Frances, Broman moved to Toronto for a few years and made his way back to Thunder Bay, working at the Lakehead University Printshop and getting involved in the gay community.³⁹ Unfortunately for Broman, writing as an openly gay man was not without consequences. As a result of his involvement in the *TGM* newsletter, Broman effectively lost his job. David Belrose's trajectory was quite similar to Broman's; born and raised in Port Arthur in 1942, he left town as a young adult to go to the University in Toronto and enroll in the military. Upon his return to the new city of Thunder Bay, Belrose helped establish the Lakehead Gay Liberation (LGL), later becoming a driving force in GTB as the first president of the organization, and focusing on HIV/AIDS issues through his involvement in the AIDS Committee of Thunder Bay (ACT-B)—all the while working as a letter carrier for Canada Post.⁴⁰ Originally from rural Wisconsin, Michael Sobota was out to only a close circle of friends when he settled in Thunder Bay in 1969, having been purged of the U.S army for being gay. He, too, later became involved in the local queer community, being a member of GTB and its Education Committee, and co-founding ACT-B in 1986, of which he was Executive Director for twenty-five years.⁴¹ All three men were deeply committed to the task of educating the community of Thunder Bay about LGBTQ2+ issues. For example, they regularly gave talks to local high school classes about homosexuality to “assure

³⁹ “Obituaries: Douglas Broman,” *Fort Frances Times*, September 1, 2021, <https://fftimes.com/features/obituaries/douglas-broman/>.

⁴⁰ Belrose, *Answering a Different Call*, 122; David Belrose, Interview with the author, June 1, 2022.

⁴¹ Michael Sobota, Interview with the author, August 30, 2022.

the community that [they] were here.”⁴² The same commitment to being visible and educating the community of Thunder Bay would later translate onto the screen.

After running *TGM* in print for eight years, Doug Broman shifted to a televisual format in 1987, embracing the possibilities offered by the local community access television laws and hoping to reach bigger audiences (Figure 21). In fact, even before the creation of *Gays of Thunder Bay* and *TGM*, gay people who gathered at the Backstreet Athletic Club already had plans to use cable access television “to do a gay program or documentary,” as indicated in the agenda of a meeting held at the Club in September 1979.⁴³ In the late 1980s, having access to the cable airwaves became all the more important, if not essential, for the LGBTQ2+ community of Thunder Bay. First, in the Fall of 1986, GTB received a call asking them to participate in a one-hour community television program, produced by Maclean Hunter, on the topic of homosexuality and human rights in Ontario. Michael Sobota, as a member of the Education Committee, agreed to be interviewed and featured on the program. However, David Belrose, who happened to catch the first episode of the series, quickly realized that GTB had not been fully informed of the goals of the Maclean Hunter program. It was revealed that the series, entitled “Life in Focus,” was sponsored by the Baptist church and featured religious ministers who were given the “last word on the program,” effectively preventing the “free, open, and fair exchange of views.”⁴⁴ Upon learning of the aims of the program, *GTB* cancelled their participation in the series, refusing to allow Maclean Hunter to use the already taped interview. The emergence of HIV/AIDS in and around Thunder Bay was an additional catalyst for GTB to create a series of their own, as David Belrose underlines: “By 1987, the issue of AIDS had

⁴² Michael Sobota, Interview with the author, August 30, 2022.

⁴³ “Meeting Agenda,” 4 September 1979, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

⁴⁴ David Belrose, “Baptist Boomerang,” *Thunder Gay Magazine* (Newsletter), Fall 1986, 1, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

become very important, so using a television program gave us a way reaching out to a much larger number of people.”⁴⁵ Although the televised magazine hoped to reach wider audiences, which would include straight people, its name remained unchanged; the show, as a result, was predominantly made by and for gay people.

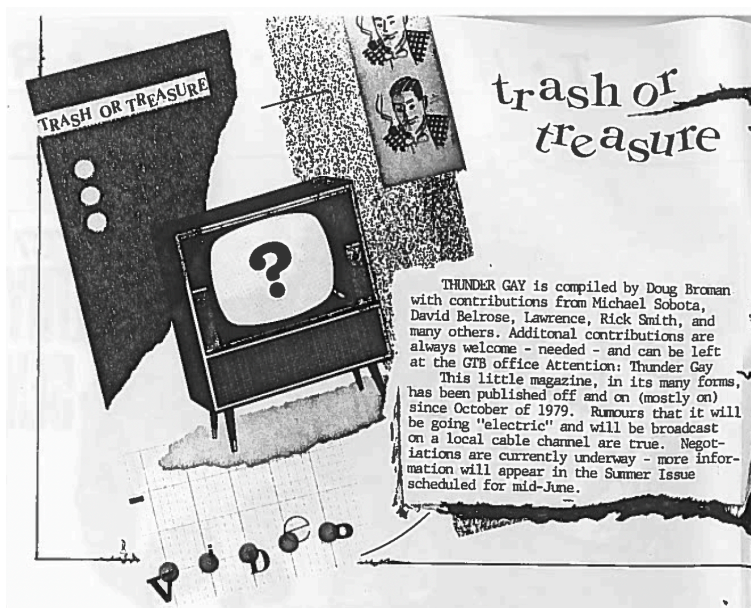


Figure 21. A TGM article discusses the switch from newsletter to television program.

“Trash or Treasure?” *Thunder Gay Magazine* (Newsletter), Spring 1987, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

⁴⁵ David Belrose, Interview with the author, June 1, 2022.

The cable access show, like its predecessors from the 1970s, relied on a small but motivated group of volunteers, which included Broman, as host and producer, Belrose, as camera operator and recurring guest, and Sobota, as guest speaker and representative of ACT-B.⁴⁶ Rick Smith and Andre Chamberlain, two members of Gays of Thunder Bay, were also regulars on the show. A few lesbians were involved in the production of the *Thunder Gay Magazine*, like Mary Bishop and Gwen O'Reilly. A Guelph transplant, O'Reilly quickly rallied behind lesbian and feminist causes in Thunder Bay when she moved there as an undergraduate student. In the 1980s, she founded a lesbian support group in the city, in addition to becoming involved with the Northwestern Ontario Women's Centre, where she wrote for the *Northern Woman Journal* and organized various lesbian feminist workshops. Thinking back to how she came to participate in the program, O'Reilly claimed that she was encouraged to join the *TGM* crew by Belrose and Chamberlain, whom she had known prior to the show through her educational activities, having given high school talks alongside the two men: "Because I was somebody who liked to do educational work and nobody else was doing it, I thought, 'Okay, well, might as well.' I was a willing victim, I guess."⁴⁷

Much like *Gay News and Views*, *Out of the Closets*, and *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals*, then, *Thunder Gay Magazine* was the product of connections. As O'Reilly recalls: "All of these personal and social connections...were happening in the background. Because that's what the community was about."⁴⁸ This sentiment was echoed by David Belrose, who remembers that *TGM* "just recruited from within the community and managed to build a group of people."⁴⁹ However, if Belrose remembers the *TGM* crew "working together quite

⁴⁶ Belrose, *Answering a Different Call*, 127.

⁴⁷ Gwen O'Reilly, Interview with the author, August 11, 2022.

⁴⁸ Gwen O'Reilly, Interview with the author, August 11, 2022.

⁴⁹ David Belrose, Interview with the author, June 1, 2022.

well,” O’Reilly often felt like “the token lesbian offender” in a male-dominated environment. She explained: “A lot of the men didn’t have to deal with women, so they didn’t really care about our issues. So, it was not necessarily always a friendly atmosphere.”⁵⁰ Despite *Thunder Gay Magazine*’s attempts to include lesbians both in front of and behind the camera, these efforts once again fell short of bringing about genuine equality to the program. As O’Reilly recalls: “I did my best, but I was young then, right? I don’t think I ever really challenged anybody about content, I was just happy to have an opportunity. In hindsight, I would have been clear about how we needed a lesbian committee to determine what that content was. You know, we would be wanting to produce our own content.”⁵¹ The same tensions that existed in the 1970s between gay men and lesbian feminists carried out in the 1980s; yet, as was the case in the 1970s, the necessity of working together to educate audiences via community TV still often prevailed over separatist politics—despite existing tensions between crew members.

Sustaining Thunder Gay Magazine Over the Years

The show, which aired weekly on Maclean Hunter TV Cable 7, featured episodes that ran between fifteen to forty-five minutes; segments ranged from pre-recorded reports and talking head interviews on and off set, to live call-ins and performances by local musicians and artists. Unlike the early days of cable access programming, during which some television shows experimented with and circulated radical messages of liberation, *TGM* hosts and guests often wore formal attire and employed a serious tone throughout, which was indicative of a drive to be taken seriously by the community at large (Figures 22-23). As Gwen O’Reilly notes:

We were really just trying to portray ourselves as normal. That’s why everybody’s wearing a suit and tie. We were so serious and trying to be credible. You know, cover

⁵⁰ Gwen O’Reilly, Interview with the author, August 11, 2022.

⁵¹ Gwen O’Reilly, Interview with the author, August 11, 2022.

news events and stuff. There was this idea that we wanted to show people that we were normal people, that there wasn't anything particularly different about us, and that we were credible...At this point in my life, I would have injected a lot more humour into it!⁵²

Despite this drive for respectability, the show was slotted to air at 10:00 or 10:30PM on Tuesday evenings—a timeslot which suggests that *TGM*'s topics may have been considered to be unpalatable for all audiences. And indeed, some viewers did object to the show. O'Reilly, again, highlights that “there was always backlash. There were a number of people in the community...saying that we were angry feminists or queers who were recruiting people. That we were going to take over the world, and that that was bad thing. That God wouldn't approve.”⁵³ In a live episode dedicated to the topic of homophobia, for example, an angry caller claimed that homosexuality was a crime against humanity, violently telling the *TGM* crew that gay people should, in his opinion, be shot to death.⁵⁴ These negative responses did not deter the participants from continuing the show, however, which they saw as being a vital service to the community of Thunder Bay. As O'Reilly insists:

There were lots of negative responses. But the other thing was that we also knew that there were people who were suffering...There were people who were coming out, desperate for this contact, and they didn't know how to get in touch...We understood that the reason for our work wasn't just to educate the general public; we were also trying to become a conduit for people to have community.⁵⁵

⁵² Gwen O'Reilly, Interview with the author, August 11, 2022.

⁵³ Gwen O'Reilly, Interview with the author, August 11, 2022.

⁵⁴ “Coping with Homophobia,” *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), May 1, 1990, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

⁵⁵ Gwen O'Reilly, Interview with the author, August 11, 2022.



Figure 22. Doug Broman on the set of *Thunder Gay Magazine*.

Episode title/number unknown, *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), April 28, 1988,
Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.



Figure 23. Gwen O'Reilly (left), Andre Chamberlain (centre), and Mary Plummer (right) on the set of *Thunder Gay Magazine*.

Episode title/number unknown, *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), January 10, 1989,
Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

All participants also highlighted the constant encouragement of Thunder Bay’s Maclean Hunter’s station manager, René Rees Boyer, who kept the show alive despite audience criticism—contrary to other cable company directors and managers who discontinued LGBTQ2+ community television shows in the face of viewer complaints. Boyer maintained his support for the program by stressing that the CRTC’s mandate was to provide access to *all* community groups. Should somebody have an “opposing point of view,” Boyer insisted, they would have “equal access and equal support from the community programming department” at Maclean Hunter.⁵⁶ Consequently, *Thunder Gay Magazine* was never cancelled; rather, interpersonal conflicts between members of *TGM* and other Thunder Bay-based organizations would end the program.

Additionally, by the time the show started airing in 1987, Ontario had finally passed equal rights legislation preventing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation—becoming the second province in Canada to do so after Quebec.⁵⁷ Indeed, the implementation of the Charter of Rights and Freedom in 1982, as well as the constant lobbying from gay and lesbian organizations had pushed Canadian provinces to amend their human rights laws in the mid- to late 1980s.⁵⁸ With the passage of Bill 7 in Ontario in 1986, *Thunder Gay Magazine* participants “felt their rights guaranteed,” as they were now able to file discrimination complaints with the Ontario Human Rights Commission—which they did.⁵⁹ In 1988, Broman attempted to charter the “Welcome Ship,” a local tour boat on Lake Superior, for a staff party to mark the end of the first season of the show. The owner of the ship told Broman that she would not charter the boat

⁵⁶ “Thunder Gay Magazine News Segment,” *Thunder Bay Television News*, 1987, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

⁵⁷ David Rayside, *On the Fringe: Gays and Lesbians in Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 143.

⁵⁸ Tom Warner, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 197; Tim McCaskell, *Queer Progress: from Homophobia to Homonationalism* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016), 267.

⁵⁹ “TV Program Focuses on Gay Community,” *Thunder Bay Chronicle-Journal*, October 27, 1987, 29.

to a gay group, adding that gay people were “known to have parties that got out of control.”⁶⁰ Broman swiftly filed a complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Commission, who settled the matter in March of 1989. The owners of the “Welcome Ship” subsequently agreed to comply with the provisions of the Human Rights Code and invited the *Thunder Gay Magazine* staff to book the ship—although by that point, *TGM* no longer had any interest in renting it. As David Belrose explains: “The Welcome Ship eventually agreed to host *Thunder Gay Magazine*, but we never did follow through. We decided, ‘hey, if you don’t want us, we don’t really want to.’”⁶¹ By the late 1980s, then, gays and lesbians in Ontario benefited from more legal protections, which made community television a safer space for them to express their opinion—although, as mentioned earlier, discrimination against LGBTQ2+ people still persisted in Ontario, especially as people with HIV/AIDS faced prejudice and intolerance throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

“If You’re Going to Play, Play Safe!”: Teaching Safer Sex through Repetition and Audience Participation

Thunder Gay Magazine touched on various issues affecting Thunder Bay’s LGBTQ2+ community, such as coming out, human rights and discrimination, spirituality and religion, LGBTQ2+ health care, as well as arts, literature, and cinema, with a special emphasis on HIV/AIDS. As David Belrose recalls, the program meant to encourage “people who might be LGBT—traditionally gay and bisexual men in particular, but anybody in the community—to get accurate information about how the virus is transmitted, how it’s not transmitted, what you can do to still enjoy sex safely, or as safely as possible anyway... Education and prevention were both part of what the television program was all about—trying to get prevention information out

⁶⁰ “Thunder Gay Staff Welcome on Ship,” *Thunder Bay Chronicle-Journal*, March 28, 1989, 30.

⁶¹ David Belrose, Interview with the author, June 1, 2022.

there.”⁶² In addition to helping reduce the stigma associated with the virus, in the late 1980s and 1990s, education and prevention were the only way to prevent the spread of the virus since there were no effective treatments against HIV.

Television, then, served as a conduit to transmit educational messages about HIV/AIDS, especially in the absence of comprehensive sex education.⁶³ At the time that *TGM* aired, it was strongly felt that the Canadian federal government had been, for the most part, apathetic to the issue. It was not until 1990 that Health Canada, the federal department responsible for national health policies, responded to the crisis by developing a National AIDS Strategy—a document which listed education and prevention as its primary goals.⁶⁴ And, because Canadian mainstream media outlets were also reluctant to circulate information on the virus and the ways in which it impacted the LGBTQ2+ community, Broman and his team were doubly committed to circulating explicit information about HIV/AIDS.⁶⁵ Community television was therefore a way to bridge educational gaps and respond to government failures; through cable access, *Thunder Gay Magazine* could directly share information about HIV/AIDS and provided a safe space to openly deal with sexuality and sexual practices. Gwen O’Reilly commented on the importance of doing HIV/AIDS education through television in Thunder Bay: “Nobody else was doing it... We were the only game in town, really.”⁶⁶ *Thunder Gay Magazine*’s safer sex workshops, live call-in episodes, and TV documentaries, therefore, performed several pedagogical functions.

Throughout its existence, *TGM* relied on the close-knit network of organizations that existed in Thunder Bay to disseminate information about HIV/AIDS to their viewers—namely,

⁶² David Belrose, Interview with the author, June 11, 2022.

⁶³ Malynnda Johnson, *HIV on TV: Popular Culture’s Epidemic* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2018), x-xii.

⁶⁴ McCaskell, *Queer Progress*, 344-345.

⁶⁵ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 163.

⁶⁶ Gwen O’Reilly, Interview with the author, August 11, 2022.

GTB and ACT-B. At the time, the AIDS Committee of Thunder Bay was the only AIDS Service Organization in the city, having been launched a year prior to *TGM*, in January 1986, with a mandate to “1. Educate the community 2. Provide support to AIDS patients (and/or the patient’s family or friends) 3. Educate the helping professions dealing with AIDS patients 4. Provide a media liaison with particular emphasis on a gay perspective and 5. Establish a resource base of topical and current information.”⁶⁷ Many of these goals were effectively shared with *Thunder Gay Magazine* and Gays of Thunder Bay; not only were there overlaps between the two organizations in terms of goals, but Doug Broman, David Belrose, and Michael Sobota were all part of ACT-B’s founding committee. Consequently, Broman would often call on the same ACT-B representatives, namely Belrose and Sobota, to share information on *Thunder Gay Magazine* regarding the services ACT-B offered—such as how to access support groups, confidential counselling, or financial help. In that sense, *Thunder Gay Magazine* sought to connect people who were HIV-positive to vital resources in the community, especially, as Michael Sobota underlined, “People living with AIDS didn’t connect with our services readily at the beginning.”⁶⁸

On behalf of ACT-B, these representatives would also dispel and counter misinformation about the virus by sharing various facts about HIV/AIDS in accessible, plain language, to help viewers navigate risks. Safer sex demonstrations, indeed, were particularly critical to *Thunder Gay Magazine*. As Broman emphasized: “AIDS is in Thunder Bay. People here have died from it and a number of persons have tested positive...The more we know about this disease, about safer sex, the more we talk openly about our concerns, the faster the spread of AIDS will be

⁶⁷ “ACT-B Formed,” *Thunder Gay Magazine* (Newsletter), March 86, 2, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds. The AIDS Committee of Thunder Bay was the second community-based AIDS organization in Ontario, after the AIDS Committee of Toronto.

⁶⁸ Michael Sobota, Interview with the author, August 30, 2022.

defeated.”⁶⁹ In multiple episodes, Belrose, Broman, and Sobota disseminated the most up-to-date information on safe and unsafe sexual activities which could prevent or lead to HIV infection. The show repeatedly promoted prophylactics such as condoms, the use of which was explicitly demonstrated on screen (Figure 24). Furthermore, these safer sex sessions predominantly included information on queer sexual practices, thus not only countering the often-moralizing AIDS education which promoted abstinence, but also supplementing the gaps in sex education which often focused on heterosexual sexual practices. By mainly directing AIDS information at gay and bisexual men, *TGM* hoped to address those who were “at highest risk” of HIV/AIDS in the late 1980s while simultaneously refuting the idea that AIDS was a “gay disease”—which explains why, in 1989, this demographic responded positively to the survey circulated by *Thunder Gay Magazine*.⁷⁰

TGM's safer sex segments not only highlighted the need to protect oneself during sexual intercourse to prevent HIV infection, but also represented people with AIDS as capable of sexual agency. *TGM* was adamant that, in the age of AIDS, (gay) sex could be “hot, sweaty, steamy, fun, pleasurable, and still very safe”—regardless of one’s HIV status.⁷¹ In that sense, the cable access show followed in the footsteps of its print predecessor, as the newsletter version of *TGM*, too, had spent significant time discussing safer sex over the years; in the Spring of 1987, for instance, *TGM*'s seventh anniversary edition dedicated to “healthy sex” contained several pages of safe sex advice accompanied by explicit imagery.⁷² Throughout *TGM*'s existence, safer sex was presented as a lifesaving act, as well as an act of self and community care.

⁶⁹ “Live Safer Sex Episode,” *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), May 26, 1988, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

⁷⁰ “Live Safer Sex Episode,” *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), May 26, 1988.

⁷¹ “Live Safer Sex Episode,” *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), May 26, 1988.

⁷² *Thunder Gay Magazine* (Newsletter), Spring 1987, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

Because *TGM* drew from the small number of organizations in Thunder Bay, it is likely, then, that viewers would have heard the same information about HIV/AIDS prevention repeated throughout the episodes and the series as a whole, all the while becoming acquainted with the services available to people with HIV/AIDS in Thunder Bay—as ACT-B and Gays of Thunder Bay’s phone numbers were repeatedly displayed on the screen during the program’s episodes. *TGM* thus effectively provided education about HIV/AIDS through the repetition of information, which viewers would access privately, without encountering stigma. At the same time, featuring the same set of ACT-B representatives worked to create a sense of familiarity, perhaps safety, for viewers, and made the organization appear more accessible.

TGM also provided a space to exchange information and communicate with viewers in real time, as the program was keen to engage and educate viewers through participation. To that end, *TGM* hosted various live episodes, during which callers could phone-in and ask questions about the virus. These live call-in episodes offer a glimpse into the ways in which HIV/AIDS affected the local community, as many viewers from various demographics called to have honest conversations about the spread of HIV/AIDS and the practices that led to transmission in a confidential manner. In fact, live call-ins about HIV/AIDS were quite popular, as indicated by the following disclaimers which often appeared on screen: “Our lines are full, keep trying;” “No more calls please” (Figure 25).

The popularity of the live shows not only indicates that people were watching the program, but that Thunder Bay viewers were, in fact, actively seeking out information on HIV/AIDS by watching *Thunder Gay Magazine*, which they perceived as a safe space to voice their questions and concerns. Through participation and dialogue about sensitive yet critical issues, *Thunder Gay Magazine* was able to impart viewers with knowledge about HIV/AIDS so

that they could make decision about their well-being, and that of their loved ones. Using cable access, *TGM* “refashion[ed] the uses of the television screen for local, specific, interactive education” about HIV/AIDS.⁷³

Safer sex episodes, however, presented the possibility of controversy. Aware that some viewers could find the explicit nature of safer sex demonstrations upsetting, *TGM* members often warned their audiences that they would “be using terms some might find offensive,” but that their aim was not to “offend but to educate.” Some episodes also contained a visual warning beforehand: “The following presentation contains coarse language. Viewer discretion is advised” (Figure 26). Despite these precautions, one safer-sex episode, in particular, caused a stir. In May of 1988, controversy arose over the use of the term “fuckerware parties,” which Sobota employed to discuss informal gatherings during which safe sex practices were demonstrated and talked about. After watching the episode, an offended viewer decided to bring his complaint to Thunder Bay’s mayor, Jack Masters.

Differing accounts about what ensued emerged from the interview process. Belrose, for instance, recalled that Masters came to the Maclean Hunter studio to view the tape, but that nothing came of it.⁷⁴ Sobota, on the other hand, did not mention Masters coming to the studio but remembered getting a call from the mayor’s office asking for a meeting. At the meeting, the mayor allegedly told Sobota that he was concerned about the reputation of the city, if such programming was meant to reflect the community of Thunder Bay. Sobota also recalled that there were meetings with the station manager, René Rees Boyer, who insisted on implementing new rules and regulations: “All the participants, the volunteers, everybody had to agree to them.

⁷³ Alexandra Juhasz, and Catherine Saalfeld, *AIDS TV: Identity, Community, and Alternative Video* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995), 23.

⁷⁴ Belrose, *Answering a Different Call*, 127-128.

It was about what you could and couldn't say on the air."⁷⁵ What emerges from these recollections is that, even if the program briefly came under fire for using a swear word during a safer sex demonstration, it was the use of the word “fuckerware,” not the demonstration itself, which was reprimanded. As Sobota explains:

We were demonstrating on dildos. We were talking about using dental dams for rimming. We were talking about pretty provocative stuff...[T]hat was pioneering in that era for public education on a community-based cable television program. They didn't try to stop us from doing any of that...Definitely, the F word was the worst thing I could have done.⁷⁶



Figure 24. David Belrose (left) and Michael Sobota (right) demonstrating how to use a condom on *Thunder Gay Magazine*.

“Safer Sex,” *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), November 26, 1987, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

⁷⁵ Michael Sobota, Interview with the author, August 30, 2022.

⁷⁶ Michael Sobota, Interview with the author, August 30, 2022.



Figure 25. Michael Sobota (left) and Doug Broman (right) take viewers calls about safer sex.

“Live Safer Sex Episode,” *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), May 26, 1988,
Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

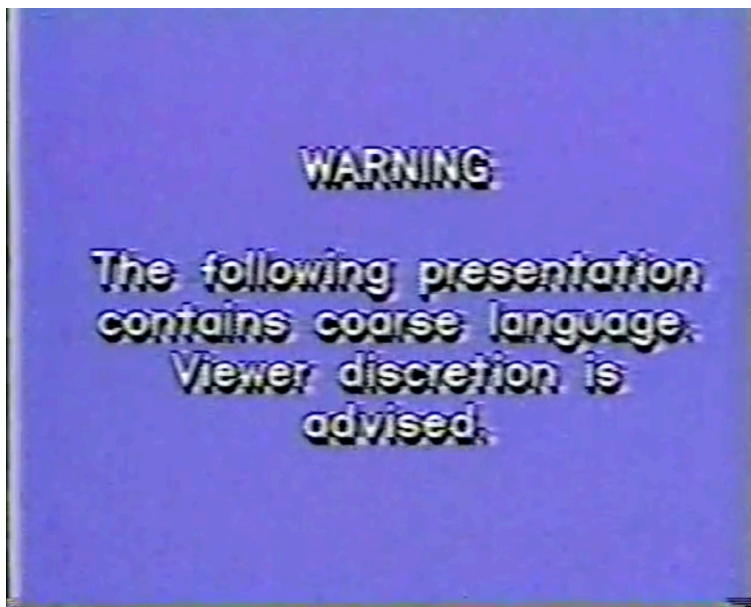


Figure 26. A content warning at the beginning of *Thunder Gay Magazine*.

“Live Safer Sex Episode,” *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), May 26, 1988,
Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

“Most of us Know Someone with AIDS”: Dealing with HIV/AIDS Through Compassion, Care, and Kinship

In addition to airing numerous safer sex episodes, *TGM* relied on testimonies from people with HIV/AIDS and their close relations to educate their viewers about the epidemic. By giving people with AIDS a voice, *TGM* was committed to upholding the idea that people with AIDS (PWAs) were experts on their own health, a concept born out of the Denver Principles outlined in 1983 by American PWAs at the second National Forum for AIDS in Denver, Colorado. The prologue of the declaration read: “We condemn attempts to label us as “victims,” a term which implies defeat, and we are only occasionally ‘patients,’ a term which implies passivity, helplessness, and dependence upon the care of others. We are “People With AIDS.”⁷⁷ In 1989, a group of Canadian activists, in conjunction with ACT UP New York, developed *Le Manifeste de Montréal* (the Montreal Manifesto), a “Declaration of the Universal Rights and Needs of People Living with HIV,” which further reiterated that people with HIV/AIDS’s “voices must be heard and their special needs met.”⁷⁸ Affirming the right to determine the conditions of their care, PWAs claimed authority to speak about their experiences of HIV/AIDS.

Direct address segments from people with AIDS broadcast on the program sought to humanize the virus for the audience. Broman, indeed, often reminded *TGM* viewers that: “Most of us know someone with AIDS. Most of us know someone who has died from it.”⁷⁹ By introducing people with AIDS onto the television screen, *Thunder Gay Magazine* fully ensured that most viewers could indeed say that they knew (of) someone living with AIDS in Thunder

⁷⁷ People with AIDS Coalition, “Founding Statement of People with AIDS/ARC (The Denver Principles), in Douglas Crimp, *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* (London, England: The MIT Press, 1988), 148-149.

⁷⁸ ACT UP, AIDS ACTION NOW! “Montreal Manifesto,” *AIDS Activist History Project*, <https://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/67>.

⁷⁹ “Live Safer Sex Episode,” *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), May 26, 1988.

Bay. In December of 1988, for instance, *TGM* aired an interview with “Ron,” founder of a group called “Living with AIDS” in Thunder Bay. Throughout the interview, Ron speaks with difficulty and emotion about his fears and struggles as a person living with AIDS. In having Ron on the show, *TGM* attempted to elicit compassion toward people with AIDS as a way of further educating their audiences about the virus.⁸⁰ *TGM* also featured families and friends of people with AIDS who shared their experiences of dealing with their loved ones’ illness. In an episode which aired shortly after Ron’s interview, a guest named “Trevor” discusses his relationship with a man who has AIDS. The interview, like Ron’s, paints a compassionate portrait of Trevor by delving into the challenges and emotions that he and his lover are experiencing, emphasizing the importance of talking about HIV/AIDS, of taking care of oneself, and of loving people with HIV/AIDS.⁸¹

Although these interviews are incredibly powerful, it is important to highlight that Trevor and Ron both wished to remain anonymous; only Trevor and Ron’s darkened silhouettes are visible on screen and their last names are not disclosed to the public (Figure 27). The interviews make clear that despite their willingness to openly talk about AIDS and the ways in which the epidemic is affecting them on a personal level, Trevor and Ron are not yet ready to be visible for fear of discrimination. This point is made even more salient in Ron’s interview: Ron, speaking to Broman about how people can reach “Living With AIDS,” explains that referrals to the group would be made through GTB or ACT-B, for fear of repercussions if the founding members of the organization were known publicly: “We really don’t have any affiliation with them directly, but

⁸⁰ Episode title/number unknown, *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), December 13, 1988, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

⁸¹ “Support Groups,” *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), January 31, 1989, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

we're going to work on a referral system so that none of us will be persecuted from trying to do this. I can't afford to lose my job today because I put my phone number on [television]."⁸²



Figure 27. “Ron,” a person with AIDS, appears in silhouette on *Thunder Gay Magazine*.

Episode title/number unknown, *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), December 13, 1988, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

Whereas many critiques have pointed out that the silhouette technique, often used by the mainstream media in early reports on HIV/AIDS, typically locates HIV/AIDS as a site of shame, *Thunder Gay Magazine*'s use of the technique to anonymize its participants is more complex, and points to an ambivalent relationship to visibility and privacy, with the television screen simultaneously conceived as a both a public and private platform.⁸³ On the one hand, the *TGM*

⁸² Episode title/number unknown, *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), December 13, 1988.

⁸³ Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 78; Stephen Vider, “‘Picture a Coalition’: Community Caregiving and the Politics of HIV/AIDS at

team was boldly giving a voice to queer people to talk about HIV/AIDS at a time when these topics were not often talked about explicitly. As a result, other gay people in Thunder Bay could access this information privately, at home. On the other hand, while the small team of recurring guests and hosts were openly discussing HIV/AIDS, their guests were often not willing to do so. As Dagmar Brunow emphasizes, “for queer individuals, visibility comes with an increased risk of vulnerability in forms of surveillance, governmentality, policing, pathologizing, homophobic or transphobic violence.”⁸⁴ Gwen O’Reilly echoed this point during our interview:

Outing was a big deal. Part of the issue with *Thunder Gay Magazine* was that, if people appeared on the show, they had to accept the fact that they were outed at work and everywhere else. That was a big commitment to decide to go and be a part of that show whether as a guest or a participant. You had to accept the disclosure of your identity, even though you just never know who’s going to end up watching. It’s cable access, so supposedly, it’s not too many people. But you’re still broadcasting yourself to a segment of the population, no matter which sexual orientation they identify with.⁸⁵

HIV/AIDS further compounded these issues, as gay people with AIDS would often have to out themselves as both queer and HIV positive. Consequently, as Michael Sobota remembers, people with HIV/AIDS in Thunder Bay were often “reluctant...to come forward and speak” about their experiences.⁸⁶ Yet, a few people in the city and beyond were still determined to put a face on the disease by appearing on television; in that sense, *TGM*’s interviews with Trevor and Ron anticipated three documentaries about HIV/AIDS which aired on the program: *Ken* (1989), *Her Giveaway* (1989), and *Keewaywin (Journeys)* (1990).

Home,” in *The Queerness of Home: Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Domesticity after World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 205.

⁸⁴ Dagmar Brunow, “Naming, Shaming, Framing: The Ambivalence of Queer Visibility in Audio-Visual Archives,” *The Power of Vulnerability: Mobilising Affect in Feminist, Queer and Anti-Racist Media Cultures*, ed. Koivunen, Katariina Kyrölä, and Ingrid Ryberg (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 176.

⁸⁵ Gwen O’Reilly, Interview with the author, August 11, 2022.

⁸⁶ Michael Sobota, Interview with the author, August 30, 2022.

Ken (1989)⁸⁷

A deeply personal narrative of resilience and compassion, the thirty-minute video produced by *Thunder Gay Magazine* focuses on Doug Broman's former lover, Kenneth (Ken) Plante, who faces the camera to share his battle with the virus, while his caregivers—namely the *TGM* crew, Doug Broman, David Belrose, and Andre Chamberlain—take turn expressing their feelings about Ken's disease. Throughout the documentary, Ken talks candidly about his experience of HIV/AIDS, and the ways in which the illness has impacted his daily routine. The effects of AIDS on his body are made evident through the presence of archival photographs of a younger, healthier Ken, which stand in sharp contrast to the man who appears on camera, visibly emaciated and shaking, struggling to convey his experience with the disease (Figures 28-29).

The documentary, however, refrains from shedding a pitiful light on its protagonist by delving into the small joys Ken still experiences, as the latter is depicted as having kept his happy demeanour and his sense of humour throughout his illness. In other words, even though the virus is wreaking havoc on his immune system, Ken's character, the documentary shows, remains intact. David Belrose, for instance, repeatedly insists that Ken "is still the same person that he's always been," and whom he loves and cares for deeply. In that sense, *Ken* also purposely avoids treating HIV/AIDS as a moral issue, portraying the virus as a medical problem and not, as conservative voices of the time would have it, a character flaw.

⁸⁷ "Ken," *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), January 11, 1989, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.



Figure 28. Kenneth (Ken) Plante being interviewed on *Ken* (1989).

“Ken,” *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), January 11, 1989, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.



Figure 29. An archival photograph of a younger Ken opens the documentary.

“Ken,” *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), January 11, 1989, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

Place and location play an important part in the documentary and further help bring viewers closer to the subject matter. In *Ken*, Thunder Bay becomes a place of care, as opposed to larger cities where the epidemic is raging. On the one hand, Toronto is presented as the source of Ken's HIV infection. Viewers are told that, after meeting Broman at a local gay bar in 1979 and dating each other for six years, Ken moved away to Toronto, where he contracted HIV in 1988. Canada's largest city is also framed as alienating and lonely, unable to meet Ken's everyday needs as a terminally ill person, as Ken testifies:

I was having a difficult time in Toronto, mainly because I found the city too fast after I got sick. I found it very difficult to get shopping done and things like that. Laundry was a really big problem for me. I often had to wait a long time until my roommate finally had time to do it for me. I was fortunate in that he'd cooked my suppers, but I'd have to rely on myself for breakfast and lunch. Often, I was so lethargic that I didn't eat during the day.

By contrast, Thunder Bay becomes the place where Ken is surrounded by loving, familiar figures who are all able to care for him—a site of community where he can finally rest.

The documentary also takes viewers away from the Maclean Hunter studios and into Broman's house, where Ken is being taken care of. Even though Ken is terminally ill, a certain warmth emanates from the documentary, as Ken and his friends are shot in a comfortable interior space, surrounded by plants, couches, and armchairs. A cat can even be seen lounging next to Belrose while the latter is being interviewed. By moving to the intimate space of the home, *Thunder Gay Magazine* "sought to activate domestic space" not simply as "a venue for screening their work," but also "as a site to depict and document the fight against AIDS."⁸⁸

Ken further exemplifies the ways in which queer and HIV chosen families responded to state neglect by providing care to people infected with HIV/AIDS. Although Ken does mention having visited his biological family a few times since his return, he also explains that they live

⁸⁸ Vider, "Picture a Coalition," 203.

“out of town” and that, being too tired to travel, he would rather spend his final days with his chosen family. *Ken* is thus a moving portrayal of a network of care which does not rely on biological expectations of kinship. At the same time, the documentary also refuses to simply relay the care of people with AIDS to their chosen families, and encourages biological families to equally support their loved ones with HIV.⁸⁹ Ken, for instance, clearly expresses what a supportive environment can look like for a person with HIV—no matter who is caring for them; after being prompted by Broman, off-camera, about what his friends could do for him in Thunder Bay, Ken replies, without hesitation, that they should “visit more often.” He continues:

[My friends] all said they would give me the support I need. But a lot of the support I need is not just driving me to the doctor’s office or helping me get my prescriptions, or whatever. It’s keeping me company, you know...when you’re alone you have too much time to think about the negative aspects of how you feel...but if somebody’s there it’s a distraction from that. Plus, it gives you a little happiness.

By outlining in detail how he would like to be supported as a person with HIV/AIDS, Ken simultaneously instructs viewers who might care for someone with the virus on how to do so appropriately and sensitively.

Ken gives voice both to the person being cared-for and to their support system. As the camera turns to Ken’s caregivers, viewers are privy to Broman and the *TGM* team expressing their personal feelings about Ken. No a longer a detached television host, Broman allows himself to become vulnerable in front of the camera; in multiple scenes, he is seen journaling about his feelings and talking about his relationship with Ken in voiceover, as intimate pictures of the two of them appear on the screen (Figure 30). One section of the documentary speaks powerfully to

⁸⁹ Marty Fink, *Forget Burial: HIV Kinship, Disability, and Queer/Trans Narratives of Care* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 32.

the importance of chosen families and queer kinships, as Broman explains how his relationship with Ken has evolved over time:

I see myself as a friend, a confidant. A brother almost. I don't see myself as a romantic partner. A care partner, but not a romantic partner anymore. This is something that's deeper than anything I felt for him before. It's a true, kind of pure—very crystal pure—love. So, I have to help him when I can. And one of the things I have to help him with is his own death.

What *Ken* makes abundantly clear, therefore, is that HIV is a “kinship disease,” which impacts relationships, biological and chosen families, and communities, as much as it impacts individuals affected with the virus.⁹⁰ In that sense, *Ken* also conveys the message that the community of Thunder Bay as a whole is impacted by and should care about HIV/AIDS.

Throughout the documentary, his caregivers mention an array of feelings ranging from anxiety, sorrow, guilt, anger, to loneliness, depression, and powerlessness. Aware that this is an emotionally trying time in their lives, all participants emphasize that caring for Ken has taken a toll on their mental health. The need to take care of themselves, in addition to caring for Ken, is made paramount. Andre Chamberlain, for instance, insists that if he “fall[s] apart” he won't be “good to Ken, or good to anybody.” As the main themes of the documentary, care and compassion are weaved through various voices and perspectives and put at the centre of the fight against HIV/AIDS. As Stephen Vider underlines, documentaries like *Ken* emphasize “ordinary, everyday acts of caretaking and self-care.” In doing so, “private acts of support and resilience” become “as personally and politically significant as street protests.”⁹¹

⁹⁰ Ellen Block and Will McGrath, *Infected Kin: Orphan Care and AIDS in Lesotho* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2019), 7.

⁹¹ Vider, “Picture a Coalition,” 205.



Figure 30. A tender photograph of Plante and Broman kissing.

“Ken,” *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), January 11, 1989, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

Because of its ability to mobilize feelings of compassion toward people with HIV/AIDS to educate the residents of Thunder Bay about the epidemic, *Ken* received high praise from the local community. *Thunder Gay Magazine* won the award for Best Feature on Television from the Thunder Bay Press Club in 1990, as the panel judged Ken to be “a gentle, non-sensational moving piece of work that speaks to the heart.”⁹² The documentary was also recognized at the national level at the Canadian Cable Television’s Association’s Annual National Cable Awards of 1990.⁹³ Belrose credited the intimate portrayal of the virus for the documentary’s success, although he admitted being surprised by the acclaim:

I was quite surprised; I don’t know why. The fact that it got such recognition from the wider community, with the climate of discrimination that was taking place in Canada and in North America at the time. It was really great to see that it got some recognition from the wider community, and that it did probably help change some people’s minds

⁹² Episode title/number unknown, *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), March 20, 1990, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

⁹³ “Outing,” *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), November 6, 1990, Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

about HIV and AIDS, seeing it through such an intimate portrayal. It's really...a beautiful documentary.⁹⁴

Today, the documentary is all the more impactful with the knowledge that Ken has since long passed from AIDS; the footage of Ken talking directly to the camera becomes haunted with Ken's on-screen presence and simultaneous absence. As Ryan Conrad notes in his analysis of the Toronto-based cable access show, *Toronto Living with AIDS*: "Much like the way photographs functioned during the Holocaust as a technology of cultural memory, [AIDS] videotapes...serve as a vivid rejoinder against forgetting how the battles against HIV/AIDS were fought."⁹⁵ In the case of *Ken*, current viewers are reminded of the fact that these battles were not only fought in the streets, but inside people's homes and within circles of care.

Her Giveaway: A Spiritual Journey With AIDS (1989)

If Ken primarily centres the struggles of a white gay man dealing with HIV/AIDS, *Thunder Gay Magazine* also aired works by and about Indigenous peoples which encouraged Indigenous communities and the Thunder Bay community at large to show compassion toward people with HIV/AIDS, while providing education about the virus that was culturally appropriate. On March 20, 1990, *TGM* aired a twenty-two-minute documentary entitled *Her Giveaway: A Spiritual Journey with AIDS (1989)*, produced by Indigenous filmmaker Mona Smith and funded by the Minnesota American Indian AIDS Task Force.⁹⁶ Thunder Bay's close geographical proximity to the state of Minnesota afforded the possibility of cultural exchanges

⁹⁴ David Belrose, Interview with the author, June 1, 2022.

⁹⁵ Conrad, "Cable Access Queer," 4.

⁹⁶ Mona Smith, *Her Giveaway a Spiritual Journey with AIDS*, 1989, featured in episode title/number unknown, *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), March 20, 1990, Lakehead University, David Belrose Fonds. The tape is also available at York University's Sound & Moving Image Library (SMIL Storage, ACT 0171).

across the border, as Gwen O'Reilly explains: "Thunder Bay is quite close to Duluth...That was sort of the closest major centre, and there were actually gay bars there. People locally had connections with those communities. That was a source of other organizers and educators."⁹⁷ By collaborating with Indigenous organizations as opposed to speaking for them, *TGM* continued to show its commitment to devolve authority to people with lived experience, challenging top-down models of knowledge transmission.

Her Giveaway spotlights Ojibwe activist Carole LaFavor (1948-2011), an HIV positive lesbian, mother, and recovered drug user.⁹⁸ Like *Ken*, most of the documentary revolves around seated interviews of LaFavor in what appears to be her living room, as well as interviews with her support system: her young daughter, Theresa, as well as friends/partners, doctors, and medicine men (Figure 31). *Her Giveaway*, however, does not solely locate care in the space of the home. On many occasions, LaFavor is filmed walking and being interviewed outside; images of nature, in fact, open and close the documentary, making it clear that nature is an integral part of LaFavor's healing journey, in addition to western medicine and her support system (Figure 32). Nature is presented as a caregiver to which Indigenous peoples should return, as LaFavor explains:

We've gotten caught up in the concrete and telephone wires and the fast cars and the fancy TVs... What I think that we need to do as a people is to return...to our native place. The place that really has never left us in our spirits...the place of dawns and sunsets, and the place of deer and *makwa* [black bear] and *migizi* [eagle]. The place where being out...brings comfort and rest to our souls. Because whether we are in the process of dying or we are in the process of living, this is really what sustains us.

⁹⁷ Gwen O'Reilly, Interview with the author, August 11, 2022.

⁹⁸ Gabriel Estrada, "Ojibwe Lesbian Visual AIDS: On the Red Road with Carole LaFavor, *Her Giveaway* (1988), and Native LGBTQ2 Film History," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 20, no. 3-4 (2016): 395.

By incorporating Ojibwe traditions and beliefs, the documentary thus seeks to educate Indigenous peoples on how to deal with the epidemic in a culturally sensitive manner.

Using interviews with LaFavor as well as direct address segments featuring various gay, lesbian, and Two-Spirit community members to convey basic facts about HIV transmission, the tape also communicates information about HIV/AIDS that is directed specifically at Indigenous peoples. In doing so, the documentary works to dispel some of the myths that prevented Indigenous peoples from receiving adequate care and education about the virus—such as the fact that AIDS was supposedly “a white man’s disease,” or that there were “no gays and lesbians among Indigenous communities.”



Figure 31. Carol LaFavor seated in her living room with a picture of her daughter in the background.

Episode title/number unknown, *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), March 20, 1990, Lakehead University, David Belrose Fonds.



Figure 32. LaFavor being interviewed outside, sitting next to a stream of water.

Episode title/number unknown, *Thunder Gay Magazine* (TV), March 20, 1990, Lakehead University, David Belrose Fonds.

Additionally, *Her Giveaway* highlights the ways in which the trauma of genocide and colonial displacement directly impacts HIV/AIDS transmission among Indigenous populations. For instance, LaFavor admits to her previous inability to engage in safe sex when under the influence of substances. Consequently, HIV/AIDS is presented as being part of a mosaic of intertwined and systemic issues that Indigenous peoples have had to experience because of colonization in North America:

[Indigenous] people are incredibly resilient. We know how to survive. We were taught how to survive by drawing upon the spirits of all living things. We survived smallpox. We survived tuberculosis. We survived war and starvation. We survived the government who came in and stole our means of survival and then turned their backs on us. We survived chemical dependency...AIDS is the latest challenge.

It is this same spirit of resilience which enables LaFavor to speak in front of the camera about the losses she has faced—or is about to face; in particular, LaFavor emotionally reflects on the fear

of missing out on her daughter's life. Her daughter, Theresa, also expresses the difficulties she has been having whilst dealing with her mother's diagnosis in front of the camera. The video emphasizes that Theresa has not been shielded away from the reality of HIV/AIDS but that, on the contrary, she has been fully involved in her mother's fight against AIDS, accompanying her on visits to the medicine man or to her AIDS support group. As Gabriel Estrada underlines, this reflection is "a valuable lesson for the [Indigenous] target audiences viewing the film. It lets those at risk for AIDS or infected by HIV envision a future that includes community support integral for healing."⁹⁹

LaFavor concludes the documentary by reminding viewers that Indigenous people with HIV/AIDS do exist, and that they, perhaps more than ever, need the support of their communities to get through this next crisis: "I think reservations need to get ready for those of us who have it because we're gonna want to come home to die."

Keewaywin (Journeys): AIDS in the First Nations (1990)

Shortly after airing *Her Giveaway* on TGM, Doug Broman, in association with the AIDS Committee of Thunder Bay, went on to produce, write, and direct *Keewaywin (Journeys): AIDS in the First Nations (1990)*, which also aired on the cable television program.¹⁰⁰ The nineteen-minute-long video follows Manitoba-born Cree actor Billy Merasty as a person with HIV/AIDS who is making the journey home from Toronto to the reserve—the same journey that LaFavor is alluding to at the end of *Her Giveaway* (Figure 33). Shot outside of Thunder Bay on the Lake Helen Reserve in Nipigon, Ontario, the video departs from the interview focus of the previous

⁹⁹ Estrada, "Ojibwe Lesbian Visual AIDS," 397.

¹⁰⁰ Doug Broman and the AIDS Committee of Thunder Bay, *Keewaywin (Journeys): AIDS in the First Nations*, 1990, Sound & Moving Image Library at York University (SMIL Storage, Video ACT 0215).

two documentaries by embracing a storytelling format to provide culturally specific information about HIV/AIDS. As Roanne Thomas explains, Indigenous storytelling works as a “source of connection with traditional values, community, and spirituality” and is “valued as a means of conveying experiences of health and healing.”¹⁰¹ By centring Indigenous ways of knowing in order to transmit effective information about the virus, the tape’s format, in addition to its content and slow pace, offers a pathway to discussing HIV/AIDS within Indigenous communities.

In the documentary, Indigenous peoples are encouraged to be more compassionate toward people who, like Merasty’s character, may return to the reserve after having contracted HIV/AIDS. The camera follows Merasty’s journey home from the city, while the tape’s narrator, Cree elder Vern Harper, explains in direct address to the camera: “We [were taught to] care for one another. We respected *all life*. Now we must care for some of our people that have this disease” (Figure 34). Harper further discourages the community from passing judgement on people with HIV/AIDS, no matter the source of their infection: “Some First Nations people who already have AIDS might be homosexual or bisexual men. Some might abuse drugs. These are not bad people. They need our love and support.” The tape echoes *Her Giveaway* in that it draws upon traditions to fight homophobic sentiments, explaining, for instance, that “men who sleep with other men” had their place among Indigenous societies prior to colonization. Finally, protecting oneself against HIV/AIDS and accepting people with HIV/AIDS is depicted as a way to ensure the survival not only of the individual, but of the community as whole. The documentary makes it abundantly clear that safe sex, for Indigenous peoples, becomes more than an act of care—it becomes an act of community survival.

¹⁰¹ Roanne Thomas, et al. “Exploring the Intersections of Storytelling and Visual Arts: Indigenous Peoples’ Experiences of Cancer,” *Storytelling, Self, Society* 15, no. 1 (2019): 74.



Figure 33. Billy Merasty's character makes the journey to the reserve.

Doug Broman and ACT-B, *Keewaywin (Journeys): AIDS in the First Nations*, 1990, Sound & Moving Image Library at York University (SMIL Storage, Video ACT 0215).

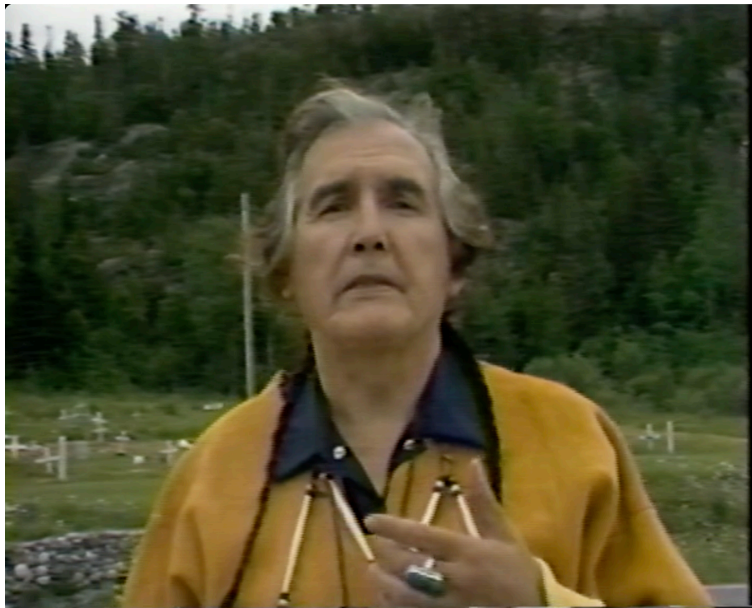


Figure 34. Elder Vern Harper shares facts about HIV/AIDS.

Doug Broman and ACT-B *Keewaywin (Journeys): AIDS in the First Nations*, 1990, Sound & Moving Image Library at York University (SMIL Storage, Video ACT 0215).

Keewaywin was originally supposed to be accompanied by an educational pamphlet aimed at Indigenous communities in and around Thunder Bay. Broman, however, never completed this work; by the time the video aired, Broman had distanced himself from the AIDS Committee of Thunder Bay, and *Thunder Gay Magazine*'s end was near.¹⁰² *TGM*, indeed, did not survive past 1991, when Broman produced and aired a special investigative report called "Out of Touch." The video, an attack on the AIDS Committee of Thunder Bay, accused the organization of not meeting the needs of the communities that it was supposed to serve. Specifically, Broman strongly felt that the organization had not done enough for Ken when he was sick, which led him to produce and air the investigative report in the aftermath of Ken's death. The egregious documentary, which participants have called Broman's "swan song," led to a bitter conflict between Broman and the members of ACT-B/*TGM*.

At the time the documentary aired, O'Reilly felt separated from the issue, having distanced herself from the program because she felt like "[her] contribution wasn't valued;" however, Sobota and Belrose were deeply affected by the video, as both were close friends of Broman's and key members of ACT-B.¹⁰³ Sobota remembers that it was "an extremely difficult and tough time" for ACT-B, whose credibility was damaged by the report—although the board of the AIDS Committee of Thunder Bay was able to air an eight-minute rebuttal of the episode, which, according to Belrose, further "cemented the split between Doug and Michael and the AIDS Committee."¹⁰⁴ After putting an abrupt end to the program, Broman moved back to his hometown of Fort Frances, cutting off all contact with *TGM* members. Through the AIDS Committee of Thunder Bay, Belrose and Sobota, however, continued working with Maclean

¹⁰² Michael Sobota, Interview with the author, August 30, 2022.

¹⁰³ Gwen O'Reilly, Interview with the author, August 11, 2022.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Sobota, Interview with the author, August 30, 2022; David Belrose, Interview with the author, June 1, 2022.

Hunter to produce shows that dealt with HIV/AIDS such as *Life Line: AIDS And You* (1992-1993), a four-part series produced and hosted by David Belrose looking at AIDS “from a variety of perspectives” (Figure 35).

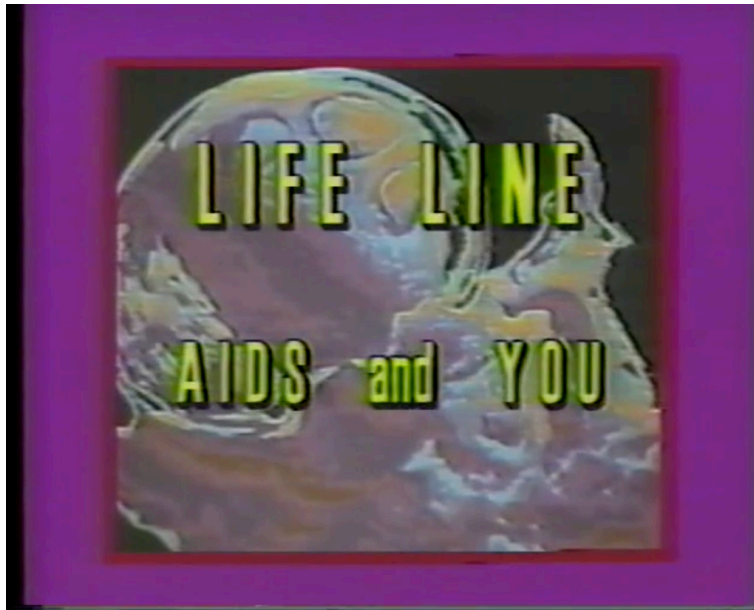


Figure 35. AIDS Committee of Thunder Bay, *Life Line: AIDS and You* (1992-1993).

Lakehead University Archives, David Belrose Fonds.

Despite the controversies surrounding the end of *Thunder Gay Magazine*, the program’s episodes dedicated to HIV/AIDS exemplify how, in the face of a devastating epidemic, individuals and communities took it upon themselves to care for one another by sharing critical information about the virus with their local community. *Thunder Gay Magazine* saw television as having the potential to reach into people’s homes directly to “support people impacted by AIDS” as well as to “educat[e] a broader public.”¹⁰⁵ In that sense, Broman and his team

¹⁰⁵ Vider, “Picture a Coalition,” 183.

“harnessed available technologies to create vital spaces in an unfolding pandemic,” the success of which they were able to demonstrate at the 1989 Montreal Conference.¹⁰⁶ Community television, the survey showed, was the best way to deliver AIDS education to gay and bisexual men in Thunder Bay. The results were outlined on a poster designed by Broman and Sobota: “It wasn’t academic at all. It was quite flamboyant. It featured the *Thunder Gay* logo, the AIDS Committee of Thunder Bay logo, splashy, bold print about the survey and test results. I think there was even a self-congratulation on the bottom.”¹⁰⁷ The conference presentation concluded:

Community television is an important media to access difficult to reach targeted populations. Community television can be utilized at little financial cost if there is a volunteer pool available. Community television rallies volunteers from within the gay and lesbian community if they see the project to have real and specific benefit to their brothers and sisters.¹⁰⁸

Although the survey determined that gay and bisexual men were the main beneficiaries of the program, race was notably absent from the results. *TGM*’s coalitional work and attempts to include Two-Spirited Indigenous peoples in their HIV/AIDS outreach efforts, however, suggest that it is likely the magazine also reached racialized gay and bisexual men from various communities. Furthermore, because of *Thunder Gay Magazine*’s efforts to include the plight of women and HIV as well as its discussion of trans issues within their programming, the show also potentially reached these demographics in ways that were unaccounted for.

Despite the efforts of activists in Thunder Bay and beyond, it would be another five years before the advent of HIV treatments in Canada; by that time, the LGBTQ2+ movement in the country and in Ontario had started following new paths, propelled by the damaging effects of

¹⁰⁶ Cifor, Marika, and Claire McDonald, “I Hope We Leave More of a Record,” *Feminist Media Histories* 9, no. 1 (2023): 94.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Sobota, Interview with the author, August 30, 2022.

¹⁰⁸ “V International Conference on AIDS: The Scientific and Social Challenge,” Montreal, Quebec, Canada, June 4-9, 1989 (Ottawa, Canada: International Development Research Centre, 1989).

HIV/AIDS on the community. These changes were captured by cable access programs like the one discussed in the next chapter, *Cable 10%/10%QTV*.

PROLOGUE: WELCOME TO THE GAY 90s

The HIV/AIDS epidemic had a profound effect on gay and lesbian communities. It also had a profound effect on the kinds of legislations the movement wanted to see enacted in the 1980s and 1990s. As David Rayside underlines, relationship issues, in particular, became increasingly important. He writes: “Partners of men who were infected risked having no access in hospitals, and no say in the event of death. The increased visibility given to sexual difference by the rapid spread of the epidemic also induced more same-sex couples to become open about their relationships.”¹ As a result, Rayside posits, “lesbian and gay employees began launching grievances or human rights complaints against provincial authorities to get their partners covered by workplace benefit plans or social insurance programs.”²

Although these new demands were a response to HIV/AIDS, they were also continuation of “the widening protection of individual rights,” which had begun in the 1970s when gay and lesbian activists had demanded inclusion in Human Rights Codes and taken further hold upon the creation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.³ At the same time, however, the rights of the individuals were also being expanded to include the rights of couples and families.⁴ Organizations like EGALE (Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere), which had been created in 1986, and the Campaign for Equal Families, founded in 1994, would spearhead the fight for relationship and family recognition in Canada.

¹ David Rayside, *Queer Inclusions, Continental Divisions: Recognition of Sexual Diversity in Canada and the United States* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 95.

² Rayside, 95.

³ Rayside, 94.

⁴ Miriam Smith, *Political Institutions and Lesbian and Gay Rights in the United States and Canada* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2008), 109.

In 1990, Toronto became the first of Canada's biggest cities to extend workplace benefits to the partners of its lesbian and gay employees, while gay and lesbian relationships whose cases were taken to court began winning major victories throughout the decade.⁵ Eventually, in 1999, the Ontario Legislative Assembly provided same-gender couples "with the same statutory rights and responsibilities as applied to heterosexual common-law spouses."⁶ Federally, in April 2000, following a landmark Supreme Court decision in 1999, the government of Canada adopted Bill C-23, the Modernization of Benefits and Obligations Act, which gave same-gender and opposite gender couples the same benefit rights. Marriage, then, became the next target of LGBTQ2+ activists, and "the dominant 'gay rights' issue in national politics" in Canada.⁷ And, alongside the push for relationship recognition, the rights of queer parents and their children also became important to the movement. As Miriam Smith underlines, "the late 1980s and early 1990s saw the growth in numbers and visibility of lesbian and gay families as a social fact, a new phenomenon that had been hidden from view in the previous generation."⁸ Consequently, the push for parenting rights would become a predominant issue throughout the 1990s as well.

As a result, these campaigns for visibility and legal inclusion also meant that "the heterosexual public was more aware, and better educated about [queer people]."⁹ As Tom Warner highlights: "Thousands and thousands of queers all over Canada had been able to see others like them on television, in newspapers, and in the streets, and been able to find the strength to come out of the closet."¹⁰ Parallel to this movement "out of the closet," Miriam Smith

⁵ Rayside, *Queer Inclusions*, 96-97; Smith, *Political Institutions and Lesbian and Gay Rights*, 116.

⁶ Tim McCaskell, *Queer Progress: From Homophobia to Homonationalism* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016), 459.

⁷ Smith, *Political Institutions and Lesbian and Gay Rights*, 109.

⁸ Smith, 80.

⁹ Tom Warner, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 215.

¹⁰ Warner, 215.

concur, the 1990s were a period in which the queer community “flourished at the urban level,” having developed a “recognizable infrastructure” which included social and recreational organizations, AIDS service organizations, gay and lesbian businesses, Pride celebrations, parents and friends groups, and queer-friendly churches.¹¹ The community was growing, as demonstrated by the increased use of the acronym “LGBT” to include bisexual and transgender people, whose activism was also expanding.

In other words, the 1990s “saw a reformist, and even, in the view of some, conservative and assimilationist activism” take hold in Canada.¹² At the same time, as Tom Warner and Gary Kinsman highlight, “the lesbian and gay movement was proceeding along two parallel tracks.”¹³ Whereas a large part of the movement became almost exclusively rights-oriented, hoping to attain equality “along the lines of traditional heterosexual standards,”¹⁴ others kept “pushing the envelope in areas of sexual expression, community standards, harassment of queer sexuality, rejection of victimization and vilification, and assertion of visibility and pride.”¹⁵ This strand saw rights-based demands, or “rights-talk,” as Miriam Smith puts it, with skepticism and as “attempting to fit queer relationships, in all of their diverse and often radical forms, into the constraints of oppressive state-sanctioned coupledness based on monogamy, inequality, and sexism.”¹⁶ Also born out of the AIDS movement, the new “queer” generation refuted the assimilationist demands of the mainstream LGBT movement in favour of advocating for a movement that would be more inclusive of “sexual minorities and marginalized peoples” rather

¹¹ Smith, *Political Institutions and Lesbian and Gay Rights*, 79.

¹² Manon Tremblay, *Queer Mobilizations: Social Movement Activism and Canadian Public Policy* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2015), 20.

¹³ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 191; Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Homo and Hetero Sexualities* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1996), 375.

¹⁴ Nick J. Mulé, “Human Rights Questioned: A Queer Perspective,” *Canadian Social Work Review* 35, no. 1 (2018): 141.

¹⁵ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 191.

¹⁶ Warner. 218.

than pursue respectability politics.¹⁷ Therefore, it is unsurprising that queer cable access TV programs of the 1990s were pulled between these two strands, as I demonstrate in the following chapter.

¹⁷ Warner, 261.

CHAPTER SEVEN: “WE’VE COME A LONG WAY, BABY” (OR HAVE WE?): COMPLICATING *CABLE 10%/10% QTV*’S NARRATIVE OF QUEER PROGRESS (1995-2001)

In 2001, the team of *10% QTV* (formerly known as *Cable 10%* and shortened as “*10%*” thereafter in this chapter), a Toronto-based program which had started airing on Rogers Cable TV six years prior, posted the following message on their website:

When “Cable 10%” first hit the air in the fall of 1995, it was revolutionary. Despite being preceded by a similar Toronto community TV program in 1972, people were still shocked that queers could have their own television show!¹ In six seasons, more than 100 episodes and almost a thousand stories, 10% chronicled queer love, families, tragedy, causes, religions, politics, fantasies, fetishes and fun for millions of viewers in Ontario - and in fact the world. Six years after 10%’s debut, there are queer leading roles in movies and television - even a TV series entirely focused on the lives of “queer folk.” We have new human rights protections and same-sex benefits, and a million revelers in the streets on Pride Day.²

Yet, despite this teleological narrative of “queer progress,” the message warned that LGBTQ2+ people should not be complacent:

But those six years did not spell the end of ignorance, intolerance and hatred. Our gains can be lost just as quickly if we take them for granted or forget where we’ve come from. We have indeed come a long way, baby. Our heartfelt thanks to everyone who helped bring us this far. Our best wishes for those who continue to cherish and fight for queer freedom and equality everywhere.

This brief message, which signalled the end of the show, reveals much about the changing environment in which the program unfolded. On the one hand, the post’s concerns with

¹ As shown in this dissertation, this assertion is inaccurate; there were, in fact, many community access shows in Canada between 1972 and 1995.

² “10% QTV– (Originally Cable 10%)”, Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives Website, The Internet Archive, <https://web.archive.org/web/20020202041443/http://clga.ca/Material/MovingImages/docs/10percentQtv/10percentIntro.htm>.

LGBTQ2+ rights, benefits, and the popularity of Pride Day point to the larger climate of acceptance in Ontario and Canada at large in the 1990s and 2000s—a trajectory which the program volunteers hoped to see continue. The terminology used—“queers,” “queer love,” “queer freedom”—are also indicative a shift in identity politics, as the “gay and lesbian” community made way to the “queer” community in an effort to become more inclusive, following the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis which led to a more expansive recognition of the politics of sexuality and gender. On the other hand, the post also points to technological changes which impacted not only the program itself, but cable access as whole. Public and private media outlets were now showing a stronger interest in representing queer lives; series like *Will & Grace* (NBC, 1998-2006) and *Queer As Folk* (Showtime, 2000-2005) were capturing the attention of mainstream audiences, and TV celebrities—like Ellen DeGeneres—were coming out both on screen and in real life.³ Further, the advent of the digital and the Internet provided new opportunities to share information and stories about queer communities, as demonstrated by *10%*'s own use of an online platform to communicate their message, thereby “lessening the need for LGBTQ community television on cable access” over time, as Lauren Herold explains.⁴

10% thus aired at a momentous juncture in Canadian queer politics, culture, and history. In this chapter, I argue that some of *10%*'s main preoccupations—such as consumerism, entertainment and leisure, and assimilation-driven politics—mirrored the larger changes that the community was undergoing at the dawn of the new millennium. These changes, I show, correspond to a “homonormative” turn in North American gay and lesbian politics in the 1990s. To that end, I offer an overview of *10%*'s programming and spend some time with the show's

³ Wendy Hilton-Morrow, and Kathleen Battles, *Sexual Identities and the Media: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 73.

⁴ Lauren Herold, “Cable Comes Out: LGBTQ Community Television on New York Public Access Stations” (PhD Dissertation, Chicago: Northwestern University 2021): 216.

coverage of the 1998 Pride festivities in Toronto, which, I argue, is especially representative of the new concerns of the gay and lesbian movement of the late 1990s. I also dedicate a portion of my analysis to the show's coverage of HIV/AIDS to investigate how the program navigated what cultural theorist Dion Kagan calls "a post-crisis" world after the introduction of Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART) at the Vancouver AIDS Conference of 1996. Unsurprisingly, *10%*'s coverage of HIV/AIDS post-1996 largely follows "the move toward the neoliberal normative" embraced by mainstream gay and lesbian politics.⁵

However, as mentioned in the introduction, *10%* escapes easy categorizations. Although the majority of *10%*'s programming did broadcast a sanitized and commercial version of gay and lesbian life, the show was also very much the product of the emerging "queer" culture of the late 1990s. The program, indeed, documented the rise of Toronto's distinctly queer scene, with an emphasis on "dyke culture." And, as it prided itself on being "queer television as diverse as our community," the show also gave a platform to an array of voices which resisted assimilation within the mainstream. This tension, which is particularly noticeable in the program's second season, was partly the result of dissenting views between *10%* participants. Yet, these diverging opinions cannot be attributed to interpersonal conflicts alone; rather, they, too, were a product of the time during which the show aired. As explained earlier, in the 1990s, "[t]wo distinct tracks or ideologies emerged to vie for influence and dominance." Tom Warner argues: "While equality rights campaigns thrived and succeeded, campaigns based on liberated sexuality and resistance to state repression remained an important, if more controversial and marginalized, element of gay and lesbian activism."⁶

⁵ Dion Kagan, *Positive Images: Gay Men & HIV/AIDS in the Popular Culture of "Post Crisis"* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 13.

⁶ Tom Warner, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 347.

Additionally, *10%* often looked and “felt backward” in that it regularly featured historical segments on organizations, individuals, and events that impacted the local LGBTQ2+ movement over the years.⁷ In the last section of this chapter, I show how this turn towards the past worked, too, in tension with the narrative of progress that the show promoted. As the show’s history segments mediated queer collective memory, I demonstrate how the program negotiated desires for shared rights and shared histories by attempting to bridge the gaps between an emerging generation of queers and the generations that came before them, as well as attempting to map a path forward for the future.

Community or Market? The Changing Landscape of “Queer” Cable Access Television

From its beginnings in 1995 to its concluding episode in 2001, *10%* viewers witnessed several iterations of the program on Rogers Cable TV. The first season, which aired from 1995 to 1996, consisted of nine, one-hour long monthly episodes, which revolved around a specific theme—such as “Education,” “Family and Community,” “Arts and Culture,” “Body and Spirit,” and “Gay and Lesbian Power.” The first season of the show was, in many ways, similar in aesthetics and format as previous cable access television shows; yet, unlike its predecessors, *10%* was run by a rather large group of volunteers, which included, in the first season, Barry Birnberg, Sid Potma, Janus Culbert, Shannon Phillips—now an NDP politician based in Alberta—, Lilka Swiergalska, Rob Haas, Edge Friars, and Stuart Charlap. These volunteers had some but overall limited ties to political and activist circles in the city, marking a sharp departure from previous LGBTQ2+ programs. As a result, oftentimes, volunteers had little to no prior knowledge of each other; rather, people came to participate in the show because it was advertised throughout

⁷ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

Church and Wellesley—Toronto’s gay village—as well as in the pages of queer print media outlets, such as *Xtra! Magazine*, *The Body Politic*’s glossier successor. As Liz Marshall, who would become involved later on, recalls: “I saw an announcement for it. I don’t remember that I knew anyone. When I went to the first meeting, I actually did not know anybody.”⁸

These differences were further cemented as the show entered its second season and switched to a weekly thirty-minute magazine format, when it became evident that one-hour monthly programs were no longer suited for the turn of the millennium. A negative review of the show’s first season published in *Xtra!* indeed bemoans: “Cable 10%, an all-volunteer show...covers issues and events of interest to the local gay and lesbian community. Unfortunately, most of the interviews either rehashed old news or issued prosaic promos for community organizations - a job better handled by brochures or phonelines.”⁹ Consequently, *Xtra!* praised the switch to a shorter, “zippier” format as the show entered its second season:

Cable 10% has come a long way since its start two years ago as a bloated 60-minute talk fest. With the help of professional producer Ian Ross, the local queer newsmagazine has trimmed down and sped up. It’s now a fast-paced half-hour with its regular time slot...and a keen sense of what works well on television. Gone are the interminable interviews of old. In their place are lots of zippy, on-site reports that take full advantage of the medium’s capacity for immediacy and you-are-there impact.¹⁰

Viewers also noticed the shift. One viewer admitted, for instance, being “pleasantly surprised” by how far the show had come, as they thought the second season was now “polished and streamlined,” while another “appreciated” the new weekly format as it gave the show an impression of being more “current.”¹¹ *Cable 10%*’s second season still focused on amplifying the

⁸ Liz Marshall, Interview with the author, June 2023.

⁹ Brent Ledger, “Some News Shows Are a Pleasure,” *Xtra! Toronto’s Gay and Lesbian News*, no. 296, February 29, 1996, 28.

¹⁰ Brent Ledger, “Cable 10% Trims Down & Speeds Up,” *Xtra! Toronto’s Gay and Lesbian News*, no. 321, February 13, 1997, 30.

¹¹ “Season 2: Viewer Feedback (1996-1997),” Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives Website, The Internet Archive, <https://web.archive.org/web/20020117195323/http://www.clga.ca/Material/MovingImages/docs/10percentQtv/Feedback/1996-97a.html#TOP7>

work of LGBTQ2+ organizations, services, outlets, and events in Toronto/Ontario, while also expanding the scope of the program to include cooking segments, comedy skits, music videos, and other “fluff” pieces.

As highlighted by *Xtra!*, the new season of *Cable 10%* was partly run by skilled television professionals—notably Ian Ross, the program’s executive producer, who had prior TV experience before launching the program and was keen on taking the show beyond the cable access airwaves.¹² Moreover, while the first season of *10%* was hosted by an intergenerational cast of volunteers, the new season now relied on a pair of “conventionally attractive” (white, cisgender, able-bodied) hosts in their twenties: Stuart Elliott (formerly Charlap), who had made his debut on *10%*’s first season, and Liz Marshall, a graduate of Toronto Metropolitan University’s filmmaking program, whose involvement in the show was formative to her coming out years and to her future career as a videographer and filmmaker (Figure 36).¹³ Finally, by the time season two unfolded, the show’s volunteer pool had expanded dramatically: about 30 volunteers now worked on *10%*. Ralph Hamelmann, for example, joined the show in 1996 so that he could practice his skills in graphic design and acquire experience as a television producer:

I just said, “Oh my God, a TV show!” Because I had a background in writing and graphics. And I thought it would just be a really good marriage of those skills...at the first meeting they were talking about their needs, and they wanted someone to do the ads. And I agreed to do it... But my real goal was to produce. I really wanted to do segments.¹⁴

Another volunteer, Brian Hardy, who worked as a camera operator, editor, and producer on *10%* from 1997 to 2000, had always an interest in media making, taking some film classes in the 1970s, and lugging his camcorder around Toronto throughout the 1980s. “To get on TV,”

¹² Ralph Hamelmann, Interview with the author, June 2023; Brian Hardy, Interview with the author, July 2023.

¹³ Liz Marshall, Interview with the author, June 2023.

¹⁴ Ralph Hamelmann, Interview with the author, June 2023.

however, “was a beyond-[his]-dreams kind of thing.” Yet, Hardy’s HIV diagnosis the early 1990s led him to join the *10%* team:

I had found out I was HIV [positive] back in 1992. In 1995, I decided I was going to take long term disability. I was working on the loading docks at Canadian Pacific Transport. I was a union member, so I was able to. This is after five years feeling myself not getting any better. In those days, it was 100% fatal, and that just stuck in my mind. That’s why I took disability. Then, I sort of had time on my hands. So, in 1996, me and a couple of friends went down to check out that TV show on Rogers and dropped by a meeting.¹⁵

The sheer number of volunteers, however, opened up the potential for tensions and dissensions, as volunteers came to the show with different visions of what *Cable 10%* could and should be.

When the show began airing its third season in the Fall of 1997, *Cable 10%* became *10% QTV*—“Queer Television”—to better reflect the ever-growing LGBTQ2+ community of Toronto and beyond. As the program evolved, so did its reach; in the span of its first three years, *10%* was carried across the Rogers Ontario network “into more than 1.5 million households.” Mainly, the program circulated in Southern Ontarian cities like Ajax, Brampton, Brantford, Grand River, Guelph, Kitchener, London, Mississauga, Newmarket, Oshawa, Ottawa, Stratford, and Whitby—thus eventually becoming, as the gay magazine *fab* described it, a “pan-Ontario program.”¹⁶ Hosts Chris Oslach and Alan Lewis were chosen to be the new faces of the third iteration, and, like Marshall and Elliott, both Oslach and Lewis were attractive, white, cisgender, young, and able-bodied (Figure 37). A native of Welland, Ontario, Oslach had moved to Toronto to get her Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree, eventually working as a driving instructor and a landlord. Her wishes to become “more involved in the community” then led her to *10%*.¹⁷ Born in Trinidad, Lewis grew up in Orangeville and Mississauga, subsequently moving to Kitchener

¹⁵ Brian Hardy, Interview with the author, July 2023.

¹⁶ John Kennedy, “On the Air,” *Fab Toronto’s Gay Scene/Lifestyle Magazine*, no. 129, January 6-19, 2000.

¹⁷ John Kennedy, “Community Access,” *Fab: Toronto’s Gay Scene / Lifestyle Magazine*, no. 104, January 21-February 3, 1999, 12.

to study architecture and working as a computer animator at a University of Toronto computer lab.¹⁸ Unlike Oslach, who wanted to further connect with her community, Lewis was encouraged by a friend to participate in the show (presumably because of his good looks).

Once again, neither host knew each other prior to participating in the program; in fact, both had to audition for the part, which testifies to the changing nature of cable access television and its institutionalization in the 1990s. In an interview with *fab*, the two hosts explained that “except for a weekly two-hour planning meeting and on-location shooting for four to five hours every other week,” hosting QTV was “not a huge burden”—a far cry from the long hours that volunteers in the 1970s and 1980s devoted to their programming.¹⁹ The perception of LGBTQ+ community television and who it was for also seemed to have changed; for instance, when the program began a collaboration with *fab* in its fifth season, the editor of the magazine, John Kennedy, reported: “It’s the perfect marriage since both *fab* and *10% QTV* reach the gay market throughout Ontario.”²⁰ Now catering to a “market” and not just a community, the preoccupations of the show increasingly reflected this shift.

¹⁸ “Close Ups,” *Xtra! Toronto’s Gay and Lesbian News*, no. 337, September 25, 1997, 31

¹⁹ John Kennedy, “Community Access,” 12.

²⁰ John Kennedy, “On the Air.”



Figure 36. *10%* hosts Liz Marshall (left) and Stuart Elliott (right).

“Cable 10% [Per Cent]- Season #2 – 1996/97: Episode #3/4 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment and Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/009.



Figure 37. *10%* hosts Alan Lewis (left) and Chris Oslach (right).

Cable 10% - Season #4- 1998/99: Episode #5/6 [QTV], The ArQuives, Entertainment and Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/066.

Following Lewis's departure from the program, the sixth and final season of *10%* was hosted by Oslach alone, at a Church Street restaurant, in front of a live audience. This season was criticized by some members of the community, however, as viewers were dissatisfied with Oslach's performance as host. Upon hearing of Lewis's departure, *fab* noted: "Sources claim Oslach wants to host the show by herself – a thought that makes some loyal viewers bristle since she is decidedly unpolished."²¹ In a later article, gay media critic Rob Wilson further added: "Oslach simply has no personality or charisma on the tube."²² Readers seemed to agree with the publication, as the following reaction from a viewer indicates: "Unpolished?! That's the best word you could come up to describe Chris Oslach on *10% QTV*?! How about Awful?...She does not belong on TV."²³ In addition, as *fab* reported: "Viewers of *QTV* have...criticized the show for lacking the kind of content and production values Rogers has been capable of achieving with shows like *Structures*, *Daytime*, and *Entertainment Toronto*."²⁴ Another article lamented: "On a station with some pretty slickly-produced local programming, *10% QTV* stands out as amateurish, sloppy and—well, just bad television."²⁵

The show's continued relevance was thus called into question by the rapidly evolving televisual landscape of the time, as *10%* had to find its footing within a new media ecology. Viewers not only demanded more "polished" and professional-looking community productions, the likes of which now existed on cable access channels, but, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, broadcasters were now "anxious" to "tap [into a] lucrative gay market"—leading to the

²¹ Rob Wilson, "Rogers Needs to Pull the Plug on Its Queer Show," *Fab: Toronto's Gay Scene/Lifestyle Magazine*, no. 155, January 4-17, 2001, 8.

²² Rob Wilson, "Station Boss Promises a New Look for Queer Show," *Fab: Toronto's Gay Scene / Lifestyle Magazine*, no. 150, October 26-November 8, 2000, 8.

²³ "Fab Mail," *Fab: Toronto's Gay Scene / Lifestyle Magazine*, no. 151, November 9-22, 2000, 4.

²⁴ Wilson, "Station Boss Promises a New Look for Queer Show," 8.

²⁵ Wilson, "Rogers Needs to Pull the Plug on its Queer Show," 8.

appearance of more queer television programs on the Canadian airwaves.²⁶ In 1998, for example, CablePulse24 (CP 24), Toronto’s brand-new commercial television channel owned by Canadian media guru Moses Znaimer, launched the *Q-Files*, a weekly show about queer life hosted by Irshad Manji.²⁷ In 2000, the program was added to Toronto’s Citytv’s schedule and renamed *QT: QueerTelevision*.²⁸ Although less popular among queer audiences than *10%*, *QT* was recognized at the national level by the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television, receiving three Gemini Awards Nominations. The team behind *10%* did not feel threatened by the appearance of a competitor on a local channel, however. On the contrary, *10%* volunteers remember being supportive of *Q-Files*.²⁹ The advent of new queer television programs signalled the increased normalcy of queerness in Canada and the success of assimilation politics—to which I return later in this chapter. As host Alan Lewis explained when being asked if he viewed Manji’s show as competition: “I’d be happy if there was three, four, five, or more gay shows. Then there wouldn’t be the whole uniqueness of it. It would just be standard, we wouldn’t even think about it. That would be ideal.”³⁰

Yet, as queer television was becoming more and more common, simply being “out” on the screen was no longer sufficient to appeal to queer audiences. While, in previous decades, queer characters had been judged according to whether their portrayal was offensive or pathologizing, or whether they were portrayed *at all*, queer television in the 1990s/2000s was beginning to be assessed for its “quality.” As *Xtra!* critic Brent Ledger notes in an opinion piece:

If I read one more article about the triumph of homos on TV I’m going to scream...Partly, it’s a matter of quality...Twenty-odd queer characters on TV—oooh

²⁶ “Gay TV,” *Fab: Toronto’s Gay Scene / Lifestyle Magazine*, no. 136, April 13-26, 2000, 22.

²⁷ “Something’s in the Air,” *Xtra! Toronto’s Gay and Lesbian News*, no. 363, September 24, 1998, 29.

²⁸ Brent Ledger, “This Queer TV is For Straights,” *Xtra! Toronto’s Gay and Lesbian News*, no. 402, March 23, 2000, 36.

²⁹ Brian Hardy, Interview with the author, July 2023.

³⁰ Kennedy, “Community Access,” 12.

must be a watershed...I don't want to underestimate the amount of progress that has been made. The distance between, say, *Sharing the Secret*, the CBC's creepy crawly 1981 documentary on gay men, and *Will and Grace*, is enormous...Locally, *Queer Television* and *10%-QTV* have established important beachheads on the news front...But...I can't think of a single ongoing series that I regard as a gay "home."

Ledger then concluded: "The advent of a new, all-gay TV channel may or may not change anything."³¹ Indeed, as *10%* was drawing to a close, the Canadian televisual landscape was experiencing further changes: in 2001, PrideVision TV, Canada's first national LGBTQ2+ television network, became available to digital cable and satellite customers.³² Upon launching the network, Jennifer Smith, PrideVision's executive vice president and chief strategic officer, claimed: "This isn't just going to be a Rogers channel or something like...*10% QTV*. This is revolutionary."³³

The World Wide Web was also becoming increasingly popular and available, constituting, too, a revolutionary way for queers to communicate. In the first season of *10%*, for instance, the show promoted "Rainbow Guide," an online directory for Toronto's gay and lesbian community. In the dedicated segment, the Internet was touted as "an incredible medium for the gay and lesbian community worldwide to better organize ourselves."³⁴ *10%* quickly got a website of its own (www.10percent.interlog.com) to upload schedules, synopses, and

³¹ Brent Ledger, "The Year Gave Us Queer without Quality," *Xtra! Toronto's Gay and Lesbian News*, no. 422, December 28, 2000, 29.

³² For more on PrideVision TV, see: Dawn Johnston, "Television Outside the Box: The Case of PrideVision TV" (PhD Dissertation, Calgary: University of Calgary, 2005).

³³ Jeremy Parkes, "See You in September," *Fab: Toronto's Gay Scene / Lifestyle Magazine*, no. 161, March 29-April 11, 2001, 10. As discussed in episode 1 and 3 of QTV's third season, PrideVision was chosen among 450 contenders for new digital channels, including 89 proposals for the "Category 1" channels that cable and satellite providers must carry, which included five proposals for a 24-hour digital queer specialty channel. The main three applications were CHUM/City's "QT," Levfam/Alliance-Atlantis' "PrideVision" and Quebecor's "Arc-en-ciel/Rainbow channel." A leak actually forced the CRTC to announce its decision three weeks early; the new "must carry" license was awarded to PrideVision.

³⁴ "Cable 10% [Per Cent] - Season #1 - 1995/96: Episode #6 [QTV]," The ArQuives, Entertainment and Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/004.

photographs of the program. The website also facilitated viewer feedback and gave people the option to order tapes of special episodes of *10%*, thereby creating new forms of audience engagement. Although these are local examples, in 1995, the website PlanetOut (www.planetout.com) became the first global LGBTQ2+ online platform, with news pages, chat rooms, and video broadcasts, effectively transforming the media environment within which *10%* was unfolding.

In the summer of 2001, Rogers “pulled the plug” on *10%*, following Oslach’s resignation in the face of the backlash she was experiencing from some viewers.³⁵ The decision was no doubt impacted by *10%*’s decreasing ability to compete in an ever-expanding queer media landscape or “market”—despite Rogers’ executives’ assurance that they would have wished to continue the show, were it not for Oslach’s choice. Still, the show managed to stay on the air for six consecutive years, continually inventing and re-inventing itself in the process. And, despite criticism from members of the queer community and from a few homophobic straight viewers, the show nonetheless remained popular, appealing to a wide range of audiences and performing its role of queer access mobilization. Many viewers applauded the show for its educational and entertainment value, as well as for its spotlight on queer life beyond the Toronto metropolis. Specifically, the show received praise for its ability to make audiences feel connected across distances and for its expanded focus on small towns and suburban enclaves:

I just wanted to say congratulations on producing such a great show... I’m stuck out here in suburbia and don’t have an opportunity to participate in the community very much, but I feel connected through your show.³⁶

³⁵ Vince J. Ciarlo, “Rogers Pulls the Plug on QTV,” *Fab: Toronto’s Gay Scene / Lifestyle Magazine*, no. 173, September 13-26, 2001, 6.

³⁶ “Season 4: Viewer Feedback (1998/99),” Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives Website, The Internet Archive, <https://web.archive.org/web/20020117210017/http://www.clga.ca/Material/MovingImages/docs/10percentQtv/Feedback/1998-99a.html#TOP>

Young viewers felt particularly empowered by the program's messaging, as noted, for example, in the following online review for the show's fourth season:

Hello All [sic], I am 16 years old and I am gay. I really appreciate your show. It kind of helped me come to terms with my sexuality. When I first thought to myself "Am I gay?" I denied it because of the negative slack that comes with being gay...But when...I saw these normal, decent people on your show I realized it's not such a bad thing to be gay. Unfortunately I have to deal with homophobic people every day from people at school, but I do have the gay/bi youth line #, which I never would of [sic] had if it wasn't for your TV show.³⁷

Another similar review explained:

Your show gave me the strength and will to come out and say ever so proudly that I am gay and to hell with those homophobic bible thumping...types I mean it is the ninetys [sic] isn't it?, get with the program and give gay rights the place it needs in todays [sic] society.³⁸

These last two comments potently capture some of the preoccupations of the program: the desire to show "normal," "decent" queer people, combined with the need to demonstrate the political, social, economic, and cultural progress made throughout the 1990s as a way to showcase the successful integration of the community in Toronto and its potential for further assimilation within the mainstream. However, *10%* was also determined—and sometimes struggled—to convey the diversity of an increasingly expanding, increasingly porous "community."

Accessing Mainstream Frequencies: Hailing All Homonormative Subjects!

As mentioned in the prologue, victories for equal rights in the form legal recognition had taken hold in Canada since the advent of the Charter of Rights in 1982, while the embrace of neoliberalism in North America further marginalized calls for liberation, heralding a new

³⁷ "Season 4: Viewer Feedback (1998/99)."

³⁸ "Season 4: Viewer Feedback (1998/99)."

homonormative, capitalist LGBT subject. And it is this subject which is primarily represented throughout *10%*'s existence. Although claims for political assimilation in the name of “normalcy” had existed since the 1970s as a strategy to obtain equal rights, as shown in the previous chapters, the changing social, political, and economic landscape of the 1980s-1990s made those claims different than their predecessors, as enfranchisement was now more readily available to queer people who complied with homonormative ideals. Furthermore, the push toward assimilation was also a result of the backlash experienced during the AIDS epidemic's “crisis years” (in Canada: 1982-1996).³⁹ For some, assimilation in the form of human rights claims was no longer a step toward the liberation of queers and straights alike; instead, assimilation into the mainstream became an end in itself.

As Lisa Duggan argues, “homonormativity” is “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.”⁴⁰ The homonormative subject, she further posits, seeks equality in the form of “access to the institutions of domestic privacy, the ‘free’ market, and patriotism.”⁴¹ Following this turn, the majority of *10%*'s programming depicted “positive images” of queer people as responsible family members, property-owning citizens, respected businesspeople and enthusiastic consumers, who were overall supportive of Canada's nation-building project.⁴²

³⁹ Urvashi Vaid, *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1995), 74.

⁴⁰ Lisa Duggan, “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism,” in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, ed. Dana D. Nelson and Russ Castronovo (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 179.

⁴¹ Duggan, 179.

⁴² Judy Davidson “Racism Against the Abnormal? The Twentieth Century Gay Games, Biopower and the Emergence of Homonational Sport,” *Leisure Studies* 33, no. 4 (2014): 362; Kagan, *Positive Images*, 13.

Although the program dealt with ongoing social and political issues that kept on plaguing the community, like anti-queer violence, such topics were framed differently than on previously discussed programs. These programs, especially in the 1970s, had denounced gay bashing as the result of Canada's heterosexist and patriarchal society, which institutions such as the criminal justice system played an integral part in maintaining. By contrast, *10%* largely failed to consider the systemic dimensions of anti-queer violence. For example, although they reported on the issue from the point of view of institutions dedicated to providing services to the LGBTQ2+ population, such as the Wellesley Health Centre or the 519 Community Centre, the show also gave voice to police officers, who were asked to provide advice on "how to avoid being victimized."⁴³

While this fact alone demonstrates a significant shift in thinking, what is even more notable is that the officers interviewed on *10%* were from Toronto Police Service's 52 division, the same division which had planned and executed Operation Soap in 1981 and had been the site of the famed bathhouse raids protests. The advice given by the interviewee, furthermore, deflects criticism of larger societal structures in favour of emphasizing individual responsibility: "Stay away from dark laneways...Don't be a victim...Know your area, look people in the face, walk up straight." Such framing, therefore, transmitted the message that violence against queer people was the result of a person's own prejudices, and, most importantly, that it could be avoided if queer people acted responsibly.

In fact, *10%*'s episodes and segments endeavoured to portray the community as responsible and respectable—not as victims. Politically, *10%* was predominantly concerned with the legal fight for same-sex benefits, and the recognition of (monogamous) gay and lesbian

⁴³ "Cable 10% [Per Cent] - Season #2 - 1996/97: Episode #3/4 [QTV]," The ArQuives, Entertainment Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/009.

relationships, mirroring the larger battles that were taking place in Canada at the time. The program regularly promoted the work of national organizations such as EGALE, as well as local support groups like PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) and Gay Fathers of Toronto. Queer families were regularly shown on the program; during its second season, for example, *10%* introduced a short two-episode series called “We Are Family,” as the show felt that “every day, the definition of family [was] being rewritten.”⁴⁴ Yet, far from entirely “rewriting” the definition of the family, these episodes portrayed gays and lesbians as responsible family members who followed heterosexual domestic patterns.

The first segment of the short series featured a white, middle-class, cis, monogamous, lesbian couple and their 10-year-old son. Family photographs, home movie footage, and “real-time” heartfelt moments are shown in between talking head interviews with each family member, displaying the family watching TV together, celebrating birthday parties, playing guitar, and so on, as the song “Our House” (1970) by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young plays in the background. While the segment is touching and important, it is above all a portrait of an “ordinary,” happy family that heterosexuals could identify with. Following that first episode, the second installment depicted a white cis gay male couple—one of them being a drag queen—in a seven-year relationship. The segment begins with the following question: “Most of you guys probably don’t think long-term gay relationships exist. What makes it work?”⁴⁵ This segment once again emphasizes that monogamy and domesticity are desired by most queer people—even drag queens! After all, as the show insisted, drag was “strictly performance, not a lifestyle.” These segments thus gave credence to the political and legislative arguments put forth by the

⁴⁴ “Cable 10% - Season #2 - 1996/97: Episode #22 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/027.

⁴⁵ “Cable 10% - Season #2 - 1996/97: Episode #23 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/028.

established organizations and groups which were featured on the program: save for what same-sex couples did in the privacy of their bedroom (or sometimes, in public, but under the guise of “performance”), gay and lesbian families were no different than heterosexual ones, and were, therefore, worthy of the same rights.⁴⁶

Moreover, *10%* portrayed queer people as deserving, hard-working businesspeople. Many segments, indeed, were dedicated to promoting queer people’s newfound “entrepreneurial spirit.” *10%* regularly featured local queer-owned businesses, took viewers to the National Gay and Lesbian Business Exposition in Toronto, and advertised the work of the Ontario Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce. In addition, on several instances, the show described the city’s gay village as a desirable place for businesses to invest in. As activist Tim McCaskell explains: “Church Street was a depressed area when it first became the focus of the gay village in the 1980s. But as the new century approached, Church was becoming prime real estate.”⁴⁷

If businesses were now investing in the Village, gay and lesbian couples were busy investing in homes, either in the city or the suburbs, as shown on a segment dedicated to “gay and lesbian buying power,” which aired during the show’s first season and focused on the new real estate needs of the queer community of Toronto.⁴⁸ Although the segment frames the needs of queer buyers as being “a bit different from the average buyer,” a guest realtor on the show, Susan Pimento, also stresses that, in the end, these needs are “not entirely different,” as traditional gender norms still played a key role in figuring out the type of neighbourhood they wanted to live in: lesbian buyers (i.e. prospective mothers) might “be concerned with safety or schools,”

⁴⁶ Alexandra Chasin, *Selling Out the Gay and Lesbian Movement Goes to Market* (New York, NY: Macmillan Company, 2000), 211.

⁴⁷ Tim McCaskell, *Queer Progress: From Homophobia to Homonationalism* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2018), 459-460.

⁴⁸ “Cable 10% - Season #1 – 1996: Episode 3/4 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment Moving Image Collection, The ArQuives, 1999-089/002.

while gay men (i.e. breadwinners) may want to be “close to work.” The segment is rife with homonormativity—both in its assumption that the queer community is homogeneous, mainly white and middle-class, and its inference that monogamy and domesticity, as opposed to expansive understandings of sexuality and relationships, again, are desirable to most members of the community. Furthermore, *10%* framed financial participation in the neoliberal capitalist system as a form of enfranchisement. As Susan Pimento explains: “The banks’ main concern when they’re lending money is 1. Can they pay it back? 2. Are they a good risk? The fact that they’re a same sex couple has nothing to do with it. Remember, you’re the customer!” Indeed, in the 1990s, the show touted, “businesses, big or small, [were] going after our queer bucks.”⁴⁹ Such segments, therefore, assured viewers that consumption was “a route to political enfranchisement as well as social acceptance.”⁵⁰

As gays and lesbians were now eager to be property owners, *10%* gave them tips on how to decorate their homes, aired a regular “gay gardeners” segment, taught them how to cook, advised them on what kind of car to look for at the Toronto International Auto Show, where to go Christmas shopping, and where to have fun with their community. In the mid- and late 1990s, *10%* insisted, queer people were now able to fully participate and be integrated in mainstream forms of leisure and entertainment. Throughout the years, for example, *10%* sponsored “Gay Day” at Canada’s Wonderland, a corporate-run theme park located in Vaughan, Ontario, just north of Toronto. First held in August 1996 in support of the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Youth Hotline, “Gay Day” continued as a fundraiser and “circuit party” in subsequent years. The event

⁴⁹ “Cable 10% [Per Cent]- Season #2 - 1996/97: Episode #3/4 [QTV].” As Kathleen Battles and Wendy Hilton-Morrow underline, although the appearance of a gay market in North America can be traced back to the 1960s, advertisers and businesses really began catering to the gay and lesbian “market” in the 1990s. See: Wendy Hilton-Morrow, and Kathleen Battles, *Sexual Identities and the Media: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 101-127.

⁵⁰ Chasin, *Selling Out*, 25-26.

furthered the perception that gay people were simply “average Janes and Joes” who were part of the larger multicultural mosaic of Toronto. As one Gay Day-goer asserted on camera: “We’re just like any other group, like Christian Music Day or Italian Day at Wonderland... We’re here to have fun, not really to make a political statement... We’re here in good spirits and not rough anyone’s feathers.”⁵¹

Likewise, *10%*'s segments on various local gay leagues and sporting events served to further the claim that queer people were now integrated within Toronto's fabric. A segment on the city's Judy Garland Memorial Bowling League, one of the oldest organized gay sports leagues in North America, aptly illustrates how supposedly “normal” being out and playing sports was in the 1990s: as the segment delves into the history of the club, the camera then zooms in on a young man participating in a local tournament. Suddenly aware of the presence of the camera, the man turns his head to hide his face. Yet, it is not his sexuality that he is ashamed of, the joke goes: “I don’t want to be seen on camera on *Cable 10%*. You see, I don’t want my friends and family to know... that I bowl.”⁵² Although progressive ventures which testified to the advancement of the queer community, as gay people broke down barriers and countered stereotypes, leisure and sports, too, became sites of homonormativity.⁵³

These segments thus speak to the overall goals *10%* hoped to achieve with their program. As an article published in the *Toronto Star* in 1996 indeed asserted: “Rather than play to an in-crowd... *Cable 10%*... demonstrates how homosexuality has been integrated into the city’s mosaic.”⁵⁴ Such segments, furthermore, proved very popular with audiences. As one viewer

⁵¹ “Cable 10% [Per Cent]- Season #2 - 1996/97: Episode #3/4 [QTV].”

⁵² “Cable 10% - Season #2 - 1996/97: Episode #10 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/015.

⁵³ Davidson, “Racism Against the Abnormal?,” 365.

⁵⁴ Henry Mietkiewicz, “Gay TV Offers Insight With Humor,” *Toronto Star*, December 10, 1996, C6.

testified at a live screening of *10%* at Slack Alice, a Church Street bar: “I like to see just people dealing with their normal lives and normal situations instead of just making a big hype about something.” At the same event, another viewer said to the camera: “I like the non-issue-oriented stuff, like the garden stuff. Ordinary things from a gay perspective. We’re not talking about AIDS. We’re not talking about “should there be a dyke march?”... and I like that.”⁵⁵

Not only did queer people now have children, buy homes, garden, open businesses, go to Canada’s Wonderland, and play sports, but they also went on vacation. In a segment on the International Gay and Lesbian Tourism Association featured in the show’s fourth season, *10%* indeed boasted that queer people “took over 162 million trips in 1997,” making gay tourism a “\$17 billion market.”⁵⁶ *10%*’s programming anticipated the travel needs of its viewers by regularly promoting gay cruises and gay-friendly travel agencies (Figure 38). The show’s segments on gay tourism also delineated which international destinations were attractive for queer people based on their economic appeal—for instance, one destination framed as being “of excellent value” was Porto Vallarda in Mexico—and based on whether they upheld the same progressive social values as Canada.⁵⁷ In that sense, the new queer subject produced and addressed by *10%* was both homonormative and homonationalistic.

Expanding on Duggan’s concept of homonormativity, Jasbir Puar frames homonationalism as a critique of the nation state’s narratives of “social progress” in which certain subjects are included (i.e. white, middle class, gay men and lesbians) in the national narrative at the expense of others.⁵⁸ Puar further explains that homonationalism is also a useful

⁵⁵ “Cable 10% - Season #3 - 1997/98: Episode #1 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/032.

⁵⁶ “Cable 10% - Season #4 - 1998/99: Episode #8 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/068.

⁵⁷ “Cable 10% - Season #1 - 1996: Episode 3/4 [QTV].”

⁵⁸ Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

frame for “understanding the complexities of how ‘acceptance’ and ‘tolerance’ for queer subjects have become a barometer by which the right to and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated.”⁵⁹ Homonationalism is thus linked to what Puar terms “the human rights industrial complex,” in which “the gay and lesbian human rights industry continues to proliferate Euro-American constructs of identity...that privileges identity politics, ‘coming out,’ public visibility, and legislative measures as the dominant barometers of social progress.”⁶⁰ In other words, homonationalism describes the ways in which nation states embrace superficial narratives of diversity—which includes certain LGBTQ2+ subjects—to bolster their image as democratic and free countries on the global stage.

In delineating which nations were gay-friendly and which ones were not, therefore, *10%*'s segments on gay tourism were deeply homonationalist and often tinged with racist and neocolonial undertones. Asserting that “we vote with our dollars every time we take a trip,” such segments warned viewers to “avoid English-based Caribbean destinations like Jamaica,” while praising former French and Spanish Caribbean colonies as “much more welcoming.”⁶¹ By contrast, “every major North American city,” *10%* asserted, had become a “gay destination.” The program itself often framed Toronto as being “the” tourist attraction for queer foreigners, as the city was a “big queer town.” Toronto’s Pride Festivities in the 1990s were a perfect example of how queer friendly the city was (Figure 39).

⁵⁹ Jasbir K. Puar, “Rethinking Homonationalism,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45, no. 2 (2013): 336.

⁶⁰ Puar, “Rethinking Homonationalism,” 338.

⁶¹ “Cable 10% - Season #4 - 1998/99: Episode #8 [QTV].”



Figure 38. Promoting international gay tourism on *10% QTV*.

Cable 10% [Per Cent] – Season #1 – 1995/96: Episode #3/4 [QTV], The ArQuives, Entertainment and Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/002.



Figure 39. Promoting gay tourism in Toronto.

Cable 10% [Per Cent] – Season #1 – 1995/96: Episode #3/4 [QTV], The ArQuives, Entertainment and Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/002.

“If You Don’t Like Yourself, How Can Anyone Else Like You?” 10%’s Coverage of Toronto Pride 1998

Despite the event’s political roots, the program’s coverage of Pride fit the rest of its homonormative and homonationalist messaging: Pride Week and Pride Day were 1. A time to party 2. A place to spend (and make) money 3. A family event—as proclaimed, for instance, by the 1996 Pride theme “We Are Everyone’s Family.” 4. A way to affirm and support Canada’s neoliberal branding as a diverse, multicultural country. Of course, *10%*’s reporting did not take place in a vacuum, and followed the ebbs and flows of the LGBTQ2+ movement in the 1990s. As scholars have observed, in North America at that time, “‘marches’ became ‘parades’ and ‘rallies’ became ‘parties.’”⁶² As Alexandra Chasin charges: “The opportunities for shopping booths proliferated, while floats in the parade itself were increasingly the displays of banks and professional politicians.”⁶³ As a side effect, however, “exhibitions of sexuality decreased.”⁶⁴ These changes were particularly noticeable in *10%*’s coverage of the 1998 Pride March.

1998 is a particularly significant date in Toronto’s history, which signalled a shift in politics and demographics, as Ontario’s capital became a “Megacity” after the amalgamation of the six cities that made up Metropolitan Toronto. Tim McCaskell explains: “The pretext was cost-cutting, despite studies of other amalgamations showing higher costs and less responsive services. The real reason was to wipe out the old city of Toronto, a traditional NDP stronghold, by merging it with more conservative suburbs.”⁶⁵ And, indeed, Toronto’s mayor from 1994 to 1997, NDP politician Barbara Hall, had been supportive of gay rights throughout her career and

⁶² Chasin, *Selling Out*, 214; El Chenier, “Foreword,” in *Queer Mobilizations: Social Movement Activism and Canadian Public Policy*, edited by Manon Tremblay (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2015), ix.

⁶³ Chasin, 214.

⁶⁴ Chasin, 212.

⁶⁵ McCaskell, *Queer Progress*, 445.

had been the first Toronto mayor to regularly attend Pride festivities—as shown by *10%*'s various segments featuring Hall. The new mayor of the Megacity, however, conservative suburban businessman Mel Lastman, had once publicly declared that anti-gay activist Anita Bryant should be awarded a medal for her “crusade against homosexual activists.”⁶⁶ Yet, by 1998, Lastman understood that the gay community was now also a “business community,” which led him to attend the “MegaPride” festivities—testifying to the new kind of relationship between queers and “the mainstream.”⁶⁷

As pointed out in an article published in the *Globe and Mail* the day before the parade: “Mel Lastman agreed to march although he expressed reservations about being part of an event that often involves nudity...But Mr. Lastman knows Pride events fit in perfectly with his economic agenda to both bring tourists to the city and keep Torontonians at home on the weekends.”⁶⁸ Instead of critiquing Lastman’s attempts to woo the community for economic and political gains, however, *10%* praised the mayor’s “soul-searching” about his participation the Pride Parade, emphasizing that the mayor’s decision to ultimately participate was a sign of a “cultural shift” for the city of Toronto and the community at large.⁶⁹ During the Parade, the crowd cheered Lastman on as he paraded on a Toronto Fire Truck, and *10%* excitedly reported on the mayor’s presence (Figure 40). When asked what his message was on Pride Day, Lastman delivered a message, not of solidarity, but of neoliberal individualism addressed to a universal audience (which strangely happened to echo one of RuPaul’s famous mantras): “Everyone

⁶⁶ McCaskell, *Queer Progress*, 446

⁶⁷ McCaskell, 453.

⁶⁸ Jane Armstrong, “Corporate Cash Rains Down on Gay Parade,” *Globe and Mail*, June 27, 1998, A1.

⁶⁹ “Cable 10% - Season #3 - 1997/98: Episode #29 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment and Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/060.

should be proud of what they are and who they are. If you don't like yourself, how can anyone else like you?"⁷⁰

The *Globe and Mail* article also emphasized that Lastman was not the only one with an economic agenda at MegaPride 1998. Titled "Corporate cash rains down on gay parade: No longer a fringe festival, Pride Week becomes a marketer's dream," the article noted that queer people were "a group of people whose spending habits ha[d] been studiously tracked by marketers for several years."⁷¹ The article further asserted that "more than 700,000 people" would spend "an estimated \$43 million on restaurants, hotel rooms, shopping excursions, and entertainment" during Pride Week.⁷² As a result, corporations were eager to sponsor the event. Again, *10%* presented this as a positive development, which served to testify to the apparent progress the community had made over the years, while failing to recognize the ways in which corporate sponsorship may hinder the political intent of Pride (Figure 41). As Tim McCaskell claims: "At the ACT beer tent, Molson's signage overwhelmed ACT's messaging," while other community organizations "began to be priced out of the action."⁷³

Furthermore, the show seemed to agree with Lastman's assertion that sexuality was undesirable at Pride, as it did not question the decision of the Pride committee to hire more police to crackdown on nudity—despite the Toronto gay community's recent antagonistic history with law enforcement. At the beginning of their 1998 Pride coverage, Chris Oslach and Alan Lewis reassured *10%* viewers: "This is a family-oriented show. We promised Rogers there would be no nudity."⁷⁴ Instead, the show, much like the Parade itself, highlighted organizations

⁷⁰ Indeed, one of RuPaul's most famous quotes, which he uses regularly in the *RuPaul's Drag Race* franchise and in his songs is: "If you can't love yourself, how in the hell are you gonna love somebody else?"

⁷¹ Jane Armstrong, "Corporate Cash Rains Down on Gay Parade," A1.

⁷² Armstrong, A1.

⁷³ McCaskell, *Queer Progress*, 454.

⁷⁴ "Cable 10% - Season #3 - 1997/98: Episode #28 [QTV]," The ArQuives, Entertainment Moving Image Collection, The ArQuives, 1999-089/059.

such as PFLAG or EGALE, the Metropolitan Community Church's float, professional associations and leisure-based organizations, thus showing, "gay life as compatible, even continuous, with heteronormative life."⁷⁵ And, one could add, as compatible with Canada's neoliberal values. As Mel Lastman proclaimed in a conference held with the gay community on the eve of Pride which was broadcast on the show, "The gay community is a strong and vibrant part of our city... We are acclaimed worldwide for our ability to celebrate our diversity with civility and dignity."⁷⁶ *10%*'s 1998 Pride coverage, and of the parades that would follow, therefore, uncritically embraced homonormativity and homonationalism. The show's messaging was validated by its viewers; one comment on *10%*'s website, for example, reads:

"[N]ow is a great time to be gay... the gay community is as diverse as any other: not all gay men are fashion-obsessed, bed-hopping, AIDS-positive interior decorators; not all lesbians are aggressive, sport-playing, head-shaving feminists... We are all human, and it's the humanity of those who happen (yes, *happen*, not choose) to be gay that should be documented. I, as do many others, look forward to watching QTV grow."⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Chasin, *Selling Out*, 211.

⁷⁶ "Cable 10% - Season #3 - 1997/98: Episode #29 [QTV]."

⁷⁷ "Season 4: Viewer Feedback (1998/99)."



Figure 40. Mega Mayor Mel Lastman in the 1998 Pride Parade.

“Cable 10% - Season #3 - 1997/98: Episode #28 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment and Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/059.



Figure 41. Corporate sponsorship on display at the 1998 Pride Parade.

“Cable 10% - Season #3 - 1997/98: Episode #28 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment and Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/059.

Documenting a “Post-Crisis” Toronto: From Direct Action to Corporate Philanthropy

When *10%* went on the air in 1995, four years had passed since the end of *Thunder Gay Magazine*. In that time, the HIV/AIDS epidemic and AIDS activism would change dramatically and would continue to do so throughout the program’s existence. One year into the show, in 1996, protease inhibitors (HAART-Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy) were introduced, progressively making HIV/AIDS a manageable disease—at least for some, as treatments remained expensive and out of reach for many at the beginning. As Tim McCaskell explains, after the advent of the drug cocktail: “The dying was coming to an end...One no longer saw emaciated men with Kaposi’s hobbling down Church Street. A new generation emerged for whom AIDS was just another fact of life.”⁷⁸ By the time the show folded in 2001, as Brian Hardy told me, “AIDS wasn’t as big a thing” (the question remains, however: for whom?).⁷⁹ The show thus documents what Dion Kagan calls the “post-crisis” period of the epidemic, a time when HIV/AIDS underwent a period of “normalization,” marked by “a diminution of its once terrifying status,” and the “incorporation of it into institutional, social norms.”⁸⁰ This period of time following the introduction of treatments also corresponds to what Ted Kerr and Alexandra Juhasz have called “The Second Silence,” as HIV/AIDS became less visible and talked about in the public sphere.⁸¹

While *Thunder Gay Magazine* performed radical acts of care on television by explicitly demonstrating safer sex techniques and humanizing people with HIV/AIDS in the absence of effective treatment, *10%* continued to focus on groups which promoted prevention and education

⁷⁸ McCaskell, *Queer Progress*, 447.

⁷⁹ Brian Hardy, Interview with the author, July 2023.

⁸⁰ Kagan, *Positive Images*, 10.

⁸¹ Alexandra Juhasz and Theodore Kerr, *We Are Having This Conversation Now: The Times of AIDS Cultural Production* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022).

in the city of Toronto (such as ACT or Black CAP), but also reported on the expansion and progress of treatments for HIV/AIDS—airing segments on the Community AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE), which had been born out of the AIDS Committee of Toronto, the advent of post-exposure prophylaxis, and the AIDSVAX HIV Vaccine Study initiated in 2000.

In the late 1990s, direct action also gave way to institutionalized efforts to provide services for people with HIV/AIDS. As Tim McCaskell argues: “The tsunami that had ravaged the community in the 1980s and early ‘90s had passed, leaving behind professionalized agencies whose job it was to clean up the debris.”⁸² These professional organizations, which had formerly been volunteer-based, Tom Warner further posits, “had become large bureaucracies, with big budgets, sizable staff, income derived from government grants, lucrative fundraising campaigns, and increasingly, corporate sponsorships.”⁸³ As the voices of activists were becoming quieter, AIDS gradually turned into a philanthropic concern, an issue effectively “decoupled from systemic reform.”⁸⁴

10% aired segments on various HIV/AIDS fundraisers throughout its existence. While previous cable access programs had attempted to elicit feelings of compassion, sometimes anger, about HIV/AIDS, *10%*'s programming on HIV/AIDS fundraising meant to entertain its viewers. For example, the show aired a short segment on the Jack Russell Terrier Club of Canada's fundraiser for the Toronto AIDS hospice Casey House, held at Centennial Park in Etobicoke, in which dogs were competing for prizes by running an obstacle course.⁸⁵ The show also aired

⁸² McCaskell, *Queer Progress*, 447-448.

⁸³ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 254.

⁸⁴ Vaid, *Virtual Equality*, 86.

⁸⁵ “Cable 10% - Season #3 - 1997/98: Episode #2 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/033.

several excerpts from Kiss'n'Feud, a queer take on the U.S game show *Family Feud*, in which gay and lesbian associations and businesses got together and competed for a trophy while raising money for the PWA Foundation.⁸⁶

HIV/AIDS fundraising was not only fun, but it was also chic and glamorous, as demonstrated by two popular galas to which 10% dedicated airtime: Dancers for Life and Fashion Cares. Both fundraisers began in 1987 with the aim of raising money for the AIDS Committee of Toronto, as the dance and fashion communities were being decimated by the epidemic. Although both Dancers for Life and Fashion Cares started out relatively small, they rapidly turned into yearly must-attend, A-List events. While Fashion Cares became “Toronto’s most highly anticipated fashion happening,”⁸⁷ Dancers for Life brought together “some of the finest dancers in Canada to perform on stage.”⁸⁸

AIDS, therefore, progressively became a social cause worth supporting, and celebrities and corporations started endorsing AIDS fundraisers.⁸⁹ MAC Cosmetics, for instance, partnered with Fashion Cares, becoming the event’s official sponsor in 1994.⁹⁰ Other Canadian brands like Holt Renfrew, Loblaws, and Labatt Brewing Company also happily sponsored the event.⁹¹ Gay celebrities RuPaul and k.d lang, the faces of MAC’s AIDS Fund, regularly appeared and performed on the Fashion Cares runway (Figure 42). As Andrea Benoit explains, despite the “increasingly promotional nature” of Fashion Cares, “ACT needed this heightened corporate buy-in in order to raise the event to the next level of visibility, legitimacy, and financial

⁸⁶ “Cable 10% - Season #3 - 1997/98: Episode #12 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/043; “Cable 10% - Season #3 - 1997/98: Episode #14 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/045.

⁸⁷ Andrea Benoit, *Viva M.A.C: AIDS, Fashion, and the Philanthropic Practices of M.A.C Cosmetics*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 7.

⁸⁸ Deirdre Kelly, “Fighting AIDS: Dancers hope to raise \$40,000,” *Globe and Mail*, January 28, 1991, 1.

⁸⁹ Benoit, *Viva M.A.C*, 8.

⁹⁰ Benoit, 7.

⁹¹ Benoit, 145.

success.”⁹² Dancers for Life, too, experienced the same level of “financial success” due to the legitimacy provided by corporate sponsorship. In fact, an article published by the *Globe and Mail* in 1997 about Dancers for Life proclaimed: “Dancers for Life offers a sound lesson. Those seeking donor dollars should study the strategy that has made AIDS a cause-of-choice.”⁹³ AIDS, like the LGBTQ2+ movement as a whole, had become a commodified cause, an object of “corporate philanthropy.”⁹⁴



Figure 42. Celebrity Drag Queen RuPaul at Fashion Cares '97.

“Cable 10% - Season #2 - 1996/97: Episode #23 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment and Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/028.

⁹² Benoit, *Viva M.A.C.*, 145-176.

⁹³ Deirdre Kelly, “Dancers for Life Offers a Sound Lesson,” *Globe and Mail*, March 8, 1997, C3.

⁹⁴ Benoit, *Viva M.A.C.*, 174.

Tellingly, a segment featured on *10%* about the 10-year anniversary of Dancers for Life focuses not on the dancers or the upcoming performances, but on what representatives of Molson Breweries and the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC) had to say.⁹⁵ Another segment, this time dedicated to Fashion Cares, does not even mention AIDS at all; instead, the segment delves solely into the fashion aspect of the event.⁹⁶ The program's praise of Fashion Cares and Dancers for Life for being "sophisticated" and "glamorous," however, failed to critique the increasing corporate presence within gay and lesbian life, or to recognize that these events were once again catering to white, middle-class gay men and lesbians, especially due to the high cost of the tickets—as the show advertised, tickets were \$200 per person.⁹⁷ As Alexandra Chasin explains: "Because of these prices, it seems likely that these events cater to existing donors or bring in more affluent new donors, rather than providing the function of broad outreach or education," therefore leaving less privileged members of the queer community behind.⁹⁸ Furthermore, although corporate sponsorship was efficient and desirable, it could also easily be swayed. As the *Globe and Mail* noted: "There is evidence that, even as corporate sponsorship picks up, people may be growing tired of the AIDS message. Other diseases are now elbowing their way into the niche chiselled out by AIDS over a decade of savvy marketing."⁹⁹

As demonstrated by *10%*'s coverage of HIV/AIDS and of Pride events, then, *10%* intended to depict the "progress" of the LGBTQ2+ community as it was consolidating itself into a growing consumer base with political clout. Homonormativity and homonationalism, however, dangerously delineate who is worthy of rights and who should be left behind. As Judy Davidson

⁹⁵ "Cable 10% - Season #2 - 1996/97: Episode #11 [QTV]," The ArQuives, Entertainment and Moving Images Collection, 1999-089/016.

⁹⁶ "Cable 10% - Season #3 - 1997/98: Episode #22 [QTV]."

⁹⁷ "Cable 10% - Season #2 - 1996/97: Episode #23 [QTV]," The ArQuives, Entertainment and Moving Images Collection, 1999-089/028.

⁹⁸ Chasin, *Selling Out*, 189.

⁹⁹ Kelly, "Dancers for Life Offers a Sound Lesson," C3.

notes, homonormativity “functions as a technology of abnormality – attempting to secure the privileges of whiteness, class and normative embodiments against deviant threats.”¹⁰⁰

Consequently, the related “positive” images of gays and lesbians circulated on *10%* did not necessarily “reflect the material realities of queer lives.”¹⁰¹ Dion Kagan explains: “Positive images have tended to disavow a consciousness of the negative states and feelings that have constituted queer life, both historically and now. They may also set up a further set of unrealistic norms that are irrelevant or unreachable for most queer people.”¹⁰² However, *10%*, as mentioned in the introduction, defies simplistic interpretations that would see the program as being entirely complicit with racial, economic, and gender-based exclusions within the LGBTQ2+ community. In fact, *10%*’s efforts to offer programming “as diverse as our community” sometimes meant broadcasting views that were opposing the mainstreaming of the gay and lesbian movement, in favour of promoting “queerer” ways of being.

“Le Freak, C’est Chic”: Rejecting Lesbian Chic, Embracing (Sexy) Dyke and Queer Freaks

As one “gay father” testified in the 23rd episode of season 2, in a segment on Gay Fathers of Toronto: “I talked to Gay Fathers and suddenly, I felt normal. I wasn’t a freak.”¹⁰³ In an interesting segue, which was no doubt a very conscious, almost insolent, decision on the part of the editor(s), the concluding section of the episode takes the viewers to a literal freak show: Dirty Babette’s transgressive cabaret, “Strange Attractor,” performed at Club 360 on April 4, 1997. A forum for “sexy, angry, multitalented performers,” showcasing “avant-garde, radical, and controversial work,” “Strange Attractor” was the brainchild of Toronto-based performance artist

¹⁰⁰ Davidson, “Racism Against the Abnormal?,” 362.

¹⁰¹ Kagan, *Positive Images*, 12.

¹⁰² Kagan, 12.

¹⁰³ “Cable 10% - Season #2 - 1996/97: Episode #23 [QTV].”

and dyke writer Christy Cameron (aka Dirty Babette). After being banned from the Buddies in Bad Times theatre in 1995, Cameron launched Dirty Babette productions, a sporadic series of cabarets housed in bars and private houses meant to “give voice to a new aesthetic – a girl gang, gender-fuck, engaged/enraged aesthetic” (Figure 43).¹⁰⁴

In the 5-minute-long televisual segment, Christy Cameron is filmed alongside other queer performers—Adella Pierre, Binky Dally Rue, Margaret Lamarre, Andrew Hardwood—as they offer a S&M-laden, avant-garde, queer performance. In what almost feels like a provocative call and response to the segment on Gay Fathers of Toronto, Cameron defiantly proclaims: “We are strong enough that we can share our shit without making it palatable, without trying to fit in, without trying to be like them. We don’t wanna be like them. We are *not* like them. We are our own thing. We are fierce, and they can’t get enough of it!” She continues: “The violence we play within here is our reaction against the violence we do not choose out there, as women, as freaks, as whores, as lesbians...This is a safe space to play.”¹⁰⁵

Cameron’s decidedly punk and queercore aesthetics clashed with the otherwise assimilationist and homonormative claims of *10%*.¹⁰⁶ The segment, which was produced by Liz Marshall, then host of Season 2, was, in fact, highly controversial among the *10%* team, further entrenching divides which had begun forming between *10%* volunteers in the second season.

As Marshall recalls:

My recollection is that Ian [Ross]...wanted a very clean, conventional, and commercial kind of structure, format, and focus...Whereas, for some of us, mostly, I would say, the

¹⁰⁴ “Dirty Babette Mission Statement,” in Judith Doyle, “Life & Life Support Systems: Zines, Nets, and Outlets by Artists—the late ‘70s & Some Now,” *Fuse Magazine*, vol. 19, no. 5 (1996): 29.

¹⁰⁵ “Cable 10% - Season #2 - 1996/97: Episode #23 [QTV].”

¹⁰⁶ As Craig Jennex and Nisha Eswaran explain: “An offshoot of punk, queercore was an artistic and musical subculture that contested violence against queers...In their 1989 article ‘Don’t Be Gay, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Fuck Punk Up the Ass,’ [GB] Jones and [Bruce] LaBruce argued that the queercore movement was necessary in the late 1980s and early 1990s because the gay movement had become preoccupied with (and co-opted by) a liberal capitalist ethos.” See: Craig Jennex and Nisha Eswaran, *Out North: An Archive of Queer Activism and Kinship* in Canada, (Toronto: Figure 1 Publishing, 2020), 197.

women—although not all of us, but many of us—were more interested in politics and dyke culture and the grittier side. You know, all shades and aspects of queerness. Showcasing Christie Cameron’s Dirty Babette, for example, things like that, that were maybe a bit raunchy. But not just for the sake of being raunchy, but for the sake of just showing the spectrum of queerness.¹⁰⁷

On the other hand, Brian Hardy, who sided with Ian Ross, remembers feeling shocked when filming Dirty Babette and not quite understanding the cultural value of the performance:

Dirty Babette was like no one I’ve ever seen...I was filming, in a low ceiling room, full of lesbians...And then she [Dirty Babette] turns her back and this woman assistant, takes this medical scalpel and runs it down her back until her back starts bleeding. I couldn’t believe what I was seeing...I just remember the arguments about how culturally valuable the performance was. I agreed with Ian, to be honest. It was kind of hard to look at.¹⁰⁸

Eventually, Ross, who did not feel like the segment on Dirty Babette reflected the aims of the program, withdrew his name from the episode’s credits. Marshall’s co-host, Stuart Elliott, also refused to participate in the episode and Ralph Hamelmann, a staunch supporter of queer and dyke culture, had to step in instead. Eventually, Marshall, Hamelmann, and others left the show at the end of the second season as they felt disillusioned with the ability of the show to fully represent who they saw as being part and parcel of the “queer” community.¹⁰⁹ Queer theorist Heather Love encapsulates what was at stake in the conflicts over the Dirty Babette performance: “Pride and visibility offer antidotes to shame and the legacy of the closet; they are made in the image of specific forms of denigration,” while queerness, Love explains, “is both abject and exalted,” a “mixture of delicious and freak.”¹¹⁰

These internal conflicts indeed reflected larger changes that were taking place in the 1990s. As Tom Warner explains: “Influenced by AIDS radicalism and vigorously assailing the

¹⁰⁷ Liz Marshall, Interview with the author, June 2023.

¹⁰⁸ Brian Hardy, Interview with the author, July 2023.

¹⁰⁹ Ralph Hamelmann, Interview with the author, June 2023.

¹¹⁰ Love, *Feeling Backward*, 3.

assimilationist thrust of equality rights activism, a new generation, calling themselves ‘queer’ attempted to forge a new agenda for social change.”¹¹¹ This new generation, Warner further posits, “advocated more fluid concepts of sexuality and identity that rejected both the necessity of labelling and the attempts to achieve a new, respectable identity that too frequently sought to impose stifling conformity.”¹¹² Given the predominance of these two trends in the 1990s, *10%*’s programming, particularly during its first and second season—before the Dirty Babette controversy—, therefore also provided a window into Toronto’s queer scene, with a special emphasis on dyke culture.

The word “dyke,” like the word “queer” was reclaimed from its pejorative roots and turned into a term of empowerment, beginning in the 1970s and further gaining popularity in the 1990s. Lauren Herold also notes in her analysis of the American cable access show *Dyke TV* that, similar to “queer,” “dyke” gestures at more capacious understandings of gender and sexuality—beyond simply referring to “(cis) women loving (cis) women.”¹¹³ During our interview, Liz Marshall insisted on the importance of showcasing lesbian subcultures and activism to counter the predominance of images of cis gay men on the show: “There was some division as a result of the clashing needs or interests in what this show was. I think Ian also was kind of preferring or favouring, boy culture...more than dyke culture.”¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 247.

¹¹² Warner, 247-248.

¹¹³ Herold, “Cable Comes Out,” 167.

¹¹⁴ Liz Marshall, Interview with the author, June 2023.



Figure 43. Christy Cameron aka Dirty Babette interviewed on *10%*.

“Cable *10%* - Season #2 - 1996/97: Episode #23 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment and Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/028.

The show, for instance, documented the first ever Toronto Dyke March. Now a popular event and an integral part of Pride festivities in the city, the gay and lesbian community was quite divided on the march’s purpose when it first took place in 1996. As McCaskell underlines, “the Dyke March had begun in 1996 as a reaction to male dominance, lack of politics, and increasing corporatization of the main parade.”¹¹⁵ When chronicling the 1996 Pride preparations, *10%* interviewed various individuals about their thoughts on the new upcoming event. Out of four interviewees, three expressed negative feelings about the Dyke March. Two, in particular, accused the march of being divisive and presenting the risk of alienating gay men. Another interviewee, a lesbian of colour, shared her wishes for more inclusive representation: “As a woman of colour, I don’t see many women of colour. As a leather dyke, I don’t see very much

¹¹⁵ McCaskell, *Queer Progress*, 454.

on leather either...I don't wanna go searching for images, I'd rather they be there."¹¹⁶ In airing footage of the 1996 march, *10%* volunteers interested in "dyke" politics therefore raised important questions about inclusivity and absence, both within the show itself and within the larger movement.

Subsequent episodes, then, offered in-depth explorations of Toronto's diverse dyke cultural scene to show that, indeed, the images were "there." The show continued airing segments about the various Dyke Marches which took place in Toronto, while a five-part docuseries aired during the second season immersed the viewers inside "Dyke Night Life" in various clubs and parties, documenting events and places that no longer exist in Toronto: the Shag, S!H!E!, Wetspot, The Rose Café. In advocating for queer and dyke space making, these segments were a "defiant response" to segments which encouraged full assimilation within the mainstream.¹¹⁷

Other than nightlife, *10%* showcased Toronto's burgeoning lesbian multimedia artistic scene, promoting literature ("Clit Lit" segments), video art (Lisa Haye's "Dike;" Teresa McInnes' "Under Wraps"), performance art (The Strange Sisters Cabaret at Buddies in Bad Times), and theatre (R.M Vaughan's "Camera, Woman;" Christina Starr's "Looking for Boysland"). These segments stand in sharp contrast with the representational trends of the 1990s, such as the "lesbian chic" phenomenon which saw magazines and advertisers turning (some) lesbians into hot commodities, as seen in the now iconic *Vanity Fair*'s cover featuring Canadian singer k.d lang and model Cindy Crawford.¹¹⁸ Not so much interested in fighting invisibility or

¹¹⁶ "Cable 10% [Per Cent]- Season #1 - 1995/96: Episode #8/9 [QTV]," The ArQuives, Entertainment Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/006.

¹¹⁷ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 301.

¹¹⁸ Ann Cvektovich, "Fierce Pussies and Lesbian Avengers: Dyke Activism Meets Celebrity Culture," in *Feminist Consequences*, ed. Elisabeth Bronfen and Misha Kavka (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 283-320.

in promoting glamorous images of lesbians, *10%*'s emphasis in these episodes was on the politics of gender and space in Toronto's queer scene and on lesbian sexuality. These segments were indeed often sexually charged, promoting a queer culture of the erotic on the screen.

For example, on February 11, 1997, *10%* aired a special Valentine's Day episode. One of the episode's segments, entitled "Babes Sucking Face," showcased a diverse cast of lesbians—bitches, femmes, drag kings, doms/subs—making out on a couch (Figure 44).¹¹⁹ Some scenes are more sexually suggestive than others, as the segment includes footage of a woman licking another woman's breast, a woman licking a leather boot, and a woman hitting another with riding crop. These images especially ring back to the comment heard on the first season of *10%*: "As a leather dyke, I don't see very much on leather either...I don't wanna go searching for images, I'd rather they be there." Liz Marshall, the host, is featured in many of these scenes, eroticizing her for the audience. Another segment aired later on in the second season takes *10%* viewers to Celestina, a steam bath for women.¹²⁰ Again, Liz Marshall is heavily featured—and scantily clothed. She is filmed, in a towel only, receiving a variety of services at the spa from a woman in a bathing suit. The segment oozes sensuality, as the intimate moments between Marshall and the masseuse are carefully followed by the voyeuristic gaze of the camera and its numerous close ups on the two women's bodies. Yet, these two segments do not commodify or objectify lesbian sexuality. In displaying a diverse cast of lesbians performing various acts of pleasure, they effectively promoted ideas of queer liberation. As Tom Warner insists, against the assimilationist homonormative push, the queer movement of the 1990s sought to address issues of sexuality "in a manner firmly rooted in earlier liberation politics." This included "celebrating

¹¹⁹ "Cable 10% - Season #2 - 1996/97: Episode #15 [QTV]," The ArQuives, Entertainment Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/020.

¹²⁰ "Cable 10% - Season #2 - 1996/97: Episode #24 [QTV]," The ArQuives, Entertainment Moving Image Collection, The ArQuives, 1999-089/029.

sexuality, eroticism, and pornography, resisting state regulation and police repression - and especially challenging the notions of community standards, of public and private, and of consent regarding sexuality and sexual behaviour.”¹²¹

This was extended to both lesbian and gay sexuality—and everyone in between and beyond. For instance, *10%* made a staunch case against the regulation of queer sexuality when it documented the aftermath of the raid of a gay strip club, the Remington’s, on February 19, 1996.¹²² That night, the segment explains, 27 officers from 52 Division and the Special Investigation Unit—formerly known as the Morality Squad—raided the bar. 19 customers and dancers were charged with being found-ins and inmates in a bawdy house, and the management staff was charged with keeping a common bawdy house and permitting indecent theatrical performances. The raid was performed during a night called “Sperm Attack Mondays,” where gay male dancers masturbated and ejaculated on stage. The event, which had been launched three years prior to the raid, had never elicited any complaints. The show thus framed the raid as the result of rigid community standards, as pointed out by Remington’s manager, Jerry White:

The Indecency and Morality Acts are geared mostly toward the protection of women and children. That’s not the case here...The lap dancing issue boils down to...men hav[ing] control over women with money. I don’t know that the Crown or the police department have given any thought that we are dealing with men with men. Or that...our community standards are different than what the community standards would be for heterosexuals. To me, and this is my opinion, I think they are trying to impose heterosexual values on the gay and lesbian community.

10%’s reporter added: “Even if Monday nights at Remington’s aren’t your cup of tea, we can’t live up to the morality and expectations of another group of people. We can only live up to our own.” These segments, which emphasized the uniqueness of the community and how the erotics

¹²¹ Warner, *Never Going Back*, 266.

¹²² “Cable 10% [Per Cent] - Season #1 - 1995/96: Episode #5 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/003.

of queer spaces contributed to creating and maintaining a sense of community on the one hand, and how pleasure could become a transformative force, on the other, therefore, contrast with the homonormative and homonationalist tone of the majority of *10%*'s programming. As the show progressed past its first and second seasons, however, segments showcasing queer and dyke sexuality became increasingly rare, as the show branded itself, as described earlier, as a family-oriented show.



Figure 44. “Babes Sucking Face” on *10%*.

“Cable 10% - Season #2 - 1996/97: Episode #15 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment and Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/020.

“Queer TV as Diverse as Our Community”

In its bid to create “queer television as diverse as our community,” the program also endeavoured to expand its representation of queerness beyond white cisgender gay men and lesbians. Trans people—and the term “transgender” itself—for instance, were featured more on *10%* than on any other cable access show discussed in this dissertation. Much like the rest of the LGBTQ2+ community, in the 1990s, trans people were gaining more visibility, both within the larger queer community and the mainstream thanks to the efforts of trans activists.¹²³ Viewers, too, demanded that trans issues be made more visible on the show. As a viewer pointed out:

I’m a transsexual. I’m going for a sex change, and I find...there’s a lot of information that one can’t get readily available. And I was wondering if they could do a show...with regards to endocrinologists in the Toronto area that deal with this situation...How one goes about having all your papers changed...your passport and your drivers (sic) license and social insurance number and things like that. And just do a show on transsexuals, because I think we are not sort of lumped in with the heterosexual shows, and the gay shows seem to leave us out. We’re kind of caught between a rock and a hard place.¹²⁴

Although the show failed to devote an entire episode to trans people, *10%* did dedicate several of its segments to issues that trans people faced, documenting, for instance, the beginnings of Meal Trans in Toronto, a weekly free meal program at the 519 for and run by trans folks, and the work of the Canadian transgender resource centre. Of particular interest is a segment on Counting Past 2 (1997-2002), Canada’s first—and to this date, only—transgender film/video/arts festival.

Started in Toronto by trans activist and artist Mirha-Soleil Ross, the festival grew out of Ross’s frustration with the absence of audiovisual works made by trans people at queer and mainstream film and video festivals.¹²⁵ Counting Past 2 also responded to trans people’s

¹²³ Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2008), 151-195.

¹²⁴ “Season 2: Viewer Feedback (1996-1997).”

¹²⁵ “Background & Objectives,” Counting Past 2 Website, The Internet Archive, <https://web.archive.org/web/20010331145159/http://www.countingpast2.com/background.html>

newfound visibility in the 1990s; as Ross highlighted in her interview with *10%*, trans people were suddenly “very trendy in North America.” Yet, despite trans issues becoming more visible, Ross felt that trans people themselves were not included in these discussions, claiming: “People are writing books about us, they feature us in newspaper articles, they make tons of films about us, but it is very rare to see trans people doing stuff about trans people, or simply doing films and videos and showing them” (Figure 45).¹²⁶

Ross’s comment speaks to the importance of self-representation at the same time as it addresses the gaps within *10%*’s “diverse” programming. Indeed, it is interesting to note that this segment aired immediately after *10%* showed an excerpt from *Different for Girls* (1996, dir. Richard Spence), a comedy-drama starring actors Steven Mackintosh—portraying a trans woman—and Rupert Graves. Although the segment praises the film, which was screened at Counting Past 2’s 1998 edition, Ross’s comments points to the potential problems with *Different for Girls*’ conception and exhibition: a film made by a cis man, portraying a trans woman played by a straight cis man and directed at cis straight audiences.

By contrast, as trans activist and artist Xantra Phillippa MacKay—with whom Ross co-wrote and produced the fabulous zine *gendertrash from hell* in the early 1990s—explains in the *10%* segment, Counting Past 2 endeavoured to give trans people the opportunity to talk “about issues of *real concern* to us rather than repeating the old phrases like ‘oh yes I knew I was trans from this time etc.’ [my emphasis].” The positive feelings associated with and engendered by self-representation were compounded by the communal experience of the festival. As a festivalgoer explains on camera: “It was really terrific to come out and see transgender and transsexual people in the audience and on stage being sexy, being funny, being healthy, being

¹²⁶ “Cable 10% - Season #3 - 1997/98: Episode #3 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/034.

positive.” In that sense, the segment does not call for assimilation within the mainstream; nor does it call for the assimilation of trans cultures within the umbrella of the “queer” movement. Rather, trans artistry and activism, as Trish Salah underlines, were “contiguous but not subsumed within queer and feminist formations,” and *Counting Past 2* became a site wherein “transsexual, transgender, and intersex audiences could engage one another as well as representations and artists from their own communities.”¹²⁷

Screened at *Counting Past 2* was *Shadmith Manzo Performance*, a video short directed by multimedia artists Boyd Kodak and Cat Grant, who were both volunteers at *10%*. In fact, under the hospice of Boyd and Grant, *10%* also spent some time with the case of Shadmith Manzo.¹²⁸ A Mexican trans woman living in Toronto with her partner Crystal, Manzo was deported to Mexico where she was at risk of being persecuted and facing violence due to her gender identity. The videos—both the short screened at *Counting Past 2* and the *10%* segments—became a way to fundraise for Manzo’s legal fees and secure her return to the country. They also served to “educate broader communities about Manzo’s situation and that of other trans people immigrating to escape persecution and violence.”¹²⁹ While white gays and lesbians were encouraged to vacation abroad as they pleased, the movement of trans women of colour, the segment showed, was severely restricted; and while Toronto was supposedly a queer haven, Shadmith Manzo’s case demonstrated that only some queer bodies were considered “acceptable” enough to be included in the city’s fabric.

¹²⁷ Trish Salah, “Notes Toward Thinking Transsexual Institutional Poetics,” in Barbara Godard and Eva C. Karpinski, *Trans/acting Culture, Writing, and Memory: Essays in Honour of Barbara Godard* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013), 178.

¹²⁸ “Cable 10% - Season #2 - 1996/97: Episode #18 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/023; “Cable 10% - Season #2 - 1996/97: Episode #24 [QTV].”

¹²⁹ Salah, “Notes,” 179.

If segments dealing with and embracing dyke and queer sexuality stood in opposition to a sanitized version of gayness, then, segments dealing with queer and trans people of colour stood in opposition to the presumed whiteness of the subject addressed in most of *10%*'s programming. Segments on the *Desh Pardesh* festival, Gay Asians of Toronto's conference *AmalgamASIAN*, *Gays and Lesbians of African Descent*, *Two-Spirited People of the First Nations*, and *Blockorama* showed that queer and trans people of colour did not necessarily benefit from the new gains of the homonormative subject, as they dealt with the ongoing burdens of systemic racism in Canadian society. Although it is likely that *10%*'s felt need to showcase diversity may have stemmed from a neoliberal impulse toward diversity and inclusion, especially because these segments remained few and far between and the rest of *10%*'s programming overwhelmingly privileged cis white gay men and lesbians, these segments nonetheless constitute invaluable audiovisual records and form a rich archive of the existence, struggles, and successes of trans and queer BIPOC space-making in Toronto.



Figure 45. Toronto trans activist and artist Mirha Soleil Ross promoting *Counting Past 2*.

“Cable 10% - Season #3 – 1997/98: Episode #3 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment and Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/034.

Remembering, Reconstructing, and (Re)Imagining Queer Pasts and Futures

As *10%* charged in its farewell message, “Our gains can be lost just as quickly if we take them for granted or *forget where we’ve come from*” (my emphasis). *10%*, therefore, endeavoured to remind their viewers “where they came from.” *10%*’s turn toward the past, in fact, began as early as the program’s second episode of its first season.¹³⁰ Entitled “Toronto’s Queer Past,” the 1-hour long episode featured an interview with gay liberation activist George Hislop, who co-founded CHAT, co-organized in the We Demand rally in Ottawa, and eventually ran for local politics in 1980. The program also aired a segment on the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (the ArQuives) and covered the opening night of an exhibition of gay and lesbian histories at the

¹³⁰ Ironically, like much of queer history, the first episode has been lost and no traces remain.

Toronto Historical Board.¹³¹ That such an episode aired so early in the show indicated that history would be an important component of its programming. And indeed, *10%*'s interest in the past continued throughout its six year-run, culminating in a regular segment called "Homo History" in its fifth and sixth season. Viewers learned about the history of Canadian LGBTQ2+ events such as Pride, the 1969 Bill, the 1981 Bathhouses Raids, Halloween's drag origins; of local organizations and figures such as LOOT, CGRO, the Gay Community Appeal, Gerald Hannon of the Body Politic, Jim Egan, drag queens Michelle DuBarry and Michelle Ross; of the meanings behind the labrys, the pink triangle, and the rainbow flag; and so on.

10%'s focus on queer history further serves to complicate the narrative of queer progress presented in the rest of its programming. On the one hand, the emphasis on history did corroborate the claims that the community had made tremendous headways since its early days. As the message posted on their website claimed, "We've come a long way baby!" Educating viewers about their history was a way to show that through perseverance and hard work, gay people had overcome incredible obstacles, and were "never going back." On the other hand, these segments meant to ensure that no one would take recent victories for queer rights for granted. *10%*'s turn toward history served as a powerful reminder, as Heather Love underlines, of "the unexpected continuities between the queer past and the queer present."¹³² Thus, *10%* was faced with what Love calls "a strange choice":

Queers face a strange choice: is it better to move on toward a brighter future or to hang back and cling to the past? Such divided allegiances result in contradictory feelings: pride and shame, anticipation and regret, hope and despair. Contemporary queers find ourselves in the odd situation of "looking forward" while we are "feeling backward."¹³³

¹³¹ "10% QTV: Catalog of All Episodes, Season 1-6 (1995-2001)," The Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives Website, The Internet Archive, <https://web.archive.org/web/20020211181520/http://clga.ca/Material/MovingImages/docs/10percentQtv/Shows/Contents.html>

¹³² Love, *Feeling Backward*, 25.

¹³³ Love, 27.

Despite these dual and contradictory allegiances, *10%* also showed that the past was still part and parcel of the queer present. This “pull of the past onto the present,” what Elizabeth Freeman calls “temporal drag,” complicates “the idea of horizontal political generations succeeding one another.”¹³⁴ As such, the program attempted to establish and make visible a lineage between an emerging generation of queers and the generations that came before them, using television as a platform to “touch across time.”¹³⁵

Furthermore, *10%* made it abundantly clear that if accessing queer pasts was a worthy goal, the task of retrieving such histories was difficult—with some histories being more accessible than others. In a *10%* interview with Margaret Wescott about her 1997 NFB documentary, *Stolen Moments*, Wescott potently lays bare for the viewers the stakes of doing queer historical work: “So much of the memory of those who came before us has been destroyed. The photographs, and records of lesbians and gays were destroyed by the Nazis. There was an enormous collection in the Hershfield institute...it was all burnt. The poetry of Sappho was destroyed by early Christians. Everywhere we find that the records of our history have vanished...I wanted to spend a small tribute to them. Because of them I am able to be here.”¹³⁶

In insisting on the importance of archiving the queer past, the show was also conscious, in that sense, that it was performing the role of both witness and documentarian. As Liz Marshall insists, *10%* “was about a time, about a people, about a culture, about a place.”¹³⁷ The show, therefore, may constitute a record of moments that have become now “canon” in North American queer history, such as Ellen DeGeneres’s coming out, and the tragic murder of

¹³⁴ Freeman, *Time Binds*, 61-65.

¹³⁵ Freeman, 25.

¹³⁶ “Cable 10% - Season #3 - 1997/98: Episode #15 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/046.

¹³⁷ Liz Marshall, Interview with the author, June 2023.

Matthew Shephard, but its significance mainly lies in the fact that in featuring local queer events, organizations, and individuals, the show created an impressive (albeit incomplete) record of Toronto's queer life in the mid to late 1990s. Moreover, on July 10, 1999, *10%* announced on the air that the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (the ArQuives) would be the new home for *10%-QTV*'s past episodes, thus making an official commitment to archiving the show for posterity.

Many segments aired on the program also begged the question: how does one remedy the absence of queer historical material or correct the lack of LGBTQ2+ content within media histories? The answer, for *10%*, lied in queer cultural lineage, and specifically, camp humour. As Michael Bronski highlights, "Camp is the re-imagining of the material world into ways and forms which transform and comment upon the original...Ultimately, camp changes the real, hostile world into a new one which is controllable and safe."¹³⁸ As such, Bronski shows, camp is also useful to "reinvent the past."¹³⁹ In a segment entitled "What Do They Do?," for instance, camp humour helped the show recover and recreate a lost (i.e. poorly documented) lesbian past. In what *10%* called a "farical look at answering that age old straight question," the segment takes viewers back to 1928 Toronto as three silent black and white vignettes play out on the screen for the viewers.¹⁴⁰

The first scene, which takes place at "The Ladies Culture Club," introduces viewers to "straight but curious Kitty" who is sitting alone at a table—"but not for long," we are told. Quickly, a masculine-presenting woman sits at the table, and the two strike up a conversation. When asked if she "comes here often," the butch woman immediately responds: "Oh my, yes!

¹³⁸ Michael Bronski, *Culture Clash: The Making of Gay Sensibility* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 42.

¹³⁹ Bronski, 28.

¹⁴⁰ "Cable 10% - Season #3 - 1997/98: Episode #9 [QTV]," The ArQuives, Moving Image Entertainment Collection, 1999-089/040.

I'm a member of the Club!" Her identity as a lesbian is further confirmed by the book she is reading: *The Boudoir*, described to Kitty as "the latest lesbian novelette." Shocked at the bluntness of the woman yet intrigued, Kitty then asks: "I've always wondered, well...*what exactly do you do?*" If the question "what do you do?" cheekily refers to the popular "mystery" surrounding lesbian sexual practices—the same mystery that Stanton and Harvey had mocked on *Out of the Closets* in 1977—10% playfully turns the distasteful question into an historical enquiry: what did lesbians of the past do? Specifically, what did they do without the current spatial, communal, and informational structures which work together to support lesbian lives?

The viewer is then plunged in the midst of a women-only card game, where a group of women drink champagne and flirt with one another (Figure 46). Key to this scene is one protagonist's book: *The Boudoir*, the same lesbian novelette which is mentioned in the first vignette. Throughout the card game, excerpts from the book are read out loud. The scenes of the pulp novelette are subsequently enacted on the screen, constituting the third vignette that the viewers are privy to. In these scenes, two women, Queenie and Madison, become physically intimate with one another, which arouses both the captive audience of card players and the women of the first vignette, as the butch woman tells the story, too. As Queenie and Madison "get it on," so do the protagonists in the first and second vignette. This segment is rife with campy, humoristic quips, such as: "Now darling are you a bottom or a top? What does it matter? They continue to bop!"

The segment may be silly, but it is not unserious. It draws on and reclaims the rich queer history of paperback pulp novels—although slightly anachronistically since the paperback revolution peaked in the 40s and 50s—to imagine and fantasize a time during which lesbians

took up space, formed kinships, and had sexual relationships.¹⁴¹ As historian Cameron Duder observes, there were social networks among (mainly middle-class) women in same-sex relationships prior to the 1950s: “There were not large groups, and they did not have a public profile, but they were networks formed on the basis of shared and recognized attraction to women.”¹⁴² Although the segment is not entirely accurate—nor does it pretend to be—it raises important questions about the gaps in the queer historical and audiovisual record and suggests a playful way to fill them.



Figure 46. But what do they do?! A campy look at lesbian culture and history.

“Cable 10% - Season #3 – 1997/98: Episode #9 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment and Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/040.

¹⁴¹ Susan Stryker, *Queer Pulp: Perverted Passions from the Golden Age of the Paperback* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2001). Lesbian archivist and activist Joan Nestle also describes this genre as “survival literature.”

¹⁴² Cameron Duder, *Awfully Devoted Women: Lesbian Lives in Canada, 1900-65* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 63.

If theorist Michael Bronski saw camp as a way to reinvent or imagine the past, *10%* also mobilized camp to invent the future. In particular, *10%* reflected on how the experiences of the queer past could lead to a better queer future for upcoming generations. In a campy parody of the popular sci-fi series *Star Trek*, *10%* imagines a future where bigotry and intolerance have been overcome, where everyone is “fabulous,” and where science fiction finally acknowledges that queer people exist, even in space. Indeed, despite queer readings by scholars and fans alike, in the 1990s, the *Star Trek* universe was devoid of any explicit representation of LGBTQ2+ identities.¹⁴³ As the *10%* segment proclaims, the series had a tendency to treat gays and lesbians “as metaphors” and “never as actual human characters,” thus defining the future as “exclusively heterosexual.”¹⁴⁴ In offering a queer version of *Star Trek*, then, *10%* responded to and corrected the “lesbian and gays as metaphors” trend of contemporary sci-fi television series.

Yet, despite its lack of LGBTQ2+ representation, scholars have argued argues that *Star Trek* nonetheless represents a utopian space for queer viewers, providing “endless amounts of pleasure and fascination.”¹⁴⁵ Jenkins further adds: “Science fiction represents a potential resource for groups which have had very limited stakes in the status quo, for whom the possibility of profound social change would be a desirable fantasy.”¹⁴⁶ In the case of *10%*, *Star Trek* enabled the program to comment on issues of assimilation and diversity—two issues which were, as shown throughout this chapter, paramount to the program’s vision.

¹⁴³ See for instance: David Greven, *Gender and Sexuality in Star Trek: Allegories of Desire in the Television Series and Films* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co., 2009); Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana L. Veith, “Romantic Myth, Transcendence, and Star Trek Zines,” in *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (University of Iowa Press, 2014), 97-115; David K. Seitz, *Radical Geographies of Deep Space Nine* (Nebraska University Press, 2023).

¹⁴⁴ “Cable 10% - Season #3 - 1997/98: Episode #15 [QTV].”

¹⁴⁵ John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins, *Science Fiction Audiences: Watching Doctor Who and Star Trek* (London: Routledge, 1995), 263.

¹⁴⁶ Tulloch and Jenkins, 242.

In the segment, entitled “Queer Trek: The X Generation,” members of the *10%* cast perform a queer re-enacting of the beloved sci-fi show, “streak[ing] across [the viewers’] screens...with flair and camp screaming at full power.” “Queer Trek” follows the adventures of the crew of the “USS Fabulise,” whose mission is to “explore strange prejudices,” to “seek out and expose bad taste and marginalization,” and “to boldly promote a more fabulous Federation, where no queer has gone before.” After a grueling mission “teaching primary colour coordination to Federation Headquarters on Earth,” the crew is on route to the pleasure planet Risa for some “well-deserved R&R,” when they are confronted by the less-than-fabulous Borg, a collective of cybernetic organisms featured in the various *Star Trek* series—*10%*, in fact, aired at the same time as *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995-2001), during which the Borg are one of the main antagonists. The Borg, however, also speak to a larger queer context. The Borg, indeed, are feared precisely because their only aim is to forcibly assimilate other species as part of their collective, where they speak of one mind. Resistance to assimilation, according to the Borg, “is futile.”

Upon encountering the Borg, the captain of the USS Fabulise records the following message into her log: “We have been confronted with a hostile humanoid race which conquers and enslaves diverse cultures, assimilating them into mismatched polycotton blends and dull disenfranchised nuclear family units. Never before has the fabulousness of the Federation been so threatened.” The Borg the USS Fabulise meet, however, are unlike the Borg of the *Star Trek* series. While they do speak in the monotonous robotic voice that characterizes the Borg’s collective consciousness, they do not look like cyborgs; rather they look like humans, wearing suit, ties, and stifling dresses evocative of 1950s North America. It becomes clear, then, that the Borg are a stand-in for heteronormativity (Figure 47).

In typical *Star Trek* fashion, the captain calls an emergency meeting in the ship's conference room where the crew discusses how to best thwart the Borg's attempt at assimilation. While the segment is undoubtedly set in the future, the discussion revolves around late 20th century history: "As you may know from our history," a character named Modem asserts, "diversity was often treated by the mainstream with fear and contempt." Modem, an android modelled on Lieutenant Commander Data of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-1994), continues: "The desire by power groups to impose uniformity was pervasive." Yet, another character intervenes, queer people of the 20th century also bravely fought against uniformity, leading to a better future for everyone on earth: "But as we know, were it not for our natural fabulousness and our empathy for oppressed people, as we ourselves were once oppressed, the earth surely would have perished in the 21st century." The Borg's threat, then, means returning to the dark ages of pervasive and oppressive heteronormativity, a time before gay liberation, where there is "no Donna Summer," "no world peace," "no fabulous frontier," and "no queer sex."

Ultimately, Modem manages to "transmit a powerful magnetic field" thereby "reversing both the polarity of the Borg cube and the orientation." The Borg, now dressed in punk-coded, Dirty Babette-esque attire, appear on screen for a second time: "We are the Borg. Resistance is futile...Diversity is irrelevant" (Figure 48). Realizing that, in rejecting claims to diversity, the Borg's new discourse is just as dogmatic as their previous intentions, the Vulcan (Spock's species) officer on board initiates a "mind meld"—a form of psychic connection—between the two species to "demonstrate the illogic of intolerance and hence the true logic of fabulousness." In doing so, the crew hopes to convince the Borg that "by fostering diversity, we are made stronger, more compassionate, more rational, sexier, and much more fun to party with." The

conclusion of the segment then shows the Borg and the crew are partying together on the ship, as they have reconciled their differences and no one is attempting to assimilate anyone.

On one level, the segment's clever use of the Borg as a metaphor for LGBTQ2+ assimilation into straight society thus serves as a counterpoint to the overall homonormative tone of the show. The Borg, here, can also be read as a powerful metaphor for the conforming effects of neoliberal capitalism, which turns everyone into mindless consumers. At the same time, another reading is possible (and plausible). The segment, on the other hand, uses the neoliberal logic of diversity to promote individualism at the expense of collectivity. As the Borg emerge from their "reorientation," which ultimately is found to be undesirable because it exhibits similar intolerant traits, they declare: "All hierarchical non-progressive patriarchal organizational models are irrelevant. We are made to serve the Gay Agenda. Do not procreate. Surrender your children." Inside *10%*'s critique of intolerance and support for cultural pluralism, therefore, lies a denunciation of leftist queer politics based on collective struggle as a way to resist systems of oppression. Furthermore, the Borg's statement echoes the anti-social turn in queer theory, which refuses society's impulse toward reproductive futurism.¹⁴⁷ In a sense, the segment disavows both what they saw as the excesses of heteronormativity which led nations to deny their queer citizens their rights and sought to "assimilate" them, and the perceived excesses of the queer movement which demanded that the world be made anew. The future *10%* imagined, rather, would be one of tolerance and multiculturalism, in which the gains made in the late 1990s would be extended to everyone within the LGBTQ2+ community in the 21st century.

Throughout its existence, *10%* navigated various changes occurring in Canada in the mid- to late-1990s. Although predominantly geared towards a white, middle-class

¹⁴⁷ See for instance the works of Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman mentioned in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

homonormative audience, the show did offer queerer and more radical perspectives under its mandate of offering “diverse” programming—although this did not happen without conflicts. Much like its predecessors, then, *10%* was faced having to address “the community,” as the show struggled to define exactly, who, was part of this community at the turn of the millennium. Yet, in insisting on the importance of turning toward the past to imagine better futures, *10%* also left room for imagination and set a hopeful tone for what was to come.



Figure 47. The Borg as representative of the excesses of heteronormativity.

“Cable 10% - Season #3 - 1997/98: Episode #15 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment and Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/046.



Figure 48. The Borg as representative of the excesses of queer leftist politics.

“Cable 10% - Season #3 - 1997/98: Episode #15 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment and Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/046.

CHAPTER EIGHT: EPILOGUE: “BECAUSE OF THEM I AM ABLE TO BE HERE”

This dissertation has offered a history of the ways in which various queer individuals and groups from 1977 to 2001 mobilized community television to increase access to media and information about LGBTQ2+ issues as well as access to social, cultural, and/or political networks—thus using cable TV as a tool of queer access mobilization. Participants, indeed, took to the platform with hopes of reaching out to wider audiences, building solidarity with various groups and organizations in the province, and, most of all, helping queer people connect with one another. In writing this history, I have used a comparative approach to trace similarities between various cable access shows that aired within the province from 1977 to 2001. Not only did I highlight similarities between the programs, but I also paid attention to the complex intra-regional and pan-city differences within networks of queer organizing and media-making. As a result, this approach has enabled me to showcase the diversity of activism that existed in the region over the years.

In Chapter 4, I investigated the rise of visibility politics in Ontario by looking at the creation of groups and organizations dedicated to making queer lives visible. Specifically, this chapter looked at the difficulties that the Gay Liberation Movement experienced when trying to get information out in the mainstream media which, I argued, moved gays and lesbians to look to the potential of cable access to broadcast their message. In chapter 5, I explored how the local contexts of Toronto and Ottawa, as well as the networks available in each city, led cable access shows to enact and experiment with different visions of gay liberation on screen. Beginning in Ottawa, I looked at the program *Out of the Closets/Gais de l’Outaouais* (1977-1980) to analyze how the show addressed the specificities of gay activism in the nation’s capital at a time during

which gays and lesbians were still deemed “morally weak” and “security risks” by federal institutions. As such, I discussed how local conditions led the gay activist organization behind the program, Gays of/d’Ottawa (GO), to adopt a reformist position towards gay liberation and gay rights which influenced the shape, tone, and content of its television program, as *Out of the Closets/Gais de l’Outaouais* consciously showcased a liberal, middle-of-the-road approach to gay liberation. Therefore, I posited that the show epitomized the “human rights strategy” strand of gay and lesbian politics at the time, which saw claims for protections under the law as the best way to garner support for the growing movement. I then turned my attention to Toronto through an analysis of *Gay News and Views* (1977-1978). In this section, I argued that the collective behind the program, too, made claims for equality and acceptance of gay people based on a common sense of humanity, using television as a consciousness-raising tool to demand equal rights. At the same time, I explored how the show asserted the right to difference by injecting distinct gay liberation aesthetics and cultural elements into traditional and familiar structures, opening the door to a broader vision of gay liberation that included, but was not limited to, civil rights. Finally, I looked to another Toronto-based program, *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals* (1978-1979), which started airing shortly after *Gay News and Views*. I explored how *TSMBOH* further moved away from a reformist and assimilationist approach to liberation. Instead, the program demonstrated to its viewers how heterosexist institutions in Canada deemed gay men and lesbian women “offensive” and, as a result, prevented the achievement of what they saw as being “true” gay and lesbian liberation. To that end, *TSMBOH* promoted the creation of institutions and projects made by and for gays and lesbians and advocated for the refashioning of existing societal structures. I argued that the program did so through performing and playing

with radical feminist strategies of gay and lesbian liberation, and conceiving of the television screen as a participatory space which could lead to direct action and social change.

In chapter 6, I continued this discussion by entering the next decade and moving away from the metropolis to a smaller (yet no less important) city in Northwestern Ontario. Through this analysis, I showed that there were ways of approaching HIV/AIDS other than the popular stories of urban mobilization and direct-action activism. Framing the work of *Thunder Gay Magazine* as both educational and political and, therefore, as a continuation of the activist work that had existed in the city since the days of gay liberation, I used the results of a 1989 survey as a point of departure to analyze how and why *Thunder Gay Magazine* became the main education provider for the gay and bisexual community in Thunder Bay, as the survey claimed. I also opened up the discussion toward race and gender as factors to potentially include in the results of the survey, as *Thunder Gay Magazine* endeavoured to be in dialogue with, for instance, Indigenous ways of educating communities about HIV/AIDS in Northwestern Ontario and beyond. Through the analysis of safer sex programs and three short documentaries which aired on the program, I effectively demonstrated that *Thunder Gay Magazine* used repetition, participation, and compassion in order to successfully educate Thunder Bay's population about the epidemic.

Overall, in this dissertation, I have explored how cable access became a vehicle to convey the ebbs and flows of the LGBTQ2+ movement in the province. And, throughout this study, I have complicated the often-told history of conflicts between lesbians and gay men by showing examples of cross-political work and mutual support—despite the existence of disagreements and clashes. I have also insisted on the multiplicity and complexity of the LGBTQ2+ “movement” itself; in all of the chapters I have endeavoured to convey the intricate nature of

queer communities and politics. Instead of following a single, linear strand, which would see LGBTQ2+ rights progressively gaining ground in the province of Ontario and in Canada as a whole, I have questioned this narrative of “progress” and offered a multidimensional picture of the fight for queer liberation as translated through the television screen.

While this is recurrent throughout the study, Chapter 7, in particular, showed how television images circulated on cable access visually translated the legislative battles over the recognition of same-sex relationships and family rights, as it became the main tenet of the movement. Yet, I have also shown how the program could not be reduced to simply broadcasting a homonormative and/or homonationalist narrative. Rather, conflicts occurred between those who valued and saw “progress” as buying into heterosexual society and proponents of queer liberation who sought to continue and expand on the work of their predecessors.

In 2001, as mentioned in the last chapter, *QTV* warned its viewers: “Our gains can be lost just as quickly if we take them for granted or forget where we’ve come from.” And they were right. A lot has changed since I started writing this dissertation in 2019. In 2023, queer and trans people across North America are facing unprecedented backlash. Trans kids, especially, are under attack, both in the U.S and Canada. Some have been accusing LGBTQ2+ people of grooming children, advocating for the repeal of initiatives such as Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities (SOGI) education initiatives—wrongly dubbed “gender ideology” classes—in Canadian schools. Queer books are being censored; battles are being fought over the flying of Pride flags and drag queen story hours. In this context, the archives of queer cable access television programs appear more relevant than ever. As Kate Eichhorn insists, engaging with

past artefacts means engaging with “some of the legacies, epistemes, and traumas pressing down on the present.”¹

This epilogue thus investigates the relevance, legacy and value of the cable access programs today. First, this chapter explores the policy changes and technological innovations that impacted community television from the 1990s onwards to understand its place in the Canadian mediascape today, thus continuing the discussion initiated in the previous chapter. Then, I return to the importance of the program’s archives and highlight that, in the spirit of community television, access to information about our past can inform our choices in the present. Specifically, I suggest that past queer cable access television programming can and should push people to forge intergenerational networks to better apprehend our current realities.

What Remains of Cable Access Television? Community TV In the Digital Age

Community television is still with us. Yet, cable access has drastically shifted since its inception. Already in 1991, Kim Goldberg wrote that cable access had changed from being “radical” to being “reasonable” in the 1980s and 1990s, as programming became more controlled by the cable companies.² The notion of access, as a result, started to be questioned; as Goldberg notes: “There are very few reported instances of individuals or groups being denied access outright. The program is really one of the degrees of access.”³ And, although the number of cable access television stations in Ontario and across Canada rose dramatically in the 1990s, so did the

¹ Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 5.

² Kim Goldberg, *The Barefoot Channel: Community Television as a Tool for Social Change* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1990), 20-24.

³ Goldberg, 24.

number of TV channels that Canadians now had access to, further marginalizing community television's place in the televisual landscape.⁴

Finally, in March of 1997, as shows like *10%* were still on the air, the CRTC made the decision to deregulate community television, effectively ending its mandate to provide a community channel. As the CRTC noted: "While the Commission remains of the view that community programming, and the broader goal of local expression, are vital components of the broadcasting system, it does not intend to require any distributor to provide an outlet for local expression under the new regulations."⁵ The CRTC, indeed, felt that after 25 years of operation, cable access "had achieved a level of maturity and success such that it no longer need[ed] to be mandated."⁶ Yet, the CRTC remained convinced that "based on the expression of support for the community channel by both the cable industry and members of the public throughout this process," cable companies would still generously provide community channels and "continue to provide a vibrant local service, particularly in those communities where there is strong public demand for the service."⁷ However, across Canada, as Michael Lithgow observes, "cable companies began to progressively manage their community channels like commercial properties."⁸ As a result, Lithgow posits, by 2002 "independent community programming had all but disappeared, and in its place was a distinctly more conventional (and commercial) approach to programming."⁹

⁴ Goldberg 2; 28.

⁵ CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission), "New Regulatory Framework for Broadcasting Distribution Undertakings," March 11, 1997, Public Notice CRTC 1997-25, <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/1997/pb97-25.htm>.

⁶ CRTC, "New Regulatory Framework for Broadcasting Distribution Undertakings."

⁷ CRTC, "New Regulatory Framework for Broadcasting Distribution Undertakings."

⁸ Michael Lithgow, "Transformation of Practice, Policy, and Cultural Citizenships in Community Television," in *Alternative Media in Canada*, ed. Patricia Mazepa, David Skinner, and Kirsten Kozolanka (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012), 131.

⁹ Lithgow, 131.

Cable access enthusiasts and participants, however, opposed the decision of the CRTC. In December 1997, the CRTC indeed noted that “parties representing various local community organizations and consumer interests” had urged the Commission to “maintain a requirement for the mandatory provision of a community channel by incumbent cable television licensees.”¹⁰ Several parties, the CRTC highlighted, also “advocated a further public hearing to assess the impact of the Commission's policy on the role and the continued existence of the community channel.”¹¹ Consequently, in 2002, the CRTC decided to implement new community television requirements for cable companies. The new policy, first, distinguished between two kinds of community television programming: cable company managed and independently produced. The 2002 regulations also stipulated that between 30 and 50 percent of the programming aired on the community channel during each broadcast week was to be devoted to the broadcasting of independent access programs.¹² However, cable company productions still dominated the airwaves as opposed to independent programming, as there were no checks in place and funding for such programming was scarce.¹³

Some participants who had volunteered for queer cable access programs and remained involved with community programming acutely felt these changes. Ralph Hamelmann and a few others from *10%*, for instance, started a Toronto-based verité-style show called *Cutting Edge* on Rogers shortly after leaving *10%*; Hamelmann then went on to produce a queer talent show, *Spectra Talent Contest*, on Bell Local in the mid-2010s. Hamelmann recalls that while working

¹⁰ CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission), “Broadcasting Distribution Regulations,” Paragraph 12, December 22, 1997, Public Notice CRTC 1997-150, <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/1997/pb97-150.htm>

¹¹ “Broadcasting Distribution Regulations,” Paragraph 12.

¹² CRTC (Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission), “Policy Framework for Community-Based Media,” October 10, 2002, Broadcasting Public Notice CRTC 2002-61, <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2002/pb2002-61.htm#s4>

¹³ CACTUS (Canadian Association of Community Television Users and Stations), “New CRTC Community TV Policy Little Better than Previous One,” <http://www.cactusmedia.ca/node/436>.

with Rogers on *10%* was “tremendous,” the experience of producing the next two shows was not so positive. As Hamelmann claims: “It wasn’t the greatest experience with Rogers at the end or with Bell,” because “there just seemed to be a lot more walls.”¹⁴ In particular, Hamelmann felt that the community programming environment had become “more corporate” and “less community-oriented;” in other words, according to Hamelmann, cable companies in charge of community programming “had lost their soul.”¹⁵

The new policies also had to take into account the rise of the Internet and social media, although the CRTC did so with little success. In 2016, for instance, yet a new framework came into effect. The CRTC acknowledged that “while Canadians can now share their stories directly with one another through social media, they still value community programming on television.”¹⁶ The CRTC also recognized that, in the digital age, there was now a “diversity of broadcasting methods and distribution models” for community programming television in Canada: from linear (traditional) community channels, independent community stations, as well as video-on-demand.¹⁷ “More and more,” the CRTC noted, “community programming is also being offered online by traditional community channel operators, as well as directly by independent community groups and individuals.”¹⁸ This wide array of community programming did not endanger the original mandates of the CRTC, the policy claimed; on the contrary, it reinforced “the objective of reflecting communities, and particularly underrepresented communities, in the broadcasting system,” as this objective could “now be met through various platforms.”¹⁹

¹⁴ Ralph Hamelmann, Interview with the author, June 2023.

¹⁵ Ralph Hamelmann, Interview with the author, June 2023.

¹⁶ CRTC (Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission), “Policy Framework for Local and Community Television,” Introduction, June 15, 2016, Broadcasting Regulatory Policy CRTC 2016-224, <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2016/2016-224.htm>.

¹⁷ CRTC, “Policy Framework for Local and Community Television,” Paragraph 114.

¹⁸ CRTC, “Policy Framework for Local and Community Television,” Paragraph 114.

¹⁹ CRTC, “Policy Framework for Local and Community Television,” Paragraph 114.

Yet, despite the acknowledgement that community programming still mattered, the policy did not effectively reinforce the status of community television. Indeed, the CRTC's recognition that there were now multiple arenas for communities to access information and participate in media making was a double-edged sword. Immediately after acknowledging that the community objectives of cable access could now be met through various platforms, the CRTC insisted that because Canadians had "access to countless media sources providing community reflection and forums for community discussion, be it in the form of television and radio stations, community newspapers or online social media groups," and because "providing training to Canadians to create community programming" had become "less onerous" given that "the tools required for production" were "more readily available and simpler to use," community television funds should be allocated elsewhere.²⁰

In particular, the 2016 CRTC decision pitted community programming against local news, as the Commission feared that "the emergence of new digital technologies ha[d] made access to news and analysis from around the world easier than ever," thus threatening to "replace traditional local news sources."²¹ Therefore, the 2016 policy declared that cable companies "serving metropolitan markets" would be permitted to "direct their allowable local expression contribution to community programming in other markets and/or to designated local television stations for the production of local news."²² This resulted in the loss of community channels across Canada.²³ Furthermore, programming became all the more entrenched in the hands of cable companies; as Dahne Jobson, Chair of the Toronto Community Media Network, noted

²⁰ CRTC, "Policy Framework for Local and Community Television," Paragraph 117.

²¹ CRTC, "Policy Framework for Local and Community Television," Introduction.

²² CRTC, "Policy Framework for Local and Community Television," Paragraph 90.

²³ "Shaw TV Stations to close in Vancouver, Calgary, and Edmonton as funds diverted to Global," *CBC News*, April 26, 2017, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/shaw-tv-stations-closing-calgary-edmonton-vancouver-global-1.4086807>

upon hearing the 2016 decision: “You don’t see tomorrow’s Tom Greens on cable community TV anymore. Think of 10% QTV on Rogers in 1995. It was the first TV series to air LGBT content and the Pride Parade. Nowadays, cable staff produce the majority of the content—mostly soft lifestyle programming nobody watches.”²⁴ One quick look at Rogers’ website indeed reveals that programs today, which air both on TV and online, now mainly consist of health and wellness programs, cooking shows, movie reviews, live bingo games, with an emphasis on multicultural programming. Programming, it appears, did go “from radical to reasonable,” as Goldberg warned in 1991. As a result, community organizations like the Canadian Association of Community Television Users and Stations (CACTUS) have estimated that “90% of Canadians no longer have access to a genuine community television channel.”²⁵

Is cable access in Canada doomed to be controlled by greedy, conservative cable companies then? Was the platform even ever as radical as promised, particularly for queer people? *Gay News and Views* aired in the late 1970s when cable access had been introduced only a few years prior. Yet, the program was effectively censored by Maclean Hunter. Thirteen years later, in 1991, Rogers Cable censored and cancelled *Toronto Living With AIDS*, a series dedicated to the HIV/AIDS crisis created by video artists John Greyson and Michael Balser. The cable station manager, Ed Nasello, found a scene of “men French kissing” which contained “the caressing of thighs” to be offensive and “in bad taste”—strongly echoing the remarks made by Maclean Hunter’s station manager upon cancelling *Gay News and Views*.²⁶ And even when shows were not cancelled, they were always closely monitored by the cable company. Gays of/d’

²⁴ Cathy Edwards, “CRTC Deals Death Blow to Community Television,” Press Release, CACTUS, July 28, 2016, <http://www.cactusmedia.ca/node/690>.

²⁵ Cathy Edwards, “A New Vision for Community TV, CACTUS, January 8, 2010, <http://www.cactusmedia.ca/node/401>.

²⁶ Ryan Conrad, “Cable Access Queer: Revisiting *Toronto Living With AIDS* 1990-91,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 60 (Spring 2021).

Ottawa, for instance, had to operate under strict guidelines, while disclaimers often preceded queer cable access programs, indicating the opinions expressed on the program were those of the participants and did not reflect the opinions of the cable company. As Harvey Hamburg noted in our interview, the story of cable access is often the story of “failed attempts at gaining the support of the commercial television business by community groups.” According to Hamburg, cable access “was bound to fail because of the constraints.”²⁷

Perhaps there is a more nuanced take to be had, however. For one, some former cable participants mentioned in this study still very much enjoy cable access. Michael Sobota, for example, was invited to participate in a program called *Age Friendly Thunder Bay* on Shaw Spotlight in 2022. Sobota recalls being interviewed by Rebecca Johnson, a local member of Thunder Bay’s municipal council, about gay and lesbian history in Thunder Bay. Additionally, the program discussed the challenges (and joys) of queer aging—a topic which, unfortunately, remains underdiscussed. As Sobota told me, “It was fun!”²⁸ Cable access, then, can still be fun and useful, even in the age of the digital and with restricted budgets and programming options. After all, scholars and community groups like CACTUS have been continuing to defend cable access television, offering new visions for the medium in the 21st century. Michael Lithgow for instance, claims that: “Community television remains – even with an active Internet culture – a vital opportunity for expanding cultural citizenships well beyond the democratically feeble offerings of consumerism and into the kinds of capacities that encourage and engender public action.”²⁹ CACTUS’s concrete proposals for the evolution of the medium also need to be taken seriously by the CRTC; first that community channels should be “run by communities

²⁷ Harvey Hamburg, Interview with the author, August 2022.

²⁸ Michael Sobota, Facebook Messenger exchange, Summer 2022.

²⁹ Lithgow, “Transformation of Practice,” 126.

themselves,” instead of being in the hands of a few cable operators. Funding, CACTUS proposes, should also be allocated beyond traditional television programming, to establish “multi-platform community-access production and distribution centres.”³⁰

New stations have, in fact, started to follow this example. In October 2018, a group of Toronto volunteers launched Bump Television (BUMP TV), a 24-hour DIY, artist-run, online cable access station. BUMP TV grasps the truly queer potential of the medium of cable access—although the show is not LGBTQ2+ per se— and, in many ways, harkens back to the optimistic visions of access characteristic of the 1970s. A review in *Canadian Art magazine*, for example, praised the station, especially in light of its ability to capture the spirit of early cable access ventures, while offering a model of cable access that seemed to actually work for the 21st century. As the reviewer, Joy Xiang, notes: “If BUMP feels engaging and direct, it’s because the public-access model recuperates a way of interacting with each other that is less opaque, and contained in slower time than its online corporate-media counterparts.”³¹ Yet, in August 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, BUMP TV went on hiatus and announced on their social media platforms that:

BUMP TV was never intended to be a solely virtual project. The core of our work has always been getting together in a studio with community “TV,” or going to events in the city and broadcasting live. Both of these are made difficult or impossible by the pandemic. So we’ve been unofficially paused for a while now. As a group, we aren’t passionate about a purely virtual TV station. As individuals we are focused on direct political action.³²

The last chapter also briefly touched upon the advent of PrideVision, the first LGBTQ2+-focused channel in Canada, which launched in 2001. In 2005, PrideVision became OUTtv,

³⁰ Edwards, “A New Vision for Community TV.”

³¹ Joy Xiang, “Bump TV,” *Canadian Art*, July 29, 2019, <https://canadianart.ca/reviews/bump-tv/>.

³² “Bump Television,” Instagram post, August 17, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/bump television/>.

which is still in existence today. Among its offerings is *Outlook TV*, which itself had first started as a 1990 cable show, *Prism*, in Vancouver. After folding, the show was resurrected in 2011 on Shaw TV and subsequently taken up by OUTtv and online on OUTtvgo, a streaming VOD service; episodes of the show are also available on their website and on YouTube. A queer magazine show which is run by volunteers, *Outlook TV* looks at queer life across Canada, thus steering away from the localist model of cable access television while still providing information relevant to local communities. *Outlook TV* is therefore an excellent and successful example of how queer cable access media can still exist both within and outside of television and adapt to the current media landscape.

But what of the Internet, and how have queer communities used the Internet since the popularization of the World Wide Web? In its beginnings, when *10%* was still on the air, the Internet, too, represented a promise of democratic communication, one that was less regulated than the cable access airwaves. As the *10%* segment on the Rainbow Guide website proclaimed, the Internet could let “as many people as we can know about what’s happening in the community.”³³ The Internet has indeed created new spaces for queer people to find one another, communicate, share information, and build their communities and networks in recent decades. In addition, as Lauren Herold notes, “the availability of digital editing software and lightweight video cameras embedded in smartphones provides millions of individual users with production technology for use on a daily basis, something unavailable during the heyday of public access in the mid 1980s-mid 1990s.”³⁴ As such, these new developments have enabled more people to participate in online community-making, allowing for more diversified experiences to be

³³ “Cable 10% [Per Cent] - Season #1 - 1995/96: Episode #6 [QTV],” The ArQuives, Entertainment and Moving Image Collection, 1999-089/004.

³⁴ Lauren Herold, “Cable Comes Out: LGBTQ Community Television on New York Public Access Stations” (PhD Dissertation, Chicago: Northwestern University, 2021), 285.

portrayed and talked about—as opposed to the predominantly white, cisgender environment of cable access TV. Yet, on social media platforms, queer people often face the same censorship issues they faced in the past on cable access, albeit in a somewhat different form. Social media platforms, indeed, are all controlled and owned by big tech companies. Recently, the acquisition of Twitter (now X) by conservative billionaire Elon Musk, for instance, have made queer users feel unsafe, especially in light of Musk’s transphobic comments on the platform. In fact, most social media platforms, in one way or other, restrict LGBTQ2+ content.³⁵ The Internet and social media, therefore, like cable access, remains a liberating yet imperfect medium for queer folks.

Beyond “homemade,” DIY content, new video streaming platforms specifically dedicated to queer media have also carved a space for themselves on the web, facilitating the circulation and distribution of queer audiovisual material and “increasing audience sizes for queer...content.”³⁶ For instance, in Canada, the new platform *The Bow* promises to deliver queer content specifically (although not exclusively) aimed at queer youth. In addition to streaming queer titles, the platform will also include “community based interactive functions and comprehensive resources that will revolutionize queer living and create connection on a global scale.”³⁷ Among those resources, interestingly, is a “phone book.” The website reads: “With just a click, you’ll have access to a comprehensive list of trusted organizations and resources, always at your fingertips. Whether you’re seeking guidance, support, or practical solutions, the Phone Book is here to help you navigate all that uniquely queer life throws your way.”³⁸ In that sense, in understanding itself as more than a streaming platform and relying on updated analogue

³⁵ Avram Anderson and A.L. Roth, “Queer Erasure: Internet Browsing can be Biased Against LGBTQ people, New Exclusive Research Shows,” *Index on Censorship* 49, no. 1 (2020): 75–77.

³⁶ Wendy Hilton-Morrow, and Kathleen Battles, *Sexual Identities and the Media: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 141; Herold, “Cable Comes Out,” 286.

³⁷ The Bow, “Our Platform,” <https://thebowplatform.ca/our-platform/>.

³⁸ The Bow, “Our Platform.”

technologies, *The Bow* seems to be following the footsteps of LGBTQ2+ cable access programming. However, and perhaps unfortunately, *The Bow* also plans to rely heavily on corporate sponsorship, calling for “big brands to show true allyship in constructive and meaningful ways.”³⁹ As discussed in Chapter 7, while corporate sponsorship may be necessary, this might come at a price: corporate sponsors often have little connection to the queer community, and may enforce homonormative standards that prevent some stories from being told. Still, given the current political climate, *The Bow* is a welcome addition to online streaming platforms, and it would be interesting for future scholarship to turn their attention to the shifts in queer specialty television in Canada (from *PrideVision TV* to *The Bow*). And, hopefully, *The Bow* acknowledges its cable access predecessors.

Memories of Cable Access: Forging Intergenerational Networks Through the Archives

This next and final section focuses on the memories of the various people that participated in cable access television and briefly returns to the program’s archives. Members of cable access groups and collectives discussed in this dissertation did not stop participating in queer activism after their television ventures. Some went on to do work with groups such as Women’s Urgent Action Ottawa, Fruit Cocktail, Lesbian and Gay Youth Toronto, and even the ArQuives; others wrote plays and books and contributed to queer newspapers, newsletters, and magazines, while others went on to teach. Yet, although everyone whom I have spoken with for this dissertation felt that their work in TV and beyond was important, they were afraid that their involvement in cable access and people’s memory of these programs had been “lost to the sands of time.”⁴⁰

³⁹ The Bow, “Current Climate,” <https://thebowplatform.ca/#mission>.

⁴⁰ Robert Wallace, Interview with the author, August 2022.

Re-watching the programs, therefore, triggered a host of memories and feelings for former participants. As mentioned in the methodological section of this dissertation, upon viewing the digital versions of *Gay News and Views* and *This Show May Be Offensive to Heterosexuals*, Heather Ramsay felt relief that that people were finally paying attention to these programs, while feeling “astonished that that we were able to pull off what we did.”⁴¹ Michael Riordon expressed similar positive feelings after re-watching the shows with his partner, Brian Woods, admitting that it was “really thrilling...to watch these after 40 years. We were both very, very excited.”⁴² Watching the shows again also evoked mixed, if not negative, feelings, however. Participants inevitably wished they could “fix some things,” or felt nostalgic about their former selves. As Heather Ramsay told me: “The first [time I watched it] I was stunned at this at this kind of 23-year-old version of myself. I’d forgotten who that person was.”⁴³ Gwen O’Reilly, upon seeing one of her dear friends on *Thunder Gay Magazine*, admitted that the footage “brought tears to [her] eyes.”⁴⁴ Finally, participants also felt sadness for the people whose bodies and voices remain on the reels but who have since passed away. As Heather Ramsay put it: “A few people have died. On the one hand, it was really great to see those people again. Because it felt like they never changed. It felt as if no time had passed. Then, there was the realization that they were dead, and I found that a little sad.”⁴⁵ The programs’ archives thus carry a deeply affective value for former participants, as the moving images have, in many ways, kept their loved ones alive.

⁴¹ Heather Ramsay and Michael Riordon, Interview with the author, February 2023.

⁴² Heather Ramsay and Michael Riordon, Interview with the author, February 2023.

⁴³ Heather Ramsay and Michael Riordon, Interview with the author, February 2023.

⁴⁴ Gwen O’Reilly, Email exchange with the author, November 8, 2022.

⁴⁵ Heather Ramsay and Michael Riordon, Interview with the author, February 2023.

While this fact alone should be enough to push for more recognition of the archives of cable access, in addition, some participants were worried that if their shows were remembered, they would be remembered for the things the programs did not do—as opposed to what they *did* do. This was especially true for programming that was produced in the 1970s. Indeed, the 1970s are generative of mixed feelings in contemporary discourses about the decade. On the one hand, the 1970s can be romanticized as the era of disco, sexual revolution, and political radicalism. In this narrative, the 1970s represent an almost utopian, pre-AIDS era, where the LGBT2Q+ community was able to experiment with and develop alternative social and sexual cultures until the community was stopped in its tracks by the epidemic and pushed toward assimilation.⁴⁶ On the other hand, the early years of lesbian and gay liberation are also often dismissed by younger generations of queer people for being exclusionary of gender and racial diversity—the rigid figures of the “lesbian feminist” or the “gay liberationist” having been replaced by a supposedly more fluid counterpart: the *queer* activist.⁴⁷

Throughout my conversations with gay men and lesbians who came of age in the 1970s, all of them voiced deep concerns that the activism that they had participated in needed to be understood through proper historical contextualization. They expressed worries that younger generations would perhaps accuse them of having engaged in assimilationist politics, or of not having been “queer” enough. In other words, it seemed to me that they each dealt with conflicting feelings of both shame and pride when reminiscing about the 1970s: shame about their activism not being as “politically correct” or as “diverse” as newer generations of queer people would like them to be, but pride in their achievements at a time when gay people in

⁴⁶ Laura Stamm, *The Queer Biopic in the AIDS Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 100.

⁴⁷ Ramzi Fawaz, *Queer Forms* (New York: New York University Press, 2022), 9; Cait McKinney, *Information Activism: A Queer History of Media Technologies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 25-26; Rox Samer, *Lesbian Potentiality and Feminist Media in the 1970s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), 8-9.

Canada hardly had any rights at all. The question of “relevance” emerged from our conversations as well—not only the relevance of cable access television programming in the larger canvas of cultural activities of the 1970s, but of their own personal relevance as gay and lesbian activists from that time period now living and aging in the 2020s. As researchers of queer (media) history, it is important to ask ourselves: What does it mean to demand flawlessness from our histories? How do we grapple with potentially conflicting feelings toward an historical object without resorting to practices of shaming or further silencing? In many ways, the answers lie in the archives—the recovery of media objects now considered obsolete, like the archives of cable access, can help counter the presupposed obsolescence of the histories they contain.

Finally, if queer cable access programs drew on existing networks and generated new ones, then, their archives ought to do the same. Throughout the interviews I conducted, former participants noted that they rarely got the opportunity to talk to younger LGBTQ2+ people. Upon activating the archives of cable access television, however, new possibilities emerge: the ability to connect through and beyond the screen and forge intergenerational networks. Such network formation through the archives can prevent collective amnesia and therefore has transformative potential—which Michelle Caswell frames as “liberatory memory work.”⁴⁸ The archives of the programs, therefore, must continue to perform their role of queer access mobilization, long after the programs have aired. Yet, it is important that these archives also be activated carefully; as discussed in Chapter 3, the preservation and digitization of queer audiovisual materials present their own challenges, which demand careful consideration and collaboration. It is my hope that this study constitutes a first step in this direction and that the work of activating and

⁴⁸ Michelle Caswell, *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021).

contextualizing these archives continues beyond these pages through exhibition, curation, discussion, and pedagogical interventions.

I end this dissertation, therefore, by sharing some thoughts participants had about how they would like their programs to be remembered:

“I think it should be remembered as an innovative and provocative, but at the same time, well put-together program that offered an insight into a community that many people at the time didn’t know much about at all. Or at least if they didn’t know anything, they had wrong information about it, and had a lot of negative ideas about it.” – David Belrose.⁴⁹

“Well, the importance of being out and in continuing to speak truth to power. Trying to make a difference every day” – Heather Ramsay.⁵⁰

“There were a lot of us coming out at that time, during that cultural era. And that’s what I feel the show reflects. As a witness at that time, I didn’t necessarily understand fully myself, or the cultural era that we were dwelling within.” – Liz Marshall.⁵¹

These three responses encapsulate the various meanings of the programs today. First, the programs are a groundbreaking example of how a community can mobilize audiovisual media to share lifesaving and empowering information about themselves, in the face of growing prejudice and violence. Second, the archives of queer cable access are an encouragement for the queer community to keep fighting and mobilizing all tools at our disposal to “try and make a difference every day,” thus serving as blueprints for media activism and queer advocacy—especially as LGBTQ2+ rights face challenges across Canada and south of the border. Finally, these archives are a reminder that we need to constantly document our cultural momentum; to be both actors and witnesses of history.

⁴⁹ David Belrose, Interview with the author, June 2022

⁵⁰ Heather Ramsay, Interview with the author, September 2022.

⁵¹ Liz Marshall, Interview with the author, June 2023.

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