

Spolia

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Le

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jamais neutre

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dossier

Queering the Map is a community-generated, interactive, and online map listing memories, traumas, and stories of the queer community. It is a living and ever-growing archive available on the world's biggest public space: the internet.

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Rapport and interview with
Lucas LaRochelle -
founder of Queering the Map,

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intramural

On June 9 and 10, 2018,

Écheltes, and a group of queers gathered for a workshop focusing on urban and queer spaces, from the digital to the physical world.

Report and interview

0.

A collaboration between Queering the Map and Échelles was nothing more than a dream during the summer of 2017 when the magazine's editors first discovered the project. The following December, when Lucas LaRoche ended their residency at Concordia's Fine Art Reading Room, publishing a short-print book on their project, the Échelles team was happy to discover that the person behind the inspiring platform was based in Montreal.

For its second edition, the Intramural section looks to organize, cover, and participate in the events of Montreal's design community. A collaboration with QTM presented itself as a perfect framework for a co-design workshop. Acting as a jumping off point, Queering The Map taught us about the different scales of queer spaces: the intimate, the city, and the digital. Exploring the world from a familiar, Google-generated environment, the layer added by LaRoche's project demonstrates queer realities invisible to everyday eyes. On the platform, the number of contributions is impressive; some neighborhoods are completely covered with iconic black pins.

For this issue of Échelles, we understand Spolia as the phenomenon in which communities appropriate public places and objects in order to subvert their meanings. Striving to reveal the overwhelming amount of queer experiences archived on the web site, this collaboration was an occasion to dance between digital and physical space through discussions, field work, performances, and public readings. These interactions acted as erections of soft "monuments" to our queer spaces, spaces that are intimate, public, safe, cast in shadows, healing, unclaimed, or festive.

Queering the Map : then & now

1.

Biking home from school one fall evening, I passed by a tree in Parc Jeanne-Mance in Montreal/Tiotia'ke where, three years prior, I had met someone that I would eventually fall in love with. Passing by this tree, I was transported back to the impressions of our first encounter — an isolated moment of queer love in the making. I felt connected not only to that partner or that tree, but to the feeling of queerness that had lingered in that spot despite the passage of time. With this tree on my mind, I began to imagine other places that held this kind of queer feeling in the minds of other queer people. What could it feel like to move through a world animated by queer past, present and future?

Thus began the genesis of Queering The Map, its first iteration holding about fifteen points that grounded me in my queer orientation in the world. Hungry to move beyond the subjective and into the collective, I worked to make the site interactive, in hopes that even a few people would be interested in participating.

Over the course of the first six months, pins slowly started to show up — some from my partner at the time, some from my friends, and some from people I hooked up with (one of whom, after I showed him the site, said 'This is what you do with your time?'...and then added multiple pins the following day). Eventually, the project spread outside my immediate networks, and posts began appearing all over the map — first in Toronto, then in Vancouver, then in Sydney, Australia and then throughout the States. I would check the site every day and sit in awe at the intensity of what was shared, recanting the stories I read to anyone who would listen.

In early February, Queering The Map went viral and exploded from 600 to 6500 pins in a period of three days. This level of visibility inevitably attracted opposition, and I woke up on February 9th to discover that Queering The Map had been spammed with pop-ups reading 'Make America Great Again, Donald Trump Best President' that would multiply when a point on the map was clicked. I took the site down, and a call for support was issued on the url, asking for help from anyone who may know how to deal with the problem. I received an overwhelming amount of responses, and a group of queer coders came together through the digital woodworks to save the project. They worked not only to remove the malicious code added to the site, but to greatly increase the sites security overall to protect it from future attacks.

The fact that the site was able to go back online is a testament to the power of queer community coming together, and would not have been possible without their support. There is nothing an individual can do that a community cannot do better. What began as a community-generated project on the front-end, is now a community generated project through and through. While writing this, Queering The Map holds over 20 000 stories of queer resilience and brilliance on every continent, and shows no sign of slowing down.

— Lucas LaRochelle

Workshop Report QTM x Échelles

2.

Saturday, June 9th. 2018.

11:00

The day began with a broken coffee maker filled with 2 jugs of MacDonalds' 100 % Arabica.

About 15 queers gathered at Sousol, aptly named The Basement, a multidisciplinary creative space run by artists and designers located in the old Cadbury factory. The space is enormous, couches sitting in one corner and a drum on a small stage in the other. Laid out on the table were glitter, pompoms, pink felt, pipe-cleaners and spray chalk. The participants all settled in front of the window overlooking the woodshop.

While people continue to file in, we gather around a big table in the middle of the room. Lucas began by presenting their project, Queering the Map: its genesis, original intent, some theoretical background, and its future. Taking turns, we read QTM entries selected by Lucas, and each wrote and read aloud our own stories. Unfolding one paper after the other, the jar we had filled with our own queer experiences seemed bottomless. As the conversation delved further into the personal, it also grew more intriguing, moving and profound.

Laughter broke out intermittently as stories that would make any mother blush were shared in the increasingly intimate space.

This round table allowed for a collective exploration of the wealth of understandings of queer spaces that our experiences provided. Unclaimed, soft, ephemeral, embodied, felt rather than named: this is what we sought to explore during our march the following day.

Sunday, June 10th. 2018.

14:00

We met at a park by Papineau metro station, armed with our faithful sparkly pipe-cleaners, old lace curtains, and pink bed sheets which were destined to become capes, veils, skirts and picnic tablecloths. Saint-Catherine, a pedestrian street over the summer, was also free of its typical police presence for the weekend thanks to Justin Trudeau's G7 and the Montreal Grand Prix. We decided to take over the Village to challenge its homonormative, and claimed relationship to space and to reinscribe it with our own queer presence.

Stuck between a state of decay and gentrification's financial pressure, Montreal's Gay Village does not shine as bright as in its heyday of the 90's and early 2000's. Walking among the many tourists and usual village crowd (i.e. white cis gay men), we read aloud entries from Queering the Map. Inspired by yesterday's discussions, we were drawn towards non-places. Dressed as queer conquerors, we overtook the ruins of an era of gay lifestyle passing rapidly out of actuality and into history. We were spoliators! Laying on the ground of Complexe Bourbon's ruins, we ornamented the barricaded façade of the last known lesbian bar in town, the Drug Store. Our performances, public readings, and glitter bombings were political actions of radical softness mobilized by the idea of a possible re-symbolization of these spaces.

By late afternoon, we reached a final park and had grown hungry. Our bodies continued their work, queering the little square of lawn we sat on, just as all the little "monuments" we placed along the way were queering the city, colourful and ephemeral, waiting for the next rain to wash the spray chalk from the concrete.

Someone at the workshop brought up the idea of a marginalized body feeling safer in a dark or unofficial place than on a well-lit commercial street. Does that fit with your understanding of queer space?

A lot of the pins on the map appear in non-places and ephemeral zones, that aren't as planned or gentrified. One of the really interested outcomes of the project was how the map moved away from definitions of queer spaces as something that is "claimed".

Entrevue

3.

H → Hugues Lefebvre Morasse (échelles)
L → Lucas LaRochelle

H How does a digital project like this translate into physical space? What are the implications of this project on real space

L The map is a show of the multiple relationships that actors and bodies have in relation to space. Queering the Map moves away from the idea of queer space as a physical space, like a gay bar or a bath house or an underground party. Queer space is rather the production of queer bodies in anti-relation to object architectures and social constructions. The project proposes a new definition of queer space that is outside of commercialism, and doesn't require purchasing power to be a part of the community or to participate in queer space.

H How does that translate on to the map?

L Queerness often exists in spaces that we don't read as queer because queer is coded as simultaneously urban, because that is where the population and the wealth exists to support commonly understood queer spaces like bars and bathhouses and parties.

H And what kind of of not-read-as-queer spaces have been pinned to the map?

L Four points showed up in Georgetown, Ontario- where I grew up. 4 points on the map showed up, presumably written by the same person, detailing experiences of growing up queer in Georgetown. On a retroactive level, the pins allowed me to re-visit trauma of growing up queer in a relatively hostile environment knowing that someone shared that experience.

It's interesting to look at those points on the map, being in the presence of the area where the points were tagged. It allows for a kind of re-relation of space, outside of one's own experience of space and memory.

H Do you think your experience would have been different with access to a platform like this?

L Participatory platforms like Queering the Map and social media in general are amazing in how they democratize the sharing of personal narratives.

They are not perfect tools, I'm trying not to adopt a techno-utopian perspective in looking at the project. But the role that digital technologies occupy in how queer spaces is being defined and redefined is incredibly important. They create safe spaces and queer spaces of community, specifically if you are in an environment in which it is unsafe to be a queer person.

72 73 **H** Has the project brought to light new queer narratives?

L One of the places on the map that comes to mind is Iran. There are two points on the map in Tehran. The first point, in English, is about watching two men gently caress each other's legs on a public bus, in a public space with significant risk. They are performing queerness - they take up risk in a way that feels necessary and safe enough for them.

The second point in Farsi describes growing up and going to school, and falling in love and that being the only reason for going to school every day. I love the gentleness of these kinds of stories, these small moments of resistance that feel necessary enough to document in a place that is generally understood as unsafe for queer people in a western context.

H So the pins are not all accounts of romantic or coming out experiences?

L I like the way queering the map sort of explodes what it means to be queer and to have a queer experience. It's not a hot sex journal (though there is some good smutt which I'm very thankful for!). It's also very banal stories, that have everything and nothing to do with sexuality and gender. There are stories where I have no idea in what way they relate to queerness and that's great- evidently someone felt it was profound enough to express.

It's really inclusive, which is helpful in resisting the sort of assimilationist narrative to queer history. It's this narrative that is really beloved to audiences, telling the story of a sad queer person, living in the closet, who comes out once to their nuclear family and friends and is immediately happy and loved by their community, face no obstacles, get high paying jobs and have happy families.

H And this narrative involves patting the straight community on the back for allowing them to be queer.

L This is so far from the truth and this representation of queerness is so dangerous. It makes the assumption that only stories like this one are valuable; and places necessity on coming out- which is a privilege of socioeconomic and geographical location. It forgets the nuance of how people do and live queer in different contexts. This rhetoric continues the sort of alienation that is the queer body's relationship to heteronormativity.

There is a tendency or a voyeuristic desire to always sensationalize the other; Queer as this glorious, fabulous thing that dominant cultures can then feed off of. When you see stories produced by queer people for queer people - we see that among experiences of violence, there are also moments of joy, moments of queerness existing in relation to whatever adversity is being faced.

H What does Spolia mean to you in the context of your project?

L In terms of thinking through Spolia in regards to queerness as an identity; especially a queerness that intersects, as it often does along axes of oppression like race, class and gender, we are always in the process of building or doing identity. I think queerness relates quite fluidly to the idea of Spolia- in that multiple identity infrastructures are at play to re-build a somewhat coherent but always shifting understanding of identity.

H In talking about Spolia, we often refer to the ancient stones that were destroyed, stolen, carved into, re-purposed, re-articulated, re-symbolized. Can we imagine QTM as an archive of matter, of trauma? What are the bricks from QTM made of?

L If you look up the definition of the verb "to queer", one of the definitions is to spoil. In the context of Spolia, I like the idea of queerness disrupting something that is flawed. Kind of like ruining heteronormative relations of time and codes within the built environment.

The pins on QTM act as building blocks creating a collective voice of queer experience, now on every continent on planet earth. They are building blocks in a construction of a narrative resisting the neoliberal myth of the individual. Queering the map adopts a queer approach to time and history, constructing and deconstructing it.

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