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The underside of Pride: Looking back on 10 years of Montreal's Pervers/Cité

Reflecting on how the festival became a vital part of Montreal's queer community



Peter Knegt · CBC Arts · August 12, 2016

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Urban LGBT communities that feel frustrated with the increasingly corporate, mainstream agendas of their city's Pride organizations should look no further than Montreal for examples of what they can do to counter that. Yesterday, [CBC Arts profiled Queer Performance Camp](#), an inaugural initiative to promote community building and intergenerational mentorship in the city's artistic community. Today, we turn to an organization that is celebrating a decade of giving Montreal a substantial alternative to Pride: [Pervers/Cité](#).

A play on the now-defunct LGBT arts and musical festival [Divers/Cité](#), Pervers/Cité is a collaboratively organized radical queer summer festival that has been organizing "a blend of hot dance parties, critical political interventions and alternative art practices to build links across social justice movements and queer communities" since the summer of 2007. Their mission is to provide a schedule of activities "to reanimate the radical underpinnings to the pride movement," and no one is turned away from events due to lack of funds. Some events this year include the annual [Queer Between The Covers Book Fair](#) and a workshop on [how to encourage the queering of geographical spaces](#).

In honor of Pervers/Cité's 10th anniversary, CBC Arts asked a bunch of its artists and organizers to write us a paragraph or two reflecting on their experiences with the festival.



(Jamie Ross)

Ryan Conrad

I've been organizing with Pervers/Cité since 2011 and I've always taken particular pleasure in organizing and attending film and video screenings. While queer film festivals further and further corporatize to make financial ends meet, more experimental and politically charged work has been left on the cutting room floor. Pervers/Cité has shown new experimental and/or political work in some fashion nearly every year. This year we held the Quebec premiere of two documentaries: [Richard Fung's *Re:Orientations*](#) (2016), which follows up with the subjects of his groundbreaking 1984 film *Orientations*, and Jake Witzenfeld's *Oriented* (2015), which follows the lives of three gay Palestinian men making sense of life under Israeli occupation in Tel Aviv. Both films were followed by discussions either with the director in attendance or with a panel of community activists. Without festivals like Pervers/Cité the opportunity to see and discuss these queer political films wouldn't exist. The collective viewing experiences we've created in theatres, empty parking lots, and parks across the city create the possibility to not just be entertained by movies, but to be moved by them to collective reflection, creativity, and action.

Jamie Ross

Much has been said about Montreal in the summer. The summer of 1990 was a hot one. The Canadian army was shooting at Mohawk land defenders just outside Montreal in Kanehsatake and Kahnawake. That summer, Montreal police killed a black youth and [raided and beat queer people dancing at the Sex Garage club](#). The streets were on fire with outrage at the racist and homophobic violence of the state. Pervers/Cité is a play on the now-defunct summer Pride festival Divers/Cité, which started that year in response to the raids. Eventually the police worked their way into their festival, as did the banks and the pharmaceutical companies. So we did one ourselves.

I feel the heat of that summer when we gather at the secret beach, bikes locked to trees, and laugh the sun down around a bonfire and at the bike-powered outdoor film screening behind the train tracks. I feel it at the collaborative anal self-health workshop and new moon ritual by queer witches. A hex on the miserable world that seeks to atomize us is long overdue. A hex on those that co-opt our queer history will be cast by any means necessary.

And when we close our eyes after the evening running through the Village at dusk playing [Capture the Fag](#) and dream of a world where our streets are free of police and the prisons are shut down, it will be the strength of our organizing and our friendships and the ribald little bands of lovers that will mark our successes. We are so intimately bound up in each other's liberation and we can't usher that better world into being on our own.

Of course, our enemy is dreamless sleep.



Re:Orientations (Inside Out)

Vincent Mousseau

As a person who has been in Montreal for less than a year, being on the Pervers/Cité organizing committee has been my first real foray into the Montreal queer activist scene. My passion has always been community building and popular education, thus my desire to helping to organize training sessions and workshops for my communities.

Our queer and trans communities are dynamic and in constant development. Sharing our expertise, our experiences, and our resources is an excellent way for us to share our stories and to build community. I feel that contemporary pride organizations like Fierté Montréal sacrifice the integral community building aspects of the pride movement to instead corporatize, monetize, and depoliticize it. This is one of the many reasons that unabashedly queer political events like Pervers/Cité are necessary.

An Thorne

I think one of the successes of Pervers/Cité is its unifying nature. There are so many different pockets of queers in Montreal doing social justice work, alternative skill-shares and education, making art and music, and throwing parties, that aren't being represented or for various reasons wouldn't want to be represented by the mainstream corporatized pride events. Given the open-source nature of how Pervers/Cité is organized and who participates, it tends to be one of those moments in the year where those different pockets come together and have a big gay time together.



The festival's organizing committee having an update meeting earlier this month. (Vincent Mousseau/Facebook)

Frank Suerich-Gulick

Organizing with Pervers/Cité meant a lot to me at a time when I was working really hard to come to terms with and embrace myself as a queer and trans person. One of the things I really like about Pervers/Cité is that it is quite decentralized, geographically and in its organization. Almost all the events are organized by groups other than the Pervers/Cité collective, in spaces that they often have existing connections with. This model adds diversity to the programming and allows the festival to reach a wider range of people that it would not otherwise reach. It also significantly reduces the financial and organizing burden placed on the Pervers/Cité collective. I think this allows the festival to be more sustainable and flexible. I love the fact that it operates on such a tiny budget — that actually gives us a lot of power and independence!

I remember making a map of all the venues where events were happening. It was really satisfying to see the tentacles of the festival spread out over different areas of the city. A big part of Pervers/Cité, for me, is about occupying the city, establishing, reinforcing and revealing permanent or temporary queer spaces and networks throughout the city.

Pervers/Cité, [Radical Queer Semaine](#) and [politiQ](#) gave me hope by offering opportunities and tools to respond to the often brutal and inhumane world that I saw people encountering. I'm a bit of a pessimist when I think about the state of the world and where it's headed. But events and projects like Pervers/Cité show me that we can come together to create pockets of humanity, temporary shelters from that world - however flawed and not-always-safe these may be.

[Pervers/Cité](#). August 4-14, Montreal.