QUEER SPACES PANEL / Miriam Ginestier
A case for explicit space for queer performance in Montreal

Canada is queer from coast to coast to coast. This Roundtable is about the multiple locations of queer theatrical production in Canada (from internationally recognized institutions in major urban centres to smaller regional theatres and festivals). But it is also about how space can be queered, from re-appropriating the metaphor of the closet to thinking about how Canada's settler-colonial history can be re-territorialized through queer aesthetics.

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I'm really interested in the 2nd part of this question:
"*But it is also about how space can be queered, from re-appropriating the metaphor of the closet to thinking about how Canada's settler-colonial history can be re-territorialized through queer aesthetics.*" with regards specifically to queer performance. The idea of queering space makes me think about assimilation and resisting assimilation, and about how our cultures are transforming and evolving at top speed, maybe we anchors more than ever?

Montreal is a very queer city with an incredibly rich artistic output, notably in dance and francophone theatre. But we are very impoverished in terms of queer performance institutions. While the village is very mercantile, queerish spaces abound throughout the city - including rental halls where recurring queer events have contributed to the venue's identity. Others are queered by being queer owned or visibly queer staffed. Many if not most of Montreal's theatres and some festivals are queer-run. However, unlike Buddies in Bad Times or Videofag in Toronto, none of these spaces are **explicitly** queer. That is to say you can't find them if you google "queer theatre/performance Montreal" and you won't find them mentioned in the local gay magazine.

When I came out in 1989, I couldn't connect to the culturally homogenous LGBT scene. After university, I started working in the arts at Studio 303, and soon after put my young expertise towards producing lesbian/queer/feminist artistic events so I could experience the sense of community I craved, through shared experience. Under the moniker mimproductions, I ran a large-scale annual retro cabaret called Boudoir for 13 years from 1994 to 2006 and scruffier monthly Meow Mix events (for bent girls and their Buddies) for 15 years from 1997 to 2012. Via Studio 303, I produced various embodiments of the Edgy Women festival for 23 years. It was finally laid to rest a few months ago via a funereal suite of events involving a visitation of the body (of work), an obituary, and a performance ceremony taking audiences through the five stages of grief.

I am a big fan of ephemerality, but I don't know what to make of all these queer space closures in my life. These events have certainly reinforced my experience of aging, my sense of mortality. My queer network and contact with queer artists has shrunk dramatically as a consequence. While I let le Boudoir and Meow Mix fade away quietly, Edgy's mediatized funeral made me consider questions such as: why end it? what will replace it? and just because I initiated it, is it mine to take away?

As I mentioned before, many cultural spaces in Montreal are queer-run including Studio 303, La Chapelle, the MAI, Centaur, Tangente, Agora de la Danse, Phenomena and the FTA. Are these spaces being queered from the inside? If so, to what extent? Who notices? My sense is that the implicit queerness of these spaces is accessible only to those in the know: mostly local artist insiders.

Ironically, after decades of queer producing, and of working at Studio 303, this summer I'm launching the first ever explicitly queer event at the Studio: Queer Performance Camp, five days of workshops, skill-sharing sessions, and public events in collaboration with local radical queer festivals Qouleur and PerversCité.

Despite living in a lively artistically vibrant super-queer city, there is still a need for explicitly queer contexts for performance - where queer as an identity, as a way of doing, is the majority, even if just for a moment.