

Film Treatment

Surface Tension: Cruising Queer Weimar Berlin, Today.

An Experimental Documentary by Liz Rosenfeld

“...finding a space for the enactment of a queer self can, in itself, be a queer act.”

-Jose Muñoz,

Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer

Act (13)

Synopsis

A fleeting touch. A graze between bodies in motion. The flash of an orgasm. The moment in which eyes lock. An instant in which knowing smiles are exchanged. An *effleurement*; ephemeral relationships charged with the longing for replenishment. The enactment of the ephemeral illustrates a quintessence of queer perspective and relationships in temporality, and history enacting bodies to move freely inside and outside of fluid time. How is cruising, an ephemeral relationship of feeling and experience, documented, performed, and historicized in queer history? Where does written and oral language, performance and art, begin and end indicating that history is recording?

“Surface Tension: Cruising Queer Weimar Berlin, Today,” uses historical research in conjunction with artistic practice to investigate past sites of queer cruising during the Weimar Period in Berlin (ca.1922-1929.) Known as “The Golden Age,” in Germany, the period of Weimar is remembered as a hotbed for political art, ambiguous sexuality, the rise of a radical avant- garde. The shifting landscape of Berlin illustrates it’s own history of bodies in motion. I therefore argue that the tension of change seeps into the queer social history of Berlin. In this sense the tension of flux is invested in both Berlin and it’s queer social past. I envision this like a double helix, the queer cruising body produces Berlin, while Berlin produces the queer cruising body. As a queer Jewish woman, whose grandmother fled West Berlin in 1933, I find myself part of this winding metaphor, and the Weimar Period is one of the most visible examples in history of a budding queer subculture, rich with gender deviants, ambiguous bodies, performance, sexual exploration, resulting in a powerful sense of queer community and belonging within that community. As we see in contemporary queer art such as drag performance, burlesque, and in film, queer thinkers and cultural producers are constantly looking back to the time of Weimar for inspiration. I would also like to explore how and why the Weimar Period still resonates so strongly today within queer subcultures. What is our need to be able to look back at this time as an object of nostalgia, a golden age of possibility if you will? And is it possible to recreate these moments in this current time? “Surface Tension: Cruising Queer Weimar Berlin, Today,” will emerge out of a collected body of historical research, interviews, first hand accounts, first person narrative, and art making.

This film will also focus on cruising, a performative ephemeral act, as a point of entry into examining queer relationality during Weimar and today. I intend to create a video

work dealing with questions of how queer history and the relationships of ephemerality central to queer culture are remembered, documented, and re-enacted. I want to return to past cruising sites (street corners, cabarets, bars, parks, etc.) to re-enact the cruise through the medium of performance and video. I intend to use primary sources from The Weimar Period uncovered in my preliminary research (beginning this January in Berlin) such as letters, first hand accounts, journals and interviews with queers who were living in Berlin during the 1920's.

I understand cruising as a relationship of tension. Tension becomes the vital force betwixt and between queer bodies shifting in motion and becoming. Whether one is in search of sex, community, or a sense of belonging, these moments of cruising are necessary to rupture and intervene, to reshape a queer socio-historical perspective. Cruising is a crucial point of relationally -connecting queer bodies. Today, while in The United States the popularized image of homosexuals has become one of homogenized wealth, whiteness, and conservative "family values," I find it even more pressing as a queer scholar and artist to push the boundaries of how we record and re-tell queer histories, looking at queerness as a relationship motivated by energy, perspective, relation, and force: Tension.

In my artistic practice I utilize modes of personal narrative and historical research (archival footage, interviews, historical and field work.) In the continuation of my work on cruising, this project inhabits an important and extremely useful perspective for further investigations on queer social- historical moments, and examines how current queer history is being historicized. This experimental documentary will culminate in an hour-long film.