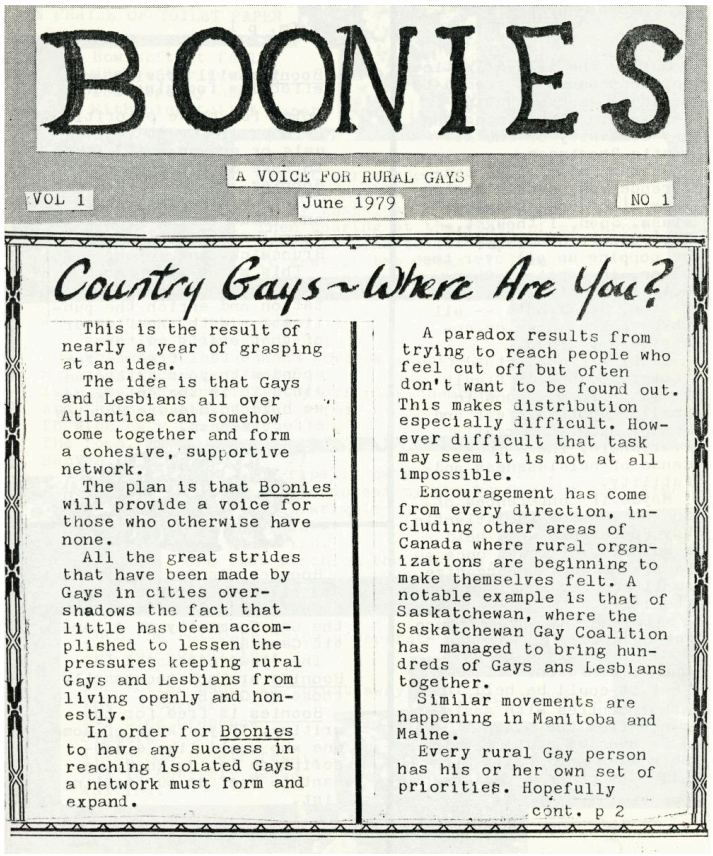
Public Parking

A journal for storytelling, arguments, and discovery through tangential conversations.

From here to there, and back again: on returning to 'Boonies'

Thursday, October 16, 2025 | Alex Turgeon



BOONIES

A VOICE FOR RURAL GAYS

VOL 1 June 1979 NO 1

Country Gays - Where Are You?

This is the result of nearly a year of grasping at an idea.

The idea is that Gays and Lesbians all over Atlantica can somehow come together and form a cohesive, supportive network.

The plan is that Boonies will provide a voice for those who otherwise have none.

All the great strides that have been made by Gays in cities overshadows the fact that little has been accomplished to lessen the pressures keeping rural Gays and Lesbians from living openly and honestly.

In order for Boonies to have any success in reaching isolated Gays a network must form and expand.

A paradox results from trying to reach people who feel cut off but often don't want to be found out. This makes distribution especially difficult. However difficult that task may seem it is not at all impossible.

Encouragement has come from every direction, including other areas of Canada where rural organizations are beginning to make themselves felt. A notable example is that of Saskatchewan, where the Saskatchewan Gay Coalition has managed to bring hundreds of Gays ans Lesbians together.

Similar movements are happening in Manitoba and Maine.

Every rural Gay person has his or her own set of priorities. Hopefully

cont. p 2

Boonies: A Voice for Rural Gays, 1979-1980. Vol. 1 No. 1. Courtesy Bob O'Niel. Image: University of Saskatchewan, University Archives and Special Collections, Neil Richards fonds, MG355, II. Publications, 22.

As urban environments evolve, becoming increasingly inhospitable to anti-normative practice, a once prevailing vision of escape regains resonance amongst the rigid contours of our cityscapes. This vision favours a desire to author one's environment outside the far reaches of capitalism's ever-expanding dexterity, predatory landlordism, and for-profit development, reigniting the dream to leave the pressures of city life behind. Existing alongside concurrent fascist flirtations, economic uncertainty, political unrest, humanitarian crises, colonial erasure, and genocide, the act of removal becomes a prevailing dream, albeit an ultimate luxury. For queer populations, home is often a fleeting idea and for those no longer captivated nor made safe by a queer home tied to the city, a belief in an alternative life is an essential tactic to persevere in the face of antagonism. Historically, this search for home has been manifested in the practices of independent queer publishing, which have been utilized to counter violent policies by offering an invitation to participate in radical new worlds. Printed matter has been wielded in diverse forms due its ability, and agility, to organize populations, invoke calls to action, establish networks and communal tethers, and provide essential resources for queer survival. Such incentives supplied the queer countercultural imagination with an antithesis to social and political hostility through back-to-the-land and alternative off-the-grid queer fantasies, shifting definitions away from a fully realized queer life being inherently cosmopolitan.

With a recent sustained period having temporarily relocated to the Fundy Shore during the pandemic—a region tied to my own settler origin—I look to the Canadian Maritimes, an area I often return to in my work, for a contextualizing locality within queer publishing in the second half of the 20th Century. East coast initiatives looked to connect queer individuals who were, at times, already positioned alone in rural or distanced communities, a position that I had also adopted during this time. *Boonies* (1979-1980), produced out of Nova Scotia, reached out to me through my research from a place in the past to resonate with my own isolation at the present. The publication was inaugurated with the headline "Rural Gays, Where Are You?," and in its short-lived effort to construct queer networks, *Boonies*, like much of queer publishing of the era, helped envision alternative spaces not bound to the culture of a specific centre, but elsewhere within the kind of periphery I found myself residing in during those isolating years. In returning to *Boonies* today, I interpret queer publishing as offering an escape from such isolation by forming a speculative architecture inherent to the queer utopian impulse of world building, realized by material practices that give tactility to the imaginary zones of intermedia. In contrast to the immateriality of the slick digital surfaces and their siloing effects on communities today (which the pandemic equally underscored), printed matter helped produce a belief in utopian futures that exist outside of heteronormative capitalist control. These acts invoked a future erected in opposition to normative modes of being, constructing an idea of utopia outside of binary systems of here or there, realized through failed yet continued attempts at erecting its very existence from the periphery.

"It is the imperfection of utopia that requires its constant reimaging. Queer identities are perpetually moving, not grounded in a single place but often in opposition to it, resistant to settling into one definition, benchmark, or definitive parameter, while always on the way to somewhere over the horizon."

Queer publishing takes on a vast array of forms beyond traditional literary publishing. Grassroots organizations and individuals have produced material that spans newsletters, brochures, fliers, party invitations, zines, pamphlets, mail order catalogues, pornography, amongst many material and immaterial modes that often exist in short print runs or as one-off handmade, artistically oriented projects. When interpreting queer independent publishing's relationship to utopia, theorist José Esteban Muñoz maps how such methods are utilized as queer efforts in world building. In his book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, a queer future and thus a queer utopia is always located just on the horizon. Muñoz suggests utopia is not a physical location, but a site realized through collective or individual attempts to define, locate, and access it. He describes utopia as always *then and there* rather than *here and now* and names an important component of its formation as "intermedia," defined as a "radical understanding of interdisciplinarity." Intermedia includes social networks, bonds and kinships that operate as an ephemeral, yet connective tissue between disparate subjects, based within intermediate spaces of creative action of which, I suggest, printed matter is a common substrate. Rather than attempt to operate within literary worlds, these independent do-it-yourself approaches reflected the immediacy that intermedia represents. He cites lesbian cultural critic Jill Johnston, whose definition of intermedia includes "the world before and after we chop it up into bits of pieces and stash it away in a filing cabinet labeled MINE, YOURS, THEIRS."[1] Intermedia, according to Muñoz, is thus a freewheeling ethos formed of shared material exchange, tethered to "[q]ueer cultural production [that] is both an acknowledgement of the lack that is endemic to any heteronormative rendering of the world and a building, a 'world making' in the face of that lack." This definition indicates queer intermedia as cooperative actions, gestures and rebuttals designed to reject normative classification and ownership in order to create space where none is supposed to exist.

Intermedia reflects the shifting non-linear parameters of queer thought, gesture, and identity. Its border zones are reformed alongside anti-normative practice that opposes categorization. Today, however, intermedia's printed residue is often collected and accessed within archival spaces, where it rubs up against definitions applied through academic or institutional standardization. I apply the term "queer" when interpreting this archival material, which historically operated within overtly cis, white, and binary logics, to indicate the very potential of the shifting definitions that intermedia purports. This is equally intended to reflect the changing definitions of the individuals such practices were designed to represent. In extending this reading of intermedia, I employ the 1975 manifesto "The New Art of Making Books," where conceptual artist Ulises Carrión declared that "a book is a sequence of spaces." Through his Fluxus practice, Carrión redefined the physical and conceptual structures of artist books through a spatially driven approach to the technology of printed matter. From an artistic means of distribution to establishing the first ever artist-run bookstore, *Other Books and So* between 1975-1979 in Amsterdam, Carrión's methodology framed the book as an active "space time sequence." To Carrión, artistic publishing is a spatio-temporal experience where the page is simultaneously a two-dimensional plane as well as a multi-dimensional arena. As a gay artist, Carrión operated outside of a time in which queer became the moniker it is today. In positioning his project within this framework of intermedia, I interpret the proposals of Muñoz and Carrión together to suggest that queer publishing, by way of intermedia, erects spaces which operate outside of heteronormative capitalist definitions of use value and function. Queer independent publishing projects could be considered failures within the linear supply and demand protocols that foreground profit sustainability, but rather it is through this unruly queer logic that this mode of production succeeds to exist outside of normativity, playing a pivotal role in forming acts of queer liberation that cannot be co-opted by capital. Often disseminated within underground channels, printed matter provides tertiary routes within a "submerged world"[2] that reads between the lines of hetero-capitalist power to control space. In this way, Carrión's "new art" reads as an architecture outside the parameters of post and beam, formed through a shared artistic temporality, representative of Muñoz's idea that "queer utopian practice is about 'building' and 'doing' in response to that status of nothing assigned to us by the heteronormative world." Through this lens, queer publishing challenges notions of how and where queer life, and its subsequent utopian worlds, can and do exist, even if only temporarily.

Independent publishing has been a crucial tool in materializing visions of the future. Rooted in ecological campaigns for sustainability, the 1960s and 1970s saw a publication boom focusing on settler-style communal homesteading via self-made architectural projects tied to anti-nuclear and anti-war political movements. A significant proponent of this initiative was the *Whole Earth Catalogue*, first published in 1968 with the prevailing motto of an "access to tools." The publication facilitated back-to-the-land spirits by providing educational methods for alternative living to communards, spurring numerous printed variations, many of which focused on emergent ways to reshape a collective form of society on the margins. A number of these publications were designed for and by queer and feminist communities, providing practical knowledge for survival to individuals with a limited access to such tools, becoming essential instruments in self-determination while disseminating ideas for queer liberation and placemaking. Publications catered to distinct populations such as *RFD*, established in 1974 as "a country journal for gay men everywhere," or conversely, *Country Women*, "a feminist country survival manual… for women who live in the country already and for women who want to move out of the cities." These queer and anti-urban projects have operated as the weft into which the fibres of queer liberation are historically woven, providing knowledge tools to sustain life in areas with limited accessibility, an ethos that *Boonies* mirrored, believing in a sustainable queer life amidst the absence of individual rights and sovereignty.

contacts

One of the ways that Boonies may help you to be Gay in the country is by getting you in touch with like minded people. Keep in mind the fact that these ads are free(but please try to keep them as short as possible) and are not available to anyone accept those on the mailing list.

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28 year old man wishes to correspond with persons finding it hard to come out. Nick Coffey Drawer A Dorchester, NB,E0A1M0

I am interested in meeting Gay people in the Valley region. Please write care of this paper or phone me at 584 3110 Bob.

Would You Like to Have A Brand New Boyfriend?

Irene Meisenheimer, claims examiner, Alcoa Plaza:

No, I wouldn't like to have a brand new boyfriend but how about a brand new girlfriend? I'd like one who is interested in horseback riding and music. Any kind of music except disco. She should like to travel and be in her early thirties. I've just described the girl of my dreams.

GAE's phone line no. is 429-6269

SPARROW (GAY CHRISTIANS)

Sundays at the TURRET 7:30

Prayer, Discussion, Fellowship.

ALL GAY MEN AND LESBIANS WELCOMED.

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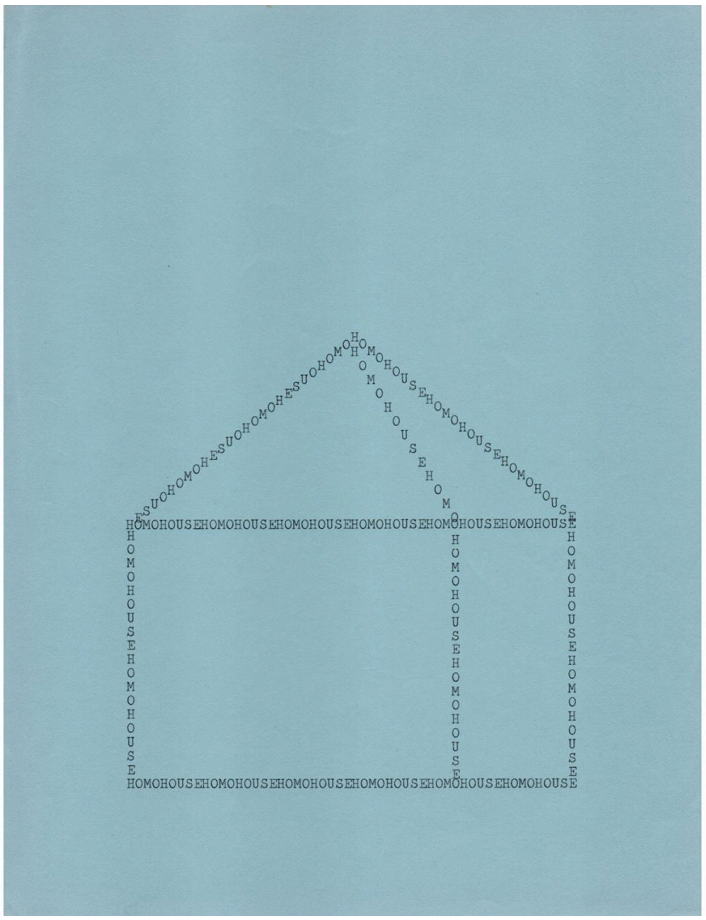
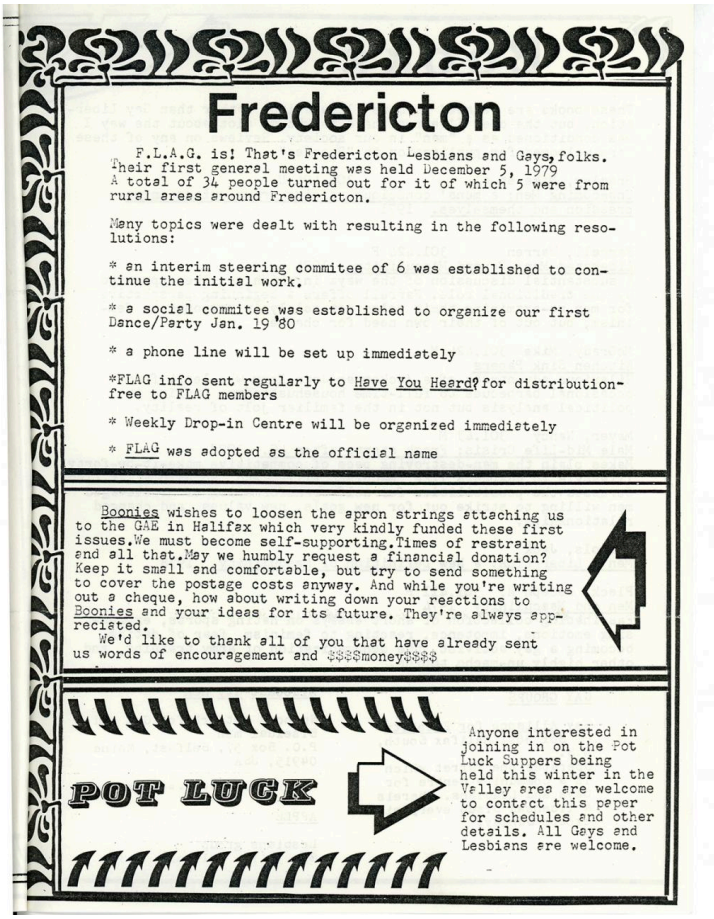
Boonies: A Voice for Rural Gays, 1979-1980. Vol. 1 No. 2. Courtesy Bob O'Niel. Image: University of Saskatchewan, University Archives and Special Collections, Neil Richards fonds, MG355, II. Publications, 22.



Alex Turgeon, *Homo House*, 2020, Sears CELEBRITY ELECTRIC 12 typewriter on paper 8.5 x 10 in.(21.59 x 25.4 cm). Courtesy the artist.



Fredericton

F.L.A.G. is! That's Fredericton Lesbians and Gays, folks. Their first general meeting was held December 5, 1979 A total of 34 people turned out for it of which 5 were from rural areas around Fredericton.

Many topics were dealt with resulting in the following resolutions:

* an interim steering commitee of 6 was established to continue the initial work.

* a social commitee was established to organize our first Dance/Party Jan. 19 '80

* a phone line will be set up immediately

*FLAG info sent regularly to Have You Heard? for distribution-free to FLAG members

* Weekly Drop-in Centre will be organized immediately

* FLAG was adopted as the official name

Boonies wishes to loosen the apron strings attaching us to the GAE in Halifax which very kindly funded these first issues. We must become self-supporting. Times of restraint and all that. May we humbly request a financial donation? Keep it small and comfortable, but try to send something to cover the postage costs anyway. And while you're writing out a cheque, how about writing down your reactions to Boonies and your ideas for its future. They're always appreciated.

We'd like to thank all of you that have already sent us words of encouragement and $$$$money$$$$

POT LUCK

Anyone interested in joining in on the Pot Luck Suppers being held this winter in the Valley area are welcome to contact this paper for schedules and other details. All Gays and Lesbians are welcome.

Boonies: A Voice for Rural Gays, 1979-1980. Vo2. 1 No. 1. Courtesy Bob O'Niel. Image: University of Saskatchewan, University Archives and Special Collections, Neil Richards fonds, MG355, II. Publications, 22.

The fetishized fiction of *terra nullis*—that land is vacant and available to acquire—has underscored the settler-colonial ethos tied to back-to-the-land countercultural movements. The perceived agility that remote living provided fed white queer settler narratives that the periphery was anonymous, offering an ability to exist in ways unimaginable within the formal gridlock of heteronormative society. I consider these peripheral spaces as part of what sociologist Abdou Maliq Simone defines as the "surrounds." Although Simone positions the surrounds in relation to urban outskirts or forgotten landscapes formed from colonial residues of urbanization, it is equally a peripheral world. As opposed to abandoned, it is a location that is "both a place on the way and the experience of being on the way,"[3] and within the context of envisioning a queer utopian future, this interpretation describes a place to which one never actually arrives. Rather than existing in a state of being lost, peripheral incentives like *Boonies* propose actions *on the way* towards an imagined collective ideal. This movement produces, and situates, a speculative location for which utopian visions arrive.

When interpreting queer movements foregrounded by white settler practices within our home on Native land, Scott Lauria Morgensen's *Spaces Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* operates as a critical tool in navigating for whom queer utopia has been historically envisioned. Through his in-depth analysis into the origins of queer liberation and its appropriation of Indigenous traditions as a legitimizing factor for queer sovereignty, Morgensen states "white supremacy and settler colonialism are interdependent and must be theorized together." He describes how queer activism historically appropriated aspects of Indigenous sexual history in order to enable "white subjects in a settler society, led by white men, to answer their settler colonial inheritance by accepting Native roots as theirs to possess and replace." By appropriating historical accounts of Indigenous practices that either resisted, or were exterior to, normative gender and sexual binaries established by colonization, "white men argued on behalf of all sexual minorities that their civil rights and national belonging were affirmed by" indigeneity. In doing so, Morgensen notes that Two Sprit practices "promised sexual or gender liberation only inasmuch as it first liberated non-Native and presumably white gays and lesbians from identifying as settlers and rewrote their lives on stolen Native land as somehow being a return to kinship with their own kind." This operative exists as a method of colonial erasure by negating forms of utopian practice to native populations, from which

holistic symbiotic praxes to land have culturally originated. Where queer activism faltered in its co-oping Native traditional practices to legitimize a relationship to land, queer publishing has been an equal culprit in how it has historically disseminated such actions under the name of liberation. “Conversations among Natives and non-natives are not made up of words and gestures,” as Dr. Sarah Hunt articulates in her analysis of Morgensen’s project, “but also silences.”[4] When queer independent publishing operates within colonial languages, it is inherently providing space favoured by a specific group over groups of others. Although acts of queer publishing never actually arrive at physical settlement upon stolen landscapes, it is possible to also interpret its material—paper—as an equal player in colonial appetite for resource extraction, through tactics of clear-cutting for its ongoing mass production. Inclusive of these colonial tethers, the diversity of queer independent publishing proposes a potential for not one, but a multitude of utopian projects simultaneously. It is the imperfection of utopia that requires its constant reimaging. Queer identities are perpetually moving, not grounded in a single place but often in opposition to it, resistant to settling into one definition, benchmark, or definitive parameter, while always *on the way* to somewhere over the horizon. This ongoing evolution foregrounds a revolutionary vision of a tangible utopia, and as revolutionary thought it is equally responsible to speak beyond the silences imposed by hegemony.

In the latter half of the 20th Century, the Maritimes also experienced an active, grassroots queer independent publishing network. *Making Waves*, edited and published by Robin Metcalfe, a queer writer, activist, curator out of Halifax, Nova Scotia, was declared “an expression of our renewed sense of place.” Another publication, *The Sister’s Lightship*, a lesbian feminist newsletter whose name refers to “a ship at anchor which serves as a lighthouse…to warn others of danger,” provided a form of foundation to a community where none previously existed. Other publications included *Sparrow - Gay Christians of Atlantic Canada* newsletter, Fredericton’s *Flagmag* and *Northern Lamda Nord*, with the latter servicing a region that spanned northern Maine, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and eastern Québec, suggesting a queer domain which transcended intersecting provincial, national, and colonial language barriers. Much of the financial support for these publications came from the Gay Alliance for Equality (GAE), a non-profit “committed to the liberation struggle of lesbians and gay men” based in Halifax, by which *Boonies* was initially supported.

> *“ In the constant search for an alternative to this world, a form of speculative architecture of that world is constructed. Its foundation is built upon mishaps, dreams, loves, losses, and failures that, when compiled together, offer a world already not-yet wholly constructed, erected at the periphery or across the shoreline, awaiting our arrival.”*

Created by Bob O’Neil, *Boonies* distills ideas around intermedia into a localized project from this period. With only three issues produced and disseminated during its run, the publication sought to develop a network for queers living in rural areas of the Maritimes and northeastern parts of New England. Originating out of the small township of Paradise, Nova Scotia, a region opposite my Fundy shoreline and situated within Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the ingenious Mi'kmaq People, *Boonies* looked to establish what many queer settler-publishing practices of this period sought: a resource for individuals enacting queer lives remotely as an alternative to the centralized urban sites understood as the epicenters of queer liberation. The first issue’s formative call to action was an effort to bring those hidden away out of the woodwork, or

the closet, and consider queers not based in cities as equal to those on the front lines of queer activism. Where other publications positioned remote communal living as the penultimate goal in moving queer life to the periphery, *Boonies* framed the individual already within a rural landscape, often providing content which spoke directly to that particular form of isolation. Within its simple xeroxed folded pages, *Boonies* promoted gay conferences and events, dances and potlucks, distributed recipes alongside creative works of queer poetry, framed by quaint, collaged, cottagecore designs. *Boonies* was promoted in issues of *RFD* as well as *Northern Lamda Nord*, which provided access to subscribers and contributors as distant as Australia. Even through small-scale initiatives like *Boonies*, the desire for constructing queer utopian futures permeates by way of intermedia. Included in the second issue, a letter from writer Paul Christopher—a self-proclaimed "teenage country queer"—asks if there is an alternative to a home in the city or alone in the countryside. He goes on "to ask if anyone out there sees a third option...because I think Boonies is a big part of that answer." The contributor's inquiry hangs on the belief in a "third space"—complicating the binary logics between cityscape and countryside. Moving towards a third option, Christopher inadvertently forms a queer kind of utopia that is neither here nor there but rather on the way to somewhere else completely. The publication's short run might read as a failure to sustain a position from the periphery; however, this reflects what Jack Halberstam describes as queer art's essential failure to prioritize permanence within the framework of an evolving populace. *Boonies*' fleeting sustainability underscores the fluctuating field the periphery represents, antagonizing the rigid parameters of success that homogeneity dictates from its center. Through the logics of intermedia as a material of exchange—continually operating within a speculative dimension of a third space of possibility—historical practices of queer publishing continue to transcend cultural and chronological epochs, even if not absolved of their historical acts of appropriation and erasure.

As a perceived response to society's shift towards conservatism, there has been a renewed interest in the physical remnants of past liberation movements in contemporary exhibitions and cultural initiatives. Focusing on grassroots activism, projects reflect how queer collectivity and liberation has prospered—if not wholly inclusively—in the face of past persecution. Muñoz writes that this re-examining of a "time of the past [that] helps mount a critique of the space of the present [...]is not revisionary history or metahistory; it is a critical deployment of the past for the purpose of engaging the present and imagining the future" where one seems more and more obsolete. A handful of examples of this renewed focus in the past year can include the documentary *Parade* (2025) chronicling Canada's various 2SLGBTQI+ rights movements, directed by Noam Gonick, which premiered at Toronto's Hot Docs Festival this past spring. In addition, *Country Lesbians: the Story of the Womanshare Collective*, an exhibition at Shmorévaz, Paris, curated by Salmoé Burstein and Louise Toth with contributing artist Agathe Cotte, offered a poignant approach to rematerializing queer publishing of the 20th century. The exhibition utilized the book *Country Lesbians* (1973) as a formal and conceptual substrate to extrude an interpretation of feminist collective practice as publishing into an expanded public program, through which a French translation of the book has been now made available. In Nat Pyper's project, "A Queer Year of Love Letters," the "alphabet artist" catalogues and digitizes "letterforms [that] derive from the life stories and printed traces of countercultural queers of the last several decades," as described in a recent public presentation, becoming open-source fonts to be reimagined for queer acts today. Projects such as these branch out from the material of queer placemaking based in queer publishing sourced from the 20th Century, of which *Boonies* is an integral yet unassuming participant. With a belief in a return to collectivity sourced in the past to re-envision a queer future, these histories offer an alternative location, and infrastructure, to the dematerialization of media's dissemination and its detrimental effects. Though such incentives might seem like nostalgic infatuations with the past, the belief in something alternative to the immediacy of the *now* is the very engine which keeps such aspirational dreams, and activist methods, alive. In the constant search for an alternative to *this* world, a form of speculative architecture of *that* world is constructed. Its foundation is built upon mishaps, dreams, loves, losses, and failures that, when compiled together, offer a world already not-yet wholly constructed, erected at the periphery or across the shoreline, awaiting our arrival.

The above text was written by Alex Turgeon, a Toronto-based artist, educator, and acting board member of the Halifax Art Book Fair.

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[2] Cory, D. W., & Ellis, A. (1957). *The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach* (7th ed.). Greenberg. P. 121.

[3] Simone, A. (2022). *The Surrounds: Urban life within and Beyond Capture*. Duke University Press. P.87.

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