



Cinephilia, Publics, Cinegoraphilia: Surveying the Short-Term Effects of Covid-19 on Community-Based Festivals in Toronto

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Beginning in March 2020, nearly every film festival worldwide, regardless of its size and influence, canceled, postponed, or adapted their programming to meet the public health recommendations to slow the spread of Covid-19. Tracking the myriad responses festivals have had to the virus—especially in a country like Canada where arts sector funding and public health are distributed across three levels of government—requires a reconfiguration of our methodological and conceptual tools for studying film festivals during a pandemic (de Valck 2020). As Zielinski (2020) notes, “these new heightened online activities pose significant challenges to method, particularly regarding learning more about the largely anonymous and unreachable audience, depth of engagement, among other data.” Further complicating matters is the unevenness with which public health restrictions have been implemented across Canada. As health care is under provincial, as opposed to federal, jurisdiction in Canada, each individual province had its own set of public health guidelines to manage the pandemic. The province of

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Newfoundland and Labrador, for example, implemented incredibly robust restrictions for a short period of time whenever there was a new Covid outbreak and as a result has only had approximately 1100 total cases of Covid as of May 2021, or less than 0.25% of their population. Meanwhile, Ontario opted for a series of half-measures that saw some industries and public spaces closed for much longer, and as a result has had nearly 500,000 total cases of Covid as of May 2021, or approximately 3.5% of their population. These vastly different Covid numbers and approaches to public health restrictions impacted each province's film, media, and cultural sectors in vastly different ways: as de Valck and Damiens (2020) note, "the crisis does not necessarily impact every festival at the same time or on the same level." To understand the effects of Covid-19 on the film festival circuit—and indeed, on the film, media, and cultural sectors as a whole—we have to attend to the local contexts and individual responses.

Such documentation is well underway, as this book and the numerous special issues on Covid-19's effects on various aspects of arts, culture, and leisure attest (Ironstone and Bird 2020; de Valck and Damiens 2020; Lashua et al. 2020). This chapter aims to contribute to this growing body of literature by surveying some of the changes to arts and festival funding in the province of Ontario, with a specific focus on its effects on two community-based festivals in Toronto: Toronto Outdoor Picture Show (TOPS), which organizes outdoor film festivals in parks across the city, and the Toronto Queer Film Festival (TQFF), a radical queer film festival that centers accessibility and supporting racialized, poor, disabled, and undocumented queer and trans artists and communities. This chapter traces how changes to the grant ecosystem, as well as constantly shifting public health advice, caused the festivals to reimagine their programming in ways that distilled their individual mandates. In the case of TQFF, they canceled their festival and reimaged their programming as a form of mutual aid with an eye toward financially and materially supporting filmmakers and audiences during the crisis. Meanwhile, TOPS offered a socially distant outdoor cinema that captured their community-minded ethos. In both cases, TOPS and TQFF aimed to capture what I term *cinegoraphilia*, or the love of watching movies *together*, during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Methodologically, I draw largely from my own experience as an organizer with both festivals. I was a member of the TOPS board of directors from 2018 to 2021 and have volunteered with TQFF as a collective member since 2019. The stories I narrate here about changes to arts funding,

and the responses of both TOPS and TQFF, are drawn from email exchanges I have had as an insider to both organizations, conversations I have had with festival leadership and staff over the last year, and my own personal experience contributing to the planning and execution of each festival's programming during the pandemic. When both organizations began shifting operations to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic I did not imagine that I would be writing an article documenting these shifts; as a result, I have no thick autoethnographic notes from the last year to draw upon. I have email threads that pick-up conversations held over Zoom, meeting minutes that capture high-level discussions and decisions made, and memories of conversations held both formally and informally over the year. As Damiens notes in his contribution to this collection, there is a necessity to begin documenting festival responses to Covid, lest we lose much of digital infrastructures of these responses to the ephemerality of internet archiving. To this I would also add we are at risk of losing the material and affective dimensions of community festival organizing during this time: community festivals organized during Covid are festivals organized under duress. Festivals pivoted to digital and physically distanced programming because that is what they needed to do to retain funding, retain their staff, and retain their audiences. Festivals organized under Covid highlight the extent to which festivals are simply more than just the sum of their films; festivals are gathering spaces where people share in the love of cinema *together*. This chapter is my attempt to document how two community-based festivals sought to retain that spirit of togetherness from my dual position as both festival scholar and organizer.

This chapter proceeds in three parts. In the first part, I provide a brief overview of Canada and Ontario's responses to Covid and how public health restrictions affected the operations of arts organizations and festivals in the province. I then turn my attention to how the arts funding ecosystem in Canada responded to the pandemic and trace how various levels of government and other funders adapted and distributed funding during the first six months of the pandemic. These shifts in public health and funding provide the backdrop for my theorizing in the third part, wherein I turn my attention to how TOPS and TQFF adapted their programming in the first year of the pandemic. Here I theorize their pandemic-era offerings as capturing *cinemoraphilia*, or the love of watching cinema together, and narrate how each festival responded to both the public health restrictions and funding changes in order to organize their festivals and offer programming in 2020.

COVID IN ONTARIO: A TIMELINE

In Canada, health care is constitutionally the jurisdiction of the provinces. As a result, though the federal government announced on March 16, 2020 that they would bar foreign nationals from entering Canada effective March 18—one week after the World Health Organization declared the pandemic—it was up to individual provinces to manage their own stay-at-home orders and public health restrictions. The Government of Ontario declared a state of emergency on March 17, 2020, and issued a stay-at-home order (Rodrigues 2020). Shortly thereafter, Hot Docs International Documentary Film Festival and Images Festival postponed their festivals (slated for late April 2020) and moved their programming online. Likewise, Inside Out LGBTQ Film Festival postponed their May festival to October in hopes that they would be able to offer programming in-person by that time. After the initial wave began to abate in Ontario, the provincial government announced a three-stage re-opening plan in which provincial regions would be able to gradually open up and folks would gradually be able to gather once a number of key targets were met. On May 19, 2020, the entirety of the province entered Stage 1 re-opening, which largely meant that some outdoor recreational facilities like marinas, golf courses, and tennis courts were allowed to open—outdoor facilities used largely by the sorts of wealthy suburban elite that make up the provincial Progressive Conservative government’s voter base (Neilsen 2020). Stages 2 and 3 of the re-opening plan were entered piecemeal by region, with Toronto one of the last regions to be allowed to re-open in each of the three stages in large part because it is the country’s largest city and as such it took the city longer to meet the provincial thresholds.

When Toronto entered Stage 2 on June 24, 2020, outdoor gatherings were increased from 10 people to 50 people, drive-in movie theaters were allowed to operate, film production was allowed to resume, and outdoor dining and bar service opened (“City of Toronto Enters Stage 2 of the Province’s Reopening” 2020). But it was not until Toronto entered Stage 3 on July 31, 2020 that indoor movie theaters and indoor dining was allowed to begin operating again, outdoor gatherings were increased to 100 people, and outdoor festivals were allowed to operate (“City of Toronto Now in Stage 3 Reopening” 2020). As a result, much of Toronto’s film festival culture had to remain online until August 2020. It should also be noted that the provincial government did not at any point issue a province-wide mask mandate and instead left that up to individual

municipalities. As a result, masks did not become mandatory in indoor spaces in Toronto until city council passed a bylaw effective July 7, 2020 (“City of Toronto Makes Masks or Face Coverings Mandatory in Enclosed Public Spaces” 2020).

Because the province took a regional approach to re-opening, Toronto’s festivals could predict with some certainty when they would likely be allowed to return to some form of in-person screening again. There was also a general sense in the province that by fall case counts would likely increase, and the province would have to return to some form of lockdown—which would turn out to be true as the province and the City of Toronto began slowly adding more restrictions to outdoor activities starting September 25, 2020. This meant that film festivals had a two-month window in which they could stage some form of an in-person event in Toronto before cool fall temperatures began to push people back inside, though only a few festivals, like the Italian Contemporary Film Festival (ICFF), Toronto Outdoor Picture Show (TOPS), and the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), were nimble enough to offer some form of in-person gatherings. ICFF was one of the first out of the gate with a drive-in film festival in late July 2020, followed by TOPS with its outdoor walk-in screenings in late August, and TIFF with some combination of drive-in, walk-in, and indoor screenings in early September. Festivals usually held in the fall, like imagineNATIVE, Rendezvous with Madness, and Reel Asian, held their fall dates and moved their programming online. By November 20, 2020, the City of Toronto was placed in a new lockdown by the province, though by that point cold weather had already moved all festival programming back online.

CANADA’S ARTS FUNDING ECOSYSTEM

While festivals and arts organizations were attempting to keep track of the constantly shifting public health guidelines, they also had to contend with changes being made to arts council and other public funding. Most arts organizations depend on project funding and only a small number of arts organizations qualify for organizational funding through the arts councils each year. An even smaller number of festivals have a sizeable enough corporate donor base that they would be able to operate with significant public funding reductions (and even then, the economic impact of Covid restrictions meant that corporate sponsorship also significantly declined during this period, though at this stage it is difficult to say by how much).

In either case funding comes with deliverables: festivals must offer programming. In short, canceled programming could lead to declined grants and spell the end of the organization.

This possibility was something arts councils largely recognized, and both the Ontario Arts Council and Canada Council for the Arts provided an advance to organizations who received core operational funding from each of them. Project grant deadlines, however, were almost uniformly postponed by the Canada Council, which left the numerous small arts organizations not eligible for core operational funding without a significant source of funding in the first half of 2020. In particular, the postponement of the Public Outreach grant program, which provides up to \$100,000 to support activities that “contribute to the public appreciation and enjoyment of the arts” in the form of live events and publications, from March 2020 to September 2020 affected numerous festivals and arts organizations in Ontario (“Public Outreach” *n.d.*).

The postponement of the Public Outreach grant and the rapid dissemination of operating funding by the arts councils was supplemented with other significant funding shifts federally, provincially, and municipally. At the federal level, the government offered a number of key financial supports to arts organizations affected by Covid. The Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) initially covered up to 25% of an organization’s employment costs, but was soon increased to 75% after criticism and slow uptake from businesses and non-profit organizations. Festivals and arts organizations also had access to the Canadian Emergency Business Account (CEBA), which provided eligible small businesses and non-profit organizations with an interest-free loan of up to \$40,000, of which 25% would be forgivable if the loan was repaid by the end of 2022. Though both CEWS and CEBA were distributed to a minority of arts organizations (with 41% and 17% of arts organizations, respectively, indicating they intended to apply for each), both became a crucial part of the arts funding ecosystem during the first part of 2020 (“National Survey on Federal Emergency Aid Measures and the Arts Sector in Canada” 2020, 16). Indeed, though these two federal programs may not have been taken advantage of by the majority of arts organizations, 61% of respondents still noted that these and other federal measures would be of benefit to them and to the wider sector (“National Survey on Federal Emergency Aid Measures and the Arts Sector in Canada” 2020, 42).

At the provincial level, in Ontario, arts organizations anticipated a 16% decrease in revenue between March and June 2020 (“Early Covid-19

Impacts on OAC-Funded Arts Organizations” 2020). In response to this anticipated loss in revue, numerous new funding streams targeting festivals were created by provincial and municipal funders. The Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism, and Culture Industries reallocated funding from its Celebrate Ontario program, which provided funding to arts and culture festivals across the province, into a new granting stream called the Reconnect Festival and Event Program. This new program was designed specifically for organizations who had to adapt their programming to meet the Covid public health guidelines and provided funding to online and in-person events that “encourage people to travel locally and rediscover the beauty and diversity of their community” (Ontario 2021). The program invested \$7 million to 87 events in 2020 (Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries 2021). The City of Toronto offered the Cultural Festivals Recovery Program, which offered funding up of to \$25,000 to festivals that had to be canceled due to Covid, and provided a total of \$500,000 in funding to 60 organizations, including TOPS and TQFF (“Covid-19: Business & Sector Resources” 2020). That both the provincial and municipal governments offered new funding programs designed specifically to support festivals should not be undersold. Both the Reconnect Festival and Event Program and the Cultural Festival Recovery Programs recognized the centrality of the festival sector to the city and provincial economy.

At all three levels of government, then, there was a sizeable influx of cash into the arts and cultural sector to ensure that it would be able to weather the pandemic. However, it is important to note this survey is not exhaustive, nor is this all necessarily new funding; some of this, like the Reconnect Festival and Event Program, was simply a reorganization of already existing funds into new programs. At this stage, it is difficult to say if the change in programs was enough to ensure the longevity of the arts and cultural sector in Toronto through to the end of the pandemic and beyond.

CINEGORAPHILIA AND TORONTO FESTIVALS

Festivals had to adapt their programming to continue to access the public funds they depended on. Some project grants, like the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism, and Culture Industries Reconnect Festival and Event Program fund, and Canada Council’s Public Outreach grant, required that their programs adapt to meet the new public health orders

in order to access the funding. Other forms of grants, in particular core operational grants, required no changes to programming from organizations initially. However, for a festival to access public funding they have to offer programming. Festivals changed because they had to in order to keep accessing funding. No arts council was going to provide funding to festivals that planned to stay in an indefinite holding pattern.

Moreover, the constantly shifting and increasingly strict public health measures enacted in Ontario meant that as the pandemic wore on, there was an increased desire to be able to gather to watch cinema *together*. Public health restrictions not only forced festivals to reimagine their programming, but also to reimagine how to reach their audiences. As case studies in festivals thriving in this new environment, I turn to two Toronto-based festivals that I have been working with throughout the pandemic: the Toronto Outdoor Picture Show (TOPS) and the Toronto Queer Film Festival (TQFF). Like many community-based festivals, these two festivals share a core mandate to program film for their communities. In the case of TOPS, these are the local neighborhoods in which it screens its outdoor festivals. In the case of TQFF, it is the more marginalized segments of the broader queer and trans community—queer and trans folk with disabilities, low-income, and racialized queer and trans folk—segments of the community that were hardest hit by Covid. TOPS’s decision to organize a physically distanced and highly regulated version of their outdoor festival and TQFF’s decision to move their festival online and to offer micro-grants and other forms of non-festival programming support can largely be traced back to how each festival reimaged their mandates during the pandemic. In both cases, TOPS and TQFF reimaged and distilled their mandates to capture what I term *cinegoraphilia*.

Cinegoraphilia is neologism that aims to capture the specific desire to not simply watch movies, but to *gather to watch movies with others*. The term brings together *cinophilia*, or the love of watching movies, with the ancient Greek *agora*, which was an open public space in which people would gather. Scholarship on both cinophilia and publics has been attentive to how power imbalances and inequities can be produced by both frameworks. De Valck and Hagener (2005) describe cinophilia as “Janus-faced” since it can equally describe both a utopian love of cinema and an elitist view of loving cinema associated with the *Cahiers du Cinema*. Likewise, work in queer theory and feminist geographies has noted how publics and public gathering spaces are policed and designed only for the dominant (often cisgender white male) public, leaving marginalized

groups to produce counterpublics and guerilla public spaces in which to gather (Warner 2002; Caudwell and Browne 2011).

While cinegoraphilia can certainly capture such Janus-faced inequality, I use it here in its utopian framing to describe how gathering to watch cinema may meet the emotional and psychological needs of people living under Covid restrictions and to imagine what cinemagoing may look like “after Covid.” The changes to festival organizing and cinemagoing that are happening now will not completely disappear and remnants of Covid-era organizing will linger long after this is “over.” To evoke Munoz’s (2009) theorizing of utopia: cinegoraphilia describes both the “here and now” of cinemagoing and a “horizon” always just out of reach. Gathering to watch movies now and in the future is not and will not be the same as it once was. Cinegoraphilia aims to capture this temporal flux.

Cinegoraphilia also draws heavily from how Dean Spade describes the goals of mutual aid projects during the pandemic. For Spade mutual aid has two goals: “meeting people’s needs and mobilizing them for resistance” (Spade 2020, 12). Mutual aid fills in the gaps left by capitalist and imperialist systems that have little interest in meeting the basic needs of people. Mutual aid provides people with what the need for survival and mobilizes those needs toward present and future political action. “At its best,” Spade writes, “mutual aid actually produces new ways of living where people get to create systems of care and generosity that address harm and foster well-being” (Spade 2020, 11).

As that which meets our present emotional and psychological needs to gather with others, and as that which tries to imagine alternative futures for cinemagoing, cinegoraphilia evokes the structure of mutual aid. It is not interested in reproducing inequitable regimes of taste between art cinema and popular cinema, between high art and low art. Cinegoraphilia imagines a utopian space where we can gather to watch movies—any and all movies—together.

This is fundamentally what I argue many community-based festivals have been attempting to provide before and during the ongoing pandemic. Cinegoraphilia is the fundamental driver of community-based festivals who have little interest in premieres, red carpets, markets, and those other markers of A-list “business festivals” (Peranson 2009). The pandemic did not produce cinegoraphilia; it simply brought it into sharper focus. TOPS and TQFF’s pandemic programming illustrate this: neither festival changed their mandate; they simply re-focused their efforts on delivering programming that would bring their audiences together.

TORONTO OUTDOOR PICTURE SHOW

In a socially distanced world, how can a festival whose key draw is community stay afloat? Unlike A-list festivals, or even other community-based festivals in Toronto, Toronto Outdoor Picture Show's main draw is not premieres and new films. Rather, Toronto Outdoor Picture Show's main draw has always been the desire to watch classic and contemporary films outdoors with your neighbors in community.

Toronto Outdoor Picture Show began in 2011 as the two-night Christie Pits Film Festival, held in Christie Pits Park in Toronto's west end, organized by programmer and cultural curator Emily Reid. Reid came up with the idea while completing her MA in Cinema Studies at the University of Toronto in 2009. She lived across the street from the park and "mused about seeing outdoor films there" to her MA supervisor, who told her the event would be impossible to mount (Melton 2019). After graduation, the underemployed Reid decided to try to make the event happen anyway and organized a two-night screening to a modest crowd of around 100 patrons. Over the next five years the Christie Pits Film Festival grew, providing more weekly screenings each year until their audience size averaged 1000 per night. In 2015 Reid incorporated the festival as the Toronto Outdoor Picture Show and began expanding its offerings beyond Christie Pits Park, and held screenings in Corktown Common Park, Fort York National Historic Site, Bell Manor Park, Parkway Forest Park and others across Toronto. Each new park aimed to recreate the original founding ethos: to provide high-quality accessible film programming that would appeal to the local community.

The year 2020 would mark the tenth festival held in Christie Pits Park, and TOPS wanted to mark the occasion in a big way: with a retrospective of its nine most popular, important, or influential screenings and the premiere of nine new short films commissioned by TOPS to commemorate the occasion. TOPS sought out funding for this special anniversary season from arts funders, the private sector, and other public funders. To bring the project across the finish line, and to generate buzz and community buy in, the organization launched a crowdfunding campaign to raise the final \$30,000 for the project. The crowdfunding campaign was officially launched on Tuesday, March 10, 2020. The World Health Organization declared the Covid-19 pandemic the following day. Needless to say, this put a wrench in TOPS's fundraising plans and caused the organization to reconsider the optics and communications of the crowdfunding campaign.

TOPS had scheduled a board meeting for Monday, March 16, and as a board we exchanged numerous emails over the weekend about the safety and ethics of holding an in-person board meeting and quickly decided to move the meeting online. The meeting was initially supposed to focus on programming for the 2020 season and to continue to strategize around promoting the crowdfunding plan. The meeting instead focused on ways to completely re-write key messaging for the campaign, since asking for donations in a moment when the arts, culture, and creative industries in Toronto were completely shutting down and many people were likely to lose their jobs was not a position the board was eager to take. Moreover, many of the film productions the campaign was supposed to support were likely to be canceled or postponed indefinitely due to the stay-at-home order and gathering restrictions.

The bulk of the meeting focused on how the festival would be able to operate if stay-at-home measures continued to persist well into the summer. At this point no one in the arts and culture industries had any idea how long the stay-at-home order would persist or for how long they would have to adapt their operations. TOPS, as an outdoor festival, knew that it had more flexibility and Reid proposed a number of contingency plans, each more unappealing than the next, as a way to keep the organization nimble as various levels of government continued to announce new restrictions. Depending on the length of the restrictions, TOPS would do anything from either delaying the announcement of the season, reducing the number of events, or canceling the festival entirely.

Each contingency plan not only had effects on the capacity of the organization and the quality of programming it could offer; it also potentially could affect the organization's eligibility to apply for new grants and accept already submitted grants. TOPS received organizational funding from the Ontario Arts Council and project funding from the Toronto Arts Council, and the organization was relatively certain in March that these funding streams would be safe. However, project funding is tied to specific projects and specific deliverables, and TOPS had submitted a number of applications in the previous months for projects that at this point they were no longer sure if they would be able to deliver because of Covid.

Once public health guidelines in Canada shifted and began to allow for gathering outdoors—since the science supported that risk of Covid transmission outdoors was extremely low, especially when combined with physical distancing and mask use—TOPS knew that it was in a unique position as an outdoor festival to offer some version of its original programming. However,

given that public health guidelines were constantly shifting, and the provincial government could not outline a long-term schedule as to when restrictions may be lifted enough for outdoor gatherings, TOPS had to remain nimble and flexible in their programming in order to be able to organize their festival within what would be the small two-month window in which gatherings were allowed. Further, the fate of TOPS's 10th Anniversary short film project was in jeopardy, as public health restrictions effectively shut down film production in the province. Two of the nine funded productions had luckily completed shooting before the stay-at-home order was issued and were able to complete their films in time for August.

Ultimately, TOPS was able to organize their festival over ten back-to-back evenings at the end of August and was able to fund it in large part due to the ways the arts ecosystem was reorganized during the pandemic. This was the first outdoor festival to happen in the city since Covid restrictions were in place (excluding drive-in festivals), followed shortly thereafter by the Toronto International Film Festival in September. However, because outdoor gathering restrictions limited capacity to 100 people, they opted to hold the festival at Fort York National Historic Site, which was gated and could provide some control over the number of people who entered. Further, in order to limit the possibility of folks crowding outside hoping for a chance to get in, TOPS required every attendee to reserve a free ticket in advance.

Once inside the venue, patrons were asked to self-assess for Covid symptoms and were asked to seat themselves in the open field at least 6 feet from each other. This TOPS knew would not be difficult to enforce. At a regular outdoor screening before the pandemic at their flagship festival in Christie Pits Park, patrons at their events would naturally sit as far from each other, with gaps between patrons only beginning to fill as crossed the 1000 attendee threshold. Attendance at their Fort York screenings in previous years rarely exceeded 400, though the space could easily support four or five times that amount without physical distancing. With a strict attendance cap of 100 people and physical distancing put in place in a space with capacity for thousands, they knew that there would be little chance of crowding. Staff wore masks and worked physically distanced where possible and strict limitations were placed on the indoor washroom. As a result, no case of Covid transmission was ever linked to the festival.

The festival featured the two completed new short films and a roster of favorite short and feature films screened in previous years. This captured the spirit of their original 10th Anniversary program—in which nine short

films would be specifically commissioned to be paired with a favorite feature film from the last nine years of TOPS programs—without replicating it entirely. This nostalgia-hued program took on new meaning in the midst of the pandemic, capturing the cinegoraphilia of public cinemagoing in transition. By celebrating ten years of outdoor movie magic—ten years of being able to watch cinema together without physical distancing and constantly shifting public health guidelines—TOPS’s 2020 Fort York festival reminded us of what cinemagoing once was and provided a glimpse of what it might be in the future.

TORONTO QUEER FILM FESTIVAL

Like TOPS, TQFF knew that the Covid pandemic would require the organization to reimagine how they were going to offer their festival. TQFF’s Artistic and Development Director Kami Chisholm had been following the news of Covid since it broke in January 2020 and was largely unsurprised by the federal government’s stay at home order in March 2020. In an email to the collective on March 17, 2020, Chisholm outlined both a plan of action for the festival and a path toward supporting the wider queer and trans community:

“So, I’ve actually been expecting something like this for a long time, and the good news is that all the planning and building we have done over the last years has in part been to prepare for this. I’m getting messages from the councils that funding will still be flowing. In fact in the short term it looks like possibly more funding may come. So at the moment I am not expecting a huge hit to our budget and I am exploring all funding options [...] For now I’m still expecting that all the jobs we’ve been discussing and budgeting for will happen. [...]

“I’m not going to get into details here [...] but this is not going to be over in a few weeks. And this is hitting our community hard. One of the main reasons I wanted to start TQFF was to be a site for community care and support when this eventually happened. So I’ve been thinking a lot about what we can do.

“Most queer people I know have lost their jobs or all their contract work for the next few months. What do we think about starting a fund? We could use the money to commission found footage/works that can be done from home, host online screening events that pay artists fees, give people grants to host online training webinars. Other ideas? The point is to give people work and to also be a site for the sharing of this work now”. (Chisholm 2020)

I quote this email at length because it accurately predicts the longevity of the pandemic, the short-term response of the arts councils, and outlines how TQFF's eventual pandemic programming is situated within its larger mandate. Chisholm started TQFF in 2016 after noticing that the city's major queer film festival, Inside Out, rarely screened the sorts of experimental and politically challenging films they made—indeed, part of TQFF's impetus was to create a space in Toronto where Chisholm's 2016 documentary *Pride Denied* could be screened, which had been rejected from Inside Out the previous year.

Central to TQFF's mandate from the beginning was building, as Chisholm wrote in this email, a “site for community care and support.” In practice, this meant that TQFF prioritized providing wages and artist fees above the minimum rates recommended by the Independent Media Arts Alliance (IMAA)—a Canadian non-profit organization representing over 100 media arts organizations that sets a recommended fee schedule to ensure media artists are compensated fairly for the exhibition of their work—and operates equally from a disability justice and accessibility perspective as it does from a queer and trans perspective. TQFF was an early adopter of providing subtitles and ASL at their screenings. Ticket prices are pay what you can, with no one ever turned away for lack of funds. The festival is usually held at OCAD University in wheelchair-accessible rooms and is an alcohol-free festival in order to create a space safe for people who struggle with substance abuse.

This history of centering disability justice and accessibility meant that TQFF made the decision early on to move its scheduled November 2020 festival online. However, the postponement of Canada Council's Public Outreach fund to a date at that point was unknown (eventually it would be reinstated for September 2020) put the festival's plans to finance the festival in jeopardy. Faced with the possibility of organizing a festival and not having it funded, and thus not having a way to pay its staff, TQFF planned to postpone their 2020 iteration of the festival to March 2021. This bought the festival time to get a sense of funding streams that would be available to the festival.

The festival did, however, have enough funding in the bank that they opted to redirect some of it toward artists in the form of micro-grants. The festival issued a call for submissions for short films made in a Covid-safe manner under the theme “Queer Emergencies.” Successful applicants would receive minimum \$500 in unrestricted funds to artists. Because the festival wanted the funds to move as quickly as possible, as well as to

generate some press for the festival to further fundraise, films were made within the span of two weeks and were screened publicly on the TQFF website. Queer Emergencies acted as a mutual aid project designed to get funds out to artists *now*, while governments continued to fumble about developing new programs and new deadlines. To be clear: while the government *eventually* developed new supports for artists, they did not do so nearly fast enough. This is where Queer Emergencies was situated.

Queer Emergencies was the first of three separate support programs TQFF offered in response to the shortcomings of government response to the Covid pandemic. The second program was a Covid DIY Documentary workshop facilitated by documentary filmmaker Chanda Chevannes, which operated similarly to the Queer Emergencies program but over a longer period of time guided by Chevannes as a mentor to emerging filmmakers. The third program was their Food Knows No Borders food box program. With the financial support of the Canadian Red Cross, TQFF provided administrative support to Vivimos Juntxs, Comemos Juntxs (VJCJ), a migrant-led group that advocates for migrants to access to support and services, to distribute food and personal protective equipment to nearly 100 queer, trans, migrant, racialized, and undocumented households across the Greater Toronto Area.

To cinephiles and festival scholars, the fact that a queer film festival would support a program that is decidedly uncinematic is clearly unique. TQFF's Food Knows No Borders program (along with their two filmmaking programs, Queer Emergencies and Covid DIY) highlights both the ways festivals have had to shift their programming and activities over the pandemic *and* offers an alternative model for other community-led festivals to follow to generate cinegoraphilia as we enter the second year of the pandemic. The desire to watch movies together can be mobilized toward alternative programs that offer material support artists and filmmakers and not simply just representational space in a film program. It is one thing for festivals to save themselves and to survive the economic effects of the Covid pandemic; it is another thing entirely if there's no artists left to show their work at the festivals.

CONCLUSION: TOPS AND TQFF IN 2021 AND BEYOND

The year 2020 proved to be a year that TOPS, TQFF, and indeed the broader festival network in Toronto experimented and adapted to meet the ever-changing needs of their audiences and the shifting public health

guidelines. As large-scale vaccination efforts get underway in Canada with an optimistic goal of returning to some sense of “normal” by fall 2021, it is possible that these festivals may begin to return to some form of their pre-2020 operations by 2022.

The arts funding ecosystem in Toronto has seemingly stabilized for the moment, no longer plagued with persistent questions of shifting grant deadlines or delayed funding. Indeed, despite the months of uncertainty around funding, both TOPS and TQFF managed to not only survive but thrive during the first year of the pandemic. While major A-list festivals had identity crises and were the hardest hit by the shutdown of the film industry and movie theaters, community-led festivals were flexible and adaptable enough to survive and thrive.

It is difficult to say with any certainty if this flexibility will be enough to allow these festivals to continue to thrive. As various levels of government begin to roll back the support programs they implemented in 2020, many festivals may end up shuttering in 2021 and beyond despite best efforts to save the sector. In Canada the arts sector is behind only airlines as the hardest hit sector during the pandemic (Taylor 2021). While the sector may be holding together for now, it is doing so due to the tireless labor of underpaid and overworked arts administrators, who have been able to capture audience cinegraphophilia over the last year despite the numerous uncertainties the last year and a half have brought.

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