

Review:

***The Romance of Transgression in Canada:
Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas***
**Thomas Waugh (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-
Queen's University Press 2006)**

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Thomas Waugh, Professor of Film Studies and Interdisciplinary Studies in Sexuality at Concordia University in Montreal, has written a book that encompasses both of these disciplines. The book provides the reader with an excellent queer inflected point-of-view on Canadian cinema (film and video). It is like having an amusing and knowledgeable friend watching the films and videos with you and whispering in your ear. The prevailing feeling of naughtiness makes the book a good read. In this sense, it has an apt title, *The Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas*. To see the world differently, and as somewhat askew, is the privilege of the outsider in any society. Thomas Waugh's personalized point-of-view is acknowledged and emphasized by the insertion of personal memories of growing up queer in small-town Ontario, and by the acknowledgement of personal emotional reactions to the media texts discussed. One result of this is that the queerness discussed is mostly male. Although there are some interesting parts in the book where female queer depiction is analyzed, on the whole, women play a minor role. But, since in Canada, no women directed features until the fourth decade of the period he covers and no out lesbians directed any until the late seventies, it is understandable that this should be so.

Canadian cinema as a whole is already defined as marginal because of its lack of commercial production. Waugh sees it as being defined, since World War Two, by a spiraling flirtation with the romantic possibilities of transgression. So for him, a book about the production of queer moving images in Canada is about all Canadian cinema.

He defines queer as a continuum encompassing both a fixed sense of queerness as a network of discrete sexual identities, social constituencies, and strategic political agendas with a cultural canon belonging to them, and a fluid sense of queerness as a "zone of possibilities," troubling the traditional configurations of gender and sexual identities.

Waugh's sense of queerness sets up a spectrum of cinemas encompassing homoerotic works, works that have been appropriated as queer, and homosocial narratives embodying increasing entanglements with the sex in same-sex relations. He brings together a whole spectrum of image regimes from popular narrative, to auteur based art cinema, to the avant-garde, from radical documentary to pornography. These cinematic modes are examined through a scholarly if irreverent lens, and from a political point-of-view. The politics provides his analysis of the works with a passion which is grounded in a thorough knowledge of the social cultural forces that have affected both the makers and the viewers of the cinema.

The book follows a rough chronology, starting with the queer glimmers and symptomatic denials of the 1940s and 50s. This is followed by a chapter on the subsequent sexual ferment of the 60s and 70s. Chapter 5 examines the gender inflected queer narrative mythologies concerning movements from the country to the city and from youth to adulthood. This is followed by a discussion of the Canadian National Film Board's approach to depicting social and sexual changes. Chapter 7 scrutinizes masculinity itself through an analysis of sports films and Chapter 8 focuses on the explicit sexual discourses of pornography. This is followed by an analysis of the queer media texts that address the HIV crisis. Then Part 1 of the book finishes with a chapter on the transhistorical problematics of shame. Part 2 provides an encyclopedic portrait gallery of the careers of individuals, entities and institutions who participated in the construction of moving images that inspired the ten essays.

On the whole, although the readers do not get a thorough historical overview of the topic, they are provided with a variety of approaches to Canadian queer cinema which keep one's interest throughout. Waugh is also providing a rich array of material for anyone interested in the topic of sexuality in the media which encompasses various contemporary scholarly approaches to the topic. For that reason, it would be a good book to recommend to any teacher or student of the topic.