Contrasting Double Features

On How the Combination of Contrast Programming and Double Features Can Elevate the Modern Queer Short Film Experience.

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1. Introduction

When curating a program, there are many different approaches to reach your audience, while creating the biggest impact possible. Playing movies back-to-back in the form of double features is nothing new, but it has not been popular for a long time. The same applies to the idea of contrast programming. But what happens if you combine the two concepts, modify them, play on their strengths, and apply them to shorts in a new contemporary way?

This paper will focus on short films, programming, and curating. With a brief theoretical introduction, I am taking on a rather practical approach by creating what I like to call *contrasting double features*[1]. I will discuss my selection of the two shorts, in what way they contrast each other, and how we can improve on my selection. This will result in three different contrasting double features that all revolve around queer themes to set the frame. I will do this to solidify the following thesis:

The combination and customization of contrast programming and double features can elevate the queer short film experience and can result in an approachable way into complex topics.

To fully achieve this, I will first go the traditional route of contrast programming, then refine it to current curating standards, and then experiment with the concept further to elevate the program. These three double features are not intended to be presented next to each other but rather stand on their own. Additionally, I would advise you to watch the double features first before reading my analysis on them. The analysis of the actual effect of the contrasting double features is only hypothetical. Unfortunately, it would go beyond the possibilities of this paper to present and evaluate these with test audiences. My assumptions are merely based on other texts and my personal experiences.

On a final note, this paper is not here to discuss and question the fundamentals of the LGBTQIA+ community. I am aware that everyone has their own experience and I am not trying to take away from that. In the second chapter, I will go into more detail regarding

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[1] Despite the term *double features* referring to feature-length films – and not short films – I want to actively make use of it here in a more general way; exactly two films playing back-to-back. I would argue that most people can already get a vague idea of what a *contrasting double feature* might be from the name alone. If I coined a new term here, this wouldn't be the case and I don't want to burden any reader with more new terminology than necessary. Apart from that, *contrasting double feature* does have a nice ring to it.

this matter.

2.   Presenting Films

An essential part of creating a short film – or any film for that matter – is its distribution and presentation. In this chapter I am going to focus on different ways to present movies in general, the work of programmers and curators, and the fundamentals of how one creates a program around a specific topic. This will help to further understand my concept, its origins, and my execution of the contrasting double features.

2.1 Double Features and Contrast Programming

Since shorts usually do not get a theatrical release, they find their audience online, at exhibitions, or film festivals around the world. Especially at festivals these movies are more often than not presented together with other shorts in a program. The pairing of movies is nothing exclusive to the short film since double and even triple features have been part of the cinematic experience since the establishment of the feature length film (Gomery, 1992, p. 77). Especially during the great depression in the 1930s, the so-called *duals* became a new way to get more people to go to the movies. This was when studios started producing B movies which were made "cheaply, with second-rate stars and running times of about sixty minutes" (Schatz, 1999, p. 43). The idea was to keep their formulaic and cost-effective production going to finance the production of their big A-movies (ibid.). The *pay-one-watch-two* strategy became predominant through the 1940s and was popular, especially among younger audiences (Gomery, 1992, pp. 77–78). Others opposed double features, complaining about "eye strain and fatigue" and that "'[g]ood' films were often paired with 'poor' films" (ibid., p. 78). Programmers at the time tried to fix this by pairing movies that would appeal to the audience while also maximizing revenue (Fox, 2017, p. 13). Later, the complaint of always having to watch a 'poor' movie prior to a 'good' one was embraced and embedded specifically within so-called "contrast programming" (Lameris, 2017, p. 159).

Lameris shows in her chapter *Framing Programmes* how film museums presented their programs over the years. She states that "positioning objects adjacent to one another, […] produces a semantic connection" (Lameris, 2017, p. 151). The Soviet Lev Kuleshov already demonstrated in the early 20th Century that the adjacent images and shots are not

only in strong relation to each other but also influence the way the audience perceives their contents. According to Lameris the fundamental idea of montage theory also applies to movies: "[The] most common way of presenting films 'in context' with each other […] is by screening them on the same evening" or by connecting them thematically (ibid.). With program booklets, lectures, and an exhibition, the museum would inform the audience on how they would have to see, read, and contextualize the films presented in the program. Around the mid-1950s a new strategy emerged that would enforce a new reading mode on the spectator. With the addition of a prelude to the main film, the museum would focus on the difference in status of the selected movies (ibid., pp. 158–159). The prelude would mostly consist of a "primitive curiosity" that would further elevate and emphasize the quality of the main movie that was labeled as "art" – hence "contrast programming" (ibid., p. 159). "The so-called failures were presented as anonymous pieces of film without mentioning their creators or their year of production; they were simply presented as old and unsuccessful" (ibid., p. 160). This shows that their only value was to elevate the subsequent film and that it was not meant to be presented outside of the program. This is not state-of-the-art programming anymore since it goes against the fundamentals of current curators who seek to be sympathetic and respectful to the films in their programs (Damiens, 2020, p. 44).

2.2 Programming and curating

When it comes to programs and festivals, there are often two activities that come to mind: programming and curating. To further understand the process of this paper, it is necessary to take a closer look at these two concepts first. For this, I am going to rely on the definitions stated in Laura Marks' article about programming, since the following arguments are going to be based on her thesis.

Marks clearly states that programming and curating are two separate activities. Programming is particularly used for ongoing exhibitions like festivals and is supposed to be rather objective (Marks, 2017, p. 36). Due to the environment in which the program is presented, it represents "a reflection on the state of the field and thus has its own ethics of responsibility to artists and audiences" (ibid.).

Curating on the other hand differentiates itself in its subjectivity of the curator and the environment it is presented in. Marks defines it as "organizing thematic programs that are not necessarily linked to a regular venue" (ibid.). These programs are driven by the

subjective agenda of the curator and by an overall connecting theme or topic, both of which are responsible for attracting an audience. According to her friend Patty Zimmermann, "the role of the curator is to prepare the program carefully, then step back and allow the interaction between works and audience to unfold" (ibid., p. 38).

With these two definitions in mind, we can take a first look at my work which is presented in the next chapter of this paper. As stated in the introduction, I am going to prepare hypothetical programs of short films that combine the idea of the double feature with contrast programming to then further evolve that concept. Since the selection of films revolves around this concept and is rather subjective to me as a queer person, it is safe to assume that I would rather take on the role of the curator than of the programmer. These double features all stand on their own and are way too short to be presented realistically to an audience with the exception of an art installation or exhibition perhaps where they could play on a loop. Furthermore, my program is only hypothetical and obviously not suited for a festival which further solidifies my role as a curator – even though we are talking about contrast *programming*. Unfortunately, the interaction between the double features and the audience cannot be tested due to the limits of this paper.

We can now take a closer look at how one curates a program to make my thought process more accessible further down.

2.3 Curating (a Queer) Program

As stated previously, curating is or should be, something that is rather subjective, that should "just come naturally", which means there is very little theory on it (Marks, 2004, p. 37). Yet in her article, Marks presents different inputs, fundamentals, and ideas on how to curate a program with her *dinner-party model*. She compares the films in a program with a menu that should break the ice for a conversation among the guests – the audience. This multi-course *meal* should follow an idea and concept that should arise from the films themselves and create a lively dialectic between the two. Furthermore, she says that a program calls for an "argument" or a "hypothesis" and that through the exchange of the program and its audience, it further develops into new ones (ibid., pp. 38–40). "The quality of the exchange is a function not merely of volume of response, but of how interesting is the new synthesis that emerges" (ibid., p. 40). To mimic this new synthesis, I will discuss the double features one by one by myself, analyze what I conceive to be their flaws, and try to adapt and improve my execution in the following pairing.

According to Marks, the already mentioned argument is the base of every program: "A curated program is an argument, a well-defined, defensible, pertinent statement. An argument needs a thesis. And a thesis needs a verb. Without these, a curated program is meaningless" (ibid., p. 39). She further suggests that there is a strong responsibility for the curator to create a space where the performative dialogue between pleasure and quality can unfold, from which unforeseen meanings can emerge. This unpredictable "dialogue between [the curator,] the work and the world" can "assist artist by drawing out latent qualities in their work or showing new facets through combination with other works" (ibid., p. 43). Therefore, it is not necessary that the audience must fully understand or follow the curator's intents but instead think about them, create dialogues, and further develop their ideas and thoughts. "If all goes well, the curator becomes the catalyst of a dialectic between media works and ideas, the zeitgeist sniffer" (ibid., p. 40).

Queer and LGBTQIA+ film festivals not only have a long and broad history but also some rather controversial discussions regarding the not broad enough representation and exclusion of certain groups surrounding them. Since these are not necessary to fully understand the rest of this paper, I will not explore this topic here in detail. Instead, I am going to implement some of the arguments and ideas that are necessary further down when analyzing my program. Similarly to the book *LGBTQ Film Festivals*, I will not separate the art from the artist and its community (Damiens, 2020, p. 28). This not only makes sense when talking about directors and their films for my program but also when it comes to my role as a curator. There are some aspects of this paper where it would go against the spirit of curating and of myself as a queer person to remain objective.

> The separation of the personal from the intellectual, often held as a cornerstone of so-called objective research, erases not only how queer people sustain communities but also how our artistic and scholarly endeavours are always the result of collaborations and chosen networks of friends (Damiens, 2020, p. 29).

I cannot talk for the entire LGBTQIA+ community, nor for entire subgroups I feel part of. I cannot and will not claim an objective position on the values of the queer community since it is way too broad and colorful to generalize it. But what I can do is talk from my experiences and my ideas, values, and feelings as a Caucasian pansexual trans woman from central Europe. Furthermore, I will quote from blogs and social media and try to "sniff" the current zeitgeist to solidify my remarks.

3. Contrasting Double Features

In the following chapter, I will curate three different and independent double features with shorts dealing with queer topics. I will justify my selection, analyze it, and try to improve on it with the next one. This way I will show that even though contrast programming is out of date, it can still provide an interesting approach to contemporary curating.

3.1 The Classic

In this first contrasting double feature, I am trying to recreate an original museum program as described by Lameris. I will not use movies from the 1950s but rather focus on contemporary films to find out how contrast programming could work from today's point of view. For this, we need a *good* vs. *bad* scenario, a *primitive* prelude for the canonical *art*. Since the *good* movie was the main attraction, I am going to focus on that one first and find a contrasting *primitive curiosity* second:

RELUCTANTLY QUEER (Akosua Adoma Owusu, GH/US 2016) is a perfect example for our first pairing. This picture focuses on a young Ghanaian man who emigrated to the US. Through a voice-over, he reads the letter he is writing to his mother. He writes about his struggle to reconcile his queer sexuality with his love for his mother who still lives in Africa. His sincere words are chosen carefully almost like those of a poet but without being pretentious or artificial. "This self wanders around seeking to speak out, yet at the same time being careful and fearful with what to say and what not to say" (RELUCTANTLY QUEER, 4'36"–4'48"). In the letter instead of referring to himself as "I" when talking about his sexual orientation, he uses "this self" in the third person singular. This way, the fact that this part separates him from so many things he calls home gets emphasized. Even though he never mentions that he is queer, it follows from the title and from the imagery where we see him lying together naked with other people, both men and women. He elaborates that even though he once could talk about everything with his mother, he never mentioned "this self" to her but is trying to open up now. Inside, he is fearful of what she might say and if she would still love "this self" the same way or if everything would change.

During the credits, there is a cover by FALCONE of the R&B song "Are You That

Somebody?" by Aaliyah playing. He sings to a boy about a big secret he is about to share, and that the boy should be discreet and not tell anyone else. Because a man is now singing these lyrics and because they stand in juxtaposition with the film we just saw, their meaning changes. The lyrics now clearly stand for the fear of being exposed as a queer person and what that could mean for their personal life.

This film is not only about love but also about home. Even though he wants to be home, feeling his mother's warm embrace, he wonders if he would be accepted back home. Even if his mother would open the door for "this self", Ghana – a profoundly anti-LGBT country – definitely would not. He says that Ghana is his "unhappy home" (ibid., 5'43"–5'52") and that he temporarily lets go of "this self" when being there. His feeling of being lost and wandering around with no place to call home gets further emphasized when he talks about living as a black person in the United States. Even though he does not have to deal with racism in Ghana, he can never be his "true self" there. Essentially, all he wants is a place to call home and where he can feel his mother's unconditional love. "I love you dearly. I don't want to be alone" (ibid., 7'02"–7'08").

From a queer person's point of view, this movie just hits the mark. Coming out to their parents is always difficult, no matter if it is about gender or sexuality. You are afraid the *unconditional* love of your parents might vanish, that they see you as someone else now, and that nothing will ever be the same again. Additionally, parts of Western society and many countries in this world – like Ghana – claim that it is wrong to be queer. The way the protagonist talks about "this self" is very relatable too; it always takes time to accept this new side as a part of oneself. Time to realize that it is not necessarily a "new self" but rather your "true self". The fact that he brings the aspects of racism into this conversation allows for even more people who are not necessarily queer, to relate to him. This search for home and love is something fundamental to marginalized groups like queer people.

RELUCTANTLY QUEER can be considered part of the queer canon. The film was nominated at the Berlin International Film Festival 2016 for the *Golden Berlin Bear* and the *Teddy* (*Reluctantly Queer*, n.d.). Among several other nominations, the film was also featured on The Criterion Channel which is famous for "gathering and publishing the greatest films from around the world" (Criterion Collection, n.d.). The fact that this film is shot in black and white further solidifies it in the "art" category. As Lameris states in her text, it was more likely for a museum to show art films in black and white instead of color since "[t]he colouring of silent films only began to be considered artistic around the mid-1980s. […]

[A]rt film became increasingly associated with black and white, while colour was connected to the far less valued early part of film history" (Lameris, 2017, p. 162).

According to what I have gathered about RELUCTANTLY QUEER, let us try and find the worst possible short that contrasts it the best. I have decided to not include an actual movie here but rather a hypothetical placeholder. This is for two reasons: 1) When creating a program with an argument, "we need an understanding of argument that is sympathetic, sensitive, and respectful to the films and videos it argues about" (Marks, 2004, p. 44). I am aware that this goes against the idea of contrast programming, which purposefully puts films against each other to separate them in quality. Yet I do not think it is for me to say what is bad and to label movies as "primitive". 2) I do not want to create a platform to highlight homo- or transphobic content. Such films are outdated and forgotten for a reason. Let us try and keep it that way. Additionally, this totally fits the original experience of not knowing where or when this prelude is from.

Let us talk about the aspects of this hypothetical "primitive curiosity" I would choose: As discussed, I would select an older re-colored movie, made in the US, that has not received any recognition from festivals and also has been forgotten over time. I would try to highlight the theme of the film more than its technical aspects. While RELUCTANTLY QUEER is sincere and from the heart, I would choose something that is from the outside view: Made with cast and crew that are not queer or marginalized by society and a depiction of queer people full of stereotypes that were common at the time; words would be used that are deemed inappropriate by today's standards; a story that shows that it is wrong to be queer and how to raise your kid, so it fits the cis-heteronormative standards; a happy ending from the parents' and film's point of view. The film would also contain the aspects of fear; the fear that this could happen to you and your child and that you are to blame. I could go on and on, but I think you get the idea.

This pairing would perfectly display the contrast of how far we have come as a society. Or would it? RELUCTANTLY QUEER demonstrates that it is still hard for many people in many countries to openly live as their true selves without discrimination. But at least it would show that Western societies have embraced or at least started to tolerate this queer way of life. That it is no longer deemed wrong to be queer but instead that there is a platform for queer people to talk about their hopes, dreams, fears, and struggles openly and from the heart. This creates awareness and awareness often leads to progress.

3.2 The Refined

Now let us look at what did not work with the execution of the first double feature and what we can improve on: We should embrace today's standards and only incorporate films in our program that we can and want to treat with respect. It would be nonsensical to work with anonymous films. That is why I will choose actual existing films and name them. This means we must move away from the drastic "good vs bad" approach that would pair a queer film with an anti-LGBTQIA+ one. To make further progress, we should try to find movies that give us an inside perspective from the queer community itself, contrasting each other in their approach. If we keep focusing on pro-LGBTQIA+ movies, we also need to distance our experiment from the notion that there needs to be a difference in the production year. The "old vs new" approach does not work because similarly to women, queer people have been crossed out from official histories (Damiens, 2020, pp. 25–26). Therefore, any form of historical revision of queer people in cinema is valuable in itself. Hence, I will refrain from using anything older than 2012.

Let us try and use two movies that are both featured on The Criterion Channel to highlight that even work within the community that is considered "one of the greatest films around the world" can be stereotypical and miss the mark. Furthermore, I would separate quality into two aspects: one is the writing, the themes of the movie, and the overall idea. The other is their execution in the technical sense. To highlight the difference between the two films in terms of thematic quality, I will present the thematically deeper film first. This way I try to create a hollow feeling when following it up with something rather dull.

The first movie I want to highlight is BLOOD BELOW THE SKIN (Jennifer Reeder, US 2015) which focuses on three teenage girls before prom night. They go to the same high school and even though they are from different social circles, they form a bond and connect in one way or the other. This film is very much about relationships: Darby tries to reconnect with her single mother who appears to be mentally unstable. Because of that, she has to mother her, and the roles are reversed. By the end of the film Darby and her mother form a blood pact and become best friends. Darby also gets acquainted with her brother's (ex)girlfriend Joni. They talk about boys and their body parts, initially lying to each other about their experiences.

Joni gets to know Joan and the two classmates quickly fall in love with each other. They are shy at first but eventually text each other, meeting for a date. This shyness and

awkwardness are reflected in the writing and acting of their scenes. It all seems very forced and dry, almost unbearable to watch. Intentional or not, it perfectly captures the feeling of the first few butterflies – the insecurity of not knowing whether the other person likes you back, thinking to yourself: "Should I send her a message or should I silently endure eternal heartache?" (BLOOD BELOW THE SKIN, 15'39''). This is something many people can relate to, queer or not. The normalcy with which the queer relationship is treated is very refreshing to see. There is no need to show a sexual awakening or questioning oneself whether this is "normal" or not. In their final scene, they try on lip-gloss and send each other messages telepathically: "I don't hardly know you, but I think I could love you" (BLOOD BELOW THE SKIN, 29'39''). This is in homage to Joan Jett's version of "Crimson & Clover", which starts off the film and gets performed in a later scene by Joni.

The film is full of songs and artist references like Joan Jett and The Smiths, both of which are considered part of queer culture (365 DAYS OF LESBIANS, 2017) (Zugi, 2019). The choice of music, the creativity of the girls, revenge pranks, colored hair, the short nails and so much more add to the queer-lifestyle experience. The film combines the confidence in their actions with their awkwardness and teenage angst to recreate the world they are living in. There is also a melancholic side to their daydreamy life, full of depression and sadness within these young feminist minds. The excessive close-up shots further intensify their positive and negative feelings and create a form of intimacy within their small world.

As a contrast, I have chosen SOCIAL BUTTERFLY (Lauren Wolkstein, FR 2013) about the 30-year-old Margaret who crashes Chloé's 18th birthday. She pretends to be the French birthday girl's cousin and starts to steal jewelry at the party. Eventually, Chloé finds her, talks to her, takes her to her room and after a first kiss and without hesitation, the American reaches down into the virgin's pants. After giving Chloé her first orgasm, Margaret just wants to leave. But the other party guests throw both into the pool, eventually revealing all the things that were stolen.

What contrasts these two films is the difference between the romantic and the sexual approach. BLOOD BELOW THE SKIN focuses on the romantic tension where holding hands is the only physical contact the queer characters share. Meanwhile, in SOCIAL BUTTERFLY the sexual desires of Chloé are front and center. There is no real tension between the two. Additionally, Margaret as an American embodies the "lesbian desire in an outsider figure", a stereotype that is very common in French lesbian movies (Cairns, 2006, p. 94). To further

amplify Margaret's role as an outsider, she is depicted as a runaway and a thief. Ultimately, the American is a thief twice over, since she doesn't just take, but actively steals Chloé's virginity. The moment appears to be meaningless – almost like a necessity – to the thief who tried to leave the party multiple times by now. By not even undressing and only giving pleasure, Margaret is taking Chloé's virginity on her way out as if it was another piece of jewelry she just happened to find – not valuing its worth. Through this intimate moment, the birthday girl becomes a victim, fully vulnerable, framed with her naked back turned to the camera. Furthermore, their entire relationship is based on mutual lies and is therefore depicted as 'not real'. These lies and the American's criminality can be associated with "sin" and "evil" and therefore her sexual act can be as well (ibid., p. 19).

To make things worse, Chloé literally just turned 18 and even gets called "a baby" by Margaret (SOCIAL BUTTERFLY, 07'52"). Intentional or not, the sexual act plays on the forbidden and taboo especially since Margaret pretends to be the girl's cousin. The audience as well as these women both know this isn't true, but it still creates a space for perversions similar to porn titles that imply familial relations between the actors and actresses. Additionally, the huge age gap between the two creates an association with the fetishization of female 18-year-old porn stars. In general, Lesbian depictions have always been heavily fetishized by the male gaze and this influence is indirectly visible in SOCIAL BUTTERFLY even without an explicitly voyeuristic cinematography (Holleb, 2019, p. 170). To lean further into that and to create a relationship that is based on lies, implying that lesbian love is 'not real' and an 'act of sin', is blatantly lesbophobic[2]. Coming from a filmmaker who herself is married to another woman, this is very surprising.

Let us talk about other notions of quality in this double feature: One could argue that SOCIAL BUTTERFLY is the better-executed and acted film of the two, even though it is full of stereotypes and renders lesbian relationships as 'fake' and 'sinful'. This goes to show that we should not be too focused on prestige and canonized queer films since it is not necessarily a measuring tool for its representation. This always raises the question of who it is that labels the movies as part of a canon. I would argue that within such a broad and colorful community like the LGBTQIA+, there are many ways of seeing films. Hence, I will try to distance myself from any already prestige-labeled queer films in the next double feature.

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[2] "Lesbophobia is a particular manifestation of homophobia, and shares the general dismissal of lesbian sexuality as unreal or disgusting. Lesbophobia is being dehumanized on two fronts: being hyper-sexualized and fetishized, and being told you're disgusting and unnatural" (Holleb, 2019, p. 169).

3.3 The Experimental

In this final pairing, I am going to focus on the trans experience and take the contrast in a little bit of a different direction. We already explored pro and anti-LGBTQIA+ films and good and bad representation. Now let us focus on two positive examples. As Eisenstein already stated, new meanings can emerge through montage or, in this case, by playing them back-to-back. In the following double feature, I will present an explicitly trans film after one that does not necessarily have to be.

First, I will present CATERPILLARPLASTY (David Barlow-Krelina, CA 2018) a very stylized sci-fi animation about extreme plastic surgery. It is about a man who goes to surgery to change his body to realize his inner butterfly. The characters are deformed and will go through any form of pain just to be "pretty". The commentary on plastic surgery aside, this film goes full body horror with the way you see the surgeons modify their patient's body. This is very reminiscent of the work of the father of body horror – David Cronenberg. The animation is grotesque and really makes you crawl in your skin. The unsettling character designs and the way the surgeries are portrayed achieve a profound sense of unease – dysphoria.

I think it is not that far of a stretch to say that the idea of wanting to show your inner self to other people is something that resonates with trans people. Expressing yourself – and possibly your gender – with your outward appearance is called gender expression which can relieve gender dysphoria. This gender expression can but does not necessarily have to come in the form of surgery (Holleb, 2019, pp. 131–134). Therefore, this movie functions as a metaphor for dysphoria and the way to euphoria through your gender expression. Ideally, booklets or an accompanying text would already hint at this connection. I would like to add that I think this film would work without making the connection to transness at first. By creating a more general and non-gender-specific form of dysphoria, the cis viewer can identify with an approximation of the feeling of dysphoria and can possibly relate somewhat to the specific gender dysphoria that is presented in the second short.

I am going to follow up this highly polished animation with a very raw documentary: A TRANS WITH A MOVIE CAMERA (Frances Arpaia, US 2018) is a non-narrative cine-essay that very much locates itself in the avant-garde scene. With self-awareness front and center, it reflects on the potential trans women have in film – similar to MAN WITH A MOVIE

CAMERA (CHELOVEK S KINO-APPARATOM, Dziga Vertov, SU 1929) at the time. The contrast between animation and documentary further leans into my idea of contrast programming. A fire-spitting trans woman and the hardcore punk lyrics: "They told us we were girls; So we claimed our female lives; Now they tell us we aren't girls; […] We're fucking future girls; living outside society's shit" (A TRANS WITH A MOVIE CAMERA, 0'30"–0'47") create a strong contrast to the high polished render that played before. This film is not decorated with cute aesthetics. Instead, it is raw, unpolished, and true to the many facets of the life of trans women.

This film is separated into four parts which I want to highlight.

1) "Dysphoria" is shown as the struggle of constant back and forth amplified through reversed images, the shaving and then un-shaving of the beard in the morning, the breaking of the egg that symbolizes new life, and the repeated need for punishment. Hating yourself or some higher power for the body you are stuck in.

2) "Congregation" – which means a gathering or assembly of people – is the second chapter and refers to the community and the friends around her. The video depicts scenes of presumably her friends in a sequence of home-video-style vignettes played with a low frame rate. Additionally, there is a scene at the beach intercut which shows two trans women kissing. A rare moment in film history where two trans women are shown kissing on film outside of pornography. Sally Jane Black, an established critic in the trans film scene, wrote about why this moment in particular, even though it should be considered normal, is so special "because this film is such a raw vision of trans experience […] [and] strips naked (literally and figuratively) the emotional chaos of trans life, seeing two trans women kiss in this context feels like it's something far more profound that it should be" (Black, 2021).

3) In this third part "Anamnesis" – meaning the recollection of a previous existence – we travel back in time and visit their "dead" old self at the cemetery, all in black and white of course. With only some moments left of their past self, this refers to how many people leave their old self behind and start living as their true self. This often – but not always – comes with a new name. The old name is then their so-called deadname which is associated with their "dead" old self. It is not part of this person's life anymore.

4) The film ends with the chapter "Asseveration" which means affirmation. There is a series of still images flashing in rapid succession, eventually ending in imagery of an atomic bomb exploding.

These four topics are all big parts of the life of trans people. A chaotic and stunning approach that presents these topics in a new and unfiltered light. Some of them might be considered painful experiences as highlighted in the contrived sketches that separate the chapters from each other. But the film also highlights the moments that feel good, where we feel like ourselves in a community that respects, affirms and loves us, and where our former self is nothing more than a faded memory. True, magical moments where we turn dysphoria into euphoria. And even though the two films are so different in their approach they both achieve moments of happiness, where the characters can be their true self, and show us that it was worth the pain and the unsettling way we took upon ourselves.

4. Conclusion

After having a closer look at the initial intent and effects of contrast programming and how one curates a program, I tried to combine these different aspects in a more practical example. In an attempt to create a contrasting double feature, I already had some issues with the parameters. A "good vs. bad" approach to representation did not align with the moral code of curating. Since I did not want to highlight anti-LGBTQIA+ films in my work, I decided to take a different approach with the second attempt. There I focused on two films from within the community that were both considered prestige. This way I could find a contrast in their way of representing women-loving women. While the first film focused on the awkwardness of young girls, their relations to each other, and the queer lifestyle in general, the second film focused on the sexual approach. Without tenderness or feelings, this film seemed hollow in contrast to the previous one and leaned into stereotypes of lesbian depiction, ultimately rendering the experience as 'fake' and 'sinful'. This showed that I had to distance myself from a canon of films. With the next and final example, I tried to think a little more outside the box and left any form of bad representation behind me. By contrasting the following films with their approach to dysphoria I tried to create a context about trans people and their dysphoria around a not necessarily queer film. From the relatively general approach with body horror to a very specific one about gender dysphoria. Both films manage to highlight the euphoria, even though one is a highly polished animation and the other a very raw and chaotic essay.

With the third double feature, I managed to focus on a very central topic for many trans people through the inclusion and evolution of the basic concepts of contrast programming. Even though some of the fundamentals do not align with today's curating standards, it can be used as a tool to highlight that there are different approaches to representation and that different points of view on the same topic can make them more accessible to everyone.

It would be very interesting in the future to see how these contrasting double features would resonate with different test audiences. Will the effects resonate with the people the way I described it, what are their reactions, their thoughts, and does it differ outside of queer audiences? This could also be incorporated into exhibitions in museums, eventually going full circle to the origins of contrast programming.

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6. Filmography

A Trans with a Movie Camera
Frances Arpaia, US 2018, 14'
(vimeo.com,
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Blood Below the Skin
Jennifer Reeder, US 2015, 33'
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Caterpillarplasty
David Barlow-Krelina, CA 2018, 05'
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https://vimeo.com/362160902
Retrieved September 8, 2022.)

Man with a Movie Camera (Chelovek s kino-apparatom)
Dziga Vertov, SU 1929, 68'

Reluctantly Queer
Akosua Adoma Owusu, GH/US 2016, 08'
(The Criterion Channel US,
https://www.criterionchannel.com/reluctantly-queer
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Social Butterfly
Lauren Wolkstein, FR 2013, 14'
(The Criterion Channel US,
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On how the combination of contrast programming and double features can elevate the
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