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Long Live the Dead Boys or Nothing really matters in the face of sex

The Quebec, London's oldest gay pub, opened in 1946. Located near Marble Arch tube, its unimposing facade opens up onto a warmly lit bar, 20 metres long. The predominantly wooded interior is lined with well-polished copper and followed by a tasteful Persian rug. The bar hosts a steady crowd of regulars, almost exclusively older gay men. On a visit to London earlier this year, the bar was introduced to me as a place "where old queens go to die." This is a pub that is run by the older gentlemen of the capital. The Quebec could very well be made up of Damascus, heaven, and a very particular circle of hell. As you pass along the bar's floor-to-ceiling amber wall of properly aged spirits, you come to approach a mini grand piano—ivory white at that. Like a little taste of heaven. I'd just as well fill the room with some dry ice haze, dress everyone up in linens and attach little cardboard wings, and put a St. Peter at the entrance. This is a lucid territory, albeit a little tipsy at points, filled with quiet conversation. There is a proper air about things. Yet as a cruising bar its dissymetry is what runs underneath the floor boards. The basement is accessed through a narrow stairwell just to the right of the piano. Descending, I spot framed pictures of Rudolf Valentino, Errol Flynn, and Tom Waits on the stairwell wall. Below, the Persian rug becomes a worn Verner Panton pelt. Crammed between the worn rug and drop ceiling that The Quebec's own accused share are "plenty of mature men with their younger pretenders."

It is here in this basement that Jim Beresford, James Hollands, Ian White, and Andrew Walsh, under the name MANGINA, realized "Culling Occupants," a new incantation with radical queer writer Dennis Cooper.

For this particular event the rent boy pub's basement dance floor was taken over by a soundproof box. A live telephone feed connected the box directly to Dennis Cooper at his home in LA. The Quebec's patrons could then enter the booth, press a red button, and speak to the author, confessing anything they wanted to him in complete secrecy. Copper's replies were then relayed, with heavy delay effects, to the audience outside of the booth. This broadcast was intermingled with a live feed from the venue's jukebox, along with prerecorded interviews with the bar's regulars. The Quebec was turned over: a full inversion of space. The dead boys of Cooper's fiction had come back.

MANGINA vanquished the autocracy of the author whilst creating a magical tense where Cooper's boys returned and revenged themselves for 2000 years of pederastic abuse, culling and finally confronting the occupants of their history. The greatest success of the night was not the people who came to see the work specifically, but the regulars of The

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Interview with David Altmejd

'Long Live the Dead Boys'
MANGINA and Denis Cooper,
London 2000

Quebec, who carried on about their business with only one complaint, fascinated but not really bothered. After all, it wasn't what they were there for; it provided an alternative to the usual background of cruising, but nothing more. Each event had only conceptual bearing on the other, the sense that nothing really matters in the face of sex.

The Quebec, matched with MANGINA, had calmed that rather sweaty face of truth. Where friction and violent contradictions were expected, the extreme proposals of the event had simply been incorporated into environment. And all so naturally, as if sometime in its tightly sealed history The Quebec had already surpassed these exterior pretenses, and in its maturity had only to patiently wait out the redundant performance of this younger set.

"Culling Occupants" By MANGINA (Jim Beresford, James B.L. Hollands)
UK 2000, approx. 8 minutes
For preview copies, please contact
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The Quebec <http://www.thequebec.co.uk/>

Long Live the Dead Boys

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