

FILM  
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IN TRANSITION

# LGBTQ FILM FESTIVALS



## Curating Queerness

ANTOINE DAMIENS

Amsterdam  
University  
Press

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*Antoine Damiens*

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# Dedication

To Craig Burns Eberhardt and Sylvain Duguay.

Craig passed away in August 2018 at the age of 61. Craig was a healer, a home builder, and a fixture of many queer communities. Above all, Craig was a father to many chosen families. I have yet to meet anyone from his vast circle who hasn't been impacted by Craig's courage, generosity, and resilience. A true role model, Craig represents the best of who a queer person can be: tremendously compassionate, eager to foster an intergenerational solidarity, and resolutely unapologetic.

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I would like to pretend that, through archival/historical research, I stand in a lineage of fierce gay men – sustaining relationships with ghosts and traces, enacting a form of queer friendship that trumps death itself. As a justice project, I can only hope this book will honour Sylvain and Craig's memory.





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# List of abbreviations

<b>AIVF</b>	Association for Independent Video and Film
<b>GAA</b>	Gay Activists Alliance
<b>GAU</b>	Gay Academic Union
<b>IGLHRC</b>	International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission
<b>LSF</b>	Lesbisch Schwule Filmtage Hamburg   International Queer Film Festival
<b>NALGF</b>	National Association for Lesbian and Gay Filmmakers
<b>NEA</b>	National Endowment for the Arts
<b>NGLTF</b>	National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce
<b>NQC</b>	New Queer Cinema
<b>NYLGEFF</b>	New York Lesbian and Gay Experimental Film Festival
<b>NYPL</b>	New York Public Library
<b>NYSCA</b>	New York State Council for the Arts
<b>NYU</b>	New York University





# Introduction. Festivals, Uncut: Queering Film Festival Studies, Curating *LGBTQ Film Festivals*

'Fearless, Shameless, Timeless.'<sup>1</sup>

This book is born out of a paradox: while scholars have increasingly legitimated festivals as a semi-independent field of research within film and media studies, critics and arts organizers have long questioned the cultural relevancy of LGBTQ festivals. As early as 1982, Thomas Waugh wondered why (and whether) a new gay and lesbian film festival should be organized in Montreal.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, B. Ruby Rich famously observed that queer festivals have simultaneously been 'outlasting their mandate and invited to cease and desist'.<sup>3</sup> In focusing on LGBTQ festivals' conflicted temporalities and historiography, this book examines the disciplinary assumptions that structure festival studies: it questions the theoretical and political narratives implied in current festival scholarship.

In particular, this book is concerned with festival studies' quest for legitimacy: as a relatively recent field of academic research, festival studies has been burdened with justifying its object of research. Symptomatically, most books and dissertations on the topic start with a numbered description of the festival phenomenon. It is customary to highlight that thousands and thousands of festivals are organized each year.<sup>4</sup> LGBTQ festivals are

1 Inside Out (Toronto, 1991-ongoing), 2011 tagline.

2 Waugh, 'Pourquoi encore un festival de cinéma lesbien et gai?'

3 Rich, 'The New Homosexual Film Festivals', 620.

4 While it is almost impossible to estimate the number of festivals being organized each year, the festival submission platform Withoutabox claims it serves over 5,000 festivals. See: Loist, 'Queer Film Culture', 18n7. In France alone, between 350 and 600 festivals are alleged to have been organized in 2006. See: Iordanova and Rhyne, *Film Festival Yearbook I*, 1; Taillibert, *Tribulations festivières*, 10.

not an exception: for instance, Ger Zielinski asserts that queer festivals are 'often second largest only to the IFF [International Film Festivals] in their respective city'.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Skadi Loist argues that 'the LGBT/Q film festival scene has grown exponentially, covering most regions of the globe with about 230 active events on the circuit today'.<sup>6</sup> The tendency to rely on statistics and to map out what has been coined as the festival circuit can difficultly be avoided: it justifies the relevancy of festival scholarship and is symptomatic of an academic climate in which scholars are constantly asked to evaluate the social impact of their research. It does, however, encode a set of assumptions about which festivals matter, take hard numbers as self-evident, and foreclose an examination of what constitutes a festival.

Instead of participating in this collective effort to *describe and justify* the festival phenomenon, this book is concerned with analyzing the effects of festival studies' theoretical and methodological frameworks – frameworks that tacitly structure our scholarship but are never fully acknowledged. To that end, it is guided by the belief that festival studies is currently at an impasse: as a self-referential field, it not only constantly reproduces a particular type of scholarship, but also drastically limits our understanding of what festivals are and thus of what their uses can be within film studies.

## Pre-screening: constituting festival studies

'Where films come out.'<sup>7</sup>

Festival studies largely draws on the historical and theoretical framework established by Marijke de Valck.<sup>8</sup> According to her, film festivals started out as a European phenomenon: Venice (1932), Cannes (1946), and Berlin (1951)

5 Zielinski, 'Furtive, Steady Glances', 116. Scholars generally argue that around 280 yearly events would be dedicated to the screening of queer cinema. They systematically reference 'The Big Queer Film Festival List' (<http://www.queerfilmfestivals.org/>). The number of LGBTQ festivals being organized each year is probably underestimated: as this book argues, scholars often rely on a strict definition of what a festival is, thereby ignoring events which are ephemeral by design, which do not name themselves 'festivals', or which adopt a slightly different format.

6 Loist, 'Queer Film Culture', 12.

7 New Fest (New York City, 1988-ongoing), 2011 tagline.

8 de Valck, *Film Festivals*. Marijke de Valck is not the first scholar focusing on film festivals. She is, however, the first to publish a monograph on the topic. Earlier articles and theses, such as Julian Stringer's 2003 PhD dissertation, have largely been (re)discovered after the publication of de Valck's foundational opus.

simultaneously attempted to energize a European film industry damaged by two world wars, increasingly suffering from Hollywood's competition, and to expand their country's influence in the context of the Cold War. Cannes, for instance, was founded on a joint French and American initiative as a way of countering the influence of Mussolini's Mostra. Significantly, festivals did not select films: cultural embassies were responsible for submitting a national entry. Thomas Elsaesser thus argues that festivals served as a sort of 'parliament of national cinemas', at once promoting films which were supposed to reflect the character of a nation and replaying or pacifying conflicts through celluloid.<sup>9</sup>

In the 1960s, new cinemas and social movements forced international festivals to adapt their organizational structure. Confronted with the creation of new political festivals (such as Pesaro in 1964), international festivals started curating films. According to de Valck, this area corresponds to the 'age of the programmers', best symbolized by the creation of side-sections for innovative and political films (Cannes's Directors' Fortnight and Berlin's International Forum of New Cinema). The 1960s also mark a shift from film as instrument of cultural diplomacy to a discourse in terms of cinema as art. With the popularization of the festival format in the 1970s, festivals increasingly searched to distinguish themselves from one another, notably through the discovery of new talents. It was the 'age of the directors', a shift accompanied by a new focus on film markets. With the apparition of video and a boom in independent filmmaking, festivals became legitimized as key nodes in the circulation of films by the 1990s.<sup>10</sup>

In that context, de Valck's opus is largely concerned with festivals' role as tastemakers and cultural gatekeepers. Mobilizing Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital and Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, de Valck analyzes the role played by festivals in legitimizing and circulating art cinema. Her description of festivals as a network composed of 'sites and rites of passages' relies on three inter-related arguments: 1. that international festivals constitute a network through which films circulate (an alternative circuit of exhibition), 2. that festivals, through their selections and awards, add a certain amount of cultural capital which may then be transformed into profit, and 3. that festivals structure the economy of film.<sup>11</sup>

Julian Stringer similarly argues that festivals constitute a 'multi-functional phenomenon' that cannot be reduced to film exhibition. They mark the

9 Elsaesser, 'Film Festivals Networks', 88.

10 de Valck, *Film Festivals*.

11 Ibid., 36-37; See also: de Valck and Soeteman, "And the Winner is..."

coming together of various stakeholders whose agendas diverge from one another. Journalists, filmmakers, producers, lawyers, buyers, distributors, tourists, curators, audience members, and policymakers do not have the same investment in a festival. Film festivals both rely on and are realized through an assemblage of sometimes competing performances.<sup>12</sup>

Since de Valck's foundational opus, scholarship has largely been dedicated to determining the shape taken by the 'festival network'. Some festivals matter more than others, both economically and culturally: Stringer's definition of the circuit as 'a socially produced space unto itself, a unique cultural arena that acts as a contact zone for the working through of unevenly differentiated power relationships' and Dina Iordanova's description of the network as a 'two-tiered system' effectively capture this inequality.<sup>13</sup> While some festivals add cultural capital, others are mostly concerned with exhibition: they merely re-screen films (therefore paying rental fees). For these reasons, the term network, which implies unity and circulation, has been seen as too monolithic by festival scholars. Festivals are varied and cannot be reduced to a single entity. As Iordanova puts it:

There is a strict task division between festivals; a small number of major festivals have leading positions as marketplace and media event and the remaining majority may perform a variety of tasks ranging from launching young talent to supporting identity groups.<sup>14</sup>

In that context, festival scholars have sought to conceptualize various forms of circuits, coexisting and largely overlapping. This often results in an ever-growing typological impulse in a scholarship body that distinguishes A-list festivals from identity-based ones, thematic from generalist, buyers from players.<sup>15</sup> Significantly, Iordanova's *Film Festival Yearbook* series focused successively on the notion of a circuit, films festivals in Asia, activist

12 Stringer, 'Regarding Film Festivals', 9. See also: Rhyne, 'Film Festival Circuits and Stakeholders'. A similar argument is made by: Dayan, 'Looking for Sundance'. The discrepancies between Stringer's use of Howard S. Becker's 'art world theory' and de Valck's emphasis on 'cultural capital' typically reflect different conceptions of the relationship between the cultural and the economic. On the one hand, Becker's 'art world theory' insists on the cultural as composed of a network of people whose connections shape artistic discourses: the cultural is marked and regulated by a cooperative logic. On the other hand, Bourdieu conceptualizes the cultural as a 'field of struggle': the meanings we ascribe to work of arts emerge from competing definitions of 'cultural' and 'economic' capital.

13 Stringer, 'Regarding Film Festivals', 109; Iordanova, 'Film Festivals and Dissent', 17.

14 Iordanova, 'The Film Festival Circuit', 29.

15 Among others: Wong, *Film Festivals*; Cheung, 'Funding Models of Themed Film Festivals'.

or archival festivals, and festivals in the Middle East.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, de Valck's Framing Festivals series covered Australian, Chinese, and queer festivals.<sup>17</sup>

This separation between various *types* of festivals may at times have unintended consequences: it forces scholars to present themselves as working on 'queer film festivals' or 'diasporic film festivals' as if one's object of study was more important than the theoretical arguments or methods used in our analyses. Furthermore, festivals with a similar curatorial focus are often understood to belong to a single circuit and to be fundamentally alike. In that context, festival studies' typological impulse emphasizes the differences among various circuits, conceptualized through theoretical tools and historical narratives devised for A-list events: it may foreclose a critical examination of the diversity of the festival phenomenon.

Here, I do not aim to discount the knowledge gained through festival studies' typological impulse but rather to draw attention to the institutional and disciplinary logics that condition and shape our work as scholars. As such, festival studies' reliance on typologies is partly a consequence of the mechanisms through which academic knowledge is produced and disseminated: it enables scholars to be legible and to speak to colleagues working on a similar historical period, identity, or geographic area *outside of* festival studies. Furthermore, the field's typological impulse often refracts festival studies' complex institutional location – between the Humanities and Social Sciences, *film* and *media* studies. Significantly, scholars analyzing general international festivals and those writing on thematic or identity-based ones often build upon different disciplinary traditions. While the former generally draw from media industry studies, the latter rely mainly on cultural studies and ethnographic observations – focusing on festivals' role in community-building and identity politics.

The literature on LGBTQ film festivals is here particularly instructive. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, several articles and dossiers on LGBTQ festivals were published in *Jump Cut* and *GLQ*. They not only predate festival studies proper but also provide us with an alternative theoretical framework. For instance, Patricia White's 1999 *GLQ* dossier centres on a tension between the 'real, truly live place' of festivals and the idea of festivals as a theoretical tool. According to her, LGBTQ festivals simultaneously entail a collective

16 Iordanova and Rhyne, *Film Festival Yearbook 1*; Iordanova and Cheung, *Film Festival Yearbook 3*; Iordanova and Torchin, *Film Festival Yearbook 4*; Marlow-Mann, *Film Festival Yearbook 5*; Iordanova and Van de Peer, *Film Festival Yearbook 6*. For a non-festival studies analysis of festivals as they intersect (or do not intersect) with Arab cinema, see: Dickinson, *Arab Cinema Travels*.

17 Stevens, *Australian Film Festivals*; Berry, *Chinese Film Festivals*; Richards, *The Queer Film Festival*.

experience of queer cinema *and* constitute an ideal site for reconceptualizing LGBTQ people's relationship to film.<sup>18</sup> They 'manufacture' queerness and/or authenticate what counts as queer.<sup>19</sup>

Waugh and Straayer's *GLQ* dossiers, although conceived as follow-ups to White's, adopt the format of the roundtable.<sup>20</sup> In creating a virtual conversation between festival organizers, curators, and filmmakers, they simultaneously emphasize the diversity of the LGBTQ festival phenomenon, nuancing and even questioning the idea of a unified circuit, and point to the interplay between curation and academic knowledge production. Significantly, these dossiers have tended to be interpreted as documentation of LGBTQ festivals in the early 2000s. Seeing as they do not adopt familiar academic lingo, they are not immediately legible as important acts of scholarship.

Most of the festival studies scholarship on LGBTQ film festivals is in the form of unpublished dissertations. Written and/or defended over a decade ago, they could not have anticipated major developments in queer filmmaking and cultural organizing. Crucially, these dissertations also correspond to the beginning of festival studies, understood here as an independent field of academic research. As such, they both built upon festival studies' foundational concepts and helped define new methodological and theoretical approaches. My choice to rely on these dissertations thus reflects their centrality in the historical development of the field: although they have not been published, they shaped the political project of festival studies.

Scholars focusing on LGBTQ film festivals generally examine the relationships between festival organizing and queer film cultures. Rhyne analyzes major shifts in the organizational structures of a few US-based LGBTQ festivals as symptomatic of the advent of a 'pink dollar' economy.<sup>21</sup> Zielinski theorizes LGBTQ festivals' relationship to identity and community politics through Foucault's heterotopia.<sup>22</sup> Loist argues that LGBTQ festivals enact and crystallize a 'queer film culture': they reflect and participate in the evolution of queer cinema.<sup>23</sup> In the only monograph on LGBTQ festivals, Richards defines queer film festivals as social enterprises that both reflect the rationality of the creative industry and constantly renegotiate their

18 White, 'Introduction: On Exhibitionism', 73.

19 Clark, 'Queer Publicity at the Limits of Inclusion'.

20 Waugh and Straayer, eds., 'Queer Film and Video Festival Forum, Take One'; 'Queer Film and Video Festival Forum, Take Two'; 'Queer Film and Video Festival Forum, Take Three'.

21 Rhyne, 'Pink Dollars'.

22 Zielinski, 'Furtive, Steady Glances'.

23 Loist, 'Queer Film Culture'.

relationship to community organizing.<sup>24</sup> All of these pioneering texts rely on a few case studies: as their focus is on the emergence of a transnational queer film culture, they analyze some of the largest, oldest, and most important international LGBTQ film festivals.

In contrast, this book examines forgotten, minor LGBTQ film festivals. In so doing, it echoes a growing number of scholars who argue that festival studies' conceptual apparatus does not adequately apply to the vast majority of festivals: its theoretical and methodological tools, devised for international festivals, do not necessarily account for smaller events. For instance, Papagena Robbins and Viviane Saglier call for a critical examination of "other" film festival networks, [...] driven not only by curiosity and the need to always look further, but also by the very desire to stretch what counts as being part of the festival networks in order to open its branches and reveal its porosity'.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Lindiwe Dovey, Joshua McNamara, and Federico Olivieri note that the Slum Film Festival (Nairobi) 'does not attract widespread global attention; it is not a glittering showcase for films and people; it is not a vital node for global film industries, businesses, institutions, and information'. Consequently, they argue that there is a

danger in assuming that the channels through which films circulate – such as film festivals, and other 'media events' – are in themselves coherent entities that can be easily understood and unpacked by individual scholars. While we welcome the new field of film festival studies as a major advance in film studies, we feel that this field will benefit from an openness of approach that remains attuned to alternative definitions of 'film festivals'.<sup>26</sup>

Several scholars have explored how festival studies' theoretical concepts presuppose a particular *type* of festival. For instance, Ezra Winton's critiques of festival studies aim at correcting the field's bias toward fiction films, thereby insisting on the specificities of documentary film festivals.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Tascón and Wils develop a theory of activist film festivals.<sup>28</sup> In questioning and/or deconstructing some of festival studies' main theoretical

24 Richards, *The Queer Film Festival*.

25 Robbins and Saglier, 'Introduction', 4.

26 Dovey, McNamara, and Olivieri, "From, By, For" Nairobi's Slum Film Festival, Film Festival Studies, and the Practices of Development'.

27 Winton, 'Good for the Heart and Soul, Good for Business', 32–33.

28 Tascón, 'Opening Thoughts', 3.

concepts, these scholars often adopt a reparative practice that both relies on and aims at recognizing an understudied *type* of festival, sometimes inadvertently replaying the field's typological impulse. In contrast, this book builds upon festival studies' main theoretical contributions: instead of arguing for the specificity of LGBTQ festivals, it seeks to uncut, or expand, festival studies' concepts and methods.

To that end, I do not aim to criticize my colleagues for their insightful and foundational work. My focus is not on individual texts or scholars but on the institutional production of knowledge and its effects on festival scholarship. Similarly, this book does not aim at providing the reader with an exhaustive survey of the literature on film festivals. As with any scholarly project, this book is a partial, 'curated' intervention. If my framing of 'film festival studies' may at times seem a bit too monolithic, it is done so with the intention of mapping the constitution of an academic field of research – that is, to identify festival studies' key debates and methodological frameworks and to present an alternative approach.

In particular, this monograph does not account for the development of a new set of literature on festivals that do not screen films (ranging from international exhibitions to music festivals to anime conventions). This new literature, published among others in the new *Journal of Festive Studies*, is curiously disconnected from film festival scholarship: as such, the two fields operate independently, largely ignoring each other. While future research will benefit from connecting these two independent fields, my analysis is limited to the emergence and institutional location of *film* festival studies. Throughout this book, I thus use 'festival studies' as a shorthand for the development of a field of research concerned with film and media festivals.

### **Queering festival studies: critical (film) festival studies and the festival as a method**

This book attempts to navigate the fine line between being *about* LGBTQ festivals and *queering* festival studies. In theorizing LGBTQ festivals, I aim to reveal the political project and axiological coordinates of festival studies. As White's and Waugh and Straayer's dossiers suggest, LGBTQ festivals offer a productive framework for reconceptualizing festivals *because* and *in spite of* identity: LGBTQ festivals' focus on identity makes visible the power dynamics



at the heart of both festival organizing *and* academic knowledge production.<sup>29</sup> In 'queering festival studies', this book attends to both the knowledge created by festivals (queering *festivals*) and the ways in which scholars create knowledge of and on festivals (queering festival *studies*).

While the lexicon 'uncut' clearly points to my own position and biases as a gay man – the gendered imbalance this book suffers from as well as the desires, fantasies, and imagined encounters it is born out of – this project is informed by feminist historiographies and epistemologies.<sup>30</sup> My use of Women's Studies might seem anachronistic as the discipline (if it ever cohesively existed) has been incorporated (both figuratively and administratively) within gender studies and queer theory departments. In recuperating some of Women's Studies' theoretical debates, in particular as it relates to the regimes that regulate academic knowledge production, this book hopes to, as Elizabeth Freeman elegantly states, 'min[e] the present for signs of undetonated energy from past revolutions'.<sup>31</sup>

In particular, feminist historiography attempts to counter the erasure of women from archives/academia and to account for the absence of ontology of the entity known as women. Schematically, scholars such as Denise Riley and Joan Wallach Scott seek to simultaneously question the disciplinary assumptions underlying the writing of linear (some would say heteronormative) history and resist trans-historical essentializing narratives.<sup>32</sup> In this book, I use feminist historiography both as a method for examining the political project of festival scholarship and as a model for thinking about queer subjects throughout history. Feminist historiography urges us to simultaneously attend to the politics of history-writing and find productive

29 To that end, I am not interested in countering the widespread and problematic assumption according to which gay and lesbian festivals would be of a lesser quality because of identity. Taking LGBTQ festivals as symptomatic of festivals' role in knowledge production, my inquiry seeks to bypass the question of legitimacy altogether.

30 While this book strives not to participate in the erasure of lesbians from queer film history, it certainly reflects both my own position as a gay man and the gender imbalance at the heart of queer film history. As I will argue in Chapters 2 and 3, this erasure is partly an effect of the uneasy positioning of lesbian filmmaking / scholarship between feminist and LGBTQ movements. Similarly, trans filmmaking is relatively recent – and can be seen as being at times erased by the type of historiographical narrative I propose. Future research will address the complex relationships between trans and gay and lesbian cinemas at festivals, as well as the recent development of trans film festivals.

31 Freeman, *Time Binds*, 16.

32 Riley, 'Does a Sex Have a History? "Women" and Feminism', 122; Riley, *Am I That Name?*; Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*.

ways of accounting for the similitudes and differences among queer subjects separated in time and space.

To that end, my use of Women's Studies echoes recent discussions on queer temporalities. Drawing on Michel Foucault, scholars have argued that the notion 'gays and lesbians' is a relatively recent (Western) construct.<sup>33</sup> In that framework, queerness entails a particular relationship to time: LGBTQ people have been simultaneously erased from official histories and archives and positioned outside of the linear temporality of heterosexuality.<sup>34</sup> In that context, scholars have tried to find ways of accounting for the separation of queer subjects in time, attempting to negotiate the fine line between the historical specificity of LGBTQ identities and the transhistorical constant of same-sex desire.<sup>35</sup>

Film offers here a productive framework for understanding LGBTQ history and identities. As Richard Dyer rightly notes in what may be considered as the first academic book on homosexuality and film, 'gays have had a special relationship to the cinema'.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, photographs and films played a major role in the constitution of gay and lesbian subjectivities: the development of imaging technologies parallels Foucault's description of the proliferation of a modern discourse on (homo)sexuality in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>37</sup> In that context, photographs and films constitute what Waugh calls a 'communal currency'<sup>38</sup> as they 'manage not only to *resemble* the living flesh of everyday sexual experience (iconic) but also to *testify to the existence* of that flesh (indexical)'.<sup>39</sup> LGBTQ festivals refract the temporalities of the cinematic apparatus: in curating a wide assortment of gay and lesbian films, they fundamentally join queer subjects in and through time, visualize (or evidence) queerness, and entail a specific relationship to temporality.

In addition to feminist historiography, this book is inspired by the debates over the shift from Women's Studies to Gender and Sexuality Studies in the 1990s. This period provoked a definitional crisis, forcing scholars to describe

33 Halperin, 'Is There a History of Sexuality?', 257.

34 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*; Edelman, *No Future*.

35 See among others: Carolyn Dinshaw et al., 'Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion', 178. This debate is largely indebted to 1980s feminist historiography.

36 Dyer, *Gays and Film*, 2nd edition. Dyer's use of the word 'gays' includes lesbians.

37 Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, vol.1: *La volonté de savoir*. For an analysis of the role played by these new imaging technologies in shaping medical and scientific discourses on the queer body, see: Terry, 'The Seductive Power of Science in the Making of Deviant Subjectivity'; Terry, 'Lesbians under the Medical Gaze'. These imaging technologies were also the core of Hirschfeld's scientific treatises. See: Dyer, *Now You See It*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 34.

38 Waugh, 'Cultivated Colonies'.

39 Waugh, *Hard to Imagine*, 21. [Emphasis in the original]

the differences between the interdisciplinary discipline Women's Studies, the political project of Women's Studies as a field committed to social justice, and the constitution of Women's Studies as a method of research slowly adopted in various non-identity-based departments and disciplines (including film studies).<sup>40</sup> My use of these debates is (1) historical, as they are emblematic of the advent of neoliberal universities and the evolution of identity politics, and (2) epistemological, for what they offer is an analytics of the power dynamics at the heart of academic knowledge production (one particularly tuned in to how our attachments to our objects of study shape the scholarship we write).

These debates are consequently refracted in the two theoretical concepts around which this book is organized: 'critical festival studies' and 'the festival as a method'.<sup>41</sup> 'Critical festival studies' operates as an epistemological critique, an analysis of the methodological conundrums and political projects that structure the field of film festival studies. It reveals the assumptions built into festival studies – how our quest for academic legitimacy orients our research toward particular 'festivals that matter'. Conversely, 'the festival as a method' mobilizes festivals not solely as objects of research but as ideal sites for understanding cinematic cultures. 'The festival as a method' tunes us in to the regimes of knowledge production presupposed in the festival format itself. As curated juxtapositions of moving images, festivals exemplify many of film studies' theoretical conundrums, such as spectatorship, film cultures, and representational queries. To that end, *LGBTQ Film Festivals* operates simultaneously as a critique (or queering) of festival studies and as a method for expanding – or uncutting – the field.

## Labour of love: desiring scholars/festivals

'Love! Drama! Sex! Politics!'<sup>42</sup>

As it will become clear, this book foregrounds my own positionality and draws a parallel between the act of doing queer academic research and that

40 Among others: Boxer, 'For and About Women'; Brown, 'The Impossibility of Women's Studies'; Scott, 'Women's Studies on the Edge'; Stacey, 'Is Academic Feminism an Oxymoron?'; Wiegman, ed., *Women's Studies on Its Own*; Wiegman, *Object Lessons*.

41 I borrow the concept 'critical festival studies' from Ezra Winton, see: Robbins, Saglier, and Winton, 'Interview with Ezra Winton, Director of Programming at Cinema Politica'.

42 Inside Out Toronto, 2009 tagline.

of festival organizing. It is animated by the belief that festival organizing and academic writing are not antithetical. Both of these activities offer a framework for understanding the stakes and material realities of knowledge production. To that end, *LGBTQ Film Festivals* refuses to separate, or cut, the author from both its object of study and the people it pays homage to. This book is, as festival organizers put it, 'a labour of love' – one that is offered to the reader yet that cannot be disentangled from my own experiences.

While the insider/outsider binary (which I deconstruct in Chapters 1 and 3) has structured the field of festival studies, I cannot claim the objective position of the scholar-as-observer – doing research *on* rather than *with* and *at* festivals. As such, *LGBTQ Film Festivals* reflects my own 'circuits' and 'networks'. This book is the result of numerous conversations and arguments. I draw inspiration and knowledge from my experiences, as a volunteer and curator at Écrans Mixtes Lyon, MIX NYC, and Image+Nation Montréal, a film professional liaison officer at Cannes's Queer Palm, a festival liaison officer at the Queer Media Database Canada/Québec, and above all as an avid festival-goer. I do not pretend full authorship and cannot separate myself from the events this book focuses on and/or the people who have frequented them – some of whom I have loved.

My tendency to adopt the personal will not surprise queer scholars: early gay and lesbian film studies notoriously refused to separate academic labour and community-based politics. From crying in the New York Public Library archives, especially while reading the last letters sent to Vito Russo, to sustaining friendships through historical research, my positionality as researcher and my scholarship refract the role of queer sociality within academic knowledge production.<sup>43</sup> As Foucault famously argues:

The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of one's sex, but, rather, to use one's sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships. And, no doubt, that's the real reason why homosexuality is not a form of desire but something desirable. Therefore, we have to work at becoming homosexuals and not be obstinate in recognizing that we are.

43 I consulted the Vito Russo Archives exactly 25 years after Russo's death – and was thus the first scholar able to access several boxes of personal letters and documents which were previously restricted. I was overwhelmed by Russo's love letters to his long-term partner Jeffrey Sevcik, as well as by the farewell notes sent by his students at the University of California, in Santa Cruz. I am forever grateful to the New York Public Library staff who, despite asking me to leave the room, offered me their moral support (and handkerchief!).

The development toward which the problem of homosexuality tends is the one of friendship.<sup>44</sup>

Some readers will, between the lines, notice sticky strings and traces of past and present encounters – my own as well as those of the friends and colleagues this book analyzes. Friendship and fucking, be it in an academic context or at festivals, structure artistic and intellectual productions. 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.<sup>45</sup> In the context of this book, I do not want to pretend I have not gained (literal and figurative) insider knowledge, for instance, in living with someone who has volunteered at and curated for one of the festivals I examine. Similarly, this book would not be possible without my PhD advisor, Thomas Waugh, someone whose scholarship and curatorial practices are analyzed in various chapters.

Friendship/fucking, gossip, and ‘insider’ knowledge structure both queer scholars’ and festival organizers’ experiences. To that end, *LGBTQ Film Festivals* is fully aligned with B. Ruby Rich’s use of the retrospective gaze of the autobiography as a method: her book *Chick Flicks*, which has curiously been overlooked by festival scholars, may be the only full-length monograph on sustaining friendships, collaborations, and sexual encounters at and through festivals / academic conferences. As Rich eloquently puts it,

Knowledge can be acquired and exhibited in a variety of ways. To read and then to write: that’s the standard intellectual route. In the years of my own formation, though, there were many other options. Journals and journeys, conferences and conversations, partying and politicking, going to movies and going to bed.<sup>46</sup>

44 Foucault, ‘Friendship as a Way of Life’; originally published as: Foucault, ‘De l’amitié comme mode de vie’.

45 The title of this introduction was inspired by John Greyson’s 1997 *Un@ut*, a film about intellectual property, censorship, and queer collaborations. In addition to featuring some of the people this book pays homage to, *Un@ut* is an exercise in artistic collaborations through networks of friendship. On this film, see: Zeilinger and Coombe, ‘Three Peters and an Obsession with Pierre’. On the role played by festivals in sustaining friendships: Damiens, ‘Incestuous Festivals’.

46 Rich, *Chick Flicks*, 3. While B. Ruby Rich’s writings on queer cinema are abundantly quoted by festival scholars, her earlier articles on feminist filmmaking (and women’s film festivals!) have

In foregrounding my own experience at LGBTQ festivals, I do not mean to replay the stereotypes that 'queer people would be obsessed with sexuality' and that 'people attending LGBTQ festivals would not care about film'.<sup>47</sup> If this book runs the risk of being *too* personal, it reveals how my attachments to festivals (and the boys who frequent them) have shaped this research.

### The cut: a note on methodology

As I implied earlier, festival studies has largely relied on case studies. In analyzing particular festivals, scholars may inadvertently replay festivals studies' quest for legitimacy: as such, scholars are asked to simultaneously justify why a particular festival matters and to cast this event as emblematic of the festival phenomenon as a whole. Put another way, case studies entail paradigmatic readings.<sup>48</sup> They encode particular assumptions about what festivals are and refract the disciplinary assumptions embedded in the field. This book attempts to resist the imperative of case studies. It adopts an eclectic corpus composed of established festivals, ephemeral events that only exist as traces in archival collections, and festivals which are generally ignored in our scholarship.

My analysis is, however, limited to LGBTQ festivals in Western Europe, the US, and Canada. While I run the risk of replaying a Western-centred description of the festival phenomenon, this book cannot account for forms of same-sex sexualities that do not fit with American or European gayness. As Foucault reminds us, 'sexuality' is a relatively recent concept, tied to and emerging through particular discursive regimes.<sup>49</sup> There is little evidence that 'homosexuality' adequately describes non-Western same-sex subjectivities. Any consideration of non-Western festivals requires both a deep ethnographic knowledge of the country in which an event is organized and an understanding of foreign languages. Applying the same

been relatively ignored. As such this conundrum illustrates quite well the uneasy positioning of lesbians within 'gay and lesbian cinema'.

47 Queer scholars are constantly asked to justify their focus on queer cinema *as cinema*. My experience at the 2015 NECS Conference is here quite instructive: as I was presenting on the parts of Chapter 1 that pay homage to festival-goers I have known and loved, someone accused me of insisting too much on the festival as a space of sociality – of prioritizing queerness over cinema.

48 Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, 32.

49 Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, vol.1; Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*; vol.2 : *L'Usage des plaisirs*.

monolithic frame of analysis might submerge these subjectivities under the umbrella of a global gayness, thus replaying the imperialism of Western frameworks. Although my focus is on LGBTQ festivals organized in the West, I do not want to suggest that 'homosexuality' and 'queer cinema' are concepts that can be applied unilaterally to describe the realities of LGBTQ people in various European countries, Canada, and the US. In resituating festivals within the larger context of geographically specific understandings of queerness, I partly aim to provide a more nuanced understanding of the West – one that does not take US identity politics as the only way of expressing same-sex desire.

### **Curating the book**

As this book suggests, LGBTQ festivals' curatorial practices oftentimes operate through a juxtaposition of films, a collage that encompasses very different films (in terms of format, temporality, and geographic origin) yet creates the illusion of a whole. Festivals produce knowledge through a sedimentation of discourses and representations. The organization of this book reflects the act of curation. Each chapter pays attention to a specific theoretical conundrum. Taken together, these five chapters illustrate both the regimes of knowledge production at the heart of the festival phenomenon and the epistemological conundrums of festival studies.

Chapter 1, 'Festivals that (did not) Matter: Festivals' Archival Practices and the Field Imaginary of Festival Studies' explores the historiographical and political project of festival studies. In considering both queer film festivals' investment in preserving their own history (or lack thereof) and the state of various French, Canadian, and American archives, I am interested in two inter-related issues. 1. How do institutional settings, professionalization, and sexual politics shape festivals' archival practices and/or the very existence of archives on film festivals? 2. How might we understand the gaps in the archives, the presence of documents that attest to the existence of yet do not describe ephemeral festivals? In rescuing or recovering festivals which have been erased from traditional histories, Chapter 1 operates a critique of festival studies' disciplinary unconscious. It reveals the set of theoretical and axiological coordinates which have conditioned the development of the field: as such, festival studies is a project dedicated to making (some) festivals matter within film studies. In uncovering ephemeral festivals, I thus advocate for a 'critical festival studies'.

Centring on some of festival studies' theoretical conundrums, Chapter 2 and 3 expand on what a 'critical festival studies' could entail. In analyzing the regimes of taste and films cultures that condition the circulation and cultural currency of queer cinemas, Chapter 2, 'The Queer Film Ecosystem', aims to reconceptualize the notion of festival circuits. It locates queer cinema at the intersection of two regimes of cultural value – identity and cinephilia. Through a Bourdieusian approach to taste-making and cultural production, I highlight how both festivals and scholars negotiate these conflicting cultural values. Film traffic relies on a symbolic economy that is based on and fosters differentiated cultural discourses on queer cinema. In analyzing the strategies of both European and American film distributors, I underscore how this interplay between queerness and cinephilia is strategically mobilized so as to assert a film's legitimacy and authenticity.

Chapter 3, 'Out of the Celluloid Closet, Into the Theatres!' revisits traditional historical accounts of the development of both gay and lesbian cinema and festivals. In particular, I trace the emergence and mutation of the concept 'gay and lesbian cinema(s)' – a relatively recent notion shaped through an interplay between film criticism, festival organizing, and scholarship. I detail the careers and works of various critics and scholars as they intersect with LGBTQ festival organizing. In highlighting the networks of friendship, fucking, and collaboration that informed the development of LGBTQ cinema, I nuance the divide between scholars, critics, and practitioners that has been instrumental in asserting the legitimacy of festival studies and describe various uses of the festival format as a praxis of academic knowledge production.

Chapters 4 and 5 shift the focus from 'critical festival studies' to 'the festival as a method'. Chapter 4, 'Festivals as Archives: Collective Memory and LGBTQ Festivals' Temporality' pays attention to LGBTQ festivals' visual productions and curatorial practices. As events dedicated to the screening of sexual images, LGBTQ festivals are enmeshed with the accumulation of temporalities and affects. As such, their film selection is akin to a collage or a juxtaposition of films, each with a peculiar relationship to history. Through their selections and visual productions, festivals make time 'matter': they constitute a virtual archive and entail a particular type of relationship with gay and lesbian visual history. In positing that festivals constitute an ideal space for theorizing gay and lesbian spectatorship, Chapter 4 argues that LGBTQ festivals exemplify some of the modalities through which we access, visually, gay and lesbian cultural memory.



Chapter 5, 'Images + Translation: Imagining Queerness and its Homoscapes' focuses on the geographic imaginaries embedded in festival programming. In screening films from various countries, festivals participate in the circulation of various geographically specific representations of queerness. I argue that festivals provide us with a model for thinking through the globalization of queerness. Borrowing from gay linguists' focus on the interplay between geography and subjectivities, I pay attention to the language used to describe various films and contend that catalogues perform the task of cultural translation. They reinterpret films from a foreign context for a nationally situated audience. As institutions screening films from all around the world, they simultaneously localize films from other geographical contexts and provide us with various discourses on the globalization of queerness.

While this book can be understood as an epistemological intervention in festival studies, it should not be taken as a totalizing critique of the field. As such, it is not exempt from the conundrums it seeks to analyze. I address these issues in my conclusion, a meditation on the nature of field interventions that posits critical film festival studies and 'the festivals that did not matter' as already enmeshed in the search for scholarly legitimacy.

### **Speaking in queer tongues: a note on terminology**

The words we use matter, especially so when it comes to sexuality. They refract various forms of articulation between desires, subjectivities and social movements. Concepts such as 'gays and lesbians', 'LGBTQ', and 'queer' reflect historically situated conceptualizations of sexual desires. The difference between gay and lesbian, LGBTQ, and queer festivals is however not so clear-cut. The name a festival 'gives itself' is not necessarily indicative of its sexual politics.<sup>50</sup> A self-proclaimed queer festival might adhere to a quite classical gay and lesbian programming. As Zielinski puts it,

these festivals have gone through a number of important name changes over the years that reflect, to various degrees of success, changes in their structure and policies regarding content, effectively revealing their self-understanding and how they want to been [sic] understood [...] In fact, to discuss these festivals in general quickly becomes quite a semantic

50 As explored in: Gevert, "The Names We Give Ourselves".

challenge. Does the use of 'lesbian and gay' negate the broadened LGBTQ claim of most festival today? When or under what conditions might an LGBTQ film festival ever be queer? Not only have their names changed, but also the meaning of the words comprising them.<sup>51</sup>

For these reasons, I adopt the following conventions:

- When discussing a specific event, I respect the terminology adopted by the festival – the name it gave itself within its historical context.
- In order to avoid anachronism and to emphasize historical specificity, I mobilize the term best fitted with a festival's context. For instance: when discussing 1970s festivals, I use the terminology 'gay' or 'homosexual'.
- When my inquiry is not limited by historical specificity, I mobilize 'gay and lesbian', 'LGBTQ', and 'queer' interchangeably.

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<sup>51</sup> Zielinski, 'Furtive Steady Glances', 224–225.

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## Filmography

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