

Antoine Damiens, *LGBTQ Film Festivals: Curating Queerness*

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Like any developing field, festival studies' methodological and theoretical tendencies often seem to justify its validity and necessity, both within film studies and the humanities more broadly. Typologies that delineate various types of festivals consistently appear in festival scholarship, as well as analyses of major international festivals. These studies point to the industrial significance of international festivals for the funding, circulation, and exhibition of films by both emerging filmmakers and established auteurs. Alternatively, some scholars have addressed smaller festivals and even festivals that ended long ago, especially in early festival-focused articles like Melinda M. Barlow's analysis of the vibrant 1970s New York Women's Video Festival that lasted just eight years and Elena Gorfinkel's study of erotic film festivals from the same decade. But the field tends to separate international festivals as an object of inquiry from discussions of other types of festivals, reifying industrial distinctions that neglect the potential yield of studying smaller events.

In *LGBTQ Film Festivals: Curating Queerness*, Antoine Damiens clarifies the assumptions that seem to structure festival studies, like this emphasis on major festivals, and aims to reconsider the frameworks that have thus

far guided a rich field of academic inquiry. While the book focuses on LGBTQ film festivals, it seeks to critique and expand the theoretical concepts and methods that continually appear in festival studies as a whole, instead of limiting the contribution to LGBTQ festivals specifically. Throughout the book's thoughtful examination of the field, Damiens resists criticizing particular scholars and their projects. Instead, the book remains centrally concerned with knowledge production more broadly and how institutional pressures have generated scholarly preoccupations. Two main concepts structure the project's intervention: "critical festival studies" and "festivals as a method." "Critical festival studies" examines the methodological and political results of festival studies' goal of academic legitimacy, while the idea of "festivals as a method" considers festivals' role in producing knowledge, by creating particular conditions of spectatorship and canon formation. Each chapter highlights a specific theoretical problem within these larger conceptual interests, with Damiens' extensive archival research offering examples from the history of LGBTQ film festivals throughout.

In the first chapter, Damiens contends with a core problem of festival studies' formation as a field: the ten-

dencies that make certain festivals “matter,” while neglecting countless others. This chapter suggests that academic disciplines and festivals’ archival practices collectively created an intellectual approach that ignores festivals that failed, or no longer exist. Damiens grants due attention to the ephemeral nature of festivals, with the goal of reimagining festival studies’ dedication to longevity and industrial relevance in selecting festivals to analyze. He accounts for the archival traces of LGBTQ festivals that do not fit conventional definitions within the field, referencing numerous festivals, often seemingly one-off events, that were produced by varied organizations like adult theaters or universities, instead of independent festival organizations. Festival histories usually disregard such events, despite their contribution to the burgeoning field of LGBTQ festivals that Damiens uncovers. This chapter foregrounds the methodological challenges of this analysis, a concern that reappears throughout the book in its analysis of an ephemeral format.

Chapter two nuances the use of Bourdieu’s concepts of taste-making and cultural production in festival studies, as well as its reliance on circuits as a theoretical framework. The analysis takes identity and cinophilia as the dual regimes of cultural value at play in queer cinema’s development and contemporary distribution. Damiens rightly acknowledges the institutions that operate alongside and in collaboration with festivals, particularly distributors, in the circulation and valuation of queer films, and he also identifies the significance of video festivals as a key part of queer cinematic

culture. While the book largely resists the field’s tendency to rely on extended case studies to demonstrate theoretical concepts and historical phenomena, Damiens incorporates valuable examples that indicate the breadth of his research, with films like *Laurence Anyways* (Xavier Dolan, 2012), *Tomboy* (Céline Sciamma, 2011), and *Weekend* (Andrew Haigh, 2011) demonstrating distribution strategies that draw on both queer and general cultural fields. Through these films and others, Damiens examines the complex dynamics of LGBTQ film circulation, as filmmakers and distribution companies might highlight queer associations, broader arthouse connections, or both depending on the context and their goals. For instance, *Tomboy* typically screened at general festivals rather than LGBTQ festivals in most of Europe, and reviews interpreted the film as a story about the crisis of puberty, not a trans narrative. But in the United Kingdom and the United States, the film’s acquisition by LGBTQ distribution companies and its LGBTQ festival screenings led to reception of the film as a trans story. Like the book as a whole, this chapter both encourages a more reflective avenue for festival studies and contributes to queer film history through its analysis of cultural discourses in distribution practices.

In chapter three, Damiens traces the origin of the concept “gay and lesbian cinema” through three of film culture’s seemingly distinct areas that contain a long history of crossover: criticism, festival organizing, and scholarship. This chapter questions the clear distinctions between roles like critics, scholars, organizers, or festival-goers that appear in scholar-

ship on festival stakeholders, instead highlighting the various roles that one individual might occupy in different situations or time periods. Damiens focuses especially on the critic/scholar binary through examples like Vito Russo and Robin Wood, unpacking the blended theoretical and political dimensions of their writing on cinema in the 1970s. Like the first chapter's discussion of ephemeral festivals, this analysis extensively references long-forgotten events with potential historical influence, from conferences to protests to festivals. Ultimately, the third chapter allows Damiens to reconsider the emergence of LGBTQ festivals and film studies through early writers and interpersonal relationships that facilitated the development of the "gay and lesbian cinema" concept.

The fourth and fifth chapters turn to festivals as a method, identifying ways in which festivals are valuable sites to consider key questions for film studies. Chapter four considers festivals as archives, attending to the affective experience gay spectators have with the images produced by and for LGBTQ festivals, from marketing materials to documentaries about festival histories. In another insightful move for festival analysis, the chapter turns to the visual elements, or "visual architecture," that populate festivals for attendees and how they create an affective experience, drawing on queer references and suggesting a communal relationship between queer history and festival attendees. These images range from marketing materials, like trailers and posters, to the physical space of the festival, including décor in screening rooms and other areas. Damiens references numerous creative

examples, like Frameline's *Wizard of Oz*-inspired 2015 trailer or its four telenovela parody trailers from 2010. The *Wizard of Oz* trailer exemplifies how the visual architecture of LGBTQ festivals references queer readings of general film culture, and the telenovela trailers demonstrate attempts to create a distinct festival environment across screenings, inviting audiences to construct a narrative from the four separate trailers. Damiens argues that trailers attest to festivals' unique relationship to temporality. Trailers both build anticipation for festivals, as ephemeral events, and structure the experience by preceding individual screenings. The analysis of various LGBTQ festival trailers reveals their historiographic impulse, often involving a collage of clips, and the films produced by festivals about their own histories offer an additional set of case studies for how temporality and gay spectatorship converge in LGBTQ festivals. In approaching festivals as a method in this chapter, Damiens demonstrates how festivals create particular affective experiences through their visual architecture.

The final chapter turns to the experience of globalization at festivals. Through an analysis of the Montreal festival Image+Nation's programs, Damiens unpacks the geopolitical dynamics evident in festival programming practices. This discussion extends beyond the clear categories of local, national, and international that are present at many festivals, including many LGBTQ festivals, to consider the linguistically specific ways of addressing sexuality that appear in festival programs. The bilingual presentation of festivals like Image+Nation, with

film descriptions in both English and French, reveals the strategic use of language that positions films differently for festival-goers reading only one of the two languages. Damiens also identifies the ways in which Western festivals simplify non-Western queer films and queerness, often exoticizing the subjects at the center of these stories or adopting a tourist gaze. Through the analysis of globalization and queerness in film descriptions, this chapter rightly points to the dissimilar experiences that festival-goers might have watching the same film at different festivals.

Each of the book's chapters effectively merges substantial archival research on LGBTQ festivals and larger theoretical concerns for festival studies, but Damiens also makes an important contribution to the field through the consistent references to his positionality. He repeatedly mentions his affective experiences and his positionality as a gay man writing in the lineage of gay critics, scholars, and/or programmers from the 1970s. For example, one early memorable reference to the affective dimension of research involves his reaction to the love letters in Vito Russo's collection at the New York Public Library, and multiple anecdotes about festival experiences appear throughout the book. Festival studies often involve a scholar's history and interests, merging the professional and personal in ways that become convoluted and complicated, so it's refreshing for a festival scholar to confront and center this fact as both an object of inquiry and a condition of the book's creation.

By its nature, this expansive study of the emergence and theoretical significance of LGBTQ film festivals mentions some examples that beg further consideration, with the discussion of the Image+Nation catalogs demonstrating the value of extended analysis. Since the book refrains from a conventional case study structure, it often mentions fascinating examples that could become entire chapters themselves, although many exist only as minimal traces within archival collections. At the same time, the book's structure allows a far greater number of references to worthy events that would not even be acknowledged in a project traditionally structured around case studies.

In this book, Damiens both contends with the emerging boundaries and preoccupations of festival studies and makes a significant contribution to queer film history. The central concepts of "critical festival studies" and "festivals as a method" offer substantial reflection on the field and its current directions, and they lead this study to larger yields about knowledge production within both film studies and film festivals. By resisting the tendency to quantify and map festivals to justify their significance, the book recognizes LGBTQ festivals' broader connections to developments in film culture and the historical significance of these events -- many of which no longer exist and may not even fit traditional academic definitions of a festival. *LGBTQ Film Festivals'* organization around key theoretical questions stands as an ambitious and thought-provoking development in festival studies.

References

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