

“Who Designed These Boxes Anyway?”
Queer Film Festivals in Canada: The Economics and Politics of Queer Space

by

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Abstract

Queer film festivals have been steadily growing in Canada, both in the number of festivals as well as the number of people that attend these events. However, relatively little has been written about the festivals. The small amount of literature that is available paints a romantic picture of these events, characterizing them as spaces for the construction of queer community and promotion of queer resistance and political organization. This study attempts to provide a detailed examination of the three largest Canadian queer film festivals. An analysis of these festivals suggests that as they have become larger, they have also become more commercial. Consequently, they have become increasingly disconnected from their activist roots. I argue that this drastically reduces the festivals' ability to promote a radical queer politic and act as sites of queer resistance and organization. This project will therefore problematize the utopian discourse that has often surrounded these festivals.

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Introduction

Gay and lesbian film festivals began in Canada in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Image+Nation began in Montréal in 1988, Out on Screen began in Vancouver in 1989, and Inside Out began in Toronto in 1991. These festivals attempted to provide alternative cultural spaces that allowed for the construction of discourses counter to the hegemonic dominance of white patriarchal heterosexuality. They also allowed for the increasing production and distribution of films whose point of view was rarely seen in the dominant culture. These films documented the histories and lived experiences of those with divergent sexualities and often worked in opposition to mainstream media representations that tended to naturalize traditionally acceptable notions of sexuality. However, the festivals not only acted as spaces for the proliferation of film and video by and about gays and lesbians but they also provided a place within which to convene a visible community of people. Consequently, the festivals became an important focal point for gay and lesbian community construction and political resistance. Since this time, gay and lesbian film festivals have refashioned themselves as LGBT or queer festivals in an effort to reflect the diversity of queer experience. These queer film festivals have been steadily growing in number, size, and influence. The larger festivals have been joined by smaller festivals in many other cities across the nation; Queer City Cinema began in Regina in 1996, Fairy Tales began in Calgary and Reelout began in Kingston in 1999, and the Reel Pride Film Festival began in Winnipeg in 2000. These festivals all share the common aspiration of creating space, both literal and figurative, for the promotion of queer representation, community and discourse. However, many of these festivals evolved from the grassroots organizations they once were into professional

institutions complete with complex funding structures that include private donations, government funding, and corporate sponsorship. In this thesis, I argue that these changes have drastically reduced the ability of the festivals to act as sites of radical queer resistance. I will expand on this argument by examining the three oldest and largest queer film festivals in Canada: Image+Nation in Montréal, Inside Out in Toronto, and Out on Screen in Vancouver.

When these festivals began, they acted as sites of political resistance and organization that were influenced heavily by the lesbian, gay, and queer political movements and intricately connected to other grassroots organizations. They attempted to create queer community and reclaim queer history in an effort to bolster support for the numerous queer political battles that were occurring when the festivals began. Since this time, the festivals have become bigger, more commercial, more privatized, and more focused on film than direct political action. This not only marginalizes other more direct forms of political and social resistance, but also threatens to entrench queer as an ethnic style collective rather than a strategic category for political and social resistance.

It could be argued that the subtext of this thesis is the passage from a radical definition of queer to a homonormative definition of queer; however, as this is such a complex issue, I cannot provide a thorough examination of this topic here. Furthermore, given the scope of this thesis, my examination of the festivals is limited in several other respects. I was unable to speak to spectators and community groups and therefore do not address the intricate web of identification and resistance that might characterize their experience of the festivals. In addition, due to the complex connections between queer news sources and the festivals, I did not spend time reviewing these sources. Newspapers

such as *Xtra* sponsor the festivals and have advertisements in the festival program guides. Consequently, their comments on the festivals may be partial and deserving of a more thorough analysis. Therefore such complicated interaction between queer festivals and queer media cannot be thoroughly analyzed here.

Terms

For the majority of this paper, I will be using the term queer. I prefer this term to the trendier LGBT¹ (which is the term many of the festivals now use) because it reflects a history of resistance against heterosexist hegemony as well as a history of subversive and countercultural discourse. In addition, queer represents a rejection of the compartmentalization inherent in LGBT. This is not to deny the effects that these categories have on people's lives or to deny the power imbalances that continue to exist between these groups. Instead, queer is meant to, as Douglas Janoff has argued, "underscore the contingency and contestability of categories – that there is nothing natural about them."² Further to this, queer constitutes a recognition of the spaces, both in between, as well as outside this acronym. In this way, queer is a way to build bridges between all people who are marginalized by their involvement with non-normative sexual and gender practices and identities.

Although I prefer the term queer, in the first chapter, I use "lesbian and gay" to refer to the festivals and movements I discuss. I use lesbian and gay in this chapter because this is the term that the festivals used to refer to themselves in this time period. It is also the term most commonly used to describe the political movements that I discuss. Queer, as a term of affirmation rather than abuse, was not used until the early 1990s when radical groups such as Queer Nation adopted the term. The use of lesbian and gay is

therefore an attempt to be historically accurate. I do not mean to minimize the contributions of other marginalized groups to the early festivals or political movements.

Common Discourse

Although there is a wealth of scholarship on queer cinema, there has been comparatively little written about the festivals within which these films are shown. The few theorists and artists who have written about queer film festivals champion them as crucial forums for the construction of queer community and promotion of queer resistance and political organization. In one of four dossiers on queer film festivals created for *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Patricia White argues that these festivals constitute a counter cultural space which addresses “the dissymmetric history of opportunity for public consumption of sexual imagery by lesbians and gay men.”³ In other words, the festivals act as spaces within which to promote images, especially sexual images, which run counter to the stereotyping or exclusion of queers within the dominant media. She goes on to argue that this counter public space works to create and promote queer community. In the same dossier, critic B. Ruby Rich and filmmaker Richard Fung also point to the community building function of the festivals. Rich argues that the communion offered through queer film festivals “reinforces the faith of the faithful, assures supplicants of their worthiness, creates a bond to strengthen them individually once back in the larger world, [and] puts audiences back in touch with shared experiences and values.”⁴ Similarly, Fung writes that the festivals “present queer community to itself.” Fung also takes a step further arguing that the festivals “constitute a kind of double representation on and in front of the screen” because they not only present queer community to itself but also to the larger public.⁵ This claim that queer film festivals

play a positive and important role in promoting queer visibility to the larger culture can also be found in the later dossiers on queer film festivals.

In the 2006 dossier on queer film festivals, Juan A. Suárez explains that the festivals helped to circulate queer work and promote the visibility of queers and queer concerns.⁶ Similarly, in 2008, Bill Basquin argues that “queer film festivals are a site of queer reproduction.”⁷ Not only do they promote queer visibility but they also help create more queer filmmakers. In the same forum, B. Ruby Rich argues that as queer cable channels and queer representation in mainstream film and television proliferate, the importance of the festivals in creating queer visibility is increasing. She writes, “What has become apparent is the extent to which the LGBTQ festivals may instead become repositories of that which mainstream popular culture does not intend to embrace.”⁸ Put another way, queer film festivals promote perspectives that have not been, and are unlikely to be, co-opted by the mainstream; particularly perspectives of queers of colour, non-Western queers, and people who fall outside traditional definitions of gender and sexuality. The festivals, therefore, retain their importance as sites from which to advance the visibility of the diversity of queer identity and experience.

However, some have expressed concerns about the changes that have occurred since the festivals began. Joshua Gamson, in his examination of New York’s Mix (previously the Experimental Festival) and the New Festival, argues that the festivals have become more focused on promoting themselves as film community events than queer community events and that “as corporate interest has expanded, the community has come to be constituted less as a political group to be organized and more as a niche audience for sale.”⁹ He argues that this institutional and organizational context limits

how the festivals shape collective identity.¹⁰ I share the concern that the increasing commercialization of the festivals has moved them away from their roots in political resistance. My thesis therefore takes Gamson's perspective and applies it to the larger queer film festivals in Canada.

Methodology

With the exception of Gamson, there has been little detailed analysis of particular festivals. For this reason, I decided to largely base my thesis research on primary material from the queer film festivals themselves. Because my interest lay primarily with funding and programming, I decided to conduct interviews with the directors of programming for the festivals. At Image+Nation, I spoke to director of programming, Katherine Setzer. Setzer has been the director of programming since 1997 and is responsible for the film related aspects of the festival, although she also has a hand in putting together the catalogue and preparing grant proposals.¹¹ At Inside Out, I was unfortunately unable to speak to the director of programming. Instead, I spoke with Scott Ferguson, the executive director. Ferguson has been with Inside Out since 2000 and is responsible for the overall management of the festival. This includes marketing, fundraising, and the management of human resources.¹² At Out on Screen, I spoke with Amber Dawn. Dawn has only been the director of programming for Out on Screen for a short time but also has experience with the festival as a filmmaker and performance artist. Her responsibilities include programming films, speakers, and performances as well as fundraising and writing grant proposals.¹³

During the interviews, I used a series of open-ended questions in order to allow the interviewees the freedom to elaborate on their answers. To begin, I asked the

participants what they think the mandates of their particular festivals are and what they see as the function of queer film festivals in Canada and abroad. I then asked specific questions about the festivals' funding structures and how these structures have changed over time. Next, I asked about programming, including how films are chosen, what kind of criteria are used to determine which films are chosen, and what steps the programmers take to include marginalized voices. Finally, I asked whether the participants feel that there is a relationship between funding and programming.¹⁴ The most surprising answers that I received were with regards to the relationship between funding and programming. Katherine Setzer, of Image+Nation, and Scott Ferguson, of Inside Out, adamantly denied any relationship between funding and programming. Amber Dawn denied that there was any relationship between funding and programming with regards to content; however, she did express that funding, particularly a lack of funding, plays a large role in what types of films get shown and how many of them the festival is able to screen. The responses that I received to these questions gave me a better understanding of the festivals' funding structures and programming processes.

In addition to interviews, I also examined primary materials from the early festivals in the late 1980s and early 1990s up to the latest festivals in 2009. This included program guides, press releases, promotional materials, and newsletters from previous years. The program guides were the most useful to my research. I was able to obtain an almost complete set of these from Image+Nation (1988-2009) and Inside Out (1991-2009)¹⁵ and a partial set from Out on Screen (1995-2009).¹⁶ The program guides allowed me to analyze the types of films the festivals exhibit in terms of length, form and content and how these films have changed over time. Additionally, the program guides gave me

a chance to examine how the films were/are framed by the festivals and how the festivals mission statements and foci have changed. Furthermore, the program guides provided important information about sponsorship, funding, and advertising. To acquire this information, I performed both quantitative and qualitative analyses of the information in the program guides.

The qualitative analysis consisted of analyzing and interpreting changes in the types of films that are shown at the festivals, including their themes and form (for example, experimental, narrative, performance, or documentary), changes in the types of panels, performances, and presentations that the festivals showcase, changes in the mission statements and write-ups, and changes in the types of advertisements featured in the program guides.

The quantitative analysis consisted of compiling data such as how many films were shown each year, how many of these were shorts and how many were features, how many were shot on video and how many on film, where films originated, how ticket prices have changed, who sponsored the festivals each year, and how the number and type of advertisements have changed over time. This information was particularly useful when analyzing how the most recent festivals differ from the earliest festivals. Not only was I able to compare the changes to each festival in terms of content (which is always subjective), but also in terms of more objective information such as changes in the number of films shown, changes in the types of films shown, and changes to how many films originate from Canada, outside Canada and outside North America.

Although my primary sources of information were the materials collected from the festivals and the interviews I was able to perform, I also made use of secondary

research such as books and journal articles. In order to locate the festivals within their particular historical, national, and political contexts, I researched the history of gay, lesbian and queer political movements, Canadian history, society and film industry, and the history of queer representation in the media (mainly television and film). I also read literature on queer film festivals and queer markets/economics. In addition, I viewed many of the films that the festivals have exhibited over the course of their existence. However, I spend little time analyzing these films with regard to content and style as my interest lies more with the context within which these films are exhibited. Rather than analyzing the films themselves, I attempt to provide a detailed analysis of the festivals' infrastructures and how these affect the types of films that are shown and how these films are understood.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter 1, I discuss the festivals' historical and political roots. This includes a brief history of the lesbian and gay and queer political movements in North America and how the festivals fit into this history. I also analyze how, through the films that they showed and the mission statements and write-ups within their program guides, the early festivals attempted to construct an active, politically aware community united in their resistance to heterosexist hegemony.

Chapter 2 examines the festivals today and how they have changed since the early 1990s. I analyze funding and corporate sponsorship, commercialization, the shift towards narrative features, and the depoliticization of festival space.

Chapter 3 explores the view of queer film festivals as queer space. I discuss the limitations of a separate queer space, especially when that space is disconnected from

political resistance. In addition, I critically examine the festivals' construction of queer community as a unified, diverse, transnational collective.

Finally, in the conclusion, I review the changes that have occurred in the festivals and suggest how these changes complicate the view of queer film festivals as radical sites of queer resistance.

Notes

¹ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender.

² Douglas Janoff, *Pink blood: Homophobic Violence in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 107

³ Patricia White, "Introduction: On Exhibitionism," in "Queer Publicity: A Dossier on Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies* vol. 5, issue 1, (1999): 76.

⁴ B. Ruby Rich, "Collision, Catastrophe, Celebration: The Relationship between Gay and Lesbian Film Festivals and Their Publics," in "Queer Publicity: A Dossier on Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies* vol. 5, issue 1, (1999): 82.

⁵ Richard Fung, "Programming the Public," in "Queer Publicity: A Dossier on Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies* vol. 5, issue 1, (1999): 90.

⁶ Juan A. Suárez, "Surprise Me," in "Queer Film and Video Festival Forum, Take Two: Critics Speak Out," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* vol. 12, issue 4, (2006): 602.

⁷ Bill Basquin, "A Site for Queer Reproduction," in "Queer Film and Video Festival Forum, Take Three: Artists Speak Out," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* vol. 14, issue 1 (2008): 124.

⁸ B. Ruby Rich, "The New Homosexual Film Festivals," in "Queer Film and Video Festival Forum, Take Two: Critics Speak Out," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* vol. 12, issue 4, (2006): 621.

⁹ Joshua Gamson, "The Organizational Shaping of Collective Identity: The Case of Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals in New York," in *A Queer World: the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Martin Duberman (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 537.

¹⁰ Gamson, 527.

¹¹ Setzer, Katherine (director of programming for Image+Nation). Personal Interview. 15 April 2010.

¹² Ferguson, Scott (executive director for Inside Out). Personal Interview. 1 January 2010.

¹³ Uptold, Amber Dawn (director of programming for Out on Screen). Personal Interview. 20 May 2010.

¹⁴ For a full list of questions, see the Appendix.

¹⁵ For Image+Nation, I am missing program guides for 1990, 1996, and 1999 while for Inside Out, I am missing program guides for 1992, 1999, and 2000.

¹⁶ I was unable to gain access to program guides for Out on Screen in their earliest years. Although I was able to obtain guides for the festival from 1995 to 2009, my inability to analyze the earlier guides hindered my ability to gain a complete sense of the changes that have taken place at Out on Screen since the festival began in 1989. Nevertheless, the 14 program guides that I was able to obtain represent a significant portion of the festival's history.

Chapter 1

Collective Resistance: The Birth of Gay and Lesbian Film Festivals in Canada

“We Are Everywhere. We Want Everything” – Queer Nation, Gay Pride Parade, New York, 1991.

When they began in the late 1980s, Canadian gay and lesbian film festivals were framed by organizers as radical sites of resistance that had direct links to gay and lesbian political organizing in Canada and the United States. They therefore had much in common with other grassroots political organizations and were heavily influenced by developments in the gay, lesbian, and queer political movements in North America. They acted as spaces for the solidification of queer community and used this to promote queer activism and resistance against the heterosexist mainstream. To understand the festivals, it is therefore important to discuss the political and historical contexts within which they were birthed.

In North America, the organized campaign for gay rights began in the 1950s with the homophile movement. This movement took an accommodationist stance to gaining equality for homosexuals. Barry D. Adam, in his history of gay and lesbian movements, describes this movement as “an approach founded on an implicit contract with the larger society wherein gay identity, culture, and values would be disavowed (or at least concealed) in return for the *promise* of equal treatment.”¹ Homophile groups like The Daughters of Bilitis and the Mattachine Society therefore used tropes of respectability to appeal to the broader society. Rather than challenging the dominant cultural and social mores, these early groups adopted a cautious and conservative politics. They advocated for tolerance, rather than acceptance, of homosexuals and worked with dominant heterosexist institutions like the psychiatric community. For this reason, the homophile

movement did not address common heterosexist and homophobic assumptions about sexuality, instead focusing almost entirely on civil rights and the cessation of discriminatory practices in employment and housing.

This changed in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1970s, the gay liberation movement came into being, both in dialogue with, and in resistance to, the homophile movement. Unlike the earlier homophiles, liberationists were not interested in making concessions to hegemonic society or gaining rights based on respectability or assimilation. Rather than accepting dominant attitudes, liberationists sought to challenge them. Miriam Smith writes that “gay liberation grew out of the counter-culture of the sixties and its meaning frames were transformational, aimed at the elimination of heterosexism, patriarchy and sex and gender roles.”² The movement was then less a civil rights movement for a gay and lesbian minority than a revolutionary struggle against established social mores, particularly those that confined sexuality to a limited heterosexual, patriarchal model. This does not mean that gay rights were not important to gay liberation. Liberationists were involved in advocating for gay rights as well; however, for the liberation movement, gay rights were a way to create and mobilize a gay community to resist the dominant heteropatriarchal social order, they were not an end in themselves. In other words, the visibility of a gay and lesbian community brought about through the publicity of civil rights struggles would make people realize the inherent heterosexism, as well as racism and sexism, of the capitalist, patriarchal social system. This involved a coalition with other forces such as the feminist movement and the anti-capitalist movement. The success of liberationist politics in making queers more visible, both to each other as well as mainstream society, allowed what Adams describes as “a new generation of businesses

oriented to a gay market.”³ This included gay and lesbian book stores, community centers, and, in the US, the first international gay and lesbian film festival in San Francisco in 1977.⁴ Miriam Smith writes that “an essential precondition for the rise of the modern movement has been that lesbians and gay men define themselves, constitute themselves, and think of themselves as belonging to a common category.”⁵ Gay and lesbian film festivals were therefore instrumental to the gay and lesbian movements in that they helped to build this sense of a bordered community. Patricia White argues that,

besides giving public exposure to thousands of works (and, as exhibition venues, causing work to be produced, as mushrooming annual submissions bear out) and – one hopes – garnering publicity for gay and lesbian media, film and video makers, and organizations, the festivals constitute a counter public sphere, providing a collective experience and a literal site of critical reception. What they exhibit and make visible, alongside their programming, is an audience⁶

By showcasing gay and lesbian cultural expression and convening an audience to witness this expression, the early film festivals made a gay and lesbian audience visible and could therefore potentially further the position of gays and lesbians in society. (Whether the festivals continue to act as a site of critical reception will be covered in Chapter 2).

With the greater visibility of these gay and lesbian oriented businesses and with amendments to civil rights laws in Canada and the US, the movement began to shift away from more radical calls for societal transformation towards attempts to change already existing structures and institutions. The new gay rights movement of the 1980s retained the liberationist goals of creating a visible lesbian and gay community; however, it increasingly framed this community in terms of a distinct minority group. This was particularly true in Canada after the entrenchment of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982. Section 15 of the Charter,⁷ although it did not explicitly include sexual

orientation, allowed gays and lesbians to challenge differential and discriminatory practices in employment and housing through existing legal channels. Consequently, in Canada at least, legal change became the primary goal of gay and lesbian political organizing. This changed with the discovery of AIDS and the subsequent panic and hysteria caused by the spreading epidemic. The disease brought with it a renewed pathologization and demonization of same-gender sex practices and identifications. The AIDS epidemic and the lack of positive media representation gave the movement new urgency and led to the creation of AIDS activist groups such as the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP) and AIDS Action Now! Although this new activism did not replace the drive for legal equality, it did place new emphasis on radical resistance. According to Lisa Duggan, these groups, along with other radical groups of the 1990s, “challenged the now ‘respectable’, integrated gay/lesbian in favor of a radical coalition of the sexually excluded, including bisexuals, transgendered people, and presumably some heterosexuals as well.”⁸ Many activist groups adopted the term queer to refer to this coalition and began to take radical action against the denigration of this queer community by hegemonic society. Rather than focusing on legal equality, these new groups focused on confronting and counteracting negative media portrayals, violence against queers, and the appallingly inadequate response to AIDS. Roger Hallas writes that “AIDS cultural activism of the late 1980s and early 1990s engendered a politicized community at once local and transnational in which the distinctions between activists, artists, and critics became increasingly fluid.”⁹ These radical activist groups used art, performance, and film and video as a means to confront widespread heterosexism and homophobia and draw attention to the lack of positive queer representation in popular media such as

television and film. This new militancy led to the resurgence of grassroots community organizing; one outlet for which was a growth in the number of gay and lesbian film and video festivals.

In Canada, gay and lesbian film and video festivals were formed in major metropolitan areas in the late 1980s. In 1988, Image+Nation began in Montréal and Out on Screen began in Vancouver. A few years later, in 1991, Inside Out began in Toronto. These festivals were part of a growing network of groups and businesses in Canada dedicated to advancing the position of gays and lesbians. Following in the footsteps of the liberation and gay rights movements, these festivals attempted to create a unified gay and lesbian community by building links with other gay and lesbian groups, individuals and establishments and by building a gay and lesbian history. We can see this through the mission statements and articles within the program guides as well as through the films the early festivals screened.

The festivals' attempts to create and promote a bordered gay and lesbian community can be seen in the promotional messages and mission statements written by festival organizers. In a message from the Inside Out Collective in 1991, the first year of the Inside Out film festival, the collective states that "the works [films] represent *our* community in its diversity."¹⁰ Similarly, in their mission statement, Out on Screen emphasizes their commitment to "produce a festival containing films, video and other forms of communication that are of interest to *our* communities"¹¹ This idea of community is mirrored in the discourse that surrounded the early festivals. In the 1990s, B. Ruby Rich argued that queer film festivals have a unifying function. She wrote that "perhaps they are festivals in the oldest sense of the word, serving the important

functions of instilling faith and inspiring agency.” She went on to argue that attendance at the festivals can be seen as a “form of pilgrimage for the faithful.”¹² In other words, Rich believed that queer film festivals serve the same function as spiritual or religious sites in that they provide a space for the formation of queer identity and community. This emphasis on community building reflects trends within the gay rights movement of the 1980s. Building a united queer community was integral to the fight against prejudice and discrimination as well as the fight for civil rights. Gary Needham argues that the importance of gay community spaces lies in “their ability to function as places of communal structuring, collective identity and solidarity, especially when one has no other place where they can experience a sense of belonging.”¹³ It was this ability to provide a space for the promotion of a collective identity that made the festivals important hubs of gay and lesbian political and social organizing. The importance of the festivals as spaces for gay and lesbian community construction can be seen in the way the early festivals were organized. For example, the Montréal festival was established in 1988 by l’Organisation de Diffusions Gaies et Lesbiennes. This speaks to the fact that not only was the festival a place for the consumption of queer entertainment, but it was also a place to disseminate important information about the community to community members as well as to the larger society. In this way, the festivals were essential in creating visibility for the queer community and promoting local queer events, businesses, and community groups. This was especially important at a time when attitudes towards homosexuality were overwhelmingly negative and the representation of homosexuality in the dominant media was either non-existent or homophobic.

When the Canadian festivals began in the late 1980s, the few gay and lesbian characters that had been on film and television were represented as sissy stereotypes, neurotic losers, or psychotic killers. Despite the gains of the gay liberation movement, popular representation of gays and lesbians still reflected heterosexist and often homophobic attitudes towards homosexuality. Films such as *Boys in the Band*, *Cruising*, and *The Hunger* constructed queers as pathetic and laughable, deviant and threatening, or literally monstrous. In his examination of queer representation in the mainstream media, Roger Hallas writes that “homosexual bodies were put on display as a traumatizing threat to the general public, while traumatized queer lives were discounted.”¹⁴ In other words, queer characters were now occasionally included in mainstream media; however, they existed almost entirely as devices to shock, scare, or provide comic relief. Real queer lives continued to be completely invisible. Vito Russo summed up this situation in the *Celluloid Closet*. He writes, “Real gay people don’t exist in the minds of those who continue to see homosexuality simply as a comic device or a symbol of what threatens us most.”¹⁵ Contesting dominant imagery and providing a space for the representation of gays and lesbians by and for gays and lesbians was therefore an important method of community building used in the early festivals.

In 1992, the Inside Out collective wrote that “the very reason for its [the festival’s] existence is a historical lack of authority to represent ourselves in mass media.”¹⁶ Unequal access to popular film and video exhibition and distribution meant that gay and lesbian film festivals were one of the only venues for queer self-representation. The festivals provided exhibition spaces for scores of works that would not otherwise have been seen. In its first year, Image+Nation managed to exhibit 47

films from countries around the world. This jumped to 69 films in 1989 and 127 by 1991. Inside Out in Toronto also exhibited a large number of films, screening 85 works in its first year. Although, I was unable to find data for Out on Screen in its earliest years, by 1995, the festival was showing 112 films. The growing number of films is indicative of the desire of queer communities to see themselves on screen. In 1992, Image+Nation organizers wrote that the festival is “still here because of our need to represent ourselves, a need shared and reflected by the continuous and growing support from you, the lesbian and gay communities.”¹⁷ The production of images of queer experience, particularly images of queer pleasure and resistance were a very effective way to fight what Inside Out programmers call “the silencing and soul-destroying forces of repression and invisibility.”¹⁸ The Toronto festival, in its second year, even included a program entitled “Fighting Invisibility,” a program advertised as a “visual testament to the struggles of lesbians and gays worldwide.”¹⁹ This program was comprised of *Khush*, a film about South Asian lesbians and gay men, *Ferdous*, about prescriptions against homosexuality in the Quran, and *Not Because Fidel Castro Says So*, a film dealing with the position of sexual minorities in Cuba. Not only does this program represent the efforts made by the festival to create community and combat invisibility, but also represents the desire to create an ethnically and racially diverse transnational queer community. This reflects changes in the gay and lesbian movement in the 1990s that saw the rise of critiques of the primarily white, middle class, and gay male biases of the gay rights movement.

Critiques of the dominant movement came from many sources in the late 1980s and early 1990s; including lesbians, non-Western queer communities, and queers of colour. Festival programming therefore reflected the movement’s new found awareness

of the intersecting power structures that affect queer communities. Consequently, the Canadian gay and lesbian film festivals placed emphasis on the diversity of the community they were helping to shape. In 1989, Image+Nation expressed that as part of the diversity of their programming²⁰ they included the work of several directors who discussed the “position des minorités visibles dans nos sociétés occidentales.”²¹ This included a selection of works by filmmakers in the Asian and Black communities²² as well as a round-table discussion on ethnicity and representation entitled “Representation, Responsibility and Moveable Margins.” This discussion included input from filmmakers Richard Fung, Isaac Julien, Michelle Parkerson, and Midi Onodera. Also indicative of this drive towards accessibility and inclusivity is Image+Nation’s move to bilingualism in 1991. Prior to this, the festival was conducted entirely in French. Inside Out made similar efforts to include representation of marginalized groups. In their first year, the collective wrote that their “truly international programme is designed to highlight equally works by and about gays and lesbians” and that special emphasis was placed on film and video by lesbians and gays of colour.²³

In addition to the emphasis on ethnic diversity, the festivals worked to construct the gay and lesbian community as a transnational collective that transgressed national borders. In this way, the Canadian festivals followed in the footsteps of American and European gay and lesbian film festivals which were thriving by the mid 1980s. Vito Russo writes that “in 1986, an international lesbian and gay film festival in Amsterdam drew ten thousand participants from fifteen countries.”²⁴ The new Canadian festivals were small by comparison but they still managed to attract filmmakers from various areas of the world, showcasing film and video from Canada, the United States, and Western

Europe. In fact, the majority of the festival programming came from outside of Canada. For example, in the first year of Image+Nation, 32 out of the 47 films shown (60.0%) were from outside Canada while in the first year of Inside Out, 51 out of the 85 films shown (68.1%) were from outside our national borders. This represents an attempt by festival organizers to show that the gay and lesbian community was not isolated to North America, a trend that had concrete benefits for the gay and lesbian rights movement which was struggling in Canada and abroad to gain support from the larger society.

The festivals also began to include programming that dealt with other stigmatized sexual identities. This reflected the influence of queer theory in the 1990s and the rise of queer activist groups such as Queer Nation. Out on Screen instituted a yearly program dealing with 2-Spirited People, and Inside Out and Image+Nation included film and video by and about people of various identifications including bisexual, transgendered, and transsexual. These attempts at inclusivity show how connected the early festivals were to trends in the gay and lesbian activist movements of the 80s and 90s.

The early festivals also attempted to promote queer community through the creation of queer history. Because representation of gays and lesbians in the popular media was infrequent and most often negative, the film festivals acted as one of the only places in which to resist dominant versions of history. Gary Needham argues that gay and lesbian film festivals played a role in “reclaiming, appropriating and subverting official histories, cultures and ideas that have strategically excluded queers.”²⁵ This involved programming films that made connections to earlier queer individuals and groups as well as films that made visible social experiences that were ignored by the dominant media. To this end, Image+Nation, in 1988, included *Race d’Ep, un Siècle*

d'Images de l'Homosexualité. This film retraces the history of homosexuality from 1900 to 1980. Similarly, Inside Out included *The History of the World according to a Lesbian* which “traces the invisible and visible references to women who love women from prehistory to contemporary times.”²⁶ The festivals also included portraits of queer historical figures such as James Baldwin and Oscar Wilde as well as a number of adaptations of earlier literature by or about queers.²⁷ Making links with local history was equally important. In its first year, Image+Nation included an homage to the famous Québécois playwright Michel Tremblay, screening five films on which he worked.²⁸ This tracing of queer history was also not isolated to film. Slide shows and presentations were also included in the festivals’ programming. For example, in 1992, Inside Out included a slide show entitled “Hard to Imagine,” facilitated by Tom Waugh, which traced the history of gay sexual representation. These films and presentations exposed the rupture between official history and the lived experiences of those with divergent sexualities while at the same time creating a sense of a shared history and community.

The festivals not only acted as sites of queer community building, but they also provided a means for the community to raise awareness of issues essential to the political struggles of the gay and lesbian movements. Put another way, the sense of unity constructed by the early festivals was not simply designed to build a queer community but an active, politically aware community united in their resistance to heterosexist oppression. Like the gay and lesbian rights movement of the 1980s, the festivals used the sense of community they created to rally support for political resistance against particular local and national issues such as censorship, police harassment, and discrimination. We can see this activist framing through the overwhelming presence of films about

HIV/AIDS and anti-queer oppression, as well as through the appeals made by festival organizers for audiences to get involved in local and national queer political efforts.

When the festivals began in the 1980s, AIDS was central to their programming. Image+Nation began in 1988 with at least 16 films dedicated to the subject. This included a program on AIDS and the Media and a selection of films on AIDS from France and Belgium. In the 1990s, the festival continued this trend declaring in 1991 that “AIDS/HIV is an integral part of many films and videos.”²⁹ Inside Out also opened with a large number of films on AIDS, including a selection of films about women with AIDS and a number of safe sex videos produced by GMHC (Gay Men’s Health Crisis). In 1992, the Toronto festival increased the number of AIDS film and video they screened to include three full programs dedicated to the epidemic. The prevalence of AIDS activist video and films that show the lived experiences of PWAs³⁰ shows how closely the early festivals were linked to the AIDS activism occurring during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Not only did these films act as powerful reminders of the toll AIDS continued to take on queer communities, but they also served as acts of resistance against mainstream media which refused to acknowledge the seriousness of AIDS, instead using the disease as a way to justify the defamation of queer communities, particularly communities of gay men. Roger Hallas writes about the early years of the epidemic, “from 1981 to 1983, an official conspiracy of silence refused to recognize a disease that was ravaging gay men and intravenous drug users... AIDS languished in obscurity until U.S. television found more ‘respectable’ and ‘innocent’ victims of the disease among children, people who had received blood transfusions, and, in 1985, the popular actor Rock Hudson.”³¹

The early festivals also screened a large number of films about queer oppression. These included films about the police entrapment of gay men (*In Black and White*), homophobic violence (*Just Because of Who We Are*), gay and lesbian custody battles (*Labor More than Once*), lesbians expelled from the military (*A Woman in my Platoon*), and the psychiatric “treatment” and incarceration of gays and lesbians (*Mad Dykes, Still Sane*). These films spoke to gay and lesbian experience and put a literal face on the toll of queer oppression. Through interviews and personal testimony, they attempted to validate queer experience and give voice to what had been silenced by heterosexist mainstream society. Roger Hallas writes that “bearing witness affirms the reality of the event witnessed; moreover, it produces its ‘truth’”³² Therefore, by presenting these personal experiences to audiences, these documentaries make the events real, not only to those who witnessed them, but also to the audiences who experienced their testimony. In addition, by framing these experiences in terms of the lesbian and gay political movement, the early festivals attempted to turn the individual experiences contained in the films into a collective trauma inflicted on the queer community. Like the queer political groups that were active at the time, the festivals used documentary and personal autobiography to raise consciousness of the issues facing queer people in an effort to facilitate positive change. In other words, the festivals framed the consumption of queer film as a resource to inform and direct queer activist efforts, efforts with which the festivals were often directly involved.

The rise of the festivals coincided with larger political campaigns against legal and social discrimination. In Vancouver, Little Sister’s Book and Art Emporium was embroiled in a legal dispute over widespread and discriminatory censorship practices by

Canada Customs, in Toronto, Glad Day Bookshop was fighting obscenity charges, and numerous private battles were occurring across Canada for the recognition of queer relationships and rights. These legal and political battles took centre stage at the festivals through programming choices, write-ups, and pleas by the festivals to get involved.

Censorship was a particularly important issue for the festivals as it not only affected queer communities generally but also because it posed a direct threat to the festivals' continued existence. Inside Out organizers drew attention to the censorship issues facing Canadian queer bookstores and other distributors and exhibitors of queer material, writing in 1993 that "recent judiciary decisions, continued police action and the current climate at Canada Customs threatens to endanger festivals such as ours and individual civil liberties as well – reminding us of the fragility of our assumed rights."³³ In 1994, the festival again placed emphasis on censorship by including a program entitled "Censored!" which involved screenings and a panel discussion revolving around censorship in Canada. In 1996, Out on Screen initiated an even more detailed discussion of censorship. "Explicit: sex.sin.silicon" consisted of a selection of film and video about censorship in the Canadian context,³⁴ panel discussions and essays, as well as a variety of explicit film and video designed to resist the censoring of queer sex and queer lives. The festivals were also dealing with direct censorship. In 1994, Inside Out had their Metro Council operations grant of \$4,000 revoked due to an outcry over "obscene language" in their 1993 program guide. In the 1994 program guide, they write,

We might also ask ourselves whether we can afford to let our desire to be dignified, tasteful or respectable lead us to an acceptance of standards of obscenity and good taste that are currently fashioned by people who give themselves license to promote hate and use public forums such as Metro Council Chambers to refer to other citizens as 'sodomizing pigs' and who have publicly called for 'death to homosexuals',³⁵

In addition, films that the festivals intended to screen were occasionally stopped at the border. For example, according to *Inside Out*, “the video transfer of *Slam* [Bruce la Bruce, 1992] was refused re-entry at the Canadian border and charged with sedition: n. agitation against the authority of the state.”³⁶

However, censorship was not the only issue with which the festivals were concerned. They were also involved with larger debates about discrimination and legal inequality. The festivals therefore included films and programs that dealt with the legal and political struggles occurring in Canada in the early 1990s. For example, in 1995, *Inside Out* included a program entitled “Summer of 94: the Agony and the Ecstasy” which dealt with what organizers called “the crushing defeat of Bill 167 (the same-sex benefits bill) in the Ontario legislature.”³⁷ The festivals even attempted to play a more direct role in shaping queer political resistance. For instance, in 1993, *Image+Nation* stated in their program guide that the Commission des droits de la personne would begin hearings regarding Clause 10 of the Québec Charter of Rights. They wrote, “The issue at stake is our right to be full and equal citizens of Québec. Please represent yourselves and your communities by supporting this effort and contact your Provincial representative and sign the petition circulating during the festival.”³⁸ This appeal to audiences to get involved in a political campaign for queer rights shows how the festivals were not only involved in activist discourse, they were directly involved in attempts to change the political and social inequalities facing queers.

The early festivals not only had activist content and goals, but they resisted dominant trends in other ways as well. They rejected conformity with mainstream society by incorporating film and video that resisted dominant trends in ways besides

content. In addition, their structures mimicked that of other grassroots political organizations.

When the festivals began, they screened fewer features and a large number of shorts. In their first years, 78% of the films shown at Inside Out and 51% of the films shown at Image+Nation were shorts. The earliest data for Out on Screen shows an even higher percentage of shorts with 91% of all films shown at the festival in 1995 being less than 40 minutes.³⁹ The large percentage of shorts screened at the early festivals allowed a variety of voices to be heard. In addition, as shorts are cheaper and less time-consuming than features, screening more shorts made the festivals accessible to a greater number of people. More importantly, it made the festivals more accessible to people who had limited resources. Programming many shorts also allowed the festivals to resist mainstream trends by showcasing a variety of film styles, including experimental film and performance pieces. In 1991, Image+Nation stated that they “continue[d] to showcase a selection of avant-garde productions which boast specific artistic contributions of undeniable importance to cinema and video.”⁴⁰ This included a selection of works by Barbara Hammer and Sadie Benning. These avant-garde works, according to Kay Armatage et al., represented “challenges to documentary truth claims, to the illusionism of fiction and to the identity-constituting functions of representational systems.”⁴¹ The short experimental films and performance pieces screened by the festivals not only resisted hegemonic representation but also resisted unitary constructions of identity and sexuality.

We can also see the festivals’ resistance to dominant modes of thinking through their organizational structures. The structures of the festivals mimicked that of other

grassroots political organizations. All three festivals began as not-for-profit, volunteer-run collectives that relied primarily on donations and support from gay and lesbian communities. This support came immediately and from a variety of sources. In its first year, Image+Nation was sponsored by lesbian, gay, and feminist bookstores as well as the Concordia Women's Centre. In addition, the festival received support from local businesses that catered to the lesbian and gay community such as hotels, guest houses, bars, and saunas. Inside Out, in its first year, received assistance from the Lesbian and Gay Community Appeal (now the Community One Foundation), a group that worked to build the lesbian and gay community in Toronto. Out on Screen received support from gay and lesbian bookstores and community groups as well as through private donations and fundraising. Throughout the nineties, this community support increased. In Toronto in 1993, community-run activist groups such as PFLAG and 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations sponsored individual programs. Similarly, in Vancouver in 1995, sponsorship for individual programs came from activist groups such as the December 9th Coalition and the Pride Society. However, despite the overwhelming show of support from community sources, the festivals continued to struggle with budget constraints and limited resources. For example, Inside Out organizers were only able to institute paid staff positions in 1995, five years after the festival began.⁴² However, support for the festivals did not come entirely from community sources. Due to the fact that the festivals were film festivals in addition to gay and lesbian festivals, they also found some financial support through Canadian cultural institutions. George Melnyk writes that the Canadian government implemented "regulatory measures, tax incentives and subsidies to support a domestic film industry in the face of the overwhelming presence of the United States in

the cultural and entertainment industries.”⁴³ For this reason, even as Canadian governments and courts were fighting against the push for the recognition of lesbian and gay rights, government bodies were showing limited support for the new festivals. Inside Out, in 1991, received money from both the Ontario Arts Council and the Toronto Arts Council.⁴⁴ Likewise, Out on Screen received assistance from the Canada Council and Human Resources Development Canada.⁴⁵ However, this was not a condition that existed for all festivals. Image+Nation, in 1991 had still not received any support from Québec or Montréal cultural institutions.⁴⁶

Despite the support the festivals were receiving from government sources, they continued to use the sense of community and shared history they promoted to resist political, legal, and social discrimination against queers in Canada and abroad. However, since these early beginnings, the festivals have changed drastically. They now have more money, employ paid staff, engage larger audiences, and show more films. In Chapter 2, I will discuss these changes and how they have affected the festivals’ connection to activism and queer resistance.

Notes

¹ Barry D. Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 66.

² Miriam Smith, *Lesbian and Gay Rights in Canada: Social Movements and Equality-Seeking, 1971-1995* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 43.

³ Adam, 106.

⁴ The San Francisco International LGBT Film Festival (Frameline), “About Us,” The San Francisco International LGBT Film Festival, <http://www.frameline.org/about/>.

⁵ Smith, 8.

⁶ Patricia White, “Introduction: On Exhibitionism,” in “Queer Publicity: A Dossier on Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies* vol. 5, issue 1, (1999), 74.

⁷ Section 15 of which guarantees that “every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without

discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.” (Department of Justice Canada, “Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms”

<http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/charter/1.html#anchors:1>)

⁸ Duggan as cited in Adam, 163.

⁹ Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 8.

¹⁰ Inside Out Program Guide (1991), 1. [emphasis mine]

¹¹ Out on Screen Program Guide (1995), 10. [emphasis mine]

¹² B. Ruby Rich, “Collision, Catastrophe, Celebration: The Relationship between Gay and Lesbian Film Festivals and Their Publics,” in “Queer Publicity: A Dossier on Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals,” ed. Patricia White, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies* vol. 5, issue 1, (1999), 82.

¹³ Gary Needham, “All that Diaspora Allows: Film Between Queer and Diaspora,” in *Transnational Lives and the Media: Re-Imagining Diaspora*, edited by Olga G. Bailey, Myria Georgiou, Ramaswami Harindranath. (Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 234.

¹⁴ Hallas, 17.

¹⁵ Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harper & Row; Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1987), 253.

¹⁶ Inside Out Program Guide (1992).

¹⁷ Image+Nation Program Guide (1992), 5.

¹⁸ Inside Out Program Guide (1993)

¹⁹ Inside Out Program Guide (1992), 32.

²⁰ Image+Nation program guide, 1989. (translation mine)

²¹ the position of visible minorities in Western societies – translation mine. Image+Nation Program Guide (1989).

²² *Displaced View* (Midi Onodera, 1988), *Orientations* (Richard Fung, 1985), *Chinese Characters* (Richard Fung, 1986), *This is Not an AIDS Advertisement* (Isaac Julien, 1987), *The Passion of Remembrance* (Isaac Julien, 1986-87), *But Then She's Betty Carter* (Michelle Parkerson, 1980), *Gotta Make the Journey: Sweet Honey on the Rock* (Michelle Parkerson, 1984).

²³ Inside Out Program Guide (1991).

²⁴ Russo, 319.

²⁵ Needham, 231.

²⁶ Inside Out Program Guide (1991).

²⁷ In 1988, Image+Nation screened *Les Amitiés Particulières* (Jean Delannoy, 1964) which was based on the novel by Roger Peyrefitte and *Olivia* (Jacqueline Audry, 1950) which was based on the novel by Dorothy Bussy. In 1991, Inside Out screened *Myra Breckinridge* (Michael Sarne, 1970) which was based on the novel by Gore Vidal.

²⁸ *Il Était une Fois dans l'Est* (André Brassard, 1973), *Françoise Durocher*, *Waitress* (André Brassard, 1972), *le Soleil se Lève en Retard* (André Brassard, 1976), *Parlez-Nous d'Amour* (Jean-Claude Lord, 1976), and *le Coeur Découvert* (Jean-Yves Laforce, 1986)

²⁹ Image+Nation Program Guide (1991), 7.

³⁰ People with AIDS.

³¹ Adam, 155.

³² Hallas, 10.

³³ Inside Out Program Guide (1993).

³⁴ *Restricted Entry: Censorship on Trial* (Aerlyn Weissman, 1995), *After the Bath* (John Greyson, 1995), *Front* (Andrew Power, 1995), *Tainted: Christopher Lefler and the Queer Censorship Chill* (Maureen Bradley)

³⁵ Inside Out Program Guide (1994), 4.

³⁶ Inside Out Program Guide (1992), 37.

³⁷ Inside Out Program Guide (1995), 39.

³⁸ Image+Nation Program Guide (1993).

³⁹ In 1991, Inside Out contained 66 shorts and only 19 features. In 1988, Image+Nation contained 24 shorts and 23 features. In 1995, Out on Screen contained 102 shorts and 10 features.

⁴⁰ Image+Nation Program Guide (1991), 7.

⁴¹ Kay Armatage, Kass Banning, Brenda Longfellow, and Janine Marchessault, "Gendering the Nation," in *Gendering the Nation: Canadian Women's Cinema*, eds. Kay Armatage, Kass Banning, Brenda Longfellow, and Janine Marchessault (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 9.

⁴² Inside Out Program Guide (1995).

⁴³ Melnyk, 245.

⁴⁴ Inside Out Program Guide (1991).

⁴⁵ Out on Screen Program Guide (1997), 8.

⁴⁶ Image+Nation Program Guide (1991), 7.

Chapter 2 Queer Film Festivals Today

The festivals today, in some ways, bear little resemblance to the festivals of the late 80s and early 90s. They are now large, high profile events that attract tens of thousands of people, including artists, film industry professionals, and academics. As the festivals have grown, they have become more connected to hegemonic institutions such as government and big business. Like the assimilationist homophile movement of the 1950s, the festivals today attempt to fit themselves into already existing networks, working with hegemonic institutions rather than against them. This has facilitated changes to the organizational structures, programming choices, and political mandates of the festivals. In this chapter, I will argue that although these changes have made the festivals more financially stable, they have also caused them to become less connected to radical queer social and political resistance.

Strange Bedfellows: Government Funding and Corporate Sponsorship

The festivals of the early 1980s and 1990s were kept afloat almost entirely through the support of queer community groups and queer businesses. Although these early festivals received small grants from provincial and municipal arts councils; government funding was not their primary source of income. However, by the late 1990s, government grants had become a significant source of income for the festivals. By 1998, all three major festivals were receiving upwards of \$30,000 in grants from the Canada Council for the Arts¹ in addition to grants received through the provincial and municipal government bodies. Since this time, government funding to the festivals has continued to increase. For example, in 2008, Inside Out and Out on Screen received more than \$100,000 in arts council funding alone.² Funding to Image+Nation has also increased

and the Canada Council for the Arts is now their main source of income;³ however, due to differences in provincial funding structures, the Montréal festival still receives very little from the Montréal Arts Council and nothing from the Québec Arts Council. According to Katherine Setzer, Image+Nation does not receive funding from the Québec Council for the Arts because they claim not to fund “sociological festivals.” Exactly what constitutes a “sociological festival” and why Image+Nation receives this designation remains a mystery to festival organizers.⁴ Nonetheless, due to the lack of funding from Quebec's cultural institutions, in 2008, Image+Nation only received \$37,100⁵ in arts council funding.

In addition to arts council funding, the festivals received support from the municipal governments of Montréal and Vancouver as well as government run institutions and foundations such as the Ontario Trillium Foundation (Inside Out) and the Department of Canadian Heritage (Inside Out and Out on Screen). This increase in government funding facilitated the festivals' growth from small community festivals into high profile events that draw audiences numbering in the tens of thousands. In 2002, Image+Nation wrote that it had grown from “its modest beginnings of a few days of screenings at an intimate 100 seat theatre to our present incarnation: 5 downtown screening rooms, 11 image-filled days and close to 30,000 loyal festival-goers.”⁶ Inside Out reported similar success. By 2002, the festival was drawing audiences of 20,000⁷ and by 2006 almost 30,000. This growth in funding has also allowed the festivals to showcase an increasing number of films. For example, in 2008, Image+Nation screened 106 films, Inside Out screened 240 films, and Out on Screen screened 113 films. This is a large increase from the number of films the festivals were able to screen in their first

years.⁸ However, in 2009, the festivals decreased the number of films that they screened. Image+Nation screened 108 films, Inside Out screened 196 films, and Out on Screen screened 69 films.⁹ Despite this drop, the festivals still screened many more films in 2009 than they did in their earliest years.

Some would argue that the growth in government funding for queer cultural expression is a sign of the growing acceptance of queers within mainstream society. However, we cannot assume that this funding automatically denotes an acceptance of, or even a tolerance of, queers. The growth in financial support from government institutions can be seen as a strategic way to attract capital, tourism, and shore up Canada's multicultural image. Dereka Rushbrook, in her examination of queer spaces in cities, claims that cities support these spaces in an effort to market themselves as attractive cosmopolitan cultural centres. She argues that

to stake a claim to cosmopolitanism, one of the most desirable forms of contemporary cultural capital, many [cities] emphasize their ethnic diversity. In a growing number of instances, 'queer space' functions as one form of this ethnic diversity, tentatively promoted by cities both as equivalent to other ethnic neighbourhoods and as an independent indicator of cosmopolitanism.¹⁰

She asserts that this explains governments' promotion of queer neighbourhoods and events like Pride Parades. The state can support these queer spaces and events as a safe form of cultural expression that creates the perception of cities and countries as diverse, cosmopolitan centres. This argument applies equally well to events such as Image+Nation, Inside Out, and Out on Screen. Government funding bodies can support these queer film festivals because they give the impression that the cities within which they take place are cultured and diverse. We can see this claim to diversity through the numerous letters from government officials and senior management of government

funding bodies that now grace the pages of the festival guides. These letters explain support given to the festivals in terms of their diversity and importance to the cultural landscapes of the cities within which they take place. They make no reference to queer oppression nor do they endorse any political or social change. By opening up limited cultural spaces for queers, the government can appear to endorse queer communities while at the same time refusing to challenge what Gary Kinsman has called “the deeply rooted practices of heterosexual hegemony in Canadian state and social formation.”¹¹ In other words, making queer spaces and events a priority allows the state to placate a voting “minority” while not committing itself to any larger picture of social change. Therefore, government financial support is not necessarily a sign of growing acceptance. It can also be seen as a way for the government to channel queer expression and resistance into acceptable and easily contained forms.

Rushbrook also points out the limiting function of governments’ endorsement of queer space. She writes that “the state has an interest in shaping the forms of (non threatening) gay space that are legitimized; by offering tolerance, if not acceptance, the state can elicit appropriate behaviour from queers who police themselves, assuaging the state’s moral anxieties.”¹² For this reason, the festivals’ reliance on government endorsement may limit their countercultural potential. After all, it is difficult for the festivals to critique dominant institutions when they depend on those institutions for their continued existence. In addition, as Alexandra Chasin pointed out in her discussion of funding for AIDS events and groups, “those [organizations] working for radical social change are surely among the least favored by funders.”¹³ It is therefore not in the best interests of the festivals to be overtly political as it may hurt their chances of winning

much needed funding from the federal, provincial, and municipal governments. Consequently, the festivals' radical political messages have been tempered and they have slowly shifted towards the mainstream.

The growth of the festivals facilitated by government sponsorship, combined with their shift away from radical queer politics, has also attracted corporate sponsors looking to tap into what has been perceived as a lucrative queer market. Max Kirsch writes that "the managers of commodity production recognize that money speaks, and with a growing awareness that queer populations, or at least gay, white males, have in general more disposable income than other consumers, corporations and advertisers have been more than willing to orient their marketing campaigns to queer populations."¹⁴ As a result, corporate support for the festivals has been increasing.

The festivals have received sponsorship from businesses since they began; however, this sponsorship has moved from a few local queer run or queer friendly businesses to national and multinational corporations with little or no connection to queer communities. Since the late 1990s, the festivals have been sponsored by companies such as Famous Players, Alliance Atlantis, Showcase, Global, Rogers, AOL, Bell Mobility, Fido, Smirnoff, Labatt Blue, Absolut, Steamwhistle, Pizza Pizza, Hershey, Crest Whitestrips, TD Bank Financial Group, Vancity, and CIBC.¹⁵ In addition, the festivals have received support from large multinational queer-oriented media outlets such as Pridevision TV, OutTV, and PlanetOut. Although this propagation of government funding and corporate sponsorship does not mean that smaller, local queer businesses and community groups no longer support the festivals, their support has taken a back seat to

companies who can afford to pay more to be more visible. We can see this through an examination of the advertising in the program guides.

The festivals offer advertising space in their program guides. The early festival guides were filled with small advertisements for local queer bars, hotels, bookstores, and bathhouses as well as queer parties or events. In fact, a large portion of the guides were used for this purpose.¹⁶ The proportion of space that the festivals reserve for advertising has changed little since the early 1990s; however, there has been a significant shift from a large number of small local ads to a smaller number of glossy, full page and multipage advertisements. This means that advertising space in the program guides has been progressively taken up by large chains and corporations that can afford to pay for full page advertisements. This condition has been steadily increasing since early 2000. For example, in 2001, in the Image+Nation program guide, 14 out of the 25 pages (56%) of advertisements were full page ads for larger companies while in 2009, 14 out of the 17 pages (82%) of advertisements were full page ads. Inside Out shows a similar pattern. In the Inside Out 2001 program guide, 20 out of the 38 pages (53%) of advertising were full page advertisements while in 2009, 21 out of 31 pages (68%) were full page ads. Similarly, in the 2001 Out on Screen program guide, 14 out of the 30 pages (47%) of advertisements were full page or multipage advertisements while in 2009, this rose to 27 out of 37 pages (73%). This increase in full page advertisements shows how the festivals are shifting towards bigger business. These more prominent advertisements showcase national companies such as TD Canada Trust, RBC, and VIA Rail, as well as multinational companies such as Ramada Inn and Suites.

Like government sponsorship, corporate sponsorship is not necessarily indicative of a growing acceptance of queers. It can also be seen as a symptom of changes in the market place that make niche marketing more practical and profitable than the economies of scale that once dominated our society. Larry Gross explains that there are two factors that motivated this change: “the steady erosion of the mass common-denominator audiences once delivered by the networks and the exploding sophistication of marketing data bases and analytic techniques.”¹⁷ Taking this into account, the increased attention corporations are paying queer film festivals is less a sign of positive social change than an indication that large corporations are attempting to manipulate their images in order to make a profit. According to Danae Clark, this increase in advertising to queers shows that “capitalists welcome homosexuals as consuming subjects but not as social subjects.”¹⁸ A closer examination of the advertisements in the festival program guides demonstrates this. These advertisements use clichéd images or clever slogans to appeal to queer viewers rather than images that suggest queer relationships. In other words, while closet doors and rainbows abound in the corporate advertisements, images of queer intimacy remain nonexistent.¹⁹ Like Kinsman has already noted about government institutions, big business is “unwilling to be seen to endorse or to encourage the actual sexual practices and relationships in which we engage.”²⁰

One could argue that despite the self-serving intentions of the corporations that support the festivals, they are still enabling them to survive and therefore supporting the production and exhibition of queer film. However, this shift towards corporate support means that the festivals are forgoing the local connections they once had to queer grassroots organizing in favour of more profitable national and international corporate

connections. This has transformed the festivals from spaces of queer resistance to commercial spaces more conducive to niche marketing and entertainment than political organizing.

Gross commented on this trend in his examination of large American gay publications such as *the Advocate*. He writes

an unforeseen consequence of the success of national gay publications in obtaining mainstream advertisers is that they raised their rates accordingly, and seem to have forgotten that small independent presses can't afford to pay the same rate as a big airline. Thus... the small independent lesbian, gay, and feminist presses are being shut out of advertising in the publications best able to reach their potential readers²¹

This does not mean that local companies no longer advertise in the program guides. On the contrary, some of the advertisements, even some of the full page advertisements, are for local restaurants, bars, and businesses. However, these are far fewer in number than advertisements for large companies and corporations. In addition, the advertisements for local community organizations and outreach programs that filled the pages of the early program guides are now virtually non-existent. I am not suggesting that the festivals make no effort to include or promote local queer community groups. Inside Out and Out on Screen both continue to include a list of community sponsors in their program guides and Image+Nation includes a list of community sponsors in their Sponsor section. However, these lists are relatively inconspicuous, especially when compared to the prominent advertisements for larger companies. For example, in the Image+Nation program guides, evidence of community sponsorship exists solely in the form of small logos on a sponsorship page filled with larger and more visible logos. Similarly, in the Inside Out and Out on Screen program guides, community sponsor information is consigned to a few pages at the backs of the guides, often nestled between

other, more high profile advertisements. I am also not suggesting here that these changes are due to any malicious intent on the part of festival organizers. As they grow larger, the festivals require significantly more in the way of financial resources in order to survive. It is therefore necessary for the festivals to take advantage of the superior financial resources of larger businesses in order to maintain this growth. However, I contend that this growth has affected the festivals' organizational structures and programming choices.

The greater emphasis on corporate and government sponsorship has been accompanied by changes to the festivals' organizational structures. Chasin argues that government and corporate funding favours a particular style of leadership and organization. She links this directly to the mainstreaming of the movement. She writes that the "very structure of funding favors white male leadership or leadership by people who can pass in a white male monied arena."²² More specifically, corporate and government funding favours the type of leadership that speaks the same language as those in government bodies and the corporate world. This has changed the way the festivals are run. Whereas, when they first began, the festivals were artist-run, volunteer-supported collectives, as they grew bigger, they instituted paid positions and more hierarchical structures. Rather than being run as collectives, the festivals now employ familiar institutional structures including specialized positions such as Executive Director, Director of Programming, Manager of Operations, Director of Development, and Director of Corporate Sales. However, the responsibilities for each position are not necessarily set in stone as, according to Katherine Setzer of Image+Nation, much of the work is still done collaboratively.²³ Nonetheless, these changes in the institutional structures of the festivals ensure that they are seen as professional organizations that are

attractive to corporate and government sponsorship. It also means, as Michael Piore has noted, “that we are developing an entrepreneurial class, a capitalist class of our own.”²⁴ This has been accompanied by the privatization and commercialization of festival space.

Money Talks: The Privatization and Commercialization of Festival Space

As the festivals have increasingly aligned themselves with hegemonic institutions like government and big business, festival space has become an elite space as well as a queer one. Gordon Brent Ingram argues that “capitalistic interests often focus on creating relatively privatized, elite, and expensive queer space.”²⁵ Consequently, as the festivals have adopted a capitalist framework, access to festival space has become increasingly expensive and exclusive. Tickets have been steadily increasing in price since the festivals began. For instance, individual adult ticket prices for Inside Out were \$5.50 in 1991 and \$9-\$12 in 2009²⁶ and adult ticket prices for Image+Nation were \$2-\$4 in 1989 and \$11 in 2009.²⁷ The only exception would be Out on Screen whose 2009 ticket prices of \$7-10 (not including the mandatory \$2 membership) are comparable to their 1995 ticket prices of \$5-10. However, this may be misleading as ticket price data for the first Out on Screen in 1989 is not available. From these numbers, it is clear that even when adjusting for inflation, the ticket prices are much higher than they were when the festivals began.²⁸

In addition to rising ticket prices, Image+Nation and Inside Out have both instituted membership programs that give extra benefits to people who can afford to pay more. For example, at \$50/year, Inside Out’s most basic membership package allows members access to the priority members’ line up and the advance box office, as well as discounts on festival screenings and an advance copy of the program guide. If one is

willing to pay more, the Deluxe Package at \$2,640/year offers members these benefits plus guaranteed personalized seating, immediate entry to all programs, and guaranteed access to all VIP parties.²⁹ Image+Nation offers similar benefits with its Friends of the Festival membership packages which range in price from \$40/year to \$2,500/year. Although it is not necessary to be a member to take part in the festivals' film screenings or special events, the institution of these membership packages marks a shift towards a capitalist framework that awards special privileges to the affluent.

The festivals' special events are also geared towards the financial elite as these events are often located in commercial spaces such as clubs, restaurants and bars and most often require an entry fee. Chasin commented on the high prices of queer fundraising events and their effect on the organizers' political and social goals. She writes, "because of these prices, it seems likely that these events cater to existing donors or bring in more affluent new donors, rather than providing the function of broad outreach or education."³⁰ In addition, the festivals also hold a small number of exclusive VIP events. The director of programming for Out on Screen commented on these events when she was asked about the relationship between funding and programming. She replied that,

It's not dark and ugly, like if a CEO of a corporate sponsor was to give me a film that I hated and was like my niece made this, we have to bring it to the festival, we wouldn't, I mean we would have to feel onboard with all of our programming, but you know there are things that we do that are VIP events that we do for our sponsors, our top donors and I think that's pretty typical for a non-profit that wants to survive these days.³¹

Although this may fulfill the festivals' fundraising goals, it limits the ability of the festivals to act as sites of queer resistance and political organization.

This is not to say that the festivals have become completely inaccessible; in fact, some of them have put structures in place to ensure greater accessibility. For example, Inside Out now has youth screenings with discounted pricing and they occasionally have free screenings of select films. In addition, in 2009, the festival offered free childcare for one afternoon screening. Out on Screen has similar structures in place, they offer lower ticket prices for the underemployed, childcare subsidies and a limited number of complimentary tickets which they distribute through local community groups. They also occasionally have free screenings. Nevertheless, most festival screenings and events, particularly the high profile events such as gala parties and screenings, remain more accessible to those who can afford the expense.

Programming

The changes to the funding, sponsorship and institutional structures of the festivals have been accompanied by changes in the types of films that they show. First of all, there has been a shift towards feature films. This is most evident with Out on Screen which, in 1995, showed 10 features and 102 shorts and in 2009 showed 33 features and 36 shorts. This represents a huge jump in features, from 8.9% of the program in 1995 to 47.8% of the program in 2009. Image+Nation and Inside Out also show many more features now than they did when they first began; however, the changes in the percentages of features are not as drastic as those for Out on Screen.³² We can also see the shift towards features through an examination of the festivals' opening nights. The festivals today, almost without exception open with feature films. This does not mean that the festivals never include short films in their opening nights. For example, Inside Out included the short animated film *The Island* in their opening night program in 2009

and *No Bikini* in 2008. However, there are certainly fewer shorts in the opening programs now than in the early opening nights. In fact, a shorts program has not opened a festival since Out on Screen began with one in 1996.

There has also been a shift towards more mainstream, traditional narrative features. This is also evident when comparing the opening films in the early festivals with those in the later festivals. Today, the festivals tend to open with relatively big budget, narrative features. For example, in 2009, Image+Nation opened with *Hollywood, je t'aime*, a feature length narrative about a gay man leaving France to become a star in Hollywood, Inside Out opened with *Patrik Age 1.5*, a drama about two gay men struggling to cope with their accidental adoption of a teenage boy, and Out on Screen opened with *I Can't Think Straight*, a narrative feature about two women from very different cultural and religious backgrounds who fall in love and struggle to come out to their families. In 2008, the festivals also opened with narrative dramas. Image+Nation opened with *Mulligans*, a feature-length narrative drama about a family coming to terms with a father's realization that he is gay, and Inside Out and Out on Screen opened with *Cheonhajangsa Madonna (Like a Virgin)*, a comedic drama about a Korean transgendered high school student's struggles with family and friends as he tries to win enough money for a sex change operation in a traditional wrestling competition. These films, although they differ greatly in their settings and plotlines, all tell their stories through realist formats that exhibit little formal experimentation. In addition, all 5 films demonstrate easily palatable, universal themes such as the value of accepting who you are, the idea that people can change, and the difficulties of coming out. This is not to say that these themes are unimportant or that these films do not have important stories to tell and

it is certainly not meant to propose a hierarchy based on formal experimentation. Instead, these films illustrate the shift towards comfortable mainstream narrative features.

This stands in marked contrast to the films that opened the festivals of the early 1990s. The early festivals' opening nights included experimental narratives such as John Greyson's *Urinal* and Marlon Rigg's *Black Is... Black Ain't*, documentaries such as *Common Threads* (about those who have died of AIDS) and *Forbidden Love: the Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives*, and even short safe sex videos such as *Current Flow* (a lesbian safe sex video about dental dams), *Safe Sex: The Manual* (an animated short about putting on a condom), and *The Mavis Davis Safe Sex Video*. Although the festivals still include some avant-garde, sex-positive, and documentary films, these are now fewer in number and are not shown in prestigious time slots like the opening night galas. Amber Dawn of Out on Screen explained the reasoning behind having fewer experimental films. She asserted that they unfortunately "just can't afford to have a theatre with only 50 people in it anymore." In other words, with bigger theatres and rising festival costs, it is just not financially feasible to screen a large number of films that only draw small crowds. This threatens to turn the festivals into warehouses for popular, primarily narrative films, which may further polarize filmmakers along lines of class. As the bigger budget, mainstream queer films take up more of the festival space, they leave less room for those who work on shoestring budgets and can only afford to make what Amber Dawn dubs "scrappy shorts."³³

The Politics of Queer Film

As the festivals have become more mainstream, their political discourse has also changed. This discourse has become more abstract and less connected to local direct

activism. The early festivals, as I argued in Chapter 1, were heavily influenced by liberation and queer politics and were intricately connected to queer political resistance. For this reason, as M.V. Lee Badgett noted about other early gay and lesbian businesses, the early film festivals “had some direct and indirect political potential. Those businesses created meeting places that facilitated political organization and the spread of important ideas, news, and information to gay people, making the further development of gay, lesbian, and bisexual culture and politics possible.”³⁴ The early festivals used their position as community centres to, not only educate and entertain, but provoke and direct queer anger towards specific local and national causes. The more commercial festivals that we see today, although they still contain some films that highlight queer oppression and resistance, frame these political messages in a much different way. The direct calls to action, the petitions and community forums on local issues, are no longer an integral part of the festivals. Instead, they highlight the power of film itself to perform these political functions. In other words, the festivals have shifted from emphasizing the power of film to help inform activism to the power of film *as* activism.

The festivals have always emphasized the power of film to change lives. Out on Screen organizers explicitly stated as much in their 1995 mission statement. They wrote that the festival “recognizes film and video as a powerful media of communication, empowerment and self-determination.”³⁵ Since this time, organizers have continued to emphasize the revolutionary potential of film. Like their predecessors, festival organizers in the late 1990s and 2000s proclaim the power of film to change the oppressive conditions of society that relegate queers to a subordinate position. In 2001, Image+Nation organizers wrote that “filmmaking is a tool; a tool of freedom, of

identification and of recognition. A tool with the power to both educate and to wildly entertain.”³⁶ The same year, Inside Out made a similar declaration about the transformative potential of film and of the festival. Executive director Scott Ferguson wrote “with Inside Out, our community has created a vital mechanism for change.”³⁷ From these statements, we can see that festival organizers see film, particularly queer film, as an agent of positive change. Out on Screen organizers even go so far as to declare that not only is queer art vital, but that it is “the most potent means available to us for cultural and political transformation.”³⁸ The festivals are certainly not the first to attribute film with these revolutionary powers. There is a long history of using cinema in a bid to influence public opinion. This represents what Rosemary Hennessy describes as “the progressive romantic notion of art as an instrument for social revolution.”³⁹ This notion endows art with the radical capacity to educate, provoke, and shock people out of their complicity with dominant social mores.

This “progressive romantic” view of film has led the festivals to focus almost entirely on initiatives designed to encourage the production of queer film and video. For example, all three festivals have created cash awards for various categories of film (for example, best feature, best Canadian short). These awards have steadily increased in number since the late 1990s. Today, Image+Nation and Inside Out offer three juried awards and three audience awards each and Out on Screen offers two juried awards and two audience awards. Inside Out and Out on Screen have also created scholarship opportunities for artists or students who are studying film or video. In 1998, Out on Screen offered scholarships to a series of workshops and, in 2002, Inside Out created an annual \$5,000 scholarship that is awarded to a student pursuing post-secondary studies in

film or video.⁴⁰ The festivals have also put in place other initiatives that are designed to increase queer access to film production. For example, Inside Out created the Queer Youth Digital Video Project in 1998. This project, according to Inside Out, “provide[s] opportunities for youth to learn video production in a supportive atmosphere. Queer youth under the age of 25 are mentored through the process of making their first videos – from storyboarding and shooting to post-production and editing.”⁴¹ In addition, Out on Screen and Inside Out regularly offer master classes designed to educate participants on selective aspects of filmmaking such as scriptwriting, screenwriting, acting, or grant writing. This is not meant to suggest that all three festivals focus exclusively on the ability to produce and consume queer film. Out on Screen also runs an education program called Out in Schools. This program attempts to use queer film to educate youth about homophobia and bullying. According to Out on Screen, in 2009 this program “reached more than 4800 students through 46 presentations to high schools in Surrey, Saanich, Vernon and Prince Rupert”⁴² However, this is the only initiative undertaken by any of the festivals that looks to promote change outside of the festival setting. Furthermore, Out on Schools, like the cash awards, scholarships, and master classes, also emphasizes film as the most effective way to transform oppressive social conditions.

These initiatives and incentives have their benefits. They support queer filmmakers and allow those who may not otherwise have the financial resources or knowledge to make a film the opportunity to take part in the means of queer cultural production. However, the emphasis on access to filmmaking and film consumption ignores the numerous other reasons that people are unable to freely express their sexuality or openly voice their opinions. Furthermore, the romantic view of film as the

“most potent” form of political and social resistance threatens to equate supporting queer film with supporting queer resistance. In other words, it suggests that consuming queer films and giving financial support to queer film festivals is all one has to do to effect positive change. This reduces queer resistance to the ability to produce and consume queer art and deflects attention from the persistence of economic, social, and cultural inequality. Consequently, as Chasin has argued, in this environment, “consumption becomes a form of political participation, perhaps supplanting other, more direct models of participation.”⁴³ This is evident when one compares the festivals today with the festivals of the early 1990s.

When the festivals first began, they framed film as a means to an end, a tool in the toolbox of activists seeking to end queer oppression. Early festival organizers recognized that film could be used to educate and provoke and used the festival space, not only to promote queer film, but also to promote more direct forms of collective resistance. Adversely, the festivals today promote the production and consumption of queer film as an act of collective resistance. Therefore, strategies that diversify and grow audiences are seen as “innovative outreach programs”⁴⁴ for the community. This is not intended to undermine the importance of these programs but to problematize the privileging of film as the sole focus for such endeavours. By focusing on the ability to produce and consume queer film, other aspects of queer resistance, including more direct forms of outreach and activism, are minimized. Because viewing queer film is constituted as a political act in itself, it is less likely to provoke additional political action. Consequently, rather than stirring up collective anger and provoking direct resistance, these films

become testaments to more abstract qualities such as the strength of the human spirit or the power of individuals to overcome adversity.

Furthermore, when queer film is automatically endowed with the revolutionary potential to change the political and social conditions that affect queer lives, it lessens the ability of the festivals to provide what Patricia White described as “a literal site of critical reception.” Rather than encouraging audiences to be critical of the films within the festival, organizers frame the viewing of any queer film as an act of queer resistance. As a consequence, the festivals have become less spaces for the critical reception of queer film than spaces for the uncritical consumption of queer film. Audiences are encouraged to identify with films because they are critical but are not encouraged to be critical of the films or their own consumption. Within this context, films, even politicized films, lose their effectiveness as tools for social and political transformation.

This depoliticization of festival space reflects a more general depoliticization within the gay, lesbian, and queer political movements. Theorist Michael Warner has commented on this trend citing developments such as the redefinition of AIDS as a manageable problem rather than an epidemic, the waning of direct-action activism, and the growing importance of political lobbying.⁴⁵ This trend is particularly visible in Canada after such celebrated legal gains as the right to same-sex marriage and the right to obtain same-sex partner benefits. This depoliticization raises important questions about the potential for queer spaces like the festivals to promote a radical queer politic and act as sites of queer resistance and organization. I will discuss the problematics of queer space and its relationship with political resistance in Chapter 3.

Notes

¹ In 1998, Image+Nation received \$30,000 in Canada Arts Council funding, Inside Out received \$30,000, and Out on Screen received \$37,000 in Canada Council for the Arts grants. (<http://www.canadacouncil.ca/grants/recipients/>)

² In 2008, Inside Out received \$42,900 in Canada Council funding, \$48,400 through the Ontario Arts Council, and \$28,000 through the Toronto Arts Council, and Out on Screen received \$87,300 in Canada Council funding and \$17,500 through the British Columbia Arts Council.

³ Setzer, Katherine (director of programming for Image+Nation). Personal Interview. 15 April 2010.

⁴ Setzer, Katherine (director of programming for Image+Nation). Personal Interview. 15 April 2010.

⁵ In 2008, Image+Nation received \$30,100 in Canada Council funding and \$7,000 through the Montréal Arts Council.

⁶ Image+Nation Program Guide (2002): 7.

⁷ Inside Out Program Guide (2002): 16.

⁸ As I mentioned in Chapter 1, in Image+Nation's first year (1988), they screened 47 films and in Inside Out's first year (1991), they screened 85 films. I do not have data for Out on Screen's first year (1989) but in 1995, they screened 112 films, which is comparable to the number of films screened in 2008.

⁹ More research would be needed to determine the causes of the drastic drop in the number of films exhibited at the festivals. The federal, provincial, and municipal arts councils, at the time of this writing, have not released their funding information for 2009 so it is very difficult to tell if this drop is due to a decrease in government funding for this year.

¹⁰ Dereka Rushbrook, "Cities, Queer Space, and the Cosmopolitan Tourist," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* Vol. 8, No. 1-2 (2002): 183.

¹¹ Gary Kinsman, "Challenging Canadian and Queer Nationalisms," in *In a Queer Country: Gay and Lesbian Studies in the Canadian Context*, ed. Terry Goldie (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2001), 219.

¹² Rushbrook 2002, 195

¹³ Alexandra Chasin, *Selling Out: the Gay and Lesbian Movement Goes to Market* (New York; Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2000), 202.

¹⁴ Max H. Kirsch, *Queer Theory and Social Change* (Cambridge; New York: Routledge, 2000), 16.

¹⁵ This list is by no means exhaustive.

¹⁶ In 1991, Image+Nation featured 18 pages of advertisements (in a 46 page program guide) and Inside Out featured 11 pages of advertisements (in a 43 page program guide)

¹⁷ Gross, 238.

¹⁸ Danae Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism," in *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*, ed. Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 492.

¹⁹ Absolut and Fido both ran advertisements in the festival program guides that featured open closet doors, while TD Bank ran an advertisement that featured a rainbow pillow on their signature chair.

²⁰ Kinsman 2002, 219.

²¹ Larry Gross, *Up From Invisibility: Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Media in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 238.

²² Chasin, 193.

²³ Setzer, Katherine (director of programming for Image+Nation). Personal Interview. 15 April 2010.

²⁴ Michael Piore, "Economic Identity/Sexual Identity" in *A Queer World: the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Martin Duberman (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 505.

²⁵ Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter, "Narratives of Place: Subjective & Collective," in *Queers in Space: Communities/Public Places/Sites of Resistance*, ed. by Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter (Seattle, Wash.: Bay Press, 1997), 59.

²⁶ Inside Out program guides for 1991 & 2009.

²⁷ Image+Nation program guides for 1988 & 2009.

²⁸ According to the Bank of Canada, calculating for inflation at the same profit margins, Inside Out tickets would be \$8.52 in 2009, Image+Nation tickets would be \$3.07-\$6.15 in 2009, and Out on Screen tickets would be \$6.56-\$13.12.

²⁹ Inside Out Program Guide (2009), 13.

³⁰ Chasin, 189.

³¹ Uptold, Amber Dawn (director of programming for Out on Screen). Personal Interview. 20 May 2010.

³² Image&Nation showed 23 features and 24 shorts in 1988 and 46 features and 62 shorts in 2009 and Inside Out showed 19 features and 66 shorts in 1991 and 55 features and 141 shorts.

³³ Amber Dawn used the term "scrappy shorts" to refer to films with miniscule budgets that nonetheless had a very important message or story to tell. This was, by no means, a derogatory term.

³⁴ M.V. Lee Badgett, "Thinking Homo/Economically," in *A Queer World: the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Martin Duberman (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 473.

³⁵ Out on Screen Program Guide (1995): 5.

³⁶ Image+Nation Program Guide (2001): 5.

³⁷ Inside Out Program Guide (2001): 7.

³⁸ Out on Screen Program Guide (2005): 3.

³⁹ Rosemary Hennessy, "Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture," *Cultural Critique*, No. 29 (Winter, 1994-1995), 54.

⁴⁰ The Mark S. Bonham Scholarship for Queer Studies in Film and Video is awarded each year to a Canadian student who identifies as part of the LGBT community.

⁴¹ Inside Out Program Guide (2009), 9.

⁴² Out on Screen Program Guide (2009): 12.

⁴³ Chasin, 24.

⁴⁴ In 2009, Inside Out initiated what they refer to as an “innovative outreach program.” Their pilot translation program involves the translation of press releases and some program notes into the 10 most common languages in Toronto.

⁴⁵ Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 76-77.

Chapter 3 Beyond Queer Space

It has been argued that queer film festivals constitute queer space, concrete sites for the “queer community” to come together and see films that are both by and about us, while at the same time feeling a connection to other festival goers. As Gordon Ingram argues, “for most people whose sexualities have been ‘marginalized’ through some experience of same-sex desire, who therefore feel or are made to feel ‘queer’, we travel great distances in order to live in the ways that enhance fuller contact with one another.”¹ Despite the depoliticization of the festivals, they continue to actively construct this idea(l) of a united queer community. The festivals today, like the festivals of the early 1990s, promote the ideal of a community that crosses national boundaries as well as boundaries of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, class, and ability; a collective that, despite its pluralistic nature, shares a common identity on the fringes. This vision of queer community has proven effective in mobilizing queer communities to demand the same rights as other minorities. This has led, in Canada at least, to the acquisition of civil rights that were previously denied queer people. However, the reification of identity as the unifying factor for queer communities threatens to reinforce homonormativity by attempting to place a particular template of queer identity over the diversity of queer experience. In addition, the creation of a separate and identifiable queer space works to isolate queer people as separate rather than interrogating and looking to change the dichotomizing conditions of society that can only understand homosexuality and heterosexuality as two opposite and distinct categories. This entrenches a homo/hetero dichotomy and prevents the community from becoming part of “a broader movement targeting the politics of sexual shame.”² I am not suggesting that identity politics do not

serve a valuable purpose. On the contrary, they have historically acted as a “basis from which to struggle against heterosexual hegemony.”³ However, as the festivals become more commercial and less explicitly political, it threatens to turn queer from a strategic category into a fully developed ethnic style collective,⁴ one that, I will argue, works to entrench homonormative and heteronormative hegemony.

Queer Community/Queer Space

Queer film festivals actively produce the idea(l) of a unified, transnational queer community. As I argued in Chapter 1, this community-building rhetoric has been present within the festivals since their beginnings. Today, they continue to promote this ideal. In 2009, Inside Out executive director Scott Ferguson expresses that “equally important [to the films Inside Out screens] is the sense of community you experience at the Festival.”⁵ Similarly, Out on Screen organizers write that their festival facilitates “a unique community space.”⁶ This production of community can also be seen in terms of national belonging. This is made explicit in the writing of organizers of Image+Nation. Katherine Setzer, the director of programming for the Montréal event, writes that the festival is “a place to become a citizen of the (queer) world.”⁷ Katherine’s comments solidify the queer film festival as a type of rite of passage, a passport into the queer nation. In addition, the festival title, Image+Nation also invokes this sense of queer national belonging. It suggests that through the consumption of queer images we can solidify a queer world. The idea of citizenship explicitly connects queer community with nation building. It is no coincidence that this trope of citizenship is used by a Québécois festival. Image+Nation is not only connected to a history of queer resistance against heterosexual hegemony, but also a history of Québécois resistance against English hegemony.

However, although the Toronto and Vancouver festivals do not explicitly frame their version of queer community in nationalist terms, their characterization of this community as unified and distinct with a unique cultural background and tradition of cultural expression that deserves protection is similar to the more explicit nationalist rhetoric of the Québécois festival. This nationalist framework constructs the films screened at the festivals as national products through the consumption of which one affirms one's membership in the queer community. This highlights what James Allen describes as the "role of cultural production in the creation and propagation of nations."⁸ As if through the production and exhibition of queer film and video, we are able to create a unified queer "nation" that, through its visibility, will promote positive change in the lives of queer people around the world.

This queer nation is constructed across lines of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class. We can see this through the festivals' transformation from "Lesbian and Gay" to "LGBT." This change was made relatively recently. Image+Nation began using LGBT in 2004 while Inside Out made this change in 2009. This moniker continues to expand in an attempt to include many different identities within one community. However, Joshua Gamson has pointed out that this accommodation of gender, ethnic, and racial diversity works "primarily through a multiculturalism that posits a plurality of lesbian and gay experiences, but does not challenge their basic commonality. The boundaries of the collective category are expanded, the "family" enlarged; racial and ethnic differences are framed as variations on a theme rather than as demonstrations of the instability of the collective."⁹ In other words, while the ever-expanding LGBTTIQQ2S¹⁰ seems to be more inclusive, it creates superficial connections between

groups who, as Gordon Brent Ingram has argued, “possess only vaguely similar desires, practices and sensibilities, and who demonstrate a great disparity in their vulnerability to economic and cultural inequities.”¹¹ For instance, the experiences of a lesbian woman of colour in Canada are likely vastly different from the experiences of a gay white man in Canada. The film festivals therefore not only create awareness of the experiences of others within the “queer community” but also create the illusion of common experience despite vast social, cultural and economic differences. This illusion is based on the assumption that we are all united in our experience of oppression based on sexual orientation. However, this ignores the numerous power relationships at work within and between these groups. Queerness cannot be separated from other aspects of an individual’s identity. Each individual differs in their relationship to privilege. Zoë Newman argues in her paper on the effects of identity politics on the Jewish Feminist Action group, that the attempt to create solidarity through marginalization is “a priori premised on victimhood, which equals a claim of innocence and a denial of dominance.”¹² Put another way, lesbian, gay, bi, transsexual, transgendered, intersex, queer, questioning, and two-spirited, are not parallel forms of identity; they exist within multiple intersections of power and dominance including male/female, homosexual/heterosexual, white/non-white, etc. Therefore, although the incorporation of a spectrum of other identities can be seen as a way to recognize and celebrate the plurality of queer experience by including previously overlooked groups, it also encourages a denial of ourselves as oppressors in addition to being oppressed.

Furthermore, I would argue that by incorporating other identities into already existing lesbian and gay frameworks, lesbian and gay remain the face of the festivals. The

idea of an integrated LGBT community assumes that the same community logic that governed lesbian and gay will work for a community that encompasses many queered identities. The switch to LGBT is therefore open to the same criticisms that have been leveled at multicultural policy in the larger Canadian context. In his essay on multiculturalism in Canada, Carl E. James contends that “the [multicultural] policy has set up a discourse whereby the charter groups – the English and French – remain the reference groups and diversity is conceived of in relation to them.”¹³ The same can be said of the LGBT film festivals that, despite their claim of diversity, remain centered around identity based on same-sex desire. However, the claims to diversity put forth by the festivals are not necessarily the same as official Canadian multicultural policy and they may not come from the same place. Clifford Jansen argues that Canadian multicultural policy was put in place as “a method of offering alternative channels to minority ethnic groups, which would prevent them from moving into mainstream positions in society.”¹⁴ In other words, it was a way to placate minority groups rather than accept them. The efforts of the festivals to diversify and include other marginalized groups are not necessarily based on a similar attempt to prevent marginalized groups from moving into mainstream positions within the queer community; however, the implicit drive towards diversity within the queer film festivals, like official Canadian multicultural policies, seldom addresses the economic, cultural, and social roots of oppression.

The queer community championed by the festivals is increasingly constructed as transnational, in addition to being constructed as multicultural. We can see this through the increase in international programs screened at the festivals. For example, in the first

year of *Inside Out*, 51 out of the 85 films (60%) screened were produced outside of Canada, with 15 films (17.65% of all films screened) produced outside of North America¹⁵ while in 2009, 134 out of 196 films (68.37%) were produced outside of Canada with 82 films (41.84% of all films screened) produced outside of North America.¹⁶ In addition, in 1991, the majority of the “foreign” films came from Western Europe (Great Britain, Belgium, Germany, Australia) while in 2009, films came from a wide variety of areas including Europe, Asia, Africa and South America.¹⁷ The increasing accessibility of video filmmaking¹⁸ brought on by lower equipment costs and the ease of digital editing can account for this change in demographics. Nonetheless, it also represents a deliberate effort to create a unified queer community that crosses national boundaries in addition to boundaries of gender and sexual orientation.

This drive towards inclusiveness and internationalization may be misleading. Although it may be true that the festivals are including more films by and about traditionally marginalized groups as well as an increasing amount of submissions from outside of North America, these films do not come to us directly from the source. They are mediated through festival programmers who choose which work will be shown and which will not. Queer film festivals are not just democratic exhibition spaces that show films from any source; access to this space is highly regulated. For this reason, Gamson claims that the festivals “involve ongoing and quite self-conscious decision making about the content and contours of the ‘we’ being made literally visible.”¹⁹ The very act of whittling down films from 700 to 2-3 hundred²⁰ is an act of community construction. In other words, our access to queer stories from around the world is still coloured by a privileged Canadian viewpoint. This limits the festivals’ potential to “challenge attitudes

and change lives through the promotion, production, and exhibition of film and video by and about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) people of all ages, races and abilities.”²¹ In addition to this, I would argue, that it is difficult to gain even the most basic understanding of the issues that affect the many marginalized groups within the LGBT mosaic through a film or a series of films. Even the longest film is too short to convey the complex cultural, political, and economic issues that affect people’s lives. Furthermore, the consumption of images of marginalized groups in other parts of the world is not necessarily a sign of cultural and ethnic diversity. It can also be viewed in terms of exoticism, or even Orientalism,²² where the largely privileged audiences of *Image+Nation*, *Inside Out*, and *Out on Screen* consume images of an exotic other under the guise of diversity and transnationalism. Consequently, rather than promoting diversity, we may be complicit in a form of neocolonialist tourism while denying our own complicity in the oppression, essentialization, and exploitation of the less privileged groups we see on screen.

Contrary to the festivals’ goals of promoting a diverse international queer community, the internationalization of the festivals may also be contributing to the homogenization of queer culture. James Allen, in his essay “Imagining an Intercultural Nation: A Moment in Canadian Queer Cinema,” argues that the films screened at the festivals

...engender links between international queer audiences and national queer subjects, links that ideally might foster an international, cosmopolitan queer identity, promoting an awareness of the multiplicity of queer lives and the productive similarities between them. At the same time, however, such trans-national film cultures may simply encourage a vast sea of narrative clones, representing and replicating a single vision of queer identity across borders and cultures, overshadowing local practices and traditions.²³

In other words, because access to the festival space is regulated through a centralized governing body, the films that are shown are filtered through that governing body's conception of what it means to be queer. This encourages filmmakers in other regions, who want their work to be shown internationally, to make films that reflect this particular version of queerness.

Despite this homonormative drive, some argue that the festivals constitute queer space because they provide a safe space in which to convene a queer audience. However, audiences of queer film festivals are presumably as diverse as the festivals' programming. People may attend for a multiplicity of reasons and more than likely encompass divergent communities of taste that cross gender, racial, ethnic, class and sexual lines. In addition, queer film festival audience members and filmmakers can have radically different histories, ideology and political beliefs. Furthermore, as the festivals are *film* festivals in addition to being queer festivals, they also attract people who are interested in film whether or not it is queer film. This is increasingly the case as the festivals become larger and more commercial. As the festivals have grown, the number of industry professionals such as curators, programmers, and broadcasters who attend has increased.²⁴ Individuals who attend these festivals, therefore, do not necessarily identify as queer or consider themselves a part of the queer community. Despite this, some would argue that audiences of queer film festivals adopt what Alexander Doty calls "reception positions that can be considered 'queer' in some way, regardless of a person's declared sexual and gender allegiances."²⁵ It is not my intention here to discuss audience reception in detail; however, I will say that even if festival audiences adopt queer reception positions, these positions are limited by the decisions of program directors.

Furthermore, queer film festivals are not necessarily the only spaces within which audiences can adopt these queer “reception positions.” Any festival that features marginal cinema (for example, experimental film or animation) may challenge spectators to occupy this type of position.

The space created for audiences is likely equally limited. One could argue that queer film festival goers represent only a small segment of the ‘queer community’. First of all, it is likely that not all queer people are interested in watching the art films and low budget films that often grace the screens of the festivals. Some may not even be interested in queer film at all. The programming choices of the festivals therefore may not represent the films that Canadian queers actually watch; films that Allen argues probably consist of “straight Hollywood fare for the most part.”²⁶ Second, the larger festivals are isolated to the metropolises of Toronto, Montréal, and Vancouver. Even the smaller festivals take place in large cities²⁷ and are therefore not necessarily accessible to people who live in smaller cities, towns, or rural areas. Third, film viewing is still an act of leisure that is only available to those who have the time and can afford the expense. This means that people in lower income brackets are much less likely to be able to attend. Lastly, attendance at the festivals requires an individual to either be “out of the closet” or at least be in a position in which discrimination based on sexuality is not a concern. This excludes the large population of people who are “in the closet” or who do not consider themselves queer despite their same-sex sexual practices. Based on these likelihoods, the queer space of the festivals may isolate one form of queer culture from all others. This may alienate those within the queer community who experience oppression based on other issues such as ethnicity, race, ability or class.

Queer Space/Separation

Creating queer space based on a unitary queer identity not only alienates those within the queer community who experience multiple forms of oppression, but also separates us from other oppressed groups and reinforces the absolute distinction between homosexual and heterosexual. In other words, constructing “queer” as an ethnic style collective creates an alternative queer space that may produce more marginalization by reinforcing heterosexual hegemony.

Steven Seidman argues that “societies create regimes that make homo/hetero gender preference mutually exclusive master categories of sexual identity.”²⁸ The separation of queer space works with these regimes rather than against them. Queer film festivals privilege identification based on gender preference alone. When they were first formed in the late 80s and early 90s as “lesbian and gay” events, the festivals created alternative spaces for the promotion of a community of people brought together by a common experience of same-sex desire. In this way, the creation of alternative social spaces based on gender preference reinforced and celebrated the idea of homosexual identification as separate from the heterosexual norm. This kind of oppositional queer culture was based on the urgent need to mobilize against a society hostile to the idea of same-sex sexual practices and identities. It also marked a departure from the liberationist politics of the 1970s that Seidman claims sought to “free[ing] individuals from the constraints of a sex/gender system that locked them into mutually exclusive homo/hetero and feminine/masculine roles.”²⁹ Queer film festivals were an explicit attempt to create separate sites of queer cultural formation. However, this separation of lesbian and gay space from all other space reinforced a binary way of thinking about sexual desire.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes that “to identify as something implies a process of identification with, not to mention identification against.”³⁰ Because homosexuality and heterosexuality are defined in opposition to one another, identification as part of a queer community also includes identification against the heterosexual community. This reinforces hetero and homo as an ontological dichotomy. In other words, the reification of a queer identity necessarily includes a reification of an opposite heterosexual identity. This binary mode of thinking is essentially a hetero construct, one that is based on oppositional thinking (us vs. them, us vs. the ‘other’) that flies in opposition to a queer epistemology. The queer nation/community building rhetoric of the festivals reinforce this oppositional politic. Festival goers are asked to “celebrate *our* unique queerness”³¹ and share in “*our* experiences, voices, cultures, politics, and activism.”³² One can even literally become a member of the queer film festival community through one of the numerous levels of paid membership. Although reinforcing a collective “we” through tropes of ethnic or national belonging has historically helped in the struggle for rights, it also threatens to lock queer communities into a subordinate position. Rather than being one group among many who are affected by a system of sexual regulation, as Kinsman has stated, we become “simply another minority group.”³³ Although this has helped achieve limited rights for queer people, it has done little to address the roots of sexual oppression. Society remains stubbornly heterosexist and in many cases explicitly homophobic. Identifying oneself as part of the LGBT rainbow can still have concrete adverse social, economic and physical consequences. Seidman argues that within this heteronormative environment, “identifying a gay subject reinforces and reproduces this hierarchical figure.”³⁴ Put another way, separating queer space assumes the

heterosexuality of all other space. This limits the ability of the festivals to make an impact on the larger society. Zoë Newman notes that, “identity can be both a catalyst for and an impediment to political struggle.”³⁵ This leaves us with a Catch 22 situation in which dismantling the “gay subject” reduces the chance of using the categorization strategically, while *not* dismantling the “gay subject” may further entrench heteronormativity (which is the reason for a unified gay subject in the first place).

It could be argued that the transformation from “lesbian and gay” to LGBT represents an effort to break out of this binary thinking and move towards a mosaic of sexual identities and desires. However, LGBT (and even the extended LGBTTIQQ2S) is still a mosaic in which heterosexuality remains conspicuously absent. LGBT is therefore no less oppositional than gay and lesbian. It still assumes a distinction between LGBT identities and a heterosexual identity. Attempting to incorporate a spectrum of other queered identities within the lesbian and gay framework denies the blurring of boundaries that many identities represent. For example, bisexual and transgendered identities question the very idea of categorizing identities along lines of sexual preference or gender and cannot just be incorporated uncritically into an expanded lesbian and gay community. Isolating queer culture denies the fluidity and blurring of boundaries that Jean-Ulrick Désert describes as “the very richness and contradictions that should be embraced.”³⁶ Désert argues that the isolation of queer culture would destroy the fruitful spaces between heterosexual and homosexual cultures.³⁷

This does not mean that identifying as LGBT is a problematic or invalid choice; after all, as Seidman so aptly put it, “many of us have built coherent and meaningful lives around this identity.”³⁸ What I mean to draw attention to here is that privileging gender

preference is not necessarily the best tool to “challenge attitudes and change lives”³⁹ The separation of queer space that the festivals represent continues the process of “othering” which originated from heterosexist discourse that constructs all sexualities that are outside the traditional heterosexual pairing as abnormal or even dangerous. The festivals therefore work to validate a particular queer lifestyle more so than they work to expose and challenge heteronormative society.

The separation of queer culture has been steadily increasing, from the growth in queer film festivals to the creation of queer cable television networks such as OUTtv. The creation of these alternative networks has also encouraged similar separation in the larger society. For example, the Berlin International Film Festival now has an award for best queer film.⁴⁰ Films with queer content can still be chosen for other awards; however, this separate prize establishes queer as a special interest group. This special interest group mentality not only widens the perceived gap between heterosexuality and homosexuality but it also prevents us from building bridges with other oppressed groups.

Basing solidarity solely on gender preference overlooks the fact that not only is the norm heterosexual desire, but that it is also a particular form of heterosexual desire, namely monogamous, vanilla, and reproductive. This fails to recognize, as Kinsman has noted, that the oppression of same-sex partnerships “comes from a centuries-long tradition in Western Christian cultures of prohibiting non-reproductive sexual activity.”⁴¹ Sexuality, not just homosexuality, is socially organized and regulated. There are therefore many ways that one can be affected by sexual regulation that are not necessarily linked to same-sex desire. For example, despite the fact that their sexual object choice may be primarily heterosexual, the BDSM community, or the multitude of fetish

communities, are vulnerable to the same mythologizing and demonizing discourse as LGBT communities have been subjected to. Isolating identification along the lines of gender preference, or even gender identity, therefore limits the queer film festivals to challenging a narrow definition of homophobia, rather than mounting a wider challenge to the normalizing conditions of society that put one type of sexual desire on the top and all else at the bottom. This limited scope threatens to re-inscribe a heteronormative order contrary to the stated goals of the festivals.

As the festivals become larger and more commercial, they rely more and more on the ethnic model of belonging to assure financial backing. The festivals rely on a unified yet diverse queer community to gain government funding and ensure the continued interest of corporate sponsors and private donors. For this reason, it is beyond the ability of the festivals to question the “we” that is being constructed as disrupting this ethnic collective threatens the festivals’ existence. The idea of a unified, transnational queer community attracts interest from corporate sponsors who want to tap into what is perceived as a lucrative queer market. Challenging the perceived collectivity of the queer community would threaten this corporate response. As I discussed in Chapter 2, the festivals also rely heavily on government funding. This funding requires the promotion of multiculturalism. The Canada Council makes explicit that their funding is contingent on the festivals’ ability to “highlight a diversity of voices and visions.”⁴² Constructing a community that fits with this mandate is then necessary for the festivals’ continued existence. The festivals therefore must promote the appearance of a basic commonality of queer experience while at the same time incorporating the discourse of diversity required for government grants and community support. This entrenches the minority

status of queer communities and limits the ability of the festivals to mount wider challenges to the social organization and regulation of sexuality.

Cementing the minority status of the queer community through the separation of queer space from “all other space” also embodies what Pauline Greenhill describes as the “danger of establishing and reinforcing a mainstream and a margin, rather than of critiquing the processes which create those divisions.”⁴³ This is not only true with regards to identity politics. This reinforcement of a mainstream and a margin also affects the festival films as commercial products. The marginal position of the queer festivals hurts their chances of featuring commercially viable, mainstream queer films. For example, Image+Nation organizers wrote in 2008 that “this season’s hyped Hollywood gay-written-and-gay-directed-biopic about a gay man who dedicated his life to the recognition of queer equal rights couldn’t be included in image+nation 21: ‘(Our) festival isn’t part of (their) strategy to release (the film)’, we were told.”⁴⁴ In addition, because queer space sets up an opposition to mainstream heterosexual space, the queer label given to films shown in the queer festivals may carry with it the same oppositional assumptions. In other words, because the heteronormative nature of society remains unchallenged, to mainstream distributors or exhibitors, a film that premieres at a queer festival may be labeled as a “queer film” and therefore be less likely to appeal to a wide audience. This could effectively ghettoize queer film, limiting distribution to a small “queer” niche market and contributing to queer artists’ lack of access to distribution, an issue that remains despite the proliferation of queer film festivals around the globe.

The lack of distribution channels for queer film limits the visibility of this work within mainstream society ensuring that the festivals remain the only outlet for

marginalized groups within queer communities, such as women, trans-people, and people of colour. As a result, queer representation in mainstream sources remains dictated by homonormative and heteronormative assumptions. Consequently, queer representation on television and in mainstream film remains primarily white, male, and middle class. The separation of queer space celebrated by the festivals therefore contributes to the continued invisibility of marginalized queer groups within the mainstream. For this reason, queer space also *contains* the visible presence of queers.

The creation of queer space follows in the footsteps of other attempts to limit the expression of “deviant” sexuality to private spaces. Kinsman has argued that, historically, this “public/private means of sexual regulation was a way of... allowing homosexuality to be tolerated in a limited and highly patrolled social space, while also preserving heterosexual hegemony.”⁴⁵ The queer space of the festivals works in the same way to earlier forms of sexual regulation. The queerness of a festival is tolerated as long as it doesn’t step outside the boundaries set by heterosexual culture. Greenhill noted this with regards to other queer cultural festivals. She writes that despite the greater visibility of queer people, “queer culture can be mainstream legitimate only in limited terms; it must remain in the realm of the aesthetic cultural [sic], and never intrude into ‘real life’ – economics, politics, and so forth.”⁴⁶ Queer film and queer film festivals are accepted as long as they do not represent any larger political agenda.

One can see evidence of this trend outside of queer film festivals. For example, Pride parades, which originally began as street protests, are now huge events that, like the festivals, are sponsored by corporations and supported by hegemonic institutions. These events attract millions of people and contribute millions of dollars to the economies of the

cities within which they take place.⁴⁷ They have also become more focused on entertainment than resistance. This year, Toronto Pride even made the decision to stifle direct political resistance by censoring groups fighting against Israeli Apartheid. The commercialization and mainstreaming of queer culture is therefore not limited to queer film festivals. Harry M. Benshoff writes that “grassroots activism as it was practiced during previous generations seems to have been replaced with more or less corporate strategies that attempt to effect progress for queers from within dominant institutions.”⁴⁸ Although this may work to win limited acceptance by the dominant culture, it does little to change what Michael Warner calls the “self-understanding of that culture.”⁴⁹ Instead, it encourages cultural production that accommodates to dominant ideology.

This is not to say that queer film festivals have no place. They still offer a much needed exhibition space for queer work and a forum for marginalized voices. However, as “queer” is solidified as a niche market and the festivals are increasingly commodified and separated from their roots in community-based political action, their usefulness as sites of resistance declines. This threatens to strengthen the homonormative and heteronormative ideology that the festivals were originally created to challenge.

Notes

¹ Gordon Brent Ingram, “Marginality and the Landscapes of Erotic Alien(n)ations,” in *Queers in Space: Communities/Public Places/Sites of Resistance*, ed. Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter (Seattle, Wash.: Bay Press, 1997), 27.

² Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 31.

³ Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire; Sexuality in Canada* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1986), 190.

⁴ I would like to clarify my use of the term “ethnic style collective.” An ethnic group is generally understood as a collective that has a shared national, linguistic, racial, or religious history. Although queer individuals and groups do not necessarily share

these characteristics, the construction of “queer community” as a unified and distinctive minority group with a unique cultural history and shared identity functions in a similar way to expressions of ethnic belonging. In this way, in this context, queer can be seen as an ethnic style collective, if not an actual ethnicity.

⁵ Inside Out Program Guide (2009): 4..

⁶ Out on Screen Program Guide (2009): 12.

⁷ Image+Nation Program Guide (2009): 13.

⁸ James Allen, "Imagining an Intercultural Nation: a Moment in Canadian Queer Cinema," in *In a Queer Country: Gay and Lesbian Studies in the Canadian Context*, ed. Terry Goldie (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2001), 139.

⁹ Joshua Gamson, “The Organizational Shaping of Collective Identity: The Case of Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals in New York,” in *A Queer World: the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Martin Duberman (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 538.

¹⁰ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Intersex, Queer, Questioning, Two-Spirited

¹¹ Gordon Brent Ingram, “Marginality and the Landscapes of Erotic Alien(n)ations,” in *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*, ed. Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter (Seattle, Wash.: Bay Press, 1997), 36.

¹² Zoë Newman, "The Bisexuality Wars: the Perils of Identity as Marginality," in *In a Queer Country: Gay and Lesbian Studies in the Canadian Context*, ed. Terry Goldie (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2001), 129.

¹³ Carl E. James, “Perspectives on Multiculturalism in Canada,” in *Possibilities and Limitations: Multicultural Policies and Programs in Canada*, ed. Carl E. James (Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood Pub., 2005), 14.

¹⁴ Clifford J. Jansen, “Canadian Multiculturalism,” in *Possibilities and Limitations: Multicultural Policies and Programs in Canada*, ed. Carl E. James (Halifax, N.S.: Fernwood Pub., 2005), 30.

¹⁵ Inside Out Program Guide (1991)

¹⁶ Inside Out Program Guide (2009)

¹⁷ Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, China, Cuba, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Guatemala, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Ireland/North Ireland, Iran, Israel, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Turkey, and the UK.

¹⁸ 76.53% of the films at Inside Out in 2009 were shot on video compared to 43.53% in 1991.

¹⁹ Gamson 1997, 528.

²⁰ Ferguson, Scott (executive director for Inside Out). Personal Interview. 1 January 2010.

²¹ Inside Out Program Guide (2008): 11.

²² Orientalism refers to "the construction of the idea of "the Orient" as mysterious, exotic, feminine, unchanging..." See Richard Paul Knowles, *Reading the Material Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 217.

²³ James Allen, "Imagining an Intercultural Nation: a Moment in Canadian Queer Cinema," in *In a Queer Country: Gay and Lesbian Studies in the Canadian Context*, ed. Terry Goldie (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2001), 139.

²⁴ Ferguson, Scott (executive director for Inside Out). Personal Interview. 1 January 2010.

²⁵ Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xi.

²⁶ Allen, 143.

²⁷ *Fairy Tales* takes place in Calgary, *Queer City Cinema* takes place in Regina, the *Reel Pride Film Festival* takes place in Winnipeg, and *Reelout* takes place in Kingston.

²⁸ Steven Seidman, "Identity Politics in a "Postmodern" Gay Culture: Some Historical and Conceptual Notes," in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 115.

²⁹ Seidman, 110.

³⁰ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 61.

³¹ Image+Nation Program Guide (2009): 13 (emphasis mine).

³² Inside Out Program Guide (2009): 7 (emphasis mine).

³³ Kinsman, 1986. 190.

³⁴ Seidman, 130.

³⁵ Newman, 122.

³⁶ Jean-Ulrick Désert, "Queer Space," in *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*, ed. Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter (Seattle, Wash.: Bay Press, 1997), 19.

³⁷ Désert, 19.

³⁸ Seidman, 129.

³⁹ Inside Out Program Guide (2008): 11.

⁴⁰ *Berlin International Film Festival*, http://www.berlinale.de/en/das_festival/preise_und_juries/preise_unabhaengigen_jurys/index.html

⁴¹ Kinsman, 1986. 38

⁴² The Canada Council for the Arts, "Annual Assistance to Media Arts Festivals," The Canada Council for the Arts,

<http://www.canadacouncil.ca/grants/mediaarts/iw127226368228437500.htm>.

⁴³ Pauline Greenhill, "Can You See the Difference?: Queering the Nation, Ethnicity, Festival, and Culture in Winnipeg," in *In a Queer Country: Gay and Lesbian Studies in the Canadian Context*, ed. Terry Goldie (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2001), 116.

⁴⁴ Image+Nation Program Guide (2008): 13.

⁴⁵ Kinsman, 1986. 165.

⁴⁶ Greenhill, 114.

⁴⁷ In the 2010 Pride Guide for Toronto Pride Week, organizers write that Pride Week contributed \$136,000,000 "to the local economy in 2009."

⁴⁸ Harry M. Benshoff, *Queer Images: a History of Gay and Lesbian Film in America*, ed. Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Pub., 2006), 268.

⁴⁹ Warner, 50.

Conclusion

Theorists have championed queer film festivals such as Image+Nation, Inside Out, and Out on Screen as spaces for the construction of queer community, the promotion of queer visibility, and sites of political resistance. What this thesis has tried to show is that these proclamations cannot be taken uncritically. The structures of the festivals and their relationship to hegemonic institutions such as government and big business affect the kind of space they create, who they make visible, and their potential to act as vehicles for queer resistance. By examining the festivals' program guides, interviewing festival organizers, analyzing the festivals' funding and sponsorship structures, and placing the festivals within their particular historical contexts, a more complicated picture of the festivals emerges.

When the festivals first began, they were volunteer run community festivals that were connected to lesbian, gay, and queer political organizing. They acted as an important site to formulate and promote a queer community and provided an important outlet for queer self-representation. They screened films that resisted dominant images of queer people: films that exposed contemporary and historical queer oppression and films that showed queer pleasure. However, these early festivals were not passive vehicles for queer film and video. They also framed themselves as activist spaces and encouraged the community they convened to become involved in queer political initiatives. They used the films they screened to educate and entertain as well as to direct queer anger towards these initiatives. By circulating petitions and holding screenings and discussions about local and national issues such as censorship, the festivals not only engaged in activist discourse, but were involved in more direct forms of queer political action. In this way,

the festivals worked as radical sites of queer resistance. They not only created a space for queer community but had a broad vision of how to use this community to promote positive political and social change.

However, what becomes apparent from an analysis of the festivals' program guides and funding structures is that since they started, the festivals have changed drastically. Firstly, governments, rather than local community organizations, are now their primary source of income and corporate sponsorship and advertising have been steadily increasing. Accordingly, they have become professional organizations and festival space is now more expensive and privatized. This begs the questions: what kind of space are the festivals creating? And does this have the same impact as it once did? Furthermore, as Richard Fung argued in the 1990s, the festivals have a double function because they present queer community to itself and to the dominant culture.¹ Queer film festivals are now some of the largest and most visible queer events, therefore, they continue to have this function; however, what kind of community are these events now making visible? And to whom? Secondly, the films the festivals promote have also changed. There has been a shift towards features and towards more traditional narratives. Therefore, contrary to B. Ruby Rich's comment that queer film festivals will "become repositories of that which mainstream popular culture does not intend to embrace,"² the festivals actually seem to be increasingly embracing mainstream films and filmmaking practices. The festivals may not show only dominant-society-approved work, but as they move towards more traditional narrative features and shorts, marginal film practices and groups may be pushed farther towards the margins. This is of great concern as the festivals continue to be one of the only spaces within which marginalized queer work is

presented. Finally, from an analysis of the festival program guides, it becomes clear that the festivals have shifted away from direct action activism. Rather than promoting direct queer resistance, the festivals now frame film as the most potent method of creating social and political change. Consequently, unlike their previous incarnations, the festivals' efforts to affect change revolve almost entirely around the ability to produce and consume film. The festivals today are therefore less sites of queer resistance than depoliticized sites of queer consumption.

The changed relationship the festivals have with queer political resistance limits the effectiveness of the queer space that they promote. Depoliticized queer space threatens to entrench queer as an ethnic style collective rather than a strategic category for queer resistance. Consequently, the separate and unique queer community that the festivals continue to promote may lead to further marginalization. This raises important questions about the ability of the festivals to promote social change.

My purpose here is not to denigrate the importance of queer film festivals to the artists whose films the festivals screen or the audiences that attend. Art, particularly film, is an important outlet for queer self-representation and the festivals continue to provide one of the only spaces for this work to be seen. My intention is also not to criticize the festivals or dictate what the festivals should or should not be. Instead, I attempt to complicate the utopian discourse that is promoted by them and often surrounds them. Despite the loosening of the festivals from community based political action, they continue to promote themselves as vehicles for social change. However, as the festivals become larger and gain higher profiles, they threaten to replace more direct forms of

activism with activism based on consumption. For this reason, we need to question their efficacy as spaces of queer resistance.

One could argue that the increasing inclusion of queer film and queer space into a capitalist free market can be seen as representative of positive change. One could even argue, as Deirdre McCloskey has, for the “power of the market for advancing the project of human freedom and, in particular, queer freedom.”³ Applying this view to the festivals, it could be argued that their newer more commercialized incarnations, because they are larger, more financially stable, and reach a larger audience, are actually more capable of promoting social change than grassroots organizing.

However, being accepted as a market does not necessarily translate into broad social change. So far, this acceptance has only embodied very limited gains for a small segment of the queer population. Although queers are being increasingly included in mainstream media such as film and television, the most visible are also the most affluent. Television shows such as *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, *Will and Grace*, and *Queer as Folk*, as well as films such as *Brokeback Mountain* and *Milk* all centre on middle to upper class gay, white, men. Even more recent television shows such as the *L Word* or *the Real L Word* that centre on lesbians continue to focus on affluent, and primarily white, individuals. Marginalized queer communities remain virtually invisible. Furthermore, the queer community that is promoted by commercial interests remains separate and distinct.

Stuart Hall, in his discussion of Black popular culture, writes that “what replaces invisibility is a kind of carefully regulated, segregated visibility.”⁴ The same can be said of the queer visibility denoted by acceptance into the market. Capitalist interests have

opened up separate commercial spaces for some while severely limiting others. For example, in the United States, commercial queer events have been steadily increasing; however, as Harry Benshoff has noted “for all the media popularity of lesbians and gays, recent years have also brought [us] more troublesome attention, including the odious Defense of Marriage Act, a rise in anti-gay hate crimes and a continuing wave of anti-gay referenda.”⁵ Even in Canada, where same-sex marriage is now legal, opposition to queer relationships continues to exist; most recently, when a Saskatchewan marriage commissioner refused to marry a same-sex couple because he felt that such a union was a breach of his religious freedoms.⁶ The increasing support of queer film festivals by hegemonic institutions such as government and big business is therefore not necessarily a sign of positive social change. Instead, it may be a way for hegemonic institutions to channel queer resistance into forms that are most beneficial to those institutions. Adam Barry writes that “while gay liberation theory presumed that the release of homosexuality would explode conventional sexual and familial arrangements, capitalist environments cultivated new institutions compatible with itself.”⁷ For this reason, it is important to remain critical of queer spaces and queer film in the same way we are critical of hegemonic spaces and dominant media.

A detailed analysis of the films that the festivals screen would add to this discussion. For the purpose of this thesis, I concentrated on the festivals’ structures and therefore was unable to provide an in depth analysis of how the content of the films they screen has changed over time. An analysis of this content would give important insights into how the commercialization of the festivals’ has affected their relationship to hegemonic discourse. For instance, do the festivals still present challenging content

despite their more commercial structures and their focus on narrative films? In addition, an analysis of festival audiences would also add to this discussion. Although I speculate on the types of audiences the more commercial festivals convene, it would be interesting to study this in more detail.

Queer film festivals remain important outlets for the exhibition of queer film; however, what this thesis has shown is that as they have grown more commercial, the potential for the festivals to act as radical sites of queer resistance is greatly reduced. The political change that can be won through the creation of separate and commercialized festivals is limited. Instead, the power to make real change lies not with the creation of elite, privatized queer space but rather, to quote Michael Warner, “by actively imagining a necessarily and desirably queer world.”⁸

Notes

¹ Richard Fung, “Programming the Public,” in “Queer Publicity: A Dossier on Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies* vol. 5, issue 1, (1999): 90.

² B. Ruby Rich, “The New Homosexual Film Festivals,” in “Queer Film and Video Festival Forum, Take Two: Critics Speak Out,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* vol. 12, issue 4, (2006): 621.

³ Deirdre McCloskey, “Queer Markets,” in *Media Q: Media/Queered: Visibility and its Discontents*, ed. Kevin G. Barnhurst (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 84.

⁴ Stuart Hall, “What is this “Black” in Black Popular Culture? (Rethinking Race),” *Social Justice* Vol. 20, No. 1-2 (Spring-Summer 1993), 107.

⁵ Harry M. Benshoff, *Queer Images: a History of Gay and Lesbian Film in America*, ed. Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Pub., 2006), 288.

⁶ Queen’s Bench for Saskatchewan, “Orville Nichols v. M.J. and Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission,” <http://www.canlii.org/en/sk/skqb/doc/2009/2009skqb299/2009skqb299.pdf> (accessed August 24, 2010).

⁷ Barry D. Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 106.

⁸ Michael Warner, "Introduction." In *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xvi.

Appendix
Interview Questions

- What is your position and what are your responsibilities?
- How long have you been with the festival?
- What do you see as the mandate of your festival?
- What do you see as the function of queer film festivals, both in Canada and around the world?
- With the increasing visibility of queer characters and queer films within mainstream culture, do you still see a place for Queer film festivals? Why?
- (Image&Nation only) What is the significance of the festival title Image+Nation? To what “nation” are you referring?
- Does the festival have any connection to alternative distribution channels for the queer work that you show?

Funding:

- What is the primary funding source for the festival?
- Can you describe your funding structure in detail? (sponsorship, donations, ticket sales...)
- How, if at all, has this structure changed over time?
- Do you feel that there is a relationship between funding/sponsorship and programming?
 - Do you feel that corporate support/government support puts limits on your programming choices?

Advertising:

- How do you evaluate companies who want advertising space either at the festival or in the festival program guide?

Programming:

- How are films chosen and who makes these decisions?
- What kinds of criteria do you use to determine which films will be shown?
- Do you make a conscious effort to ensure fair representation for different queer identities, particularly queer identities that have traditionally been marginalized?
 - What steps do you take to do this?
- Do you make a conscious effort to include different types of film/video (ex. Experimental, short film, animation, documentary, etc...)
- Do you make an effort to include a certain portion of Canadian work?
 - If you do, how do you strike a balance between international works and Canadian works?
- Do you use a rating system for films? How is this rating system derived?
- Have you ever had trouble with censorship with regards to the films you show?

- For example, have you had trouble at the border with queer work you want to screen?
- Have you had trouble with funding due to sexually explicit material

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Chapter 1 Filmography

- A Woman in my Platoon* (Marilyn Burgess, 1989)
Boys in the Band (William Friedkin, 1970)
Cruising (William Friedkin, 1980)
Ferdous (Shakila Maan, 1990)
The History of the World According to a Lesbian (Barbara Hammer, 1988)
The Hunger (Tony Scott, 1983)
In Black and White (Michael McGarry, 1979)
Just Because of Who We Are (Abigail Norman, Toni Dickerson, Robin Omata, Lydia Dean Pilcher, 1986)
Labor More than Once (Liz Merzky, 1983)
Khush (Pratibha Parmar, 1991)
Mad Dykes (Irene Rea, 1991)
Not Because Fidel Castro Says So (Graciela Sanchez, 1988)
Race d'Ep, un Siècle d'Images de l'Homosexualité (Lionel Soukaz, 1979)
Slam (Bruce la Bruce, 1992)
Still Sane (Brenda Ingratta & Lidia Patriasz, 1984)
Women Like Us (Suzanne Neild/Rosalind Pearson)

Chapter 2 Filmography

- Black Is... Black Ain't* (Marlon Riggs, 1995)
Common Threads (Robert Epstein/Jeffrey Friedman, 1989)
Current Flow(Gay Men Health Crisis, 1989)
Drool (Nancy Kissam, 2009)
Forbidden Love: the Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives (Lynne Fernie and Aerlyn Weissman, 1992)
Cheonhajangsa Madonna (Like a Virgin) (Lee Hae-yeong and Lee Hae-jun, 2006)
Hollywood, je t'aime (Jason Bushman, 2009)
I Can't Think Straight (Shamim Sarif, 2008)
The Island (Trevor Anderson, 2008)
The Mavis Davis Safe Sex Video (James Raymond, 1993)
Mulligans (Chip Hale, 2008)
No Bikini (Claudia Morgado Escanilla, 2007)
Patrik 1.5 (Ella Lemhagen, 2008)

Safe Sex: The Manual (Greg Lawson, 1993)

Urinal (John Greyson, 1988)

Conclusion Filmography

Brokeback Mountain (Ang Lee, 2005)

The L Word (television show, 2004-2009)

Milk (Gus Van Sant, 2008)

Queer as Folk (television show, 2000-2005)

Queer Eye for the Straight Guy (television show, 2003-2007)

The Real L Word (television show, 2010 – present)

Will and Grace (television show, 1998-2006)

Interviews

Ferguson, Scott (executive director for Inside Out). Personal Interview. 1 January 2010.

Setzer, Katherine (director of programming for Image+Nation). Personal Interview. 15 April 2010.

Uptold, Amber Dawn (director of programming for Out on Screen). Personal Interview. 20 May 2010.