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of Glasgow

**On Women's Film Festivals:  
Histories, Circuits, Feminisms, Futures**

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*A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

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## Abstract

When they began to flourish in the 1970s, women's film festivals offered pivotal opportunities for the exhibition of films by women filmmakers beyond the mainstream. Since then, these festivals have grown into significant platforms for the dissemination of and research into women's films and are actively shaping the global film festival landscape. Yet, despite this proliferation and the advance of the burgeoning field of Film Festival Studies, little research has been undertaken into the organisation and development of women's film festivals. This thesis presents the first lengthy study that explores women's film festivals in depth.

The key concern of this research project is to fill a conceptual gap in scholarship by mapping the field of Women's Film Festival Studies. It is situated at the intersection of Film Festival Studies, feminist theory and feminist film theory and draws on a multidisciplinary theoretical and methodological framework. The enquiry is based on Patricia White's understanding of cinefeminism, which is concerned with the exhibition and distribution of women's films as an activist practice. Departing from this theoretical starting point, this thesis examines women's film festivals from four perspectives: their history, their position on the film festival circuit, their relationship with feminist theories and their archiving practices.

At the heart of this analysis are case studies of four festivals: a study of the Dortmund | Cologne International Women's Film Festival, a comparative study of the London Feminist Film Festival and Underwire Festival in London, and a reconstructive study of the Women's Event at the 1972 Edinburgh International Film Festival. Drawing on findings about these festivals, this thesis proposes a conceptual framework for the study of women's film festivals that is informed by their history, impact, activism and documentation. The thesis also focusses on an underexplored aspect of the feminist film movement: exhibition. It lifts women's film festivals out of the generic framework of niche film festivals, and draws connections between Film Festival Studies, history and archive studies. Thus, the conceptual originality of the work is found in its contribution of new knowledge to the fields of feminist film theory and Film Festival Studies.

The research design is based on feminist research methodologies and is rooted in Standpoint Theory and a feminist epistemological understanding of knowledge production.

As such, another key contribution of the thesis is a methodological intervention, which is not only valuable within the academic context of the field, but can also be applied by festival organisers and practitioners.

This thesis attempts to reconstruct a comprehensive history of women's film festivals and embeds their development in the context of the general history of film festivals and the political progress of women's movements. Moreover, it draws parallels and highlights differences between the cultural and political contexts of individual festivals, and provides a survey of contemporary women's film festivals. With regard to women's film festivals on the global festival circuits, the thesis suggests how different purposes of these festivals inform how they are positioned in relation to one another. In terms of feminisms at women's film festivals, it analyses the way different feminist theories become manifest at these festivals and proposes that contrasting theoretical perspectives can be present simultaneously at the same festival. Finally, considering the state of archiving women's film festivals, it argues that renewed encounters with historical festivals through the archive can produce new knowledge about these events, which can inform contemporary and future practitioners.

The thesis takes the view that the future of women's film festivals lies in their past. Every aspect negotiated in this thesis draws a connection between contemporary and historical women's film festivals and considers how the past informs the present and the future. As such, the research serves as a practical application of what Kate Eichorn describes as the archival turn. It proposes an open dialogue between the historical progress of women's movements, which gave birth to the idea of women's film festivals, and contemporary feminist activism at festivals and festival research, by looking backwards and forwards at the same time.

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## Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Katharina Kamleitner

## List of Abbreviations

AFI	American Film Institute
ANT	Actor-Network-Theory
BEV	Birds' Eye View Film Festival
CIFF	Copenhagen International Film Festival
DoP	Director of Photography
EAI	Electronic Arts Intermix
EIFF	Edinburgh International Film Festival
EIFF18	2018 Edinburgh International Film Festival
EIFF72	1972 Edinburgh International Film Festival
EIFF79	1979 Edinburgh International Film Festival
FCR	La Festa del Cinema di Roma (Rome International Film Festival)
FFF	Dortmund   Cologne International Women's Film Festival
FFF12	2012 Dortmund   Cologne International Women's Film Festival
FFF17	2017 Dortmund   Cologne International Women's Film Festival
FFRN	Film Festival Research Network
FIAPF	International Federation of Film Producers Association
FIFF	Festival International de Films de Femmes de Créteil et du Val de Marne
FFTS	Frauen Film Tage Schweiz (Women Film Days Switzerland)

GWL	Glasgow Women's Library
IWFFN	International Women's Film Festival Network
LFFF	London Feminist Film Festival
MLF	Mouvement de Libération des Femmes
NLS	National Library of Scotland
NRW	North Rhine-Westphalia
TIFF	Toronto International Film Festival
TIFF13	2013 Toronto International Film Festival
UF	Underwire Festival
WLM	Women's Liberation Movement

## Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to map the field of Women's Film Festival Studies, situated at the intersection of Film Festival Studies, feminist theory and feminist film theory. Despite the worldwide proliferation of women's film festivals since the 1970s and particularly in recent years, the existing research concerned with this type of festival is scarce. While women's film festivals have been regarded as a kind of specialised film festival, they have not been understood as a festival genre with its own specific history, development and dynamics (FFRN, 2017). This research project offers an intervention to change this. It seeks to produce knowledge about women's film festivals as a category and to establish characteristics that unite them as a festival genre.

As such, this enquiry is situated in a burgeoning field of research that concerns itself with specialised or niche film festivals. Studies produced in this area have presented theoretical and methodological interventions for festival research into genres such as queer film festivals, human rights film festivals and documentary film festivals, always aiming to apply frameworks and lenses rooted in the context of these festivals' origins and communities (Loist, 2015; Richards, 2016; Tascón, 2015; Vallejo, and Winton, 2019a; 2019b). This thesis takes inspiration from this trend and engages with women's film festivals through the lens of feminist history, theory and methodology.

This research was inspired by the limited number of female-directed films that are exhibited at cinemas in every city I have ever lived in, and at every festival I have ever attended. From 2013 to 2014, when I studied film journalism at the University of Glasgow, I had the opportunity to attend the following four major local and international film festivals with a press pass and to review films for publications and my own portfolio: Glasgow Film Festival, Edinburgh International Film Festival, Berlin International Film Festival and Cannes Film Festival. While each of these festivals included varying numbers of films by women in their programme, I noticed a dominant trend to invite women directors to present their films in side strands rather than the prestigious competitions or special gala screenings.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> At the Cannes Film Festival 2014, for example, only two out of eighteen films in Competition, but five out of nineteen films in the Un Certain Regard strand were directed by women (Ivan, 2014). In 2018, the

At the same time, I became interested in online film exhibition and the alternative distribution platforms women were utilising considering their exclusion from prestigious film festivals. When I first conceptualised the scope of this thesis, I focused on these opportunities, and wanted to explore how women filmmakers used online distribution channels in order to fight their marginalisation. I was particularly interested in online film festivals, which seemed to connect the advantages of online film exhibition with the cultural capital and heightened attention of film festivals. Women's film festivals and other feminist exhibition initiatives would have been considered in a chapter of the intended thesis outline.

Yet, the more I read about women's participation in film festivals and these specialised women's film festivals, my interest in these events became pertinent. It was Kay Armatage's essay that particularly sparked my enthusiasm to delve deeper into the study of women's film festivals (2009a). From the literature, I knew that women's film festivals were and continue to be a source of integral opportunities for women filmmakers to exhibit their work in a context that international film festivals often cannot provide. Yet, the lack of widely available sources as discussed by Armatage, resulted in a lack of studies examining women's film festivals beyond the occasional case study.

I was curious about the purpose of women's film festivals. I wondered about their history and if could it be reconstructed. I asked myself how women's film festivals related to mainstream film festivals on the circuit and to the wider film industry; what appropriate research methodologies might look like; and what role women's film festivals played within the feminist (film) movement.

Thus, instead of discussing women's film festivals as just one potential distribution channel for women filmmakers, I decided to focus entirely on these events and explore how they relate to film history, the film industry and the feminist movement. Rather than providing just one exemplary case study of a women's film festival as initially planned, I chose to explore four different women's film festivals in depth. The process of selecting these case studies was grounded in crucial expert interviews I conducted at the beginning of the second year of this research. These interviews with women, who had been working

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numbers rose to three out of nineteen Competition films and six out of thirteen in the Un Certain Regard selection (Erbland, 2018).

with or researching women's film festivals in the past, helped me to identify trends and pressing issues in the discourse around women's film festivals and informed the research questions I formulated for this thesis. The aim of this thesis is not to investigate how concepts developed through research at international film festivals, such as Peranson's two models of film festivals (2008) or Harbord's understanding of festivals as sites intertwining art with commerce (2002), could be applied to women's film festivals; instead, I developed research questions based on the lived experiences of people who had been involved with these festivals throughout their lives.

## The Beginnings of Women's Film Festivals

The first women's film festivals were established in North America and Europe in the early 1970s. Among these pioneering events were festivals in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, Toronto, Berlin, Paris and Edinburgh. B. Ruby Rich suggests that the phenomenon of women's film festivals was a logical consequence of the revolutionary ideologies of the 1960s. She writes that:

For a younger generation just emerging from a sixties counter-cultural framework, women's film festivals were experimental laboratories, producing a new feminist cinematic consciousness while simultaneously putting into practice the political commitment behind the activity. (Rich, 1998, p. 31)

In the 1970s, these festivals were often the only spaces where many women could showcase their work and where they could research and write women's film history (Rich, 1998). Rich places the festivals within the wider political feminist movement, the women's liberation movement, which took root in the late 1960s on university and college campuses, in neighbourhood groups and community centres, through magazines, newsletters and awareness-raising events across North America and Europe. Those first women's film festivals were organised independently from each other and were each embedded in their specific local feminist, political, social and cultural context. However, they also shared certain organisational structures, such as inclusive programmes with a focus on retrospectives and local talent, a social and educational agenda with open forum discussions and practical skills workshops for women who wanted to make films themselves, and ideological and intellectual influences such as the women's movements. They all relied heavily upon voluntary work, faced a lack of resources and encountered difficulties in securing consistent financial support. Often, they used non-cinema screening



venues like university campuses, community centres or art spaces and frequently, they were one-off events (Rich, 1998; Armatage, 2009a).

At the time of writing, there are over 130 women's film festivals around the World in North and South America, Europe, Asia, Australia and Africa.<sup>2</sup> Sixty-six of these festivals are members of the International Women's Film Festival Network (IWFFN), which strives to connect and support women's voices in the film industry (International Women's Film Festival Network, 2018b). The network is open to any independent film festival that:

has staged at least one festival within the last three years and whose programs are dedicated to screening films by or about women and girls. (International Women's Film Festival Network, 2018b)

While there are a number of academic case studies of specific historical and contemporary women's film festivals, there is no in-depth research on their origins, their development or their legacies. Kay Armatage connects this absence of research with the lack of archival material documenting these festivals and the insignificance attributed to them by the press, the industry and even the event organisers at the time (2009a, p. 83).

Embedded at the intersection of Film Festival Studies, feminist theory and feminist film theory, this thesis will draw on existing theories and methodologies from these fields. Since the establishment of the earliest European film festivals in Venice (1932), Cannes (1946) and Berlin (1951), they have attracted the attention of journalists and film critics, but also scholars from various disciplines such as Film Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science, Marketing, and Cultural Policy.<sup>3</sup> While film festivals have been a subject of studies for much longer, Film Festival Studies as an academic research area has been developing since the 2000s and was formally established with the founding of the Film Festival Research Network (FFRN) in 2008 by Marijke de Valck and Skadi Loist. Considering its background, Film Festival Studies is based on multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks. Research in the field addresses issues such as the history of film festivals, their role within national and transnational film industries, and their intersections with

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<sup>2</sup> A list of active women's film festivals can be found in Appendix A.

<sup>3</sup> For further reading on multidisciplinary approaches to Film Festival Studies, see: Bazin, 1955; Dayan, 2002; de Valck, 2007, 2008; de Valck et al, 2016; Dickson, 2018; Elsaesser, 2005; Harbord, 2002; Iordanova, 2009; Nichols, 1994a, 1994b, 1994c; Peranson, 2008; Porton, 2009; Strandgaard Pedersen and Mazza, 2011; Stringer, 2001; Turan, 2002; Vallejo and Peirano, 2017.

identity and community building. This rich framework also informs the work in this thesis, especially in the way it draws from multiple disciplines in its methodology. Particularly the study of specialised film festivals has grown with the development of the research area. This thesis is part of this movement to broaden the field and produce research about niche film festivals grounded in their specific contexts and drawing on related theoretical and methodological concepts. Feminist film theory is a comprehensive field of research that has developed since the 1970s and extended its enquiries toward women's filmmaking practices, the representation of women on and off screen and the reception of films by female audiences among others. Feminist research methodologies and approaches developed in this field are an invaluable source for the research design of this study. Among these approaches in feminist film theory, one stands out as it expands the field by focussing on the exhibition of female-directed films: cinefeminism. It constitutes a particularly useful framework because it describes the intersection of the fields where this research project is situated, women's film festivals as practical embodiments of feminist film theory.

## **Cinefeminism as a Framework**

The Western feminist film movement began to develop in North America and Western Europe in the late 1960s and early 1970s and took inspiration from the political achievements of the women's liberation movement. At that time, film had been quickly established as the 'public face of feminism' (Rich, 1998, p. 30), because as a mass medium it had the potential to reach many people and expose a mainstream audience to feminist issues. Films could provide access to social, political or cultural issues, which were often complex, and this could engage the public in a political discourse (Iordanova, 2012). Additionally, with the advancements of lightweight video technologies in the 1960s and 1970s, barriers limiting access to filmmaking had decreased significantly. Historically, women had been excluded from film schools and industry unions, such as the *L'Institut des hautes études cinématographiques* in France (Duverger, 2013) or North American trade unions for filmmakers (Milano, 1976). As film and video material became more easily accessible, more women gained access to low-budget film production. While working with photochemical film required financial resources to pay for material as well as technical expertise, women who were untrained as filmmakers and worked independently without the financial support of a production company, were now able to create their own films more easily. Particularly women making experimental and documentary films benefitted

from this greater access to film production. Filmmakers and video artists, such as Shigeo Kubota, Joyce Wieland, Barbara Hammer, Martha Rosler, Claudia Alemann and Marguerite Duras began to shoot films in this period, and many women's film and video collectives, such as the London Women's Film Group, Tufnell Women's Liberation Workshop, the Women's Video Collective or Queer Blue Light Video produced documentaries that reflected their circumstances. Many of these filmmakers were able to exhibit their films at the newly established women's film festivals. The accessibility of low-cost video technology meant that more women would create work that represented themselves and other women like them on screen (Barlow, 2003). Documentary filmmaking, in particular, became a political tool, an 'instrument of social change', which women could utilise to document their own gendered experiences (Warren, 2008). However, women in this period also brought forward narrative feature films, which challenged established male-coded notions of storytelling and aesthetics, such as Jane Arden's *The Other Side of the Underneath* (1972) or Mai Zetterling's *The Girls* (*Flickorna*, 1968). Many of these films raised awareness of women's issues and allowed women to not only share their own stories, but also see themselves reflected in the narratives (Aufderheide & Zimmerman, 2004). Beyond making films, the feminist film movement was also concerned with reflecting on filmmaking practices and women's representation on and off screen. There are countless publications dedicated to women filmmakers, feminist filmmaking and the analysis of on-screen representation of women in male- and female-directed films from Hollywood and beyond.<sup>4</sup> These discussions have contributed to the writing of Western women's history, the establishment of feminist film theory and the dissemination of women's narratives by exposing wider audiences to their stories and viewpoints (Walter, 2010). The feminist film movement was not only engaged with filmmaking and Film Theory, but also with the exhibition and reception of films by women and films touching on feminist issues. Practices related to the curation, exhibition and distribution of feminist films, the acts of disseminating them and bringing them onto cinema screens, is also referred to as cinefeminism (Rich, 1998; White, 2006). It is this aspect of the feminist film movement that is most relevant within the scope of this thesis.

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<sup>4</sup> For further reading on women filmmakers, feminist filmmaking and on-screen representation of women, see: Bobo, 1995; Chatterji, 1998; Columpar & Mayer, 2009; Cui, 2003; Dasgupta, 1986; Ellerson, 2000; Jain and Rai, 2002; Johnston, 1973; Kaplan, 1983; Kaplan, 2000; Kay & Peary, 1977; Keeling, 2007; Kuhn, 1982; Marubbio, 2006; Mulvey, 1975; Nair and Gutiérrez-Albila, 2013; Oshana, 1985; Rich, 1998; Ukadike, 1994; Wang, 2011; White, 2006; White, 2015.

Cinefeminism is concerned with the exhibition and distribution of women's films. Rich uses this term to describe a form of feminist activism that predates the establishment of academic feminist film theory (1998). She suggests that the exploration of women's films in the early 1970s would have taken place at women's film festivals, in regular cinema spaces or in improvised screening environments (i.e. community centres). They were sites of research into women's contributions to film history. According to Rich, the scholarly engagement with women's film and women in film evolved out of the research done at these festivals. Laura Mulvey, for example, who spearheaded feminist film theory with her seminal essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), was also one of the co-curators of the Women's Event at the Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972. It was the first event of this kind in the United Kingdom and Mulvey's research at the British Film Institute archive contributed to the historical variety of women's film programmed at the festival. Mulvey inhabited two essential roles within the feminist film movement. She was a practitioner and a theorist. She was a cinefeminist according to Rich's definition of the term because her research as festival organiser pre-empted her work as film theorist. However, she was also a cinefeminist according to another definition, given by Patricia White (2006).

White describes cinefeminism of the 1970s as inhabiting 'concrete, material practices and spaces' (2006, p. 146); it is composed of women's film festivals, publications, distribution companies and other activist organisations who provided women's films with contextualised exhibition and reception. Cinefeminism is what the feminist film movement practised inside the physical space of the cinema. Its primary focus was not necessarily to analyse the production context or the contents of films, but rather to showcase and disseminate women's films to public audiences. As such, cinefeminism is defined as the activist practice of making women's films accessible to the public, primarily through exhibition, distribution and curation. These methods were supplemented by public discourse, film criticism and scholarly research, but the focus remained on engaging audiences with women's films in regular or improvised cinema spaces and screening environments.

According to Esther Quetting, the cinema functions as a site for emancipation and a safe space for the feminist film movement (2007). In her overview of Swiss cinefeminism during the 1980s, Quetting argues that programming feminist films at local cinemas had three effects. Firstly, it exposed mainstream audiences to feminist discourses and had a

positive influence on the public image of the women's liberation movement in Switzerland. Secondly, it helped women programmers to establish themselves in the male-dominated field of film curation and cinema programming. Finally, the curation of women's films contributed to the differentiation of feminist films from the male aesthetic and male-dominated auteur theory (2007).

Unlike Rich, White and Quetting do not understand cinefeminism as a pre-stage to formalised academic theory, but rather a separate form of activism that added another layer to the intellectual engagement with women's filmmaking practices. This thesis builds on this understanding of cinefeminism and focuses on women's film festivals as cinefeminist activities.

Wherever they were established, women's film series and festivals played a significant role within the feminist film movement. They were some of the few places for women filmmakers to exhibit their work in a relevant exhibition and reception context and sometimes pre-dated the formal establishment of Film Studies as an academic field in the respective geographical contexts – for example in Switzerland (Quetting, 2007). Using this concept of cinefeminism as a framework for the thesis allows me to locate this study where film festivals and feminist activism overlap.

As such, this thesis constitutes a conceptual intervention into Film Festival Studies and feminist film theory. This research represents the first time that available sources on historical women's film festivals have been synthesized in order to construct and contextualise the history and development of this festival genre. It also provides a quantitative overview of currently active women's film festivals to illustrate the diversity of the genre and uses three contemporary and one historical festivals as exemplary case studies. The thesis discusses the varying roles women's film festivals play in relation to international film industries and film festival circuits and analyses how festivals can navigate these environments. It argues that all women's film festivals are underpinned by feminist theories and demonstrates the variety of feminist approaches to addressing these considerations. The research reconstructs the history of one of the earliest women's film festivals and based on that illustrates the process of producing knowledge about this event. It also argues that engaging with their history has an impact on the present and future of women's film festivals and offers a speculative approach to analyse the impact this

historical research has had on the author's own practice as producer of a feminist film festival.

## Definitions

### What is a Film Festival?

The International Federation of Film Producers Association (FIAPF), which is an organisation in charge of regulating international film festivals, defines film festivals in the following way:

By international film festival, FIAPF understands an event:

- bringing together films of the world, many of which originate from countries other than the organising country, that are being screened in front of audiences including a significant number of accredited international industry, press and media representatives as well as general public,
- taking place for a limited duration of time, once a year or every second year, in a prior defined city. (Fiapf.org [no date])

Definitions of film festivals in academic writing have drawn on a variety of contexts and emphasise a plethora of aspects of film festivals. Among these characteristics are the festival as a tastemaker and cultural gatekeeper (de Valck, 2008); the festival as a temporal event of short duration (de Valck, 2007; Harbord, 2002); the festival as annually or biannually recurring event (Iordanova 2009); the festival circuit as an 'alternative distribution network' in opposition to Hollywood (Iordanova, 2009, p. 22); the festival as 'global [phenomenon]' balancing international power relations and connecting cultural events (Wong, 2011, p. 4); the festival as marketplace and gathering place for the industry (Strandgaard Pedersen and Mazza, 2011); the festival as celebration and defence of cinema as art form (Koehler, 2009); the festival as exhibition space for otherwise unavailable films (Nichols, 1994b); the festival as communal meeting place for filmmakers, audiences and professionals (Peranson, 2008); the festival as cultural contact zone to engage with foreign national cinemas (Rhyne, 2009); the festival as public stage of political activism and debate (Archibald and Miller, 2011), among others.

Not each film festival fulfils each of these aspects and thus, there is not one single, exact definition of that constitutes a film festival. However, in the context of this thesis Peranson's distinction between business and audience festivals is particularly useful (2008). According to Peranson, there are two main forms of festivals, business and audience festivals, and all film festivals can be located on a spectrum between these two poles. For Peranson, business festivals are mostly international film festivals with an industry-oriented agenda. They are characterised by hierarchical programming, competitions and award ceremonies, the implementation of production and funding initiatives and the presentation of a marketplace among others. In opposition to this type of festival stands the audience festival, which can also be considered a special interest festival. These festivals are usually smaller in terms of audience and programme volume and often devoted to a genre or a social cause, such as documentary films or human rights, which attracts a certain community of filmmakers or audience members to their screenings.

The women's film festivals considered in this thesis mostly show characteristics of this second festival type, although they also carry elements of business festivals to varying degrees. Using such a fluid definition allows me to position individual women's film festivals on a spectrum between categories, which will be a recurring theme throughout Chapters 4 and 5 in this thesis.

## **What is a Women's Film Festival?**

Women's film festivals do not constitute a homogenous category of film festivals that all follow the same definition and structure. On the contrary, each women's film festival uses its own definition, which informs their film selection, the composition of their audience and their self-representation. Overall, they screen films by, about or for women, but these attributes are not set in stone. The majority of women's film festivals require films to be directed by women and prioritise films that feature female protagonists. However, many festivals, such as Athena Film Festival in New York, International Images Film Festival for Women in Zimbabwe or the Vancouver Women in Film Festival in Canada will showcase films directed by men as long as a certain number of creative key positions are held by women. These roles may include writer, cinematographer, editor or lead performance. Festivals that describe themselves as feminist in particular, such as the London Feminist Film Festival or the Davis Feminist Film Festival in California, are primarily concerned with the contents of films and prioritise stories about feminist issues

or films that challenge traditional male-coded narratives or aesthetics. Festivals that position themselves as international festivals, such as the St John's International Women's Film Festival in Canada or the Dortmund | Cologne International Women's Film Festival in Germany emphasise women as directors and whether they tell the stories of female or male characters is secondary.

Another defining feature of women's film festivals is their nature as politically-situated events. The first women's film festivals were established in North America and Europe embedded in local women's movements and in response to questions of representation, self-determination and equality. They served a variety of purposes from providing opportunities for women working in the film industry to giving attending women the chance to see themselves represented on screen and use these images as springboards for personal and political action.<sup>5</sup> Women's film festivals were initiatives launched by grassroots activists, aiming to affect change from the bottom up. Their origins differ significantly from the top-down agenda of many international film festivals, such as Cannes, Berlin or Venice, which serve specific geopolitical and economic purposes. As such, the definition of women's film festivals is tied to a significant revolutionary moment in time. Much like, the development of African film festivals can be related to post-colonialist movements across the continent or early South American film festivals must be understood in the context of the revolutionary nature of Third Cinema, women's film festivals were born out of the political women's movement. Thus, women's film festivals are not only platforms for films directed by and telling the stories of women, they are also significant political events.

In this thesis, I use the widest definition of women's film festivals possible and regard as such any festival that considers itself a women's film festival and uses this or a related term, such as feminist film festival, in its self-representation. When speaking about 'women' in this thesis, I include all people who identify as women (trans-inclusive).

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<sup>5</sup> The purposes of women's film festivals will be further explored in Chapter 3.



## The Feminisms of this Thesis

Many feminist scholars have emphasised the importance of acknowledging the multiplicity of feminist thought and the significance of intersectional feminist approaches (Butler, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989; Daniels, 2009; Gaines, 1988; Hill Collins, 1991; Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016; hooks, 1981). Intersectional feminism recognises and acknowledges that sexism is not the only source of oppression for women. Moreover, discrimination is a multi-layered phenomenon and can also be based on race, class, ability, age, religion and sexual orientation among others. The term ‘intersectional feminism’ was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her 1989 essay on black women and antidiscrimination laws and describes that women experience oppression in its various forms in varying degrees of intensity (Crenshaw, 1989). Advancing this idea, journalist Ava Vidal states that:

The main thing “intersectionality” is trying to do [...] is to point out that feminism which is overly white, middle class, cis-gendered and able-bodied represents just one type of view – and doesn't reflect on the experiences of all the multi-layered facets in life that women of all backgrounds face. (Vidal, 2014)

It is thus crucial to acknowledge that, while some white, middle class, cis-gendered and able-bodied women do not experience gender-based oppression, women with other identities are still being discriminated against based on their gender, race or sexual orientation and so on. In the context of this research project, this means that some women directors can choose to avoid women’s film festivals, while for others they are still the only platforms. Some require dedicated spaces, in which they can network, showcase and discuss issues related to their identities as women filmmakers. In the 1970s, women’s film festivals were part of a politically engaged women’s movement, but at the time of writing some women filmmakers consider them a “ghetto” and feel pigeonholed by drawing attention to their gender. Even though, women’s film festivals aim to help women filmmakers in gaining recognition, some argue that they could potentially achieve the exact opposite effect (Loist, 2012; Quetting, 2007b; Rich, 1998; White, 2006; Walter, 2010). In an interview with *DGA Quarterly*, filmmaker Lake Bell, who directed *In a World...* (2013), notes that, ‘Women want to be recognized for their talent and their merits, not their gender’ (Bell quoted in Dawes, 2014). The debate revolves around the question, whether emphasising the gender of a filmmaker pushes them further into marginalisation or not. Rich proposes that the root of this discussion lies in the increase of opportunities for women filmmakers (1998). Women’s film festival are no longer the only platforms for

films directed by women; on the contrary, Rich argues, contemporary women filmmakers can choose from a plethora of exhibition platforms. Loist suggests that the issue is linked to the increasing cultural capital attached to invitations to A-list film festivals (2012). She argues that '[women] filmmakers, who first want to be seen as filmmakers and only secondly as women, will most likely opt for the larger festival run in hopes for wider attention' (2012). Festivals that emphasise gender are therefore often perceived as limiting potential audiences and press coverage of a director's work. Other filmmakers though, such as Marielle Heller, director of *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* (2015), emphasise the persistent lack of opportunities for women directors. She suggests that:

I've seen over and over, women who make incredible first features. [...] And then you hear the word on the street, which is: Well, I want to see what she does next, and then maybe I'll give her an opportunity. [...] There's this feeding frenzy when a man makes a good first feature. Like, let's scoop him up! We have to give him some giant franchise. And there's this sense with women that you have to prove yourself so many times over before that same feeling happens. (Heller quoted in Felsenthal, 2016)

This indicates that gender inequalities in the film industry today might be less overt than in the 1970s, but they are still there. According to the Screen Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Survey conducted by Creative Scotland 39% of women working in film and TV in Scotland cited their gender as a significant barrier (2016). The 2018 Celluloid Ceiling study by the Center for the Study of Women in Television in Film at San Diego State University reports that women comprise only 8% of directors on the top 250 domestic grossing films in the US (Lauzen, 2019). A study surveying women's participation in the film industries of seven European nations found that while 44% of film school graduates are female, only 24% of working directors are women. Furthermore, films directed by women receive only 16% of funding resources (European Women's Audiovisual Network, 2016). There are still less opportunities for women in the industry than for men and Cornelia Walter argues that women's film festivals are thus far from obsolete (Walter, 2012). As such, this thesis acknowledges that women's film festivals can fulfil different purposes for women filmmakers with overlapping social identities, such as gender, race, class, age, sexuality or ability, or in different geographical and cultural contexts.

Furthermore, this work acknowledges that feminism is not a homogenous category, but rather characterised by the simultaneous existence of multiple definitions and ways to act out or implement feminist ideologies. Informed by an individual's multi-faceted social identities, each person may define feminism in their own way. As such, feminism as a

singular category does not exist. Instead, I choose to speak about *feminisms*, always emphasising the co-existing multiplicity of feminist thought.

## Research Questions

The central concern of this thesis is to produce knowledge about women's film festivals and thus establish them as a festival genre. This is achieved through an in-depth engagement with women's film festivals from four angles: their history, their position on the film festival circuit, their relationship with feminist theories and their archiving potential. In order to negotiate such a broad line of enquiry, it is useful to split up the central research questions of this thesis in four main themes:

*Regarding the history of women's film festivals:*

- When and where did women's film festivals develop and what characterised them?
- How can women's film festivals be situated within film festival history and within the history of the political women's movement in North America and in Western Europe?
- What is the current state of women's film festivals?

*Regarding their position on the film festival circuit:*

- What purposes do women's film festivals fulfil for different participants and in contrast to international film festivals?
- How do women's film festivals relate to other film festivals, such as international film festivals competing for the same films or national film festivals competing for the same audiences?

*Regarding women's film festivals as sites of feminisms:*

- Which feminist theories influence the discourses at contemporary women's film festivals?
- How does the multiplicity of feminisms play out at contemporary women's film festivals?
- How do contemporary and historical women's film festivals compare with regards to their feminist approaches?

*Regarding the archiving of women's film festivals:*

- How have women's film festivals been documented and archived, and why is it important to investigate these archives?
- What can be achieved from engaging with their archives and what can contemporary archive practitioners learn from this encounter?

These research questions were developed on the basis of six interviews conducted with experts in the field of women's film festivals and the feminist film movement. The questions posed in these interviews were deliberately broad and open-ended to give each interviewee the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in the field and draw attention to issues they thought were particularly significant.<sup>6</sup>

The open interviews yielded a large quantity of data, particularly due to the length of some of these conversations (up to 90 minutes). Analysing and synthesising the information gathered in the interviews took a significant amount of time and generated many potential topics for academic enquiry. However, it also allowed me to map the field in which to embed my study according to the lived experiences of women organising and researching women's film festivals. This enabled me to continue the trend of other niche film festival studies to engage frameworks that are rooted in the context of the festival category at hand. In my analysis of the interview data, I focussed on shared concerns among the interviewees to refine the areas of interest to this study and these issues subsequently informed the formulation of the research questions.

I elaborate on the expert interviews and their purpose as starting points in my reflections on my feminist research methodology in Chapter 2.

## Structure of the Thesis

The thesis includes six chapters and is structured to encompass three case studies of four festivals: Dortmund | Cologne International Women's Film Festival (FFF), London Feminist Film Festival (LFFF), Underwire Festival (UF) and the Women's Event at the 1972 Edinburgh International Film Festival (EIFF72). The study covers four broad aspects of women's film festivals research from a historical overview and contextualisation of their position on the film festival circuit on the basis of FFF, their relationship with feminisms comparing LFFF and UF, and their documentation in the archive considering particularly EIFF72. Within each case study the festivals are situated at the centre and a theoretical framework provides the basis for a focussed analysis of particular aspects of the events.

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<sup>6</sup> A list of exemplary questions used for these interviews can be found in Appendix C.

To provide a more detailed context for this research project, Chapter 1 is a review of the current literature that has informed this study. It situates my enquiries into women's film festivals within the studies of film festivals and feminist film theory. The chapter examines approaches in Film Festival Studies and traces the field's interdisciplinary influences. It also discusses which aspects of feminist film culture have been prioritised in feminist film theory and locates this research project within this context. Finally, it proposes that in order to develop a deeper understanding of women's film festivals, it is necessary to move beyond the single case study approach. I suggest that research must make use of a more comprehensive and comparative research design to studying the history, positioning, feminisms and documentation of women's film festivals, which is what this thesis represents.

Chapter 2 outlines the methodology and research design applied in this project and discusses how the study came to be. It provides the philosophical considerations that informed the methodological choices in this project, which are rooted in feminist epistemology and standpoint theory. It justifies the mixed-method approach chosen for this work and highlights the limitations and constraints resulting from these choices. This chapter also outlines the process of selecting case studies and introduces key interview partners whose insights contributed significantly to the research design of this work.

Chapter 3 traces the development of women's film festivals from the political women's movements in North America and Europe in the late 1960s to the establishment of the first festivals throughout the 1970s. Drawing on existing festival research about some of the earliest women's film festivals in the US, Canada, the UK, Germany and France, it situates their growth alongside the progress of the political women's movements in these countries as well as significant changes in the established film festival landscape. It highlights the significant local contexts in which these festivals were situated, but also emphasises similarities and cross-pollination between them.

Chapter 4 discusses the purposes of women's film festivals and their position on the wider film festival circuit. Using FFF as an example, it illustrates that the festival is embedded in different national, international and niche contexts. It asks which purposes women's film festivals fulfil for different participants and stakeholders. Informed by this, the chapter also examines how the festival relates to other festivals that compete for the same films or audiences.

Chapter 5 turns to the conceptual feminist roots of women's film festivals and examines the relationship between women's film festivals and different feminist theories and philosophies. Drawing on a comparative case study of LFFF and UF, it proposes a categorisation of feminist theories that is neither chronological (i.e. waves) nor strictly ideological. This chapter asks which feminist theories influence contemporary women's film festivals and how intersectional feminism and the multiplicity of feminist thought plays out at these events.

Chapter 6 advances Chapter 3's exploration of the history of women's film festivals and explores how women's film festivals can be documented and archived for the future. It provides an overview of the documentation of the Women's Event at EIFF72 and outlines my experience of encountering this archive. Drawing on a theoretical framework that is informed by feminist pedagogy and history, this chapter then turns away from the past towards the present and future. Here, I draw on my own experience as festival organiser and archivist. I examine what contemporary feminist activists and archivists can learn from their engagement with archives and how current events can be documented for the future.

The conclusion to this research summarises the thesis findings and indicates where the study fits within the contemporary field of Film Festival Studies and feminist film theory. It addresses the key issues and themes that have emerged throughout the thesis and outlines how these might be developed further.

# 1 Literature Review

This chapter positions the thesis in relation to the current body of relevant literature and situates my research questions at the intersection of the fields of Film Festival Studies, feminist theory and feminist film theory. It is divided into three parts, providing an overview of the main areas of research that inform this study: Film Festival Studies, feminist film theory and the study of women's film festivals.

Film Festival Studies is a burgeoning multidisciplinary field of research, which draws upon a multitude of theoretical frameworks. Before film festivals became an object of study for academic researchers, they were already examined and theorised from a journalistic point of view by critics (Bazin, 1955; Turan, 2002). Academic studies of film festivals emerged from disciplines such as Anthropology, Sociology, Film Studies, History, Tourism Studies, Economics and Globalisation Studies from the 1990s onwards, applying diverse theoretical and methodological frameworks (Dayan, 2000; Elsaesser, 2005; Harbord, 2002; Nichols, 1994abc). These approaches formed the multidisciplinary context from which the prolific research area of Film Festival Studies emerged since the mid- to late-2000s. This literature review will address the issues that this field is concerned with and how the study areas have expanded in recent years. In addition, it will outline how this study is related to these developments and identify gaps in the field, which this thesis will fill.

Initially, studies of film festivals were primarily concerned with understanding the flow of films, people and cultural capital between different mainstream film festivals, as well as the history of European international film festivals in particular (de Valck, 2007; Elsaesser, 2005; Iordanova, 2009; Stringer, 2001). However, since the establishment of the Film Festival Research Network (FFRN) there has been an increased number of studies concerned with specialised film festivals, exploring different circuits of thematically related festivals, such as activist and human rights film festivals (Torchin, 2012, 2015; Tascón, 2015; Tascón & Wils, 2017), LGBTQ+ film festivals (Zielinski, 2012ab; Loist, 2014; Dawson and Loist, 2018; Richards, 2016) documentary film festivals (Vallejo, 2014, Vallejo and Winton, 2019a, 2019b [forthcoming]), or national film festival circuits, such as Australian (Stevens, 2016), African (Dovey, 2015) and Chinese film festivals (Berry and Robinson, 2017). This thesis is embedded in this trend to examine niche film festivals and festival circuits beyond the dominant context of international film festivals in Europe and

North America. These studies bring different conceptual and theoretical frameworks to the field, which are deeply rooted in the specificity of the festival genre they engage with.

There is currently no research that engages in-depth with women's film festivals. An overview of the existing case studies of such festivals is provided in the third section of this chapter, but the majority of these are relatively short journal articles, book chapters, or books about women's film cultures in a wider context that consider women's film festivals among many other aspects (Armatage, 2009a; Barlow, 2003; Dönmez-Colin, 2014; Huang, 2003; Maule, 2014; Quetting, 2007). Despite the significance of film within the women's movement, which will be addressed in Chapter 3 of this thesis, there is a dearth of scholarship on women's film festivals. One of the major contributions of this thesis is to provide a historical and theoretical study of women's film festivals and thus contribute another dimension to the field of Film Festival Studies.

In addition to Film Festival Studies, this study also draws on work from Feminist Theory and feminist film theory, which provide additional layers to the framework of this research project. In this chapter, I will examine dominant trends in feminist film theory and locate this study within this extensive scholarship. However, in Chapters 2, 4, 5 and 6 I also engage with specific feminist theories and methodologies, such as Rosemarie Buikema and Anneke Smelik's concept of categorisation of feminist theories (1995), Monica Dall'Asta and Jane Gaines' understanding of doing historical research (2015) and various concepts on feminist archiving (Eichhorn, 2013; Perrier and Withers, 2016). As such, Feminist (Film) Theory not only provides a conceptual framework for my study, but also methodological tools I applied to the study of women's film festivals.

My analysis of dominant research trends in the field will illustrate that feminist film theory has been primarily concerned with films by women, women's representation on screen, film analysis and criticism, the careers of women filmmakers and the role of audiences and spectatorship. In other words, scholars have focussed on what goes on on film sets, on the screen and in the films, and in front of the screen amongst the audience. However, there is far less research concerned with the mechanisms of bringing the films to the screen and the feminist activism, or cinefeminism related to this. Building on the exceptional contributions by B. Ruby Rich (1998) and Esther Quetting (2007), the emphasis in this section of the chapter will be to illustrate the potential that lies in the consideration of



exhibition processes and contexts of women's cinema. Through this analysis, I will highlight the gap in feminist film theory that this thesis fills.

The final section of this chapter contains an overview of short studies on women's film festivals and extracts some of the themes and issues that these works have in common. This provides a framework in which to map out the key concerns of the study of women's film festivals, which align with the research design of this project.

## 1.1 About Film Festivals

One of the key moments in the field of Film Festival Studies is Marijke de Valck's publication *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global* (2007), the first monograph dedicated entirely to film festival research. Spearheading the field, the author includes a historical overview of the development of European film festivals as well as a cultural examination of the current international film festival circuit. Following an introductory chapter and an outline of her methodology, de Valck presents four case studies conducted at the Berlin International Film Festival, the Cannes Film Festival, the Venice International Film Festival and the Rotterdam International Film Festival. Three out of these festivals, namely Cannes, Venice and Berlin are FIAPF-accredited 'A-list festivals'. Each case study focuses on a different aspect of film festivals reflecting the diversity of the field. In relation to Berlin, the author discusses the historical development of film festivals and highlights a few key moments in their history. Cannes serves as an example to examine the festival as a marketplace and its role within the global film industry. The chapter on Venice delves into the festival as media event and reviews the process of value adding. Finally, the case study of Rotterdam engages with festival audiences, specialised programming and the effects of globalisation.

In 2008, de Valck co-founded the Film Festival Research Network (FFRN) with Skadi Loist to support interdisciplinary exchange among researchers working on film festivals across different fields. One of the Network's key initiatives is the FFRN Bibliography, which is available online and regularly updated (FFRN, 2017). It presents a crucial resource for researchers in the field of Film Festival Studies and exemplifies its diversity in terms of research interests and methodological approaches. The research topics listed in the bibliography include an extensive corpus of scholarship on Film Festival Theory, the history and geo-political significance of film festivals, the relations between film festivals

and the film industry, national cinemas, genre-based film festivals, festival programming and case studies of individual film festivals. As such, the bibliography highlights dominant trends in the field, such as the focus on international film festivals and the study of festivals through an economic lens.

Examining this existing body of early film festival research and journalistic writing on film festivals at the time in *On Film Festivals* (2009), Richard Porton criticises the lack of engagement with hardly anything but the international film festivals. He states that:

Megafestivals such as Cannes, Toronto and Berlin have metamorphosed into ultra-hierarchical corporate entities in which the most glamorous, although not necessarily the most artistically distinguished, films are displayed in competitions that receive the lion's share of media attention while more audacious work is ghettoised in sidebars that are usually only covered with any depth by specialised film magazines. (Porton, 2009, p. 2)

Porton argues that many journalistic discussions of film festivals are frequently too celebratory and lack a critical discourse. He finds too few of the key issues of contemporary film festival programming, such as the contrast between glitzy red-carpet premieres and arthouse cinema, reflected in festival writing. Porton's collection of critical essays by programmers and film critics provide an alternative perspective on festival writing and studies. Critic Mark Peranson, for example, assesses how international film festivals become more and more alike by adding strands or initiatives for economic reasons and prestige, rather than as a reaction to actual changes in the landscape of production, distribution and exhibition (Peranson, 2008, p. 41). Critic and programmer James Quandt contributes an interview with Dubai International Film Festival programmer Simon Field, who explains and disassembles what he calls "The Sandwich Process" (Quandt, 2009). A popular programming strategy, the sandwich process is the way in which 'you use bigger films to get audiences to support your festival as well as smaller – but equally important – films' (Quandt, 2009, p. 56). In his contribution on cinephilia and film festivals, critic and programmer Robert Koehler offers a very narrow definition of the film festival. He argues that festivals have only one task and that is 'to defend cinema' as an art form (Koehler, 2009, p. 82). Definitions by key academic figures in the field of Film Festival Studies have included notions of the presence of the press, industry involvement, and premiere status of films as well as the festival's role as cultural gatekeeper. The primary function that Koehler and others, such as Mark Cousins allude to – namely the defence, 'discovery and

revelation’ of cinema – is only sparsely represented in research (Cousins, 2009, p. 157).<sup>7</sup> Koehler even proclaims ‘the certain death of the festival as a whole’ and emphasises the importance of niche film festivals, along with the necessity of festival writing to engage with them (Koehler, 2009, p. 86). This publication illustrates a trend in the field of Film Festival Studies that moves away from engaging with mainstream festivals and towards a more diversified research area. This study is part of this movement and thus embedded in a rich and burgeoning field that expands far beyond the “megafestivals” that Porton criticises.

### 1.1.1 Broadening the Field

Two crucial book series in the field of Film Festival Studies are the Film Festival Yearbook at St Andrews Film Studies and Framing Film Festivals at Palgrave Macmillan.<sup>8</sup> The publications in these series contribute new perspectives and approaches towards Film Festival Studies, expanding the field’s scholarly output beyond the context of Europe and international film festivals. The first publication in the Film Festival Yearbook series, *The Festival Circuit* (Iordanova and Rhyne, 2009) deals primarily with international film festivals and the flow of films, capital and prestige between them. However, it also examines how smaller festivals with niche emphases such as African film festivals or women’s film festivals fit into the wider landscape of the film festival industry. Developing systems to distinguish and categorise different kinds of film festivals in this way has been a primary concern in several studies in the field (Stringer, 2001; de Valck, 2007; Peranson, 2008; Iordanova, 2009). What these studies have in common is a shared sense of a network, in which resources such as films, money, writers, talents, brands and cultural capital circulate between festivals. With that in mind, the concept of a “festival circuit” has been used in several of them. How the various interpretations of the circuit and different models of festival classification can be utilised to situate women’s film festivals in relation to other film festivals will be demonstrated in Chapter 4.

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<sup>7</sup> For definitions of film festivals see: de Valck, 2007, 2008; Fiapf.org [no date]; Iordanova, 2009; Strandgaard Pedersen and Mazza, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> More information on these series is available from <http://stafs.org/series/film-festival-yearbooks/> [Accessed on 28 February 2019] and <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/14990> [Accessed on 14 March 2018].

Other publications in the Film Festival Yearbook series, *Film Festivals and Imagined Communities* (Jordanova with Cheung, 2010), *Film Festivals and Activism* (Jordanova and Torchin, 2012) and *Archival Film Festivals* (Marlow-Mann, 2010), challenge the predominant engagement with international film festivals and engage with different elements of film festival culture. They analyse transnational community building, the relationship between festivals and social justice movements and the role of restorations, retrospectives and rediscoveries at festivals respectively.

*Film Festivals and Imagined Communities* contains essays, which examine diasporic film festivals and how minorities re-connect with their original homeland through film. Despite the narrow focus on particular diasporic groups, Dina Jordanova's findings in the chapter 'Mediating Diaspora' can be relevant to a wide range of identity-based film festivals and as such, also to this study (2010). She argues that diasporic film festivals can play a crucial role in trans-national identity-building, promotion of solidarity and empowerment. Jordanova considers this through the lens of Benedict Anderson's concept of "Imagined Communities", which enables members of a group to feel connected without knowing each other personally. The festivals she considers in her study are characterised by strong community engagement and support filmmaking initiatives within their communities. Jordanova furthermore identifies a key issue of diasporic film festivals to be the risk of ghettoisation and further marginalisation of the targeted minority (2010). All three aspects – the establishment of communities, the common characteristics of the festivals and the debate of ghettoisation – are also reflected in the research of women's film festivals, which I will discuss in the final section of this literature review.

*Film Festivals and Activism* explores issues such as the relationship between intentionality and aesthetic demands, didacticism and pedagogy, funding and financial transparency, target audiences, public engagement and outreach activities. Jordanova's chapter 'Film Festivals and Dissent: Can Film Change the World?' discusses the intention of activist film festivals to mobilise their audiences to contribute to social change (2012). Such festivals are motivated by intentionality and their aim to improve the public understanding of social, cultural and political issues. How this intentionality reflects at women's film festivals – and particularly feminist film festivals – will be discussed more in depth in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

The other two Yearbook publications, *Film Festivals and East Asia* (Jordanova and Cheung, 2011) and *Film Festivals and the Middle East* (Jordanova and Van de Peer, 2014), focus on geographical areas and the history and development of film festivals in these specific cultural contexts. Similarly, the publications in the more recently launched Framing Film Festivals series also extend their enquiries beyond the European boundaries of Film Festival Studies. Lindiwe Dovey's *Curating Africa in the Age of Film Festivals* (2015) examines the historical and contemporary relationships between international film festivals, the African continent and film industries. It also considers the exhibition context of African films abroad and film festivals on the African continent and adds a post colonialist theoretical framework to challenge the dominant narrative of festival history and development. Kirsten Stevens' *Australian Film Festival* (2016) challenges the euro-centric focus of film festival studies and considers Australia's relationship with the European and North American festival circuit. Finally, Chris Berry and Luke Robinson's *Chinese Film Festivals* (2017), the first edited collection about Chinese film festivals, further signifies a shift beyond the European and Northern American context of Film Festival Studies. Stuart James Richard's *The Queer Film Festival* (2016) looks at queer film festivals as social enterprises which create industry-focussed activities to achieve financial sustainability, and two forthcoming books edited by Aida Vallejo and Ezra Winton apply a variety of angles to the analysis of documentary film festivals (Vallejo & Winton, 2019a; 2019b).

These series exemplify a continuous movement to expand the research field while at the same time narrowing the research questions to apply to specific niches.

### 1.1.2 The Study of Niche Film Festivals

There are numerous publications that concern themselves with a wide spectrum of specialised film festivals, such as queer film festivals (Loist, 2012; 2015; Dawson & Loist, 2018; Richards, 2016), activist film festivals (Jordanova & Torchin, 2012; Tascón & Wils, 2017), human rights film festivals (Tascón, 2015), documentary film festivals (Vallejo 2014; 2017; Vallejo & Winton, 2019a; 2019b [forthcoming]), ethnographic film festivals (Vallejo & Peirano 2017) or African film festivals (Dovey, 2015). This diversification of the study of film festivals has created a rich context of specialised enquiry in which I embedded my examination of women's film festivals. The theoretical and methodological

framework I utilise in this thesis was encouraged by the multi-faceted approaches to studying niche film festivals demonstrated by these authors.

Despite the variety of concepts and frameworks applied in these studies, some share significant commonalities which have also influenced this thesis. First, they map out the field, both in terms of the historical development of the festival category as well as the contemporary network of active festivals. In *Film Festivals and Activism*, Iordanova and Leshu Torchin provide an overview of various activist film festivals (2012). While the tables are not comprehensive, they contain a vast number of film festivals concerned with human rights, indigenous cinema, queer cinema, issues of (involuntary) migration, disabilities and health-related issues. Dovey supplies a similar appendix in her work on film festivals in Africa and African film festivals outside the continent (2015). In her doctoral thesis about queer film festivals, Loist provides an in-depth account of the history of these festivals alongside trends of queer film culture, identity politics and professionalisation of the film festival landscape (2015). In *Film Festivals and Anthropology*, Maria Paz Peirano maps the geographical distribution and historical positioning of ethnographic and anthropological film festivals (2017). She demonstrates underlying trends within the category and links the increasing festival numbers to movements within the field of Visual Anthropology. Finally, Vallejo provides an overview of documentary film festivals in Eastern Europe (2014) and connects different phases in the development of these festivals to geopolitical occurrences that impacted the region, such as the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the wave of Eastern European countries joining the European Union.

These efforts serve to demonstrate the complexity and diversity of the object of the study and contribute to justifying why a certain festival category demands to be examined and analysed within its context more closely. In Chapter 3 I lay out the historical and contemporary landscape of women's film festivals for these reasons.

Second, many studies of specialised film festivals utilise theories and frameworks that are grounded in the particular context of the festival niche. Loist, for example, views queer film festivals through the lens of performativity which is a foundational term in queer studies (2015). Grounded in the performative turn in cultural studies, Loist examines different ways in which film festivals can be considered as performances (Loist, 2015, p. 40). From an anthropological point of view, festivals are performative like rituals which

follow certain rules, norms and scripts, and fulfil a specific purpose for the communities who participate in them. On a theatrical level, they are performative because they are ephemeral and transient, and require the physical co-presence of various actors and participants. Finally, following Judith Butler's understanding of performativity, film festivals are performative as they are grounded in repetitive actions. Loist also considers performativity in relation to programming and the performance of film festivals regarding their financial viability. The concept of performativity which is an essential tool in queer studies, thus provides Loist with a variety of angles to study queer film festivals. In her work on human rights film festivals, Sonia Tascón writes about the intersections of human rights, film and film festivals (2015). Based on a Foucauldian understanding of systems of power and knowledge, she uses the concept of universal human rights as a lens to discuss how different festivals encourage relationships between those who are looked at and those who are looking. Thus, she focusses on an examination of the relationship between festival programmers, audiences, films and their subjects and engages with questions of ethics with regards to representation on screen, curation, programming, and spectatorship. She questions how films and film festivals can impact audience's understanding of and engagement with human rights issues, and how films act as mediators. As such, Tascón draws a line between looking relations and the potentials of power and subversion. According to her, human rights film festivals can be complicit in what she calls "the humanitarian gaze", which is based on a dichotomy of suffering and relief – a suffering subject on screen and a witnessing audience who experiences relief by helping or saving the subject through humanitarian action (p. 34). However, human rights film festivals also have the power to subvert these politics, engage spectators in a political discourse and inspire social change.

These questions of spectatorship and the relationship between films, subjects, programmers and audiences is developed further in the collection *Activist Film Festivals*, edited by Tascón and Tyson Wils (2017). The book expands on ideas expressed in Iordanova and Tochin's book on purpose-driven film festivals, which examined film festivals as platforms for social advocacy linked to pedagogy and education (2012). While the essays in that book cover a wide range of approaches to the study of different kinds of activist film festivals, the contributions in Tascón and Wils' edited collection, narrow down on the potential of activist film festivals to foster a certain kind of spectatorship. Tascón and Wils argue that the context of exhibition at an activist film festival can provide commentary on the power relations between 'filmic images, its producers, its exhibitors and its spectators'

(p. 3) and subvert the victim-saviour dichotomy of the humanitarian gaze. Each essay considers how niche film festivals screening documentary, human rights, queer or indigenous cinema, can promote politically active spectatorship. Among the contributions particularly relevant to this thesis are Tascón's and Lyell Davies' chapters in which they focus on "off-screen" events such as post-screening discussions as tools to challenge conventional looking relations (Davies, 2017; Tascón, 2017). Another useful concept, utilised by Ezra Winton and Svetla Turnin as well as Tyson Wils, is Jacques Rancière's concept of "dissensus", which empowers constructive dispute and political pluralism in order to question the status quo (Wils, 2017; Winton & Turnin, 2017).

Dovey also utilises a concept of dissensus in her study of African film festivals (2015). Departing from Terry Eagleton's critique of Immanuel Kant's concept of *sensus communis*, Dovey suggests that in addition to consensus, dissent can also contribute to moments of festive excitement at film festivals. She expands on these moments of dissent, such as confrontations between curators and audiences at various African film festivals and focusses on the impact this (*dis*) *sensus communis* can have on the exhibition and reception of films. Arguing that films can gain meaning from their exhibition context, Dovey proposes that through this process of dissent, festival audiences are co-authors of films alongside the filmmakers and curators.

The comparative analysis of two women's film festivals in Chapter 5 of this thesis, shares elements with these approaches to spectatorship and community when it zooms in on moments of dissensus among festival participants and organisers and examines the festival programmes beyond film screenings. This might suggest that the concepts of dissensus utilised by Wils, Dovey and Winton and Turnin could have offered a suitable lens through which to analyse women's film festivals in this study. However, this was not done for two reasons. First, because this thesis does not pose an enquiry into spectatorship and the relationship between festival organisers and their audiences in the same way as the aforementioned studies. Audiences are not at the fore of this study. Second, to avoid the exclusion of a majority of women's film festivals. The concept of dissensus applied by Wils and Winton and Turnin seems to be particularly suitable for investigations into overtly purpose-driven film festivals. However, not all women's cinema and therefore not all women's film festivals are overtly political or activist. As such it was important to approach this study in a way that does not pigeonhole women filmmakers into activist, feminist filmmaking, or exclude non-activist women's film festivals from the enquiry.



While this thesis does not apply any of the specific concepts and lenses used in these specialised approaches to study identity-, genre- and intention-based film festivals, it does share two commonalities as outlined above. First, it also focusses on mapping the field and lays out the historical development and current network of women's film festivals. Second, it utilises a theoretical and methodological framework that is grounded in the specific context that envelop women's film festivals. Drawing on concepts and methodologies from feminist theory and feminist film theory this study therefore highlights the genre's specific history and the socio-political context in which women's film festivals are situated.

## 1.2 About Women's Films

As this research project is located where Film Festival Studies meets women's cinema and its exhibition, it is necessary to situate it within the wider context of feminist film theory. As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, I am utilising a number of feminist theories to frame my research questions within women's film festivals relationships with feminisms, history and archiving. To situate this study within the area of feminist film theory however, I will focus on outlining and challenging dominant research trends in the field. This will provide context for my thesis and locate it among the relevant body of feminist film research.

### 1.2.1 Feminist Film Theory

Annette Kuhn suggests in *Women's Pictures. Feminism and Cinema* (1982) 'that no set of meanings already inhabits a text, but rather that a text is, in some measures at least, created in its reading or reception' (Kuhn, 1982, p. 14). Instead of obtaining its meaning from the intentionality of its author, a text gains meaning through its reception by a consumer. The meaning could thus include aspects that the author was not even aware of at the time of creating the text. Kuhn thus emphasises the importance of the consumption of texts, whether these are forms of literature, film or other media. With this in mind, a feminist text, for example, becomes feminist through its reception by a reader who wishes to identify the text as such. The author can infuse the text with a preferred meaning and has some level of control over who can consume the text, but eventually the text requires to be read in order to gain meaning. However, Kuhn admits that setting aside the author's intentionality and the text's structure entirely is 'perhaps too extreme a stance to adopt' (Kuhn, 1982, p. 14). Instead, she argues for the combination of three different approaches

when interpreting the meaning of film through a feminist lens: a focus on the author or filmmaker's intentionality as well as their gender; the analysis of a film's textual organisation, and thus its aesthetics and content; and the context of how these signifiers are interpreted by the viewer. Kuhn uses this theoretical framework for her analysis of the connections between feminist film theory and feminist film production, between feminist ideologies and cinema. Despite the emphasis on the process of reading and interpreting of narrative, structural and aesthetic signifiers in films, Kuhn does not cover issues such as the exhibition and reception contexts in which these films are being read. As such, the book is a topical example for dominant trends in feminist film theory and sums up what the majority of research output in the field has been concerned with.

Feminist film theory in the 1970s and 1980s was occupied with a number of major trends in the field: the analysis of the representation of women on screen, the close readings of stories, characters and aesthetics of films directed by men and women directors, various approaches to gendered reception and spectatorship, collecting comprehensive filmographies and the analysis of entire bodies of work by specific filmmakers. Edited collections such as E. Ann Kaplan's *Feminism & Film* (2000) or Sue Thornham's *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader* (1999) bring together canonical works within feminist film theory that exemplify these tendencies. In the following section, I will outline some more key contributions to the field that reflect them.

The beginning of feminist film theory is often attributed to the pioneering feminist scholars of the 1970s.<sup>9</sup> Two pioneering publications about the representation of women in narrative Hollywood cinema were published in the US in 1973 and 1974. Marjorie Rosen's *Popcorn Venus* (1973) and Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (1974) chronicle the history of women in film and their representation through time. Both books are structured chronologically and deal with Hollywood cinema from the 1920s to the 1960s. Haskell and Rosen are interested in comparing the portrayal of female characters to the roles women inhabit in reality, and come to the conclusion that cinema, rather than reflecting reality, distorts it. In her analysis of the melodramatic genre of the woman's film, Haskell argues that there are three types of women projected in these films: the extraordinary woman as a model, the ordinary woman as a victim, and finally the

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<sup>9</sup> To illustrate this, neither Kaplan's nor Thornham's collection include a contribution that was written before 1970.

hypothetical woman developing from ordinary to extraordinary, who the viewer imagines herself to be (Haskell, 1974). Both Haskell and Rosen argue that these films present the audience with representations of women that are unrealistic and unobtainable for most women.

In the UK, the discourse also focussed on narrative Hollywood cinema and theorists utilised Marxist philosophy and psychoanalytical frameworks to analyse these films and their representations of women. Perhaps one of the most influential pieces of feminist film theory from this period is Laura Mulvey's essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975). Utilising a psychoanalytical framework based on theories by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, Mulvey examines films by Hollywood directors Alfred Hitchcock and Josef von Sternberg. She argues that sexual difference is not just projected in the subject matter of a film, but also in the looking relations between characters, audience and the visual apparatus of film. Mulvey discusses multiple ways in which the anticipated male viewer gains pleasure from watching films; they can identify with the male character, objectify the female character and further demystify the latter by witnessing their saviour, punishment or denunciation. According to Mulvey, the visual apparatus is used to subordinate women in film and make them passive objects of the male gaze. One of her key arguments is that in order to challenge these pleasures of mainstream cinema and create films that are different, we must first understand the code of the male gaze.

In 1973, Claire Johnston edited a pamphlet called *Notes on Women's Cinema*. The pamphlet contains essays by Naome Gilbert and Barbara Halpern Martineau, an interview with the filmmaker Nelly Kaplan and an essay by Johnston entitled 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema'. In it, Johnston examines the representation of women in Hollywood films directed by John Ford and Howard Hawks, and argues for the radical potential in the works by women directors, such as Dorothy Arzner and Ida Lupino. She argues that in male-directed films women are treated as a spectacle and are subordinate to the male character; 'in order to be accepted into the male universe,' said Johnston, 'the woman must *become* a man; alternatively, she becomes woman-as-phallus' (1973, p. 27). Another option for female characters to gain relevance in the films she discusses is by becoming fetishized as symbols for civilisation, home or tamed wilderness. Women's cinema on the other hand, has the potential to subvert this dominant sexist ideology. Johnston argues for the necessity of collaborative female-driven cinema that marries entertainment and politics and remains accessible to a broad mainstream audience. In Chapter 4, I will apply her

concept of counter cinema to established notions of the festival circuit, to challenge the way in which women's film festivals have been positioned in the film festival landscape.

Both Mulvey and Johnston were not only active as scholars and academics. As co-organisers of the Women's Event at the 1972 Edinburgh International Film Festival, their work also had practical elements. This duality of the researcher-practitioner will be further explored in Chapter 6 as I reflect on my own practice as festival organiser of Femspectives – Glasgow Feminist Film Festival.

Another major research focus in the early years of feminist film theory was to collate comprehensive filmographies of films by women and to analyse the entire works of individual filmmakers in-depth. Johnston's edited collection *The Work of Dorothy Arzner: Towards a Feminist Cinema* (1975) contains readings of a variety of Arzner's films penned by both Johnston and Pam Cook plus an interview with the filmmaker and a filmography. Both originally appeared in the US-American magazine *Cinema*. Another publication about the work of Arzner is Judith Mayne's *Directed by Dorothy Arzner* (1994). Ida Lupino is another director from the Classic Hollywood era who has been the subject of multiple books, such as Lucy Stewart's *Ida Lupino as Film Director, 1949-1953: An Auteur Approach* (1980), Annette Kuhn's *Queen of the 'b's: Ida Lupino Behind the Camera* (1995) or William Donati's *Ida Lupino: A Biography* (1996).

Apart from books dedicated to individual filmmakers, there are a number of publications offering overviews or interviews with women filmmakers, such as Maryann Oshana's *Women of colour: a filmography of minority and Third World women* (1985), Lynn F. Miller's *The Hand that Holds the Camera: Interviews with Women Film and Video Directors* (1988), Gwendolyn A. Foster's *Women Filmmakers of the African and Asian Diaspora: Decolonising the Gaze* (1997). In recent years, there have been many publications dedicated to marginalised filmmakers from non-English speaking regions of the world, such as Beti Ellerson's *Sisters on the Screen: Women in Africa on Film, Video and Television* (2000), Rebecca Hillauer's *Encyclopaedia of Arab Women Filmmakers* (2005) or Parvati Nair and Julián Daniel Gutiérrez-Albilla's *Hispanic and Lusophone Women Filmmakers* (2013).

The tendency to focus on films, their interpretation and their directors also persists in more recent publications within feminist film theory. Corinn Columpar and Sophie Mayer's edited collection *There She Goes: Feminist Filmmaking and Beyond* (2009) presents

fourteen contributions exploring connections between films and their audiences, between different works of a director's oeuvre, between filmmakers who work across nation-states, modes of filmmaking or exhibition media. In *Feminist Film Studies*, Karen Hollinger provides an introductory textbook aimed at students of film and gender studies (2012). In addition to chapters focussed on white, heteronormative, Western films, Hollinger also looks at lesbian, postcolonial and African American cinema and emphasises that this is particularly important 'because feminist film theory and criticism has had a white, Western, heterosexual focus' for a long time (Hollinger, 2012, p. 1). In addition to thematic chapters evolving around key areas of feminist film theory like the use of genre, lesbian film theory or considerations about race, Hollinger offers analyses of selected films, such as Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), Julie Dash's *Illusions* (1982) or Julie Taymor's *Frida* (2002). Sophie Mayer's *Political Animals: The New Feminist Cinema* (2016) concentrates on textual analysis and the examination of political and social contexts of the films discussed. The book covers nearly 500 films in varying degrees of depth to provide a wide range of feminist film and exemplifies the diversity and potential of the field. Mayer is particularly interested in how feminist cinema is impacted by postcolonial theories, transnational and transgenerational feminisms, and the emergence of cis-male feminist filmmakers (Mayer, 2016, p. 5).

What is absent in these rich engagements with women's cinema is the question of exhibition context, how or where these films were exhibited or what impact exhibition circumstances had on their reach and lifespan. This thesis addresses this absence and contributes a potential approach to feminist film theory that considers these questions.

This brief overview of dominant trends in feminist film theory has illustrated that the field has focussed largely on analysing the representation of women on screen, discussing spectatorship from different standpoints, interpreting the content of films by women and men, collating filmographies and examining the lives and oeuvres of specific women filmmakers. It has highlighted the lack of consideration regarding the exhibition of women's cinema and located this thesis within this context.

## 1.2.2 Theorising Cinefeminism

Before I turn to discuss the existing corpus of studies on women's film festivals, it is fruitful to consider what has not – or has only marginally – been covered within feminist film theory: the exhibition and exhibition contexts of women's films.

The only chapter in *There She Goes* that stands out as thematically different is Kay Armatage's reflection on feminist programming and her experience as programmer at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) (Armatage, 2009b). It puts into words, and theory, what practitioners those such as Mulvey and Johnston had been carrying out as feminist programmers since the 1970s. First, Armatage contemplates theoretical clashes between feminists from different backgrounds during the 1970s and how they affected programming decisions at early women's film festivals and scholarly outputs. She then moves on to reflect on her own career as festival programmer at TIFF. Armatage suggests that her feminist act as programmer was to facilitate professional networks among women working in the film industry and offer them the film festival as a valuable platform and springboard to develop their career. She argues for the significance of feminist programming at film festivals, not only to create these opportunities for women in the industry, but also to contribute towards the 'archaeology of women's film', discovering long lost works and names from the past (Armatage, 2009b, p. 93). Armatage's chapter brings the attention towards programming as feminist criticism and contributes to an area of feminist film research that connects theory with practice. As such, it also informs this study's interest in women's film exhibition as a feminist act.

As I mentioned earlier in this section, the establishment of feminist film theory is often attributed to feminist academics in the 1970s. However, it is important to acknowledge that this theoretical field did not simply emerge as a scholarly discipline, but is deeply rooted in non-academic work, such as feminist filmmaking, criticism and programming. These forms of cinefeminism had been practiced long before the mid-1970s and had a significant impact on the establishment of theory. Magazines, such as *Women & Film* (US, 1972-1975), *JUMP CUT: A Review of Contemporary Media* (US, since 1974), *Frauen und Film* (Germany, since 1974), *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism and Film Theory* (US, since 1976), *Spare Rib* (UK, 1972-1993) or *F. magazine* (France, 1978-1982) for example, were dedicated to analyse cinema, art and media as a political tool to address issues of women and other marginalised gender identities. These magazines were some of the first

places to publish feminist criticism and were significant predecessors of formalised scholarly feminist film theory (Rich, 1998).

These are the kinds of feminist acts Rich refers to in her definition of cinefeminism, which is useful to reiterate at this point. In *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement* (1998), she writes that:

My subject here is cinefeminism, a term that was sometimes used to describe the broad field of feminism and film that began in the seventies with the flourishing of film festivals and the simultaneous invention of theoretical approaches to classical Hollywood representations of women, eventually expanding to other films as well. It's a discipline that began as a movement, drawing its strength from the political breakthroughs of the women's liberation movement as well as from the intellectual and ideological lessons of the New Left. (Rich, 1998, pp. 1-2)

Cinefeminism, according to Rich, is a multifaceted movement that was inspired by practitioners and theorists alike, and later shaped into the discipline of feminist film theory. In her semi-autobiographical overview of her personal involvement with and the wider history of the feminist film movement, Rich aims to illustrate the diversity that distinguished the feminist film movement before it became a discipline dominated by a theoretical approach to reading and interpreting films. Programming at women's film festivals holds a significant position in Rich's accounts, since she was an avid festivalgoer herself and co-organised Films by Women/Chicago Festival in 1974. The quote above exemplifies that women's film festivals played an important role in this cinefeminist movement. In her chapter about the women's film festival in Chicago, she states that 'every decision [from programming choices to ticket pricing] was ideologically charged' (Rich, 1998, p. 30). For Rich, women's film festivals were platforms where film practice, criticism, history and theory came together, and this notion is also acknowledged in some other publications about these early women's film festivals (Quetting, 2007a, 2007b; Armatage, 2009a).

Echoing Armatage's idea of festivals providing a platform and networking opportunities for women filmmakers, Tess van Hemert investigates the impact exhibition at international film festivals has on emerging women filmmakers in her unpublished PhD thesis *International acclaim: The role(s) of international film festivals in supporting emerging women's cinema* (2013). Van Hemert conducted fieldwork at three international film festivals, the Brisbane International Film Festival in Australia, the International Film

Festival Rotterdam in the Netherlands and the TIFF in Canada. Her fieldwork included expert interviews with six festival professionals and nineteen filmmakers whose films were selected to be screened at the events. Through these interviews, Van Hemert found that different-sized film festivals provide varying opportunities for filmmakers. She states that:

Attending a range of smaller festivals often resulted in a film being screened for an additional local audience, rather than providing the more immediate and tangible benefits an emerging filmmaker might be seeking in terms of networking, press and funding opportunities. (Van Hemert, 2013, p. 179)

Those ‘immediate benefits’ are more likely to be felt at large, prestigious film festivals, such as Toronto or Rotterdam, which attract not only local audiences, but also a significant number of guests from international film industries. However, she also states that international film festivals often lack networking opportunities for emerging filmmakers and that filmmakers think it is difficult ‘to find information about how to approach launching their films on the festival circuit’ (Van Hemert, 2013, p. 182). Overall, Van Hemert concludes that festivals can support emerging filmmakers by creating supportive screening environments, by making their films visible in the programme and by providing industry opportunities and safe spaces in which they can network with one another.

Another noteworthy publication that focuses on the cinema and festivals as feminist spaces is Esther Quetting’s edited collection *Kino. Frauen. Experimente*. (2007a), which concentrates on the feminist film movement in Switzerland during the 1980s and 1990s. Feminist cinema practices in Switzerland during that time had a political agenda to counter the marginalisation of women. The main objective was to bring more women’s films into cinemas and Quetting describes the focus of the movement on the cinemas as locations of emancipation (Quetting, 2007a, p. 9). Among the contributing authors are former and current festival organisers, cinema programmers and filmmakers in Switzerland. They discuss the cinema as a central space for women’s movements and the emergence of gender-specific cinema programming. Others outline the development of the women’s film festival *Frauenfilmtage Schweiz* and the LGBT film festival *QUEERSICHT*. Finally, some contributions focus on the significance of feminist cinema practices in Switzerland at the time, their effects on film production and criticism, and the experiences of women in cinemas today. Quetting’s own contribution to the book is a reconstruction of the history of the *Frauenfilmtage Schweiz*, a touring women’s film festival, which ran from 1989 to 2003 (2007b). I will expand on this particular case study in the next section of this chapter, which will examine the existing body of research on women’s film festivals.



It is important to keep in mind, that these few publications are exceptions to the rule. Considering the burgeoning field of feminist film theory, there has been little scholarly output that concentrates on the exhibition circumstances of films by women. While feminist film magazines regularly published reports and reviews of (women's) film festivals, the question of how films by women were exhibited, who watched them and what was discussed afterwards, had been widely excluded from the scholarly theoretical agenda. It is in this context, that this thesis offers an intervention and argues for the importance of exhibition context.

### 1.3 About Women's Film Festivals

The final section of this literature review will provide an overview of the existing academic research on women's film festivals. Ranging from reflective statements of festival organisers who are also academics, to longer essays and case studies engaging with particular examples of this festival genre. This is the first attempt at synthesising these rare pieces of work in one place.

Before turning to the studies themselves, it is interesting to consider the reasons why the body of research on women's film festivals is so small. In her essay about the Toronto Women and Film International festival, Kay Armatage argues that there are various factors that cause the lack of scholarly engagement with women's film festivals and their history (2009a). First, she argues that there is simply not enough material there to be researched. Armatage explains that she had planned to write a comprehensive history of women's film festivals, but her attempt failed. Her most crucial resource should have been a rich archive of leaflets, programme notes and press releases from such festivals collected by Women Make Movies executive director Debra Zimmerman since the 1970s. In the planning phase of the research project, Armitage and Zimmerman realised that this archive had been lost in the process of repeatedly moving the Women Make Movies offices and so her study lost its prime source. Armatage also emphasises the lack of significance attributed to women's film festivals by the press, the industry and even the event organisers themselves. She points out that the lack of media coverage of women's film festivals for example, makes it difficult for researchers today to examine the reception context of these events. She also mentions the risk of losing personal archives, as materials deteriorate on attics or in basements. Furthermore, she argues that feminist film scholars do simply not consider exhibition contexts, but focus on analysing representation of female characters on screen,

close readings of film contents, biographical developments of women filmmakers and their involvement in film production (2009a). This underlines the argument I made in the previous section and illustrates the gap that this thesis fills further.

These circumstances begin to explain why there is so little scholarly engagement with women's film festivals, and why it is challenging for contemporary researchers to change that. There is however a growing body of research that engages with women's film festivals, particularly case studies that focus on individual festivals. The following section will provide an overview of these works.

### 1.3.1 Case Studies of Women's Film Festivals

One of the earliest academic examinations of a specific women's film festival is Melinda Barlow's essay 'Feminism 101: The New York Women's Video Festival, 1972-1980' (2003). She provides a history of the festival and discusses women's engagement with new media at the time, such as video, as feminist act of empowerment. As the name suggests, the festival did not showcase film, as in the photochemical medium, but focussed on women's video making practices. As a medium, video was more easily accessible to a greater number of people and also more affordable for many women amateur filmmakers. The festival offered a commentary on women's media practices beyond the cinematic apparatus, which included viewing installations and a critical engagement with traditional television viewing practices of American families (Barlow, 2003). Barlow argues that video making gave women the opportunity to 'represent themselves' (2003, p. 12) – women were recording, screening, sharing and discussing their daily struggles from their own perspective. The festival gave them a platform to showcase their work and network. To emphasise the empowering effect of women's engagement with the medium video Barlow quotes video artist Ilene Segalove:

not all artists made overtly political or feminist work, [but] most early '70s work by women *was feminist* simply by virtue of being made by women at that time... a time when just to put your hands on the camera was a feminist act. (Segalove in Barlow, 2003, p. 25)

Barlow argues that the engagement with video cameras, the exchange of videos and stories among women filmmakers and attendance of a festival such as the Women's Video Festival in New York was inherently feminist, because at the time, women engaging with film production and with mass media was inherently feminist. Barlow ends her essay by

linking the necessity of a 'separate forum for the exhibition of their [women's] work' in the 1970s with the status quo of women's representation in the film industry at her own contemporary time (Barlow, 2003, p. 27). Comparing the statistics Barlow quotes from 1999 and 2001 to contemporary statistics at the time of writing, the number of women directors working on big budget films, receiving critical recognition and taking on executive roles in the film industry is strikingly stagnant. For example, a study into Gender Inequality Amongst Directors within the UK Film Industry by Directors UK illustrated that only 11.5% of UK films produced between 2005 and 2014 were directed exclusively by women and across this ten-year period the numbers only increased by 0.6% from 11.3 to 11.9 (Follows, Kreager and Gomes, 2016). The Celluloid Ceiling 2018 Report conducted by the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film reveals that women accounted for 8% of directors working on the 250 top grossing films (Lauzen, 2019). That is 1% less than in 1998.<sup>10</sup>

Yu Shan Huang offers a brief examination of the relationship between the women's movement in Taiwan and the women's film festival she founded in 1993, *Women Make Waves* (2003). The festival is co-organised by a feminist organisation called Women Awakening Association, which was strongly influenced by Western feminist discourses from the 1970s. Huang's account is as much an introduction to the origins of the festival, as a brief overview of the dominating issues within the feminist movement in Taiwan during the 1990s. She writes, that the festival showcased 'films that have exposed and written a new truthful "herstory", which was once repressed and erased' and encouraged Taiwanese filmmakers to re-write the history of women and female filmmaking (Huang, 2003, p. 158).

Quetting's essay "'Cinéjournal au féminin" 1989-2003' (2007b) offers a reconstruction of the history of the women's film festival *Frauenfilmtage Schweiz (FFTS)*, which was held from 1989 to 2003. Quetting suggests that at the time of the establishment of the festival, feminist film scholarship was not on the Swiss academic agenda, so the festival constituted a primary space to engage with current and historical women's filmmaking practices intellectually, to network, and to showcase women's work. Like the *Women's Video Film*

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<sup>10</sup> For an overview of current statistics of women in the film industry, see Cobb, Williams and Wreyford, 2015; Directors.uk.com [no date]; Dga.org, [no date]; European Women's Audiovisual Network, 2016; Womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu [no date].

Festival in New York, FFTS was part of a broader feminist agenda encouraging women to tell their own stories and rediscover the history of women's filmmaking. Quetting argues that the end of the festival in 2003 demonstrates its dependence on the place of feminist agendas in the broader public context. She refers to a spontaneous survey among FFTS visitors, which revealed that many older women, who had been attending the festival since its early days, were now prioritising their family lives, while younger women seemed to be less interested in feminist debates and activities. While the audience members with a second-wave feminist background were dropping out, potential new audiences were influenced by post-feminist ideas and did not take their place. In this context, the festival faced the question whether feminism, and with it a separate exhibition platform for women filmmakers, were still necessary.

Kay Armatage's analysis of the Women and Film International Festival in Toronto exemplifies how the case of this particular festival is linked to the clash of feminist agendas in Canada at the time (2009a). The festival was held in 1973 responding to similar feminist events in the US and the UK. It was enabled by new funding initiatives offered by the liberal Canadian government. As one of the founding members, Armatage gives an anecdotal, yet critical account of the festival's main objectives and challenges. The organising team followed a liberal feminist agenda of reinforcing positive role models, raising general consciousness and addressing issues of sexism and inequalities. The centralised organisation of the event in Toronto though, proved problematic, especially against the background of already existing political and social tensions between the English- and French-speaking provinces, and white and indigenous communities (Armatage, 2009a). The matters of the festival were complicated additionally by the fact that the women of the organising committee themselves followed various feminist agendas of their own, and their objectives for a Canadian film festival for women's films were not compatible. Thus, despite its enormous success, the festival was not repeated.

A more recent case study of a specific women's film festival is Rosanna Maule's article on the Birds' Eye View Film Festival (BEV) in London which ran from 2002 until 2015 (Maule, 2014).<sup>11</sup> Maule examines the role of social media in the festival's marketing strategy and in the creation of networking spaces for women filmmakers. She suggests that

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<sup>11</sup> More information about BEV is available from <http://birds-eye-view.co.uk/> [Accessed on 6 April 2018].

women's film festivals can increase the visibility of films among potential audiences through social media, as an alternative to the lack of representation in the mainstream media and press. This idea bears resemblance to Iordanova's findings on diversification of outreach activities and re-defining the role of the film festival as exhibition space (Iordanova, 2012; Iordanova and Cunningham, 2012). However, these new methods of distributing and networking through digital technology and practices of media convergence have also sparked criticism in relation to transparency issues of algorithms as well as the lack of access and literacy among potential audiences (de Valck, 2008; Quandt, 2009). In awareness of these critical discourses, Maule identifies questions of inclusion and exclusion in digital communities, issues of white privilege, and the ideological clash of feminist agendas with globalisation and neo-liberalism. Departing from her specific focus on a women's film festival, Maule turns towards the wider context of women's film exhibition, an issue on which she expands in her book, *Digital Platforms and Feminist Film: Women's Cinema 2.0* (2016).

In *Film Festivals and the Middle East*, Gönül Dönmez-Colin provides an overview of women's film festivals in the Middle East (2014). She introduces nine women's film festivals in Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Palestine, Egypt, Jordan and Israel. Her contribution is particularly significant, because she argues that women filmmakers from the Middle East are double marginalised – first, as women filmmakers, and second, as Middle Eastern filmmakers who face culture-specific obstacles locally and internationally. However, Dönmez-Colin also emphasises that the biggest issues women filmmakers in the Middle East face are not necessarily related to gender, but rather reflect a lack of local film infrastructure, political censorship and distribution difficulties which affects male and women directors alike (Dönmez-Colin, 2014).

In his article about the Films de Femmes film festival in Creteil, Enrico Carocci poses the question, how do women's film festivals produce value for the films they are screening (2016)? As such, he builds on research by Harbord (2002), Elsaesser (2005) and de Valck (2008), which suggests that film festivals contribute towards the cultural capital of films and individuals working in the film industry. They add value through selecting and exhibiting certain works over others and thus provide films with their stamp of approval. Special interest festivals on the other hand, in particular women's film festivals, have been criticised for pigeonholing women directors rather than lifting them up to reach equality with their male counterparts (Loist, 2012). Carocci addresses this discrepancy by closely

analysing the intentionality of *Films de Femmes* and in what ways the festival seeks to support women filmmakers and their films beyond the circuit of women's film festivals.

This overview of case studies on women's film festivals provides a cross-section of the existing research in this area, which forms the context for this thesis. Synthesising these case studies and the elements of festivals they focus on helps to identify commonalities and trends within this area of research. This illustrates how important it is not only to examine individual women's film festivals in isolation, but also to compare and combine findings from several festivals in order to develop a broader picture of women's film festivals. The critical reading of the available texts about women's film festivals reveals overlapping issues and themes with which studies of these festivals are concerned. These key issues are the history and development of women's film festivals, including specific cases as well as the phenomenon as a whole; the position of women's film festivals on the wider festival circuit and their relationships with other film festivals; the relation between women's film festivals and different kinds of feminism; the status of documentation of women's film festivals and how they are archived; and the role of digital technology for festivals and the broader context women's film exhibition.

Below, I develop each of these points, highlighting how these trends reflect in my research questions and thus illustrating the relevance of this for my own research.

### **1.3.2 Key Issues of Women's Film Festival Studies**

#### ***The History of Women's Film Festivals***

Studies of historical women's film festivals are concerned with the development of these events as well as their absence from general festival and film history. Some of these studies try to reconstruct the history and development of specific events (Armatage, 2009a; Barlow, 2003; Quetting, 2007b), while others situate them in a wider historical context (Warren, 2008; Dönmez-Colin, 2014). Despite these outstanding contributions, there is currently no research that offers an in-depth historical perspective on the context and development of women's film festivals worldwide, or even regionally. A core contribution of this thesis to the field is therefore an overview of the history of women's film festivals in North America and Europe, which, whilst cognisant of its geo-political loci and framing, could serve as a model to trace similar historical studies of festivals in Asia, Africa and South America. Chapter 3 is dedicated to this conceptual intervention, while Chapter 6

builds on it by examining in more detail the history of the Women's Event at EIFF72 and offers a methodological model for this research concern.

### ***Women's Film Festivals, the Festival Circuit and Other Film Festivals***

Barlow and Quetting's studies suggest that successful Western women's film festivals in the 1970s and 1980s did not necessarily include the same festival elements that are commonly found at international film festivals (Barlow, 2003; Quetting, 2007b).<sup>12</sup> Instead, they incorporated alternative film formats and content strategies, such as video installations, long-term and travelling event series, or participatory film curation. From this, questions arise regarding the purpose of women's film festivals, their position in relation to other film festivals on the circuit and their similarity or difference from international film festivals. My case study of FFF in Chapter 4 will address these questions and illuminate what purposes the festival aims to fulfil and how it locates itself on a vast network of international, national and women's film festivals.

### ***Women's Film Festivals and Feminisms***

Several of the discussed studies draw connections between women's film festivals and the political and social women's movement (Barlow, 2003; Huang, 2003; Maule, 2014; Quetting, 2007b). Historical studies locate the establishment of early women's film festivals within the context of the rise of the women's liberation movements in North America and Europe. Chapter 3 of this thesis will expand on this connection.

Barlow, Quetting and Maule suggest further that post-feminist ideologies and the decrease of political feminist activity contributed to the ending of the events in New York, Switzerland and London. Huang on the other hand, underlines how successful a women's film festival can be in the light of a strong public interest in feminisms. The question of the public reception of feminist ideas echoes the fear of some women filmmakers: to be further marginalised as women filmmakers, and their wish to not emphasise their gender as part of

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<sup>12</sup> Such common elements of international film festivals involve short duration and temporary events (de Valck, 2007), hierarchal film selection committees, competitions and award ceremonies (Bakker, 2015) and marketplaces to foster business relations (Bakker, 2015).

their profile as filmmakers (Loist, 2012). Austrian director Barbara Albert for example states that:

I wish that female-directed films would be screened at film festivals around the world, especially A-list festivals, and that it would not require the particular accentuation of female filmmaking practices anymore. (Schiefer, 2007, p. 123)<sup>13</sup>

She wishes not to be recognised and rewarded because of her gender and hopes that one day, female-directed films will not need this special accentuation any longer. Quetting refers to this issue as the ‘categorisation corset’ (2007b, p. 27), while White argues that the ‘stigmatisation’ of the term feminism in itself is the key issue (2006, p. 148). However, as the previously mentioned statistics regarding film production illustrate, women are continuously marginalised and underrepresented in the film industry. This thesis argues for the significance of women’s film festivals as platforms that offer women filmmakers and their films visibility and opportunities that they lack at other festivals or exhibition platforms.

Tying in with its examination of a festival on the circuit, Chapter 4 will illustrate what a women’s film festival like FFF offers women filmmakers and its feminist work. Focussing more deliberately on different concepts of feminism, the comparative analysis of two women’s film festivals in London in Chapter 5 will engage with expressions of feminist aims and objectives.

### ***Archiving Women’s Film Festivals***

Building on the issue of the history of women’s film festivals, some studies are also concerned with the state of documentation of the events they examine. Armatage describes the loss of an invaluable archive of documents, containing details of women’s film festivals since the 1970s (2009a). Barlow assesses how the women’s video festival in New York has been archived and demands a more complete archiving of women’s film festival history (2003). Quetting applies a mixed method approach to reconstruct the history of the FFTS in Switzerland, combining personal memory, interviews, conversations and critical

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<sup>13</sup> Unless stated otherwise, the translations of quotes from other languages in this thesis are provided by the author.



analysis of archival materials (2007a). Inspired by these research approaches, Chapter 6 will concentrate on the archiving of women's film festivals. Examining the Women's Event at EIFF72 as a case study, the chapter will lay out on how the festival has been archived and speculate how current and future festivals should be documented and stored in order to increase their lifespan and influence.

## 1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of research in the multidisciplinary field of Film Festival Studies that is relevant to this study and I have located my research within the gaps between dominant trends in the area of feminist film theory. Based on a review of existing literature on women's film festivals, I have also outlined the key issues of the study of women's film festival and illustrated how these have informed my own research. As such, the texts I have reviewed in this chapter inform the theoretical framework of my research project and situate it at the intersection of Film Festival Studies, feminist theory and feminist film theory. The combination of diverse conceptual influences reflects the breadth of enquiry covered by my research questions and informs the mixed-method approach outlined in the following chapter.

My overview of current research on film festivals and feminist film theory illustrated that specialised film festivals, and women's film festivals in particular, require more scholarly attention. Besides a handful of dedicated case studies, women's film festivals have been a blind spot in both fields, although the potential research enquiries into these events demonstrate great diversity. Aligning this study with other interrogations of specialised film festivals, I have identified the necessity to first map the field of women's film festivals and to apply a theoretical and methodological framework that is routed in the context of my object of enquiry.

Situating my research within this gap, I have identified four key issues, which I will address in this thesis: the history of women's film festivals, the position of women's film festivals on the wider festival circuit, the relation between women's film festivals and different kinds of feminisms, and the archiving of women's film festivals. Examining these issues in Chapters 3 through 6 of this thesis, my research presents an intervention in the fields of Film Festival Studies and feminist film theory. It constitutes the first in-depth engagement with women's film festivals within both fields and argues for the significance

of these events with regards to festival history, the festival circuit, feminist activism and the documentation of women's histories.

## 2 Methodology

The previous chapter introduced the conceptual framework that has informed the research questions for this study. This chapter focuses on the methodological framework. The reviewed literature covers a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches in Film Festival Studies, feminist theory and feminist film theory, which stem from the multidisciplinary background of the fields. While this broadens the potential for research designs, many of the studies show a shared interest in a particular methodological approach: the case study. At the centre of this thesis are also case studies of distinctive women's film festivals, underpinned by a mixed-method approach combining desk and archival research, participant observation, and interviews. My research design and the selection of film festivals for closer examination are informed by feminist methodologies, such as Tracy Bowell's and Sandra Harding's understandings of Feminist Standpoint Theory (Bowell, no date; Harding, 1993) and Monica Dall'Asta and Jane Gaines' concept of reconstructing women's film history (2015). This chapter contains two sections examining the philosophical considerations underlying this study and describing the methods applied throughout.

### 2.1 Philosophical Considerations

In his seminal textbook *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, John W. Cresswell argues that acknowledging one's own philosophical assumptions and interpretative frameworks is the first step of qualitative research (2013). These assumptions shape how the researcher asks questions and how they seek to answer them; it informs what is deemed important and how collected data is interpreted and read. Cresswell argues that by linking one's own philosophical assumptions with an interpretative framework, the researcher can describe what influence both have on their research project. It is thus pertinent for me to acknowledge the philosophical assumptions and interpretative frameworks that underpin this thesis.

This study is grounded in an epistemological understanding of knowledge production and framed by feminist theories with a transformative agenda. Traditional epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge. However, it privileges scientific knowledge – rather than personal or practical knowledge – and does not consider gender as a relevant factor of knowledge production (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005). Feminist critiques of

epistemology have revealed a bias in many of the concepts established by its theorists, and argue that knowledge is not gender-neutral, but in fact, 'reflects the gendered perspective of the knowing agent' (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005, p. 173). Feminist theoretical frameworks can relate to a diverse field of theoretical and pragmatic orientations. Cresswell argues that qualitative research framed by feminist theories focuses on collaborative and non-exploitative approaches to avoid objectification. Additionally, feminist theories can have a transformative agenda, in that they assume that 'knowledge is not neutral and [...] reflects the power and social relationship within society' (Cresswell, 2013, p. 25). As such, my research questions are shaped by the idea that the current understanding of women's film festivals is based on assumptions made within research of dominating international film festival models and the mainstream film industry. A central aim of my thesis is to transform this understanding through a feminist epistemological lens.

### 2.1.1 Feminist Epistemology and Standpoint Theory

Feminist Epistemology adds a feminist interpretative lens to the epistemological philosophical assumption of how knowledge comes into being. Elizabeth Anderson suggests that traditional epistemology prioritises scientific and theoretical knowledge (2005). The production of this knowledge is male-dominated and women's access to and their influence on it has historically been very limited. Female-coded knowledge on the other hand, such as practical experience and personal knowledge, has been undervalued. Anderson describes feminist epistemology as part of naturalised as well as social epistemology. Naturalised epistemology assumes the knowing agent to be affected by the same causal forces as their objects of study, and thus investigates what changes about knowledge if the inquirer's circumstances alter. Social epistemology within this idea of naturalised knowledge focuses specifically on the influence of social factors. Following on from this, feminist epistemology narrows down its field of enquiry even more. Anderson suggests that:

Feminist epistemology can be regarded as the branch of social epistemology that investigates the influence of *socially constructed conceptions and norms of gender and gender-specific interests and experiences* on the production of knowledge. (Anderson, 2005, p. 190)

One of the main questions feminist epistemologists are concerned with is how the historical exclusion of women has affected the knowledge produced about the world. Feminist epistemologists argue that all accounts of knowledge can only be 'properly

understood in the social contexts in which they arise, and in terms of the biases and prejudices those contexts generate' (Bowell [no date]). Unlike in traditional epistemologies, this means that a general and universal account of knowledge is impossible. Every scientific enquiry is informed by a gendered understanding of objectivity, value of information and knowledge. The researcher therefore bears the responsibility to acknowledge how their values influence their enquiry and research, and question what influences the kinds of questions they ask (Janack [no date]).

Feminist Standpoint Theory, as a branch of feminist epistemology, criticises any form of knowledge production where knowledge about marginalised groups is produced by the dominating group. According to Tracy Bowell's understanding of Feminist Standpoint Theory, knowledge produced and shared by a dominating group limits and restricts what can be known and what is enquired about the reality of a marginalised group. She argues that in these cases the dominated group would have been 'forced to adopt dominant conceptual frameworks that do not truly belong to them' (Bowell [no date]).

In traditional epistemologies, personal and socially situated experiences would have been considered opinions. However, according to Sandra Harding, Feminist Standpoint Theory legitimises these as knowledge, even though they are still tied to their local and historical circumstances (1993). Standpoint Theory has its intellectual roots in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's master-slave dialectic, as well as Marx, Engels and Lukacs' concepts of the 'standpoint of the proletariat' (Hegel, (1807) 1977; Lukacs, 1971; Marx and Engels, 1975). Central to the idea of the standpoint is that in a hierarchical society the dominating group organises and controls what other people acting within the social structures can know about themselves and their environment; while the experiences of the dominated people can provide starting points for enquiries that relate to the society as a whole and would not arise from the point of view of the dominant group. For example, Harding writes that:

Women's lives [...] can provide a starting point for asking new, critical questions about not only women's lives, but also about men's lives and, most importantly, the causal relations between them. (Harding, 1993, p. 55)

According to Bowell, a standpoint is defined as 'earned through collective political struggle' and is not automatically obtained (Bowell [no date]). She argues that:

Standpoints make visible aspects of social relations and of the natural world that are unavailable from dominant perspectives, and in so doing they generate the kinds of questions that will lead to a more complete and true account of those relations. (Bowell [no date])

In practice, this means that standpoint research starts with an initial enquiry into the lived experiences of a marginalised group. Based on an understanding of their shared experiences - their standpoint - the researcher then develops further questions, conclusions and theories. If knowledge is produced by the dominating group and informed by the dichotomous relationship of oppressor and dominated, the knowledge about the dominated group is restricted and limits what can be known about its members.

It is important to note that, even though feminist theorists such as Harding have contributed significantly to the development of standpoint theory, the concept of the standpoint and situated knowledge exists across all social movements. It is a means to amplify the voices and lived experiences of people who are marginalised for different reasons. In the context of this thesis, the methodological framework of Feminist Standpoint Theory will be applied to research the marginalised phenomenon of women's film festivals and the power dynamics these festivals navigate.

The epistemological assumption of how knowledge is produced and the feminist interpretative framework of the standpoint form the basis of my philosophical understanding. They inform the questions I ask in this thesis and the ways in which I seek to answer them. In line with this theoretical position, I avoided basing my research questions upon concepts of film festivals that were developed through research conducted at mainstream international film festivals. These concepts do not take into consideration the unique history and political background of women's film festivals and limit what can be known about them. In fact, women's film festivals have developed out of a distinct counter-cultural movement, opposing the traditional film festival circuit and cinema industry. Thus, instead I used lived experiences of women who have been organising and researching women's film festivals in the present and past as starting point for my enquiry.

## **2.2 Methods**

As referenced above, Kay Armatage intended to create a research project dedicated to the history and development of women's film festivals but failed due to the loss of a significant archive of festival documentation (2009a). With this in mind, it becomes

necessary to rule out a single-method approach. Firstly, methodologically, because the ‘use of one method to assess a given phenomenon will inevitably yield biased and limited results’ (Greene et al., 1989, p. 256); and secondly, practically, because the use of a single method or kind of source could impossibly provide a comprehensive account of women’s film festivals. Film festivals are ephemeral events (Zielinski, 2016). By definition, they are meant to be experienced by their attendees in the present; preserving their events for the future is secondary. Conducting research for this thesis I have come across many loose ends, such as brief mentions of women’s film festivals that happened during the 1970s or 1980s, or websites of more recent festivals that have not been updated for years or expired. I have come across “skeletons” of festivals or even just individual “bones” without a trace of more detail – the majority of women’s film festivals are not comprehensively documented and archived. Researching them poses significant methodological challenges and requires a mixed-method approach. I applied a variety of methods at different stages in my project, including desk-based research, interviews, case studies and archival study.

### 2.2.1 Timeframe

The project began in October 2015 with an initial phase of desk research into existing scholarship on film festivals, feminist film theory and cinefeminism. I began conducting expert interviews in September 2016.<sup>14</sup> In total, I conducted six loosely structured interviews with women and researchers who had intense experience with historical and contemporary women’s film festivals. Fieldwork for the case studies began in April 2017 at the International Women’s Film Festival in Dortmund and consisted of participant observation and interviews with attending filmmakers. I subsequently returned to Dortmund in July 2017 to conduct interviews with the festival director Silke Rübiger, festival manager Christina Essenberger and programmer Sonja Hofmann. I also used this trip for desk-based archival study in the festival’s office space. In August 2017, I attended London Feminist Film Festival and my fieldwork included participant observation as well as an interview with the festival director, Anna Read. The final stage of fieldwork was conducted at Underwire Festival in London in November 2018, consisting again of participant observation and interviews with the festival director Anna Bogutskaya and co-

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<sup>14</sup> A complete list of interview partners who participated in this study can be found in the Interview List at the end of the thesis.

founder Gabriella Apicella. The final stage of my research took place between January 2018 and July 2018, which saw me returning to archival research in order to complement my contemporary case studies with a historical example, the Women's Event at EIFF72. Building on reconstructive interviews with Laura Mulvey and Lynda Myles and my research on existing film festival scholarship conducted at earlier stages in the project, I consulted archival materials held by the National Library of Scotland (NLS), the BFI Reuben Library and online archives, such as the *Women and Film* archive hosted by *Jump Cut* (Ejumpcut.org [no date]).

### 2.2.2 Starting Points

Harding suggests that research, which takes women's lived experiences as a starting point results in a more nuanced and reflected account of knowledge applicable to all levels of society (1993). Informed by this philosophical approach to knowledge production, it was crucial to place interviews with experts in women's film festivals at the heart of my research project.

Between September 2016 and May 2017, I conducted expert interviews with six individuals. The interviews were informal and loosely structured around a set of pre-formulated questions. However, plenty of space was given to interviewees to digress and talk about aspects of women's film festivals and cinefeminism they deemed important. The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and were conducted, where possible, face-to-face or via Skype. The women I interviewed were:

- Prof Kay Armatage, co-organiser of the Women and Film International Festival in Toronto 1973, Professor Emerita at the University of Toronto and international programmer at TIFF from 1983 to 2004;
- Debra Zimmerman, Executive Director of the New York-based feminist film distribution company Women Make Movies;
- Melissa Silverstein, founder of *Women and Hollywood* and founder and director of Athena Film Festival in New York;
- Dr Skadi Loist, Professor at Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF in Potsdam;



- Lynda Myles, writer and producer, former director of EIFF 1973 – 1980, co-organiser of the Women’s Event at EIFF72 and former Head of the Fiction Department at National Film and Television School; and
- Prof Laura Mulvey, Professor at Birkbeck, University of London and co-organiser of the Women’s Event at EIFF72.

The interviewees were chosen for their expertise in – and often first-hand experience of – the early stages of women’s film festivals in North America and Europe, and their comprehensive knowledge of historical and contemporary cinefeminist movements, women’s film festivals and the wider festival circuit. The purpose of the interviews was for me to recognise common themes, challenges and ideas that the women would identify independently from one another. The conversations gave them the platform to discuss the themes and developments at women’s film festivals they considered most significant.

Analysing the interviews and cross-referencing the information with existing scholarship on women’s film festivals, I identified several shared considerations. First, the women shared a distinct awareness that festivals are ephemeral events by default and that their documentation is not necessarily a priority for the organisers. Second, the women showed a shared concern to express the purpose of women’s film festivals, and third, related to that, describe the relationship between these events and the wider festival circuit and the film industry in general. It was important to them to challenge the notion of women’s film festivals as forming simply a subordinate circuit to the international film festival circuit, and to highlight the variety of intentions and purposes women’s film festivals can fulfil. A fourth shared element of these interviews was the reflection on feminist theories and the role of feminist movements within women’s film festivals.

On the basis of the shared observations of the women I interviewed and the women who testified their accounts of women’s film festivals in existing scholarship, I developed research questions for this thesis, as well as a theoretical framework for my case studies.

### **2.2.3 Case Studies**

Cresswell describes case studies as a method that is used in many disciplines either to ‘develop an in-depth understanding of a single case’ or to utilise ‘a single case as an exemplifying demonstration of a particular issue’ (Cresswell, 2013, p. 97). In this thesis, I

present three case studies of four festivals to illuminate some of the key issues raised in the expert interviews. These case studies draw on multiple forms of data, collected through participant observation, interviews and archival research. The studies have an instrumental intent, which means that they serve to illustrate particular issues, rather than presenting case studies for the sole purpose of documenting each individual festival.

According to Cresswell, there are five steps to case study research. First, the boundaries of the case study are defined and its suitability stated. Second, a representative case or several suitable cases are identified. Third comes a period of extensive data collection from multiple sources, such as ‘documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation or physical artefacts’ (Cresswell, 2013, p. 100). Fourth, the collected data is sorted, contextualised and analysed. Finally, the researcher provides an interpretation of what meaning is derived from the study. This section will discuss my process of case study research, focussing particularly on the first three steps.

### ***Setting Boundaries***

In the initial stages of this research project, I sought to identify how many women’s film festivals exist around the world. Due to the scale of this task, I limited my inquiry to online research, consulting existing festival databases and search engines. Unfortunately, the category of women’s film festivals eludes clear definition. Browsing established festival databases, such as the *Festivals Directory* by the British Council, and applying “women” as search term resulted in an extensive list of festivals, including those that have a special strand for women’s films (Britishcouncil.org, 2016). *The Film Festival Timeline* by The Takes – and online project management resource for film and TV production – lists only two film festivals when filtering the search result for “women” (Thetakes.com [no date]). Other established databases and directories of film festivals do not offer the option of refining search criteria to film festivals focussing on films by and about women. One exception is the directory of festivals provided by the IWFFN (International Women’s Film Festival Network, 2018a). However, since festivals must apply and meet certain requirements to be members of this network, it does not cover all existing women’s film festivals.

With the help of additional research through the use of search engines, I was able to identify over 130 women’s film festivals across Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and the

Americas.<sup>15</sup> Depending on their location, their affiliation with organisations, charities or educational institutions, and other factors, they are embedded in a variety of cultural, political and social contexts.

The first step to determining feasible boundaries for my case studies was to identify selection criteria that would facilitate choosing individual festivals for this research project. My fieldwork at festivals would include interviews and participant observation. It was crucial to me that I would be able to represent individual's statements and my observations of discussions or situations at festivals with the absence of language or cultural barriers. Thus, my own skills and capacity was a significant decisive factor in defining the selection of case studies. I decided to choose only from festivals where German or English were the primary languages spoken at events, to avoid translation issues or linguistic misunderstandings. Furthermore, I made the choice to focus on festivals in geographical and cultural areas I felt familiar with, to limit potential issues of cultural misinterpretations. As such, I limited the group of potential festivals for case studies to festivals that happened in western regions, more specifically in the UK, Ireland, the US, Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

### ***Identifying Case Studies***

The next step was to identify at which festivals I would conduct fieldwork. Even by limiting the pool of potential cases to the above-mentioned countries, there were still over 80 women's film festivals from which to choose. As fieldwork was to be conducted between March and November of my second PhD year, I could eliminate all festivals that took place at a different time of the year. As many women's film festivals take place in March, I could also rule out a high number because they would overlap. Similarly, financial restrictions helped to narrow down the number of feasible potential cases and eliminate festivals taking place overseas in North America.

The key issues relating to women's film festivals, which I identified through the expert interviews described above, played a significant role in the selection of specific festivals for case studies. The first issue I identified was concerned with the position of women's film festivals within the wider film industry and among other film festivals on the circuit.

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<sup>15</sup> A complete list of these women's film festivals can be found in Appendix A.

A suitable festival for a representative case study to demonstrate this issue would have been running for an extended period, allowing the festival to establish itself on local, national and international levels. The festival would also orient its programme and identity outwards, rather than primarily focussing on inwards-oriented community building. As the longest running women's film festival in Germany, the International Women's Film Festival in Dortmund and Cologne distinguishes itself in all these aspects. It was therefore chosen as a case study to demonstrate the purpose and positioning of women's film festivals on the festival circuit.

Another key issue I identified was women's film festivals' reciprocal relationship with the women's movement and feminist philosophies. The histories, movements and theories of feminisms across time, cultures and geographical regions are diverse, and their significance for or impact on women's film festivals varies from festival to festival. Thus it seemed particularly useful to discuss these connections on the basis of a comparative case study. It was crucial to me to address the diverse range of relationships between women's film festivals and feminisms. In fact, the two festivals I chose for this case study – UF and LFFF – take place in the same city – London, UK. The choice of these two cases illustrates how different these relationships can be within a narrow cultural context and suggests how diverse relationships would be in an analysis of festivals with completely different cultural and historical contexts.

A third focus in this thesis relates to the history of women's film festivals and their documentation and archiving. The analysis of this issue is based on a historical case study, the documentation of the Women's Event at EIFF72. I chose this festival because of its historical significance as well as the proximity of the festival's archive to my home institution in Scotland. While the documentation of the event has significant gaps, gaining access to the stored materials and the people who were involved with it was fairly easy for me. I could also easily travel to consult the archival material in Edinburgh repeatedly.

## ***Data Collection***

### *Fieldwork*

The third step of fieldwork, according to Cresswell, is data collection. Between March 2017 and April 2018, I conducted fieldwork at three women's film festivals to gather data through participant observation and interviews, and consulted archival documents and

materials in festival archives, NLS and other institutions, such as the BBC, BFI or the Moving Image Archive of Scotland. Amongst these sources of data, it is crucial to discuss my level of access as well as the necessity of physical presence of the researcher.

Julian Stringer calls access to festivals the 'key to success of this kind of work' (Stringer, 2003, p. 242), and my access varied from case study to case study. While FFF gave me free festival accreditation and unobstructed access to their festival archive in Dortmund later in the year, the festivals in London were not able to supply me with free tickets. Both festivals welcomed my participation and the festival directors were available for interviews and follow up questions via email, but neither of them gave me access to archival materials. UF co-founder Apicella and festival director Bogutskaya were very helpful by introducing me to committee and staff members, local filmmakers and regular patrons of the festival. LFFF festival director Read had very little availability during the festival itself, but introduced me to several staff members and friends of the festival on the last night of my visit.

In Dortmund, I was welcomed by festival director Rübiger, but due to the number of events she had to attend herself, she had little availability to speak to me further. Contact with staff members during the festival was minimal. On the one hand this strengthened my position as festival participant, but on the other hand it made me miss out on a few key events for accredited festival guests, such as a networking meeting for women in the German film industry, as no information was passed on to me. Dortmund was the only festival location I visited in person twice, as I returned to the city in July 2017 for interviews with Rübiger, festival manager Essenberger and programmer Hofmann. I spent three days in the festival office, conducting these interviews and identifying and collecting relevant materials from the festival archive.

During the festival events I attended, I was both participant and observer. I remained anonymous as a researcher to the majority of the present audiences, participated in post-screening discussions and had social interactions with filmmakers, festival staff and audience members at festival venues. As a researcher and because I had worked at many film festivals before and understand how they are organised, I was both insider and outsider at the festivals I attended. Thus, it was important for me to reflect on the tensions this would create between the knowledge I sought to create on the basis of the case studies, and the knowledge I had accumulated from practical experience at festivals. However, my

methodological approach, always beginning from and building on the lived experiences of the festival organisers I interviewed, helped me to navigate my position as researcher. The interviews allowed me to reflect on my observations during the festivals, identifying where they were potentially influenced by my role as festival insider, and addressing these issues in a dialogue with my interview partners.

### *Archive Research*

Methodologically, synthesising the history of women's film festivals and my case study of the Women's Event at EIFF72 presented the most challenging parts of my research. One of the biggest challenges in the research of historical women's film festivals is the lack of documentation. Many community-oriented film festivals, not only women's film festivals, struggle to secure funding that covers not just the costs of hosting a festival event itself, but also core costs, such as renting permanent office and archive spaces. Furthermore, many festivals cannot afford to pay employees year-round or provide specific training that would be required to create and maintain a sustainable archive. However, even in permanent art spaces that are at least partially dedicated to creative content created by women, artefacts are not always safe. Barlow describes an exemplary incident at the California Institute of Arts, where archived materials from a feminist art programme were 'thrown out because there was no place to store them' (2003, p. 4).

Yet it was not only the limited availability of space that caused the loss of this material, but also the significance that was attributed to it. Another challenge of locating archive material about women's film festivals is the fact that many of these events were not considered important enough (Armatage, 2009a; Barlow, 2003). Women's film festivals were not driven by industry sales and press coverage. The films shown were often low-budget productions, short films, experimental films or documentaries and directed by women who were not invited to screen their films at international film festivals across Europe – films that the mainstream film industry had little interest in. They were hardly ever covered by the mainstream press and only a few distributors would have attended looking out for films to acquire (Armatage 2009b). Women's film festivals and the films screened at them were insignificant for the neoliberal industry of film circulation. In a time- and resource-restricted environment, archiving was not seen as a priority since all efforts were poured into the present and the future of organising events.

The women's film festivals that proliferated in the 1970s throughout North America and Europe were mostly community-driven events, based on volunteer or short-term work. The majority were one-off events, never institutionalised as recurring festivals. Barlow argues that they were '[often] deliberately conceived as impermanent and designed to be experienced in the present rather than preserved for posterity' (Barlow, 2003, p. 9). Most women's film festivals were organised to create immediate opportunities for women filmmakers to screen their films, for audiences to engage with non-mainstream cinema and for all attendees to share and discuss issues of women's rights. They were platforms for taking prompt action and exchanging ideas. Unlike major European film festivals at the time, they were not meant to create legacies as recurring festivals. Perhaps, festival organisers were optimistic and thought their goal of equal opportunities in the film industry would be reached so quickly, that women's film festivals as spaces that call out the lacking representation of women, would become redundant. They might not have expected that, decades later, women would still be protesting for equal pay, reproductive rights and their place in society and the media.<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, even the material that has been kept might be useless for future research, as catalogues, flyers and notes are forgotten in private collections in attics and basements. Films and video tapes disintegrate in dark boxes, outdated technology cannot be played or converted any longer and personal experiences of the women's film festivals go unrecorded and are subsequently lost (Barlow, 2003, p. 8). Thus, it is the availability of material that dictated which film festivals can be considered in greater detail in this thesis, for example in Chapter 3, which establishes a historical overview of women's film festivals, and in Chapter 6 that is dedicated to EIFF72.

The Women's Event in Edinburgh was part of one of the oldest film festivals in the world and is associated with prominent key figures in the British film industry: producer and former EIFF director Lynda Myles and filmmaker and film scholar Laura Mulvey. Yet, it is not very well documented. Interviews with the co-organisers and archival research gave

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<sup>16</sup> A sign held by a Polish woman, who protested her government's plan to ban access to abortion in 2016, for example, read, "I can't believe I still have to protest this fucking shit". A photo of the sign went viral and numerous publications have reported about it (for example Orr, 2016; Hanson, 2017; Capdevila and Lazard, 2017).

me the opportunity to learn more about this event. However, both methods are problematic in their own way.

My access to archival materials from the event was obstructed by factors such as the lack of resources and documentation. While EIFF has an expansive collection of archival materials, they are not catalogued. As I could not gain personal access to the archive space, my research relied on support from EIFF staff members, who had little time or resources to search the archive for items that might be relevant to me. Television scholar Margaret Compton writes that:

Archivists' prime challenges today are funding, managing storage (both physical and digital storage conditions, space needs, and their related costs), and format migration. Budget and staff cuts at libraries, archives, museums, and historical societies mean that preservation priorities are shifting. (Compton, 2007, p. 132)

While Compton refers to television archives first and foremost, her statement can also be applied to other archives, such as those documenting film festivals or the women's movement. Due to the lack of resources, knowledge and documentation of the Women's Event, the process of archival research within this case study was obstructed significantly. Some of the most valuable sources about the event I found by pure chance; for example, when a friend who used to work for EIFF and Filmhouse in Edinburgh, told me about a private EIFF archive collection held at the National Library of Scotland. Since the library assistants at NLS had not mentioned this collection to me, I can only assume that they did not know about it. Some of the items in this collection were incredibly useful to my research, others posed more questions than they could answer. Ger Zielinski's work on festival ephemera and their value proved very instructive for me (2016). He suggests that these even seemingly useless pieces of ephemera can contribute to the research of a specific phenomenon. He argues that '[these] ephemera are crucial to a study of how any festival presents itself to the world' (Zielinski, 2016, p. 141). Analysing the documents held in the EIFF archive, I therefore focussed on the potential of knowledge production of each item.

I was also influenced by Stringer's argument that documents such as brochures, press releases, letter correspondences or press clippings contribute to the establishment of the festival image. He states that:



this specific kind of public communication serves a three-fold function between audience and speaker: understanding and definition, the offering of entertainment and display, and the creation and sharing of community. (Stringer, 2008, pp. 53-54)

Adopting these perspectives helped me to navigate the materials I found in the archives of EIFF and the festival in Dortmund, no matter how important or insignificant they appeared.

### *Interviews*

For each case study, I conducted formal, semi-structured interviews with members of the organising teams and participating filmmakers. All interviews were audio-recorded to facilitate a free-flowing conversation between the interviewee and the researcher. All participants completed and signed ethics forms, which authorised me to record our talks and use them as research sources. These interviews lasted between ten and ninety minutes, although my conversations with key organisers of the festivals were usually located on the longer end of this spectrum. In total, I conducted eleven interviews with,

- Silke Rübiger, artistic director of FFF from 1993 to 2018;
- Christina Essenberger, festival manager at FFF;
- Sonja Hofmann, programmer at FFF;
- Elena Nevariani, filmmaker, participant at FFF17;
- Marion Hänsel, filmmaker, participant at FFF17;
- Meg Rickards, filmmaker, participant at FFF17;
- Pecha Lo, director of Women Make Waves film festival and jury member at FFF17;
- Anna Bogutskaya, artistic director of UF;
- Gabriella Apicella, co-founder of UF;

- Anna Read, founder and director of LFFF;
- Prof Laura Mulvey, co-organiser of the Women's Event at EIFF72; and
- Lynda Myles, co-organiser of the Women's Event at EIFF72.

The interviews with Mulvey and Myles and parts of my conversation with Rübiger stand out because our discussions evolved around events that happened thirty to almost fifty years in the past. These interviews were not just recorded conversations with experts; they were a form of oral history with a reconstructive agenda. In *Oral History Theory*, Lynn Abrams suggests that interviews can 'provide evidence about past events which could not be retrieved from conventional historical sources, usually written ones' (Abrams, 2010, p. 5). Due to the lack of written sources about the Women's Event in particular, these reconstructive interviews with Myles and Mulvey were crucial to my research. The issue with these interviews, however, was that they rest upon the memories of the interviewees and memory can be an unreliable source. Abrams refers to Alessandra Portelli's suggestion that it is crucial to acknowledge that the results of oral history interviews are 'floating [...] between the present and an ever-changing past' (Portelli, 1991, cited in Abrams, 2010, p. 1). For me, it was therefore important to consider multiple sources of data and where possible cross-reference the recorded memories with written sources and archival materials. On their own, neither source of data would have been sufficient to survey these festivals comprehensively, but combining them in a mixed-method approach, allowed "festival images" to emerge.

### *Re-Staging*

A significant part of the case study of the Women's Event was the reconstruction of the historical event in 1972. As argued above, festivals are ephemeral events that are meant to be experienced in the present. Each individual participant experiences it differently and thus there are multiple narratives that create the memory or history of a festival. I attempted to find women who could remember attending the Women's Event, spoke to people who were active in the women's film movement at the time, such as Barbara Evans and B. Ruby Rich, and posted a call for memories on the blog of the Women's Film and Television History Network - UK/Ireland (Kamleitner, 2018). These attempts proved to be fruitless and apart from Myles and Mulvey, I was not able to interview anyone who had been at the Event. It was thus impossible to reconstruct a comprehensive picture of the

festival atmosphere and the reception of the event from oral or written sources. Instead, I decided to host a re-staging of the Women's Event in Glasgow.

This method of data collection was inspired by Dall'Asta and Gaines' understanding of doing historical research (2015). Writing about reconstructing women's film history, Dall'Asta and Gaines suggest that artefacts cannot 'show us past events "as they really happened"' and that '[events] cannot be replayed or accessed by retellings' (2015, p. 18). Drawing on paradigms of memory studies (Erll, 2011; White, 1973), they argue that their research is based on the assumption that history – much like memory – is both the account of past events, as well as the narrative of those events. They consider history as fiction that is to an extent always fabricated from reliable sources and ideological constructs. That is not to say that history is inevitably fiction or that researchers can say whatever they want about historical events like the Women's Event. It means that historical accounts of events must acknowledge its narrators and accommodate a multiplicity of voices in creating these histories. In the context of Film Festival Studies, Dayan has similarly argued for the simultaneous existence of multiple, individual festival narratives (2002). Dall'Asta and Gaines' understanding of doing history means that it is an act that takes place in the present. If time was two-dimensional, doing history would be an intervention that folds time and brings points in the past and the present closer together. My aim was to stage such an intervention for the Women's Event and bring a contemporary audience as close as possible to this significant point in Edinburgh in 1972.

Due to financial restrictions, issues with sourcing rights and copies of films, as well as organisational constraints it would have been impossible to re-mount the entire programme of the Women's Event as part of this PhD project. Instead, I organised a screening of two films from the original programme. The event presented an opportunity to re-visit the festival with a local audience and discuss the films and the festival in a contemporary context. The challenges and results of applying this method will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

## 2.3 Conclusion

This chapter reflected on the philosophical considerations underpinning the research design and the methodological approach adopted for this project. It also described the research methods applied to seek answers to my research questions. The chapter has contextualised

my research within Feminist Standpoint Theory and identified how and why a mixed-methods approach was the most suitable approach for the project. Furthermore, the chapter has offered a reflective assessment of my position as researcher and provided an overview of the challenges this posed to my project.

### 3 The History of Women's Film Festivals

The first women's film festivals appeared in the early 1970s across North America and Western Europe. After the First International Festival of Women's Film in New York and the Women's Event at EIFF in Edinburgh, both in 1972, other festivals dedicated to films by women took place in cities, such as Philadelphia (1972), Toronto (1973), Washington (1973), Berlin (1973), Chicago (1974) and Paris (1974). They emerged at a time when the format of European film festivals went through radical reorganisation and many women in Western countries were engaged in the women's liberation movement. This chapter will therefore embed the history of women's film festivals in the context of film festival history and the background of the women's movement. It will provide an overview of the earliest women's film festivals, synthesising available material about their origins for the first time. The research questions at the centre of this chapter are:

- What is the history of women's film festivals, when and where did they develop and what characterised them?
- How can women's film festivals be situated within film festival history and within the history of the political women's movement in North America and in Western Europe?
- What purposes did women's film festivals fulfil historically?
- What is the current state of women's film festivals?

Inspired by Patricia White, who argues that 'women's cinema is not a cause, not minority cinema' (White, 2015, p. 39), this chapter offers a detailed examination of the history of women's film festivals. As argued earlier in this thesis, women's film festivals have often been brushed aside as a kind of special interest festival, often in the same breath as festivals that focus on minority identities such as LGBTQ+ festivals or indigenous film festivals. White's statement is helpful in understanding not only the background of women's film festivals, but also the position these events hold on the festival circuit and the diversity of women's film festivals today. The chapter contextualises women's film festivals in their contemporary political and cultural climates, and identifies key aspects

that are relevant to the wider study of women's film festivals. To conclude the chapter, I will reflect on the number and diversity of women's film festivals that exist today.

### 3.1 Women's Film Festivals and Film Festival History

Early seminal contributions to the field of film festival studies have traced the historical development of film festivals from an initially predominantly Euro-centric point of view (Elsaesser, 2005; de Valck, 2007). Marijke de Valck argues that 'history [can] help us understand why film festivals succeeded in developing into a successful network' and splits her historical overview of European film festivals since the 1930s into three phases (de Valck, 2007, p. 19). The first phase lasted from the creation of the first reoccurring film festival in Venice in 1932 until 1968. During this phase, European film festivals, such as Venice, Cannes and Berlin, were underpinned by a geopolitical agenda and served as showcases for national cinemas. Their programmes were usually pre-selected by national film committees rather than curated by the festivals themselves. Following demonstrations at the 1968 Cannes Film Festival, the established festival format was re-organised and the second historical phase of film festivals began. This period lasted until the 1980s and was characterised by independently organised film festivals and a focus on cinema as art form. The exact time of the third phase emerged is blurry, but de Valck suggests that the shift happened sometime in the 1980s (2007). It heralded the expansion of the film festival format around the world, the creation of niche film festivals, and the institutionalisation and professionalisation of film festivals. Looking beyond Europe however, de Valck's chronological overview does not match up with non-Western film festivals. The establishment for festivals such as the Mar del Plata International Film Festival in Argentina (since 1954) or the Panafrican Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO) in Burkina Faso (since 1969) fall outside this Euro-centric timeline. Many niche film festivals also sprouted outside of these constraints and it is thus crucial to expand the field of film festival history. More recent publications in film festival studies have moved away from the Euro-centric approach and have analysed and contextualised the historical development of film festivals in Africa (Dovey, 2015), Asia (Iordanova and Cheung, 2011; Berry and Robinson, 2017), South America (Barrow and Falicov, 2013; Peirano, 2016), the Middle East (Iordanova and Van de Peer, 2014) and Australia (Stevens, 2016), as well as the histories of identity-based niche film festivals (Iordanova and Torchin, 2012; Richards, 2016; Vallejo and Peirano, 2017).

In existing literature about different types of film festivals and their relationships among each other, as well as the FFRN bibliography, women's film festivals are usually listed among the specialised film festivals that are at the margins of de Valck's historiography (de Valck, 2007; Iordanova, 2009; FFRN, 2017). According to de Valck's categorisation, these niche film festivals were created around the world to cater to minority groups and communities with shared identities or interests. On her timeline, the rise of women's film festivals in the 1970s coincides with the beginnings of phase two in 1968.

The period after the Second World War witnessed a variety of cultural and political projects, such as the anti-colonialist and liberation struggles in Africa and South America, anti-communist movements in Eastern Europe, anti-war demonstrations in North America, the Civil Rights movement in the US and Western second wave feminism (de Valck, 2007). Cinema had become entangled in these projects, which is for instance exemplified by the anti-capitalist Third Cinema movement in Latin America (Wayne, 2001; Guneratne and Dissanayake, 2003). New film festivals founded during the 1950s and 1960s, such as the Pesaro Film Festival (since 1965) or the aforementioned festivals in Burkina Faso and Argentina gave a platform to voices, which were underrepresented in the national cinema showcases at other international film festivals. As opposed to Cannes, Venice or Berlin, which screened films from a selection that was provided by national film committees, festivals like Pesaro were characterised by a new kind of programming (de Valck, 2007). Films were selected on the basis of themes and aesthetics and festival directors and programmers made decisions independently from national film bodies.

In 1968, Jean Luc Godard along with other French film critics protested the dismissal of Henri Langlois from the Cinémathèque Française and disrupted the film festival in Cannes. The group also criticised the festival for failing to treat cinema as an art form and to give emerging radical directors a platform. They demanded a reorganisation of the festival (de Valck, 2007; Lloyd, 2011). In the years following these upheavals in France, major European film festivals changed their selection procedures and adopted the programming style of festivals like Pesaro. De Valck suggests that:

in much the same manner as the auteur was given credit for being the creative force behind a film, the festival director became the embodiment of the festival's image in the international film festival circuit. (2007, p. 63)

After 1968, film festivals were no longer overt showcases for national cinemas but grew into platforms for artistically valued filmmakers as well as the festival directors and

programmers who selected the films. New sections were created for alternative and political cinema, such as the *Quinzaine des Réalistes* in Cannes (since 1969) and the *Forum des Jeunes Films* in Berlin (since 1971), and many new festivals emerged (de Valck, 2007).

Since the reorganisation of film festivals after 1968, the format expanded and new festival types and niche film festivals surfaced. Considering women's film festivals in this context might make them seem like a consequence of the politicisation of film festivals. This thesis, however, argues that women's film festivals were more than a consequence. I suggest that women's film festivals were also a response to the fact that the reorganised international film festivals – just like other political movements at the time – failed to become more representative and inclusive than the systems they aimed to replace. Post 1968, women filmmakers and programmers were still widely underrepresented at film festivals and festival directors and programmers were predominantly male. Women's film festivals were a manifestation of the women's movement demanding equal opportunities and representation for women, on the level of film festivals and the film industry. The following chronicle of early women's film festivals will embed them in their historical contexts and discuss the extent to which they were connected to their respective local women's movements.

Invaluable sources for this overview are a list of women's film festivals reviewed in *Women & Film* magazine, collated by Clarissa Jacobs [no date], as well as B. Ruby Rich's reflections on the women's film movement (1998). The included festivals differ widely in terms of who organised them, what films were shown and what their prime intention was. Drawing from journal articles, published interviews, festival documentation such as catalogues and press releases, and interviews conducted with some festival organisers, the festivals offer a great variety of key aspects to consider when researching the history of women's film festivals.

### **3.2 Early Women's Film Festivals in North America**

The first women's film festivals in North America happened at a time when feminist thought had reached mainstream media and culture. Released in the 1963, Betty Friedan's seminal book *The Feminine Mystique* spoke to a vast number of predominantly white, middle-class housewives who felt disillusioned and oppressed by patriarchal society. At



the same time, many women of colour felt a sense of disenchantment with the civil rights movement because questions of gender and sexuality were not addressed to their satisfaction (Bassnett, 1986). Feminist activism offered an outlet to these and other marginalised groups of women.

Many scholars researching North American feminism agree that the women's movement was fragmented and identify two major strands; liberal and radical feminism (Bassnett, 1986; Berkeley, 1999; Fanian, [no date]). Liberal feminists focussed on equality 'before the law' and formed national institutionalised organisations like the National Organisation of Women in the US or the Committee for the Equality of Women in Canada (Berkeley, 1999, p. 20). They spoke mostly for privileged and predominantly white middle-class women, whose aims were to escape the oppression of traditional domestic arrangements and to receive equal access to civil rights and the work force. Radical feminists, on the other hand, worked mostly in grassroots organisations and aimed for larger socioeconomic and cultural changes to achieve liberation from patriarchal oppression rather than equal opportunities within existing structures and processes (Berkeley, 1999). Groups also differed over issues of race, sexual orientation and class, among others.

Even though the movement was fragmented and many women's groups held opposing views regarding their emphasis, priorities, tactics and aims, feminism, overall, was becoming increasingly popular. Liberal and radical women's groups alike addressed issues such as women's health and reproductive rights, rape and violence against women, lesbianism and separatism, the process of socialisation, and critiqued the domestic space (Barlow, 2003). Film became an important medium to do so for an increasing audience and throughout the 1960s and 70s, the women's movement and women's cinema cross-pollinated. Rich suggests that there were 'women who were feminists and thereby led to film' – those making feminist films – as well as 'women already working in film and television' who discovered feminism as a consequence and often worked at universities or started women's film festivals (1998, p. 65). Video and film became popular tools used by consciousness-raising groups across North America. Melinda Barlow describes video as an effective medium that allowed women to increase their self-awareness (2003). By using video technology to engage their self-reflexivity, women made themselves the subject of their audio-visual work, which was a stark contrast to seeing themselves as objects in films in the cinemas or on television. Rich argues that film was also increasingly used at

women's studies departments on university and college campuses in an educational context to engage the public and young people in particular with issues of women's rights (1998).

Women's film festivals were a marriage of this popularity of feminism and the high status film and video held as powerful tools within the movement. Women were largely excluded from feature filmmaking and exhibition in Canada and the US, but as filmmakers their work was embedded in a 'rich, local feminist culture' of overlapping scenes in 'feminist [film,] art, video, theatre, and literature scenes' (Fanian, [no date]). Women's film festivals presented a rare chance to exhibit their work in a relevant context, connect with other women filmmakers and save their films from lives in basements.

### 3.2.1 Grassroots Festivals in New York City

The first women's film festival to take place was the First International Festival of Women's Film, which was held from June 5-21, 1972 at Fifth Avenue Cinema in New York City (Jacobs, [no date]). The festival was financed with the private money of festival director, Kristina Nordstrom, and relied heavily on volunteer work. It had not been advertised in or covered by any mainstream press in advance and instead relied on peer-to-peer marketing among the local feminist community in New York City (Salyer, 1972). Saundra Salyer's report about the festival in *Women and Film* magazine, which she wrote under the pen name Dora Kaplan, states:

Against a silent and hostile established press, internal staff and organizational hassles, three postponed starting dates, and an impatient group of participants, the First International Festival of Women's Films emerged shaky, unconfident and poorly attended its first week but climaxed in a loud insistent demand for a repeat performance two and a half weeks later. (Salyer, 1972, p. 38)

The festival faced several organisational issues and was postponed a number of times. Yet, it turned into a successful event and received positive feedback from the local feminist press (Henshaw, 1972; Lester, 1972; Salyer, 1972). The organisers even gathered for a second edition – the Second New York International Festival of Women's Films – in 1976, but it was 'smaller, noncollective [and] less successful than the first' (Rich, 1998, p. 64).

In 1972, the programme contained over one-hundred films; thirteen feature films, four documentaries and ninety-six shorts, some of which were shown in thematically arranged programmes, others together with the long films (Jacobs, [no date]). The films were both

current and historical, giving contemporary filmmakers the opportunity to exhibit their work at the same time as contributing to the archaeological project of digging up women's contributions to film history. Among the features were Mai Zetterling's *The Girls* (1968), Dorothy Arzner's *The Wild Party* (1929), Ida Lupino's *The Bigamist* (1953) and Liliana Cavalli's *The Year of the Cannibals (I cannibali)*, (1970). Many films were made by North American filmmakers – most of the shorts were in fact US-American productions – but also numerous European contributions from Sweden, Italy, Finland, France, Hungary, Poland, the UK, Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. The fifteen short film programmes contained four to eight films each and bore names such as “Women: Myth and Reality”, “Pioneers of Cinema and Theatre”, “Maternal Images”, “Eroticism and Exploitation” and “Camaraderie” (List of Films at Women's Film Festival in New York [no date]). As such, they reflected many issues raised by the women's movement, such as sexuality, domesticity, sisterhood and reproductive rights. The festival also hosted a series of panel discussions on such topics and with titles as “The Image of Women in Film”, “Directing and Production”, “Women in Television”, “Is there a Female Film Aesthetic?” and “The Image of Men in Film” (Salyer, 1972).

The audience was made up of filmmakers, activists, frequent cinemagoers and members of the alternative press from New York who gathered to celebrate women's contributions to the film industry as well as feminist activism (Salyer, 1972). The event posed a valuable networking opportunity for women working with film, giving them an opportunity to exchange information, jobs and ideas, find other women to collaborate with and build strong connections outside the established film industry.

These aspects – the programme, the audience, the financial and organisational background – make this festival an illustrative example of the kind of work US-American grassroots groups of radical feminist artists staged in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Using film as a captivating medium to engage audiences in women's issues, the festival provided an unprecedented opportunity for women filmmakers to screen their work and meet others in the field. With little attention from mainstream media, the festival made use of an extensive network of local women's groups and gathered films by women who took the opportunity to represent versions of themselves on the screen.

Only three months later, another women's film festival took place at The Kitchen, a multi-media theatre in Greenwich Village, New York. Co-founder Steina Vasulka was

programming a series of video screenings at the venue and noticed that despite women making up a third of the local New York-based video community, significantly fewer women video artists submitted their work for the series. This realisation led her to create a dedicated festival for women's videos (Barlow, 2003). The Women's Video Festival happened from September 14-30, 1972 at The Kitchen (Barlow, 2003). The festival was co-organised by Vasulka, herself an electronic art pioneer, and documentary filmmaker Susan Milano in collaboration with Shridhar Bapat from The Kitchen and Laura Kassos. It ran from 1972 until 1980, apart from a fallow year in 1974, and also toured to other cities in the US and Europe (Barlow, 2003).

Funding for the festival came from Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), which also provided funding for The Kitchen, and a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts (Eai.org, [no date]). In later years, the festival secured additional sponsorship from the Women's Interart Center, and subsequently moved to its venue in Manhattan in 1975 (Barlow, 2003). With the additional funding, the video festival was able to expand its programme to non-videotape-based content, such as staged viewing environments and the inclusion of sculptures (Milano, 1976; Eai.org, [no date]). Alongside Vasulka's own online archive, where numerous festival documents such as posters, catalogues, invitations, press releases and a 45-page proposal are freely accessible, the EAI also hosts several documents regarding the first two festival editions on its website (Eai.org, [no date]; Vasulka.org, [no date]).

Unlike the first women's film festival in New York, the video festival focussed entirely on new and contemporary work in a medium that was particularly popular among feminists and women creatives (Barlow, 2003). Milano indicates that US-American women were largely excluded from the local mainstream film industry and that relevant trade unions had restricted access for women (Milano, 1976). Video as an audio-visual medium, on the other hand, was more accessible to many women artists. Barlow argues that this was due to the affordability of the technology, but also the specific materiality of the medium. She writes:

[Video] was solicited in many different directions by all kinds of artists and group shows like the New York Women's Video Festival [...] In this moment, the low coast, instantaneous transmission, and sense of intimacy offered by the medium seemed to forecast a revolution in image-making; access was of paramount importance, and controlling the technology was, for women, tremendously empowering. (Barlow, 2003, p. 7)

The festival organisers sent out sixty-five requests to women video artists in New York and California and received twenty-five submissions in return (Barlow, 2003, p. 14). The submitted films were mostly personal documentaries and essayistic experimental films, and while many films were submitted by individuals, there was also a significant number of films by collectives, often leaving the names of individual contributors unknown (Barlow, 2003).

The festival's focus on video, the popularity of personal documentary filmmaking, and the emphasis on collectivism reflected trends within the North American women's movement. As mentioned above, many women's groups across the continent used video and film to foster engaged discourses with screenings and to encourage women to explore and tell their own stories. As such, it is perhaps not surprising that many of the submitted films touched upon common topics in the women's movement, such as sexuality, violence against women, reproductive rights, beauty standards and oppression in or by domestic spaces.

### 3.2.2 Mainstream Media Take an Interest

The relationship between the feminist movement and mainstream media was complex. Feminist groups often faced harsh critique and ridicule in mainstream media, and organised well-publicised demonstrations and protest actions against publishers or art institutions who excluded women (Berkeley, 1986; Bassnett, 1986). Many such groups targeted media with a focus on changing the representation of women and supported women to participate and create media themselves (Barlow, 2003). In her introduction to the catalogue of the 1976 edition of the Women's Video Festival in New York Milano writes:

Women in the Movement knew that the possibility of change depended on their own ability to reach the public with their message-not a reporter's version of it. Many newspapers and publications were born, independent films made, and organizations formed. Very slowly avenues of communication began to open: small monthly publications were able to expand distribution to more states; independent women filmmakers started distributing their own films-first to other women's groups and then to the growing number of universities and colleges offering women's studies programs. (Milano, 1976)

However, many mainstream publishers also recognised the potential in the women's movement, giving them access to a wide network of engaged women's groups all over the

US and Canada (Berkeley, 1999). By 1972, when the first women's film festival happened in New York City, women were on the covers of mainstream magazines, such as Kate Millet on *Time* magazine in 1970, film magazines, such as *Film Library Quarterly* and *Film Comment*, published special editions about women and film and filmographies of women's films, and songs like 'I Am Woman' by Helen Reddy (1971) were on top of the music charts. New galleries were opened focussing entirely on works by women and Women Make Movies began to train women in New York in filmmaking techniques. Art institutions like the California Institute of Art or the College Art Association created special programmes and caucuses for women. A number of feminist magazines were established and circulated widely, such as the independent *Women and Film* magazine in California and New York's *Ms.* magazine, which was partially funded by Warner Communications, owner of Warner Bros. Pictures, DC Comics and several other mainstream media outlets (Barlow, 2003; Rich, 1998).

The Films by Women Festival in Chicago is an excellent example of mainstream media taking an interest in the feminist movement. The festival took place from September 3-17, 1974 at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and attracted around 10,000 people (Bale, 2011; Hershman, 2006; Rich, 1998). It was organised by a collective including B. Ruby Rich, Patricia Erens, Virginia Wright Wexman, Laurel Ross, who acted as festival coordinator, and several other local women. The collective also received input from Laura Mulvey, who had been involved with the Women's Event at EIFF72.

Other than its predecessors in New York, which had been funded through either public grants or private savings, the festival in Chicago was supported and financed by the local daily newspaper, *Chicago Tribune* (Rich, 1998). According to Rich, the paper's marketing department provided office space, a budget to employ a full-time festival coordinator, support by the art department as well as daily advertising space during the festival. The idea for the festival was conceived by the paper's male film critic Gene Siskel, after seeing Mireille Dansereau's *Dream Life (La vie rêvée)*, 1972) in Washington, D.C., and marvelling at how 'different' it was to see a film shot from a woman's point of view (Rich, 1998, p. 33). Yet, the reason why it was the marketing department and not the editorial side of the *Tribune* that funded the festival was most likely that the paper saw a potential for reaching new audiences. Rich suspects that they wanted to shake off their stuffy 'Republican image' and attract different groups of readers who would have read different local newspapers at

that time: culture-oriented people, art students, liberals and, of course, women (Rich, 1998, p. 35).

The content of the festival was decided upon independently by the organising collective. Reflecting on this organisational structure of the festival, Rich writes:

And unfortunately, we said, “Oh, no, this is a feminist film festival. We have to have a collective.” And so we organized a collective, and this became like endless headaches, with women fighting over who would get to do what and who was going to get credit. (Rich quoted in Hershman, 2006)

At the time, Rich described herself first and foremost as a film curator. She was interested in feminism and women's filmmaking but could not identify with the consciousness-raising groups she had tried to attend at school. She was one of the women she described as working in film and television first and discovering feminism as a consequence (Rich, 1998). The organising collective of the Chicago women's film festivals decided to stay consistent with the way prior festivals of women's film in New York, Edinburgh or Toronto had been structured. They selected old films and current work, films representing the avant-garde as well as Hollywood, documentaries and videos, and paired short with feature-length films. They invited filmmakers to speak about their work and hosted a series of feminist debates, panels and workshops in which women learnt how to make low budget films. These sessions were recorded on video and the workshops also resulted in documentaries being produced (Bale, 2011; Hershman, 2006; Rich, 1998). Among the films presented were *Dirty Mary (La Fiancée du Pirate)*, 1969) by Nelly Kaplan, Jill Godmilow and Judy Collins' Academy Award-nominated documentary *Antonia: A Portrait of the Woman* (1974) and the controversial *The Blue Light (Das Blaue Licht)*, 1932) by German director Leni Riefenstahl, who directed several propaganda films for the Nazi government during the 1930s. Films were selected with an ethos of inclusivity. As Rich writes, 'virtually anything made by a woman could be included', even if the director was not favourable for the women's movement herself or her films were not particularly feminist in their aesthetics or message (Rich, 1998).

Even though it was a one-off event, the festival had a significant impact on the local community. Rich remembers:

For years afterwards I met women who said it changed their lives; women who had left their marriages, women who had decided to go back to school, women who had changed their profession. (Rich quoted in Bale, 2011)

The success of the festival in Chicago illustrates the impact women's film festivals could have at the time and why some mainstream media would be interested in being associated with them and the wider women's movement.

### 3.2.3 Across the Border: A Women's Film Festival in Canada

Unsurprisingly, the format of women's film festivals – just like the women's liberation movement with its consciousness-raising and women-only groups – also travelled north across the US border to Canada. The context the festivals were embedded in there, however, changed significantly. As Susan Bassnett argues, the women's movement was not one global movement with 'regional developments of the same thing' (Bassnett, 1986, p. 1). Instead, the cultural, social and political context influenced the tactics and priorities of the women's movement in Canada.

In 1972, inspired by the festivals held in New York and encouraged by Canadian filmmaker Sylvia Spring, whose film *Madeleine is...* (1971) is regarded as the first Canadian feature film directed by a woman, a group of women in Toronto formed the Women and Film organisation and started planning a festival of women's films (Armatage, 2009; Femfilm.ca, [no date]). Woman and Film International Film Festival took place in downtown Toronto from June 8 – 17, 1973 at St Lawrence Centre, a large performing arts theatre complex opened in 1970, and went on a subsequent tour to cinemas in eighteen Canadian cities (Armatage, 2009a; Jackson, 2005). It was the largest women's film festival thus far and screened over 180 films, including Nell Shipman's silent film *Back to God's Country* (1919) and Severson's montage of vagina close-ups, *Near the Big Chakra* (1971) (Jackson, 2005).

Just like in the United States, the women's movement was gaining traction in Canada since the late 1960s and early 1970s. The liberal government led by Pierre Eliot Trudeau, who was elected in 1968, had given into demands by women's groups and installed a Royal Commission on the Status of Women. According to Kay Armatage, this made feminism essentially a 'governmentally sanctioned movement in Canada' (2009a, p. 87). At the same time, the women's movement became manifest in cultural institutions. In 1971, a women's



video and performance gallery named A Space opened its doors in Toronto and the National Gallery of Canada hosted its first major exhibition by a women artist – Joyce Wieland's work on women's totems exploring traditional and domestic crafts. In 1972, *Take One* film magazine published a special edition on women's cinema (Armatage, 2009a). Colleges and universities became significant locations for feminist grassroots groups and hosted consciousness-raising sessions, while institutionalised women's groups targeted the government directly and campaigned for funding to be set aside for women-specific projects (Fanian [no date]). In 1971, the government launched the Local Initiatives Program (LIP), which presented a versatile solution to create jobs as well as fostering the Canadian creative industries. The programme distributed financial support to cultural organisations, many of which were targeted at women and youth (Fanian [no date]). One of these organisations was Women and Film, who received CAD\$25,000 for the organisation of its festival. This significant contribution of federal funding allowed the organisation to pay for administration and salary costs. Kay Armatage, who was one of the staffers, remembers:

Trudeau just threw money at young people, created jobs, and there were a lot of grants available for community projects and for starting [...] arts groups of any sort. (Armatage, 2016)

Additional funding over CAD\$14,000 could be secured from the Ontario Arts Council, the Province of Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, Youth and Recreation Branch and the Toronto City Council (Armatage, 2009a).

There were nine women staff members as well as up to forty other women – video artists, filmmakers, writers and other feminists – who attended regular committee meetings. Armatage suggests that the team had a predominantly 'white liberal feminist agenda'; for them, the festival was about providing positive role models and representations of women, consciousness-raising activities and addressing sexism and gender inequities (Armatage, 2009a, p. 88). She recalls that there were many arguments in the collective about what kind of films should be screened, whether men would be allowed to attend the events and how decisions among the organisers should be made (Armatage, 2009a).

Admission to all screenings throughout the ten-day festival were free and on-site day care was provided free of charge. There was an organic food court in the lobby of St Lawrence Centre as well as an exhibition of women's photographs, TVs showing a curated video programme and daily parties (Armatage, 2009a). Many guests were able to attend the

festival, such as Sylvia Spring, Stephanie Rothman, Mireille Danserau, Shirley Clarke, Viva Superstar and Agnès Varda. They presented their films, participated in discussions and hosted workshops.

The festival was well publicised. Thanks to the substantial budget, the organisers distributed 10,000 printed posters throughout Toronto and had 25,000 copies of the printed programme. National radio had covered the festival in advance and mainstream press took a special interest in gossip surrounding some of the team members, such as Jull Frayne or Penny Berton, who were daughters of nationally rewarded media representatives, or Deanne Tayler, who was a child star on *CBC*, Canada's public broadcasting service (Armatage, 2009a). The impact of the festival is undeniable, and Armatage recalls:

Nobody had anticipated how successful the festival would be. Every screening was sold out and there were all kinds of activities surrounding the films. One of our team, Anne Mackenzie became second in command at [Toronto International Film Festival]. Some people today think that it was the success of our festival that gave the idea to TIFF and other festivals that followed. (Armatage, 2016)

Mackenzie would not be the only staff member of Women and Film who went on to work for TIFF. Kay Armatage joined the festival in 1983 and helped shape it as a programmer until 2004 (Jackson, 2005). However, Women and Film did not just create a prototype of a successful film festival format in Canada. The organisation also secured additional funding for a Canada-wide film tour in 1973 and several follow-up events and conferences in 1974 and 1975 (Armatage, 2009a). The organisation's aims were to continue work as a national organisation with the head office in Toronto, to start a distribution circuit for films by women, to launch a magazine or newsletter and to collect a comprehensive database of all available films by women (Armatage, 2009a).

However, the organisation was riddled with internal disputes. These reflected not necessarily the fragmentation of the women's movement – although there were also disagreements about the feminist vision for Women and Film – but rather political issues of federalism in Canada. The decision to steer all Women and Film projects from Toronto formed the basis of a debate on regionalism. During the 1973 film tour, regional partner groups were particularly agitated by the lack of control over the programming of films. Due to the budget and the availability of prints the central Toronto-based committee decided how many and which films would be screened in which city. This caused discontent with some of the local committees, who would have appreciated the opportunity

to choose the films themselves (Armatage, 2009a). These regional problems also reflected in feedback in a report from Yukon, where the timing of the festival tour in the summer meant that most local women's group had halted their activities for the short and work-intensive summer and were therefore not able to attend screenings (Armatage, 2009a). Perhaps the biggest problem occurred between the organisers in Toronto and the partner committee in Montreal. In light of the founding of the separatist political party Parti Quebecois in 1968 and the Official Languages Act in 1969, which made Canada officially a bilingual nation, the Montreal committee complained about the failure to budget for and provide French translations of film notes and publicity materials. At the time, Montreal was bigger than Toronto and had a more substantial film industry. Thus, the organisers in Montreal would have expected their event to be of a similar size as the Toronto event. However, they were disappointed as only three days of screenings were allocated (Armatage, 2009a). The disagreements between the two groups led to an irreconcilable divide within the organisation. Armatage describes the Women and Film conference in 1974 as a 'pitched battle between centre and regions,' and eventually Women and Film folded in 1975 and the project of a national organisation with a centralised steering committee was deemed 'not workable' (Armatage, 2009a, p. 95).

The women's film festival in Toronto illustrates the scale and reach women's film festivals could have, given appropriate public, political and financial support. However, the issues within the Women and Film organisation also illustrate how the fragmentation of the women's movement intersected with other political fissures to challenge the survival of women's film festivals in North America. The case of the Toronto festival makes clear how important it is to consider not only the feminist activist context, but also the local national context in which a festival is embedded.

### **3.3 Early Women's Film Festivals in Western Europe**

Many demands of the women's liberation movement in North America were shared by feminist activists in Europe. Yet, the discourse about the global women's movement is dominated by US-American and British literature while European voices are largely marginalised. According to Gabriele Griffin and Rosi Braidotti (2002), this has three reasons. First, the institutionalisation of women's studies happened earlier in the US and the UK, thus resulting in ground-breaking scholarship in the field. Second, European academia was characterised by an 'ivory-tower mentality'; women could either not gain

access to the means of intellectual production or the academic language expected in European scholarship was too complex to appeal to the masses. Additionally, European research was not traditionally grounded in empiricism, which discouraged feminists from producing scholarship based on their experiences as women. Thirdly, English as a global language meant that publications from the US and the UK were more profitable to publishers than paying for translations of European texts into English (Griffin and Braidotti, 2002, pp. 4-6).

Due to the wide availability of American and British texts, North American and European feminists share a wealth of intellectual heritage. Feminists from all over Europe were influenced by the ideas disseminated by their Anglophone counterparts (Griffin and Braidotti, 2002). Among the most influential American publications in Europe were Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1960) and texts by Audre Lord and Adrienne Rich, as well as – from Britain – Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) and Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1969), and the English translation of Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1953) (Browne, 2014; Griffin and Braidotti, 2002; Hannam, 2007).

These texts were embedded in the radical political climate enabled by the New Left movement of the 1960s. Dissatisfied with the Old Left, which had been institutionalised in unions and political parties, radicals championed New Left thinking, which was participatory, non-hierarchical and rejected traditional political structures (Marx Ferre, 2012). European women initially participated in these new movements, protesting wars in Algeria and Vietnam, US-American imperialism and foreign intervention, for example in Iran, or the capitalist system. They joined worker strikes and social student movements. However, like many women in the United States who felt underrepresented by the civil rights and student movements, women in Europe felt excluded from the agenda of New Left groups. In fact, gender hierarchies were often reinforced in these groups and women left with subordinate tasks like note-keeping or distributing leaflets (Marx Ferre, 2012; Gerhard, 2002; Hannam, 2007; Picq, 2002). Thus, women's groups broke away from these movements and formed their own loose networks of organisations. This shared root in exclusion from or disenchantment with other political movements is a key aspect that the European and North American women's movements have in common.

However, as the differences between the US-American and Canadian contexts have illustrated above, it would be unproductive to assume that the women's groups across

Europe acted as a united movement. On the contrary, language barriers, lack of translations and cultural specificities hindered exchange and debate between different European national women's movements (Bassnett, 1986; Duchén, 1987). It is thus worthwhile to not only analyse what the movements had in common, but also to look at how these similarities and differences played out at different early women's film festivals across the continent.

### **3.3.1 The Aftermath of May 1968: French Women's Film Festivals**

The beginnings of the organised women's movement in France can be traced back to the time of the French Revolution in 1789 (Picq, 2002). Then, women fought the exclusion from the so-called universal principles of the revolution, which granted equal civil rights to all men, but not to women. Later, the social revolution of 1848 brought supposedly universal suffrage, but yet again women were excluded from this concept of universality and were not granted the right to vote. Subsequently, women's groups formed, campaigning for equal civil rights as well as equal access to education and work. When a new constitution came into effect in France almost one-hundred years later – after World War II – it guaranteed legal equality between men and women, seemingly bringing the women's movement to an end (Picq, 2002).

However, for the new women's movement that emerged in France during the late 1960s and 1970s, legal equality was no longer enough. The *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes* (MLF) was embedded in and fuelled by the radical thinking of the New Left movements, which came to a high point during the student revolts in 1968. The women of the MLF longed for deeper social change and aimed for the liberation of women from the patriarchal system and the end of gender-based oppression and exploitation (Hannam, 2007; Picq, 1987, 2002). Françoise Picq suggests that the women of the movement wanted to replace the patriarchy rather than reforming the existing system (2002). Among their demands were bodily self-determination, the legalisation of abortion and contraception and new laws regarding family, divorce and rape. Consciousness-raising workshops and grassroots women-only groups sprung up across the country. The movement was characterised by a lack of hierarchy or permanent structures (Picq, 2002).

The MLF staged several well-publicised protest actions, such as the *Whore's Manifesto* in 1971, which was a statement signed by three-hundred women who stated that they had

illegal abortions. This protest had international repercussions and a similar declaration also emerged in West Germany (Hannam, 2007). Yet, according to Claire Duchon, the MLF focussed more on rigorous intellectual debates and theory than on solutions for the immediate practical questions (1987). She argues that French feminists were, for example, slower in adapting measures like crisis centres and women's shelters than their British counterparts. While publicity played a significant role for the MLF, cinema and filmmaking did not have the same status initially. Although filmmakers, critics and cinephiles, such as Jean Luc Godard, Agnès Varda or Francois Truffaut, were involved in the new political movements, feminists were slower to adopt this emphasis on film and visual media. The following accounts of two women's film festivals in France, which were influenced by the first festivals in the US, are exemplary for the MLF's adaptation of film into its strategy.

### ***Musidora Festival in Paris 1974***

Musidora Festival took place from August 3-11, 1974 across two venues in Paris: the privately owned Olympic cinema and the state-run Museum of Modern Art (Greenbaum, 1975; Halpern Martineau, 1975; Kuhn & Radstone, 1990; Duverger, 2013). It was organised by the Musidora Association, a largely anonymous collective of women, which was named after French silent cinema star Jeanne "Musidora" Roques. At the time, press releases were signed off anonymously to emphasise the collective effort over individual achievements (Greenbaum, 1975). A few members of the organisation and thus co-organisers of Musidora Festival are known today; among them were Francoise Flament, Nicole-Lise Bernheim, Dana Sardet, Claire Clouzot and Claudine Serre (Duverger, 2013). Agnès Varda, whose film *La Pointe Courte* (1956) heralded the French New Wave and whose films often feature female protagonists and feminist issues, also participated in the Association's weekly meetings (Greene, 2007; Vincendeau and Graham, 2009). Even though she wanted the event cancelled because of the lack of organisation and infrastructure, she hosted a filmmaker brunch during the festival (Greenbaum, 1975; Halpern Martineau, 1975). According to Connie Greenbaum, there had been a backlash among male journalists and publications in regards to the anonymity of the Association (Greenbaum 1975). The collective decided to name the commercially successful filmmaker

Jacqueline Audry as President of Musidora.<sup>17</sup> This helped the festival to gain positive media attention and gave the press a celebrity to talk to and about (Greenbaum, 1975).

The organisers of Musidora were primarily influenced by the earlier women's film festivals in New York and Toronto. Bernheim had heard about the North American festivals on her visits to New York and had the idea to replicate these events in France (Duverger, 2013). Similar to the New York events, Musidora started as a grassroots organisation, but unlike Toronto, it had hardly any official support. An initial offer of funding by an MLF group was turned down to avoid the political pressure of the women's movement. The organisers eventually received a \$2,000 grant from the Centre National du Cinema, but the money only arrived after the festival and did not cover staff costs (Greenbaum, 1975; Halpern Martineau, 1975). The festival could not pay any fees to filmmakers and a lot of them came at their own expense, many transporting their own films for screenings (Greenbaum, 1975). According to Greenbaum, Musidora also had managed to arrange a deal with the government to allow American films to enter France duty-free, but as this did not apply to European films many got stuck in customs and never arrived for their scheduled screening. Among the films screened at the festival were Lina Wertmuller's *The Basilisks* (*I basilischi*, 1963), Claudia Alemann's documentary *The Point is to Change it* (*Es kommt drauf an, sie zu verändern*, 1973), Niki de Saint Phalle's *Daddy* (1973) and several films from a women's film collective in Quebec (Halpern Martineau, 1975). In total, they screened forty-six feature-length films and almost one-hundred shorts and videos (Greenbaum, 1975).

16mm material, short films and video were predominantly screened at the Museum of Modern Art, while 35mm screenings were held at the Olympic cinema (Halpern Martineau, 1975). This split between venues caused several issues for the festival. First of all, busy city traffic prevented many guests from travelling between the venues in time to attend screenings in both locations. Secondly, the technical split between 35mm and 16mm/video projections meant that audiences were more likely to engage with only one format and subsequently only with more artistic, long-form cinema or considerably more

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<sup>17</sup> Jacqueline Audry had been working as assistant director during the Second World War and began directing feature films in 1946 (Pallister and Hottell, 2005). Many of her films had central female characters and challenged traditional gender roles and images of female sexuality. Her first film *Les Malheurs de Sophie* (1946) was censored due to its depiction of political riots. *The Pit of Loneliness* (1951) depicts a lesbian love story between a student and her teacher. *Mitsou* (1956) was heavily censored due to its depiction of non-marital sex.

amateurish short and video formats. Finally, the venues insisted on a certain level of control over the event; the owner of the Olympic, for example, would not let the festival stop between projections of films, allowing no time for discussions. He also withheld a percentage of takings. The Museum of Modern Art on the other hand, insisted that men had to be admitted to discussion events. This caused participants, who were in favour of women-only conversations, to act hostile towards men in the audience (Greenbaum, 1975; Halpern Martineau, 1975). In an interview with Barbara Halpern Martineau half a year after Musidora, one of the organisers Suzi Cohen said:

If we do the festival again it won't be that way [with two separate venues]. We could probably have our choice of where we show films and it would be much easier. People take us seriously now; before they always began by laughing at us. (Halpern Martineau, 1975, 14-15)

Even though the festival had no publicity strategy, according to criticism voiced by Varda at a committee meeting, it was well received in the press (Greenbaum, 1975). Several journals, including *Revue du Cinema*, *Image et Son* and *Les Temps Modernes* dedicated special issues or sections to women filmmakers and covered Musidora extensively. The organisers were even invited by the Maison des Jeunes et de la Culture in Nice to come and screen films by women directors there during the next Cannes Film Festival (Greenbaum, 1975; Halpern Martineau, 1975).

In the introduction to her report of the Musidora Festival, Barbara Halpern Martineau writes that:

I was hopeful that the women's film festivals I had attended in New York, London, Edinburgh, and Toronto would lead to more permanent changes in our cultural condition, altered consciousness about the role of women in filmmaking, perhaps an archive for women's films, resource centers for showing these films and making others. Perhaps the changes are still on their way, and I'm just impatient. But I do sense that these major festivals left a great deal of discussion, division, and general disinclination to carry on together among the women who organized them. (Halpern Martineau, 1975, p. 10)

While the early festivals in New York, Edinburgh and Toronto failed to achieve longevity, it is interesting to contemplate what happened in France after the first women's film festival in 1974. The Musidora Association made plans for a second festival and a women's distribution cooperative and considered publishing a film magazine and hosting a tour of women's films around France (Greenbaum, 1975). While they did arrange several



screenings in 1975 in Toulouse, La Rochelle and Tours, the majority of these plans never came to fruition (Duverger, 2013).

In 1975, another women's film festival called Women by Women was held at the American Centre in Paris (Duverger, 2013). Its organisers Vivien Ostrovksy and Roseline Granger also co-founded Femmes / Media, an organisation that arranged screenings by women's films across France and in Europe and created a cineclub for women's films. Just like Musidora Festival, Women by Women remained a one-off event.

In 1979, however, a new women's film festival was founded in the suburbs of Paris, which would become the longest-running women's film festival in the world, fulfilling several of Halpern Martineau's imagined changes.

### ***Films de Femmes in Créteil, 1979***

The first Festival International de Films de Femmes de Créteil et du Val de Marne (FIFF) took place in 1979 and was held in Sceaux until 1984. In 1985, the festival moved to another suburb of Paris, Créteil, and has been held there at the Maison des Arts et de la Culture 'André-Malraux' ever since (Kuhn & Radstone 1990; Carocci, 2016). Founded by Jackie Buet, the festival's programme director at the time of writing, and Elisabeth Tréhard, who co-directed the festival until 1990, the festival is partly funded by the French Ministry of Culture. However, the majority of funding derives from the local council of Créteil and the regional department of Val de Marne (Brauerhoch, 1987).

FIFF's main purpose is 'to help women directors improve their standing within the film industry' (Vincendeau, 1998, p. 128). The festival is strongly rooted in the rise of political film festivals during the 1960s, the French New Left context of cinema culture and cinephilia, as well as the local women's movement (Carocci, 2016). Ginette Vincendeau suggests that one of the reasons the festival has survived for so long is that France's cultural policy protects cultural institutions regardless of which party forms the government (1988). Eric Carocci, however, implies that its longevity is closely linked to the festival's political openness (2016). According to him, FIFF had never identified completely with the political feminism of the MLF in order to avoid marginalisation. Co-founder Jackie Buet suggests that:

While keeping in line with the women's movement, we didn't want to marginalise ourselves by affirming a feminist hard line which would have ghettoised the festival. The idea was to create a big open window that was as professional as possible in order to pull in the distributors. (Buet quoted in Carocci, 2016, p. 451)

Since 1979, the festival focussed on creating an open dialogue between women filmmakers and the film industry. FIFF has grown significantly since the beginning, speaking to a broad audience, the mainstream media and also the film industry. However, Carocci and Vincendeau also indicate that some filmmakers were alienated from the festival, either because they did not appreciate the emphasis on gender or because of the lack of radical experimental films (Vincendeau 1998; Carocci, 2016). An international jury and feature film competition is as much part of the annual programme as retrospectives and special thematic strands devoted to women's film culture. Apart from screenings, there are also performances, networking events and a special film education programme targeted at schools and colleges (Carocci, 2016).

FIFF illustrates how a festival with appropriate financial support can implement some of the changes feminists like Halpern Martineau were hoping for since the early 1970s. In 2002, FIFF created the Iris Resource Centre, which holds over 20,000 films as well as catalogues and other archival documents of the festival since 1979. The centre is an important site of archiving and preservation work, but also for research into and the dissemination of women's film culture in France. Furthermore, the centre publishes books and DVDs about women filmmakers and records masterclasses during the festival to make them available to the public (Carocci, 2016).

There are many reasons why FIFF might have survived well beyond its first edition and into the contemporary era. Perhaps, it is due to the festival's distance from the political women's movement, as suggested by Carocci, or its institutionalisation and affiliation with the French government and local councils, as indicated by Vincendeau. FIFF differed significantly from other earlier women's film festivals in France and North America. It was and still is relatively secure in terms of financial support, has access to continuous office and archive space and is not connected to a politically active grassroots organisation. The women's movement in France may have adapted slower to the emphasis on film and media, but its legacy was certainly more successful in fostering a women's film festival that has been successfully held for four decades and brought about change that feminists were dreaming of in the 1970s.

### 3.3.2 Breaking the Silence: The West German Women's Movement

Like in France, the roots of the organised women's movement in Germany go back to the country's revolutionary past. Despite significant social upheavals around the time of the 1848 revolution, women were continuously excluded from social and political conversations (Gerhard, 2002). Thus, they took matters into their own hands. Led by Louise Otto, the 'mother of the German women's movement', women – predominantly from the educated middle class – raised awareness through political poetry and published their own journals and newspapers (Gerhard, 2002, p. 322). When the political revolution failed, the state reacted repressively and prohibited women from participating in political organisations as well as from editing newspapers (Gerhard, 2002). However, despite these setbacks, the German women's movement campaigned for women's suffrage and was active until 1933. With the rise of the National Socialists (NS), existing women's groups had to join the German Women's Front or were dissolved. According to the NS doctrine, the Women's Front promoted the exclusion of women from political life and emphasised their supportive tasks as mothers and spouses (Gerhard, 2002). The organised women's movement for the equality of women and men disintegrated.

After the war, Germany was divided and women activists on both sides of the border had to regroup. A new radical political women's movement arose in West Germany during the 1960s and developed out of the student movement. One of the key moments of this new movement was the 1968 national assembly of the German Socialist Student Association (Marx Ferre, 2012). After the male chair of the plenary refused to respond to Helke Sander's discussion of women's political agenda, women members of the association threw tomatoes at the stage and the chair. The situation made evident that some New Left groups, like the Student Association, continued to exclude women, and so they began to form their own groups. One of them was the Action Committee on the Liberation of Women founded by Sander in 1968. Influenced by the US-American women's movement, German feminists met in consciousness-raising groups, opened women's centres and bookstores, offered women-specific courses at universities and started counter-cultural women's projects (Gerhard, 2002). Myra Marx Ferre describes their aims as 'political independence, self-determination, gender solidarity and resistance to the state' and their main goal was autonomy on a personal and political level (2012, p. 55).

Since Sander was a filmmaker and remained a key player in this new German feminist movement, it is not surprising that film came to play a significant role. In her films, Sander deals with themes like women's exploitation, children's rights and access to contraception (*Das schwache Geschlecht muss stärker werden – Weibergeschichten*, 1969; *Macht die Pille frei?*, 1973). Other contemporary German filmmakers working on these and other themes of the women's movement were Claudia Alemann (*The Point is to Change it*, 1973), Helma Sanders-Brahms (*Under the Pavement Lies the Strand* [*Unter dem Pflaster ist der Strand*], 1975), Margarethe von Trotta (*The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum* [*Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum*], 1975) and Ula Stöckl (*The Cat Has Nine Lives* [*Neun Leben hat die Katze*], 1968) – their works are among the most influential feminist films in Germany. To bring together this rich community of German feminist filmmakers, Sander and Alemann organised the first Women's Film Seminar in Berlin.

### ***The First International Women's Film Seminar in Berlin, 1973***

The two filmmakers set up the Women's Film Seminar in Berlin in collaboration with the Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek in West Berlin, the Evangelische Konferenz für Kommunikation in Frankfurt/Main and the Kommunales Kino Frankfurt. They showed around forty-five films and videos from seven different countries. 'Actually it was a festival', explains Helke Sander, but the term *seminar* was chosen consciously to emphasise the discussion element of the four-day event (Schulte Strathaus, 2000, p. 153). The idea was not so much to criticise individual films, but rather to work on a feminist film critique and to develop a concept for using women's film in educational contexts (Alemann and Sander, 1974; Schulte Strathaus, 2000). Since there was no existing network for women working in media – in television, broadcasting, the press, and as filmmakers – the seminar also acted as an opportunity to meet and connect. Over two-hundred women participated in the event (Arsenal-berlin.de, 2013; Schulte Strathaus, 2000).

Each day the films and discussions focussed on a different topic, and the participants split up into smaller work groups. The four themes were Women and the Work Struggle, Women's Representation in the Media, Sexuality, Gender Roles and Paragraph 218 – Germany's abortion law – and the Women's Movement in Europe and the USA (Schulte Strathaus, 2000). The films were selected on the basis of how critically they reflected on these issues. Alemann and Sander emphasised that the films should not only illustrate the status quo of a certain issue, but also discuss the necessity and opportunities for change

(1974). They showed analytical documentary films, films documenting particular events or protest actions, documentary-style feature films and experimental feature films. The screened films included Susan Shapiro's *Fakenham Occupation* (1972), Madeline Anderson's *I am somebody* (1970), Vibeke Pedersen's *Femø 1971* (1974) and Valeska Schöttle's *Who Needs Whom? (Wer Braucht Wen?, 1972)* (Alemann and Sander, 1974).

Even though the seminar was ridiculed by the mainstream press and many invited critics did not attend, two events followed in its footsteps (Alemann and Sander, 1974; Schulte Strathaus, 2000). Firstly, a repetition of the seminar in Frankfurt/Main with the same line-up of films and themes; and secondly, a follow-up seminar in Munich, organised by Angela Hardt in December 1973. Hardt's event screened fewer films to fewer participants, but had a stronger focus on the discussion elements. Furthermore, the seminar inspired Helke Sander to launch the feminist film journal *Frauen und Film* in 1974. It had no budget, no office space and not even an address, yet it became one of the most significant German-language sources for film theory and created a non-hierarchical political space for feminist film critique (Brauerhoch, 2012). Initially published biannually, the issues became more sporadic. The latest issue, number 68, was published in 2015 (Frauenundfilm.de, [no date]). In the 1980s, the journal significantly influenced the co-founders of *femme totale*, a women's film festival in Dortmund, which launched in 1987. 'We wanted to "do" what "Frauen und Film" was writing', read *femme totale*'s first brochure. The Women's Film Seminar might have not been conceptualised as a returning festival, but it was still far from being an isolated happening and left a significant legacy. It contributed significantly to the establishment of feminist film critique in Germany and encouraged an engagement with women's film that eventually led to the establishment of a women's film festival that exists to this very day – the case study at the heart of Chapter 4 of this thesis.

### 3.3.3 Cinephilia and the British Women's Liberation Movement

As suggested by Griffin and Braidotti, British feminist texts by theorists like Germaine Greer or Kate Millet were widely available across Europe and similarly influential as their US American counterparts (2002). The British Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) also shared certain characteristics with North American feminist groups, such as wide use of consciousness-raising workshops (Browne, 2014). However, Sarah Browne argues that class played a particularly crucial role in the WLM and divided middle class and working class women as well as radical feminists and socialist feminists (2014). While radical

feminists emphasised the division between men and women and saw patriarchy as the root of oppression, socialist feminists concentrated on the class division and overthrowing capitalism in order to end the oppression of women. Many early examples of British feminist activism, such as the women worker strike at a Ford Plant in Dagenham in 1968, are related to worker's rights as well as women's rights (Browne, 2014). At the first British women's conference held at Ruskin College in Oxford in 1970, the WLM made four major demands: equal pay; equal education and job opportunities; free contraception and abortion on demand; and free 24-hour childcare (Browne, 2014; Bl.uk [no date]). Browne argues, however, that even though the women gathered at a university, academic spaces were not as important for the movement, as they were in North America. Small local groups were far more common, particularly in more rural and isolated areas and among working class women (Browne, 2014).

Film was a popular form of expression among British feminists and was used to explore women's own life experiences, document key actions of the WLM and transform these into shared experiences. Women's film collectives, such as the London Women's Film Group, Hackney Flashers or the Leeds Animation Workshop sprouted during the 1970s and produced many key films of the movement, such as Sue Crockford's *A Woman's Place* (1971) or Midge Mackenzie's *Women Talking* (1970). They also taught more women how to make films and encouraged them to produce their own (Bl.uk [no date]).

The first film event in the UK that was entirely dedicated to films by women gave many of these activist feminist films a wider platform. The Women's Event at EIFF72 took place from August 21-26, 1972. It was not an independent festival, but rather a dedicated strand in the festival's main programme. Despite being called an "event" and not a "festival", it is commonly referred to as the first women's film festival in Europe (Armatage, 2009; Rich, 1998; Stanfield, 2008).

Through its affiliation with EIFF, the event stood out significantly from other women's film festivals. Even though WLM films were screened as part of the programme, the organisers of the event were perhaps influenced more by trends in British cinephilia than by feminist thought. They were women who worked in film and were thereby led to feminism. Lynda Myles, one of the organisers of the Women's Event, became involved with EIFF in 1968 after criticising the programming of the festival in an open letter to *The Scotsman* newspaper with her partner David Will (Lloyd, 2011). Will and Myles were film

students in Edinburgh and cinephiles of the French tradition. Like the French critics of the New Wave, Will and Myles wanted films to be selected based on their artistic merit, and demanded cinema to be viewed as art form isolated from academic and political contexts (Lloyd, 2011). Inspired by the French cinema journal *Cahiers du cinema*, they spent time at the Cinematheque Francoise in Paris and ran the Edinburgh University Film Society, screening several films per week (Myles, 2018). The pair were dissatisfied with the film selection at EIFF, which was largely pre-selected by national cinema committees, and to their surprise festival director Murray Grigor invited them to join the programming team for the 1969 festival. According to Myles, the contemporary British film culture as fostered by the British Film Institute and their *Sight & Sound* magazine was not daring enough and favoured 'middle of the road films' over subversive, radical cinema (Myles, 2018). Her and Will's intention was to challenge British film culture and infuse it with French cinema trends. They also hoped to dissolve the divide between high and low culture. Myles, who succeeded Grigor as EIFF festival director in 1973, became known for programming intellectual auteur cinema side by side with independent B-movies or genre cinema from the States (Lloyd, 2013; Myles, 2018). The case study of the Women's Event in Edinburgh in Chapter 6 will provide a more in-depth discussion of the context the event was embedded in as well as Myles' programming practices, but this non-feminist theoretical context is noteworthy here as it sets the Women's Event apart from other women's film festivals at the time. Inspired by the changes in Cannes and Berlin and the instalment of new festival strands for young arthouse cinema, Grigor, Myles and Will introduced new elements, such as retrospectives about little known directors or experimental films. During the 1970s, EIFF also hosted a number of special screening series, of which the Women's Event is one example.

For the Women's Event, Myles collaborated with Claire Johnston and Laura Mulvey, who contributed to the collation of a list of potential films, tracking down copies and curating film programmes (Mulvey, 2016a). The event was a celebration of women's contributions to film history. It included documentaries, fiction features and shorts with the vast majority of fiction works stemming from the 1930s to the 1960s. More contemporary films included aforementioned documentaries produced by women's liberation groups, such as *A Woman's Place* and *Women Talking*, as well as features by Jane Arden (*The Other Side of the Underneath*, 1972), Nina Companeez (*Faustine and the Beautiful Summer* [*Faustine et le bel été*], 1972), Eija-Elina Bergholm (*Poor Maria! / Little Marja* [*Marja pieni!*], 1972), Nelly Kaplan (*Papa the Little Boats* [*Papa Les Petits Bateaux*], 1971), Barbara Loden

(*Wanda*, 1970) and Kirsten Stenbaek (*Lenin, You Rascal, You / The Lenin Gang* [*Lenin, din gavtyv*], 1972).<sup>18</sup> Mulvey remembers:

There was a politics in looking back at the past of women's achievements which had been hidden from history – lost, buried, disappeared. This had already been happening in the world of literature, with the Virago imprint. [...] At the same time there was excavation, digging up, in the world of art - women looking for women painters who had been lost and forgotten. [...] So there was this sense that we were doing something for film that was also being done as part of the cultural politics of the women's movement. (Mulvey, 2016a)

Even though the Women's Event was never continued as independent festival or recurring strand at EIFF, it has had a significant impact on British cinefeminism and feminist film theory. During her time as EIFF director, Lynda Myles organised two follow-up women's seasons at the festival in 1976 and 1979. For the larger of the two, in 1979, Myles was able to programme more contemporary films as 'there had been a huge wave of films made by women in that intermediate period' (Mulvey, 2016a). The focus shifted from historical contributions to what women directors had done in the more recent years since 1972. The 1979 event also included a symposium and many participants came to Edinburgh from Canada and the United States. However, the friction that had been troubling the women's movement had taken its toll and Mulvey remembers that there was much more division in 1979 than seven years earlier:

'72 was that very happy moment, when everyone was pleased to discover that the films existed, before we started arguing about what the films should be. (Mulvey, 2016a)

There is no dedicated archive of the Women's Event at EIFF72 and the documents covering the event are held largely uncatalogued in the EIFF archives at the National Library of Scotland. However, since the beginning of this research project, the event has received renewed attention. In 2018, the newly founded feminist film festival Femspectives – co-organised by Lauren Clarke and myself – dedicated its launch event to the first women's film event in the UK by revisiting two films from the 1972 programme and sharing historical research findings with the public.<sup>19</sup> Also in 2018, EIFF hosted a special event with Lynda Myles in conversation with Rachel Hosker, looking back at her

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<sup>18</sup> A full list of films screened at the Women's Event can be found in Appendix B.

<sup>19</sup> More details about the Femspectives launch event is available from <https://femspectives.com/event/46-years-in-the-future-womens-film-festivals-then-and-now/> [Accessed on 20 September 2018].



time as festival director and particularly the Women's Event in 1972.<sup>20</sup> Last but not least, a new women's film festival in Germany, Remake Women's Film Days in Frankfurt, paid tribute to the history of women's film festivals and screened a selection of films from the 1972 programme in November 2018. The festival also hosted a discussion with Lynda Myles and Laura Mulvey, to reflect on the impact and legacy of the Women's Event.<sup>21</sup>

The outcomes of the Women's Event in Edinburgh were not as immediate as the founding of Films des Femmes following the Musidora Festival, or the establishment of *Frauen und Film* journal in Germany following the Women's Film Seminar. Yet, the event at EIFF72 has made a lasting impact on feminist film exhibition practices in the UK and beyond that is coming to fruition in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The conclusions we can draw from revisiting its archived materials and how to engage the present with the past of feminist film festivals will be the focus of the case study presented in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

### 3.4 The Purposes of Women's Film Festivals

Emanating from the political women's movement, the establishment of women's film festivals marked a point of change. With a do-it-yourself mentality, the organisers of these events set out to fill in the gaps in representation that the international film festivals and the mainstream film industry were not filling and to create opportunities for contemporary women directors. Despite their differences, the women's film festivals that were launched throughout the 1970s in North America and Europe shared the intention of giving films by women a platform. Laura Mulvey confirms that one of the goals of the 1972 Women's Film Event in Edinburgh was to enable films by women to become part the canon of film history (Mulvey, 2016a). However, they also fulfilled a variety of other purposes, which can still be observed in women's film festivals today. Analysing these purposes shines a light on a festival's priorities and thus contributes to determining its position in the wider film festival circuits.

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<sup>20</sup> More information about Behind the Curtain: Women and EIFF is available from <https://www.edfilmfest.org.uk/2018/behind-curtain-women-eiff> [Accessed on 20 September 2018].

<sup>21</sup> More information about Remake Women's Film Days is available from <http://remake-festival.de/> [Accessed on 20 September 2018].

Synthesising the information drawn from my analysis of the earliest women's film festivals discussed above, I have identified six core purposes that women's film festivals pursue to various degrees. These purposes are:

1. To demand attention and create presence for women filmmakers and their films;
2. To re-write film history with women's contributions in mind;
3. To emphasise women's right for representation;
4. To create networking opportunities and audience engagement;
5. To use film as educational tool;
6. To promote the political women's movement.

These purposes are in stark contrast to the purposes ascribed to international film festivals in Film Festival Theory. While international film festivals fulfilled functions tailored towards the film industry, the purposes of women's film festivals were motivated by a political movement. In the following sections, I will focus on each of the six purposes identified and how they became manifest at the earliest women's film festivals.

### **3.4.1 The Demand for Attention and Creating Presence**

When the first women's film festivals were established, women filmmakers were not in the public eye. Women had no or little access to film schools, trade unions and subsequently the mainstream film industry (Milano, 1976). Additionally, film cameras and rolls were expensive, thus making feature films, in particular, posed an immense economic challenge to independent filmmakers. Video was a more affordable alternative, but most international film festivals required films to be submitted on 35mm photochemical film (and many still do) – arthouse and mainstream exhibition were exclusively reserved for filmmakers who could afford to work on this medium (Dovey, 2015). Yet, films by women such as Alice Guy-Blaché, Lois Weber, Germaine Dulac, Lotte Reiniger, Dorothy Arzner or Tazuko Sakane prove that women had been making films since the invention of cinema. Women's film festivals were a manifestation of women in the film industry demanding attention for their contributions and participation. Through these film festivals, women organisers and

filmmakers were saying: 'We are here, we make movies, we make different kinds of movies, we make the same kinds of movies' (Silverstein, 2016). Exhibiting historical and contemporary works by women at festivals exemplified that even though men dominated the film industry, women had always been a part of it.

### 3.4.2 Re-writing of Film History

Acknowledging the contributions made by women directors goes hand in hand with adding them to accounts of film history. Early women's film festivals in the 1970s were committed to re-write film history and add women's contributions to the narrative (Armatage, 2009; Quetting, 2007b; Rich, 1998). In places, such as Toronto and Edinburgh, this was pursued in the context of local intellectual and emerging academic engagement with film theory (Armatage, 2016; Mulvey, 2016a). In other places, such as Switzerland, there was a lack of an academic framework for film theory. A women's film festival like FFTS was a crucial – if not the only – platform for the engagement with women's role in film history (Quetting, 2007b). Feminist magazines and journals were another important site of doing women's film history at that time. Feminist film criticism in publications such as *Frauen und Film*, *Women and Film*, *Spare Rib* and *Camera Obscura*, contributed to the uncovering of women's cinematic past and challenged established notions of film history. The phenomenon of writing her-story was not isolated to film. Throughout the 1970s, women went on a journey to re-discover the lost history of women's achievements across the creative disciplines, which fuelled projects such as London's Virago publishing in literature or The Women's Building for arts and crafts in Los Angeles (both established in 1973).<sup>22</sup> Women's film festivals as spaces to re-write film history in the 1970s were embedded in this international and interdisciplinary discourse of reconsidering the understanding of history.

Little has changed since then, as retrospectives of women directors at international film festivals are still a scarcity and the standard canon is still male-dominated. The BFI's Top 50 Films of All Times list, which was updated in 2018, contains only one female-directed title – Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Commerce Quay, 1080 Brussels* (*Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles*, 1975), while the 2008 Top 100 Films of

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<sup>22</sup> Further information about Virago is available from <https://www.virago.co.uk/the-history-of-virago/>; The Women's Building is subject of Susan Mogul's film *Feminist Studio Workshop Videoletter* (1975).

All Times list by *Cahiers du cinema* does not name a single female-directed film (Christie, 2018; Heron, 2008). Women's film festivals remain vital in the process of looking back at women's film history and provide essential opportunities for retrospectives, restoration projects and relevant theoretical discourses, such as symposia or exhibitions.

### 3.4.3 The Right to Representation

Writing about 1970s women's film festivals, feminist scholars and festival organisers repeatedly emphasise the problem that women were underrepresented on and off screen (Barlow, 2003; Aufderheide & Zimmerman, 2004). The festivals presented some of the first opportunities for women audiences to not only see that women could sit in the director's chair, but also to see versions of their lives on screen that they had never seen in cinemas before. The films screened at women's film festivals often engaged with topics that were discussed widely in the women's movement but had previously been regarded as private matters not to be raised publicly, such as women's sexuality, domestic violence, career opportunities or motherhood. The festivals facilitated to lift the perceived taboo to speak about such issues publicly. Seeing films about these topics on screen gave women the confidence to talk about them in public. The events were an opportunity for women to see themselves represented on screen and engage with a medium they could use as an empowering tool to tell their own stories.

It is important, however, to acknowledge the limitations of many women's film festivals to represent *all* women equally on screen. Different festivals chose different priorities and spoke to varying audiences and groups of filmmakers. Examining reviews of these early women's film festivals reveals that questions of representation were of utter importance. In *Women & Film*, for example, Dora Kaplan provided a festival report from the First International Festival of Women's Film in New York in which she reviewed some of the short films she saw at the festival. She emphasised the 'lively' atmosphere at the event and linked it particularly to the networking opportunities provided by the festival (Kaplan, 1972, p. 37). However, she also criticised the event for its ticket pricing, the lack of a day care centre and the amount of daytime screenings, which made the festival inaccessible to caregivers. Furthermore, she questioned whether the festival was able to address the non-white communities within the feminist movement in New York City. She indicated that these aspects of the festival have created an exclusive environment to which only certain women had access. At the 1973 women's film festival in Toronto, on the other hand,

providing free tickets and free full-time day care were among the top priorities of the organisers (Armatage, 2009a). This demonstrates that at these festivals important debates took place about representation, accessibility and diversity.

Women's film festivals in the 1970s provided opportunities for feminists with diverse ideological positions to come together and engage in an exchange of ideas. At times, these arguments between different groups of feminists were heated. In her review of the 1974 Musidora Film Festival in Paris, Claire Clouzot described how the daily debates hosted by the festival were dominated by conflicts:

between lesbian women and straight women, [...] between women who wanted to show all films submitted without selection and women who wanted to show only avant-garde films or only explicitly feminist films, between women who worked hard at festival organizing and women who came to the open meetings to criticize, between women who wanted the festival to be *professional* and women who wanted it to exist. (Claire Clouzot, translated from French by Barbara Halpern Martineau; Halpern Martineau, 1975, p. 13)

Halpern Martineau's review of this festival sounds even more pessimistic. She wrote that:

I was hopeful that the women's film festivals I had attended in New York, London, Edinburgh, and Toronto would lead to more permanent changes in our cultural conditions, altered consciousness about the role of women in filmmaking, perhaps an archive of women's films, resource centers for showing these films and making others. Perhaps these changes are still on their way, and I'm just impatient. But I do sense that these major festivals left a great deal of dissension, division, and general disinclination to carry on together among the women who organized them. (Halpern Martineau, 1975, p. 10)

Both experiences suggest that while there was some attention given to discussing the screened films, the discourse at the festival in Paris was dominated by theoretical arguments between women with different feminist persuasions.

Rich's account of her experience at the Film and Feminism conference at EIFF79, which was a continuation of the Women's Event and organised by the same group of women, illustrates a similar sentiment. Rich observed a split of participants in two opposing camps, as well as a third group of women who, instead of subscribing to either camp, stood up for a feminist movement that embraced its plurality (1998). She describes that:

[Theoretical] and critical approaches to cinema constituted the points of division. A crude labelling of the two opposing forces would yield

“theoreticism” versus “anti-intellectualism”, or perhaps Lacanians versus empiricists, but such labels would only tell part of the tale. Many of the women there subscribed to neither camp: instead, they saw themselves, particularly the Europeans, as part of a global women's movement that offered numerous positions (Rich, 1998, p. 164)

In favour of the latter, Rich and her debate partner Pam Cook, who Rich had previously criticised in her writing, argued for the complementary nature of their approaches. Cook furthermore coined the buzzword of the conference by demanding a ‘heterogeneity’ of feminist discourse (Rich, 1998, p. 160). Yet, the conflicts dominated the conference and co-organiser Mulvey remembers that:

It was very different [to the Women's Event in 1972]. There was a symposium [...], it showed lots more recent films, lots of people came over from the United States [...]. But for some reason, it was much more – there was much more friction, much more division. [1972] was that very happy moment, when everyone was pleased to discover that the films existed, before we started arguing about what the films should be. (Mulvey, 2017)

The only festival from that period that still exists today is Creteil's Films de Femmes, which is the longest ongoing women's film festival in the world and was established in 1979. According to Enrico Carocci, the festival managed to escape the self-ghettoisation, which caused the downfall of other women's film festivals of the time (2016). He writes that:

Irrespective of its unquestionable rigour and perseverance in the pursuit of its objectives, the festival, since its beginnings in the 1970s, has not embraced any rigid or ‘hard and pure’ version of the period's feminism. (Carocci, 2016, p. 451)

This suggests that while representation mattered to the programmers and the audiences of these festivals, arguments about who was or was not represented also caused many festivals to end shortly after they were launched.

### **3.4.4 Creating Networking Opportunities and Audience Engagement**

Considering that women used to have little access to the mainstream film industry and film exhibition networks, women's film festivals presented a crucial opportunity for women working and interested in film to meet and connect. Women's film festivals facilitated women facing similar barriers and dealing with comparable issues to meet and exchange

skills and knowledge. While most of the earliest women's film festivals programmed an international film selection spanning various continents, they also provided pertinent networking opportunities in a local context. French women in film gathered at Musidora in Paris, Canadian filmmakers, critics and cinephiles met at the Woman and Film International Film Festival in Toronto, and women in the German film and TV industry connected through the Filmseminar in Berlin. By taking their events on tours to cities around the country, these networking opportunities were extended beyond the borders of urban hubs and the festival prolonged their lifespan by creating longer-lasting programmes. For audiences, women's film festivals presented opportunities to be exposed to a different kind of cinema than the films they encountered in mainstream venues. Women's film festivals were safe spaces where women filmmakers and audiences could come together and connect with one another for the first time.

### 3.4.5 Film as Educational Tool

A fifth element that united many women's film festivals was that they aimed to use film as an educational tool. The Filmseminar in Berlin, for example, pursued this purpose very explicitly. Developing a model for the use of films as educational tools in the context of women's education was a key focus for the festival. Following the event, the organisers published a seventy-page strong brochure in partnership with Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek (Alemann and Sander, 1974), which contained a syllabus for a course about women's issues and rights. The document outlined how films by women could be utilised in an educational context and provided a list of suggested viewings for each unit. The brochure also included a report about the seminar, a list of most films that were screened at the event, information about how to access them, contact details for distributors of women's films in Germany and abroad and an extensive bibliography.

Not only should audiences learn through being confronted with versions of themselves on screen, they should also be challenged to new viewing experiences. Quetting suggests that Swiss festival audiences who were exposed to unconventional films by women were often shocked and overwhelmed by what they saw, simply because they were not used to it from mainstream cinema (2007a). Knowing nothing but mainstream films, audiences expected films to follow a certain structure and portray women in a particular way. Many films by women, however, challenge exactly these established narratives and portrayals, and

women's film festivals thus contributed to questioning these conventions further. Quetting names this as one of the main reasons the festival was established in the first place.

### 3.4.6 Promoting the Political Women's Movement

There is an important sixth dimension to the purpose of women's film festivals that also permeates the other five aims of these events. As illustrated by the women's film festivals discussed above, they were manifestations of the political movement for women's rights. They were organised by people who had identified a gender inequality and decided to do something about it, which means they were inherently political (Loist, 2012). Not every women's film festival used the terms 'feminist' or 'women's liberation' in their titles or descriptions, but they all had an essentially feminist political core. Beyond the vast diversity of programming, strategy and target audience at these women's film festivals lay the common ground of wanting to celebrate and highlight women's work in the film industry. This was based on the shared notion that these films and their makers were under-represented. Women's film festivals were about supporting women and their films and creating solidarity among marginalised people in the film industry. I will come back to these purposes in Chapter 4 to illustrate how they reflect at the Dortmund | Cologne International Film Festival and thus affect its position on the festival circuit.

Having considered the purposes and legacies of some of the earliest women's film festivals, it is also useful to examine the contemporary landscape of film festivals and women's film festivals at the time of writing.

## 3.5 Women's Film Festivals in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Today, a staggering number of film festivals take place around the world (McGill, 2011). The festival format has proliferated since the drastic changes caused by the post-68 shift in programming, and increasing numbers of niche and community film festivals are joining the established and new international film festivals on the circuit (de Valck, 2007). While the *Festivals Directory* of the British Council lists 1,278 festivals spanning all genres and continents, the festival and film database *FestivalFocus* lists details from 2,185 festivals around the world (Britishcouncil.org, 2016; Festivalfocus.org, 2018). The most extensive list however is published by the film festival portal *FilmFestivals.com* listing over 6,000 currently active festivals in its database (Filmfestivals.com [no date]).



The format of women's film festivals has also developed and expanded since its beginnings in the 1970s. While women's film festivals, like the ones discussed above, initially blossomed all over North America and Europe in the early and mid-70s, the majority of them remained one-off events. With the exception of the Women's Video Festival and the immediate follow-up events of Musidora in France, the International Festival of Women's Film in New York and the Women's Film Seminar in Germany, these early women's film festivals were not repeated and there are many potential reasons for this. When women's film festivals blossomed in the early to mid-70s, there was also a lot of friction developing within the involved women's movements. The arguments among women involved in Women and Film in Canada and the heated discussions at the women's film events in Edinburgh are exemplary for the divisions in the movement (Armatage, 2009a; Mulvey, 2016a; Rich, 1998). As the women's film movement progressed, there were tensions between lesbian and straight women, women of colour and white women, women from the working class and women with a middle-class background and higher education, women from cities and from rural areas. Women disagreed over what the screened films should be about, and whether narrative, experimental or documentary films were the right way forward. They also disagreed over the use of theory and intellectual language. In many cases, these differences were irreconcilable and many groups who had organised women's film festivals in the 1970s split or collapsed (Armatage, 2009; Rich, 1998).

However, these disagreements were not the only reason for the short life span of many early women's film festivals. Many of them were staged by women who were first and foremost activists, and as such, they were never intended to be recurring festivals. The Women's Event in Edinburgh, for example, were thought up by its organisers to be an intervention in the writing of film history and the construction of a film canon, and thus a form of academic activism (Mulvey, 2016a; Myles, 2017). Other events served a particular purpose, such as the Women's Film Seminar in Berlin, which was designed in order to create outlines for teaching units about women's issues and rights incorporating film screenings (Alemann & Sander, 1974). While both examples named here had follow-up events in different cities and later years, there was no need to repeat them in the same format on an annual basis, since they had fulfilled their initial purpose of drawing attention to an issue.

Finally, another likely contributing factor to the decrease of activity towards the end of the 1970s was the financial burden of organising large-scale film festivals altogether. The festivals discussed above illustrate a spectrum of how such events could be financed at the time. Some relied on private funds, volunteer work and donations, while others received public funding or found private investors and in-kind sponsorship. However, apart from the Women's Video Festival in New York, which received a mix of public funding, these sources did not prove as sustainable, as private funds were exhausted, unpaid labour was precarious, political shifts froze the availability of public money and private investors or sponsored demanded too much editorial control. When there are no funds available, it becomes difficult, if not unfeasible, to organise a festival (Czach, 2016; Loist, 2011).

After the Women's Video Festival held its final edition in 1980, *Films de Femmes* in France remained as the sole large-scale women's film festival from the 1970s. In the 1980s and 1990s however, there was a new wave of women's film festivals. In Germany, two festivals were founded in Dortmund and Cologne, *femme totale* (1987) and the *Feminale* (1984), while Paris saw the establishment of the *International Lesbian & Feminist Film Festival* (1988), a group in Switzerland organised the first *Women's Film Days* (1989), in Canada the *St John's International Women's Film Festival* started up in Newfoundland (1989) and the *Rocky Mountain Women's Film Festival* was founded in Colorado (1988). The format of women's film festivals also spread across the globe and festivals were founded in Taiwan (*Women Make Waves*, 1993-present), Australia (*World of Women's Cinema*, since 1994), South Korea (*International Women's Film Festival in Seoul*, since 1997) and Turkey (*Flying Broom International Women's Film Festival*, since 1998), among others. In contrast to the festivals established in the 1970s, many of these festivals still exist at the time of writing.

Yet, throughout the 1990s and into the early 2000s, many women's film festivals struggled with the post-feminist notion that feminism was no longer a relevant political movement. Many struggled to justify their existence. One of the founders of FFTS, for example, describes how the festival struggled to attract young audiences and saw its numbers of attendees dwindling until the festival had to fold in 2003 (Quetting, 2007b). Swiss industry insiders Maddalena Tognola and Stefanie Arnold speculate that a decrease in political sensibility among women and thus a reduced interest in feminist debates caused the end of the festival (Tognola and Arnold, 2007).

During the 2010s, however, there has been an increase in public awareness for feminist issues and many new women's film festivals have been created. Some of these new festivals are activist reactions to concrete political situations, such as the Dublin Feminist Film Festival, which was founded in 2015 in response to the passing of Savita Halappanavar, who had been denied an abortion and died following a septic miscarriage in 2012 (Bbc.co.uk, 2012; O'Meara, 2018).<sup>23</sup> Other women's film festival were established to showcase niche cinema that had previously been overlooked. The Women Over 50 Film Festival in Brighton, for example, screens films by and about women over fifty, addressing ageism, sexism and the exclusion of older women and their stories in the film industry (since 2015).<sup>24</sup> Recent years have also seen the increasing number of recurring women's film festivals outside Europe and North America. New festivals were created in response to women's struggles and feminist movements in the Global South and developing countries, such as Femcine in Chile (since 2011), Reel Women in Hong Kong (since 2013), the International Women's Film Festival in Afghanistan (since 2013) or Udada Women's Film Festival in Kenya (since 2014).

The International Women's Film Festival Network was founded at FFF12 and is currently operating through Athena Film Festival in New York. IWFFN aims to establish a database of women's film festivals and to 'serve as a forum for members to exchange knowledge and expertise' (International Women's Film Festival Network, 2018b). Any independent women's film festival can request membership if its programme is devoted to screening films by and about women and girls and if it has organised at least one festival in the last three years. The network currently lists sixty-eight member festivals, posts the calls for submissions and gathers links to statistics reports and resources for women filmmakers.

However, the number of women's film festivals around the world is much higher than sixty-eight and a list compiled during the initial stages of researching this thesis has yielded a result of over 130 currently active women's film festivals around the world.<sup>25</sup>

The majority of these women's film festivals takes place in North America, with numbers

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<sup>23</sup> More information about Dublin Film Festival is available from <https://www.dublinfeministfilmfestival.com/> [Accessed on 3 October 2018].

<sup>24</sup> More information about Women Over 50 Film Festival is available from <http://woff.co.uk/> [Accessed on 3 October 2018].

<sup>25</sup> A full list of active women's film festivals including details about their location and founding year can be found in Appendix A of this thesis.

in the United States dominating those in Canada and Mexico. In Europe, women's film festivals are predominantly held in Northern, Western and Southern Europe, however no women's film festivals were recorded in Eastern Europe. Several festivals are being staged in Australia, Japan and South Korea, and over thirty festivals can be found in countries of the Global South. These festivals cover a wide range of subject matters, film formats and ideological perspectives. There are festivals dedicated to specific genres, such as Broad Humor in Los Angeles (comedy) or Scream Queen Filmfest in Tokyo (horror), or particular aesthetics like animation, such as Tricky Women in Vienna and Womanimation! in Providence, Rhode Island. Some festivals screen films of any length and format, others focus on specific forms of film only, like the A Corto di Donne short film festival in Italy or the BAWIFM Shorts Showcase in San Francisco.

Many large-scale women's film festivals have adapted the established format of international film festivals and have incorporated an international competition, thematic side strands and a press accreditation system. Smaller festivals, however, are considerably more community- and audience-focussed, emphasising participation, discussion and safe spaces over networking opportunities and prizes. Thematically, women's film festivals cover a wide range of subjects and emphases. While some are overtly activist and feminist, others focus on the business side of the film industry. There is a whole range of feminist and humanitarian festivals that deal with issues of women's rights, such as the Berlin Feminist Film Week in Germany or the Flying Broom International Women's Film Festival in Turkey. Some of these focus broadly on issues of gender and sexuality, while others are more specific such as Reel Sisters in New York City, which provides a platform for women of colour. Themes of feminism and race also frequently intersect with other aspects such as sexuality or class at a number of festivals, such as the Paris International Lesbian & Feminist Film Festival or the Queer Women of Color Film Festival in San Francisco. Other women's film festivals focus less on the wider societal women's issues, and concentrate on elevating and supporting women who work in the film industry. Festivals such as the St. John's International Women's Film Festival in Canada or UF in England provide training and networking opportunities for their filmmaker participants, while festivals like the California Women's Film Festival or the Bentonville Film Festival in the US focus on highlighting the work of women in the context of the neoliberal film industry.

The sheer variety of festivals that all fall under the term of women's film festivals, signifies the need for subtler and more complex research approaches towards these events.

The diverse groups driving the first women's film festivals in the 1970s is still reflected in the plethora of festivals today.

### 3.6 Conclusion

As established earlier in this chapter, some film festival historiographies suggest that women's film festivals are a consequence of the shift in film festival development after 1968 and as one of the many kinds of niche film festivals that were established since then. As this chapter has demonstrated, however, this does not do justice to the context that these events were embedded in and the complexity and diversity among them. Women's film festivals were not just a side effect of the protests at Cannes Film Festival in 1968, which expanded the idea of what could be shown at film festivals or who should attend. On the contrary, some of them were in fact a symptom of the shortcomings of these protests, and embedded in location-specific political and social contexts. As particularly evident when looking at the Women's Event in Edinburgh, the post-68 discourse of film as an art form influenced by New Left philosophy did not consider women filmmakers and films by women equally. Women's film festivals contributed significantly to the uncovering of women's contribution to film history and created much needed spaces for the exhibition of films by women.

Most of the early women's film festivals were in fact not associated with the wider film festival network at all. With the exception of the Women's Event in Edinburgh, the vast majority of women-centred events were not organised by festival workers and programmers who aimed to create a space for films by women filmmakers; they were organised by feminist activists who were led to film as a popular medium of expression used to underline the demands of the women's liberation movements in Europe and North America. Thus, women's film festivals must be considered beyond the context of film festival history and the development of niche film festivals, and discussed in relation to feminist theories and activism.

The shifts that occurred in terms of programming and curation at international film festivals happened side by side with the establishment of women's film festivals. One was not a response to the other, but both developed in relation to political movements that affected society on different levels. Changing the way international film festivals were programmed altered the discourse around film as an art form and aimed to dissolve the line

between high and low culture. Creating dedicated exhibition spaces for women filmmakers and film by and about women addressed a much deeper societal issue – the inequality between women and men and the unevenly distributed value granted to their stories. With this in mind, this chapter has illustrated the need for more contextualisation and more nuanced research approach towards the study of women's film festivals. Understanding the historical development of women's film festivals and the contexts the earliest of these events were embedded in, helps to comprehend the position women's film festivals hold on the film festival circuit today and the diversity of this format around the world. By means of a case study of FFF, Chapter 4 will discuss which purposes women's film festivals like it fulfil and how this event positions itself on the national German and the global international and women's film festival circuits. Chapter 5 will examine two women's film festivals in the same city, and elaborate how differences in feminist philosophies and approaches impact the shape of these festivals.

## 4 Women's Film Festivals on the Film Festival Circuit

Women's film festivals sit at the intersection of the political women's movement and film festivals as places of film consumption. This chapter will focus on the latter aspect and investigate the objectives of women's film festivals as well as the relationship between them and international film festivals as part of the wider film festival circuit. There are two underlying questions framing this chapter:

- What purposes do contemporary women's film festivals fulfil?
- How do women's film festivals relate to other film festivals competing for the same films, such as international film festivals, or competing for the same audiences, such as national film festivals?

Considering the diversity of women's film festivals around the world, it would perhaps be unwise to make the same general assumptions about the position of *all* women's film festivals. Their purpose and position can vary greatly depending on a festival's location, its cultural or political context and its history. This chapter draws on a case study of the Dortmund | Cologne International Women's Film Festival (FFF) which is one of the longest-running women's film festivals in the world. As such, it has faced many ideological and structural changes that are indicators for how festivals have to adapt to changing societal circumstances and industry landscapes. As an international film festival, FFF is actively outwards facing and competes for international film premieres with similar events; on the German circuit, it competes with a plethora of other film festivals for national and local attention. FFF is therefore a good example to draw conclusions that apply to the wider women's film festival circuit as well.

The chapter has four sections. The first two introduce the theoretical framework that provides the context of my analysis and discusses briefly the history of FFF and more specifically the festival I attended in Dortmund (FFF17). In the third part of the chapter, I propose that a festival's objectives influence how it relates to others as partners or competitors, and how it positions itself on various festival circuits. I examine the festival's earliest mission statements from 1986 and 1987 and link them to its aims and intentions in 2017. In the final section of the chapter, I discuss FFF's position on the German and the

international film festival circuits, drawing on examples from FFF17 and interviews with its key staff. In particular, I consider the curatorial process, the selection of films and the promised benefits for filmmakers who participate in the festival, to make a distinction between these circuits.

My enquiry is framed by two theoretical concepts that suggest and illustrate potential relationships among different film festivals. The first is the idea of the 'festival circuit', laid out in different ways by Julian Stringer (2001), Mark Peranson (2008) and Dina Iordanova (2009); the second is Claire Johnston's notion of women's cinema as counter-cinema (1973). Analysing FFF through these concepts will allow me to draw conclusions about the key purposes of the festival and its position in relation to others. Based on the findings of this case study, I identify which key elements point towards the position of a women's film festival on national and international festival circuits. As such, this chapter offers a model of analysis that could inform further studies of women's film festivals in relation to other festivals.

## 4.1 Festival Circuits and Counter Cinema

The "festival circuit" is one of the key metaphors used to categorise and systematise the organisation of film festivals worldwide (Stringer, 2001; De Valck, 2007; Peranson, 2008; Iordanova, 2009). Stringer describes the festival circuit as an analogy for the 'geographically uneven development [of worldwide] film culture' (Stringer, 2001, p. 137). He argues that in response to the proliferation of local and international film festivals during the 1980s and 1990s, cities have had to find ways to remain competitive and distinguish their cultural capital from that of other major global cities. By extension, publicly funded film festivals, which attract tourism, media interest, celebrities, brands and subsequently funding and cultural capital for host cities, had to secure their uniqueness in opposition to other festivals. 'Inequality,' Stringer emphasises, 'is thus built into the very structure of the international film festival circuit' (Stringer, 2001, p. 138). The image he construes is a manifestation of power relations – big international film festivals are at the centre of the circuit, appealing to a wider market and attracting established talent and professionals, while small film festivals with specialised audiences and opportunities for new ideas are found at the periphery. Similarly, Peranson splits festivals into two different models, audience and business festivals (2008). He argues that most festivals combine elements of both and sit on a spectrum between being oriented towards public audiences or



towards the business side of the film industry. This classification after a target audience can be mapped onto Stringer's model of the circuit. The powerful festivals in the middle are business festivals, while the small festivals at the periphery are audience festivals. Iordanova expands the notion of the festival circuit away from power or impact and the attending audiences, towards a festival's purpose of distribution (2009). She describes the festival circuit as an 'alternative distribution network for world cinema beyond Hollywood' (Iordanova, 2009, p. 22). Festival on the circuit showcase films that are usually not available to audiences through the mainstream distribution network. They are a platform for emerging directors and arthouse cinema. They also aid independent film professionals to connect and acquire financial support for future projects. There is in fact not only one circuit of film festivals, but multiple circuits that are sometimes overlapping or other times separate from each other. These circuits are characterised by aspects such as geography, type, genre, target audience, social concern, commercial intentions, tourism expansion or film professionalism development (Iordanova, 2009, pp. 31-32). Apart from the international film festival circuit of A-list festivals, which focus on distribution, such as Cannes, Venice or Berlin, there are circuits for special interest films, which concentrate on fostering and showcasing a certain kind of cinema such as documentary, short films or films by women directors. One crucial element that Stringer and Iordanova's concepts of festival circuit have in common though, is that they exist in a hierarchical system – some circuits are more powerful than others and have more influence on the film industry or film professionals.

Considering Stringer and Peranson's models, women's film festivals would be found at the periphery of the circuit. They cater to specialised interests and engage primarily local audiences rather than established industry professionals. According to Iordanova's concept, the circuit of women's film festivals is thus also lower down in the hierarchy of circuits and less influential than the mainstream film festival circuit. Concepts of the festival circuit can thus be used to map the relationship between exhibitors of women's cinema and other kinds of cinema.

In her 1973 pamphlet *Notes on Women's Cinema*, Johnston describes women's filmmaking practices and women's film festivals as counter-cinema. She argues that films by women have the potential to counter established narratives of society, which are distributed in mainstream cinema. One such narrative is that female characters are most likely portrayed as an extension to the male character rather than self-sufficient figures. On the basis of

Dorothy Arzner's *Dance, Girl, Dance* (1940) and Ida Lupino's *Not Wanted* (1949), Johnston outlines the revolutionary potential of film to change the way women are represented on screen. While aware of the fact that film is embedded in a bourgeois context of male-dominated cinema, she insists that through collaborative work, solidarity among women in film and by giving up the dichotomy of entertainment and political films, women filmmakers would be able to challenge this system. Her concept of women's cinema as counter-cinema does not imply that women filmmakers must operate outside of the mainstream film industry. On the contrary, Johnston argues that women filmmakers do not have to shy away from studio productions, "classical" Hollywood narratives or premieres at international film festivals in order to utilise the subversive power of film – they can challenge the system from within (1973).

While Stringer suggests a hierarchical relationship determined by who holds power and Jordanova speaks of a separate women's film festival circuit, Johnston suggests that women's cinema, and by extension women's film festivals, have the subversive power to challenge the mainstream cinema economy from within. Women's cinema and the circuit of women's film festivals must not be considered separate from mainstream cinema and the international film festival circuit. The circuits form a complex network and many films travel multiple circuits consecutively or at the same time. Some women's film festivals have competition strands and give out awards to compete with larger international film festivals, and speak to similar audiences, whether it is the public, filmmakers or other industry professionals. The relationship between women's film festivals and other festival circuits, and thus the positioning of women's film festivals as a site of film exhibition can differ from festival to festival. The case study of FFF will illustrate which factors must be considered when identifying the position of any women's film festival on the circuits. In order to understand how a festival can be positioned in relation to other similar events, it is also important to examine what drives and motivates the decisions a festival makes for itself. It is thus necessary to consider the purposes that motivate film festivals to create these platforms for film exhibition, as they contribute to establishing their goals, aims and missions.

Before examining the purposes and positioning of women's film festivals though, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the festival that serves as case study in this analysis.

## 4.2 The Dortmund | Cologne International Women's Film Festival (FFF)

FFF is the result of the merger of two women's film festivals in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), *Feminale* and *femme totale*.<sup>26</sup> The *Feminale* celebrated its first edition in Cologne in 1984 and was held biannually until 2004. The *femme totale* started a few years later in 1987 in Dortmund and was held every two years until 2005. In 2006, the festivals joined artistic and financial forces as the Dortmund | Cologne International Women's Film Festival and became the biggest women's film festival in Germany. The festival is held annually, but the location alternates between Dortmund and Cologne. In 2007, the former artistic director of *femme totale* in Dortmund Silke Rübiger took on the artistic leadership of the festival and remained in this position until 2018. Even though the two festivals have merged, the two city branches have kept their individual character and programming structure. Since 1987, the festival programme in Dortmund is curated around a thematic focus. This allows the programmers to draw from the entire back catalogue of women's filmmaking practices and show historical films as well as recent productions. In 2011, FFF launched an international feature film competition for women directors in Dortmund. Eligible films must not be student or graduation pieces or debut films, as the festival is particularly looking for films by more experienced directors.<sup>27</sup> In Cologne, the festival programme is structured into sections that are more conventional and aims to showcase new films produced within two years before the festival. 'Panorama' is the section for international cinema, 'desired! - film lust & queer' for lesbian, trans and queer cinema, and each edition has a national focus, celebrating the cinema of a different country or region, such as Mexico in 2016 and Germany in 2018. Additionally, in Cologne, the festival hosts two competitions: an international debut feature film competition for emerging women filmmakers and a national competition for women Directors of Photography (DoP) in feature films and in documentary films. Despite this complex twin existence, FFF presents an interesting case study in relation to its positioning on the circuit.

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<sup>26</sup> The online archives of the *Feminale* and *femme totale* can be accessed from <http://wayback.archive-it.org/all/20070111223508/http://www.feminale.de/dyn/1358.htm> and <http://www.femmetotale.de/>. The online archive of the Dortmund | Cologne International Women's Film Festival is available from <https://www.frauenfilmfestival.eu/>. [Accessed on 25 October 2018].

<sup>27</sup> The full rules of eligibility for the international feature film competition at FFF is available from <https://www.frauenfilmfestival.eu/index.php?id=3459&L=1&id=3459> [Accessed on 12 December 2018].

It is one of the longest running women's film festivals in the world and has successfully adapted its strategies to internal as well as external circumstances. It taps into three different film festival circuits – German film festivals, international film festivals with competitions and women's film festivals – each requiring specific strategies and considerations. Additionally, Rübiger, who served as festival director at the time the fieldwork was conducted, had been involved with the festival since its early days and was able to provide great insight into the development of the festival since then.<sup>28</sup> The data that this chapter is based on was gathered through fieldwork at FFF17 in Dortmund. I interviewed Rübiger as well as festival manager Christina Essenberger, programmer Sonja Hofmann and several attending filmmakers. To supplement my own observations and the interview material, I conducted archival research at the festival's archive in Dortmund and considered internal and external documents, such as programme notes, minutes from staff meetings, press reviews and visual materials. It is important to note however, that due to financial constraints and accessibility I could only consult the archive of FFF post-2006 as well as femme totale material from 1986 to 2005.<sup>29</sup> Keeping in mind the diverse structure of FFF in Dortmund and Cologne, it made sense to link my observations at FFF in Dortmund with the history of femme totale

#### 4.2.1 History: femme totale (1987-2005)

Femme totale was launched in 1986 in Dortmund by a group of five cinephile women who called themselves 'project group femme totale im Revier'. Rübiger, who at that time was working at a film distribution company, joined them in those early months and remembers that 'in the mid-80s the city's cultural administration worked intensively to include independent organisations and collectives into their cultural policies [...] and the project group femme totale was one of them' (Rübiger, 2017). Some of the women participating in the group were film scholars and as such, the group was heavily influenced by the aforementioned feminist film magazine *Frauen und Film*. The aim of the project group was to make scholarly discourses about women's cinema accessible for the general public

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<sup>28</sup> In 2018, Maxa Zoller took over the artistic direction of the women's film festival in Dortmund and Cologne. More information is available from [https://www.frauenfilmfestival.eu/index.php?id=490&L=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=583&cHash=c39e7c1934b7b9491c06c5f600b7b1c1](https://www.frauenfilmfestival.eu/index.php?id=490&L=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=583&cHash=c39e7c1934b7b9491c06c5f600b7b1c1). [Accessed on 26 October 2018].

<sup>29</sup> Archived documents of the Feminale (1984-2005) are held at the Bildwechsel archive in Hamburg and it would have been beyond the capacity of this research project to travel to Hamburg and consider this also.

and raise awareness for the variety of filmmaking practices of women. In 1987, the festival showcased mostly films from West Germany with a few exceptions such as films by Marguerite Duras from France or Valie Export from Austria. The films were curated into three blocks, each preceded by introductory lectures and followed by discussions, workshops and seminars. Encouraging discourse and facilitating exchange of ideas was a central element of *femme totale*. This discursive nature of engagement with women's cinema is still a pertinent feature of FFF today.

#### 4.2.2 Case Study: 2017 Dortmund

I attended the festival when it was held in Dortmund from 4-9 April 2017. The festival's theme was 'In control of the situation', which Rübiger ascribed to the increasing possibility to control every aspect of our lives through technology and the 'political conditions all over the world [which] appear to be spiralling out of control' (Dortmund | Cologne International Women's Film Festival, 2017, p. 13). The films in this part of the programme discussed issues of control or lack thereof from a variety of perspectives such as migration, personal development, power relations, hopes and fears, body images and collective efforts of empowerment. Overall the festival screened about 120 films from over twenty countries. The international feature film competition gathered eight films from six different countries and the jury was made up of three industry professionals; actress and screenwriter, Marnie Blok, film critic and artistic director of the Women Make Waves film festival, Pecha Lo, and editor Gesa Marten. Delphine and Muriel Coulin's *The Stopover (Voir du pays, 2016)* emerged as winner of the award, which is endowed with €15,000, and Sally Potter's *The Party (2017)* received a special mention.

The film programme included silent film screenings with live piano accompaniment, a retrospective of films by Narcisa Hirsch, a short film programme of Super 8 films and a collaboration with the Cologne Short Film Festival called *Shorts on Wheels*. Special events beyond the film programme included discussions, an editing masterclass, a symposium at the Museum Ostwall, performances by Anja Kaiser and Katharina Merten (*What's good?*), Lisa Gornick (*Lesbian Film Live Drawing Show*) and Club Fortuna (*Gnawz Imaman*), a presentation of film documents from the GDR, and the presentation of a fictional radio feature in a local book shop. There was also a festival party at the bar *sissikingkong*, a drinks reception after the prize ceremony at the black frame event space, and daily post-screening drinks at the bar *Kraftstoff*, which enabled audiences, festival guests and staff to

engage in an informal environment. The audiences attending the screenings were mostly local and, from what I could observe, predominantly white women from all age ranges. The festival was also attended by international guests and industry professionals, whom I will discuss in further detail below.

Most screenings at FFF17 took place across two cinemas in the centre of Dortmund, the more traditional Schauburg cinema and the Kino im U at the Centre for Art and Creativity. There were also events in five other locations, including the small community cinema Sweetsixteen, the multiplex cinema Cinestar and other non-theatrical venues. Apart from the community cinema, all venues were within walking distance and as a guest of the festival, I benefited from a free rental bike through the local city bike scheme.

Funding for the festival was provided by the Ministry of Family, Children, Youth, Culture and Sport (NRW), the city councils of Dortmund and Cologne, the Film- und Medienstiftung NRW, the Federal Ministry of Families, Seniors, Women and Youth, the Ministry for Health, Equalities, Care and Ageing (NRW), the Minister of State for Culture and the Media and the local bank Sparkasse Dortmund (Dortmund | Cologne International Women's Film Festival, 2017).

### 4.3 The Purposes of FFF

Since its inception as *femme totale* and *Feminale*, the International Women's Film Festival in Dortmund and Cologne has undergone significant changes with regards to its content, structure and mission. Before analysing the festival's position on different festival circuits, it is useful to establish what purposes the festival set out to fulfil in the past and what its aims are today. This will illustrate how the goals of a festival determine its relationships with other festivals internationally and locally.

In an internal document, *femme totale* summarised its core intentions as follows: to showcase a representative cross section of historical and contemporary films by women; to create an inclusive and educational cinema culture by and with women; to introduce each film considering its context; to exchange opinions and experiences in order to potentially develop particular exhibition structures for films by women; and to foster direct exchange between lay audiences and film professionals and experts (*femme totale*, [no date]).

Motivated by the theoretical discourse about women's cinema showcased in the feminist film magazine *Frauen und Film*, the organisers wanted to create a platform for the

discovery, exhibition and discussion of films by women. Based on the intentions discussed internally, the festival stated publicly in its first festival brochure that:

We remained true to the idea [...] to discover the invisible in the visible / to let others know / to seek a way to present films by women that fulfils these wishes for us and others: to get familiar with the interesting, rarely screened, mostly undervalued, but imaginative films by women / to see them again, to finally catch up with what has been misunderstood, or wants to be seen and experienced anew / [...] building a relationship with 20 years of women's film and cinema work with other women. [...] In practice, this means for us, to uncover the connections between the individual areas through films, conversations, workshops etc., theory, criticism and reception as extension [...] to give time and space for exchange. [...] We wish for another kind of film education for women. (*femme totale*, 1987, p. 4)

This introductory text to the festival illustrates that the five core intentions outlined above had been transformed into a number of objectives that the festival wished to pursue. The festival demanded attention for films by women and gave them visibility. It aimed to promote women's issues through an approachable and accessible medium and engaged wide audiences with these social and political issues. It questioned the established canon and contributed to the writing of women's film history. It wanted to create networks among women filmmakers and activists, between members of the public and of the industry. It strengthened their relationships and hoped to facilitate support networks. Finally, it taught women how to make their own films and aimed to create educational material based on women's creative outputs. As such, *femme totale's* aims mirrored the purposes of historical women's film festivals outlined in Chapter 3.

While *femme totale* in Dortmund and the *Feminale* in Cologne presented two of the few opportunities for women filmmakers in Germany to showcase their work, their successor the International Women's Film Festival is embedded in a diverse landscape of film festivals and exhibition platforms all over Germany. Yet, many of the aims and purposes the festival set out to achieve in the 1980s were also reflected at the festival in 2017.

Advocating for the visibility of women filmmakers is still a core target of FFF today. Multiple quantitative studies examining the contemporary presence of women and female-directed cinema at film festivals have come to the conclusion that they are still significantly under-represented in Germany and internationally (Krainhöfer, Schreiber & Wiedemann, 2017; European Women's Audiovisual Network, 2016; Krainhöfer & Schreiber, 2016; Smith, Pieper & Choueiti, 2014). According to Rübiger, women's film

festivals are still crucial platforms to showcase the variety of women's filmmaking practices and expose audiences to films they would usually not see in the cinemas. For her, creating this presence is 'the starting point and impetus of this festival' (2017). Thus, the purpose of raising awareness and creating presence is still as pertinent as it was at the beginning of *femme totale*.

The festival also strives to draw attention to women's historical contributions to cinema and highlight some of them in its programme. FFF17 included several such measures. The festival screened four German silent films from 1906 to 1919 with live piano accompaniment. The films introduced the audience to some of the most famous actresses of the German silent film era: Asta Nielsen, Wanda Treumann, Henny and Rosa Porten, and Anna Müller-Lincke. They discussed themes such as women's right to vote, gender fluidity and the golden cage of marriage. By focussing on actresses in particular, this programme strand also challenged the idea of the director as sole author of a film. The retrospective of films by Narcisa Hirsch, a pioneer of experimental cinema in Argentina since the 1960s, included four short films by the director as well as a feature documentary by Daniela Muttis (*Narcisa*, 2014). It gave audiences a glimpse into a genre that is under-represented in mainstream cinemas in general, illustrating the double marginalisation of women making this kind of film. The short film programme *Polyversum Super 8* brought together eighteen contemporary and historical short films shot on Super 8 film, paying tribute to the popularity of this medium among women filmmakers in particular. It drew attention to film as a medium and reflected on the format, which would have been available to women filmmakers historically. As such, it also commented on the loss of many films by women from that time that was caused by the lack of appropriate storage, conversion or screening facilities.

In addition to the film programme, the festival partnered with Museum Ostwall, a local museum of modern and contemporary art, to present a one-day symposium on the work of Niki de Saint Phalle. While the artist is widely recognised for her monumental Nana sculptures, the symposium focussed on her less known moving image artwork, such as the surreal horror film *Daddy* and recordings of her creation of pieces in the *Tirs (Shooting)* series. Participation in the symposium included a ticket for an exhibition at the museum, which showcased more of her visual and audio-visual work. The day included screenings and presentations about de Saint Phalle's artistic process and drew attention to an aspect of her work that is overshadowed by her more famous pieces.



With these events, FFF17 contributed to prevalent discourses in women's film history, uncovered knowledge and made it accessible to the public, and touched on issues from feminist film theory.

A key component for the organisers of FFF is that filmmakers should be able to share their work away from the conventions and the pressure of the male-dominated film industry, such as sales-oriented market environments. All staff members I interviewed agreed that creating these informal networking opportunities for women in the film industry as well as audiences is a key function of the festival. The direct engagement of film professionals with lay audiences has been a core element since the inception of *femme totale*, as well as the opportunity to share opinions and experiences with other women in the film industry. The first festival in 1987 presented an opportunity to come together and connect women from all over Germany, Austria and Switzerland through professional and social networking opportunities. It aimed to be 'a space for conversations about film and cinema work with, by and for women' (*femme totale*, 1987, p. 5). In 2017, the festival describes itself as a 'vibrant meeting place' where 'young and established film-makers [have] the opportunity to showcase their work and voice their opinions and visions' (Dortmund | Cologne International Women's Film Festival, 2017, p. 13). Guests at the 2017 festival in Dortmund included filmmakers such as Marion Hänsel from Belgium (*Upstream [En amont du fleuve]*, 2016), Meg Rickards from South Africa (*Tess*, 2016), Katarzyna Adamik from Poland (*Spoor [Pokot]*, 2017) and Elene Naveriani from Georgia (*I Am Truly a Drop of Sun on Earth [Me Mzis Skivi Var Dedamicaze]*, 2017), and actresses like Lola Créton from France and Ariane Labed from Greece, but also the students and staff from the Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF and experts participated in panels and post-screening discussions. Every year the festival hosts regional and international network meetings as well as workshops and skill-sharing opportunities, and encourages guest filmmakers to engage with one another and local audiences through Q&As and informal events. The festival thus facilitates the exchange of skills and expertise on filmmaking among women working in the industry.

A key initiative of the festival is an annual masterclass held by an established member of the German film industry. At FFF17, this masterclass was given by editor Gesa Marten. The screening of one of her film projects, Kiki Allgeier's *FEMMEfille* (2014), was followed by an in-depth discussion of the role of editing in storytelling and Marten's workflow as an editor. In the audience, I observed aspiring filmmakers from local film

schools as well as lay audiences. Additionally, festival guests gathered for the annual filmmaker brunch as well as a formal networking meeting for women working in the local film industry. The festival organises similar events throughout the year, for example during the Berlin International Film Festival every February.

Film screenings at FFF17 were framed by an informative supporting programme of introductions, talks, panel and plenary discussions, workshops and seminars to encourage an open dialogue between lay audiences and film professionals. There was a special educational programme for school groups as well as day care centres and integration groups, which contained four feature films and four short film programmes. These screenings were held in the mornings and the festival worked with local educators to programme suitable films (Räbiger, 2017). The special event “Babelsberger Salon” created a learning platform for lay audiences to engage with women’s films through a feminist film theory lens. Students and lecturers of the Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF in Potsdam were invited to share their interpretations of a number of films in the FFF17 programme, and discussed these with people in the audience. The result was an open discussion about feminist storytelling and aesthetics, making academic concepts accessible to a non-academic audience.

By bringing together young and established filmmakers, industry insiders, creatives and lay audiences the festival puts an emphasis on its role as facilitator of film education. It is important to note however, that despite the efforts to promote film education and film as educational tool, Räbiger does not see the festival’s role as a pedagogical one. For her, it is not about conveying a particular feminist standpoint and she suggests that these political debates are ‘often very scientific and academic’ (Räbiger, 2017). Instead, she proposes that it is the festival’s duty to create spaces in which these debates can take place, without overshadowing them with a specific opinion. I observed similar trends towards creating platforms rather than pursuing a feminist pedagogy at the film festivals I analyse in Chapter 5.

The festival advocates for gender equality in the film industry, celebrates and supports women directors and raises awareness for women’s issues on and off screen. While the term ‘feminist’ was not always overtly put on paper, it permeates every aspect of the festival’s programme and conception. FFF does not call itself a feminist film festival, even though Räbiger admits that some team members would like to see the festival position

itself stronger within the political women's movement (Räbiger, 2017). She explains that festival does not use the label feminism, because it evokes feelings of apprehension in Germany. Hofmann suggests that in Germany feminism is simply not very popular and still widely associated with negative stereotypes (Hofmann, 2017). Between 1997 and 2005, *femme totale* even took the term "women" out of its name in an effort to make it more accessible to a wider audience. The posters from this period read, 'femme totale. Internationales Filmfestival Dortmund'. The festival used this strategy to gain distance from the post-feminist theoretical context, which would have potentially rendered a film festival highlighting women's films unnecessary (Räbiger, 2017). Yet, Essenberger remarks that:

We put on a festival with films only by women and women work here almost exclusively – do I still have to say, I'm a feminist? Or isn't the action we deliver here a feminist achievement. (Essenberger, 2017)

As if to underline this point, the festival created a reflecting postcard to promote the 2018 edition in Cologne. Whoever held the postcard would see their face reflected in the mirror-like surface and a text at the bottom of the postcard read "Feminist".<sup>30</sup> This illustrates that the festival considers participating in its events a feminist act and underpins Essenberger's view on the festival as inherently feminist.

Who is represented at women's film festivals and how overtly feminist issues are talked about is strongly dependent on the specific local cultural context. Commenting on the inclusion of male-centred stories such as Hänsel's *Upstream* (2018) at FFF, Hofmann proposes a difference between women's film festivals in Germany and Latin America:

They will often screen films about violence against women or domestic violence or such, and that can also be films directed by men. There it's about the topic [of a film] and that is understandable, because there it's much more important for society to talk about these things. [...] For us I see the situation differently – we want to finally achieve equality, and that is at the moment primarily a technical issue. It's not about the content of the films, it's about the jobs. (Hofmann, 2017)

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<sup>30</sup> A photo of this postcard in action can be seen on the festival's Facebook page, available from <https://www.facebook.com/IFFF.Dortmund.Koeln/photos/a.164314529761/10156824084434762/> [Accessed on 22 October 2018].

Whom and what women's film festivals represent in their programmes correlates with the local cultural context and reflects the most pertinent issues of local women's movements.

This suggests that even though women's film festivals set out with similar intentions in mind, priorities adapt to their specific circumstances. My interviews with experts and the analysis of purposes reflected in the programme of FFF17 have illustrated that women's film festivals today continue to follow similar intentions as historical women's film festivals. They aim to draw attention to women filmmakers, document and honour their creative achievements, create networks and opportunities for women in the industry, represent a diversity of women's roles on and off screen, challenge audiences with new viewing experiences and raise awareness for gender inequalities in the film industry. However, the festival approaches these issues in a more nuanced way. The question in Germany but also in other Western contexts is no longer, whether women can be directors, create high-quality films, achieve awards, prizes and accolades or handle big budgets – there are infinite examples that women filmmakers can do these things.<sup>31</sup> While women filmmakers continue to be underrepresented at award ceremonies, festival competitions and high budget film projects, they are there and they are in the public eye.

The question in the context of FFF is more directed at the opportunities that are given to women in the industry. This shift of focus is reflected in the merging of two local festivals, *femme totale* and *Feminale*, into an international women's film festival. As an international festival, FFF takes on a different task and had to re-negotiate its purposes and its position in relation to other festivals on the circuit. I will now examine how the festival ties in with the wider network on a local and an international level.

#### 4.4 Positioning Dortmund on the Festival Circuits

FFF is part of a circuit of women's film festivals. They engage and collaborate with each other, for example through their membership in the IWFFN, which was conceived at the

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<sup>31</sup> Such as statistics showing that around 50% of graduates from film schools in Europe and North America are female (European Women's Audiovisual Network, 2016; Murphy, 2015; Prommer and Loist, 2015); Kathryn Bigelow's Oscar win for Best Director with *The Hurt Locker* (2008); Ava Duvernay's and Patty Jenkins \$100+ million dollar projects *A Wrinkle in Time* (2018) and *Wonder Woman* (2017); and global festival hits such as Deniz Gamze Ergüven *Mustang* (2015), Haifaa al-Mansour's *Wadjda* (2013) or Ann Hui's *A Simple Life* (2011) – just to name a few.

2012 festival in Cologne. However, with the purposes of women's film festivals and the shift of priorities from the 1970s to present times in mind, it is useful to examine closely how the purpose of a women's film festival influences its positioning on the wider festival circuits on national and international levels.

At the press conference of FFF17, a journalist raised his hand and asked why after thirty years there was still the need for a women's film festival in Germany. The question may seem justified. Women's situation in the German film industry has after all improved immensely since the festivals in Dortmund and Cologne were established in the mid to late 1980s. Initiatives such as Pro Quote Film (formerly known as Pro Quote Regie)<sup>32</sup> have raised awareness for gender inequality in the film industry and German women filmmakers bring their films to mainstream cinemas and enthuse press and industry at international film festivals worldwide. Successful films include Maren Ade's *Toni Erdmann* (2016) which was screened in competition at the 2016 Cannes Film Festival, won four European Film Awards and was nominated for an Oscar for the Best Foreign Language Film; and Maria Schrader's *Stefan Zweig: Farewell to Europe (Vor der Morgenröte)*, (2016) which was screened at the 2016 Locarno Film Festival and nominated for Best Director at the 2016 German Film Prize. Nearly half of all graduates from German film schools are women (Prommer and Loist, 2015). At first glance, it looks like the playing field in Germany is even. Yet, numerous studies and gender reports have revealed that it is far from it. The *Gender Report German Feature Films* found that between 2009 and 2013, only 22% of German feature films that had a general release were directed by women, and female-directed projects received only 66% of the funding given to films directed by men (Prommer & Loist, 2015). However, Prommer and Loist's study also uncovers that films by women receive proportionally more awards and are more often selected in one or several film festivals. The *Gender Study German Film Festivals* found similar results in its analysis of the programmes of nineteen German film festivals; women win more awards, but the awards attached to larger sums of prize money are more likely to go to men (Krainhöfer & Schreiber, 2016). Krainhöfer and Schreiber's study revealed that only 27% of selected films at German film festivals were directed by women, including all genres and lengths. 32% of German entries were directed by women, but that number drops to

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<sup>32</sup> For more information on Pro Quote Film, see: <https://proquote-film.de/> [Accessed on 23 October 2018].

24% when considering feature films in particular. In the sample year of 2015, none of the analysed festivals dedicated a retrospective or homage to the work of a woman.

Despite the hard evidence of gender imbalance in the German film industry and the German film festival circuit illustrated by these reports, women's film festivals are frequently urged to justify their existence. Hofmann, who was a curator at Cologne's *Feminale* before joining the programming team of FFF, admits that the question is raised at almost every interview she gives in the run-up to the festival (Hofmann, 2017). She suggests that this kind of justification is not asked of any of the other festivals she works for, such as a Latin American film festival, a short film festival and a festival to showcase films made in her local state, NRW. Rübiger and Essenberger also spoke about this lack of acknowledgement of the necessity of their work and linked this to the positioning of the festival on the hierarchical festival circuit.

The paucity of women in the film industries was even more severe in the 1970s. At that time, international film festivals were failing to represent women filmmakers and their filmmaking practices. This is where women's film festivals entered the scene and provided valuable exhibition and networking opportunities for women in the film industry. They were what Leshu Torchin describes as activist film festivals (2012). Like other activist festivals they were informative rather than entertaining and had the intention to bring about positive change. They stood in clear opposition to the neoliberal Hollywood industry and opposed to the industry-oriented international film festivals. As such, they inhabit a position of double opposition – towards the wider industry as well as all international film festivals. This makes it necessary to investigate how women's film festivals are positioned on multiple circuits. In the case of FFF, this means that I will focus particularly on the festival's relation with other German and other international film festivals. Rübiger argues that 'in order to play along in the so-called game of national and international film festivals, it is necessary to open up towards the film industry too' (Rübiger, 2017). Encouraging discourse about films by women is an integral intention of the festival; however, it is not enough to catapult the festival onto the national and international film festival circuit. Thus, the festival makes conscious decisions to position itself in relation to and fulfil certain expectations of stakeholders and participants from the national and international film industries.

#### 4.4.1 Dortmund on the German Film Festival Circuit

Festivals are a significant method of film consumption in Germany and are increasing in popularity both in urban as well as rural areas. In 2017, around 400 film festivals took place all over the country with the highest number of festivals happening in its capital Berlin and in its largest state, Bavaria (Krainhöfer, 2017). FFF is by far not the only women's film festival in the country – there are others in Freiburg, Tübingen, Munich, Frankfurt/Main and Berlin.<sup>33</sup> However, it is the oldest and the only one that considers and calls itself an international film festival. Considering Stringer, Peranson and Iordanova's concepts of festival circuits, it is important to note that Rübiger and Essenberger acknowledge that there is a hierarchy among German film festivals which they cannot ignore (Essenberger, 2017; Rübiger, 2017). They attribute this power imbalance mostly to the significance of festivals as marketing events for distributors and producers. However, the festival also attempts to overcome the hierarchies by considering its position carefully. FFF also collaborates with other festivals by sharing films and potentially the costs of filmmakers coming to Germany to attend (Rübiger, 2017).

Rübiger splits the German film festival circuit into three groups: A-list festivals, mid-sized festivals and special interest festivals (2017). Firstly, there are two events that are accredited as A-list film festivals by FIAPF; the Berlin International Film Festival, (Berlinale), founded in 1951, and the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, founded in 1954.<sup>34</sup> The Berlinale is one of the world's leading international film festivals, a reputable media event and host of a significant film market for European film distribution and co-productions. Oberhausen is one of the most influential international platforms for short films. There are two other major players, which Rübiger considers in this top tier of German film festivals: the Munich International Film Festival, founded in 1983, and the Filmfest Hamburg, founded in 1991.<sup>35</sup> Munich is particularly established among industry professionals – Rübiger describes its role for the German film industry similar to Cannes;

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<sup>33</sup> More information about these festivals is available from <http://freiburger-lesbenfilmtage.de/>, <http://www.frauenrechte.de/filmfest/>, <http://www.lesbenfilmfestival.de/>, <http://berlinfeministfilmweek.com/>, <https://www.bimovie-frauenfilmfest.de/>, <http://www.remake-festival.de/> and <http://www.furorafestival.de/>. [Accessed on 26 October 2018].

<sup>34</sup> More information about these festivals is available from <http://berlinale.de/> and <https://www.kurzfilmtage.de/>. [Accessed on 25 October 2018].

<sup>35</sup> More information about these festivals is available from <https://www.filmfest-muenchen.de/> and <https://www.filmfesthamburg.de/>. [Accessed on 25 October 2018].

'if you can't go to Cannes, you can go to Munich and see similar films' (Räbiger, 2017). Together these four festivals in the opposing geographical regions of Germany form the different poles at the centre of the German film festival circuit. Next in Räbiger's system follows a variety of mid-sized film festivals, such as Ludwigshafen, Hof and Lünen, which showcase the best of German cinema and offer pertinent media and networking opportunities for national film professionals.<sup>36</sup> Finally, at the third stage is a number of smaller international film festivals in cities such as Oldenburg, Braunschweig or Münster, but also special interest festivals, such as *achtung berlin* for films from or about Berlin or *Nippon Connection* in Frankfurt/Main, which screens Japanese cinema.<sup>37</sup>

Räbiger places FFF in the second category, the field of mid-sized festivals. These events happen largely without the presence of the international film industry or members of the international press. They showcase around 100-150 films each year, which do not necessarily require a specific premiere status. These festivals generally present the first opportunity for local audiences to see them. FFF fits neatly into this category. In 2017, it screened around 120 films; three out of eight films in competition were national premieres, the others had been previously screened in Germany. The number of international guests is manageable and provides opportunities for relaxed networking, instead of the pressure of making deals at a film festival of the first tier.

However, the festival does not only relate to other German film festivals by its volume of films or attending guests; timing and location also play a significant role. FFF takes place every year in April, the same time slot that *femme totale* inhabited before the merger with *Feminale*. The Cologne branch of the festival used to be held in October but gave up this time slot after 2006. While Räbiger does not remember, whether there was a significant reason for the project group to host the first *femme totale* in April of 1987, she later 'fought tooth and nail' for that date (Räbiger, 2017). She prefers this date since in April the festival is in no direct conflict with any other film festival in Germany of similar scale and significance. The festival in Berlin has already happened in early February, which according to Loist gives FFF the unique opportunity to pick up films in the narrow window

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<sup>36</sup> More information about these festivals is available from <https://www.festival-des-deutschen-films.de/>, <http://hofer-filmtage.com/> and <https://www.kinofest-luenen.de/>. [Accessed on 25 October 2018].

<sup>37</sup> More information about these festivals is available from <https://www.filmfest-oldenburg.de/>, <https://www.filmfest-braunschweig.de/>, <http://www.filmfestival-muenster.org/>, <https://achtungberlin.de/> and <http://www.nipponconnection.com/>. [Accessed on 25 October 2018].



'between world [or German] premiere [at the Berlinale] and before they actually get released' in cinemas (Loist, 2016). The two films in competition in 2017, which were also in competition at the Berlinale two months earlier, illustrate this. The festival in Oberhausen takes place in May and due to its focus on short films, it does not stand in direct competition with FFF. Munich and Hamburg take place in June and October respectively and are thus geographically and temporally separated from FFF. Alternating between the feature film competitions in Dortmund and Cologne means that each year the curators can select films completed within the two preceding years. This does not only increase the number of films to choose from, but also releases tension between the festival and other German festivals with regard to a film's premiere status. Finally, Rübiger suggests, that in spring neither press nor audiences feel the same festival fatigue they might feel in the autumn at the end of a long and intense festival season (Rübiger, 2017).

Since many of the German film festivals that FFF is in direct competition with are also international film festivals, it is useful to broaden the field of reference and consider the positioning of the festival in Dortmund on an international scale next.

#### **4.4.2 Dortmund on the International Film Festival Circuit**

Analysing the purposes and positions of women's film festivals such as FFF is inevitably entangled with Johnston's concept of women's cinema as counter-cinema, which suggests that women filmmakers can subvert mainstream film culture by applying alternative strategies within the conventional framework. Similarly, women's film festivals act as counter-public spheres, subverting the industry-oriented network of international film festivals. Skadi Loist describes them as 'a space for work by, for and about women' that offers opportunities for community building, networking and collaboration and '[sets] women's work apart' from mainstream perspectives (Loist, 2012). At the same time, women's film festivals implement similar elements as international film festivals in order to improve their status. They help films by women reach wider audiences, some even aim for a certain premiere status; they host competitions and give away awards and cash prizes; they invite film professionals to connect and network, offer training opportunities and attract members of the press to their events. The relationship between women's film festivals and the international film festivals echoes Johnston's concept of counter-cinema. The festivals offer an alternative, yet familiar space – familiar, because they share key characteristics with other film festivals; alternative because it offers filmmakers and

audiences different opportunities and contexts to engage with female-directed cinema. They are an alternative to the international film festival circuit as well as mainstream Hollywood distribution circuits. However, they do this not by constituting an opposite structure, but rather, by subversively using mainstream festival strategies to their advantage.

FFF makes conscious decisions to align some of its structures to those of international film festivals and gears its appearance towards the international film industry. In doing so, the festival oscillates between Stringer, Peranson and Iordanova's concept of hierarchical festival circuits and Johnston's idea of counter-culture creating change from within the mainstream system. It adopts certain characteristics of international film festivals to draw the same kind of attention from the industry, press and talent. However, at the same time, these elements are subverted and used differently in the context of a women's film event. Through interviews and observation, I identified two aspects of FFF in particular, which illustrate the festival's distinct demarcation from international film festivals: its programming process and film selection, and its incentives for attending filmmakers.

In a 2008 essay, de Valck argues that international film festivals provide films in their programme with cultural capital and function as guidance systems for film consumption. They offer films and their directors the prestige of theatrical exhibition and direct engagement with a physically present audience. They also provide media attention and news value increased by the short duration of a standard film festival. Finally, they open audiences up to new viewing experiences and enable them to refine their taste (de Valck, 2008). According to her, audiences need film festivals to show them what is good and worth their time. Dortmund's self-proclaimed aim to show films that audiences would usually not have access to illustrates this (Hofmann, 2017; Rübiger, 2017). However, this oversimplifies the complex curatorial processes that are at play at film festivals. Quality is merely one of many criteria in the curatorial process of assembling a film festival programme. Considerations regarding the premiere status of a film, the celebrity status of names attached to the project, the existing relationships of festivals with certain filmmakers, the balance between catering to and challenging an audience's expectations, among others, complicate this process significantly.

The idea that film festivals are programmed based on merit alone is closely linked to what Anne Lawton calls the meritocracy myth (Lawton, 2000). In her research on equal

employment opportunities in the US, she explores in which ways latent forms of discrimination against sex or race operate in today's workplace. She defines two key aspects of the meritocracy myth; firstly, the idea that employment discrimination against women and people of colour does not exist anymore, and secondly, that due to the absence of overt discrimination, every choice made by decision-makers is objective and fair. She writes:

According to the myth, differences in outcomes result not from unequal opportunity and discrimination, but from unequal talent and effort. (Lawton, 2000, p. 593)

That Lawton's observations are significant beyond her specific field of enquiry becomes undeniable when influential decision makers, such as Cannes' artistic director Thierry Fremaux blames the lack of female-directed films in his festival on the lack of women directors and quality films directed by women (Erbland, 2017). FFF-programmer Hofmann argues, that 'if no women would study [at film schools], then no one would have to complain that there are too few female directors' (Hofmann, 2017). However, as mentioned above, studies have shown that there are plenty of women graduating from film schools and that many of their films are well received by audiences, press and juries. These statistics support the idea that the lack of women's representation in the film industry in Germany is not merely an effect of objective meritocracy or paucity of women filmmakers. The disparity between women graduating from film schools and women working in the industry is an indicator that gender bias – conscious or unconscious – contributes to the lack of representation of women's films in cinemas and at film festivals.

Like in the case of the US-American hiring processes examined by Lawton, quality and merit are not the singular motivation behind curatorial decisions at film festivals. Acknowledging the complexity of programming was pertinent in my interviews with the programming team of FFF. While the programmers insisted that the artistic quality, the technical execution and a film's unconventional or innovative storytelling are crucial selection criteria, they also admitted that they were considering other aspects, such as country of origin (Essenberger, 2017; Hofmann, 2017; Rübiger, 2017). The festival makes an effort to feature a wide spread of production countries in its sections but particularly in its competition. Hofmann states that:

Sometimes we definitely give extra points [to films] from countries which you usually don't see. You certainly watch the film differently if it's from the

Central African Republic, from where you never see anything. You probably give that a different chance than the 200<sup>th</sup> film from France. (Hofmann, 2017)

In line with the aim to showcase films that the audience would normally not get to see, the festival thus also considers the diversity of production countries represented in its programme. If a film has been produced in a country that has a small film industry or is less frequently represented at the festival, the programmers are likely to view the film in a different light. Further, Hofmann suggests that the festival's criteria regarding aesthetics or content may become secondary when the programmers watch a film from a country with fewer submissions. Among the eight films in competition at FFF17 were three entries from France, illustrating Hofmann's indication of the disproportionately high number of submissions from this country. The other five films in competition were produced in Brazil, Belgium, South Africa, the United Kingdom and Poland. The rest of the programme featured films from over fifteen more countries, such as Hui-chen Huang's *The Priestess Walks Alone* (2016), Guetty Felin's *Ayiti Mon Amour* (2016) or Maysaloun Hamoud's *In Between (Bar Bahar)* (2016). This is not to say that these films are not artistically valuable or deserve to be screened at film festivals, but it signifies that the festival considers much more than the quality, content and aesthetics of a film. The curatorial process at FFF is influenced by considerations with regard to diversity and representation.

Another element the programming team is aware of when selecting films, is their premiere status. The festival asks for submissions to the competition not to have screened in Germany before. However, as the films in competition in 2017 illustrate, this rule can be bent. Five out of eight films had been at other German film festivals in advance of their screening in Dortmund. Two, Agnieszka Holland and Katarzyna Adamik's *Spoor* and Potter's *The Party* were screening in competition at the 2017 Berlin International Film Festival, Anna Muylaert's *Don't Call Me Son (Mãe só há uma)* (2016) screened in Berlin the year before and the other two, Danielle Arbid's *Parisienne (Peur de rien)* (2015) and Coulin's *The Stopover* premiered at the 2016 Munich International Film Festival and the 2016 Hof International Film Festival respectively. Only three films in competition, Dominique Cabrera's *Corniche Kennedy* (2016), Hänsel's *Upstream* and Rickards' *Tess* were German premieres. The programmers are aware of their competition with other German film festivals, particularly the industry-focused festival in Munich, and consider how that might affect their chances to win a certain film for their programme. Essenberger notes that:

A festival like Munich is more important, if a distributor shows a film there that already has a date for theatrical release. Then they invite all cinema operators who are at the festival to the beer garden, serve sausages and have a great time. [The festival then] is a marketing event and we can tell them ten times, that our festival has a competition – the film will go to Munich. (Essenberger, 2017)

Thus, instead of not showing such films at all, the programming team would rather make an exception and invite a film despite potential previous screenings at other German festivals. While Rübiger emphasises that the festival is generally more interested in showing films that are rather unlikely to get a theatrical release otherwise, she also mentions that it is easier to attract media attention and audience numbers by including films by well-known directors. This resonates with Quandt's programming concept of 'the sandwich process' (2009). He suggests that festivals can use films associated with well-known directors, producers or actors to gain support from funding bodies as well as increased interest by audiences and the media. In return, this gives them the opportunity to programme films that are made by less established filmmakers or that really only speak to niche audiences. Inviting Sally Potter's film to the festival, for example, meant that audiences would see it shortly after its world premiere in Berlin, but before its general theatrical release in July 2017. This gave local audiences the opportunity to see it before almost anyone else. Potter is a well-established director whose work has been frequently invited to A-list film festivals and won her many accolades including a European Film Academy Award and many festival awards. The film opened the festival in Dortmund and attracted much press and media attention in the run up for the festival (Dortmund | Cologne International Women's Film Festival, 2016).

Finally, the curators also consider the contents of the films, particularly the representation of female characters on screen and potential ways in which they could be exploited by narrative or visual means. While films do not have to focus on female protagonists – being directed by a woman is the main selection criteria for the festival – the representation of women on screen still matters to the programming team. Hofmann recalls that one film in particular led to heated debates among the team. *Tess* tells the story of a young white sex worker in Cape Town whose life is derailed by an unexpected pregnancy. The film's central theme is violence against women, an issue pertinent in South African society where studies have shown that at least one in four women will experience domestic violence in her life and research suggests that the vast majority of cases go unreported (Gov.za [no date]; Jewkes, Levin and Penn-Kekana, 2002; Maluleke, 2018). Hofmann states that:

We actually loved the film, we thought the actress [Christia Visser] was great, it was well-made and the topic is really important. It's about violence against women and it was particularly important for the director to talk about that in [South Africa], the country with the highest rate of violence against women in the entire world. But the implementation – I know, [one of us] had a problem with how the camera lingered on that. (Hofmann, 2017)

The depictions Hofmann alludes to are explicit scenes in which the film's protagonist Tess is exposed to extreme acts of violence. In one such sequence, she accepts money in exchange for sex with a group of young white men, and the camera lingers on her face throughout the act while the diegetic sound is replaced by an energetic drumbeat soundtrack. In another scene, Tess is lured into a shed by a customer and subsequently locked up and beaten with a stick until she is unable to move. Scenes like this, which display violence against women so explicitly, caused discussions among the programming team, whether the on-screen representation of women in this film was suitable for the festival's overall mission. As Hofmann suggests, the film was eventually chosen due to the importance of its subject matter, but this decision was not left uncriticised. During the Babelsberger Salon discussion session, students from film schools in Potsdam and Berlin called out the film for its un-feminist aesthetics. They argued that the cinematography during these scenes focussed too heavily on Tess's body and that the music drowning out the diegetic sound in the group sex scene disables the audience to feel empathy for the protagonist. Many of the women in the audience agreed with the speakers' observations and challenged an attending member of the festival's programming team to justify the reasons behind selecting the film for the competition. On the one hand, this illustrates the content of a film is an important criterion for the programmers. On the other hand, it also shows that the programmers are open to critique and encourage discussion about on-screen representation among its guests and audiences.

These cases of different criteria applied by the programmers at FFF show that merit and conventional standards of quality are not the only aspects that influence the curatorial process of a film festival. Instead, curation is a complex process that marries considerations towards representation, aesthetics, industry and taste, and requires programmers to become aware and question which pre-existing ideas might skew their decisions. Taste, and by extension what is considered a *good* film, does not follow a universally true set of rules and regulations. Taste is highly subjective, or as Roya Rastegar calls it, nothing more than 'history reproduced by education' (Rastegar, 2016, p. 185). Based on the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu, Rastegar proposes that taste is embedded in a

person's class, education and social position.<sup>38</sup> The task of a curator is to acknowledge potential biases and challenge them at the same time through curatorial practices. German filmmaker Jutta Brückner calls out the unconscious bias of the film industry in her keynote speech for Pro Quote Regie (now known as Pro Quote Film) at the 2017 Berlin International Film Festival (Pro Quote Regie, 2017). She argues that this bias affects decision-making processes in funding committees, production panels and curatorial boards alike and that the idea of the artist as genius is still conceptualised around the idea of the artist as male. While male filmmakers are able to push boundaries of mainstream society and film culture, she argues that women (filmmakers) are expected to remain within the restrictions of what is standard and acceptable. Brückner implies that because women filmmakers have gotten used to being told "no", they arrange themselves and too often make films that are not out of the ordinary. This in turn has the consequence that many films by women are regarded as less artistically valid. The unconscious bias Brückner describes in relation to women in the film industry works in two ways. On the one hand, she feels there is an idea that films *by* women are only *for* women, and therefore men do not have to engage with them. On the other hand, there is the tangible view that films by men are simply better. The unconscious idea that women are not capable or creative enough to produce outstanding films creates a vicious circle in which women filmmakers receive less funding, make less films and receive less attention.<sup>39</sup> Melissa Silverstein proposes that women's film festivals contribute towards changing gender representation in the film industry by challenging the normative male perspective on the world and screening films that present another view (2013). At a panel discussion at TIFF13, she states that:

The world we live in, the male is seen as universal, and the female is seen as other. [...] This is how we see the world [...] [but] how do you expand that view? How do we not have the male gaze, voice [...] be the dominant narrative of our culture? [...] Until we have a critical mass of women directors and women's films out there it's gonna be that way. (Silverstein in Athena Film Festival, 2013)

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<sup>38</sup> Rastegar draws on Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

<sup>39</sup> For an extended discussion of unconscious bias in the film industry and its consequences, see '2016 Athena Film Festival: Unconscious Bias Workshop', available from <http://athenafilmfestival.com/film/unconscious-bias/> [Accessed on 7 December 2018].

Festivals as gatekeepers can open and close the gate to the film industry. However, festivals apply different criteria of who is let through and who is not. Often the movement of the gate relies on the personal tastes of programmers and curators and this can result in a significant disadvantage for films that do not meet these highly subjective criteria. Many international and A-list film festivals are keeping the gates of what is regarded as culturally valid cinema so well, that they fail to give women filmmakers and their alternative worldviews or aesthetics space on their influential platforms. The aforementioned number of female-directed films in competition at three of the world's leading film festivals illustrate this kind of gate keeping. Women's film festivals, like FFF and their curators have to fill this gap. They have the responsibility to challenge this dominant narrative and present their audiences with films that move beyond the established aesthetic and narrative experience of mainstream cinema. While international film festivals keep the gates closed and limit who has access to the film industry, women's film festivals focus on opening gates to expand the number of people who are let in and provide women filmmakers with access to the mainstream film industry in the long run. Loist outlined the initial motivation of women's film festivals in her keynote speech addressing the audience of FFF12:

Women's film festivals offer not only a screen, but also a specific kind of reception context – through framing introductions and Q+As for these works. They enable viewers (regardless of gender) to learn, practice and experience a reception in solidarity. This means, the work can be presented and considered *outside of mainstream norms of film reception* that still often have a tendency (if they are not outright) sexist and heteronormative. (Loist, 2012)

By screening their films at women's film festivals, women filmmakers cannot only reach a relevant audience in a topical contextualised environment, but also build their network with other filmmakers and significant industry professionals and build their professional portfolio. However, women's film festivals do not function on the same level as international film festivals. They serve a different purpose and cannot offer filmmakers the same cultural capital as prestigious A-list events. Debra Zimmerman speaks in her role as distributor when she says that:

Filmmakers and distributors have to create a strategy around festivals. [...] [Women's film festivals] are so important in terms of getting films out to audiences, they are so important in terms of creating networks. However, they are not industry events. And for women to get their films into the mainstream, they need to be seen in mainstream events. (Zimmerman in Athena Film Festival, 2013)



This insight into how filmmakers and distributors navigate the variety of film festivals available to them exemplifies that there is indeed a perceived hierarchical relationship between women's film festivals and international film festivals as suggested by Stringer (2001), Peranson (2008) and Iordanova (2009).

The inequality among film festivals, reflected in these concepts is also evident from Rübiger and Essenberger's own assessment of the German film festival landscape. Like many other women's film festivals, FFF attracts very little mainstream and industry press coverage and few members of international press attend the events. The annual press reviews, which gather a selection of media coverage of the festival, illustrate this tendency to attract mostly local press (see for example, Dortmund | Cologne International Women's Film Festival, 2016). The festival therefore partners with local media outlets, such as the film magazine *FILMDIENST*, the lesbian magazine *L-MAG*, the cultural magazine *trailer* and the regional event magazine *coolibri*, rather than focussing on international film critics to generate awareness for the films among the public and industry. In 2017, the festival was featured daily in the regional newspaper *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, which had been covering the festival since its first edition in Dortmund in 1987. These partnerships allow the festival to speak directly to local audiences and constitute an integral part of the festival's marketing strategy, which also include appearances in radio and television broadcast, billposting and social media.

The festival is not targeted at participants from the press and film industry, but focuses on local communities. As a consequence, industry professionals show less engagement with women's film festivals like FFF than with international film festivals. Zimmerman, for example, states that 'as a distributor [...] women's film festivals are not very important' to her, even though her company Women Make Movies distributes feminist films by women. Instead, she attends international film festivals, where the chances are higher to see films that have not found a distributor yet, and offer more networking benefits of attending film festivals for women filmmakers. She proposes that:

Attending a range of smaller festivals often only resulted in a film being screened for an additional local audience, rather than providing the more immediate and tangible benefits an emerging filmmaker might be seeking in terms of networking, press and funding opportunities. (Van Hemert, 2013, p. 179)

Programmers, such as Melissa Silverstein from Athena Film Festival in New York and Pecha Lo from Women Make Waves Film Festival in Taiwan, identify the resistance of women filmmakers to let their films be screened at women's film festivals as one of the biggest challenges in their curatorial practices. According to them, a lot of effort goes into convincing women filmmakers to choose a women's-focused event over other more generic mainstream film festivals. Many filmmakers do not want to spoil the chance of screening at an A-list film festival by bringing their film to a smaller women's film festival in advance (Silverstein in Athena Film Festival, 2013; Lo, 2017). Silverstein elaborates on this when she writes that:

The women directors are always going to hold out for something bigger and less women focused. They would still go to a non-female festival first even if they have made the most women centric or feminist film around. (Silverstein, 2011)

Räbiger also observes this behaviour among women filmmakers she invites to FFF and calls it a 'stigma of a women's event' – many people in Germany think women's film festivals are 'an unnecessary relic from the 1980s' (Räbiger, 2017). Zimmerman sums up the issue by saying that women often do not want to be associated with women's film festivals, distributors focused on films by women or the term "women filmmaker" in general, 'because it makes them look smaller' (Zimmerman in Athena Film Festival, 2013). This echoes the hierarchy of inequality among film festivals as suggested by Stringer, Persanson and Iordanova, but also raises questions about the backlash against the women's movement and post-feminist ideas (Modleski, 1991).

Despite this potential for apprehension, Essenberger asserts that many women actually change their minds as soon as they have attended the festival once. She says that:

My favourite example is, last year in Cologne, a young filmmaker told me that she was sceptical at first and thought it was embarrassing to attend a women's film festival. But she came anyways and loved it so much, she hopes that she will be invited back. (Essenberger, 2017)

Räbiger believes that women filmmakers enjoy the festival because women's film festivals present them with unique opportunities beyond screening their often-unconventional films in a relevant context. According to her, the most significant added value of the festival is its networking opportunities. She states that:

Not in the sense of a big A-list film festival, where it's all about getting the next assignment or connect with your next producer or a TV station – all that falls away and it's a considerably more relaxed feeling of togetherness of filmmakers among each other. (Räbiger, 2017)

The pressure of networking at international film festivals, where every conversation could lead to the next big project, falls away. At FFF women directors, writers, DoPs, editors, actresses etc. meet in an informal environment. They can get to know each other, exchange ideas and share their experiences working in the film industry. Hofmann emphasises that the festival creates a safe space and opportunities for film professionals to discuss even difficult issues, such as gender inequality, among themselves. She says that the festival, through its particular focus on women DoPs in Cologne, has contributed to establishing a network and an open platform for women to share their experiences. Hofmann further suggests that providing such meeting points is an incredibly important function of women's film festivals and helps to enhance the perception of the festival among filmmakers (2017).

Many women's film festivals employ strategies to try to counter-act the power relations that situate them on the periphery of the circuit. Women face gender discrimination and unconscious bias in the film industry, which creates barriers for receiving funding or directing opportunities. Many women's film festivals therefore see it as their task to offer women filmmakers unbiased industry-focused events and training opportunities. The St John's International Women's Film Festival in Canada, for example, invites filmmakers to participate in its annual [Interactive] Film Industry Forum and offers networking opportunities through workshops, panel discussions, pitch sessions and project consultations.<sup>40</sup> Another strategy to increase the value of a festival is the introduction of competitions. FFF implements both elements in its festival strategy. As mentioned earlier, Räbiger acknowledges that in order to be recognised as a significant player on the international film festival circuit, the festival has to open up to the film industry to some extent. It thus offers training opportunities for filmmakers through masterclasses and workshops, hosts events in partnership with groups such as the German documentary film network LaDOC or Pro Quote Film and invites local film professionals for networking events. A goal for the future is to integrate German filmmakers stronger in the festival and

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<sup>40</sup> For more information about the festival in St John's see, <https://www.womensfilmfestival.com/>. [Accessed on 25 October 2018].

thus strengthen the position of the festival within the German film festival circuit (Essenberger, 2017). Essenberger admits that in the past, the festival has not had a significant platform for local filmmakers, because of its goal to show films from a broad spectrum of countries. In 2018, the festival took a step in this direction, by dedicating its country focus to German films. The festival also hosts several annual competitions and all awards are endowed with cash prizes. Awarded DoPs receive €2,500, while the winner of the debut feature competition takes €10,000. The highest amount is awarded for the international feature film competition – the cash prize of €15,000 is split between the filmmaker and the film's German distributor in order to support the theatrical release of the film. Cash prizes and awards like this can help a festival to build its validity and its reputation, and to secure its position closer to the centre of the festival circuit. Pecha Lo acknowledges that ever since her festival has started to give out awards, women filmmakers pay a lot more attention to the festival (Lo, 2017). While she had only introduced the competition in 2014, Lo says she can already see a rapid growth in submissions from local and international filmmakers. Awards can catapult film festivals onto the radar of filmmakers and press; they can attract distributors to submit films they acquired; but they are also beneficial for the filmmakers themselves. Silverstein points out that winning an award at a women's film festivals 'is women getting money when they wouldn't otherwise have access to the money' (Silverstein, 2016). In this sense, women's film festivals can also play an important part in filmmakers being able to create their next project. Rather than simply mimicking established features of international film festivals to gain validity and significance, women's film festivals thus utilise these features to facilitate change within the industry – and this reflects Johnston's idea of counter-culture subverting and changing the mainstream with its very own tools.

## 4.5 Conclusion

Women's film festivals' positions on international, national and specialised film festival circuits are first and foremost affected by the festival's purposes. The aims and intentions that differentiate women-centred festivals from international film festivals have an impact on how these events relate to each other, how they differ and in what ways they can be similar. Women's film festivals inhabit a complex position on the global film festival circuit and each individual festival must be considered in relation to its own local, regional or national as well as thematic and cultural context. As such, my analysis of FFF has illustrated that the festival's approach to positioning itself oscillates between Stringer,

Peranson and Iordanova's concepts of hierarchical festival circuits and Johnston's idea of the subversive potential of counter-culture. My analysis of FFF's curatorial process and the incentives it offers to filmmakers has shown the festival is embedded in tight-knit international and national film festival circuits. It overlaps or clashes with other film festivals at multiple nodal points and makes conscious decisions to strengthen or overcome these points of contacts. Finally, I have also demonstrated how positioning women's film festivals on national or international festival circuits requires considerations with regard to geographical dimensions, the annual festival calendar, issues of gender discrimination, the question of taste-making, and relations of power. With this in mind, this chapter presents a way to analyse other women's film festivals on the festival circuits in a similar way.

## 5 Women's Film Festivals and Feminisms

The women's liberation movement was not just a political campaign expressing its concerns about women's rights through activism and protest. As pointed out in Chapter 3, the aims and intentions of the WLM also became manifested in forms of cultural practice and production. The feminist film movement was one of them and consisted of excavating the contributions of women to film history and the fostering of an emerging women's filmmaking community. Women's film festivals were embedded in this movement from their beginnings in the 1970s. This chapter expands on their role in the movement and aims to trace how contemporary women's film festivals act as crucial feminist exhibition, research and community platforms. The questions underlying the chapter are:

- Which feminist theories influence discourse at contemporary women's film festivals?
- How does the multiplicity of feminisms play out at contemporary women's film festivals?
- How do contemporary and historical women's film festivals compare with regards to their feminist approaches?

Acknowledging the multiplicity of feminisms and approaches to feminist theory, this chapter draws on findings from a comparative case study of two women's film festivals in London: Underwire Festival (UF) and the London Feminist Film Festival (LFFF). Considering similarities and differences between the two festivals, I will discuss how various feminist theoretical approaches are reflected at these events. The festivals happen in the same city and are thus embedded in similar national and international contexts of feminisms and women's filmmaking. This comparison will illustrate how different two events in a similar context can be, and thus allow me to propose that these differences exist on an even larger scale between women's film festivals in different countries or continents. The differences would grow when festivals are embedded in different cultural and social contexts related to race, religion, cultural heritage, class and so on. However, this chapter aims also to illustrate the assumption that all women's film festivals are feminist to some extent. Loist has argued that all women's film festivals are feminist at their core, since they derive from the desire to increase the visibility of women making films (2012). This notion

lies at the centre of this thesis and I argue that even those festivals that are not overtly feminist – i.e. carry the term feminist in their name or use the word in their publicity material – are still influenced by feminist theories and concepts.

To frame this analysis, I utilise Anneke Buikema and Rosemarie Smelik's differentiation of feminist theories, which they split into three categories: theories of equality, theories of difference and theories of deconstruction (Buikema & Smelik, 1995). After outlining this framework, I will discuss the first example, LFFF. I will provide a brief overview of the history of the festival as well as details about the edition of the festival I attended in 2017. I will then examine how the data I collected through fieldwork and interviews fits into Buikema and Smelik's framework and how different feminist theories play out at the festival. I will then follow the same pattern for the second example, UF, which I also attended in 2017. I will conclude the chapter by interpreting both festivals within a wider context of how women's film festivals have engaged with feminist theories historically.

## 5.1 Three Kinds of Feminist Theories

Women's film festivals have been actively contributing to feminist film movements since the 1970s in a variety of ways depending on cultural, geographical, political and ideological aspects. There is no singular, universally applicable description of the relationship between women's film festivals and feminist theory. Festivals can engage with a range of feminist theories, which results in a plurality of relationships between cinefeminist practices and the theoretical discourse fostered by feminist scholars and practitioners. Thus, when analysing the relationship of a particular festival with feminist theory, it is useful to refer to a flexible theoretical framework that allows for this multiplicity of relationships regardless of chronological order, geographical location or established feminist types, such as radical, cultural or socialist feminism, or the categorisation of feminist 'waves' (Hollows, 2000). Buikema and Smelik's categorisation of feminist theories allows such flexibility and plurality.

In the anthology *Women's Studies and Culture: A Feminist Introduction*, Buikema and Smelik divided feminist theories into three ideological categories that relate to the different levels of significance ascribed to sexual difference (1995). The three categories are theories of equality, theories of difference and theories of deconstruction and they transcend the limitations of chronology and geography. The essays contained in the book,

examine how these three perspectives within feminist theory can be applied to categorise different research approaches in a variety of fields, from Feminist Film Studies to Feminist History, Black Studies and Lesbian Studies. This chapter seeks to apply the same principle to the practices at women's film festivals.

### 5.1.1 Feminist Theories of Equality

Feminist theories of equality focus on the social and cultural equality of women and men. Scholars within this paradigm are concerned with eliminating formal inequalities between women and men and recording and preserving women's contributions to a variety of disciplines. Historically, feminists of equality would have been concerned with equal access to education, health care, civil rights and the workforce – the suffrage movement demanding the right to vote for women is an example for this. These ideologies also become manifest in historical research, which is exemplified by the archaeological projects of digging up women's work mentioned by Armatage (2009a) and Mulvey (2017), and critical examinations of the existing canon of artworks across the disciplines. Scholarly output with this perspective focuses on the achievements of individual women and their contributions to their respective fields. Overall, this kind of research would demand recognition and space for women within the dominant cultural structures and not necessarily question these structures themselves. A contemporary manifestation of feminist theories of equality is the neoliberalist feminist movement, which is embodied by economically successful women such as Sheryl Sandberg, author of *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (2013), Sophia Amoruso from Nasty Gal or Hillary Clinton (Shulevitz, 2013). In Film Studies, many early feminist film theories, such as Molly Haskell's examination of women's representation on screen (1973), will fall under this paradigm. They assume that a human's identity 'is determined by the [social and cultural] structures in which she or he exists' and thus examine how women have been represented as the "other" or their lack of representation all-together (Buikema, 1995, p. 6). What all these philosophical approaches, political campaigns and contemporary movements – spanning centuries of feminist activity – have in common is their focus on formal equality and particular interest in a gender-neutral legal system and policies. One of the key underlying messages is that there is no essential difference between the genders, and that women can do anything that men are doing.



### 5.1.2 Feminist Theories of Difference

Feminist theories of difference do not strive to make established structures accessible to women, but rather aim to promote women's interests by creating new gender-specific networks and opportunities (Buikema, 1995). Feminist film theorists with this perspective raise the question of a specific female aesthetic and, instead of adding women to an existing canon, are interested in establishing a separate canon of female-authored works. Laura Mulvey (1975) for example, rejects male-coded narrative cinema and argues for a specific female aesthetic that provides new forms of visual pleasures for female spectators. However, these approaches and subsequent research were also accused of reducing issues to sexual difference, eliminating race from the discourse and rendering the experiences of lesbian and black women, among others, invisible (Gaines, 1988). Historian Berteke Waaldijk, for example, challenges theories of difference when she argues that shifting 'from demanding equality to exploring difference' is an attempt to unify opposing experiences and interests of very different women under one theoretical framework (Waaldijk, 1995, p. 19).

### 5.1.3 Feminist Theories of Deconstruction

Feminist theories of deconstruction are based on the assumption that 'thinking in terms of binary oppositions can be transcended' (Buikema, 1995, p. 11). Even though research under this paradigm also criticises the lack of representation and the oppression of women and femininity in Western cultures, the question in focus is how terms, such as women and femininity, can be defined and separated from the biological sex. Buikema writes:

The consequence of deconstructivist thought for feminist theory is that femininity is disconnected from a specific female identity. Femininity can be regarded as a discursive construction and not as exclusively related to a specific biological or social group. (Buikema, 1995, p. 13)

Referring to Derrida's concept that 'something [only] acquires meaning in its constant reference to something else', Buikema suggests that deconstructivist feminist theorists call binary categories into question (Buikema, 1995, p. 12).<sup>41</sup> To underline this point, she

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<sup>41</sup> Buikema and Smelik's concept of deconstruction build upon post-modern theories, such as Derrida's understanding that knowledge and reality are discursive (Derrida, 1972). Suggested further reading includes Culler, 1981 and Johnson, 1994.

quotes theorists such as Barbara Johnson or Julia Kristeva, who address different meanings of and associations with the terms women and femininity that arise in texts (Johnson, 1994; Kristeva, 1979/1981).

Instead of excavating women's contributions to society or exploring assumed essential (biological) differences, deconstructivist feminist scholars investigate socially constructed differences and the multiplicity of experiences made by different women. Two significant fields of research within this paradigm are queer theory and intersectional approaches, often applied by black feminist scholars. Judith Butler's seminal text *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* argues that gendered identity is socially constructed through the performance of repetitive everyday activities (1990). She stresses the normative character of the essentialist category called "woman". She views it as a patriarchal tool to value certain sets of characteristics and groups of people – i.e. the category called "man" – higher than others. In her discussion of Butler's contribution to deconstructivist and post-feminist thought in the 1990s, Nicola Rivers writes:

Butler stresses the performativity of gender, challenging essentialist ideas of the category of 'woman.' Although abandoning the notion of a unified category called 'women' could seemingly undermine any collective movement that is seeking to challenge discrimination based on sex or gender, by calling attention to the normative value of such a category, Butler instead allows for a wider acceptance of feminism. (Rivers, 2017, p. 13)

In the context of deconstructivist feminist theory, this means that there had been a shift of focus from how women are oppressed by the patriarchal system, to how this oppression rests in the continuous reinforcement of a binary system, in which only two groups, "man" and "woman", exist and are associated with more or less valuable characteristics.

Intersectional approaches by feminists, such as bell hooks (1981), Patricia Hill Collins (1990; 2016) or Jane Gaines (1986), consider not only sex or gender as sources of discrimination against women, but acknowledge that race, class, sexual orientation, age or ability also contribute to unequal power relations and to how different women experience the world. In her influential text *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*, Hill Collins discusses how issues particular to the experiences of African-American women have been neglected by both the women's movement and the civil rights movement in the US (1990). She argues that these focused on the experiences of white women and black men respectively. Expanding and re-framing her arguments in later work, Hill Collins writes:

When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 2)

Hill Collins emphasises that power relations within social systems are constructed not between two oppositional extremes, but rather along a multi-axial spectrum that results in a variety of different experiences (2016).

#### 5.1.4 The Suitability of this Model

At first glance, constructing a framework for the wide range of feminist theories with only three categories seems as restrictive as speaking of first, second and third wave feminisms. In her book *An Introduction to Feminism*, Lorna Finlayson outlines these waves of feminism along a chronological and an ideological order (2016). First wave feminists, who campaigned in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, wanted to gain legal equality and demanded the right to vote for all (white, educated, middle-class) women. Second wave feminism came in the 1960s and 1970s when women demanded equality beyond the legal system in terms of economic opportunities, reproductive healthcare and in the domestic sphere. The third wave of feminism from the late 1980s to early 2000s as well as a potential contemporary fourth wave are harder to define. They are linked to a variety of ideas such as the post-feminist suggestion that feminist demands have been achieved and thus political feminism has become redundant. However, they can also be considered in the context of neoliberal capitalism, the financial exploitation of feminist messages in popular media and the hyper-sexualisation of female bodies (Finlayson, 2016). Finlayson criticises this categorisation of waves for a variety of reasons. Firstly, assuming 19<sup>th</sup> century first wave feminism to be the earliest occurrence of political feminist activism renders earlier accounts of feminist thought invisible.<sup>42</sup> Secondly, strictly defining the second wave as feminist activity in the 1960s and 1970s leaves no room to acknowledge the political resistance to patriarchal oppression between the 1920s and 1960s, particularly in the context of black and working-class women. Thirdly, the categorisation in consecutive

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<sup>42</sup> There are many examples of writers discussing or advancing women's equality before the so-called first wave. Plato argued for the political and sexual equality of women 400 BC, and so did other writers throughout the centuries, such as French-Italian Christine de Pizan (1364 - c. 1430), Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651 - 1695) in Mexico or Margaret Lucas Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, also in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

waves suggests falsely that the progress of feminist thought is unidirectional and causally determined. Finally, Finlayson suggests that in the narrative of feminist waves the West is generally regarded as the driving force behind feminist progress, disregarding all non-Western feminist scholarship, such as Islamic feminism, black feminism or African feminism (Finlayson, 2016). Similarly, the grouping of feminist thought into strict ideological categories, such as liberal, socialist, cultural or radical feminisms, has historically allowed little fluctuation between them (Phillips, 1987). These ideological clusters represented opposing ideas within the wider women's movement and developed distinctly to their geographical and cultural context. Liberal feminism, for example, was particularly popular in North America, where it formed the dominant feminist discourse, while in the UK it was more of a bystander and developed in a very different manner (Phillips, 1987). Contextualising and framing liberal feminism – or other such categories – requires distinctive attention to chronological and geographical circumstances. Buikema and Smelik's concept of theories of equality, difference and deconstruction, however, is more flexible. The categories do not fall into a strict consecutive chronological order or causal ideological structure, but rather allow to be developed and explored side by side. They argue that:

It is therefore important to note that the various theoretical approaches that can be distinguished in feminist theory and in the resulting feminist studies (equality, difference, deconstruction) do not follow each other chronologically in the sense that the birth of one theoretical framework marks the death of the other. Once initiated the various types of research develop simultaneously and for the greater part in relation to each other. (Buikema & Smelik, 1995, p. 4)

This is what makes this concept such a suitable theoretical framework for this research in particular. Like feminist theories, women's film festivals' positions on sexual differences do not follow a strict chronological order and multiple theoretical approaches can be found within the same festival. Indeed, analysing LFFF and UF through this framework will show that there are elements of equality, difference and deconstruction at play throughout both festivals.

## **5.2 London Feminist Film Festival (LFFF)**

The London Feminist Film Festival was established in 2012 by Anna Read (Londonfeministfilmfestival.com, 2017). Hosted twice at the Hackney Picturehouse, the festival had a fallow year in 2014 and returned in 2015 at the community-run Rio Cinema

in Dalston, where it has been held since. Joining Birds' Eye View (2003 – 2015) and Underwire Festival (since 2010), LFFF was the third women's film festival in London. Without a significant background in the film industry but drawing on her own experience as a woman and her involvement in activism, Read saw a gap in the city's prolific festival landscape and founded the festival as a space to address feminist issues. She states that:

There wasn't really anything like that, that I knew of in London. There were women's film festivals doing amazing work supporting women filmmakers, but it doesn't necessarily mean that the films are going to be feminist. And I wanted it to be partly about the discussion and encouraging people to maybe get involved with activism. (Read, 2017a)

LFFF focuses primarily on documentary films about feminist issues by women and non-binary directors. All films are gathered through open submissions and works by cis-male directors are not eligible.<sup>43</sup> Selection criteria for Read and her team include the positive representation of women on screen and how engaged the films are with women's rights issues (Read, 2017a).

In 2017, the festival ran from August 17-20 and showed seventeen short, medium and feature-length documentary films. The opening screening was the European premiere of Kaori Sakagami's documentary *Talk Back Out Loud* (2013) which was followed by a panel discussion. In addition to the programme curated from submissions, the festival also presented a screening of Marva Nabili's Iranian fiction feature *The Sealed Soil* (*Khake Sar Beh Morh*, 1977) at the BFI Southbank, commemorating the film's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The curated programmes were presented in thematic sessions, usually combining several short or medium length films or one feature film with one or two related short films. The five programmes held at the 2017 festival included 'Indian Women Claiming Space', 'Feminism and the Archive', 'Visibility', 'VAWG/Resistance & Survival' and 'Aspire/Inspire'. The films dealt with issues such as violence against women, representations of women of colour on and off screen, women in STEM and archiving women's histories among others. Each screening was followed by a panel discussion with filmmakers and speakers from the film industry and activist organisations related to the theme of the programme. Depending on the length of the films, these discussions lasted for twenty to forty minutes and actively engaged the audience with the speakers on stage.

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<sup>43</sup> LFFF submission rules are available from <https://filmfreeway.com/LondonFeministFilmFestival2018> [Accessed on 21 November 2018].

They encouraged not only conversation about the films, but also about the wider cultural context they are situated in, and women's issues connected to that.

Apart from the screening of *The Sealed Soil*, all events were held at the Rio Cinema, a community cinema in Dalston.<sup>44</sup> In 2017, the cinema had only one screen – although this changed in 2018, when a second screen was built and opened in the basement of the building. No session was programmed in competition with the screening at the BFI Southbank. Thus, audience members had the opportunity to participate in every single event of the LFFF programme throughout the weekend. This created a heightened atmosphere of community and shared experiences among audience members. While Read admits, that this decision 'was not totally conscious', she suggests that being able to participate in the whole festival sets the audience up to feel more involved (Read, 2017a). Throughout the festival, I observed several audience members who attended multiple screenings and the foyer of the Rio Cinema was bustling with patrons between screenings. Certainly, the limited space and the straightforward schedule contributed to the buzz at the venue and the feeling of community among audience members, filmmakers, festival staff, volunteers and speakers.

### 5.2.1 Feminisms at LFFF

As suggested by its name, LFFF addresses feminist issues centre-stage. To examine in what way the feminist perspectives described by Buikema and Smelik can be observed at the festival, I will analyse two particular aspects. First, I will outline the significance of space and the festival location and then analyse the festival's focus on diversity on and off screen.

#### *Claiming space*

When Read conceived the idea for the festival in 2012, she initially planned to host the event at The Feminist Library, an archive collection of WLM literature and pamphlets

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<sup>44</sup> More information about the Rio Cinema is available from <https://www.riocinema.org.uk/>. Research conducted by Selina Robertson, a film MPhil/PhD candidate at Birkbeck, and presented at LFFF 2017 and at the *Doing Women's Film and Television History Conference* in Southampton 2018, uncovers the invaluable contribution of the Rio Cinema to queer and feminist film collectives in London between 1979 and 1995. The cinema's historical ties to the feminist film movement also reflect today in its support of the London Feminist Film Festival (Burrows, Ostrowska and Robertson, 2017).

(Read, 2017a).<sup>45</sup> However, she also contacted Hackney Picturehouse, which was still part of an independent cinema group at that time, to see whether its programmers might be interested in supporting the festival.<sup>46</sup> She recalls that:

I contacted the Hackney Picturehouse – Clare Binns was the programmer at the time, and she's quite feminist, so I thought I'd give it a go [...]. Which is lucky, because would it have been, like, a man, maybe it wouldn't have happened. (Read, 2017a)

Binns agreed to host the festival at the cinema and after initially selling out the smaller auditorium with 115 seats, the 2012 festival Opening Gala was relocated to the bigger screen with 350 seats. The bigger screen was also sold out and Read points out that:

I think most of the rest of the screenings sold out. It shows that there is an appetite for it. People want to see these things and have a safe space to discuss the issues. (Read, 2017a)

Collaborating with an established independent cinema group like the Picturehouse enabled LFFF to reach audiences beyond London's feminist community who regularly gathered to discuss women's issues at the Feminist Library. Instead, LFFF could engage the much broader audience of an arthouse cinema and bring feminist discourses into a mainstream space, where they are not usually on the daily agenda. Read suggests that:

[It is] important for our festival that we bring all these films into a mainstream cinema. I really wanted to do that. We had it in the Hackney Picturehouse before, just had it in the BFI and other ones, so bringing into the mainstream so people who might not think about feminism usually, can see it. Even just having the poster there with the word "feminist" on, is kind of getting feminism [to take] up space. (Read, 2017a)

Claiming this space for feminist events and discussions and raising awareness for feminist issues among a mainstream audience is evocative of feminist theories of equality. One event of the 2017 LFFF programme reflects this in particular: the Feminist Classic screening of *The Sealed Soil* at the BFI. Every year, LFFF selects a film that it considers a

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<sup>45</sup> More information on the history and activities of The Feminist Library in London is available from <http://feministlibrary.co.uk/> [Accessed on 23 January 2018].

<sup>46</sup> Hackney Picturehouse is part of the arthouse cinema group Picturehouse, which later in 2012 was bought over by Cineworld, a multiplex concern operating over 80 cinemas across the UK (Kollewe, 2012). At the time, Picturehouse ran 21 cinemas across England and Scotland, a number that it has since expanded to 24. A full list of Picturehouse cinemas is available from <https://www.picturehouses.com/cinemas> [Accessed on 25 January 2018].

classic of feminist film history. In 2012, the festival screened Marleen Gorris' *A Question of Silence* (*De stilte rond Christine M.*, 1982), followed by Sally Potter's *The Gold Diggers* (1983) in 2013, Cynthia Scott's *Strangers in Good Company* (*The Company of Strangers*, 1990) in 2015 and Pratibha Parmar's *A Place of Rage* (1991) in 2016. For the 2017 feminist classic screening, director Marva Nabili provided her personal 16mm print of *The Sealed Soil* and attended for a post-screening Q&A. The BFI Southbank is one of the UK's leading repertory and arthouse cinemas, focussing on new and re-releases of classic and contemporary, independent and non-English language films. A large part of the BFI Southbank's programme consists of several regular strands as well as thematic seasons, such as 'African Odysseys' with films by and about the people of Africa, BFI Flare for LGBTQ+ films or 'Projecting the Archive' for rediscovered British features.<sup>47</sup> These thematic seasons consist of collections of films by genre, theme, actors or directors and,

align with the BFI's new strategy BFI 2022, which commits to drive forward the BFI's Diversity Standards to support greater diversity in the film industry and inform its funding decision making and year-round programming. (Bfi.org.uk, 2017)

The LFFF screening was part of the BFI's regular strand Woman with a Movie Camera, which highlights films created by and about women. Screenings are often presented in partnership with local women's organisations and NGOs. By collaborating with organisations, such as LFFF, the BFI aims to broaden its film programme and contribute towards more diverse film exhibition. However, LFFF also benefits, by expanding its audience reach to the cinephile audience of the BFI Southbank. At the sold-out screening of *The Sealed Soil*, I observed that the audience more mixed in terms of gender and age than during the sessions at the Rio. Talking about LFFF and its mission before introducing the film allowed Read to expose a different audience to the festival and thus potentially reach new audiences for future festival editions. The questions during the Q&A with Nabili also differed clearly from the conversations following the sessions at the Rio. Broad thematic questions about feminist filmmaking and women's oppression in Iran were joined

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<sup>47</sup> More information about the BFI Southbank's regular strands is available from <https://whatson.bfi.org.uk/Online/default.asp?BOparam::WScontent::loadArticle::permalink=regular-strands>; more on current thematic season is available from <https://whatson.bfi.org.uk/Online/default.asp?BOparam::WScontent::loadArticle::permalink=seasons> [Accessed on 12 November 2018].



by more specific questions regarding the circumstances in which the film was made, how it was shot and where it had been screened in the past.

The festival's intention to claim mainstream spaces for feminist issues and inspire feminist discourses among new audiences reflects elements of feminist theories of equality. Nabili's film itself might reflect feminist theories of difference, as it focusses on the gender-specific experience of rural life in Iran and highlights tasks and chores of domestic labour in particular. However, its inclusion in the LFFF programme and screening at the BFI Southbank reflect the festival's aim to establish a continuous presence of women and women's issues in established systems of film exhibition. Like many of the early women's film festivals, which focussed on digging up women's contributions to film history, LFFF highlights an individual achievement of a woman director in order to 'question the category [of the classic film] and reclaim the label "classic" for films by women' (Read, 2017b).

### ***Diversity first***

While my analysis so far has illustrated that ideas of equality are present at LFFF, the festival is in fact dominated by another ideological perspective: feminist theories of deconstruction and ideas of intersectionality in particular. With LFFF, Read aims to instil feminist thoughts in its audience, to foster conversations about women's issues and to encourage participants to become involved with feminist activism (Read, 2017a). She states that:

Ideally, I'd like everyone to go out there and become radical, militant feminists. Go out and change the world. But if people come and enjoy the festival, plant a seed of thinking about things and meet other feminists, have really good chats [that is great]. (Read, 2017a)

Being open towards a plurality of feminist credos, lifestyles and interpretations is a significant element of the festival. Read's statement illustrates that the audiences at LFFF are not a cohesive union who define and embody feminism in the same way, but rather a mixed group of people who engage with feminism on different levels.

For Read, providing a safe space for women filmmakers and their work, but also for other women to voice their different opinions and experiences, is an essential aspect of the festival (2017a). Even though she is convinced that men can also make feminist films and

not all films by women are inherently feminist, for her it is a significant feminist act to provide a platform for women in particular (Read, 2017a). Instead of presenting a fixed notion of what feminism is or should be the festival invites women with different feminist backgrounds to come together, exchange ideas and discuss a variety of issues and standpoints. Read states that as feminists the festival's audience is 'very critical about everything', and thus it is unavoidable that some participants will disagree with one another (2017a). She says that:

In a way it is like a get-out clause – we're not saying, this is what we want or this is what we believe. [...] We try to make it as broad and as international as possible. I think that's really important for us. (Read, 2017a)

LFFF represents feminism in its diversity and for Read it is crucial to give space to a broad variety of feminist perspectives. Fostering a diverse community of festival participants, including filmmakers, audience members and volunteers, is a key concern for LFFF. Women of colour and women of different ages, class backgrounds, body shapes, sexual orientations and educational backgrounds were represented throughout the festival on screen, behind the camera, on stage as experts and in the audience. Read argues that:

We try to be aware, [be]cause most of us [on the festival team] are white and straight and, you know, middle class. [...] I think it is a mainly white audience [but] we do try and think about diversity in our panels. [...] We don't want it to be all academic or all filmmakers, so we have a whole mixture, and we definitely have women from women's organisations – you know, they're on the ground, doing the actual work. (Read, 2017a)

The thematic programmes lend themselves to community marketing, which reflected particularly in the participation of Indian women during the 'Indian Women Claiming Spaces' session, and women of colour who attended the 'Visibility' session. Read states that, when finalising the programme, she and her team reached out to women's organisations and other activist groups to ask them to share information about and potentially participate in the events. The success of this interest- and identity-based approach to community marketing shows in the diverse audiences that reflect the thematic highlights of the sessions and sold-out events across the festival. In addition to audiences, the festival team pays specific attention to diversity on the panels. This creation of a safe space for conversation combined with an awareness for diversity and multiplicity within feminism allows highly engaged debates to rise. The following three examples will demonstrate that the discrepancies among audience members were particularly fruitful starting points for critical conversations about intersectional feminism.

The first example is a matter that came up during the post-screening discussion of the 'Visibility' session. The screening included seven short films that broached different aspects of visibility or invisibility of women in the public sphere: women of colour in particular, women in science and women in the film industry, among others. Quickly the discussion changed from what could be done to improve visibility and make it safer to be visible for all women, to how the women on the panel were using the term feminism. One audience member in particular raised the issue of class and said that she considered herself to be a women's liberationist rather than a feminist. According to her, this was a more suitable term considering her working class background. Even though the films set up the session to be about women's visibility in society, it created the space to question how gender intersects with issues of class and race in order to question who struggles with visibility within the feminist community. The session also revealed the suitability of the term feminist in different contexts. Even though not everybody present at the event self-identified as "feminist", the term in the name of the festival worked as a catchall phrase, attracting people with different ideas and approaches towards gender and women's issues to the same event.

Another incident that demonstrates the festival's openness to intersectionality occurred during the 'Indian Women Claiming Spaces' session, which included Manuela Bastian's *Where To, Miss?* (2016). The film tells the story of Devki, a young woman in India, who aspires to be a taxi driver. Bastian and her team followed Devki's story for three years and accompanied her on her personal journey from a daughter fighting the will of her father, to a wife standing up to her new husband, and finally a mother who struggles against the traditional views of her father-in-law. In a statement at the Hof International Film Festival 2015, director Manuela Bastian stated that:

The provocation for this film were the cases of rape [on public transport in Delhi] in December 2012. I wanted to make a film that shows why it is so difficult for women to break free from the traditional conditions in India.  
(Bastian, 2015)

The film was screened together with two short films by and about Indian women, and followed by a discussion with the filmmakers, two of which joined via Skype. During this discussion, Bastian came under crossfire for the ethical implications of making the film. Some audience members raised that by filming in three sequences across three years, the filmmaker dropped in and out of her subject's life, choosing which moments to film based on the narrative she had in mind. Other participants raised the concern that certain scenes,

particularly conversations between Devki and her parents-in-law, seemed scripted or staged, and questioned the authenticity of the story. Finally, the director herself, as a white German woman, was criticised for presenting an outsider perspective on these complex issues within Indian society. As a white woman myself, I appreciated that the festival created the opportunity for this conversation to happen. Even though the film and its director were criticised, the question of who tells whose stories and in what way is pertinent to the dialogue between white women and women of colour in the feminist movement. The post-screening discussion presented an opportunity in which the women of colour who spoke up felt represented and safe to raise their concerns with regard to authorship. They touched on a number of crucial issues, such as the lack of women of colour in the film industry and insider/outsider positions among different groups of women within the women's movement. The festival provided an open forum that allowed different opinions to be voiced and heard.

Finally, a third occasion that inspired audience members to debate the intersection of gender, veganism and class in particular was the 'Veganism & Feminism' talk offered in addition to the festival's film programme. This panel discussion, hosted with support of The Vegan Society, gathered three speakers and around thirty audience members in the basement of Rio Cinema, to discuss potential touchpoints between vegan and feminist activism.<sup>48</sup> After an initial statement by each panellist, explaining how their veganism relates to their feminism, the conversation was opened to the floor. Resonating intersectional criticism of white feminism, speakers from the audience raised a range of issues that the panellists had failed to address. They criticised the veganism represented on the panel to be limited to experiences of white, middle-class women and that it lacked perspectives of women with small children in particular. One of the key critiques was the panellists' failure to acknowledge the access barriers of a vegan lifestyle that particularly affect people with low income or certain geographical limitations. Other points raised were the potential exploitation of people of colour around the world by the vegan food industry, veganism as a lifestyle enabled by western privilege, the ethical implications of buying vegan brands owned by big corporations, and the problem of anthropomorphising animals in order to serve a political cause. This dynamic and the engaged participation of the

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<sup>48</sup> More details about the event and speakers is available from <https://londonfeministfilmfestival.com/past-festivals/lfff-2017/lfff-2017-programme/fri-18-aug-8-30pm-talk-feminism-and-veganism/>; a partial recording of the talk can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJI7YRTKkUE> [Accessed on 24 January 2018].

audience members illustrates the variety of standpoints encouraged by LFFF and the safe space provided for intersectional discussions like this.

Disagreements and debates among the festival participants are a calculated risk that provide the festival with a critical momentum. It allows LFFF to position itself as a platform for intersectional approaches to feminism, questioning the connections between gender, race and class among others, in relation to women's rights issues. As such, these aspects of the festival demonstrate that feminist theories of deconstruction and among these intersectional approaches towards feminism in particular, are dominating the discourse of the festival.

My analysis of LFFF has shown, that elements of different philosophical interpretations of feminism can be reflected in the same festival. To demonstrate that this is not an isolated case at LFFF, it is useful to analyse a second festival and the ways in which this plays out in a different context.

### 5.3 Underwire Film Festival (UF)

In 2010, London-based screenwriter Gabriella Apicella and producer Gemma Mitchell discussed the need to address the under-representation and under-appreciation of women across all creative and technical crafts in the film, industry. In an interview conducted in the run up to the 2017 festival, Apicella remembers:

Both Gemma and I had short films that we were submitting to short film festivals, and we recognised that all of the prizes in short film and short film festivals were going to directors. And as I'm a writer and at that time Gemma was a producer, we sort of felt, we want some prizes too, basically. (Apicella, 2017a)

As a consequence, Apicella and Mitchell co-founded Underwire Festival, which is a short film festival that celebrates women working in film across the crafts and screens work by British and UK-based filmmakers (Underwirefestival.com, 2017). Since its first edition, which took place over three days 'in a small room above a pub' (Mitchell, 2015), the festival has grown to a five-day event screening programmes in six cinemas across London. At the time UF was launched, London already had a well-established women's film festival, BEV. Apicella remembers that initially this challenged them to justify their festival's existence:

When we started it, everyone was kind of a bit bemused as to why we were doing it, because the Bird's Eye festival was still running at that time. There was this quite peculiar notion that there couldn't be more than one festival addressing women. Like, oh there already is one, why do we need another one? (Apicella, 2017a)

However, UF and BEV were two very distinct festivals, with different programming foci and target audiences. While UF is a platform for British short films that features the work of women in a variety of creative roles, BEV screened international films and focused primarily on feature-length works by women directors. Mitchell adds that there was another key concern that affected their decision to start UF. They believed that more women working in all aspects behind the camera would eventually lead to more diverse on-screen representation (Mitchell, 2015). UF would create the opportunity for all women involved in filmmaking to receive acclaim and recognition, and for more voices to be heard.

In addition to screening films, UF gives out awards for ten filmmaking professions as well as the 'XX Award' for the film with the best on-screen representation and an Under 25 Award for women working in the film industry below the age of twenty-five. The crafts recognised with awards are Directing, Acting, Screenwriting, Producing, Cinematography, Sound Design, Composing, Editing, Animation and Production Design. Every selected film in the programme is also nominated for one of these twelve awards. To be considered for screening, films thus do not have to be directed by a woman, but in order to be eligible for an award, the respective creative or technical department has to be single-handedly led by a woman.

In 2017, the festival ran from 22-26 November, and screened 123 short films in competition, three feature films, a retrospective of short films by Kate Herron, an anniversary screening of Sally Potter's *The Tango Lesson* (1997) and a programme of short films produced by festival partner Refinery29. The films were curated into thematic programmes, a structure which festival director Anna Bogutskaya introduced when she took over the festival in 2016. Originally, the programme had been structured by craft and all nominated films in one craft category would have been screened together. Bogutskaya however, felt that this had '[limited] the festival's audience potential' and instead curated programmes that touch on specific themes, such as different women's lived experiences or genre. In 2016, the festival increased its audience three-fold and with sold out screenings

across the board, UF exceeded those numbers again in 2017 (Bogutskaya, 2017a). Each screening is followed by the opportunity to hear from the filmmakers themselves, and women who are involved with the screened films are invited up on stage for a Q&A.<sup>49</sup> In the screenings that I attended at UF 2017, these Q&A sessions lasted for ten to fifteen minutes; however, conversations with filmmakers outside of the cinema space were encouraged. Feature films are a relatively new addition to UF's programme and were introduced in 2015 to fill the vacuum for British female-directed feature films that the folding of BEV had left behind.<sup>50</sup> UF screens first and second feature films only, and Bogutskaya and her team find potential options through open submission and curation. Focussing on second features is particularly important for Bogutskaya, because she argues that many festivals lack a platform for second-time feature filmmakers. She suggests that:

It is just as, if not more difficult to make a second feature, and actually in a lot of festivals there are often categories or competition strands that are about debut filmmakers. There is nothing there for second feature filmmakers. If you made a second feature, but it's not solid enough or good enough to get into the main competition or a particular strand, it goes by the waste line. And there is not the sort of communication or media support around it as well, to helm it as a new resource of debut features, unless you really break through, with something like *Whiplash* [Damien Chazelle, 2014] did a couple of years ago. (Bogutskaya, 2017a)

However, Bogutskaya admits that the available number of films to choose from is very small; only thirty to forty features could be considered in 2017 (Bogutskaya, 2017a). Furthermore, she says that many features UF would like to screen are unattainable for the festival, because they already have distribution contracts. Bogutskaya is hopeful, that in the future UF short film alumni will proceed to make feature films, for which the festival can then provide another spotlight.

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<sup>49</sup> It is crucial to understand that when Bogutskaya, Apicella and Mitchell talk about *filmmakers* or *making* films, they are not limiting this to the craft of directing. They emphasise that every craftswoman in the business is a filmmaker, not just directors, but also DoPs, editors, scriptwriters, sound designers and so on.

<sup>50</sup> BEV announced the closure of its film festival in January 2015 due to financial insecurities. The organisation behind the festival continues to support local women filmmakers through workshops and events. More information is available from <http://birds-eye-view.co.uk/2015/01/07/birds-eye-view-announce-film-festival-closure/> [Accessed on 10 January 2018].

### 5.3.1 Feminisms at UF

At first glance and in comparison to LFFF, UF is not an overtly feminist festival and feminist debates and issues are not necessarily addressed centre-stage. The festival does not use the term feminist in its name or publicity material, however, it does state that it aims to '[celebrate] female filmmaking talent across the crafts' and 'to address gender imbalance in film and change the industry from the inside out' (Underwirefestival.com, 2017). Instead of concerning itself with wider, global feminist issues, as LFFF does through its thematic sessions, UF focuses on one specific women's issue in particular: the lack of representation of and opportunities for women in the UK film industry. Rather than concentrating on films with feminist contents or on the engagement of audiences in feminist discourses, UF puts the advancement of women filmmakers and their skills at its core. As such, feminist considerations permeate every aspect of the festival. When I asked festival director Bogutskaya about the general aims of UF, she emphasised the creation of a warm, welcoming and unpretentious environment for women filmmakers. It is important for her to give filmmakers the feeling that they can network freely and form new alliances with other women working in the industry: '[It is] really important to me [...] that people feel like they can talk to each other' (Bogutskaya, 2017a). Throughout the festival I observed two ways in which this aim to create a welcoming space to nurture, encourage and celebrate women's talent becomes manifest at UF. On the one hand, the festival focuses on the creation of strong relationships among women filmmakers and their subsequent participation in the film industry. On the other hand, they provide training and industry activities.

#### ***Strengthening bonds, creating opportunities***

In the 2017 festival brochure, Bogutskaya highlights that the festival's aim is 'to celebrate and spotlight the most exciting female talent working in film' (Underwire Festival, 2017). To underline this effort during the opening event at BFI Southbank, she asked all attending filmmakers and craftswomen to rise and stand for a minute of applause. Throughout the events I attended, I observed how this emphasis on celebrating women's achievements permeated every aspect of UF. Unlike many other festivals, UF invited all attending female film team members from the screened films up on stage for Q&A sessions. Not only directors were able to talk about their films, but also actresses, DoPs, editors and producers shared their insights with the audience. This signifies a shift to a more inclusive celebration



of film talent and acknowledges film making as collective effort. As such, it presents a shift away from notions of the male-coded auteur as single creative driving force behind a film. During these post-screening discussions, the hosts drew particular attention towards women's participation across the crafts, praised the women's skills and achievements and provided a platform to speak about film as a collaborative medium and the multifaceted creative roles of the filmmaking process.

However, the festival does not only seek to shine a light on these creative women, but also to connect them with one another and strengthen bonds among filmmakers across the crafts. The festival offers plentiful networking opportunities, which include drinks receptions, special training days for local filmmakers in advance of the festival and formal Q&A sessions after screenings. Co-founder Apicella explains that the festival fulfils this purpose even beyond the programmed events:

Whenever we run Underwire, we always have opportunities for filmmakers to meet one another and network. I mean, people actually have come to the festival with the aim to actually put a crew together and that's very possible at Underwire, because we have people from the different areas [...] present.  
(Apicella, 2017a)

All films are screened at established venues with generous foyer or bar areas. Personal engagement between audience and filmmakers, as well as among filmmakers, is highly encouraged by UF hosts and facilitated by the circumstances at the venues. The programme is dominated by emerging local filmmakers. The festival's participants are therefore able to engage with other craftswomen at similar stages of their career and with people who also work in the London area.

Organisations such as Women in Film & Television UK, Directors UK or the BFI Network sponsor the awards at the festival, which include non-cash prizes like mentoring sessions, network memberships or equipment hire. By partnering with these organisations, UF offers its award winners immediate opportunities to engage with established networks and services provided within the industry. During the award ceremony, the sponsors also emphasised how their organisations support emerging female film talent and encouraged the filmmakers in the room to take advantage of the networks beyond the festival. The consensus between the festival and the sponsoring organisations was on the importance of fostering a thriving community of women filmmakers.

Through these partnerships, UF suggests that female-centric networks have something to offer that the wider film industry cannot provide, perhaps because women make films differently than men. This notion of difference is reiterated in a variety of ways throughout the festival. In its programme brochure, the festival uses wording which implies that the female-made films they show tell stories from a distinct perspective. The spectators get to see stories 'through the lens of female directors' or 'from a female point of view', and to reinforce this, the brochure emphasises that there is a 'need to get more women behind the camera' to tell 'real' women's stories (Underwire Festival, 2017). More overtly, this point is made by asking the filmmakers to talk about their specific approach to a certain topic and in what ways this might have been influenced by their gendered perspective.

Another question suggesting the notion of difference that was repeatedly asked in the Q&A sessions was what it was like to work with female crewmembers. This seemed particularly interesting in cases of films that were produced by predominantly or entirely female crews. The answers varied, from some filmmakers admitting that working with a female crew felt more welcoming, supportive and boosted their confidence; to others suggesting that it did not make a difference to their experience on set. A cinematographer I spoke to after a screening revealed that she actually considered the all-female crew on one of her latest projects a limitation to the film. She expressed her concerns over working with women in certain technical departments of filmmaking, such as key grips, but not due to lack of skills. On the contrary, she pointed out that there is such a limited number of women working in this field in the UK and not all of them have the necessary certifications to use certain machinery, such as camera cranes, it can be difficult to get the camera shots she imagines. This experience in particular demonstrates the importance of festivals like UF, which demand opportunities for women in the film industry beyond directing jobs. It exemplifies the vicious circle that women in the industry face – the lack of opportunities results in a lack of skills which continues to minimise available opportunities in the future. UF attempts to change this by raising awareness for women's involvement with technical filmmaking departments and offers training opportunities for women filmmakers. Overall, the response of the filmmakers to this question during Q&As was mixed and showed a division between those who believe that there is a difference in working with a female crew, and those who did not experience it differently.

Even though UF does not insist on an aesthetic specificity that distinguishes female from male filmmakers, the proposition of the female perspective and a gendered experience on

set indicates a reflection of feminist theories of difference. During some of the Q&As, staff and filmmakers mentioned that women often choose narratives evolving around women, create more rounded female characters and portray their stories from a female perspective. Still, UF does not argue for a female-specific visual film language or narrative niche. It is evident from the programme that the festival emphasises that women can make films about anything. The gender of a film's director is not an eligibility criterion for the festival and films do not have to evolve around female protagonists or women's issues to be selected. For example, UF 2017 included several films by women with male protagonists, such as Ruth Pickett's *One Under* (2016) or Hanna Mansson's *That Time of the Month* (2017). The festival also dedicated an entire thematic programme to 'Men by Women', including seven films portraying masculinity from a female perspective, to demonstrate that women do not exclusively tell women's stories.<sup>51</sup> This strongly suggests that the festival does not insist on an essential difference between works created by women or men; on the contrary, it proposes that gender should in fact not be a significant signpost for the narrative quality of films at all.

At first glance, this could be interpreted as signs of feminist theories of equality; yet, the wording chosen in the brochure also illustrates that this is in fact not the case. By stating that the selected films show 'something real' or 'a glimpse of what life [as a woman] is really about', the festival suggests that the films' distinct viewpoints are not necessarily tied to the gender of their creators, but rather their individual experiences (Underwire Festival, 2017). Through this, the festival reveals elements of feminist theories of deconstruction, as in deconstructivist feminist theories, the difference of perspectives is not justified by essentialist biological difference between men and women. Instead, women make distinct experiences based on the way their gender is embedded and constructed in the wider societal context.

Yet, feminist theories of equality are prominently at play at UF, for example by emphasising the importance of participating in women's networks and highlighting women's perspectives in the film industry. During the award ceremony closing the festival, Apicella expressed how 'frustrating [it is] to see a bad film, especially when you know that there is all that amazing talent out there' (Apicella, 2017b). Bogutskaya suggested a similar

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<sup>51</sup> More information about the films in 'Men by Women' is available from <http://www.underwirefestival.com/events/men-by-women/> [Accessed on 12 November 2018].

perspective by stating, that 'no one can ever say again that there are not enough women making films, because they are right here' (Bogutskaya, 2017d). With these statements, the festival suggests that the UK-wide standard to employ more men in certain technical and creative roles means that many talented women lack opportunities.<sup>52</sup> UF's programme aims to demonstrate that women can master creative and technical skills on the same level as their male colleagues, and work on films that appeal to broad audiences. The festival pleads for equal opportunities for skilled women, normalising their participation and thus bringing 'change to the film industry by any means necessary from the inside out' (Bogutskaya, 2017b).

### ***Training women, facilitating access***

Another way in which UF creates a nurturing environment for emerging women filmmakers in the UK is by providing training opportunities and expert insight into the film industry. Every year the festival hosts special events that evolve around training and access, and give participating filmmakers the opportunity to improve their skills. At early UF editions these events took place within the main festival programme and included a screenwriting masterclass with Linda Aronson (2010), a film criticism workshop (2011), a Crowdfunding masterclass (2013), Story and Script Clinics with Euroscript (2013 and 2014) among others. Since 2015, Underwire has expanded this skills-based approach into 'Wired Women', a special event series that happens separately from the festival and combines workshops, expert presentations, masterclasses and panel discussions about filmmaking skills and industry knowledge. The weekend is a continuation of the festival's focus on providing a warm, welcoming and unpretentious environment for filmmakers. Bogutskaya emphasises:

Especially with Wired Women, one of the great things about it as well is that we try to encourage a sense of – even with speakers and with hosts and with everyone attending – that they can ask whatever they want; that they can dig deep and engage with anyone, and talk to anyone as well. The fact to kind of

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<sup>52</sup> A recent report by the AHRC-funded project *Calling the Shots: Women and Contemporary Film Culture in the UK, 2000-2015* has shown that across six categories (director, screenwriter, producer, exec-producer, editor and cinematographer) women in the UK film industry represent only 13% of directors, 20% of screenwriters, 27% of producers, 18% of exec-producers, 17% of editors and 7% of cinematographers, with numbers plummeting to 0-2% representation of BAME women across all categories (Cobb, Williams and Wreyford, 2015).

break down the barriers and demystify certain elements of the industry is what's important. (Bogutskaya, 2017a)

As such, she hopes that the 'Wired Women' workshops help to expose certain processes of the film industry, which are inaccessible to many women at the early stages of their careers.

The issues addressed at 'Wired Women' 2017 correspond with the perceived access barriers to the film industry recorded in studies, such as Creative Scotland's *Screen Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Survey*, which include the cost of professional training, the lack of financial stability, the availability of public funding and the limited access to networks and personal recruitment connections (2016). The workshops included discussions about approaching and working with funders, utilising transferrable skills to build a career, finding distribution and masterclasses on scriptwriting, editing and sound design among others. Through these opportunities, UF aims to equip women filmmakers with knowledge, skills, tools and connections that will assist them in gaining access to the film industry.

Within the framework of feminist theories suggested by Buikema and Smelik, this motivation to facilitate women's participation in the film industry is most aligned with feminist theories of equality. As mentioned above, theorists with this perspective are particularly interested in equal access to economic, legal and educational opportunities and rights. A key concern for them is that women are treated as subordinate to men regarding the legal system, the economy, the education system, cultural structures and society on the basis of their sex. These matters resonate with the opening remarks given by Bogutskaya on the first night of the 2017 festival. She commented on the fact that there are not enough opportunities for women in the film industry and that the aim of the festival is to 'help and elevate women working in different crafts' in order to 'get their films seen and then the women more work' (Bogutskaya, 2017b). Apicella echoes this sentiment when she states that:

our sort of USP is that we're trying to change the industry from the inside out. And we're really pleased to see filmmakers who were nominated or won awards in our first couple of years, are now making their feature films and getting acclaimed at that feature level. (Apicella, 2017a)

While historically feminists concerned with equality have focused on women's access to education, the workforce and the legal system, as well as their participation as full citizens

in society (Philipps, 1987), the women of UF focus particularly on the lack of opportunities for women in the film industry. They acknowledge the lack of funding, training schemes, technical or creative jobs and roles in leadership positions, and address these issues directly. The exact parameters of which areas women lack access to might not be the same, but what UF shares with these feminist scholars is the motivation to increase women's rights, presence and participation within an existing, male-dominated system.

This analysis has shown that, while the influence of theories of equality dominates UF, elements of all three feminist categories suggested by Buikema and Smelik can be observed at this one festival. Moreover, my examination of UF has demonstrated that even festivals, which are not overtly feminist or concern themselves with a multitude of global feminist issues, are still infused by feminist thought and theories.

## **5.4 Feminist - To be or not to be**

Analysing LFFF and UF individually has allowed me to identify ways in which a variety of feminist theories become manifest at these events. The case studies indicate the range of feminist concepts permeating contemporary women's film festivals in the UK and demonstrate that different feminist ideologies, despite often being arranged in chronological and consecutive waves, can coexist side by side at the same women's film festival. It is however, not only fruitful to examine the festivals independently, but also to view them in comparison.

The case study of UF in particular, has demonstrated that not all women's film festivals articulate their feminist intentions overtly. How UF and LFFF address their underlying feminisms differs in a variety of ways. The most striking disparity of feminist expression lies in the festivals' self-representation. While one proclaims its intentions overtly using the word 'feminist' in its title, description and call for submissions, the other does not use the term in any of its publicity materials. In the following comparative analysis, I will focus on the festivals' uses of the word 'feminist' as a label and the presence of feminist issues during the screenings.

### 5.4.1 A Question of Choice

The way UF describes itself on its website focusses on the celebration of women filmmakers and their marginalisation in the film industry – it is undeniably feminist, as it is concerned with the lack of gender equality in cinema. However, the words ‘feminist’ or ‘feminism’ are not used in any of the available print material or the festival’s web presence. Bogutskaya explains that:

Personally, I am wary of using the term because of how it’s now being used in pop culture. It’s really powerful but it also can shut off people who are not completely engaged with what it means and its history, and that’s not what I’m interested in. I’m interested in the content speaking for itself and the filmmakers and their work speaking and attracting as wide as an audience as possible. (Bogutskaya, 2017a)

Not describing the festival as feminist is a conscious decision and while LFFF uses the term as a catchall phrase to attract people who identify with different aspects of feminisms, UF avoids using the label altogether. The use of the term feminism in popular culture that Bogutskaya refers to has been the subject of recent critical examinations of contemporary feminism, by authors such as Roxane Gay (2014), bell hooks (2016) and Jessa Crispin (2017). hooks, for example, who had been a significant figure of black feminist theory since the 1980s, published an essay about Beyoncé’s visual album, *Beyoncé: Lemonade* (2016) entitled ‘Moving Beyond Pain’ (2016). In the text, she criticises not only the capitalist exploitation of the women’s movement for the purpose of the album, but also the sexist construction of the black female body as victim in Beyoncé’s lyrics. She writes that:

Her vision of feminism does not call for an end to patriarchal domination. It’s all about insisting on equal rights for men and women. In the world of fantasy feminism, there are no class, sex, and race hierarchies that breakdown simplified categories of women and men, no call to challenge and change systems of domination, no emphasis on intersectionality. In such a simplified worldview, women gaining the freedom to be like men can be seen as powerful. (hooks, 2016)

As such, hooks questions whether the artist’s interpretation of feminism challenges the patriarchal system which she claims to fight. Similarly, Gay and Crispin offer in-depth analyses of the state of contemporary feminism and comment on cultural aspects of our society that are at odds with their feminist ideologies. Not using the label feminist at UF is a way for the festival to withdraw itself from the potential pressure to take a stance on the different viewpoints within this contemporary feminist debate. Yet, through interviews and

fieldwork, I discovered that Bogutskaya and Apicella *do* consider UF a feminist film festival. Both stated that they use the term when they describe the festival in conversations (Apicella, 2017a; Bogutskaya, 2017a). Bogutskaya even opens the Q&A after the screening of Elizabeth E. Schuch's *The Book of Birdie* (2017) with the words, 'this is a feminist film festival' (2017c). The director and the co-founder are convinced that feminism permeates every aspect of the festival, even though the term is not used overtly. Bogutskaya emphasises that while she tries not to overuse the term, 'you don't need to put it on a big banner for it to be a feminist festival' (Bogutskaya, 2017a). This also resonated with Christina Essenberger's understanding of the feminism of FFF in Germany.

In contrast, LFFF director Read states that while she does not want to scare potential audiences off by appearing overly radical, she also does not want to cause any doubts about what the festival is doing. She states that:

I really liked the idea of having the word 'feminist' there and having that in mainstream places. [...] even though I don't want to put people off, I don't want to, like, mince about, you know, what we're doing. Like, we are feminist and proud of that. (Read, 2017a)

With this statement, Read shows an awareness for the elusive character of the term feminist that withdraws itself from universal definition. She acknowledges that the word can be exclusionary or alienating towards some groups of women, women's rights activists and particularly potential audience members who have not identified with this label before. However, other than Bogutskaya of UF, she sees this tension as an opportunity to attract audiences with a variety of feminist ideological backgrounds, rather than a hindrance. She argues that:

I can understand that it has got watered down. I think by keeping that name we can entice these people in who maybe, might be a bit, what I call a cupcakey feminist, like, and then, you know, they'll see these slightly more radical ideas and maybe start thinking about them. (Read, 2017a)

For Read, the festival's name helps to attract not only devout feminists – radical, liberal or otherwise – but also people who have only recently developed an interest for the issues and people who identify with the movement through other labels, such as women's liberationists. The aforementioned debate regarding the significance of class within the women's movement is an indicator that this strategy is working for LFFF. It is not necessary for Read to state what her own definition or interpretation of feminism is in



order to provide a platform for people with diverse opinions to come together and negotiate their standpoints. The festival is able to attract a variety of women who are interested in women's rights issues, regardless of their personal use and definition of the label feminist.

This openness to a plurality of feminisms is also reflected in the festival's post-screening discussions and the emphasis on diversity on and off screen. LFFF is an issue-based festival, curating its film programmes around particular themes and women's issues. The generous post-screening discussions serve the purpose to contextualise the films within the wider discourse of the theme and give guest speakers and the audience an opportunity to share thoughts, ideas and opinions about the issues at hand. Unlike most other film festival Q&As I have attended in the past, which usually evolve around practical questions of how a film was made, the discussions moved on very quickly to the wider context of the films. Common questions were: why or for whom the films were made, which real-life issues inspired the films, what the situation was like for women affected by or working around these issues, how things can be changed and what the films mean to different women. The festival's aforementioned emphasis on diversity on screen, on the stage and in the audience, contributed to these diverse and in-depth discussions of feminist issues and topics. While some filmmakers and a few academics were invited to speak, the majority of guests on stage were women involved in activism with varying backgrounds. Furthermore, LFFF managed to attract audiences through niche marketing and community-focussed curation, which were diverse in terms of race, class and feminist ideologies. Using the term feminist overtly in its publicity materials, the festival successfully extended an invitation to a diverse group of people to discuss what feminism means to them and whom it includes or excludes.

UF, on the other hand, does not necessarily encourage discussions about feminisms. While the festival's goals and intentions are permeated by a variety of feminist theories, challenging the very definition and plurality of feminism is not a key concern of the festival. The post-screening Q&As were very brief and focused on technical questions regarding the particular department represented for each film. The majority of questions was usually asked by the host, which left little time to extend the invitation for questions or remarks to the audience. When the films themselves were more overtly feminist, such as Alison Piper's *Free Period* (2017) or Phoebe Montague's *100 Women I Know* (2017), the Q&As presented an opportunity for the filmmakers to speak about the women's issues addressed in their films. However, since most short film programmes at UF were not

curated around particular feminist themes, these films were not necessarily situated within a broader feminist context. Thus, the focus of post-screening discussions quickly shifted back to the making of the films. Instead of providing a platform to negotiate different definitions of feminism, UF is more invested in addressing issues of representation within the film industry and giving more women the opportunity to share their work.

This is not to say that one festival is more feminist than the other. On the contrary, this comparison serves to illustrate that festivals make conscious decisions about including or excluding the label feminist in order to express their purposes or address audiences. However, how different feminist positions at festivals are negotiated, helps to situate these events within the wider context of feminist activism and the political women's movement. As discussed in Chapter 3, women's film festivals have always been important arenas for the mediation between different feminist ideologies and objectives – some festivals, like LFFF, do this overtly and by engaging its participants in the discussion; other festivals, like UF, choose to address feminist issues behind the scenes. Echoing Carocci's statement about Creteil's Films de Femmes, UF and LFFF both avoid identifying with a universal definition of feminism and thus put the movement's plurality centre-stage

## 5.5 Conclusion

The historical examples attest that the presence of multiple feminist ideologies at the same festival is not a new development. On the contrary, women's film festivals have always been crucial platforms to negotiate contrasting viewpoints within the feminist (film) movement. The analyses of UF and LFFF validate that contemporary festivals make conscious decisions about how overt these negotiations are addressed without discouraging or alienating potential audiences. Perhaps they thus embody part of the change that Halpern Martineau had been appealing for in 1975. In conclusion, determining a women's film festival's relationship with feminisms, the women's movement and feminist theories, is a complex undertaking that requires case-by-case analyses. Buikema and Smelik's concept of feminist theories has proven as a suitable framework, particularly because it is independent of common chronological or ideological categories. When applying this framework to other women's film festivals, a number of key elements from the comparative analysis offered in this chapter should be considered. These are, among others, the name of the festival and the language used in its description and publicity materials, the criteria for film selection and the contents of the screened films, the structure

of the programme with a particular focus on programming choices, the question of audience engagement, who is attending, who is working for the festival and who is invited to speak, and how the festival handles questions of access and barriers.

## 6 Women's Film Festivals in the Archives

After focussing on several contemporary festivals and their contexts, this chapter will advance the exploration of women's film festival history started in Chapter 3 and propose a reciprocal connection between the past and the present of women's film festivals. At its heart lies a case study of the weeklong Women's Event at the 1972 Edinburgh International Film Festival (EIFF72), which was the first event of its kind in Europe, and a Glasgow-based feminist film festival, which was co-founded by the author as a result of this doctoral research project. The underlying questions framing this chapter are:

- How have women's film festivals, particularly the Women's Event at EIFF72 been documented and archived, and why is it important to investigate these archives?
- What can be achieved from engaging with its archives and what can contemporary archive practitioners learn from this encounter?

This chapter explores how the Women's Event has been documented and archived and in what ways a renewed engagement with the archival material can create new knowledge about it. It also examines how this can inspire the present and future of similar festivals today. In her essay 'The Last Days of Women's Cinema', Patricia White argues for the need of an 'archive for the future' (2006, p. 146). She proposes that the future of feminism can only be formulated if feminist activities today are being documented, and if researchers engage with the archives of the women's movement in the past. Similarly, Melinda Barlow suggests that research can prevent the loss of women's histories and demands a more thorough investigation of women's engagement with technologies (2003). Their key message is that women's film history has to be written in order to create a feminist legacy. In this sense, this chapter suggests that the future of women's film festivals is located in the examination of their own past. It will demonstrate that by engaging with the archives, contemporary women's film festivals can gain a deeper understanding of their heritage, which will inform their decisions in the future. With this in mind, this chapter also provides me with the opportunity to reflect on my own practice as a festival producer and analyse the process of documenting and archiving Femspectives, the festival I founded in collaboration with Lauren Clarke in 2018.

This chapter has three parts. First, I will outline the theoretical framework utilised to work with the archival collection from the Women's Event in Edinburgh including Philis M. Barragan Goetz's idea of the accidental archive (2015), feminist approaches to archiving and historical research (Compton, 2007; Wallin, 2017; Eichhorn, 2013) and Maud Perrier and Deborah Withers' concept of radical unlearning (2016). Some of the questions emerging from this theoretical framework are concerned with what we can learn from the archival materials, how this challenges the existing knowledge about the Women's Event, and how we can create new knowledge by opening a dialogue between the past and the present. I will address how my findings from the archive can contribute answers towards these questions.

I will then expand on the overview of the Women's Event provided in Chapter 3 and discuss the development, the organisation and the programme of the event in detail. Consulting a variety of sources including literature, interviews and archival material, I will paint a picture of this event and discuss how new knowledge about it can be produced.

In the final part of this chapter, I will turn to the present and Femspectives, the Glasgow-based feminist film festival. Contemplating Monica Dall'Asta and Jane Gaines' suggestion that even though past events cannot be recreated, engaging with them can change what we know about them (2015), I will illustrate how through engagement with the EIFF archive, new perspectives on the past and the present can be opened up. Tying in with Kate Eichhorn's proposal that the past also informs the present and future, I will provide a speculative approach to envision the idea of an ideal archive and discuss my experience of applying these ideals in the practice of archiving the organisation and its activities.

Overall, this chapter argues for the importance of archives as ever-evolving entities of the *present*, not the *past*. The Women's Event serves as an example for how women's film festivals have been documented and how the engagement with archival materials can produce new knowledge and inspire new practices, but also as a reminder for contemporary festival organisers to consider strategies of documentation and preservation of their work for the future.

## 6.1 Learning and Unlearning in the Archive

Many film festival scholars have argued for the importance of analysing written documents and ephemeral objects distributed by or during a film festival (Dayan, 2002; Stringer, 2003; Zielinski, 2016). In his case study of the Sundance Film Festival, Dayan seeks to define a set of rules that determines the behaviour of a festival's key players (2002). Building on the idea that festivals are collective performances in which individual players might have different agendas – some conflicting, some harmonising – he concludes that a film festival is a multi-layered experience. An attendant's agenda influences the way they participate in the festival, and vice versa. Thus, each individual's festival experience is different even though they might follow collective behaviours of groups, such as journalists, filmmakers or sales agents. No two people experience a festival in exactly the same way. Apart from the countless individual narratives of a single festival, he also suggests that researchers have to consider two kinds of festival at the same time: 'the visual festival of films' meaning the programme, 'and the written festival' (2002, p. 52). This 'written festival' is constituted by official print materials such as posters or flyers, press releases and press coverage, programme notes and press packs provided by production companies, agents or distributors, invitation cards and all other print communication about the festival. According to Dayan, these materials serve to present a fuller picture of the event (2002). Similar arguments have been made by Julian Stringer and Ger Zielinski. Stringer suggests that documents, such as the brochures, press releases, letter correspondences or press clippings, are crucial in the creation of the festival image (2008). They serve a number of functions, such as mediating the festival's structure and messages to its audience, offering entertainment and promotion to accompany events, and creating a sense of shared experience and community among all participants. Focussing particularly on film festivals at the margins, Zielinski expands on Stringer's suggested functions and argues that these pieces of ephemera document how a festival approaches old and new audiences (2016). They are crucial in understanding a festival's image and self-representation and shape how a festival wants to be perceived by its audience and beyond.

In the context of the case study of the Women's Event, I will utilise an expanded understanding of what constituted the written festival and consider the process leading up to the event. In that sense, the 'written' Women's Event includes draft versions of press releases and programme schedules, letters and correspondences of festival staff, postcards

and personal notes, and other material about the festival that was not meant for publication. Engaging with the archival material and documentation of the Women's Event offered the opportunity to learn more about the image created of the event internally and externally.

What was particularly frustrating in my examination of the archival material though, was that I knew neither who had gathered most of the archival materials, nor what other materials were consciously or unconsciously excluded or disposed of. Margaret Compton describes the role of the archivist as a knowledge bearer, who creates an archive with a certain agenda and is able to guide researchers or the public through the contents of the archive (2007). She argues that archivists can provide access, insight into what is held in an archive and the context in which to situate the materials. The EIFF archive, however, can be more accurately described as an "accidental archive", a term used by Barragán Goetz in her research about the American Film Institute's (AFI) Directing Workshop for Women, which started in 1974 (2015).<sup>53</sup> Attempting to trace the early history of the Workshop, particularly the films produced by its first participants, Barragán Goetz did not find much in the dusty archive of the AFI. The films that had been kept from that period were low in numbers and often not transferred to accessible media, such as VHS tapes. She further suggests that, 'the ones available for viewing were saved accidentally', not necessarily as a conscious effort 'to exclude women from film industry history' but rather due to 'a lack of organization' (Barragán Goetz, 2015, p. 52). It is thus not only crucial to consider the narrative documented in an archive, but also the process and context of collecting, cataloguing and storing materials. In her research on the work of visual artist Alex Martinis Roe, Amelia Wallin describes archiving as a 'feminist strategy of care' (2017, p. 135). Engaging with archive materials means to uncover lost, hidden or forgotten histories, to identify gaps and absences and thus expose power relations and reassess established knowledge. For Wallin, archives are 'unstable, in flux, subjective and laborious' (2017, p. 136). Therefore, archiving is a process of expanding our understanding of the past and making room for marginalised experiences. By doing this, we acknowledge archives as ever-evolving entities.

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<sup>53</sup> I was made aware of this concept through a conference paper by Dr Gracia Ramirez of University of the Arts London; Ramirez, G. (2018): A Ticket to Top: The American Film Institute's Director Workshop for Women. In: *Doing Women's Film and Television History Conference*, Southampton.

How we encounter an archive is significantly shaped by our pre-existing knowledge about the events or narratives that are documented within. In their work on feminist pedagogy, Perrier and Withers propose to shift the focus of research to the process of knowledge production and recount their experience of encountering an archive of the women's liberation movement together with their students for the first time (2016). They state that:

strong perceptions pre-exist our encounter with the feminist archive, and these feelings orient readers to the feminist archive in particular ways. Uncovering or tracking these feelings is a pedagogical exercise in itself [...] (Perrier and Withers, 2016)

Perrier and Withers define the process of becoming aware and leaving behind these preconceptions as 'radical unlearning'.<sup>54</sup> They argue that by unlearning what we thought we knew about a certain historical event, we open ourselves up to new possibilities of learning. Instead of relying on established explanations, simplified abstractions or existing narratives, researchers can challenge the knowledge they have received in the past. Perrier and Withers draw inspiration from the work of Vietnamese filmmaker and scholar Trinh T. Minh-Ha, whose book *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* challenges its readers to unlearn knowledge they received through standard academic theory and to question the way they structure reality (1989). Her films, such as *Reassemblage: From The Firelight to the Screen* (1983) or *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989), deal with similar issues by blurring the lines between documentary and fiction, often offering multiple narratives of the same event as equal accounts of reality. In an interview with Erika Balsom for *Frieze* magazine, Minh-Ha stated that:

it's illusory to take the real and reality for granted and to think that a neutral language exists, even though we often strive for such neutrality in our scholarly work. (Minh-Ha in Balsom, 2018)

As such, Minh-Ha acknowledges the role of the author of a narrative, whether it is cultural, personal or historical. She proposes that there is no objective or neutral account of history, and thus argues for the multiplicity of narratives as a strategy to approximate reality. She refuses to tell singular stories and so do Perrier and Withers in their encounter with the archive of the feminist movement. They argue for a dialogical relationship between the

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<sup>54</sup> Rona Murray from Lancaster University utilises this concept of "radical unlearning" in her research of the Leeds Animation Workshop (Murray, 2018).



archivist who collated the materials or who cares for them in the future and the artist or theorist who engages with them in order to produce new knowledge. Furthermore, they want to extract different perspectives from the archival materials and not only try to understand what happened, but also how it had been remembered by different people throughout time (2016).

Their study of the WLM archive is informed by what Eichhorn calls, the 'archival turn in feminism' (2013). She writes:

Rather than a destination for knowledges already produced or a place to recover histories and ideas placed under erasure, the making of archives is frequently where knowledge production begins. (Eichhorn, 2013, p. 3)

For Eichhorn, the archival turn thus describes the shift from an understanding of the archive as a repository for documents to acknowledging every engagement with archive materials as an act of producing new knowledge. However, it is not only information, researchers gain from creating or revisiting archives, but also energy (Freeman, 2010). Advancing Freeman's suggestion, Eichhorn argues that by engaging with the past through archives, contemporary feminists cannot only learn about past struggles, but also find inspiration and strength from the feminist movements that came before them. She links this particularly to the recent rise and current domination of neoliberalism, when she writes:

the archive [is able] to restore to us what is routinely taken away under neoliberalism – not history itself but rather the ability to understand the conditions of our everyday lives [...] and, more important, the conviction that we might, once again, be *agents* of change in time and history. (Eichhorn, 2013, p. 4)

In that sense, the archival turn in feminism is not only an examination of the past, for history's sake, but rather a matter of learning from the past in order to envision a different present and future.

For my encounter with the EIFF archive, this meant that I had to prepare not only to acquire new knowledge about the Women's Event, but also to generate new ideas and gain inspiration for how to act as a researcher and practitioner in the present and the future. I had to challenge the facts that constituted my knowledge about the Women's Event in order to open myself to new perspectives on the event. Several questions emerged, including what materials had been kept in the archive, how they conformed with or differed from the assumptions gathered through literature and interviews, who the voices in

the archive belonged to and what surprising pieces of information I would be able to find. I also had to evaluate my own practices as festival producer and consider how my contemporary activism could benefit from my engagement with the archive.

## 6.2 The Women's Event at EIFF72

The Women's Event at EIFF72 was organised by Lynda Myles, Laura Mulvey and Claire Johnston. It consisted of a programme of over thirty films directed by women and a workshop, which was only open to women attendees, to discuss the status quo and future of opportunities for women in the film industry.

In a panel discussion at EIFF18, Myles explained that as a student at the University of Edinburgh in the late 1960s, she and her partner David Will had taken over the university's film society and organised screenings to educate themselves with the kind of cinema they did not have access to elsewhere (Myles, 2018). As stated in Chapter 3, the pair then became involved with EIFF because they were deeply dissatisfied and frustrated with the kind of films the festival programmed then. Gender or the lack of representation of women directors was not yet an issue per se; rather, inspired by the structural changes at Cannes Film Festival, Myles and Will demanded a festival that was programmed by independent programmers who selected films based on their artistic merit, and would not shy away from unknown directors and radical or challenging films. She wanted to see and show subversive films and radical cinema. Other big international film festivals at the time, such as Cannes or Venice, had big budgets and hosted competitive programmes, but Myles and her team were not interested in that. Instead, she encouraged an intellectual engagement with cinema through symposia and conferences, while at the same time bringing genre films and New American cinema by directors like Martin Scorsese or David Cronenberg to the screens of Edinburgh (Lloyd, 2011). Myles was not interested in the accepted canon of established filmmakers and did not want the festival 'to be simply about showing a batch of movies' (2017). Of course, this also attracted some negative responses. She remembers that much of the initial criticism of her programming was directed at these seemingly incompatible approaches (2018). Matt Lloyd quotes film theorist Paul Willemen, who described Myles as a 'cinephiliac schizophrenic' (Lloyd, 2013). In saying this, Willemen expresses the contrast between Myles' dedication to intellectual ideas, film theory and experimental films, and her ability to attract wide audiences with Hollywood B movies by directors such as Scorsese, De Palma or Cronenberg. Despite the criticism, Myles persisted

as programmer and pursued the idea of organising the UK's first women's film festival in 1972.

The Women's Event was a significant intervention and has been recognised as such in numerous publications about EIFF (Hardy, 1992; Stanfield 2008; Lloyd, 2011). In his history of the festival, Forsyth Hardy acknowledges the unique focus of the event 'on an aspect of cinema little considered in the predominantly male world of movie making' (1992, p. 114). He calls the event a 'welcome addition' to the festival's programme and continues to mention a few titles that were screened (1992, p. 115). He particularly pays attention to Arden's *The Other Side of the Underneath*, which was the only British feature film in the 1970s to be solely directed by a woman (Janisse, 2012). Stanfield and Lloyd both mention the Women's Event only briefly. Stanfield mostly uses it to back up his argument that EIFF took the lead among festivals in gender politics (2008). He also names a few directors whose films were screened including Leni Riefenstahl, Dorothy Arzner and Barbara Loden. Following a similar line of thought, Lloyd emphasises that the Women's Event, along with the Douglas Sirk retrospective of the same year, '[marked] the first significant interrogation of cinéphilia's gender politics and its unquestioning promotion of (white) heterosexual male directors' (2011, p. 45).

However, none of these written accounts about the festival go into much detail on the Women's Event. They mention a few directors whose films were screened, a small number of film titles, the names of the co-organisers and point out the uniqueness of the event. However, they do not investigate what made the Event stand out, how the programme was put together and what aim its organisers pursued. This illustrates the limited result that my search for information about the Women's Event in libraries revealed. It was thus necessary to consult other sources in order to fill in the gaps.

To do so, I conducted interviews with the surviving co-organisers, Lynda Myles and Laura Mulvey.<sup>55</sup> Keeping in mind the methodological challenges of reconstructive interviews outlined in Chapter 2, these conversations with Myles and Mulvey added a great amount of new information to my research. Both emphasised that they wanted to challenge the established canon of films and the male-dominated narrative of film history. The cinema

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<sup>55</sup> The third co-organiser, Claire Johnston passed away in 1987.

they had been exposed to as film students and cinephiles was dominated by male-directed films and male-centred stories. For Mulvey it became 'essential to run an event around films made by women' (2017). Myles stated that she had been involved in the early 1970s women's movement and developed feminist thought in her practices as programmer (2017). The Women's Event was thus a logical evolution of the notion of questioning the canon and at the same time, developing the intellectual side of EIFF. At EIFF18, Myles expanded on this notion and described that they wanted to discover a different kind of film; films that were cheaper, more radical, more avant-garde and made by women. Myles argued that the aim of the Women's Event was to exhibit these films and celebrate women in cinema who had been forgotten in the past. However, she also made clear that the Event was not just about showing films directed by women, but also about questioning what kind of cinema women were making. She insisted that:

It was never simply, 'oh there should be more women directors,' it was also about what a women's cinema would be, and how it would be different. (Myles, 2017)

When it came to finding potential films for the programme, Mulvey, who was based in London at the time, took the lead (2017). She stated that:

I spent a long time of happiness and excitement working in the British Film Institute Library, just looking for any women film directors I could possibly find. [...] then the problem came of how do we actually get the films. It is one thing to think of a film and another thing to get them. [...] So, in compiling the list, we weren't only driven by what we wanted to show, but what we were able to show. (Mulvey, 2016a)

In saying this, Mulvey alludes to the team's programming practices and acknowledges the challenges they faced when curating the programme. On her list were films by Dorothy Arzner and Germaine Dulac, however both proved particularly difficult to source (Mulvey, 2016a). In the end, the organisers managed to find a negative of Arzner's *Dance, Girl, Dance* in the BFI Archive, who made a print for the festival, and received a copy of Dulac's *The Smiling Madame Beudet* from the BBC. Another film that Mulvey tried to find, but did not know how to source, was Chantal Akerman's first short film *Saute ma Ville* (1968) (Mulvey, 2016a). After our interview, Mulvey sent me a list of the films that made up the programme of the Women's Event (Mulvey, 2016b). The list indicates film titles, director credits, sometimes the production year and the respective page numbers for the film synopses in the programme brochure. The order of the titles correlates to the order they were screened in and when programmed together, feature and short films are also

listed together.<sup>56</sup> The list contains all films that are mentioned in the festival brochure; however, it misses a short film that was mentioned in the festival's programme schedule (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a). Mulvey's list, the festival brochure and the programme schedule illustrate that there were twelve short and mid-length films of up to sixty minutes and nineteen feature length films. The programme consisted of films produced in nine countries between 1923 and 1972 and included nine documentaries and twenty-two narrative or experimental fiction films. It is significant to point out these details, because on the one hand, they had not been recorded in a publication about the event before, and on the other hand, my analysis of other archival materials will illustrate that digging deeper challenged this knowledge.

Examining written sources as well as conducting reconstructive interviews with two co-organisers allowed me to map out how the Women's Event fitted into the cultural context of the time, what its aims were, and which films were part of the programme. However, I still knew little about the reception of the event, who attended its screenings or which other films were invited but not screened. The next section of this chapter seeks to examine in what way materials from the EIFF archive at NLS can contribute to our knowledge about the Women's Event and challenge the narrative established by the scholarly and oral sources I had considered so far.

### 6.2.1 What is in the Archive?

The NLS holds a vast archive of EIFF materials consisting of documentation from the festival's earliest years until the late 1990s in almost 200 boxes. The materials are not listed in the library's catalogue, but a rough inventory of the contents of the boxes has been made available to me by Sally Harrower, a curator of Modern Literary Manuscripts at NLS.<sup>57</sup> Due to the incomplete inventory of the boxes, I was not sure which materials I would encounter, which was frustrating and exciting at the same time. One of the boxes, box twenty-five, contains four folders, three of which hold materials related to the Women's Event in 1972 (Acc. 11308/81 to 83). Folder Acc. 11308/81 holds two versions of the festival's programme schedule, a flyer about the Women's Event, two undated press

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<sup>56</sup> A complete list and schedule of films screened as part of the Women's Event can be found in Appendix B.

<sup>57</sup> *Edinburgh International Film Festival*. [Inventory] National Library of Scotland, Archives & Manuscript Collections, Acc.11308, Edinburgh.

releases, regulations for entering film into the festival, film brochures and production notes including films from the Women's Event; Kirsten Stenbæk's *Lenin, You Rascal, You* and Nelly Kaplan's *Dirty Mary*. It also holds an alphabetical list of all films with short synopsis for the programme copy, information about press shows, and an overview of the Politkino strand of the festival. Folder Acc. 11308/82 contains instructions for festival delegates and members of the press, an undated programme overview, Certificates of Participation including the accompanying letter signed by festival director Murray Grigor, a schedule of press screenings in Edinburgh and at the National Film Theatre in London, and an undated press release listing the films of the Women's Event with brief synopses. The majority of documents in this folder though, are press clippings from local and national newspapers and magazines, such as the *Glasgow Herald*, *The Scotsman*, *The Guardian*, *Evening Standard*, *The Times*, *Financial Times*, *Scottish Daily Express* and *Continental Film Review*. Folder Acc. 11308/83 contains drafts of flyers and press releases for the Women's Event with handwritten notes and corrections, a few more press clippings, receipts for shipments of films and a number of letters and correspondence papers between Lynda Myles and filmmakers, distributors and other right holders, such as Contemporary Film Ltd in London and French filmmaker Jacqui Raynal. Furthermore, this box holds flyers and posters from similar later events, such as the Women and Film International Festival in Toronto (1973) and a programme poster of Arsenal Cinema in Berlin, which featured a special season of women's cinema in March 1973.

The boxes from the EIFF archive can only be consulted on site at the Special Collections Reading Room in Edinburgh, which requires the physical presence of the researcher at NLS. There is no self-service photocopying, but copies or scans can be requested via the library, which is a paid-for service.

### 6.2.2 Two Examples of Unlearning

My encounter with EIFF72's archival materials at NLS challenged my assumed knowledge in many ways, and numerous pieces of information I found, confirmed, contradicted or added to the knowledge I gained from literature and interviews. The following are examples of how the archive required me to recognise and unlearn some of my knowledge in the process of research.

### ***Collective vs. Individual***

From literary sources and the interview with Myles and Mulvey, I learnt that the Women's Event had been co-organised by three women; Myles and Mulvey were joined by Claire Johnston (Hardy, 1992; Stanfield, 2008; Lloyd, 2011; Mulvey, 2016a; Myles, 2017). Furthermore, official festival documents, such as the foreword introducing the Women's Event in the festival catalogue are signed by all three women, confirming their collective work (Edinburgh International Film Festival, 1972a). The press clippings covering the event however, convey a different narrative.

Very few of the reviews and reports collated in the archive box actually mention all three women as co-organisers of the event. According to Molly Plowright of the *Glasgow Herald*, Myles 'put weeks of devoted effort into "The Women's Event"' (Plowright, 1972b) and in an earlier feature she speaks of Myles as if she was the sole decision maker regarding the programme of the event;

The conference is still in the blueprint stage, though she [Lynda Myles] won't be including the over-familiar names like Leni Riefenstahl but seeking out those remembered less – Ida Lupino, Leontine Sagan, Dorothy Arzner, Louise Weber. (Plowright, 1972a)

Other journalists such as David Leigh of *The Scotsman* spoke in a similar tone of Myles as the organiser of the Women's Event. He refers to her in two articles and writes, 'Lynda Myles has organised a women's session' (Leigh, 1972a) and 'Linda [sic!] Myles has garnered 22 new and old women's films, to display the plight and talents of women directors' (Leigh, 1972b). The fact that he misspelled her name in the second article perhaps suggests that Leigh did not spend much time researching the team behind the Women's Event in the first place. Yet in another undated clipping an unnamed author describes the whole event as 'largely 23-year-old Lynda Myles' idea' (Unnamed author, 1972). A noteworthy exception is Eileen Abrams' report on the event for *Off Our Backs*, which names all three co-organisers (Abrams, 1972). After stumbling upon the Women's Event during her Scotland holiday, Abrams wrote about her experience at the festival and calls it 'a marvelous idea, a laudable feat of selection and assemblage' (1972, p. 14). She lauds several of the films she saw, but also criticises the lack of audience outreach and opportunities for discussion, as well as the permission of male audiences. She would have preferred the 'exclusive company of women where [I would have] had a strong sense of the community of the audience' (1972, p. 14). Interestingly, her report is not contained in

the archive boxes at NLS, which suggests that the person collecting the clippings did either not have access to the magazine, or did not consider an article in a feminist magazine – a critical one on top of that – worthy of archiving. Indeed, there are no clippings of reviews of the Women's Event in feminist publications contained in the archive boxes held at NLS.

Even the collectively written report by the members of the London Women's Film Group for *Spare Rib* – also not contained in the archive boxes – names Myles as the sole organiser of the event (London Women's Film Group, 1972). Considering the widely established practice of women's collective work at the time, I found this erasure of the collective effort by Myles, Mulvey and Johnston puzzling. Overcoming individual subjectivity and recognising women's oppression as a collective issue was a leading principle of the women's liberation movements in the United States, the UK and in Europe (Binard, 2017; Kimpton Nye, [no date]; Meskimmon, 2007). Women came together in consciousness-raising groups in order to find solutions for collective problems and carried on this ideal of collectivism in their feminist activism. Many feminist journals, such as *Spare Rib* in the UK or *Women & Film* in the US, or filmmaking groups, such as the London Women's Film Group, were organised and run by collectives. Louise Kimpton Nye states that:

'[They] offered a fresh, non-hierarchical way of working where all members of an organisation were equal [and] a tangible way of challenging established patriarchal structures.' (Kimpton Nye, [no date])

From my research of other women's film festivals at the time, I knew that they were also mostly organised by collectives and major decisions were made through democratic processes (Rich, 1998; Quetting, 2007; Armatage, 2009a).

However, the Women's Event happened during a time, which in film festival history could be regarded as the dawn of the artistic festival director. Following the protests disrupting Cannes Film Festival in 1968, the large international film festivals in Cannes, Berlin and Venice changed their selection procedures (de Valck, 2007). Instead of national film bodies, there should be an artistic director selecting those films that best emphasised artistic quality. De Valck describes this figure of the festival director as similar to the film director as creator of a piece of art (de Valck, 2007).

The festival image of EIFF had changed significantly after 1968, particularly due to Myles' involvement with the programming team. The changes at EIFF and Myles' work were



strongly influenced by the shifts happening on the international film festival circuit. It is thus less surprising that the public discourse covering the festival in the press would be inspired by these changes and choose a torchbearer for the festival's unique programme. Considering that the Women's Event was also embedded in the context of the WLM, this negation of the collective to me seemed like an oversight. However, it also suggests that the event might have been perceived in the context of the development at international film festivals, rather than as part of the WLM. My engagement with the archival material about the Women's Event in Edinburgh challenged me to reconsider my perception of the event as first and foremost feminist intervention, and recognise that the Event was perhaps not recognised as the collective effort it constituted to me. Retrospectively and as a researcher, the Women's Event was one of the earliest women's film festivals and as such reflected developments of the feminist film movement. At the time, however, the event was certainly perceived as a strand of EIFF72, and thus required Myles as the figure of artistic programmer to signpost it as such.

### ***Even the final programme is not final***

Another aspect of the Women's Event I had to unlearn, was my understanding of the films that had been screened throughout the six festival days. The film list provided to me by Laura Mulvey, the festival brochure and the festival schedule, suggested that the Women's Event was constituted of thirty-one films. I knew the titles, director credits, film lengths, and could gather from the short synopses in the festival brochure what they were about and whether they were fiction, experimental or documentaries. This knowledge however, was challenged as soon as I found two different versions of the programme schedule in one of the folders at NLS.

The first overview lists the films I had already known about, plus six additional titles, including five short films and Jacqueline Audry's 1958 feature-length comedy *In Six Easy Lessons* (*C'est la faute d'Adam*). The other programme overview contained in the same folder, adds another title: Jacquie Raynal's 1968 experimental film *Twice Upon a Time* [*Deux Fois*] (Box 25, Folder Acc 11308/81). A postcard signed by Raynal and addressed to Myles, confirms that the filmmaker accepted the invitation to screen her film and asked for the coverage of travel expenses to Edinburgh. Yet, her film never appeared in the festival brochure, and it is unclear what happened after she sent the postcard – was the film shown? Did she withdraw? If so, why? Various press releases and promotional material penned and

signed by the co-organisers add even more additional titles to the list or films that were potentially screened, or refer to filmmakers whose films were considered for the programme. Works by Stephanie Rothman, Lisa Wertmuller, Agnès Varda and Juleen Compton were presumably joined by Olga Preobrazhenskaya's *Peasant Women of Riazan* (*Baby ryazanskie*, 1927), Leni Riefenstahl's *The Triumph of the Will* (*Triumph des Willens*, 1935), Kirsten Stenbæk's *The Numbed Kiss* [sic!] (*The Nun's Kiss* [*Nonnekysset*], 1968) and Yoko Ono's one-minute film *Freedom* from 1970. The fact that none of the documents that name these films are dated makes it difficult to track in which chronological order to consider them. A press release – presumably dating from the Women's Event's early organising stages – states that:

This year Lynda Myles is organising a retrospective of womens [sic!] films to change the balance. Over 50 women directors have been traced and we shall be showing as many of their films as we can lay our hands on. (Edinburgh International Film Festival, 1972b)

The question emerges, what had happened to the films of the directors that were traced, but not present in the programme overviews. Were the additional titles on Mulvey's research list? Why did they have to be dropped from the programme? Perhaps the organising team was not able to track down rights holders, they could not afford to pay screening fees, or maybe there were no copies available? The archive does not contain the answers.

One potential explanation for the inconsistencies is hidden in Murray Grigor's response to a reader comment in *The Scotsman*. A reader had written in response to the Women's Event's screening of Leni Riefenstahl's *The Blue Light* and complained about the unexpected changes to the programme on the night:

According to the printed Film Festival programme, the 7pm performance on Monday should have consisted of Leni Riefenstahl's "Das Blaue Licht," lasting 85 minutes. Those who bought their tickets on the strength of this information found a very different bill of fare at the Film House. It began with a propaganda effort about women trade unionists, advocating for a general strike and violence against the police. Then followed a short immodest picture and then Riefenstahl's film, reduced to about 40 minutes. This left time for two more "surprises." (Malkiewicz, [no date])

This letter indicates, that there were several short films screened in addition to the Riefenstahl feature, yet the brochure and festival schedule do not mention any of them. In a response written by Grigor, the festival director explains why not all screened films were actually listed in the festival programme. He also suggests that some films were selected at

the very last minute, which did not always allow enough time to add them to the official festival schedule:

The Edinburgh Film Festival programme is printed three weeks before our event commences. In order to incorporate new work, some films may not be indexed in it although supplements are available at the Film House. (Grigor, 1972)

As if to underscore this point, Grigor mentions yet another film title I had not encountered on any of the programme overviews, Anne Stevenson's *Near the Big Chakra*, which was supposedly screened after *The Blue Light*. Since the folders of the archive do not contain the programme supplements, mentioned by Grigor, it seems thus impossible to know for sure which films were in fact screened as part of the Women's Event. This challenges one of my key assumptions I relied on throughout my research at film festivals, namely that I could trust a festival brochure to list the entire programme of the festival. At the same time, it provides an excellent example underlining the necessity of access and the presence of the researcher in order to study a film festival (Stringer, 2003).

The letters in the archive left me with another list of film titles: those that were requested but had not shown up anywhere in the printed programme overviews or press releases. From the correspondence between Myles and various filmmakers, distributors and production companies I gathered another twenty-one titles, predominantly feature films, including mostly recent works such as Zetterling's *The Girls*, Ida Lupino's *The Trouble with Angels* (1966), Stephanie Rothman's *It's a Bikini World* (1967) and Lina Wertmüller's *The Basilisks*. All these films had been requested for screenings, yet for the majority of them the outcome is unclear, as no response letters are contained in the archive. The materials only account for a few responses by distributors, such as regarding Kinuyo Tanaka's *Love under the crucifix* (*Ogin-sama*, 1962), which could not be screened since the only remaining print was too heavily damaged (Unknown, 1972). In other cases, rights holders could not be sourced, or copies were unavailable due to geographical or financial restraints. For the rest of these titles the question, whether they were screened or not, remains unanswered. The example of Stevenson's film, which had only been mentioned by Grigor in his response to the reader letter above, demonstrates that it was possible for films to have been requested and shown without a trace in the archival materials. If they arrived in Edinburgh late, they might have been screened on short notice and programme supplements were not kept or archived. Even though the twenty-one films were all feature-length fiction films, there is a chance that – like in the case of Riefenstahl's *The Blue Light*

– abbreviated versions could have been screened to make room for more films within one session. The inconsistencies in the archive prove that the stored documentation is incomplete and stress again that it is impossible to know for sure which films were in fact screened as part of the Women's Event.

## **6.3 The Present and the Future of the Women's Event**

At the same time as producing new knowledge about the Women's Event, my engagement with its archive was also a 'way of understanding and imagining other ways to live in the present' (Eichhorn, 2013, p. 9). Examining the archive of EIFF72 challenged and informed my knowledge about the Women's Event as a scholar. Yet, it also influenced my practice as a festival and event organiser.

### **6.3.1 The Women's Event Revisited**

Instead of trying to force a homogenous narrative of the Women's Event, my research aligns with Perrier and Withers' concept of "unlearning". My study of the archive embraces the existing materials in their fragmentary quality and incompleteness, and acknowledges that different voices, might tell contradictory accounts of the event. I was inspired by Dall'Asta and Gaines' concept of multiple co-existing histories and Eichhorn's idea of understanding the present through the archive. With this in mind, I asked myself, how I could disseminate my research findings and engage a broader audience with the history and the narrative of the Women's Event.

I planned to host a re-staging of the Women's Event during the Radical Film Network Festival in Glasgow during May 2018. I would screen two films from the programme and engage the local audience in a discourse about the radicalism and significance of the event, and how it has been preserved in the archive. In addition to the Radical Film Network Scotland, I partnered with Glasgow Women's Library (GWL), which supported this endeavour in-kind with the free use of their screening space as well as promotion through their print and online channels. Shortly after the initial conception of the project idea, I co-founded Femspectives, a feminist film festival in Glasgow with Scottish-Canadian film curator Lauren Clarke (Femspectives.com, 2018). The re-staging event became the official launch event of Femspectives, which gave the screening an additional feminist framework. While we would not be able to reconstruct the social and political context of the Women's

Event at the time, we partnered with organisations and networks that would allow the event to be embedded in the radical and feminist context of Glasgow's film cultures today. We would fold the sheet of time and approximate the audience now with the event then.

Before recounting and analysing the re-staging event at GWL, it is useful to consider the process of research that went into preparing the event. After initially gaining access to the list of films provided by Laura Mulvey, I started to investigate and tried to track down as many films as possible. Some were easy to source, such as Arden's *The Other Side of the Underneath* – with DVDs widely available and rights held by the BFI – or Vera Chytilová's *Fruit of Paradise* (*Ovoce stromu rajských jíme*, 1970), which is distributed in the UK by Second Run.<sup>58</sup> Others proved more difficult to find. I found a print of Riefenstahl's *The Blue Light* at the Deutsche Kinemathek – Museum für Film und Fernsehen in Berlin, however the copy did not have any subtitles and since the most recent rights holder had just passed away, it was unclear who would hold them in the future. Similarly, the options I found for screening Leontine Sagan's *Girl in Uniform* (*Mädchen in Uniform*, 1931) were unsuitable. The German distributor Beta Films would have been able to license the film, but did not have a copy, and the DVD I found online did not come with English subtitles. The only way to screen the film would have required producing a translation and new subtitles from the dialogue script provided by Beta Films; however, this expanded beyond the financial limitations of the project. The BFI in London on the other hand, held a 35mm print of the film, which had subtitles and only light to heavy scratches. This format though, limited the potential screening venues for the film and would have eliminated GWL as a viable option.

In the end, Lauren and I made the decision to screen Arden's *The Other Side of the Underneath* and Sue Crockford's *A Woman's Place*. After researching Sue Crockford online, I had found a YouTube video of an interview with her, uploaded by a user called Marc Hudson. Mr Hudson, I learnt, was a PhD candidate at the Sustainable Consumption Institute of University of Manchester, and thus easy to contact. I sent an email to enquire about his contact with Crockford. Luckily, Hudson was happy to put me in touch with her and she was delighted about my interest in her film and the Women's Event. The next step was for Crockford to find a copy of her film, which required her to 'clear the basement so

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<sup>58</sup> Information about the films is available from <https://www.bfi.org.uk/blu-rays-dvds/other-side-underneath> and [http://www.secondrundvd.com/release\\_fruit.php](http://www.secondrundvd.com/release_fruit.php) [Accessed on 12 July 2018].

[she could] make a path to film stuff' (Crockford, 2018). Slowed down by hospital visits, it took another two months for Crockford to find the DVD and send it to me via mail. The way I gained access to *A Woman's Place* illustrates the complex process and sheer amount of luck involved in tracing the films from the Women's Event. It required creative investigative skills, large amounts of online research and luck in finding contact addresses or people who could pass on my request. Many of the leads I found turned out to be dead ends. The majority of films were untraceable and it seemed like history repeated itself. I went through the same frustrating process the co-organisers of the Women's Event must have gone through in 1972, trying to gain access to copies and prints of films from their wish list. Their goal of changing the canon and elevating the status of these films by women had failed – they were as hard to track down, as they were in the 1970s.

The re-staging event was part-account and part-narrative of the Women's Event. It made information about the film festival accessible to the audience and explained how it had been documented. To introduce the screening, I presented my research findings about the event to date and a slide show with impressions and quotes from the archival documents illustrated my talk. We invited Charlotte Procter from LUX London to introduce Arden's film and contextualise it through research she had conducted since her undergraduate studies. The viewing of *The Other Side of the Underneath* was followed by a brief comfort break and subsequently we split the audience into two discussion groups. There were four leading questions, which were used to kick-start the conversation. The participants were challenged to consider the representation of women's mental health as well as the experimental form of the film, but many topics of discussion also arose from Charlotte's introduction and the wider context in which Arden's work was embedded in 1970s United Kingdom. After twenty minutes, the two groups joined and shared with each other what they had focussed on mostly in their discussions. Splitting up the group in this way allowed for every participant to speak and voice their experiences with the film; it created an intimate circle in which to share and speak freely. It was particularly interesting to hear how the two groups had discussed some of the same issues, but both also came up with different topics. After this participatory talk session, we screened the second film of the day, *A Woman's Place*, which is a thirty minute film documenting three windows on the WLM at the time: a women's conference in Oxford, a man asking women in the street about women's rights and the Women's March in London in 1971. The viewing was

followed by a briefer discussion session in the big group of attendees, who all happened to be women or non-binary people.<sup>59</sup>

Resurrecting these two films from the 1972 programme challenged my assumed knowledge about the Women's Event. For example, from my conversations with Mulvey and Myles, I gathered that their event was predominantly attended by cinephiles, people working in film education and other members of the film industry. The regular audience at GWL is overall very different, and so I had expected that Arden's film might be particularly challenging to discuss. However, the conversation after the screening was highly engaged and Charlotte, after pointing out similar doubts before the screening, noted in her feedback that she realised that 'people of all ages and backgrounds can connect with a difficult, challenging film like *The Other Side [of the Underneath]*' (Femspectives, 2018). For our knowledge about the Women's Event and with a little historical imagination, we might conclude that even though EIFF might have been predominantly frequented by cinephiles and industry insiders, the discussions following the screenings of the Women's Event might have focussed on more personal and political aspects of the works presented.

The re-staging event was created as a safe space, and as such, there is no audio or video recordings of the discussions. Considering the potentially disturbing content, particularly of the Arden film, our goal was to create an environment in which the participants of the screening could speak their minds freely without feeling observed or evaluated. Instead, we asked for audience feedback after the event, including questions about the learning experience of each participant. The feedback we received illustrates that the event was indeed part-account, part-narrative as argued above. When prompted to reflect on what they took away from the event, participants stated that they had learnt some new facts as well as encountering new narratives about the context in which the Women's Event was embedded. One participant wrote that they learnt 'that there was a womens film festival in 1972. I had no knowledge of this prior to the event' [sic!] (Femspectives, 2018). Others noted that they learnt about the women's movement in the 1970s, the way in which women protested, women directors from the period and their work as well as Jane Arden specifically. However, some participants also gave feedback that illustrates the idea of

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<sup>59</sup> The screening was advertised as open to all genders.

doing history as bringing together the past and the present; they learnt 'about the 70s [and] how our oppressions were similar' and 'that the women in the films wanted the same things & said it in the same way, that we do'. For another, the selected films were a way 'for later generations to understand what society was like back in the day'. One participant pointed out that she took away the 'immense importance to document' feminist stories, events and movements. Several people pointed out that they had particularly enjoyed the opportunity for extended discussions, with one saying that 'during the discussions after each film screening everyone was so engaged about the films they had watched, all in all I just felt really happy to be there.' As such, the re-staging event opened up an interesting exchange between the present and the past. It invited a group of viewers to engage with materials from a historic event and allowed them to contextualise these anew with a contemporary feminist framework in mind. The participants learnt about a historical event, but, in line with Eichhorn's theory, they also gained new energy and inspiration for their own feminist activism in present times.

### **6.3.2 The Ideal Festival Archive**

In a similar way, my research of the Women's Event inspired the way Lauren and I document and archive Femspectives. From the beginning, I emphasised the importance of documenting our festival in order to provide as much information as possible for future reference. Considering my own research experience with the archival materials at NLS, I felt it was crucial to provide a different experience for potential future researchers. Femspectives is the only feminist film festival in Scotland, conceived at a time when issues of gender equality, sexualised violence against women and the oppression of marginalised groups keeps feminisms at the forefront of public discourses. If I was interested now in an event that happened in Edinburgh almost fifty years ago, who knows who would be interested in our festival in the future?

I wanted to question what I had learnt from my research in EIFF's archive and how I would apply this to documenting my own feminist film festival for the future. As an archivist, I began to envision what the ideal festival archive would look like and which compromises would have to be made. This ideal archive follows the principles of completeness, transparency and accountability. It would contain everything an outsider would require to make sense of the organisation and its events, to reconstruct its development and to understand its context and legacy. It would be fully accessible in a



physical archive on site, but also online from a distance. Every item in the archive would be catalogued, described with keywords and cross-referenced with relevant materials. The archive would contain complete records of all conversations with regards to the festival – email correspondence regarding film requests, partnerships or sponsorship enquiries and venue coordination; and minutes from internal and external meetings, documenting decision-making processes and arguments for or against different options. It would hold lists of requested and selected films including contact information, information about events' running orders, including last-minute changes and handouts; documents outlining the ethos and objectives of the organisation, including drafts with comments and different edits to trace discussions and changes. It would involve a complete catalogue of films that were considered, requested and screened, and documents to illustrate a transparent curation process, which includes written statements about why certain films were chosen, while others were omitted. There would be policies regarding, among others, curation, equality and diversity, safe spaces and audience participation, including dated versions of these after updates. In the archive catalogue, it would be traceable, who added what to the archive, and the collection would include bios of anyone who has contributed to it over the years. Staff members and volunteers would be invited to create reports about their personal experience with the festival, audience feedback would be kept and press clippings would illustrate the public reception of the events. Apart from documents concerning the actual festival, the archive would also contain a collection of related materials, such as flyers and programmes from related events or information about relevant social, cultural or political contexts. As such, issues I encountered with the archival material covering the Women's Event, such as the absence of the archivist, the gaps in documentation and the contradictory narratives contained in the archive without context, could be avoided.

Many of these measures, such as collating staff reports and press clippings or creating policy documents, are widely established among many film festivals I have researched or worked with in the past. However, as suggested by its name, this ideal festival archive also faces a number of internal and external obstacles – it is an ideal after all, and in order to become realistic, compromises have to be made. In working around these obstacles and finding solutions, the realistic archive becomes an approximation to the ideal archive. Some of the challenges festivals face today have changed very little since, for example, the early days of women's film festivals in the 1970s. Resources are often limited, which means that there is no dedicated space for archive materials, and paid staff hours are too limited to cope with the workload of archiving continuously. Other obstacles, such as the

life span of formats (i.e. video tapes, audio files, software programmes etc.), have increased in intensity in the digital age. Editing processes, for example of grant applications or policy documents get lost in the digital world, as changes are made in the original digital documents, edited formulations overwriting initial drafts. Michelle Moravec argues that digitisation can even 're-inscribe marginalisation', particularly when the archivists choose to forego digitising certain documents in favour of others (Moravec, 2017, p. 187). Furthermore, the majority of films nowadays are submitted to festivals as password-protected digital uploads, which expire after a set time. How long they are available online is determined by the right holders - the festivals have no way of archiving these films for the future.

From the beginning, Femspectives has been determined to archive its activities as thoroughly as possible; however, the challenges outlined above also affect our festival. Femspectives started in 2018 as a passion project and is in the process of applying for start-up funding to cover costs. In its first year though, there has been a lack of resources, which could have been directed towards archiving activities such as film screenings, internal meetings, drafts of funding applications and meetings with external advisors or funding institutions. One challenge is the availability of human resources. Since both directors of Femspectives have other economically motivated obligations, they cannot prioritise the unpaid labour that would go into meticulously documenting and archiving their organisation's activities. Notes from meetings cannot always be typed up and archived electronically and collated materials cannot always be immediately catalogued and tagged. However, handwritten notes and other materials from internal and external meetings are kept and dated as thoroughly as possible with the goal, that they can be catalogued, transcribed, digitised and archived at a later point, when start-up funding has been successfully achieved. The lack of space to store documents, both physically and digitally, is another issue Femspectives faces in its effort to archive its development. Femspectives does not currently inhabit a set office space and does thus not have a dedicated archive area. Instead, physical materials, such as administrative documents, feedback forms from events and other documents are stored in the private homes of the organisation's directors. In addition to what the directors can collect by attending relevant events themselves, Femspectives accepts external material donations, such as event flyers, festival brochures, programme notes and handouts, in order to archive documents that are useful to position the organisation in a wider cultural context. Similar to physical documents, all digital files regarding the festival are kept on the personal computers and hard drives of the directors

rather than being stored on a dedicated server. As a compromise, Femspectives takes advantage of the digital space and technology it has access to wherever possible. In order to keep a structured overview of the existing documents in relation to the festival, all files are stored on a shared Google Drive, to which both directors have equal access. It contains scans of administrative documents and audience feedback forms, draft and final versions of funding applications, income and expenses receipts, key visuals and a photo archive, among others. Since both directors have access to the drive, it is easily traceable who uploaded files and who made changes. The organisation is collating meticulous spreadsheets including film requests and screener links, relevant external contacts for the festival and budget overviews. A shared email inbox is thoroughly structured to make sure all correspondence regarding the organisation, its events and partnerships are documented and reproducible. The current archive of Femspectives is a work in process and approximating the realistic archiving process to the ideal archive outlined above is a learning curve. The goal is that over the years the collection will not only grow, but also to fill its gaps and create a more thorough archive of the organisation and its activities for the future. Femspectives aims to avoid the lack of documentation that has posed such a challenge in researching the Women's Event at EIFF72. As a festival producer, I draw strength and inspiration from my engagement with the historical event and strive to find solution for my own activism in the present.

## 6.4 Conclusion

Using White's concept of the 'archive for the future' as a starting point, this chapter has illustrated what such an archive of a women's film festival could look like. Based on the archive of the Women's Event at EIFF72 and the author's own experience of documenting a feminist film festival that was inspired and informed by her engagement with this archive, it has outlined the connection between an event in the past, an event in the present and its archival future. Considering Dayan, Stringer and Zielinski's arguments for the significance of ephemeral material and documents, I have provided an account of the sources available covering the Women's Event, but also laid out my challenging journey of engaging with these materials. The archive of the Women's Event, though, is more than the sum of the documents assembled in boxes and shelves. Utilising Compton, Barragán Goetz and Wallin's understandings of the archivist's role, I have addressed the absence of authorship of this particular archive and argued for the continuous requirement of care and engagement with the archival material. Finally, employing Perrier and Withers, Dall'Asta

and Gaines, and Eichhorn's theories of feminist pedagogy and archival labour, gave me the opportunity to challenge the idea of the archive as a thing of the past. As such, the archive is not only testament of a historical event; it is also a source of knowledge and inspiration for other similar archives and thus, can have a significant impact on the present and future. My experiences as co-director and archivist of Femspectives illustrate this process of learning and drawing inspiration for the future from the past. The 'archive for the future' is thus an ever-evolving entity and with every renewed dialogue between the present and the past, new layers of information can be gathered and added. Future generations will be able to create new knowledge and make sense of the past by overcoming their assumed knowledge and engaging with the archive. They will also be able to draw strength and inspiration from the archive, in order to envision and create new archives for the future themselves. I hope that the detailed description of my engagement with the Women's Event will contribute to this process.

## Conclusion

Women's film festivals were first established in the 1970s and have flourished as a festival category ever since. Yet, scholarly research engaging with this phenomenon has been limited and it is here, that this research project provides a significant intervention. *On Women's Film Festivals* has mapped the field of Women's Film Festival Studies and investigated these festivals from four key perspectives to produce new knowledge about their history, their position on film festival circuits, their relationships with feminist theories and their archiving processes. The thesis has examined four women's film festivals with varying focusses and strategies; the Dortmund | Cologne International Women's Film Festival, London Feminist Film Festival, Underwire Festival and the Women's Event at the 1972 Edinburgh International Film Festival. In order to explore the potential of each case study to contribute towards knowledge production about women's film festivals, I based my research on Patricia White's understanding of cinefeminism and applied a mixed-method approach, which is inspired by feminist methodologies (Buikema & Smelik, 1995; Cudd & Andreasen, 2005; Eichhorn, 2013; Harding, 1993; Hill Collins, 1990; Perrier and Withers, 2016; White, 2006).

In this concluding chapter, I pull the findings of my case studies together to provide an argument for the wealth of knowledge about women's film festivals that has been revealed by this thesis. I firstly review the original contribution to the field that this study presents. I then summarise the key findings thematically, before I finally identify potential areas for future research and the practical implications of my work for film festivals.

## Original Contribution

The field of Film Festival Studies is a burgeoning academic research area, which is situated at the intersection of and draws from a variety of disciplines, such as Film Studies, Anthropology, Sociology, Business and Globalisation Studies. Within this field there has been a trend to broaden the area of study and focus more specifically on niche film festivals. Within this movement there has been some interest in women's film festivals (Armatage, 2009a; Barlow, 2003; Carocci, 2016; Dönmez-Colin, 2014; Huang, 2003; Loist, 2012; Maule, 2014; Rich, 1998; Quetting, 2007a). Much of this work has been concerned with individual festival case studies in relation to isolated issues, such as the history of the Women's Video Festival in New York (Barlow, 2003), the digital marketing

strategies of the Birds' Eye View in London (Maule, 2014) or an overview of women's film festivals in the Middle East (Dönmez-Colin, 2014). While B. Ruby Rich (1998) and others have considered women's film festivals as part of the feminist film movement, there remains a lack of studies that engage with the phenomenon of women's film festivals more broadly. Of the small number of studies on women's film festivals, the majority focuses on specific festivals without locating these events within the wider context of film festivals and the women's movement worldwide. This research provides the first multi-faceted investigation of women's film festivals to emerge from the field.

## **Methodological Intervention**

One of the specific aims of this research was to locate the study of women's film festivals at the intersection of Film Festival Studies, feminist theory and feminist film theory. As such, it is the first extended study that explores women's film festivals through a feminist theory lens. A mixed-method approach has enabled me to draw on a wealth of different sources and materials to outline a comprehensive map of Women's Film Festival Studies. The methods, I took advantage of, include literature review, participant observation, interviews and archival research.

While many other research projects in Film Festival Studies also combine a number of methods and approaches, few take their starting point explicitly in the lived experiences of the people involved with their object of study. One of the strengths of this thesis is that my research questions are grounded in a feminist epistemological understanding of knowledge production. Rooted in standpoint theory, the research questions of this study have been formulated following interviews with women's film festival practitioners and researchers, which allowed me to conduct research that was relevant to not only the academic field of Film Festival Studies, but also the practical area of women's film festivals. The four thematic enquiries covered by this thesis are framed by feminist theories. In Chapter 3, I connect the history of women's film festivals with that of the women's movements in North America and Europe. In Chapter 4, I situate these festivals among Julian Stringer (2001), Mark Peranson (2008) and Dina Iordanova's (2009) interpretations of the festival circuit and Johnston's proposal of women's cinema as counter-cinema (1973). In Chapter 5, I examine the relationship between women's film festivals and feminist theories, utilising Rosemarie Buikema and Anneke Smelik's non-chronological and non-essentialist categorisation of feminist theories (1995). Finally, in Chapter 6, I consider Monica

Dall'Asta and Jane Gaines (2015) and Kate Eichhorn's (2013) understanding of feminist archiving and history in order to design the ideal film festival archive. I propose that certain aspects of my research design are also suitable for the study of other kinds of film festivals, such as the philosophical considerations of Standpoint Theory that formed the basis of my research questions, or the feminist reading of history and archives presented in Chapter 6 of this thesis. As such, I hope that my methodological approach outlined in Chapter 2 will be a useful resource for researchers who work within Film Festival Studies and want to incorporate feminist methodologies in their research designs.

## Conceptual Intervention

Beyond this methodological intervention, this thesis also contributes knowledge to the fields of Film Festival Studies and feminist film theory. Within feminist film theory, this research builds on existing scholarship, which places women's film festivals within the feminist film movement (Rich, 1998; White, 2006). While much of the research of the movement is occupied with the representation of women on screen, film analysis, spectatorship and the study of outstanding individual women filmmakers (Columpar and Mayer, 2009; Gaines, 1988; Hollinger, 2012; Kaplan, 2000; Kuhn, 1982; Mayer, 2016; Mulvey, 1975; Thornham, 1999), this thesis has focussed on an underexplored aspect of the feminist film movement: feminist activism in the cinema space. Furthermore, it also offers a useful intervention into the more general discourse of cinefeminist activism and the role of film festivals for women filmmakers.

Within Film Festival Studies, this thesis examines women's film festivals as a category of specialised film festivals, and proposes to situate them within their own conceptual framework that considers its relations to women's movements, wider film festival circuits, feminist theories, history, and archive studies. In recent years, studies of specialised film festivals have increased covering identity-, genre- and nationality-based film festivals, such as LGTB+ film festivals (Zielinski, 2012ab; Loist, 2014; Dawson and Loist, 2018; Richards, 2016), activist and human rights film festivals (Iordanova and Torchin, 2012; Torchin, 2012, 2015; Tascón, 2015; Tascón & Wils, 2017), archival film festivals (Marlow-Mann, 2013), documentary film festivals (Vallejo, 2014, Vallejo and Winton, 2019a, 2019b [forthcoming]), or national film festival circuits, such as Australian (Stevens, 2016), African (Dovey, 2015) and Chinese film festivals (Berry and Robinson, 2017). This thesis presents the first dedicated study of this kind for women's film festivals.

In order to emphasise the conceptual contributions of this work to both fields, I will now address the thematic enquiries offered in this thesis.

## Findings

Each of the preceding four chapters is concerned with a different area of women's film festival studies and thus a different set of questions. Even though the thesis presents case studies of individual festivals, I compare my case-specific findings to trends and movements on the wider circuit of women's film festivals and to other examples of historic and contemporary women's film festivals. Despite the case study-centred approach of the study, this process allows me to draw conclusions regarding the wider network of women's film festivals. Through this process of analysis, comparison and synthesising shared concerns, the thesis is able to answer its deliberately broad research questions.

I now move on to review my findings thematically from chapter to chapter.

### Regarding the History of Women's Film Festivals

The underlying questions in this chapter were:

- When and where did women's film festivals develop and what characterised these events?
- How can women's film festivals be situated within film festival history and within the history of the political women's movement in North America and in Western Europe?
- What is the current state of women's film festivals?

In Chapter 3, I illustrate the context in which the history of women's film festivals must be embedded. Drawing on desk research (literature review and archival work), I outline the relevance of the wider development of film festivals at the time women's film festivals first emerged, and the significance of progress in the political women's movement for their establishment. This chapter offers the first attempt at collecting a comprehensive history of women's film festivals, which developed in North America and Europe since 1972, including accounts of the first festivals in New York, Edinburgh, Toronto, Chicago, Paris, and Berlin. It places these examples of early women's film festivals in their specific cultural and political context, drawing parallels between the women's movements in North America and Europe, but also highlighting significant differences between festivals and



between national movements. Contextualising so many of these early women's film festivals and synthesising the available information into one text is one of the core conceptual contributions of Chapter 3. Furthermore, it situates the rise of women's film festivals within the context of the political turnover of international film festivals in Europe, which resulted in new curation strategies and a re-structuring of many festivals' programme designs. This chapter also provides a quantitative overview of contemporary women's film festivals, and comments on the diversity of festivals that fall within this category.

## **Regarding the Position of Women's Film Festivals on the Film Festival Circuit**

The leading questions for this chapter were:

- What purposes do women's film festivals fulfil, for example for different participants or in contrast to international film festivals?
- How do women's film festivals relate to other film festivals, such as international film festivals competing for the same films or national film festivals competing for the same audiences?

In Chapter 4, I outline six purposes of women's film festivals, drawing on literature, archival material and interviews with festival practitioners. According to my research, women's film festivals are tools for raising visibility, re-writing film history, creating representation, establishing networks and engagement, providing education, and fostering feminist debates. Based on a case study conducted at the International Women's Film Festival in Dortmund, Germany, I offer an analysis of how these purposes reflect at the festival and inform its position on the wider film festival circuit. This was informed by participant observation at the festival in 2017, interviews with key staff and participants and an analysis of current and historical publicity materials and internal documents. A significant conceptual contribution of Chapter 4 is to consider the particular festival not only in relation to other women's film festivals, but across multiple festival circuits; national (German), international and specialised (women). Reflecting on three different understandings of the festival circuit (Stringer, 2001; Peranson, 2008; Iordanova, 2009) and Johnston's concept of counter-cinema (1973), this chapter also suggests that women's film festivals are both part of the hierarchical system of the circuit – as suggested by the former – and countering, in opposition to the circuit – as suggested by the latter.

## **Regarding Women's Film Festivals as Feminist Exhibition, Research and Community Platforms**

The questions underpinning this chapter were:

- Which feminist theories influence the discourses at contemporary women's film festivals?
- How does the multiplicity of feminisms play out at contemporary women's film festivals?
- How do contemporary and historical women's film festivals compare with regards to their feminist approaches?

In Chapter 5, I propose that all women's film festivals are infused by feminist theories, but this presence of feminist thought can become manifest in different ways. On the basis of a comparative case study of the London Feminist Film Festival and Underwire Festival, which both take place in London, this chapter examines how feminist ideologies and perspectives become manifest at women's film festivals. I attended both festivals in 2017, conducted participant observation and interviews with key festival staff, and analysed the festivals' publicity materials. One of the conceptual contributions of this chapter is that the feminist theory framework by Buikema and Smelik was applied in order to analyse the structure and content of the festivals – their programme and event structure, self-representation in publicity materials, locations, outreach strategies and contents of event introductions – rather than the contents of their programme itself, i.e. the films. Of course, the films contribute to the festivals' expressions of feminisms, but there are also many other ways the festivals embed feminist approaches. Furthermore, the chapter argues that various interpretations of feminist thought can be present at the same festival simultaneously. In fact, the findings suggest, that the strength of both case studies lies in their openness to the multiplicity of feminisms. Finally, this chapter draws parallels between the examined contemporary festivals and feminist perspectives, which were present at historical film festivals. Thus, the chapter illustrates that women's film festivals have always had a complex relationship with multiple feminist theories.

## **Regarding the Archiving of Women's Film Festivals**

The questions concerned in this chapter were:

- How have women's film festivals, particularly the Women's Event at EIFF72 been documented and archived, and why is it important to investigate these archives?
- What can be achieved from engaging with its archive and what can contemporary archive practitioners learn from this archival encounter?

In Chapter 6, I advance the exploration of the history of women's film festivals of Chapter 3 on the basis of a particular example, the Women's Event at EIFF72. Based on extensive archival research, interviews with key organisers and literature review, I re-construct the Women's Event including gaps of knowledge and conflicting pieces of information. Using a theoretical framework of feminist archiving, feminist history and feminist pedagogy, this chapter proposes that any renewed engagement with the archive of this event can produce new knowledge about it, while also informing contemporary practitioners at festivals and in archives. The description of my encounter with the archive is deliberately lengthy and documents how my research journey has revealed new knowledge about the event and informed my own practice as a festival producer. Thus, this chapter departs from the past of women's film festivals and lands in their present and future. On the basis of the author's own feminist film festival, *Femspectives*, the chapter proposes the ideal film festival archive and discusses which challenges and barriers this way of archiving faces in the realistic, capitalist context of contemporary cultural work.

## **Regarding the Future of Women's Film Festivals**

A core argument of this thesis is that the future of women's film festivals lies in their past. As such, all four chapters draw a connection between contemporary and historical women's film festivals. Chapter 3 links up the diversity of women's film festivals then and now, and locates some of the signifiers of difference, which are discussed later in Chapters 4 and 5, within the historical development of these events. Chapter 4 is seemingly occupied with a contemporary film festival. However, it draws significant conclusions on the position of the International Women's Film Festival in Dortmund from the examination of archival documents dating to its beginnings in 1986 and 1987. Chapter 5 traces the co-existence of different negotiations of feminist theories at contemporary festivals and argues that the multiplicity of feminisms that inform the two contemporary case studies, have also impacted historical women's film festivals since the 1970s. Finally, Chapter 6 provides the strongest illustration of the link between past, present and future. It draws a direct line from my engagement with the archive to my practice as a contemporary festival producer.

In all instances, the past informs the present, and in the case of Chapter 6 and the example of Femspectives, the past also forms the basis of the potential future of women's film festivals. By delving into the history of women's film festivals, what unites them with regards to their origins, but also what makes them unique in their significant local, social and political contexts, this thesis establishes an understanding of their development over time. By closely examining individual cases and comparing them with one another, we can start to comprehend what motivates these festivals and what purposes they serve in the past and in the present. Looking back enables us to grow as researchers and as practitioners. It highlights which strategies were successful at these festivals and which caused friction, and allows people involved with women's film festivals today to improve their work in the future. Based on these findings, practitioners can make informed decisions about moving their festivals forward, for example along the axis between industry-focussed and political/activist festivals. The same applies to further research into women's film festivals, which can benefit from this historical investigation by contextualising ongoing discourses and recurrences. Some potential research topics that build on or compliment the findings of this thesis are suggested in the next section.

Perhaps, a critic of such a comparative-historical approach would judge it for spending too much time analysing the past and not enough on taking radical actions in the present – looking backwards instead of moving forwards. However, this thesis – and thus the author who is also a practitioner – subscribes to Eichhorn's idea of passing on (feminist) political strength through intergenerational dialogue and exchange. After all, how can we know what is radical and new, if we don't know what generations of feminists have done before us? This understanding of knowledge production informed the way in which the research questions were formulated – taking the lived experiences of feminist researchers and practitioners who came before me as a starting point – and answered by applying feminist research methodologies. Our conversations formed the backbone of the feminist approach and framework applied in this thesis, but also the wider understanding of women's film festivals suggested in this research and my work as a festival organiser. True to this standpoint, this thesis answers questions about contemporary women's film festivals – what is their current state and position, how do they relate to and embed different feminist theories, how can they be archived – by contextualising them within the history of the festival genre.

The focus on the historical origins of women's film festivals in the 1970s reveals that the genre at its roots is connected to a revolutionary moment in history and the political women's movement. This illustrates that women's film festivals have emerged with a different central motivation than international film festivals. At their core, they were all feminist even if this was presented in different ways on the outside. They were providing spaces for marginalised communities of artists, industry members and audiences, and offered opportunities to gather for collective political, social and cultural action. This impacts our understanding of what a film festival can be in similar ways as other research on community- and purpose-driven film festivals, such as queer or human rights film festivals. Defining women's film festivals in relation to their history requires an expansion of FIAPF's terminology to incorporate this political element.<sup>60</sup>

Contemporary women's film festivals present themselves as feminist in varying stages, yet they all relate back to their shared origin in the women's movement. Their relationship with the feminist movement and feminist theories informs their position on the hierarchical film festival circuit. Oscillating between the political ideal of counter-culture and the necessity to conform to the rules of the film industry, the question arises how women's film festivals can find a balance to keep their political integrity in the face of economic pressure. A similar question has been raised in relation to queer film festivals (Richards, 2016) and would encourage further research. The hierarchy among film festivals and particularly among the international film festival circuit and the women's film festival circuit cannot be denied. It is informed by economic pressures, prioritisations of purpose and intentions, target audiences among other things. As a practitioner and co-organiser of Femspectives I experience this first hand. Our festival is a small fish in a big pond. As programmer I must be realistic about what platform the festival can offer to a film and whether a screening within our programme maximises or restricts the potential reach of the film. Additionally, we are embedded in a culturally rich local contexts and compete with other festivals in Glasgow and Scotland for films, resources, audiences and attention. The conversations with festival organisers throughout this thesis reflect these considerations with regards to positioning their festival on the circuit and within the feminist movement.

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<sup>60</sup> '[The screening of] films of the world [...] in front of audiences [...] taking place for a limited duration of time [...] in a prior defined city' (Fiapf.org [no date]).

Drawing on the case studies presented in this thesis, I suggest that women's film festivals oscillate along an axis between festivals focussed on economy and industry, and those focussed on politics and community. While this axis shows parallels to Peranson's model of business and audience festivals (2008), the significant difference is that even the most industry-oriented women's film festival has its roots in the political women's movement and strives for equality of opportunities. The strategies of different women's film festivals might differ, but the essential objective of gender parity underpin them all equally.

Positioning itself along this axis is a balancing act for every women's film festival. It might be possible to locate a festival closer to one side or the other but choosing one cannot exist without considering the other. Even a festival that tries to avoid being political, engages with feminist politics by virtue of highlighting women's work. Even an overtly activist festival is embedded in a wider capitalist cultural landscape in which money is needed to run a public event, funders want premieres and the industry demands certain features in order to participate. Different women's film festivals prioritise different nuances of this internal conflict and tackle issues from different angles and perspectives. The future of women's film festivals lies in doing so consciously and transparently within the context women's film festivals' shared origins.

## Further Research and Applications

As outlined in Chapter 2, the scope of this research project, in particular the selection of suitable case studies was limited by factors such as time, language skills, cultural barriers and financial constraints. Considering that this thesis provides the first lengthy study of women's film festivals in a wider theoretical context, there is great potential for further research in the area. For example, studies of other historical women's film festivals, such as the festivals in New York, Berlin or Paris, could provide a greater insight in differences and similarities between early women's film festivals. Furthermore, there are many women's film festivals, which have been mentioned in this thesis, for example in Washington or Philadelphia, and would benefit from an in-depth archival research project.

Another potential avenue for further research would be to shift regional focus and consider the history and/or contemporary case studies of women's film festivals in South America, Asia or Africa. This could involve a similar research design, but also the inclusion of distinct feminist theories emerging from these contexts, in relation to colonialism, national women's movements, religious interpretations of feminism (i.e. Islamic Feminism), or race

(i.e. Black Feminism). In Asia for example, there is an extensive number of women's film festivals, which are fostered and in part structured by the Asian Women's Film Festival Network (Lo, 2017).

Lastly, another potential area for research development would be the study of contemporary women's film festivals. Building on the relationship of women's and international film festivals discussed in Chapter 4, this could revolve around the differences between these two kinds of festivals and what they can offer women filmmakers. The study might trace the experiences of specific filmmakers who have exhibited at both kinds of festivals and create a qualitative analysis of how they benefit from their participation. It could also potentially turn its focus to sales agents and distribution companies and investigate how they create successful strategies considering the different festival circuits, and what role women's film festivals play in these strategies. Finally, potential studies might also examine how other women's film festivals document their events and achieve an approximation of the ideal archive proposed in this thesis.

Apart from opening up new research avenues within the field of Film Festival Studies and feminist film theory, the findings of this research project also have valuable implications for the wider film industry. The study could be used by film festivals to inform their outreach policies as well as their archiving practices, among others. It could impact their strategies of self-representation and the way they position themselves on various film festival circuits.

## Final Thoughts

Since the beginning of this research project, the public's attention has been inescapably drawn towards the gender inequality in the global film industries. On 5 October 2017, *The New York Times* published a story detailing decades of allegations of sexual harassment against Harvey Weinstein, co-founder and producer at Miramax (Kantor and Twohey, 2017). Among the women who came forward with allegations were Rose McGowan, Alyssa Milano and Ashley Judd, and others such as Gwyneth Paltrow, Angelina Jolie, Asia Argento and Uma Thurman joined them at a later point. The list of women who have been assaulted by Weinstein seems endless and the public outcry over the issue is still raging today. In another piece for *The New York Times* from June 2018, Jessica Bennett discusses the consequences of this critical moment in time. She quotes statistics about rates of sexual

harassment in the United States and worldwide, some as high as 81% among women and 43% for men (2018). ‘The personal is political’, was the slogan of the WLM in the 1970s. It encouraged women to speak up about issues that were previously considered private, such as their income, their sexuality, their partnerships and cases of domestic violence. Following McGowan’s interview and Weinstein’s public shunning in 2017, many more women and men have shared their stories of sexual assault in the entertainment industry. The hashtag #MeToo has been crucial in uniting these testimonies and provided a public platform (Frye, 2018; Zacharek, Dockterman and Sweetland Edwards, 2017).<sup>61</sup> Many more men were accused. Some, like Weinstein or Kevin Spacey, lost their jobs, partners and reputations, while others, like Louis C.K., regained them after a brief period of silence, and the vast majority, like Johnny Depp, Casey Affleck and Lars von Trier, were relatively unaffected by the allegations. They still get offered roles, they get nominated for awards and their films premiered at prestigious film festivals.

However, the atmosphere had changed. With #MeToo, it seems that the personal has become political once again and debates about patriarchal power relations and sexual assault stories are given a public forum. The movement has also spread beyond the entertainment industry and #MeToo has been used to draw attention to stories of power abuse in politics, sports, academia and many other public and professional areas (Anderson, 2018; Gregory, 2017; Lewis, 2018).

More allegations were not the only consequence of #MeToo. The movement also heralded actions. Bennett refers to the sprouting of collective campaigns and actions, from the Time’s Up organisation, which includes a legal defence fund, to the increased public awareness for “inclusion riders” following Frances McDormand’s acceptance speech at the Academy Awards 2018 (Buckley and Victor, 2018). The increased awareness for the issues women face in the film and entertainment industries has also caused an increase in engagement with the contributions of women to these industries, particularly digging up “lost” histories of the people who have been left out in the past. Research projects, such as the AHRC-funded *Calling the Shots: Women and Contemporary UK Film Culture* at the University of Southampton collects quantitative data on the representation of women in the

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<sup>61</sup> The phrase ‘Me Too’ was first used by American social activist Tarana Burke as early as 2006.



contemporary UK film industry.<sup>62</sup> Directors UK is considering the gender inequality among film directors in the UK in particular (Directors UK, 2016), while the BFI Filmography reveals how women and people of colour have been marginalised in the UK film industry since 1911 (BFI, 2018).

There has also been a number of new women's film and arts festivals. Some, like the Glasgow Feminist Arts Festival, were founded in direct response to the outcry of #MeToo. The festival challenges the narrative to turn from the alleged predators towards the work that women produce despite their marginalised position in the industry. Others, like the Furora Film Festival in Berlin, draw the attention to films produced by emerging talent in particular.<sup>63</sup> The author's festival, Femspectives, showcases films by women directors and emphasises the necessity for spaces in which feminist issues can be discussed and given a wider platform. Another new festival, the Remake – Frankfurt Women Film Days celebrated its first festival in November 2018. Organised by Karola Gramann, Heide Schlüpmann and Gaby Babic from Kinothek Asta Nielson in Frankfurt/Main, Germany, Remake is first and foremost an archival film festival. The majority of the programme consisted of repertory titles from 1914 onwards, but included also a few contemporary titles looking back at outstanding people, moments or organisations from the women's liberation movement, such as Liz Garbus' *What Happened, Miss Simone?* (2015), Nigel Cole's *Made in Dagenham* (2010) and Irene Lusztig's *Yours in Sisterhood* (2018). In 2018, the festival had three thematic key concerns: looking back at the achievements of the WLM, a retrospective of films by Recha Jungmann and the history of women's film festivals, with a focus on the Women's Event at EIFF72. I was invited to participate in a panel discussion with Laura Mulvey and Lynda Myles to talk about the 1972 event, but also about my research and the state of documentation of the event in the archive. Like this thesis, Remake represents a practical application of Eichhorn's archival turn. The festival looks simultaneously backwards and forwards, drawing strength from acknowledging the work the women's movement had done in the past and gaining ideas for potential activism

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<sup>62</sup> More information on *Calling the Shots* is available from <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/cswf/index.page> [Accessed on 3 December 2018].

<sup>63</sup> More information about these festivals is available from <http://www.glasgowfeministartsfestival.com/> and <https://www.facebook.com/furorafilmfestival/> [Accessed on 7 December 2018].

and research in the future. In the booklet accompanying the first Remake festival, Schlüpmann writes that:

the women's film festivals of yesteryear were underpinned by political and emancipatory considerations, and by a will to take action, an expectation that they carried over to filmmakers and everyone who worked with film and in cinemas. (Schlüpmann, 2018, p. 121)

This thesis draws attention to the value of the scholarly engagement with women's film festivals and highlights the urgent need for more research on historical and contemporary women's film festivals in order to inspire their future.

## Filmography

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*A Question of Silence (De stilte rond Christine M.)*. 1982. [Film]. Marleen Gorris. dir. Netherlands: Sigma Film Productions.

*A Woman's Place*. 1971. [Film] Sue Crockford. dir. UK: London Women's Film Group.

*A Wrinkle in Time*. 2018. [Film]. Ava Duvernay. dir. USA: Walt Disney Pictures; Whitaker Entertainment.

*Antonia: A Portrait of the Woman*. 1974. [Film]. Judy Colling. dir. USA.

*Ayiti Mon Amour*. 2016. [Film]. Guetty Felin. dir. Haiti, USA.

*Back to God's Country*. 1919. [Film]. Nell Shipman. dir. Canada: Canadian Photoplays Ltd.; Shipman-Curwood Company.

*Bessie*. 2015. [Film]. Dee Rees. dir. USA: HBO Films; Flavour Unit Entertainment; The Zanuck Company.

*Beyoncé: Lemonade*. 2016. [Music Video]. Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, Kahlil Joseph, Melina Matsoukas, Dikayl Rimmasch, Mark Romanek, Todd Tourso, Jonas Åkerlund. dirs. USA: Good Company; Parkwood Entertainment.

*Corniche Kennedy*. 2016. [Film]. Dominique Cabrera. dir. France: Everybody on the Deck; Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC) ; Canal+; Région Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur; Sacem.

*Daddy*. 1973. [Film]. Niki de Saint Phalle. dir. UK/France.

*Dance, Girl, Dance*. 1940. [Film]. Dorothy Arzner. dir. USA: RKO Radio Pictures.

*Das schwache Geschlecht muss stärker werden – Weibergeschichten.* 1969. [TV Film]. Helke Sander. dir. West Germany: Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR).

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*I Am Truly a Drop of Sun on Earth (Me Mzis Skivi Var Dedamicaze)*. 2017. [Film]. Elene Naveriani. dir. Switzerland/Georgia.

*Illusions*. 1982. [Short Film]. Julie Dash. dir. USA.

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*In Between (Bar Bahar)*. 2016. Maysaloun Hamoud. dir. Israel/France: Channel 10; DGB / deux beaux garçons; En Compagnie Des Lamas; Israel Film Council; Israel Lottery Council for Culture and Art; Yes.

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## Appendix A

### Table of Women's Film Festivals

#### Historical and Discontinued Women's Film Festivals Mentioned in this Thesis

*Birds' Eye View Film Festival*, London, United Kingdom, 2002 – 2015

*Feminale*, Cologne, Germany, 1984 – 2004

*femme totale*, Dortmund, Germany, 1987 – 2005

*Films by Women Festival*, Chicago (IL), USA, 1974

*First International Festival of Women's Film*, New York City, USA, 1972 & 1976

*First International Women's Film Seminar*, Berlin, Germany, 1973

*Musidora Festival*, Paris, France, 1974

*New York Women's Video Festival*, New York City, USA, 1972 – 1980

*The Women's Event*, Edinburgh International Film Festival, Edinburgh, United Kingdom, 1972

*Women and Film International Festival*, Toronto (ON), Canada, 1973

*Women by Women*, Paris, France, 1975

*Women's Film Days (Frauenfilmtage Schweiz)*, Switzerland (touring), 1989 – 2003

*Women's Film Festival*, Philadelphia (PA), USA, 1972

*Women's Film Festival*, Washington (DC), USA, 1973

## Current Women's Film Festivals Worldwide

Festivals mentioned in this thesis are marked **bold**.

### *Africa*

*Cairo International Women's Film Festival*, Egypt, since 2007

*Festival du Cinéma au féminin / Women's Film Festival*, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, since 2014

*Festival International du Film de Femmes de Salé*, Salé, Morocco, since 2006

*Films Femmes Afrique / Films Women Africa Festival*, Dakar, Senegal, since 2003

*International Images Film Festival for Women*, Harare, Zimbabwe, since 2002

*Journées de la femme africaine de l'image*, Ouagadougou & Banfora, Burkina Faso, since 2012

*Mama Afrika Film Festival*, Nairobi, Kenya, since 2018

*Mis Me Binga*, Yaounde, Cameroon, since 2010

*Mzansi Women Film Festival*, Johannesburg, South Africa, since 2014

*Ndiva Women's Film Festival*, Accra, Ghana, since 2014

*Tazama African Women Film Festival*, Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, since 2014

***Udada Film Festival*, Nairobi, Kenya, since 2014**

*Urusaro International Women Film Festival*, Kigali, Rwanda, since 2016

*Women of Color Arts and Film Festival*, Lagos, Nigeria, since 2005 (formerly in Atlanta (GA), USA)

*Women of the Sun Film Festival*, South Africa, since 2010

## **Asia**

*Asian Women's Film Festival*, Delhi, India, since 2005

*Film Festival for Women's Rights*, Seoul, South Korea, since 2006

*Filmmor International Women's Film Festival on Wheels*, Istanbul, Turkey, since 2003

*Flo Film Festival*, Mumbai, India, since 2016

*Flying Broom International Women's Film Festival*, Ankara, Turkey, since 1998

*International Women's Film Festival*, Herat, Afghanistan, since 2013

*International Women's Film Festival*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, since 2013

*International Women's Film Festival*, Seoul, South Korea, since 1997

*Jeju Women's Film Festival*, Jeju City, South Korea, since 1999

*KIN Women's International Film Festival*, Yerevan, Armenia, since 2011

*Mumbai Women's International Film Festival*, India, since 2013

*Reel Women*, Hong Kong, since 2013

*Scream Queen Filmfest*, Tokyo, Japan, since 2013

*Shashat Women's Film Festival*, Palestine, since 2004

*Women Make Waves Film Festival*, Taipei, Taiwan, since 1993

## **Europe**

*A Corto di Donne - Women's Short Film Festival*, Pozzuoli, Italy, since 2005

*Arab Women's Film Festival*, Den Haag, Netherlands, since 2011

***Berlin Feminist Film Week***, Germany, since 2014

*Berlin Lesbian Film Festival*, Germany, since 1998

***Bimovie***, Munich, Germany, since 1991

**Dortmund | Cologne International Women's Film Festival**, Germany, since 2006

*Elles Tournent - Dames Draaien Festival*, Brussels, Belgium, since 2009

*Feminista Film Festival*, London, United Kingdom, since 2018

***Femspectives – Glasgow Feminist Film Festival***, United Kingdom, since 2019

***Films de Femmes – Festival International de Films de Femmes de Créteil et du Val de Marne***, Creteil, France, since 1979

*Films, Femmes, Mediterranee*, Marseilles, France, since 2006

*FrauenFilmTage*, Vienna, Austria, since 2004

***FrauenWelten / Terre des Femmes Filmfest***, Tübingen, Germany, since 2001

***Freiburger Lesben Filmtage***, Freiburg, Germany, since 1990

***Furora Film Festival***, Berlin, Germany, 2018

*Heroines*, Paris, France, since 2012

*Ifema*, Malmö, Sweden, since 2006

*International Film Festival Assen*, Netherlands, since 1980

*International Women's Film Festival Barcelona*, Spain, since 1993



*Laboratorio Immagine Donna*, Florence, Italy, since 2007

*Ladybug Film Festival*, Gothenburg, Sweden, since 2009

*London Feminist Film Festival*, United Kingdom, since 2011

*Mostra Internacional de Films de Dones de Barcelona*, Spain, since 1993

*Olhares do Mediterrâneo – Cinema no Feminino*, Lisbon, Portugal, since 2014

*Paris International Lesbian & Feminist Film Festival*, France, since 1988

*Remake Women Film Days*, Frankfurt/Main, Germany, since 2018

*Sguardi Altrove Film Festival*, Milan, Italy, 2009

*Tricky Women Festival*, Vienna, Austria, since 2001

*Underwire Festival*, London, United Kingdom, since 2010

### **North America**

*African American Women in Cinema Film Festival*, New York City, USA, since 1998

*Another Experiment by Women Film Festival*, New York City, USA, since 2010

*Archer Film Festival*, Los Angeles (CA), USA, since 2012

*Artemis Women in Action Film Festival*, Los Angeles (CA), USA, since 2015

*Athena Film Festival*, New York City, USA, since 2010

*Ax Wound Film Festival*, Brattleboro (VT), USA, since 2015

*BAWIFM Shorts Showcase*, San Francisco (CA), USA, since 2009

*Bentonville Film Festival*, Bentonville (AR), USA, since 2015

*Bluestocking Film Series*, Portland (Maine), USA, since 2011

*Breakthroughs Film Festival*, Toronto (ON), Canada, since 2012

***Broad Humor***, Los Angeles (CA), USA, since 2015

*Brooklyn Girl Film Festival*, New York City, USA, since 2012

***California Women's Film Festival***, Los Angeles (CA), USA, since 2014

*Citizen Jane Film Festival*, Columbia (MO), USA, since 2008

*Davis Feminist Film Festival*, Davis (CA), USA, since 2005

*Etheria Film Night*, Los Angeles (CA), USA, since 2011

*Everett Film Festival*, Everett (WA), USA, since 1997

*Female Eye Film Festival*, Toronto (ON), Canada, since 2001

*Fusion Film Festival*, New York City, USA, since 2003

*High Falls Film Festival*, Rochester (NY), USA, since 2001

*International Black Women's Film Festival / Black Laurel*, San Francisco (CA), USA, since 2002

*LA Femme International Film Festival*, Los Angeles (CA), USA, since 2005

*Lady Filmmakers Film Festival*, Beverly Hills (CA), USA, since 2008

*Les Femmes Underground Film Festival*, Los Angeles (CA), USA, since 2016

*London Lesbian Film Festival*, London (ON), Canada, since 1992

*Los Angeles Women's International Film Festival*, Los Angeles (CA), USA, since 2009

*Loyola - NOLA Feminist Film Festival*, New Orleans (LA), USA, since 2015

*Lunafest*, USA (touring) , since 2000

*No Man's Land Film Festival*, Aspen (CO), USA, since 2013

*Portland Oregon Women's Film Festival – POWFest*, Portland (OR), USA, since 2008

*Post Alley Film Festival*, Seattle (WA), USA , since 2003

*Queer Women of Color Film Festival*, San Francisco (CA), USA, since 2000

*Reel Sisters*, New York City, USA, since 1997

*Rocky Mountain Women's Film Festival*, Colorado Springs (CO), USA, since 1988

*San Francisco International Women's Film Festival*, San Francisco (CA), USA, since 2004

*San Francisco UNSC-UN Women Film Festival*, San Francisco (CA), USA, since 2016

*Sick Chick's Film Festival* , Cary (NC), USA, since 2016

*St. John's International Women's Film Festival*, St John's (NL), Canada, since 1989

*Through Women's Eyes International Film Festival*, Sarasota (FL), USA, since 2000

*Vancouver Women in Film Festival*, Vancouver (BC), Canada, since 2005

*Womanimation!*, Providence (RI,) USA, since 2008

*Women In Film Chick Flicks Film Festival*, Dallas (TX), USA, since 2006

*Women of African Descent Film Festival*, New York City, USA, since 2001

*Women Texas Film Festival*, Dallas (TX), USA, since 2016

*Women's Film Festival / Women's Freedom Center Film Festival*, Brattleboro (VT), USA, since 1991

*Women's Independent Film Festival*, Los Angeles (CA), USA, since 2012

*Women's International Film & Arts Festival*, Miami (FL), USA, since 2005

*Women's International Film & Television Showcase*, Los Angeles (CA), USA, since 2008

*Women+Film Voices Film Festival*, Denver (CO), USA, since 2011

*Women and Fashion Film Festival & WEB fest*, New York City, USA & online, since 2013

### **Oceania**

*Girls On Film Festival*, Melbourne, Australia, since 2014

*Seen & Heard Film Festival Marrickville*, Sydney, Australia, since 2009

*Seen & Heard Film Festival Melbourne*, Melbourne, Australia, since 2009

*Stranger With My Face International Film Festival*, Tasmania, Australia, since 2012

*Women Media Arts and Film Festival*, Sydney, Australia, since 2014

*World of Women's Cinema – WOW Film Festival*, Sydney, Australia, since 1994

### **South & Central America**

*Femcine – Festival Internacional de Cine de Mujeres*, Santiago de Chile, Chile, since 2011

*Femina - International Women's Film Festival*, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, since 2007

*Muestra Internacional de Cine con Perspectiva de Género*, Mexico City, Mexico, since 2012

*Muestra Internacional de Mujeres en el Cine y la Television*, Mexico, since 2004

*Mujeres en Foco / International Film Festival for Gender Equality*, Buenos Aires, Argentina, since 2009

**Other**

*Women's Voices Now*, online, since 2010, <http://www.womensvoicesnow.org/>

*Directed by Women*, participatory viewing party, since 2015, <https://directedbywomen.com/>

## Appendix B

### Films of the Women's Event at EIFF72

#### Sources

Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a. *26th Edinburgh International Film Festival*. [Festival programme] National Library of Scotland, NLS printed & other collections, P.1a.3349, Edinburgh.

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Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972c. *Press release No 3*. [Press release] National Library of Scotland, Archives & Manuscript Collections, Box 25 Acc.11308/83, Edinburgh.

Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972d. *Programme overview*. [Document] National Library of Scotland, Archives & Manuscript Collections, Box 25 Acc.11308/81, Edinburgh.

Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972e. *Provisional programme overview*. [Document] National Library of Scotland, Archives & Manuscript Collections, Box 25 Acc.11308/81, Edinburgh.

Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f. 1972. *Various correspondence letters*. [Document] National Library of Scotland, Archives & Manuscript Collections, Box 25 Acc. 11308/83, Edinburgh.

Grigor, M. 1972. Response to reader comment by A.J.A. Malkiewicz. *The Scotsman*, 25 August. [Press clipping] National Library of Scotland, Archives & Manuscript Collections, Box 25 Acc.11308/82, Edinburgh.

Mulvey, L. 2016a. *Phone interview with K. Kamleitner*. 7 April, London/Glasgow.

Mulvey, L. 2016b. Women's Film Event films. [Document] In: *Email to Katharina Kamleitner*, 6 October.

## Films: Announced; Screening Status - Known or Uncertain

*A to B*. Unknown. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972d).

*A Woman's Place*. 1971. [Short Film]. Ellen Adams, Sue Crockford, Tony Wickert. dirs. UK: Liberation Films. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*At Land*. 1944. [Short Film]. Maya Deren. dir. USA. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*Black Pudding*. 1969/1971. [Short Film]. Nancy Edell. dir. UK: Bristol University Drama Department. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972d).

*Charlie Co*. Unknown. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972d).

*Coming Attractions*. 1970. [Film]. Beverly Grant Conrad. dir. USA. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*Dance, Girl, Dance*. 1940. [Film]. Dorothy Arzner. dir. USA: RKO Radio Pictures. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*Dirty Mary (La Fiancee du Pirate)*. 1969. [Film]. Nelly Kaplan. dir. France: Cythère Films; Paris Film. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*Fakenham Occupation*. 1972. [Short Film]. Susan Shapiro. dir. UK: London Women's Film Group. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*Faustine and the Beautiful Summer (Faustine et le bel été)*. 1972. [Film] Nina Companeez. dir. France: Marianne Productions; Parc Film; Union Générale Cinématographique (UGC); Universal Productions France. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*Four Square*. 1971. [Short Film]. Tony & Beverly Conrad. dirs. USA. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*Freedom*. 1970. [Short Film]. Yoko Ono. dir. USA. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972c).

*Fruit of Paradise (Ovoce stromu rajských jíme)*. 1970. [Film]. Very Chytilová. dir. Czechoslovakia/Belgium: Elisabeth Films; Filmové studio Barrandov. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*Girl in Uniform (Mädchen in Uniform)*. 1931. [Film]. Leontine Sagan. dir. Germany: Deutsche Film-Gemeinschaft. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*Go for It, Baby (Zur Sache Schätzchen; As: Come to the Point, Baby)*. 1968. [Film]. May Spils. dir. West Germany: Peter Schamoni Film. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*Hornsey Film*. 1970. [Short Film]. Patricia Holland. dir. UK: Lusia Films. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*In Six Easy Lessons (C'est la faute d'Adam)*. 1958. [Film]. Jacquie Raynal. dir. France: Socipex; Sonofilm. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972d).

*Lenin, You Rascal You (Lenin, din gavtyv! As: The Lenin Gang)*. 1972. [Film]. Kirsten Stenbaek. dir. Denmark: Panorama Film A/S. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*Near the Big Chakra*. 1971. [Short Film]. Anne Severson. dir. USA: Glide Methodist Church, San Francisco. (Grigor, 1972).

*Papa the Little Boats (Papa Les Petits Bateaux)*. 1971. [Film]. Nelly Kaplan. dir. France: Cythère Films. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*Paris 1900*. 1947. [Film]. Nicole Védres. dir. France. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).



*Peasant Women of Riazan (Baby ryazanskie)*. 1927. [Film]. Olga Preobrazhenskaya. dir. Soviet Union: Sovkino. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972b).

*Poor Maria! (Marja pieni! As: Little Marja)*. 1972. [Film]. Eija-Elina Bergholm. dir. Finland: Jörn Donner Productions. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*Reason over Passion*. 1969 [Film]. Joyce Wieland. dir. Canada. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*Take me back to Tooting*. 1971. [Film]. Corinna Gray. dir. UK. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972d).

*The Blue Light (Das Blaue Licht)*. 1932. [Film]. Leni Riefenstahl. dir. Germany: Leni Riefenstahl-Produktion. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*The Flicker*. 1965. [Short Film]. Tony Conrad. dir. USA. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*The Lady from Constantinople (Sziget a szárazföldön)*. 1969. [Film]. Judith Elek. dir. Hungary: MAFILM 4. Játékfilmstúdió. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*The Mad Dane (Den gale dansker; As: Le Danois Extravagant)*. 1969. [Film]. Kirsten Stenbaek. dir. Denmark: ASA Film. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*The Merry-Go-Round*. 1969. [Short Film]. Kirsten Stenbaek. dir. Denmark: Athena Film. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*The Nun's Kiss (Nonnekysset)*. 1968. [Short Film]. Kirsten Stenbaek. dir. Denmark: Athena Film A/S; Kirtfilmrådet. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972b).

*The Other Side of the Underneath*. 1972. [Film]. Jane Arden. dir. UK: Bond. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*The Smiling Madame Beudet*. 1923. [Film]. Germaine Dulac. dir. France: Colisée Films. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*The Tattooed Man*. 1969. [Film]. Storm de Hirsch. dir. USA. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a)

*The Triumph of the Will (Triumph des Willens)*. 1935. [Film]. Leni Riefenstahl. dir. Germany: Leni Riefenstahl-Produktion; Reichspropagandaleitung der NSDAP. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972b).

*The Woman's Film*. 1971. [Film]. Louise Alaimo, Judy Smith, Ellen Sorren. dirs. USA: San Francisco Newsreel Film Collective. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*Three Lives*. 1971. [Film]. Kate Millett. dir. USA: Women's Liberation Cinema Company. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*Twice Upon a Time (Deux Fois)*. 1968. [Film]. Jacquie Raynal. dir. France: Zanzibar Films. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972e).

*Wanda*. 1970. [Film]. Barbara Loden. dir. USA: Foundation for Filmmakers. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*Women against the Bill*. 1972. [Short Film]. Esther Ronay. dir. UK: A.C.T.T. Freeprop Films. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*Women, are you Satisfied with your Life?* 1969. [Short Film]. UK: Tufnell Women's Liberation Workshop. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

*Women Talking*. 1970. [Film]. Midge Mackenzie. dir. UK. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972a; Mulvey, 2016b).

## Films: Requested; Screening Status - Not Screened or Unknown

*Bitter Fruit (Fruits amers – Soledad)*. 1967. [Film]. Jacqueline Audry. dir. France, Italy, Yugoslavia: Avala Film; Prodi Cinematografica; Terra Film Produktion. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f).

*Bloodbath*. 1966. [Film]. Stephanie Rothman. dir. USA: Avala Film; Jack Hill Productions. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f).

*Bury me in my Boots*. Unknown. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f).

*Daisies*. 1966. [Film]. Vera Chytilová. dir. Czechoslovakia: Filmové studio Barrandov. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f).

*Hitch-Hike (Le petits matins; As: Girl on the Road)*. 1962. [Film]. Jacqueline Audry. dir. France: Les Films Metzger; Paris Elysées Films; Woog. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f).

*It's a Bikini World*. 1967. [Film]. Stephanie Rothman. dir. USA: Trans American Films. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f).

*Jemina, Girl of the Mountains (Jemina, fille des montagnes; As: Jeannina, fille des montagne)*. 1971. [Film]/ Ginette Gablot. dir. France: Moullet et Cie. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f).

*Le Collier de Ptyx*. 1972. [Cine-Novel]. Nelly Kaplan. dir./writer. France. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f).

*Lions Love (...and Lies)*. 1969. [Film]. Agnès Varda. dir. USA, France: Max L. Raab Productions. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f).

*Love under the crucifix (Ogin-sama)*. 1962. [Film]. Kinuyo Tanaka. dir. Japan: Ninjin Club. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f).

*Nausicaa*. 1970. [Film]. Agnès Varda. dir. France: Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision Française (ORTF). (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f).

*Pearls of the Deep (Perlicky na dne)*. 1965. [Film]. Vera Chytilová. dir. Czechoslovakia: Filmové studio Barrandov. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f).

*Saute ma ville*. 1970. [Short Film]. Chantal Akerman. dir. Belgium. (Mulvey, 2016a).

*School for Coquettes (L'école des cocottes)*. 1958. [Film]. Jacqueline Audry. dir. France: Productions Métropolitaines de Films. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f).

*The Basilisks (I basilischi)*. 1963. [Film]. Lina Wertmuller. dir. Italy: Galatea Film; 22 Dicembre. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f).

*The Connection*. 1961. [Film]. Shirley Clarke. dir. USA. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f).

*The Girls (Flickorna)*. 1968. [Film]. Mai Zetterling. dir. Sweden: Sandrews. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f).

*The Hitch-Hiker*. 1953. [Film]. Ida Lupino. dir. USA: RKO Radio Pictures; The Filmmakers. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f).

*The Last Stage (Ostatni etap)*. 1948. [Film]. Wanda Jakubowska. dir. Poland: P.P. Film Polski. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f).

*The Student Nurses*. 1970. [Film]. Stephanie Rothman. dir. USA : New World Pictures. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f).

*The Trouble with Angels*. 1966. [Film]. Ida Lupino. dir. USA: Columbia Pictures Corporation; William Frye Productions; Eaves Movie Ranch. (Edinburgh International Film Festival 1972f).

*The Velvet Vampire*. 1971. [Film]. Stephanie Rothman. dir. USA: New World Pictures.

## Appendix C

### Expert Interviews

In order to develop research questions rooted in the shared experiences of women with a deep knowledge of women's film festivals, I conducted a series of expert interviews. These interviews were semi-structured and open to develop according to the participants' expertise. As such, every interview was different and focussed on different aspects of the participants' experiences.

This is a list of questions I drew from during these interviews.

#### *Definitions and Distinctions*

How would you define a women's film festival? What does it need to have to be a women's film festival? What sets them apart from other film festivals?

What are your thoughts on the terminology and the use of the word 'women' and/or 'feminist' when describing these festivals?

Are women's film festival a radical concept?

#### *Perceptions, Relationships and Purposes*

How do women's film festivals relate to other film festivals, i.e. international film festivals, queer film festivals etc.?

In your opinion, what role and purpose do women's film festivals play in the diverse exhibition landscape available to filmmakers today?

In your experience, how do women filmmakers perceive women's film festivals? What are their concerns about participating, and/or their gains when they do?

Where to you see the role of women's film festivals in relation to the film industry?

Do you think women's film festivals are counter-culture? If so, who or what are they counter to?

How do conventional methods, such as competitions and awards, fit into the idea of women's film festivals as counter culture, which are also challenging the conventional film exhibition industry?

Who are women's film festivals for? Who is included, who is excluded?

How can women's film festivals affect the public discourse around women filmmakers and women in the film industry?

What are the aims of women's film festivals? Do you think women's film festivals work towards their own redundancy? What hinders them from achieving their goals?

What are your thoughts on festivals as value adding processes? What values do women's film festivals add? What impact does that have on the cultural and economic hierarchy of film festivals?

In your opinion and experience, how to production, distribution and exhibition relate in terms of working towards equality in the film industry? Is there one aspect that has to change first? How do women's film festivals impact film production?

### ***Then and now***

How were early women's film festivals embedded in the existing landscapes of film exhibition and festivals (if at all)?

Comparing women's film festivals in the 70s and 80s, and women's film festivals now, what do you think are the biggest differences and similarities?

What role does feminist activism play for organisers of women's film festivals (historic and contemporary)?

What is the role of archiving for women's film festivals and the wider women's film movement?

What are the biggest challenges women's film festivals are facing at the moment?

Are women's film festivals still the public face of feminism?

Synthesising the data gathered through these interviews informed not only the formulation of my research questions, but also later interviews with filmmakers and festival organisers as part of the case studies. These conversations picked up elements identified in these early expert interviews but narrowed the scope to the specific festival considered in each chapter.