

Riding the Gay New Wave into New Queer Cinema:
Revealing the Contexts that Created a Movement

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Introduction

In 1991, Todd Haynes' feature debut, *Poison*, won the Grand Jury prize at the Sundance Film Festival. The following day, *The New York Times*' festival coverage announced that "Sundance Festival Honors Gay Film,"¹ a statement that was met with both excitement about, and trepidation towards, the acknowledgement of LGBTQ filmmaking. The formal recognition that the festival supplied to Haynes' film legitimized this transgressive, low-budget art film, which contains both explicit and implied queer elements. The film, however, was by no means universally applauded, and created divisive reactions in viewers. As Amy Dawes of *Variety* put it, the film was "loved and loathed... Its vociferous supporters extolled it as brilliant, while others considered it deplorable."² David Ansen of *Newsweek* likewise remarked that this "taboo-breaking work [was] defamed and acclaimed... 'Poison' doesn't go down easy, and it isn't meant to."³ In the aftereffects of the festival, and in part because *Poison* received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, the film became embroiled in controversy. Despite not having seen the film, Reverend Donald Wildmon and the American Family Association spearheaded conservative attacks against *Poison*, arguing that the film was government sponsored pornography. The denigration of the film, ironically, placed it in the spotlight, provided free publicity, and drew more attention than anyone connected with the film had expected it to receive. It was in this storm of controversy and wider attention for LGBTQ cinema that a queer film movement was born.

New Queer Cinema, as it came to be called, seemed to appear overnight. And indeed, the early 1990s provided crucial components that sparked the formation of a movement—

¹ Aljean Harmetz, "Sundance Festival Honors Gay Film," *The New York Times* (26 January 1991): 15-16.

² Amy Dawes, "Eclectic fare finds fans on Sundance Festival jury," *Variety* (4 February 1991): 10.

³ David Ansen, "'Poison' Doesn't Go Down Easy," *Newsweek* 117 (29 April 1991): 61.

recognition from a high-profile film festival, conservative backlashes and a political atmosphere that placed emphasis on queer art, the work of a renowned critic, and attention from well-funded, independent production and distribution companies. My research reveals, however, that New Queer Cinema did not appear out of nowhere, nor was it the result of a few key figures working apart from industry concerns. Rather, this dissertation argues that the phenomenon of New Queer Cinema was produced through a combination of these early 1990s influences and long-term developments in LGBTQ filmmaking. New Queer Cinema occurred as a result of a decade-long effort on the part of non-profit funding institutions, distributors, festivals, critics, and filmmakers to develop a well-defined audience and accessible market, distinct industrial opportunities, and effective language for framing the movement and its importance. By emphasizing previously under-explored figures and institutions, my history of New Queer Cinema provides a more complete explanation as to why the movement emerged when it did. Additionally, my work nuances our understanding of both the myriad forces influencing LGBTQ cinema in the 1980s and 1990s and the factors that shape the formation of film movements more generally.

Defining New Queer Cinema

The term New Queer Cinema was coined by critic B. Ruby Rich in a landmark 1992 article for *Sight and Sound*, in which Rich outlines and defines the attributes and distinctive qualities of New Queer Cinema.⁴ Rich discusses a noticeable trend in films shown at film festivals in 1991 and 1992, and called 1992 a “watershed year for independent gay and lesbian

⁴ B. Ruby Rich, “New Queer Cinema,” *Sight and Sound* vol 2 no 5 (September 1992): 30-34. She uses the phrase in an earlier article for the *Village Voice*, but the *Sight and Sound* version is more often cited as the origin of the name.

film and video.”⁵ Specifically, she noted the emergence of a group of films on the festival circuit that were:

United by a common style. Call it “Homo Pomo”: there are traces in all of them of appropriation and pastiche, irony, as well as a reworking of history with social constructivism very much in mind... These works are irreverent, energetic, alternately minimalist and excessive. Above all, they’re full of pleasure. They’re here, they’re queer, get hip to them.⁶

This often-quoted passage has become the accepted definition of New Queer Cinema (NQC), and has heavily influenced the way future critics and scholars have approached queer film. Rich called attention to key films, which include the canonical feature length films that constituted the most visible segment of the movement, as well as lesser-known short film and video works. The greater attention and distribution given to feature-length films led to NQC being broadly considered a feature film movement.

While often associated with American independent cinema, New Queer Cinema was a transnational, albeit anglophone, movement that included significant works from European and Canadian filmmakers. In discussions of NQC, the core films typically evoked are *Paris is Burning* (Jennie Livingston, 1990, US),⁷ *Poison, Edward II* (Derek Jarman, 1991, UK), *My Own Private Idaho* (Gus Van Sant, 1991, US), *The Hours and Times* (Christopher Munch, 1991, US),⁸ *The Living End* (Gregg Araki, 1992, US), *Swoon* (Tom Kalin, 1992, US), *Zero Patience* (John Greyson, 1993, Canada), and *Go Fish* (Rose Troche, 1994, US). These films are strikingly different in many ways. How could one compare, for example, the colorful musical numbers and larger-than-life props of *Zero Patience* with the simple, stark black and white period aesthetics of

⁵ Rich, “New Queer Cinema,” 31-32.

⁶ Rich, “New Queer Cinema,” 31-32.

⁷ Although this is a documentary, it is generally considered in the canon of NQC because of its timing and subject matter (black and Hispanic drag queens and the New York ball culture). While I do not examine documentaries in detail in this dissertation, it is necessary to include this important film, as it is considered a foundational NQC text.

⁸ The length of this film puts it in between a feature and a short, but it is generally considered with feature length films, and so I have included it here.

The Hours and Times, or the contemporary setting, location shooting, and punk aesthetic of *The Living End* with the highly artificial, stagey atmosphere and Elizabethan dialogue of *Edward II*? While these films do not fit into a single, uniform aesthetic mold, they do share an attitude or perspective, as Rich states in the above quotation. This attitude—a confrontational, transgressive celebration of difference from the heteronormative mainstream—is linked intricately with the sense of these films as “queer.” These films came out of a certain historical moment, following a decade of anger connected with the AIDS crisis and alongside a wave of radical activism that drew widespread attention to LGBTQ communities.

The use of the term “queer” connects with a contemporary shift in identity politics. The term is highly contentious, with a range of possible meanings. Some people use queer in reference to identity, defined as a collection of innate, non-heterosexual identities, so that queer becomes a shorthand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. Others use queer as a radical call celebrating outsider status and marking a difference from assimilationist “gays and lesbians.” There is considerable flexibility within identifying films as queer (an author can be queer, a text can be queer, and/or an audience can “queer” a text or an author).⁹ It is entirely possible that a filmmaker who identifies as queer might make films that are heteronormative in structure,¹⁰ while it is also possible for straight-identifying filmmakers to create works that can be read as queer or have queer followings.¹¹

“Queer” can also be a rhetorical tool used by critics to position films in particular ways. Embracing this term contributed to a larger effort to support and promote films that explore non-

⁹ Alexander Doty, “Whose Text is it Anyway?” in *Queer Cinema, The Film Reader*. Ed by Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 23.

¹⁰ Doty suggests that even George Cukor and Dorothy Arzner (who have both been considered queer auteurs in large part because of their homosexuality) could be seen as “closeted homosexual collaborators who helped perpetuate a heterocentrist industry catering to the desires of a queer-oppressive society.” (Doty, “Whose Text,” 20.)

¹¹ As examples, Doty lists Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks, and Jacques Rivette, among others. (Doty, “Whose Text,” 23.)

normative sexualities. Reclaiming a derisive term, and shifting it into an aesthetic rallying cry, connected with a strand of political and cultural fervor of the early 1990s. The wider recognition and application of the term “queer” gave fairly experimental, esoteric art films political heft and connected them to the more radical re-forming of the gay civil rights movement. With these definitions in mind, I consider queer to mean non-heterosexual identities and aesthetic practices that offer resistance to or critiques of heteronormativity. Within this dissertation, I use “queer,” as opposed to the broader “LGBTQ,” when referring specifically to films or filmmakers who either explicitly self-identify with queerness or are discussed in critical contexts through the use of the label “queer.”

While Rich herself declared New Queer Cinema over by the end of the nineties, reassessing it as more of a “moment” than a “movement,”¹² the term has had extraordinary staying power in discussions of LGBTQ cinema in the 1990s and beyond. When LGBTQ films draw increased attention, people typically label them in relation to NQC, with terms such as the “New New Queer Cinema,”¹³ or “New Queer Cinema 2.0.”¹⁴ This movement was an essential touchstone in the history of queer cinema and a catalyst for future filmmaking. This dissertation argues that understanding this important movement requires a consideration of its origins—those factors that were crucial in its development. Examining these factors demonstrates how film movements form and explains why a queer film movement emerged at this particular moment. This investigation also explores why NQC had the impact that it did and charts the effect this movement had in the evolution of LGBTQ filmmaking.

¹² B. Ruby Rich, “Queer and Present Danger,” *Sight and Sound* (March 2000): 22.

¹³ Adam B. Vary, “Here Comes the *new* New Queer Cinema,” *The Advocate* (26 April 2005): 40-51.

¹⁴ Rebecca Beirne, “New Queer Cinema 2.0? Lesbian-focused Films and the Internet,” *Screen* 55(1) (Spring 2014): 129-138.

New Queer Cinema as Activist Cinema

During the 1980s, LGBTQ avant-garde film and art grew substantially, and became particularly vibrant, partly in response to the AIDS epidemic. The health crisis helped bring together the realms of activism and artistic expression in the works of, for example, David Wojnarowicz and the Gran Fury Collective. AIDS activism provides an important lens through which to view NQC and is thought by many to be the central explanation for the movement's formation. Indeed, the importance of AIDS activism has dominated discussions of NQC.

José Arroyo asserts that “AIDS has affected what amounts to an epistemic shift in gay culture... AIDS is why there is New Queer Cinema and it is what New Queer Cinema is about.”¹⁵ Monica Pearl agrees with this sentiment when she writes, “New Queer Cinema *is* AIDS cinema: not only because the films... emerge out of the time of and the preoccupations with AIDS, but because their narratives and also their formal discontinuities and disruptions, are AIDS-related.”¹⁶ Kylo-Patrick Hart likewise suggests that “the frustration, nihilism, and violence evident in so many works of the NQC not only resulted from the existence and realities of the AIDS crisis, but they also further influenced the conditions and trajectory of the AIDS crisis as it progressed into its second decade.”¹⁷ Filmmakers connected to each other through their involvement with AIDS activist groups, and the visible links between AIDS activism and NQC was promulgated by filmmakers. Gregg Araki noted that *The Living End* was a product of anger and reflected the frustration of a generation fed up with institutional mishandling of the AIDS

¹⁵ José Arroyo, “Death, Desire and Identity: The Political Unconscious of ‘New Queer Cinema.’” in Joseph Bristow and Angelia Wilson eds *Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Politics*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993): 92.

¹⁶ Monica Pearl, “AIDS and New Queer Cinema,” in Michele Aaron ed *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004): 23.

¹⁷ Kylo-Patrick R. Hart, *Images for a Generation Doomed: The Films and Career of Gregg Araki* (New York: Lexington Books, 2010): 9.

crisis and rampant homophobia.¹⁸ He considered the film's production to be a "cathartic experience,"¹⁹ allowing him to find an outlet for his anger.

There is no doubt that AIDS activism served as political and aesthetic inspiration for NQC filmmakers. I argue, however, that there were more proximate causes within the independent film industry that account for the emergence of this movement. NQC drew from queer activism, but the formation of a recognizable movement was more heavily influenced by institutional structures and commercial considerations. Ignoring these less visible developments and concerns creates a distorted and incomplete account of NQC's origins.

Creating a Movement

Corresponding with the arguments that NQC occurred as a result of activist impulses, at the core of Rich's depiction of NQC is the vision of Romantic artists creating a movement. She explicitly writes that her book on NQC "aims to revive a time when a tiny band, flush with passion and filled with a mission... seduced an audience and eventually an industry."²⁰ Film movements, however, do not emerge in a vacuum, nor are they the isolated products of a few charismatic directors. The creation of a film movement requires a confluence of factors. These include the production and distribution of a substantial number of films that can be linked together in formal or contextual ways, enough people interested in viewing and supporting these films, and a cultural/critical atmosphere that can create cohesion between films and perpetuate the visibility of a unified movement.

Although major film movements like the French New Wave came out of significantly different social and industrial situations than New Queer Cinema, scholarship on the

¹⁸ Gregg Araki, Interview. "Sundance 2008 Q&A" *The Living End* DVD special feature.

¹⁹ Gregg Araki, "Gregg Araki: Lawrence Chua interviews Gregg Araki," *BOMB* 41 (Fall, 1992): 26.

²⁰ Rich, *New Queer Cinema*, xxvii.

development of other film movements can suggest ways to think about the origins of NQC. Richard Neupert's work on the origins of the French New Wave in his book *A History of the French New Wave Cinema* is particularly useful. While many discussions of the New Wave focus on the goals of individual directors and traits of specific films, Neupert summarizes the movement as "a complex network of historical forces... The New Wave era is just that, a time period during which social, technological, economic, and cinematic factors helped generate one of the most intensely creative moments in film history."²¹ His work highlights the industrial circumstances that led to the production of a large number of films by first time filmmakers, technological innovations that allowed for inexpensive film production, and the cultural and critical contexts of 1950s France. Critical institutions, including journals and cine-clubs, helped prompt discussions that brought attention to small films. The New Wave as a movement was generated not only by the films and filmmakers themselves, but as much by "the conditions that fostered and rewarded these unusual productions."²² Neupert provides a model for approaching the formation of a film movement, one that looks at factors outside of text-based studies of films themselves, and his areas of inquiry closely resemble those I have suggested above. While Neupert does discuss film texts, his arguments are grounded in their production and reception contexts.

The relatively sparse scholarship on New Queer Cinema faces some of the same challenges as studies of the French New Wave. The majority of critical and scholarly work on NQC focuses on auteur studies of individual filmmakers as opposed to examinations of larger industry and cultural contexts. Examples of this work include books such as *Contemporary Film*

²¹ Richard Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*, (University of Wisconsin Press: Madison, 2007), xvii.

²² Neupert, 3.

Directors: Todd Haynes (Rob White), *Gus Van Sant: His Own Private Cinema* (Vincent LoBrutto), and *Images for a Generation Doomed: The Films and Career of Gregg Araki* (Kylo-Patrick R. Hart). These projects by definition restrict their scope to the work of a single filmmaker. As such, they do not pull together broader contextual information and draw conclusions about the origins and development of the queer cinema movement. This is also the case for most books written about a single film, either as an ancillary product published by the filmmaker (often in the form of an annotated script) or a scholarly monograph that thoroughly analyzes a particular film. Justin Wyatt's addition to the *Cinetek* series, *Poison*, is a notable exception. While he does parse Todd Haynes' *Poison* in a detailed description and formal analysis, part of the book is devoted to the film's reception and the controversy it generated. Wyatt's discussion of the film's interactions with different institutions provides an exemplary model for connecting individual film texts with larger industry histories.

The study of queer film history in general is still a relatively under-explored topic. The majority of scholarship on LGBTQ cinema is based on theoretical modes of inquiry and the analysis of film texts. While I, like Neupert, do not wish to downplay the importance of specific films and textual analyses in general, there has been significant work already completed on formal and thematic aspects of NQC films, as well as auteurist discussions of key filmmakers. These discussions do not account for the factors that allowed these films to find funding, distribution, audiences, and critical praise, nor do they look closely enough at the LGBTQ predecessors found in American independent film. It was only through key predecessors, which contributed to building a base of support for LGBTQ filmmaking, that NQC filmmakers were able to produce and distribute their work, reach a wider audience, and become part of a recognized film movement. My dissertation identifies and analyzes the institutional factors that

led to NQC, namely how industry developments, audience formation, and critical discourses (in mainstream, niche, and scholarly publications) created the circumstances for the formation of a queer cinema movement.

Studying LGBTQ Films

The earliest trend in the study of gay and lesbian cinema was the examination of representations or “images of” gay men and lesbians in film. This groundbreaking work was heavily influenced by the writings of Richard Dyer and Vito Russo in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Although the terminology changed in the early 1990s to that of “queer” rather than gay and lesbian, and later work placed a greater emphasis on theory rather than criticisms of gay stereotypes, the basic premise of studying film texts themselves has continued to be the prominent form of queer film scholarship. Very few book-length works take on questions of historical context in a sustained way, and still fewer discuss industrial contexts.

Perhaps the single most influential book in the formation of LGBTQ film studies was Vito Russo’s *The Celluloid Closet* (1981, 1987). In it, Russo comprehensively catalogs filmic representations of gay and lesbian characters. The central arguments of *The Celluloid Closet* are twofold: that gays and lesbians have existed in films since the medium’s inception, and that Hollywood has consistently created demeaning and negative portrayals of gays and lesbians. In an effort to inspire change in filmmaking practices, Russo seeks to make gay and lesbian characters visible, first of all, and to make people aware of the negative and problematic way these characters are treated. Russo’s work was the first attempt to write a history of gay and lesbian film. While he occasionally brings in information about a film’s reception or production, Russo prioritizes textual analysis over contextual information. Russo’s work played an essential part in creating the study of LGBTQ film.

The growth of queer theory caused a shift in the critical approach to LGBTQ cinema in the late 1980s/early 1990s. Perhaps the most prominent addition to the canon of LGBTQ film studies was Alexander Doty's work, particularly *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (1993) and *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon* (2000). Doty's work has a significant place in queer cultural studies, and exerted influence on the form of queer film studies. Despite the shift to the more open term "queer" as opposed to the terms "homosexual" or "gay and lesbian," one aspect of queer film studies remained remarkably consistent in the sense that it continued to place textual analysis of individual films at the center of their inquiry.

The tone and trends in academic discourses that began with "images of" analyses and moved into theoretical discussions of queerness influences how people have continued to approach the topic of queer film history. These theoretically and textually based queer interventions have helped legitimize the study of LGBTQ film in academia and provide important, fascinating readings of films and media texts. This dissertation does not discount the importance of this work, but answers different research questions. Specifically, my work examines the cultural and institutional factors that distinguished NQC from its gay and lesbian predecessors and enabled a more robust, visible, and influential phenomenon. This dissertation argues for the importance of studying industrial contexts. A film's production and distribution circumstances greatly influence modes of representation and the form of a film.

In addition to the general trajectory of queer film studies, there have been a few works that offer sustained examinations of contextual elements of LGBTQ filmmaking. One of the first books to deal substantially with broader historical contexts is Richard Dyer's *Now You See It* (1990, 2003), which takes snapshots of the cultural contexts surrounding the production of films that were made by and about gay men or lesbians. Dyer's discussions of historical moments

provide a model for examining the relevant cultural contexts that surround key films. The restriction to primarily cultural contexts, however, does not account for the importance of industrial contexts. In looking at films supported by the gay liberation movement, for example, Dyer focuses on how films reflected either assimilationist or liberationist tendencies of the movement. Assimilationist thinking assumes that the way for homosexuals to gain acceptance in the mainstream is to make differences between sexualities invisible. They emphasize sameness and underlying humanity. Liberationists shifted the focus onto affirmative, unique aspects of being homosexual and sought to celebrate this.²³ Liberationist films tended to be more confrontational and less “politically correct.”

Now You See It concludes prior to the 1980s, which Dyer considered too tangled and complicated a decade to discuss in a single chapter. Dyer’s reluctance to treat this subject in a limited space suggests the need for a longer, sustained look at the 1980s, something this dissertation provides. While a later revised edition includes a chapter on 1980-2000 written by Julianne Pidduck, the space allotted necessarily restricts the amount of detail she can include. She groups and defines significant trends in film form and content, but this span of time is so complex and formative for LGBTQ cinema that Pidduck’s analysis is not able to sufficiently examine the accompanying industrial developments.

The most thorough attempt to construct the history of LGBTQ cinema is Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin’s *Queer Images*, published in 2006. This book charts queer images from the silent era to the 2000s, covering a span similar to Russo’s book. The authors spend most of their time, however, looking at films made after the 1960s, since they are more concerned with explicitly queer images. The authors look not just at individual production circumstances but

²³ Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, (New York: New York University Press, 2003): 23.

also larger industry considerations. This book provides a wealth of information and is an excellent source for introducing readers to queer film history. The scope of the book, however, keeps the authors from delving deeply into any single moment in this history. Some of the complexity and nuance of historical influences are necessarily glossed over in an attempt to present a streamlined progression of queer filmmaking. The authors include a chapter on 1980s gay and lesbian independent film and one on AIDS filmmaking, but do not cover in detail the transition between 1980s films and those from the 1990s. In their chapter on AIDS filmmaking, Benschhoff and Griffin again suggest that AIDS cinema was the key causal factor that led to New Queer Cinema in the 1990s, a widely held opinion. The growth of grassroots political groups who helped fund and distribute AIDS films no doubt contributed to NQC both in terms of creating community awareness and providing aesthetic inspirations. There are, however, more proximate influences on the emergence of the movement. Due to the scale of their historical project, the authors cannot completely account for the myriad other elements that came together in the late 1980s and early 1990s to produce NQC.

There are two books written specifically about New Queer Cinema. One is a collection of essays edited by Michele Aaron, *New Queer Cinema* (2004), and the other is B. Ruby Rich's *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut* (2013). Aaron's book provides a thorough textual definition of NQC and contains essays that focus on film analyses, but it does not aim to produce a history of NQC as a film movement. Rich's book consists of a collection of her previously published articles as well as new material in the form of an introduction and a first chapter that lays out a brief overview of the precursors to and early formation of NQC. Rich breaks down the years of New Queer Cinema into two sections, an "embryonic" development phase from 1985-

1991, then the movement's "bursting into full view in 1992-97 with formidable force."²⁴ In her discussion of gay and lesbian filmmaking in the 1980s, she highlights a number of films that act as important precursors to NQC, looking particularly at *Born in Flames*, *Mala Noche*, *Parting Glances*, and *She Must be Seeing Things*. She also offers brief mentions of short-form works, documentaries, and foreign-produced, feature-length narratives. Rich's discussion of these films provides an introduction to their forms and subjects and focuses on how these films function as aesthetic precursors. Her work, however, does not fully develop the role these films played in demonstrating a market and shaping the industry from which future films emerged. My dissertation explains how these earlier films aided the growth of a queer cinema movement by influencing the industry and creating audiences.

Rich's depiction of NQC adopts the conception of Romantic artists working to create a movement. While the perspectives and individual talents of filmmakers have an enormous effect on their films, conceiving of these filmmakers as artists working apart from audiences and industries simplifies the complexities of the independent cinema industry structure and the support offered by established institutions. To take a single example, *Swoon* was funded by a large number of grants (including from the National Endowment for the Arts and the American Film Institute), and by completion financing provided from pre-selling the film's broadcast and theatrical release rights to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, through the PBS series *American Playhouse*, and Fine Line Features, respectively.²⁵ So although *Swoon* was shaped by an individual vision and produced to some extent outside of the regular channels of film production (close to half of the initial budget was supplied by Kalin himself), examining its

²⁴ B. Ruby Rich, *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013): xix.

²⁵ Christine Vachon, *A Killer Life: How an Independent Film Producer Survives Deals and Disasters in Hollywood and Beyond*, (New York: Limelight Editions, 2007): 57-58. And Christian Moerk, "American Playhouse Pix Up European Auds." *Variety* 348.5 (24 August 1992): 3, 5.

production contexts reveals the significant influence of larger industry structures.

Rich does briefly discuss contextual elements that contributed to the growth of queer cinema in the late 1980s. She attributes the appearance of NQC to the social movements sparked by the AIDS epidemic and Reagan's policies, changes in video technology, and the collaborative possibilities of the New York art world, a location that she sees as the center of queer filmmaking²⁶ (although, not all NQC filmmakers were based in New York). Key in Rich's depiction of the culture that facilitated the emergence of NQC is the notion of a community that inspires creative and boundary pushing work. This conception of community has several effects on queer cinema. The first, on which Rich focuses, is the creative impulses and artistic influences that this community fosters and recirculates. The NQC as a community is a productive concept, but as my research shows, the creation and identification of audiences and markets had an even greater impact on queer filmmaking. The development of an audience for LGBTQ cinema led the industry to produce and distribute first the conventional gay love stories of the mid-1980s and eventually the more experimental queer films of the early 1990s.

Rich's work provides an invaluable source that has been, justifiably, quoted or at least referenced in every discussion and publication that examines New Queer Cinema. She is able to speak from lived experience and provide insights into this moment as she reported on, for example, film festival trends and the reception of films. The benefits of being in the trenches of journalistic reporting, being present as events occurred and being able to comment on and help define the growth of a movement, butt up against the restrictions placed on critical writing in terms of word limits, impending deadlines, and catering to a broad audience. By building, in part, on accounts by people like Rich, who experienced the early years of NQC and are able to

²⁶ Rich, *New Queer Cinema*, xvi-xviii.

articulate the excitement and possibilities brought by the early nineties, my work constructs a deep and detailed history of the institutions that supported the growth of a queer film movement.

Industrial developments and the subsequent effects on filmmaking are discussed with greater frequency in the work of scholars who focus on American independent cinema. These works regularly make reference to queer cinema generally, or NQC in particular. Discussions of NQC in these works, however, tend to again break the movement into a canon of directors whose work is analyzed in order to explain NQC, explicitly or implicitly, as the result of efforts by key figures. One such source is Emanuel Levy's *Cinema of Outsiders*, which details the growth of independent cinema from the 1980s to the end of the 1990s. As the title implies, Levy sees independent cinema as one both about and driven by outsiders, and gay and lesbian filmmakers fit into this general categorization. Levy does offers useful observations on the growth of queer cinema in the 1990s. He cites the important role of critics who reported on gay and lesbian films, gay magazines, gay and lesbian film festivals, word of mouth marketing strategies, a visible gay presence in the industry, and the impact of AIDS.²⁷ His discussions, however, are only a brief piece of his larger project. After Levy lists the factors that contributed to the formation of NQC and provides a few lines of description for each, he does not return to this topic. Levy's work instead approaches films from an auteurist perspective, moving through key directors and focusing on their work as outsiders and artists and not as much on institutional developments.

A Call for Industrial Histories of Queer Film

This brief review of literature points out the dearth of scholarship that combines LGBTQ

²⁷ Emanuel Levy, *Cinema of Outsiders: The Rise of American Independent Film*, (New York: New York University Press, 1999): 460-462.

film studies with the study of industries and other contextual influences. Institutional contexts are crucial to consider because they have a direct impact on whether, and under what conditions, films are made, whether these films are accessible for viewing, and how an individual film is regarded in relation to other films. To provide a single example of how this method of inquiry can contribute to queer film studies, I will look at Gus Van Sant's 1985 film, *Mala Noche*. A close reading of *Mala Noche*'s formal and narrative elements can provide useful insights into, for example, Van Sant's aesthetic commitments and the way challenging subject matter can be presented in an artistically exciting manner. Without analysis of the film's production, distribution, and exhibition contexts, however, one cannot understand how the film emerged, its limited initial audience, and the modest impact it had on developing LGBTQ film trends.

Van Sant was unable to find backers for *Mala Noche*, and was forced to supply the entirety of the film's tiny \$25,000 budget himself.²⁸ The film was produced because Van Sant had the resources to devote to this passion project. Even though he worked to a large extent independently of traditional industry structures and with material to which he had a personal attachment, Van Sant decided to make the film based on his experience at film festivals and his knowledge of previously successful films. Van Sant has said about his decision to make *Mala Noche*:

I had seen some gay films in Hollywood before I left and had been to a gay festival in New York. I witnessed how basic the films were at those festivals, and how there was a large audience that came to see them but there wasn't really any product, not even in low-budget films. *Taxi Zum Klo* came out before I made *Mala Noche*, and I think it was really the first independent film about gay life that did well in the regular marketplace. It became quite a big hit in certain cities around the United States, even in Portland, attracting straight as well as gay audiences. I remember that being a cue that I could maybe film Walt's story [*Mala Noche*] and get my money back.²⁹

²⁸ Gus Van Sant, *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues & My Own Private Idaho*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1993): xix.

²⁹ Van Sant, *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*, xix.

Part of the impetus for making *Mala Noche* was a recognition of a growing market that was not being served adequately. Van Sant remarked that even if the film turned out to be a total disaster, it would still find a niche audience in the gay festival market. Although it would take almost 10 years for Van Sant to break even on this incredibly low budget passion project, producing the film was a calculated risk based on what he saw as increased potential in queer filmmaking. Institutional factors played a role in his decision to make the film. These important contexts are lost if one focuses entirely on the film itself, without taking into consideration its mode of production.

Mala Noche was a film ahead of its time. It was released during the mid-1980s, when the films receiving attention were more conventional, mimicking mainstream aesthetics and depicting non-threatening images of homosexuality. In form and content, *Mala Noche* closely connects with New Queer Cinema. The black and white, grainy, and rough cinematography, explicit references to and depictions of interracial desire and gay sex (including with underage boys), and the eschewing of “positive images” put this film very much in line with the sensibilities of NQC. If one looks only at this film’s textual attributes, it would seem to fit under the classification of NQC and link with the established canon. It is rarely associated with the movement, however, in part because of its earlier time of release but also because it did not get significant exposure.

Distributors of the time were hesitant to take on this risky, provocative film. They did not believe it would find a substantial audience, and therefore were hesitant to release the film until Van Sant’s work proved to have wider appeal. *Mala Noche* was successfully shown in festivals, but received only limited theatrical distribution through Respectable Films/The Other Cinema in 1987. While not catering exclusively to gay and lesbian film, The Other Cinema

tended to seek out “quality product that merits specialized handling... [They] programme both specialized and mainstream first-run films, marketing them through their individual strengths without marginalizing the more difficult product.”³⁰ A small distributor, willing to work with a difficult product, allowed *Mala Noche* to find a limited audience outside of film festivals. *Mala Noche* screened in New York and Los Angeles, although there is little evidence that it showed outside of major cities.³¹

When Van Sant’s next film, *Drugstore Cowboys* (1989), became a hit with crossover potential, *Mala Noche* experienced a modest second life, but it nevertheless remained a marginal film.³² After these scattered initial screenings and before its 2007 Criterion DVD release, *Mala Noche* was nearly impossible to see. This makes inclusion in a canon significantly more difficult, and suggests how a film’s distribution and exhibition circumstances heavily influence whether people can study a film and how it is connected, or not, to wider film movements. The fact that NQC films were produced and subsequently viewed and reviewed enough to draw attention to themselves is both the result of key institutional developments, from which *Mala Noche* came too early to benefit, and essential to these films’ impact. Industry histories deserve greater attention than has been afforded them in queer film scholarship.

Dissertation Contents

The first two chapters of this dissertation consider pockets of LGBTQ filmmaking that initially seemed promising as a harbinger for a broader movement, but did not ultimately result in a movement. I begin by briefly examining the rich history of LGBTQ filmmaking within

³⁰ Tony Kirkhope, “The Other side of the story,” *Screen International* 638, (6 February 1988): 28.

³¹ Vincent Canby, “‘Mala Noche’ on Skid Row,” *New York Times*, (4 May 1988): C20. And Peter Rainer, “‘Mala Noche’: First Flush of a Love for Film,” *Los Angeles Times* (1 December 1989): F6.

³² For example, after *Drugstore Cowboys*, *Mala* toured with AFI (“AFI Calendar,” *American Film* 15.6. (1 March 1990): 77)

global art cinema, particularly focusing on European contexts. Filmmakers such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Rosa von Praunheim experimented with aesthetic and political transgressions in their films, which could be retroactively labeled “queer.” Their work, however, was not connected to a broader sense of an LGBTQ film movement. This was due to a number of factors, most proximately the fact that in film festivals and critical contexts, LGBTQ art films prior to the late 1980s were subsumed under a broader “art cinema” label. These films were not connected to each other by virtue of their political priorities or queer sensibilities, but rather they were counted as part of other art cinema movements, such as New German Cinema.

In the early 1980s, Hollywood began experimenting with gay and lesbian themes, which resulted in eight gay and lesbian films that were released by major studios in the span of three years. This mainstream fad could be considered a “gay mini-cycle” of films, but not a full-fledged movement. The films’ conventional narratives, lukewarm box office reception, and complex relationship with gay and lesbian audiences, coupled with the rise of the AIDS epidemic, led studios to revert back to a decade-long avoidance of gay and lesbian themes. These first two chapters expand our understanding of the nature of movements by considering moments when a movement could have occurred but did not. These examinations clarify what factors are needed to create a movement by demonstrating how their absence prevents or delays the formation of a movement.

Chapters 3 through 6 argue why certain developments contributed to the growth of a queer cinema movement. In Chapter 3, I discuss the modes of production for gay and lesbian independent and art films during the 1980s and very early 1990s. The success or failure of certain films had a lasting impact on what material producers and distributors were willing to invest in. The expansion of the independent sector and corresponding increase in opportunities

for funding and distribution created space for more diverse films and subject matter. The 1980s saw the release of a number of gay and lesbian films, and in fact some critics remarked that 1986 seemed to be the start of a gay and lesbian film movement, a “gay new wave.” These films, however, failed to have the collective impact that would be achieved in the early 1990s by NQC. The growth of independent LGBTQ media production was made possible through institutional support structures such as the increase of independent production and distribution companies, non-profit grants, and television financing. These developments created a critical mass of LGBTQ films released in the early 1990s, providing a basis for a queer cinema movement.

In addition to a substantial number of films being produced, a movement requires people viewing the films. Chapters 4 and 5 examine the creation of audiences who supported LGBTQ films, both the identification and coalescence of a niche audience and the positioning of films for potential mainstream crossover markets. In order for companies to invest in films, there needs to be the potential for profit. The recognition of audiences is therefore crucial to the process of film production, distribution, and marketing. Chapter 4 considers the building of audiences through specific marketing campaigns and the formation of media watch organizations such as the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). Chapter 5 closely examines the role of gay and lesbian film festivals in audience formation and visibility, as well as the role festivals played as a distribution network for LGBTQ films. These festivals created a space for gay and lesbian audiences to come together, both developing a devoted fan base for LGBTQ films and making this market visible to investors and distributors.

The critical and scholarly landscape of the eighties and early nineties is the final piece in the puzzle, the glue that held together films and audiences in order to create a recognizable movement. In Chapter 6, I scrutinize material from the mainstream and gay press, film industry

trade publications, and archived papers in order to isolate significant patterns in the shifting discursive contexts surrounding LGBTQ films. The scholarly development of queer theory and the critical coverage of LGBTQ films, particularly the naming of New Queer Cinema, played a substantial role in creating the movement.

In the final chapter, I bring these three factors (mode of production, audiences, and critical discourse) together in an examination of the core New Queer Cinema films. The productions of films like *The Living End*, *Swoon*, and *Edward II* illustrate the continuity between independent gay and lesbian films of the 1980s and queer films of the early 1990s. These 1990s films relied on similar funding and production methods to those developed during the preceding decade. Earlier films provided exemplars and set precedents for later films. It was in the positioning of these later films in festivals and within marketing contexts, the increased interest from commercial companies, and the discourses around these films, in which NQC differed from earlier groups of LGBTQ films and formed a recognizable movement.

In order to construct a detailed, historical look at the way film industries and related institutions paved the way for a queer cinema movement, I examine a number of sources. These resources include books by and published interviews with those working in the industry, which can provide production histories for certain films. Producer John Pierson's *Spike Mike Slackers & Dykes*, for instance, includes details relating to the production of *Parting Glances* and *Go Fish*, for which he helped broker distribution deals. Producer Christine Vachon's two books, *Shooting to Kill* and *A Killer Life*, also provide insights into, and industry details about, films produced by her company, Killer Films. Killer films (and earlier iterations of the company) played an important role in the movement and produced several NQC films, including *Poison*, *Swoon*, and *Go Fish*. These and other (auto)biographical accounts do not offer a history in themselves, but

they are resources that can be used in constructing this history. Articles in popular press, trade press, and LGBTQ publications also provide a central resource, both in terms of the critical developments that helped form NQC and for gathering information on the details of production, distribution, box office revenues, and film festivals.

Wherever possible, I use archival sources, which include those located at the New York Public Library, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives at the University of Southern California, the University of Pittsburgh, the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, and Yale University. Most of the papers relating to NQC and 1980s gay and lesbian films have yet to be deposited in archives (if indeed they ever will). My research is therefore built around pulling together information sometimes tangentially related to the institutions under consideration.

Given the widespread recognition of the term New Queer Cinema and the influence this movement has had on LGBTQ filmmaking, many discussions of queer cinema highlight the early nineties as the moment of queer cinema's emergence. Scholars and critics writing after the beginning of NQC focus on films from the 1990s and after at the expense of earlier work, implying that these critically praised NQC films appeared in a vacuum. Those scholars who do mention films from the 1980s as precursors or artistic influences often look at earlier films as isolated objects without examining their institutional contexts and the influence they had on the wider industry.

While most gay and lesbian films from the 1980s follow mainstream film conventions and are not as formally exciting as the NQC films, they nevertheless played a crucial role in the development of LGBTQ cinema. In what follows, I examine how a queer cinema movement was created at a particular moment in the early nineties and not before. Gay and lesbian films in

the 1980s had to prove to hesitant producers and distributors that they could make a profit, since economics is often a driving force of film industries. These films were able to demonstrate a viable market, which in turn led to more films by and about gay men and lesbians finding funding and release deals. These precedents caused a snowball effect, with increasing numbers of LGBTQ films being produced. By deciphering the complex pre-history of NQC and providing a concrete, historical examination of the industrial and critical frameworks that created the conditions for this movement to form, we can better understand the prolonged impact of the movement and the evolution of LGBTQ filmmaking.

The fact that 1991-92 saw the release of enough LGBTQ films to constitute a visible movement is not accidental; these films did not appear out of nowhere. Their path to film festivals and theatrical releases was paved by earlier films and by specific trends in independent film financing, audience developments, and film criticism. To take a specific example, the 1994 lesbian film *Go Fish* received financial help and completion resources for two central reasons. One, the film filled a gap in the ongoing New Queer Cinema movement, and its accompanying critical discourse, by providing a formally inventive lesbian film to add to a group that was composed entirely of films by gay male directors.³³ Second, the film's producer and distributor both pointed to previously successful lesbian films, like *Desert Hearts* (Donna Deitch, 1986) and *Claire of the Moon* (Nicole Conn, 1992),³⁴ as a model for how audiences would respond to *Go Fish*.³⁵

³³ Holly Willis, "Fish Stories," *Filmmaker* (Spring 1994): < http://www.filmmakermagazine.com/issues/spring1994/fish_stories.php>.

³⁴ Although *Claire of the Moon* was released around the start of NQC, the film is conventional in its style and romance plot. It is therefore not considered in the same category as queer films, and is more closely linked to gay and lesbian films of the 1980s.

³⁵ Jessica Seigel, "Chicago Director Among First to Feel Glow of Sundance," *Chicago Tribune* (25 January 1994): < http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1994-01-25/news/9401250206_1_rose-troche-sundance-film-festival-independent-filmmaking>.

Although gay and lesbian films from the 1980s are often overlooked because critics and scholars do not consider them to be as interesting as later queer films, they played an essential role in paving the way for future films. While people began discussing gay and lesbian films that appeared in the 1980s as a cohesive group, there needed to be more films, wider audiences, and additional critical developments in order to create a movement. NQC remains the most visible and best-known LGBTQ cinema movement, and our understanding of the movement has been shaped by political and formal readings of the films themselves, privileging theoretical arguments and auteurist perspectives of key filmmakers. NQC has been conceptualized as a transgressive movement that was at odds with established institutions and conventional filmmaking—against “positive images,” against the mainstream, outside of the industry. As formally radical as NQC was, my work uncovers the extent to which it was intricately connected with and indebted to more conventional precursors and institutional support structures. Despite NQC filmmakers’ apparent rejection of established norms and their vanguard, outsider status, they relied heavily on industry structures that developed in the preceding decade. The way the films, and the movement, are discussed obscure these important connections. The aesthetic distance between 1980s gay and lesbian films and those of 1991-92 isolated these moments from each other, although in reality they were intimately connected, with earlier films laying the foundations for what followed.

Chapter 1

Queer Cinema Before it was New

Imagining that queer cinema sprung forth suddenly in the early 1990s ignores the remarkable history of queer international art cinema, underground filmmaking, and avant-garde filmmaking. If we acknowledge the presence of queer films and queer auteurs pre-1991, several key questions come to mind. If there were a significant number of queer films before the 1990s, why did they not constitute a movement in themselves? Even when these earlier films are discussed and linked to a history of queer cinema, the early nineties are still held up as the moment of queer cinema's emergence. Did these earlier films influence the development of queer cinema? And how did these predecessors pave the way for New Queer Cinema?

One central reason earlier films were not considered to be part of LGBTQ movements was the fact that these films were not discursively linked together through "queer," "homosexual," or any other sexual identity term. Instead, they were subsumed under broader categories, viewed as part of art cinema canons or national movements. For example, one of the most famous queer auteurs, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, is considered a paragon of New German Cinema, and his open homosexuality is often sidestepped in contemporary discourse on his work. Other films did not find wide enough viewership and recognition to generate the attention needed to create a film movement. While art, underground, and avant-garde filmmaking provided space for queer voices and perspectives to find an outlet, they also, ironically, impeded the formation of distinctly LGBTQ film movements.

Global Roots

While American filmmakers prior to the 1980s were generally hesitant to depict LGBTQ characters and themes, this was not the case in all national filmmaking contexts. European

filmmakers have historically experienced greater freedom to address and depict forms of sexuality. One of the earliest films to deal directly with homosexuality, *Different From the Others* (Richard Oswald), was released in Weimar Germany in 1919. Not only is the central character explicitly labeled as homosexual, but the film calls for tolerance and understanding in relation to this character. Filmmaking in Weimar Germany continued to be supportive of LGBTQ themes. Film such as *Mikael* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1924), *Maedchen in Uniform* (Leontine Sagan and Carl Froelich, 1931), and *Viktor und Viktoria* (Reinhold Schünzel, 1933) likewise conveyed an openness about sexuality and gender identity that would not be seen so explicitly in American film until decades later. These are just a few examples from a relatively long list of European films that contain LGBTQ characters and themes.

In the excitement of the moment, and in an attempt to brand early nineties queer films in a more commercially viable way, the designation of “new” is a tempting moniker. If one looks back into the preceding decades, however, there are a number of films that antedate certain aesthetic and/or thematic threads and concerns that became prominent in New Queer Cinema. These elements were particularly visible in the work of key foreign, especially European, art cinema directors, and suggests a connection with other “New” film movements. As Alice Kuzniar notes at the beginning of her book on queer German cinema,

“New Queer Cinema” resonates with the names of other key youthful movements, the French New Wave Cinema and the New German Cinema, thereby suggesting an equally significant revolution in technique and subject matter. But the very parallel calls into question the repeated claim to novelty: specifically, it raises the issue of whether New German Cinema itself was not already in some fashion queer. How path-breaking, then, are the New Queers? Does their German branch in particular—most saliently represented by Monika Treut—perhaps grow from a cinematic tradition that threads back to at least Fassbinder, as the leading proponent of the New German Cinema?¹

The majority of films in which queer sensibilities, aesthetics, and narratives were explored in the

¹ Alice Kuzniar, *The Queer German Cinema*, 1.

1970s and 1980s came from a European Art Cinema context. This includes work by directors like Pedro Almodóvar, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Rosa von Praunheim, and Derek Jarman, who was in fact considered a NQC director in conjunction with his last films. The term “queer” would not have been used in pre-1990 discussions of these filmmakers, but one can retroactively evaluate their works as containing elements that lend themselves to the term. Thomas Waugh, in looking back at his critical writing from the 1980s, speculated “was the New Queer Cinema already here in the mid-eighties on an international level before the trend watchers noticed its belated American branch?”²

Scholars have noted an affinity between queerness and art film, and Daniel Humphrey offers a thorough yet concise evaluation of the connection. Although he discusses an earlier time period, Humphrey’s assessment of the perceived connection between European, or more generally foreign, art cinema and queerness deserves repeating here:

There is ample evidence with which to argue that the European art cinema in toto was recognizable as a queer discourse... This perception was hastened and maintained primarily as a result of four complexly interconnected factors: the perception shared by innumerable people at the time, both homophobic and queer friendly, that queerness and foreignness were uncannily interconnected manifestations of disturbing and tantalizing forms of otherness; the greater visibility of homosexuality in European culture, in more or less positive ways... the painterly traditions in European cinematography, which granted homoerotic effect to a significant number of films centered on ‘sensitive’ and ‘soulful’ male characters... and the European art cinema’s profound commitment to narrative and thematic ambiguity, which has allowed for innumerable queer interpretations.³

In this evaluation, the connections between queerness and art cinema are created through both textual elements of the films that open them up to queer readings, as well as contextual aspects. These include generally more permissive cultural standards, particularly in countries like France

² Thomas Waugh, *The Fruit Machine: Twenty Years of Writings on Queer Cinema*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000): 161.

³ Humphrey, *Queer Bergman*, 24-25.

and Germany (depending on the historical period, since the last century has seen dramatic fluctuations in representation for specific national contexts), that allowed filmmakers greater freedom to explore queer themes and representations.

Early examples of queer art cinema were closely linked with auteur filmmaking and the work of key directors. While some films were one-off creations, most of the queer films could be arranged around a handful of key figures, listed above. Added to this list are several filmmakers who are less well known, including Monika Treut, Ulrike Ottinger, Alexandra von Grote, and Frank Ripplloh. Still others could be tangentially considered as “queer” filmmakers in that they produced films that open themselves up to queer readings. Such is Humphrey’s argument with relation to Ingmar Bergman.⁴ We should also consider filmmakers such as Stephen Frears, whose *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1986, UK) and *Prick up Your Ears* (1987, UK) became celebrated classics in the LGBTQ film canon. Édouard Molinaro’s *La Cage aux Folles* (1978, France) deserves recognition as the top-grossing LGBTQ import until *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, UK) unseated it in 1992. *La Cage* became something of a sensation, earning over \$20 million in the US. It demonstrated the commercial possibilities of LGBTQ cinema.

While the most prominent filmmakers under discussion come from a European background, there are certainly directors from other national contexts who deserve consideration in the realm of queer cinema pre-1991. These include Canadian filmmakers such as Bruce LaBruce, Frank Vitale, and Patricia Rozema, Mexican directors Arturo Ripstein and Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, and Japanese directors like Toshio Matsumoto.⁵ This brief overview provides some useful context for discussing pre-NQC LGBTQ films. The connections between

⁴ Daniel Humphrey, *Queer Bergman: Sexuality, Gender, and the European Art Cinema*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013).

⁵ I do not mean to overly simplify the significant differences that come from an individual country’s context and filmmaking circumstances. My research delves into specific contexts in greater detail.

queerness and art cinema persisted, allowing queer filmmakers a place to produce work and fostering the growth of what would become a queer movement. The early 1990s were a time of dramatic expansion, but the shifts that occurred had aesthetic precedents in global art cinemas.

Fassbinder, a Proto-Queer Auteur

In order to examine why a queer film movement did not appear before the early 1990s, I will first consider the work of Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Fassbinder directed over 40 short and feature-length films, many of which included LGBTQ characters, from 1966 to his premature death in 1982. This visionary director remains one of the most celebrated gay auteurs. During the 1970s, several other gay and lesbian filmmakers were creating work alongside Fassbinder, and yet these films were never considered to be part of an LGBTQ film movement.

One central obstacle to Fassbinder's work being conceptualized in connection with LGBTQ filmmaking was the critical contexts surrounding his work. In the mainstream press, Fassbinder was praised for his originality and artistic transgressions. Fassbinder and other gay filmmakers made names for themselves at international festivals, and were discussed in articles on festival screenings and with regard to international filmmaking trends. Fassbinder was one of the central figures of New German Cinema, and his position in this acclaimed movement made his life, prolific works, and death at age 37 newsworthy topics. Vincent Canby of the *New York Times* famously called him "The most original talent since Godard,"⁶ and Fassbinder's art cinema credentials made him the best known queer filmmaker of the time. While Fassbinder was not shy about his homosexuality, mainstream articles tended to downplay this aspect of his life. This was influenced by Fassbinder himself, who encouraged Marxist and broader political

⁶ Vincent Canby, "Rainer Fassbinder—the Most Original Talent Since Godard," *New York Times* (6 March 1977): 1.

readings of his works.

This shift away from queer readings can be seen with regards to Fassbinder's 1975 film *Fox and His Friends*, which includes a number of openly gay characters including the protagonist. Fassbinder suggested that "the use of gay protagonists is unimportant to the film's theme of exploitation of the proletariat," and in discussing the film he makes "no mention of homosexuality whatsoever."⁷ Although *Fox* included gay characters, the *New York Times* remarked that Fassbinder, "an acknowledged homosexual, remained outside the politicking of gay liberation. 'Fox' is no more 'about' male homosexuality than his elegantly composed, breathtakingly cinematic 'The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant' (1972) is about lesbians... The continuing theme that binds his his films together has to do with the uses of power and the consequences of oppression."⁸ While this position in some ways works to universalize his work and therefore disavow the importance of Fassbinder's queer viewpoint, as occurred in his obituaries, the article does point to Fassbinder's outsider status even within the gay community.

Variety ran well over a hundred articles that referenced Fassbinder and his work. Most of these articles contained only brief mentions in relation to film festival screenings, prize wins, and reviews of his films and theatrical work. Fassbinder's obituary in *Variety* heralded him as a "prodigiously talented and prolific filmmaker who was a central figure in the New German Cinema... the *wunderkind* of the 1970s international film scene by virtue of his extraordinary output."⁹ The lengthy article provides a chronology of his life and work, but mentions his sexuality only twice. They note that Fassbinder's lover (unnamed and gender unspecified) had recently committed suicide, and, buried in the article, they include, "He was perhaps the only

⁷ P. Gregory Springer, "Fassbinder: Accepting Despair," *The Advocate* 233 (25 January 1978): 31.

⁸ Canby, "Rainer Fassbinder," 13.

⁹ Todd McCarthy, "R.W. Fassbinder, Prolific All-Media Director, Dies in Munich Aged 36" *Variety* 307.7 (16 June 1982): 4.

famous international director to be openly homosexual, and dealt with related themes in many of his films.”¹⁰ *The New York Times* obituary likewise praised Fassbinder as the filmmaker “most responsible for the resurgence of German cinema in the 1970’s.”¹¹ Only partway through the article does it characterize him as “a committed leftist as well as an avowed homosexual,” adding that “while his work reflected these aspects of his personality, it never marked him as an ideologue, because he was too mistrustful of organized politics for that.”¹² This is not to say that Fassbinder’s sexuality should be at the forefront of discussions about his work, but rather that the focus on artistic creation and the minimizing of his gayness keeps Fassbinder and his films in the broader realm of art cinema and not specifically queer cinema as such.

Coverage of Fassbinder’s work in the gay press included more discussion of his role as a gay auteur. While it might seem that, given his international acclaim, the gay community would welcome his open homosexuality, responses to his work varied. Fassbinder brought a transgressive, non-normative, and “queer” sensibility to his films, before that was a more politically acceptable stance from the perspective of mainstream gays. For instance, gay audiences objected to *Fox and His Friends* for what they saw as its negative portrayal of gay life. The gay press also approached Fassbinder’s films from the perspective of gay and lesbian audiences, remarking that:

The importance of Fassbinder’s attitude to gay people in his films is primarily this integration into the narrative without isolating or making exception... Fassbinder’s net impact, particularly as it applies to gay people, is *reflection* rather than resolution. Since the opposite is usually what passes for gay art—that is, glib resolutions and appeasements—it is not too soon to deign Fassbinder a force whose chosen method of filmmaking has made all the difference. His self-defined theme, ‘the alienation of man from his own identity and how man in this alienation is manipulated in structures of love and friendship,’ is particularly germane to the history of the homosexual.¹³

¹⁰ McCarthy, “R.W. Fassbinder,” 32.

¹¹ Janet Maslin, “Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 36, Film Maker, Dead,” *New York Times* (11 June 1982): D18.

¹² Malin, “Rainer Werner Fassbinder,” D18.

¹³ Springer, “Fassbinder: Accepting Despair,” 31.

When discussing his gayness, Fassbinder once said, “if I didn’t accept it, or if I would play it up, then I might have to pay for it. I have had to pay less than homosexuals usually do.”¹⁴

Fassbinder had no interest in connecting his films with the gay rights movement or “playing up” his gayness. This kept him from being connected as widely as he might have been to LGBTQ film developments.

Major International Festivals and Delayed Connections

LGBTQ films have a rich exhibition history at major international festivals such as those at Cannes, Berlin, Venice, New York, and Chicago. The way LGBTQ films were conceptualized at these events contributed to the growth and, paradoxically, the retardation, of a queer cinema movement. Early inclusion in these mainstream festivals, while providing significant publicity and respectability to these films, also subsumed queer filmmaking into the broader category of art cinema. This hindered the development of a separate label of “gay film” or “queer film” from gaining ground as a unique category. The influence of mainstream festival exhibition on the development of LGBTQ films can be seen in the interactions between LGBTQ filmmaking and two major festivals, the Berlin International Film Festival and the Chicago International Film Festival. In looking at these festivals, I ask what role non-specialty festivals played in cultivating LGBTQ cinema. How did these major festivals increase the crossover potential for LGBTQ films? And how did they both aid and hinder the growth of a self-consciously queer cinema?

Before gay and lesbian film festivals became widespread venues for showcasing LGBTQ work, mainstream film festivals played a role in cultivating gay and lesbian film in an art cinema

¹⁴ Springer, “Fassbinder: Accepting Despair,” 31.

context. Large, established festivals such as those that take place in Cannes, Venice, and Berlin all had interactions with and showed work by prominent queer auteurs, including Fassbinder, Jarman, Almodóvar, and von Praunheim.¹⁵ The Berlin festival offered greater opportunities (particularly starting in the 1970s) for more radical, experimental programming. It has, historically, been receptive to works with LGBTQ themes. Starting in 1986, Berlin even added an award, the “Teddy,” to be given to “the best three queer films in three categories.”¹⁶ The more liberal stance of Berlin’s programming made it a good match for LGBTQ auteurs working in an art cinema context, since their queer-themed work was considered boundary pushing at the time due to its subject matter alone.

The Berlin Film Festival, also known as the Berlinale, began operating in 1951. The festival was originally conceived as “something of a propaganda exercise to help boost west German morale in the gloomy aftermath of World War-II.”¹⁷ It quickly gained prestige and grew to match the festivals at Cannes and Venice in international significance. The Berlin festival, however, differed from these other major festivals in its content, which leaned “more towards the independent or non-commercial films,” and in the sixties and seventies the festival “acquired some notoriety for the sensationalism and political extremism of some of the entries.”¹⁸

Starting in 1963, a group called “Die Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek” (Friends of the German Film Archive) began to organize counter-events to the main festival, which they criticized for being increasingly star driven, for their reluctance to include independent films, and for promoting Hollywood content. The “Friends,” on the other hand, programmed films based

¹⁵ While they would not have been referred to as “queer” until later, their work has retroactively been placed in the canon of queer filmmaking.

¹⁶ Gerald Zielinski, “Furtive, Steady Glances: On the Emergence and Cultural Politics of Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals,” (Ph. D. diss., McGill University, Montréal, Department of Art History and Communication Studies, 2008): 159.

¹⁷ “International Film Festivals: A Reference Paper (1982),” 10.

¹⁸ “International Film Festivals: A Reference Paper (1982),” 10.

on “aesthetics, innovative styles, and engaging stories.”¹⁹ Members of the “Friends” created a parallel festival, called “Das Internationales Forum des Jungen Films” (The International Forum of Young Cinema), where “progressive cinema and young experimental directors would find a platform.”²⁰ In this side festival, the festival director selected films, instead of determining films based on national cinema representation. Their concern with uncovering fresh talent and new movements resulted in the formation of a distinct image for the festival. This move to create the Forum had several important implications for LGBTQ cinema.

These parallel programs offered increased opportunities for LGBTQ cinema. The Forum sought films with a “revolutionary spirit,” and the “programming criteria did not shun films with explicit and/or controversial political content,”²¹ including films such as *Nicht der Homosexuelle ist Pervers, Sondern die Situation in der er Lebt* (*It is not the Homosexual who is Perverse, But the Society in Which he Lives*, Rosa von Praunheim, 1971). Instead of restricting content to feature fiction films, the Forum allowed the Berlinale to expand its horizons by opening up space for shorts, documentaries, and avant-garde films as well, and included features often had “controversial themes, innovative styles or [were] produced in neglected nations.”²² While many LGBTQ films screened in Berlin were a part of the Forum or Panorama, another parallel festival that provided a greater range of film experiences, several films played in the main festival to great acclaim. Derek Jarman, for example, was a perennial attendee and featured filmmaker, and his *Caravaggio* (1987) won a Silver Bear award, the second highest festival honor.

The Berlin Festival was covered annually by the gay press, in part because of its position as a queer-friendly festival. The festival routinely offered “one of the largest selections of gay

¹⁹ de Valck, 66.

²⁰ de Valck, 65.

²¹ de Valck, 67.

²² de Valck, 67.

films outside festivals specifically designed for that purpose.”²³ Derek Jarman referred to it as “a sort of lesbian and gay film festival without actually having the title.”²⁴ Some publications even “took a few jabs at what they called the ‘Gay Berlin Film Festival,’” but festival organizers were unconcerned about the association.²⁵ A filmmaker and programmer for the Panorama section of the festival, Wieland Speck, observed that “much of Berlin’s gay and lesbian emphasis has been due to the work of the Panorama’s director, Manfred Salzgeber. ‘Not only had Manfred fought for 21 years to get gay films selected... but he has built up a community of lesbian and gay distributors and programmers across the world.’”²⁶ Salzgeber arranged meetings for gay and lesbian²⁷ programmers during the Berlin festival, and coordinated juries for the Teddy Awards. These programmers often represented specialty festivals, and would go to Berlin to see what films they wanted to bring to their events.²⁸ In 1987, “the directors of all European and most American gay film festivals were in attendance. It’s no longer a secret: if you want to find quality films of interest to gay audiences, the Berlin Film Festival is the place to spot them first.”²⁹ Salzgeber also worked to promote gay films at the festival in the 1980s by generating “a list of films made by for and about gays [that] was posted in gay bars and discussed in gay groups before the festival began.”³⁰ While Salzgeber noted that at one time they would take any

²³ Marcia Pally, “Sex and Death: Screening the senses at the Berlin Film Festival,” *The Advocate* 495 (29 March 1988): 49.

²⁴ Jarman in “Freewheeling’ Gus Van Sant Converses with Derek Jarman,” John Boorman and Walter Donohue, eds. *Projections 2* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1993).

²⁵ David Mark Thomas, “A New Generation of Gay Cinema at the Berlin Film Festival,” *The Advocate* 395 (29 May 1984): 40.

²⁶ Peter Bowen, “Wall Down, Curtain Up: For Gay and Lesbian Filmmakers, the Berlin Film Festival Holds the Key to International Distribution,” *The Advocate* 601 (21 April 1992): 84.

²⁷ Although “lesbian” is included in discussions of gay films, the majority of these films at the festival featured gay men. Of the over 20 LGBTQ films in the 1992 festival, only one short was about lesbians (Bowen, “Wall Down, Curtain Up,” 84.)

²⁸ Programmers from LGBT festivals in New York, San Francisco, Chicago, Yugoslavia, and Amsterdam attended the 1986 festival, for instance (Thomas, “A New Generation of Gay Cinema,” 68.)

²⁹ David Mark Thomas, “New Crop of Gay Cinema Screened at Annual Berlin Film fest,” *The Advocate* 472 (12 May 1987): 54.

³⁰ Thomas, “A New Generation of Gay Cinema,” *The Advocate* 395 (29 May 1984): 40.

gay-themed film that entered, there were enough such films being produced by the mid-1980s for Panorama to start being selective.

Because of the opportunities for LGBTQ films at the Berlin festival, the event held “the promise of not only international prestige but, even better, international sales.”³¹ Festivals, particularly big international ones, are sites for more than film exhibition. Festival buzz is one of the key elements in the marketing of independent films. Earning awards and prestige at these events can lead to distribution deals, and translate into a wider release for films that already have distributors. The Berlin Festival developed a close relationship with American Independent filmmakers, particularly in the late 1980s. In 1987, the American Independents in Berlin (AIB) was created by the New York Foundation for the Arts and the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers (AIVF) to represent and promote American indie cinema at this major international festival.³² Gay and lesbian film was developing in connection to the American Independent Cinema boom at this time, and the list of films the AIB brought to Berlin to market included films like Sheila McLaughlin’s *She Must Be Seeing Things* (1988) and Gregg Araki’s first feature, *Three Bewildered People in the Night* (1988). These films were brought to the festival in the hopes of finding an international distributor. For American independent films, sales to foreign television and theatrical distributors provided a substantial amount of their overall earnings. Being a showcase for these foreign sales ties the Berlin festival to the growth of distribution networks for LGBTQ films, which became even more prominent in the early 1990s. The director of AIB, Lynda Hansen, said in 1992, “There isn’t an international festival with the number or notoriety that recognizes gay work as seriously as Berlin does. Since last

³¹ Bowen, “Wall Down, Curtain Up,” 84.

³² Jim Robbins, “American Indies in Berlin Rep 7 Forum Pics, 30 In Panorama; 19 Others Are For Market Only,” *Variety* 330, no 3 (10 February 1988): 61.

year, with the success of Todd Haynes [(*Poison*)] and Jennie Livingston [(*Paris is Burning*)], gay films have had a popularity here previously unheard of.”³³

The Chicago International Film Festival (CIFF) likewise provided space for LGBTQ films to reach greater cross-over markets. Major international film festivals both react to and foster filmmaking trends, and at several moments LGBTQ themes became visibly hot topics in Chicago. In 1978, for example, there was a “bumper crop of gay films and Chicago showed most of them,” with 10% of their features having LGBT content.³⁴ The festival’s top prize, the Gold Hugo, even went to one of them, *To an Unknown God*. During 1979:

being gay or bisexual was the theme that world cinema approached in common, trying to view the matter in new, nonjudgmental references. Trends become evident at film festivals... According to festival director Michael Kutza... ‘There are a large number of films this year that deal with sexuality... but I don’t think it is unusual. ...It is no longer any big thing to show homosexuality on the screen. That’s why so many of these films deal with it in an unstressed manner, in natural roles.’³⁵

A similar recognition of gay trends recurred in 1983, when Chicago festival organizer Suzanne McCormick stated that “Films go in trends... Since the taboos were lifted on gay films, there’s been a lot more of them and a lot of important ones. We’ve pioneered showing gay films, and in fact we’ve been criticized for it. Some say, ‘Why don’t you just admit you’re a gay festival?’ while others say, ‘You don’t show enough gay films.’ We can’t win. We just try to show good films.”³⁶ CIFF organizers were reacting to trends they observed, but as a major international festival it was also responsible for contributing to these trends, and the festival had incentive to program gay and lesbian films.

While CIFF organizers would often refrain from vocally connecting the festival to gay

³³ Bowen, “Wall Down, Curtain Up,” 84.

³⁴ P. Gregory Springer. “Chicago International Film Festival.” *The Advocate* 263 (22 March 1979): 34.

³⁵ Springer, “Chicago International Film Festival,” 34.

³⁶ Edward Guthmann, “Gay Film Festivals: Does Success Spell Obsolescence?” *The Advocate* 367 (12 May 1983): 47.

filmmaking, it was a consistent, significant part of their programming. Festival organizers, as early as 1979, noted the festival's "support from the gay community," suggesting that the "gay audience subsidizes most cultural enterprises... In fact, given the advertising, programming and personalities present this year, the gay audience was the primary customer. Most of the gay features were sold out. Several needed repeat showings, and even they sold out."³⁷ This reliance on gay support continued into the 1980s, and CIFF "accepted gay programming as a pragmatic move, since gays attend the festival in such numbers that they can easily be considered the backbone which put the festival in the black."³⁸

Despite the importance role Chicago's gay community played in supporting the festival, the official festival position presented an "air of avoidance—avoidance of the issue of gay rights, and of gay films in particular... They deny any affiliation with the gay cultural movement and refuse to make any statement on the topic."³⁹ As further verification of this positioning, *Variety* reported that CIFF gave their 1981 award to a group of German films, rather than *Taxi Zum Klo* specifically, because of a "failure to resolve strong differences of opinion and a reluctance to give the top prize to a film about homosexuality."⁴⁰ In the early years of the Chicago Lesbian and Gay Festival, it competed with CIFF for LGBTQ films. This made things difficult for the niche festival, as CIFF had years of experience programming this material.⁴¹ CIFF's hesitance to explicitly connect themselves to LGBTQ films and communities, however, left an opening for Chicago's specialty festival to grow and overtake it in this area. Given this hesitation to discuss

³⁷ Springer, "Chicago International Film Festival," 34. One film they reference in particular is *Nighthawks* (Ron Peck, 1978).

³⁸ P. Gregory Springer, "The Chicago International Film Festival," *The Advocate* 310 (22 January 1981): T14.

³⁹ P. Gregory Springer, "Another Kind of Sellout in Chicago," *The Advocate* 336 (18 February 1982): 32.

⁴⁰ Frank Segers, "Chicago Film Festival Gives Group of German Pics Top Nod; Shun Gay Ripplh Film," *Variety* (25 November 1981): 7.

⁴¹ Edward Guthmann, "Gay Film Festivals: Does Success Spell Obsolescence?" *The Advocate* 367 (12 May 1983): 47.

the presence of films with gay content, CIFF would be an unlikely site for the emergence of a queer cinema movement. It provided an earlier, wider audience for LGBTQ films, but did not directly contribute to the formation of a movement.

While queer filmmakers found outlets for their work in both mainstream and companion festivals⁴² from the late 1960s onwards, these films were not linked together as a larger movement before the 1990s. While homosexual or queer themes would be mentioned in individual festival film reviews, there was no discussion of these films in connection with each other. This is visible in, for example, the *Variety* reviews of *Het Gangstermeisje* (*A Gangstergirl*, Frans Weisz, 1967), *Il Conformista* (*The Conformist*, Bernardo Bertolucci, 1970), *Race D'Ep* (*The Homosexual Century*, Lionel Soukaz, 1980), *Ernesto* (Salvatore Samperi, 1979), and *Salut Victor!* (*Bye Bye Victor!* Anne Claire Poirier, 1989).

International film festivals offered a place for a certain kind of queer cinema to begin forming. Queer auteurs such as Fassbinder, Praunheim, Pasolini, Almodóvar, and Jarman were able to find audiences for their films, even those with explicit LGBTQ content, from the 1960s onward. This included screening at either the central branch of mainstream festivals or their more radical companion festivals. Despite providing a place for LGBTQ themes to develop within art cinema, these mainstream festivals did not cultivate a concept of “LGBTQ film” as a distinct label. The coalescence of LGBTQ films was taken up by specialty festivals beginning in the late 1970s, and only moved into mainstream festivals in the 1990s.

During the early 1990s, as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7, LGBTQ films traveled through an expanding network of prominent mainstream festivals, which included the Sundance and Toronto festivals in addition to Chicago and Berlin. The mainstream interest that

⁴² Cannes also had a more experimental side festival, called the Cannes Critics Section, which began earlier in 1961 and would at times show films with queer content. (See for example Moskowitz, 16)

these festivals helped to generate was one of the sparks that created a queer film movement. The interactions between LGBTQ films and earlier international festivals, however, as was the case with Fassbinder's complicated relationship with LGBTQ labels, did not encourage the coalescence of films under categorizations of sexuality. These earlier festivals placed queer filmmaking under the broader category of Art Cinema. While mainstream festivals supplied a platform through which queer films and filmmakers could garner critical praise and respect, it inhibited "queer cinema" from forming as its own unique classification. The lack of discursive focus that festivals, critics, and queer auteurs themselves placed on the queer elements of earlier films prevented a film movement from developing and represents a marked difference from early-1990s films.

Chapter 2 Hollywood's Failed Gay Mini-Cycle

In Hollywood filmmaking, the years of the Classical Hollywood oligopoly were marked by a production code that specifically forbade the presence or even inference of “sex perversion,” which included homosexuality. Clever filmmakers could find ways around the system, but they were forced to use coded depictions. After the Paramount decree broke apart the vertically integrated studio structure in 1948, the production code began to lose its authority, and in 1961 the code loosened to allow depictions of homosexual characters. During the 1960s and into the 1970s, homosexuality became a useful, daring plot device that signaled a work’s “edginess.”¹ Aside from occasional comic, villainous, or pitiful side characters, however, Hollywood tended to avoid lesbian, gay, and bisexual (and certainly avoided transgender and queer) characters and content. There were rare exceptions, like the 20th Century Fox-produced camp spectacle *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman, 1975), and scattered, isolated attempts to make feature-length narrative films that treated homosexuality as a central component of the narrative. Films like *The Boys in the Band* (William Friedkin, 1970), *Some of My Best Friends Are* (Melvyn Nelson, 1971), and *A Very Natural Thing* (Christopher Larkin, 1974) fall into this category. It was not until the 1980s that American studios began to seriously pursue gay and lesbian content.

In the early 1980s, there was an unprecedented surge in gay and lesbian content produced by larger Hollywood studios, leading to what I and others refer to as a “gay mini-cycle.” In March of 1982, a *Time* article proposed that “homosexuals are ceasing to be an inconvenience to

¹ See for example: Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama & Meaning*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994): 38, 51. AND “Where the Boys Are,” *Time* vol. 91, issue 28 (28 June 1968): 98.

moviemakers,”² and *Us Magazine* provocatively asked, “Does a secret gay mafia run Hollywood?”³ Given Hollywood’s historically tentative relationship with gay and lesbian subject matter, it is surprising that from 1980 to 1983, MGM/UA, Warner Brothers, 20th Century Fox, and Paramount all released films, eight in total, with significant LGB characters or themes.⁴ The release of *Cruising* (William Friedkin) and *Windows* (Gordon Willis) in 1980 initiated this mini-cycle. Two years later, Hollywood spent \$70 million dollars on five LGB films (*Personal Best* (Robert Towne),⁵ *Victor/Victoria* (Blake Edwards), *Deathtrap* (Sidney Lumet), *Partners* (James Burrows), and *Making Love* (Arthur Hiller)) that were released within months of each other, “betting that general audiences were ready to accept gays as film characters.”⁶ This brief trend came to a close the following year with *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, 1983).

This early eighties mini-cycle represents the first wide-spread attempt of major Hollywood studios to work with LGB content. Very little consideration, however, has been paid to these films. In part, this lack of attention is due to the fact that the mini-cycle was short lived. As the term “mini-cycle” suggests, this experimentation by the studios was brief and stilted. It demonstrated Hollywood’s willingness to test out material that could capitalize on hot trends, but studio interest in homosexuality quickly waned. After 1983, major studios returned for almost a decade to an avoidance of homosexuality. While there were occasional gay and lesbian side characters, there were no films during this period that included central homosexual characters or

² Schickel, 82.

³ Stephen Schaefer, “Gay Hollywood,” *Us Magazine* (7 July 1981): 14.

⁴ See appendix I for list of studio produced LGBTQ themed films from 1975-1997. I have omitted films like *The Color Purple* (Steven Spielberg, 1985) because the lesbian plot is greatly reduced in the film and does not play a central role as such. Also omitted is *The World According to Garp* (George Roy Hill, 1982) because again John Lithgow’s transgender character does not play a central role in the film.

⁵ *Personal Best* is a complicated film to place in a specific category. While its production seems to align it with independent filmmaking, it is often cited as a “Hollywood” film in contemporary writing.

⁶ Boze Hadleigh, *The Lavender Screen*, (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1993), 195.

themes.⁷ In the early to mid-1990s, studios began hesitantly experimenting again with LGB subject matter, and since then have produced a trickle of films that depict gay and lesbian characters as central to the plot.

This chapter explores this sudden increase in mainstream films with gay and lesbian subjects, the gay studio mini-cycle, in order to offer a more nuanced view of the relationship between major studios and gay and lesbian films. I focus in particular on reasons for studios to approach gay and lesbian characters and themes at this time, and why it did not lead to a film movement, or even a lasting trend. The films' limited commercial appeal and mixed critical reactions, the controversies generated by some films, and the rise of the AIDS epidemic prompted studios to cease exploring homosexuality, and prevented the formation of any possible movement. While it is important to consider these predecessors and the role they played in the development of LGBTQ cinema, mainstream filmmaking was not the area that would lead to a queer movement.

Examining the Mini-Cycle

The mini-cycle films cover a wide variety of genres. They are comprised of detective/crime thrillers, a sports film, musical, drama, comedy, romance, and horror film. The mini-cycle films approach their homosexual material using an assortment of strategies. In *Cruising* and *Deathtrap*, gayness is used as an exotic backdrop and an attention-grabbing plot twist. These films, along with *Windows* and *The Hunger*, also played on the queer character as villain/monster motif. In the case of *The Hunger*, a film about a bisexual vampire's lust for a

⁷ It should be noted that although this work focuses on films that feature LGBTQ characters in lead roles, there were many films that contained side characters who either explicitly or implicitly fell into these categories. Additionally, casual gay slurs and homophobic jokes were unfortunately prominent in mainstream films, as Vito Russo passionately cried out against in not only his *Celluloid Closet* but also in his shorter works for *The Advocate*.

human woman, this draws on a specific established archetype, the lesbian vampire. *Making Love*, with its serious tone and dramatic situations, presented gayness as a problem to be resolved. Further trading on previously established stereotypes, *Partners* and *Victor/Victoria* used homosexuality and the interactions between gay and straight characters for humor. This was either done in a loving, sensitive way (as in *Victor/Victoria*),⁸ or a homophobic way (*Partners*, the biggest flop of the mini-cycle). Lastly, *Personal Best*, a film about the relationship between two Olympic-level, female track and field athletes, focused on the physical appeal of female athletes and the sexual allure of lesbianism.

The mini-cycle films are often given significantly less attention than later independent films, which provided a more thorough, sustained platform for LGBTQ representations. The dearth of scholarship on early 1980s LGB studio films is in part due to the position that LGBTQ film scholarship and criticism took towards them. Many critics and scholars of the time offered negative, or at least mixed, opinions of these films. Some of the seminal works of gay, lesbian, and queer film studies have discounted studio made product for being degrading, insufficient, and artistically sub-par. In *The Celluloid Closet*, for example, Vito Russo claims that the “mini-cycle of so-called gay films that emerged from Hollywood in 1982 satisfied no one.”⁹ More particularly, Russo writes,

For Hollywood and network television, movies about homosexuals remain problem films... [They] encourage the making of films in which acceptance of homosexuals is begged based on the notion that they are just like everyone else. Such ideas demand films that are designed by committee to reach the largest numbers of people in the most inoffensive manner. This will never be the answer.¹⁰

⁸ *Victor/Victoria* was the most successful of the mini-cycle films, earning praise and \$28 million in the domestic box office. In many ways, this film about a female singer posing as a female impersonator in order to find employment flew under the radar because it only flirts with queerness and uses the gay character, the singer's friend and mentor, in a secondary role. Even so, the film manages to include a significant amount of queer content that could be read as subversive within a light, humorous context. *Victor/Victoria* works in a similar way as Classical Hollywood films, in that it opens itself to queer readings, while keeping the tone light enough so as not to cause conflicts.

⁹ Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 271.

¹⁰ Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 271.

Although Russo spends the majority of his book lamenting the scarcity of homosexual characters and images in Hollywood's history, and the generally derogatory and negative portrayals of gay men and lesbians when they do appear, he continues to criticize this mini-cycle. Russo felt that trying to reach broad audiences by presenting timid portrayals of homosexuality failed to capture and do justice to the gay experience. He also remarked, however, "I still think *Making Love* is an important film. I don't think I needed to see *Making Love*; I think my nine-year-old niece and my brother and his wife needed to see it desperately, and that's who it was made for."¹¹

Later queer filmmakers, critics, and scholars have likewise taken issue with these studio films, especially the "positive image" films. Queer films were considered aesthetically and politically more robust; they "take on the whole enterprise of 'positive images,' definitively rejecting any such project and turning the thing on its head."¹² NQC was seen as inspired by countering the aesthetics and assimilationist narratives of positive image films. The negation of the artistic and political significance of these earlier gay and lesbian films led people away from substantially engaging with these earlier works. While the early eighties mini-cycle in Hollywood did not represent a movement, it did reflect a significant move on the part of the studios.

Controversy and Visibility

In 1980, there was intense uproar from gay and lesbian groups over the production of William Friedkin's *Cruising* and Gordon Willis' *Windows* (both released theatrically through United Artists). The controversy, intense reactions, and protests sparked by these productions reflect a vocal section of the gay community's concern over Hollywood's representation of gay

¹¹ Vito Russo quoted in LaValley, 59.

¹² Rich, "New Queer Cinema," 34.

characters. *Cruising*'s script was leaked before production began, giving gay activist groups ample time to organize.¹³ Gay rights activists called for a boycott of the film because “the systematic pattern of misrepresentation that has always characterized Hollywood's treatment of homosexuality is simply intolerable, and the release of *Cruising* is an excellent opportunity to make that statement.”¹⁴

Cruising was shot in New York City, and by the time filming began, the film had garnered such criticism and resentment that protestors interfered with the production.¹⁵ Protestors sabotaged the filming—crowding shooting locations, unhooking or even cutting cables, and blowing whistles during shots so that they had to be reshot—all of which cost the production time and money.¹⁶ Friedkin maintained that the film was not homophobic but rather “just a murder mystery, with the gay leather scene as a backdrop... The vitriol that the film was greeted with still confounds me.”¹⁷ Friedkin claimed that the protests went beyond peaceful disagreement and were the result of key, inflammatory articles written about the film, in particular by Arthur Bell of the *Village Voice*.¹⁸ Friedkin initially thought he would benefit from the protests and demonstrations, but their length and intensity worked against the film, keeping it from reaching its expected box office potential.¹⁹ *Cruising* had a disappointing theatrical run, and some theaters refused to show the film because of the negative press attention.²⁰

¹³ A copy of the leaked script was kept in a theater for people to stop by and read (“Note to whom it may concern,” Box 1, Unnumbered folder, *Cruising Papers*, ONE Archive).

¹⁴ Philip Shehadi, “Cruising: How Dangerous?” *Gay Community News* 7:30. (23 February 1980): 1.

¹⁵ Mitzel, “Speaking Out; Boycott Cruising and Join the Picket Line,” *Gay Community News* (16 Feb 1980): 5. AND Fred Ferretti, “Filming of ‘Cruising’ Goes More Calmly,” *New York Times* (07 Aug 1979): C7.

¹⁶ Vito Russo, “Vito Russo Edited Transcript (3) 9-19-90,” Box 15, Folder 1, Vito Russo Papers.

¹⁷ Friedkin qtd in Alex Simon, “Cruising with Billy,” *Venice Magazine* (September 2007):

<http://thehollywoodinterview.blogspot.com/2008/01/cruising-with-billy.html>.

¹⁸ Janet Maslin, “Friedkin Defends His ‘Cruising,’” *New York Times* (18 Sep 1979): C12.

¹⁹ Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *Queer Images: A History of Gay and Lesbian Film in America* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006): 182.

²⁰ Benshoff and Griffin, *Queer Images*, 182. Also “For the Record: Cruising Protests On, Some Houses Pull Film,” *The Advocate* 288 (20 March 1980): 10.

The violent reactions to *Cruising* bring up several points about the burden of and issues surrounding representation. As a pamphlet handed out at a protest for the film states, violence against homosexuals are rooted in “the feelings of hatred and fear” towards a group of people, and films like *Cruising* “not only reinforce and foster these feelings, they exploit them for profit.”²¹ Put even more forcefully, one pamphlet stated that in *Cruising*:

gay men are presented as one-dimensional sex-crazed lunatics, vulnerable victims of violence and death. This is not a film about how we live: it is a film about why we should be killed... ‘Cruising’ is a film which will encourage more violence against homosexuals. In the current climate of backlash against the gay rights movement, this movie is a genocidal act.²²

This film was viewed in terms of a broader social context; “its homophobia does not stand alone in the history of American cinema, and that's where the greatest danger lies.”²³ Negative representations can be both a symptom of underlying social problems as well as a cause of them. Because of the importance of representation, particularly at a time when there were very few images of gay and lesbian characters to provide balance, critics and audiences reacted violently to what they saw as a backtracking of political position. Many people were able to offer articulate criticisms of the film. As Michael Bronski commented:

What makes *Cruising* such a bad (and offensive) film is not that it deals with gay murders, or the leather scene, or S/M (all interesting and acceptable topics) but that it steadfastly refuses to deal with any of them... You wonder what a good filmmaker (one who is interested in character as well as slambang visuals) could do with them.²⁴

As this article points out, the issue with *Cruising* is not the fact that it uses gay characters or represents gay sexuality, but that it does so in an overly simplified manner. Unpacking the complexity of, for example, S/M sexual practices or internalized homophobia would give

²¹ Janet Maslin, “‘Cruising’ Defended by Friedkin,” *New York Times* (6 Feb 1980): 67.

²² “Emergency Gay Community Meeting,” (July 1979): Box 1, Unnumbered Folder, *Cruising Papers*, ONE Archive.

²³ Philip Shehadi, “Cruising: How Dangerous?” *Gay Community News* 7:30 (23 February 1980): 1.

²⁴ Michael Bronski, “Stop Cruising/Smash Windows!” *Gay Community News* (01 Mar 1980): 14.

dimension to the characters.

Gay and lesbian protests did not have the support of the entire community. Some gay people viewed *Cruising* in theaters, undermining the boycotting efforts.²⁵ Despite the vocal opposition to the film's production, "more than 1600 gay men participated in the filming of *Cruising*,"²⁶ many of which were "part of the leather subculture and were eager to represent what they felt was a marginalized group within the gay community."²⁷ They welcomed the opportunity to bring attention to a subsection of the gay community that did not generally get recognition from mainstream gay associations. Groups that advocated assimilationist political agendas tended to view with embarrassment sexual practices that deviated significantly from normative conventions. So while some protested the film's lack of "real images" of gay men, there were others who countered this attack by illustrating that there is no single way to be gay. All sides of the debates surrounding *Cruising* were documented in *The Advocate*, including a series of articles specifically on "The Cruising Controversy."²⁸ There were vocal objections to the film, with people weighing in on whether it was a dangerous film or simply a "trivial and stupid" film²⁹ that did not deserve the attention it generated. One critic remarked, "It's ironic that the gay population of this country got stuck with *Cruising* and *Windows* as catalysts for a long over-due confrontation with Hollywood moviemakers. Seldom have we seen two films otherwise destined to lapse into more immediate and well-deserved obscurity than these two

²⁵ In Cincinnati, for example, "The effort reportedly faced opposition from many gay men, who paid to see *Cruising* and declined to join the protest action despite the ad hoc committee's call for a boycott." (Zeh, "Cincinnati Protests Film," 3)

²⁶ John Devere, "On The Set," *Mandate* (February 1980): 6.

²⁷ Benschoff and Griffin, 183.

²⁸ The 20 March 1980 *Advocate* (issue 288) contained a number of articles including those related to newsworthy events ("For the Record: Cruising Protests On, Some Houses Pull Film": 10.), and articles on the film (James M. Saslow, "Cruising: Friedkin's Folly," 31-32), as well as an opinion piece, "The 'Cruising' Controversy," 42. The next issue included a film review that mentioned controversial films, including *Cruising*, and issue 290 contains two detailed articles, one by Arnie Kantrowitz ("What has 'Cruising' Cost the Gay Community") and one by Scottie Ferguson ("The Film as Film: A Different Critical View"), that both continue the complex assessment of the film.

²⁹ James M. Saslow, "Cruising: Friedkin's Folly," *The Advocate* 288 (20 March 1980): 32.

botched jobs.”³⁰

The gay press was not unanimous in its dislike of the film, however, and allotted space to those who supported *Cruising*, or at least took a less dismissive position on the film. One article defended the film, claiming that:

Cruising has become the most maligned and misunderstood film of recent years. Trashed unmercifully by bleeding heart liberal critics as a hands-across-the-sea gesture to gay protesters who would judge a film by a script or a book, instead of experiencing the visual facts of a film, *Cruising* emerges, in its own subtle, audacious and subversive way, as the most progay film yet produced on a commercial level. Unlike *La Cage aux folles*, the film that ought to be picketed—a film in which the interior decorator stereotype is proffered to a greedily receptive straight bourgeois audience and in which it is inconceivable to imagine those two eunuchs ever going to bed with one another—*Cruising* presents the gay male in all his most *threatening* aspects to a complacent heterosexual society.³¹

This perspective was a minority one at the time of the film’s release, although future generations have returned to the film with a similar reassessment. Some sensed at the time of its initial release that *Cruising* could become a gay cult film, and efforts were made to preserve some of the promotional materials and prints.³² The film did undergo re-evaluations as it aged, and *Cruising* has been reclaimed to some extent as a camp time capsule, a “heady, horny, flashback to the last gasp of full-blown sexual abandon, and easily the most graphic depiction of gay sex ever in a mainstream movie... The atmosphere of uninhibited sexual camaraderie—invisible to the protestors and long since vanished from the scene—overpowers the trite homophobic conceits.”³³

In recognition of *Cruising*’s portrayal of a subculture of the gay community, one commentator noted that perhaps “[t]he alienation of gays from each other is the real cost of the

³⁰ Douglas Edwards, “Cruising, Windows... the lowest blow is Gigolo,” *The Advocate* 289 (3 April 1980): 34.

³¹ Scottie Ferguson, “The Film as Film: A Different Critical View,” *The Advocate* 290 (17 April 1980): 15.

³² “*Cruising* a gay cult film?” *Gay Community News* 7.35 (29 March 1980): 2.

³³ Nathan Lee, “Gay Old Time,” *The Village Voice* (28 August 2007): www.villagevoice.com/2007-08-28/film/gay-old-time/

political response to *Cruising*.³⁴ By damning the images of the leather scene, conservative gays were driving a wedge between themselves and other subcultural groups at a time when they would have benefitted from standing together. The author continued, “Political gays should not be afraid of showing this gay portrait to America, no matter how unrepresentative or dimly perceived it may be... If America has a distorted portrait of us, it is not the fault of transvestites and sadomasochists for being visible. It is the fault of less extreme gays for remaining invisible.”³⁵ Such articles demonstrate that the perspectives of those in the gay community were by no means uniform, and the gay press provided space for these discussions.

While not uniform in their responses, contemporary viewers were heavily influenced by the press surrounding the film, and *Cruising*'s lasting legacy is deeply informed by the fractious situation of its production and release. *Cruising* became a lightning rod for gay visibility, censorship, and conversations about LGBTQ images in media. *Advocate* writers discussed the broader results and implications of the gay community's vocal opposition to the film.

Specifically, protesting offered an:

avenue for educating people about the media's continuing role in the oppression of gays. Protest and educational effort will increase the public's ability to make informed decisions about the film. If people choose to stay away from *Cruising*, or if those who decide to view it are able to put it in clearer perspective, the gay community will have achieved a significant victory. The lesson will not be lost on the Hollywood establishment, or on the rest of the American media.³⁶

In this moment, what was widely considered to be a negative depiction of the gay community brought the issue of gay representations to the forefront of national discussions. Protests helped make the community more visible to the broader public, especially because the mainstream press covered the grievances of this marginalized group. Protesting mainstream films was considered

³⁴ Annie Kantrowitz, “What has ‘Cruising’ Cost the Gay Community?” *The Advocate* 290 (17 April 1980): 14, 18.

³⁵ Kantrowitz, “What has ‘Cruising’ Cost,” 14, 18.

³⁶ Editors, “The ‘Cruising’ Controversy,” *The Advocate* 288 (20 March 1980): 42.

news to these media outlets in a way that other LGBTQ film-related topics were not. This is evidenced by the relatively large number of articles in the mainstream press that discuss the protests. Any direct effect on mainstream LGBTQ representations might be hard to chart, but these actions did draw more attention to film as a battleground of representation, as well as to LGBTQ populations as a political force. The influence of the political organization of LGBTQ communities would continue to grow throughout the eighties in response to the AIDS health crisis.

Does a Secret Gay Mafia Run Hollywood?

The most pressing question when considering Hollywood's gay mini-cycle is why, at that moment, did studios decide to alter their long standing avoidance of the subject and attempt to capitalize on gay themes? It would be difficult to say for certain why a group of major studios decided to approach a topic of which they had historically been wary, but speculation at the time fell along a range of possible explanations. Some saw it as a "complete coincidence. There is no general awareness or plan on the part of the studios to exploit a given market; they're too unaware of that market's potential at this point," so it ends up being the result of the visions of individuals filmmakers.³⁷ There are, however, other contextual factors to consider. With the increased visibility of the gay rights movement in the 1970s, these films could be seen as attempts to capitalize on gayness as a trendy topic. Homosexuality offered a way of grabbing attention, and of being seen as daring, cool, or relevant.

These films might also have emerged as a result of the success of imported LGB films like *La Cage Aux Folles* (Edouard Molinaro, 1978), a French film that ran for 83 weeks in New

³⁷ Doug Edwards quoted in LaValley, 58.

York's 68th Street Playhouse theater and grossed over \$20.4 million in its overall theatrical run, making it the highest grossing foreign film of the time.³⁸ Seeing films like *La Cage* earning significant returns may have prompted studios to try including LGBT content. This was a moment of experimentation for studios, to see if these films could be financially successful. Michael Bronski of *Gay Community News* assessed the situation in 1982 in a way that deserves quoting at length:

But why are all these films with gay characters getting produced now? I am too suspicious to think that it may have to do with increasing interest and acceptance on the part of Hollywood and straight audiences about gay people's lives (and none of these films is really about gay people's lives; or at least nobody that I know). Can it be that straight audiences are so bored with straight stories (god knows gay people are) that they want something new, something titillating... Trends are hard to figure out while you are in the middle of them: you can identify them, but it's difficult to see the social substrata. Quentin Crisp once said that "tolerance is the result not of enlightenment, but of boredom." Perhaps *Deathtrap* is just the beginning of a long line of mediocre films that use homosexuality as a come-on, the way sex was used in earlier days gone by. And, if we are lucky, perhaps a more rational view of the subject might eventually emerge.³⁹

Bronski is skeptical of the intentions behind Hollywood's appropriation of gay themes, but suggests some potential motivations behind this sudden interest in portraying gay characters on screen. He also points out that assessing the reasons behind a trend is more possible when one is removed from the situation, and looking back at this moment can therefore shed different light on the films than was possible in the moment.

Examining the production and rationale behind *Making Love* allows me to examine the motivations and results of Hollywood's gay mini-cycle. *Making Love* was the most self-consciously connected to the portrayal of gay characters and psychology, and was the film that attempted to dismantle previous gay stereotypes that had been perpetuated by Hollywood over

³⁸ Eleanor Blau, "After 19 Months, 'Cage' Ends an Unusual Run," *The New York Times* (13 December 1980): 18; "'Cage' Winds Run; Sequel's Big Start," *Variety* (17 December 1980): 1, 30.

³⁹ Michael Bronski, "The Kiss of Death: New Gay Movies," *Gay Community News* 9.37 (10 April 1982): 7.

the years. *Making Love* tells the story of an outwardly happy married couple, Zach and Claire. The two are both successful in their professions (doctor and television executive, respectively), buy a house at the beginning of the film, and talk about starting a family. Zach slowly begins to drift away from Claire, drawn to the gay scene by long suppressed homosexual desires. In his office one day, Zach meets Bart, an outwardly gay man who has regular one night stands with men he cruises at a local gay bar.⁴⁰ Zach is attracted to Bart, and the two begin an affair. Zach struggles with his desires and his loyalty to Claire, and finally comes out to her and breaks up their marriage so that they can pursue their own happiness. Although Zach professes his love to Bart, Bart is unwilling to give up his single life, and the two part ways. The film's epilogue shows Zach in a happy, long term committed relationship (we assume) with a man, while Claire remarried and has the child she so desperately wanted. Claire and Zach are able to converse as friends, and the film grants them conventional happy endings.

The prospect of making money on gay themes was linked to the gay rights movement gaining visibility, a delayed response to the growth of the movement post-Stonewall. The plot of *Making Love* was conceived by A. Scott Berg, who saw gay rights as “the next big social movement... What the black movement was in the sixties, and the feminist movement was in the seventies, the gay movement will be in the eighties.”⁴¹ The script was written by screenwriter Barry Sandler, who was the sole outwardly gay member of the production team. Sandler felt that he had to come out publicly in order to lend greater legitimacy to the project. When Sandler and Berg approached 20th Century Fox producers Sherry Lansing and Daniel Melnick about making

⁴⁰ It should be noted that while *Cruising* and *Making Love* both include scenes of cruising at bars, the scenes in *Cruising* are filled with men in S/M leather gear (a world with which most viewers would be unfamiliar) and are lit and shot to make the space darker, intimidating, and filled with graphical sexual activity, while the similar scenes in *Making Love* are brighter and filled with men in everyday clothing, again making them seem “just like ordinary people.”

⁴¹ Hadleigh, 184.

a film that dealt explicitly with coming out and the relationship between two men, the producers “quickly committed, sensing a groundbreaker.”⁴² One of the Fox executives in charge of marketing for *Making Love* suggested that the industry viewed these films as “daring and bold... It took daring to make ‘Gentleman’s Agreement’ and ‘Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?’ in the past. This is it for the ‘80s.”⁴³ Linking *Making Love* with classic positive image and social message films legitimizes its position as quality, important filmmaking, and points to its function as a precursor to more challenging works.

Some critics and scholars suggested that “it always takes Hollywood a while to respond to changes in social behavior,”⁴⁴ so there was a lag time between the gay liberation movement and the appearance of these films. Along those lines, there were discussions about the role of political movements in providing a “positive repertory of images to choose from. These just did not exist for earlier artists... Certainly *Making Love* reflects the images of the political movement.”⁴⁵ Bronski contributes to this assertion, claiming that

Hollywood seems to have decided that gay may be good for box office... In each of these instances the homosexuality is a hook to hang the plot on; an audience grabber. And while all might be successful to varying degrees... it is interesting that they all treat gayness with a nonchalance that is probably a response to the outrage at the finger pointing homophobia of *Cruising* and *Windows*.⁴⁶

These two earlier films might have impacted later ones, given the timing of their production (*Making Love* was released in 1982, *Cruising* and *Windows* in 1980). They were produced by different studios, however, which suggests that Fox’s decision to produce *Making Love* was not an effort to shore up audience goodwill as a result of the backlash against UA, which distributed

⁴² Barry Sandler, “Making Love: February 1982; Writer Barry Sandler recounts the crafting of a gay love story that somehow got made by a Hollywood studio,” *The Advocate* 876 (12 November 2002): 88.

⁴³ Fox, 34.

⁴⁴ Stephen Harvey quoted in LaValley, 58.

⁴⁵ Tom Waugh quoted in LaValley, 58.

⁴⁶ Bronski, “The Kiss of Death: New Gay Movies,” 7.

both *Cruising* and *Windows*.

Hollywood attempted to appeal to both gay and mainstream audiences during the early eighties mini-cycle. The marketing and release of *Making Love* are illustrative of the tactics used in studios' marketing of LGBT films well into the 1990s. *Making Love* was produced for around \$8 million, with another \$5 million allotted for advertising and promotions.⁴⁷ While this was a relatively small budget by Hollywood standards, it was substantially higher than the budgets of independent gay and lesbian films during the 1980s. Arthur Hiller, who was best known for his 1970 smash hit *Love Story*, signed on to direct. Hiller's association with romantic melodrama made him a logical fit for the story of a married man falling in love with another man. Additionally, Hiller's mainstream recognition and celebrity brought an air of legitimacy to a film that was breaking new ground for Hollywood studios.

The use of Hiller's reputation is clear in the marketing of the film. Promotional material for the film included the phrase "From the Director of *Love Story*," and producer Melnick referred to the film as "the *Love Story* of the eighties."⁴⁸ The film's publicity department hoped that this connection with a popular romance would help the film appeal to certain demographics. Irv Ivers, executive VP of advertising, publicity, and promotion for Fox, specified three target audiences for the film: "women above age 22, the gay audience and filmgoers in the age 30-35 bracket 'who want something of quality.'"⁴⁹ Ivers and the studio lined up "an extensive screening program all across the U.S. These have been for gay groups, women's orgs, college students and, in general, 'the more liberal minded.'"⁵⁰ Again, one can see the use of specialized

⁴⁷ David Fox, "Hubby's 'Other Woman' is Man; 'Making Love' to Get Big Sell," *Variety* 305.13 (27 January 1982): 4.

⁴⁸ Hadleigh, 184.

⁴⁹ Fox, 34.

⁵⁰ Fox, 34.

tactics, in this case a screening program, used to appeal to a niche audience.

Posters for the film suggest that 20th Century Fox attempted to position *Making Love* for both a niche gay market and mainstream audiences. All of the initial visual advertising material included an image of the three leads, with Zach's arm around a shirtless Bart to suggest a physical relationship between the men and appeal to gay audiences. The images included Claire in a position of equal prominence. In interviews, the filmmakers emphasized her importance as a point of identification for the audience. As Sandler says, "I felt you needed Claire to give the audience a grounding... Most people find two men together alien or threatening. ...Even after Zach comes out, Claire says she wants her baby to have somebody like him to look up to. The audience discovers the situation isn't as threatening as they may have thought."⁵¹ Scott Berg, who penned the basis for the screenplay, likewise noted that, "This film has to reach everybody... We had to focus it almost entirely on the heterosexual relationship or else nobody would see it."⁵² These attempts to make the subject matter more approachable for a crossover audience is a reaction to the fact that the film's focus on acceptance of a gay relationship was seen as:

radical stuff for a movie intended to be popular entertainment for a general audience. With today's production costs, no producer or studio head believes a film can be successful as a result of gay moviegoer patronage alone... [and they] repeatedly stated their intention that this film be meaningful and of interest to a nongay audience. To this end, they have exhibited extreme caution in the packaging of their provocative material... It remains to be seen whether these tactics, and the film's tastefully ambiguous promotional campaign, will succeed in attracting a sizable crossover audience once national and local reviews make clear the plot and characterization.⁵³

In addition to posters, the marketing team plugged the film in related media by releasing the title

⁵¹ Sandler quoted in Hadleigh, 186.

⁵² Berg qtd. in Vito Russo, "Making Love: Two guys and a girl—but 'Jules and Jim' it ain't," *Esquire Film Quarterly* (October 1981): 102.

⁵³ Clifton Montgomery, "Making Love: Good Politics, but will it play?" *The Advocate* 337 (4 March 1982): 33.

song through Atlantic Records and printing a novelization of the film, as well as by distributing 25 million “Making Love” match books.⁵⁴ The film’s advertising campaign also attempted to draw audiences in through curiosity. After the film’s release and initial success, the studio ran a full page ad in *Variety* that contained only the text “There’s a lot being said about MAKING LOVE” at the top, and in the center of the page, “10 Days. 371 Theaters. \$5,554,364.”⁵⁵

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that *Making Love* did not have the full support of the studio executives at 20th Century Fox. Producer Daniel Melnick tells the story of a preview screening for the film after some reshuffling of high level studio positions. The head of the studio at the time got upset at the bedroom scene between the two men, at which point he stood up and said “you made a goddamn faggot movie.”⁵⁶ Co-producer Allen Adler, however, “credits 20th for its commitment to the pic. ‘The studio is not taking the position that this is a test,’ he said, citing the \$5,500,000 put up for prints and advertising.”⁵⁷ 20th Century Fox owner at the time, Marvin Davis, who was described as “a businessman with fairly conventional and family-oriented tastes,” officially stated that “I have seen ‘Making Love.’ I believe it to be a fine motion picture and I admire its boldness... I congratulate the producers for taking a controversial subject and bringing it to the screen in an honest and sensitive manner.”⁵⁸ While Davis’ comments must be taken with skepticism in conjunction with Melnick’s anecdote, the studio did present a unified front in support of the film and put substantial effort into promoting it. When Melnick was asked if he was concerned that “the subject of homosexuality has not been exactly gangbusters at the box office,” he responded, “You know, I have a theory. Without sounding pretentious, I think

⁵⁴ Fox, 34.

⁵⁵ “Making Love ad,” *Variety* 306.4 (24 February 1982): 25. Image 2.1

⁵⁶ *The Celluloid Closet* (Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, 1995)

⁵⁷ Fox, 34.

⁵⁸ Fox, 34.

that pictures that defy conventional reason have the best chance of finding an audience in the long run... The general consensus is that this is a very dangerous and risky picture.”⁵⁹ Writer Barry Sandler’s expectations were somewhat more hesitant, as he said, “I’m not sure whether there is an audience for this movie—yet... [but] this is a movie that *has* to get made. All you can hope is that people are ready for it. If they are—great. If they’re not—they’re not.”⁶⁰

Making Love began with a somewhat large limited release (350 screens in 60 major cities) in February 1982, with plans to expand the number of theaters two or three weeks later.⁶¹ The early buzz surrounding the film in its first week of release was that “‘Making Love’ is making money,” as in the downtown Philadelphia theater where it earned \$30,000, making it a top earner for the week.⁶² It did excellent business in New York, earning “a smash \$670,000 at 44 area sites, including nearly \$190,000 at its three Manhattan berths.”⁶³ Likewise, in Los Angeles, it made \$256,000 in 15 theaters, and *Variety* reported that “its homosexual theme, adventurous as it may be, doesn’t seem to have hurt it.”⁶⁴ The news was much the same from other big cities in which the film debuted, with decent to good numbers reporting from Chicago (where it was “scoring a hot \$164,000”), Baltimore, San Francisco, Pittsburgh, Seattle, St. Louis, Portland, Cleveland, and Kansas City.⁶⁵ Fox executives noted that the film “played well across the country rather than just sophisticated urban markets.”⁶⁶ It ranked second in *Variety*’s “50 Top-Grossing Films” list for the week,⁶⁷ and Fox counted the total first week gross at over \$5.5

⁵⁹ Melnick qtd in David Galligan, “Making Love, Not Stereotypes,” *The Advocate* 320 (25 June 1981): 51.

⁶⁰ Sandler qtd in Galligan, “Making Love, Not Stereotypes,” 51.

⁶¹ Fox, 4.

⁶² Harry Harris, “‘Love’ Making a Gayla 30G In Philly,” *Variety* (17 February 1982): 16.

⁶³ Lawrence Cohn, “Oscar Nominations Perk B’way; ‘Love’ Hot 670G; ‘Missing’ Fit; ‘Fire’ Big; ‘Pond,’ ‘Reds’ Sock,” *Variety* (17 February 1982): 8.

⁶⁴ Bill Edwards, “New Pix ‘Fire’ Up L.A., 138G; ‘Love’ Making Out At \$256,000; ‘Heart’ Pumps 108G; ‘Pond’ Big,” *Variety* (17 February 1982): 8.

⁶⁵ “Picture Grosses Reports,” *Variety* (17 February 1982): 14, 16, 18.

⁶⁶ Steven Ginsberg, “Fox Sets B.O. ‘Fire,’ True ‘Love,’ ‘Missing,’ ‘Pond’ Spur 4-Day Blitz,” *Variety* (17 February 1982): 38.

⁶⁷ “50 Top-Grossing Films,” *Variety* (24 February 1982): 13.

million, which they used in their marketing campaign as mentioned above. The studio's senior vice president in charge of publicity and promotion stated that the film "is doing extremely well in all markets... it is playing at comparable levels in Tulsa, Oklahoma and Salt Lake City as it is in D.C., L.A. and New York where there are large gay communities."⁶⁸

Going into its second week, there was still enthusiasm for the film in certain venues. The film earned another \$400,000 in New York, a location that *Variety* saw as a natural fit for the film's "sex variations theme."⁶⁹ It also moved into other markets, doing good business in Detroit (\$160,000 debut)⁷⁰ and Boston (\$200,000 on only 7 screens),⁷¹ for example. It held its box office earnings in week two of release, claiming the third spot on the top 50 list.⁷² As February 1982 progressed, *Making Love* and other films like *Personal Best*,⁷³ films that were "giggled at as 'the gay movies'" proceeded to "astonish the industry" by doing better than expected; a studio spokesman said of *Making Love*, it "is not only doing business in the sophisticated urban centers, it is doing well in places like Syracuse, Albany and Charlotte."⁷⁴ This ability to expand to a range of cities is crucial to the re-formulation of how producers and distributors approached gay and lesbian content.

After a promising start, however, interest in the film declined steadily. In the third week, it moved to fifth, then tenth, and by its eighth week (its final in the top 50), it had moved to

⁶⁸ "News Notes," *Gay Community News* 9.34 (20 March 1982): 2.

⁶⁹ Robert Frederick, "Crime Control In N.Y., 'Wish II' tough \$1.3-Mil; 'Pond' Glitters; 'Shoot,' 'Love,' 'Missing' Smash," *Variety* (24 February 1982): 12.

⁷⁰ June Thurston, "'Love' Passionate At 160G, Det.; 'Amateur' Wins 125G; 'Row' 30G," *Variety* (24 February 1982): 16.

⁷¹ Guy Livingston, "'Love' Steamy at 200G, Boston," *Variety* (24 February 1982): 24.

⁷² "50 Top-Grossing Films," *Variety* (3 March 1982): 9.

⁷³ *Personal Best* would go on to make significantly less money than *Making Love*, although it remained on *Variety*'s top-50 chart for longer, over 13 weeks.

⁷⁴ Jay Scott, "February films a bonanza for both artists and box office," *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto, Ont) (25 February 1982): E.1.

position 45 on *Variety*'s box office chart.⁷⁵ The film opened up to a wider release in smaller cities and rural areas, but it followed a similar trajectory of decent business and rapid decline throughout the domestic market. Final tallies for the overall gross vary, but most cite it around \$11.9 million domestic⁷⁶ and \$7 million overseas.⁷⁷ The film made money for the studio once home video and cable television profits are included. Since the film earned \$5.5 million, about half of its total domestic box office take, in the first 10 days of release, one can see how sharply ticket sales fell off. This is not necessarily an unusual course for mainstream films, which open wide and attempt to capture as much of the box office as they can in the first few weeks of release. The initially strong opening for the film suggests that people were intrigued by the subject matter.

Although 20th Century Fox succeeded in earning respectable box office sums in several markets, reactions to *Making Love* were decidedly mixed, with people either applauding the film or attacking it. The response could be summed up by saying, "those who hailed *Making Love* as a political milestone had aesthetic reservations, and those who despised it aesthetically grudgingly acknowledged it as a political step forward."⁷⁸ Several critics and spectators came out in support of the film. The film's review in *Variety*, for instance, reads:

The odds against 'Making Love' being an artistically, politically and commercially acceptable film were considerable. Surprise of the young year, therefore, is that this homosexual themed domestic drama... stands up well on all counts, emerging as an absorbing tale in which young adults of all persuasions can find emotions to connect with. Fox's marketing campaign already seems to be on the right track to build a broad audience base, and it appears that solid grosses should be forthcoming.⁷⁹

Many gay men were thrilled to see depictions of homosexuality as "normal." Scriptwriter

⁷⁵ "50 Top-Grossing Films," *Variety* (10 March 1982): 9. "50 Top-Grossing Films," *Variety* (17 March 1982): 23. and "50 Top-Grossing Films," *Variety* (14 April 1982): 9.

⁷⁶ Box office mojo, "Making Love." <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=makinglove.htm>

⁷⁷ Hadleigh, 196.

⁷⁸ LaValley, 58.

⁷⁹ Cart., "Film Reviews: Making Love," *Variety* 306.2 (10 February 1982): 22.

Sandler received a large number of letters thanking him for the film,⁸⁰ and one letter to the editor of *American Film* effused, “I saw *Making Love* five times. It was the most wonderful positive experience of my life.”⁸¹ Other critics took the position that, even though the film treats gay relationships “with kid gloves,” this is acceptable because it “guides easily upset straights at their own pace;” the gay community “should be overjoyed that it actually got made, not cynical and demanding that it isn’t blatant.”⁸² As Sandler remarked regarding the accomplishments of the film, “Say what you will, but I don’t believe any gay person will walk out of this movie with any degree of shame. This is what I intended... The negative stereotype is out. Straight and gay people want positive images.”⁸³

Despite the large amount of positive press, the film had a great many detractors. Charges of dullness, lack of true emotional connection, soap opera-like characters and situations, and an absence of identifiable imperfection in the characters were leveled at the film from both gay and straight sources.⁸⁴ The film also received negative reactions and condemnation from conservative individuals and religious groups. Reportedly, “homophobic catcalls, shocked screams, and conspicuous walkouts were commonplace among straight moviegoers, who obviously felt very threatened by the film.”⁸⁵ The U.S. Catholic Conference called the film “morally offensive” because “homosexuality is presented as nothing more than an acceptable variation on the normal process.”⁸⁶ These comments are to be expected when a mainstream film pushes the boundaries of “acceptable” material. What these reactions demonstrate, however, is

⁸⁰ Many of these are collected in Sandler’s Papers at ONE Archive (“Fan Mail,” Box 1, Folder 2, Barry Sandler Papers, ONE Archive.).

⁸¹ Michael Davis, “Letter to the editor: *Making Love* Loved.” *American Film* 8.2 (1 November 1982): 10.

⁸² Michel Lasky, BAR “*Making Love*” quoted in Hadleigh, 188.

⁸³ Sandler quoted in Hadleigh, 187.

⁸⁴ See also: David Ansen, “Boy Meets Boy,” *Newsweek* (1 March 1982): 70. AND Janet Maslin, “‘Making Love,’ Sudy Romance,” *New York Times* (12 February 1982): C18.

⁸⁵ Benschhoff and Griffin, 188.

⁸⁶ “‘Love,’ ‘Quest’ Earn ‘Offensive’ Tags As Catholics Get Tough,” *Variety* 306.9 (31 March 1982): 19.

that although there were numerous people who criticized the film's hesitant and overly sanitized stance towards a gay relationship, there were many more people for whom this depiction was unacceptably progressive.

Making Love is an exemplar of positive image filmmaking. While such films were not always well received, they provided new perspectives on gay life, in some instances targeting mainstream audiences in order to make an appeal for greater understanding and to break down longstanding stereotypes. This desire to slowly introduce mainstream audiences to gay characters and relationships is a critical function of these films, and can be seen in relation to *Making Love* by, among other things, director Arthur Hiller's defense of his cautious love scenes: "We weren't trying to say this is how gays make love. This is terribly new for most of the country, so you must lead them into it gently."⁸⁷ Although it can and was argued that *Making Love* was too hesitant and conventional in its treatment of homosexuality, this film and other positive image eighties films played a role in the development of LGBTQ filmmaking.

It is perhaps because of the negative critical reactions that the film was considered to be a flop, even though 20th Century Fox did make back its money on the film. Sandler offered his perspective on the success of the film, which he felt accomplished its goals and laid down a path for other filmmakers to follow: "To the gay community this was more than a movie--it was a celluloid insignia that told the world we're as good as everyone else. When it failed to make a fortune, some declared it the death knell for positive gay-themed movies. Well, it wasn't; in fact, scores more followed. But we were the first. Someone had to be."⁸⁸ Films like *Making Love* provided a critical stepping stone in the reception of LGBTQ films, and "some observers liken the new gay movies to the Sidney Poitier period pieces about blacks: necessary non-evils

⁸⁷ Richard Schickel, "Gays to the Fore, Cautiously," *Time* Vol 119 Issue 12 (22 March 1982): 82.

⁸⁸ Sandler, 88.

designed to disarm the middle-class public by stressing a minority group's similarities to it as a (possible) prelude to more eccentric and individualistic portrayals."⁸⁹ The comparison between more mainstream gay films and conservative positive image or social problem films about Jewish or black characters was a recurring theme in discussions of *Making Love*. The film was seen as "the *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* of gay rights."⁹⁰ Conventional, commercial films that focus on homosexuality helped to legitimize films with gay and lesbian characters and themes, potentially opening the way for future LGBTQ films. The tentative approach to homosexuality and lingering hesitancy with explicitly connecting these films to LGBTQ themes, however, hindered discussions of a gay and lesbian film movement.

It's Not a Gay Drama, It's a Human Drama

In attempting to entice a crossover market, Hollywood studios often downplayed the homosexual aspect of a film in order to appeal to a larger audience. This tactic contributed to keeping the mini-cycle from being considered a gay film movement. Even gay members of the production team participated in this positioning, for example when *Making Love* writer Sandler stated that they were "making a human drama rather than making a gay drama."⁹¹ Director Hiller added with regards to gay sensibilities and reactions that "I found it was just another human being reacting."⁹² Harry Hamlin, one of the stars of the film, likewise said that in researching his role he realized that "the gay experience is not that different from anybody else. The gay experience is, at its core, emotionally speaking, very similar to heterosexual experience."⁹³ Hamlin also remarked that "*Making Love* is the best script I've read, in terms of it

⁸⁹ Schickel, 82.

⁹⁰ Russo, "Making Love," 103.

⁹¹ Sandler qtd in Galligan, "Making Love, Not Stereotypes," 51.

⁹² Hiller qtd in Galligan, "Making Love, Not Stereotypes," 51.

⁹³ Hamlin qtd in Galligan, "Making Love, Not Stereotypes," 51.

being a human piece. We're presenting it in such a way that it can be accepted, not only by a gay audience, but by a straight audience."⁹⁴

The rhetorical strategy of minimizing gay themes and stories in favor of an emphasis on the "human" and "universal" was played out in the commentary around most gay and lesbian films from the 1980s. A similar path of avoidance was taken with *Zorro, the Gay Blade* (Peter Medak, 1981):

the terror of becoming gay-identified has been pushed to ludicrous extremes... Whether at the behest of the film's producer/star, George Hamilton, or for fear of getting a reputation as the 'gay' studio (in light of their commitment to *Making Love*), Fox publications have adamantly denied any homosexual content to *Zorro* and have displayed mock astonishment at the suggestion that the film might hold an unusual interest for gays.⁹⁵

The fact that a film with "gay" in the title could be positioned as not a gay film, suggests the extreme nervousness related to the box office potential of films with gay content. There is anecdotal evidence that studios had cause for concern. While it is impossible to know the actual effects, Christopher Reeve noted that a *Time* article, which included details about *Deathtrap* and gave away the homosexual plot twist by mentioning the kiss between Reeve and Michael Caine, hurt the film's box office performance; "We later referred to it as the 'ten million dollar kiss' as an estimate of lost ticket revenue."⁹⁶

One of the strongest attempts to deny a connection with gayness was the rhetoric surrounding *Partners*. Although the film contains explicitly gay characters, including a central character, and takes place in the gay community, "There is the continuing dread, exhibited by almost every spokesperson associated with *Partners*, at any reference to the film as a 'gay' story... [and] references to the homosexuality of one of the police partners... or to the film's

⁹⁴ Hamlin qtd in Galligan, "Making Love, Not Stereotypes," 51.

⁹⁵ Clifton Montgomery, "Film Ticket," *The Advocate* 324 (20 August 1981): 32.

⁹⁶ "Letter from Christopher Reeve to Vito Russo," (13 October 1986): Box 5, Correspondences-Celluloid Closet #2 folder, Vito Russo Papers.

storyline and setting...have been assiduously avoided in press releases and other publicity material issued.”⁹⁷ As these quotes from several members of the cast and crew affirm:

‘Partners is not a film about homosexuality. It’s about friendship.’ Francis Veber, author of *Partners*.⁹⁸

‘I don’t see this film as a gay movie. It’s the story of two guys who, though their relationship, learn about themselves.’ James Burrows, direct of *Partners*.

‘It’s really not a film about homosexuality in the sense that you deal with the psyche and the reasons why people are gay.’ Aaron Russo, producer of *Partners*.

‘The character is considered to be a ‘closet queen’—but it’s of no consequence.’ John Hurt, co-star of *Partners*.⁹⁹

Producer Aaron Russo also drew a distinction between *Partners* and other films being released with gay content. He insisted, for example, that *Making Love* “is about homosexuality, and the psyche of the homosexual. But *Partners* is not about that.”¹⁰⁰ When pushed further about the homosexuality in the film, Aaron Russo responds that yes, the gay cop falls in love with the straight cop:

but there’s no sex in this movie. You never get the sense that there’s anything dirty or porno, you know what I mean? ... it’s never *stated*. In fact, there’s a party scene where the gay cop refuses to dance with a man, even though it would only be to get information on the murders. See, it’s not a homosexual movie! One of the characters is homosexual. But it’s not making a statement about anything. It’s two hours of fun.¹⁰¹

The studio wanted to avoid connections with the gay press, and they delayed and ignored repeated requests from *The Advocate* to interview people associated with the film, until the publication assured the studio that they only wanted to do a bio on the lead actor, “not a report on a ‘gay’ film, such as this and other national publications have run recently on *Making Love*.”¹⁰²

The production hired a casting consultant/gay technical advisor, Donald Draper, but

⁹⁷ Montgomery, “Film Ticket” (20 August 1981): 32.

⁹⁸ Veber was also the screenwriter for *La Cage aux Folles*, a film that was much better received and seen as a milestone in LGBTQ cinema.

⁹⁹ Kim Garfield, “Just Good Friends: The Filming of Partners,” *The Advocate* 328 (15 October 1981): 45.

¹⁰⁰ Garfield, “Just Good Friends,” 45.

¹⁰¹ Aaron Russo qtd in Garfield, “Just Good Friends,” 46.

¹⁰² Montgomery, “Film Ticket” (20 August 1981), 32.

proceeded to ignore his advice on script changes that would make the film less offensive (for example, eliminating the gay cop's suicide attempt). Draper countered, "The movie is certainly *not* about the murders. It's not a mystery script. And all the comedy is about the gay community and the gay lifestyle. If you eliminate the gay... then you eliminate all the humor. Although the humor is from the straight point of view, not the gay point of view."¹⁰³ Whatever their intentions, the film was a critical and financial flop. The pains the *Partners*' producers took to avoid associations with gayness point to one reason why the mini-cycle films were not considered a movement. Many of these films specifically avoided connections with LGBTQ labels, and this hampered the development of a discursive construct that could have united them through their depictions of sexuality.

A Fad Fizzles

With the spread of the AIDS epidemic, studios adopted more fearful and conservative tactics in relation to gay and lesbian images on screen. While it is impossible to know what would have happened in Hollywood filmmaking had the AIDS crisis not occurred, homosexuality in mainstream filmmaking went from being a hot topic to being basically non-existent by the mid-1980s. AIDS activist work continued along the lines of the gay liberation movement in making LGBT people more visible, but this new strain of activism also presented a call for more radical art and actions. This political trend did not correspond with Hollywood's attempts to appeal to mass audiences. The short life of this mini-cycle can be partly attributed to the conservative recoiling in response to the AIDS epidemic, but it is also due to economic factors, since Hollywood is a profit-based system that requires returns on investments. Although

¹⁰³ Draper qt. in Garfield, "Just Good Friends," 46.

some films of this gay studio mini-cycle found relative success and all earned back their production budgets, as can be seen in the Appendix I, the films did not do exceptionally well and therefore diminished Hollywood's interest in exploring gay themes.

While these films were not profitable enough to tempt Hollywood to continue its mini-cycle, especially at a conflicted political time, they did prove that audiences would be willing to see films with gay themes. As one industry insider said, “an intelligent, industry-wise reading of *Making Love* would not forestall future movies on that theme, because *Making Love* showed by its opening week that people were not repelled by the subject itself... Business fell off because people found it a dull movie.”¹⁰⁴ The fact that mainstream audiences did come to and support these films suggested that gay and lesbian themes were commercially viable, particularly if done on a smaller scale, with lower production budgets and therefore a lower profit threshold.

After the brief growth and decline of this mini-cycle, foreign and independent filmmaking gained speed and overtook these hesitant Hollywood attempts. Major studios would not approach LGB subjects in a substantial way, with a central character who is gay, lesbian, or bisexual, until almost ten years later, with the release of *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven, 1992).¹⁰⁵ Although popular and critical responses were decidedly mixed for these gay mini-cycle films, they represented a significant step in the history of LGBTQ filmmaking. The aesthetic and narrative conservativeness that drew criticism to films like *Making Love* in fact worked to develop a wider audience for films with gay and lesbian characters, and suggested that

¹⁰⁴ Stuart Byron quoted in LaValley, 59.

¹⁰⁵ *Basic Instinct* faced much of the same backlash as *Cruising* and *Windows*. *Basic Instinct*, which relies on negative depictions and stereotypes (in this case the killer lesbian/bisexual) was followed shortly by the positive image film *Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, 1993), which continued in the same vein as *Making Love*. While *Making Love* was positioned as the first Hollywood film to deal sensitively with homosexuality, *Philadelphia* was the first Hollywood film to take on the AIDS crisis. As such, it marked a return to earnest attempts to look at gay content. *Making Love* and *Philadelphia* share many central attributes, including the desire to appeal to middle America, the presence of a figure of identification for a straight audience, gay characters who are upper middle class professionals and generally painted as positive role models, and so on.

these films could be commercially viable. Gay and lesbian filmmaking in the early 1980s was “a long way from being able to portray the infinite range of other choices within the larger homosexual choice... within the past decade some kind of beginning has been made. It was time, at last, for American movies to recognize that simple fact, however simplistically they have done so.”¹⁰⁶

During the early 1980s, there was “no agreement on whether the future belongs to gay independent features, which presumably render a more accurate picture of gay life, or to mainstream films about gays, which reach a broad, chiefly straight audience.”¹⁰⁷ As the Hollywood mini-cycle “fad” was petering out, several critics were quick to point to a different source for gay images on screen. As Vito Russo wrote, “1983 wasn’t a bad year at all for gays onscreen if you know where to look for them... each season, a small army of independent filmmakers, gay and nongay, pursue a personal vision of the human condition without regard for the megabuck mentality—and we are even more grateful.”¹⁰⁸ Foreign and independent films overtook and directed attention away from Hollywood. The protests that greeted several of the mini-cycle films and their generally modest box-office takes suggest that although studios attempted to capitalize on homosexual subject matter, these attempts were misdirected and failed to capture the desired mass audience. It was in non-American filmmaking, as well as in the independent sector, where one can see more proximate influences on the emergence of New Queer Cinema.

¹⁰⁶ Schickel, 82.

¹⁰⁷ LaValley, 58.

¹⁰⁸ Vito Russo, “Looking Beyond the Hollywood Version for Gays Onscreen,” *The Advocate* 383-384 (22 December 1983): 50.)

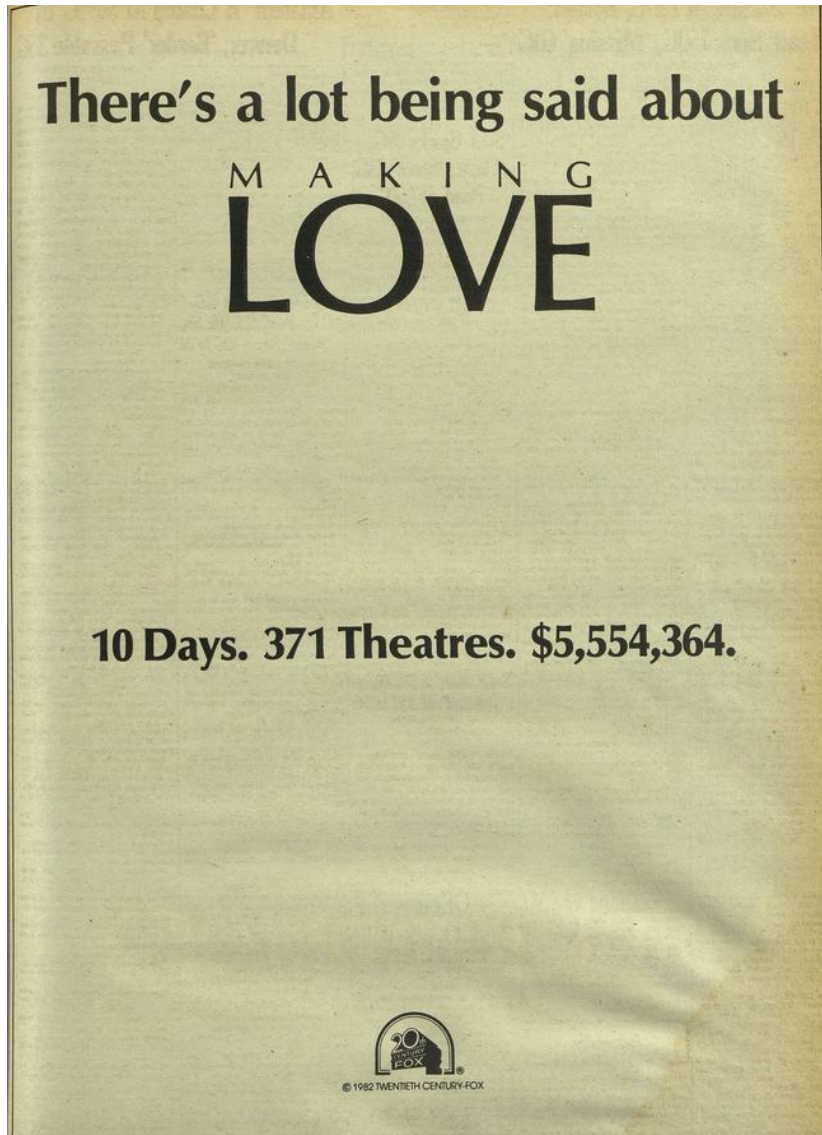
Images:

Image 2.1: *Making Love* Advertisement, *Variety* 306.4 (24 February 1982): 25.

Chapter 3 Producing a Gay New Wave

In 1981 Peter Lowy, founder of the New York Gay Film Festival, noted the problems of financing, producing, and distributing gay films. Although Lowy at one time wanted to make films with gay content, “after going through film school he realized it was impossible. [As he said,] ‘There was no industry. It would be death.’”¹ A reassessment of LGBTQ filmmaking possibilities in 1989 led to very different claims:

As film and video artists and critics, as people working in independent media pursuing lesbian and gay themes, the field had never seemed so ripe with possibilities. Funding, production, and distribution opportunities existed in ways that were unthinkable even five years earlier. The fields of lesbian and gay film and video were expanding, exploring, exploding. A critical mass of artists were producing, debating, challenging. A new militance in street politics was being cross-pollinated with a new rigor in queer critical theory. A significant moment to savor.²

This optimism about the potential and future of LGBTQ filmmaking was the result of concrete changes to existing production and distribution structures. These shifts led to the creation of an industry support system for LGBTQ films and encouraged more films to be produced and distributed. The release of a larger number of LGBTQ films in the early 1990s provided the raw material from which a queer film movement formed. My research uncovers direct connections between 1980s filmmaking and the emergence of NQC.

Filmmakers producing work with LGBTQ content have historically encountered a number of challenges, including lack of funding, difficulty in signing acting talent, and trouble finding wide distribution. This chapter examines both commercial and non-commercial institutions that helped filmmakers overcome these obstacles. Non-commercial funding

¹ Stefan Pevnik, “Gay Filmmakers Confront Media Homophobia in the US,” *The Advocate* 331 (26 November 1981): 37.

² Martha Gever, John Greyson, and Pratibha Parmar. “On a Queer Day, You Can See Forever,” in Martha Gever, John Greyson, and Pratibha Parmar eds. *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video* (New York: Routledge, 1993): xiii. This book provides an interesting perspective on NQC, in that it was begun in 1989 but was not published until 1993. Those 4 years marked an incredible change in the position of queer cinema.

structures include self-financing, community filmmaking endeavors, and the crucial role of non-profit institutions, which provided grants and support for filmmakers. Moving into commercial filmmaking, I investigate the role independent distributors played in releasing LGBTQ films pre-NQC. By examining specific production practices and industry structures, my work highlights the essential shifts that contributed to the growth of LGBTQ filmmaking generally, and specifically to the formation of a queer film movement.

The first real stirrings of an LGBTQ film movement came in 1986. In February and March of that year, three gay and lesbian films, *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Stephen Frears), *Desert Hearts* (Donna Deitch), and *Parting Glances* (Bill Sherwood), were released in the U.S. almost simultaneously, creating what producer John Pierson referred to as a “*Gunfight at the Homosexuals ‘R’ OK Corral*,” a jockeying for position in marketing these gay and lesbian themed films.³ This same month, William Hurt won the best actor Academy Award for portraying an openly gay man in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (Hector Babenco, 1985). The release of these films and the attention directed towards gay and lesbian themes caused some critics to suggest the appearance of a “Gay New Wave.”⁴ Despite this apparent new wave in the mid-1980s, however, an LGBTQ cinema movement did not appear until 1991-92. In large part, this was due to two factors. First, there were not enough gay and lesbian films in the late 1980s, and these films did not receive enough critical attention, to expand discussions of a movement. Second, distributors continued utilizing the marketing tactics employed by large studios, which downplayed a film’s gay content in an attempt to reach wider audiences. This is discussed in

³ John Pierson. *Spike Mike Slackers & Dykes* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), 39.

⁴ Richard Goldstein, “The Gay New Wave,” *Village Voice* (22 April 1986): 51. Emanuel Levy also mentions *Desert Hearts* and *Parting Glances* as “heralding a gay new wave” (*Cinema of Outsiders*, 447). And another writer referred to “a new wave of films about gay characters.” (Taylor Clarke, “Joe & Kenneth & Gertrude & Alice,” *American Film* Vol. 12, Issue 7, (1 May 1987): 45)

greater detail in Chapter 4.

To understand the context in which queer cinema thrived, it is important to examine the non-studio narrative feature market that cultivated it. European films played an important role in the growth of queer cinema transnationally. Films like *Taxi Zum Klo* (*Taxi to the Toilet*, Frank Ripplloh, 1981, West Germany) and *My Beautiful Laundrette* proved to be critical and financial successes, and they are cited as cornerstone texts that encouraged filmmakers and production/distribution companies to take greater risks with LGBTQ subject matter.

Independent filmmaking is often linked with minority representations and counter-cultures, and because of this association, indie cinema has likewise become a home of LGBTQ filmmaking.

The growth of this niche paralleled the larger indie cinema boom, and benefitted from the institutionalization of indie cinema, which:

succeeded in making a particular brand of filmmaking marketable at a global level and in effect helped a very large number of personal, idiosyncratic and offbeat films receive theatrical distribution and often find an audience. Despite arguments that see the terms of independence and institution as mutually exclusive, the emergence of an institutional framework laid the foundations for a staggering increase in the number of new filmmakers from all kinds of backgrounds.⁵

Developments in the funding and distribution of independent films were a strong causal factor in the production and distribution of NQC films. American independent filmmaking and foreign arthouse filmmaking contexts shared a number of parallels. Although there are significant differences between these modes of production and distribution, and there are variations even within these areas, they share enough similarities that I consider them in tandem.

In order for a film movement to occur, a number of films that can be connected together need to be produced and distributed, and these actions are heavily influenced by the surrounding infrastructures. The growth of the independent sector and the influx of international LGBTQ

⁵ Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 271.

films increased the opportunities for funding and distribution of non-studio films. This chapter examines these institutional developments, and how they generated space for more diverse films and subject matter. This industry expansion led to the creation of a critical mass of queer films in the early 1990s, effectively forming the base of a queer cinema movement.

Non-Film Industry Developments

The growth of feature length filmmaking occurred as part of a wider trend in a burgeoning LGBTQ art and media scene. The worlds of publishing, theater, fine arts, music, and video art provided spaces for LGBTQ individuals to express themselves. Even television, an historically conservative medium as a whole, entered into the arena of gay and lesbian representations. As evidence of the significance placed on the arts by gay communities, the gay press publication *The Advocate* included an extensive arts section in each issue. Michael Bronski, a writer for *Gay Community News*, likewise noted that the publishers felt that arts and cultural were significant areas to cover.⁶ The expansion in the creation of fine arts and media in gay culture formed a mutually beneficial relationship with the rise of the gay press. These publications offered space to advertise, free coverage in articles, and a pre-assembled mailing list of people likely to be interested in LGBTQ arts.

To highlight a few examples of this broader LGBTQ arts scene, the world of gay and lesbian publishing experienced a boom during the 1980s.⁷ It can be argued that it is “print media—with its relatively cheap technology and the possibility of private consumption—which has most expanded and extended the popular thinking and images of homosexuality.”⁸ Rita Mae

⁶ Bronski, personal interview, 25 May 2016.

⁷ Richard Laborite, “Landmark Year for Gay Lit: More Than 600 Titles Put in Print by Publishers,” *The Advocate* 463 (6 January 1987): 59.

⁸ Bronski, *Culture Clash: The Making of Gay Sensibility*, 144

Brown's lesbian cult novel, *Rubyfruit Jungle*, provides an early exemplar. The novel was initially published in 1973 through Daughters Press, a very small feminist press dedicated to working with unknown female writers, because "No one else would publish it."⁹ Brown's novel was taken over by Bantam Books in 1977, and had 13 printings through 1987, along with an anniversary hard cover edition in 1988.¹⁰ This was the first hardcover edition, as all of the others were more cheaply produced paperback ones. The early editions, however, "roared like a prairie fire. With no advertising, shaky distribution, and no help from a literary network or marketing group, it sold close to 100,000 copies."¹¹ The relatively cheap upfront costs associated with producing a paperback volume, with the ability to shift distribution strategy and issue reprints, meant that publishing LGBTQ books were a lower risk proposition. They required fewer sales to make a text financially viable; they could be targeted to niche markets in a way that mainstream filmmaking could not.

Despite having a reputation for being conservative, American network television moved well ahead of studio filmmaking in including gay characters and subplots, and in representing the AIDS crisis. The 1990s are often considered to be a breakthrough decade for the representation of LGBT characters on television, with "a startling increase of gay-themed programming on prime-time network television."¹² The history of these representations can be traced earlier, however, and in fact it could be argued that there were "decidedly queer characters since the medium's inception."¹³ From the late 1940s through the 1960s, television's representations of homosexuality were coded, not explicit, in order to conform to the networks' regulations and

⁹ Rita Mae Brown, "Revisiting Rubyfruit," *Rubyfruit Jungle* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987): ix.

¹⁰ *Rubyfruit Jungle* copyright page printing history

¹¹ Rita Mae Brown, "Revisiting Rubyfruit," ix.

¹² Ron Becker, *Gay TV and Straight America* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2006): 3.

¹³ Becker, 5.

desire to avoid controversy.¹⁴ Moving into the 1970s and 1980s, however, television expanded its depictions of gay characters.

In the early 1970s, network television shows tended to contain two types of gay-themed scripts, the “‘coming out’ script, in which a show’s regulars learn to tolerate a gay guest character, and the ‘queer monster’ script, in which the sexual-minority guest stars play killers or child molesters. The monster approach soon became the norm.”¹⁵ As a response to the increase in negative representations, gay organizations like the Gay Media Task Force and later the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation began protesting the networks. In 1975, the networks promised to stop using gay stereotypes, adding homosexuality to their policies regarding the avoidance of stereotyping racial, ethnic, and religious groups.¹⁶ The networks were pressured to have a balance of “good” and “bad” characters, in an attempt to present a more well-rounded image of homosexuality.¹⁷ This sparked a brief flourishing of gay characters on television that continued into the 1980s, and whether as a result of “the success of regulars on *Barney Miller* and *Soap*, or perhaps the various gay task forces got a message through, ... suddenly gays were prime-time commonplaces.”¹⁸

During this time of greater openness, network television funding allowed for the production of several made-for-TV movies. These included Fox’s *Without a Trace* (Stanley

¹⁴ Early depictions of “swish” stereotypes are discussed in Chelsea McCracken, “Regulating Swish: Early Television Censorship.” *Media History* 19.3 (2013): 354-368.

¹⁵ Steven Capsuto, *Alternate Channels: The Uncensored Story of Gay and Lesbian Images on Radio and Television* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000): 4-5.

¹⁶ Capsuto, 5.

¹⁷ Capsuto, 5.

¹⁸ Richard Learner, “The Televised Gay: How We’re Pictured on the Tube,” *The Advocate* 413 (5 February 1985): 21, 23.

Jaffe, 1983),¹⁹ ABC's *Consenting Adult* (Gilbert Cates, 1985),²⁰ and NBC's *Sergeant Matlovich vs. U.S. Air Force* (Paul Leaf, 1978) and *An Early Frost* (John Erman, 1985), which is often cited as the first major film to deal with the AIDS crisis.²¹ *An Early Frost* "aimed to educate viewers about the disease and shatter some myths surrounding the transmission of the virus,"²² and though it is a relatively conservative film, it was seen as a landmark at the time. In some ways, television was already prepped to handle topics like AIDS, since it could fall into a tradition of issue-oriented, or "problem of the week" programming. *An Early Frost* was described as a "social-issue blockbuster," designed to take advantage of topical subject matter.²³ There was resistance to dwelling on the topic, however, and when given the chance to air a Canadian television film about AIDS, *No Blame* (Daniele Suissa, 1988), no American network wanted it "because they all claim they've 'done their AIDS show' and nobody wants another one."²⁴ While the conservative climate and AIDS panic of the late 1980s prompted the networks to return to limited depictions of gay and lesbian characters, TV funding, particularly from premium cable channels (such as HBO and Showtime) as well as public television, continued to be important resources for LGBTQ films.

While this dissertation focuses on filmmaking, considering film production in the context of a burgeoning LGBTQ arts scene allows us to glimpse trans-media trends and consider the

¹⁹ A complicated inclusion, since it at first seems to play off of negative gay stereotypes—a gay man is arrested under suspicion of kidnapping, molesting, and murdering a young boy. He is later proved innocent; so the gayness is used for sensational subject matter, but it also plays somewhat with commonly rehearsed stereotypes. (Edward Guthmann, "Film Ticket," *The Advocate* 363 (17 March 1983): 45.)

²⁰ *The Advocate* noted that ABC had "a distinguished track record for presenting bold, honest themes via its ABC Theatre production" (Kim Garfield, "'Consenting Adult' Up Close," *The Advocate* 413 (5 February 1985): 22.

²¹ A thorough list of TV episodes and made-for-TV movies containing gay themes can be found in Stephen Tropiano, *The Prime Time Closet: A History of Gays and Lesbians on TV* (New York, New York: Applause Theater & Cinema Books, 2002).

²² Tropiano, 36.

²³ Steve Holley, "What's New? Many Gay Debuts on Big Screens, Little Screens This Fall," *The Advocate* 330 (1 October 1985): 53.

²⁴ Writer-Producer Donald Martin, qtd. in Vito Russo, "Hot Flashes: Hits and Misses on the Summer Screens," *The Advocate* 529 (1 August 1989): 67.

impact of other arts on filmmaking. This could be a direct influence, such as the use of television funding and TV exhibition of films. It could also be less direct, as is the case with radical AIDS activist art and video work providing aesthetic inspiration to NQC filmmakers. Just as NQC films were not produced in isolation from the wider film industry, they did not appear outside of larger LGBTQ arts trends.

Barriers to Entry

The history of non-studio LGBTQ filmmaking can be viewed as a history of struggles within and against established filmmaking institutions. While independent production and distribution allows filmmakers greater control over their work, and has historically been more open to minority and outsider perspectives, this freedom comes at a cost. At times, the challenges facing independent LGBTQ films are insurmountable, and examining uncompleted projects can be illustrative. In thinking only about the relatively few success stories, the films that were able to make their way through production and distribution circuits, one may get a skewed impression of the challenges filmmakers faced. Looking beyond the relatively small number of LGBTQ films produced, the film industry's "developmental back waters are home to a number of gay-themed projects that never made much headway."²⁵

Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle* is one such project, stuck in "developmental back waters." It hit a number of difficulties, perhaps due to the inequity women experienced in finding support for their projects. In the late 1970s, Brown, Arnie Reisman, and others shopped versions of the script to Paramount, Fox, Warner Bros., Universal, Columbia (which expressed interest in distributing if it could be made independently), UA, Orion, MGM, New World (which

²⁵ James Ryan, "Homophobia in Hollywood," *The Advocate* 573 (26 March 1991): 37.

expressed interest in partial funding and distribution), AVCO, Entertainment Ventures Inc, Norman Lear, Casablanca, The Film Finance Group, various actors and others in the industry, and even considered approaching Playboy about providing funding.²⁶ Despite occasional interest, most people were too hesitant to commit to working on the project. John Sayles hoped that his film *Lianna*, which made money “for our company, the distributors and exhibitors... will make it easier for the women who are trying to raise money to make gay films. I hope they’ll be able to point to *Lianna* and say ‘Look, there’s an audience out there.’”²⁷ He specifically cited Brown’s efforts to make *Rubyfruit Jungle* and expressed optimism that his success might help move the project towards production.

Perhaps the most notorious un-produced film project is *The Front Runner*, the “most celebrated failure to produce a film.”²⁸ The source material for this project, which has yet to come to fruition despite numerous attempts over the last 40 years, is Patricia Nell Warren’s 1974 book. Warren’s novel follows the love affair between a track coach and his male athlete. The athlete is remarkably talented, and with the coach’s help he makes it all the way to the Olympics in two distance running events. Both characters are gay, and their sexuality in and of itself is not the issue of the book, but rather the hostility they face when they come out publicly. Their relationship is depicted as loving and supportive, and throughout their trials, they have the support of an active New York gay community, gay rights organizations, and the legal aid of the athlete’s father (who is also a gay man, as well as a high powered attorney). The film chronicles both the individual struggles faced by the couple as well as country-wide breakthroughs in legal

²⁶ Letter from Arnie Reisman, September 1979, Box 5, Correspondences- Celluloid Closet 2, Vito Russo Papers, New York Public Library.

²⁷ K.H. Garfield, “John Sayles: A Sympathetic Filmmaker Goes Exploring with *Lianna*,” *The Advocate* 367 (12 May 1983): 41-43.

²⁸ Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 235.

battles, particularly the abolition of anti-sodomy laws. The positive images of the main characters, emphasis on gay liberation rhetoric and assimilationist political agendas, and the relative acceptance that the characters find all fit well with the priorities and trends of 1970s to mid-1980s gay politics and filmmaking.

The Front Runner was very popular, becoming the first contemporary gay title to make the *New York Times*' bestseller list, where it stayed for 12 weeks.²⁹ It has been translated into 11 languages, and sold over 10 million copies.³⁰ These considerations, coupled with the relative success of the lesbian track and field film *Personal Best*, which made \$5.67 million at the box office, would make *The Front Runner* seem like an obvious choice for a film adaptation. It had many interested parties, and came very close to production, but was never completed. A brief history of its aborted production illuminates the problems that plagued LGBTQ filmmaking.

Soon after the book's publication in 1974, Paul Newman picked up the rights, intending to direct either a studio or independent feature in which he played the coach. When he pitched the film to potential investors, including United Artists, where he had a three picture deal, they liked the idea but balked at the gay aspect; they would have required him to change the script substantially, making the central relationship a one night fling and having the coach return to his ex-wife at the end of the film.³¹ The studio did not want a gay screenwriter to work on the project, and "it did not want to have the words *gay* or *homosexual* included in the script, and the two men could never touch each other."³² In addition to problems with the script, Newman reportedly had difficulty finding the right actor to play the runner to his coach.³³ These obstacles

²⁹ Kim Garfield, "After a Decade of False Starts, *The Front Runner* Makes its Move to the Screen," *The Advocate* 464 (20 January 1987): 52.

³⁰ Patricia Nell Warren, "Print History of *The Front Runner*," *The Front Runner* (Beverly Hills, CA: Wildcat Press, 1996): unnumbered front matter page. Also, http://www.thefrontrunnermovie.com/Print_History.html

³¹ Garfield, "After a Decade," 52.

³² Garfield, "After a Decade," 52.

³³ Conlon, "Front Running with Frank Perry," 35.

proved too much and Newman decided to abandon the project rather than alter the core of the book.

When Newman let his option lapse, director Frank Perry was “waiting in the wings and quickly went to work on picking up the property.”³⁴ In 1977, Perry exercised his option on the film and moved into pre-production. His efforts to produce the film led to optimistic articles about the project and the need for an affirmative gay love story on film. As an article from *The Advocate* stated:

If Frank Perry has his way, *The Front Runner* will be an exciting, tasteful, upfront, moving affirmation of gay love. He wants to finish it as soon as possible to make sure of that. ‘I’m very concerned about sensationalism. I lie awake nights sometimes and worry that I am going to get scooped on this picture. The time for a gay love story is so right.’³⁵

In a way Perry was correct about the timing of a gay love story. Instead of this established property, however, Hollywood came out with an original screenplay and *Making Love*. Perry ran into road-blocks in financing the project. Although in 1979 he was still adamant that he was going to make the movie,³⁶ Warren noted that “it was quite clear that he couldn’t get the financing” to produce the film.³⁷

Independent producer Jerry Wheeler optioned the property in 1983. After several years of fundraising from wealthy members of the gay community, “doctors, lawyers, real estate investors—a diverse and very loyal group,”³⁸ he was able to purchase the screen rights outright. As the 1980s progressed, however, Wheeler encountered additional challenges. As he said,

Homophobia is back in vogue. For a brief, shining moment—just pre-AIDS—there were several years when it looked like we gay people were being treated like everyday people

³⁴ Perry qtd. in Conlon, “Front Running,” 35.

³⁵ Conlon, “Front Running with Frank Perry,” 35.

³⁶ Letter from John Hawkins to Patricia Warren (5 March 1979), Box 22, Folder 22, Warren (Patricia Nell) Papers, ONE Archive.

³⁷ Mike Fleming, Jr., “Will Supreme Court Ruling Give ‘The Front Runner’ Film Momentum?” *Deadline* (28 June 2013): <http://deadline.com/2013/06/will-supreme-court-pro-tolerance-rulings-give-the-front-runner-film-momentum-529899/>

³⁸ Wheeler qtd. in Garfield, “After a Decade,” 52.

and that it was no longer an issue or a problem. Politically, we were making a lot of gains... But I feel like we're back in the Dark Ages all over again... That is even more why *The Front Runner* needs to be made—and will be made!³⁹

This renewed homophobia was connected with the AIDS crisis, which Wheeler considered to be a major factor in the production difficulties he faced.

Wheeler continued to raise money from members of the gay community to develop the script and move into pre-production. He set up a limited partnership, The Front Runner Company, LTD., “to house the estimated production costs of three million (low end) to four million (high end). Units are \$150,000 each... To date, [May 1985,] 2.2 million has been committed towards the production budget.”⁴⁰ By February of 1986, he had assembled a crew, cast supporting roles as well as an up-and-coming actor, Grant Show, to play the young track star, and secured locations for filming. In August, the filmmakers were placing calls for extras “to be a vital part of the **IMPORTANT** film about a gay runner.”⁴¹ The final piece was casting the coach. While they had hoped to have William Hurt for the role, and Hurt was interested, after he won the Academy Award for *Kiss of the Spider Woman* he was swamped with offers and did not pursue *The Front Runner* any further.⁴² Wheeler wanted an established, bigger name actor and could not find one willing to take the part. There was “resistance to the material”; actors and their agents would fail to return his calls, and when they did, “responses ranged from ‘I’m not right for this role’ to ‘Given today’s social and political climate, this picture doesn’t have a chance.’”⁴³ Wheeler considered these polite “no”s as a way of saying they were not interested in, and were perhaps scared of, gay roles. Not everyone was so indirect, however, and

³⁹ Garfield, “After a Decade,” 54.

⁴⁰ Letter from Jerry Wheeler to Robert Roth, 1 May 1985, IGIC Subject Ephemera Box, Front Runner Folder, IGIC Papers, New York Public Library.

⁴¹ Casting flier, Folder 6, Box 6, Lesbian and Gay Liberation Collection, Yale University Archive. Emphasis in original.

⁴² Garfield, “After a Decade,” 53.

⁴³ Garfield, “After a Decade,” 53.

some agents bluntly said “we don’t want our clients playing a fag.”⁴⁴ Martha Wheelock, a co-producer on the film project, remembers calling actor Tommy Lee Jones about playing the part, “He practically screamed and said, ‘I’m not playing any fag part.’”⁴⁵ Despite William Hurt’s Oscar win for portraying an openly gay man, there remained concern and industry taboos that playing gay could ruin your career. Wheeler tried to combat this reasoning by taking out angry full-page ads in *Variety*, in which he listed people who had played LGBT characters and not had their careers torpedoed.⁴⁶

One of the central problems with Wheeler’s approach was that he had mainstream aspirations for the film at a time when smaller independent films were more feasible. Wheeler was trying to make this a big Hollywood film with crossover potential, but trying to make the subject matter acceptable for a mass audience would require watering down the gay content to such an extent that the core audience would be lost. As Russo wrote:

It is my opinion that Wheeler should courageously forget about trying to turn *The Front Runner* into a Hollywood film and make a really magnificent independent with unknowns. If *The Front Runner* is a good film, people will flock to see it without a star. If it’s a compromised, mass-audience feature, even Tom Selleck as the coach won’t save it. That’s why *Parting Glances* is infinitely more satisfying than *Making Love*. Movies should not be produced with the goal of making homosexuality ‘popular.’ I’d rather see a good movie than a star vehicle. Guts, please.⁴⁷

Perhaps if Wheeler had opted to do the film as a small independent and cast unknown actors, this film would have been able to replicate the relative success of *Personal Best*, *Parting Glances*, *Desert Hearts*, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, and other 1980s gay and lesbian films.

Wheeler did manage to get very close to producing the film. In a 1987 *Advocate* article, he sounded optimistic about the future of the film and set a filming start date of February 9,

⁴⁴ Wheeler qtd. in Garfield, “After a Decade,” 53.

⁴⁵ Wheelock qtd. in Ryan, “Homophobia in Hollywood,” 41.

⁴⁶ Image 3.1

⁴⁷ Vito Russo, “Spellbound in Darkness,” *The Advocate* 497 (10 May 1988): 49.

1987.⁴⁸ The project never got off the ground, however, and Wheeler died in 1990 without making the film. In addition to the difficulties in casting and the ambitious goals for crossover success, it is also possible that by the late 1980s and into the early 1990s, *Front Runner* had missed its moment. In an increasingly radical and politically demanding artistic community, the tentative gay romance may have started to seem passé in comparison to the daring queer works that gained popularity in the early nineties.

Despite the popularity of the source material and the promise of the film, production attempts on *The Front Runner* failed because of the difficulty in raising money for the production and casting known actors to star in it. Both of these stem from the base difficulty of making LGBTQ films in the 1980s: fear. As Wheelock said, “When you’re trying to mount a film dealing with gay stereotypes, it’s easier... But when you’re talking about *The Front Runner*, which is a romance dealing with the boy next door who defies the stereotype, then it scares the bejesus out of Hollywood.”⁴⁹ Not only were straight executives concerned about creating gay images, but closeted gay execs were so afraid of being outed that they were, at times, even more hesitant to approach LGBTQ works. As an *Advocate* article titled “Homophobia in Hollywood” summed up, simplistically but usefully:

Homophobia comes into play at every step of the studio filmmaking process to censor positive gay images. It begins with screenwriters and producers who shy away from gay-oriented projects knowing they will receive the brush-off; continues through the casting stages, where paranoid actors and their homophobic handlers... fret about tarnished images; and, if a project beats the odds and gets that far, is finished off by studio executives and marketing people who balk at anything that might affect box-office performance.⁵⁰

If a film is produced independently, it still encounters many of the same barriers in acquiring

⁴⁸ Garfield, “After a Decade,” 54.

⁴⁹ Wheelock qtd. in Ryan, “Homophobia in Hollywood,” 37.

⁵⁰ Ryan, “Homophobia in Hollywood,” 36.

financing and finding a cast and crew. Even after a low-budget film is produced, there are still obstacles to distribution that can keep the film from being widely seen.

The story of *The Front Runner* was not an exception, but a common occurrence. Many other film projects lingered in development hell, including those that had studio backing. Some of these were eventually produced and released, although many were not. Overall, the 1980s were a contradictory time for LGBTQ cinema. The shining examples that were produced and distributed were a minority, with many other projects lingering in development, or else reaching a festival audience but not finding a general release. In this moment of change, it is important to remember the unsuccessful films and what they can illustrate about the challenges filmmakers faced, making the accomplishments of those films that did make it to theaters even more significant.

Community Filmmaking: Circumventing the System

One of the most pressing and constant challenges for independent filmmaking, as the *Front Runner* example highlighted, is raising money. Filmmaking is an expensive enterprise, and those working in the independent sector, especially first-time filmmakers who do not have a proven track record with which to tempt financial backers, are constantly faced with the problems of financing. Producers and distributors were reluctant to work with gay and lesbian films for much of the 1980s. This initial lack of industry support pushed some filmmakers to use unconventional funding sources and grassroots fundraising, raising small amounts of money from a relatively large number of people who were otherwise not involved in the film industry. This contrasts both studio-funded filmmaking and filmmaking (common in the independent sector) that is financed through smaller production companies and pre-sales of a film's domestic

and foreign theatrical and/or television broadcast rights.

Several key 1980s and early 1990s films, including *Taxi Zum Klo*, *Lianna*, *Desert Hearts*, *Parting Glances*, and *Claire of the Moon* (Nicole Conn, 1992) circumvented established production models by finding money instead through personal financing and fundraising campaigns. Although these methods, by necessity, resulted in low budgets, it allowed films to be produced that might otherwise have met the same fate as *The Front Runner*. Having a well-networked gay and lesbian community, one that was passionate about the arts and creating LGBTQ images on film, greatly improved filmmakers' ability to fund and produce their films. The financial success of these projects provided models for other filmmakers, helped to develop both audiences and critical contexts, and encouraged companies to invest in future films. Non-commercial funding structures were therefore essential in creating the conditions for a queer film movement.

When unable to attract outside sources of funding, or when filmmakers want to work without external pressures, they can supply the entirety of a film's budget out of their own pocket. This is rare, as filmmaking is an inherently expensive and risky endeavor, and few are able to successfully navigate this system of financing. One successful German example is Frank Ripplloh's largely autobiographical 1981 film *Taxi Zum Klo*, which examines the life of a closeted gay schoolteacher who attempts to balance having a long-term partner with his desire for promiscuity, cruising local park bathrooms at night. Ripplloh worked as a school teacher for eight years, until he was fired for contributing to an article, "Wir sind Schwül" ("We are Faggots"), in the publication *Stern*.⁵¹ Ripplloh moved from teaching into filmmaking,⁵² writing,

⁵¹ Elliott Stein, "Germany in Winter," *Film Comment* 17:3 (May/June 1981): 23.

⁵² Ripplloh did have previous experience in the industry, having been an actor in some of Rosa von Praunheim's films. (Michael Bronski, "The Meter is Still Running; An Interview with Frank Ripplloh, director of *Taxi Zum Klo*," *Gay Community News* 9.21 (12 December 1981): 8.)

directing, and starring in *Taxi*. This 16mm film was made on a \$50,000 budget, the entirety of which was supplied by Ripplloh himself.⁵³ Self-funding the film gave Ripplloh the freedom to explore controversial subjects in new and transgressive ways, and he managed to keep to this tight budget in part through the use of 16mm and by recruiting people in his social circle to work as actors and crew.

Although not discussed as much in contemporary scholarship on LGBTQ filmmaking, *Taxi* was heralded in the gay press at the time of its release.⁵⁴ *Taxi* broke from the tendency to push for politically correct “positive images.” Released in the midst of the Hollywood gay mini-cycle, *Taxi* offered something substantially different. It was one of the first queer films to gain widespread recognition, although it was not labeled as “queer,” since the term had yet to be re-appropriated in this way. The film was considered “real,” an honest and frank portrayal of a schoolteacher’s romantic and sexual relationships with men. The film went on to become a festival favorite, a crossover art house hit, and an acknowledged inspiration for Gus Van Sant.⁵⁵ Despite the success of *Taxi*, Ripplloh directed only two other films, one of which (*Taxi nach Kairo*, 1987) was an ill-received sequel to *Taxi*.

Most key examples of 1980s independent gay and lesbian filmmaking used grassroots fundraising to some degree in order to complete projects in which commercial studios were hesitant to invest. In making *Desert Hearts*, for example, director Donna Deitch spent two and a half years piecing together the money to produce the film. She later recalled that she

Structured my fundraising like a Broadway backers party. When I began I didn’t know anyone who had money to invest. So I reached out to all of my friends and contacts all over the country and wrote letters. This was a networking process that went on month

⁵³ Stein, “Germany in Winter,” 23. *Variety* quotes the budget at closer to \$40,000 (Holl., “Taxi Zum Klo Review,” *Variety* 303.6 (10 June 1981): 21.)

⁵⁴ With some exceptions, for example Nancy Walker’s “Taxi, Schmaxi!” *Gay Community News* 9.22 (19 December 1981): 12.

⁵⁵ As Van Sant said about *Taxi*, “I remember that being my cue that I could maybe film Walt’s story and get my money back.” (Van Sant, *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues & My Own Private Idaho*, xix)

after month and then year after year.⁵⁶

Films that rely on fundraising campaigns often take substantially longer to raise the needed funds and complete pre-production. Deitch began her project in the early 1980s, and an *Advocate* article in 1982 suggested that the film was “readying production.”⁵⁷ Despite this optimism, it would take several more years before they began shooting.

This method of production financing continued into the 1990s and beyond. An excellent early nineties example is Nicole Conn’s 1992 directorial-debut, *Claire of the Moon*. *Claire* was the first lesbian-directed film about lesbian characters since Deitch’s *Desert Hearts* in 1986. The limited number of theatrically released lesbian films up to that point proved to be somewhat of a blessing for Conn as she began raising money for *Claire*. In Conn’s discussions of making a lesbian movie in the early 1990s, she says:

It was so much easier for me to raise money for *Claire of the Moon* than it has been for anything else, and I think the reason is that there was nothing else, literally nothing else. There hadn’t been anything since *Desert Hearts*... I literally had women who would just write checks for \$25,000. They were just, “Here, make the movie. Let’s be part of history.”⁵⁸

The film cost about \$325,000 total to make and release, and it was financed entirely by Conn, who took out \$200,000 in loans and accumulated \$50,000 in credit card debt, and donations to the project that she collected through grassroots fundraising efforts.⁵⁹ The increased potential for the commercial success of queer films in the nineties contributed to the production and theatrical

⁵⁶ Deitch qtd in Melissa Silverman, “Interview with Donna Deitch, Director of *Desert Hearts*,” *Huffington Post* (9 July 2008): http://www.huffingtonpost.com/melissa-silverstein/interview-with-donna-deit_b_111723.html.

⁵⁷ Clifton Montgomery, “Taxis, Tokens and Quick Takes at the Movies,” *The Advocate* 335 (21 January 1982): 47.

⁵⁸ Nicole Conn, “Nicole Conn Finds True Love at the Movie: an interview with Nicole Conn,” *SheWired* (21 March 2011): <http://www.shewired.com/box-office/filmmaker-nicole-conn-finds-true-love-movies-more-ways-one>.

⁵⁹ Kathleen DeBold, “Prose and Conn: an interview with Nicole Conn,” *Lambda Book Report* 6.6 (1998): 1, 6-7. Interestingly, Conn’s strategy of involving lesbian audiences in the production of her films through donations has continued through her upcoming film, *A Perfect Ending*. To finance part of the project, she used Kickstarter.com, which solicits donations from the public, and was able to raise over \$50,000 dollars for the film in only a month and a half.

release during the decade of more than twenty films focused on lesbian characters.⁶⁰ With this increased visibility and explosion of the number of lesbian themed films, grassroots fundraising became more difficult because there was no longer the intense, unmet desire to see lesbian characters represented on screen.

Parting Glances provides one of the best examples of a film that pushed the growth of LGBTQ filmmaking. In part, this is due to the grassroots fundraising techniques of writer/director Bill Sherwood. Sherwood wrote the script for *Parting Glances* in 1983 and began looking for funding to produce the film. Unable to interest major producers, Sherwood set out to finance the film's \$300,000 budget through grassroots fundraising efforts.⁶¹ He also noted a desire to "make a feature that I could produce entirely on my own and make it exactly the way I wanted to and not have to worry about executives in L.A."⁶² While this mode of filmmaking would become more common among gay and lesbian filmmakers, "there weren't many models at the time for a micro-budget movie with a gay theme shot with money the director had raised himself."⁶³ Sherwood put in his own money, money from his parents, and money supplied by "gay men—five thousand dollars here, ten there—who wanted to see their lives depicted onscreen for the first time."⁶⁴ By spring of 1984, Sherwood had raised around \$40,000 from

⁶⁰ These include: *Even Cowgirls get the Blues* (Gus Van Sant, 1993), *Girlfriends* (Mark S. Bosko and Wayne A. Harold, 1993), *Bar Girls* (Marita Giovanni, 1994), *The Incredible True Adventures of 2 Girls in Love* (Maria Maggenti, 1995), *Boys on the Side* (Herbert Ross, 1995), *When Night is Falling* (Patricia Rozema, 1995), *The Watermelon Woman* (Cheryl Dunye, 1996), *Bound* (Andy Wachowski, 1996), *Chasing Amy* (Kevin Smith, 1997), *All Over Me* (Alex Sichel, 1997), *Better Than Chocolate* (Anne Wheeler, 1999), and *But I'm a Cheerleader* (Jamie Babitt, 1999)

⁶¹ Bill Sherwood, Arthur Silverman, and Yoram Mandel formed a limited partnership called Rondo Productions in order to raise the film's \$300,000 budget. "In essence the arrangement gives investors 50 percent of the profits of a film in return for which they have no liability, no artistic say, and no guarantee that they'll make back one thin dime." (Pierson, *Spike Mike Slackers & Dykes*, 34.)

⁶² Transcript of Vito Russo's interview with Bill Sherwood, Box 15, Folder 2, Vito Russo Papers.

⁶³ Vachon, *Shooting to Kill*, 7.

⁶⁴ Vachon, *Shooting to Kill*, 7. There are examples of this funding structure reaching back into the 1970s with documentaries like *In the Best Interests of the Children* (Frances Reid, Elizabeth Stevens, and Cathy Zheutlin, 1977) (References to the film's fundraising: Andrea Weiss, *Vampires and Violets* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992): 138.)

friends and family, enough to start shooting. He was forced to stop production when the film ran out of money, which was “pretty common with independent movies back then: you would make half of it, make a reel of good stuff, and try to raise money for the rest.”⁶⁵ In the end, Sherwood was able to piece the financing together and finish the film.⁶⁶

Having funding in place is one of the largest battles for independent filmmakers, but there are additional production circumstances to consider. These include putting together a cast and crew, going through the shooting process itself, and completing post-production. These sometimes proved to be roadblocks, halting the forward momentum of a film as with *The Front Runner*, but they could also prove to be positive circumstances that advanced the development of LGBTQ cinema. Working with extraordinarily low budgets, filmmakers came together to assist on a number of different projects. This community, formed through the high pressure process of filmmaking on micro-budgets, created a collaborative creative atmosphere that helped cultivate the growth of queer cinema.

Parting Glances was the product of both an individual’s vision and the collective efforts of a community. The production of the film had a salient ripple effect on LGBTQ filmmaking. The film was a training ground of sorts, and Sherwood noted that “virtually everyone in it and who worked on it had never made a feature before.”⁶⁷ Christine Vachon, who would go on to form Apparatus Films and later Killer Films (important production companies for queer filmmaking), worked as an assistant editor for Sherwood on *Parting Glances*. She cites her time working for Sherwood as educational, giving her an inside look into the process of independent filmmaking. In particular, she later wrote, “I did learn one lesson working with him, and it was

⁶⁵ Vachon, *A Killer Life*, 28.

⁶⁶ *Parting Glances* was Sherwood’s only film; he died of AIDS in 1990, a fate that befell many members of the art and filmmaking community.

⁶⁷ Transcript of Vito Russo’s interview with Bill Sherwood, Box 15, Folder 2, Vito Russo Papers.

the most important. You don't need a giant infrastructure or budget to make your movie. Everyone needs this kind of person in their life at some point—the person who asks you, by the very fact of their ambition, What are you waiting for?"⁶⁸ Indie producer/deal maker John Pierson, who likewise worked with *Parting Glances* early in his career, says that working on the film made him realize “the excellent opportunities for gay cinema,” which played a part in prompting him to support the 1994 lesbian film *Go Fish* (produced in part by Vachon).⁶⁹

Pierson and Vachon's involvement with *Parting Glances* shows what an intimate world New York independent filmmaking was at that time, a world of connections that revolved around participation on various projects. Vachon's involvement in the film industry was initiated when she happened upon a flier posted by Jill Godmilow, who was looking for assistance on her film *Far From Poland* (1984). After Vachon worked with Godmilow, Godmilow mentioned Sherwood's project (Sherwood had previously worked as an assistant to Godmilow as well), and Vachon moved on to work with him.⁷⁰ By working as an assistant editor for Sherwood, Vachon was able to develop contacts and gain important insights into the independent filmmaking process. Pierson's involvement with *Parting Glances* came through his connection with one of the film's producers, Arthur Silverman, who had attended NYU with Pierson. The community of filmmakers formed around their collaborative filmmaking endeavors. As Vachon put it,

Now when people reminisce about the “independent film” scene of the 1980s, they're dreaming. There was no scene. It was the movies themselves that brought people together. You would go work on a low-budget indie, like *Parting Glances*, and other people who were there would have worked on something small with Jarmusch. The collective consciousness came from the work, not the bars or screenings or festivals. It came from sitting in Bill Sherwood's apartment and hearing about his day.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Vachon, *A Killer Life*, 27-28.

⁶⁹ Pierson, 43-44.

⁷⁰ Vachon, *A Killer Life*, 25-26.

⁷¹ Vachon, *A Killer Life*, 28.

Charting these individual connections provides concrete evidence of the influence that a community of filmmakers could have on each other, and how these associations led to future work. Similar interactions undoubtedly occurred on higher budget fare done through more established channels of production. These self- and grassroots-funded, low-budget projects, however, directly link to future queer filmmaking. This mode of production provided significant precedents for NQC filmmakers to follow, and helped establish a community of production support of which filmmakers, in New York at least, were able to take advantage.

The 1980s also saw the creation of Apparatus Films, an important company that engaged in nontraditional financing and bridged a gap between self-funding and non-profit production companies. Apparatus was formed by Christine Vachon, Barry Ellsworth, and Todd Haynes in the mid-1980s as a result of a significant amount of start-up funding gifted to Ellsworth from his parents.⁷² Vachon and Haynes had known each other somewhat during their time attending Brown University, but the creation of Apparatus marks the start of their professional collaboration, which has continued for over 25 years. Vachon, Ellsworth, and Haynes decided to use the investment to support young filmmakers through relatively small grants for the production of short form works,⁷³ a move reminiscent of models found in France and Germany. Instead of simply giving out money, they would work with the filmmakers, “giving artists the freedom to work but enough structure to guarantee a certain level of quality.”⁷⁴ They would budget and produce the films, acting like a small production company. Apparatus later led to the formation in 1991 of Killer Films, arguably the most important production company associated

⁷² Vachon, *A Killer Life*, 32.

⁷³ Vachon, Haynes, Ellsworth, and James Schamus also co-wrote a “Guide to No-Budget Filmmaking,” which outlined details of how to fund and produce a micro-budget film, and lists helpful organizations and tips. A copy is available at the Margaret Herrick Library.

⁷⁴ Vachon, *A Killer Life*, 32-33.

with NQC. As Vachon says of her experience with Apparatus, “Apparatus was intended to launch these young filmmakers’ careers. It actually launched *us*. It gave us the opportunity to understand filmmaking from every perspective, beginning to end, but on a small, safe scale.”⁷⁵ Although the short films produced through Apparatus were fairly obscure, some playing on the festival circuit before disappearing, others not making it that far, the fledgling company was an important stepping stone in the careers of Vachon and Haynes, who would become well known figures of NQC.⁷⁶

Non-Profit Institutions: Public and Private Grants

In addition to self-funding or grassroots financing of films, filmmakers working on low-budget, artistically significant projects could seek support from non-profit institutions in the form of grants and public television funding. These institutions played a vital role in the growth of independent LGBTQ cinema. In his work on independent cinema, Yannis Tzioumakis lists three central pillars of support for independent filmmaking in the 1980s:

1. Federal government grants (allocated primarily through the National Endowment for the Arts) and 2. Local government grants (allocated primarily through municipal or state Film Bureaus, most of which were established after 1976); but mostly... 3. Public television (the Corporation of Public Broadcasting [CPB] and its main programming outlet, Public Broadcasting Service [PBS], which was established in 1969).⁷⁷

These institutions helped to foster less commercial films, in which established producers were hesitant to invest. Filmmakers working in non-American contexts were often able to find similar funding through their government arts agencies. Without this support, American independent, European, and Canadian cinemas would not have developed the way they did, becoming a space

⁷⁵ Vachon, *A Killer Life*, 33.

⁷⁶ These early Apparatus shorts have recently been rescued and restored by Indie Collect, a group dedicated to saving and archiving independent films.

⁷⁷ Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 208.

for minority representations and traditionally marginalized voices. As evidence for the importance of non-profit funding for LGBTQ films, I examine the support provided by foreign governments, the American National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the Chicago Resource Center (CRC), and lastly, the most significant pillar of non-profit support, public television both in the US (exemplified by PBS's American Playhouse Series) and the UK (including Channel 4's Film on 4).

Non-American film production often relied on government support to a larger degree than American filmmaking. In part, this is due to the fact that countries like France, Germany, Spain, the UK, and Canada place a higher emphasis on the arts and therefore offer more funding opportunities. Moreover, these film industries must contend with Hollywood imports threatening the health of their domestic markets, and government grants are seen as essential to the very existence of their national industries. The support that government funding offered LGBTQ filmmaking at a crucial time in its development is clearly visible in the work of Pedro Almodóvar and in the Canadian-produced film, *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* (Patricia Rozema, 1987).

Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar directed his first feature film, *Pepi, Luci, Bom, y otras chicas del montón* (*Pepi, Luci, Bom, and Other Girls on the Heap*) in 1980. Almodóvar worked throughout the 1980s and became one of the most internationally acclaimed queer directors, as his films typically contain queer central characters and plot lines. Government funding, one of the key support structures for Almodóvar, helped him achieve this prominence, which in turn provided an important precedent for the growth of queer cinema more broadly. Almodóvar, though, is interestingly often not connected directly to the New Queer Cinema movement.

Pepi, Luci, Bom was partially financed by grassroots fundraising efforts on the part of Almodóvar and Félix Rotaeta, with finishing money coming from Catalan producer Pepón Coromina.⁷⁸ The film cost around six million pesetas (approximately 90,000 USD), and after becoming something of a surprise hit at the 1980 San Sebastián and Sevilla Film Festivals, it went on to gross around 43 million pesetas in its initial Madrid theatrical run.⁷⁹ The enthusiastic response to the film suggested “the emergence of an audience that had not been taken into account by the dominant forces directing the Spanish film industry,” an audience that was receptive to queer content.⁸⁰ As Almodóvar’s reputation grew, he began to find support from the Spanish government, through a combination of RTVE (Spanish State Television) funding, and “special subsidies from the Ministry of Culture’s Miró law (named for the director of the socialist government’s Film Office who spearheaded the policy of energetic government film subventions, [through which] the production received a subvention against future box-office receipts.”⁸¹ For Almodóvar’s 1986 film, *Matador*, for example, over half of the 120 million pesetas budget (his largest up to that point) came from government subsidy.⁸² The Spanish government’s financial support helped to cultivate Almodóvar’s work and allow him to become Spain’s most internationally prominent filmmaker, particularly after the breakout success of his 1988 film *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* (*Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*). *Women on the Verge* cost around 130 million pesetas to produce, with three-quarters of this being supplied through various government grants.⁸³

In terms of Almodóvar’s international reputation and connections to LGBTQ filmmaking

⁷⁸ Marvin D’Lugo, *Pedro Almodóvar* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006): 20.

⁷⁹ D’Luga, 25-26.

⁸⁰ D’Luga, 25.

⁸¹ D’Luga, 45.

⁸² D’Luga, 45.

⁸³ D’Luga, 60.

specifically, it could be argued that his rise to fame was facilitated by “the support of the gay press and gay audiences.”⁸⁴ As evidence of this, his 1987 film *La ley del deseo* (*Law of Desire*) was released in the US as a gay film (on the gay festival circuit and as an art house release) prior to his 1986 film *Matador*, which does not have explicit gay content. This point emphasizes the importance of LGBTQ institutions in supporting queer films and filmmakers, and “gives credence to the argument that Almodóvar’s international status was first secured through the promotion of his films as gay cinema.”⁸⁵ His ability to become a successful filmmaker was directly linked with both international trends in the growth of queer cinema, as well as the ability to find consistent support from government financing.

Patricia Rozema likewise found necessary support from government grants and subsidies, in this case from her native Canada. *I’ve Heard the Mermaids Singing*, a poignant story about an awkward, idealistic amateur photographer who forms an attachment to an elegant woman who runs an art gallery, was Rozema’s first feature film. After writing the script in 1985, Rozema began to look for financing. While it was initially envisioned as an hour-long television drama, Rozema was convinced to lengthen it, in order to take advantage of emerging support for feature filmmaking.⁸⁶ Fortunately for Rozema, she was entering the English-Canadian film industry at a time when it was “just starting to come of age, thanks to vigorous new government funding agendas... both the Ontario and Federal governments had just made available even more funds for Canadian feature films.”⁸⁷

Initial funds for the project were quickly granted from the Canada Council and the

⁸⁴ Paul Julian Smith, *Laws of Desire: Questions of Homosexuality in Spanish Writing and Film, 1960-1990* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992): 165.

⁸⁵ D’Luga, 53.

⁸⁶ Julia Mendenhall, *I’ve Heard the Mermaids Singing* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2014): 53.

⁸⁷ Mendenhall, 52-53.

Ontario Arts Council.⁸⁸ Less than six months after that, Rozema and her co-producer, Alexandra Raffé, had “secured the balance of the [\$262,000 US] budget from two newly created Canadian film funds—Telefilm Canada and Ontario Film Development Corp.”⁸⁹ In 1986, the Ontario Film Development Corporation (OFDC) opened, with “\$20 million CAN to fund films over a three year period. In the same year, Telefilm initiated its Feature Film Fund with \$65 million CAN.”⁹⁰ While exact numbers for the budget vary, the Arts council ended up supplying around 79,000 CAD, Rozema and Raffé deferred their salaries (20,000 CAD), the OFDC contributed around 100,000 CAD, and Telefilm ended up supplying 163,000 CAD for the film’s budget, the largest single contribution.⁹¹ Both OFDC and Telefilm were committed to the project, and in fact offered Rozema funds above what she had requested. As Rozema states:

There was some concern that we could do it for that little... and they suggested we go higher. But we didn’t want to be obligated to have a huge audience. I wasn’t sure what the audience on this would be... The less you make it for... the less you have to make back. It’s a basic business principle. When you know you’re making something unusual, you’ve got to minimize your financial risk as much as possible. You’ve got to find ways to do it cheap.⁹²

Although Rozema took a risk with this project, she need not have worried about making the money back. The film found significant critical and box office success, a “Cinderella Tale,” as *Variety* dubbed it.⁹³

Mermaids made its debut at the 1987 Cannes Film Festival, and Rozema, Raffé, and the film’s star, Sheila McCarthy, achieved “instantaneous international acclaim,” as the film received standing ovations and won the coveted *Prix de la jeunesse*.⁹⁴ During and immediately

⁸⁸ Charles Kipps, “‘Mermaids’ Boss Rozema Handles New-Found Success Swimmingly,” *Variety* 328.5 (26 August 1987): 6.

⁸⁹ Kipps, 6.

⁹⁰ Mendenhall, 53.

⁹¹ Mendenhall, 54.

⁹² Rozema qtd. in Kipps, 6.

⁹³ “‘Mermaids’ Is Canada’s Fest Cinderella Tale.” *Variety* 327.4 (20 May 1987): 7, 39.

⁹⁴ Julia Mendenhall, *I’ve Heard the Mermaids Singing* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2014): 25.

following Cannes, the film made over a million CAD in world sales to countries that included Japan, Belgium, Italy, France, the UK, Australia, Argentina and others.⁹⁵ *Mermaids* was a hot property, generating a lot of buzz, and Miramax's Bob and Harvey Weinstein enthusiastically acquired the American release rights to the film for \$400,000 US, which alone would put the producers in the black in terms of initial investments in the film.⁹⁶ The film ended up making money for all involved; the American gross alone came out to about \$1.3 million, and the total worldwide gross for the film was over 10 million CAD, which was a "phenomenal" result for such a low budget production.⁹⁷

Although *Mermaids* fell into a period of obscurity, perhaps a casualty of arriving just before, and being overshadowed by, *NQC*, it was well-received during its initial release and had a lasting impact on the filmmaking landscape of Canada. The film has been recently revived in the queer film canon by Julia Mendenhall's excellent contribution to the *Queer Film Classics* book series. In it, Mendenhall argues that *Mermaids* is:

one of the most influential feature films to be made within the English-Canadian filmmaking milieu because its financial success precipitated what is called the Toronto New Wave⁹⁸ ... *Mermaids'* initial Cannes achievement and theatrical distribution persuaded Telefilm Canada and the OFDC to invest more eagerly in the low-budget films of (now) internationally recognized Canadian filmmakers.⁹⁹

These include *NQC* contributor John Greyson. Mendenhall in fact puts *Mermaids* into a "proto-New Queer Cinema category," and argues that the film's "soft politics and territories of affect and effect had an influence, even if small, in precipitating the birth of the New Queer Cinema movement and its harder politics."¹⁰⁰ In addition to providing aesthetic inspiration and a

⁹⁵ "'Mermaids' Is Canada's Fest Cinderella Tale," 7, 39.

⁹⁶ "'Mermaids' Is Canada's Fest Cinderella Tale," 7, 39.

⁹⁷ Mendenhall, 26.

⁹⁸ A flourishing of English-Canadian filmmaking, whose years Mendenhall marks as roughly 1984-1995 (Mendenhall, 27).

⁹⁹ Mendenhall, 27.

¹⁰⁰ Mendenhall, 30, 131.

successful model of production for low budget LGBTQ filmmaking, *Mermaids* demonstrates the important role that government funding can play in bringing challenging, alternative viewpoints to the screen.

While the role of direct government funding plays a smaller part in American filmmaking contexts, it is worth discussing some of the direct and indirect influences government agencies can have. To begin with, I consider the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) during the 1980s, a period of time when Ronald Reagan's presidency (1981-1989) posed a threat to its survival. In 1981, David Stockman of the Office of Management and Budget "was trying to 'zero out'—completely abolish—the NEA."¹⁰¹ Specifically, his plan for 1982 included:

reduce the budget authority of the arts and humanities endowments by 50 percent... Reductions of this magnitude are premised on the notion that the administration should completely revamp federal policy for the arts and humanities support. For too long, the endowments have spread federal financing into an ever-wider range of artistic and literary endeavor, promoting the notion that the federal government should be the financial patron of first resort.¹⁰²

In laying out probable reactions, Stockman writes, "The arts and humanities endowments have broad and articulate public constituencies, ranging from university professors to museum directors to individual artists and scholars... A proposal to halve the budgets of the endowments could generate strong opposition."¹⁰³ Despite the stance of his administration, Reagan himself was "not strongly motivated to abolish the endowments," since he had worked as an actor and had connections to the art world.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps it is less surprising then that oppositional forces were able to fight to maintain NEA funding, keeping the 1982 cuts to ten percent and declaring

¹⁰¹ Mark Bauerlein and Ellen Grantham, eds. *National Endowment for the Arts: A History 1965-2008*. (Washington D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 2008): 69.

¹⁰² David Stockman, "Pages From Budget Director Stockman's 'Black Book,'" *The Washington Post* (8 February 1981): A15.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* Also included in the proposed cuts is a 25% decrease in funding to CPB.

¹⁰⁴ Bauerlein and Grantham, 70.

that “the arts in America are alive and well.”¹⁰⁵ The NEA continued to exist and prosper, entering the end of Reagan’s administration in a strong position, with a budget increased to \$169 million.¹⁰⁶

Although the early 1990s saw increases in the NEA’s overall budget, topping out at \$174 million in 1992,¹⁰⁷ it experienced major difficulties during this time, when funding for exhibitions by Andres Serrano, Robert Mapplethorpe, and other controversial artists led to a conservative backlash. Angered by the content of some of this work, vocal, conservative groups attacked the NEA and called for budget cuts, the defunding of work deemed “obscene or indecent,” and even the dismantling of the agency itself. This controversy is covered in more detail in Chapter 7, as it relates to the funding of *Poison*. Despite the impending “culture wars” of the early 1990s and the Reagan administration’s mishandling of the AIDS crisis, government support for the arts more generally put the NEA in a position to provide a crucial leg of support for independent filmmaking, including films with LGBTQ content.¹⁰⁸

Although the NEA did contribute to a number of individual films from the 1970s through the 1990s, its support did not always come in the form of money given directly to filmmakers. The impact of the NEA came in the form of supporting other institutional structures. For example, the Sundance Institute was founded in 1981 using grant money from the NEA, and the NEA has funded numerous Sundance programs. These include Script Development and June Laboratory programs, which gave filmmakers the chance to workshop their scripts-in-progress and network with other filmmakers and producers. Beginning in 1984, the Institute’s Production

¹⁰⁵ Bauerlein and Grantham, 70.

¹⁰⁶ Bauerlein and Grantham, 69.

¹⁰⁷ “National Endowment for the Arts Appropriations History,” <<https://www.arts.gov/open-government/national-endowment-arts-appropriations-history>> (23 January 2017).

¹⁰⁸ In the cited history of the NEA (Bauerlein and Grantham), it should be noted that although Todd Haynes is mentioned in passing, there is a general avoidance of mentioning anything related to LGBTQ arts, even in the discussion of Mapplethorpe’s work.

Assistance Program provided completion guaranties (underwriting projects and assuring investors that a film will be completed) for first-time filmmakers, networking and advisory support, creative assistance, access to equipment rentals, and interest free loans to help with preproduction expenses.¹⁰⁹ The loans provided vital funds to keep projects alive and help filmmakers develop their work to a point where they could interest investors. Working as a source of non-profit assistance and funding, the Sundance Institute and later festival were significant pillars of support for the growing indie cinema landscape, and this institution was in turn supported by larger structures, including the NEA.

In addition to grants through government funding, there were a number of private and LGBT-specific grants institutions, including the Chicago Resource Center (CRC). Much like the NEA, these private institutions supported both individual filmmakers and other filmmaking institutions, such as film festivals and workshops. The CRC in the late 1980s funded a number of gay and lesbian organizations. While it did not directly mention film or media, the CRC did fund several LGBT film festivals, specifically the Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Pittsburgh festivals. It also provided funds to individual films. A documentary film project about Audre Lorde produced received \$12,000;¹¹⁰ the video project “Cut Sleeve: Lesbians and Gays of Asian Ancestry” and the Film Arts Foundation in San Francisco were awarded \$5,000; and “The Maud’s Project” in Venice, CA was given \$7,500 towards the production of the film *Last Call at Maud’s*.¹¹¹ Moonforce Media also received \$10,000 in support of the video *Beyond Coming Out*, and Frameline, the operational group in charge of the San Francisco Festival, was

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Satter to “all concerned,” (31 January 1986), Box 3, Folder 47. Godmilow Papers.

¹¹⁰ CRC list of Gay and Lesbian Grants, 1987, Box 1, Folder 16, PILGFF Papers. The film, titled *A Litany for Survival: The Life and Work of Audre Lorde* (Michelle Parkerson, Ada Gay Griffin), was finished in 1995 with the help of PBS’ POV series.

¹¹¹ CRC list of Gay and Lesbian Grants, 1990, Box 2, Folder 7, PILGFF Papers.

awarded funds for both general support (\$7,500) and additional funds through the production company Telling Pictures (\$8,000)¹¹² for the production of *The Celluloid Closet* documentary. This private grant support, combined with government funding, provided essential support to the expanding LGBTQ cinema landscape.

Non-Profit Institutions: Public Television

In the 1980s and early 1990s, funding from public television provided an invaluable source of support and consistent funding for independent and non-American LGBTQ filmmaking. Increased opportunities provided by public service broadcasting, specifically Channel 4 in the UK and the PBS series *American Playhouse* in the US, proved instrumental in producing larger numbers of LGBTQ films as the eighties progressed. Television continued to provide support to NQC films in the early 1990s, and looking at the growing interaction between television funding and filmmaking can offer insight into one of the pivotal institutional pillars of support that helped the creation of a queer cinema movement.

Since the mandate of public service broadcasting specified using funds to support works by and about marginalized sectors of society, LGBTQ work was explored more thoroughly in the context of television-funded films than in mainstream, commercially-driven productions. Programming funded by PBS, for example, was created to provide greater diversity in filmmaking. Yannis Tzioumakis even cites the “ethos of public service broadcasting” as

a defining factor (at least initially) for the articulation of the new independent cinema... This is the point when American independent feature filmmaking became widely perceived as a vehicle for the articulation of alternative voices and political positions and therefore clearly different from other forms or brands, like top-rank and exploitation, of independent filmmaking.¹¹³

¹¹² CRC list of Gay and Lesbian Grants, 1991, Box 2, Folder 14, PILGFF Papers.

¹¹³ Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 208-209.

This “ethos of public service broadcasting” had a significant effect on the identification and development of independent cinema more broadly. Other nations’ public television outlets likewise focused on including a range of voices, and provided spaces for LGBTQ films to be produced and seen.

Public television funding in the 1970s and 1980s came from a number of sources, including German, French, and Italian networks, which were among the first to support the funding of feature length film production. In 1982, they were joined by PBS’s American Playhouse series and Channel 4’s Film on Four. Television, particularly public service broadcasting, has played an essential role in European film production, as these institutions “provided the bulk of financial support for European filmmaking.”¹¹⁴ This can be seen in the fact that in 1994, 51% of European films in production were supported by television financing,¹¹⁵ and this percentage increased in certain countries. For example, in Belgium and Portugal “television had a stake in all of the country’s films,” and in France and Germany, television funding was involved in 74% and 63% of productions respectively.¹¹⁶

Channel 4 was created in 1982 as a result of the 1980 Broadcasting Act. It joined the UK’s three existing channels (the state-run BBC1 and BBC2, as well as the independent ITV), and charted a path between commercial and public funding. Channel 4 came into being under the control of the Independent Broadcasters Association, and the ITV companies were required to fund the new channel. This alleviated the need, at least until the early 1990s, for Channel 4 to fund itself through direct sales of advertising. Channel 4 was therefore “not wholly separated from the pressures of the market, of the need to find an audience,” but it was “sufficiently

¹¹⁴ John Hill, “British Television and Film: The Making of a Relationship,” in John Hill and Martin McLoone ed. *Big Picture Small Screen: The Relations Between Film and Television* (Luton: University of Luton, 1996): 153.

¹¹⁵ Hill, “British Television and Film,” 152.

¹¹⁶ Hill, “British Television and Film,” 152.

insulated from those pressures.”¹¹⁷ In addition to programs designed solely for broadcast, the Film on Four series funded independent film productions for release both on television and in theaters.¹¹⁸ Although Channel 4's feature film output constituted only a small percent of its programming (about 14% of the 1984-1985 season), it contributed heavily to the channel's image. Filmmaking became a “center of gravity within Channel 4 programming.”¹¹⁹ While the channel often lost money in producing features, it gained critical attention, prestige, and an association with “quality” programming that made cultural contributions.¹²⁰

Channel 4 provided one leg of a support system that included foreign pre-sales, theatrical revenues, and government-backed agencies. Despite working with small budgets, £6 million for film production in the first year of operation,¹²¹ Channel 4 contributed to the production of a substantial number of films. In 1984, 10 of the 28 features produced in the UK had support from Channel 4,¹²² and “between 1982 and 1992, it invested £91 million in 264 different works.”¹²³ The channel “has been especially important for British filmmaking... At a time when both private and public finance for British film was scarce, the channel provided the British film industry with an important lifeline and was involved in many of the most successful or critically acclaimed films of the 1980s and 1990s.”¹²⁴ Channel 4 was able to revitalize British film

¹¹⁷ Jeremy Isaacs, “Public Broadcasting in the Eighties,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 131.5317 (1982): 45-46

¹¹⁸ Channel 4's film funding arm has shifted names since its inception as Film on Four (broadcasting slot) and Channel Four Films (production/distribution). These are outlined at the beginning of Hannah Andrews' *Television and British Cinema: Convergence and Divergence Since 1990* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014): xi.

¹¹⁹ Gabriele Bock and Siegfried Zielinski, “Britain's Channel 4: A TV Provider Caught Between Private Sector Funding and Its Cultural Mission,” *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 11.4 (2014): 432.

¹²⁰ John Hill, *British Cinema of the 1980s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999): 60-61.

¹²¹ Christopher Williams, “The Social Art Cinema: a Moment in the History of British Film and Television Culture,” in Williams ed. *Cinema: The Beginnings and the Future* (London: University of Westminster Press, 1996): 195.

¹²² Paul Giles, “History with Holes: Channel 4 Television Films of the 1980s” in Lester Friedman, ed, *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006): 62.

¹²³ Hill, *British Cinema*, 56.

¹²⁴ John Hill, “Contemporary British Cinema: Industry, Policy, Identity,” *Cinéaste* 26.4 (2001): 31. Films funded by Film on Four include *Another Time, Another Place* (Michael Radford, 1983), *The Ploughman's Lunch* (Richard

production and shape British film culture,¹²⁵ including carving out space for the growth of LGBTQ filmmaking.

In large part because of the guaranteed support for the channel outside of commercial concerns, Channel 4 was able to experiment and take risks that commercial producers would hesitate to undertake. As Jeremy Isaacs, the channel's first Chief Executive, stated at the inauguration of the channel, "Channel 4 will not play it safe. Channel 4 has a statutory obligation to encourage experiment and innovation in the form and content of programmes."¹²⁶ Channel 4 was designed to be a "conduit for a wide range of voices," and tasked with reaching and opening a space for "cultural and ethnic minorities—groups whose communicative needs had hitherto not been sufficiently taken account of."¹²⁷ Part of this risk-taking, which goes along with its call to include marginalized voices, included creating works with LGBTQ subjects. The best-known and most successful example of this impulse remains *My Beautiful Laundrette*, which is often considered "the archetypal" Film on Four,¹²⁸ and can even be considered one of the "defining British Films of the decade."¹²⁹ *My Beautiful Laundrette* was made entirely with funding from Britain's Channel 4 and became a surprise art house hit in 1986. The film's production and distribution history offers a valuable case study on both the role that foreign films had in shaping the American LGBTQ film market and the important part that television played in

Eyre, 1983), *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Stephen Frears, 1985), *Letter to Brezhnev* (Chris Bernard, 1985), *Caravaggio* (Derek Jarman, 1986), and *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, 1992).

¹²⁵ Discussions of Channel 4's support of filmmaking can be found in several books, for example, Andrews' *Television and British Cinema*, Hill's *British Cinema of the 1980s*, and Lester Friedman's edited volume *Fires Were Started*, as well as numerous articles, including those found in the October, 2014 special edition of the *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (issue 11.4), titled "Channel 4 and British Film Culture." This publication comes out of a four-year Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project (2010-2014), headed by Dr. Justin Smith and Professor Paul McDonald, that was designed to analyze the influence Channel 4 has had on British film culture.

¹²⁶ Isaacs, 47-48.

¹²⁷ Bock and Zielinski, 420, 422. Channel 4's task of opening a space for a variety of voices is also discussed in Patricia Holland, *Broadcasting and the NHS in the Thatcherite 1980s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

¹²⁸ Hill, *British Cinema*, 56.

¹²⁹ Williams, "The Social Art Cinema," 197.

supporting LGBTQ filmmaking.

Laundrette, written by Hanif Kureishi, follows the relationship between two young men from very different worlds: Johnny (Daniel Day Lewis) runs with a gang of white, unemployed punks and Omar (Gordon Warnecke) is an ambitious entrepreneur of Pakistani descent. Together, they refurbish and run an old laundromat belonging to Omar's Uncle. They also engage in a romantic, sexual relationship that forms the core of the film and persists despite the trials they face. In approaching the characters' homosexuality, Kureishi "wanted it to be 'taken for granted' rather than foregrounded as an issue. The film, in this respect, uses traditional romantic conventions to 'normalize' gay sexuality; while, at the same time, using its gay relationship to subvert those very same conventions."¹³⁰ The film portrays a positive homosexual relationship while criticizing racism, classism, and Thatcherite England's economic practices.

At the suggestion of Karin Bamborough (a Channel 4 Commissioning Editor), David Rose (the then Senior Commissioning Editor for fiction at Channel 4), commissioned Kureishi to write a script for Film on Four.¹³¹ After completing a script in summer of 1984, Kureishi began to shop it around to potential directors and "shoved it through Stephen Frears' door."¹³² Frears responded well to the script and signed on to direct, at which point he recommended bringing in the production company Working Title.¹³³ *Laundrette* was Working Title's first feature film, and its success impacted the growth of an important British production company, which earned a reputation for "producing low-budget dramas with a political edge," including some of Derek

¹³⁰ Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s*, 213.

¹³¹ David Rose, interview by Justin Smith, *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 11.4 (2014): 520.

¹³² Rose, interview, 520.

¹³³ Rose, interview, 520.

Jarman's work.¹³⁴ Film on Four supplied the entirety of *Laundrette*'s £650,000 budget, and the film was completed by March 1985, a very quick progression from idea to finished product.¹³⁵ *Laundrette* was shot on super 16mm because it was not considered to be a film that would have a life outside of television. Frears himself thought of it as a "telly film," one that would find an appreciative audience on Channel 4 but would not obtain significant theatrical distribution.¹³⁶ Despite hesitations about the film's commercial appeal, Working Title brought the film to the Edinburgh film festival, where it received rave reviews and generated interest in a theatrical release. At that point, they decided to blow the film up to 35mm and release it theatrically in the UK and US, where it did quite well. In its American run, which included over half a year in New York,¹³⁷ it grossed over \$2.4 million. The film's success earned Frears international acclaim and laid the foundation for his future American-funded work.¹³⁸

British television offered "considerable inducements to filmmakers: substantial financial rewards, a highly visible medium, a captive audience."¹³⁹ Frears specifically remarked that he made *Laundrette* for Channel 4 "because he wanted a large number of people to see and talk about the film."¹⁴⁰ Viewing statistics back this up, as 74% of the British population did not view film in theaters, but in 1988, British adults watched 25 hours of television per week on average.¹⁴¹ Frears also appreciated television because, as he saw it, television "gives an accurate account of what it's like to live in Britain—about men and women who go to work and lead

¹³⁴ Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980s*, 45.

¹³⁵ Rose, interview, 520-521.

¹³⁶ Rose, interview, 521.

¹³⁷ Hill, "British Television and Film," 179.

¹³⁸ Susan Torrey Barber, "Insurmountable Difficulties and Moments of Ecstasy: Crossing Class, Ethnic and Sexual Barriers in the Films of Stephen Frears," in Lester Friedman, ed, *Fires were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006): 209.

¹³⁹ Giles, "History with Holes," 59.

¹⁴⁰ Giles, "History with Holes," 59.

¹⁴¹ Giles, "History with Holes," 59-60.

rather desperate lives.”¹⁴²

The relationship between British public broadcasting and queer filmmaking, however, was not without its trials. In 1988, Section 28 was established, a reactionary law that stated “A local authority shall not... promote homosexuality or publish material for the promotion of homosexuality...[or] give financial or other assistance to any person for either of the purposes referred to above.”¹⁴³ Frears commented that films like *Laundrette* and *Prick Up Your Ears* (1987) “probably could not have been made after this law was passed.”¹⁴⁴ This law severely curtailed the role public funding could have in the creation and exhibition of LGBTQ images. In part, Channel 4 was able to circumvent some of these issues in its shift to private sector, corporate status in the early 1990s.

Much like *Film on Four*, the PBS series *American Playhouse* offered funding for low-budget filmmaking projects, as well as guaranteed exhibition on television.¹⁴⁵ Also beginning in 1982, *Playhouse* had an ambitious goal of contributing to the production of 20 projects a year.¹⁴⁶ Although it did not always reach this goal, the first 12 years of the series generated a substantial output of approximately 200 films/episodes. Around 40 of these were released theatrically in addition to their later PBS premieres, making *Playhouse* “the country’s most prolific independent film outlet” of the 1980s.¹⁴⁷ *Playhouse* remained an active producing entity until 1999, although in 1994 it severed ties with PBS and joined forces with the Samuel Goldwyn Company to create

¹⁴² Frears qtd in Barber, 211.

¹⁴³ Barber, 221. The full Section 28 text can be found at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/section/28> It reads: “**Prohibition on promoting homosexuality by teaching or by publishing material.** (1) A local authority shall not— (a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality; (b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship. (2) Nothing in subsection (1) above shall be taken to prohibit the doing of anything for the purpose of treating or preventing the spread of disease.”

¹⁴⁴ Barber, 213.

¹⁴⁵ PBS has a history of supporting filmmakers both before and outside of *American Playhouse*. For example, the collaboratively directed/produced *Word is Out* (1977) had one of its early showings on PBS.

¹⁴⁶ Ellin Stein, “Quality Time,” *American Film* 11.4 (1986): 47.

¹⁴⁷ Bruce Weber, “Big Movies on Little Budgets,” *New York Times* (17 May 1992): H27.

content primarily for a theatrical market.¹⁴⁸ This move, ironically, marked the end of its significance to indie cinema. In an overcrowded market and without the consistent financial support of PBS, Playhouse was unable to produce more than a few films from 1994 to 1999.

Playhouse operated as a non-profit entity that was funded by a consortium of American Public Broadcasting stations, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the National Endowment for the Arts, and commercial sponsors (such as the Chubb Group of Insurance Companies).¹⁴⁹ Finding support through partnerships, a mix of non-profit and commercial interests, allowed Playhouse to produce significantly more films than its initial budget would allow.¹⁵⁰ For example, programs produced during the 1984-85 season cost a total of \$20 million, of which Playhouse provided only \$8.5 million.¹⁵¹ Playhouse's involvement on projects reassured potential investors, who were more likely to contribute money to a project that had a stable, well-funded institution behind it. Studios and even smaller distributors were hesitant to "gamble" on low-budget films, often by first time directors. Playhouse could invest money upfront, and once "pictures are completed and can be screened, distributors might be more willing to release them on the movie theater circuit."¹⁵² Playhouse filmmakers could take their work to festivals or independent film marketplaces and try to interest a distributor.

In its first five years of operation, approximately one fifth of Playhouse productions were produced by or about minority subjects.¹⁵³ Lindsay Law, executive producer, remarked that the

¹⁴⁸ Glenn Collins, "American Playhouse Is Moving Into Film," *New York Times* (29 March 1994): C13. And "American Playhouse goes indie with Goldwyn money," *Variety* (5 April 1994): 15.

¹⁴⁹ Longtime Companion production notes, found in Longtime Companion Folder, ONE Archive Subject Files. See also: John O'Connor, "2 PBS Series, Natural History and Drama," *New York Times* (12 Jan 1982): C15. And Kevin Zimmerman, "A free spirit defied early limit," *Variety* (17 March 1994): 47.

¹⁵⁰ Nan Robertson, "American Drama Gets Top Billing in a PBS Showcase," *New York Times* (21 April 1985): H29. A detailed account of the series' funding and operations can be found in Chelsea McCracken, "Rethinking Television Indies: The Impact of American Playhouse," *Screen* (Summer 2016): 218-234.

¹⁵¹ Robertson, "American Drama."

¹⁵² Law quoted in Robertson, "American Drama."

¹⁵³ Stein, 46.

series' concerns with "civil rights, social problems, immigrant experiences and even nuclear weapons" are "in response to the commercial networks' pulling away from issue oriented drama and relying on fantasy, escapist fare."¹⁵⁴ Playhouse supplied funds for a number of LGBT-themed works such as *The Fifth of July* (Kirk Browning and Marshal Mason, 1982), *Waiting for the Moon* (Jill Godmilow, 1987), and *Longtime Companion* (Norman René, 1990). *Longtime Companion* was an anomalous film for Playhouse, as this was the first time it had acted as a film's sole financier, supplying the entirety of the film's \$1.5 million budget.¹⁵⁵

Law was interested in telling a story about AIDS "through the eyes of the gay community."¹⁵⁶ He explained that "there was nothing else out there, and people kept saying, 'Why is this still a taboo subject?' I mean, there was [the 1985 television drama] *An Early Frost*, and then it was as if everyone said our responsibility to the subject was now done with and we didn't have to worry about it anymore."¹⁵⁷ Screenwriter Craig Lucas, after winning a Los Angeles Drama Critics Award, was courted by numerous studios. They balked, however, when Lucas "would invariably suggest I write a film about people with AIDS, and they would invariably say: 'No.' Case closed. Lindsay Law was the first and only person to be excited about the prospect."¹⁵⁸ From early in the pre-production process, after Law commissioned a script from Lucas, Playhouse supported *Longtime Companion* and tried to bring in other funding sources. No other investors or distributors, however, were willing to commit to the film.¹⁵⁹ Law

¹⁵⁴ O'Connor, "When Public TV Excels."

¹⁵⁵ Christopher Michaud, "Is There a Distributor Out There for This Film?" *New York Times* (18 March 1990): H15.

¹⁵⁶ Christopher Michaud, "'Longtime Companion' Takes an Unflinching Look at AIDS," *The New York Times* (25 June 1989): H18.

¹⁵⁷ Law qtd. in Kim Garfield, "Where the Boys Were: *Longtime Companion* Conquers Hollywood Homophobia to Become the First Major Movie On Gay Life and AIDS," *The Advocate* 550 (8 May 1990): 35.

¹⁵⁸ Lucas qtd. in Michaud, "'Longtime Companion,'" H18.

¹⁵⁹ There were some companies (DuArt, Panavision, and Sound One) that offered service contributions to help defray production costs. (Michaud, "'Longtime Companion,'" H18.) Interestingly, an unnamed soft drink company agreed to supply its products to the production "only on the condition that the soda cans *not* be shown in any scenes" (Garfield, "Where the Boys Were," 36.)

made the decision to make the film anyway, keeping the budget low and funding it through the series. Lucas remarked that the actors worked “for next to nothing, and the production assistants are literally working for nothing.”¹⁶⁰ The production was described as “a labor of love,” since most everyone involved in it knew someone living with AIDS or who had died as a result of the disease. Lucas himself, having experience working with the Gay Men’s Health Crisis organization in New York and having lost, “by his count, 45 to 50 friends and acquaintances, including his first lover,” stated that he “felt comfortable with the setting... it was not a problem writing and developing gay characters.”¹⁶¹

Law initially believed that producing the film would be the challenge, only to discover that finding a distributor proved just as difficult. While he had worked with independent distributors for several Playhouse films in the past, and knew that “finding a distributor requires as much time, knowledge, effort and heartbreak as getting the movie made itself—and luck,” he stated that he was “definitely surprised. I was not prepared for the length of time it took to find a distributor, and it made me very nervous. I had thought that there would be a couple companies making offers, and the decision would be up to us.”¹⁶² In 1990, distributors were still reluctant to release films that dealt substantially with aspects of gay life. The film received good audience feedback at the Mill Valley Film Festival and the Independent Feature Market in New York, and it won the audience award at the Sundance Film Festival. Distribution companies, however, remained hesitant. Law and producer Stan Wlodkowski had a number of indie distributors in mind, including Miramax, Orion Classics, Cinecom, the Samuel Goldwyn Company, and Avenue Pictures.¹⁶³ While everyone was willing to take a look at the film, not wanting to miss

¹⁶⁰ Lucas qtd. in Michaud, “‘Longtime Companion,’” H18.

¹⁶¹ Michaud, “‘Longtime Companion,’” H18.

¹⁶² Law qtd. in Michaud, “Is There a Distributor,” H15.

¹⁶³ Michaud, “Is There a Distributor,” H15.

out on the next big thing, Wlodkowski noted that people in the industry were “afraid of AIDS, and they don’t know how to handle it or deal with it; and I suppose that was always the subtext of every conversation I had about the film... Everyone kept saying, ‘It’s terrific, I have a tremendous respect for it and I know you’ll get a distributor for this, but it’s just not right for us.’”¹⁶⁴ Three months into the search for a distributor, and Law returned to the Samuel Goldwyn Company, which had initially passed on the film but indicated that they would reconsider in a couple months if the film still did not have distribution.¹⁶⁵ After a well-attended and successful New York screening for a large group of industry people, Goldwyn rethought its decision and put in an offer.¹⁶⁶

Longtime Companion ended up earning a respectable \$4.6 million at the box office, and provided a precedent for releasing potentially difficult gay films. The process of *Longtime Companion*’s production and distribution offers evidence of a lingering mainstream hesitation towards this subject matter, but the film provided a critical point in the progression of commercially viable gay films. The bounds of acceptable material were pushed further and further, since the film made money and therefore offered compensation for the risk of its subject matter. It was only through the use of television funding, specifically public television, that this film was able to be produced and join the ranks of “landmark” LGBT films. The support provided by PBS in the US, Channel 4 in the UK, and other government-sponsored television stations all pushed forward the development of LGBTQ filmmaking by offering opportunities that would otherwise not have been available to projects that were seen as commercially risky.

¹⁶⁴ Wlodkowski qtd. in Michaud, “Is There a Distributor,” H15, H22.

¹⁶⁵ Michaud, “Is There a Distributor,” H22. They did have offers from a newly formed company, and from Cinevista (which was ultimately deemed “too small”—they wanted a larger release than Cinevista could guarantee)

¹⁶⁶ Michaud, “Is There a Distributor,” H22.

Independent Distributors

While it was possible to finance a film's production through grassroots fundraising and non-profit support structures, the realm of distribution is perhaps the most difficult barrier to entry, as Lindsay Law discovered with *Longtime Companion*. Getting a finished project into theaters, especially those that cater to mainstream fare, required negotiating a complicated set of hurdles. The creation of a distribution network was therefore an essential requirement for the proliferation and sustained impact of LGBTQ cinema, and the founding and expansion of independent distribution companies in the 1980s provided this network. While the majors and even larger independent companies might have been hesitant to invest in or distribute LGBTQ films, these up and coming companies were willing to take risks, and in fact some companies formed specifically around LGBTQ filmmaking. This industry segment was also essential for the domestic distribution of international films. In order to investigate the essential role these structures played in LGBTQ filmmaking, I look at the rise of home video and specialty distributors, the LGBTQ-friendly tactics of a larger indie distributor, and the formation of Promovision/Cinevista. Investigating these case studies demonstrates the key role that the evolution of distribution companies played in supporting LGBTQ filmmaking.

The rise of the home video market helped to sustain a growing gay and lesbian filmmaking niche. Home video use expanded enormously in the 1980s, "from 1,850,000 VCR sets in 78,000,000 households (2.4 per cent penetration) in 1980, the number reached 32,000,000 in 87,400,000 households (37.2 per cent penetration) in 1986, on the way to 67.6 percent penetration three years later."¹⁶⁷ Because of this growth, home video rights played an increasingly large part in recouping costs for filmmakers and in providing upfront funding by

¹⁶⁷ Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 223.

pre-selling these rights. For distributors, the home video market provides “necessary fiscal insurance” on their investment in films.¹⁶⁸ And on the side of filmmakers, “the accessibility of home video entices a larger audience to try specialty films.”¹⁶⁹ Ira Deutchman, a producer and longstanding figure in the independent cinema industry, remarked that, “home video can reach into corners that the kind of distribution we do theatrically doesn’t... Our experience has been that relative to the theatrical box office, specialized films do better (on video) than commercial films do.”¹⁷⁰

In the example of *Desert Hearts*, Vestron Video handled the home video release and made a considerable profit and visible impact with the film. *Desert Hearts* debuted as the fifth most popular wholesale acquisition in the UK,¹⁷¹ and in the US the film made it onto *American Film*’s “Best bets among this month’s releases on tape,” a substantial feat during a holiday buying month.¹⁷² Gay and lesbian niche video sales allowed for significant audience growth and access to previously unserved communities. It allowed filmmakers to reach untapped markets, those gay men and lesbians who lived outside of major cities and therefore did not have access to film festivals or art house theaters.

The ability to reach broader markets led to a call for more gay and lesbian viewing options. To meet this need on a limited, grassroots level, gay men and lesbians formed video clubs, mail-order houses, and distribution networks. They were “producing videos themselves and [were] becoming video publishers, acquiring tape rights to movies that interest gay viewers... With invention and foresight, gays are now in the nascent stages of providing their

¹⁶⁸ Goldman, 48.

¹⁶⁹ Goldman, 48.

¹⁷⁰ Tom Matthews, “Art Films: Handle With Care,” *Boxoffice* 122.5 (1 May 1986): 16.

¹⁷¹ “Video Top 20,” *Screen International* (2 May 1987): 398.

¹⁷² “Fast-Forward: Best Bets Among this Month’s Releases on Tape,” *American Film* (1 December 1986): 59.

own entertainment in the rapidly expanding video arena.”¹⁷³ This distribution outlet created space for new companies to form and cater specifically to niche groups. Two such companies were Wolfe Video (active from 1985 to the present) and Awards Films International (in operation from 1982 to about 2006),¹⁷⁴ which both started as mail order home video distributors that specialized in LGBTQ films.

Awards Film formed in 1982 because, as founder Timothy Wohlgenuth put it, “we felt that there was a large gay market that was tired of having only X-rated material... And we’ve discovered there’s some wonderful material out there.”¹⁷⁵ Awards Film partnered with the Insider Video Club (IVC), which began operating in 1981, and together the companies amassed somewhere between 100 and 150 titles in their catalog by 1988.¹⁷⁶ Wohlgenuth noted that, “we’re growing far more rapidly than anyone else in the videocassette business. We haven’t had a lot of money, but we have a lot of loyal supporters who want to see us succeed.”¹⁷⁷ This rapid growth is evidence of the company’s place at the vanguard of LGBTQ film distribution. They identified an under-served niche and sought to fill this gap, and they were soon joined by a number of other companies.

The first specialty film distribution company to exclusively serve the gay and lesbian market actually began operating in 1977. Some of the original San Francisco Gay Film Festival organizers came together to form Persistence of Vision, “a support group to encourage gay filmmaking.”¹⁷⁸ The organization was later renamed Frameline, which functions to this day as a

¹⁷³ Kate Walter, “Fast Forward to the Future: Video Entrepreneurs Bring the Gay World to the Home Screen,” *The Advocate* 490 (19 January 1988): 28.

¹⁷⁴ Award films joined with IVC, Insider’s Video Club, and remained in operation until 2006, when the company was raided and shut down under suspicion of child pornography. At this time, it is still unclear the level to which these allegations are legitimate.

¹⁷⁵ Wohlgenuth qtd in Jimmy Summers, “Award Films’ Untapped Market,” *Boxoffice* (1 January 1983): 12.

¹⁷⁶ Walter, “Fast Forward to the Future,” 28.

¹⁷⁷ Wohlgenuth qtd in Summers, 23.

¹⁷⁸ Zielinski, 122.

“nonprofit arts agency dedicated exclusively to funding, distributing, promoting and exhibiting lesbian and gay film and video.”¹⁷⁹ Frameline runs the annual festival and handles the distribution of a catalogue of films, predominantly for educational, institutional, or film festival viewing purposes.¹⁸⁰ Although Frameline distributes films primarily to specialty venues and not mainstream theaters or individuals for home use, Frameline can claim the title of oldest exclusively LGBT distributor.

Other specialty companies continued to form around the opportunities that niche distribution—filling a gap left by mainstream filmmaking—offered. In addition to Frameline, Awards Films, and Wolfe Video, these companies included Cinevista (1980-1998), Water Bearer Films (1988-present), Ariztical Entertainment (1994-Present), and Strand Releasing (1989-present). The longevity of these distributors, in comparison with many other small distribution companies that went out of business in the late 1980s and 1990s, suggests the robustness of the specialty market. It was able to sustain, for an extended period, at least five independent distributors. Although some of these companies expanded into more general indie and foreign film releases, their base has been in LGBTQ cinema. In some cases, these niche distributors found enough success in marketing LGBTQ films that they began to pre-purchase and support the production of more films to help fill their catalogues.

In addition to these specialty companies, several established companies, those that dealt with more mainstream independent films, began to take on films with gay and lesbian content. The gay-friendly tactics of the Samuel Goldwyn Company (independent from 1979-1996, then sold to Orion and later MGM) were particularly important to gay and lesbian cinema. Goldwyn’s release of *Desert Hearts* and *Longtime Companion*, followed later by films like

¹⁷⁹ “US Companies under the AIFA umbrella,” *Screen International* 894 (12 February 1993): III.

¹⁸⁰ Frameline website, <http://www.frameline.org/distribution>.

Peter's Friends (Kenneth Branagh, 1992), *The Wedding Banquet* (Ang Lee, 1993), and *Go Fish*, suggests an affinity for, or at least a business savvy open-mindedness towards, gay and lesbian films. As a large independent distributor, Goldwyn had a wider reach than the newly formed niche distributors and was therefore able to provide more visibility to films they acquired.

Bingham Ray, Vice President of theatrical sales, called 1986 (the year *Desert Hearts* was released) a “banner year” for the company. He pointed to “the brightening future of independent film distribution,” claiming that:

Goldwyn's growth has contributed to this improved attitude towards the independents... In the last two and a half years, the company has doubled in size in response to the fact that exhibitors are turning, to a greater extent, towards specialized, independent films that have been a hallmark of the company.¹⁸¹

Part of Goldwyn's stated goals was the creation of a diverse range of films, including “a wide spectrum of both specialized and commercial product. The company's 1987 line-up demonstrates a renewed commitment to a more demanding audience and to the kinds of diversified, quality films that will meet that demand.”¹⁸² Such comments, although intended to promote the company, suggest the way that Goldwyn was positioning itself in the marketplace and how it wanted audiences to view them. These comments, and a reference to *Desert Hearts* in Ray's write-up, are interesting when coupled with an admission he made to John Pierson years later, that “he had to get over a remnant of homophobia to prepare for later in-your-face queer films.”¹⁸³ This implies that Goldwyn's interest in gay and lesbian films was purely fiscal. Goldwyn made money and shaped its image by choosing to take on projects that were considered daring, provocative, and connected to the emerging image of indie cinema. Given these priorities, Goldwyn was in a position to help films find theatrical markets to which they would

¹⁸¹ Bingham Ray, “Goldwyn and The Future of Independent Film Distribution,” *Boxoffice* 123.5 (1 May 1987): 25.

¹⁸² Ray, 26.

¹⁸³ Pierson, 43.

otherwise not have access, and to lend legitimacy to boundary pushing topics. At the same time, these films helped shape Goldwyn's image and legacy, a mutually beneficial situation for filmmakers and distributor.

Indie distributors and non-American LGBTQ films also enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship during this period. *Taxi Zum Klo* and the early films of Pedro Almodóvar exemplify the results of this relationship. *Taxi* became a surprise art-house hit, and helped launch the small distributor Promovision International, which formed in 1981. *Taxi* was Promovision's first big release, and the film earned them a significant profit, despite encountering trouble with censorship and being too radical for many mainstream audiences.¹⁸⁴ Censorship snags included a situation in Norfolk, Virginia, where police confiscated and held a film print, claiming that the film was obscene.¹⁸⁵ A complicated legal situation ensued over whether the film could be released back to Promovision, and they lost money on missed bookings while the print was tied up.¹⁸⁶ The events in Norfolk caused Promovision to be "very careful about where we're dating the film," since it could not "afford to lose any more prints."¹⁸⁷

Despite these setbacks, the film grossed over \$280,000 in its first 7 weeks of limited release.¹⁸⁸ Provision founders Rene Fuentes-Chao and John Tilly, a former theater operator and United Artists Classics sales manager respectively, were able to give *Taxi* individualized

¹⁸⁴ Issues with the censors arose in, for example, Rome ("International Sound Track: Rome," *Variety* 312.11 (12 October 1983): 52.) and the UK, where the film was "unlicensed for screenings or video release" until "Film4 resubmitted it to the BBFC in 2005." (Roger Clarke, "Taxi Zum Klo," *Sight & Sound* vol. 21 Issue 7 (July 2011):90.)

¹⁸⁵ They claimed the film had "'a shameful, morbid interest in homosexual love affairs' that contains 'no serious medical, artistic or literary material and [goes] beyond the limits and candor of social acceptability'" (qtd in Jil Clark, "Police in Norfolk Seize Taxi Zum Klo," *Gay Community News* 10.16 (6 November 1982): 1.). Similar difficulties occurred in Richmond, Virginia, in 1983 ("Taxi Stalls in Richmond," *Gay Community News* 10.44 (29 May 1983): 2.)

¹⁸⁶ Obtaining a replacement print was prohibitively expensive, costing around \$2,500 to create and \$700 to ship from Germany.

¹⁸⁷ Jil Clark, "Distributor Sues Norfolk over Confiscation of Taxi." *Gay Community News* 10.24 (1 January 1983): 1.

¹⁸⁸ *Taxi Zum Klo* print ad, *Variety* (2 December 1981): 37.

attention and carefully tailor a marketing campaign for the film. Drawing on their skills and previous publicity experience to keep their marketing in-house, Fuentes-Chao and Tilly designed an ad campaign and theatrical trailer, spending only \$9,300 before the film's New York opening.¹⁸⁹ They positioned the film for art house audiences and the gay community. Smaller companies were better able to deal with films like *Taxi*; as Fuentes-Chao said, "We felt there was a specific market for these films but not enough viewers to interest the big companies... We're working on a campaign for people to request these titles in their [video] clubs."¹⁹⁰ Although a sexually explicit film about a gay school teacher may seem like a risky initial release, Tilly remarked that they were "looking for a small, personal entertainment film which we could release without spending a lot. 'Taxi' is a film that sells itself, but it needs the right theatre at the right time. We were also glad to make a little bit of history."¹⁹¹ Instead of seeing the film's challenging aspects as a hurdle and reason to avoid picking up the film, they instead saw these as virtues that, when combined with positive festival buzz, critical praise, and word of mouth, would make it an easy film to market.

A few years later, Promovision joined with Cinevista, and Fuentes-Chao became the president of the joint company. Cinevista was another small company, started in 1980, with the distinction of distributing Pedro Almodóvar's early films and helping to bring his work to wider international recognition. Since smaller distributors "cannot afford to enter the bidding wars with New Line, Miramax and Goldwyn for prime foreign films, they must glean for gold, as Cinevista did several years ago when it bought the distribution rights to the films of an unknown

¹⁸⁹ Lawrence Cohn, "Bank-Borne 'Taxi Zum Klo' Launches Promovision Int'l," *Variety* (2 December 1981): 7.

¹⁹⁰ Fuentes-chao qtd. in Walter, "Fast Forward to the Future," 29.

¹⁹¹ Tilly qtd. in Cohn, "Bank-Borne 'Taxi Zum Klo' Launches Promovision," 28.

director named Pedro Almodóvar.”¹⁹² Business as usual for a small distributor could be described as “combing the film festivals and waiting for the crumbs to fall from the tables of richer competitors.”¹⁹³ As Fuentes-Chao remarked, “Films get rejected, go down the escalator of distribution and finally get to Cinevista.”¹⁹⁴ Despite the more limited access to resources and venues that may keep small distributors from making as much in the box office, there were advantages to the personalized attention smaller companies could offer. At first, therefore, Almodóvar was “faithful in staying with this company [Cinevista]. I also think the fact that they are gay-owned and gay-run and deal primarily with gay-oriented films has given them a certain commitment to their movies which other companies just don't have.”¹⁹⁵ Indie distributors were willing to take chances, which gave opportunities to directors like Almodóvar that they would not have found elsewhere.

The case of Almodóvar constitutes an interesting example of the crossovers between LGBTQ cinema and art cinema. While many queer auteurs were initially recognized in art cinema contexts and subsequently developed LGBT followings around their work, Almodóvar came to prominence in the US as a queer filmmaker, as discussed above, before acquiring recognition in the realm of art cinema. This shift is manifested in the change of distributors, from very small and gay-friendly Cinevista, which “carefully nurtured” the American releases of his earlier films,¹⁹⁶ to Orion for his breakthrough film *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988). When his 1984 film *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* premiered at gay

¹⁹² William Grimes, “Little Movies Trying to be Bigger Movies,” *The New York Times* (30 July 1992): <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/07/30/movies/little-movies-trying-to-be-bigger-movies.html?pagewanted=all>

¹⁹³ Grimes, “Little Movies.”

¹⁹⁴ Fuentes-chao qtd. in Grimes, “Little Movies.”

¹⁹⁵ George Mansour qtd. in Michael Bronski, “The Happy Booker: George Mansour, one of the most innovative film bookers in the country, talks to GCN about lesbian and gay films and festivals,” *Gay Community News* 18.5 (11 August 1990): 8.

¹⁹⁶ Grimes, “Little Movies.”

film festivals, the mainstream press ignored it:

It was totally dismissed as being silly, stupid and dumb. But now after *Women on the Verge* they are falling over themselves and the very people who paid it no attention are now touting it as an early masterpiece. It's also a matter of perception and economics. *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* was distributed by Cinevista and no one paid attention. When *Women on the Verge* was released by one of the bigger independents, everyone sat up and took notice.¹⁹⁷

Almodóvar's expansion "beyond" the world of gay film festivals and LGBTQ niche audiences allowed for greater recognition of his films. Smaller distributors played an essential role in cultivating LGBTQ cinema, but it was larger distributors who could create significant buzz and attention for films. The formation of a queer cinema movement, as will be discussed in Chapter 7, was aided by increased interest in LGBTQ films on the part of larger distribution companies, particularly Fine Line Features.

In the case of both *Taxi*'s release through Promovision and Almodóvar's connection with Cinevista, these films and distributors worked symbiotically. The films benefitted from small distributors, who were willing to take risks in film selection and give the films individualized attention. The distributors, in turn, were able to use LGBTQ films to help bring in an influx of cash and contribute to the company's credibility. Through the growth of these indie distribution companies and the explosion of the home video market, the years 1977-1990 provided crucial industry developments and support for the proliferation of queer cinema.

While producing LGBTQ films during the 1980s provided a number of challenges, which at times proved insurmountable, developments in production and distribution created a fertile environment for LGBTQ filmmaking. The support of government grants, television funding, grassroots fundraising, and distribution pre-sales helped generate an influx of LGBTQ films, which were instrumental in identifying eager audiences and proving the financial viability of this

¹⁹⁷ Mansour qtd. in Bronski, "The Happy Booker," 8.

subject matter. Several independent and internationally-produced LGBTQ films found relatively large commercial success, which gave small producers a return on investments, encouraged greater investment in this area of filmmaking, and supplied product for up and coming distributors. The years that saw the formation of an “independent cinema movement” likewise saw the beginnings of a specifically gay and lesbian film movement. As film booker George Mansour remarked in 1990, "there are simply more lesbian and gay films available and more gay men and lesbians making films. It used to be very hard to find films—either with gay content or a gay sensibility—to book."¹⁹⁸ This rapidly increasing number of films kickstarted an LGBTQ film market and introduced the critical concept of an LGBTQ film movement, topics that will be analyzed in the following chapters.

¹⁹⁸ Mansour qtd. in Bronski, “The Happy Booker,” 8.

Images:

Fri., March 18, 1988 41

VARIETY

MYTH:

"If I play a gay role, I'll never work in this town again."

FACT:

JANE ALEXANDER <i>A Question of Love</i>	JOHN LARROQUETTE <i>Meatballs, Part II</i>
JUNE ALLYSON <i>They Only Kill Their Masters</i>	LAURENCE L. KINBILL <i>The Boys in the Band</i>
ANTHONY ANDREWS <i>Brideshead Revisited****</i>	SHIRLEY MACLAIN <i>The Children's Hour</i>
RENE AUBERJONOIS <i>Pete and Tillie</i>	PHILIP CHARLES MACKENZIE <i>Brothers</i>
MARTIN BALSAM <i>The Anderson Tapes**</i>	RICHARD MASUR <i>When the Bough Breaks</i>
ALAN BATES <i>Butley</i>	FRANCES LEE MCCAIN <i>The War Widow</i>
PAMELA BELLWOOD <i>The War Widow</i>	RODDY McDOWELL <i>Evil Under the Sun</i>
ROBBY BENSON <i>Ode to Billy Joe</i>	MELINA MERCOURI <i>Once Is Not Enough</i>
TOM BERENGER <i>Looking for Mr. Goodbar</i>	LOIS NETTLETON <i>The Golden Girls</i>
CANDICE BERGEN <i>The Group</i>	PAUL NEWMAN <i>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof**</i>
DIRK BOGARDE <i>Death in Venice; Victim</i>	GARY OLDMAN <i>Prick Up Your Ears</i>
PETER BOYLE <i>Swashbuckler</i>	AL PACINO <i>Dog Day Afternoon; Cruising</i>
MARLON BRANDO <i>Reflections in a Golden Eye</i>	ESTELLE PARSONS <i>Rachel, Rachel**</i>
RICHARD BURTON <i>Staircase; Villain</i>	ANTHONY PERKINS <i>Play It As It Lays</i>
MICHAEL CAINE <i>Death Trap; California Suite</i>	VALERIE PERRINE <i>Lenny**</i>
ROBERT CARRADINE <i>As Is</i>	DONNA PESCOW <i>All My Children</i>
RICHARD CHAMBERLAIN <i>Petulia; The Music Lovers</i>	ROBERT PRESTON <i>Victor/Victoria**</i>
CHER <i>Silkwood**</i>	AIDAN QUINN <i>An Early Frost****</i>
JAMES COCO <i>Only When I Laugh**</i>	TONY RANDALL <i>Love, Sidney</i>
JACK COLEMAN <i>Dynasty</i>	ROBERT REDFORD <i>Inside Daisy Clover</i>
TOM COURTENAY <i>The Dresser**</i>	LYNN REDGRAVE <i>My Two Loves</i>
BILLY CRYSTAL <i>Soap</i>	PAUL REGINA <i>Brothers</i>
JEFF DANIELS <i>Fifth of July</i>	CHRISTOPHER REEVE <i>Death Trap</i>
BRAD DAVIS <i>Midnight Express; Querelle</i>	CLIFF ROBERTSON <i>The Best Man</i>
DANIEL DAY-LEWIS <i>My Beautiful Laundrette</i>	GENA ROWLANDS <i>A Question of Love</i>
CATHERINE DENEUVE <i>The Hunger</i>	SUSAN SARANDON <i>The Hunger</i>
RUPERT EVERETT <i>Another Country</i>	HELEN SHAVER <i>Desert Hearts</i>
PETER FALK <i>Murder by Death</i>	MARTIN SHEEN <i>That Certain Summer</i>
PETER FINCH <i>Sunday, Bloody Sunday**</i>	ALEXIS SMITH <i>Once Is Not Enough</i>
MEG FOSTER <i>A Different Story</i>	TERENCE STAMP <i>Billy Budd**</i>
WHOOPI GOLDBERG <i>The Color Purple**</i>	BARBARA STANWYCK <i>Walk on the Wild Side</i>
CLIFF GORMAN <i>The Boys in the Band</i>	ROD STEIGER <i>The Sergeant; No Way to Treat a Lady</i>
LEE GRANT <i>The Balcony</i>	STELLA STEVENS <i>Cleopatra Jones & the Casino of Gold</i>
HARRY HAMLIN <i>Making Love</i>	DEAN STOCKWELL <i>Blue Velvet</i>
MARIETTE HARTLEY <i>My Two Loves</i>	MERYL STREEP <i>Manhattan</i>
MARIEL HEMINGWAY <i>Personal Best</i>	ELIZABETH TAYLOR <i>X, Y, and Zee</i>
BUCK HENRY <i>The Man Who Fell to Earth</i>	MESHACH TAYLOR <i>Mannequin</i>
HAL HOLBROOK <i>That Certain Summer****</i>	RICHARD THOMAS <i>Fifth of July</i>
BARNARD HUGHES <i>Midnight Cowboy</i>	CATHY TYSON <i>Mona Lisa</i>
LINDA HUNT <i>Waiting for the Moon</i>	LIV ULLMANN <i>Persona</i>
JOHN HURT <i>The Naked Civil Servant; Partners</i>	JON VOIGHT <i>Midnight Cowboy**</i>
WILLIAM HURT <i>Kiss of the Spider Woman*</i>	MICHAEL WARREN <i>Norman, Is That You?</i>
JEREMY IRONS <i>Brideshead Revisited****</i>	ROBERT WEBBER <i>10</i>
TOMMY LEE JONES <i>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof</i>	SHELLEY WINTERS <i>The Balcony; Cleopatra Jones</i>
ALEX KARRAS <i>Victor/Victoria</i>	MICHAEL YORK <i>Cabaret</i>
PERRY KING <i>A Different Story</i>	SUSANNAH YORK <i>The Killing of Sister George; X, Y, & Zee</i>

THE FRONT RUNNER
NOW IN PRE-PRODUCTION

A Jerry B. Wheeler Production
A Marshall W. Mason Film
HEMDALE RELEASING CORPORATION

*Academy Award Winner
**Academy Award Nominee
***Emmy Award Nominee

Image 3.1: Advertisement placed by Jerry Wheeler in *Variety*, attempting to break down the prejudice against acting in gay roles.

Chapter 4

Forging an Audience: “Cold Cash and Common Sense”

A group of films cannot constitute a movement if no one watches them. From the privileged position of film festival attendees to everyday theater goers, audiences are a crucial component of movement creation. This chapter examines how distributors addressed audiences, how audiences in turn talked back to producers, and how both of these reflected and influenced the development of a market for LGBTQ films. How distributors conceptualized of and spoke to audiences is visible in how films were marketed and released. This includes both the identification and coalescence of a niche audience and the push for mainstream crossover markets. In the 1980s, there was a growing sense that mainstream audiences, or at least larger art house audiences, might be interested in films with LGBTQ content. The successful identification of a market for LGBTQ films was a central factor in the creation of a queer film movement. At the same time, the way 1980s films were publicized, through the use of evasive marketing strategies that downplayed the films' LGBTQ content, kept these films from forming an earlier movement.

Audience visibility is a key component in the perpetuation of LGBTQ filmmaking, and in the 1980s, the sense of the gay market as a target demographic began to form. The coalescence of gay audiences and the recognition of this market on the part of distributors were aided by the founding of institutions that created connections and a sense of community among gay and lesbian people. The development of institutions such as the gay press, media activist organizations, and the gay and lesbian film festival circuit, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, allowed disparate individuals to coalesce around particular films, creating and demonstrating a market. Through media watchdog organizations such as the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), audiences made themselves visible and spoke

back to filmmakers. These groups pushed against what they saw as negative representations and put out calls for more positive portrayals. They united thousands of people across the country and helped shape an audience that would vocally support or condemn films.

Given the high cost of feature filmmaking, there needs to be the potential for profit in order for commercial companies to invest in films. Having a reliable market allows films to recoup costs, which is critical to the continuation of trends and future filmmakers' ability to find funding. The fact that a number of films with gay and lesbian content provided returns on investments paved the way for future films to be more explicit in their connections with gay and lesbian audiences and content. The extraordinary success of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (\$17 million return on a \$1.8 million budget),¹ and the relatively high return on investment for films like *Desert Hearts* (\$2.5 million return on a \$1.5 million budget) and the British import *My Beautiful Laundrette* (\$2.45 million return on a £650,000—around \$940,000—budget and a \$100,000 purchase fee for US distribution rights) demonstrated that there was a market for films with gay and lesbian content.² This visible market attracted the interest of well-funded indie companies, which played a vital role in the formation of NQC.

Tapping the Gay Market

During the 1980s, distributors made efforts to appeal to gay consumers. Targeted marketing strategies, which increased from the late 1970s through the 1990s, suggest that distributors were beginning to view the gay community as a valuable demographic. This interest

¹ Budget information is hard to find for *Spider Woman*, most simply refer to it as “low budget,” a designation with a lot of leeway in it. Indiewire quotes the initial budget at \$300,000, which was raised to \$1 million by the end of production (Brooks, Brian. “A Trailblazer, “Kiss of the Spider Woman” Set to Hit Cannes 25 Years Later.” *Indiewire* (13 May 2010): http://www.indiewire.com/article/a_trailblazer_kiss_of_the_spider_woman_set_to_hit_cannes_25_years_later) and an article in *The Advocate* quoted the final budget at \$1.8 million.

² See Appendix 1 for more information on the distributors, producers, and box office numbers for gay and lesbian films during this time period.

in gay consumers expanded beyond the world of film and media to that of general advertising, as Katherine Sender shows in *Business, Not Politics: The Making of the Gay Market*. In the 1990s, Sender argues, there was, “a rapid increase in the visibility of a new consumer niche: the gay market... gays and lesbians are now considered a sufficiently large and profitable group to warrant marketers’ attention, and signal a mature phase of the gay market.”³ Although Sender focuses on developments that occurred in the 1990s, she charts the growth of this market beginning in the 1970s.⁴

The visibility and viability of the gay market as a consumer base was important for gay publications like *The Advocate*. Advertising money, through both classified ads and selling ad space to companies, was essential to financially support the magazine. Companies were realizing that:

gay people are a big market. Economics overcomes homophobia... Big companies are coming around, but slowly... we’ve attracted the recording industry, some liquor companies and fashion designers. Of course, we want more. If the gay press is to prosper, it has to convince the giants of industry and other straight advertisers that the gay market is viable and affluent: it’s as simple as that.⁵

Sender, Alexandra Chasin, and other scholars who have investigated the creation of a gay market point out that this conception of the ideal gay consumer as “affluent, white, male, thirtysomething, gender conforming, and sexually discrete” was created in part by publications like *The Advocate* in order to present the “most desirable” and “most ‘positive’ (i.e., class-aspirational and politically and sexually respectable) image of gays” to potential advertising

³ Katherine Sender, *Business, Not Politics: The Making of the Gay Market* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004): 1.

⁴ In 1977, *The Advocate* included an advertisement for “The Largest Gay Advertising Agency in the United States,” suggesting that these developments were supporting businesses. (*The Advocate* 227 (2 November 1977): 15)

⁵ Scott Anderson. “From Mimeographed Memos to Centerfold Chic, The Gay Press Proliferates—And So Do Its Problems.” *The Advocate* 282 (13 December 1979): 19-20.

clients.⁶

During the 1970s and 1980s, *The Advocate* management commissioned reports from marketing research and consulting groups. The resulting documents provided significant data with which to tempt potential advertisers. They concluded that *Advocate* readers were male, young, educated, and “upscale,” with an “inordinately high” disposable income.⁷ This characterization overlaps with desirable market sectors for advertisers, helping *The Advocate* develop increased advertising revenues and contributing to the conception of a “gay market.” Targeted marketing was increasingly used by advertising firms, and the gay market fit well in this mold, given that “there’s a growing list of media by and for gays—newspapers, magazines, cable TV programming. That’s important to advertisers: Targeted media enable them to concentrate ad dollars where the consumers are.”⁸

In the early 1970s, *The Advocate* was the largest gay publication, with around 30,000 issues sold every two weeks.⁹ By 1986, this circulation had more than doubled, with some issues going well above that number.¹⁰ Taking into account the sharing of issues, *The Advocate* estimated that it reached over 300,000 “involved, dedicated readers.”¹¹ From this, they claimed an even wider sphere of influence: “300,000 Advocate Readers Influence Over 7 Million Americans. As the high end of the national gay community, ADVOCATE readers possess a

⁶ Katherine Sender. “Sex Sells: Sex, Class, and Taste in Commercial Gay and Lesbian Media.” *GLQ* 9, no.3 (2003): 356. See also Alexandra Chasin. *Selling Out: The Gay and Lesbian Movement Goes to Market* (New York: Palsgrave, 2000): 36. and Amy Gluckman and Betsy Reed. *Homoeconomics: Capitalism, Community, and Lesbian and Gay Life* (New York: Routledge, 1997): 3.

⁷ “Characteristics of Readers of the Advocate: A Study of Subscribers and Single Copy Purchasers,” Box 13, Folder 7, Advocate Records, ONE Archive.

⁸ Stuart Elliott, “Groups fight stigmas as they seek recognition as a community by marketers,” *USA Today* (17 July 1990): Found in Box 13, Folder 8, Advocate Records, ONE Archive.

⁹ “Letter from Dick Michaels to Nancy Tucker,” (1 May 1971): Box 5, Folder 105, Advocate Records, ONE Archives.

¹⁰ It jumped to an average of 67,513, and the May 27, 1986 issue sold 70,250 copies (“Standard Rate and Data Service Publisher’s Sworn Statement,” (June 1986), Box 13, Folder 7, Advocate Records, ONE Archive.)

¹¹ “The Advocate Reader: Summary of ‘Profile of Readers’ Simmons Market Research Beureau,” (January 1987), Box 13, Folder 9, Advocate Records, ONE Archive.

special sphere of influence over the gay community and the general population as a whole. They set the pace others follow.”¹² This focus on gays not only as a large and loyal market in themselves, but as a group that sets larger trends, likely helped further convince advertisers that the gay market was worth courting.

Marketing and public relations departments continually insisted that their decisions were based in business sense—appealing to as many consumers as possible—and were not political.¹³ Producing and marketing films with LGBTQ content were likewise framed as moments when the potential for profits outweighed politically conservative inclinations. Even if companies had reservations about LGBTQ material, if a gay film “makes money... you’ll see at least half a dozen similar scripts in the planning stages within six months.”¹⁴ This profit potential was directly linked with the growth and increased visibility of gay markets. As David Ehrenstein wrote in conjunction with the release of early 1980s gay and lesbian films:

regardless of the eventual success or failure of these particular projects, there’s every indication that future films and television efforts along these lines will follow. But before taking a more optimistic reading of the cultural climate, it should be pointed out that there’s little in the way of moral or political enlightenment involved in all of this activity. *It’s really just a matter of cold cash and common sense.* In an ever-tightening economy, the powers-that-be have suddenly discovered that gay people have the most money to spend for leisure entertainment. Whatever moral objections the movie moguls might harbor, they can scarcely afford to cut their own throats economically. And besides tapping the fortunes of a particular group or sub-culture, there’s the trend-setting potential of gays to consider in the long run. For, as the disco craze has shown, what gays buy today, straights may want tomorrow.¹⁵

Iterations of the “cold cash and common sense” argument continued through the 1980s and into

¹² “The Gay Market’s Primary Advertising Medium,” (1987) Box 13, Folder 9, Advocate Records, ONE Archive.

¹³ Sender, *Business, Not Politics*, 2. Sender’s work critiques and complicates the simplistic division of business and politics, which are in reality inextricably linked. For the purposes of my arguments, however, the important aspect of the creation of a gay market is the fact that a visible market, or audience in the case of film distribution, for gay films increases the incentive for producers to invest in films with LGBTQ content.

¹⁴ Honey Garfield. “A Different ‘Different Story’ Story.” *The Advocate* 247 (9 August 1978): 34.

¹⁵ David Ehrenstein. “Cold Cash and Common Sense Override Moral Objections.” *The Advocate* 320 (25 June 1981): 50. Emphasis added.

the 1990s, often in relation to Hollywood studios' experimentation with or avoidance of LGBTQ themes.

While Hollywood studios are more upfront about their desires for profit, independent production and distribution companies are likewise embroiled in profit-based concerns. Independent films, however, have the advantage of smaller budgets and lower overheads, meaning they can profit from a smaller audience base. In either case, demonstrating the existence of an audience plays a key role in the decision to fund and distribute certain projects over others. In what follows, I elaborate on specific examples of niche advertising, considering appeals to potential gay and lesbian audiences and their effects—how these strategies influenced future developments. Having a reliable audience for LGBTQ films makes it more likely that theaters will show them, distributors will acquire them, and filmmakers will produce them.

The marketing that took place in gay publications demonstrates the ways that LGBTQ audiences were courted by distributors. Ads for films and videos in *The Advocate* illustrate several notable trends. To begin with, films that contain explicit LGBTQ content were advertised in the magazine, which is unsurprising given that the magazine and these films share a target demographic. Among the films advertised were *Sebastiane*,¹⁶ *La Cage Aux Folles* (1978),¹⁷ *Fame* (1980),¹⁸ *In a Year of 13 Moons* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1978),¹⁹ *Taxi Zum Klo*,²⁰ *Victor/Victoria*,²¹ *Another Country* (1984),²² *Kiss of the Spider Woman*,²³ *Desert Hearts*,²⁴

¹⁶ Advertised in *The Advocate* 246 (26 July 1978): 32.

¹⁷ *The Advocate* 273 (23 August 1979): 1.

¹⁸ *The Advocate* 298 (7 August 1980): 28.

¹⁹ *The Advocate* 303 (16 October 1980): 41.

²⁰ *The Advocate* 335 (21 January 1982): 47; and Issue 345 (24 June 1982): 61; and for a video release in Issue 398 (10 July 1984): 46.

²¹ *The Advocate* 338 (1 April 1982): 1.

²² *The Advocate* 412 (5 February 1985): 1.

²³ *The Advocate* 444 (29 April 1986): 1.

²⁴ *The Advocate* 445 (29 April 1986): 7.

Too Outrageous,²⁵ *Prick Up Your Ears*,²⁶ and *Longtime Companion*.²⁷ By advertising in a gay magazine that offered substantial national reach, the marketing coordinators for these films were able to tap into a pre-formed market. By assembling a group of subscribers who read the magazine, *The Advocate* offered distributors direct access to gay consumers.

Interestingly, *The Advocate* contained a substantial amount of film advertisements that did not directly contain LGBTQ content. Some of these films were tangentially connected to gay and lesbian interests because of certain draws, such as stars with gay cult status: Bette Midler in *Divine Madness* (1980)²⁸ or Madonna in *Truth or Dare* (1991),²⁹ and directors with gay followings: Blake Edward's *SOB* (1981)³⁰ and Pedro Almodóvar *High Heels* (1991).³¹ Ads were often linked to personalities who were interviewed by the magazine, and whose film credits include works that contain more explicit LGBTQ themes. Given the built-in hooks and likely interest *Advocate* readers would have in these films, marketing them in the gay press made sense.

A number of other films that do not connect to explicit gay interests were advertised in full page spreads, which suggests that studios considered the gay demographic to be worth courting. These films included, for example, *Raging Bull* (1980),³² *Endless Love* (1981),³³ *Excalibur* (1981),³⁴ *For Your Eyes Only* (1981),³⁵ *Halloween II* (1981)³⁶ and *Halloween III*

²⁵ *The Advocate* 483 (27 October 1987): 3.

²⁶ *The Advocate* 496 (10 May 1988): 1.

²⁷ *The Advocate* 551 (22 May 1990): 4; as well as Issue 554 (17 July 1990): 2.

²⁸ *The Advocate* 302 (2 October 1980): 37.

²⁹ *The Advocate* 578 (4 June 1991): 4.

³⁰ *The Advocate* 323 (6 August 1981): 1.

³¹ *The Advocate* 593 (31 December 1991): 3; although the film includes a female impersonator, there is no explicit depictions of LGBT characters.

³² *The Advocate* 307 (25 December 1980): 1.

³³ *The Advocate* 323 (6 August 1981): 2; Contains the tagline: "She is 15. He is 17. The love every parent fears,"[□] which is interesting in the context of a gay publication, perhaps implying that the film will connect with gay audiences since same sex relationships are often considered to be something a parent might fear?

³⁴ *The Advocate* 315 (16 April 1981): 1.

³⁵ *The Advocate* 321 (9 July 1981): 1.

³⁶ *The Advocate* 330 (12 November 1981): 1.

(1982),³⁷ *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid* (1982),³⁸ *An Officer and a Gentleman* (1982),³⁹ *Uncommon Valor* (1984),⁴⁰ *The Cotton Club* (1985),⁴¹ *Throw Mamma From the Train* (1987),⁴² and *A League of Their Own* (1992).⁴³ While some of these films may have had particular resonance among the subscribers of *The Advocate* (due to genre or coded readings, for example), the eclectic mix of films suggests that studios saw such advertising as a low cost, low risk way of calling to a niche demographic. Since only subscribers would view the ads, they were not in danger of publicly associating their films with a gay publication. A former head of acquisitions for Fine Line, George LaVoo, also suggested that there was a strong correlation between the “art film market” and the gay market, so much so that, he stated, “we advertised any arty film in gay publications, no matter what the subject matter, because we knew that gays watched these films.”⁴⁴

In addition to ads for individual films, some companies bought space to advertise the studios themselves and their libraries of titles. Universal, for example, had regular ads in *The Advocate*.⁴⁵ RKO likewise advertised their library holdings on home video,⁴⁶ as did MGM/UA, which placed ads featuring their European classics.⁴⁷ At the start of the 1990s, a partial list of *Advocate* advertisers contained ten movie studios (MGM/Pathé, Warner Brothers, Universal, Tri-Star, New Line Cinema, Miramax, Columbia, Paramount, Cinecom, Fine Line Features).⁴⁸ This

³⁷ *The Advocate* 354 (28 October 1982): 50.

³⁸ *The Advocate* 343 (27 May 1982): 56.

³⁹ *The Advocate* 348 (5 August 1982): 2.

⁴⁰ *The Advocate* 386 (24 January 1984): 2.

⁴¹ *The Advocate* 409/10 (11 December 1984): 2.

⁴² *The Advocate* 489 (5 January 1988): 19.

⁴³ *The Advocate* 607 (14 July 1992): 1.

⁴⁴ LaVoo qtd in Peter Bowen, “Our Own Private Idaho,” *The Advocate* 614 (20 October 1992): 68, 70.

⁴⁵ A 1982 holiday ad invited readers to “Celebrate the Holiday Season with Entertainment from Universal Pictures.” (*The Advocate* 358 (23 December 1982): 35-36.)

⁴⁶ *The Advocate* 470 (14 April 1987): 39.

⁴⁷ *The Advocate* 501 (21 June 1988): 19.

⁴⁸ “Partial List of National Advertising Accounts in the Advocate,” (1991), Box 13, Folder 7, Advocate Records, ONE Archive.

niche advertising shows that even before the wider association, in the 1990s, of the gay community as a lucrative demographic, there was a conception of a gay and lesbian market, a sense of what might appeal to this group, and attempts to capitalize on it.

Specialized Tactics and Grassroots Marketing

In the 1980s, the concept of grassroots community organizing crossed over from the areas of funding and production into the realm of advertising and exhibition. In the marketing strategies for *Parting Glances*, there were discussions of “grassroots campaigns at the level of gay bartenders and hairdressers,” which helped mobilize gay and lesbian audiences.⁴⁹ The film successfully utilized word of mouth, “the subtlest (and cheapest) form of promotion,” to keep the film in Manhattan cinemas for over 3 months.⁵⁰ Donna Deitch noted that the “most clever marketing device” used to promote *Desert Hearts* was when she “went to the lines of the hippest New York movies I could think of... and passed out leaflets and talked the movie up.”⁵¹ Christine Vachon discusses other versions of grassroots publicizing from her early short films; for example “we made collages of photos from the films, copied them, and then put them up in the obvious places—coffeehouses, bars that were frequented by young bohemian types like ourselves, and theaters. We had a mailing list that was sent to general media, especially to those (few) writers who were interested in experimental filmmaking.”⁵² These anecdotes suggest that, particularly with short and low-budget independent films, specialized, local, and inexpensive efforts were made to attract niche audiences. These localized efforts contributed to the formation

⁴⁹ Pierson, 41.

⁵⁰ Richard Learner. “Gay Films Stay Strong at the Box Office—Priming audiences for More to Come?” *The Advocate* 449 (24 June 1986): 36.

⁵¹ Deitch qtd in Learner “Gay Films Stay Strong at the Box Office,” 36.

⁵² Vachon, *Shooting to Kill*, 311.

of a broader audience base.

Filmmaker Nicole Conn has likewise been able to reach audiences through directed, grassroots marketing campaigns, and the release of her 1992 film *Claire of the Moon* proved the presence of a supportive audience for lesbian films. In Conn's attempts to find a distributor for the film, people in the industry commented that the film looked like it had been made for a much larger budget and that the film was "a 'landmark,' film. 'Important,' 'groundbreaking.' [But] no one would touch it with a ten foot pole."⁵³ Conn self-distributed *Claire* for a short time, and to the surprise of the industry, the film drew large crowds and packed theaters. Conn recounts the film's experience in Birmingham, Alabama. Although the local papers refused to even print the title of the film, the theater was packed night after night by word of mouth alone.⁵⁴ After that, distributors approached Conn and the film was picked up by the specialty distributor, Strand Releasing. Strand continued a very limited theatrical release of the film, which ran for 18 months. According to Conn, there were only 12 prints of the film, but these continually traveled to new markets and earned a steady profit.⁵⁵ This strategy of limited release proved very successful, and the film eventually grossed around \$800,000⁵⁶ in the domestic market. Conn attributes this success to the rarity of having a lesbian film in theaters. She says, "It would run weeks in a row because lesbians had nothing – that was the only game in town. The film did amazing theatrically."⁵⁷

In addition to box office receipts, Conn worked to promote the film through ancillary markets. She made a *Making of* documentary that became successful on its own, again "because

⁵³ Nicole Conn, "What Price, Entertainment," *Off Our Backs* 23.11 (1993): 20.

⁵⁴ DeBold, 6.

⁵⁵ Conn (*SheWired*)

⁵⁶ The exact recorded gross varies. Levy notes it as \$687,859 (Levy 516); IMDb has the box office at \$799,674 (The Internet Movie Database. *Claire of the Moon*. 2012. Internet Movie Database Ltd. <<http://us.imdb.com>>.)

⁵⁷ Conn (*SheWired*)

there was nothing else out there.”⁵⁸ Conn also marketed a soundtrack, posters, t-shirts, and photos, and she wrote a book version of *Claire* that eventually went into 15 reprints. The total gross from the film and related sales totaled around \$4 million.⁵⁹ The successful promotion of the film in theatrical release and through ancillary channels demonstrated the existence of a lesbian market and helped future films find distribution. The strength of *Claire*'s video sales in the UK, for example, prompted increased interest in American lesbian films and provided some of the motivation for Mainline Pictures to acquire the UK rights to *Go Fish*.⁶⁰ While it did not earn critical acclaim, and Conn herself is quick to note its faults, *Claire* acquired a cult following and was a watershed film for lesbian cinema.

Beginning in the early 1980s, a number of specialty distributors, particularly those associated with the rise in home video, began to advertise heavily in *The Advocate*. The access to movies via home video opened up significant roads for increased viewership and longevity for films.⁶¹ Home video played an essential role in building larger audiences for LGBTQ films. Not only could mail-order tapes be sent anywhere in the country, reaching people who would not have the option for theatrically viewing the films, but they offered a “discreet” way for people to view them, something touted in video distributor ads.⁶² Going to a theater to see a gay or lesbian movie, with the exception of those with wide crossover appeal such as the Hollywood mini-cycle films, could be considered a political act that would associate the audience member with the

⁵⁸ Conn (*SheWired*)

⁵⁹ DeBold, 6.

⁶⁰ Adam Dawtrey, “‘Fish’ cooks in Berlin; Hottest-selling pix at fest sport gay themes,” *Daily Variety* (17 February 1994): 14.

⁶¹ Early LGBTQ films were often faced with limited theatrical distribution, both in terms of geography (restrictive to large cities) and types of theaters (art houses, porn theaters, etc.). Theatrical distribution is expensive, and films that had a lower expected return found it more difficult to secure wider releases.

⁶² For example, Insider Video Club lists reasons why their service is unique, and in addition to claiming “the largest selection of outstanding, non-X-rated gay-themed films from around the world,” they advertise their “discreet, swift service!” (IVC ad. *The Advocate* 451 (22 July 1986): 48.)

LGBTQ community. Private consumption of gay media was important to those who desired connection with a larger gay community but were not ready to be publicly associated with it, because such an association could result in a default outing of the person. *The Advocate* worked to appeal to this demographic, and early ads for the magazine emphasize that, “We deliver discreetly! Every two weeks, on schedule, our **sealed** ‘plain brown wrapper’ is deposited in your mailbox,” a plain brown envelope without any identifying markers linking it to a gay publication.⁶³ The ad even includes an image of what the wrapper will look like, as evidence that subscribing will not outwardly connect the recipient with the gay press.

The home video market brought with it a broadened distribution of sexually explicit material, and distributors for soft and hardcore videos advertised in *The Advocate*.⁶⁴ In addition to the growth of pornography, a number of distribution companies formed around non-porn films, seeking to provide “serious,” “artistic,” and “legitimate” gay and lesbian films. This included small companies such as the Video Exchange Club⁶⁵ and, prominently, companies like Award Films International. Award Films, a niche distribution company mentioned in the previous chapter, carried a number of ads that contained phrasing such as: “Finally There is a Difference... Gay home entertainment that offers you more! Full-length, major motion pictures! Solid, interesting stories! Attractive, young actors! Controversial themes!”⁶⁶ Even the name of the company, Award Films, suggests an effort to associate themselves with quality, award-winning movies. During its early years, in the early to mid 1980s, most of the films the company supplied were European, corresponding with the availability of product at the time. Early film

⁶³ “Ad for *The Advocate*.” *The Advocate* 213 (6 April 1977).

⁶⁴ For example, ads for “The Hottest Videos” by Catalina Video (*The Advocate* 395 (29 May 1984): 39.), as well as many ads for MEN, the Male Entertainment Network (see, for instance, *The Advocate* 422 (11 June 1985): 34.)

⁶⁵ *The Advocate* 489 (5 January 1988): 51.

⁶⁶ *The Advocate* 381 (24 November 1983): 54.

titles in their catalog included: *You Are Not Alone* (marketed as “The most positive mainstream gay film ever made!”) and *Confessions of a Congressman* (“the most controversial film ever to come from Spain!”).⁶⁷

Perhaps the biggest niche distribution advertising presence came from the Insider Video Club, or IVC,⁶⁸ which was connected to Award Films. Starting in the mid-1980s, almost every issue of *The Advocate* had a page or two advertising IVC. Although some of the advertising does rely on male semi-nudity and titillation, IVC echoes the Award Films ethos of being “your international passport to quality non-X-rated films from around the world”⁶⁹ and providing “universal, sensual stories of exceptional candor and power, carefully selected from the world’s most prestigious international film festivals. Each title represents a unique and heady blend of controversial story line, superb production values and outstanding performances.”⁷⁰

Advertisements such as these point to the assumed presence of a cultured audience who wanted non-pornographic options and high production value in their LGBTQ film viewing. The longevity of the distributor⁷¹ suggests that it was providing a desired service and, by extension, there was an audience for LGBTQ art films. By offering a cultivated program of films, distributors like IVC contributed to canon formation and created opportunities for a discerning, knowledgeable audience to emerge.

The existence of mailing lists for people interested in LGBT films offered a useful tool for distributors. Being able to point to an exact number of people who might be interested in a film with LGBTQ content provided a way to quantitatively define an audience. Mailing lists

⁶⁷ “Award Films Ad.” *The Advocate* 376 (15 September 1983): 50.

⁶⁸ For example, in Issue 441 (4 March 1986); Issue 445 (29 April 1986); almost every following issue has an IVC ad. Issue 463 one includes *Parting Glances*, and Issue 464 includes *Laundrette*.

⁶⁹ IVC ad, *The Advocate* 451 (22 July 1986): 48. Featured films included *Ernesto*, *Knight Fever*, and *Oscar Wilde*.

⁷⁰ IVC ad. *The Advocate* 486 (24 November 1987): 42.

⁷¹ IVC remained in operation until 2006, when the company was raided and shut down under suspicion of child pornography. At this time, it is still unclear to what extent these allegations are legitimate.

became an important assets for video distributors, such as Wolfe Video, which was formed in 1985 by its president, Kathy Wolfe.⁷² Wolfe initially supplied female health-related and other woman-oriented films to niche markets such as schools, clinics, and specialty stores.⁷³ While Wolfe did decent business in this area, it was not a substantial enough market in which to grow. It was in the early 1990s, after she shifted her focus exclusively to gay and lesbian film, that Wolfe Video began to do more business. During these early years of New Queer Cinema, as queer films garnered critical attention and relatively large box office success, Wolfe Video was poised to enter a lucrative niche market. Wolfe's shrewd business tactics illuminate the importance of quantifying audiences through client mailing lists.

Throughout its time in operation, Wolfe Video has created relationships with mainstream media companies and consumers in the LGBT marketplace. In developing her mail-order home video business, Kathy Wolfe made contacts within gay and lesbian communities and developed an extensive opt-in client mailing list. Because of these contacts, Wolfe had a valuable marketing resource at a time when the gay and lesbian market was being taken into consideration to a greater extent by media producers and marketers.⁷⁴ Wolfe's list would continue to expand throughout the 1990s and 2000s; in 1999 the list contained 75,000 names,⁷⁵ and by 2010 that number jumped to 185,000 people.⁷⁶ This growing mailing list of supportive consumers gave Wolfe leverage in making deals with distributors. The lists provided a way to quantify the gay film market by putting a number on the amount of people interested in these niche films. Using this resource, Wolfe was able to reach greater numbers of people and therefore extend the

⁷² Wolfe was replaced as president by Maria Lynn in 2002, but she remained with the company. ("Maria Lynn promoted to president of Wolfe Video." *The Advocate* (26 February 2002): <http://www.advocate.com/arts-entertainment/entertainment-news/2002/02/26/maria-lynn-promoted-president-wolfe-video-3209>)

⁷³ Robert La Franco, "Can you be too focused?" *Forbes*, Vol 163 Issue 11 (31 May 1999): 126.

⁷⁴ Sender, *Business, Not Politics*, 38.

⁷⁵ "Hollywood Video rolls out gay and lesbian sections." *Video Business*. 19.13 (29 March 1999): 4.

⁷⁶ Chloe Veltman, "Moving Gay Films Into the Mainstream," *New York Times* (11 June 2010): 25B.

bounds of the gay community, raise awareness and the visibility of gay and lesbian films, and mobilize viewers in support of these films. While much of Wolfe's growth occurred outside of the time frame under consideration, the company began these niche marketing tactics in the 1980s and its continued success suggests the effectiveness of targeting and quantifying a niche LGBTQ audience.⁷⁷

The contributions of Wolfe, IVC, and other video sales companies exposed a larger audience to LGBTQ films, and in so doing helped to form a market. Sender's work on the gay market builds on Richard Ohmann's observations that "markets are shaped, not discovered."⁷⁸ As she elaborates, "marketers do not simply begin to offer images of and sell products to preexisting niches, but shape the contours of those groups in order to present a credible, desirable, and viable target market. The development of the gay market is only one such process of niche-formation that dominated marketing in the twentieth century."⁷⁹ This externally defined market, or audience, is shaped in part through the niche marketing campaigns addressed to growing gay communities. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, this conceptualized audience took shape, and its potential was turned into actualized profit.

Media Groups and Self-Defining Community

Linked to the external conception or classification of the gay market, as created through specific advertising techniques, is the sense of community that is derived internally, a self-identification and personal claiming of community membership. This self-definition/expression is developed through institutional frameworks, and with regards to LGBTQ film audiences,

⁷⁷ Wolfe appears to be going strong over 30 years later. The remarkable longevity of this company, as well as other niche LGBTQ distributors, suggests that the market supports their specialized distribution tactics.

⁷⁸ Ohmann, *Selling Culture*, 91.

⁷⁹ Sender, *Business, Not Politics*, 24-25.

certain organizations helped shape the self-presentation of the “gay community” as a recognizable audience and source of profit to which producers and distributors in turn responded. A number of media watchdog groups and organizations formed during the 1980s to encourage the production of LGBTQ films and work against negative portrayals of LGBTQ people. These include the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), the Alliance for Gay and Lesbian Artists (AGLA),⁸⁰ the National Association of Lesbian and Gay Filmmakers (NALGF), and the Gay and Lesbian Press Association’s Media Fund for Human Rights.⁸¹ At times, the broader reaching National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) also entered into the fight for representation.⁸² The presence and support of these organizations demonstrate the emphasis that the growing gay community put on the media and LGBTQ images. The push for representation also contributed to the steady building of LGBTQ film production and the necessary conditions for a queer film movement.

The importance of these organizations can be summed up in a single category: visibility. Gay and lesbian identity politics struggles often foreground “visibility as the key to inclusion in politics, cultural and economic spheres... [and] the quest for visibility has been primarily about image production.”⁸³ These and other organizations “chose media visibility as their battlegrounds precisely because it was on these fronts that homophobic representations were being mobilized in the service of anti-gay medical and legislative policy and practice.”⁸⁴ AGLA

⁸⁰ Originally called the Alliance for Gay Artists (AGA), it shifted to include Lesbian in the title in 1983.

⁸¹ The Media Fund worked as a consciousness-raising media activism group, and broke new ground in the mid-1980s by using networked computers to disseminate press releases. The reliance on technology was perhaps ahead of its time, and the Media Fund did not take off to the extent that GLAAD did (“Gay People Urged to ‘Talk Back To The Media,’” Undated Press release, Box 13, Media Fund for Human Rights Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers).

⁸² It should be noted that a number of other gay and lesbian organizations, both local and national, existed or were founded in the 1980s. These include organizations like the Gay and Lesbian Academic Union.

⁸³ Rhyne, 55.

⁸⁴ Rhyne, 93, citing Douglas Crimp. *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988), 14.

Chairperson Chris Uzler declared that “the battleground in which the fight against AIDS must be won includes the *entertainment media*.”⁸⁵ GLAAD’s literature supports this assessment, and in a 1992 letter they state that GLAAD:

was founded seven years ago to fight homophobia by promoting visibility and countering stereotypes where they matter most: the media. If it’s through the media that politicians get elected... products get sold... and information gets communicated... then it is also through the media that gay men and lesbians can defeat homophobia—and the right-wing extremists who promote it.⁸⁶

The media, broadly defined, includes a number of sectors of which film is only one part. One of the first benefits in support of GLAAD, however, occurred at the opening night of the New York Gay Film Festival, forming an instant connection between the organization and another institution that supports the producing and distribution of LGBTQ film specifically.⁸⁷

Gay activist organizations played a key role in protesting homophobic media and in praising positive images. The organizations issued calls to arms against negative representations, met with media producers to educate them on the position of gays and lesbians, and gave out media awards to encourage positive representations. They pushed for an increase in projects with well-adjusted LGBT characters and themes. Through these actions, the organizations influenced the production of LGBTQ media.

GLAAD, the largest organization designed to specifically influence media industries, began operating in 1985 as part of the rise in AIDS activism, and was briefly called the Gay & Lesbian Anti-Defamation League.⁸⁸ GLAAD’s stated purposes included “replacing bigoted and

⁸⁵ Uzler qtd in Holley, “AGLA Media Awards,” 55-56. Emphasis in original.

⁸⁶ “Fundraising Letter from Ellen Carton to ‘Friend,’” (1992) GLAAD Folder, Box 5, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers.

⁸⁷ “Gay & Lesbian Anti-Defamation League Newsletter” (1 January 1986): Box 5, GLAAD Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers.

⁸⁸ The name changed to GLAAD in 1986, and so for purposes of clarity, I will refer to it as solely as GLAAD. Precursors to GLAAD, as well as GLAAD’s early years, are discussed in greater detail in Vincent Doyle’s *Making Out in the Mainstream: GLAAD and the Politics of Respectability* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016).

misinformed representations of lesbians and gay men in the media with positive images of our community.”⁸⁹ The organization was formed by a group of journalists and writers who were appalled by the “implicit homophobia” in the *New York Post*’s coverage of the AIDS crisis, which included “sensationalized accounts of gay activities, blatant scare tactics and outright misreporting of the facts” and “produced an unnecessary panic and a new fear of gays in the minds of millions of our neighbors.”⁹⁰ One of their first acts as an organization was to protest the *New York Post* by encouraging people to both call the newspaper, flooding its lines with demands to “fight AIDS, not gays,” and demonstrate in front of its building, in the hopes that “a large demonstration will send a message to the media that we will not allow ourselves to be maligned and attacked.”⁹¹

These actions set the tone for much of the work GLAAD has done, and continues to do, and the organization received an enthusiastic response from the gay community. As they wrote in a newsletter soon after they began operations:

none of us who helped organize that first town meeting—or the subsequent demonstrations, picketing or meetings—ever envisioned quite the extraordinary appeal such an organization would have. Hundreds of people have signed up to work on various committees... and over a thousand people have signed up to receive mailings about the League’s activities. Calls have come in from many cities across the country (and from Europe) asking how such groups can form there. There is clearly an evident desire to fight back against all those who would use the AIDS epidemic to defame us all.⁹²

GLAAD quickly began the process of incorporation to receive non-profit status and started fundraising in order to support their activist work, converting the group “from a cottage industry

⁸⁹ “GLAAD Pamphlet,” (1987): Box 5, GLAAD Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers.

⁹⁰ “The Gay and Lesbian Anti-Defamation League Press Release,” (1985): Box 5, GLAAD Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers.

⁹¹ “The Gay and Lesbian Anti-Defamation League Press Release,” (1985): Box 5, GLAAD Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers.

⁹² “Gay & Lesbian Anti-Defamation League Newsletter,” (1 January 1986): Box 5, GLAAD Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers.

to a full-fledged organization.”⁹³

One challenge GLAAD faced was how to monitor the large volume of media produced and distributed within the US. It formed the Media Watch Committee to tackle this problem, and organized a crew of volunteers to watch for, listen for, read for, and record instances of homophobia or gay slandering in the media. Representative examples were collected into reports and distributed to members of the mailing list. A chain of communication was also put together so that:

in the event of blatant homophobia, the [phone] tree will be activated and a suggested collective response will be passed along. The community may be asked to flood a TV station with protest calls, to blitz a newspaper with letters to the editor, or to spread the word about a demonstration. Our ability to act quickly and as a united community will increase our effectiveness exponentially, [and this sort of] media watch and response are at the heart of what this league will be doing.⁹⁴

These connections and collaborations between individuals worked to establish a sense of community, and by showing collective force they were able to have more of an impact. As GLAAD’s promotional material stated, “we need no longer fear that our lone letter or call of protest will be a futile gesture, because we are organized to focus the protests of many people against acts of gay defamation and to follow up our protests with education and negotiations designed to prevent more of the same.”⁹⁵ Mass mailings and calls made the community visible as an audience.

By 1989, GLAAD had opened chapters in six cities and monitored local and national media for signs of homophobia. Vito Russo praised the development of GLAAD and put out a call to readers that “if you spot something on radio, on television, or in the movies that is

⁹³ “Gay & Lesbian Anti-Defamation League Newsletter,” (1 January 1986): Box 5, GLAAD Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers.

⁹⁴ “Gay & Lesbian Anti-Defamation League Newsletter,” (1 January 1986): Box 5, GLAAD Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers.

⁹⁵ “Fundraising Letter from Craig Davidson,” (21 August 1987): Box 5, GLAAD Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers.

homophobic, bring it to the attention of your local GLAAD chapter or the New York office.”⁹⁶ GLAAD’s mailings likewise made this appeal, stating that “GLAAD needs you to become a media watchdog. If you run across a newspaper article, a comment, or a broadcast that defames lesbians and gay men, bark bark.”⁹⁷ In this way, the call of media watchdog activism extended beyond the official organization and into the realm of personal duty. In connecting a large group of members to oppose bigotry in the media, GLAAD formed a virtual community and used language of empowerment when discussing the role of individuals. By becoming a GLAAD member and supporting the cause, “you’ll know when you hear or see an incident of anti-gay defamation that you are part of the solution, and that you don’t have to suffer in silence, fear and resignation.”⁹⁸

As it expanded, GLAAD became a forceful presence within media industries nationwide, and was able to enact changes within these industries. In addition to its media monitoring and PhoneTree committee, GLAAD created the “Swift and Terrible Retribution” committee, shortened to “SWAT team,” which “organizes pickets, rallies, and demonstrations” and was the most visible of the organization’s sub-groups.⁹⁹ GLAAD’s “most effective weapon” was its letter-writing campaign, since, in the case of television networks for example, network executives “estimate that each letter counts for 11,000 viewers,” and “the more letters we can do, the more they have to wake up to the fact that gays and lesbians are a significant part of their viewing audience.”¹⁰⁰ GLAAD gained a number of victories from these protests and demonstrations.

⁹⁶ Vito Russo, “Hot Flashes: Hits and Misses on the Summer Screen,” *The Advocate* 529 (1 August 1989): 67.

⁹⁷ “GLAAD Newsletter, Winter/Spring 1987,” (1987): Box 5, GLAAD Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers.

⁹⁸ “Fundraising Letter,” (Undated) Box 5, GLAAD Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁹ “GLAAD Pamphlet,” (1987): Box 5, GLAAD Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers.

¹⁰⁰ Karen Ocamb, “GLAAD Bashes Back at Hollywood,” *The Advocate* 563 (6 November 1990): 55.

While many of GLAAD's battlegrounds were outside the direct realm of film, film remained an important area for the organization. GLAAD discussed film as:

a uniquely powerful medium, able to generate strong emotions. But as GLAAD/NY's¹⁰¹ late co-founder Vito Russo demonstrated in *The Celluloid Closet*, the emotions generated on film about gays and lesbians have historically been negative. GLAAD fights to change that. We led the outcry against *Basic Instinct* and its icepick-wielding lesbian. We put Hollywood on notice that we wouldn't tolerate swishy stereotypes like those in *JFK*.¹⁰²

As part of their fight against Hollywood in 1990, GLAAD took out a full page ad in *Daily Variety* that criticized the movie industry, shouting "Hollywood Images Fuel Gay/Lesbian Bashing."¹⁰³ A companion ad in the *Hollywood Reporter* criticized the television industry, asking "Where are the lesbian and gay characters this season?" The Executive Director of GLAAD's LA chapter, Richard Jennings, noted that "the response to the ads has been good," and "the group has received calls from producers and media people requesting GLAAD's 80-page illustrated media style guide."¹⁰⁴

GLAAD provided education for media producers and offered positive reinforcement to reward well-rounded coverage of LGBT people and issues. As part of its push for improved representation, GLAAD would meet "with media executives, conducts seminars, produces resource material and manages other programs to help media improve its coverage."¹⁰⁵ These seminars included diversity training workshops, and GLAAD produced a number of companion resources such the glossy "Lesbian and Gay Images: An Entertainment Media Resource."¹⁰⁶ With specific reference to filmmaking in their calls for support, GLAAD writes that it "lent

¹⁰¹ The abbreviation for the New York chapter of GLAAD

¹⁰² "GLAAD Newsletter," (1992): Box 5, GLAAD Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers.

¹⁰³ Image 4.1

¹⁰⁴ Ocamb, "GLAAD Bashes," 55.

¹⁰⁵ "GLAAD Pamphlet," (Undated): Box 5, GLAAD Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers.

¹⁰⁶ "Lesbian and Gay Images: An Entertainment Media Resource," Box 3, Folder 13, Jehan Agrama Collection on GLAAD/LA, ONE Archive. Hereafter, Agrama Collection.

support to positive projects,” helping “filmmakers try to break new ground in the portrayal of gays and lesbians...and as homophobic studio executives continue to resist them... your membership in GLAAD/NY will help foster a climate in which gays and lesbians are a regular subject of films at the neighborhood multiplex.”¹⁰⁷ While they were somewhat vague about how they would foster this progressive environment, meetings with executives had the potential to produce successful results.

GLAAD’s LA chapter had a “special charge” to liaise with Hollywood, and by making connections within the industry they “get copies of scripts before they go into production, and we get information about concepts that are being considered for movies... GLAAD believes that consciousness-raising in the entertainment industry will curtail stereotypical portrayals and offensive language.”¹⁰⁸ In 1991, GLAAD/LA had conducted “sensitivity training” with Universal and Disney, and was in the process of scheduling similar events with Warner Bros., Columbia/TriStar, and Twentieth Century Fox.¹⁰⁹ This early access to production materials connects back with GLAAD’s protesting work, as with *Basic Instinct*. The organization had access to the script while it was in development, and used this information to rally people and vocally oppose aspects of the film, particularly the reliance on the killer lesbian stereotype. As Carol Anderson, cofounder of GLAAD/LA, said of studio executives, “We understand that very often they do what they do not from malicious intent... but from a simple lack of knowledge. If you can give them the knowledge and express your concern, they will hear you.”¹¹⁰

This “quiet, behind-the-scenes style” of pushing executives to make gay and lesbian-

¹⁰⁷ “GLAAD Newsletter,” (1992): Box 5, GLAAD Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers.

¹⁰⁸ Ocamb, “GLAAD Bashes Back,” 55.

¹⁰⁹ “Letter From Richard Jennings to Robert Brassel,” Box 2, Folder 18, Agrama Collection.

¹¹⁰ Anderson qtd in Ocamb, “GLAAD Bashes Back,” 55.

conscious decisions was used extensively by AGLA.¹¹¹ As the Executive Director of AGLA, Chris Uszler, stated, “Whether the script ends up as we want it or not, and often it doesn’t, it is the whole process of dialogue that we see as most important... Each time we talk to a network programmer or a producer, they become more sensitive to our concerns. It is a slow, long-term process, but we are making gains.”¹¹² While AGLA also worked as a watchdog group, its efforts were not as visible as the massive protests organized by GLAAD. Instead, AGLA’s less visible activities worked to create better representations in pre-production, reducing the need to object later. The organization:

consulted on dozens of film and television scripts, developing a reputation as a reliable and knowledgeable resource for networks and studios. ‘We have a core membership of workers in the entertainment industry,’ Uszler explained. ‘We are not coming in completely from the outside. We know how to maneuver around inside the industry better. In a way, I think we have some advantages over some pressure groups who come completely from the outside... We are trying to get more and better scripts made.’¹¹³

As leverage to push executives in certain directions, AGLA emphasized the presence of an audience for shows and films with gay and lesbian content; “‘If the people who create television are aware that they have a large gay and lesbian audience that is interested in what they are doing,’ Uszler insisted, ‘or even an audience in general that isn’t even comprised of gay and lesbian people, but that is interested in seeing this sort of material, they will produce more,’” and the high ratings for LGBTQ-themed TV episodes justified Uszler’s claims.¹¹⁴ Once again, the visible presence of audiences helps to direct the industry.

Another prominent area of positive reinforcement were media awards. If you “don’t have anybody’s attention you don’t have advocacy. The biggest attention-getter is the awards show.

¹¹¹ Mark Vandervelden, “In Depth: Alliance for Gay and Lesbian Artists,” *The Advocate* 464 (20 January 1987): 10.

¹¹² Uszler qtd in Vandervelden, “In Depth: Alliance for Gay and Lesbian Artists,” 11.

¹¹³ Vandervelden, “In Depth: AGLA,” 11.

¹¹⁴ Vandervelden, “In Depth: AGLA,” 11.

By rewarding people you also encourage people... It is speaking directly to Hollywood in a language it understands.”¹¹⁵ GLAAD began holding an annual media awards ceremony in 1990 to praise films, television shows, and works in other mediums that presented positive images of gay and lesbian people and issues. AGLA held similar ceremonies starting in 1981. In 1982, during the middle of the mini-cycle, AGLA (then called the AGA), honored, among other films, *Making Love*, *Personal Best*, *Victor/Victoria*, and *Taxi Zum Klo*.¹¹⁶ For their 1985 awards show:

well-known celebrities step[ped] forth to support the responsible portrayal of gay and lesbian characters and issues in the media... Mostly, the awards show demonstrated that Hollywood, far from being ‘a town near hysteria,’ is a town full of concern for its citizens with AIDS... The evening reflected an ever-increasing awareness of gay and lesbian concerns within the entertainment media.¹¹⁷

This moment seems an anomaly in the general consensus of Hollywood’s conservative and homophobic bent, and represents an overly optimistic viewpoint. The awards that year recognized documentaries such as *Silent Pioneers*, *Before Stonewall*, and *The Times of Harvey Milk*, as well as the British narrative feature *Another Country*, none of which emerged from studios.

Despite continued pessimism about Hollywood in many areas, such as the gay press, the 1987 AGLA awards became “prized trophies. ‘It has become very competitive,’ remarked Schiowitz. ‘The first year we gave out six awards. If we were to give awards out now on the same basis that we did the first year, we would probably have to give out 80. As it is, we will still give out something in the 20-25 range. It reflects a total change.’”¹¹⁸ This change can be credited to a number of institutional developments charted throughout this dissertation, and in part this includes the work of groups like GLAAD and AGLA, encouraging an increase in

¹¹⁵ Joel Schiowitz qtd in Vandervelden, “In Depth: AGLA,” 20.

¹¹⁶ Scott Anderson, “Gay Image Celebrated in Media Awards,” *The Advocate* 354 (28 October 1982): 43.

¹¹⁷ Steve Holley, “AGLA Media Awards: A Growing Activision,” *The Advocate* 434 (26 November 1985): 55-56.

¹¹⁸ Vandervelden, “In Depth: AGLA,” 20.

LGBT-themed projects.

In addition to working within established media industries and trying to influence studios and networks, some organizations sought to create more space for LGBTQ film and video outside of the mainstream. One of these was the National Association for Lesbian and Gay Filmmakers, which formed in 1979 when a group of gay and lesbian filmmakers from all over the country attended an Alternative Cinema Conference at Bard College.¹¹⁹ While NALGF also engaged in media monitoring and public advocacy, it differed from GLAAD and AGLA in part because its membership was “limited to those actively involved in media work, including production, exhibition, criticism and research on a professional, business, academic or community basis.”¹²⁰ While certain actions of the organization reflected a politics of visibility and positive representation, being an association of practitioners meant that the organization was “not simply a political organ, but a group of artists. Overriding their political goals is the artists’ quest for truth,”¹²¹ and an accompanying desire to not be restricted to LGBT content. NALGF focused greater attention on non-mainstream media, supporting and promoting independent lesbian and gay film and video makers in order to “increase opportunities for the production and exhibition of films and tapes that effectively portray and examine lesbian and gay issues and themes.”¹²² This organization assisted filmmakers by providing a support network; “it offers financial consultation and funding leads, pursues job markets, ...[and] is there with ‘good old emotional support.’”¹²³

In terms of increasing exhibition and reaching greater audiences, NALGF provided

¹¹⁹ “NALGF Fundraising Letter,” (Winter, 1981): Box 13, NALGF Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers.

¹²⁰ “NALGF Fundraising Letter,” (Winter, 1981): Box 13, NALGF Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers.

¹²¹ Stefan Pevnik, “Gay Filmmakers Confront Media Homophobia in the U.S.,” *The Advocate* 331 (26 November 1981): 38.

¹²² “NALGF Fundraising Letter,” (Winter, 1981): Box 13, NALGF Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers.

¹²³ Pevnik, “Gay Filmmakers Confront Media Homophobia,” 38.

“information on what films and tapes are available and how to organize screenings,” as well as working with special events like gay and lesbian films festivals.¹²⁴ The organization worked closely with the New York Gay Film Festival and created a mutually beneficial environment of supply and demand. NALGF recognized the importance of creating an audience in order to ensure sustainability in LGBTQ media. As NALGF member Sheila Roher put it, “You can have gay media but you have to support it.”¹²⁵ An article published in 1981 noted that:

One of the central issues confronting NALGF is the need to create a market for gay media, explains Roher. ‘Gays will pay \$5 to see *Ordinary People* but won’t pay to see a gay film. It doesn’t come with the trappings—the Hollywood seal of approval, or Robert Redford.’ The ambiguities involved in defining a gay identity further hinder the creation of such a market. ‘We grow up with different cultural identities. How can we develop a gay identity without gay culture, art or media?’ Roher asks.¹²⁶

The accusation that the LGBT community does not support its own media recurs, harshly, in a bitter article by Vito Russo towards the end of his life, in which he berates gays for accepting homophobia in mainstream media and not supporting independent works like *Parting Glances*. In it he writes, “Most gay people have turned out to be nothing but a bunch of Americans who just want to be entertained for two hours and not have any hassle. It stinks. They should be ashamed of themselves.”¹²⁷ Despite these moments of skepticism, however, an extensive network of LGBTQ film distribution and a loyal audience base formed during the 1980s and has persisted to this day. The most visible demonstration of this audience base is the LGBTQ festival circuit, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

As the work of GLAAD, AGLA, and NALGF suggests, media were seen as important battlegrounds for the improvement of gay and lesbian images and lives. There were conscious,

¹²⁴ “NALGF Fundraising Letter,” (Winter, 1981): Box 13, NALGF Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers.

¹²⁵ Roher qtd in Pevnik, “Gay Filmmakers Confront Media Homophobia,” 37.

¹²⁶ Pevnik, “Gay Filmmakers Confront Media Homophobia,” 37.

¹²⁷ Vito Russo, “Malice at the Movies: A Critic Gets ‘Bad,’ Mad, and Just Plain Fed Up With Bigots and Spineless Gays,” *The Advocate* 552 (5 June 1990): 60.

organized efforts to counteract discriminatory depictions and to praise and support media that fit within the groups' definitions of positive representations. These organizations grew in strength and momentum into the 1990s, and by championing the growth of gay and lesbian media they had concrete effects on the filmmaking environment that produced New Queer Cinema. This effect included making media producers aware of the existence of not only an audience for positive gay and lesbian media, but a vocal group that would rain down bad press on them if they did not take the group's viewpoints into consideration.

Appealing to the Mainstream

By the late 1980s, there were a number of financially successful precedents for films with gay and lesbian themes. As one critic noted in 1986,

Moviemakers are doing away with old-style gay movies and looking towards a brighter, hipper, fresher sensibility. And guess what? It's *selling*. Not only are the newfangled gay specialized films big with gay and urban audiences, but many of these presumed 'art films' are also attracting a mass film audience... there is definitely a growing market for what used to be termed 'films for a gay audience.'¹²⁸

This section examines the marketing strategies distributors used in relation to gay and lesbian content. While the financial success of key pre-NQC films was connected to a niche base market, they also represented attempts to bring in crossover, mainstream audiences.

Crossing over into a mainstream audience was a priority for larger-budget independent features. Hector Babenco's 1985 film *Kiss of the Spider Woman* created a successful campaign to bridge the gap between niche and mainstream audiences. It became one of the highest-grossing LGBTQ films of the 1980s and was the first independent film to break the \$10 million

¹²⁸ Learner "Gay Films Stay Strong at the Box Office," 36.

mark.¹²⁹ *Spider Woman* grossed over \$17 million dollars, putting its box office take well ahead of other relatively successful foreign and independent films such as *Maurice* (\$3.1 million) and *Torch Song Trilogy* (\$4.86 million). It even outgrossed the Hollywood studio-produced *Making Love* and came close to *Cruising* and *Deathtrap*'s \$19.8 and \$19.3 million respectively. The production was independently financed by private investors from both Brazil and the US,¹³⁰ as well as a hefty \$1.5 million advance from distributor Island Alive in exchange for the distribution rights.¹³¹ My analysis of *Spider Woman*'s marketing reveals how its makers strategically navigated both niche and crossover audiences. At the same time, I argue, the returns on investment and the prestige generated by the film provided another precedent that encouraged future LGBTQ film projects.

Spider Woman tells the story of two cellmates in a South American prison. Molina, played by William Hurt, is gay and enjoys mentally escaping his situation by retelling the plot of a film that he remembers seeing. Valentin, played by Raul Julia, is a political prisoner whose brusqueness and realism contrasts his cellmate's enjoyment of fantasy. The two grow closer together, becoming intricately tangled in political plots. The film's script had a prestigious pedigree, as it was adapted from Manuel Puig's acclaimed 1976 novel of the same name. This literary lineage helped the film connect with trends in 1980s independent filmmaking, namely the marketing of films as "quality" works, betting that viewers would have an "appetite for sophisticated film fare."¹³² By using the label of "quality film," distributors could convey "the requisite upscale tone without precluding substantial commercial success."¹³³ Gay and lesbian

¹²⁹ Yannis Tzioumakis, *Hollywood's Indies: Classics Divisions, Specialty Labels and the American Film Market* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012): 73.

¹³⁰ "Press Kit." http://www.kissofthespiderwoman.com/kotsw_press_kit.pdf

¹³¹ The biggest advance ever from the company. "Island Alive Seeking Crossover Audiences For 'Spider Woman,'" *Variety* (14 August 1985): 7.

¹³² Debra Goldman, "Business for Art's Sake," *American Film* 12.6 (1 April 1987): 44.

¹³³ Goldman, "Business for Art's Sake," 44.

films were often placed in a category of quality or “specialty film” by default, since gay and lesbian subject matter was considered taboo enough to make it instantly “adult” in character.

Early reviews out of Cannes seemed hesitant about *Spider Woman*’s commercial prospects, and suggested that the film would appeal to only a niche demographic. As the *Variety* review stated, “Hurt’s performance in the central homosexual role will give critics and audiences a lot to chew on, pro and con. Intellectual, literary, sexual and political orientation of the piece demands some strong notices to launch it in the marketplace, but if this happens, film could do well with upscale, discerning audiences looking for works of substance.”¹³⁴ The film, however, did better than expected and took many people by surprise. When *Spider Woman* opened, Island Alive representative Dan Genetti said they “couldn’t get enough prints out; it seemed this movie, which was meant for a specialized audience, found an audience in everyone.”¹³⁵ As is common with art films or smaller-budget pictures, *Spider Woman* first opened in big cities, generated good word of mouth and reviews, and then was rolled out to more cities. After some preview screenings to generate buzz, the film opened 20th in *Variety*’s August 7th top-50 list. It broke the box office record for New York’s Cinema I, bringing in over \$55,000 the first weekend and \$108,778 in the first week.¹³⁶ Island Alive hoped that the film would “attract a crossover audience and consolidate the company’s position somewhere between a major and an art film distributor.”¹³⁷ In this case, the “crossover” was from an art film audience to a mainstream audience, and there was not as much attention paid to the presence of a gay audience specifically. Gay viewers, however, were accustomed to seeking out films of special interest to them, whether

¹³⁴ Cart., “Kiss of the Spider Woman,” *Variety* (15 May 1985): 14.

¹³⁵ Genet qtd in Learner, “Gay Films Stay Strong at the Box Office,” 36.

¹³⁶ James Greenberg, “Island Pictures Revs Up Releases of ‘Spider Woman’ and ‘Bountiful’ To Maximize Their Oscar Mileage,” *Variety* (2 April 1986): 36. and “Kiss of the Spider Woman Ad,” *Variety* (7 August 1985): 29.

¹³⁷ “Island Alive Seeking Crossover Audiences For ‘Spider Woman,’” *Variety* (14 August 1985): 7.

these were advertised as such or not. The gay audience courted itself, with the help of the gay press, which printed a number of articles about the film, bringing it to the attention of its readers.

The side-stepping of gay themes in the film's marketing can be seen in the film's advertising. The initial print ad, Image 4.2, features the woman from Molina's imagination/memory in a revealing spider web dress on an expressionistic tropical island. The top of the ad contains the lead actors' names, and other credits are squeezed into the lower right-hand corner. The image gives no indication of the film's gay theme, and instead plays up the fantasy element of the film within a film. After the film opened, distributor Island Alive released another print ad (Image 4.3) that trumpeted the film's box office success. The top of the ad includes the Cinema I box office total for the first week and touts the fact that this take broke the house record. The rest of the ad resembles the original ad, including a different image of a woman on a tropical island, this time in a more abstract silhouette with a spider web overlaid on the image. Ads in *The Advocate* were no more explicit about the film's gay themes, leaving that aspect of the film unmentioned but highlighting the film's Academy Award nominations (Image 4.4). The trailers for the film show bits of Hurt's performance, and therefore signal the presence of a flamboyant character. The connection to homosexual themes, however, is still downplayed in favor of again emphasizing critical praise, fantasy elements, and action scenes—an interesting addition as most of the film takes place in a jail cell with limited physical action. This mitigating of gay themes was visible in the Hollywood mini-cycle, and recurred in other gay and lesbian independent films, which is discussed in the following section.

Spider Woman was able to reach a crossover audience in part because Island Alive emphasized the critically praised, quality aspects of the film and downplayed the film's gay themes. Even so, the film contained a central homosexual character, reached a large number of

people outside of a niche LGBTQ audience, and “with the proven success of *Spider Woman*, even those not so adventurous are willing to try something different.”¹³⁸ The film proved “that honest gay themes can, in fact, translate into big box office, just like any other contemporary theme.”¹³⁹ The film garnered Academy award nominations for Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Director, and Best Picture, and William Hurt won Best Actor for his portrayal of an openly gay man. Hurt also won the BAFTA, Cannes, and several critics choice awards for Best Actor. Winning awards was a way of legitimizing the film’s themes and rewarding the actor and filmmakers for taking on a topic that was still taboo. Additionally, this was the first time an independent film had been nominated in four big categories, and it therefore marks an important moment in the development and wider recognition of independent cinema more generally. The film not only demonstrated the money making potential of LGBTQ films, but the prestige and possibility for awards that could accompany them. *Spider Woman* set a precedent that encouraged others to explore LGBTQ themes.

It’s Not a Gay Drama, It’s an Indie Drama

The concern over marketing gay content that marked the Hollywood gay mini-cycle recurred in the independent filmmaking sector, if with less frequency and intensity. Many marketing strategies tried to draw in both mainstream and niche audiences, making appeals to gay viewers while being coy about gay content, so as not to frighten away straight viewers. Libra Films International, the US distributors for Derek Jarman’s first feature, *Sebastiane* (1976), positioned the film to appeal to the gay community, although hesitated to label it a gay film. Gay American audiences had “awaited the riot-causing British film *Sebastiane* for over a year since

¹³⁸ Learner, “Gay Films Stay Strong at the Box Office,” 36.

¹³⁹ Samir Hachem, “Producer David Weisman in ‘Breaking the Bank’ With A Hit *Spider Woman*,” *The Advocate* 430 (1 October 1985): 60.

its controversial London premiere,” and the distributors built anticipation through “an ad campaign carefully designed to cash in on the gay audience,” including “a bombastic radio-ad campaign with a butch growl tempting us to see ‘the film that may tell the truth about a saint.’”¹⁴⁰ Despite the direct appeals made to potential gay audiences, the ads “pointedly sidestep scaring off potential straight viewers by avoiding the words ‘gay’ or ‘Homosexual.’”¹⁴¹ The distributor perhaps counted on the fact that the film was known in gay circles, allowing them to be vague in its public associations with gayness.

The marketing of Jill Godmilow’s *Waiting for the Moon* (1987), which has implied but not explicit lesbian content, provides another example of tentative marketing. Skouras Pictures handled *Waiting*’s domestic release. Jeff Lipsky, president of Skouras’ motion picture division, stated “We are breaking our backs to try to position the film within the gay community, with underpublicized private screenings, massive mailings, and so forth;” there was, however, a lingering concern and effort to avoid “pigeonholing” the film.¹⁴² Skouras was worried that marketing it too heavily as a gay film would limit it to this niche market and adversely affect its profitability. While distributors would use direct and individualized tactics to secure the gay demographic, there was still much hesitancy, even in the late 1980s, about labeling a film “gay” or “lesbian” for fear of alienating a cross-over audience.

Three central films of the Gay New Wave were likewise caught up in this negotiating of gay content, and the hesitancy towards this material kept these films from becoming a fully-formed movement. *My Beautiful Laundrette*, *Parting Glances*, and *Desert Hearts* were all set to release at the same time, causing competition in marketing these gay and lesbian themed films.

¹⁴⁰ James M. Saslow, “Not Even Latin Saves a Martyred Movie: Sebastiane: Unnui Vincit Omnia,” *The Advocate* 241 (17 May 1978): 32.

¹⁴¹ Saslow, “Not Even Latin,” 32.

¹⁴² Clarke, 47.

The distribution companies for each film (Orion, Cinecom, and Samuel Goldwyn Co., respectively) took a different approach to marketing them. Goldwyn played up the eroticism angle of *Desert Hearts*, and Orion positioned homosexuality in *Laundrette* as “just one component of a very rich film that touched on a laundry list of issues in a dramatically compelling manner.”¹⁴³ The publicizing of *Parting Glances* was somewhat more complicated. While Steve Seifert, the person most responsible for bringing the film to Cinecom, was openly gay and would presumably not have shied away from the gay aspects of the film, the press book Seifert prepared emphasized the low-budget, independent roots but “it wasn’t immediately apparent that it was gay, and there was absolutely *no mention* of the fact that Steve Buscemi’s character had AIDS.”¹⁴⁴ John Pierson suggested that the marketing tactics were most likely the result of Seifert’s discovery, after acquiring the film, that he had AIDS.¹⁴⁵

Despite the press book, Cinecom marketing director, Richard Abramowitz, did say that they positioned *Parting Glances* towards urban gays, in part because “there’s no way we could have said this was a ‘straight film’... so the gays knew it was meant specifically for them.”¹⁴⁶ Orion representatives pushed this “gay” classification, and referred to *Parting Glances*, particularly when around conservative exhibitors, as “that *gay* film,”¹⁴⁷ self-consciously distancing it from *Laundrette*. Orion representatives also told reporters that “we do not want to be spoken about in the same breath as those other [gay] films...what struck us was the universality of the love story. I never saw it as a gay film,” although they later recanted somewhat in *The Advocate*, perhaps in an attempt to court gay audiences as well, and stated,

¹⁴³ Pierson, 40.

¹⁴⁴ Pierson, 41.

¹⁴⁵ Pierson, 42.

¹⁴⁶ Abramowitz qt. in Learner, “Gay Films Stay Strong at the Box Office,” 36.

¹⁴⁷ Pierson, 40.

“I’m not saying it isn’t a gay film; we just feel it has more messages than that.”¹⁴⁸ They attempted to distance *Laundrette* from its gay content by comparing it with a film that was *really* a gay film, using the same logic as Aaron Russo’s comparison of *Partners* to *Making Love*.

There were certainly exceptions to this avoidance of gay associations. In an interview with John Sayles about his lesbian-themed film *Lianna*, Sayles remarks that although he tried to include points of identification for everyone in the audience,

It’s meant to make people uncomfortable. There are things I put in—like the explicit sex scenes, like *Lianna* exclaiming that she eats pussy—as sort of a reminder both to *Lianna* and to the audience to call a spade a spade... I thought it was really important that when Maggie and I went around the country talking about it, that we’d never do the number of ‘Oh, this isn’t a movie about homosexuality... it’s about people.’ I heard that a lot after *Personal Best* and *Making Love*. It may be good advertising for a general audience, but if you’re not proud of what you do, then why do it in the first place?¹⁴⁹

Lianna did well theatrically even with a marketing strategy that did not shy away from the film’s focus on lesbian characters. Although its budget was significantly lower than that of a studio-produced film (\$300,000 versus *Making Love*’s \$8 million), *Lianna* earned a healthy \$1.5 million at the box office. The marketing of *Lianna* represents an anomaly, however. Most LGBTQ films in both the indie sector and the mini-cycle of studio films in the 1980s were marketed using evasive rhetorical strategies that served to minimize the specificity of the films’ narratives. Such marketing strategies delayed the formation of a movement.

This hesitancy over LGBTQ content would lessen somewhat in the early 1990s, as the films of New Queer Cinema earned decent box office returns. In part this was because they were positioned for crossover into wider art cinema releases, but their successes were also credited to a strong niche market. As producer Vachon said, “it shocked a lot of people that a film like

¹⁴⁸ Michael Barker qt. in Learner, “Gay Films Stay Strong at the Box Office,” 37.

¹⁴⁹ K.H. Garfield, “John Sayles: A Sympathetic Filmmaker Goes Exploring with *Lianna*,” *The Advocate* 367 (12 May 1983): 41-43.

Poison could make a lot of money. But theater owners and distributors, like Fine Line and Prestige, are beginning to recognize that there's a gay and lesbian market."¹⁵⁰ Another, unnamed producer added that "one of these small independent films has to break through and make the sort of money that will make Hollywood sit up and take notice. It doesn't have to be a lot of money by Hollywood standards, just enough to show that making a gay or lesbian film won't be a risk."¹⁵¹ Part of mitigating this risk involves relying on an LGBTQ base of support, a loyal audience that will help a film make back its upfront costs regardless of whether it reaches a large crossover audience or not. Distribution of all independent films encounter similar cost and potential profit analyses before being picked up for distribution. By the early 1990s, however, the work of LGBTQ community building and emphasis on visibility politics placed this niche market in an advantageous position. Especially when there were few gay and lesbian films on the market, as with *Claire of the Moon*, distributors could count on a base line of support from LGBTQ audiences.

This discussion of marketing, both niche and mainstream, conveys the important role real and perceived audiences play in the filmmaking process. As an expensive medium, filmmakers rely on income from the theatrical box office and ancillary markets to recoup the costs of a film's production and marketing. In addition to the growth of targeted advertising towards gay demographics, audiences became increasingly visible through the efforts of organizations like GLAAD and AGLA, pushing media outlets to take into consideration gay and lesbian perspectives. The visibility of an audience, and the demonstrated ability for films with LGBTQ themes to bring in crossover viewers, suggested the box office potential for these films. As with the "cold cash and common sense" logic, having a greater chance for returns on investments

¹⁵⁰ David Ehrenstein. "Homophobia in Hollywood II." *The Advocate* 600 (7 April 1992): 40.

¹⁵¹ Ehrenstein, "Homophobia in Hollywood II," 40.

makes producing entities more likely to take a chance on LGBTQ projects.

Bringing in substantial amounts of money can affect future filmmaking trends, and producers justify the expense of filmmaking by calling on data from previously successful films. As director Joel Schumacher (who was, for a time, in talks to direct *And The Band Played On*) remarked, “If *Longtime Companion* made as much money as *Home Alone*, there would be 50 projects about AIDS. It’s not about homophobia, it’s about greed.”¹⁵² Although, as discussed in Chapter 3, some films were funded through non-commercial means, these passion projects would not occur with enough frequency and visibility to constitute a movement. Gay and lesbian films from the late seventies to the early nineties consistently provided financial returns on investments and earned critical praise. These monetary inducements and potential for critical esteem provided incentive to support LGBTQ filmmaking, which in turn paved the way for a queer film movement.

¹⁵² Schumacher qtd in Ehrenstein, “Homophobia in Hollywood II,” 43.

Images:

ADVERTISEMENT

Hollywood Images Fuel Gay/Lesbian Bashing

Over 7,000 hate crimes against lesbians and gay men were reported last year. This year's screen images of violence and abuse fuel a climate of increasing anti-gay violence.

Gay and lesbian film characters are portrayed either as sissies and victims, or murderers and twisted villains. We are maimed and killed. We are verbally abused with offensive terms such as "faggot" and "dyke."

There are an estimated 25 million lesbian and gay Americans. With all due respect for freedom of expression, isn't it time Hollywood used that freedom to depict lesbians and gay men in a more realistic and responsible way? We think so.

We are the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), and we are available to work with the Hollywood community on ending this bigotry. A nationwide organization, GLAAD's purpose is to counter defamation and to promote accurate portrayals of lesbians and gay men in the media.

For more information, and for a copy of GLAAD's Media Guide to the Lesbian and Gay Community, contact us in **Los Angeles at (213) 558-0750** or in **New York at (212) 966-1700.**

In **DARKMAN**, the gay character is a vicious crime boss who collects the severed fingers of his victims.

In **WILD AT HEART**, the highly offensive term "faggots" is used to refer to gays.

In **MEN AT WORK**, two near-naked policemen are tied up, one behind the other, prompting several offensive anti-gay jokes.

Earlier this year . . .

In **Q & A**, one gay man is viciously beaten. Another is strangled to death.

In **HOUSE PARTY**, the lead character does an anti-gay rap song, with such lines as "Me a homo?/Nah man, that's a no-no."

And in the near future . . .

Joe Eszterhas' \$3 million screenplay for **BASIC INSTINCT**, now in development, features lesbian and bisexual women as murderers.*

MILLER'S CROSSING contains three stereotypical, extremely negative gay characters.

The script for **TICKING MAN** features a villain described as a "weirdly effeminate" man who threatens the hero in a restroom stall with a machine gun amid dialogue alluding to the villain's sexual orientation.*

*Based on the screenplay drafts we reviewed.

Image 4.1: "Hollywood Images Fuel Gay/Lesbian Bashing," *Daily Variety* (September 1990): 17.



Image 4.2: Early *Kiss of the Spider Woman* Print Ad, *Variety* (1 May 1985): 141.

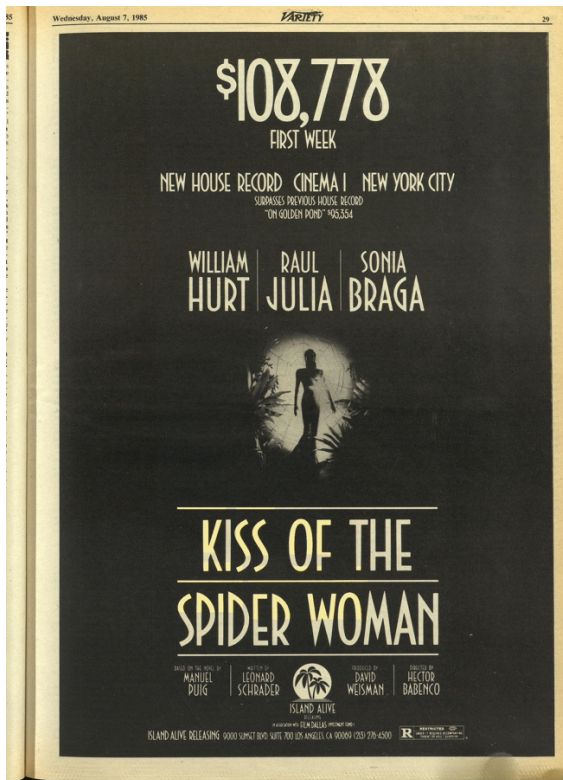


Image 4.3: Later *Kiss of the Spider Woman* Print Ad, *Variety* (7 August 1985): 29.

Chapter 5 Film Festivals: A Defining Institution

A key institution for the proliferation of LGBTQ filmmaking was the gay and lesbian film festival circuit. Festivals hold a privileged position in independent and international filmmaking, as a point of intersection between producers, distributors, audiences, and critical contexts. These events, particularly niche gay and lesbian festivals, supported the steady growth of LGBTQ filmmaking in the decade prior to NQC. Since the late 1970s, these festivals created networks of distribution and exhibition that reached beyond major cities. Festivals provided space for the coalescence of LGBTQ films and allowed these films to connect with audiences and build film communities, making the market for LGBTQ films visible and quantifiable. Gay and lesbian festivals became “one of the largest institutionalizations of gay and lesbian media and arts in the world.”¹ In the immediate pre-NQC years, Vito Russo described gay and lesbian film festivals as “among the most popular, well-attended, and most cherished events in our community, attracting lesbians and gay men who cannot remember a time when such festivals didn’t exist. The sense of community engendered by the gay film festivals is palpable and perhaps even more important than the quality of the films being presented.”²

As sites of community building, visible audience formation, and exhibition, gay and lesbian film festivals heavily impacted the trajectory of LGBTQ filmmaking. By providing a designated exhibition space, the rapidly growing gay and lesbian festival circuit cultivated and provided exposure for foreign and independent films, videos, and short form works, which would have had difficulty obtaining theatrical releases. Creating screening opportunities encouraged

¹ Rhyne, 6. The growth of Gay and Lesbian festivals comes after the early development of other identity politics festivals. See Zielinski, 172-174, which discusses the history of LGBTQ festivals in women’s festivals and offers an overview of this trajectory.

² Vito Russo, “From Screen to Shining Screen: The Richness of Gay Life is Celebrated at Film Festivals,” *The Advocate* 554 (3 July 1990): 68.

the production of greater numbers of LGBTQ films and drew increased attention to these films. Festivals also played a central role in the growth and solidification of trends in gay and lesbian filmmaking, and their self-consciously curated programs provide evidence for the manner in which LGBTQ film criticism and activism functioned during this time period. As a side effect of gathering and supporting certain films, gay and lesbian festivals helped form a distinct category of “gay and lesbian” cinema, a key conceptual basis for the formation of a movement. These effects, made possible through the institutional support that niche festivals provided, combined to create the required conditions for the formation of a queer cinema movement.

LGBTQ Film Festival Programming and Audience Self-Presentation

Queer film scholars are beginning to pay greater attention to the crucial history and role of LGBTQ film festivals. This is evidenced by works such as Reagan Rhyne’s 2007 dissertation “Pink Dollars: Gay and Lesbian Film Festivals and the Economy of Visibility,” Gerald Zielinski’s 2008 dissertation “Furtive, Steady Glances: On the Emergence and Cultural Politics of Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals,” and Skadi Loist’s work on the history and programming of queer film festivals.³ Much work, however, remains to be done on this complex and fascinating topic. This section illustrates how festivals contributed to the creation of a queer film movement by drawing attention to and elevating LGBTQ films that would otherwise have gone unseen, developing a conception of LGBTQ film as a distinct category, and forming a visible film

³ Including Loist’s dissertation: “Queer Film Culture: Performative Aspects of LGBT/Q Film Festivals;” her published chapters, “The Queer Film Festival Phenomenon in a Global Historical Perspective (the 1970s-2000s)” in the 2013 book *Une histoire des festivals* and “A Complicated Queerness: LGBT Film Festivals and Queer Programming Strategies” in the 2012 book *Coming Soon to a Festival Near You: Programming Film Festivals*; and numerous articles such as “Precarious Cultural Work: About the Organization of (Queer) Film Festivals,” *Screen* 52:2 (2011): 268-273).

community and audience.⁴

Early gay and lesbian film festivals were founded by filmmakers or activists in order to showcase their work and draw attention to their politics. These festivals were:

focused first on developing an infrastructure for gay filmmaking and then later on changing the terms upon which gays and lesbians had been represented in popular media. This relationship between visibility and self-determination has been, since the beginning, at the very heart of festival missions and their work to build communities around these venues.⁵

The San Francisco Gay Film Festival (later renamed the San Francisco International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival),⁶ for example, was initially produced by a small group of filmmakers who wanted a forum in which to share their work with fellow filmmakers and the broader public. The festival's organizational group was first called Persistence of Vision, but was renamed Frameline in 1979. They arranged a screening on February 9th, 1977 at the Gay Community Center on Page Street, and after the surprising success of the event they arranged an additional screening in March. The event moved to June, to correspond with Pride month, and became the first recurring gay and lesbian film festival. There were scattered gay and lesbian film screenings prior to 1977, and as early as 1973 there was a call for applications for the "first American gay film festival," to be held in Washington DC and sponsored by the Janus Film Society.⁷ These earlier initiatives, however, did not coalesce into regularly occurring events. The San Francisco festival therefore holds the distinction of being the oldest and longest running gay and lesbian film festival.

⁴ By focusing on the formation of communities around films, I do not wish to propose a single, unified group, as the bounds of communities are flexible and encompass a range of individuals and sub-groups. For my purposes, however, I focus on the practical uses of the term and the direct effects these uses can have on the institutional development of queer cinema.

⁵ Rhyne, 118.

⁶ This name change occurred in 1982. Many niche festivals began as "gay" festivals but quickly shifted to become "lesbian and gay" festivals.

⁷ Press Release, "First Gay Film Festival to be Held in Washington, D.C.," in "Film Festivals: First American Gay Film Festival (DC 1973)" Folder, IGIC—Subject Ephemera Papers.

Critical and academic discussions of gay and lesbian film festivals tend to focus on American events. Similar festivals were forming at the same time around the world, but the early festivals based in the United States became the largest and longest running. While there has been some significant work done on North American gay and lesbian festivals, there has been almost no English-language scholarly attention paid to the historical position of European LGBTQ film festivals. This is despite the fact that the Amsterdam festival became a major player in the gay and lesbian film festival circuit and has particular resonance with queer film history. B. Ruby Rich's "New Queer Cinema" article, in which she coined the term, includes a major "Dateline Amsterdam" section in which she discusses the festival.

Gay and lesbian film festivals appeared throughout Europe in the 1980s. Early examples include festivals in Ljubljana, Slovenia (which began in 1984, making it the "oldest annual gay and lesbian film festival in Europe"),⁸ Copenhagen (which began in 1985),⁹ London (began 1986),¹⁰ and Amsterdam (also 1986).¹¹ One of the earliest European gay film festivals was mentioned in a report in the February 8th, 1978 edition of *Variety*. They noted that "the two week Homosexual Film Festival running at a Left Bank specialized house was raided by members of a far right youth organization."¹² The fact that this festival was set to run for two weeks, collected admissions fees, and showed films that first went through state censorship suggests that the festival was more organized and official than the first few years of the San Francisco festival, which consisted of a limited number of short films with admission based on donations that were suggested but not required. The "Homosexual Film Festival," however, did

⁸ Brian Pozun, "Lost and Found," *Transitions Online*: <http://www.tol.org/client/article/13206-lost-and-found.html>

⁹ "Germany's Ottinger and her pix slated for 4th Gay, Lesbian film fest in Denmark." *Variety* (25 October 1989): 20.

¹⁰ "Cheek to Cheek," *Sight and Sound*, 16, no. 4 (April 2006): 4-5.

¹¹ "Dutch Group Marks 40th Anni With A Film Fest," *Variety* 325:8 (17 December 1986): 22.

¹² "French Ultra-Rightists Break Up Gay Film Fest; Rob Under Cops' Eyes," *Variety* (8 February 1978): 1.

not grow into anything sustained, and in fact is only mentioned in *Variety* because of the controversy and aggression that it sparked with conservatives.

LGBTQ films also screened at events that did not constitute “gay film festivals.” For example, in 1977 the British National Film Theater scheduled a series titled “Images of Homosexuality,” which was programmed by Richard Dyer. This “epoch-making event”¹³ screened over thirty-five films and laid the groundwork for the later London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, although it would take another nine years before this turned into an annual event. To accompany with the series, the British Film Institute published the landmark book of essays, *Gays and Film*, one of the earliest books on the subject.

The number of gay and lesbian film festivals increased throughout the 1980s, with 11 American and 26 non-American festivals in operation in 1991.¹⁴ This number exploded during the 1990s, and by the end of the nineties, there were more than 150 festivals worldwide.¹⁵ The popularity of festivals and number of submissions received likewise grew throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as is visualized in Figure 5.1. The 1980 San Francisco festival contained only 12 films, all of which were shorts.¹⁶ The 1987 festival screened 30 feature films in addition to a number of shorts programs. Advance ticket sales for the event was double that of 1986, and overall attendance and grosses set records that year.¹⁷ The Los Angeles International Gay and Lesbian Film/Video Festival in 1989 offered a record setting 92 selections for the festival itself, and reported receiving twice that number of submissions.¹⁸ The Pittsburgh International Lesbian

¹³ Brian Robinson, “Queer Film and Video Festival Forum: Take One,” 580.

¹⁴ David Perry, “State of the Arts,” *The Advocate* 594 (14 January 1992): 69.

¹⁵ Rhyne, 60. And Skadi Loist’s LGBT/Q Festival Map: https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1m-UV5Kpw39u-eLn--Dj6RALd4ks&hl=en_US&ll=-3.81666561775622e-14%2C0&z=1

¹⁶ “Program Guide: The Fourth Annual San Francisco Gay Film Festival” (1980): <http://issuu.com/frameline/docs/4th-sanfrancisco-international-lgbt-film-festival>

¹⁷ “S.F. Gay Film Fest Set Gross, Attendance Marks,” *Variety* (1 July 1987): 5.

¹⁸ Amy Dawes, “Record number of features, shorts set for Intl. Gay and Lesbian fest; increased global pool to be reflected,” *Variety* (5 July 1989): 23.

and Gay Film Festival (PILGFF) likewise reported significant growth in the late 1980s from its founding in 1986, when it showed only five films and drew in 403 attendees.¹⁹ Around 682 people attended the festival's 16 films the following year,²⁰ and the festival hit a turning point in 1988, where it screened 34 films/videos and attendance hit a record high of 1,760.²¹ The growth continued in 1989, with 1,887 attendees and 56 film/video selections.²² Although PILGFF is a smaller event than other major festivals, it had significant regional impacts that will be discussed below.

This is not to say that gay and lesbian film festivals followed an uncomplicated trajectory of increased growth and expansion. Funding crises plagued the festivals, especially as Reagan-era policies and conservative attacks threatened government arts funding opportunities. The pushback against arts funding was directed at gay and lesbian media makers in particular during the early 1990s, when right wing conservatives pressured the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to stop funding LGBTQ media. Festivals, however, were able to overcome these challenges and provide a consistent exhibition site and source of institutional support for queer cinema.

Festivals made visible an audience that demonstrated the demand for LGBTQ films, and both critical and scholarly writing focus on festivals as sites of community formation. Film festivals help to generate collective identities, which “although they are not organizational inventions, are continually filtered and reproduced through *organizational bodies... identity boundaries are shaped by and shift through organizational activity*,” such as the action taken by

¹⁹ “1988 Chicago Resource Center Grant Application,” undated, Box 1, Folder 11, PILGFF Papers.

²⁰ “1988 Chicago Resource Center Grant Application,” undated, Box 1, Folder 11, PILGFF Papers.

²¹ “Evaluation Report for the Fourth Annual Pittsburgh International,” undated, Box 1, Folder 16, PILGFF Papers.

²² “Evaluation Report for the Fourth Annual Pittsburgh International,” undated, Box 1, Folder 16, PILGFF Papers.

specialty film festivals on the part of “communities.”²³ With regard to the New Festival, which formed in 1988 after the New York Gay and Lesbian Festival closed down due to lack of funding, “the original impetus for the festival...was to join grassroots community politics and film art: to bring lesbians and gays together in another public space, to increase lesbian and gay visibility, to demonstrate the pluralism of that community, and to raise lesbian and gay consciousness.”²⁴ These festivals provided a communal experience, in which “our identities are constituted as much in the event as in the images we watch.”²⁵ As one writer put it, in the:

economy of visibility, gay and lesbian film and video festivals are especially important because they constitute a kind of double representation on and in front of the screen. So when one programs a festival, one also programs the audience and the community. One presents queer community to itself and then, as a festival becomes more ‘mainstream,’ to the larger public as well.²⁶

Festivals provided a venue to exhibit LGBTQ film and video, creating a distribution network of sorts, as well as space to make visible the conceptual market discussed in Chapter 4. Patricia White has summed up these benefits of the festival circuit succinctly:

Besides giving public exposure to thousands of works (and, as exhibition venues, causing work to be produced, as mushrooming annual submissions bear out) and—one hopes—garnering publicity for gay and lesbian media, film- and video makers, and organizations, the festivals constitute a counter public sphere, providing a collective experience and a literal site of *critical* reception. What they exhibit and make visible, alongside their programming, is an audience. In turn, it has become possible to stage ‘outings’ (‘we are watching’), to issue demands for images more accurately reflecting community diversity, and to stand up and be counted by market researchers.²⁷

These discussions of community suggest the important role festivals play in creating a visible

²³ Joshua Gamson, “The Organization of Collective Identity: The Case of Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals in New York,” *Sociological Forum* Vol. 11, No. 2 (Jun., 1996): 235. emphasis in original

²⁴ Gamson, 242.

²⁵ Martha Gever, “The Names We Give Ourselves,” in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson et al. (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990): 201.

²⁶ Richard Fung, “Programming the Public,” in Patricia White ed. “Queer publicity - A dossier on lesbian and gay film festivals,” *GLQ-a Journal Of Lesbian And Gay Studies* Vol.5(1) (1999): 90.

²⁷ Patricia White, “Introduction: On Exhibitionism,” in Patricia White ed. “Queer publicity,” 74.

audience/market, which increases the commercial viability of LGBTQ film. This visibility and base of support aided the formation of a queer cinema movement.

Film festivals are transnational events, where films from different national contexts can come together. Early gay and lesbian film festivals had a particularly international bent for the logistical reason of product availability. Even festivals held in countries with rich histories of LGBTQ filmmaking had to draw from transnational offerings, since no single country was yet producing enough gay and lesbian themed work to fill a substantial, annual festival program. This trend is apparent in Frameline's programming of the San Francisco Festival. From 1981 (the first year the festival included feature films) to 1985, Frameline showed 75 features (both narrative and documentaries): 23 from the US, 22 from Germany, ten from Great Britain, seven from the Netherlands, six from France, three from both Japan and Canada, two from Australia and Spain, and one each from Denmark, Brazil, Greece, Israel, Mexico, Finland, and Norway.²⁸ Although the largest number of films originated in the United States, a significant percentage of these were documentaries (9 out of 23). Most of the imported films were fictions, meaning that the majority of narrative features that played at the festival in these first five years were not American. Festivals provided a site of cross-cultural exchange that supported transnational LGBTQ filmmaking and fashioned “gay and lesbian” (and later “queer”) cinema as a recognizable and respectable niche category.

As the oldest and most established gay and lesbian festival, Frameline’s programming decisions and subsequent distribution catalogue helped shape the trajectory and definitions of LGBTQ filmmaking. Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, trends at gay and lesbian film festivals shifted, as Frameline’s programming reveals. In its first decade of operation, Frameline

²⁸ “Program Guides” accessed at <http://frameline.org/now-showing/festival-program-guide-archives>. See film festival list in Appendix II.

sought to curate certain types of gay and lesbian filmmaking. Programming for an individual festival was often influenced by the festival's "historic relationships with its audience and community" and "developed over time in accordance with the then-current discussions in the gay, lesbian and queer movements."²⁹ The lineup of feature length fiction films from the Frameline Festival (Appendix II) can be arranged into three general categories of film, and these groupings roughly correspond with the dominant trends in gay/lesbian and queer film studies and filmmaking in the United States during the 1980s.³⁰ Frameline brought in contemporary "positive image" films, which offered a view of homosexuality as a normal part of life, re-issued older film classics, which made visible the often-invisible past of homosexuality, and provided a place for more experimental work to find an audience, which encouraged the growth of queer cinema.

Gay and lesbian film festivals offered space "where non-stereotypical, non-negative images could be seen, images that the mainstream did not provide."³¹ The first group of films correspondingly consists of contemporaneously produced, classically constructed films that offer high production values and positive images of gay and lesbian characters. The inclusion of such films functioned to resist the common negative representations of homosexuality, and can be termed a "corrective motif" in festival selections, correcting against Hollywood and other mainstream sources that "misrepresented" gay life and experiences.³² Films in this category

²⁹ Skadi Loist. "A Complicated Queerness: LGBT Film Festivals and Queer Programming." in Jeffrey Ruoff ed. *Coming Soon to a Festival Near You: Programming Film Festivals*. (London: St. Andrews Film Studies, 2012): 165.

³⁰ This overview looks only at feature length fiction films. The inclusion of shorts and documentaries would most likely skew the included works in a more avant-garde or politically radical direction. For more on shorts, see Loist "A Complicated Queerness: LGBT Film Festivals and Queer Programming." These other forms of filmmaking are fruitful avenues for exploration, but in this current project I focus on feature-length fiction films, since these most directly connect to the growth of New Queer Cinema.

³¹ Loist, "A Complicated Queerness," 161. While Loist's comments on the history of LGBTQ film festivals and general festival approaches to content are useful, she focuses on post-2000s programs of shorts.

³² Zielinski, 129.

include *A Love Like Any Other* (Hans Stempel and Martin Ripkens, 1982), *This Special Friendship* (Jean Delanoy, 1982), *November Moon* (Alexandra von Grote, 1984), and *Coming Out* (Heiner Carow, 1989). The international origins of these films suggest that positive image aesthetics were a transnational phenomenon, suited to global gay activist agendas and assimilationist politics.

In an historical approach to gay and lesbian images, programmers mined older films for glimpses of progressive attitudes towards gay and lesbian subjects and breathed new life into these classic films. Among the repertory films programmed were *Different from the Others*, *Salome* (Natasha Rambova and Charles Bryant, 1922), *Mikael* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1924), *Mädchen in Uniform* (Leontine Sagan and Carl Froelich, 1931), *Lot in Sodom* (Melville Webber and JS Watson Jr, 1933), and *Viktor und Viktoria* (Reinhold Schünzel, 1933). This approach to programming uncovered and pointed to a hidden history of gays and lesbians, and the ability to see and refer to these older images gave the current gay and lesbian movement legitimacy and a legacy on which to build. Festivals also cultivated a sense of LGBTQ film history through programming lectures by critics and historians on gay and lesbian representations in classical Hollywood films. The most enduring of such lecture series was Vito Russo's talk "The Celluloid Closet," in which he worked through and demonstrated material for/from his eponymous 1981 book, which became a documentary feature film in 1996.³³

Lastly, there were films that pointed towards queer filmmaking, which consistently found a space in the festival circuit but began to dominate in the early 1990s.³⁴ As Gus Van Sant said

³³ The first time this lecture occurred at the San Francisco festival was in 1981, and it was repeated numerous times ("Program Guide: The 5th Annual San Francisco Gay Film Festival" (1981): <http://issuu.com/frameline/docs/5th-sanfrancisco-international-lgbt-film-festival>). Russo also gave versions of the lecture elsewhere starting in the late 1970s, when he was still developing his book.

³⁴ These formally inventive films were later eclipsed by the trend back towards conventional or classically constructed films.

about his decision to make *Mala Noche*, he saw early festivals as desperate for product. They offered space for low-budget, formally challenging films to find exhibition space and support, and Van Sant felt that this institution could help him find an audience and break even on his first feature. The presence of formally inventive films grew in prominence at Frameline during the 1980s. These can be categorized as difficult or “queer” through their experimental, often low-budget aesthetics, the foregrounding of controversial or potentially negative images of gay men and lesbians, and a rejection of classical narrative conventions. This group includes the films of Rosa von Praunheim, Ulrike Ottinger, and Monika Treut, as well as films like *Mala Noche*, *Born in Flames*, and *She Must Be Seeing Things*. These and other works, which functioned as direct precursors to NQC, would not have found an audience at the time except through festivals.

The interaction between LGBT festivals and feature length gay and lesbian films in the 1980s is a complicated matter. Some directors and distributors did not want their films associated with these festivals. *Je Tu Il Elle*, a film with explicit lesbian content, was removed from the program of the 1984 New York Gay Film Festival “at the insistence of Chantal Akerman, its director.”³⁵ When asked about the decision to remove the film, Akerman stated that she did not want her work to be “ghettoized.”³⁶ *Desert Hearts* was also not initially released on the gay and lesbian film festival circuit. This was likely a marketing decision, as showing in a gay film festival was perceived to restrict a film’s commercial prospects. As one producer of the time said, “To have this film seen as strictly a gay film for a gay audience,” which he assumes would be the case if the film was shown at a gay and lesbian film festival, “would be to limit its potential.”³⁷ The co-founder of NewFest (New York Gay and Lesbian

³⁵ “Addendum to Festival Program.” Box 9, Festival Folder, IGIC Ephemera-Subjects Papers.

³⁶ Akerman Qtd in Raymond Murray, *Images in the Dark: An Encyclopedia of Gay and Lesbian Film and Video*, (Philadelphia: TLA Publications, 1994): 2.

³⁷ Clarke, 47.

Film Festival) likewise commented that in the early years of the festival, “film distribution companies were ‘leery of LGBT representation, and avoided contact with NewFest.’”³⁸

Filmmaker Monika Treut noted in reference to her 1987 film *Virgin Machine*, which had a sneak preview at Frameline, “industry people tell you never to have a world premiere at a gay film festival because then it is marked and branded, just look for a big film festival first and so I thought, ah!, I don’t give a shit.”³⁹

Whether as a self-fulfilling prophecy or not, most films that showed at LGBTQ festivals at the time did not have much theatrical success, while a film like *Desert Hearts* managed to gross \$2.5 million. The way these festivals were viewed and approached by distributors began to change in the 1990s, and they stopped seeing LGBTQ festivals as box office poison. Many NQC films showed at gay and lesbian film festivals, and continued on to relatively successful theatrical distribution. Looking back at the late 1980s and early 1990s, producer James Schamus remarked that there was no longer a stigma against certain festivals, and that producers and distributors would attend whatever festivals accepted their films.⁴⁰ Larger festivals, however, were more desirable as premiere locations, since they reached larger audiences and international distribution companies. Entering films into gay and lesbian festivals factored into later marketing plans, as part of community outreach and drawing in niche audiences.⁴¹ Festivals and distributors would later form mutually beneficial connections to push films to reach a broader audience.

³⁸ Daryl Chin qtd in Zielinski, 135.

³⁹ Treut qtd. in Colin Richardson, “Monika Treut: An Outlaw at Home,” in Paul Burston and Colin Richardson, eds., *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men, and Popular Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1995): 177.

⁴⁰ James Schamus, personal interview, 13 December 2016.

⁴¹ Schamus, personal interview, 13 December 2016.

Festival Distribution

In addition to functioning as an exhibition venue and creating regional screening events for LGBTQ films, some festivals provided wider distribution. Festivals helped filmmakers move past distribution roadblocks by creating networks of release for films that would otherwise have gone unseen. The movement of films through the festival circuit itself provided one channel of (albeit limited) distribution. Some festivals also made forays into forms of national distribution. By operating as a distributor, both in offering road show tours of selections from a festival program and supplying a catalog of films to rent and sell, festivals extended their support of gay film culture, developed larger distribution networks, and reached broader audiences.

Festivals are intricately connected through the festival circuit. Some festivals are even linked at the institutional level, as is the case with NewFest in New York and Outfest in Los Angeles, which form a programming partnership. The New York MIX queer experimental film festival served as inspiration for, and at times has partnered with, MIX Brazil, MIX Mexico, MIX Copenhagen, and MIX Milan. These partnerships allow festivals to work together to program lineups, and the selected films can move smoothly through linked festivals. Even in festivals that were not organizationally bound, any given year's lineups would contain substantial overlap due to that fact that organizers were pulling from the same, at times relatively small, pool of available films. These films could therefore travel through the international gay and lesbian festival network, reaching a significant number of cities even without a commercial release.

Festival film tours were attempts to solidify an exhibition network outside of festivals themselves. The New York Lesbian and Gay Film Festival attempted to institutionalize broader distribution and reach a larger audience through their American Gay Film Tour. The tour was

launched in 1987 to provide “a new system of support” for gay film culture.⁴² Festival organizers envisioned it as a way to reach theater audiences, but also “film distributors, television buyers and other mass market outlets.”⁴³ Organizers pulled films from their festival selections and packaged them together into tour programs. Immediately after the festival, the tour films would travel to markets that would otherwise not have the opportunity to view them. This also allowed the festival to promote certain films and assume greater national significance. Its curatorial role could boost the festival’s position as a gatekeeper and tastemaker.

The first American Gay Film Tour included 15 cities, but its organizers hoped to expand to 50 cities in 1988. In promotional material for the tour, the festival organizers called for community support for their vision:

We want to see films that reflect the fact that our lives count. We want to be able to show high quality, well made American films that speak to us, not just about us. Why can’t these films get produced, when there’s an audience of twenty million waiting for them? Because no one will finance them when the chance for national distribution is almost nonexistent. Now there is going to be a way for gay films to be distributed... The American Gay Film Tour.⁴⁴

The language of this material suggests a self-conscious understanding of the state of gay and lesbian filmmaking and what is required for this niche to prosper. This move into roadshow distribution could also provide a year round revenue stream for the festival, and consistent funding would aid the festival’s expansion. Charting the development of this tour reveals that despite optimistic visions, it did not have a prolonged or substantial impact. The festival ran the tour for the next few years, ending in 1991 with a 12 city, 24 film tour titled, “Passion, Politics and Popcorn.”

Touring the films shown at LGBTQ festivals was not unique to the New York Festival.

⁴² “...Say Hello to the American Gay Film Tour” pamphlet, Film Festival Folder, IGIC Subject—Ephemera Papers.

⁴³ “Positive Projections,” 4.

⁴⁴ “...Say Hello to the American Gay Film Tour” pamphlet, Film Festival Folder, IGIC Subject—Ephemera Papers.

MIX Brazil likewise toured a selection of festival films both in Brazil and internationally, and New York's MIX experimental festival put together highlight programs of shorts that they sent to other festivals and university campuses. Pulling together shorts programs helped experimental films reach a larger audience, and aided other festival programmers by providing a pre-packaged and curated program to fill part of their festival schedule. Touring programs worked as marketing and outreach for MIX, and helped to generate funding for both the festival and filmmakers. These tours reflect a desire to expand access to distribution for LGBTQ films, and they found modest successes. The most significant festival foray into distribution, however, was the creation of Frameline distributing.

Frameline offers a prime example of this expansion from festival to distributor, and it functions as a specialty distributor to this day. In 1981, Frameline began organizing tours for their festival programming, traveling to large cities such as Boston, New York, and Washington, DC. In conjunction with these forays into roadshow distribution, Frameline created a designated distribution arm to supply prints, and later home videos, to educational institutions, community organizations, other film festivals,⁴⁵ and individuals. They provided individual titles and offered to assemble series of shorts into feature length programs. Frameline acquired an extensive catalogue of films to rent and sell. Frameline's 1993 catalog boasted over 75 available titles, and its current catalog contains over 250 titles. As the first niche LGBTQ distributor, Frameline was able to get a head start on the market, secure a number of films for its catalog, and establish itself as a major player without significant competition.

Frameline's distribution strategies paid off, and film and video rental and sales made up a large portion of its revenue. As the relationship between festivals and the circulation of gay

⁴⁵ For example, Frameline supplied a number of films to the Pittsburgh Gay and Lesbian Festival.

films was solidifying, Frameline “set the standard” by paying increasing attention to distribution “as a means of achieving both programmatic missions and long-term fundraising goals.”⁴⁶ By the end of the 1980s, supplying films to a rapidly expanding festival circuit contributed heavily to Frameline’s annual income. The opportunity to bring in a steady stream of year-round revenue helped the festival expand and maintain its position as a driving force behind LGBTQ filmmaking. Frameline helped to draw attention to films by mailing out a catalogue describing available titles, making them accessible for a range of exhibition spaces. The festival also published a regular mailer, Framelines, that highlighted issues and topics related to LGBTQ films and filmmaking.

The Pittsburgh International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival

The Pittsburgh International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival (PILGFF) offers a significant, but under-explored, case study. The festival’s history is well documented in archival holdings, which allows me to examine its operations, interaction with other institutional structures, and influence on gay and lesbian film culture. While PILGFF was smaller than festivals in cities like New York or San Francisco, it had a disproportionately large regional impact, and analyzing this impact emphasizes the important role festivals played in spreading gay film culture. Examining the details of PILGFF demonstrates the challenges that festivals faced and what support structures helped the events prosper. Successful regional festivals provided a node on a festival distribution circuit that supported both regional and widespread production of LGBTQ films. The ability for regional festivals to reach markets outside of big cities played an important part in building a broad base of support by bringing LGBTQ films to

⁴⁶ Rhyne, 61-62.

people who would otherwise not have the opportunity to view them. The growth of PILGFF in the late 1980s illustrates the steady expansion of the LGBTQ film market, which created the conditions for a queer cinema movement to form in the early 1990s.⁴⁷

PILGFF, which operates to this day under the name ReelQ: Pittsburgh LGBT Film Festival, got its start in 1982, with occasional film series shown through the Gay and Lesbian Community Center (GLCC).⁴⁸ The frequency of these screenings increased to monthly events in late 1984-early 1985.⁴⁹ GLCC then joined forces with local film school and filmmaking organization, Pittsburgh Filmmakers, which was interested in running a festival and not a series.⁵⁰ Coordinating with this organization provided a concrete link between LGBTQ and independent filmmaking resources. Independent filmmaking institutions aided the development of LGBTQ filmmaking and exhibition spaces. The first official Pittsburgh Gay Film Festival ran in 1986, and the Pittsburgh Filmmakers and GLCC split costs and income 50/50. The festival had a limited program of three American documentaries (*The Times of Harvey Milk*, *Before Stonewall*, and *Choosing Children*) as well as Arthur Bressan Jr.'s *Abuse*, the Dutch film *Casta Diva*,⁵¹ and the British import *Another Country*.⁵² While the \$1,600 box office take was a decent amount of money, it was not enough to cover the expenses accrued for film rentals, shipping,

⁴⁷ Indicators of the festival's growth are charted in figure 5.1.

⁴⁸ "Chicago Resource Center Grant Application," (1992): Box 2, Folder 14, PILGFF Papers.

⁴⁹ Screenings included: *Taxi Zum Klo*, *Maedchen in Uniform*, *Flesh on Glass* and *Christopher Isherwood*, *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*, *The Cats*, and a mixed shorts program. The largest draw by far was *Taxi*, which had 171 audience members total over two screenings, and the smallest turnout was for *The Cats*, which had only 20 attendees ("Movie Attendance Figures," (1984-1985): Box 1, Folder 1, PILGFF Papers.).

⁵⁰ "Operational Grant Proposal," (1987): Box 1, Folder 6, PILGFF Papers.

⁵¹ The film had no US distributor, so the Festival budgeted \$350 for the film to cover international duty tariffs. After receiving the film, "the cultural attache for the Netherlands informed the Festival that they would absorb the cost of all duties and tariffs as they were please[d] that the film would get increased exposure in the Unites States" ("Operational Grant Proposal," (1987): Box 1, Folder 6, PILGFF Papers.).

⁵² ("Festival Program," (1986): Box 1, Folder 2, PILGFF Papers.) A total of 403 tickets were sold for the screenings, an average of 21 people per show ("Letter from Robert Marinaccio to Richard Cummings," (13 May 1986): Box 1, Folder 6, PILGFF Papers.)

advertising, and minimal personnel.⁵³ While the festival projected a loss in 1987 as well, additional contributions from individual donors and the Men’s Collective, as well as an unexpectedly large box office take, brought the festival into the black even though actual expenses exceeded those projected.⁵⁴ The jump in box office returns demonstrates the immediate growth of the festival, and the “overflow crowds indicate the widespread community interest in Gay and Lesbian films.”⁵⁵

In 1987, the festival began operating independently of its founding organizations, and this required seeking out new funding sources.⁵⁶ Grant funding provided crucial financial resources for growth, enabling PILGFF to “meet the demands from the community for newer releases, a larger screening space and a longer running Festival.”⁵⁷ They applied to a number of grant agencies and obtained 501(c)(3) non-profit, tax exempt status in 1988.⁵⁸ That year the festival received grants from the Chicago Resource Center (CRC) and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.⁵⁹ As discussed in Chapter 3, the CRC funded a large number of gay and lesbian organizations, from larger entities like the Lesbian and Gay Rights Project with the American Civil Liberties Union to smaller community organizations. Arts grants enabled festivals to grow and allowed for greater diversity in programming. Instead of relying on “popular crowd-pleasing retrospectives (usually camp and cult classics)” to turn a profit, grants offered “a means to achieving the artistic freedom festivals would require to support emerging artists and more

⁵³ “Final Budget,” (1986): Box 1, Folder 2, PILGFF Papers.

⁵⁴ “Gay & Lesbian Film Festival Budget,” (1987): Box 1, Folder 3, PILGFF Papers.

⁵⁵ “Letter of support from Jan McMannis, Screening Room Coordinator,” (6 March 1988): Box 1, Folder 11, PILGFF Papers.

⁵⁶ “Operational Grant Proposal,” (1987): Box 1, Folder 6, PILGFF Papers.

⁵⁷ “Letter of support from Jan McMannis, Screening Room Coordinator,” (6 March 1988): Box 1, Folder 11, PILGFF Papers.

⁵⁸ “Letter from Lesbian & Gay Film Festival of Pittsburgh Inc to IRS,” (31 December 1988): Box 1, Folder 8, PILGFF Papers.

⁵⁹ “Letter from Sarah Bradley to Mark Friedman,” (26 August 1988): Box 1, Folder 11, PILGFF Papers. And “Invoice for general support and specific support grant awards,” (4 August 1988): Box 1, Folder 12, PILGFF Papers.

experimental work,”⁶⁰ which included supporting queer filmmaking. Receiving state grants and nonprofit status was a way of legitimizing the festival, and PILGFF highlighted its grants in festival programs and press releases.

Grant funding was not without its challenges and complications. In 1991, PILGFF became embroiled in a controversial debate in which Pennsylvania Representative Ron Gamble “wrote a letter to city council calling the festival ‘illegal and immoral.’ Gamble demanded the Arts Council rescind their \$4,000 grant to the festival, or he would work to have their money decreased or eliminated next year.”⁶¹ The festival also hit problems with an NEA grant that was awarded through the National Alliance of Media Arts Centers. The NEA held up the grant dispersal process in reaction to pressures the agency was under from conservatives who objected to its support of LGBTQ media. The threatened withholding of funds from PILGFF, New York’s New Festival, and the Gay and Lesbian Media Coalition (Los Angeles’ LGBT festival) prompted a lawsuit from the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of those festivals.⁶²

While PILGFF Festival Director Richard Cummings did not believe that these grants would be revoked, he did remark that “next year, it might be a problem. If our grants are denied, we’ll have to go to the community for fundraising.”⁶³ By scaling back on the festival’s costs and becoming “as aggressive as possible in general fundraising,” which included direct mailings asking for donations and hiring a part-time development director to focus on raising money, PILGFF was able to survive a few challenging years.⁶⁴ Ironically, these years were also landmark years for queer cinema. It was in part the widespread recognition and praise of queer

⁶⁰ Rhyne, 57-58.

⁶¹ Rocky Caldararo, “Director discusses festival controversy, films,” *Out* (October 1991): 27.

⁶² “Letter from Gary Crawford to Ana Steele at the NEA,” (1 April 1993): Box 2, Folder 20, PILGFF Papers.

⁶³ Cummings qtd in Caldararo, 27.

⁶⁴ “Organization History and Project Description,” (1992): Box 2, Folder 15, PILGFF Papers.

film that allowed PILGFF to bounce back strongly in 1993. Along with this new push for donations came a shift to the importance of membership for festivals. Having people pay to become a member of the festival provided consistent funding sources and reliable donations, as well as solidifying the sense of community involvement felt by festival participants.

Creating a gay and lesbian festival in a relatively conservative city like Pittsburgh, surrounded by extremely conservative pockets of western Pennsylvania, provided both challenges and opportunities. While the festival had to contend with skeptical critics and homophobic reactions,⁶⁵ they were also able to bring in large audiences by presenting films that would not show in Pittsburgh otherwise. While cities like New York and San Francisco had a substantial number of art house theaters that showed LGBTQ films, it was highly unlikely that such films would play in Pittsburgh. In part because of the benefits it could offer the LGBTQ community and broader cultural life of the city, the festival expanded quickly in late 1980s. 1988 was a “major turning point” for the event, and festival organizers worked to expand the festival in terms of screening locations, number of films and screenings, festival length, attendance, and media attentions, as well as to

increase the diversity of the films, (having two locations allows for an increase not only in the number of films but also in the diversity of the films in that the Oakland Screening Room will play more specialized/alternative films while the Fulton Theater will play more ‘mainstream’ lesbian & gay oriented films).⁶⁶

This expansion in content and providing a place for both “specialized/alternative” films and “mainstream” gay and lesbian films is crucial to the development of queer cinema. This tactic encouraged cross-over audiences and the production of larger-budget films that could draw

⁶⁵ Pittsburgh was at times a hostile city for LGBTQ citizens. Grant proposals make mention of “violence and discrimination against lesbians and gays” as well as “raids and harassment of gay-oriented bars” (“1988 Chicago Resource Center Grant Application,” (10 July 1987): Box 1, Folder 11, PILGFF Papers.).

⁶⁶ “Chicago Resource Center Proposal Summary Sheet,” (10 July 1987): Box 1, Folder 11, PILGFF Papers.

mainstream attention to gay and lesbian cinema, while also helping to support a nascent queer film movement.

PILGFF's stated purpose was "to educate and entertain citizens of Pittsburgh through the presentation of diverse and informative lesbian and gay oriented films. The festival also provides a forum for local filmmakers to have their work presented."⁶⁷ In addition to bringing nationally known films to Pittsburgh, the festival began holding a "local filmmakers' night" and encouraging submissions from filmmakers in Ohio, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania.⁶⁸ The festival supported local work, and it often "featured the productions of local lesbian and gay artists, thereby providing young artists with a forum for their work."⁶⁹ This was visible in 1990 with the "huge success of Pittsburgher Raymond Yeo's film *One of the Living*," which "indicates that the community is interested in seeing productions by native filmmakers."⁷⁰ This is one small example of how festivals stimulated LGBTQ film production by increasing exhibition opportunities for independent films.

The festival organizers were correct in their assertion that 1988 could be a turning point for the festival, and a dramatic shift in scale, coupled with the festival's robust profit margins, suggested the health and importance of this regional gay and lesbian festival. The festival continued to grow in size and prestige over the next few years.⁷¹ In 1991, PILGFF claimed to be the third largest gay and lesbian festival, behind only San Francisco and New York.⁷² The festival reported heightened interest from people in West Virginia and Ohio, corresponding with

⁶⁷ "Chicago Resource Center Proposal Summary Sheet," (1989): Box 1, Folder 16, PILGFF Papers.

⁶⁸ "Festival Program," (1988): Box 1, Folder 10, PILGFF Papers. And "Press Release," (17 June 1988): Box 1, Folder 9, PILGFF Papers.

⁶⁹ "1990 Chicago Resource Center Application," Box 1, Folder 21, PILGFF Papers.

⁷⁰ "Evaluation Report for the fifth annual Pittsburgh International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival," (Undated): Box 1, Folder 21, PIGLFF Papers.

⁷¹ Attendance and film selection numbers are included in Figure 5.1

⁷² "Pittsburgh Foundation Application for Arts Organization," (26 July 1991): Box 2, Folder 10, PILGFF Papers. In 1992, several newspapers refer to it as the 4th largest, with the Chicago Festival passing it in size.

the organizers' desire to create a regional festival with wider geographic reach.⁷³ The following year, the “fairly conservative” Pittsburgh Foundation also began contributing, which “demonstrated that the festival was perceived as an important cultural event in the city that deserved support.”⁷⁴

As evidence of the festival’s position, in 1991 it showed *My Own Private Idaho* in a preview screening, which had record breaking attendance; “This was a major coup for the festival. It was only the film’s third screening in the United States, and the distributor refused to allow the Chicago Lesbian and Gay Film Festival to screen the film.”⁷⁵ This is most likely due to the fact that Chicago was a larger market that offered greater theatrical and mainstream festival exhibition options. PILGFF gave the distributor, Fine Line Features, the opportunity to reach out to niche demographics and get the reactions of this preview audience in a low-stakes region. Although they screened the film, the festival was not permitted to release the name of the film or its stars. Coverage in one newspaper wrote that the festival “will include the sneak preview Oct. 12 of a still-unreleased mainstream film with name actors. The movie’s identity cannot be disclosed because of an agreement with the producer.”⁷⁶ The lack of publicity again minimized the film’s associations with a gay festival. While *Idaho* became one of the core NQC films, its early engagement with gay and lesbian institutions was tentative.

In grant applications, PILGFF organizers repeatedly pointed out that the event, and the presentation of films that were not generally shown in Pittsburgh, “increases the sense of community and pride among lesbian and gay individuals and serves to increase the general

⁷³ “Evaluation Report for the fourth annual Pittsburgh International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival,” (Undated): Box 1, Folder 16, PILGFF Papers.

⁷⁴ “Organization History and Project Description,” Box 2, Folder 15, PILGFF Papers.

⁷⁵ “Chicago Resource Center Grant Application,” (1992): Box 2, Folder 14, PILGFF Papers.

⁷⁶ Ed Blank, “Gay Film Fest to run Oct. 10-20,” *The Pittsburgh Press* (Unknown date): Box 2, Folder 8, PILGFF Papers.

community's awareness of the existence of a sexual minority."⁷⁷ The festival provided a:

high profile event that serves to reinforce the image of our community as a productive and responsible one. The media attention adds legitimacy to us and provides an invaluable education tool for the general population of the city of Pittsburgh and the surrounding area. It also provides a focal point of gay pride for the lesbian and gay community. The Pittsburgh Lesbian and Gay Film Festival was the only festival of its kind last year from Washington DC to Chicago.⁷⁸

The festival presented itself as an important cultural event, not just to the gay and lesbian community of Pittsburgh, but also to a mainstream audience that can find educational value and greater tolerance through exposure to gay and lesbian images. The festival's rapid growth and longevity suggest that the festival did strike a chord with the citizens of Pittsburgh and the surrounding areas. Local publications likewise indicated that the festival was a "revelation for audiences—gay and straight,"⁷⁹ a festival that "offers something for everyone regardless of sexual orientation."⁸⁰ Creating an event that would appeal to both gay and straight audiences, albeit for different reasons, was one way of building a sustainable festival and contributing to the growth of LGBTQ filmmaking. Festival Director Cummings understood this and made efforts to bring in a diverse audience outside of the gay and lesbian community. He is quoted saying, "straights... would like these movies because they like *good* movies... These are not gay films but films about people who happen to be gay."⁸¹ This rhetorical strategy, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, was often used in attempts to bring wider audiences to films with LGBTQ themes. Festivals like PILGFF built this cross-over market at a regional level, which in turn constructed a base of support for a queer film movement.

⁷⁷ "Chicago Resource Center Proposal Summary Sheet," (1988): Box 1, Folder 11, PILGFF Papers.

⁷⁸ "Chicago Resource Center Proposal," (1989): Box 1, Folder 16, PILGFF Papers.

⁷⁹ Barry Paris, "Gay Roots," *In Pittsburgh* (14-20 October 1987): 10.

⁸⁰ Marilyn Uricchio, "Gay movie lineup offers variety, less on AIDS," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (14 October 1988):

2.

⁸¹ Cummings qtd in Ted Hoover, "Gay and Lesbian Film Festival: Movies to Educate, Inform, and Entertain," *In Pittsburgh* (undated, found in Box 1, Folder 9, PILGFF Papers): 5-6.

The Role of the Festival

As early as 1983, questions arose as to the future viability of gay and lesbian film festivals. In part, this was due to the success a group of gay-themed films were finding on the mainstream festival circuit. Filmex in Los Angeles, for example, included a number of gay films in 1981 and 1983. The “high profile for gay product” these years was considered to be “simply reflective of current public tastes and interests,” and festival Director Gary Essert, asserted that, “In the last five or six years, there’s been an unusual amount of interest in gay subjects, and an incredibly powerful group of filmmakers who’ve chosen to work in this area.”⁸² LGBTQ festivals were forced to compete with larger, non-specialty festivals for product, in part because the good business done at these niche festivals began to have “a subtle and cumulative effect on the future of gay programming at other levels,” particularly the mainstream industry seeing the success and wanting to capitalize on it.⁸³

Directors of gay and lesbian festivals, while still asserting the necessity of their events, did suggest that “gay festivals may become obsolete as gay films become assimilated into the mainstream and don’t need the push and exposure of a festival;” as Michael Lumpkin, director of Frameline, stated, “One of our goals...is to put ourselves out of business.”⁸⁴ Brenda Webb, coordinator of Chicago’s Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, added, “If more gay films get into major festivals and the gay festivals aren’t needed anymore...that’s fine with me. But I still think that specialty or theme festivals are valuable as an area of focus, and as a means of gathering support.”⁸⁵ Andrea Weiss highlights the important position gay and lesbian film

⁸² Edward Guthmann, “Gay Film Festivals: Does Success Spell Obsolescence?” *The Advocate* 367 (12 May 1983): 47.

⁸³ Guthmann, “Gay Film Festivals,” 47.

⁸⁴ Guthmann, “Gay Film Festivals,” 52.

⁸⁵ Guthmann, “Gay Film Festivals,” 52.

festivals held, as well as offering some general thoughts on the role these events played in shaping LGBTQ filmmaking:

The Amsterdam festival served a number of needs in the lesbian and gay media-making community: a reconsideration of films that have contributed to shaping the gay subculture and the identity of many gay people; a chance to see these films in a context that emphasizes gay sensibilities at work and to see new work produced by lesbian and gay video- and filmmakers that addresses gay experience and gay audiences... and finally, an opportunity to establish an international community that is often difficult to attain when one is working independently.⁸⁶

Weiss' comments emphasize the importance of gay and lesbian film festivals as sites that celebrate and construct gay culture, form a sense of community and identity, and provide opportunities for collaboration.

In the 1990s, critical debates increasingly brought the role of LGBTQ film festivals into question.⁸⁷ At the 1991 Amsterdam festival, filmmaker Pratibha Parmar was calling the festival circuit "my lifeline," while others like Derek Jarman were speculating on whether their usefulness was at an end, that, as B. Ruby Rich phrased it, "maybe life in the ghetto now offers diminished returns."⁸⁸ Some defend the lasting benefits of these institutions, claiming that they are critical in creating spaces for the continued growth of LGBTQ filmmaking and the visibility of non-heterosexual identities onscreen. Others see them as an outdated institution that continues to marginalize films.

Whatever the arguments for the current role of these festivals, their importance in queer film history cannot be overstated. The founding and growth of gay and lesbian film festivals supported the production of LGBTQ films, provided publicity and exhibition platforms for these

⁸⁶ Andrea Weiss, "Going Dutch: the International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival," in Bowser ed. 52.

⁸⁷ These are most thoroughly seen in Patricia White's "Queer Publicity: A Dossier on Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals" from 1999. This spawned the later "Queer Film and Video Festival Forum," series from 2005, which consisted of three parts. In "Take One," festival curators were invited to offer their "diagnoses on the current state of the international queer festival network, its history, and the challenges it faces" (579). "Take two" followed much the same format for critics and scholars, and "Take three" presented artists' point of view.

⁸⁸ Rich, "New Queer Cinema," 32.

films, connected films with critical contexts and audiences, and made visible this loyal audience base and LGBTQ communities. Gay and lesbian festivals “paved the way for a distribution network for films that would not have been seen otherwise.”⁸⁹ This includes substantial space for shorts programs, and as producer James Schamus put it, “lesbian and gay film festivals, which often highlight short experimental or video work, have been able to sustain a film culture that the avant-garde of whatever persuasion has been unable to do.”⁹⁰ Through these festivals, which facilitated connections between filmmakers and the convergence of a variety of conventional, radical, and transnational films, “the new breed of young gay directors have been very much plugged into their gay constituency, and the international circuit of gay film festivals has begun to consolidate something like real gay genres, gay audiences, and gay authors, arguably for the first time in our history.”⁹¹ In addition to audience considerations, this quote points to the importance of festivals in developing a definition of and standards for LGBTQ filmmaking.

Despite the questions surrounding the utility of gay and lesbian film festivals, they played an invaluable role in laying the groundwork for a queer film movement. They provided space for LGBTQ films to find audiences, and for audiences and filmmakers to create communities around the conception of “gay and lesbian,” and/or “queer” films. While the interactions between mainstream festivals and queer films played a role in developing early queer films, gay and lesbian festivals greatly expanded LGBTQ cinema. New Queer Cinema was first identified on the gay and lesbian festival circuit, which provided an exhibition space for a range of LGBTQ

⁸⁹ Yves Lafontaine, “City of Festivals,” in “Queer Film and Video Festival Forum: Take Two,” 603.

⁹⁰ Schamus qtd in Bowen, “Our Own Private Idaho,” 68.

⁹¹ Thomas Waugh, “The Third Body: Patterns in the Construction of the Subject in Gay Male Narrative Film,” in Martha Gever, John Greyson, and Pratibha Parmar eds. *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video* (New York: Routledge, 1993): 154.

works and contributed to the visibility of a gay market. The commercial potential of NQC led to increased industry interest in gay and lesbian film festivals, and solidified the importance of these festivals in the chain of distribution and marketing of LGBTQ films.

Images:

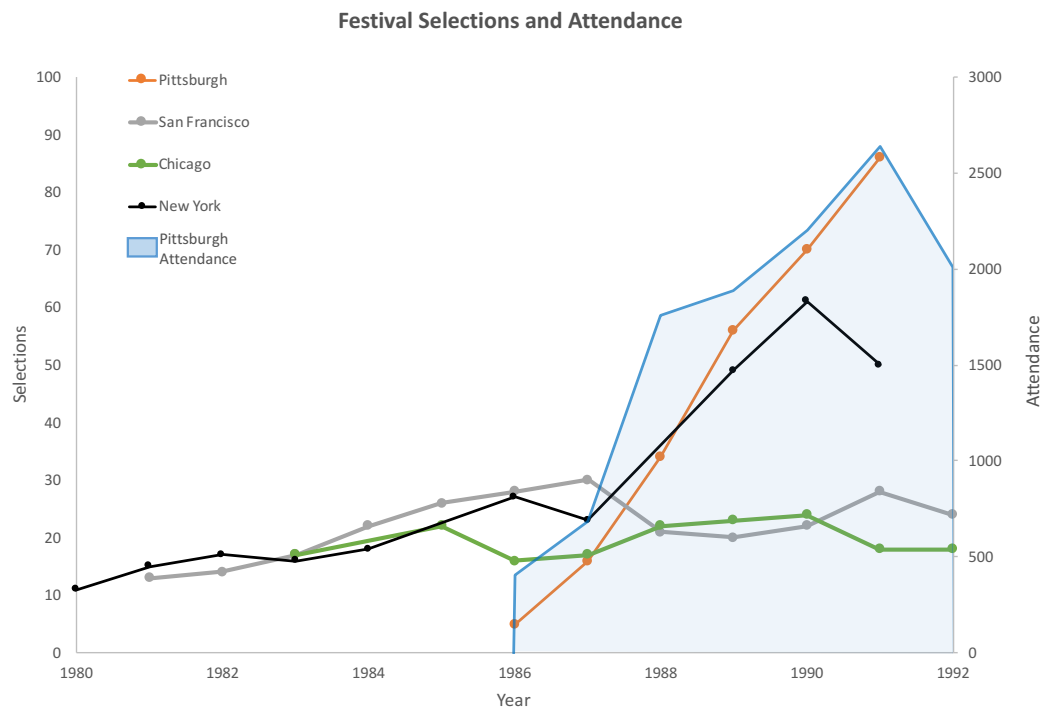


Figure 5.1: This graph charts the number of films screened at key gay and lesbian film festivals over time, as well as the attendance at the Pittsburgh International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival for 1986-1992. The screening numbers for Pittsburgh and New York include features and shorts, while the San Francisco and Chicago numbers include only feature length films. This could account for the smaller inclines and consistency over the latter festivals, versus the significant rises in the former.

Chapter 6 Critical Contexts

The increase in production and distribution of LGBTQ films, coupled with the growth of a visible audience for these films, created the necessary conditions for the formation of a queer film movement. Having a larger number of films and dedicated audiences, however, is not enough to create a film movement. In order for a movement to spread and be recognized, there needs to be a critical context, a discourse surrounding these films and audiences, that calls attention to these developments and unites isolated texts into a cohesive whole. This chapter explores the press coverage surrounding LGBTQ films, and I argue that the mainstream press, LGBTQ publications, trade journals, and academic publications contributed significantly to the expansion and recognition of LGBTQ cinema, providing the final piece of the puzzle that set the stage for the formation of a queer cinema movement.

From the late 1970s to the early 1990s, there is a discernible growth in articles about LGBTQ films. These increasingly prevalent articles fall into a few main discursive strands: directing attention to specific films, filmmakers, and events, chronicling controversies, examining what a gay film “should” be, and making connections between films. The rate of growth and location of these discussions influenced the timing of a queer cinema movement. This chapter asks, how did each of these discursive strands contribute to the development of New Queer Cinema?

In terms of mainstream publications, this chapter focuses on national newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times*, the weekly independent newspaper *The Village Voice*, the mass market weekly news magazine *Time*, and a selection of local newspapers. These publications offered relatively little discussion of LGBTQ film. From 1974 until 1994 *The New York Times*, for example, only published around 62 articles that related to LGBTQ films or

filmmaking. There is a telling trend in the breakdown of these articles, as shown in Figure 6.1. 18 articles were published in the first 10 years under consideration and 44 in the second decade, with 29 of those appearing in or after 1990. This sharp increase in references to LGBTQ film corresponds with the expansion of film production, the pressure from organizations such as GLAAD,¹ and the growing cultural awareness of these films and audiences, something publications in turn helped foster and create. In terms of what generated notice from *The New York Times*, 23 of these articles are film reviews, 8 focus on film festivals, 13 articles cover filmmakers and films, 12 relate to protests and controversies around films, 4 are connected to representations of AIDS, and only two articles consider the growth of gay media more generally.

The New York Times was regularly accused by the gay press of being a homophobic institution² and was criticized by GLAAD for printing homophobic articles.³ The paper was mentioned in a Fund for Human Rights in New York City publication which stated, “*The New York Times* is daily proof of how badly the media needs to be educated on matters of vital concern to the Gay and Lesbian community.”⁴ This makes the increase in articles on LGBTQ film significant, suggesting that these films had become newsworthy events and that discussions

¹ GLAAD exerted pressure on a number of publications. Along with the *New York Times*, they held meetings with *Time* magazine editors in 1987, and “the result was eight positive pieces on gay politics and culture in 1988 alone” (“Fundraising Letter from Craig Davidson,” (Undated): Box 5, GLAAD Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers).

² For example, see George De Stefano, “The New York Times vs. Gay America: ‘All the [Heterosexual] News That’s Fit to Print,’” *The Advocate* 461 (9 December 1986): 42-47. There was also a book published, *Shelf Life: Gay Bashing at the New York Times*, about AM Rosenthal’s NYT, and his homophobic impulses. These cries would later be rectified, at least somewhat, by an apparent change in stance during the early 90s, discussed in articles such as Michelangelo Signorile’s, “Out at the New York Times” (*The Advocate* 602 (5 May 1992): 34-42.), which stated “A ‘lavender enlightenment’ is under way at America’s newspaper of record.”

³ For example, in a letter dated 30 April 1986, GLAAD wrote out their objections to an article from March 18th that suggested people with AIDS should be tattooed for identification (Box 5, GLAAD Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers). GLAAD also held meetings with *Time* magazine, in which the managing editor admitted that it was a mistake to not cover the 1988 National March for Lesbian and Gay Rights; “You know that *Time*’s failure to cover the March was in part a homophobic value judgment that our struggle for civil rights is not just, and just not important” (“GLAAD Newsletter,” (9 February 1988. GLAAD Folder): Box 5, GLAAD Folder, IGIC Org Ephemera Papers.)

⁴ “Fund for Human Rights Pamphlet,” Box 5, Media Fund for Human Rights (NYC) folder, IGIC Org Ephemera papers.

of this niche media gained a cultural currency that warranted inclusion in the eyes of mainstream publications.

While mainstream publications are important to consider, especially in relation to wider recognition of LGBTQ film, earlier and more thorough discussions of these films and movements occurred elsewhere. The majority of critical discourses surrounding gay and lesbian films from the late seventies into the nineties occurred in niche publications aimed at gay and lesbian readers. This chapter focuses on two such publications: the Los Angeles-based *The Advocate*, the oldest gay⁵ magazine, and the Boston-based *Gay Community News (GCN)*. These publications were the largest specialty journals and had the broadest range of distribution. Based on the west and east coasts, these publications provide access to central hubs of gay activity in the US at the time. While both *The Advocate* and *GCN* were male-dominated in terms of personnel, and this could skew article contents towards gay film and male perspectives, these publications made efforts to address a range of LGBTQ issues and viewpoints. As the most prominent specialty magazines at the time, they played a significant role in developing discussions about LGBTQ film that in turn helped shape a movement.

The final sources under consideration here are film-specific publications, which can be broken into industry publications and academic/critical works. Trade presses, such as *Variety* and *Boxoffice*, reflect how the industry viewed LGBTQ themes and media. In general, this coverage was minimal, which in some cases led again to charges of homophobia from the LGBT community. During this time period, *Variety* ran over 120 articles that dealt in some way with

⁵ When discussing LGBTQ publications, I often refer to them as “gay” publications, since this is how they self-identified and is consistent with the terminology used for most of the time period under consideration. While they did later shift to being “gay and lesbian” publications, most references are still made to “gay” issues or “gay” culture, taken to include the spectrum of non-heterosexual sexualities. Starting in 1990, they begin to use the term queer to replace gay at times, but the old terminology remained.

LGBTQ film. While this number seems high, the majority of these are film reviews that mention gay content only in passing. In their 1983 review of *The Dresser* (Peter Yates), for example, Tom Courtenay's performance is praised as "so varied and intricately shaded that once when his character playfully steps out of its homosexual roots to effect a brief tough, sneer-like pose the result is jolting."⁶ This is the only point in the review where the critic hints at the presence of a gay character, whereas in gay publications much more space was given to the character's sexual orientation.

In the realm of critical and scholarly works, I have examined publications such as *Film Comment*, *Film Quarterly*, *Sight & Sound*, *Jump Cut*, and *Screen*. Scholarly work provides theoretical and political frameworks for analyzing representational modes, such as "positive images." This work includes calls for certain types of films and helps construct a conceptual basis for categories of "gay" and "queer" films. These prescriptive, categorical classifications link films together into cohesive, defined units. Grouping films together under unifying labels, discursively linking them together, is interconnected with the formation of a movement. Looking at critical contexts as a whole, I argue that certain publications and strands of discourse aided the development of a queer film movement, while others slowed the expansion of LGBTQ cinema.

Drawing Attention to Films and Audiences

Hints of the growth of LGBTQ cinema can be found in articles that deal with specific aspects of individual films, such as film reviews, interviews with filmmakers and other creative personnel, and film festival coverage. These articles, scattered throughout all forms of publication under consideration, were one of the central ways in which LGBTQ filmmaking was

⁶ Loyn, "The Dresser," *Variety* 313:3 (16 November 1983): 16.

able to generate wider attention. The number of these reviews and articles increased with the expansion of LGBTQ film distribution. Speculations on this trend could lead to something of a chicken-egg debate, in which it is unclear whether the articles helped stimulate film production or whether their escalation was a reflection of this increase in production. I argue that the growth in critical discussions about LGBTQ films and filmmaking helped create an atmosphere in which these films were taken seriously, and because of this atmosphere, more resources became available for LGBTQ filmmaking. By praising and rewarding LGBTQ films, critical discourses influenced filmmaking trends.

Film reviews were one of the most prominent types of article about LGBTQ films, and were included most consistently across all publications. While some publications reviewed every film that was released and others were more selective, the discussion of a film's LGBTQ content ranged drastically depending on the article's context, as suggested above with the example of *The Dresser*. In trade press and mainstream publications there were often single references to a homosexual plot line or character, while the same film would be discussed in much greater detail in the gay press or scholarly works. These havens were home to taste-making critics for LGBTQ film, Vito Russo and B. Ruby Rich being the most prominent. A comparison of reviews and coverage in mass market versus gay publications for two British imports, *Prick Up Your Ears* (Stephen Frears, 1987) and *Maurice* (James Ivory, 1987), reveals significant differences in how these areas of publication positioned gay films. I have selected *Prick Up* and *Maurice* in part because they are often-overlooked films, coming just after the "Gay New Wave" of 1986, but were nevertheless highly anticipated films in the gay press.

Prick Up, while rarely considered in the primary canon of important gay films, was

heralded as “the most eagerly awaited gay film of the year” in *The Advocate*.⁷ This anticipation was generated in part because of the source material, the life of well-known gay playwright Joe Orton and his murder at the hands of his partner Kenneth Halliwell, as well as the credibility director Stephen Frears had accrued with the gay community after the crossover success of *My Beautiful Laundrette*. Marcia Pally of *The Advocate* credits Frears as a “forger of gay sensibility,” since in both *Laundrette* and *Prick Up*, “gay men are the guys you root for, the characters you identify with, the heroes.”⁸ Pally praises *Prick Up* for breaking through the bounds of “ghetto films” that act as “boosters or primers in tolerance,” and instead presenting a film in which the homosexual relationship is foregrounded and straight relationships are “othered,” presented as secondary to the plot.⁹ The gay press published lengthy articles about the film both pre- and post-release and included interviews with people involved in the production. The month of *Prick Up*’s US release, the gay press ran articles about the film, the director, and star Gary Oldman. The space devoted to the film suggests its importance to the gay community, or at least the perceived interest level of the journals’ readers.

Prick Up was reviewed widely, but had limited coverage in the mainstream press prior to its release. One of the few examples came from the *LA Times*, which published a brief article about the film’s production in November 1986.¹⁰ While including details about the film’s production (a \$1.9 million project co-financed by the British Zenith Films, Channel 4, and Goldwyn), little attention was directed towards the film as a “gay film,” or to the gay community’s interest in it. Instead, the film’s producers emphasized the universality of the film

⁷ Contents page, *The Advocate* 471 (28 April 1987): 2.

⁸ Marcia Pally, “*Prick Up Your Ears* A tale of Ordinary Outlaws, says Director Stephen Frears,” *The Advocate* 471 (28 April 1987): 30.

⁹ Pally, “*Prick Up Your Ears*,” 30.

¹⁰ Clarke Taylor, “‘Your Ears’ is More than a Gay Murder Tale,” *Los Angeles Times* (1 November 1986): SD_C3.

and their desire “to do so much more than tell the story of a sensational homosexual murder.”¹¹

Frears added:

‘Orton’s and Halliwell’s life together was as natural to them as a more conventional, heterosexual life is to others’ ... noting that Orton’s story is the story of an artist, as well as a homosexual, who had his own values and lived the way he wanted to live. ‘Clearly, it was a gay relationship, and right up front we’re saying this is the way it was—no excuses, no parentheses... we are not judging it. We’re trying to explain the kind of behavior that might seem exotic to others, and anything that explains or humanizes tends to undermine people’s prejudices.’¹²

The way Frears describes and positions the film echoes the way *Laundrette* was successfully marketed, as an art film that included homosexual elements as *one* part of a complex examination of human experience.

Numerous reviews picked up on this thread and used similar language, comparing the trials that Orton and Halliwell faced to conflicts a married heterosexual couple might face.

Vincent Canby’s *New York Times* review, for instance, suggested that “the story of the Orton-Halliwell relationship probably doesn’t seem much different from those of many heterosexual unions, or even of nonsexual relationships of, say, teachers and students, foremen and machinists, editors and reporters and, on a short-term basis, of taxi drivers and their fares.”¹³

This comparison comes from the fact that Halliwell helped foster Orton’s work, only to be overshadowed when Orton became hugely successful. The review also includes the following statement: “The Orton-Halliwell story isn’t exactly universal in its application, and to treat it as such, if only by default, is not to do it justice.”¹⁴ Canby, however, does not follow up this line of thought. The review implies a universality of the subject matter despite superficially suggesting that doing such would undermine the film. Focusing on “universal” aspects of the film

¹¹ John Lahr quoted in Taylor, “‘Your Ears’ is More than a Gay Murder Tale.”

¹² Frears qtd in Taylor, “‘Your Ears’ is More than a Gay Murder Tale.”

¹³ Vincent Canby, “Joe Orton’s Life, In ‘Prick Up Your Ears,’” *New York Times* (17 April 1987): C17.

¹⁴ Canby, “Joe Orton’s Life.”

downplays the film's connection with LGBTQ cinema, a recurring tactic used to position gay films for cross-over markets.

Prick Up's art cinema pedigree and the insistence on the universality of the story gave the filmmakers greater leeway in creating a film with a challenging subject. The film's gay relationship and "tasteful" depictions of gay sex were taken in stride as suitable topics for art house fare. This positioning, however, did not stop reviewers from seeing the film as radical in some ways. *Screen International* commented that the film "confirms Zenith Productions as Britain's most adventurous production company. A far-from-mainstream subject, it is treated with sufficient humor and verve to make it accessible to a wide audience, but without any of the cuteness or condescension that has ruined many a project that looked brave on paper, but became bland on the screen."¹⁵ *Prick Up* manages to balance the tension between making itself accessible to non-gay audiences while still pushing the envelope of mainstream acceptability in its portrayal of homosexuality.

As was the case with *Prick Up*, *Maurice* was treated to extensive coverage in the gay press, far outweighing the attention the film received in mainstream press sources. Mainstream publications included only single reviews of the film and gave no sense of the movie's pre-formed audience base. The gay press, in contrast, offered numerous multi-page articles about the film's production and detailed interviews with production personnel, in addition to reviews of the film.¹⁶ *Maurice* and *Prick Up* were also included in broader trend articles about the state of gay and lesbian filmmaking in 1987.

¹⁵ NR, "Review *Prick Up Your Ears*," *Screen International* 585 (31 January 1987): 61.

¹⁶ See, for example, articles in *The Advocate*: Samir Hachem, "Inside *Maurice*: Actor James Wilby on Playing the Dark Side of a gay Romantic Hero," *The Advocate* 487 (8 December 1987): 62-64. and Marcia Pally, "*Maurice*: A Perfect Fantasy: E.M. Forster's Long-Buried Novel of Gay Love Comes to the Screen with Elegant Passion," *The Advocate* 481 (15 September 1987): 52-53, 109-111.

In comparing the reviews of *Maurice* in mainstream and specialty publications, one can see a clear difference in how critics positioned the film's gay content. While Maurice's second relationship is shown as explicitly sexual, the film leaves open the question of how physically intimate Maurice is with his first love. This openness allows space for the audience to interpret Maurice's first relationship in different ways. In the mainstream press, there was a tendency towards euphemism and downplaying the homosexual content of the film. The *New York Times* review characterizes the relationship between Maurice and his first love, Clive, as "a close platonic bond" and "the fondest of friendships,"¹⁷ seemingly to reassure readers of the toned down romantic aspects. While including a plot synopsis of the same-sex relations, which necessarily brings in mentions of homosexual-themed material, the reviewer focuses on the film's style and its connection with other Merchant/Ivory productions. The focus on style connects with the film's position as art house fare, a position that also provides greater leeway in terms of sexual content. Reviewers situated the film as an art film with some gay content (which can be downplayed), rather than a "gay" film.

Maurice's trade press coverage, which included reviews and little else, followed the same tendencies. *Variety*, for example, wrote the following about the film's gay content: "theme of homosexuality, handled tastefully but with explicitness, will prove no barrier to the pic's arthouse acceptance in the wake of 'My Beautiful Laundrette' and 'Prick Up Your Ears,' but presents a formidable marketing challenge for distributor Cinecom's quest for crossover audiences."¹⁸ The review connects the film with other gay films, a gesture that could create the sense of a gay film movement, but proceeds to undermine that possibility by situating *Maurice* in a broader arthouse context. *Variety* also positions the film's gay content as a challenge to

¹⁷ Janet Maslin, "Film: 'Maurice' in Style of Ivory and Merchant," *New York Times* (18 September 1987): C18.

¹⁸ Lor., "Venice Festival Review: *Maurice*," *Variety* 328.5 (26 August, 1987): 15.

overcome in an effort to reach a wider audience. The review continues by outlining the plot, including the same sex relationships that grow during the film, but is reluctant to read into the implied homosexual relationship between Maurice and Clive. Again, *Variety* emphasizes the relationship as existing "on a platonic level,"¹⁹ calming audiences who may be hesitant about a film with gay content. The film's *Boxoffice* review was more upfront about the homosexual aspects, for example characterizing Maurice and Clive's relationship as "discreet but passionate."²⁰ Although the reviewer noted that the film "is never going to play the Bible Belt—not with its footage of complete male nudity and male homosexual foreplay," she predicted a solid art house performance.²¹

Maurice was important to the gay community, and provided viewers with a polished prestige picture that reflected their desires. The gay press and gay audiences were more likely to read greater physicality into Maurice and Clive's relationship and interpret their love as romantic in nature. The gay press emphasized the homosexual relationships in the film, rather than skirting around them, and focused on the film's relevance to contemporary society and gay audiences. Although *Maurice* is set in the early 1900s, *The Advocate* claimed that the film "becomes more than just a period piece. It describes the need we all have for a physical, sexual life, and the private horror of having to go without it. It describes the release we feel when we are finally touched, and the touch is right."²² Additionally, the gay press was more likely to refer to, or at least hint at, Ivory and Merchant as a couple, using terms such as "life partners."²³

While *Variety* and *Boxoffice* positioned *Maurice* within the art cinema market and

¹⁹ Lor. "Maurice," 15.

²⁰ Karen Kreps, "Maurice review," *Boxoffice* 123.10 (1 October 1987): R-95.

²¹ Kreps, R-96.

²² Pally, "Maurice: A Perfect Fantasy," 53.

²³ Michael Bronski, "Pretty Postures; Ivory and Merchant put out Forster's fire in Maurice," *Gay Community News* 15.15 (25-31 October 1987): 7.

speculated on the film's ability to find crossover audiences, these reviews did not mention the gay market. Placing the film within an art cinema context, combined with the literary source material and Merchant/Ivory productions' reputation for creating quality films, works to legitimize the film's artistic merits. As I have argued previously, however, the art cinema label in some ways hindered the film's association with the category of LGBTQ cinema, which prevented it from being linked to the Gay New Wave and helping to form a wider movement. While the *Variety* review mentions *Laundrette* and *Prick Up* as significant precursors, it does not suggest that the films constitute any sort of nascent LGBTQ film movement. The gay press, on the other hand, played a crucial role in drawing attention to films like *Maurice* and *Prick Up*. These periodicals also emphasized the same sex relationships and gay perspectives in the films, while other publications glossed over them. Recognition of LGBTQ themes is one step towards connecting LGBTQ films together as a movement.

In addition to highlighting specific films, journalists profiled and interviewed queer filmmakers (referring to both those who identify as LGBTQ and those whose work connects with queer sensibilities and communities). Subjects included Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Pedro Almodóvar, Rosa Von Praunheim, John Waters, Stephen Frears, and Derek Jarman, as well as directors who worked on single LGBTQ films, such as John Sayles. Articles about filmmakers appeared more often, in greater depth, and with more of a focus on queer elements of the directors' works in gay and academic publications than in mainstream publications. Mainstream press sources occasionally profiled Fassbinder and others, but in a relatively superficial fashion.

The attention directed towards gay and lesbian film festivals in the press notably increased the visibility and prestige of these events, drawing more attention to them and helping them expand. As Vito Russo remarked in 1990, "a measure of their success is that the

immutable *New York Times* has finally decided that the gay festivals are legitimate enough to cover. For the first time, the *Times* will review films directly out of the festival screenings instead of waiting until they open commercially.”²⁴ Since many LGBTQ films did not find wide release, this festival coverage played an important role in directing attention to smaller films.

Local media coverage of the Pittsburgh International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival offered:

a prime example of how effective a cultural tool the film festival is in changing attitudes. Six years ago a brief paragraph article mentioning the festival was included in the local newspapers. Now newspaper editors call us for information, trying to scoop the other local newspapers. Last year, every feature film hav[ing] its Pittsburgh debut was reviewed in the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*. The film festival was the cover story of *In Pittsburgh Magazine* and a major article and interview in the *Pittsburgh Press*.²⁵

The amount of press coverage generated by the festival was used as evidence of the festival’s expansion and regional importance. In the 1991 festival report, organizers wrote: “The festival has also made great strides in educating the city of Pittsburgh about lesbian and gay culture and films... Last year, both daily newspapers vied for festival information to scoop the other. Critics who were insensitive to lesbian and gay issues now talk about homophobia in their reviews.”²⁶

Festival organizers referenced this media coverage in grant applications, which may have contributed to improved fundraising efforts in addition to bringing in larger audiences by publicizing screenings.

Festival coverage was more prevalent and consistent in the gay press. Festivals such as the San Francisco and New York gay and lesbian film festivals were covered by *Advocate* reporters every year, and they generally remarked on the growth of the festivals. The magazine also regularly sent people to cover major international festivals. In their coverage of the Berlin

²⁴ Vito Russo, “From Screen to Shining Screen: The Richness of Gay Life is Celebrated at Film Festivals,” *The Advocate* 554 (3 July 1990): 68.

²⁵ “Chicago Resource Center Proposal,” (1991): Box 2, Folder 7, PILGFF Papers.

²⁶ “PILGFF report,” (1991): Box 2, Folder 6, PILGFF Papers.

and Cannes festivals, *Advocate* reporters commented on gay film trends. In some cases, these trends were not noted by other publications. For instance, a 1982 article about Cannes states, “Ask any European this year about the recent spate of gay-themed films, and you will undoubtedly hear, ‘what gay movies?’ ...Something as insignificant as a few films with gay protagonists barely makes a ripple in the world cinema market.”²⁷ By reporting on gay films playing in major international festivals, *The Advocate* not only increased awareness of gay cinema, but also began to connect films together and create a concept of “gay cinema,” a precursor to movement formation.

Controversies and Dissidence

A prominent theme in the press coverage of LGBTQ film was the reporting of controversies surrounding particular films. These include the gay and lesbian protests of films such as *Cruising*, *Windows*, and *Basic Instinct*, as well as the conservative backlash against queer films like *Poison*. Both of these forms of controversy represent moments when LGBTQ films became “news,” or “newsworthy” in the eyes of publications and media outlets. The gay press covered gay and lesbian media activism, as these publications were invested in LGBTQ political struggles that included those related to arts and culture. Gay publications considered cultural endeavors to be essential to an understanding of gay communities and legacies. These specialty publications were also more likely to include items not seen as news by larger publications, such as the banning of *Taxi Zum Klo* and the confiscation of prints,²⁸ a raid on a fundraising dance,²⁹

²⁷ Gregory Springer, “Fetishes for Everyone at Cannes,” *The Advocate* 348 (5 August 1982): 41.

²⁸ Jil Clark, “Police in Norfolk Seize Taxi Zum Klo,” *Gay Community News* 10.16 (6 Nov 1982): 1. And Jil Clark, “Distributor Sues Norfolk Over Confiscation of Taxi,” *Gay Community News* 10.24 (1 January 1983): 1. And “Taxi Stalls in Richmond,” *Gay Community News* 10.44 (29 May 1983): 2.

²⁹ Ruth Borenstein, “Raid Follows Take Back the Night March,” *Gay Community News* 11.6 (20 August 1983).

and calls to boycott PBS for refusing to air LGBTQ films.³⁰ The documentation of these struggles and protests from both queer and conservative groups influenced the growth and wider recognition of LGBTQ representation in film.

Organizing and attending protests of *Cruising* and *Windows* helped to bring the community together in the pre-AIDS activism years. This larger-scale organization united people and resources around a common goal, to improve the representations of LGBTQ people; “The demonstrations this summer were *politically important*: The protest created a counter-image of *connectedness* in the gay community... While William Friedkin and [producer] Jerry Weintraub ran around the city this summer trying to humiliate the gay community, I could have sworn I saw the framework of a people more clearly than ever.”³¹ The protests physically brought individuals together to cause disruptions at filming locations and call for boycotts outside of theaters, making the gay and lesbian community and their viewpoints visible.

These actions extended beyond cities such as New York and Los Angeles to places like Cincinnati, Ohio, where a group protested both individual theaters and United Artist's branch headquarters.³² The protest coverage in niche and mainstream publications helped create these events and fostered a sense of connection to them for those who lived outside of protesting cities. To use Cincinnati as an example, press coverage of other protests helped spark action, as “copies of articles from *The Body Politic*, *Gay Community News*, *GayLife*, and New York papers stimulated people... to get involved.”³³ And as one of the group organizers suggested, “part of the significance of what we're doing here... [is that] it has stirred up people all across the

³⁰ “How Public is Public TV?” *Gay Community News* 7.32 (8 March 1980): 1. And over ten years later, Jacob Smith Yang, “Public TV blasted,” *Gay Community News* 19.8 (14 September 1991): 3.

³¹ Charles Ortleb, “The Context of ‘Cruising,’” *Christopher Street* (September 1979): 7-8. Emphasis in original.

³² John Zeh, “Cincinnati Protests Film, Readies Action on Windows,” *Gay Community News* 7.32 (8 March 1980): 3.

³³ Zeh, “Cincinnati Protests Film,” 3.

country—the gay community certainly so.”³⁴ This wider "stirring" would not have been possible without media attention following the developing controversies. The controversies surrounding LGBTQ films created media attention that the films would not have otherwise had. Whether arguing against negative stereotypes or against queer works, which will be covered in the following chapter, controversies generated widespread attention, increasing the cultural significance of certain LGBTQ films and providing a building block in the creation of a queer film movement.

What makes a “gay” film “good”?

Prescriptive discussions of LGBTQ filmmaking have been occurring since the 1970s in the gay press as well as leftist film journals.³⁵ Critics and scholars called for certain types of gay characters and gay films, a tradition of thought very much linked with the scholarship of representation. In tracing the formation of the concepts and definitions of LGBTQ films, one can see how films begin to connect with each other into distinct categories. Providing opinions and calls to arms, both for and against certain films, demonstrates one way in which critics and intellectuals shaped the growth of “gay film,” by suggesting what makes a film gay, and what makes a gay film good. By offering these prescriptive assessments, one can begin to see the formation of a unique category of film, which lays the groundwork for connecting films into a cohesive movement.

My analysis of *The Advocate* and *GCN* from the late 1970s to early 1990s reveals that the chronicling of gay cultural history, a way of emphasizing the contribution the gay community

³⁴ Joshua Moore of the UC Alliance, quoted in Zeh, “Cincinnati Protests Film,” 3.

³⁵ These discussions continue into the present day, with constant assessments about what LGBTQ films are or should be. For instance, the move against coming out stories, a genre that has historically made up a large percentage of LGBTQ media. Instead, critics call for films that shift to focus on the everyday realities and life of out individuals.

makes to a wider society, was a primary goal of these publications. Defining and creating gay culture was an important part of the gay experience. Film articles and reviews played one part in extensive arts sections that included articles on books, theater, dance, opera, fine arts, choirs, pop music, and more. The printed space these magazines allotted to the arts reflects the importance they placed on gay culture. In addition, these publications included articles on books and archive projects related to documenting gay culture and the arts, a self-conscious reflection on the importance of this work within the broader realm of gay history. Given their focus on images and the role of the arts in shaping aspects of the gay experience, these publications advocated for certain kinds of filmmaking. The gay press contributed to the development of a sense of gay film history as early as 1977, with P. Gregory Springer's article, "Roots of the Gay Film."³⁶ The article calls upon a lineage of avant-garde, art cinema, and coded Hollywood representations to fashion a history of gay film. What is interesting about this early attempt to lay out a history of gay film is its contradictory definition of its subject. By pointing to artistic precursors in the avant-garde, for example, the article suggests that these could be considered gay films. They are seen only as roots, or precursors, however, and it is suggested that a true gay or homosexual cinema is one that takes "gay sexuality as its primary subject."³⁷ Some of the limitations of this "homosexual" cinema were alleviated by a later turn to the conception of "queer" cinema.

During the 1970s, in publications such as *Jump Cut*, *Cineaste*, and *Screen*, discourses on post-Stonewall gay films "centered, in part, on how gay films could have a political impact on mainstream acceptance of gayness."³⁸ This is not to say that politically leftist journals such as these have an uncomplicated history with LGBTQ issues and viewpoints. Thomas Waugh

³⁶ P. Gregory Springer, "Roots of the Gay Film," *The Advocate* 218 (29 June 1977): "Trader Dick" insert, 5.

³⁷ Springer, "Roots of the Gay Film," "Trader Dick" 5.

³⁸ Justin Wyatt, *Poison*, 20.

pointed out, in a 1977 article written for *Jump Cut*, “even a journal as progressive in its sexual politics as *Jump Cut* needs to examine its own record,” not just for occasionally homophobic articles, but also for:

A more general homophobia-by-default... Any faggot or dyke worth his or her salt knows that silence is one of the first symptoms of advanced homophobia. And in this sense *Jump Cut* is clearly suspect (although the silence of other radical film mags, from *Cineaste* to *Screen*, is deafening in comparison-without even considering the latter's adherence to certain latently homophobic aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis).³⁹

Although discussions of LGBTQ film were growing at this time, the major journals of intellectual film thought were not initially on the forefront of this discourse. B. Ruby Rich did, however, call *Jump Cut* an important training ground for her early critical work.⁴⁰ Towards the end of the 1980s, with the growth of queer theory, this would change somewhat.

While attempting to offer contributions to the discussion of gay and lesbian film and “establish a precedent in North America”⁴¹ for this type of intellectual engagement, Chuck Kleinhans, an editor and driving force for *Jump Cut*, acknowledged the limited role played by scholarly film journals. He states that:

for the most part, open gay criticism in the 70s has resided in the gay press and parts of the alternative press in North America. It hasn't been on the agenda in film studies or in the pages of film publications. That situation is changing. In England, the National Film Theatre has completed a major season on gays, and the publication by the British Film Institute of an indispensable booklet, ‘Gays and Film,’ ...marks the emergence of a strong gay presence in contemporary film thought.⁴²

Jump Cut did work to stay on the forefront of this development. From the late 1970s to the mid 1990s, the journal included numerous articles about gay films and filmmakers, as well as an

³⁹ Thomas Waugh, “Who Are We? A Very Natural Thing, The Naked Civil Servant: Films by gays for gays,” *Jump Cut* no 16 (1977): 14-18

⁴⁰ B. Ruby Rich, “Conversations: Foundational Moments of New Queer Cinema” Panel Discussion, Columbia University (8 October 2013), found at <http://filmstudiesforfree.blogspot.com/2017/06/richly-resourceful-on-bruby-richs-work.html>

⁴¹ Chuck Kleinhans, “Gays and film: an introduction,” *Jump Cut* no. 16 (1977): <https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinesays/JC16folder/IntroGaysinFilm.html>.

⁴² Kleinhans, “Gays and film.”

entire issue devoted to gays and film in 1977 and a special issue on lesbians in film in 1981. Both issues emphasized the political nature of gay film work. As Kleinhans wrote, gay film “is part of and inextricably bound to the gay community and the political expression of that community, the gay liberation movement in all its diversity. Gay film work — criticism, teaching, filmmaking, distribution, and exhibition — comes out of, stands as part of, and contributes to gay liberation.”⁴³ This early evaluation of (and defining of) gay film as linked strongly with politics helped set the tone for much of the discourse on LGBTQ film. The association with gay liberation politics influenced the call for certain types of filmmaking. The gay liberation movement was connected with assimilationist politics, the main goals of which were to acknowledge the existence of gay people and show how they were just like everyone else.

Assimilationist political agendas led to a call for “positive images” in film and media. Richard Dyer provides a concise and useful definition of positive representation that consists of three, not always compatible, elements: “thereness, insisting on the fact of our [gay and lesbian] existence; goodness, asserting our worth and that of our lifestyles; and realness, showing what we were in fact like.”⁴⁴ One of the biggest, consistent areas of concern in terms of gay films was the avoidance of negative, stereotypical characterizations. Calls for positive images and the academic focus on “images of” scholarship dominated the context for LGBTQ filmmaking. The rising gay rights movement called on Hollywood to offer positive representations of gay and lesbian characters.

In 1973, the Gay Activist Alliance, along with the National Gay Task Force, drafted “Some General Principles for Motion Picture and Television Treatment of Homosexuality.”

⁴³ Kleinhans, “Gays and film.”

⁴⁴ Richard Dyer, *Now You See It: Studies on Gay and Lesbian Film* (New York: Routledge, 1990): 274.

While these groups did not want a return to media invisibility for gays and lesbians, they listed eight principles of appropriate representation. These guidelines included eliminating derogatory slang terms for homosexuals, using the same standards producers used when representing other minority groups, and refraining from the use of stereotypes. The activist groups argued, “Stereotypical people do exist, but if such a minority of any group receives exclusive media exposure, that’s bigotry. Until a broad spectrum of the gay community has been stressed on film, and the stereotypes are put in perspective, the use of stereotype is damaging.”⁴⁵ They conclude the list of guidelines by announcing the creation of a consulting board to help the industry improve its depictions of homosexuality, and calling on media producers to make their workplaces open atmospheres in which gay and lesbian employees can share their opinions.

The call for positive images resulted in several “identity politics films,” such as *Making Love*, in which “gay stereotypes were deliberately, and often clumsily, revoked.”⁴⁶ These films were criticized as aesthetically conservative works in which one set of (negative) stereotypes was exchanged for other (supposedly positive) stereotypes. These admirable types do not offer any more accurate a depiction of gay and lesbian life and diversity, but rather reflect dominant strains of thought and critical pressures of the time. As a 1983 *GCN* article remarked, filmmakers:

must grapple with the political and artistic questions a film's content provokes. Should it entertain, inform or organize? Notes Russo, “films about gay life, especially those made by openly gay filmmakers, have the burden of having to redress all the misinformation, the stereotypes and the myths of society that have accumulated through the ages. Every film is expected to be ‘the breakthrough film,’ but it will not happen that way. Gays are realizing, finally, that the myths will be exploded one by one, in small ways, in big films and small films.”⁴⁷

Given the relative dearth of gay and lesbian images in the 1970s and 1980s, there was the

⁴⁵ “Some General Principles for motion Picture and Television Treatment of Homosexuality” (1973): www.rainbowhistory.org/pdf/generalprinciples.pdf

⁴⁶ Niall Richardson, *The Queer Cinema of Derek Jarman* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009): 60

⁴⁷ Nancy Langer, “We Ought to be in Pictures,” *Gay Community News* 10.43 (21 May 1983): 6.

tendency to try and say everything about a community in a single film. As this is an impossible task,⁴⁸ early films were criticized for showing single aspects of a community or focusing on limited, individual portraits.

The perceived acceptability of a given characterization depends heavily on the persona and status of a film's production team, particularly the director, and the context in which the film is released. For example, the depiction of a gay serial killer in 1980 in *Cruising* aroused passionate anger while, in the early 1990s, queer filmmakers made use of the same stereotype without generating outrage. One reason for the varying reception of "negative" characters is the passage of ten important years of filmmaking and activism, but the evaluation of these works are greatly influenced by the authorship of a film, often encapsulated in the public profile of the film's director. In his review of *Swoon* and *The Living End*, Roy Grundmann writes, "There are differences between negative stereotypes from Hollywood and those coming from our own ranks... Stereotypes emerging from within our own film culture may be no less reductive but at least we can control their production and make sure they will always be only a few of the multiple ways in which we see ourselves."⁴⁹ Richard Dyer's perspectives correspond with this logic. As he writes, "it is not stereotypes, as an aspect of human thought and representation, that are wrong, but who controls and defines them, what interests they serve."⁵⁰ This positioning of LGBTQ filmmakers' authorial status and the insistence upon control of images suggests not only a re-appropriation of specific images, but the entire image-making process. It is acceptable for gay directors to play with negative stereotypes (and in fact queer cinema thrives on "negative"

⁴⁸ For more on the burden of representation, see Kobena Mercer, "Black Art and the Burden of Representation," *Third Text* 10 (1990): 61-78. AND Song Hwee Lim, *Celluloid Comrades: Representations of Male Homosexuality in Contemporary Chinese Cinemas* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006): Chapter 2.

⁴⁹ Roy Grundmann, "The Fantasies We Live By: Bad Boys in *Swoon* and *The Living End*," *Cineaste*, 19.4 (1993): 25.

⁵⁰ Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images* (New York: Routledge, 1993): 12.

portrayals), whereas studio filmmaking is instantly suspect because of its complicated and unfavorable history of handling LGBT subjects and characters.

One of the most vocal and prolific proponents of positive images was Vito Russo, both in his *The Celluloid Closet* and many articles for publications such as *The Advocate*. Towards the end of his life and career, Russo became increasingly frustrated by both the continued homophobia in mainstream films as well as "the relationships lesbians and gay men have with their own image on film, which really grates on me. Not only do 'average' gay people (I guess I mean nonactivist types) not recognize and react to bigotry when they see it on-screen, but they also don't go out of their way to support positive images of themselves."⁵¹ By pushing against mainstream homophobia and calling for the support of independent films, Russo advocated for a certain type of gay film.

The Advocate played a role in supporting the kind of gay films that it felt were important to produce, as well as providing a forum for discussions of what constituted "good gay films." For instance, it put out calls for funding for a Harvey Milk documentary project, which later became *The Times of Harvey Milk*, and stated that "support from within the gay community is urgently needed."⁵² Identifying the film projects that received the majority of attention and praise helps us understand what constituted a "good" gay film in the 1980s. Like *Harvey Milk*, *Desert Hearts* and *Parting Glances* both had articles published about them during their pre-production phases, in which the need for support from the gay community is discussed.⁵³ In general, the gay press launched calls of support for out gay and lesbian filmmakers working on

⁵¹ Vito Russo, "Malice at the Movies: A Critic Gats 'Bad,' Mad, and Just Plain Fed Up With Bigots and Spineless Gays," *The Advocate* (5 June 1990): 60.

⁵² Clifton Montgomery, "Film Ticket: Milk Movie Benefit," *The Advocate* 339 (1 April 1982): 47.

⁵³ For example, K.H. Garfield, "Donna Deitch: Giving Bloom to 'Desert of the Heart,'" *The Advocate* 341 (29 April 1982): 45-46. And Ray O'Loughlin, "Making It: Putting a Price Tag on the Arts," *The Advocate* 370 (23 June 1983): 55-57, 68, 83.

projects directly related to LGBTQ lives and history. Several documentaries fundraised using the gay press,⁵⁴ in part because these were often non-commercial projects that needed to find alternative funding sources, and their low budgets meant that small individual contributions could make a big difference.

While generally enthusiastic about the increase in gay and lesbian images onscreen, the gay press was not without its hesitations. Despite the presence of a few “positive image” films, the tension between mainstream filmmakers and gay organizations continued, and persists to this day. Even in 1991, a great year for queer film, *GCN* noted that in Hollywood, “while there were a few positive gay and lesbian characters in 1991 films... there is insufficient space here to document the countless films containing negative, stereotypical gay characterizations.”⁵⁵ In the early nineties, *The Advocate* ran a series of articles about homophobia in Hollywood, and again noted that Hollywood continued to rely on stereotypes; “As long as we play the monster, we’re tolerable; a three-dimensional gay or lesbian human being is another matter.”⁵⁶ The general stasis of the mainstream industry in terms of gay representation meant that people began to put their faith in other sources of LGBTQ images, notably the realm of independent filmmaking. As one critic put it, “As the industry sets its sights on making more of the same, don’t expect the stories it wants ‘driven’ to involve gays and lesbians in any major way. For that, you have to look toward the independent filmmaking arena.”⁵⁷ While independent filmmakers in the 1980s generally worked within a positive image framework, they also connected with a parallel thread of discourse, a call for nuanced, complex images that avoided treating sexual and gender

⁵⁴ For example, *GCN* included a call for subjects and support for a documentary on lesbian motherhood, which became *Choosing Children* (“News Notes: Documenting Parenthood.” *Gay Community News* 10.16 (6 November 1982): 2.) and (“Choosing Children.” *Gay Community News* 10.43 (21 May 1983): 6.)

⁵⁵ Ellen Carton, “Lesbians and Gay Men in the Media: From the sublime to the ridiculous,” *Gay Community News* 19.25 (12 January 1992): 5.

⁵⁶ David Ehrenstein, “Talking Pictures,” *The Advocate* 567 (1 January 1991): 58.

⁵⁷ David Ehrenstein, “Talking Pictures,” *The Advocate* 570 (12 February 1991): 75.

orientation as problems to be solved.

One early example of this strain of definition for gay filmmaking comes out of Fassbinder's work. Despite conflicting reactions to his films, Fassbinder was an important figure in the development of LGBTQ cinema, and his work pushed critics to consider what made a film a "gay" film. As a 1978 article about Fassbinder from *The Advocate* speculated:

Are there homosexual films? Can we consider a gay cinema? ...It is time, now that Fassbinder is established as a director, to discuss the implications of the homosexual filmmaker in both possible senses of the term, whether a homosexual maker of films or a maker of homosexual films. At various points in Fassbinder's filmography he is one, both, or neither of these, yet one might finally conclude that Fassbinder is to homosexual movies what Ali is to black boxing, despite all the categorical irritants that the modified labels will impose. Fassbinder may be the world's first homophile director worthy of the title.⁵⁸

While Fassbinder was a complicated figure in gay culture at the time, he was viewed in some ways as a positive model for the production of homosexual art:

One criteria for true homosexual art appears to be transcendence of the subject... Fassbinder's films make no point of gayness; indeed they seem overwhelmingly to understate the fact. Although he has used gay elements in at least half of his films, he has never made a film about gayness... What Fassbinder establishes is a positive criterion for a definition of gay art: that which includes gayness (or that which is of and to gay people) but is not exclusively about, for, or by gay people. That inclusion, in contrast to earlier definitions of exclusivity, is sound. The gay person acknowledged and present as a part of the human fabric, not isolated, not a punch line (*Ode to Billy Joe*), not a ploy (*Outrageous*) and not an invisible man (*Marathon Man*).⁵⁹

This quote suggests the importance of expanding beyond gayness as an issue, something that remains in many positive image films of the eighties. Similar calls have been repeated, and increased, up through the present day, pushing to include LGBTQ characters and subjects into films without making them an "issue" that needs to be confronted and resolved. Fassbinder's work was ahead of its time, an advanced form of queer filmmaking that came when "gay films"

⁵⁸ Springer, "Fassbinder: Accepting Despair," 31.

⁵⁹ Springer, "Fassbinder," 32.

most often consisted of positive image message films, which presented homosexuality as a central concern that drives the plot.

The considerations brought up in relation to Fassbinder's work continued in discussions of independent cinema in the 1980s and early 1990s. With the rise in independent LGBTQ filmmaking, there was a sense that, "After years of seeing three or four varieties of screen homosexuals...what we're finally getting in the 1980s is a breadth of gay characters, as nearly diverse and as complicated as their heterosexual screen counterparts."⁶⁰ This call for diversity and a move away from simplistic stereotyping was one of the central demands in the gay press. The increasing number of films depicting gay characters allowed for a wider variety of stories and images.

Numerous gay press articles suggested that independent filmmaking was the future of gay and lesbian images, as it provided a place for "honest reflections,"⁶¹ where "each season, a small army of independent filmmakers, gay and nongay, pursue a personal vision of the human condition without regard for the megabuck mentality—and we are even more grateful."⁶² This shift to independents and growth of the number of gay films being produced in the mid eighties created "a fundamental shift... in the definition of gay films."⁶³ There was the sense that independent films were more "sophisticated," "mature," and "realistic" in their depictions of gay characters.⁶⁴ These descriptors work away from the positive image message films, since "Films

⁶⁰ Edward Guthmann, "A Colorful Spectrum of Gay Characters on Silver Screen," *The Advocate* 463 (24 December 1985): 54.

⁶¹ Edward Guthmann, "Looking to Independent Artists for Honest Reflection in Cinema," *The Advocate* 409/410 (11 December 1984): 58.

⁶² Vito Russo, "Looking Beyond the Hollywood Version for Gays Onscreen," *The Advocate* 383-384 (22 December 1983): 50.

⁶³ Vito Russo, "Important Change of Attitude in Defining Gay People in Screen," *The Advocate* 442 (18 March 1986): 52.

⁶⁴ Marcia Pally, "Independent Gay Cinema Fills Screens with more Sophisticated Realities," *The Advocate* 463 (6 January 1987): 58, 69.

about relentlessly happy homosexuals have been equally false in their own way, providing neither good politics nor good cinema."⁶⁵

Members of the gay press pushed for a certain type of gay film; they wanted films that offered complex, three dimensional portraits of gay and lesbian characters, while ideally maintaining the tenets of positive representations that opposed mainstream stereotypes. In contrasting mid-eighties independent films with earlier ones, critics remarked that, "Movie-makers are doing away with old-style gay movies and looking toward a brighter, hipper, fresher sensibility."⁶⁶ Newer forms of gay film were likely to include homosexuality more casually, as a single aspect of complex individuals. *Parting Glances* is an excellent example of this trend. The film takes place within the New York gay community, the characters' sexuality is presented upfront, and the plot revolves not around gayness as a problem but around the intricacies of relationships and confronting AIDS. This form of filmmaking included homosexuality but was not "about" homosexuality. Marcia Pally applauds this shift in the 1987 article "Movies, Not 'Messages,' Screened This Year, and Festival Better for it." She writes, "The seventh annual New York Gay Film Festival (GFF) marked an ironic accomplishment. A record number of its films weren't about homosexuals. All included homosexual characters and same-sex sex, but of the 11 I'll talk about... seven focused on something besides sexual preference. And they were better films for it."⁶⁷ Vito Russo concurred, citing the important role of gay film festivals in this growth of gay cinema. He writes, "We still don't like everything we see, but for the first time we are presented with a diversity that includes films about the way gay people actually live, as well

⁶⁵ Russo, "Important Change of Attitude," 53.

⁶⁶ Richard Learner, "Gay Films Stay Strong at the Box Office—Priming Audiences for More to Come?" *The Advocate* 449 (24 June 1986): 36.

⁶⁷ Marcia Pally, "Movies, Not 'Messages,' Screened This Year, and Festival Better for it," *The Advocate* 383/384 (22 December 1983): 52.

as films on other subjects in which the sexuality of gay characters is natural and implicit."⁶⁸ This harkens back to the discussions surrounding Fassbinder's work, and the credit he got for including gay characters without making them an issue.

The Call for Queer Cinema

A shift occurred in the late 1980s from a call for complex, positive image "gay" films to more transgressive "queer" films, those that, for example, do not subscribe to distinct or static sexual orientations, that aim to push boundaries of sexual representation, and that celebrate difference without being hindered by a desire to fit in. "Queer" was used long before this transition, as a derogatory slang term. It was only later reclaimed as a source of LGBT pride and power. While the term is more heavily associated with the nineties, articles in the eighties began to develop the difference between gay and queer.⁶⁹ As early as 1986, *The Advocate* ran an article titled, "It's Time to Reclaim 'Queer.'"⁷⁰

Scholarly work called for the development of a theoretical framework for queer cinema. In the late 1980s there was a sense that this area was under explored in academia, and several groups sought to remedy this. Martha Gever, John Greyson, and Pratibha Parmar, for example, collectively edited a volume titled *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*. Gever was a critic and editor, and later transitioned to academia; Greyson and Parmar were both filmmakers and had worked as writers in some capacity. Their work, begun in 1989 and published in 1993, offers a manifesto of sorts for critical, theoretical, and scholarly work on LGBTQ film and video. They write that this project was:

⁶⁸ Vito Russo, "Important Change of Attitude in Defining Gay People in Screen," *The Advocate* 442 (18 March 1986): 53.

⁶⁹ For example, the article by John P. De Cecco, Ph.D. "Pleasure and Relationships: Queers vs. Gays," *The Advocate* 329 (29 October 1981): 20.

⁷⁰ Malcolm Boyd, "It's Time to Reclaim 'Queer,'" *The Advocate* 437 (7 January 1986): 69.

triggered by the profound dearth of critical theory addressing independent productions by lesbian and gay media artists. We were inspired by the groundbreaking (if sporadic) critical inquiry of the previous decade: special issues of *Jump Cut* and *Screen, The Celluloid Closet* by Vito Russo, the occasional panel at a cinema studies conference or gay film festival.⁷¹ We were dissatisfied with queer critics who endlessly analyzed Hollywood but ignored the independent sector. We were bored with tired seventies notions of positive role models, tired of boring seventies preoccupations with classical narrative structures... We were eager to contribute a volume to the growing bookshelf of contemporary projects that were in the works... We were empowered by the growing network of lesbian and gay film and video festivals on six continents which were building critical and enthusiastic audiences for queer media and queer debate.⁷²

While seeing their work as a continuation of earlier scholarly inquiries, the editors also placed a call for a new form of filmmaking, one that was informed more by avant-garde impulses than classical structures and positive images. They called for radical “queer,” rather than conservative “gay and lesbian” works.

Another representative example of the growth of academic contribution to queer film was the 1989 conference, “How do I Look? Queer Film and Video,” held at the Anthology Film Archives in New York City. The event included six presentations, by Cindy Patton, Stuart Marshall, Judith Mayne, Richard Fung, Kobena Mercer, and Teresa de Laurentis, and was attended by a robust group of scholars, critics, and filmmakers (including John Greyson and Tom Kalin, who was a member of the organizing group). The conference was organized by “Bad Object Choices,” which was a New York City-based “reading group formed in the spring of 1987 to address questions of gay and lesbian theory.”⁷³ The conference was accompanied by a screening series, and both were subsidized by grant funding, another example of the varied ways in which grants supported LGBTQ media. The conference arose from the group’s “interest in

⁷¹ Again, the role of festivals is emphasized. Not only did these events provide places to screen films and draw critical attention to them, but they often contained panels and roundtables on conceptual elements of LGBTQ film and video making.

⁷² Gever, Greyson, Parmar, “On a Queer Day You Can See Forever,” xiv.

⁷³ Bad Object-Choices, ed. *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991): 9.

theoretical and political questions raised by lesbian and gay media. Or, rather, it arose from our frustration at the scarcity of work on this topic, a scarcity we knew resulted from a lack of institutional support from the academy and the publishing industry.”⁷⁴ This hesitancy in academia would dissipate to a large extent in the 1990s, and queer theory would become a well-established area of study.

Bad Object-Choices published an edited volume containing the talks given at the conference as well as transcribed roundtable discussions that occurred at the event. As an example of publishers’ hesitancy, the group was turned down by a number of publishers (due to the content of accompanying images) before finally being published by Bay Press in 1991. *Queer Looks* and *How Do I Look?*, along with other works published in the early 1990s such as Doty’s *Making Things Perfectly Queer*, Dyer’s *Now You See It: Studies on Gay and Lesbian Film*, Judith Mayne’s *Woman at the Keyhole*, and Diana Fuss’ *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, represented a sharp increase in scholarly output relating to LGBTQ media. Scholarly work might not directly reach a large number of people, but it helped shape a call for a certain form of filmmaking.

“Queer” remains a contentious term with a range of possible meanings, but it is deeply connected to a sense of transgression and deviance. As such, in film it was first associated with activist and experimental filmmaking.⁷⁵ The word “queer” has an activist lineage, and came to represent a rebirth of the gay rights movement, this time in a more radical form. *The Advocate* called 1990 “The Year of the Queer,” and the cover story was titled “The queering of America:

⁷⁴ Bad Object-Choices, 11.

⁷⁵ For example, it is used in relation to the first New York gay and lesbian film festival (Barry Walters, “Queer Dreams: New York’s Lesbian and Gay Experimental Film Festival Offers a Very Mixed Bag,” *The Advocate* 485. (10 November 1987): 71.)

looking back at 1990 and the resurrection of the gay movement.”⁷⁶ In reviewing 1991, the magazine again used queer in its evaluation of the arts, stating that:

it's been a banner year for up-front queer culture in the mainstream... The state of the arts has never been queerer... In unprecedented fashion, 1991 saw the mainstream bombarded with in-your-face gay and lesbian creation. Throughout the visual arts and in literature, music, film, theater, and dance, it has been a queer year in American culture. Even more impressive is that America seems to be buying it.⁷⁷

The use of queer spread and the term gained cultural currency. While based in concrete shifts in political tactics and rhetoric, queer also gained a certain amount of trendiness as a term. It became a hip, new phrase that was appropriated by even staid outlets, such as *The Advocate*, which tried to stay up to date with current political stances while remaining, at its heart, a conservative publication.

The rise of queer cinema shifted the nature of what constitutes a “good” gay film. While sectors of the gay press still called for positive representations and applauded films such as *Longtime Companion* and *Philadelphia*, more transgressive queer films were garnering a large amount of critical attention. During the 1991 festival circuit, “Many in Berlin came away tantalized [by the new gay independent films] and all the more frustrated with the meager scraps thrown to them by Hollywood. As the festival made clear, there is a need for even more opportunities to see images that reflect the full spectrum of gay and lesbian life.”⁷⁸ The goal of queer filmmaking was no longer creating positive images, but rather challenging middlebrow sensibilities through transgressive aesthetics and the re-appropriation of negative stereotypes. As B. Ruby Rich remarked in reference to *Swoon*, which reclaims the murderous gay villain stereotype, the film “takes on the whole enterprise of ‘positive images,’ definitively rejecting any

⁷⁶ Randy Shilts, “The Queering of America,” *The Advocate* 567 (1 January 1991): 32-38.

⁷⁷ David Perry, “State of the Arts,” *The Advocate* 594 (14 January 1992): 68.

⁷⁸ Larry Horne, “Berlin Stories: The Best of New Gay Cinema Screened at International Film Festival,” *The Advocate* 575 (23 April 1991): 74.

such project and turning the thing on its head... Hopefully the film will force a rethinking of positions. Claim the heroes, claim the villains, and don't mistake any of it for realness."⁷⁹ *Swoon* in particular challenges the idea of verisimilitude and consciously engages with the contradictions and nuances of presenting historical realities on film. While a film like *Cruising* may not market itself as realistic (although it did claim to be inspired by real life murders), mainstream filmmaking practices tend to naturalize stories and subjects. Queer filmmaking, in contrast, often emphasizes its artifice and pushes viewers to self-consciously examine the film and its broader social implications. Mainstream films that convey single, naturalized viewpoints that are taken as "givens," without provoking thought or calling attention to the film's construction, increasingly came to be seen as inadequate in LGBTQ filmmaking and criticism.

The development of queer representations did not always correspond with the more widespread acknowledgement of them and celebration of them. For example, the films of European auteurs such as Fassbinder, Von Praunheim, Almodóvar, and Jarman contain queer characters, situations, and themes. It is perhaps because people lacked the vocabulary to talk about "queer" films before the late 1980s, or because these more radical works resisted inclusion in positive image canons, that a number of European films fell through the cracks. Such works were not championed in the gay rights movement, being either ignored or creating divisiveness among viewers, as was the case with Fassbinder's *Fox and His Friends*. These earlier queer films did not fit the prescribed call for positive image gay and lesbian films, so they did not generate as much attention in gay press. Other publications were less likely to cover LGBTQ films, or if they did, it was under the umbrella of art cinema, which kept the films from coalescing under an LGBTQ label. These films lacked a broader label to bring them together,

⁷⁹ Rich, "New Queer Cinema," *Sight and Sound*, 34.

something that would change in the early 1990s.

Making Connections

There are three moments throughout the period under consideration in which critics discussed groups of LGBTQ films (films with LGBTQ themes, directors, or both) in a cohesive way, suggesting the possibility of a unified movement. These include Hollywood's gay mini-cycle, the Gay New Wave, and of course New Queer Cinema itself. While previous chapters have explored some aspects of these groupings, here I outline the role of critics, journalists, and scholars in linking certain films together pre-NQC.

Throughout the first few years of the 1980s, both mainstream and niche publications covered the Hollywood mini-cycle of films that heavily featured gay and lesbian characters. Even *Time*, which rarely discussed LGBTQ films, included an article titled "Gays to the Fore, Cautiously," which looks at how "several new releases try a freer portrayal of homosexuality."⁸⁰ Considering primarily *Victor/Victoria*, *Making Love*, *Personal Best*, *Deathtrap*, and *Partners* (pre-release), the article notes that the films look "suspiciously like a trend" and tend to "show homosexuality neutrally, as just another fact one is likely to encounter while stumbling through modern life."⁸¹ The article suggests that this was "real progress" from the previous sissy, self-tortured, and monstrous gay characters that had historically come with mainstream films, although this current crop left something to be desired in terms of narrative and aesthetic excitement. This criticism of the mini-cycle films was fairly common, in both individual film reviews and in trend pieces like the one published in *Film Comment*, "The Gay Deception: The

⁸⁰ Richard Schickel, "Gays to the Fore, Cautiously," *Time* 119:12 (22 March 1982): 82.

⁸¹ Schickel, "Gays to the Fore," 82.

subject is homosexuality. The films are very straight."⁸²

Variety, another source that shied away from extensive discussions of LGBTQ films, included a few small mentions of a growing gay film trend within articles about specific films, companies, or festivals. In discussing Edward Anhalt's proposed production of the gay-themed *Splendor*, for example, they write, "In assessing the film's commercial potential, Anhalt also acknowledges a debt to the break-through in mass audience appeal of United Artists' gay comedy, 'La Cage Aux Folles.'... While Anhalt sees a big homosexual market, he is wary of overkill taking its toll as it did when the market for black films peaked and then abruptly fell off."⁸³ There are occasional articles about gay film festivals,⁸⁴ and the greater recognition of these institutions is connected to the growth of a movement. *Variety*, the industry's most important trade publication, however, does not make this leap. It reports on mainstream festivals showing gay films,⁸⁵ but only in scattershot fashion, and thus did not contribute to the recognition of the nascent movement.

Every few years, articles would appear in the gay press that discussed the increased visibility of gay and lesbian films and filmmakers, and question whether this was a passing fad or a more prolonged trend. In February 1980, a special "Film Ticket" section of *The Advocate* enthused:

Today, gay and lesbian filmmakers are more visible and vocal than ever. In the following articles, *The Advocate* profiles a number of young, outspoken, staunchly independent film artists who are making movies of direct relevance to gay lives everywhere. Whether they are love stories, investigative documentaries or formal/stylistic experiments, these films and the creative people who made them

⁸² Mary Richards, "The Gay Deception: The Subject is Homosexuality. The films are very straight," *Film Comment* (May/June 1982): 15-18.

⁸³ "Anhalt to Film Gay Lovers Idyll," *Variety* 303.3 (20 May 1981): 5.

⁸⁴ For example, "Gay Fest, 3d Year, Draws Big Throng," *Variety* (9 December 1981): 7, 26.

⁸⁵ For instance, side-by-side articles about *Taxi Zum Klo* being shunned for major prizes at the Chicago Film Festival, and being nonetheless "far and away, the hit of the Chi-Town Film Festival." ("Ripploh Rides 'Taxi' Ballyhoo Nationwide" and Frank Segers, "Chicago Film Festival Gives Group of German Pics Top Nod; Shun Gay Ripploh Film," Both in *Variety* (25 November 1981): 7.)

represent an exciting attempt to take hold of a medium that has all too often presented a distorted and distorting image of gay (and straight) people, and to put it to work for our universal benefit.⁸⁶

A few months later, an *Advocate* article claimed that, "Notwithstanding such films as *Cruising*, *Windows* and *American Gigolo*, 1980 may prove to be a landmark year for legitimate portrayals of homosexuality on screen."⁸⁷

While reactions to the mini cycle films were mixed, the *Advocate's* recurring Film Ticket section continued to follow Hollywood developments with hope and some hesitation. The following year, the film section noted that, "Many of us have been holding our breath this year, hoping that some long overdue breakthroughs in the realistic portrayal of gay men and women, their relationships and far-ranging lifestyles would at last reach the silver screen," but "ongoing developments have, unfortunately, prompted increased caution and diminished optimism in recent weeks."⁸⁸ Following along this same, cautious perspective, programmers for the 1982 Filmex (an alternative but not specifically gay/lesbian film exposition), reported a lack of films with gay and lesbian themes, leading the *Advocate* reporter to speculate whether there was "a momentary lull, perhaps? Or is gay no longer chic in world film circles?"⁸⁹

In 1982, *The Advocate* published an article titled, "Hollywood's Gay Fling: Too Hot Not to Cool Down?",⁹⁰ further chronicling contemporary attempts to bring LGBTQ images to the screen. The article asked, "Have we become moviedom's new hot topic?...almost \$70 million has been invested in subject matter that a scant five years ago would have been unthinkable,

⁸⁶ "Film Ticket Special," *The Advocate* 285 (7 February 1980): 28. The filmmakers they profiled included Rosa Von Praunheim, Dick Banner (director of *Outrageous*), and experimental filmmakers Barbara Hammer and May Sarton.

⁸⁷ Douglas Edwards, "Film Ticket: Ballet Ross," *The Advocate* 291 (1 May 1980): 35.

⁸⁸ Clifton Montgomery, "Film Ticket," *The Advocate* 324 (20 August 1981): 32.

⁸⁹ Clifton Montgomery, "Film Ticket," *The Advocate* 339 (1 April 1982): 47.

⁹⁰ Douglas Edwards, "Hollywood's Gay Fling: Too Hot Not to Cool Down?" *The Advocate* 341 (29 April 1982): 36-37.

much less bankable."⁹¹ This issue contained a number of other articles about both mainstream and independent features, and focused on *Personal Best*, *Victor/Victoria*, *Pixote*, and *Desert Hearts*, still in pre-production. Despite references to the growth in gay and lesbian films and homosexuality as a hot trend, articles from the early eighties tended to concentrate on individual films. Even an article with the title "A Breakthrough Year for the Gay Image on Film"⁹² looked at key films as breakthroughs without calling the phenomenon a film movement. The resistance to conceive of such films as a nascent movement could be due in part to the negative and conflicted reception to some of the films. They did not garner enough critical support or money for studios to continue backing what was still viewed as risky subject matter, so the craze ended. As Russo wrote, "Some of us naively wondered whether 1982's mini cycle of so-called gay films... would prove to be a trend or a passing fad. Well, it's almost 1984, and we have ceased wondering. The fad is over."⁹³ While the gay press recognized the growth of gay film, connected key films together under pronouncements of "breakthrough years," applauded the work of independents, and contributed to the above conversation about what gay films should be, these articles did not attempt to connect films together into a defined movement.

More than noting the ebbs and flows in gay film, the continual re-assessment of gay representations in film demonstrated a desire to track trends and draw attention to moments of increased LGBTQ filmmaking. Before 1986, however, these films were not discussed as a movement, but rather as a "crop" or "trend" in filmmaking, with an implication that the phenomenon will be short lived. These articles played an important role in connecting early films together and laying the groundwork for later critics to advance the idea of an LGBTQ film

⁹¹ Edwards, "Hollywood's Gay Fling," 36.

⁹² Beery, "A Breakthrough Year for the Gay Image on Film," 65.

⁹³ Russo, "Looking Beyond the Hollywood Version," 50.

movement, but they did not lead to a movement at that time. Perhaps this was in part the source of the films, larger studios that downplayed the gay elements in their marketing, as was discussed in Chapter 2. The later LGBTQ films that came out of independent filmmaking sectors, often with gay and lesbian directors, would find greater credibility as gay films and connect more directly to a gay or queer movement.

From the mid eighties through the early nineties, independent LGBTQ films were the ones garnering critical attention.⁹⁴ This was in large part because mainstream producers did not release any gay and lesbian-themed films from the end of the mini-cycle until *Basic Instinct* (1992) and *Philadelphia* (1993). Corresponding with the rise of, and rhetoric associated with, a larger independent cinema movement, LGBTQ independents were able to carve space for a sub-movement. This sense of a movement, as opposed to a trend or fad, gives the connections between films a more concrete, substantial foundation. In 1986, critics began to point to a slew of gay and lesbian feature films, and with this “Gay New Wave,” the first specific references to a gay film movement occurred.

In the gay press, articles about the further expansion and independent basis of LGBTQ films both international and domestic echoed the same tactics as those from the early eighties. They discussed individual “landmark” films,⁹⁵ pointed out trends, and questioned the viability of future gay and lesbian films. These trends often emerged in film festivals, and the Berlin Festival was a particularly important event for the growth and coalescence of gay film. In *The Advocate's* coverage of the 1984 and 1986 festivals, there were references to “A New Generation

⁹⁴ Many *Advocate* articles mentioned the importance of independent film, in addition to those already mentioned: (Guthmann, “Looking to Independent Artists for Honest Reflection,” 58.) and (Marcia Pally, “Independent Gay Cinema Fills Screens with more Sophisticated Realities,” *The Advocate* 463 (6 January 1987): 58, 69-71.)

⁹⁵ For example, *Desert Hearts* is touted as “a landmark film that should warm the hearts of lesbians the world over...[a] major breakthrough for the motion picture industry.” (Kim Garfield, “Desert Hearts: A Lesbian Love Story Heats Up the Silver Screen,” *The Advocate* 440 (18 February 1986): 44.)

of Gay Cinema,”⁹⁶ and in 1987 critics again remarked on a "New Crop of Gay Cinema."⁹⁷ In relation to the future potential of these films, Vito Russo noted that, “Every year, when a few films with gay characters or gay themes are released and do moderately well at the box office, people start wondering: Is it just a trend, or is it a sign from heaven that things are really changing?”⁹⁸

While the gay press covered numerous aspects of filmmaking and trends during the mid to late eighties, the naming of the Gay New Wave did not come from these sources but rather from the *Village Voice*, and later by publications such as *American Film*.⁹⁹ The gay press continually covered gay films, and included numerous pre-release articles on each of the Gay New Wave films. While 1986 was an exciting moment of mainstream recognition for gay and lesbian cinema, the cluster of films that appeared at this time was not written about by gay publications as if it had appeared out of the blue. In contrast, the *Village Voice* dubbed the mid-1980s group of films a “new wave.”¹⁰⁰

Other publications, while not giving a specific name to the mid-eighties gay and lesbian films, used the same terminology to discuss them and suggest that these films connected together in a direct and meaningful way. *Variety*, for example, ran an article titled "Gay-Themed Features Hot B.O. Stuff," which referred to "the current wave of gay-themed pics."¹⁰¹ After

⁹⁶ David Mark Thomas, “A New Generation of Gay Cinema at the Berlin Film Festival,” *The Advocate* 395 (29 May 1984): 40-41, 44. and David Mark Thomas, “A New Generation of Gay Cinema Unreeled at Berlin Film Festival,” *The Advocate* 444 (15 April 1986): 68-69, 127.

⁹⁷ David Mark Thomas, “New Crop of Gay Cinema Screened at Annual Berlin Filmfest,” *The Advocate* 472 (12 May 1987): 54-56.

⁹⁸ Vito Russo, “From Rebel Art to Claptrap: Is Gay Good in the Movies?” *The Advocate* 489 (5 January 1988): 44-45, 58-59.

⁹⁹ Richard Goldstein, “The Gay New Wave,” *Village Voice* (22 April 1986): 51. And another writer referred to “a new wave of films about gay characters.” (Taylor Clarke, “Joe & Kenneth & Gertrude & Alice,” *American Film* Vol. 12 Issue 7 (1 May 1987): 45)

¹⁰⁰ This phrasing was not limited to film. The industry trade paper *Variety* wrote of the stage version of *Torch Song Trilogy*, “Hit 'Torch Song' cues new wave” (Richard Hummler, “Mainstream Visibility for Gay Legit,” *Variety* (17 July 1985): 111.)

¹⁰¹ Richard Gold, “Gay-Themed Features Hot B.O. Stuff,” *Variety* (9 April 1986): 5.

discussing details of the 1986 films' distributions and receptions, the author remarks that "observers were unanimous in pointing to the breakthrough of these films as proof of the boldness of the independent film movement."¹⁰² So while not partitioning these films into a separate movement, *Variety* connects them to a broader independent film movement (even the foreign produced *Laundrette* and *Doña Herlinda*). Although these films played an important role in the development of LGBTQ cinema, their distributors (with perhaps the exception of Cinecom and *Parting Glances*) attempted to distance them from their gay content, in order to appeal to a larger market. This undermined a sense of the films' connections to a fledgling gay film movement. Critics noticed the influx of gay and lesbian films in 1986, but largely refrained from conceptualizing the group of films as a movement. In 1987, there were fewer LGBTQ films attracting mainstream attention in the press, and so the conversations about LGBTQ cinema faltered. It was not until five years later, with the formation and naming of New Queer Cinema, that an LGBTQ film movement gained widespread and lasting recognition.

This chapter has outlined the major trends in the treatment of LGBTQ film in articles by mainstream, gay, scholarly, and industry presses. Through a thorough examination of these sources, I assessed the ways in which discourse facilitated, but also slowed, the creation of a film movement. Through the coverage of individual films, filmmakers, festivals, and controversies, the press drew attention to and helped publicize LGBTQ filmmaking. This attention helped cultivate specific developments in LGBTQ filmmaking. Publications, particularly academic and gay presses, furnished definitions of gay, and later queer, film. By creating these categories, and joining films together through the rhetoric of trends, this work laid the foundation for the discursive construction of a queer film movement.

¹⁰² Gold, "Gay-Themed Features Hot B.O. Stuff," 26.

Images:

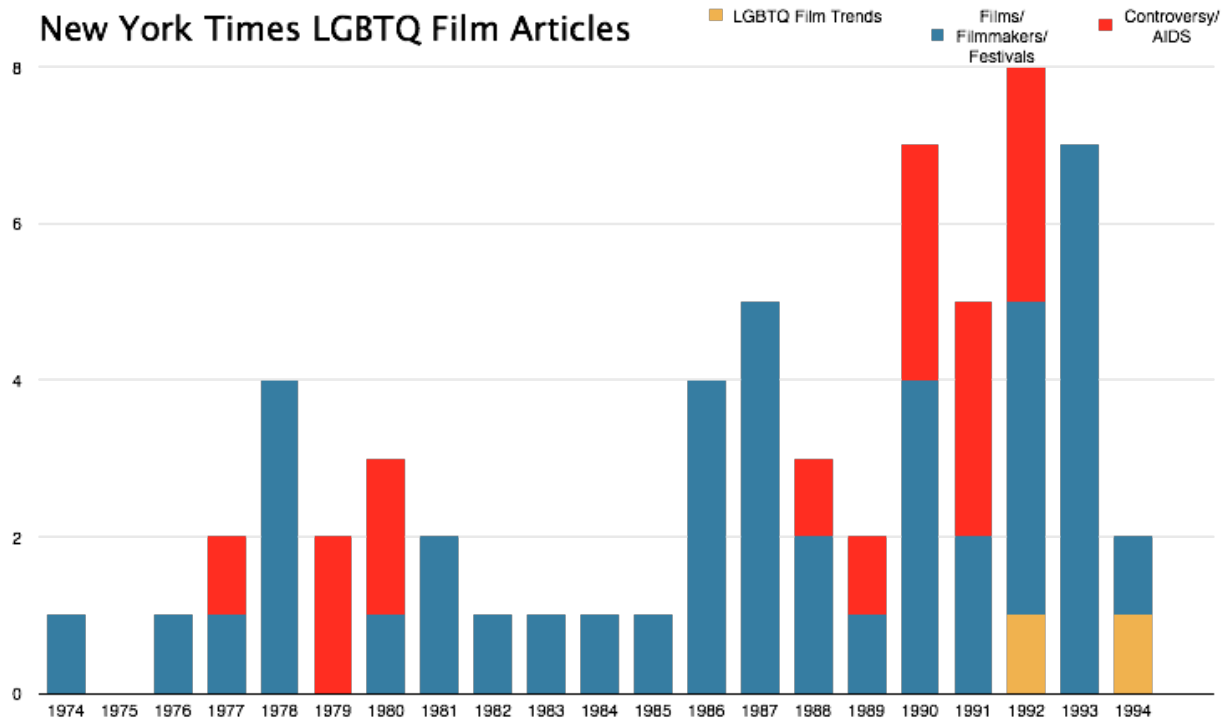


Figure 6.1: Breakdown of *New York Times* articles about LGBTQ films and filmmaking.

Chapter 7 A Queer Cinema Movement

In 1992, two Chicago-based filmmakers were producing their first feature film, a lesbian romantic comedy, and had run out of money. Rose Troche and Guinevere Turner put their life savings into a micro-budget production, relying on a mostly volunteer cast and crew made up of friends and acquaintances, other women who were enthusiastic about making a lesbian film. After shooting part of the film, which would later be titled *Go Fish*, Troche and Turner searched for additional funding in Chicago but “hit a brick wall.”¹ They had seen *Poison* and *Swoon*, and came across B. Ruby Rich’s “New Queer Cinema” article in *Sight and Sound*.² Marking down the names of production companies connected with NQC, Troche contacted people to ask if they would be willing to help out. She spoke with Christine Vachon, who soon after signed on to produce.³

Go Fish was seen as the lesbian equivalent of and answer to the male-dominated New Queer Cinema. Vachon said of the film, “it was the lesbian movie that I had been looking for. It had the potential to go very far and I knew that the so-called community was looking for this kind of movie.”⁴ She brought in John Pierson of Islet Productions, who thought the footage had “charm and spunk,” and who was likewise “on the lookout for the right lesbian audience feature.”⁵ While mainstream film critics looked at *Go Fish* “as though it dropped, unique, out of the sky, instead of out of a community with a shared aesthetic voice,” Troche and Turner were familiar with, and inspired by, the work of Patricia Rozema, Chantal Akerman, Lizzie Borden,

¹ Troche qtd in Achy Obejas, “*Go Fish* Celebrates Its Target Market,” *Chicago Tribune* (17 June 1994): < http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1994-06-17/entertainment/9406170163_1_rose-troche-lesbian-film-festival-guinevere-turner>.

² Vachon, *Killer Life*, 60.

³ Vachon, *Killer Life*, 60-61.

⁴ Vachon qtd in Willis, Holly. “Fish Stories.” *Filmmaker* Spring 1994: < http://www.filmmakermagazine.com/issues/spring1994/fish_stories.php>.

⁵ Pierson, 280.

Cheryl Dunye, and Sadie Benning, and they hoped people would make connections between *Go Fish* and the work of these filmmakers.⁶

Vachon and Pierson produced *Go Fish* because they associated the film with the current trend in queer filmmaking and saw a potential market. Pierson described selling *Go Fish* in reference to two pieces of “bait,” *Claire of the Moon* and *She’s Gotta Have it* (Spike Lee, 1986, also produced by Pierson); “*Claire* represented the lesbian ‘floor’ and Spike (an obvious artistic inspiration) the breakout potential... With dreadful reviews and minimal P&A support, Nicole Conn’s dyke odd couple had grossed \$900,000 from its vastly underserved audience.”⁷

Pierson’s sale tactics paid off, and Goldwyn bought the distribution rights at the 1994 Sundance Film Festival for \$400,000, making *Go Fish* the first film ever to be sold at the festival itself.⁸

Howard Cohen, vice president of acquisitions for Goldwyn, corroborates the impact of earlier lesbian films, stating that, “The commercial success of last year’s *Claire of the Moon* in the face of mediocre reviews demonstrated the built-in constituency for films with lesbian themes, a key element in signing *Go Fish*.”⁹ Goldwyn saw the film for both its niche marketing potential and the possibility of reaching wider audiences, confirmed by the success of recent queer films.

When purchasing the film, Tom Rothman, Goldwyn head of production, commented, “I think every lesbian who goes to movies in the world will go see it, and it has crossover potential.”¹⁰

Goldwyn used Gay Pride month and the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Film Festival to launch the film’s theatrical release, earning \$800,000 in its opening weekend. *Go Fish* was well

⁶ B. Ruby Rich, “Goings and Comings: *Go Fish*,” *Sight and Sound* 4.7 (July, 1994): 16.

⁷ Pierson, 286.

⁸ Pierson, 288-291.

⁹ Cohen qtd in Seigel, Jessica. “Chicago Director Among First to Feel Glow of Sundance.” *Chicago Tribune* 25 January 1994: <http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1994-01-25/news/9401250206_1_rose-troche-sundance-film-festival-independent-filmmaking>.

¹⁰ Rothman qtd in James, Caryn. “For Sundance, Struggle to Survive.” *New York Times*. 25 January 1994: <<http://www.nytimes.com/1994/01/25/movies/critic-s-notebook-for-sundance-struggle-to-survive-success.html>>.

received at festivals, garnered critically acclaim, and went on to earn around \$2.4 million in its initial theatrical release.¹¹ Vachon and Pierson's decision to take a risk and invest in a partially-realized vision, Goldwyn's enthusiasm in purchasing a lesbian film, the wider attention that the film received, and the role festivals played in publicizing the film and connecting it to a broader indie marketplace, are all deeply connected with developments that had occurred over the preceding decade. The circumstances surrounding *Go Fish*'s production and release were directly linked with the formation of a queer film movement: Rich's article, Vachon's newfound status, the position held by Sundance, and the self-conscious links drawn between *Go Fish* and the emerging New Queer Cinema. Rich called *Go Fish* evidence of an emerging lesbian cinema and "a lesbian dramatic film to cheer," signaling the continued expansion of lesbian cinema as part of the wider NQC.¹² *Go Fish* was one of many LGBTQ films to emerge in the early 1990s. Unlike predecessors such as *Desert Hearts* and *Claire of the Moon*, *Go Fish* was seen as part of an aesthetically vibrant and financially viable film movement: New Queer Cinema.

This chapter examines the early years of New Queer Cinema, 1991 and 1992. These years contained several key turning points and led to the initial formation of a queer cinema movement. Earlier developments in the film industry, audience formation, and critical contexts came together to influence the production, distribution, and reception of the central films that constituted the movement, particularly *Poison*, *Edward II*, *My Own Private Idaho*, *Swoon*, and *The Living End*. These films form the core canon of NQC,¹³ part of the "veritable river of gay and lesbian films"¹⁴ that appeared in the early 1990s, and the discursive construction of the

¹¹ Pierson, 297.

¹² Rich, "Goings and Comings," 16.

¹³ Although I am aware of the potential limitations of re-affirming canon, in looking at the formation of a movement I must emphasize the films that were most closely connected to the definition of the movement.

¹⁴ Peter Bowen, "Our Own Private Idaho: Gay and Lesbian Films Reach their Audience Without Hollywood Help," *The Advocate* 614 (20 October 1992): 68.

movement is centered on these five films.

These films highlight different backgrounds and opportunities that were generated as a result of the institutional developments that I outline in previous chapters. These earlier developments created the conditions for a queer film movement to emerge in the early 1990s. This slow, steady build in infrastructure for LGBTQ films, however, was not enough to jump start a movement, and the progression towards a movement was not inevitable. This can be seen in the Gay New Wave's floundering. There were crucial crossroads and watershed moments in the early 1990s that built on long-running institutional developments. I contend that four specific sparks fanned the flames of the New Queer Cinema movement: Fine Line and the entrance of larger production and distribution companies into the queer cinema arena, the Sundance Film Festival's queer-friendly film selections, controversies surrounding queer films, and the naming of the movement. These four factors, coming together at roughly the same time, created a recognizable queer film movement at this particular moment.

Activist Impulses

The intersection of activism, gay culture, and creative endeavors provided a significant political and aesthetic inspiration for New Queer Cinema. This influence is visible in the films' tones and narrative events. *The Living End*, for example, tells the story of two men, both HIV positive, who go on a rampaging road trip together. Jon is a movie critic who learns he has HIV at the beginning of the film, a revelation that prompts intense depression. Luke is a drifter and hustler who adopts a "live life to the fullest" attitude and takes his anger out on the world through graffiti (he sprays "Fuck the world" on a wall), casual sex, and violence towards those who cross him. Luke and Jon meet when Luke needs a quick getaway after killing three homophobic men who threatened him. The two leave town together and begin their road trip to

nowhere. Their tumultuous relationship has ups and downs, and the film ends with the two of them embracing on a beach after Luke nearly commits murder-suicide during sex with Jon.

In addition to providing formal inspirations, AIDS activist organizations had concrete effects on creating a network of filmmakers and artists. Most of the key NQC figures were involved in organizations such as ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power), and interactions generated through activist work led to artistic collaborations. Tom Kalin, for example, came to New York to work with the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program, doing installation art.¹⁵ He built connections in the New York art world through his work co-founding the Gran Fury Collective, an agitprop group that used collectively-produced artworks to call attention to political issues, such as the government's (lack of) response to the AIDS crisis. Kalin was introduced to Todd Haynes and Christine Vachon through their mutual involvement with ACT UP. Vachon and Haynes encouraged Kalin, who had been working on short, experimental films, to apply for funding through their company, Apparatus. Vachon became a producer on Kalin's first feature, *Swoon*, and the two continued producing films together afterwards, including *Go Fish*.

Another prominent queer filmmaker, Derek Jarman, found himself thrust into the forefront of political activism, as he was open and outspoken about his AIDS diagnosis. *Edward II* was the tenth of twelve features Jarman completed, and he also produced a number of shorts. *Edward* is a retelling of the Christopher Marlowe play about the monarch, Edward II, who ignores his wife in favor of his true love, one of his young generals named Gaveston. The queen and other members of the court plot to get rid of Gaveston and overthrow Edward, and Edward is eventually executed, sodomized with a hot poker. The film re-works this ending somewhat,

¹⁵ Kalin qtd in Vachon, *A Killer Life*, 56.

allowing for a possible happy ending with the jailer throwing away the metal rod and kissing/freeing Edward instead. The film uses Marlowe's dialogue, but while Marlowe did not make explicit the sexual relationship between Edward and Gaveston, Jarman puts their relationship, and the historical vestiges of homophobia, explicitly at the film's center. Jarman dedicated *Edward II* to "the repeal of all anti-gay laws, particularly Section 28."¹⁶ Among other things, Section, or Clause, 28 forbade government money from going towards supporting LGBTQ material that could be construed as "promoting" homosexuality, and the opposition against this clause "resulted in the largest queer demonstrations ever seen in Europe."¹⁷ Although there were no prosecutions from Clause 28, and it was repealed in 2003, "this piece of legislation took enormous symbolic importance both for its supporters and its opponents."¹⁸

By working with historical subject matter but including blatant anachronisms, such as Edward's summoning of the activist group OutRage (played by actual OutRage members) to help him battle the queen, Jarman simultaneously points to the presence of queer people in history and connects the past and present through a lineage of homophobia. Jarman was himself involved with OutRage, a group that:

aimed to create a specifically 'queer' activism answerable only to its own concerns. As the name suggests, this was an activism which, in its fight against homophobia, would tackle oppression in a radical way, using civil disobedience where necessary. There was no violence, but no politeness, either—certainly no assimilation into mainstream society.¹⁹

In reference to using OutRage members as extras, Jarman noted that "I knew of those people and it seemed the right moment to put them into a film. It was a rent-a-crowd cheaply. Everyone

¹⁶ Jarman, *Queer Edward II*, dedication.

¹⁷ Martin Quinn-Meyler, "Opposing 'Heterosoc': Derek Jarman's counter-hegemonic activism," in Lippard ed, *By angels driven*, 124.

¹⁸ Rowland Wymen, *Derek Jarman* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005): 145.

¹⁹ Peake, 463.

wanted to come for the morning and demonstrate. I got a big crowd of people, very sympathetic people, people who really wanted to do it.”²⁰ The protest scene placed AIDS activism on screen, and Jarman’s connections to OutRage provided a cost-effective, mutually beneficial way of realizing his vision.

As discussed in the introduction and in the above examples, AIDS activism provided political and aesthetic inspiration for NQC filmmakers, and the impact of AIDS activism on NQC has dominated the conversation about the origins of the movement. I argue, however, that the foundation of the movement truly lies within the institutional developments charted in this dissertation. While the influence of activism is a worthwhile avenue of inquiry and has produced significant scholarship, it does not explain how films were produced, how they reached audiences, or how they were discursively connected under the auspices of a movement.

Production Outside of the Mainstream

In many ways, the production of films under the New Queer Cinema banner showed remarkable similarities to the films of the preceding decade. As discussed in Chapter 3, LGBTQ filmmakers developed strategies for producing work from which mainstream production entities shied away, and in so doing were able to carve out a niche segment of the independent cinema market. These methods often included working with low budgets that pulled together a collection of funding sources, such as a filmmaker’s own savings, grassroots fundraising, grants from government and independent organizations, and occasionally pre-sales to theatrical, television, or home video distribution companies. These tactics are visible in the production of *The Living End*, *Swoon*, and *Edward II*. The production histories of these films allow us to

²⁰ Jarman qtd in Lippard, *By angels driven*, 166.

consider how previously developed fundraising practices were used at this moment. While there was a growing “appetite for lesbian and gay movies around the world,” filmmakers still had to “rely on their own resources and fight for the opportunities to get them made.”²¹

The Living End was Gregg Araki’s third feature, and it followed Araki’s established fundraising and production methods at the time— “guerrilla” filmmaking strategies (in which a generally un-paid cast and crew worked with borrowed equipment and no shooting permits or other paperwork) that were necessary due to the films’ micro-budgets, raised through individual financiers and grants. Araki began production on *The Living End* after securing small loans from relatives and individual investors. A significant break came towards the end of post-production, when Araki was awarded a \$20,000 AFI grant.²² *The Living End* was reported to have been produced (up to its initial festival run) for a mere \$22,700, making it an early exemplar of micro-budget filmmaking. In the 1980s, low budget films would still fall within the \$500,000 to \$1 million range, while “micro-budgets” were no lower than \$60,000, and often closer to \$100,000.²³ In the 1990s, a film’s extremely low budget became a selling point, causing people to marvel at a filmmaker’s ability to create a film on a shoestring budget. Ultra-low budgets gave films a sense of authenticity, of something different from glossy Hollywood fare, and *The Living End* came at a moment when it could benefit from this trend. The most famous example of a 1990s micro-budget film is Robert Rodriguez’s 1992 film *El Mariachi*, shot for a reported \$7,000, but there were several other films that likewise worked from ultra low-budgets.²⁴ A mythology grew around these micro-budget films and the directors who made them. Often,

²¹ Larry Horne, “Berlin Stories: The Best of New Gay Cinema Screened at International Film Festival,” *The Advocate* 575 (23 April 1991): 72.

²² Peter Broderick, “The ABC’s of No-Budget Filmmaking,” *Filmmaker* (Winter 1993): http://filmmakermagazine.com/archives/issues/winter1993/abc_no_budget.php#.V54a2o4hyt3

²³ King, *American Independent Cinema*, 12.

²⁴ For example, *Laws of Gravity* (Nick Gomez, 1992, \$38,000 budget), *Slacker* (Richard Linklater, 1991, \$23,000), and *Clerks* (Kevin Smith, 1994, \$27,000).

however, the budget figures cited in celebration of such films did not take into account the funds eventually required to ready prints for theatrical release. The additional costs needed to prepare such films for release could easily run to \$100,000, or for an international release even into the \$300-500,000 range.²⁵

The Living End was filmed on and off from October 1990 to January 1991. It was shot on 16mm film, giving it a grainy, rough look, and Araki made extensive use of mobile framings and shaky, improvisational cinematography. The film's unpolished visual texture was both a result of budget restrictions as well as aesthetic decisions. The unpolished look is supplemented by the heavy metal and punk soundtrack, which in turn supports the increasingly nihilistic mentality of the central characters. The first line of opening credits points to the film's rejection of a mainstream aesthetic by calling it "an irresponsible film." The uneven look of the film ironically contributed to its success, as the "grungy" or "grainy" aesthetic was popular in early 1990s indie films.²⁶ The film's style provided a marker of its low budget origins, rejected established signifiers of "quality," and helped develop Araki's rebel persona.

Part of the success of *The Living End* resulted from the lore surrounding its low budget. The film was characterized by Peter Broderick in *Filmmaker* as using "no-budget," "guerrilla" filmmaking tactics and was linked to Nick Gomez's *Laws of Gravity* and Rodriguez's *El Mariachi*. The article provided detailed budgets for the three films and discussed the seemingly impossible task of creating films for such small amounts of money. This popular article had several effects. It inspired a generation of up and coming filmmakers to try and produce films for "no-budget," and it connected Araki to the vanguard of independent cinema, legitimizing his

²⁵ Pierson, *Spike, Mike, Slackers & Dykes*, 235. Vachon, *Shooting to Kill*, 38. and James Schamus, "To the Rear of the Back End: The Economics of Independent Cinema," 102.

²⁶ Pierson, *Spike, Mike, Slackers & Dykes*, 286.

artistic pursuits outside of the realm of niche LGBTQ film. This process of legitimation was something that each NQC film underwent in various ways, and was helped by exposure on the festival circuit, the critical contexts (particularly Broderick's article in Araki's case), and eventually through the films' connections with each other. As Araki has said, "The impact and hubbub surrounding *The Living End* was totally an accident. The film just happened to be in the right place at the right time. It became the eye of this storm that no one expected."²⁷

Despite the growth in opportunities for LGBTQ filmmaking, most projects in the early 1990s (with some exceptions, like *My Own Private Idaho*) were still limited to working with minuscule budgets pieced together from a variety of sources. Analysis of the production history of *Swoon* reveals the influence of the previous decade of institutional growth and shifts. The availability of grants, and the willingness of granting institutions to invest in queer filmmaking, were invaluable to Tom Kalin's ability to produce a feature. Kalin, a Chicago native,²⁸ came out of avant-garde filmmaking and fine arts, and elements of his artistic persuasions carried over into *Swoon*, his first feature length narrative film. He originally envisioned his project on a much broader scale, using a multi-time period structure that would produce "a reading of lesbian and gay marginalization in twentieth century culture by taking specific historical episodes... and attempting to link them up."²⁹ He abandoned this idea, however, because the logistics of it were impractical on a tiny budget.

Swoon tells the story of Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb's infamous crime and trial. Leopold and Loeb were intelligent, wealthy young men, who plotted to abduct and murder a

²⁷ Araki qtd. in Matthew Hays, *The View from Here: Conversations with Gay and Lesbian Filmmakers* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007): 38.

²⁸ Growing up in Chicago, Kalin was well acquainted with the Leopold and Loeb trial, which occurred in Chicago and quickly became mythic in the region.

²⁹ Tom Kalin, "Tom Kalin Interview," *Sight and Sound* (September 1992): 36.

younger boy. Although they asked for a ransom, their crime appeared to be motivated more by the intellectual stimulation that they got from planning and executing what they thought would be the perfect crime. They slipped up and left a piece of evidence at the crime scene, which caused them to be caught. During their trial, evidence was presented that the two men were engaged in a sexual relationship, in which Nathan, who loved Richard in what we would consider a homosexual way, would aid Richard, a sociopath, in his criminal activities in exchange for sexual favors. The nature of Leopold and Loeb's relationship became a structuring absence of the trial. Kalin was struck by the way the sexual component of the boys' relationship was reduced to innuendo in the press, and he was inspired to make his version of the murder case in large part to set the record straight, to re-insert homosexuality into historical accounts from which it had been erased.³⁰ After researching court records and primary document material, Kalin constructed a film that tries to be as accurate as possible. In fact, much of the script comes verbatim out of primary documents.³¹

Coming out of the art world, which relied on public and private grant sources, Kalin was well versed in making use of these resources. He wrote a number of grant applications and was able to raise over \$100,000.³² Kalin received a production grant from the American Film Institute, \$25,000 from the NEA, and "pretty much every grant you could get at the time."³³ These granting institutions included an assortment of public, government funding sources. In addition to the NEA, Kalin received money from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, PBS, the New York Foundation for the Arts, and the New York State Council on the Arts. He was also awarded funding from private, non-profit agencies, which include the Paul Robeson

³⁰ Kalin Interview, 36.

³¹ Kalin Interview, 36.

³² Kalin qtd in Vachon, *Killer Life*, 56-57.

³³ Kalin qtd in Vachon, *Killer Life*, 57.

Fund/Funding Exchange, Art Matters Inc, the Chubb Group of Insurance Companies, and the Jerome Foundation.³⁴ The work Kalin put into generating financing and producing his film earned him the Open Palm Award, “a designation saluting someone who has gone to extraordinary lengths to complete a first film,” from the Independent Features Project’s Gotham Awards.³⁵ Kalin noted that, ironically, since *Swoon* was “perceived as a financial and critical success,” he was unable to get smaller arts grants again.³⁶ The support these institutions provided to new, young filmmakers with fresh perspectives, however, was invaluable.

In a consequential overlap, B. Ruby Rich worked as the Director of Electronic Media and Film Program at the New York State Council on the Arts from 1981 until 1991. She was in charge of supporting non-profit film and video projects and had a hand in selecting projects to receive essential grant money.³⁷ Her position in this influential funding structure during these key transitional years further emphasizes the role Rich played in the creation of a queer film movement. Rich propelled the New York state arts council to aid the production of LGBTQ films, which in turn solidified the position of this filmmaking niche.

After gathering a substantial amount of funding and working to refine *Swoon*’s script, Kalin approached Vachon for help, and she signed on to produce the film. Although made on an extremely tight budget, *Swoon* is beautifully shot, managing to turn its limitations, such as the need to use cheaper black and white film stock and emphasize close framings (which are less expensive to light than longer shots) into stylistic advantages. Like many under-financed independent films, *Swoon* was shot in multiple blocks. Kalin and the crew filmed for ten days in

³⁴ Funding sources listed in the film’s credits.

³⁵ Lawrence Cohn, “IFP’s Gotham Awards,” *Variety* (31 August 1992): 4.

³⁶ Catherine Dunphy, “Fame has Rookie Director Swooning,” *Toronto Star* (25 September 1992): C1.

³⁷ B. Ruby Rich, “Conversations: Foundational Moments of New Queer Cinema” Panel Discussion, Columbia University (8 October 2013), found at <http://filmstudiesforfree.blogspot.com/2017/06/richly-resourceful-on-bruby-richs-work.html>

the summer of 1990, selecting certain key (inexpensive) scenes to film before they ran out of money and stopped.³⁸ Kalin then took eight months to edit the footage, which ended up being something of a blessing. As he said, “It gave me the time to figure out what I had and what I needed—where the gaps were.”³⁹ Kalin continued to raise money from grants, and ended up shooting for an additional four days. While *Swoon* was distributed through the major independent Fine Line Features, which is discussed below, the film’s production was completely indebted to granting organizations and the support they provided to independent filmmakers.

Derek Jarman was the longest working filmmaker prior to the start of NQC, making queer features and a name for himself since *Sebastiane* in the late 1970s. His career placed him “aloft and unchallenged as the most important gay filmmaker ever to have come out of the UK.”⁴⁰ A large amount of critical and scholarly work, more than for any other director discussed here, has been devoted to Jarman’s life, career, and films. Jarman himself was prolific in his written and artistic output, and he published several volumes containing journal entries, musings, sketches, and annotated scripts. Throughout the 1980s and up to his death of AIDS-related illness in 1994, Jarman managed to work consistently, in large part because he made do with small budgets and established lasting relationships with institutions such as the BBC. During the 1980s, Jarman often shot on Super 8 film in order to produce films on very tight budgets. As Jarman said, Super 8 films were critical for him at the time because “it was very simple to get the money for them. We got it from Germany, from ZDF [(German Television)], and, quite honestly, without the Super 8 camera I wouldn’t have been working. It enabled me to work at a

³⁸ Vachon, *Shooting to Kill*, 24. And Kalin, qtd in Vachon, *Killer Life*, 57.

³⁹ Kalin qtd in Vachon, *Killer Life*, 57.

⁴⁰ Raymond Armstrong, “More jiggery than pokery: Derek Jarman’s *Edward II*,” in Robin Griffiths, ed, *British Queer Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2006): 145.

time when it was quite difficult to get funding.”⁴¹ Whether working with Super 8 or 35 mm, as he did with *Edward II*, Jarman notes that “the budget is always so small for all the films... if I made a film, it was always the cheapest film made in England that year.”⁴² The small-scale funding of art films and the consistent critical praise Jarman received for his work allowed him to have a noteworthy career that was sadly cut short by his untimely death.

Jarman had a number of moderate financial successes in his filmography, but *Edward II* was his most widely viewed and distributed film.⁴³ In part this may have been due to the source material, Christopher Marlowe’s 1594 play. Mainstream audiences may have been more familiar with or willing to explore the Elizabethan play, whose form and age lent instant artistic legitimacy to the project. Jarman noted that he was in some ways restricted to working with historical subjects; this was how he was able to find financial support for his projects and make his British gay films marketable.⁴⁴ Put another way, Jarman wrote “How to make a film of a gay love affair and get it commissioned. Find a dusty old play and violate it... Marlowe outs the past—why don’t we out the present?”⁴⁵

During the fall of 1990, Jarman had a finished script for *Edward II* and was working to finalize funding and pre-production. He approached production companies and funding entities, with the hope of starting filming in early 1991.⁴⁶ Working Title stepped forward to produce the film, taking only six months to finalize and confirm financing.⁴⁷ Although the film was produced through a profit-based production company, the funding itself came from a few

⁴¹ Jarman qtd in interview by Chris Lippard; Chris Lippard, ed. *By angels driven: The films of Derek Jarman* (Wiltshire, England: Flicks Books, 1996), 163.

⁴² Jarman qtd in Lippard, *By angels driven*, 163.

⁴³ Lippard, *By angels driven*, 6.

⁴⁴ Gus Van Sant, “Freewheelin’ Gus Van Sant Converses with Derek Jarman,” in John Boorman and Walter Donohue eds. *Projections 2* (New York: Farber & Farber, 1993): 94.

⁴⁵ Derek Jarman, *Queer Edward II* (London British Film Institute, 1991): front material.

⁴⁶ Tony Peake, *Derek Jarman* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1999): 462.

⁴⁷ Peake, 466.

additional sources. These included the BBC, British Screen, and a Japanese distribution company, which all together provided a £750,000 budget,⁴⁸ the largest with which Jarman had ever worked.⁴⁹ Despite the relatively large budget, it was still a small amount to produce a film, and Jarman opted, for both fiscal and creative reasons, to shoot in a studio and use limited set pieces. The main set pieces were a collection of “blank walls and cubes” that could be “moved and rearranged to suggest an unlimited number of different spaces.”⁵⁰ The restricted set design proved cost-effective, and Jarman also noted that “the set became a metaphor for the trapped country, the prison of our lives, ‘the closet of our heart,’ in Edward’s words.”⁵¹

Jarman’s deteriorating health due to AIDS presented production challenges, and he was required to have an assistant director who could step in should he become too sick to continue. Jarman decided to work with a pre-formed script, Marlowe’s play, and “had the added advantage of the involvement of Working Title, a company whose size and efficiency would keep any production problems at bay.”⁵² Filming got underway in mid-February, 1991, and lasted for around 5 weeks, wrapping on schedule.⁵³ The editing process was likewise smooth, and the film was finished in time to premiere at the Edinburgh Film Festival in August, 1991.

The productions of *The Living End*, *Swoon*, and *Edward II* illustrate the continuity between independent gay and lesbian films of the 1980s and queer films of the early 1990s. These 1990s films relied on similar funding and production methods to those developed during the preceding decade. Earlier films provided exemplars and set precedents for later films. It was in the positioning of these films in festivals and within marketing contexts, the increased interest

⁴⁸ Most sources put the budget at £750,000, although Michael O’Pray has it at £850,000 in his *Derek Jarman: Dreams of England* (184).

⁴⁹ Peake, 467.

⁵⁰ Peake, 470.

⁵¹ Jarman qtd in Mike O’Pray, ‘Damning Desire,’ *Sight and Sound* I:6 (October 1991): 11.

⁵² Peake, 462.

⁵³ Peake, 470.

from commercial companies, and the discourses around these films, in which the NQC differed from earlier groups of LGBTQ films.

Film Festivals, Sundance, and the Shaping of New Queer Cinema

New Queer Cinema was formed in large part within the world of film festivals. While the number of queer works showing at gay and lesbian festivals had steadily increased, and these niche festivals continued to provide an important space for the development of LGBTQ cinema, these events did not provide the exposure that would create a wider movement. During the early 1990s, however, a number of queer films appeared on the mainstream independent festival scene, and this sudden, concentrated exposure for LGBTQ films within a period of two years (1991 and 1992) encouraged critics to connect them in a unified, distinct group. The Sundance Festival in particular was largely responsible for assembling the NQC canon and putting these films in conversation with each other for more mainstream recognition. This section focuses on festival institutions and how these contributed to the creation of a queer film movement. Festival selections are curated in specific ways, and I consider the reasons for, and effects of having, a significant number of queer films screen at the 1991 and 1992 Sundance festivals.

Niche LGBTQ festivals continued to be important support structures for the expansion of queer cinema, and they aided the growth of some NQC filmmakers. Niche festivals created opportunities for a large number of queer films to find audiences, and in fact part of Rich's NQC article profiled the Amsterdam gay and lesbian film festival. Several NQC directors, including Gregg Araki and John Greyson, were nurtured through niche festivals before coming out into varying degrees of mainstream indie recognition. Gay and lesbian festivals made it possible for them to reach audiences and develop their craft prior to the early 1990s.

While Araki seemed to come out of nowhere to a more mainstream audience, he actually

began making films and cultivating a fan base, in large part through the gay and lesbian film festival circuit, in the late 1980s. His work was aided and developed in part through this supportive community institution, which later allowed him to jump into cross-over art house recognition. Araki's exposure on the festival circuit had specific effects on his future work, namely attracting investors and building a name for himself among audiences. Araki graduated from film school at USC in 1984. He briefly worked within the industry, but when he found that he did not like working in Hollywood and on large sets, he began his career as an independent.⁵⁴ Prior to making *The Living End*, Araki produced and directed two feature length films, 1987's *Three Bewildered People in the Night*⁵⁵ and 1989's *Long Weekend (O'despair)*, for the startlingly low cost of around \$5000 each. These black and white, 16mm films, shot using available light on a Bolex camera without synch sound, were necessarily very rough in their construction. Their completion, however, proved that Araki was capable of finishing work within extreme restrictions, making producers Marcus Hu and Jon Gerrans confident that Araki could complete a feature for \$20,000, which they were prepared to raise for *The Living End*.⁵⁶

Araki was a darling not just of film festivals, but also of the gay press. Starting in 1988, just after the festival release of *Three Bewildered People*, *The Advocate* contained several articles on his life and work. Araki was a promising young filmmaker, as well as a filmmaker concerned with gay representations. As Araki said in 1988:

With Hollywood churning out a neo-Nazi flood of *Top Guns* and Stallone clones, honest, non patronizing representations of gay themes need to come out and be seen, now more than ever... My intent is to take cinema out of the conservative corporate boardrooms and put it back out on the streets where, hopefully, others will be encouraged to gain control of the medium.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Stuart Timmons, "Bewildered, Bothered, and Brilliant: A Young Gay Filmmaker Lights Up the Screen," *The Advocate* 491 (2 February 1988): 38.

⁵⁵ This film did show at non-specialty festivals too, particularly the Locarno Festival in Switzerland, where it won the Bronze Leopard, a jury prize for young filmmakers.

⁵⁶ Broderick, "ABC's of No-Budget Filmmaking."

⁵⁷ Araki qtd. in Timmons, "Bewildered, Bothered, and Brilliant," 62.

His outspoken call for people to chip away at the hegemony of Hollywood and make their own movies, with a particular emphasis on gay images, made him an ideal figure for the gay press.

The publicity this institution offered aided Araki's development.

Interestingly, the early 1990s were still marked by industry hesitation with regards to gay and lesbian film festivals. *Idaho*, for example, was pulled from the LA gay and lesbian festival line-up. The film's publicist, Mickey Cotrell, remarked that "the distributor doesn't want the film positioned as a gay film... Then many people would be frightened away."⁵⁸ This move reflected lingering homophobia, as well as offering a continuation of concerns and well-established strategies employed by hesitant studios trying to mitigate the gay content of their films. While *Idaho* did show at the Pittsburgh gay and lesbian festival, it was as a surprise, secret screening. The festival organizers were forbidden from mentioning the film in any published materials or advertising, and were not allowed to disclose the title of the film prior to the event itself. These efforts limited the film's connection with the gay festival.

The link between LGBTQ festivals and commercial distributors began to change as the 1990s progressed, and distributors stopped seeing LGBTQ festivals as box office poison. With the commercial success of NQC in the early 1990s, niche festivals began to factor into the marketing plans of distributors like Miramax and Goldwyn. As a 1996 report stated, "There was a day not so long ago when Hollywood scouts wouldn't be caught filling seats at a lesbian and gay film festival. Now it's schmooze city as such festivals gain stature as marketing tools and sources of new films and directing talent."⁵⁹ The vice president of acquisitions for Fine Line Features noted in 1998 that "I don't think we've bought anything at Outfest, [the Los Angeles

⁵⁸ Cotrell qtd. in David J. Fox, "Gay Fest Loses Out on Four Films," *Los Angeles Times* (9 July 1991): F4.

⁵⁹ Martha Irvine, "Hollywood Scouts Flock to Gay and Lesbian Festivals," *The Associated Press* (29 July 1996): Entertainment News. Also published in *The San Bernadine County Sun* (5 August 1996): 26.

Gay and Lesbian Film Festival,] but I think that's definitely in the future. It's not Sundance or Toronto; it's still a niche festival. But I've been going to Outfest for the last three or four years, and I think it's grown by leaps and bounds in quality of programming."⁶⁰ Even before gay and lesbian festivals gained cultural currency in the eyes of the broader indie industry, they were invaluable resources for developing talent and creating audiences. These venues provided space for filmmakers like Araki to get their start, and were in large part responsible for queer cinema reaching a point at which it could expand into a wider market. In terms of defining a movement, however, one must look to more mainstream festivals, which called wider attention to the expansion of queer cinema, and isolated and established the canon of films that represented the core of the movement.

Since the late 1980s, Sundance has held a privileged position as a gatekeeper of independent cinema and a place for positive buzz to grow around films. It has been called, "the flagship of the burgeoning American independent film movement and a dream factory for the modern age."⁶¹ It carries great significance as "the institution that first connects many independent filmmakers and films with critics, distributors, and ultimately, audiences."⁶² By facilitating these connections, a number of small, low-budget projects gained access to a wider market. Sundance had screened gay films prior to the early 1990s. For example, *Desert Hearts* and *Parting Glances* both showed at the 1986 festival, which was called a "benchmark year for gay-themed dramatic films."⁶³ Both Sundance and NQC were tied to the overall growth of independent cinema in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and this institution and group of films

⁶⁰ Paul Federbush qtd in Hunter Garcia, "Outfits '98 Finds a Growing Niche as Gay Movies Go Mainstream," *USA Today* (9 July 1998): Section O3D.

⁶¹ Kenneth Turan, *Sundance to Sarajevo: Film Festivals and the World They Made* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002): 31.

⁶² Newman, *Indie: an American film culture*, 63.

⁶³ Lory Smith, *Party in a Box: The Story of the Sundance Film Festival* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith Publisher, 1999): 104.

interacted in mutually beneficial ways. The innovative, fresh films of NQC seemed to appear suddenly, a cutting edge of indie cinema “discovered” by the gatekeeper of independence, Sundance. Festival goers saw this group of films as new, unique, and connected because these audiences were not exposed to previous queer work in the way LGBTQ festival attendees were. In sharing obvious thematic connections, these films were linked together, creating a necessary foundation for the discursive creation of the movement.

The origins of the Sundance Film Festival were twofold: the Sundance Institute and the US Film Festival. The Institute was founded in 1981 by Robert Redford to serve as a writing retreat for new filmmakers, where industry professionals would help aspiring filmmakers to develop and polish their screenplays. Although it had little direct effect on the NQC filmmakers, the institute became “an important training ground for young filmmakers, especially those coming from an ethnic or other minority background.”⁶⁴ In 1985, the Sundance Institute acquired the rights to the US Film Festival, “a showcase for films that were made completely outside the American film industry.”⁶⁵ The festival changed names to the Sundance Film Festival in 1991 and has solidified its position as a key exhibition site for independent films. This was especially the case after the crossover success of Stephen Soderbergh’s *sex, lies, and videotape* in 1989. The Sundance festival began to hold a position of power, as a gateway to wider distribution, since it was a venue to both build buzz around a film as well as connect distributors to films. Critics and industry professionals began to see Sundance as “the ‘engine’ that drives independent filmmaking.”⁶⁶

Given the influence that Sundance wielded, the selection and curating process for the

⁶⁴ Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 254.

⁶⁵ Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 254.

⁶⁶ Tzioumakis, *American Independent Cinema*, 254.

festival took on increased significance. Films that showed at Sundance were given greater consideration than those that played only in smaller or niche festivals. In relation to queer cinema specifically, the Sundance programming can help explain the formation of a specific canon of films, as all except *Idaho* and *Zero Patience* showed at Sundance. Sundance, and other comparable festivals, were “not merely exhibition venues and nodes in a distribution circuit. Like any successful cultural institution, they encourage production of appropriate works, give artists the incentive to create, and cultivate an audience... they encouraged the production of the kind of cinema they championed—low-budget films made independently of the industry.”⁶⁷ The selection of a number of queer films in the early 1990s corresponded with Sundance’s consistent preferences over the years. Specifically:

the films shown at Sundance were not simply independently made by passionate young novices. They were perceived to have certain textual features in common as well, especially an alternative sensibility eagerly casting its light on themes and topics and characters not often seen in Hollywood cinema, and a sense of risk-taking that would seem impossible in a mainstream industrial context of production.⁶⁸

Given this predilection for challenging work, queer cinema would seem to have a natural place among the Sundance selections. Crucially, Sundance awarded its Grand Jury prize to *Poison* in 1991, and followed up this much discussed decision by programming a slate of queer films in 1992. In what follows, I discuss both of these elements, and the important role they played in creating a movement.

Poison is perhaps the most influential NQC film. It has been argued that *Poison* itself was responsible for the creation of the movement, that it “cracked open the door” for future films.⁶⁹ David Ehrenstein, film reviewer for *The Advocate*, called *Poison* “the most important

⁶⁷ Newman, 67.

⁶⁸ Newman, 68-69.

⁶⁹ Jeff Hill qtd. in Bowen, “Our own Private Idaho,” 69.

gay American film since *Mala Noche*.”⁷⁰ The film is experimental in form, intertwining three seemingly unconnected narratives that are each shot in different styles. The “horror” section, which tells the story of a scientist who is infected with a contagious disease after an experiment goes awry, looks like a low-budget B horror or sci-fi film from the 1950s. It is shot in black and white and makes use of expressive cinematography techniques (such as canted angles). The “hero” narrative is shot in the style of a TV special investigation report and recounts, through interviews and reenactments, the story of a child who shoots his father in defense of his mother and proceeds to fly out of the window and disappear. The final segment, “homo” is a Jean Genet-inspired story about the life of a prison inmate, his obsession for a fellow prisoner, and his recollections of their shared past at a reform school. The film jumps between these threads, and while there is a thematic and narrative logic to the film’s construction, it requires work on the part of the viewer.

The challenging form and occasionally disturbing content make *Poison* a seemingly unlikely candidate for a trend-setting film with crossover appeal. In part, *Poison*’s impact was a result of its funding, as well as its festival exposure and reception. *Poison*’s \$250,000 budget was raised through an assortment of grants and a limited partnership. Haynes was able to secure grant funding from the Jerome Foundation, the New York Council for the Arts, New York State Council for the Arts, and the NEA. The NEA funding became the center of controversy when right wing, conservative groups attacked the organization and referred to the film as government sponsored, gay pornography. *Poison* might have flown under the radar, with limited attention being paid to it, if not for the buzz it generated at festivals. At the 1991 Sundance festival in particular, *Poison* won the grand jury prize. Many people would place the start of NQC at this

⁷⁰ David Ehrenstein, “Talking Pictures,” *The Advocate* 572 (12 March 1991): 75.

moment, with the unexpected media attention that followed the controversial film. What Todd Haynes had thought was a little experimental film went on to be a media sensation and helped open the door for a queer film movement to form. *Poison* helped show that, “No longer burdened by the approval-seeking sackcloth of positive imagery, or the relative obscurity of marginal production, films could be both radical and popular, stylish and economically viable.”⁷¹ It was the combination of critical praise and the films’ profitability that led industry professionals to see queer film as the next big thing, and inspired acquisitions of NQC films. As Vachon noted, the attention directed towards queer films was in large part due to the potential for profit: “Suddenly there’s a spotlight that says these films can be commercially viable.”⁷²

While *Poison* is a stunning, thought-provoking film that deserves the praise it has received, it is worth noting that its Grand Jury prize win is also an effect of coming at a specific moment. As Peter Biskind noted, for *Poison*, “the timing was perfect, a narrow window between the granola Sundance of the past and the cell phone Sundance to come.”⁷³ By this, he is referring to the shift from more regional, less polished fare to the slick, commercial products of later Sundance years. *Poison* came at a moment where it could draw on the Sundance affinity for extremely low-budget filmmaking, while at the same time being caught up in a storm of industry buzz that helped push the film to its full profit potential. The decision to award the prize to *Poison* was not unanimous, and many on the jury were leaning towards awarding it to Hal Hartley’s *Trust*.⁷⁴ Journalist and *Village Voice* editor Karen Durbin, however, “made a fierce appeal on behalf of *Poison*,” and Haynes walked away with the award.⁷⁵ The recognition of

⁷¹ Aaron, *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader*, 89.

⁷² Vachon qtd. in Rich, “New Queer Cinema,” 32.

⁷³ Biskind, 106.

⁷⁴ Biskind, 106.

⁷⁵ Biskind, 106.

Poison at a venue that was quickly becoming the center of indie filmmaking was one of the defining moments of the fledgling film movement.

The inclusion of more queer films at the 1992 Sundance festival helped to solidify the sense of a movement. These programming selections, again, were the result of specific decisions made by individuals. Films are chosen for Sundance by both a selection committee and the director of programming, a position filled by Geoff Gilmore in 1991/1992. The Competition Selection Advisory Committee, consisting of five members in 1991 and six in 1992, passed on their recommendations to the programming director, who had the final say in the program. B. Ruby Rich was a member of the selection committee for the 1992 festival, and the introduction to the festival program stated, “To a greater degree than in past years, specific selections reflect the enthusiasm and convictions of individual members of the Competition Selection Advisory Board. Their choices and opinions ensure that the Competition remains well-rounded, expressive of the diversity of work available, and also filled with welcome surprises.”⁷⁶ This wording suggests that Rich was a prominent voice in the festival selections that year. Rich maintained an advisory position with Sundance past 1992, and while she claimed to generally not have much say in what films were selected, she was approached about projects that they were on the fence about. One such project was *Go Fish*, which Rich wholeheartedly endorsed and recommended that they program.⁷⁷ While it is unclear how much input Rich exerted on the 1992 selections, it is likely that she encouraged the nomination of queer films.

In addition to screening *Edward II*, *The Hours and Times*, *The Living End*, and *Swoon*, the 1992 festival contained a panel entitled “Barbed Wire Kisses: Contemporary Lesbian and

⁷⁶ Sundance Festival Program, 1992.

⁷⁷ B. Ruby Rich, “Conversations: Foundational Moments of New Queer Cinema” Panel Discussion, Columbia University (8 October 2013), found at <http://filmstudiesforfree.blogspot.com/2017/06/richly-resourceful-on-bruby-richs-work.html>

Gay Cinema.” The panel, moderated by Rich, brought together a number of queer filmmakers (Jarman,⁷⁸ Haynes, Van Sant, Norman Rene (director of *Longtime Companion*), and experimental filmmaker Sadie Benning) to discuss the current state of LGBTQ filmmaking. The panel description remarked that “without question gay filmmaking is at the leading edge of the American independent-filmmaking movement in terms of innovation and aesthetic risk taking.”⁷⁹ Calling attention to gay films as the “leading edge” reinforces this idea of queer films as the hot commodity of the year. The existence of the panel also worked to shape the concept of gay, or queer, films as not just individual texts but a connected group, laying the foundations for these films to be considered a movement.

It is no coincidence that the canon of NQC films is closely connected with films selected for Sundance. In a broad sense, “canonical films emerge from a process of creation that involves both artists and finance, often triangulated through festivals... Reception practices, especially in the form of film criticism and film studies, [also] contribute to legitimization and canonization of certain works.”⁸⁰ The festival and NQC were symbiotically linked. One could argue that the Sundance selection committee and programing director would select the best films, and there would therefore be a natural connection between these standouts and the core exemplars of a queer film movement. There is validity to this argument, but it neglects the fact that films showing at Sundance are given higher standing and greater visibility than others. One could question whether a queer film movement was there for Sundance to take notice of and promote, or if the festival’s selections promoted films that could then be considered the basis for a

⁷⁸ As part of the older generation, Jarman assumed the position of “cultural icon,” and “vital father figure” even if some felt he “seemed too old to form part of this new wave” (Peake, 490).

⁷⁹ Sundance Festival Program 1992, 37.

⁸⁰ Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong, *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2011): 101.

movement. The steady growth of LGBTQ filmmaking, both American and international, is visible in the screening lists for gay and lesbian festivals.⁸¹ In these niche festivals, the early 1990s marked a continuation of this growth, but there is little sense of a sudden shift or emergence at this moment. It was the elevation of certain films by Sundance and other mainstream festivals that created a visible movement. Sundance rendered visible impulses that had been gaining traction over the course of a decade.

As B. Ruby Rich wrote of NQC, “It all started in Toronto at the Festival of Festivals, the best place in North America to track each year’s trends... All through autumn and summer the message was clear: queer was hot. Even the mainstream press has confirmed the news: gay films are the ‘in’ thing on the festival circuit from Toronto to Park City [(Sundance)] to Berlin—and now, New York.”⁸² This appearance was most surprising to those who did not follow the gay and lesbian festival circuit or gay press, where these developments were better documented. There was no single root cause of NQC, and NQC was not an “overnight success” story, but rather the result of forces that emerged over a decade of developments. Through programming decisions, mainstream festivals gathered together a select group of queer films, providing a larger, international exhibition platform and chance for distribution deals. This visibility called attention to queer cinema and helped cultivate the sense of these films as a movement.

Hitting the Indie Mainstream: Fine Line and Shifting Profit Potentials

While many New Queer Cinema films were produced using funding methods that were less reliant on commercial prospects, the early nineties marked a growing interest in queer cinema on the part of mainstream indie production and distribution companies, such as the New

⁸¹ See Appendix II

⁸² B. Ruby Rich, “A Queer Sensation,” *The Village Voice* (24 March 1992): 41.

Line subsidiary Fine Line Features. As one report from *The Advocate* put it, “it has become clear that gay and lesbian independent films are more than simply fashion or fads; they are a profitable commodity.”⁸³ The profit potential for queer films in the early 1990s led companies to take risks in distributing and funding these films. Larger distributors were able to support wider releases, bringing transgressive works to cross-over audiences, and in so doing draw attention to films that otherwise may have been lost to obscurity.

The increase in prestige and profit potential for queer films supported the expansion of niche companies, formed to cater predominantly to LGBTQ films. Strand Releasing in particular played a role in the accessibility of queer films, predominantly post-NQC. Strand formed in 1989, but the company experienced a significant bump in business and status a few years later as a result of its connection to NQC. *The Living End* was an early Strand project, as Strand founders Marcus Hu and Jon Gerrans helped pull together funding for the film’s production. Although it was initially released by October Films, Strand later acquired the rights, as it did with other films like *Swoon*, and handled ancillary distribution on home video. While falling outside of the NQC categorization, Strand also distributed Conn’s *Claire of the Moon* after she successfully self-distributed it. Niche companies played an important role in the sustained growth of LGBTQ filmmaking.

The backing from larger indie companies, however, brought queer cinema to mainstream attention. This attention emphasized the sense of these films as new, exciting, and appearing suddenly, which contributed to creating a queer cinema movement. By developing and releasing queer films, these companies created a self-perpetuating loop in which queer films became more profitable *because* they had this larger institutional support. Fine Line Features deserves

⁸³ Bowen, “Our Own Private Idaho,” 68.

recognition for the role the company played in fostering the NQC movement. Three of the core NQC films, *My Own Private Idaho*, *Swoon*, and *Edward II*, were distributed in the US through Fine Line, and *Idaho* was produced through Fine Line's parent company, New Line Cinema. While other, smaller distributors, such as Zeitgeist⁸⁴ and October Films, released LGBTQ films, Fine Line was the most enthusiastic in taking on the queer cinema trend, and was the largest player to do so. The involvement of major independents demonstrates the growing commercial interest in these films.

Analysis of the LGBTQ-friendly practices of Fine Line reveals that the changes in indie production and distribution companies' approach to previously taboo subject matter created space for queer films to cross over to more mainstream art house audiences. This topic was introduced in Chapter 3, in connection with the gay and lesbian friendly practices of companies like Samuel Goldwyn, Cinecom, and Orion. Significantly, the investments these companies made in buying the rights to gay and lesbian films paid off, signaling the profit potential of LGBTQ films and paving the way for more investments by independent production and distribution companies.

New Line is an interesting case, as it was known for distributing an eclectic collection of projects and historically did not shy away from LGBTQ subject matter. Back into the 1960s, *Variety* referred to the New Line catalogue as a group of "arty and freak" films.⁸⁵ By the mid-1970s, New Line distributed a mix of "foreign, sexploitation, gay cinema, rock documentaries and 'midnight specials' ... The intent behind these choices was to tap those markets which would be ignored by the majors, and to maximize the difference of New Line's product from more

⁸⁴ *Poison* was a defining early success for Zeitgeist, which acquired *Poison* prior to the media attention it received.

⁸⁵ "Arty and 'Freak' films packaged to theatre trade by New Line; sex, too," *Variety* (4 July 1973): 6.

traditional commercial film.”⁸⁶ For example, New Line released a number of films by John Waters, such as *Pink Flamingos* (1972) and *Female Trouble* (1974), as well as gay classics like *A Very Natural Thing* (Christopher Larkin, 1974). In the 1980s, New Line distributed the gay-themed *Buddies* (Arthur J. Bressan, Jr., 1985) and *Torch Song Trilogy* (Paul Bogart, 1988). These queer-friendly tactics continued into the 1990s, where “more than any other independent distribution company, Fine Line [a subsidiary of New Line] has aggressively picked up and distributed gay and lesbian films.”⁸⁷

Fine Line was created in 1990 to act as a specialty arts or classics division for New Line. Fine Line would release smaller, more “artistic” films, in order to cater to “sophisticated adult audiences.”⁸⁸ As with other specialty divisions, they worked to cultivate a brand identity and “establish a name that people associate with a certain level of quality.”⁸⁹ At the time it founded Fine Line, New Line was a “well-capitalized, stand-alone producer-distributor” with over twenty years of industry experience and several very profitable franchises.⁹⁰ The money from these commercial successes allowed New Line to establish a well-funded secondary label.

During its first four years of operation, under the direction of Ira Deutchman, Fine Line “established itself as a prolific distributor of primarily US independent film acquisitions.”⁹¹ Deutchman was interested in going after a combination of mid-level films with commercial appeal as well as low-budget films, which had the potential for significant profit margins. Fine Line’s management was hoping to cash in on the indie box office boom, exemplified by *sex, lies,*

⁸⁶ Justin Wyatt, “The Formation of the ‘Major Independent’: Miramax, New Line and the New Hollywood,” in Steve Neale and Murray Smith, eds. *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (New York: Rutledge, 1998): 76.

⁸⁷ Bowen, “Our Own Private Idaho,” 68.

⁸⁸ William Stevenson, “Companies on the Move: New Line,” *Variety* (6 January 1992): 75. Numerous studios and independent companies followed a similar trajectory, for example the creation of Orion’s Orion Classics, Sony’s Sony Pictures Classics, and Fox’s Fox Searchlight.

⁸⁹ Deutchman qtd. in William Stevenson, “Fine Line Finesse Art-House Mainstays,” *Variety* (10 August 1992): 44.

⁹⁰ Tzioumakis, *Hollywood Indies*, 87.

⁹¹ Tzioumakis, *Hollywood’s Indies*, 88.

and videotape, through the use of “specialized marketing and platform release strategies on films with crossover potential.”⁹² Fine Line’s decision to acquire queer films had “less to do with any homosexual agenda than with critical and market appraisals.”⁹³ Deutchman said that he did “not make a point of finding gay-oriented films, but [was] simply responding to the increasing number of good films that happen to be aimed at gay audiences. It doesn’t hurt, he admits, that ‘there’s a core audience of gays who are loyal filmgoers.’”⁹⁴ The visibility of this loyal audience and the market potential for queer films was created through the institutional developments outlined in this dissertation. These shifts encouraged profit-based companies to invest in queer filmmaking.

Part of the interest in investing in certain projects connects with establishing Fine Line’s image as a distributor of artistic, sophisticated, quality, and critically praised films. Such was the case with *Swoon*. Vachon and Kalin took *Swoon* to the 1991 Independent Feature Film Market (IFFM), in order to show a portion of the film in the “works-in-progress” section and try to interest American distributors.⁹⁵ Here, the film benefitted from *Poison*’s success the previous year, as there was “a lot of insider chat which deemed it this year’s *Poison* (I.e., ‘crossover’ NEA nose-thumber/pick hit),” and the film “ nabbed financing by Fine Line, in a co-production deal with American Playhouse.”⁹⁶ Initially, John Pierson’s Islet was in position to provide completion financing for *Swoon* and distribute it domestically. According to Pierson, as the deal progressed “we got hung up on the issue of who would sell the foreign rights, and for what fee...

⁹² Deutchman qtd. in Claudia Eller, “New Line Cinema Expands Base: Opens Specialized Division in N.Y.,” *Daily Variety* (6 December 1990): 23.

⁹³ Bowen, “Our Own Private Idaho,” 68.

⁹⁴ Stevenson, “Fine Line Finesses Art-House Mainstays,” 40.

⁹⁵ *Swoon* is mentioned as one of the discoveries coming out of the IFFM in Leonard Klady, “Talent Rises from IFFM Chaos,” *Variety* (26 Sep-2 Oct 1994): 18.

⁹⁶ David Noh, “No Rest for NY Film Mavens At Independent Feature Market,” *The Film Journal* 94.10 (1 December 1991): 61.

American Playhouse and Fine Line swooped down at the behest of newly designated executive producer James Schamus⁹⁷ and snatched it away.”⁹⁸

Deutchman noted the benefits of partnering with Playhouse on films like *Swoon*, since Playhouse’s involvement maximized “the TV value of a feature film, an area where it is real hard to anticipate revenue.”⁹⁹ The two entities arranged to provide completion funds for the film, in exchange for the first TV release for Playhouse and all other North American distribution rights for Fine Line.¹⁰⁰ Vachon and Kalin accepted Fine Line’s “teeny, not-even-six-figure advance,”¹⁰¹ offer prior to bringing *Swoon* to the 1992 Sundance festival, an event which might have prompted a higher sale value. They did not know, however, what the film’s reception would be and therefore decided to play it safe. As Vachon put it:

we had a modest offer before the Sundance Festival from Fine Line, and had to ask ourselves: Do we take the film to Sundance and hope that people start bidding against each other, or do we sell it now at lower-than-bidding-war prices? We chose the safer route because we wanted a distributor behind us at the festival, and because *Swoon* was such an unusual picture—there was no way to predict how it would be perceived.¹⁰²

While they might have been able to sell the film for more at the festival, particularly in the context of queer films as the hot new trend, that would have been a gamble.

Pierson recalled being somewhat relieved to have lost *Swoon* after he saw the finished film at Sundance. He remarked that the people at Fine Line had their work cut out for them in

⁹⁷ Throughout his career as a producer, Schamus provided opportunities for LGBTQ filmmaking. Although not queer-identified himself, Schamus was an assistant producer on both *Swoon* and *Poison*, and later went on to produce films like Ang Lee’s *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) and *Brokeback Mountain* (2005).

⁹⁸ Pierson, *Spike, Mike, Slackers & Dykes*, 209.

⁹⁹ Deutchman qtd in Christian Moerk, “American Playhouse Pix Up European Auds,” *Variety* (24 August 1992): 3.

¹⁰⁰ Claudia Eller, “New Line stokes ‘Burn This,’” *Variety* (11 November 1991): 12. The foreign distribution rights were sold later, at the international marketplace at Milan’s MIFED through the London-based company, Jane Balfour Films (“Films Screening at the Market,” *Variety* (19 Oct 1991): 154.). Interestingly, in the more expanded “Market Guide: For Sale in Milan” section (p. 118), the film’s description makes no mention of homosexuality; instead it describes the film thusly: “true story of the kidnap and murder of a young boy in Chicago in 1924 by two Jewish 18-year-olds.”

¹⁰¹ Kalin qtd in Vachon, *Killer Life*, 58

¹⁰² Vachon, *Shooting to Kill*, 291.

marketing this challenging film, which might be a hard sell.¹⁰³ Pierson found *The Living End* “to be far more effective, energetic, promotable, and, ultimately, likely to succeed. October’s Bingham Ray and Jeff Lipsky felt the same way. They worked that film all the way to a \$1 million gross,¹⁰⁴ making it one of the Sundance success stories.”¹⁰⁵ In a similar vein, *Variety* remarked that *Swoon* would “stir interest among sophisticated urban audiences inclined toward alternative subject matter and storytelling techniques... Director’s esoteric methods, much more than his subject matter, limit his intended audience to a very small group, but within it the film will find a degree of favor.”¹⁰⁶ There were others, however, who felt that the film would “appeal to the same urban gay audience that supported ‘My Own Private Idaho,’” which would make it “an easier sell” than some of Fine Line’s other offerings.¹⁰⁷ Schamus likewise commented on the built-in audience for gay films; “‘The current market access has been created not by the media or the film industry but by the gay community itself. Gay and lesbian film festivals, queer magazines, activist organizations, and a fast-moving word-of-mouth network’ have made gays into what he jokingly refers to as ‘a cheap date.’”¹⁰⁸ Citing the gay audience as significant in acquisition decisions and the ability for films to recoup their expenses reveals the evolution of the relationship between distributors and LGBTQ audiences.

Swoon traveled the festival circuit, showing at non-specialty festivals in Berlin and Stockholm, in addition to Sundance and Toronto. In March of 1992, the film screened as part of the New Directors/New Films series at the Museum of Modern Art.¹⁰⁹ *Swoon* also showed at a

¹⁰³ Pierson, 210.

¹⁰⁴ Gross numbers for this film vary greatly, from close to \$700,000 up to \$1.4 million. The \$1-1.4 million estimates may be the result of including ancillary or foreign sales.

¹⁰⁵ Pierson, 210.

¹⁰⁶ Todd McCarthy, “Review: *Swoon*,” *Variety* (10 February 1992): 82.

¹⁰⁷ Stevenson, “Fine Line Finesses Art-House Mainstays,” 40.

¹⁰⁸ Bowen, “Our Own Private Idaho,” 68.

¹⁰⁹ Janet Maslin, “A New Vision of Leopold and Loeb,” *The New York Times* (27 March 1992): 8.

number of gay and lesbian festivals, marking a distinction from previous LGBTQ films that often avoided contact with potentially “ghettoizing” situations. The film closed the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in March of 1992.¹¹⁰ It also headlined the L.A. Gay and Lesbian film festival in June, playing on the opening night and serving as *Swoon*’s LA premiere.¹¹¹ After *Swoon* showed at festivals, Fine Line put the film out in a limited release, which included LA later in the summer of 1992.¹¹² Considering that the film’s budget was very low, *Swoon* had a decent theatrical run. It earned around \$340,000 in the domestic box office, which is not an insignificant amount for a small, challenging art film, but put it well behind most of the other films under consideration in this dissertation (except for *Zero Patience*).

While *Swoon* did not make an extraordinary amount of money, and marked a financial loss for Fine Line, perhaps the more important effects of its release were the accolades and cultural currency that the distributor could acquire by releasing a critically praised and artistically significant film. *Swoon* became Fine Line’s (and New Line’s as well) top-nominated feature at the Independent Spirit awards, being recognized in the categories of first feature, directing, actor, and cinematography.¹¹³ Although it did not win, *Swoon* did earn awards through various festivals, including the Caligari Film Award and the Teddy at the Berlin Festival, and an award for cinematography at Sundance. The cinematography in *Swoon* was consistently praised in reviews and discussions of the film. Shooting with a small budget, on 16mm black and white stock that was later blown up to 35mm, cinematographer Ellen Kuras managed to create strikingly beautiful images. In an increasingly crowded market of arts and indie distributors,

¹¹⁰ “Festival Spotlight: London Lesbian & Gay Film Fest,” *Variety* (16 March 1992): 36.

¹¹¹ Marc Berman, “‘Swoon’ to open 10th annual L.A. Gay & Lesbian Festival,” *Variety* (29 June 1992): 15.

¹¹² Vachon notes in *Shooting to Kill* that they had trouble with the ratings board, which wanted to give the film an NC-17 rating, largely because of one scene in which the two men are in their underwear and one climbs on to of the other, suggestively but “*Very* briefly” (308).

¹¹³ “New Line, IRS draw Spirit-ed acclamations,” *Variety* (1 February 1993): 19.

films that could help generate a brand identity and increase the company's cultural capital could be just as valuable as films that reached high levels of box office success.

While Fine Line invested in *Swoon* during its final stages of production and post-production, it acquired *Edward II* after the film was completed. *Edward* played at the Toronto festival late in 1991, where it became one of "the most talked-about pics."¹¹⁴ This praise helped inspire a distribution offer from Fine Line, which was also connected to the film through an extended distribution deal with producing company Working Title. In 1989, the two signed a three-year picture deal, giving New Line (and therefore Fine Line) North American rights, except for video, to their slate of films.¹¹⁵ The North American market was one of the largest, most receptive, and profitable markets for Jarman's films, and the interest of distribution companies like Fine Line was critical in helping to tap this potential. Fine Line ended up bringing in close to \$700,000 for the film's US run. The press surrounding NQC, "Did it really exist? Did it have a future?" helped Jarman reach his largest American audience.¹¹⁶ Ironically, Jarman found great difficulty in securing distribution in the UK. With *Edward II*, "despite attracting his largest-ever US audience and winning prestigious awards at both Venice and Berlin, he was unable to find anyone who would agree to distribute the movie theatrically in Great Britain."¹¹⁷ As Jarman said, "the distribution of films in Great Britain is terrible. It's the great weak link. You make them and then there's no one there to pick them up, nowhere to put them on."¹¹⁸ The same impediments might have plagued US distribution, if not for the presence of a network of independent distribution companies.

¹¹⁴ Amy Dawes, "'Proof,' 'Volere' Fine-Lined up," *Variety* (2 December 1991): 23.

¹¹⁵ "New Line, Working Title in 3-year deal," *Variety* (31 May 1989): 21. Fine Line finalized the purchase of distribution rights to *Edward* from The Sales Company, based out of London (Colin Brown, "Fine Line Swoon swoop," *Screen International* 832 (8 November 1991): 2.).

¹¹⁶ Peake, 490.

¹¹⁷ Armstrong, 151.

¹¹⁸ Jarman qtd in interview by Lippard, 168.

Unlike many of the NQC filmmakers who worked in a more artisanal mode and pieced together bits of finance from different investors, pre-sales, and non-profit sources, Gus Van Sant negotiated his way within the rapidly growing independent filmmaking industry in order to create what many consider to be his queer masterpiece. Being funded through an established production company (New Line) gave *My Own Private Idaho* a larger budget, allowed Van Sant to hire star actors, and helped the film to become the highest grossing NQC film by far, earning \$6.4 million in the domestic box office. After the success of *Idaho* and his previous film, *Drugstore Cowboy*, Van Sant secured his reputation “as the darling of the growing American indie movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s.”¹¹⁹ Van Sant has continued to cultivate this reputation and his auteur status, which is visible in the 2016 Cinémathèque française exhibition dedicated to his work. As a director who has attracted attention in part by moving between mainstream fare and more experimental projects, there is a substantial amount of previous biographical and scholarly work on Van Sant’s filmography and personal history.¹²⁰ Given the significant number of pages dedicated to Van Sant as an auteur, I focus instead on the production and distribution of *Idaho*, and examine how the early involvement of a major independent contributed to the film’s trajectory.

Van Sant’s first feature, *Mala Noche*, received only limited distribution and is discussed earlier in this dissertation. His next feature, *Drugstore Cowboy*, helped Van Sant establish a name and credibility for himself. The film had a \$2.5 million budget and made around \$4.7 million, but was most noted for the positive critical reception. *Drugstore Cowboy* won a slew of critics awards, from the Los Angeles Film Critics Association, National Society of Film Critics,

¹¹⁹ Mario Falsetto, *Conversations with Gus Van Sant*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015): 12.

¹²⁰ For example: James Robert Parish, *Gus Van Sant: An Unauthorized Biography* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2001) and Vincent LoBrutto, *Gus Van Sant: His Own Private Cinema* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010).

New York Film Critics Circle, and more. The film also came away from the Independent Spirit awards with eight nominations and four wins. The relative box office success, coupled with critical praise, raised Van Sant to the status of person to watch, a new director with potential to become a major player on the indie scene. After *Drugstore Cowboys* began to get good press, Van Sant found himself in the position of being "this hot new filmmaker amongst this group of hot new filmmakers trying to get attention from the people who back films."¹²¹ With his newly established, profitable indie credentials, he pitched *Idaho* to various producing entities, who would be "very supportive and would want to read it, but after they read it they didn't really want to finance it."¹²² Although some of this may have been related to the film's gay content, Van Sant also notes that it could have been his unconventional way of putting together a script, as well as the use of Shakespeare and the script's short length (only eighty pages).¹²³

Idaho was the result of several partial screenplays, including a story of street hustlers, a road movie, and a re-telling of Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, combined into one. The film follows a young hustler, Mike (played by River Phoenix), who suffers from narcolepsy. He interacts with clients and other hustlers, including Scott (played by Keanu Reeves), the son of a wealthy politician, whose hustling and homeless lifestyle are enacted as rebellions against his family's expectations. Intertwining with the daily activities of this milieu are encounters with Bob, a father figure to the young men, who mirrors the Shakespeare character Falstaff and even prompts conversations in Shakespearian verse. The second half of the film also follows Scott and Mike as they search for Mike's mother, a trip that leads them to Italy and back. Interestingly, one of the scenes that makes same-sex desire and love explicit in the film was scripted by River

¹²¹ Gus Van Sant, *My Own Private Idaho & Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993): XXXV.

¹²² Gus Van Sant, *My Own Private Idaho & Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*, XXXV.

¹²³ Gus Van Sant, *My Own Private Idaho & Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*, XXXV.

Phoenix. During an evening spent by a wilderness campfire, Mike admits to Scott that he loves him, and although Scott says little and does not seem to return the love, he does care for Mike and cradles him to sleep. Van Sant had originally envisioned the scene as one in which the two decided to fool around out of boredom, and it was Phoenix, with encouragement from a friend who was a member of ACT UP, who reworked the scene from two pages to eight, substantially changing the tone of the interactions and creating Mike as a more explicitly gay character.¹²⁴

After shopping the script around, Van Sant finally received an offer of \$2 million from an outside investor, which ended up falling through soon after. In the interim, however, Van Sant managed to interest Reeves, who was looking for a small film to do, and Phoenix to sign on as the leads. Their involvement gave producer Laurie Parker added leverage when looking for backers, and New Line signed on to provide a larger, \$2.5 million budget. Phoenix and Reeves did not appear overly concerned about the prospect of playing queer hustlers, perhaps suggesting that one of the troubles that consistently plagued LGBTQ filmmaking, finding name actors and actresses willing to "play gay," was dissipating.¹²⁵ Another sign of change came two years later, when huge star Tom Hanks played an openly gay character in *Philadelphia*, for which he won an Oscar. This is not to say the stigma had vanished; Reeves and Phoenix "were advised not to take the roles because of the potential effect on their careers,"¹²⁶ but they opted to ignore this advice.

Although it took Van Sant numerous tries to find financial backing for *Idaho*, once he was attached to New Line the film was supported through the production and distribution stages. This support, along with the higher production values and gloss, not to mention the presence of

¹²⁴ Van Sant qtd. in Falsetto, 32.

¹²⁵ In interviews, the two brushed off concerns for their image and careers. When asked if people gave them a hard time about it, Phoenix replied, "Fuck Them. That's all I can say. A capital F and a U-C-K, and then THEM" (Keanu Reeves and River Phoenix, interview by Gini Sikes and Paige Powell, *Interview* (November): 84.). Similar nonchalance can be found in James Ryan, "Private Lives: What makes two pretty-boy actors risk their careers by stripping off to play male prostitutes in an art movie?" *The Face* (March 1992): 55-60.)

¹²⁶ Steve Warren, "Van Sant Won't Gussy Up to His Own Private Art," *San Francisco Sentinel* (10 Oct 1991): 39.

two stars, led *Idaho* to the position of most profitable NQC film. Although green-lit by and produced under the auspices of New Line, New Line passed the distribution of the film on to their newly formed Fine Line, which was designed to work with this sort of lower budget art cinema fare. Fine Line experienced a “great commercial success in its first year with a film [*Idaho*] that quickly joined the emerging canon of US indie cinema.”¹²⁷ *Idaho* earned around \$6.4 million in the domestic box office, more than seven times the second highest grossing narrative NQC film (*Poison* at \$850,000). This box office take is very little next to a film like *Philadelphia*, which earned \$77 million domestically and a total of \$206 million worldwide,¹²⁸ but is still a significant amount for a small independent film.

The growth of independent distribution companies created competition and a race between these companies to identify hot new trends and acquire inexpensive films that could be marketed to a growing indie audience, with the potential for crossover breakthroughs. Fine Line’s decision to actively pursue LGBTQ films led it to produce and acquire films like *Swoon*, *Edward II*, and *My Own Private Idaho*, and give them larger releases than somewhat experimental queer films could have found even a few years previously. These films benefitted from Fine Line’s aggressive acquisition of queer themed films, an attempt to capitalize on a visible trend coming out of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Earlier developments created a situation in which a film like *Idaho* could find mainstream indie support, and New Line/Fine Line’s choice to produce and release *Idaho* in turn helped to solidify the presence of a queer film trend. This confluence of factors in the early 1990s created opportunities for the production and distribution of queer films, and when coupled with the attention they received at film festivals

¹²⁷ Tzioumakis, *Hollywood’s Indies*, 90.

¹²⁸ *Philadelphia* was produced and distributed through a larger studio, TriStar, and had more than 10 times the production budget of *Idaho*, \$26 million versus \$2.5 million.

and in the press, these films became part of a queer film movement.

Packaging New Queer Cinema

The critical contexts surrounding early nineties queer films, particularly coverage of controversies and the naming of the movement, unified and packaged these films into a cohesive movement. While there were moments in the preceding decade when potential LGBTQ film movements began forming, none of these fully developed. It was not until the early 1990s when a group of films were finally joined together into a movement, and they had a lasting impact of the trajectory of LGBTQ cinema in a way no previous group of films had. This section highlights key factors that contributed to finding wider audiences for NQC films, as well as elucidating how these films were united into a concrete movement.

Marketing NQC was a somewhat contradictory exercise. NQC filmmakers were often vocal proponents of anti-consumerism, who placed the value of their films in their self-expression and personal satisfaction in creating art, regardless of what audiences thought. In writing about making films for a specific audience, Jarman stated, “I’ve never thought of the audience in my life... Over the years, an audience has grown, as my films have. Each one seems to bring a few more people. It has happened quite organically, there was no plan to [for example] net a group of ‘arties.’”¹²⁹ Araki likewise positioned himself as a director with a unique vision that might not be palatable to everyone, including those within the gay community. Araki was less concerned with how the film would be received than he was in the experience of making the film and in:

trying to push myself harder to explore things I haven’t explored before. Whether that means that my films are more successful or less successful in terms of the ‘mainstream’—that’s a by-product... fuck the audience. They’re my films. I’m just

¹²⁹ Jarman qtd in interview by Lippard, 167-168.

going to make them, and if people like them, that's great, and if they don't, well, I'm not going to kill myself over it.¹³⁰

Ironically, Araki's stated rejection of audience perspectives spoke to the angst and anger that many felt at the time, and this sensibility may have contributed to the film's relatively high box office revenue. This self-presentation has helped shape discussions of NQC, and are part of the reason why industry and audience contexts have been under-explored. Vachon was more candid and pragmatic about her work on *Poison*, noting that the incentive to produce *Poison* "wasn't personally motivated—I never really thought about [the gay element]," but she did feel that the film could bring in gay audiences; "I was savvy enough even then to be able to tell that there was a market that nobody had really tapped into yet. People who in a million years wouldn't go to see a movie that experimental, did so just because they heard there was male sex in it. Most of them came out feeling like, So I watched that whole movie for two seconds of boys fucking!"¹³¹

Despite the insistence on art over commerce, the film industry, even the independent sector, is an industry that requires commercial success in order to continue operating. The financial success of previous gay and lesbian films, the positive reception at trend-setting festivals, and the heavy competition to acquire hot new films in the independent sector more generally, prompted distributors to take risks with queer cinema. After *sex, lies, and videotape* broke open the indie sector and proved that these films could have large profit potentials, independent (and semi-independent) companies began to pay more and more for indie films with breakout potential. The ability for a film to break out was in many ways connected to its trendiness, how it hit a chord with audiences, and distributors were therefore always on the lookout for the next big thing. In the early 1990s, queer cinema was the hot new fad, and

¹³⁰ Araki qtd. in Lawrence Chua, *BOMB* 41 (Fall, 1992): 26.

¹³¹ Vachon qtd. in Biskind, *Down and Dirty Pictures*, 110.

distributors began investing in this area. Some would argue that queer film buying reached a peak in 1994, when *Go Fish* sold for a hefty \$400,000 price tag.

Another reason that queer films became a distinct and recognized phenomenon was the controversy sparked by conservative protests against the National Endowment for the Arts. During the early nineties, a number of conservative attacks were aimed at the fact that NEA funds had been used to support queer institutions, such as gay and lesbian film festivals, and queer artists, including Todd Haynes, Tim Miller, Holly Hughes, John Fleck, and Karen Finley. These last four became known as the “NEA Four,” and they fought court battles claiming that the removal of financial assistance was a censoring act, in violation of their first amendment rights to freedom of expression. Of 53 arts organizations that the National Alliance of Media Arts Centers recommended through a peer-review process to receive NEA funding, only 3 were denied funding: New York’s Gay and Lesbian Festival, the Pittsburgh Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, and Outfest, the Los Angeles gay and lesbian film festival.¹³² The American Civil Liberties Union filed an appeal of the decision, and the following year the NEA recanted and granted the festivals their funding. Although the NEA grants themselves were generally small they offered institutional backing and legitimacy that could generate funding from additional public and private sources. These grants were “important not just in themselves, but because with their imprimatur, artists or presenting organizations are more likely to receive corporate or foundational funding.”¹³³

After lengthy legal battles, the festivals eventually received their funding. The continued conservative pressure stopped the events from applying for funding in the following years.

¹³² “National Alliance for Media Arts & Cultures Press Release,” (20 November 1992): Box 2, Folder 20, PILGFF Papers.

¹³³ Charyl Much, “Gay Art: What’s it Worth To You?” *Positive Projections*, The New Festival, Inc., no 1 (fall 1990): 2.

NQC, however, “flowered in spite of this resistance, or perhaps because of it: the NEA funding controversy made many people more aware of and curious about these works, and queer organizations and individuals stepped in to help fund new projects.”¹³⁴ The support of private sector institutions was possible only because of the networks and infrastructure that had been built around LGBTQ communities and filmmaking in the preceding decade. The controversy generated by these conservative attacks created greater press and attention for specific queer artworks, helping the films associated with NQC to find a wider audience and providing one element that differentiated the early nineties’ critical context from that of the 1980s.

Despite the relatively small amount of funding *Poison* received from the NEA, conservative groups (particularly Reverend Donald Wildmon and the American Family Association) condemned the film as government-sponsored, gay pornography. This led to a large amount of media coverage by major news networks such as CNN, CBS, Fox, and ABC, as well as shows like *Entertainment Tonight* and articles in publications such as *Time* and trade papers like *Variety*, all of which traditionally covered very little queer film news. Haynes himself was surprised at the attention the film received. As he said:

With *Poison*, I thought, this is a small, first, 16mm, fairly difficult and depressing film that I didn't think would mean much to people out there...I just didn't think that people would get it, connect to it, like it, or anything. When they did, I was amazed to the extent that they did - I mean *Newsweek*, *Time*, and all the audiences that would go, it was much more of a general cross-over audience than we expected.¹³⁵

Justin Wyatt argues that the visibility granted the film by its Sundance win, along with controversies around its NEA funding and the subsequent arguments about its merits, “allowed for the entry of *Poison* into another category as an artistically worthy or legitimate work that it

¹³⁴ Benshoff and Griffin, *Queer Images*, 223.

¹³⁵ Haynes quoted in Wyatt, *Poison*, 37.

might not have achieved without this formal recognition.”¹³⁶ Ironically, then, conservative protests increased the media attention given to films such as *Poison*, which in turn generated curiosity and interest in viewers and led to larger box office success and a wider distribution. The attacks on *Poison* and the NEA “pushed an avant-garde artist into the spotlight.”¹³⁷ This publicity, which Haynes and distributors Zeitgeist Films (theatrical) and Fox Lorber (home video) were able to capitalize on, was similar to that which Friedkin and others had hoped to use, with less success, in driving ticket sales for *Cruising* and other films picketed by gay groups. Both of these forms of controversy represent moments when queer films became “news,” or “newsworthy” in the eyes of mainstream media outlets.

Alongside the influence these controversies had on individual viewers, they also impacted the perspectives of distributors. The press coverage of queer films was free advertising, and created a sense that LGBTQ film was the next hot thing. As Vachon noted, smaller distributors for queer films generally could not “afford huge ads and are dependent on newspaper features, interviews, and reviews” to draw attention to the films.¹³⁸ Not wanting to miss out on potential breakout hits, and seeing both a built in (gay) audience and the increasing crossover opportunities, companies like Fine Line acquired queer films. As Emmanuel Levy wrote:

As soon as the possibilities seemed lucrative, suggesting that there was money to be made out of gay product, the ‘new’ market began to garner an unprecedented response from producers. ‘The reason there’s a higher degree of attention now is because distributors have shown a profit,’ said Mark Finch of Frameline... ‘It’s just like any trend,’ notes Strand’s co-president, Marcus Hu. At a particular moment, the new films heralded the arrival of Queer Cinema.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Wyatt, *Poison*, 37.

¹³⁷ Levy, *Cinema of Outsiders*, 465.

¹³⁸ Vachon, *Shooting to Kill*, 310.

¹³⁹ Levy, *Cinema of Outsiders*, 460.

In terms of marketing tactics for these films, indie distributors were able to give NQC films individualized attention and bring them to audiences through targeted strategies. This was one of Deutchman's fortes:

marketing specialty films by generating publicity while keeping advertising costs relatively low... Instead of mimicking the macro-marketing of the major studios, Deutchman believes in micro-marketing. 'We think city by city, venue by venue,' he says. 'Every single film has its own quirks, advantages and opportunities. We never give up on a situation until we've squeezed every last dollar out of it.'¹⁴⁰

In the marketing of *Idaho*, we can see some remnants of the hesitancy that the Hollywood mini-cycle and Gay New Wave displayed in terms of marketing gay content. In an interview with Van Sant, Amy Taubin remarked that the "PR people in 'Idaho' got upset when I referred to it as a gay film," to which Van Sant replied, "Do you think it makes a gay statement? ...It's not that it's *not* a gay film, but it doesn't play into any obvious gay politics. I've been noticing that when people write about me, they say I'm 'openly gay.' John Waters and I were talking about it and he said, 'in a list of forty things that I am, gay is not the first thing.'¹⁴¹ This perspective marks a desire to both claim queerness but not be limited by it.

The formation and dissemination of NQC is also linked with the naming of the movement, the discursive solidification of individual films into a whole. The gay press was the first to remark on this emerging movement, as it came out of developments that these publications had been tracking all along. Mainstream press sources were more likely to react with shock or unease at *Poison's* Sundance Grand Jury Prize win and the other transgressive queer works showing at non-specialty festivals. When another group of queer films showed at Sundance in 1992, "like last year, the mainstream press had fits over this ongoing gay and

¹⁴⁰ Stevenson, "Fine Line Finesse Art-House Mainstays," 40.

¹⁴¹ Amy Taubin interview with Gus Van Sant, "Objects of Desire," Jim Hillier ed, *American Independent Cinema: Sight and Sound Reader*, (London: BFI Publishing, 2001): 86. When asked what label Van Sant would prefer to be associated with, he said, "impressionistic, or postmodern."

lesbian movie revolution."¹⁴² This sense of revolution, of working against the grain, is an important component of why NQC became a fully fledged movement while the Gay New Wave did not.

The films of the Gay New Wave represented attempts to break into the mainstream, or at least the more widespread success of certain indie films. The way these films were marketed, as discussed in Chapter 4, showed a desire by the distributors to universalize the subjects and play up the films' production values, in order to make them appealing to a mass audience. In many ways, they were successful in these endeavors and managed good box-office returns.

Rhetorically positioning these films as complementary alternatives to Hollywood, ones that nevertheless follow mainstream conventions, took away the incentive to create a distinct movement. It made more sense to connect Gay New Wave films with the broader independent film movement that was getting media attention at the time, and not risk ghettoizing them as "gay films." Among the films, there was jostling for attention and position, which led to attempts to differentiate each film from the others. From the distributors' standpoint, therefore, there was little to gain from connecting the films together.

This perspective changed in the early nineties, when queer films had political incentive to break away from the mainstream and tout their "revolutionary" aspects and rejection of convention. This led to a different marketing strategy. Moving further from Hollywood conventions, to the outskirts of transgressive and avant-garde independent films, these films were potentially more difficult to make commercially viable. There was motivation to unify the new crop of queer films under a trendy label, drawing on the coolness factor of the whole to help call attention to individual films. As Rich has remarked, her New Queer Cinema label was adopted

¹⁴² David Ehrenstein, "Talking Pictures: The good news seems to be that we don't need Hollywood at all." *The Advocate* 598 (10 March 1992): 79.

so rapidly because it was “very useful to people, because ideas like this don’t work if they don’t have use value. It was immediately repurposed into a marketing hook, and it became a way to promote films so that people who might want to see them knew that they were going on, knew that it was happening. And so it got taken up, and I wasn’t expecting it to be.”¹⁴³ The marketing of *Go Fish* provides a clear example of NQC’s value. *Go Fish* was publicized as the “lesbian New Queer Cinema film,” drawing on its connection to a pre-established notion of hip, politically extreme, critically acclaimed, and stylistically experimental queerness.

While key films in 1991 jump-started a queer trend, it was in 1992 that the recurrence of queer films in mainstream festivals signaled the possibility of a more fully developed, prolonged movement. *The Advocate* noted “a quiet but impressive revolution in the world of independent gay film,” and drew distinctions between these early nineties films and past trends:

While in the ‘80s films like *Parting Glances*, *Desert Hearts*, and *My Beautiful Laundrette* appeared every few years like oases, the ‘90s have brought a veritable river of gay and lesbian films. It would be too easy to dismiss this recent rise in gay films as a flavor-of-the-month syndrome. Jeff Hill, a publicist for the bicoastal public relations firm Clein and White, hopes that his promotion of such films as Todd Haynes’s *Poison*, Derek Jarman’s *Edward II*, Tom Kalin’s *Swoon*, and Gregg Araki’s *The Living End* is not simply part of a trend. “That implies it will stop,” he says. “I think of these films as a beginning. *Poison* cracked open the door, not because it was gay but because it was artful and won the critics award.”¹⁴⁴

By creating this distinction, and suggesting a lasting change as a result of the early nineties queer films, the gay press helped to solidify the importance of NQC and its status as a lasting artistic movement and not a temporary trend. This is not to say that Hollywood studios’ early 1990s adoption of LGBT themes did not constitute another attempt to capitalize on what they saw as a timely fad. As the screenwriter for *Philadelphia*, Ron Nyswaner, put it, “gay-themed films are

¹⁴³ B. Ruby Rich interview by Elle Flanders, *Daily Xtra*, <http://filmstudiesforfree.blogspot.com/2017/06/richly-resourceful-on-bruby-richs-work.html>

¹⁴⁴ Bowen, “Our Own Private Idaho,” 68.

becoming trendy; now you can be in a meeting at a studio and present one and not feel like you just farted."¹⁴⁵ He notes that studios at the time were on the lookout for an AIDS film, and *Philadelphia* "was the easiest development deal in the history of movies... There was constant support all the way along. It was all stunningly positive."¹⁴⁶

In their 1992 assessments of the growing queer film phenomenon, *The Advocate* self-consciously noted its position at the vanguard of critics discussing queer filmmaking:

As this year's Sundance festival demonstrates, gays and lesbians are riding the crest of a new wave of filmmaking. So where are the articles in the mainstream press announcing it? They'll be along soon enough; probably by early summer. They'll be lengthy pieces guessing whether gays and lesbians can tone down their images, make their lives appear more universal, and take their place within that all-important moviemaking 'mainstream.' I hope not. We're 'esoteric.' Let's keep it that way.¹⁴⁷

Prior to the adoption of New Queer Cinema as the term defining these films, the article harkens back to "new wave" rhetoric as a way of both marking these films as different and connecting them with legitimized previous film movements (such as the French New Wave) that were also often low-budget and stylistically daring.

The naming of the movement in 1992 brought together this group of early nineties queer films. Critics noted the increase in LGBTQ films in the early nineties, and the shift towards more transgressive, stylistically daring films. In 1991, when *Poison* was garnering an abundance of critical attention, *The Advocate* created the term "New Gay Cinema"¹⁴⁸ in reference to the substantial number of compelling "gay" films being shown at the Berlin Film Festival. Among these international selections, "a strong American independent film presence captured a good

¹⁴⁵ Ron Nyswaner qtd in Ronald Mark Kraft, "Ron Nyswaner: Writing the Gay Philadelphia Story," *The Advocate* 638 (21 September 1993): 47.

¹⁴⁶ Nyswaner qtd in Kraft, 47.

¹⁴⁷ Ehrenstein, "Talking pictures: the good news seems to be that we don't need Hollywood at all," 79.

¹⁴⁸ Larry Horne, "Berlin Stories: The Best of New Gay Cinema Screened at International Film Festival," *The Advocate* 575 (23 April 1991): 72-74.

deal of the attention overall,"¹⁴⁹ which connects to NQC's base in American Independent Cinema.¹⁵⁰ Comparable terms were used in other publications as well, such as "New Gay Film" used in the *LA Weekly* to describe *Edward II*.¹⁵¹

B. Ruby Rich used similar terminology in the first version of her "New Queer Cinema" article, published as "A Queer Sensation" in *The Village Voice* in March of 1992. The tagline for the article read, "From Toronto to Berlin to New York the word is out—A New Gay Cinema is here." The article contained "New Gay Film" across the top of each of its four pages, although within the article she does refer to "a new queer independent cinema" and suggest that a Sundance panel on the subject of queer filmmaking marked "the arrival of the new queer cinema."¹⁵² As with Gay New Wave, however, the "New Gay Film" term did not have staying power and did not find substantial usage. Given the political moment, the use of "Gay" was not as appealing, as people were moving into greater use of "queer," particularly when describing formally inventive works. This small but significant difference in terminology had some impact on the popularity of one term over another.

Rich's movement-defining article reads much like earlier trend pieces, and she mentions that people tried "to guess how long this moment of fascination will last."¹⁵³ Rich also called 1992 a "watershed year for independent gay and lesbian film and video."¹⁵⁴ This observation is reminiscent of those made in *The Advocate* throughout the 80s, when certain films were held up as landmark breakthroughs and the prognosis for a given year suggested that it marked a change in LGBTQ filmmaking. This begs the question, what makes Rich's evaluation different? In part,

¹⁴⁹ Horne, "Berlin Stories," 72.

¹⁵⁰ Although the movement had substantial foreign influence, and several foreign films are considered canonical works of NQC, it is generally considered an American Independent movement.

¹⁵¹ Dennis Cooper, "Derek Jarman & The New Gay Film," *LA Weekly* (April 10-April 16, 1992): 17.

¹⁵² Rich, "A Queer Sensation," 41-44.

¹⁵³ Rich, "New Queer Cinema," 32.

¹⁵⁴ Rich, "New Queer Cinema," 31.

this is connected with the industrial and institutional shifts that I chart throughout this dissertation, which, I argue, created space for a substantial number of LGBTQ films to continue being produced and released throughout the 1990s. Had the number of queer films showing at festivals and garnering critical response not remained consistently high for several years in a row, or had these films not found more mainstream attention, Rich's optimistic remarks about a queer film movement would not have had the lasting impact that they did.

The Village Voice held an important position between mainstream and niche publications, as it had a relatively wide-reaching circulation while still being attuned to developments in queer culture and arts. As such, it is unsurprising that both the Gay New Wave and New Queer Cinema were identified in its pages. Rich re-published a version of her article in *Sight and Sound* in September of 1992, as part of a special supplement to an international conference on NQC. The film series and two day conference, titled “New Queer Cinema,” was sponsored by Channel 4 and the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London.¹⁵⁵ Rich credits a conversation with Philip Dodd, *Sight and Sound*'s editor in chief at the time, with helping her crystalize her position on the developments in queer cinema and use of the term New Queer Cinema.¹⁵⁶ The conference, as well as the publication of Rich's galvanizing article in a respected newspaper and journal, helped solidify both the term New Queer Cinema and the existence of the movement itself. The identification of key films, their naming, and the reinforcement of the term crystallized a movement that had been years in the making.

Rich's critical authority helped shape the phenomenon that she was observing. Rich has in fact reflected on her role in creating the movement through her coverage of film festivals and

¹⁵⁵ “Reprinted New Queer Cinema article and ad for the screenings and conference,” Box 5, Folder 6, Lesbian and Gay Liberation Collection, Yale Archives.

¹⁵⁶ Rich, *New Queer Cinema*, 31.

by providing a moniker with which to link the canon of NQC films. Giving a group of films a name, particularly one labeled as “New,” helped generate buzz and attention. As Justin Wyatt writes:

While the proclamation seemed overstated given only a handful of films (mostly directed by “media-friendly”, young, white gay males), Rich’s cinematic moment constituted a political act in itself—as much an argument for gay/lesbian cinema as an account of the current filmmaking climate for gays and lesbians. Rich forged a rather forced identity for the group by uniting the projects stylistically.¹⁵⁷

The catchy phrasing caught on quickly, and was taken up as both a category in which to place the large number of queer films being produced, and a political rallying cry for future filmmaking endeavors. This was the moment when LGBTQ films were recognized not for their connection with mainstream filmmaking, but for their defiance of it. Coming at a time when anger over the mishandling of the AIDS crisis fueled a large amount of creative energies, this distinction from mainstream culture was appealing. The fact that this movement, which consciously and decisively deviated from mainstream cinema, was nevertheless able to generate press attention and critical success, suggests why New Queer Cinema remains a touchstone of queer film history.

Despite NQC’s outsider status and apparent rejection of commerce and industry, the films were deeply indebted to larger institutional structures. It was institutional developments of the 1980s that helped early 1990s queer films find funding, production support, and distribution. The core films of NQC employed a range of funding and production techniques, from the ultra low-budget, guerrilla filmmaking practiced by Araki, to the more mainstream, independent production company support Van Sant found for *Idaho*. And in between these two poles, Jarman, Haynes, and Kalin were able to capitalize on public funding and grants to secure

¹⁵⁷ Wyatt, *Poison*, 47.

financing for their low-budget features. All of these modes of production draw from precedents in, and build upon, the preceding decade of LGBTQ filmmaking.

While the growth of LGBTQ cinema can be traced through the 1980s and 1990s, the formation of a movement was by no means pre-determined. NQC became a film movement with lasting recognition and impact only through a confluence of factors at this particular moment in the early 1990s. The central canon of films, *Poison*, *My Own Private Idaho*, *The Living End*, *Edward II*, and *Swoon*, was placed in conversation with each other through film festival programming decisions. Exhibition at Sundance gave the films artistic legitimacy and greater commercial viability, prompting distributors to take notice. Arriving on the scene during a profitable indie boom, no one wanted to miss out on a hot new trend. A movement also requires films to be discursively connected, and Sundance, buttressed by increased press attention due to the NEA controversies, solidified these films into a whole. In giving the movement a name, calling attention to a core group of films, and generating press coverage of queer cinema's trending years, B. Ruby Rich and other critics and scholars named and framed the movement, enhancing still further its cultural legitimacy and visibility.

Conclusion The Legacy of New Queer Cinema

At the 2017 Academy Awards, after a startling mix-up of envelopes, *Moonlight* (Barry Jenkins, 2016) won the Oscar for Best Picture. The film presents a subtle, powerful exploration of black masculinity and queer identity in its chronicle of three periods in the life of a young man growing up amidst poverty and drug addiction. In some ways, its win should come as no surprise, as *Moonlight* was lauded by critics for its understated acting, luminous cinematography, and open-endedness. *New York Times* critic A.O. Scott admired the film's mix of subtle social criticism and artistic achievement: "'Moonlight' is both a disarmingly, at times almost unbearably personal film and an urgent social document, a hard look at American reality and a poem written in light, music and vivid human faces."¹ The film's black, gay male protagonist made *Moonlight* a politically charged, controversial pick, yet it garnered almost universal praise. While *Moonlight* was released 25 years after *Poison*, one can draw a connection between these two films and consider the lasting legacy of New Queer Cinema.

NQC's challenging, transgressive formal elements contrasted the gay and lesbian filmmaking that preceded it. NQC filmmakers reclaimed "negative" stereotypes and developed complex, ambiguous narratives and characters. NQC was able to connect with a vibrant activist culture, giving the films political weight, while still generating mainstream attention. The fact that a group of films were labeled "queer" and positioned as both an aesthetically and a politically significant movement marks a stark departure from earlier positioning of LGBTQ cinema. Although many earlier films could retroactively be deemed "queer," these films were often subsumed under a broader art cinema label and universalized in discursive contexts. At

¹ A.O. Scott, "'Moonlight': Is This the Year's Best Movie?" *New York Times* (20 October 2016): https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/21/movies/moonlight-review.html?_r=0

this moment in the early 1990s, the connection with a queer label became a marketing tactic and a boon to the films' cultural impact. This explicit connection to (commercially viable) queerness is an important distinction of NQC, and contributed to its lasting legacy.

NQC represented something genuinely new, but my research also reveals continuity. NQC came from, and was a part of, a growing realm of LGBTQ filmmaking. Twice in the decade prior to NQC, significant gay and lesbian film trends formed. The Hollywood gay mini-cycle and the Gay New Wave did not become film movements, but they enhanced the visibility of LGBTQ filmmaking and demonstrated its profitability. While LGBTQ filmmaking has undergone periods of waxing and waning, there has been an underlying, steady building of this niche as a distinct market subsection. NQC influenced the direction and growth of LGBTQ cinema in the 1990s and beyond, and the longevity of NQC's legacy is enhanced by institutional support structures that emerged over the preceding decade and facilitated the formation of a movement. Examining these institutional structures helps us understand the end of NQC and its lasting legacy.

NQC emerged from a wider base of LGBTQ filmmaking, which was supported by key institutions that helped create a broad, sustainable LGBTQ cinema niche. As this dissertation has argued, movements cannot be explained solely by their political contexts or the existence of audacious, rebel filmmakers. All film movements are constructed through the convergence of a complex array of factors and concrete developments, which this dissertation has traced in regards to NQC. Approaching NQC with the benefit of historical distance and archival research, I have been able to excavate and piece together the circumstances that shaped a movement in the early 1990s. The formation of NQC was not inevitable. NQC was a "radical impulse" that represents but one offshoot of a burgeoning LGBTQ cinema, fed through developments in industry,

audiences, and critical contexts. Although NQC filmmakers and the critical contexts surrounding them cultivated an image of these filmmakers as transgressive figures working outside of the industry, NQC films actually worked within existing independent production and distribution structures. Examining these support structures displays the abundant connections between exemplar films, which were joined together and held aloft, and a wider base of LGBTQ filmmaking. NQC's separation from this base was manufactured, a result not of innate differences per se but of the way NQC films were packaged as a distinct unit. While NQC stood out as a defined movement, an examination of NQC reveals underlying continuities between these films and other, lesser-known films.

Despite NQC's radical edge, the movement's canon is filled predominantly with films by and/or about white, gay men. NQC, and LGBTQ filmmaking more broadly, has been accused of whitewashing, ignoring the experiences and stories of people of color. Indeed, *Moonlight* is the first widely circulated feature film about a black, gay man. And while the more inclusive "LGBT" label is used retroactively in examining films from the 1990s and earlier, in most cases it would be more accurate to use "gay." Trans representations were virtually non-existent, and lesbian filmmakers were not as visible at this time as their male counterparts. One lesbian filmmaker noted "the difficulty, through gender inequality, of access to economic and marketing resources."² Rich remarked in her 1992 article that, "all the new movies being snatched up by distributors, shown in mainstream festivals, booked into theaters, are by the boys... The amazing new lesbian videos that are redefining the whole dyke relationship to popular culture remain hard to find."³ Cherry Smyth likewise remarked that "despite the growing numbers of talented lesbian filmmakers, there is little evidence of a new queer dyke cinema... In the new queer wave,

² Pratibha Parmar, "Queer Questions: Interview with Pratibha Parmar," *Sight and Sound* 5 (September 1992): 35.

³ Rich, "New Queer Cinema," 32.

lesbians are drowning.”⁴ As Rich and Smyth imply, the 1990s were a contradictory time for non-(cis-gender) male filmmakers. LGBTQ films were gaining greater recognition in mainstream markets, but this attention was predominantly given to male directors.⁵ This changed somewhat as the 1990s progressed, and more production opportunities were created. In part, the media attention, critical praise, and financial success of NQC enabled this expansion.

NQC’s lasting legacy was built through its critical and economic success. Ironically, Rich considered this success to be a key element of the movement’s downfall. At the end of the 1990s, B. Ruby Rich declared NQC to be over. In an article published in *Sight and Sound*, Rich re-positions her earlier work, asserting that NQC “was a more successful term for a moment than a movement.”⁶ She considers the legacy of NQC, and its relationship to films like *Boys Don’t Cry* (Kimberly Peirce, 1999), *Being John Malkovich* (Spike Jonze, 1999), and *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (Anthony Minghella, 1999). If these larger budget films, with stars and crossover success, could “be counted as the full-fledged flowering of the New Queer Cinema’s early shoots, then the movement may really have arrived, hitting the big time at last.”⁷ Rich hesitates in this optimistic pronouncement, however, claiming that “the movement itself in question, if not in total meltdown.”⁸ Rich states that NQC ended because it had “become so successful as to have dispersed itself in any number of elsewhere. Lacking the concentrated creative presence and focused community responsiveness of the past, the New Queer Cinema has become just another niche market, another product line pitched at one particular type of discerning

⁴ Cherry Smyth, “Trash Femme Cocktail,” *Sight and Sound* 2.5 (September 1992): 39.

⁵ This inequality occurred in the realm of producing, as when Christine Vachon (who produced *Poison*) was “upstaged” by James Schamus (who was associated with, but had not done much work on, *Poison*) at the 1991 Berlin Film Festival; “people swarmed around him, congratulating him on its success, ignoring Vachon, because she was female” (Biskind, 109).

⁶ B. Ruby Rich, “Queer and Present Danger,” *Sight and Sound* 10.3 (March 2000): 22.

⁷ Rich, “Queer and Present Danger,” 22.

⁸ Rich, “Queer and Present Danger,” 22.

consumer.”⁹ The attention garnered by queer films led studios and heterosexual directors to venture into queer-themed filmmaking, albeit with films that were often no longer queer in form. Queer themes were absorbed into more mainstream filmmaking practices, as stars began to welcome the critical acclaim that could accompany “playing gay.” Larger studios reentered the gay and lesbian filmmaking arena starting in 1993. They sought to take advantage of the cultural phenomenon of LGBTQ cinema and to cash in on individual trends, niches, and successful precursors. The “success of independent gay features shows that you can sell a *Philadelphia*.”¹⁰ The increase in product flooded the relatively small market, leading to a decrease in individual box office revenues. This dispersal might signal the end of a clearly defined movement, but it points to this movement’s lasting impact.

Queer independent film continued to be produced and even thrive in the following decades. Geoff King suggests that the trajectory followed by NQC mirrored that of the “independent sector as a whole since the early 1990s: a period of initial innovation followed by consolidation, expansion, crossover success closer to the mainstream and, as a result, expressions of concern about a loss of radical edge.”¹¹ King remains more optimistic than Rich, and suggests that even if the movement has lost some of its initial novelty and influence, there is a lasting dialectic between “more or less radical currents” of queer film.¹² Rich herself recanted somewhat in recent years, remarking in 2013 that NQC has “come back around. It’s never completely gone away, and happily it has survived as a category to be here for a whole new cycle of really interesting, exciting work.”¹³ The legacy of NQC is embedded in part in its lasting

⁹ Rich, “Queer and Present Danger,” 23.

¹⁰ Kleinhans qtd. in King, *American Independent Cinema*, 46.

¹¹ King, *American Independent Cinema*, 243

¹² King, *American Independent Cinema*, 244

¹³ B. Ruby Rich interview by Elle Flanders, *Daily Xtra*, <http://filmstudiesforfree.blogspot.com/2017/06/richly-resourceful-on-bruby-richs-work.html>

utility as a label for future generations of LGBTQ films. NQC has remained an important touchstone, and continued academic and critical references to the movement have further solidified the concept of NQC and its importance, often at the expense of earlier LGBTQ films.

NQC became the most visible LGBTQ cinema movement, and has continued to be a landmark of queer film history. Movements have beginnings and endings, and the brevity of a movement should not define its importance. Although the exact parameters can be debated, restricting NQC to a certain time span does not negate its status and importance as a movement. The initial use of NQC as a distinct, defined, and culturally significant label concluded by the end of the 1990s, but its legacy did not. This moment of wider recognition continued to shape an environment that encouraged the production of other LGBTQ films, leading to films like *Boys Don't Cry*, *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005), *Moonlight*, and beyond. Opportunities for LGBTQ filmmaking continued to grow in the 1990s and 2000s, aided by the advent of digital technologies. This continued expansion has inspired critics and audiences to note the formation of new waves of LGBTQ filmmaking, or at least ripples that might swell into future movements.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, there was an international surge in LGBTQ filmmaking, sparked in part through the continued growth of LGBTQ film festivals. Some critics were:

declaring the next Gay New Wave as an international phenomenon... Indeed, this second wave of queer cinema produced a number of internationally recognized films, especially from third world gay filmmakers... The queer diaspora had been identified, and before marketers would let the flame of New Queer Cinema snuff out completely, they would tap into burgeoning markets in Eastern Europe, Asia, and South America.¹⁴

NQC's success generated increased production opportunities around the world, in Asia, South America, and South Africa. In addition to this transnational expansion, there was continued

¹⁴ Rhyne, 60-61, 197-198.

growth in American LGBTQ filmmaking.

In recent years, the transgender experience has become the next frontier in LGBTQ civil rights battles, as exemplified in the fight against “bathroom bills” that attempt to regulate trans bodies. In conjunction with the fight for recognition and legal rights, trans representations in film and other media have swelled. Movies such as *Ma vie en rose* (Alain Berliner, 1997), *Boys Don't Cry*, *Transamerica* (Duncan Tucker, 2005), *Boy Meets Girl* (Eric Schaeffer, 2014), and *Tangerine* (Sean Baker, 2015), and series such as *Transparent* (2014-), present trans characters and viewpoints. In fact, trans representations have sparked discussions of a “Trans New Wave,”¹⁵ a return to new wave rhetoric, which indicates that the ripples of LGBTQ cinema continue to form and spread.

New Queer Cinema is not without its complications and contradictions, but it remains a touchstone in scholarship and popular conceptions of LGBTQ film. This was a moment when queer films were recognized, not in spite of their queerness, but because of it. NQC Filmmakers presented explicit, unapologetically queer images that were markedly different from films of the 1980s. My work connects this canon of critical exemplars with its wider base. NQC combined the success of earlier independent films with an underground, transgressive approach and tone. While there had been queer films before NQC, the mainstream attention and coalescence of a group of films around queerness makes this moment different and deserving of recognition. These films, however, are inseparable from their production, distribution, and critical contexts, and one cannot understand NQC without examining the contexts from which it emerged.

¹⁵ For example, Akkadia Ford, “Transliteracy and the Trans New Wave: Developing a New Canon of Cinematic Representations of Gender Diversity and Sexuality,” *The Journal of Communication and Media Studies* 1.2 (June 2016): 1-19.

Filmography

Abuse (Arthur J. Bressan, Jr, 1983)
Basic Instinct (Paul Verhoeven, 1992)
Born in Flames (Lizzie Borden, 1983)
Buddies (Arthur J. Bressan, Jr, 1985)
Claire of the Moon (Nicole Conn, 1992)
Cruising (William Friedkin, 1980)
Deathtrap (Sidney Lumet, 1982)
Desert Hearts (Donna Deitch, 1986)
Dona Herlinda and Her Son (Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, 1985, Mexico)
Edward II (Derek Jarman, 1991, UK)
Fun Down There (Roger Stigliano, 1989)
Go Fish (Rose Troche, 1994)
Kiss of the Spider Woman (Hector Babenco, 1985)
La Cage aux Folles (Édouard Molinaro, 1978, France)
Law of Desire (Pedro Almodóvar, 1987)
Lianna (John Sayles, 1983)
Long Weekend (O'Despair) (Gregg Araki, 1989)
Longtime Companion (Norman René, 1990)
Making Love (Arthur Hiller, 1982)
Mala Noche (Gus Van Sant, 1986)
Maurice (James Ivory, 1987, UK)
My Beautiful Laundrette (Stephen Frears, 1985, UK)
My Father is Coming (Monika Treut, 1991, Germany)
My Own Private Idaho (Gus Van Sant, 1991)
November Moon (Alexandra von Grote, 1985, W. Germany)
Outrageous (Richard Benner, 1977)
Paris is Burning (Jennie Livingston, 1990)
Parting Glances (Bill Sherwood, 1986)
Partners (James Burrows, 1982)
Personal Best (Robert Towne, 1982)
Peter's Friends (Kenneth Branagh, 1992, UK)
Philadelphia (Jonathan Demme, 1993)
Pissoir (Urinal), John Greyson, 1989, Canada)
Poison (Todd Haynes, 1991)
Prick up Your Ears (Stephen Frears, 1987, UK)
Salmonberries (Percy Adlon, 1991)
She Must be Seeing Things (Sheila McLaughlin, 1988)
Swoon (Tom Kalin, 1992)
Taxi Zum Klo (Taxi to the Toilet), Frank Ripplloh, 1981, West Germany)
The Crying Game (Neil Jordan, 1992, UK)
The Fourth Man (Paul Verhoeven, 1983)
The Hours and Times (Christopher Munch, 1991)
The Hunger (Tony Scott, 1983)
The Living End (Gregg Araki, 1992)

The Wedding Banquet (Ang Lee, 1993)
Torch Song Trilogy (Paul Bogart, 1988)
Totally Fucked Up (Gregg Araki, 1993)
Victor/Victoria (Blake Edwards, 1982)
Waiting For the Moon (Jill Godmilow, 1987)
What Have I Done to Deserve This? (*Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!*, Pedro Almodóvar,
1984, Spain)
Windows (Gordon Willis, 1980)
Zero Patience (John Greyson, 1993, Canada)
Zorro, the Gay Blade (Peter Medak, 1981)

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Appendix I: Film Budgets/Production/Distribution/Box-Office

Film	Year	Directed By	Produced By	Budget	Distributed by	Box-Office (US)
<i>La Cage aux Folles</i>	1978	Édouard Molinaro			United Artists	\$20.4 million
<i>Cruising</i>	1980	William Friedkin	MGM		MGM/UA	\$19.8 M
<i>Taxi Zum Klo</i>	1981	Frank Ripploh	Ripploh	\$50,000	Promovision	>\$280,000
<i>Deathtrap</i>	1982	Sidney Lumet	Warner Bros.		Warner Bros.	\$19.3 M
<i>Personal Best</i>	1982	Robert Towne	Warner Bros.		Warner Bros.	\$5.7 M
<i>Making Love</i>	1982	Arthur Hiller	20th C Fox	\$8M	Fox	\$11.9M
<i>Victor/Victoria</i>	1982	Blake Edwards	MGM		MGM	\$28 M
<i>Partners</i>	1982	James Burrows	Paramount		Paramount	\$6 M
<i>The Hunger</i>	1983	Tony Scott	MGM(/UA)		MGM(/UA)	\$6 M
<i>Lianna</i>	1983	John Sayles	Winwood Prod	\$300T	UA Classics or MGM?	\$1.5M
<i>Kiss of the Spider Woman</i>	1985	Héctor Babenco	HB Films	\$1.8 million	Island Alive	\$17M
<i>Mala Noche</i>	1985	Gus Van Sant	Van Sant	\$25,000	the Other Cinema	\$62,000 (eventually)
<i>Parting Glances</i>	1986	Bill Sherwood	Rondo Productions	\$300,000	Cinecom Pictures	\$537,000
<i>Desert Hearts</i>	1986	Donna Deitch	Deitch	\$1.25M	Goldwyn	\$2.5-\$3.5M
<i>My Beautiful Laundrette</i>	1986	Stephen Frears	Channel 4	£650,000	Orion Classics	\$2.45M
<i>I've Heard the Mermaids Singing</i>	1987	Patricia Rozema		\$262,000	Miramax	\$1.3M
<i>Maurice</i>	1987	James Ivory	Merchant Ivory (British)	\$2.6M	Cinecom Pictures	\$3.1M
<i>Prick Up Your Ears</i>	1987	Stephen Frears	Zenith/Chan4/Goldwyn	\$1.9M	Goldwyn	\$1.65M
<i>Law of Desire</i>	1987	Pedro Almodóvar			Cinevista	\$245,530
<i>Matador</i>	1988	Pedro Almodóvar		\$837,000	Cinevista	\$206,952
<i>Torch Song Trilogy</i>	1988	Paul Bogart	New Line Cinema		New Line	\$4.86M
<i>Longtime Companion</i>	1990	Norman René	American Playhouse	\$1.5M	Goldwyn	\$4.6M
<i>Claire of the Moon</i>	1991	Nicole Conn	Nicole Conn	\$325,000	Conn/Strand	\$700,000
<i>Paris is Burning</i>	1990	Jennie Livingston				\$3.8M
<i>Poison</i>	1991	Todd Haynes	Christine Vachon/Killer Films/Limited partnership	\$250,000	Zeitgeist	\$850,000
<i>My Own Private Idaho</i>	1991	Gus Van Sant	New Line Cinema	\$2.5M	Fine Line	\$6.4M
<i>Swoon</i>	1992	Tom Kalin	Vachon		Fine Line	\$340,000
<i>Edward II</i>	1992	Derek Jarman	Working Title	£750,000	Fine Line	\$700,000
<i>The Living End</i>	1992	Greg Araki		\$22,700	October	\$692,500
<i>Basic Instinct</i>	1992	Paul Verhoeven	TriStar	\$49 M	TriStar	\$118 M
<i>The Crying Game</i>	1992	Neil Jordan			Miramax	\$62.5M
<i>Philadelphia</i>	1993	Jonathan Demme	TriStar	\$26 M	TriStar	\$77 M
<i>Go Fish</i>	1994	Rose Troche	KVP	\$73,000	Goldwyn	\$2.4M

Appendix II: Film Festival Screening Lists

(All screening lists are pulled from viewing festival programs. An emphasis is given to feature length, narrative films, which are all listed, although select shorts and documentaries are also included.)

Pittsburgh International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival

- **1984/1985:**
 - November: Mixed Shorts
 - December: *Taxi Zum Klo* (Frank Ripplloh, 1980, W. Germany)
 - February: *Flesh on Glass*; *Christopher Isherwood: Over There On a Visit* (Alan Wallis, 1976, Great Britain)
 - March: *Mädchen in Uniform* (Leontine Sagan and Carl Froelich, 1931, Germany)
 - April: *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* (Douglas Hickox, 1970, W. Germany)
 - May: *The Cats* (Henning Carlsen, 1965, Sweden)

- **1986: “Gay Film Festival”**
 - *The Times of Harvey Milk* (Robert Epstein, 1984, USA)
 - *Before Stonewall: The Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community* (Greta Schiller and Robert Rosenberg, 1984, USA)
 - *Choosing Children* (Debra Chasnoff and Kim Klausner, 1984, USA)
 - *Abuse* (Arthur Bressan, 1982, USA)
 - *Casta Diva* (Eric de Kuyper, 1982, Netherlands)
 - *Another Country* (Marek Kaniévská, 1984, UK)

- **1987: “Gay and Lesbian Film Festival”**
 - *Mala Noche* (Gus van Sant, 1986, USA)
 - *Law of Desire* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1987, Spain)
 - *Buddies* (Arthur Bressan, 1985, USA)
 - *Before Stonewall: The Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community* (Greta Schiller and Robert Rosenberg, 1984, USA)
 - *Comedy in Six Unnatural Acts* (Jan Oxenberg, 1975, USA)
 - *Damned if You Don't* (Su Friedrich, 1987, USA, short)
 - *Un Chant D'Amour* (Jean Genet, 1950, France, short)
 - *Firewords* (Dorothy Todd Henaut, 1986, Canada)
 - *My New Friend* (Gus Van Sant, 1987, USA, short)
 - *Five Ways to Kill Yourself* (Gus Van Sant, 1987, USA, short)
 -

- **1988: “Lesbian and Gay Film Festival”**
 - *November Moon* (Alexandra von Grote, 1984, W. Germany/France)
 - *Doña Herlinda and Her Son* (Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, 1985, Mexico)
 - *Taxi Zum Klo* (Frank Ripplloh, 1980, W. Germany)
 - *Too Outrageous!* (Richard Benner, 1987, Canada)
 - *The Outsiders* (Yu Kan-Ping, 1986, Taiwan)
 - *Three Bewildered People in the Night* (Gregg Araki, 1987, USA)

- *Not All Parents are Straight* (Kevin White, 1988, USA)
 - *Silent Pioneers* (Lucy Winer, 1985, USA)
 - *Tiny and Ruby: Hell Divin' Women* (Greta Schiller and Andrea Weiss, 1988, USA)
 - *She Must be Seeing Things* (Sheila McLaughlin, 1987, USA)
 - *Salome's Last Dance* (Ken Russell, 1988, UK)
 - *Improper Conduct (Mauvaise Conduite)*, Nestor Almendros and Orlando Jimenez Leal, 1984, France)
 - *The War Widow* (Paul Bogart, 1976, USA)
 - *AIDS videos*
 - Experimental Festival tour
- **1989:**
 - *Fun Down There* (Rogen Stigliano, 1988, USA)
 - *Dark Habits* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1983, Spain)
 - *Boys in the Band* (William Friedkin, 1970, USA)
 - *Empire State* (Ron Peck, 1986, UK)
 - *Salut Victor!* (Anne Claire Poirier, 1988, Canada)
 - *The Killing of Sister George* (Robert Aldrich, 1968, UK)
 - *A Man like Eva* (Radu Gabrea, 1983, W. Germany)
 - *Another Way* (Karoly Makk, 1982, Hungary)
 - *The Passion of Remembrance* (Maureen Blackwood and Isaac Julien, 1986, UK)
 - *Looking for Langston* (Isaac Julien, 1988, UK)
 - *Torch Song Trilogy* (Paul Bogart, 1988, USA)
 - *The Days of Greek Gods* (Richard Fontaine, 1949-1962, collection of shorts, USA)
 - *The Long Weekend O'Despair* (Gregg Araki, 1989, USA)
 - *The Virgin Machine* (Monika Treut, 1988, W. Germany)
 - *Urinal* (John Greyson, 1988, Canada)
 - *Westler, East of the Wall* (Wieland Speck, 1985, W. Germany)
 - *An Empty Bed* (Mark Gasper, 1990, USA)
 - *Anita-Dances of Vice* (Rosa von Praunheim, 1987, W. Germany)
 - *Pink Flamingos* (John Waters, 1972, USA)
 - *The Heart Exposed* (Jean-Yves Laforce, 1986, Canada)
 - *Desire* (Stuart Marshall, 1989, UK)
 - *Territories* (Isaac Julien, 1985, UK, short)
 - *Two of Us* (Roger Tonge, 1986, UK)
 - Best of NY experimental fest
 - John Greyson Video Shorts
 - Barbara Hammer Shorts
 - "Lesbian Shorts"
 - **1990:**
 - *The Times of Harvey Milk* (Robert Epstein, 1984, USA)
 - *Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt* (Robert Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, 1990, USA)

- *Tongues Untied* (Marlon Riggs, 1989, USA, short doc)
 - *The World is Sick (Sic)* (John Greyson, 1989, Canada)
 - *Extramuros* (Miguel Picazo, 1986, Spain)
 - *Dance Girl, Dance* (Dorothy Arzner, 1940, USA)
 - *Two-Faced Woman* (George Cukor, 1941, USA)
 - *Taxi to Cairo* (Frank Ripplloh, 1988, W. Germany)
 - *Westler, East of the Wall* (Wieland Speck, 1985, W. Germany)
 - *I Am a Man* (M.L. Bandevanop Devakul, 1988, Thailand)
 - *Drugstore Cowboy* (Gus Van Sant, 1989, USA)
 - *Out on Tuesday* (TV shows)
 - *Mala Noche* (Gus Van Sant, 1986, USA)
 - *Straight to the Heart* (Lea Pool, 1988, UK)
 - *Out of Our Time* (Casi Pacilio and L.M. Keys, 1988, USA)
 - *The Last Song* (Pisan Akarasainee, 1986, Thailand)
 - *Remembrance* (Colin Gregg, 1982, UK)
 - *Comrades in Arms* (Stuart Marshall, 1990, UK, documentary)
 - *Nocturne* (Joy Chamberlain, 1990, UK)
 - *Anguished Love* (Pisan Akarasainee, 1987, Thailand)
 - *Tiny and Ruby: Hell Divin' Women* (Greta Schiller and Andrea Weiss, 1988, USA)
 - Terence Davies: *Children, Madonna and Child*, and *Death and Transfiguration*
 - *Coming Out* (Heiner Carow, 1989, E. Germany)
 - Symposium: Sexuality and Gender in the films of George Cukor and Dorothy Arzner
 - All Girl Action: The History of Lesbian Erotica
- **1991:**
 - *My Own Private Idaho* (Gus Van Sant, 1991, USA)
 - *Time Off* (Eytan Fox, 1990, Israel)
 - *Together Alone* (P.J. Castellaneta, 1991, USA)
 - *Le Jupon Rouge* (Genevieve Lefebvre, 1987, France)
 - *The Making of 'Monsters'* (John Greyson, 1991, Canada, short) and other shorts
 - *My Father is Coming* (Monika Treut, 1991, USA/Germany)
 - *The Wounded Man (L'Homme Blessé)* (Patrice Chereau, 1983, France)
 - *Macho Dancer* (Lino Brocka, 1988, Philippines)
 - *Seduction: the Cruel Woman* (Monika Treut and Elfi Mikesch, 1985, W. Germany)
 - *No Skin off My Ass* (Bruce LaBruce, 1990, Canada/Germany)
 - *Via Appia* (Jochen Hick, 1989, W. Germany)
 - *The Garden* (Derek Jarman, 1990, UK)
 - *Forbidden Love* (Aerlyn Weissman and Lynne Fernie, 1992, Canada)
 - *Apartment Zero* (Martin Donovan, 1988, UK/Argentina)
 - *Evenings* (Rudolf Van den Berg, 1989, Netherlands)
 - *In a Glass Cage* (Agustin Villaronga, 1986, Spain)
 - *James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket* (Karen Thorsen, 1989, USA)
 - *Vaudeville* (Ira Sachs, 1991, USA, short)

- *Voices from the Front* (Testing the Limits Collective, 1990, USA)
- Homo Promo (Talk)
- **1992:**
 - *Hours and the Times* (Christopher Munch, 1991, USA)
 - *Friends Forever* (*Venner For Altid*, Stefan Henszelman, 1986, Denmark)
 - *The Twin Bracelets* (Yu-Shan Huang, 1990, Hong Kong/Taiwan)
 - *Edward II* (Derek Jarman, 1992, UK)
 - *Wild Flowers* (Robert Smith, 1989, UK)
 - *The Affairs of Love* (Jaime Chavarri, 1990, Spain)
 - Gay Cable Network Night
 - Celluloid Heroes (shorts)
 - Out on TV: British Style (shorts)
 - Houses of Color (shorts-including one by Marlon Riggs)
- **1993:**
 - *Agora* (Robert and Donald Kinney, 1992)
 - *And the Band Played On* (Roger Spottiswoode, 1993)
 - *Being at Home with Claude* (Jean Beaudin, 1992, Canada)
 - *Claire of the Moon* (Nicole Conn, 1992)
 - *Crush* (Alison Maclean, 1992, New Zealand)
 - *For A Lost Soldier* (Roeland Kerbosch, 1993, Netherlands)
 - *Last Call At Maud's* (Paris Poirier, 1993)
 - *Okoge* (Takehiro Nakajima, 1993?, Japan)
 - *Sex is...* (Marc Huestis and Lawrence Helman, 1993, Documentary)
 - *Young Soul Rebels* (Isaac Julien,

Frameline, San Francisco Lesbian and Gay Film Festival

- **1981:** (first year with features)
 - *Mädchen in Uniform* (Leontine Sagan and Carl Froelich, 1931, Germany)
 - *A Woman Like Eve* (Nouchka van Brakel, 1979, Netherlands)
 - *Lot in Sodom* (Melville Webber and JS Watson Jr, 1933)
 - *Christopher Isherwood: Over There On a Visit* (Alan Wallis, 1976, UK)
 - *Sergei Eisenstein* (V. Katanyan, 1958, USSR)
 - *Portrait of Jason* (Shirley Clark, 1967, USA)
 - *A Woman's Place is in the House* (Nancy Porter and Mickey Lemie, 1976, USA)
 - *Gertrude Stein: When This You See, Remember Me* (Perry Miller Adato, 1970, USA)
 - *A Bigger Splash* (Jack Hazan, 1973, UK)
 - *Twice a Woman* (George Sluizer, 1979, Netherlands)
 - *We Were One Man* (Philippe Vallois, 1979, France)
 - *Lieve Jongens* (*Dear Boys*, Matthijs van Heijningen, 1980, Netherlands)
- **1982:**
 - *Depart to Arrive* (Alexandra von Grote, 1982, W. Germany)

- *Madame X: An Absolute Ruler* (Ulrike Ottinger, 1977, W. Germany)
 - *Army of Lovers of Revolt of the Perverts* (Rosa van Praunheim, 1978, W. Germany)
 - *Salome* (Natasha Rambova and Charles Bryant, 1922, USA)
 - *Prison for Women* (Holly Dale and Janis Cole, 1981, Canada)
 - *Once Upon a Time in the East* (Andre Brassard, 1971, Canada)
 - *Pink Triangles* (Cambridge Documentary Films, 1981, USA)
 - *Greetings from Washington DC* (Lucy Winer, 1981, USA)
 - *Times Square* (Robert Stigwood, 1980, USA)
 - *Funeral Parade of Roses* (Toshio Matsumoto, 1968, Japan)
 - *The World of Gilbert and George* (Gilbert and George, 1981, UK)
 - *NightHawks* (Ron Peck and Paul Hallarn, 1978, UK)
 - *Montreal Main* (Frank Vitale and Allan Bozo Moyle, 1974, Canada)
 - *Midnight Life and Death* (Svend Wam and Peter Vennerod, 1980, Norway)
 - Showing of in progress film- *Out of Order* (Harvey Milk film)
 - Tribute to Barbara Hammer
 - Tribute to Iris Films
 - Talk by Barry Sandler
- **1983:**
 - *Different from the Others* (Richard Oswald, 1919, Germany)
 - *A Love Like Any Other (Eine Liebe wie Andere)*, Hans Stempel and Martin Ripkens, 1982, W. Germany)
 - *This Special Friendship* (Jean Delanoy, 1982, W. Germany)
 - *Mikael* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1924, Germany)
 - *City of Lost Souls* (Rosa von Praunheim, 1983, W. Germany)
 - *Rainer Werner Fassbinder: The Last Works* (Wolf Gremm, 1982, W. Germany, doc.)
 - *The Sound of Fast Relief* (Weiland Speck, 1982, W. Germany)
 - *Pauline's Birthday or The Beast of Notre Dame* (Fritz Matthies, 1979, W. Germany, doc.)
 - *The Farewell* (1980, Tuija-Maija Niskanen, Finland)
 - *Hell Without Limits* (Arturo Ripstein, 1977, Mexico)
 - *Casta Diva* (Eric de Kuyper, 1982, Netherlands)
 - *Club Des Femmes (Women's Club)*, Jacques Daval, 1936, France)
 - *Born in Flames* (Lizzie Borden, 1983, USA)
 - *The Deputy* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1980, Spain)
 - Terence Davies: *Children, Madonna and Child*, and *Death and Transfiguration*
 - Tribute to James Broughton
- **1984:**
 - *The Sprinter (Der Sprinter)*, Christoph Böll, 1984, W. Germany)
 - *Second awakening of Christina Klages* (Margarethe von Trotta, 1977, W. Germany)
 - *Viktor und Viktoria* (Reinhold Schünzel, 1933, Germany)
 - *Improper Conduct (Mauvaise Conduite)*, Nestor Almendros and Orlando Jimenez

- Leal, 1984, France)
 - *On Guard* (Susan Lambert, 1983, Australia)
 - *The Black Lizard* (*Kuro Tokage*, Kinji Fukasaku, 1968, Japan)
 - *Drifting* (*Nagua*, Amos Guttman, 1983, Israel)
 - *Angel* (George Katakouzinis, 1982, Greece)
 - *Sparkle's Tavern* (Curt McDowell, 1984, USA)
 - *Recent Sorrows* (Jerry R. Barrish, 1984, USA)
 - *The Rainbow Serpent* (Philippe Vallois, 1983, France)
 - *ASA Branca—A Brazilian Dream* (Djalma Limongi Batista, 1982, Brazil)
 - *Dressed in Blue* (*Vestide de Azul*, Antonio Giminez-Rico, 1983, Spain)
 - *The Dozens* (Christine Dall and Randall Conrad, 1981, USA)
 - *Jean Genet* (Antoine Boun Seillem, 1983, France)
 - *Un Chant D'Amour* (Jen Genet, 1952, France)
 - *Maneaters* (Michael Zen, 1984, USA)
 - *Stand By* (Curt McDowell, 1984, USA)
 - *The Clinic* (David Stevens, 1982, Australia)
 - *Pleasure Beach* (Arthur J. Bressan, Jr., 1982, USA)
 - *Mirror Mirror* (Edward Fleming, 1978, Denmark)
 - Terence Davies: *Children, Madonna and Child*, and *Death and Transfiguration*
- **1985:**
 - *November Moon* (Alexandra von Grote, 1984, W. Germany/France)
 - *A Man like Eva* (Radu Gabrea, 1983, W. Germany)
 - *Seduction: the Cruel Woman* (Monika Treut and Elfi Mikesch, 1985, W. Germany)
 - *Horror Vacui- the Fear of Emptiness* (Rosa von Praunheim, 1984, W. Germany)
 - *Paso Doble* (Lothar Lambert, 1983, W. Germany)
 - *Blue Smoke* (*Blauer Dunst*, Klaus Keske, 1983, W. Germany)
 - *Depart to Arrive* (Alexandra von Grote, 1982, W. Germany)
 - *Choosing Children* (Debra Chasnoff and Kim Klausner, 1984, USA)
 - *Pink Narcissus* (Jim Bidgood, 1971, USA)
 - *Breaking the Silence* (Melanie Chait, 1985, USA)
 - *The Times of Harvey Milk* (Robert Epstein, 1984, USA)
 - *Broken Mirrors* (*Gerbroken Spiegels*, Marleen Gorris, 1984, Netherlands)
 - *Before Stonewall* (Greta Schiller and Robert Rosenberg, 1984, USA)
 - *More Love* (Koshi Shimada, 1984, Japan)
 - *Bondage* (Monika Treut, 1983, W. Germany, short)
 - *Angelic Conversation* (Derek Jarman, 1984, UK)
 - *Naughty Boys* (Eric de Kuyper, 1983, Netherlands)
 - *Silent Pioneers* (Lucy Winer, 1985, USA)
 - *The Leather Boys* (Sidney Furie, 1964, UK)
 - *The L-Shaped Room* (Bryan Forbes, 1962, UK)
 - *Luminous Procedures* (Steven Arnold, 1971, USA)
 - *A Taste of Honey* (Tony Richardson, 1961, UK)
 - *Paul Cadmus: Enfant Terrible at 80* (David Sutherland, 1984, USA)
 - *Domestic Bliss* (Joy Chamberlain, 1984, UK)

- *Behind Glass* (Ab van leperen, 1981, Netherlands)
- *Victim* (Basil Deardon, 1961, UK)
- **1986:**
 - *Westler— East of the Wall* (Wieland Speck, 1985, W. Germany)
 - *Different from the Others* (Richard Oswald, 1919, Germany)
 - *Mädchen in Uniform* (Leontine Sagan and Carl Froelich, 1931, Germany)
 - *Doña Herlinda y su hijo* (*Doña Herlinda and her son*, Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, 1985, Mexico)
 - *Times Square* (Robert Stigwood, 1980, USA)
 - *Buddies* (Arthur Bressan, 1985, USA)
 - *Salome* (Natasha Rambova and Charles Bryant, 1922, USA)
 - *Das Ganze Leben* (*The Whole of Life*, Bruno Moll, 1983, Switzerland)
 - *Manuel Y Clemente* (Javier Palmero Romero, 1985, Spain)
 - *Pervola, Sporen in de Sneeuw* (*Pervola, Tracks in the Snow*, Orlow Seunke, 1985, Netherlands)
 - *Sebastiane* (Derek Jarman, 1977, UK)
 - *La Muerte De Mikel* (*The Death of Mikel*, Imanol Uribe, 1984, Spain)
 - *Mala Noche* (Gus Van Sant, 1985, USA)
 - *A Strange Love Affair* (Eric De Kuyper, Paul Vestraten, 1985, Netherlands)
 - *Club Des Femmes* (Jacques Deval, 1936, France)
 - *Self Defense* (Michael Donovan, 1983, Canada)
 - *Lieve Jongens* (*Dear Boys*, Matthijs van Heijningen, 1980, Netherlands)
 - *Adios Roberto* (Jorge and Enrique Dawi, 1985, Argentina)
 - *The AIDS Show* (Peter Adair and Robert Epstein, 1986, USA)
 - *Los Placeros Ocultos* (*Hidden Pleasures*, Eloy de la Iglesia, 1977, Spain)
 - *Wiener Brut* (Hans Fädler, 1985, Austria)
 - *Coming of Age* (Marc Huestis, 1986, video, USA)
 - *Inevitable Love* (Henry Moch, 1986, USA)
 - *No Sad Songs* (Nick Sheehan, 1985, Canada)
 - *El Lugar Sin Limites* (*A Limitless Place*, Arturo Ripstein, 1977, Mexico)
 - *We were One Man* (Philippe Vallais, 1979, France)
 - *Men Behind Bars* (MEN Video produced, Jim Cvitanich and Mark Abramson, 1986, USA)
 - *Born in Flames* (Lizzie Borden, 1983, USA)
 - (Celluloid Closet talk)
- **1987:** (Frameline award to Alexandra von Grote)
 - *A Virus Knows No Morals* (*Ein Virus Kennt Keine Moral*, Rosa von Praunheim, 1986, W. Germany)
 - *The Berlin Affair* (Liliana Cavani, 1985, Italy/W. Germany)
 - *Desert of Love* (Lothar Lambert, 1986, W. Germany)
 - *Wolfgirl* (Dagmar Beiersdorf, 1986, W. Germany)
 - *Drama in Blond* (Lothar Lambert, 1984, W. Germany)
 - *November Moon* (Alexandra von Grote, 1984, W. Germany/France)
 - *She Must be Seeing Things* (Sheila McLaughlin, 1987, USA)

- *Pouvoir Intime* (Yves Simoneau, 1986, Canada)
 - *Aqueles Dois* (Sergio Amon, 1985, Brazil, North American premiere)
 - *Anne Trister* (Lea Pool, 1985, Canada)
 - *The Outsiders* (Yu Kan-Ping, 1986, Taiwan)
 - *La Triche* (Yannick Bellon, 1984, France)
 - *Daughters of Darkness* (Harry Kumel, 1971, Belgium/France/Germany/Spain)
 - *Vera* (Sergio Toledo, 1986, Brazil)
 - *What have I done to deserve this?* (Pedro Almodovar, 1984, Spain)
 - *Simone* (Christine Ehm, 1984, France)
 - *The Passion of Remembrance* (Maureen Blackwood and Isaac Julien, 1986, UK)
 - *A Moffie Called Simon* (John Greyson, 1986, Canada, short)
 - *Meteor and Shadow* (Takis Spetsiotis, 1985, Greece)
 - *Tras el Cristal* (Agustin Villaronga, 1985, Spain)
 - *Olivia (The Pit of Loneliness)* (Jacqueline Audry, 1951, France)
 - *Sisters of Darkness (Dark Habits)* (Pedro Almodovar, 1983, Spain)
 - *P.A.N.I.C. In Griffith Park* (Lee Garlington, 1987, USA)
 - *Nineteen Nineteen* (Hugh Brody, 1984, UK)
 - *Bright Eyes* (Stuart Marshall, 1986, UK)
 - *Firewords* (Dorothy Todd Henaut, 1986, Canada)
 - *Law of Desire* (Pedro Almodovar, 1987, Spain)
 - *Gertrude Stein and a Companion* (Ira Cirker, 1986, USA)
 - *Hail the New Puritan* (Charles Atlas, 1986, UK)
 - *Crimes Against Nature* (Edward Dundas, 1977, USA)
- **1988:**
 - *Mädchen in Uniform* (Geza von Radvenyi, 1957, W. Germany)
 - *Dorian Grey in the Mirror of the Popular Press* (Ulrike Ottinger, 1984, W. Germany)
 - *The Virgin Machine* (Monika Treut, 1988, W. Germany)
 - *Dark Habits (Entre tinieblas)* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1983, Spain)
 - *Empire State* (Ron Peck, 1986, UK)
 - *Dracula's Daughter* (Lambert Hillyer, 1936, USA)
 - *Kamikaze Hearts* (Juliet Bashore, 1986, USA)
 - *Crows* (Ayeley Menahemi, 1988, Israel)
 - *Friends Forever (Venner For Altid)* (Stefan Henszelman, 1986, Denmark)
 - *Three Bewildered People in the Night* (gregg araki, 1987, USA)
 - *Another Way* (Karoly Makk, 1982, Hungary)
 - *The Last Song* (Pisan Akarasainee, 1986, Thailand)
 - *The Last of England* (Derek Jarman, 1987, UK)
 - *The Ice Palace* (Per Blom, 1987, Norway)
 - *The Everlasting Secret Family* (Michael Thornhill, 1988, Australia)
 - *Tiny and Ruby: Hell Divin' Women* (Greta Schiller and Andrea Weiss, 1988, USA)
 - *Anguished Love* (Pisan Akarasainee, 1987, Thailand)
 - *Revolutions Happen like Refrains in a Song* (Nick Deocampo, 1987, Philippines)
 - *Wendel* (Christoph Schaub, 1987, Denmark)

- *The Days of Greek Gods* (Richard Fontaine, 1949-1962, collection of shorts, USA)
 - *The War Widow* (Paul Bogart, 1976, USA)
 - Talk: "A Queer Feeling When I Look At You," presentation by Andrea Weiss
 - Talk: "A Queer Kind of Film," selection of experimental shorts from New York Lesbian and Gay Film Festival
 - Panel: Sapphic Celluloid
 - Symposium: AIDS Video
- **1989: Cinevista/Promovision is awarded the Frameline Award**
 - *Johanna D'Arc of Mongolia* (Ulrike Ottinger, 1989, W. Germany)
 - *Taxi to Cairo* (Frank Ripplloh, 1987, W. Germany)
 - *Salut Victor!* (Anne Claire Poirier, 1988, Canada), "world theatrical premiere"
 - *Therese and Isabelle* (Radley Metzger, 1966, France)
 - *Out of Our Time* (Casi Pacilio, 1988, USA)
 - *The Long Weekend (o'despair)* (Gregg Araki, 1988, USA)
 - *What Shall We Do Without Death* (Elfi Mikesch, 1980, doc, W. Germany)
 - *Summer Vacation: 1999* (Shusuke Kaneko, 1988, Japan)
 - *Fun Down There* (Rogen Stigliano, 1988, USA)
 - *Looking for Langston* (Isaac Julien, 1988, UK)
 - *The Killing of Sister George* (Robert Aldrich, 1968, UK)
 - *Some of My Best Friends Are...* (Melvyn Nelson, 1971, USA)
 - *Urinal* (John Greyson, 1988, Canada)
 - *Pink Narcissus* (Jim Bidgood, 1971, USA)
 - *Men in Love* (Marc Huestis, 1989, USA)
 - *Desire* (Stuart Marshall, 1989, UK)
 - *Night Visions* (Marusia Bociurkiw, 1989, Canada)
 - *Wonderland* (Philip Saville, 1988, UK)
 - *The Heart Exposed* (Jean-Yves Laforce, 1986, Canada)
 - *Two of Us* (Roger Tonge, 1986, UK)
 - Videos by John Greyson
 - Panel: "Lesbian/Gay Media in the 90's"
 - **1990:**
 - *Coming Out* (Heiner Carow, 1989, E. Germany)
 - *Querelle* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1983, W. Germany)
 - *Nocturne* (Joy Chamberlain, 1990, UK)
 - *The Balcony* (Joseph Strick, 1963, USA)
 - *Caged* (John Cromwell, 1950, USA)
 - *Prisonnières* (Charlotte Silvera, 1988, France)
 - *Scrubbers* (Mai Zetterling, 1982, UK)
 - *Silence=Death* (Rosa von Praunheim, 1990, doc, W. Germany)
 - *Positive* (Rosa von Praunheim, 1990, doc, W. Germany)
 - *Comrades in Arms* (Stuart Marshall, 1990, UK)
 - *Crocodiles in Amsterdam* (Annette Apon, 1989, Netherlands)
 - *Evenings* (Rudolf Van den Berg, 1989, Netherlands)

- *Extramuros* (Miguel Picazo, 1986, Spain)
 - *Gay USA* (Arthur Bressan, 1977, doc, USA)
 - *Abuse* (Arthur Bressan, 1982, USA)
 - *I Am a Man* (M.L. Bandevanop Devakul, 1988, Thailand)
 - *My Hustler* (Andy Warhol, 1965, USA)
 - *Paris is Burning* (Jennie Livingston, 1990, doc, USA)
 - *Pink Ulysses* (Eric de Kuyper, 1990, Netherlands)
 - *Straight to the Heart* (Lea Pool, 1988, UK)
 - *Wild Flowers* (Robert Smith, 1989, UK)
 - *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* (Beeban Kidron, 1989, UK)
 - Shorts series: “New Lesbian Short Films,” “New Gay Short Films”
 - Talks:
 - “Feminist Theory/Lesbian Media: Rethinking Sexual Representation”
 - “AIDS and Media: Strategies for the 90s”
 - “Experimental Media/Gay audiences: Working at the Edges”
 - “Looking for Home: Lesbian & Gay Media Artists of Color”
 - “Subcultural Stances, Mainstream Visibility: Lesbians & Gays in Media and Visual Arts”
 - Presentation: “Coming Attractions: Selling the Homo, Hollywood Style,” curated by Jenni Olsen
- **1991:**
 - *My Father is Coming* (Monika Treut, 1991, USA/Germany, opening night)
 - *All of Me* (Bettina Wilhelm, 1990, Germany)
 - *The Complaint of the Empress* (Pina Bausch, 1990, France/Germany)
 - *Macumba* (Elfi Mikesch, 1981, W. Germany)
 - *Via Appia* (Jochen Hick, 1989, W. Germany)
 - *Seduction: the Cruel Woman* (Monika Treut and Elfi Mikesch, 1985, W. Germany)
 - *What Shall we do Without Death* (Elfi Mikesch, 1980, W. Germany)
 - *The Garden* (Derek Jarman, 1990, UK)
 - *The Nun* (Jacques Rivette, 1966, France)
 - *Seven Women* (John Ford, 1965, USA)
 - *Damned if you Don't* (Su Friedrich, 1987, USA, short)
 - *Evolution of a Sex Life* (Cindy Gaffney, 1988, USA, short)
 - *Gently Down the Stream* (Su Friedrich, 1983, USA)
 - *The Way of the Wicked* (Christine Vachon, 1989, USA, short)
 - *American Fabulous* (Reno Dakota, 1991, USA, video)
 - *Coal Miner's Granddaughter* (Cecilia Dougherty, 1991, USA, video)
 - *The Complaint of the Empress* (Pina Bausch, 1990, France/Germany)
 - *Deserter* (George Korras and Christos Voupouras, 1988, Greece)
 - *The Making of 'Monsters'* (John Greyson, 1990, Canada, short)
 - *Nighthawks* (Ron Peck and Paul Hallam, 1978, UK)
 - *Strip Jack Naked* (making of *Nighthawks*, Ron Peck, 1991, UK)
 - *No Skin off My Ass* (Bruce LaBruce, 1990, Canada/Germany)
 - *Over our Dead Bodies* (Stuart Marshall, 1991, UK)

- *Portrait of a Marriage* (Stephen Whittaker, 1990, UK)
 - *Rough Sketch of a Spiral* (Yasushi Kojima, 1990, Japan)
 - *Thank You and Goodnight* (Jan Odenberg, 1991, USA)
 - *Together Alone* (P.J. Castellaneto, 1991, USA)
 - *Via Appia* (Jochen Hick, 1989, W. Germany)
 - Talk: "Passing the Bucks: Funding for Lesbian/Gay Media"
 - Talk: "Basic Instincts: Hollywood's Treatment of Lesbian and Gays on screen"
- **1992:**
 - *November Moon* (Alexandra von Grote, 1984, W. Germany/France)
 - *The Affairs of Love* (Jaime Chavarri, 1990, Spain)
 - *Desert Hearts* (Donna Deitch, 1986, USA)
 - *The Twin Bracelets* (Yu-Shan Huang, 1990, Hong Kong/Taiwan, Bay Area Premiere)
 - *Swoon* (Tom Kalin, 1991, USA, West Coast Premiere)
 - *That Tender Touch* (Russel Vincent, 1969, USA)
 - *Borderline* (Kenneth Macpherson, 1930, UK)
 - *The Lost Language of Cranes* (Nigel Finch, 1992, UK)
 - *Times Square* (Allen Moyle, 1980, USA)
 - *Friends Forever* (Stefan Henszelmann, 1986, Denmark)
 - *The Hours and the Times* (Christopher Munch, 1991, USA)
 - *Ernesto* (Salvatore Samperi, 1979, Italy)
 - *Craig's Wife* (Dorothy Arzner, 1936, USA)
 - *Last Call at Maud's* (work in progress, Paris Poirier, 1992, USA)
 - *Inca Princess* (Gunther Czernetzky, 1992, Germany)
 - *The Gay Deceivers* (Bruce Kessler, 1969, USA)
 - *Rock Hudson's Home Movies* (Mark Rapport, 1992, USA)
 - *Flaming Ears* (Angela Hans Scheirl, Dietmar Schipek, and Ursula Purrer, 1992, Austria)
 - *Affengeil* (Rosa von Praunheim, 1990, Germany)
 - *Fortune and Men's Eyes* (Harvey Hart, 1971, Canada/USA)
 - *Boy! What a Girl* (Arthur Leonard, 1945, USA)
 - *Can't Stop the Music* (Nancy Walker, 1980, USA)
 - *Olivia* (Jacqueline Audry, 1951, France)
 - *The Living End* (Gregg Araki, 1991, USA, west-coast Premiere, closing night)

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- **1983:**
 - *Abuse* (Arthur Bressan, 1982, USA)
 - *Gay USA* (Arthur Bressan, 1977, USA)
 - *Forbidden Letters* (Arthur Bressan, 1976, USA)
 - *Women* (Marta Meszaros, 1977, Hungary)
 - *Track Two* (Harry Sutherland, 1982, Canada)
 - *Fox and His Friends* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1975, W. Germany)
 - *A Woman Like Eve* (Nouchka van Brakel, 1979, Netherlands)

- *Madame X—An Absolute Ruler* (Ulrike Ottinger, 1977, W. Germany)
 - *Christopher Isherwood: Over There On a Visit* (Alan Wallis, 1976, UK)
 - *The Deputy* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1980, Spain)
 - *The Curse of Fred Astaire* (Mark Berger, 1982, USA)
 - *Prison for Women* (Janis Cole and Holly Dale, 1981, doc, Canada)
 - *“Machedchen” in Uniform* (Leontine Sagan and Carl Froelich, 1931, Germany)
 - *The Queen* (Frank Simon, 1968, USA)
 - *Winter Kept Us Warm* (David Sector, 1965, Canada)
 - *Thundercrack* (Curt McDowell, 1975, USA)
 - *By Design* (Claude Jutra, 1982, Canada)
- **1985:**
 - *Horror Vacui- the Fear of Emptiness* (Rosa von Praunheim, 1984, W. Germany)
 - *Buddies* (Arthur Bressan, 1985, USA)
 - *Before Stonewall* (Greta Schiller and Robert Rosenberg, 1984, USA)
 - *The Black Lizard (Kuro Tokage)* (Kinji Fukasaku, 1968, Japan)
 - *Depart to Arrive* (Alexandra von Grote, 1982, W. Germany)
 - *Choosing Children* (Debra Chasnoff and Kim Klausner, 1984, USA)
 - *Pink Narcissus* (Jim Bidgood, 1971, USA)
 - *Breaking the Silence* (Melanie Chait, 1985, UK)
 - *Domestic Bliss* (Jay Chamberlain, 1984, UK)
 - *Cass* (Chris Noonan, 1978, Australia)
 - *The Music Lovers* (Ken Russell, 1971, UK)
 - *November Moon* (Alexandra von Grote, 1984, W. Germany/France)
 - *The Death of Mikel* (Imanol Uribe, 1984, Spain)
 - *Erotic in Nature* (Lynn Dorgan, 1985, USA)
 - *Paul Cadmus: Enfant Terrible at 80* (David Sutherland, 1984, USA)
 - *Silent Pioneers* (Lucy Winer, 1985, USA)
 - *A Woman Like Eve* (Nouchka van Brakel, 1979, Netherlands)
 - *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (Ken Hughes, 1960, UK)
 - *The Wounded Man (L’Homme Blessé)* (Patrice Chereau, 1983, France)
 - *Scrubbers* (Mai Zetterling, 1983, UK)
 - *Abuse* (Arthur Bressan, 1982, USA)
 - *Behind Glass* (Ab van Ieperen, 1981, Netherlands)
- **1986:**
 - *Adios, Roberto* (Enrique Dawi, 1985, Argentina)
 - *Bewildered Youth* (Veit Harlan, 1956, Germany)
 - *Coming of Age* (Marc Huestis, 1986, USA, video)
 - *Commercial for Murder* (Amy Goldstein, 1985, USA)
 - *The Hidden Pleasures* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1977, Spain)
 - *The Angelic Conversation* (Derek Jarman, 1985, UK)
 - *Sebastiane* (Derek Jarman, 1976, UK)
 - *Mala Noche* (Gus Van Sant, 1986, USA)
 - *Mara* (Angela Linders, 1985, Netherlands)
 - *Olivia (The Pit of Loneliness)* (Jacqueline Audry, 1951, France)

- *Once Upon a Time in the East* (Andre Brassard, 1974, Canada)
 - *The Passion of Remembrance* (Maureen Blackwood and Isaac Julien, 1986, UK)
 - *Pauline's Birthday or The Beasties of Norte Dame* (Fritz Matthies, 1977, W. Germany)
 - *Pervola, Tracks in the Snow* (*Pervola, Sporen in de Sneeuw*, Orlow Seunke, 1985, Netherlands)
 - *Seduction: the Cruel Woman* (Monika Treut and Elfi Mikesch, 1985, W. Germany)
 - *What You Take for Granted* (Michelle Citron, 1983, USA)
 - Celluloid Closet lecture
- **1987:**
 - *The Outsiders* (Yu Kan-Ping, 1986, Taiwan)
 - *The Berlin Affair* (Liliana Cavani, 1986, Italy/W. Germany)
 - *Bright Eyes* (Stuart Marshall, 1986, UK, video)
 - *Three Bewildered People in the Night* (Gregg Araki, 1987, USA)
 - *Meteor and Shadow* (Takis Spetsiotis, 1985, Greece)
 - *Buddies* (Arthur Bressan, 1985, USA)
 - *Daughters of Darkness* (Harry Kumel, 1971, France/Belgium/Germany/Spain)
 - *Firewords* (Dorothy Todd Henaut, 1986, Canada)
 - *Wolfgirl* (Dagmar Beiersdorf, 1986, W. Germany)
 - *The Whole of Life* (Bruno Moll, 1983, Switzerland)
 - *Westler--East of the Wall* (Wieland Speck, 1985, W. Germany)
 - *The Black Lizard* (*Kuro Tokage*, Kinji Fukasaku, 1968, Japan)
 - *Maedchen in Uniform* (Leontine Sagan and Carl Froelich, 1931, Germany)
 - *Novembermoon* (Alexandra von Grote, 1984, W. Germany/France)
 - *Drama in Blond* (Lothar Lambert, 1984, W. Germany)
 - *Simone* (Christine Ehm, 1984, France)
 - Curt Mcdowell films
 - (Inauguration of the American Gay Film Tour from the NY fest)
- **1988:**
 - *Tiny and Ruby: Hell Divin' Women* (Greta Schiller and Andrea Weiss, 1988, USA)
 - *Friends Forever* (*Venner For Altid*, Stefan Henszelman, 1986, Denmark)
 - *Vera* (Sergio Toledo, 1986, Brazil)
 - *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* (Patricia Rozema, 1987, Canada)
 - *Empire State* (Ron Peck, 1986, UK)
 - *The Virgin Machine* (Monika Treut, 1988, W. Germany, midwest premiere)
 - *The Everlasting Secret Family* (Michael Thornhill, 1988, Australia)
 - *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (Pedro Almodovar, 1984, Spain)
 - *Out of Our Time* (Casi Pacilio and L.M. Keys, 1988, USA)
 - *Manuel & Clemente* (Javier Palmero Romero, 1985, Spain)
 - *Extramuros* (Miguel Picazo, 1986, Spain)
 - *Black and White* (Claire Devers, 1986, France)
 - *Nineteen Nineteen* (Hugh Brody, 1984, UK)
 - *Crows* (Ayeley Menahemi, 1988, Israel)

- *Anita-Dances of Vice* (Rosa von Praunheim, 1987, W. Germany)
 - *Kamikaze Hearts* (Juliet Bashore, 1986, USA)
 - *Intimate Power* (Yves Simoneau, 1986, Canada)
 - *She Must be Seeing Things* (Sheila McLaughlin, 1987, USA, Midwest Premiere)
 - *In a Glass Cage* (Agustin Villaronga, 1986, Spain)
 - *The War Widow* (Paul Bogart, 1976, USA)
 - *Revolutions Happen like Refrains in a Song* (Nick Deocampo, 1987, Philippines)
 - *Six of Hearts*- gay programs from channel 4
- **1989:**
 - *Salut Victor!* (Anne Claire Poirier, 1988, Canada)
 - *Night Visions* (Marusia Bociurkiw, 1989, Canada)
 - *Where the Sun Beats Down* (Joaquin Pinto, 1989, Portugal)
 - *The Way of the Wicked* (Dir. Christine Vachon, 1989, USA short)
 - *Fun Down There* (Rogen Stigliano, 1988, USA)
 - *The Long Weekend (o'despair)* (Gregg Araki, 1988, USA)
 - *Dorian Gray in the Mirror of the Popular Press* (Ulrik Ottinger, 1984, W. Germany)
 - *A Strange Love Affair* (Eric de Kuyper and Paul Verstraten, 1985, Netherlands)
 - *Desire* (Stuart Marshall, 1989, UK)
 - *Apartment Zero* (Martin Donovan, 1988, UK/Argentina)
 - *Le Jupon Rouge* (Genevieve Lefebvre, 1987, France)
 - *Summer Vacation: 1999* (Shusuke Kaneko, 1988, Japan)
 - *Another Way* (Karoly Makk, 1982, Hungary)
 - *Urinal* (John Greyson, 1988, Canada)
 - *Looking for Langston* (Isaac Julien, 1988, UK)
 - *Taxi to Cairo* (Frank Ripplloh, 1988, W. Germany)
 - *Love, Death and Little Devils* (Lothar Lambert, 1989, W. Germany)
 - *Men in Love* (Marc Huestis, 1989, USA)
 - *Emergency Exit* (Thierry Michel, 1988, Belgium)
 - *The Heart Exposed* (Jean-Yves Laforce, 1986, Canada)
 - John Greyson videos
 - *Out on Tuesday*- Channel 4's gay and lesbian newsmagazine programs
- **1990:**
 - *Coming Out* (Heiner Carow, 1989, East Germany)
 - *Nocturne* (Joy Chamberlain, 1990, UK)
 - *James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket* (Karen Thorsen, 1989, USA)
 - *Comrades in Arms* (Stuart Marshall, 1990, UK)
 - *The Last Song* (Pisan Akarasainee, 1986, Thailand)
 - *Macho Dancer* (Lino Brocka, 1988, Philippines)
 - *The Outsiders* (Yu Kan-Ping, 1986, Taiwan)
 - *Straight to the Heart* (Lea Pool, 1988, UK)
 - *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* (Beeban Kidron, 1989, UK)
 - *Tongues Untied* (Marlon Riggs, 1989, USA, short doc)
 - *Pink Ulysses* (Eric de Kuyper, 1990, Netherlands)

- *Johanna D'Arc of Mongolia* (Ulrik Ottinger, 1989, Germany)
- *I Am a Man* (M.L. Bandevanop Devakul, 1988, Thailand)
- *Mala Noche* (Gus van Sant, 1986, USA)
- *Short Fuse: The Story of an AIDS Activist* (Rick Delaup, 1990, USA)
- *Evenings* (Rudolf Van den Berg, 1989, Netherlands)
- *Anguished Love* (Pisan Akarasainee, 1987, Thailand)
- *Dry Kisses Only* (Jane Cottis and Kaucyila Brooke, 1990, USA)
- *Wild Flowers* (Robert Smith, 1989, UK)
- *Nocturne* (Mark Harris, 1990, USA)
- *Voices from the Front* (Testing the Limits Collective, 1990, USA)
- *Out on Tuesday* (channel 4 series)
- *AIDS videos*
- *All Girl Action Show* (history of lesbian erotica with Susie Bright)
- *Looking for my Penis* (presentation by Richard Fung)
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- **1991:**
 - *Young Soul Rebels* (Isaac Julien, 1991, UK)
 - *The Search for Intelligent Life in the Universe* (John Bailey, 1991, USA)
 - *Seven Women* (John Ford, 1965, USA)
 - *My Father is Coming* (Monika Treut, 1991, US/Germany)
 - *Frida* (Paul Leduc, 1987, Mexico)
 - *Nighthawks* (Ron Peck and Paul Hallam, 1978, UK)
 - *The Last Island* (Marleen Gorris, 1990, Netherlands)
 - *The Making of 'Monsters'* (John Greyson, 1991, Canada, short)
 - *Together Alone* (P.J. Castellaneta, 1991, USA)
 - *Quest for Love* (Helena Noguiera, 1989, S. Africa)
 - *Strip Jack Naked* (Ron Peck, 1991, UK)
 - *Jerker* (Hugh Harrison, 1991, USA)
 - *Vaudeville* (Ira Sachs, 1991, USA, short)
 - *Dream Man* (Hugh Harrison and David Edwards, 1991, USA)
 - *102 Boulevard Haussman* (Udayan Prasad, 1990, UK)
 - *Via Appia* (Jochen Hick, 1989, Germany)
 - *Crocodiles in Amsterdam* (Annette Apon, 1989, Netherlands)
 - *The Natural History of Parking Lots* (Everett Lewis, 1990, USA)
 - Sadie Benning in person
 - Discussion of LGBT depictions in Hollywood
- **1992:**
 - *Where Are We?* (Jeffrey Friedman and Rob Epstein, 1992, USA)
 - *Claire of the Moon* (Nicole Conn, 1992, USA)
 - *Portrait of a Marriage* (Stephen Whittaker, 1990, UK)
 - *Friends Forever* (Stefan Henszelman, 1986, Denmark)
 - *The Twin Bracelets* (Yu-Shan Huang, 1990, Hong Kong/Taiwan)
 - *The Affairs of Love* (Jaime Chavarri, 1990, Spain)
 - *Wild Wild World of Jayne Mansfield* (Arthur Knight, Joel Holt, and Charles Brown jr., 1968, USA)

- *Changing our Minds* (Richard Schmicchen, 1992, USA)
 - *Ernesto* (Salvatore Samperi, 1979, Italy)
 - *Nitrate Kisses* (Barbara Hammer, 1992, USA)
 - *The Nun who Became Lieutenant* (Javier Aguirre, 1987, Spain)
 - *I'll Love you Forever... Tonight* (Edgar Michael Bravo, 1992, USA)
 - *That Tender Touch* (Russel Vincent, 1969, USA)
 - *Affengeil* (Rosa von Praunheim, 1990, Germany)
 - *Hours and the Times* (Christopher Munch, 1991, USA)
 - *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* (Beeban Kidron, 1989, UK)
 - *Safe, Sane Consensual SM* (Greg Roberts and Ann Soucy-West, 1991, USA, video)
 - *Salut, Victor* (Anne Claire Poirer, 1988, Canada)
- **1993:**
 - *Forbidden Love* (Aerlyn Weissman and Lynne Fernie, 1992, Canada)
 - *Tectonic Plates* (Peter Mettler, 1992, Canada)
 - *Verzaubert (Enchanted)* Jörg Fockele et. all, 1993, Germany)
 - *For a Lost Soldier* (Roeland Kerbosch, 1992, Netherlands)
 - *The East is Red* (Ching Siu-Tung and Raymond Lee, 1993, Hong Kong)
 - *Amazing Grace* (Amos Gutman, 1992, Israel)
 - *Zero Patience* (John Greyson, 1993, Canada)
 - *Prince in Hell* (Michael Stock, 1993, Germany)
 - *A Touch of Fever* (Ryosuke Hashiguchi, 1993, Japan)
 - *Belle* (Irma Achten, 1992, Netherlands)
 - *Smoke* (Mark D' Auria, 1993, USA)
 - *Wittgenstein* (Derek Jarman, 1993, UK)
 - *Green on Tuesdays* (Dean Bushala and Deirdre Heaslip, 1993, USA)
 - *Lick Bush in '92* (Gabriel Gomez and Elspeth kydd, 1993, USA)
 - *Living Proof: HIV and the Pursuit of Happiness* (Kermit Cole, 1993, USA)
 - *Changing* (Ireen van Ditschuyzen, 1992, Netherlands)
 - *One Nation Under God* (Teodoro Maniaci and Francine Rzeznik, 1993, USA)

New York Lesbian and Gay Film Festival

- **1980:**
 - *Once Upon a Time in the East* (Andre Brassard, 1971, Canada)
 - *Olivia (The Pit of Loneliness)* (Jacqueline Audry, 1951, France)
 - *Keiko* (Claude Gagnon, 1979, Japan)
 - *Some of My Best Friends Are...* (Melvyn Nelson, 1971, USA)
 - *The Rubber Gun* (Allan Moyle, 1977, Canada)
 - *Montreal Main* (Frank Vitale and Allan Bozo Moyle, 1974, Canada)
 - *Comedy in Six Unnatural Acts* (Jan Oxenberg, 1975, USA)
 - *Portrait of Jason* (Shirley Clark, 1967, USA)
 -
- **1981:**
 - *Times Square* (Robert Stigwood, 1980, USA)

- *Prison for Women* (Holly Dale and Janis Cole, 1981, Canada)
 - *The Cats* (Henning Carlsen, 1965, Sweden)
 - *Therese and Isabelle* (Radley Metzger, 1966, France)
 - *To an Unknown God* (Jaime Chavarri, 1977, Spain)
 - *Corner of the Circle* (Bill Daughton, 1975, USA)
 - *Lieve Jongens (Dear Boys)* (Matthijs van Heijningen, 1980, Netherlands)
 - *You Are Not Alone* (Ernst Johansen, Lasse Nielsen, 1978, Denmark)
 - *We Were One Man* (Philippe Vallois, 1979, France)
 - *Glenn or Glenda* (Edward Wood, Jr., 1953, USA)
 - *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* (Douglas Hickox, 1970, W. Germany)
 - Films by Curt McDowell
- **1982:**
 - Barbara Hammer Retrospective
 - "New Lesbian Films From Australia"
 - *Depart to Arrive* (Alexandra von Grote, 1982, W. Germany)
 - *I Berlin-Harlem* (Lothar Lambert, Wolfram Zobus, 1974, Germany)
 - *Pauline's Birthday or The Beast of Notre Dame* (Fritz Matthies, 1979, W. Germany, doc.)
 - *Fucking City* (Lothar Lambert, 1982, W. Germany)
 - *Track Two* (Harry Sutherland, 1982, Canada)
 - *The Deputy* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1980, Spain)
 - *Immacolata and Concetta* (Salvatore Piscicelli, 1980, Italy)
 - *The Clinic* (David Stevens, 1982, Australia)
 - *Faux Pas de Deux* (Lothar Lambert, 1977, W. Germany)
 - *Nightmare Woman* (Lothar Lambert, 1981, W. Germany)
 - *The Curse of Fred Astaire* (Mark Berger, 1982, USA)
- **1983:**
 - *The Deputy* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1980, Spain)
 - *Matinee* (Jaime Hermsillo, 1977, Mexico)
 - *A Woman Like Eve* (Nouchka van Brakel, 1979, Netherlands)
 - *The Fourth Man* (Paul Verhoeven, 1983, Netherlands)
 - *Angel* (George Katakouzinis, 1982, Greece)
 - *The Rubber Gun* (Allan Moyle, 1977, Canada)
 - *Casta Diva* (Eric de Kuyper, 1982, Netherlands)
 - *Drifting (Nagua)* (Amos Guttman, 1983, Israel)
 - *Mirror Mirror* (Edward Fleming, 1978, Denmark)
 - *The Farewell* (1980, Tuija-Maija Niskanen, Finland)
 - *We Were One Man* (Philippe Vallois, 1979, France)
 - *The Rainbow Serpent* (Philippe Vallois, 1983, France)
 - *City of Lost Souls* (Rosa von Praunheim, 1983, W. Germany)
 - *Olivia (The Pit of Loneliness)* (Jacqueline Audry, 1951, France)
- **1984:**
 - *Je Tu Il Elle* (removed at insistence of Akerman)

- *Scrubbers* (Mai Zetterling, 1982, UK)
 - *Hotel of the Stars* (Jon Bang Carlsen, 1981, Denmark)
 - *La Triche* (Yannick Bellon, 1984, France)
 - *Cass* (Chris Noonan, 1978, Australia)
 - *A Man like Eva* (Radu Gabrea, 1983, W. Germany)
 - *The Death of Mikel* (Imanol Uribe, 1984, Spain)
 - *The Sprinter (Der Sprinter)*, Christoph Böll, 1984, W. Germany)
 - *The Black Lizard (Kuro Tokage)*, Kinji Fukasaku, 1968, Japan)
 - *What You Take for Granted* (Michelle Citron, 1983, USA)
 - *Pink Narcissus* (Jim Bidgood, 1971, USA)
 - *Whoever Says the Truth Shall Die* (Philo Bregstein, 1981, Netherlands)
 - *Behind Glass* (Ab van leperen, 1981, Netherlands)
 - Homosexuality and Death in film (public forum)
- **1986:**
 - *Drama in Blond* (Lothar Lambert, 1984, W. Germany)
 - *Alexandria... Why?* (Youssef Chahine, 1979, Egypt)
 - *Seduction: the Cruel Woman* (Monika Treut and Elfi Mikesch, 1985, W. Germany)
 - *Paul Cadmus: Enfant Terrible at 80* (David Sutherland, 1984, USA)
 - *A Strange Love Affair* (Eric de Kuyper and Paul Verstraten, 1985, Netherlands)
 - *A Woman Like Eve* (Nouchka van Brakel, 1979, Netherlands)
 - *November Moon* (Alexandra von Grote, 1984, W. Germany/France)
 - *This Special Friendship* (Jean Delanoy, 1982, W. Germany)
 - *O Beijo No Asfalto (The Kiss)*, Bruno Barreto, 1981, Brazil)
 - *Domestic Bliss* (Jay Chamberlain, 1984, UK)
 - *Horror Vacui- the Fear of Emptiness* (Rosa von Praunheim, 1984, W. Germany)
 - *Mala Noche* (Gus van Sant, 1986, USA)
 - *The Hidden Pleasures* (Eloy de la Iglesia, 1977, Spain)
 - *Sparkle's Tavern* (Curt McDowell, 1984, USA)
 - *Three by Three* (Calogero Salvo, 1986, Venezuela)
 - *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Peter Hall, 1968, UK/USA)
 - *Naughty Boys* (Eric de Kuyper, 1983, Netherlands)
 - *Olivia (The Pit of Loneliness)* (Jacqueline Audry, 1951, France)
 - *Times Square* (Robert Stigwood, 1980, USA)
 - *Lieve Jongens (Dear Boys)*, Matthijs van Heijningen, 1980, Netherlands)
 - *More Love* (Koshi Shimada, 1984, Japan)
 - *Angelic Conversation* (Derek Jarman, 1984, UK)
 - *Parting Glances* (Bill Sherwood, 1986, USA) (First public screening, "The Festival is pleased and honored to present the world's first public screening of this landmark film. This is the first American movie to chronicle with authenticity and style the excitement, pleasure and pain that we call being gay in 1986.")
- **1987:**
 - *Westler--East of the Wall* (Wieland Speck, 1985, W. Germany)

- *Man of Ashes* (Nouri Bouzid, 1986, Tunisia)
 - *My Life for Zarah Leander* (Christian Blackwood, 1986, USA, doc.)
 - *Wolfgirl* (Dagmar Beiersdorf, 1986, W. Germany)
 - *The Berlin Affair* (Liliana Cavani, 1986, Italy/W. Germany)
 - *The Black Lizard* (*Kuro Tokage*, Kinji Fukasaku, 1968, Japan)
 - *Broken Mirrors* (*Gerboken Spiegels*, Marleen Gorris, 1984, Netherlands)
 - *The Rose King* (Werner Schroeter, 1986, W. Germany)
 - *Adios, Roberto* (Enrique Dawi, 1985, Argentina)
 - *Pink Narcissus* (Jim Bidgood, 1971, USA)
 - *The Passion of Remembrance* (Maureen Blackwood and Isaac Julien, 1986, UK)
 - *November Moon* (Alexandra von Grote, 1984, W. Germany/France)
 - *Simone* (Christine Ehm, 1984, France)
 - *The Fourth Man* (Paul Verhoeven, 1983, Netherlands)
 - *Manuel & Clemente* (Javier Palmero Romero, 1985, Spain)
 - *Mala Noche* (Gus van Sant, 1986, USA)
 - *Afternoon Breezes* (Hitoshi Yazaki, 1980, Japan)
 - *A Love Like Any Other* (*Eine Liebe wie Andere*, Hans Stempel and Martin Ripkens, 1982, W. Germany)
 - *A Virus Knows No Morals* (*Ein Virus Kennt Keine Moral*, Rosa von Praunheim, 1986, W. Germany)
 - *Firewords* (Dorothy Todd Henaut, 1986, Canada)
 - *Desert of Love* (Lothar Lambert, 1986, W. Germany)
- **1989: (Newfest)**
 - *Word is Out* (Rob Epstein, et al, 1977, USA)
 - *Sebastiane* (Derek Jarman, 1976, UK)
 - *Angelic Conversation* (Derek Jarman, 1984, UK)
 - *Desire* (Stuart Marshall, 1989, UK)
 - *Victim* (Basil Deardon, 1961, UK)
 - *Clay Farmers* (A.P. Gonzalez, 1988, USA)
 - *Maedchen in Uniform* (Leontine Sagan and Carl Froelich, 1931, Germany)
 - *Tea and Sympathy* (Vincente Minnelli, 1956, USA)
 - *Anita--Dances of Vice* (Rosa von Praunheim, 1987, W. Germany)
 - *The Children's Hour* (William Wyler, 1961, USA)
 - *Salome* (Natasha Rambova and Charles Bryant, 1922, USA)
 - *Different from the Others* (Richard Oswald, 1919, Germany)
 - Midi Onodera Films
 - *The Days of Greek Gods* (Richard Fontaine, 1949-1962, collection of shorts, USA)
 - *An Empty Bed* (Mark Gasper, 1990, USA)
 - *Friends Forever* (Stefan Henszelman, 1986, Denmark)
 - *Vera* (Sergio Toledo, 1986, Brazil)
 - *Fun Down There* (Rogen Stigliano, 1988, USA)
 - *Le Jupon Rouge* (Genevieve Lefebvre, 1987, France)
 - *Tiny and Ruby: Hell Divin' Women* (Greta Schiller and Andrea Weiss, 1988, USA)

- *Johanna D'Arc of Mongolia* (Ulrik Ottinger, 1989, Germany)
 - *Out of Our Time* (Casi Pacilio and L.M. Keys, 1988, USA)
 - *Taxi Nach Kairo* (*Taxi to Cairo*, Frank Ripplloh, 1988, W. Germany)
 - *City of Lost Souls* (Rosa von Praunheim, 1983, W. Germany)
 - *The Tempest* (Derek Jarman, 1979, UK)
 - *Before Stonewall* (Greta Schiller and Robert Rosenberg, 1984, USA)
 - *Boys in the Band* (William Friedkin, 1970, USA)
 - *The Leather Boys* (Sidney Furie, 1964, UK)
 - *The Killing of Sister George* (Robert Aldrich, 1968, UK)
 - *Therese and Isabelle* (Radley Metzger, 1966, France)
 - *Another Way* (Karoly Makk, 1982, Hungary)
 - *The Virgin Machine* (Monika Treut, 1988, W. Germany)
 - *Urinal* (John Greyson, 1988, Canada)
 - *The Last of England* (Derek Jarman, 1987, UK)
 - *Salut, Victor* (Anne Claire Poirer, 1988, Canada)
 - *Abuse* (Arthur Bressan, 1982, USA)
 - *Buddies* (Arthur Bressan, 1985, USA)
 - *Jubilee* (Derek Jarman, 1978, UK)
 - *A Virus Knows No Morals* (*Ein Virus Kennt Keine Moral*, Rosa von Praunheim, 1986, W. Germany)
 - *Pink Narcissus* (Jim Bidgood, 1971, USA)
 - *Caravaggio* (Derek Jarman, 1986, UK)
- **1990:**
 - *Walk on the Wild Side* (Edward Dmytryk, 1962, USA)
 - *Tongues Untied* (Marlon Riggs, 1989, USA, short doc)
 - *Crocodiles in Amsterdam* (Annette Apon, 1989, Netherlands)
 - *Christopher Strong* (Dorothy Arzner, 1933, USA)
 - *Westler--East of the Wall* (Wieland Speck, 1985, W. Germany)
 - *Full Moon in New York* (Stanley Kwan, 1989, Hong Kong/USA)
 - *Nocturne* (Joy Chamberlain, 1990, UK)
 - *Pink Ulysses* (Eric de Kuyper, 1990, Netherlands)
 - *Nocturne* (Mark Harris, 1990, USA)
 - *November Moon* (Alexandra von Grote, 1984, W. Germany/France)
 - *Comrades in Arms* (Stuart Marshall, 1990, UK)
 - *Looking for Langston* (Isaac Julien, 1988, UK)
 - *Paris is Burning* (Jennie Livingston, 1990, doc, USA)
 - *The Heart Exposed* (Jean-Yves Laforce, 1986, Canada)
 - *The War Widow* (Paul Bogart, 1976, USA)
 - *She Must be Seeing Things* (Sheila McLaughlin, 1987, USA)
 - *Pervola, Tracks in the Snow* (*Pervola, Sporen in de Sneeuw*, Orlow Seunke, 1985, Netherlands)
 - *Dry Kisses Only* (Jane Cottis and Kaucyila Brooke, 1990, USA)
 - *Anguished Love* (Pisan Akarasainee, 1987, Thailand)
 - *Empire State* (Ron Peck, 1986, UK)
 - *Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt* (Robert Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman,

- 1990, USA)
 - *Desert Hearts* (Donna Deitch, 1986, USA)
 - *Law of Desire* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1987, Spain)
 - *The Last Song* (Pisan Akarasainee, 1986, Thailand)
 - *Olivia (The Pit of Loneliness)* (Jacqueline Audry, 1951, France)
 - *Taxi Zum Klo* (Frank Ripploh, 1980, W. Germany)
 - *I Am a Man* (M.L. Bandevanop Devakul, 1988, Thailand)
 - *Andre's Mother* (Deborah Reinisch, 1990, USA)
 - *Parting Glances* (Bill Sherwood, 1986, USA)
 - *Night Visions* (Marusia Bociurkiw, 1989, Canada)
 - *Meteor and Shadow* (Takis Spetsiotis, 1985, Greece)
 - *Where the Sun Beats Down* (Joaquin Pinto, 1989, Portugal)
 - *A Florida Enchantment* (Sidney Drew, 1914, USA)
 - *Dorian Gray in the Mirror of the Popular Press* (Ulrik Ottinger, 1984, W. Germany)
 - *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* (Beeban Kidron, 1989, UK)
 - *Making Love* (Arthur Hiller, 1982, USA)
 - *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* (Patricia Rozema, 1987, Canada)
 - Terence Davies: *Children, Madonna and Child*, and *Death and Transfiguration*
 - *James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket* (Karen Thorsen, 1989, USA)
 - *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1953, USA)
 - *Coming Out* (Heiner Carow, 1989, East Germany)
 - Vito Russo Presents: "Images From the Eighties"
- **1991:**
 - *The Great Lie* (Edmund Goulding, 1941, USA)
 - *Privilege* (Yvonne Rainer, 1990, USA)
 - *Evenings* (Rudolf Van den Berg, 1989, Netherlands)
 - *The Garden* (Derek Jarman, 1990, UK)
 - *Otra Historia de Amor (Another Love Story)*, Américo Ortiz de Zárate, 1986, Argentina)
 - *Once Upon a Time in the East* (Andre Brassard, 1971, Canada)
 - *My Father is Coming* (Monika Treut, 1991, US/Germany)
 - *The Last Island* (Marleen Gorris, 1990, Netherlands)
 - *Rough Sketch of a Spiral* (Yasushi Kojima, 1990, Japan)
 - *Doña Herlinda and Her Son (Doña Herlinda and her son)*, Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, 1985, Mexico)
 - *Strip Jack Naked* (Ron Peck, 1991, UK)
 - *Las Cosas del Querer (The Things of Love)*, Jaime Chávarri, 1989, Spain)
 - *The Bitter Tears of Petra Van Kant* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1972, W. Germany)
 - *All of Me* (Bettina Wilhelm, 1991, Germany)
 - *Drama in Blond* (Lothar Lambert, 1984, W. Germany)
 - *Resident Alien* (John Gaspard, 1991, USA)
 - *Wild Flowers* (Robert Smith, 1989, UK)
 - *Adios, Roberto* (Enrique Dawi, 1985, Argentina)

- *Freak Orlando* (Ulrike Ottinger, 1981, W. Germany)
- *Ava & Gabriel* (Felix de Rooy, 1990, Netherlands/France)
- *Extramuros* (Miguel Picazo, 1986, Spain)
- *Simone* (Christine Ehm, 1984, France)
- *Three by Three* (Calogero Salvo, 1986, Venezuela)
- *Over our Dead Bodies* (Stuart Marshall, 1991, UK)
- *Absolutely Positive* (Peter Adair, 1991, USA, doc.)
- *Times Square* (Robert Stigwood, 1980, USA)
- *Three Bewildered People in the Night* (Gregg Araki, 1987, USA)
- *Club Des Femmes* (Jacques Deval, 1936, France)
- *Clandestino Destino* (Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, 1987, Mexico)
- *Mädchen in Uniform* (Geza von Radvenyi, 1957, W. Germany)
- *Thank You and Goodnight* (Jan Odenberg, 1991, USA)
- *Weininger's Nacht* (Paulus Manker, 1990, Austria)
- Beyond Superdyke: A Tribute to Barbara Hammer
- Talks:
 - "Hard to Imagine," presentation by Tom Waugh
 - "A Queer Feeling When I Look At You," presentation by Andrea Weiss