

*Moving Image Review*

## **QUEER FILM AND VIDEO FESTIVAL FORUM, TAKE THREE**

### **Artists Speak Out**

**Thomas Waugh and Chris Straayer**

The following essays bring together seven film and video makers from the United States, Canada, France, and India for the third and final installment of our series on queer film and video festivals. We are happy to assemble in this virtual forum these representatives of a spectrum of generations, identities, and cultures as well as of conceptions and formats of film and video. Our seven contributors follow the voices of curators and critics in the previous two installments.<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, they are very distinctive in their take on the phenomenon that has so profoundly marked LGBT cultures in the global North—and increasingly elsewhere—since Frameline first bowed in San Francisco in 1977 (and almost all of the essayists pay tribute to this grandparent of queer festivals). We asked for responses to questions about the upside and downside of participating in queer festivals; about the differences between queer and nonqueer, American and “foreign” festivals; about their release strategies and experiences of festival programming; and finally about their sense of the current trajectory of and prognosis for the festival phenomenon. Each person’s answers were collated to produce an individual statement. Though individually distinct, these contributors collectively are all focused on their careers and their relationships with their art form and their audiences, as well as, not surprisingly, on the funding for their next work. Their testimonies are pragmatic, rich in personal experience and anecdote rather than abstract theoretical and political positions, and they are unanimously wary of being pigeonholed. We are grateful

to these six solo artists and one creative duo for their inspired additions to *GLQ*'s ongoing conversation about an international moving image institution whose future after three decades of erratic growth may not be certain, judging from these three installments, though it is certain to be variegated and lively.

**Note**

1. See *GLQ* 11 (2005): 579–603, and *GLQ* 12 (2006): 599–625, respectively.

## FILM BUFFS ARE FILM BUFFS NO MATTER WHOM THEY SLEEP WITH

**Su Friedrich**

I've been out since before I started making films and have almost always had some sort of lesbian content in my work, but I've shown much more often at nongay festivals. I think this has a lot to do with my work being part of the experimental film world and there being (sometimes, although less frequently these days than in the past) more room at nongay festivals for my kind of work.

Queer festivals are best for me when I show a film with substantial lesbian content (like *Hide and Seek*, 1996) and get a rousing response, as I did, for example, at Frameline. They are worst when I show work that doesn't have substantial lesbian content or is somehow "too experimental" and the audience seems disoriented; they're expecting something with two women in bed, and instead I've given them something that's too formal and in which the two women are only part of a more complicated web of ideas and images. I often wonder why my work that is not explicitly lesbian is programmed at gay festivals, and it's usually because the programmer has some affinity with the avant-garde film community and thinks she or he can "bring the audience around."

It's hard for me to talk about the differences between the festivals, and I find that there's more distinction to be made in the scale and intent of the festivals than in the sexual orientation of the work being shown. In other words, the hustle and intensity of Frameline is more like the Berlin Film Festival than like a small-scale gay festival. Film buffs are film buffs, no matter whom they sleep with. I suppose the only very obvious difference is that audiences at gay festivals have tended to be more charged up because of the chance to see work about themselves. In the past, when there was little gay and lesbian media available at the video stores and on TV, it was a big deal to have these festivals. These days, I'm not so sure it's that different from nongay festivals, that is, people go to any kind of festival because they hope to see unusual work, work that won't necessarily get into distribution, or work that will do so later but they want to be the first to see it. With the changed landscape for gay and lesbian media, I think the situation is fairly similar to that of a nongay festival.

Regarding foreign queer festivals, programmers often insist that their audiences understand English well enough not to require subtitles, but the reality is

that, without subtitles, the audience misses most of the subtleties of the film's dialogue. But as for attitudes about being lesbian, I haven't found anything that different in foreign film audiences.

I don't think about release strategies because I'm not trying to position my work in ways that will ensure theatrical release—with the exception of *Hide and Seek*, my work hasn't had that potential. Nevertheless, having a body of work that has addressed lesbian identity in various ways, I'm aware of the fact that a new film would likely be of interest to programmers at gay and lesbian festivals, so I always make an effort to have the work shown to them in order to build press.

I don't go to many festivals these days and haven't for the past few years because of the sort of work I've been doing. I suppose if I have to speculate, I would say that festivals are becoming more unwieldy and that makes it harder to negotiate the terrain. It seems they're all getting bigger, everyone's upping the ante, and it's hard to be seen in the crush of that many films and parties. I imagine queer festivals will continue for a while, since more and more people are producing gay and lesbian films and videos and there isn't room in the nongay festivals for all that work to be shown (and as far as I'm concerned, a lot of it shouldn't be shown even in the gay festivals—a little editing would be in order!). I wonder sometimes whether they'll go the way of the women's film festivals, which were so essential, empowering, and wonderful back in the day but which now barely exist except in countries where women still have a much harder row to hoe and the urgency for showing work specifically about women's experiences is still strong.