

# Across and in-between: Transcending disciplinary borders in film festival studies

Kirsten Stevens<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Since the mid-2000s film festivals have emerged as a distinct area of critical academic inquiry. While originating within a film studies framework, the study of film festivals has developed its own character as a sub-field that moves well beyond the traditional boundaries of screen and media studies. The study of film festivals is inherently transnational, transmedia and interdisciplinary in its approach. Borrowing from cultural studies, anthropology, business and technology studies, event management and curatorship studies, alongside media studies, screen studies and the emergent area of media industry studies, film festival research transcends traditional disciplinary frameworks. This article traces the emergence of film festivals as a critical area of study and its evolution towards its status as a distinct sub-field. In exploring how the study of festivals and screen events connects with and extends traditional film and media studies frameworks, this article also makes a case for what is gained (and what is lost) through the intersections and interrelations of these two areas of study.

## Keywords

Film Festivals; Film Studies; Transnational; Interdisciplinary; Transmedia; Field of Study

## Introduction

In 1997 Daniel Dayan attended the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah. As a media anthropologist, Dayan's visit to Sundance was not a simple cinephile quest for the latest offerings of American independent film production. Rather, it was intended as an interrogation of dispersed media spectators and the social phenomena of events of temporary duration (41-42). While Dayan sought out the experiences of spectators within the confines of what he imagined to be the "harmonious coordination" of the festival (42), his account reveals the many participants, occasions, agendas, diversions,

---

✉ Kirsten Stevens: [kirsten.e.stevens@gmail.com](mailto:kirsten.e.stevens@gmail.com)

<sup>1</sup> University of Melbourne, Australia

temporalities and texts which form the festival. As he explains, “the very nature of the Festival pulls its story in different directions, makes it the centre of divergent and sometimes competing scripts” (42). The festival that Dayan discovered was not a simple, coherent object of study; “rather, it was a repeated victory over entropy” (42).

Writing close to twenty years later, Marijke de Valck similarly observes the complexity of the film festival. She explains, “there are distinct images that come to mind when the term “film festival” is used: red carpets, open-air screenings, paparazzi, a bustling crowd that fills the theaters and dominates the public spaces that are temporarily taken over by the festival event” (“Introduction” 1). As the accounts of both Dayan and de Valck reveal, at their core film festivals are complex events. While their proclaimed interest lies in focusing attention on cinema – they are after all *film* festivals – the reality of their status as an event often means that the specific films screened become secondary and even tertiary concerns in understanding the festival as a whole. As Dina Iordanova observes: within the film festival space the importance of the film text to an understanding of film culture is transposed, “the films remain intrinsic, but they can be any films” (xii). Instead, as both Dayan and de Valck observe, other aspects of the festival emerge as increasingly central concerns in understanding how films fit within festivals and how festivals fit within larger networks of film. As the centrality of specific film texts recedes, the importance of the social, cultural, industrial, symbolic, economic and material aspects of cinema come to the fore. It is unsurprising then that film festivals beget in their study an ever-widening array of methodologies, disciplinary concerns and theoretical frameworks that are employed to understand their role and functionality beyond the cinematic. Yet, despite this divergence of approach, film festival studies remains closely tied to film studies at an institutional level, with the latter providing the conditions from which the former emerged.

This essay takes up a discussion of the ways in which the study of film festivals introduces key points of extension and rupture within the discipline of film studies. It considers how the development of film festival studies as a subfield of film studies offers the latter a point of extension that enables a more wholistic approach to conceiving of screen texts as located within broader socio-cultural relationships. Beginning with an examination of how film festival scholarship has evolved and the efforts to define this area as a distinct discipline, this essay then works to interrogate how focusing attention on festivals as sites of exchange and cinematic encounters pushes against the traditional limitations of film studies.

In particular, this essay presents an examination of film festivals along three axes of extension. Firstly, exploring the inherent transnationality of film festivals, this essay posits that film festivals move beyond the current formulations of transnationalism within film studies to connect cinema and screen texts to broader traditions of transnationalism located within cultural studies, political science, cultural geography and migration studies. Secondly, it works to extend theories of transmediality and transmedia storytelling, positing these frameworks as a means for describing and understanding the nature of film festival programming and participation. Through a transmedia framework, this essay demonstrates how the multi-faceted festival experience, when theorised collectively as part of a “franchise” or larger text, offers an

extension of existing understandings of transmediality to consider a socially and culturally situated experience of cinema. Thirdly, this essay explores the many cross-disciplinary transgressions that inform film festival scholarship and consider what place film studies holds in the ever-widening mix of approaches and methodologies festival research employs. Ultimately, this article argues for thinking of film festivals as sites that enable an extension of film studies through positive intersections with interdisciplinary approaches and the conception of cinema within an embodied culture. Yet it also considers the extent to which the relationship between film studies and film festival studies might be limiting the direction and form that film festival studies can take in its quest for recognition as a discipline in its own right.

## The rise of film festival studies

Academic interest in film festivals is a relatively recent phenomenon. Aside from a few key works, systematic analysis of film festivals did not emerge in any real way until the twenty-first century, close to seventy years after what is widely recognised as the first reoccurring film festival took form in Venice in 1932. Despite the status of film festival studies as a nascent area of academic enquiry, there is no paucity of research on the topic. Over the past decade, film festivals have received significant academic attention with an expanding tally of works emerging to examine these events both individually through case studies of specific celebrations, as well as in terms of the phenomenon as a whole. As such, film festival studies has been hailed as not simply constituting an important evolution in film or media studies approaches, but rather as revealing itself as “a new academic field in which knowledge of festivals is considered essential for our understanding of cinema and media cultures” (de Valck and Loist 179).

The subfield of film festival studies developed within a film studies context. Its emergence as an area for serious academic study can in many ways be traced to shifts in the conception of film historicism that occurred during the 1980s through the work of figures such as Douglas Gomery, Robert Allen, Tom Gunning, Miriam Hansen, Janet Staiger and Thomas Elsaesser, to name only a few.<sup>2</sup> Emerging in place of the existing conceptualisation of film history, which focused on the linear progression of cinematic technology and the achievements of individual “masters” and their “masterworks,” new film historicism emphasised the importance that institutional, economic and social factors had on the development and progression of the cinema. It called for, as Philip Beck observed, “the need for new ways to study film – not simply new techniques, new methods of research and argument, but new ‘approaches,’ new conceptualizations of interrelations between film style, technology, economic and social history, and ideology, as they illuminate the historical development of the cinema” (5). New film historicism was then marked by an increased reliance on the use of alternative sources of information, including archival documents relating to the internal operations of institutions, contemporaneous reviews and commentary, as well as ephemera

---

<sup>2</sup> See Allen and Gomery’s *Film History: Theory and Practice* for a comprehensive overview of the New Film Historicism. See also work by Gunning, Hansen and Staiger on early American cinema, as well as Elsaesser’s *New German Cinema: A History* for further examples of this revised approach to the study of film history.

surrounding processes of film production, distribution, exhibition and consumption. This move away from a focus on the film text as the primary object of study championed by new film historicism set a template for film festival studies to build on. While the arrival of film festival studies would not be immediate – as de Valck explains, systematic and sustained attention to film festivals did not arise until the late 1990s (*Film* 21) – this turn within what was then still the relatively young field of film studies nevertheless paved the way for the methodologies and approaches that would mark the arrival of sustained film festival analysis some two decades later.

Three broad phases of scholarly writing on film festivals are discernible. The first of these emerged through the 1990s,<sup>3</sup> with a small but growing number of articles and book chapters that moved away from the consumer-guides, popular histories and journalistic reports that had previously characterised festival writing to incorporate more academically rigorous discussions.<sup>4</sup> However, it was not until the 2000s that the study of film festivals grew substantially. This second phase of scholarship began with a concerted effort to draw attention to the importance of film festivals as an area for serious debate and analysis. Studies examining festivals as institutions (Stringer *Regarding*), as parts of interconnected networks (Turan, Elsaesser “Film”), issues of their reception (de Valck “Drowning”), as well as their spatial, temporal, political and cultural aspects (Stringer “Global”, Harbord, Czach, Mazdon), began to emerge with greater frequency. The culmination of the second phase of festival scholarship was the publication of de Valck’s *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* in 2007. De Valck’s monograph offered film festival studies its first book-length treatment and identified film festivals as complex phenomena that were “hard to describe using mono-disciplinary approaches” (*Film* 32). Representing a consolidation and extension of the various theories on international film festivals that had been advanced to that point, de Valck’s work also utilised a variety of approaches to explain and gain insight into film festival operation. Borrowing primarily from cultural studies, sociology and anthropology, de Valck’s study of film festivals in Europe emphasised the

---

<sup>3</sup> While written accounts of film festivals have accompanied events since the 1930s, the vast majority of this writing has taken the form of journalistic appraisals of specific festivals and the films they screen. Through the 1990s, however, these annual reports were increasingly joined by a number of popular histories of particular events – including Forsythe Hardy’s history of the Edinburgh Film Festival (1992) and multiple publications on the history of Cannes (see for example Cari Beauchamp and Henri Béhar’s *Hollywood on the Riviera* (1992) or Peter Bart’s *Cannes: 50 Years of Sun, Sex and Celluloid* (1997) – as well as a range of consumer ‘survival’ and ‘insider’ guides – such as Steven Gaydos’ edited *The Variety Guide to Film Festivals* (1998), Adam Langer’s *The Film Festival Guide* (1998) and Chris Gore’s *The Ultimate Film Festival Survival Guide* (1999).

<sup>4</sup> Most notably, two articles by film critic and theorist Bill Nichols published in 1994 emphasised the importance of recognising the role contemporary film festivals played in mediating encounters with ‘new cinemas’ and the function of the festival circuit in translating the local/global dynamics of world cinema (“Global”; “Discovering”). Over the remainder of the decade, Nichols work was joined infrequently by a smattering of other articles and book chapters that sought to engage with festivals at a critical level, often with a focus on specific festivals (Sundance) or specialised events (queer film festivals) – see work by Chin, Dayan, Lutkehaus, Gamson or Seale as examples. Despite these early contributions, serious commentary on the nature of film festivals, their role within the wider film industry as well as their contributions to ideas such as film culture, ‘the auteur’ and ‘art cinema,’ did not eventuate in any substantial form until the start of the twenty-first century.

need for film festival research to reach beyond its film studies roots for theoretical frameworks to explain the interactions encountered and engendered within the festival space.

In December 2008, Marijke de Valck and Skadi Loist published online an annotated bibliography that gathered together existing film festival publications in an accessible, searchable form. The list, already substantive, was then printed the following year in *Film Festival Yearbook 1: The Festival Circuit*, alongside a discussion of the several axes along which film festival studies was developing. The publication of the bibliography, as well as the arrival of what would be the first of many *Film Festival Yearbooks* (2009), signalled the transition to the most recent phase of film festival scholarship. Despite a growing cross-disciplinary appeal of film festivals through this period, however, film festival studies maintained its close association with film and media studies.

The majority of film festival studies publications – especially those that have held a field-defining role – have emerged from film and media studies researchers and within film and media studies-oriented publications. Notably two key multi-book series on film festivals – the *Film Festival Yearbook* anthology series (2009-2014) and the Framing Film Festivals book series (2015 - ) – are overseen by series editors (and key film festival theorists) who are themselves housed within film and media studies departments: Dina Iordanova as Professor of film studies at St Andrews University and Marijke de Valck and Tamara Falicov as Associate Professor of media studies, Universiteit Utrecht, and Professor of film studies, University of Kansas respectively.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, to date film studies journals such as *Film International*, *Screen*, *Scope*, *Synoptique* and *New Review of Film and Television Studies* have provided the main outlet for the special film festival issues and dossiers that have marked the evolution of the field. The publication in 2016 of *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice* (de Valck et al), a volume that worked to provide the clearest overview yet of film festival studies as a coherent area of research, furthered this trend. The edited collection marked out specific understandings of how to *do* festival research, working to consolidate the area of film festival research and chart a structured and systematic approach for its continued evolution through mapping the key methods and theories involved in their analysis. Yet in bringing together the luminaries of the field, each of whom currently work within film and media studies departments or achieved their doctoral qualifications through film, media and communication programs, the book also ultimately confirms the connection between film festival research and film studies sensibilities.

Alongside the evolution of a clear body of film studies-inflected publications, film festival studies has also developed other close institutional ties. Film festival courses have emerged as part of film and media studies degrees (see Zielinski), while several research groups and associations have also developed within existing film and media

---

<sup>5</sup> The imprints through which these book series are published also highlight institutional connections to film and media studies, emerging from the St Andrews Film Studies Publishing House (*Film Festival Yearbook*) and via the Cultural, Media, and Communication Studies program at Palgrave Macmillan (Framing Film Studies).

studies frameworks. The Film Festival Research Network, initiated in 2008 by Skadi Loist and Marijke de Valck, has facilitated the emergence of two dedicated workgroups: the Film Festival Research work group within the European Network for Cinema and Media Studies (NECS) and the Film and Media Festivals Scholarly Interest Group within the Society of Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) (see <http://www.filmfestivalresearch.org/>). The location of these groups within film and media studies networks, with their annual gatherings located within the respective NECS and SCMS conferences, highlights the priorities for the evolving discipline. The institutional affiliations that support the research and teaching of film festival studies ultimately define the shape and form that the evolving field takes. Moreover, this relationship helps us understand the position that film festival studies still holds as subfield rather than as a fully realised discipline.

The designation of film festival studies as a subfield that sits below and between the fields of film and media studies is significant. This understanding of how film festival studies has emerged in relation to, and remains largely indebted to, these disciplines has influenced not only how the study of festivals has evolved but also conditions how we might understand the continued development of the areas of film and media studies themselves. Film festival studies' subfield status rests on its relative lack of disciplinary coherence. While the afore-mentioned scholarly research groups, publications, book series and pedagogical approaches have worked towards articulating film festivals as a recognisable and distinct area of study, there remains considerable divergence and heterogeneity in the methods and perspectives pursued through film festival research. As Paul McDonald cautions (145-46), the overuse of the term "studies" and commensurate labelling of new "fields" often overlooks the understanding that such terms denote a level of coherence in methodologies, principles and purposes that an area such as film festival studies has not yet achieved.

Film festival studies then, while not yet a fully realised field of study, does exist as a subfield that, although indebted to a film studies base, nonetheless moves characteristically beyond the traditional frames of film studies. Stressing the social and cultural aspects of film across the levels of production, circulation, presentation and reception, film festival studies produces an extension of the broader film and media fields, offering an approach that is inherently transnational in scope, transmedia in articulation and interdisciplinary in conception. By thinking through the place of film festival studies as a subfield of film studies, we can nevertheless see how the evolution of the former reveals an expansion and extension of the latter.

## **Film festivals as transnational events**

As sites of international exchange, film festivals are inherently transnational. Through the films they screen, the dealings of the global film business they facilitate, and the flows of international audiences, filmmakers, journalists and industry personnel they condition, film festivals produce links and interactions that transgress the boundaries of national categorisations and sensibilities. Indeed, as Iordanova explains, "the film festival has always been the site where the inherently transnational character of cinematic art reveals itself most glaringly" (xiv). However, it is not only that the film

festival offers a particularly clear example of cinema's transnationalism that holds significance. Rather, it is that the transnational qualities of the festival as an embodied site of screen culture also opens opportunities to expand an understanding and application of transnationalism within film studies.

As Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim, via Bergfelder (9), and more recently Deborah Shaw have observed, transnationalism as a critical concept infiltrated film studies somewhat more slowly than other disciplines within the humanities, establishing itself through a clear transnational turn since 2005 (Shaw 290). While film studies was relatively slow to move beyond its strong conceptual ties to national cinema frameworks, since the mid-2000s the body of work taking note of cinema's transnational qualities has grown considerably. However, within this turn, textual and industrial approaches have dominated understandings of cinema's transnationalism. Higbee and Lim highlight this (9), identifying three main approaches taken up within film studies to theorise cinema's transnationalism. These approaches – to the national/transnational binary, regional and supra-national considerations, and diasporic and cross-cultural filmmaking – place clear emphasis on the examination of what Iordanova identifies as the dominant disciplinary strands of film studies: textual analysis, national frameworks and industry studies (xi). Yet as Iordanova contends, film festivals as sites that crucially bring cinematic texts together while simultaneously straddling the three key lines of enquiry in industrial analyses – production, distribution and exhibition – remain poorly understood as sites that not only speak to each of these approaches but also to a more inherent and consuming “transnational essence” of film culture (xi).

The nature of film festivals as cinematic events works to consolidate and intensify the disparate ways in which the transnational quality of cinema can be understood. Not only sites where, as Berry and Robinson observe, the programmed films offer “a window on the world translating ‘foreign’ cultures into ‘our’ culture via the cinema, and vice versa” (1), film festivals also offer a space that, according to Shaw (292), “is transnational at its core... wherein global arts cinema and business intersect.” Film festivals, as temporary events with clear industrial as well as aesthetic concerns, condense the transnational workings of cinema, bringing them into confluence within a limited spatial and temporal setting. Yet even more than this, through such confluence festivals also work to expose a wider understanding of cinema's transnationalism. Indeed, looking to the six distinct conceptual premises highlighted by Steven Vertovec as being of particular importance to understanding how transnationalism has been applied differently in a variety of disciplines – as social morphology, type of consciousness, mode of cultural reproduction, avenue of capital, site of political engagement, and (re)construction of “place” or locality (449-57) – a case can be made for film festivals encompassing the lot.

Where film studies, with its interest in texts and industry, aligns most closely with Vertovec's themes of transnational cultural reproduction and, through co-productions and market flows, to avenues of capital, film festivals through their multifaceted nature and interest in cultural exchange offer other avenues of enquiry. Festivals, for example, offer spaces of transnational social morphology, creating shifting “transnational

communities” (Vertovec 449) through the engagement of itinerant industry participants, diasporic audiences and cultural tourists. The well-established role of festivals as sites of cultural diplomacy and soft-power emphasise their relevance to political engagement (see de Valck *Film*). Meanwhile the liminal nature of festivals as sites of spatial and temporal disruption – where everyday conceptions of place and time are replaced with the new morphologies of the event – offer up spaces for the establishment of a temporarily located and socially connected cinephile experience that builds an “awareness of multi-locality” and “stimulates the desire to connect oneself with others, both ‘here’ and ‘there’ who share the same ‘routes’ and ‘roots’” (Vertovec 450).

Then there is the international film festival circuit; a descriptor that broadly traces the organic and imagined global networks of exchange (Elsaesser “Film”, de Valck *Film*) and global space economy (Stringer “Global”) that connects events to one another as well as to international flows of resources, influence and participants. The understanding that individual events do not exist in isolation but rather fit within this global network, conditions an interpretation of film festivals as “inherently transnational...no matter what the intention of the festival is” (Iordanova xiv). The inherent and complex nature of film festivals as transnational events thus produces an avenue by which we can undertake a line of transnational enquiry that at once exceeds, yet continues to align with, the core concerns of film studies.

## Film festivals as transmedia experiences

If film festivals are inherently transnational, then they are equally fundamentally transmedia experiences. Like transnationalism, notions of transmediality have gained an increasingly secure foothold within film studies and media studies since the mid-2000s. Transmediality looks beyond inter-textual associations and dependencies to explore the way that contemporary “media” content exceeds the confines (and capacity) of a single medium to extend across and between media types and converge in the multi-platformed, participatory experience of the actively-engaged consumer. The growing interest in such approaches in film studies sits within a turn that has seen the object specificity of “film” diminish in favour of a more inclusive conception of “screen.” As such, the interest in and influence of transmedia discourses have largely accompanied the proliferation of new media forms – particularly the rise of digital media and their associated devices. This has facilitated a convergence of modes of production and consumption for formally discrete media types.

The impact of digital media technologies on how films are produced, distributed and consumed has been dramatic and has been the focus of a significant and growing body of scholarship. Dina Iordanova and Stuart Cunningham’s aptly titled collection *Digital Disruption* offers one example of the ways in which film studies has traced technological innovation and its transformation of the experience of cinema from a singular experience of “the movies” to a complex engagement across and between media and mediums. Within this context, as several of the collection’s chapters note,<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, chapters in this collection by de Valck, Fischer, Gubbins, Iordanova, or Silver et al.

film festivals too have been transformed. They have undergone significant changes regarding the media and mediums they screen, with events programming TV, VR, webfilm and streaming channels alongside their traditional cinematic fare. The demise of analogue film stock has further seen many events embrace digital projection formats alongside integrating other digital technologies into their presentation (via websites, smart-phone apps, social media, etc.) to increasingly offer up mediated experiences that disrupt their status as “live” and “lived” events (Stevens). However, the fundamental transmediality of festivals is not dependent on their digital entanglements. Rather, the transmedia experience of film festivals rests on their nature as multifaceted events that unfold through a variety of spatial, temporal and perceptual mechanisms.

To understand film festivals’ transmediality, it is useful to consider Henry Jenkins definition of transmedia storytelling: “a transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole” (95–96). For Jenkins, the defining quality of transmedia storytelling lies in the confluence of media forms and platforms in pursuit of a single (although not singular) narrative franchise. He explains:

*In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best – so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction. (96)*

This understanding of a transmedia narrative that extends beyond a single medium and requires, for its fullest appreciation, an engagement across several media, offers a useful way to conceptualise the interaction with films – or more specifically film culture – offered within the film festival.

As argued at the beginning of this essay, film festivals are complex and multifaceted events. Not just one thing – a showcase of films, for instance – film festivals are made up of a range of planned components, constituents, agendas and contingencies that work together and, at times, against one another to produce the “full” festival. At an organisational level, as Ruling and Pedersen argue (319), film festivals reveal “a nexus of multiple events” which include competitions, award ceremonies, red carpet appearances, press conferences, Q&A sessions, networking opportunities, parties, opening night galas, co-production markets, and, of course, film screenings. Moreover, as Dayan noted about his 1997 visit to Sundance, accompanying such festival “events” there exists another festival – a “written festival” (47). For Dayan, the importance of the written word to the functioning of Sundance was its “most striking” feature (47). He observed: “definition is on the minds of all involved: organizers, jury members, award candidates, audiences, buyers, and story tellers of different sorts – those who create catalogues, those who write reviews, those who script buzz, those who compose wrap-up essays” (47). While Dayan recounted the printed pages that issued from, accompanied and informed the unfolding event, his comments continue to ring true in the digital age, in which festival websites, social media, photo boards, video logs, printed and digital program notes and the ever-present reviews remain an integral part of what makes up a film festival.

Taken together, then, the film festival “narrative” that emerges from this mix is one that reveals its transmedia quality and ultimately the socio-cultural quality of festivals as expressions of film culture. Like the accounts of *The Matrix* film-comic-video game franchise, which informs Jenkins’ introduction to notions of transmedia storytelling, film festivals reveal an experience that unfolds across different media (printed word, film screenings, broadcast press conferences, live performance, located experience). From the festival program, to the Q&A sessions, to the festival trailer and the screenings of films, each iteration of the festival contributes to, but does not fully contain, the full “story” of the event. Moreover, like a “good transmedia franchise” film festivals work to appeal to “multiple constituencies by pitching the content somewhat differently in the different media” (Jenkins 96). Film markets, gala parties, filmmaker Q&A, award ceremonies, and the many other aspects of the film festival, have as their focus a different constituency – industry, audiences, filmmakers, sponsors, and so on – revealing not only different potential “versions” of the festival but a whole that occurs in relation to the fresh experiences encountered in the cross-overs that occur between the different festivals at play. What the critical conception of film festivals as transmedia experiences offers, then, is a way to understand the inter-relation of the social and cultural as inherent and important qualities in the encounter with films that festivals provide. As with the case of transnationalism, the utilisation of transmediality as a means for theorising festivals thus offers a point of extension in conceptualising the boundaries of film and media studies, emphasising the social contexts – beyond simply media reception – that shape how (media) content is experienced and understood.

## **Ingrained interdisciplinarity: Mapping the path from subfield to field**

The complex nature of film festivals as events that move across and between established conceptual frameworks – of nation, texts, industry – conditions in their study a commitment to interdisciplinarity. Film festival studies routinely borrows from a range of other disciplines. Indeed, as a young subfield, the theoretical and methodological approaches utilised by film festival researchers have, by necessity, been drawn down from more established fields, many of which sit well beyond the limits of what McDonald argues are the “already inter- or multi-disciplinary fields” of film and media studies (145). To date this has seen theories and methodologies borrowed from cultural sociology (in particular the works of Latour, Bourdieu, Habermas), anthropology and ethnography (see Vallejo and Peirano), organisational studies (Rüling and Pederson), urban and cultural industries (Stringer), business studies (Rhyne), and the digital humanities and geo-visualization (Loist), among other sources. The advice from de Valck, then, that “depending on one’s interest and particular research question, one may turn to different theoretical traditions to try and explain a specific aspect or dynamics of the fascinating work that film festivals make” (“Introduction” 68), reinforces the sensibility that has grown within film festival studies that the field is only limited by the questions and approaches that researchers can conceive.

For film studies, the ingrained interdisciplinarity of film festival research offers a boon. It opens a space for profitable intersections between an interest in film and a much wider array of concerns and methodologies, extending the understanding of film as tied to specific histories, meanings, and practices of reading outwards into conversations with other areas of analysis. This marks, in many ways, a reversal of what Kristen Warner has observed as the tendency within film studies in the past. She argues:

*at some point, film and media studies ceded ground to other academic disciplines as well as to the realm of popular criticism... we yielded our expertise in a quest to remain committed to interdisciplinarity and without being offered – or, quite frankly, asking for – reciprocity. (144)*

For Warner, the growing interest in films as pedagogical tools and objects of analysis within other disciplines saw the influence and expertise of film and media scholarship become diminished and sidelined within a growing popular and cross-disciplinary discussion of its texts. Yet, if film and media studies in the past did not seek reciprocity in such an exchange, film festival studies now does; it operates from a film studies base but seeks to colonise for its own ends a more diverse set of methodologies.

If the interdisciplinarity of film festival research offers film studies a chance to consolidate its influence and expand its reach, however, it also ultimately reinforces the status of film festival studies as a subfield. While the disciplinary and methodological borrowing that characterises film festival studies has enabled its evolution and topicality, it also creates a challenge for the field's ability to define its own disciplinary structures. If all disciplines and methodologies offer potential approaches for researching festivals, then what demarcates a coherent methodological framework within film festival studies? Where lies the difference between film festival studies as a critical area of enquiry and simply an interest in film festivals as objects or texts? The task of moving from subfield to a fully realised field of film festival studies thus requires further consideration of how the disciplinary heterogeneity of festival research can be consolidated and more clearly defined. Moreover, any effort at forming such a definition must also begin the work of distancing film festival studies from film studies paradigms. As Iordanova argues, “more and more, one recognizes that the films have become but one of the many elements that make up a festival” (xii). In amongst the parties, red carpets, industry gatherings and other planned and unplanned aspects of the festival event, films offer only a single part of the festival narrative. As such, their importance within festival research must be balanced and matched by an equal level of attention directed towards non-filmic elements of the event. While film festival studies remains linked institutionally and conceptually to film studies, these very ties impose restrictions on the ability for researchers (conditioned by access to funding, the need to report on research outputs, or the need to gain access to film studies-focused publications) to push the boundaries of film festival research and conditions the avenues along which the discipline can and will develop.

## Conclusion

As a subfield of film studies, film festival studies opens avenues for positive intersections to emerge. Moving well beyond the traditional concerns of texts, nations and industry, film festival research offers an approach to the study of screen environments that privileges understanding film through its social and cultural construction. As intrinsically multifaceted events, the study of film festivals engages an interdisciplinary approach that enables an extension of how key frameworks, including transnationalism and transmediality, can be taken up within film studies. In so doing, film festival studies offers film studies a means by which a concern with cinema can be moved further past questions of medium specificity towards questions of culture. It enables the field to regain some of the conceptual ground perceived as lost through the appropriation by other fields of screen media as objects of study. Yet, if film festival studies offers film studies a means to extend its disciplinary reach, it does so at the expense of the continued evolution of film festival research. While film studies as an established field helps to offer film festival studies an institutional base for its development, it also imposes certain limitations on how film festivals are conceived and the priorities placed on developing research. Ultimately then, the graduation of film festival studies from subfield to field will require not only a clearer articulation of its conceptual structure but also a level of emancipation from the overarching concerns of its originating discipline. Only once film festival studies moves beyond its reliance on film studies will it achieve its desired place as a fully realised field in its own right.

## References

- Allen, Robert C., and Douglas Gomery. *Film History: Theory and Practice*. Knopf, 1985.
- Beck, Philip. "Historicism and Historism in Recent Film Historiography." *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1985, 5-20.
- Berry, Chris and Luke Robinson. "Introduction." *Chinese Film Festivals: Sites of Translation*, edited by Chris Berry and Luke Robinson, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 1-12
- Chin, Daryl. "Festivals, Markets, Critics: Notes on the State of the Art Film." *Performing Arts Journal*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1997, 61-75.
- Czach, Liz. "Cinephilia, Stars, and Film Festivals." *Cinema Journal*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2010, 139-45.
- Dayan, Daniel, "In Quest of a Festival." *National Forum*, vol. 77, no. 4, 1997, 41-7.
- de Valck, Marijke, and Skadi Loist. "Film Festival Studies: An Overview of a Burgeoning Field." *Film Festival Yearbook 1: The Festival Circuit*, edited by Dina Jordanova and Ragan Rhyne, St. Andrews Film Studies, 2009, 179-215.
- De Valck, Marijke. "Drowning in Popcorn at the International Film Festival Rotterdam? The Festival as a Multiplex of Cinephilia." *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*, edited by Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener, Amsterdam UP, 2005, 97-109.
- De Valck, Marijke. *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia*. Amsterdam UP, 2007
- De Valck, Marijke. "Introduction" *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, edited by Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell and Skadi Loist, Routledge, 2016, 67-8.
- De Valck, Marijke. "What is a film festival? How to study festivals and why you should" *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, edited by Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell and Skadi Loist, Routledge, 2016, 1-11.

- De Valck, Marijke; Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist, editors. *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*. Routledge, 2016.
- Elsaesser, Thomas. "Film Festival Networks: The New Topographies of Cinema in Europe." *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood*, Amsterdam UP, 2005, 82-107.
- . *New German Cinema: A History*. Rutgers UP, 1989.
- Gamson, Joshua. "The Organizational Shaping of Collective Identity: The Case of Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals in New York." *Sociological Forum*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1996, 231-261.
- Harbord, Janet. *Film Cultures*. Sage, 2002.
- Higbee, Will and Song Hwee Lim. "Concepts of transnational cinema: towards a critical transnationalism in film studies." *Transnational Cinemas*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2010, 7-21.
- Iordanova, Dina. "Foreword." *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, edited by Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell and Skadi Loist, Routledge, 2016, xi-xvii.
- Iordanova, Dina, and Stuart Cunningham, editors. *Digital Disruption: Cinema moves online*, St Andrews Film Studies, 2012.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York UP, 2006.
- Loist, Skadi. "Research Projects." *Skadi Loist: Queer\*Media\*Studies*. Wordpress, 2018, <http://skadiloist.de/>
- Lutkehaus, Nancy C. "The Sundance Film Festival: Notes Towards an Ethnography of a Film Festival." *Visual Anthropology Review*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1995, 121-129.
- Mazdon, Lucy. "The Cannes Film Festival as Transnational Space." *Post Script*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2006.
- McDonald, Paul. "Introduction: In Focus – Media Industries Studies." *Cinema Journal*, vol. 52, no. 3, 2013, 145-149.
- Morgan, Michael. "Making space for experiences." *Journal of Retail and Leisure Property*, vol. 5, no. 4, 2006, 305-313.
- Nichols, Bill. "Discovering Form, Inferring Meaning: New Cinemas and the Film Festival Circuit." *Film Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 3, 1994, 16-30.
- Nichols, Bill. "Global Image Consumption in the Age of Late Capitalism." *East-West Film Journal*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1994, 68-85.
- Rhyne, Ragan. "Film Festival Circuits and Stakeholders." *Film Festival Yearbook 1: Film Festival Circuit*, edited by Dina Iordanova and Ragan Rhyne, St Andrews Film Studies, 2009, 9-39.
- Rüling, Charles-Clemens, and Jesper Strandgaard Pedersen. "Film festival research from an organizational studies perspective." *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, vol. 26, 2010, 318-323.
- Searle, Samantha. "Film and Video Festivals: Queer Politics and Exhibition." *Meanjin*, vol. 55, no. 1, 1996, 47-59.
- Shaw, Deborah. "Transnational Cinema: Mapping a field of study." *The Routledge Companion to World Cinema*, edited by Rob Stone, Paul Cooke, Stephanie Dennison and Alex Marlow-Mann, Routledge, 2017, 290-298.
- Stevens, Kirsten. "'You Had to Be There': Film Festival 'Liveness' and the Digitally Connected Audience." *International Film Festivals: Contemporary Cultures and History Beyond Venice and Cannes*, edited by Tricia Jenkins, IB Tauris, 2018, forthcoming.
- Stringer, Julian. "Global Cities and the International Film Festival Economy." *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, edited by Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice, Blackwell, 2001, 134-44.
- Stringer, Julian. *Regarding Film Festivals*. PhD Thesis. Indiana University, 2003.
- Turan, Kenneth. *Sundance to Sarajevo: Film Festivals and the World They Made*. California: U of California P, 2002.
- Vallejo, Aida and María Paz Peirano, editors. *Film Festivals and Anthropology*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017.

Vertovec, Steven. "Conceiving and researching transnationalism." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1999, 447-462.

Warner, Kristen. "The sustainability of film and media studies." *Cinema Journal*, vol. 57, no. 2, 2018, 143-7.

Zielinski, Ger, editor. "Film Festival Pedagogy: Using the Film Festival in or as a Film Course." Special Issue of *Scope: An Online Journal of Film & TV Studies*, vol. 26, 2014.

## About the author

Kirsten Stevens is Lecturer in Arts and Cultural Management at the University of Melbourne. Her research explores film festivals and film culture events with particular interest in the impacts of digital technology and the influence of festivals within national screen industries. She is the author of *Australian Film Festivals: Audience, Place and Exhibition Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) and has taught extensively in screen and media studies. She is deputy director of the Melbourne Women in Film Festival and Vice President of *Senses of Cinema* journal ([www.sensesofcinema.com](http://www.sensesofcinema.com)).