“THE HOLD OUT”: THE SAN FRANCISCO TRANSGENDER FILM FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITION AS PROTEST

by

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the School of Journalism and Communication
and the Division of Graduate Studies at the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June 2021

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE

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Title: “The Hold Out”: The San Francisco Transgender Film Festival and Exhibition as Protest

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Degree awarded June 2021.

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is an historical cultural analysis of the San Francisco Transgender Film Festival (SFTFF). Founded in 1997, this exhibition culture is the world’s longest-running documented trans film festival. Although content made by trans filmmakers or films with trans themes have been programmed at queer film festivals, trans-specific film festivals are an important and steadily growing phenomenon since the late 1990s. This dissertation seeks to address the limited scholarship that acknowledges the robust history of trans exhibition cultures, and by using ethnographic and historical methods, examines cultural and economic frameworks within which SFTFF emerged and persisted, illuminating tensions that cannot be disentangled. By tracing the festival’s interconnected queer, punk, and trans subcultural lineages, this dissertation outlines several of the festival’s counter-hegemonic practices. SFTFF’s enactment of punk as a sensibility translates to four key areas explored in this dissertation: identity, exhibition, spatiality, and economics.

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Robbins, A. (2018). (Trans)gendering public toilets: Queering toilet humor in South Park's "The Cissy." *Queer Studies in Media and Popular Culture,* 3(3), 321-334.

Steel, E., Robbins, A., Jenkins, M., Flander, L., Gaff, C., and Keogh, L. How does genetic risk information for Lynch Syndrome translate to risk management behaviours? *Hereditary Cancer in Clinical Practice,* 15(1), 1-9.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost, I offer my unending gratitude to all past and present queer, punk, and trans artists, activists, and sex workers that paved the way for, built, and sustained SFTFF since its official debut in 1997. It has been an honor to world-build, laugh, grieve, and rage with those I have met over the past five years. Thanks also to my committee members, Dr Peter Alilunas, Dr Quinn Miller, Dr Erin Hanna, and Dr Julianne Newton for your ongoing support, guidance, and inspiration during the PhD process. Much of this dissertation was inspired by my experiences in the classrooms of Dr Quinn Miller who centered trans feminist reading practices and pedagogy. These experiences challenged me to question academic grooming in normative canons and reawakened my own punk sensibility. Similarly, Dr Peter Alilunas' encouragement of experimentation was a gift. It is a rare and enviable occurrence to find an advisor who is deeply invested in both the scholarship and personal well-being of graduate students. I also extend gratitude to Dr Erin Hanna for believing in this project, helping me crystallize my research methods, and for giving me space in her classrooms to experiment with modes of teaching trans media history. And many thanks to Dr Julianne Newton for guiding me into ethnographic modes of being and writing, which have enriched my historical research. Additionally, I am deeply indebted to Dr Ernesto Martinez, Dr Shoniqua Roach, and Dr Isabel Millán who centered BIPOC knowledges, and queer and trans of color theory, literature, poetry, and media in their classrooms. Combined, their courses helped shape my thinking about this project's investments, methods, and lineages. I am also grateful to a handful of friends who helped ease the isolation of the PhD experience. This dissertation was primarily written on the stolen land of the Kalapuya people.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Like all histories, this one starts somewhere in the middle, building on what came before while envisioning what might be. Contextually, this research is situated in the 1990s in America, and more specifically the geographic region now referred to as San Francisco. A common memorialization of this era is embedded in the phrase the "culture wars," often periodized between the late 1980s and mid-1990s. The so-called culture wars serve as a contextually significant precursor to the debut of The San Francisco Transgender Film Festival (SFTFF) in 1997, the primary object of study. The discursive arguments that took place during these years comprised a cocktail of buzz words such as censorship, propaganda, and pornography, and the ideological debates about these concepts informed queer and trans cultural production at the time, both culturally and economically.

More broadly, the nineties are marked by a number of social, political, technological, and economic changes. In July of 2017, a seven-part docu series titled *The Nineties* (Alvarez et al.) premiered on CNN. Produced by Herzog & Company and Playtone, the series, following *The Sixties, The Seventies, and The Eighties,* catalogues events, people, trends, and popular culture deemed newsworthy in the United States. Subject matter regarding the 1990s includes the changing role of television in terms of representation and emerging formats, Bill Clinton's presidency, social issues such as the OJ Simpson trial and Los Angeles riots, international politics, particularly the Gulf War, school shootings (Columbine), the notion of "terrorism," mainstream adoption of the internet, dot-com business, Y2K, and musical trends that spanned the decade. All of these elements contextualize this dissertation and when combined, demonstrate what Gomery

& Allen (1985) refer to as generative mechanisms of SFTFF, what they define as the forces that lead to events (p.16). This framework is useful for historical research because it draws attention to varying forces that have uneven amounts of significance but contribute overall to the emergence of phenomena. While it is untenable to exhaustively explore all of the mechanisms that cumulatively provided the conditions for SFTFF's emergence in 1997, each chapter considers the festival from a different vantage point and at varying temporal moments in the festival's life. Specific questions that emerged at the outset of this research and were developed through ethnographic encounters with actors and encounters with official archives include: what factors led to the festival's emergence, what is the significance of the festival's spatial and temporal locations, why did the festival name change, and how has the festival sustained itself over time?

I have introduced the docu series, *The Nineties* (Alvarez et al.) to provide some context for SFTFF's emergence. However, a key issue not discussed in the docu series is the discursive shifts concerning the meanings, limitations, and possibilities of gender that were gaining new momentum during this decade and in the early and mid-2000s. This omission signals a limitation of any contemporary retrospective account. Attempts to highlight important issues of the nineties inevitably produces absences, including discussions of gender, which this dissertation centers as a prominent discourse of the nineties that situates SFTFF's debut both culturally and economically.

At the time of this writing there is growing conversation about trans televisual media and communication including trans self-representation on YouTube (Horak, 2014; Miller, 2017; O'Neill, 2014; Raun, 2016) trans casting (Capuzza & Spencer, 2017), and the paradoxes and limits of representation, notably that increased visibility often

correlates with more violence, policing, and regressive policies (Gossett, Stanley, and Burton, 2017)[1]. Far less critical, mainstream media outlets have cashed in on the transgender beat, and it has become commonplace to stand in line at a chain supermarket and see magazines with cover features about trans celebrities, trans identities, and spectacularized medical transition stories. *TIME* magazine's publication of an issue titled "The Transgender Tipping Point" (Steinmetz) in May 2014, followed by a *Vanity Fair* cover story in June 2015, titled "Caitlyn Jenner: The Full Story," suggests a trans zeitgeist (Bissinger, 2015). While these years were significant in terms of increasing mainstream representations and discussions of trans experiences, identities, and rights, this dissertation is not invested in analyzing the significance of contemporary mainstream media artifacts or discourse. Rather, this research focuses on subcultural formations and the modes and artifacts of cultural production that informed and represented the concept of gender in the nineties and early 2000s in regard to the primary object of study.

SFTFF emerged in a vastly different mediated climate than the so-called "transgender tipping point." In the nineties in America, and particularly in San Francisco where the festival takes place, transgender as discourse, mode, and category primarily circulated in independent publishing, subcultural performance cultures, and activist groups working for political recognition. It is noteworthy that this process of linguistic development was in no way linear, a point I further articulate in this introduction when I address terminology. What is useful to note here is that the contextual configuration of space and time in which SFTFF emerged serves as an important landmark for historians

[1] See the continuously updated bibliography compiled by Thomas J. Billard: TMS: A Bibliography of Transgender Studies in Media, Communication, and Technology: https://www.thomasjbillard.com/tms

of gender lexicon. This historical case study also offers insights for film festival scholars interested in "minor genre" or "identity-based" film festivals that represent what I articulate as a "hold out" from the dominant thrust of market-oriented festivals to corporatize and professionalize.

Historical research about a film festival that is largely "off the map" is a tenuous project, and as such, sources include non-mainstream media texts such as newsletters, zines, murals, performance art, ephemera, and secondary accounts of artistic and activist movements. These artifacts tell a different story of trans lives and cultural formations than what is typically presented in mainstream narratives. A number of subjects I interviewed during this research narrated SFTFF as "ahead of its time," but in this dissertation I conceptualize it as representative of its temporal and spatial specificity – a response to the growing need of trans and gender non-conforming (TGNC) people to create their own political agendas and activist coalitions, subcultural formations, and film production and exhibition cultures. One writer, going by the name of Shadow, wrote in a 1993 edition of the zine, *Brat Attack,* billed as "Do It Yourself S/M," that, "Gender is the issue of the nineties." This primary artifact from a San Francisco-based independent publication stands in striking contrast to the CNN docu series' representation of the nineties. Both suffer from overgeneralization. However, this is a productive tension and one which surfaces throughout this dissertation. The baseline premise of this research is predicated on a contention that people now commonly referred to as TGNC have always existed, even before discourse named them as such, and that they will continue to exist even if an administration attempts to write them out of existence (Green, Benner & Pear, 2018).

While this research focuses on one particular case study, the findings illuminate several insights about identity, exhibition, spatiality, and economics. In other words, there are layered histories within the central object of study that speak more broadly to film festival scholarship, queer and trans studies, and media industry studies. My goal in writing this history is not an attempt to pin down the festival's ephemerality, order and contain its outrage and apparition, resolve its multiple tensions, or name all its utopic imaginings. I have encountered many layered stories in a mixture of unarchived memories and ephemeral spaces of congregation that have highlighted desire, grief, rage, and care, alongside encounters with two official archives, including collections at the San Francisco GLBT Historical Society Archives[2] and the Maga/zine collection at the San Francisco Public Library. My encounters with both official and unofficial archives have worked in tandem to illuminate different aspects of this festival's world. I note this because despite my organization of this research into chapters and arguments, this history is ultimately incomplete and uncontainable within written form which speaks to the broad and diffuse nature of its punk sensibility as a key animating principle.

A Brief History of SFTFF

SFTFF debuted to the public in 1997, under the name Tranny Fest: Transgender and Transgenre Cinema. Until 2011, the festival went by the shortened name, "Tranny Fest." Given the material impact of the T-word, my own positionality, the notion of care work that I articulate in this dissertation, and particularly the ways in which this slur has and continues to be used to incite violence and hatred at the intersections of gender, race, and class, throughout this dissertation, I primarily refer to the festival by its current name,

[2] See: (Berg, 2018) for a discussion of the history of this collection and its state of processing as of 2018.

SFTFF. I do not make a case for contemporary use of the T-word. My discussion of some historical contentions around this word serve the purpose of contextualizing the historical and spatial emergence of SFTFF in 1997 and the decision to drop the T-word from the festival name in 2011. The rhetorical move to write T-word, except in quotes and titles acknowledges the ways in which I understand my positionality and commitment to trans liberation at the time and place of this writing. The T-word has been and continues to be described by some of the key informants of this research as a non-medicalized term created and circulated by TGNC people despite being leveraged as a slur, and as a term of endearment among some kinship networks. I address these perspectives as well as a selection of critiques of these views in a broader analysis of the festival's official name change in chapter four.

Discussions about the need for a film festival devoted specifically to trans content emerged prior to 1997 and not only in San Francisco. Two other trans-specific film festivals debuted in 1997: Counting Past 2 in Toronto (1997-1999, 2002) and the International Transgender Film and Video Festival in London (1997-1999). At least four known trans-specific film festivals popped up a couple years later - in Austria, Germany, Boston, and Olympia, Washington, but they were short-lived. A decade after SFTFF's emergence, between 2006 and 2015, only a handful of trans film festivals have been in continuous operation in Europe, the US, and Australia (Dawson & Loist, 2018; Horak, 2017). SFTFF is arguably the most historically relevant mainstay of this disparate global film festival phenomenon and as such deserves robust attention beyond the little recognition it has received in popular press and sparse academic writing (Horak, 2017/2021; Stryker, 1997).

Christopher Lee (1964-2012), a Chinese-Polish-American trans person, co-founded SFTFF, alongside Alex Austin, a white trans person who is now a media lawyer.[3] In the late nineties, Austin was running a queer festival in Oakland called Alternate Vision: Diverse Images in Queer Cinema (dates unknown) and told me in a brief side conversation at SFTFF's twentieth anniversary in 2017 that they talked to Lee about starting a trans film festival after screening some of his work. Christopher Lee was a trailblazer. He made one of the first known films by and featuring trans men and nonbinary folks of color and produced and starred in some of the first known pornographic films to feature trans men.[4] In 2002, Lee was the first trans man (at the time often referred to as FTM which stands for female-to-male) Grand Marshall of San Francisco's LGBT Pride, alongside Shawna Virago, current Artistic Director of SFTFF (since 2001). His unfortunate death by suicide at the age of 48 in 2012 was grieved by many close friends in his artistic and activist circles. The violent act of marking Lee with an "F" on his death certificate became the inspiration for California's Respect After Death Act (AB 1577), which passed in September 2014 and was signed into law in July 2015. This law requires death certificate officials to reflect the deceased person's gender identity per legal documentation, personal written instructions, or next of kin. Given the unfortunate circumstances of Lee's death and the inability to contact Austin after multiple attempts, I do not have official dates to verify when their friendship began and they started conversing about starting a trans film festival. Regardless, in the late nineties, Austin and Lee knew it was time to build something of their own.

[3] I am using the umbrella version of the term trans to describe both Lee and Austin.
[4] Christopher Lee's known directed filmography: *Christopher's Chronicles* (1996), *Trappings of Transhood* (1997), *Alley of the Trannyboys* (1998), *Sex Flesh In Blood* (1999).

Part of the need for a trans-specific film festival was arguably the slow and often controversial incorporation of trans filmmakers and their films at the older, more established "queer" film festival that now goes by the name Frameline. I discuss SFTFF's relationship with Frameline in more detail in chapter two, but for now it is worth noting that Frameline did not change its name to include both the B and T of LGBT until 2005 and that it has screened films that could be considered controversial at best and transphobic at worst since its inception. Regarding timeliness, trans historian, Susan Stryker, wrote in a 1997 review for the *San Francisco Bay Times*, found in the collection at the GLBT Historical Society that the International Transgender Film and Video Festival in London and SFTFF in San Francisco, by sheer coincidence, debuted less than three weeks apart. "Clearly," she writes, "a transgender film festival was an idea whose time had come." However, she distinguishes between the local context and aims of the festival in London and San Francisco. I quote her contextualization of SFTFF at length because it captures the significance of the temporal and spatial relationship that enabled its emergence:

> San Francisco … has a vibrant and anarchic contemporary transgender scene where many of the old distinctions between transsexuals, transvestites, butches and queens have broken down. The city also has a long history of transgender political organizing and community building, creating a space where less survival-oriented forms of cultural production can flourish. It's important to remember that gay drag queen Jose Sarria got nearly 7,000 votes in the 1961 San Francisco City Supervisor's elections, that transsexual street prostitutes in the Tenderloin began organizing as early as 1966, that Lou Sullivan organized the most internationally influential female-to-male (FTM) advocacy group here back in the mid-'80s, that the city-funded Tom Waddell Health Clinic is one of the few places on earth where cross-gender hormones are available on demand, and that since 1995 anti-transgender discrimination has been illegal in the city. Building on those past accomplishments, transgender people have built a uniquely livable transgender subculture that blows apart conventional ideas about what men and women are supposed to be...Whereas the London festival looked towards the past, the San Francisco festival has its gaze firmly set on the future.

Stryker's quote highlights some of the key formations that led to the emergence of SFTFF in 1997 and showcases the importance of temporal and spatial specificity in analyzing its debut in the broader context of cultural, technological, political, and economic trends of the 1990s and 2000s. Throughout this dissertation, I explore aspects of Stryker's appraisal in terms of subcultural formations, activist endeavors, and the historical significance of San Francisco as a geographic location. I take a similar stance to Stryker to argue SFTFF continues to focus on world-building and futurity, a topic I take up in chapter three.

Many of the historical artifacts I have encountered in this research illuminate the overlapping importance of activist and artistic formations to the lineage, debut, and vision of SFTFF. For example, Lee's resume, included in the collection at the GLBT Historical Society, reveals some of his investments in media activism. His earliest employment is listed as "Producer/Director Correspondent" for Dyke TV between 1995 and 1996. The collection overview at Smith College states Dyke TV was "produced by and for lesbians … as a way of empowering the lesbian community and increasing visibility and ending isolation of lesbians. It was founded by the Lesbian Avengers, a direct-action group founded in 1992, and was part of their education and activist program." Largely volunteer-based, this media arts organization sought national correspondents to report on local events deemed newsworthy to lesbians under the maxim of "television to incite, subvert, organize, and provoke." Lee's involvement with Dyke TV highlights his early investment in Do-It-Yourself (DIY) media and dyke communities that merged activism and art during the "culture war" era in which LGBT expression was vehemently threatened and as such also proliferated. Per Austin's resume in the same collection, they

received their J.D in 1995 and in addition to running the Oakland-based film festival, Alternate Vision (years unknown), worked for non-profits and media law firms throughout the nineties, eventually starting The Austin Law Group as the founding attorney in 1998.[5] It seems Austin strong-armed the grant writing aspect of SFTFF's early years.

SFTFF publicly debuted on November 22, 1997 at the Roxie Theater with six consecutive programs spanning 1 p.m. to 1 a.m. This exhibition included an adjacent video lounge that screened free continuous films at the Proyecto Contra SIDA por Vida (1993-2005), a non-profit HIV-prevention agency that served gender and sexual minorities, specifically Latinx communities. SFTFF kicked off with a "child friendly" program and proceeded throughout the day with multiple programs of short films, ending with an 11 p.m. showing of hardcore pornography. Exhibiting works in 16mm and video format, the first festival showcased shorts in experimental, documentary, drama, animation, and pornographic genres. In a press release for the 1997 festival, housed in the collection at the GLBT Historical Society, Lee and Austin described the impetus for the festival as "really to bridge communities, break down stereotypes, raise a few eyebrows (!), and most importantly raise a lot of consciousness about the wonderful commonalities and differences within our community. It's about time we saw *all* of ourselves up there on the big screen." The last line speaks directly to the timeliness of this festival as a means to address the limitations inherent within practices of incorporation of trans film and video within larger "queer" film festivals.

[5] https://www.austinlawgroup.com/

SFTFF has been operating continuously from 1997 to present. The festival was an annual event from 1997 to 1999, biennial from 1999 to 2005, and returned to yearly exhibition from 2005 to present, including a virtual festival in 2020 as a result of COVID-19. As noted, the original organizers were steeped in artistic subcultural formations and activist networks that are significant to the vision and success of SFTFF. These formations addressed AIDS response, prison abolition, housing, police violence, and myriad other concerns relevant to the most marginalized trans and queer people, namely those who are Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). Evidence of these coalitional investments are present in the first year's printed program. The 1997 debut was co-sponsored by organizations such as Proyecto, the Tenderloin AIDS Resource Center, the Asian Pacific-Island Wellness Center, Umoja (Unified GLBT people of African descent for socializing and social action), the Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, FTM International, Intersex Society of North America, Lavender Youth, and more. In addition, several media arts organizations served as co-presenters including San Francisco Cinematheque, Women Make Movies, Bay Area Video Coalition, Frameline, and the Film Arts Foundation. It is arguably because of these networks and on-going relationships with a number of large and small social, political, and media arts groups that SFTFF was able to leverage a large audience (recorded at over 2,000 in 1997 according to handwritten notes in the collection housed at the GLBT Historical Society) and extend their own circuits of care, a concept I elaborate throughout this dissertation. In the early years, the festival also hosted live performances, readings, panel discussions, photo exhibits, and receptions a week prior to the day-long festival but has since pared

back to only screening films, a change that current Artistic Director, Shawna Virago, describes as a consequence of a small group of staff and resources.

Terminology

Throughout this dissertation I discuss intersections and divergences between the terms queer, punk, and trans, so I briefly outline some context and how I define my use of these terms below.

Queer

A brief consideration of the word queer demonstrates its unfixed nature. The introduction of the word queer into the English language sometime around the sixteenth century has no singular origin story (Sayers, 2005). While the word is commonly suggested to have etymological ties to the German word "twer" or "quer," loosely translated as "oblique," (Ahmed, 2006), queer in the English language has undergone several transformations within a discursive field of power and has been taken up and employed to represent divergent practices, political investments, significations, methods, and identity markers. In terms of subject formation and later, identity reclamation, the word queer has historically been employed to mark difference from some mythological norm, signifying deviance in terms of constructed categories such as sexuality, race, personality, and gender. While the word queer has now entered mainstream popular culture and is often used as a stand-in for gay or lesbian or the entire and ever-expanding acronym of identity categories, I do not use queer to primarily signal identity. Rather, I am invested in thinking about queer as historical, as political investment, and as a sensibility that informs the doing of both gender and sexuality.

I take the position that queer theory, as it came to be known in the academy in the late 1980s and early 1990s, must give credit to the streets – the places of contact where ideas, affects, fluids, and forms of capital where exchanged, particularly among BIPOC bodies, sex workers, and youth. T. Kebo Drew, Managing Director of the Queer Women of Color Media Arts Project (QWOCMAP) drew attention to this multiplicity of queer histories during a Living History Discussion of LGBTQ Art, Film, and Poetry in 2019:

> When people ask me questions about queer culture, I'm like which queer culture, that's always the first question because most of the time when we talk about queer culture, I feel like we're these little colored sprinkles on the white cupcake when the reality is, we're like savory parts of our own cultures and our own histories. Like if you look at the Black community there were actually advertisements in Black community newspapers in the 1920s and 1930s about drag balls.

T. Kebo Drew's sentiments align with my use of the term queer as a signifier of more than sexuality and as embedded in lived experiences between social categories of difference such as class, race, ability, immigration status, nationality, age, and religion. This dissertation's object of study speaks to Drew's point that there a multiplicity of savory histories of queer and trans experiences, subcultural formations, and performance cultures that are not officially canonized, archived, or containable in formulations such as "queer culture."

Punk

I use the term punk throughout this dissertation to refer to a sensibility rather than an identity category, genre, or semiotic playground. Clark (2003) writes the "death" of punk in its conventional sense, birthed a new punk sensibility or "subcultural discourse" of do-it-yourself (DIY) culture wherein "culture could be produced with less capitalism, more autonomy, and more anonymity" (p. 234). Barber (2006) further defines some of the key aspects of a punk sensibility, which he argues is evidenced in people who "are

prepared to say NO to governments, bosses, the police, the establishment, parents … the state apparatus in all its subterranean guises" (p. 14). The notion of saying no to hegemonic society holds an inherent suggestion of choice. As such, it is important to heed Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's (2015) contention that "…Black and brown families had always been DIY" (p. 57). This quote serves as a reminder to consider one of the many paradoxes of punk as a sensibility, which I address throughout this dissertation. In other words, disinvestment in hegemonic practices varies according to the historical and social location of any subcultural formation or individual actor.

Tavia Nyong'o (2008) eloquently merges the etymology of punk to the use of Black vernacular in prisons, a term he argues is associated with a man who is anally penetrated. Nyong'o reminds us of the way in which punk in contemporary Black vernacular is entangled with discourses of sexuality, exemplifying the need to always employ analysis that considers multiple and overlapping categories of difference. He writes:

> Queer is to punk as john is to hustler, with both words referencing an established if underground economy of sexual favors and exchanges between men … the subterranean linkages between punk and queer are as frequently disavowed as they are recognized. This suggests that alongside the 'frozen dialectic' between black and white culture that Dick Hebdige famously noticed in British punk, there is also a less frequently noticed but equally furtive set of transactions between queer and punk that is hidden (p. 107).

This dissertation contributes to theorization of the relationship between punk and queer by adding the term trans. Part of the project of linking trans to these other sensibilities acknowledges that the word punk has various historical connotations linked to sexual practices that were constructed as deviant but unrelated to prison culture. In a newsletter titled "Punk Research," published by Mike Johnson in San Diego in 1984, he addresses the question, "what is the origin of punk?" Johnson writes that punk was used

to describe female prostitutes in the 1600s, according to the Oxford English Dictionary. Johnson cites a few English writers such as Thomas Lodge, William Shakespeare, and Thomas Middleton who used the word punk (spelled variously as punck, puncke, and pung) in this framework. These two examples of historical etymology of the word punk and its link to sex work and sexuality share in common a deviation from normative sexual practice and assigned gender.

The etymology of "rough trade" as a gay hustler and also the chosen name of a punk label demonstrate another significant intersection between punk and queer (Nault, 2018). Referencing Hebdige's writings on subcultural formations of punk, Curran Nault argues Hebdige does not mention queerness' relation to punk as another "present absence," like that of race, even though queerness is the basis of Hebdige's *Subculture.* Nault reminds us that *Subculture* opens with the anecdote of gay author, Jean Genet and a jar of Vaseline, which he reads as an innuendo for anal sex and Genet's resistance to a homophobic world. However, Hebdige never revisits this signifier after the first page of *Subculture.* While Nault addresses the relation of trans to punk, he does so only cursorily.

In addition to the aforementioned scholars who explore the etymological linkages between queer and punk, José Esteban Muñoz (2013) is also central to this research because he extends the relationship between punk and queer to more fully consider how deviant modes of gender performance have been informed by a punk sensibility. Working within the articulations of queer of color critique and performance studies, Muñoz highlights TGNC of color punk artists such as Vaginal Davis and Darby Crash to reveal how intersections between queer and punk must consider race, gender, sexuality, and

other social categories of difference to understand the rich complexities and histories of performance cultures and spaces for BIPOC artists and audiences. Muñoz has written extensively about the sociality that emerged in the punk rock commons in Los Angeles and argues that performance spaces offered an alternative to the homosocial spaces of sports and war. Notably, the mosh pit became an unexpected place for queer relations. Punk, he argues, is "replete with queer animism but does not indulge in the holding pattern of naming this desire as anything but the style we call punk … simultaneously destructive and generative, annihilative and innovative, insofar as it is the ground for enacting new modes of being in the world" (p. 98). Drawing from these vectors of scholarship that consider intersections of queer and punk, in this dissertation I articulate how punk as a sensibility was an animating principle of SFTFF. I argue this animating principle is underexplored in broader histories of subcultural formations in the nineties and the specifics of identity, exhibition, spatiality, and economics in relation to the primary object of this analysis.

Trans

Like queer and punk, transgender (henceforth trans or TGNC) has been increasingly circulated in mainstream media over the past few decades and thus its meanings and particularities to individuals, groups, and institutions, also like queer and punk, are diffuse, diluted, and endlessly shifting. Although there is an academic narrative that the term transgender emerged in the 1980s, Rawson & Williams (2014) argue the first recorded use of the trans + gender compound appeared in psychiatrist, John F. Oliven's, *Sexual Hygiene and Pathology* in 1966, and that the 1970s ushered in new terms such as transgendered, transgenderism, and transgenderist, all "rooted in divergent

meanings of the word gender" (p. 3). By the 1980s, it became more common to use the term transgender as what is now referred to as an "umbrella" term to describe anyone diverging from their gender assigned at birth. In the 1990s, people used terms like transvestite and transsexual, and transgender gained more traction to differentiate from these terms. Media played a large role in the wider use of the term transgender, notably the publication of Leslie Feinburg's 1992 booklet, *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come* and the debut of *Transgender.com* in 1996 for resource-sharing (Rawson & Williams, 2014).

In this dissertation I follow Susan Stryker's definition of trans primarily because she is a trans historian, was involved in queer and punk subcultural formations in the Bay Area in the 1980s and 1990s, and has lived experiences in activism, academia, and subcultural formations that inform this research. In *Transgender History,* a book that charts an American post-World War II transgender movement, she writes, transgender "refer(s) to people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over (*trans*-) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender … it is the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place, rather than any particular destination or mode of transition, that best characterizes the concept of transgender …" (2017, p. 1). This definition is useful because it affords use of the term trans as noun, adjective, or verb. At the same time, there are limitations to this definition, notably that it does not fully account for non-western cosmologies of gender. The term trans has also been incorporated in academia and mainstream media and thus its deployments at the time of this writing in contrast to the years of SFTFF's beginnings carry contrasting meanings. Despite changes in

discourse, by focusing specifically on intersections between queer, punk, and trans formations and sensibilities, I attempt to narrow the focus of trans to spatial and temporal specificity related to the object of study.

Positionality

As a white, queer, trans person of working-class origins, I became aware of gender, sexuality, and class at a young age. Awareness of my whiteness came much later, through activism and academic training. That this process of awakening took so long to begin is testament to the power of white supremacy. My whiteness and other forms of institutional privilege demand a lifetime of work to consistently deconstruct as part of my commitment to liberation of all marginalized bodies. I mention these details because discussion of positionality is key to ethnographic research. However, the notion of insider or outsider status in relation to the object of study, a distinction often discussed in ethnographic writing, is arguably misleading. I consider myself both insider and outsider because positionality is not fixed and involves movement across and between culturally constructed boundaries. Following Madison's (2012) writing on critical ethnography, I contend that positionality is a dialectical process in which one's social position is always being produced within interpersonal interaction. This recursive relating results in neither researcher nor subject being fixed, but always in flux. Given that SFTFF is composed of several primary actors, audiences, and texts, I have been differently situated in the multiple encounters that have transpired during this research - the encounters in sanctioned archives as well as the unofficial archives and meeting spaces of the sidewalk, cafe, garage, kitchen table, alleyway, Roxie Theater, and myriad digital spaces. It is also important to note that during the course of this research, I started programming work for

trans-specific festivals (not SFTFF) and co-curated special trans programs for two shorts film festivals. These experiences both enriched and embedded my reflections in the materiality and politics of the film festival industry more broadly, situating me as a fluctuating insider and outsider.

Theoretical Orientation

A Cultural Approach to Film Studies

Film studies is a discipline typically categorized into the sub-groups of film criticism, film theory, and film history. Bordwell (1996) argues that Sausserean semiotics, Althusserian Marxism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic feminism, and Barthesian textual analysis comprised “New Film Studies" in the 1970s. He further divides these Grand Theories into “subject-position” theories and Culturalism, noting that of the three sub-fields of Culturalism (Frankfurt School, post-structuralism, and Cultural Studies), Cultural Studies has endured the longest. A cultural studies approach to the study of film and film history is likely the most enduring because it affords modes to analyze text, audience, industry, and context. One can see the effects of a cultural studies approach to film and film history in the shift from studying films and their reception to the study of films as “cinematic events” (Bordwell, 1996). This dissertation is situated within a cultural studies approach because it theorizes SFTFF as an exhibition culture, uses ethnographic and historical methods, and makes cultural and economic interventions. The conclusions this dissertation presents are situated within what Bordwell (1996) and Gomery & Allen (1985) deem middle-range theories that consider

context over content and localize historical shifts and the complex emergence of such shifts.

Subcultural & Post-subcultural Studies

A cultural studies approach to film builds from the work of The British Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) which emerged, according to Stuart Hall (1994), in the 1950s, but was articulated in Birmingham in the mid-1960s. Hall (1994) argues that CCCS was invested in redefining the term culture as every day, ordinary practice in contradistinction to "high art." This version of a cultural studies project was in part responsible for the legitimization of research about entertainment and media such as sports, fashion, and film. Lines of enquiry, including audience engagement, identity, hybridity, and pleasure were central to this project. Hall and Hebdige notoriously studied youth subcultures and used their respective case studies to articulate theories of resistance within cultural formations. They examined how oppositional youth cultures challenged hegemonic power and semiotic order by their use of fashion, music, and symbols. Following Barthes, Hebdige employed semiotics to examine punk subcultures, specifically the music of Teddy Boys, mods, skinheads, and Rastas. He is famously quoted as saying that punk subcultures are defined by their acts of "semiotic guerilla warfare" (1979, p. 133). His argument is that these guerilla tactics countered hegemony but ultimately got co-opted by hegemony, thus dismantling their oppositional power.

Post-subcultural studies, defining itself as an offshoot of CCCS, became more prominent in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This field is invested in thinking about how global mainstreams and sub-streams coalesce in multiply fractured ways to create hybrid

formations (Weinzierl, Muggleton & Berg, 2003). The field of post-subcultural studies broadly articulates that there are no longer discrete subcultures in time and space. In the twenty-first century one must account for transnational flows of cultural exchange, hybridity, and identities in flux. Post-structural theories have informed this field to take an anti-essentialist approach that considers plural, fluid subject identities and group formations (Weinzierl, Muggleton & Berg, 2003, p. 8). In other words, a simplistic binary of oppositional subculture and parent hegemonic culture is insufficient to account for myriad contradictions and relational formations that occur across lines of identity, industry, and culture.

Methodologically, post-CCCS research lends itself to ethnographic approaches. Given this emphasis on ethnographic research, Sara Thornton (1995) delineates between subcultures, as "taste cultures which are labelled by media as subcultures," and *subcultural,* as the ways that group formations define their own practices (p. 10). Similarly, Halberstam (2005) argues subcultural formations are "transient, extrafamilial, and oppositional modes of affiliation" (p. 154). These articulations suggest that discrete subculture evokes unity whereas subcultural formations celebrate discontinuity in space and time.

I use the word *subcultural*, following Thornton (1995) and Halberstam's (2005) arguments. This phrasing also aligns with Berlant and Warner's (1998) articulation of queer culture and counterpublics as "worlds" that differ from the notion of community because they "necessarily include more people than can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond a few reference points, modes of feeling that can be learned rather than experienced as a birthright" (p. 558). The theoretical conceptualization of SFTFF as

a subcultural formation affords a framework to consider how it has historically defined its exhibition practices and how these practices demonstrate geographic hybridity and identities in flux across space and time.

Not all punk formations afford an equal degree of possibility for interdependent and extrafamilial care work. Indeed, some subcultural formations that claim punk as an ideological tactic or which have been labeled as punk, replicate harmful hierarchies even while attempting to disengage from some hegemonic ideologies. For example, in a discussion of punk formations in Los Angeles, Nault (2018) writes these movements were often dominated by hyper-masculine white straight cis men and espoused homophobia, sexism, and racism. Halberstam (2005), Nguyen (2012/2015), and Piepzna-Samarasinha (2015) have made similar arguments about the exclusionary and harmful practices of some formations that have been associated with punk. As a result of these hierarchies, these authors also highlight how punk formations composed of multiply marginalized bodies have always existed to challenge mythological norms and center other forms of experience. SFTFF is a subcultural formation that is animated by a punk sensibility that centers BIPOC queer and TGNC people. Throughout this dissertation I argue that SFTFF is exemplary of the ways in which intersecting queer, punk, and trans formations contain myriad possibilities for modes of resistance, care, and world-building even within the precarity of capitalist constraint.

Film Festival Studies

Most film festival literature emerged after 1990, which is likely a result of film studies largely focusing on textual analysis up until the 1980s when political economic

and historical factors were increasingly considered in regard to film history (de Valck, 2007). Categorizing a history of film festivals, de Valck (2007) articulates three phases: first, the inception of the Venice film festival in 1932 up to the 1970s, second, the 1970s to 1980s, an era of independently organized festivals that both protected cinematic art and facilitated the growth of film industries, and third, the 1980s onward, during which an international festival circuit emerged and festivals became increasingly professionalized and institutionalized.

In response to an increasingly nationalistic and commercially driven film festival mode, de Valck (2006) argues that avant-garde film events re-emerged in the 1960s, and that post-WWII, New York replaced Paris as the hub of the avant-garde. The American underground film movement of the 1950s and 1960s challenged Hollywood hegemony and in 1955 the Film Makers' Cooperative (Co-op) was formed to distribute and archive avant-garde films, giving filmmakers a repository for their works. This Co-op structure countered the New York Film Festival (1963) that focused on programming within a role of cultural gatekeeping according to a logic of taste appraisal. By the 1960s and 1970s, de Valck (2007) argues that cinema was fully entangled in political projects such as supporting anti-colonial struggles in the Global South, Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, and left-wing movements in the west. In the late 1960s and 1970s, many festivals started incorporating "specialized" or "thematic" programming that reflected world politics, which de Valck (2007) reads as evidence of the ways in which ideological underpinnings of the avant-garde movement, such as "art for art's sake" became absorbed in festival networks (p. 29).

Gay, then Gay and Lesbian, and later, Queer Film Festivals (QFF) emerged within this broader historical film festival context and were made possible in large part by emerging social movements and activism in the 1960s and 1970s that contributed to the growth of politically focused identity groups with increased public presence. Returning to the idea of generative mechanisms of GL/Q film festivals, particularly in San Francisco where the first documented "Gay Film Festival of Super-8 films" (now known as Frameline) began in 1977, there are myriad forces at play including increased access to contraceptives, the "Summer of Love" in 1967, and the loosening of anti-pornography laws under Nixon (Loist & Zielinski, 2012). Hollywood's Motion Picture Production Code, which set the moral standards for major studio releases between the 1930s and late 1960s, banned depictions of "sexual deviance" thereby barring explicit representations of "homosexuality" or gender deviance (often conflated) on screen. While implicit representation was present during this time, as were active audiences engaged in queer readings of implicit images, by the late 1960s, these moral codes were loosened. The development of GL/Q film festivals emerged within this context as alternative exhibition sites to screen content that would otherwise have no platform. These festivals functioned as corrective representation and self-affirmation alongside swelling activist movements that were mobilizing political agendas. Combined, these factors helped build an increasingly global system of GL/Q film festivals. In chapter two, I articulate various theoretical approaches to the study of film festivals in greater depth, address the notion of a film festival "circuit" to introduce my intervention of the "circuits of care," and parse out some of the ongoing and historical contentions between trans filmmakers and incorporation of their work in a larger QFF system.

Methods

My methodological approach is in part inspired by *The Watermelon Woman* (Dunye, 1996), wherein the main character, played by Cheryl Dunye, determines that in the absence of history, she has to write her own. Without official archives that would illuminate the "unnamed actor" known only in credits as "the watermelon woman," Dunye finds answers in gossip, kinship, and other unsuspected sources. This has become a metaphor for my approach to seeking and collating myriad unofficial sources and drawing source material from two traditional repositories. As Howell & Prevenier (2001) contend, the historian's task is to construct a truth not the Truth. Dethroning the fetishization of "facts," they describe new historicism as a process of reading, contextualizing, and reflexively considering the selection of sources. Part of my intervention in this dissertation is to expand the definition of what counts as a source. This move follows Black feminist and queer and trans of color scholars who have articulated the need to look outside of official repositories and markers of evidence. Muñoz (2009), for example, theorizes ephemeral analysis as a "hermeneutics of residue" wherein he encourages performance and cultural studies scholars to search for historical evidence in the lingering traces of affect, memory, and gesture related to subcultural formations. Similarly, Miller's (2012) discussion of searching for "traces of trans encounters" (p. 77) informs this research.

Even though part of my corpus involves analysis of ephemera I encountered while visiting two "official archives" wherein documents with first degree accounts of SFTFF's history have been preserved, many of the sources I use in this dissertation come from subjective interpretations, sidewalk and kitchen conversations, murals, and alternative

media texts such as zines, newsletters, and documentaries. Thus, while the nineties ushered in an "archival turn" for feminist historians (Eichhorn, 2013) and a similar trend occurred in queer studies in the 2000s (Arondekar et al., 2015), "official" legal, social, and political documents that speak to queer, punk, and trans lives are limited because of myriad structural exclusions that have attempted to erase these lives and their histories. The official archives that do exist for queer, punk, and trans historical preservation contain great disparity and hierarchy along lines of nation, race, class, and gender and typically feature collections that document the most dominant groups (Arondekar et al., 2015). These elisions reinforce Foucault's (1972) assertion that an archive is a process of the construction and reconstruction of statements, not a static and authoritative repository of facts. Similarly, Rawson (2015) asserts that archives are alive and constantly changing, not only because of the influence of the archivists that house them, but also as a result of those who visit and interpret them. As such, my aim is not to create an official archive of SFTFF, but to note its aliveness and flux as key attributes of its punk sensibility.

The practice of writing history is an interpretive act. The sources I have collated and their interpretation have all been filtered through multiple lenses acquired by my lived experiences. Thus, the analysis I present is one piece of an infinitely sprawling history. Another scholar could choose to analyze a single film or program screened at SFTFF and this would undoubtedly reveal other robust vectors of the festival's lineage and cultural practices. This is the first known dissertation-length analysis and documentation of SFTFF, and I hope more scholars will build on whatever aspects of this research inspire them.

Chapter Outline

Throughout this dissertation, I focus on three particular flash points: the festival's emergence and first few years in the late nineties, the year surrounding the festival's name change in 2011, and the twentieth anniversary and commemorative discourse in 2017. These flashpoints are not always presented in a linear fashion. In chapter one I present a historiography of some of the salient subcultural lineages that influenced the emergence of SFTFF as an exhibition culture in 1997. Specifically, I consider the relationship between queer, punk, and trans to theorize punk as a sensibility that enables what I term a punk method of doing gender, or genderfuck. I define this mode as a non-conformist sensibility that is less concerned with identity categories than it is with practices that destabilize conventions of gender and sexuality. I argue genderfuck has manifested in the festival's identity formation as oppositional to assimilationist trans narratives.

In the second chapter I consider the ways in which SFTFF challenges hegemonic practices in the global film festival world, specifically European International Film Festival (IFF) and business-oriented Queer Film Festival (QFF) modes. Instead of using the common metaphor of a "circuit" to describe the global film festival system, I use Bourdieu's notion of a field to analyze the hierarchies and prescriptive "rules of the game" that mark film festivals' connections and disjunctures. The metaphor of a circuit suggests A-list and business-oriented QFFs have a greater effect on the festival field than the "minor genres" or "local" festivals. Rather than debate quantifying effects or replicate these binary frameworks for understanding the film festival field, I argue that SFTFF challenges dominant festival rules by enacting counter-hegemonic exhibition practices. I

redeploy the term circuit in my formulation of the work SFTFF does, what I articulate as an expansion of circuits of care – practices steeped in mutual aid that invite collaboration versus competition.

In chapter three I theorize spatiality, charting a brief history of the built environment of San Francisco, the Mission District, and the Roxie Theater before analyzing the spaces of SFTFF as an exhibition culture. To theorize this multiplicity of spaces and their inherent contradictions, I draw on Lefebvre's theory of the right to the city and Muñoz's theory of the utopian performative as a mode of queer and trans of color world-building. My key argument in this chapter is that SFTFF enables an ephemeral spatialized form of resistance that reveals the dialectical relationship between cities and inhabitants and demonstrates the ways in which the use of material space can enable new modes of being and inspire future imaginaries.

The fourth chapter outlines a brief historiography of arts funding in America. Specifically, I appraise ideological debates during what is often framed as the "culture war" era of the nineties to contextualize how SFTFF has navigated the precarity of nonprofitization as a hegemonic framework in the arts world. I ground this discussion in a case study of the festival's name change in 2011 and think alongside Raymond Williams' articulation of a materialist critique that considers the relations within which people negotiate their everyday practices. I argue there is a dialectical relationship between culture and economics and articulate how SFTFF has mobilized what I theorize as a punk tactic of "holding out" versus selling out.

CHAPTER II
QUEER AND PUNK SUBCULTURAL FORMATIONS AND GENDERFUCK LINEAGES OF SFTFF

"Fucking with gender is fucking with the dominant paradigm and that's punk rock… The definition of punk is to subvert the dominant paradigm through art, music, culture, and we were turning gender and sexuality on its head."

– Lynn Breedlove (of Tribe 8, interview in *Queercore: How to Punk a Revolution*, 2018)

"I'm still more at home in a punk bar than a gay bar…there's straight people in the gay world … but I don't know any straight punks." – John Waters (interview in *Queercore: How to Punk a Revolution*, 2018)

In this chapter, I outline vectors of SFTFF's subcultural lineages. I engage with scholarship regarding the linguistic, ideological, and cultural interconnections between punk and queer and push this scholarship in a new direction by considering how trans also overlaps with these investments and sensibilities. Punk formations are rhizomatic, continuous, hybrid, and fluid across space and time. Given this sprawl and the differing modes of cultural production, exhibition, and consumption punk has inspired, in this chapter I theorize how punk as a sensibility has influenced practices of gender that are not contained within discrete identity categories or a notion of community. I argue that a punk method of doing gender, or genderfuck, is a sensibility that is concerned with practices that destabilize conventions of gender and sexuality. In other words, genderfuck does not depend on the biological or ontological positioning of the subject. I argue genderfuck is a mode that has influenced actors of SFTFF and has thus manifested in the festival's exhibition culture's oppositional stance to assimilationist trans narratives.

Addressing these aims, I trace a lineage of queer, punk, and trans activist and artistic vectors of genderfuck that were important to the emergence of SFTFF, including

for example, direct action groups such as ACT UP, Queer Nation, and Trans Nation, and cultural production including film, music, and printed text. These vectors demonstrate that SFTFF did not arise out of thin air or as a result of more mainstream motivations of film festivals such as city planning and tourism and increasing professionalization characteristic of the 1990s. Rather, SFTFF was informed by the rich and complex subcultural locations of its original actors, the broader discursive histories of the region in which it took place, sprawling punk movements, and punk sensibilities that have traveled across space and time. Throughout this chapter I draw from personal interviews, panel discussions, ethnographic observations, ephemera from the collection at the GLBT Historical Society archive, the Maga/zine archive collection at the San Francisco Public Library, the *FTM* newsletter, and several documentaries about punk formations and Queercore. These sources speak to the diverse vectors of SFTFF's emergence and the limitations of "official" archives to contain and represent the sprawl of queer, punk, and trans cultural formations and their impacts.

As such, the task of presenting a subcultural lineage of SFTFF is itself an endless sprawl because this history could be told from many starting points and perspectives. The compilation of sources I integrate and interpret in this chapter presents one version of this festival's history. This collage-like methodological approach I have pursued to enhance archival absences is also conducive to account for the flux of subjects' discursive categorizations and self-identifications across the sprawl of SFTFF's genderfuck lineage.[6] For example, some subjects have been categorized or identified themselves as

[6] I have attempted to practice care in my use of names and pronouns with an understanding that these aspects of language are alive and changing and what this document reflects may not be the most up-to-date language any actor uses.

crossdressers, transvestites, drag performers, transgender, transsexuals, dykes, queens, fags, MTFs, FTMs, trannys, queers, and countless other terms. My framework for theorizing punk as an animating principle of genderfuck assists in accounting for this flux while refusing to codify such flux. Consider the following SFTFF press release titled "GENDER CHAOS FUN!" that was distributed for the festival's public premier in 1997:

> Tomboy. Transgender. Drag King. Draw Queen. Ma'hu'. Tom tom. MTF. FTM. Hombre a mujer. Mujer a hombre. Cross dresser. Intersex. Two-spirited. Wink te. Girlie-man. Bull dagger. Fagelah. Onabe. S/he. He/she. Fa'afafine. Pre-op. No-op. The Third Sex. Remember when you were a baby dyke pretend-shaving in dad's mirror? Or when your best friend Kenny got caught wearing his mom's high heels? Well, there's a hot new film festival for you!

All of these terms have histories of their own, and I am not concerned with debating their ontological meanings through a lens of identity politics. Rather, I suggest this robust nomenclature and celebration of flux from the outset of SFTFF's emergence can be read as evidence of SFTFF's commitment to challenging assimilation, a key sensibility shared between queer, punk, and trans investments.

In numerous press interviews, Shawna Virago, folk-punk singer-songwriter and current Artistic Director of SFTFF, highlights her punk music influences – X, the Clash, the Damned, and Black Flag, to name a few. On opening night of SFTFF's twentieth anniversary, Virago opens with the following words:

> …when we started, we didn't have to worry about an assimilationist vision, trans and gender variant artists, right? That didn't exist. So now, that's still our mandate is to try and create a space for anti-oppression, for DIY, for anarchist, for punk, for sex-positive art and so much of that is still untouched by mainstream media.

In these opening curatorial lines, Virago articulates a link between the festival culture and punk, a sensibility she likens to other modes of investment in liberation, DIY modes of production and exhibition, anarchism, and sex-positivity. I also interpret a sense

of nostalgia in her comment by the suggestion that there was, at one point in time, no concern about assimilation. I take an anti-nostalgic stance when reflecting on any historical era and am inspired by Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore's assertion that "Nostalgia for the pre-gentrified time or place or space might be one of the worst forms of gentrification" (2020: 148). Related to expressions of nostalgia, Virago also mentions the concept of assimilation in numerous conversations over the three years in which this research was conducted. Virago has never articulated her definition of assimilation to me but she has mentioned certain signifiers of assimilation such as Caitlyn Jenner, Netflix, and the Amazon Studio series, *Transparent* as examples of mainstream figures, media industries, and cultural texts that SFTFF defines itself against.

Another key term Virago uses frequently is the word punk, and when considered as a sensibility, this also illuminates her anti-assimilationist stance. Explaining how she and original co-founder, Christopher Lee, had similar visions for the festival, Virago states, "I think it helps that Christopher and I both come from kind of a punk rock place … that vision of like punk scenes or punk labels" (personal communication, November 10, 2017). Two years later, Virago expresses a similar sentiment when she states, "…We aren't connected to Hollywood, or we don't emulate Hollywood, so that's really not the focus of the festival. The festival is pretty bare bones … I always think of it for me it's like running a punk label or something, you know, like SST records, Black Flag's label"[7] (personal communication, June 19, 2019). These quotes demonstrate consistency in Virago's articulation of a punk sensibility as an animating force of the festival and an

[7] In a *Rumpus* interview with Virago (April 6, 2015), she describes the communal listening experience of buying a punk LP and having listening parties during which people were quiet and absorbed in the music, even when it was loud and raucous. She states, "It was like going to the movies."

anti-assimilationist approach in terms of cultural exhibition. This consistent rhetoric might appear at odds with the aforementioned flux inherent to a history of SFTFF. However, as noted, I see these seemingly contrastive elements in dialogue. Punk, as a consistent sensibility, has enabled key principles of the festival's cultural and material structures.

My research has illuminated the influence and enactment of a punk sensibility in contemporary curatorial content, past and present exhibition practices, and textual accounts of the festival's history. However, I have also observed some contradictions. For example, after a screening at the festival's twentieth anniversary in 2017, I questioned Virago about the choice to screen the short film, *Umbrella* (Ernst, 2018), a project funded and sponsored by Google about "four transgender individuals across America who are fighting for rights and representation in a challenging and changing world. From serving their country's military to building successful businesses and advocating for policy advancements …".[8] This brief description of the film is staunchly assimilationist, what Cathy Cohen (1997) articulates as any queer, or in this case trans political agenda that is based on an ethnic, or essentialist construction of identity as a means of articulating civil rights and inclusion into white, middle-class society.

Given the overly rights-based framework this film depicts (i.e. inclusion of trans people in the military as progress), I was not surprised that during the screening, ripples of agitation washed through the audience, and a person next to me booed when rhetoric about trans people in the military was presented through a heroic framing. The following

[8] Film description in printed SFTFF 2017 program.

day, I approached Virago and expressed my curiosity about the choice to screen this content. Virago simply stated, “We don’t always get it right” (personal communication 12 November 2017). Although we did not have the opportunity to discuss the politics of programming in greater depth, her comment suggests alignment with an overarching anti-assimilationist sensibility while also speaking to the possibility of a divided programming committee. I asked Virago about film selection practices and the overall festival operations on a few occasions, but she seemed hesitant to provide specifics. She simply noted there is a group of programmers who screen the films. I do not know how many people comprise the screening committee, if all or some screeners are monetarily compensated, or the broader mechanics of the festival operation during any given festival year.

The topic of programming politics re-emerged in an interview with Virago nearly two years later when she mentioned the festival screened films by filmmakers connected to the series, *Transparent* (Soloway), a text she has repeatedly used to signify trans assimilation. Curiously, Ernst, the director of *Umbrella*, was also involved with the *Transparent* series. Virago said, “It was interesting how some people were thrilled by that, you know, and some people weren't, so it's always interesting for me to see what's the temperature in the room nowadays” (personal communication, June 19, 2019). This anecdote and my own observations of the “temperature” in the auditorium in 2017 during the screening of *Umbrella* (Ernst, 2018) highlights why a term like community is problematic because of its implication of unity. As these examples attest, there are trans people fighting for rights-based inclusion into mainstream institutions (assimilation) and those invested in forms of abolition and liberation from these structures. The collection at

the GLBT Historical Society archive illuminates programming from 1997-1999 and 2000 and I attended the festival in 2017-2020. Programming from these years reveals what I interpret as a broad historical arc of the festival's commitment to an anti-assimilationist agenda as a whole. It seems plausible that SFTFF aims to provide a platform for a diverse group of filmmakers, and because there is an awareness of diverse audiences, this creates a necessary tension that the programming committee must work out each year. Even with the occasional programmatic tension, a point I discuss further in chapter two, my overall assessment is that SFTFF organizers, past and present, have been and remain significantly invested in foregrounding experimental, low-budget, anti-slick short films of many genres, with an emphasis on liberationist struggles that center BIPOC experiences, sex work, and prison abolition. The occasional programming of a film such as *Umbrella* (Ernst, 2018) serves to highlight these broader issues as the baseline investments of the festival.

Looking back at SFTFF's inception, Lee's punk sensibility, while not encapsulated in a direct quote like Virago, is also traceable in his activism and filmography. As noted in the introduction, his resume, part of the collection at the GLBT Historical Society, reveals these investments, beginning with the line listing him as "Producer/Director Correspondent" for Dyke TV between 1995 and 1996. Largely volunteer-based, Dyke TV sought national correspondents to report on local events relative to lesbians under the maxim of "television to incite, subvert, organize, and provoke." Lee's involvement with Dyke TV, the capacity of which is unknown given his death, highlight his lineage of DIY media that was infused with a punk sensibility championing both activism and art during the "culture war" era in which queer and trans

expression was vehemently threatened. I discuss this era in more depth in chapter four and later in this chapter I devote attention to the ongoing tension between identity categories that Lee traversed – lesbian, dyke, and trans, specifically. I move now to a discussion of the influence of direct-action groups, ACT UP and Queer Nation, on SFTFF's investments in anti-assimilationist goals.

ACT UP & Queer Nation

Two important direct-action movements that were active in the Bay Area in the 1980s and 1990s, wherein queer and punk sensibilities overlapped and circulated, were ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) & Queer Nation. According to Deborah Gould (2009), oppositional AIDS groups cropped up in 1986-87 and these movements can be credited with the birth of queer theory in the academy. Queer Nation, a direct-action group and spin-off of ACT UP, founded in New York City in 1990, rallied around confrontational politics to institutional, economic, and cultural violence against people who expressed queer sexualities and genders. Known for phrases such as "We're Here, We're Queer, Get Used to It" and "Queers Bash Back," sprawling iterations of this movement and these anti-assimilationist sensibilities mobilized around the importance of provocative visibility rather than discrete inclusion into hegemonic society.

What underlies both of these direct-action groups is the mobilization of anger, a salient affect of punk formations. Gould argues that ACT UP's key intervention was to insist that anger should surpass grief. This sentiment is notable in the stock phrase, "Don't mourn, organize" (taken from Joe Hill, activist of Industrial Workers of the World). In a 2019 "Living History" panel discussion to reflect on the notion of "Queer

Then and Now," T. Kebo Drew, managing director of Queer Women of Color Media Arts Program states:

> A lot of us were in ACT UP at the time…I was…and there was a split…a lot of cis gay white men didn't want to look at what was happening in Black and brown communities and then cis gay white men who were allies... Part of us coming up with Queer Nation at the time was a big fuck you … to we're not gonna be out, we're gonna be normal middle-class people which we weren't. That's where queer came from and also in response to the incredible homophobic violence we were all dealing with at the same time.

This animating force of outrage, what Drew refers to as a "big fuck you," was a salient characteristic of a growing queer sensibility. Gould writes:

> ACT UP marshaled grief, tethered it to anger, and linked both sentiments to confrontational AIDS activism…ACT UP's emotional pedagogy offered new ways for queer folks to feel about themselves, about dominant society, and about political possibilities amid the AIDS crisis, offering a 'resolution' of sorts to lesbian and gay ambivalence…[this] also gave birth to a newly politicized *queer* sensibility (p. 214-15).

ACT UP is an exemplary subcultural formation to explore a linkage between sensibilities such as anti-assimilation and rage and I argue these sensibilities link queer, punk, and trans. Evidence of this linkage emerges in many forms of DIY cultural production. For example, in the 2001 German-directed documentary, *Step Up and be Vocal: Interviews with Queer Punks and Feminists* (Busch & Ortmann, 2001), Matt Wobensmith, editor of the zine *Outpunk* and founder of Outpunk Records in San Francisco states he joined ACT UP and Queer Nation because he was angry. He notes, "A lot of my anger was directed at mainstream gays … queer was defining yourself against gay, the mainstream."

These quotes by Drew and Wobensmith highlight that outrage was indeed an animating force of radical queer activism, a movement defined both against hegemonic society and against an assimilationist thrust within rights-based G/L agendas. The quote

by punk godfather, John Waters, that opens this chapter also reiterates this. His notion of "straight gays" is similar to Drew's reference to "white cis gays" and Wobensmith's demarcation of "mainstream gays." These traces of defining oneself and one's political investments against assimilation demonstrates a link between queer, punk, and trans.

It is also important to note that radical queer activism was also divisive. Direct-action queer radicalism built on and profited from the activist and scholarly work of BIPOC activists. Despite this lineage, which T. Kebo Drew articulates in the preceding quote about ACT UP and Queer Nation, some queer of color scholars have rightfully noted that these direct-action groups too often centralized the issue of sexuality while ignoring or de-centralizing categories of difference such as race, citizenship, and class. Cathy Cohen (1997) argues one limitation of ACT UP and Queer Nation was its embeddedness in class, gender, and racial privilege. She argues these direct-action groups were therefore ineffectual and imbalanced toward the aim of addressing the divergent and overlapping needs of people of color. Cohen's critiques are essential to thinking about the history of activist and artistic subcultural formations and the ways in which they perpetually struggle to be both radical and exclusionary, an ongoing tension to which SFTFF is not immune[9].

[9] Similar critiques can be made about the ways in which punk has appropriated BIPOC cultures. For example, the 2003 documentary, *Afro-Punk* (Spooner), highlights the experiences of Black punks in majority white spaces, noting the Black roots of punk and the appropriation of Indigenous and African culture in punk fashion.

Transgender Rage

Transgender Nation was another direct-action group in the Bay Area at the same time as ACT UP and Queer Nation. At a conference called "Rage Against Disciplines" in 1993, Susan Stryker describes Transgender Nation as "a militantly queer, direct action transsexual advocacy group" (p. 237). She cites "transgender rage" as the animating force of this movement that challenges both institutional and assimilationist L/G forms of trans-exclusionary politics. In other words, the transgender body is situated as a threat to the "natural" order and remains unassimilable and antagonistic both materially and ideologically even with the possibilities for some bodies to take up visual cultural citations of gender legibility. Through a language of rage, Stryker argues for the possibility of "furnish[ing] a means for disidentification with compulsorily assigned subject positions" (p. 248-9). Transgender rage, as disidentification, and as an animating principle of Trans Nation evidences another historical link between punk as a sensibility informing gender.

Relating her existence as a transsexual woman to Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Stryker writes, "Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment; like the monster's as well, my exclusion from human community fuels a deep and abiding rage in me that I, like the monster, direct against the conditions in which I must struggle to exist" (p. 238). She describes the hegemony of the gender binary reinforced by medical establishments and many gays and lesbians who built their rights-based political actions upon definitions of biological essentialism (wherein categories of woman and man were assumed natural and given at birth). Transgender Nation, per Stryker, mobilizes rage at institutional oppression and exclusion

from L/G spaces. Her response to marginalization from cis gays and lesbians is not grief. She writes, “I do not fall from the grace of their company – I roar gleefully away from it like a Harley-straddling, dildo-packing leatherdyke from hell” (p. 239). This quote echoes the anti-assimilationist sentiments of Drew, Wobensmith, and Waters, but offers a specifically trans perspective which assists in my project to link queer, punk, and trans.

My contention here is that rage, as an animating force of the direct-action and subcultural formations I have discussed, both divides and connects marginalized bodies. I have drawn some salient connections between the actors I have included in this chapter, but also acknowledge that the contours of rage are undeniably variable across subject positions, time, and space. Stryker’s citation of disidentification is a well-known tactic BIPOC activists and artists have engaged to deal with ongoing oppression and erasure in activist movements and cultural productions. Disidentification, as articulated by Muñoz (1999), is a process whereby those outside the racial, sexual, and gender mainstream consciously transform cultural production for their own purposes. Returning to Cohen’s previous argument, it remains important to consider the specific ways all movements both challenge and reinforce hegemony.

Genderfuck

One of the first references I have traced to the term genderfuck is Christopher Lonc’s article, “Genderfuck and its Delights,” printed in the 1974 edition of *Gay Sunshine: A Journal of Gay Liberation.* This piece of evidence contextually suggests that genderfuck was a term in circulation and significant to an early punk era. In the autobiographical reflection, Lonc self-defines as an “effeminate homosexual” and a

"genderfucking queen" (p. 4) who joined the ranks of the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), a collective of gender non-conforming people founded by Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, two trans women of color. STAR advocated for homeless youth, sex workers, and the most marginal of society among the growing constituency of mainstream gays and lesbians. Lonc writes:

> One of the most common things people shout at me on the street is: 'Are you a boy or are you a girl?'… That is exactly what my life is all about … I can't help but think that when I walk down the street, I am a one-person guerilla theater-revolutionary army attacking the entire straight structured world around me … my gay brothers and sisters also seem scared and confused (p. 4).

Lonc's articulation of genderfuck echoes my previous argument that rage has been a shared animating affect between radical queer political organizing and punk formations. Genderfuck, at its best, is a sensibility that is also concerned with anti-racism, sex-positivity, drag culture, and queer liberation. Lonc's article reminds us that the foundational principles of queer and trans liberation are invested in challenging hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality and their deeply complex intersections with racialization and capitalism. Similar to Stryker's articulation of transgender rage, Lonc's quote also asserts that gender conformity was another aspect of assimilation against which punk and queer sensibilities raged.

The notion of genderfuck is not only traceable through male-assigned modes of gender nonconformity. Theorizing butch/femme relations and the role of dildos, June L. Reich (1992) defines genderfuck as:

> …the effect of unstable signifying practices in a libidinal economy of multiple sexualities … This process is the destabilization of gender as an analytical category, though it is not, necessarily, the signal of the end of gender … the play of masculine and feminine on the body subverts the possibility of possessing a unified subject position …

> we are not defined by who we are but what we do. This is effectively a politics of performance. It neither fixes nor denies specific sexual and gendered identifications but accomplishes something else … genderfuck structures meaning in a symbol performance matrix that crosses through sex and gender and destabilizes the boundaries of our recognition, of sex, gender, and sexual practice (p. 125).

Following Reich (1992), I am invested in thinking about genderfuck as a politics of performance that has informed SFTFF's actors and exhibition culture. It is significant that SFTFF emerged in the Bay Area, a spatial region where genderfuck infused several subcultural formations in the nineties. German director, Monika Truet's (1999) film, *Gendernauts: A Journey Through Shifting Identities* depicts this genderfuck sensibility in San Francisco and features several cultural producers who could be categorized as genderfuckers: Sandy Stone, Texas Tomboy, Susan Stryker, Annie Sprinkle, Jordy Jones, Max Valerio, Ray Rea, Hida Viloria, and others. *Gendernauts* screened at SFTFF's third official year, in 1999, alongside a developing version of Susan Stryker and Victor Silverman's 2005 documentary, *Screaming Queens: Compton's Cafeteria Riots*.[10] The festival's first program also featured films directed by artists featured in *Gendernauts* (Truet, 1999) – Jordy Jones, Texas Tomboy, Ray Rea, and Lucia Davis, for example. Perhaps the most explicit example of SFTFF's link to a genderfuck lineage is the name of the production company of Christopher Lee and Elise Hurwitz's (1997) film, *Trappings of Transhood: A Documentary About Gender Identity* – Genderfuck Fuckgender Productions. This documentary uses personal interviews and video collage to explore the phenomenological experiences of a multi-racial and multi-ethnic group of trans men and nonbinary people. The subjects discuss experiences of race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender,

[10] Their work-in-progress was billed in the 1999 SFTFF program as "Documenting San Francisco's Transgender History."

and the medical industry. *Trappings* has been catalogued as one of the first known films to document the experiences of trans men and nonbinary people of color.

Punk modes of doing gender, or genderfuck, are present in other media and subcultural formations such as S/M clubs and pornographic video that are significant to SFTFF's historical lineage. Stryker (1994) self-identifies as a "transsexual leatherdyke," and writes about S/M play parties in "Dungeon Intimacies" (2008). She reflects that she started by attending play parties known by the moniker LINKS, which were held at a club called the Golden Bull in the Mission District of San Francisco. She describes this location as intersecting the margins of three subcultural formations and social movements – homosexuality/gay liberation; the women's movement/lesbian feminism; and consensual sadomasochism, which she describes as a playground for gender transgression. From the back deck of the club, Stryker recalls seeing the Bearded Lady Café, a dyke-owned coffee shop she describes as the location where Tribe 8, a queercore band I discuss in the forthcoming section, held court. It was at LINKS, a space Stryker started attending in 1990, that she recalls first encountering the word queer. Stryker also notes she first read the word transgender on a flyer for a LINKS "Gender Play Party" in 1991. She writes:

> For most of us there, gender was something we explored, analyzed, and experimented with in the context of a broader engagement with bodily practices and power; people came at questions of gender from many different angles and emotional investments, with no one right way to proceed. Since the 1990s, considerable ink has been spilled about the relationship between queer and transgender, transgender and transsexual, transgender and genderqueer. For me, these things were linked from the outset (p. 40).

Stryker's reflection exemplifies genderfuck as a punk sensibility wherein the boundaries of gender and sexuality do not depend on the bodies from which performance

is received and extended. At LINKS, genderfuck was arguably a means of survival, pleasure, and sociality, and there is residue of these investments in SFTFF's history.

I have noted that SFTFF's current Artistic Director, Shawna Virago, was steeped in punk music and cultural production. In terms of genderfuck lineage, she describes circulating mostly in gay male circles and then lesbian circles but always feeling a bit on the edge of both. Feeling displaced in L/G formations, Virago notes she eventually found other gender rebels and punks. She describes the importance of reading Kate Bornstein's (1994) book, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*, a formative experience she notes she is often surprised to learn that younger generations of queer and trans people have not encountered.

> One of the most important works for me personally, I mean I had been out by this point, but, was *Gender Outlaw* by Kate Bornstein because if you look at especially kind of the coming out stories before that book, they really all have kind of similar story arc and this sort of old way of understanding one's self, like I always knew I was this gender since I was a child, always this way. And you know, she kind of broke that apart (personal communication 19 June 2019).

The selected Bornstein quote on the back cover of the first printed edition of *Gender Outlaw* reads: "I know I'm not a man … and I've come to the conclusions that I'm probably not a woman, either … the trouble is, we're living in a world that insists we be one or the other." While Virago had access to genderfuck in punk music, Bornstein was a more direct line to a fleshed-out articulation of genderfuck as an anti-assimilationist project of embodiment and cultural production for Virago. Bornstein was also a strong advocate of the T-word and her name resurfaces in chapter four when I discuss punk associations with this word, its meaning for some actors involved with SFTFF, and the controversies surrounding its use in the nineties.

This discussion of Virago and Lee's investments, as well as the punk-leanings of a collection of other activists, artists, and academics who were in the Bay Area in the 1990s, demonstrates a collection of differing starting points in terms of social location in L/G circles and cultural production. Despite these divergences, as Virago states, both she and Lee were invested in activist and artistic endeavors and "came from a punk rock place." I have articulated that "punk rock place" as arising from a long lineage of activism, scholarship, and cultural production that involved anti-assimilationist, anti-capitalist modes of disidentification. In the next section, I discuss a brief history of Queercore and the band Tribe 8, to continue the project of tracing intersecting lineages of queer, punk, and trans investments and their significance to the emergence of SFTFF.

Queercore

The common origin story of queercore is that G.B. Jones and Bruce LaBruce were two frustrated youth in Toronto who started their own "movement" that included documenting overlaps between punk and queer cultural production. In the 2018 documentary, *Queercore: How to Punk a Revolution,* director, Yony Leyser, constructs a lineage of gender and sexual misfits, mythologized as originators of the movements known as Homocore and later, Queercore. The film opens with a low-angle, close-up shot of a white, tattooed forearm and hand flipping through the San Franciscan zine, *Outpunk*, authored by the aforementioned Wobensmith. Beneath the centered pages of *Outpunk* are stacks of other zines, cassette tapes, and punk concert ephemera. We see an article about the band, Pansy Division, also from San Francisco, and the title, "Yes, punks get AIDS."

The camera lingers over a page that reads, “Queer is the new Punk.” The hands then set the notebook on fire and the opening credits role. Leyser’s narration introduces the film:

> …Homocore, Queercore started as a secret society, a farce that became real. Conceived a generation before the internet by a couple of frustrated twenty-year-olds, they punked a revolution on their own terms.

The documentary does not start immediately with the voices of LaBruce and Jones. Rather, it presents a lineage that traces back to the 1970s punk movement in New York by showing a scene from the film, *The Blank Generation* (Král & Poe, 1976). The scene features Jayne County, a genderqueer American singer, songwriter, actress, and record producer born in 1947 who was the main vocalist of the proto-wave punk band, Jayne County that started performing in the 1970s.

Regarding County, Curran Nault (2018) writes, “In the heyday of Jayne County’s punk cultural production, ‘transgender’ was not in common usage: ‘drag queen’ and ‘transvestite’ were conflated with what might now be termed ‘transgender” (p. 70). County existed in the era of Lonc, the author of “Genderfuck and it’s Delights” (1974). Similar to Lonc’s association with the street activist group, STAR, County mobilized queer-punk affiliations to enact oppositional modes of doing gender. The opening homage to Jayne County is a performance of the song, “Are You a Girl or Are You a Boy?” This lyric parallels Lonc’s description of this question as a key force of opposition found in the constant policing of gender on the street. In the documentary, *Queercore* (Leyser, 2017), this particular narrative sequencing asks the viewer to not periodize Queercore as a 1980s and 1990s phenomenon, but to consider a longer history of the ways in which punk afforded spaces to enact deviant modes of doing gender and sexuality.

Disrupting the origin story of Queercore is multi-pronged. Leyser (2017) also decentralizes Toronto as the origin city of the scene. He narrates, "Although the kids in Toronto were credited for creating Homocore, they weren't the only ones. In Los Angeles, the punk drag queen, Vaginal Davis rules the scene. In San Francisco, two anarchists, Deke and Tom, started a zine they called *Homocore*, solidifying the name." Tom Jennings, artist and editor of *Homocore* zine (1988 – 1991) states he met co-editor, Daniel "Deke" Frontino Elash, at an anarchist conference in Toronto hosted by the aforementioned LaBruce and Jones, creators of the zine *J.D.'s*. This conference is the first documented to bring people together to discuss the intersection of queer, as a radical political project, and punk. Jennings notes, "In San Francisco at that time, there was a layer of arty weirdos and we were less concerned with who was gay or not than having a cohort to hang out with. Punk and gay overlap was at the fringes of the fringe." After the anarchist conference Jennings made the first issue of *Homocore* as a response to his experience in Toronto. He credits the word homocore as originating from the Toronto-based zine, *J.D.s*, evidencing a strong connection between a growing subcultural formation of queer and punk. Jennings states:

> We set out to make the world we wanted to live in. You can complain, or you can do something… Deke and I were selectively documenting things that we liked in the world and creating a mythology of queer punk in San Francisco that did not exist.

These anecdotes in *Queercore* (Leyser, 2017) demonstrate how intersections of queer and punk are invested in anti-assimilation and DIY approaches to cultural production, sensibilities that I have argued influenced the emergence of SFTFF and continue to inform its exhibition practices. Additionally, these anecdotes in the documentary, without specifically using the word trans, invite the viewer to link anti-

assimilation and DIY intersections of queer and punk sensibilities to the broader realm of gender. Just as Jennings and ELash in San Francisco and LaBruce and Jones in Toronto worked to carve out intersecting worlds of queer and punk they wanted to live in, the original actors of SFTFF knew the time had come for their own queer, punk, and trans exhibition culture that was avowedly against the assimilationist agenda of many L/G (and increasingly "queer") film festivals and the professionalization of the broader film festival industry.

The thread between queer, punk, and trans investments returns in the documentary's discussion of a 1989 pride parade in San Francisco. Jennings, ELash, and a small group of queer punks recall on screen that a "rich benefactor rented a junk car and a tow truck" and they painted it to look like a police car. Someone made a giant paper mâché high heel that they stuck to the top of the car to make it appear as though it was crushing the police car. They towed it down Market Street, and in the words of Elash, "Let it all hang out that we were the punks and we hated the police." In a later interview, trans performance artist, Justin Vivian Bond, also featured in the previously mentioned film, *Gendernauts* (Treut, 1999), and whose name comes up again in chapter three, recalls attending the pride parade and standing at the front with the intention to join as soon as they felt resonance. Trans filmmaker, writer, director, and former Tribe 8 musician, Silas Howard, recalls a similar intention. When the queer punks started smashing the police car with baseball bats and high heels taken from an apple crate attached to the trunk, Bond and Howard recall joining in. Howard states, "It was a crystallizing moment because that's our people…we went and found our scene … it was that day and seeing that action. It was like falling in love." The float ahead of the queer

and trans punks was a group holding a banner that read: “No Apologies. No Assimilation. Ever.” This liberationist discourse was a connective thread that brought queer punks, ACT UP, Queer Nation, and Transgender Nation activists together in anti-police, anti-military, anti-middle-class investments alongside disinvestment in sexual and gender categorization. As I have noted, these subcultural formations were predicated on liberationist discourse that has and continues to inform SFTFFs investments.

I am also keenly aware that it is important to not overly romanticize queer, punk, and trans intersecting formations as fully inclusive or to overstate their revolutionary potential. While queer and trans liberation depends on the end of all oppression, the on-the-ground work and sense of belonging in any particular subcultural formation varies according to each subject’s social position. For example, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2015), a Toronto and Oakland-based poet, activist, and educator, writes in her memoir, *Dirty River,* that she only “found her people” in Toronto in alternative spaces for Black, Indigenous, Asian Pacific Islander and other queer punks of color that were not featured in *Queercore* (Leyser, 2017). I draw attention to this because Christopher Lee, original co-founder of SFTFF, was a Chinese and Polish-American trans person and Shawna Virago, current artistic director, is a white trans woman. While Lee and Virago share punk investments that have informed their modes of doing gender and cultural production and they both were involved in anti-racist, anti-police organizing, they also had very different lived experiences, histories, and traversed in divergent circles. This again highlights the necessity for intersectional analysis to challenge the mythos that “finding one’s people” is a singular and easy process, when a sense of

belonging is always fractured and in flux for people with multiple marginalized identities.

To this end, it is useful to note that in the early years, SFTFF did not sell the idea of "community" as cohesive. Rather, in a press release for the first festival in 1997, the original organizers highlight that one of their strategies for the festival is to "raise a lot of consciousness about the wonderful commonalities and differences within our community." Although they evoke the term community, I suggest they use the term more in the sense of a subcultural formation that makes space for the "gender chaos" they also reference in early print materials. A subcultural formation, unlike the notion of community, attends to the pointed investments of anti-assimilation and DIY cultural production inherent to the intersections and divergences between and across queer, punk, and trans sensibilities. To further the discussion of Queercore and its overlap with SFTFF's emergence, I turn to a discussion of Tribe 8, a San Franciscan band composed of members who overlapped with SFTFF from its inception.

Tribe 8

Tribe 8 is often documented as one of the frontrunner Queercore bands. They formed in San Francisco in 1991 and disbanded in the mid-2000s. The four original bandmates were vocalist and songwriter, Lynn Breedlove (featured in the documentary, *Queercore*), guitarist, Leslie Mah, rhythm guitarist, Silas "Flipper" Howard (featured in the documentary, *Queercore*), bassist-guitarist, Lynn "Tantrum" Payne, and drummer, Slade Bellum. The press has categorized the band with various terms, including: "a group of five lesbians" (Auman, 1998), "a leading lesbian punk band" (Harvey, 2003) "trans-dyke neofeminist rabble-rousers," "the world's greatest dyke-punk band" (Chonin, 2006),

and as part of the Riot grrrl movement (Oden, 2011). In the documentary, *From the Back of the Room* (Oden, 2011), Slade Bellum states, "They always wanted to put us in with Riot grrrls, but we didn't fit with Riot grrrls. It's no put down to them or us, it's just not our thing." These classifications as lesbian, dyke, and trans-dyke, signifiers used to describe the band from 1998 to 2003 and similar terms that chart Christopher Lee's history of identity nomenclature, demonstrate ongoing changes in gender politics in the 1990s wherein the definitions of gender and sexual categories such as "woman," "lesbian," and "dyke" were challenged by growing liberationist queer and trans discourse. At the time of this writing, both Howard and Breedlove are publicly open about their trans identities, which again highlights the movement of genderfuck across space and time and within queer, punk, and trans lineages.

In band-member Breedlove's 2009 memoir, *One Freak Show,* which contains excerpts from his comedy performances, he writes about his experiences of being grilled about his gender, similar to the aforementioned Lonc and County whose lives were oriented by a similar oppositional question in the 1970s:

> Do you identify as a man or a woman? A dyke or a transman? Which all really means, "Whose side are you on."…The Feminists are trying to wrap their huge brains around the Trans thing. Their brains are huge from thirty years of processing…They say to me, 'Wait, what's a transman? Is that the oppressor? Or is that the traitor?' (p. 48-49).

Members of the band have self-identified with various terminology at different times in their lives but have been consistently historicized with reference to their brash persona and on-stage S/M practices. Given the climate of gender and sexuality politics in the nineties, it is not surprising that Tribe 8 caused a lot of controversy among and within shifting boundaries of identity categories, activist and subcultural formations, and academic theorization. Perhaps one of the most vehement protests against Tribe 8's

genderfuck punk sensibility occurred at the band's performance at the infamous Michigan Womyn's Music Festival in 1994. In the festival directory, Tribe 8 provided the following self-description (Shoemaker, 2010):

> We are San Francisco's own all-dyke, all-out, in-your-face, blade-brandishing, gang-castrating, dildo-swingin', bullshit-detecting, aurally pornographic, Neanderthal-pervert band of patriarch-smashing snatchlickers (p. 297).

Although members of the band might no longer identify with the term "all-dyke," I have included this quote to highlight Tribe 8's sex-positive, genderfuck stage antics that challenged gender and sexual relations of power. For example, the band's songs comment on sexuality, rape, racism, and capitalist greed. Breedlove was also notorious for daring cis men to come on stage and perform oral sex on his strapped-on dildo. Regarding this practice, Breedlove states in the documentary, *Queercore* (Leyser, 2017):

> They had never seen it, but they also weren't like against it. They were like embracing it immediately, like this is punk rock. Fucking with gender is fucking with the dominant paradigm and that's punk rock…The definition of punk is to subvert the dominant paradigm through art, music, culture, and we were turning gender and sexuality on its head.

This quote attests to a particular genderfuck sensibility that Tribe 8 embraced and which led protestors at the trans-exclusionary Michigan Womyn's Festival to argue that Tribe 8 perpetuated misogyny and rape culture. Outside of this festival, the band had a broad global following, notably in San Francisco, Canada, and Germany, with fans that spanned the gender and sexual spectrum. Tribe 8's genderfuck sensibility was reported and celebrated in numerous queer-punk zines including *J.D.'s, Homocore, Homoture, Holy Titclamps,* and *Outpunk.*

Tribe 8's practices of genderfuck also overlapped with racial critique, and the band was unique to the Queercore scene for the single fact of having two band members

of color, Leslie Mah, an Irish Catholic Chinese Muslim (Nault, 2018), and African-Canadian bass player, Lynn "Tantrum" Payne (later replaced by a white band-member). Shoemaker (2010), following personal communication with Sharon Bridgeforth, refers to Mah's performance as "macha femininity," because it "resignifies cultural notions of macho as a hypermasculine, aggressive performance of maleness and rearticulates it as a possible femme(inine) performance" (p. 296). This performance flaunts her demarcation as "excess" and Shoemaker contends that similar to Muñoz's (2013) analysis of Black genderqueer performer, Vaginal Davis, a central figure in the genderfuck LA punk scene, Mah embellishes her "freakish" subject position for cultural critique. In songs like "People Hate Me," Mah sings about taking revenge on those who victimized and raped her ancestors.

Mah's personal history also highlights intersections of queer, punk, and trans. Her band, Anti-Scrunti Faction (A.S.F.), a queercore trio from Boulder, Colorado, made their first appearance in 1984, and were one of the bands featured in the original queercore zines, *J.D.s,* formed by LaBruce and Jones in Toronto. In the documentary, *Queercore* (Leyser, 2017), Breedlove describes "scunti" as the term used for cis women who went to punk shows to perform oral sex on cis men. A.S.F. was one of the first bands to make a public statement against this gender and sexual dynamic, a critique that Breedlove continued in his genderfuck stage performances. Mah was also connected to queer-punk Toronto projects and acted in G.B. Jones' film, *The Yo-Yo Gang,* a 1982 exploitation film shot on location in Toronto and San Francisco about "girl gangs." After A.S. F. disbanded, Mah moved to San Francisco and joined Tribe 8. She continued to move between both music and film production and starred in the film, *Shut Up White Boy* (Há,

2002), a film that continues the theme of racialized revenge against white supremacy and the exotification of Asian women. The trailer for this film screened at SFTFF in 2001, again evidencing a queer, punk, trans intersection.[11] Mah, along with several other women of color, created the film's score.[12]

The relationship between SFTFF and Tribe 8 first came to my attention when I saw Tribe 8 singer-songwriter, Lynn Breedlove, in the audience of the 2018 festival. Screening that evening was a music video, "Homosafe" (Murphy, 2018) for his current band, Homobiles. Archival ephemera from the collection at the GLBT Historical Society archive also provided evidence of Mah's connection to the festival. In the 1998 festival program, SFTFF screened Mah's short film, *Estrofemme*. In the 2000 program, Mah is listed as a donor, and Tribe 8 is given special thanks. Additionally, Christopher Lee sent an email to fellow festival organizers in 2000, in which he writes:

> i love the trailers idea and that is the wave of the future and here and now! with music (but we would need music from folks we know and get their written legal permission, for sure. I'm sure Tribe 8 would kick in a partial song, or?

Tribe 8 band-member, Silas Howard, a white trans filmmaker, known for his collaboration with Harry Dodge in their 2002 Sundance debut feature, *By Hook or By Crook*, also moved within and between queer, punk, and trans circles. As noted, he reflected in the documentary, *Queercore* (Leyser, 2017), that he joined the queer punk demonstration at the 1989 pride parade. He and band-members also held court at The Bearded Lady Café, a space I discuss in more detail in chapter three as a location where several queer, punk, and trans activists and cultural producers merged. Howard was also

[11] See Nault (2018) for more references to the significance of Asian American artists within Queercore.
[12] Mah went on to open a tattoo parlor where she worked as a tattoo artist in the Mission District.

one of twenty directors involved in the film collaboration for *Valencia: The Movie/s* (Anthony et al., 2013) an homage and reinterpretation of Michelle Tea's memoir about the Mission District in the nineties, which I discuss in chapter three.

Connections between SFTFF and Tribe 8 also surfaced in interviews I conducted. Virago shared a memory of walking in the Castro District with Christopher Lee to hang flyers for their joint campaign to run for Grand Marshall of Pride in 2002. She recalls Leslie Mah riding by on her bike and yelling, "What the hell are you two doing here?" Demonstrating familiarity between Mah, Virago, and Lee, this anecdote also suggests there was something suspicious to Mah about Lee and Virago's presence in the Castro. The relationship between the Castro and Mission Districts is something Virago has mentioned in other interviews and a point I discuss at length in chapter three.

Aside from demonstrating overlaps between queer, punk, and trans investments, another reason to explore Tribe 8 relates to the multiple ways in which they have been categorized in terms of gender and sexuality, like Christopher Lee. As noted, Lee worked for Dyke TV and archival and ethnographic evidence points to the 1990s as a time of tension and affable relationality among and between butch, dyke, lesbian, and trans modes, terms, and identities. An anecdote from Virago further speaks to this relationality. In one of our conversations, I ask Virago how she came to know Lee and she says she first met him at SFTFF in 1997, then got to know him a few months later in the Mission District:

> A trans mutual friend of ours was coming out. He was coming out officially as a trans man and about to start testosterone and he was making declarations to like you know eighteen people that he would continue to fight misogyny and male supremacy. And Christopher and I were in the back of a house, a back stairwell, smoking cigarettes. We could hear everything. That's when we bonded (personal communication, June 19, 2019).

What is notable about this memory is its centrality to discursive conversations about identity politics at the time and the need one might feel to make a declaration to a large group of people that they would not take up the position of what Breedlove describes as traitor or oppressor.

Similar conversations surfaced in a selection of zines from the 1990s. Viewing the Maga/zine collection at the San Francisco Public Library, I noticed a handful of articles in predominantly dyke-identified zines that had feature articles about the growing FTM phenomenon, as it was commonly referred to at the time. *Brat Attack* v. 3 (n.d.), a zine billed as "Do It Yourself S/M" had a feature article titled "Female to Male Transsexuals in the Leather Community" that consisted of an interview between the zine editor and five trans men and nonbinary people. The first question posed by editor, Deva, was:

> The biggest question is the real general "why?" Why do you do it? What is it you don't get from having a butch lesbian identity, or from playing boy games as gender roles, so you want to carry it to the next step of it being your full identity?

I read this question as transphobic, steeped in the "traitor discourse," exuding both panic and defensiveness of an identity politics that insists on stable gender and sexual categories. As noted, this discourse was not unique to the nineties but also circulated in the 1970s in regard to genderfuck performances and activism. In this particular example of a ninety's iteration, the zine respondents' answers challenge the notion of the category man, reject the use of medical intervention as the only way to assume an identity as a man, cite the existence of gay and bisexual trans people such as Lou Sullivan, discount FTM identities as a fad, note FTM has overlaps with drag and other forms of gender play and fluidity, and highlight each person's right to their own body. One respondent, Sky, notes they maintained the mailing list for *FTM International*, the first documented

organization for FTM-identified people in San Francisco, formed in 1986 by Lou Sullivan. Sky mentions they received a lot of letters from people around the country trying to get information about how to form FTM groups in several regional locations. *Brat Attack's* publication of this discussion highlights how tensions between queer and trans identity politics were a prominent discursive debate in the nineties within punk modes of cultural production such as zines and newsletters.

Not surprisingly, just as there was a strong link between San Francisco and Toronto in the Queercore movement, there were also collaborations between FTM movements in these two cities. The FTM newsletter, *Metamorphosis*, edited by trans elder, Rupert Raj, an activist of Indian and Polish descent, originated in Toronto and circulated between Feb. 1982 – Feb 1988. In a 1989 letter to the editor published in San Francisco's *FTM,* Raj congratulates *FTM* for their ongoing newsletter. Raj was in correspondence with Lou Sullivan and their friendship arguably played an influential role in Sullivan's founding of the San Francisco FTM group and mailing list (Smith, 2010).[13] Issues of the *FTM* newsletter report on films and books that feature "crossdressers" that could be read as trans men, group meeting panel discussions with medical professionals and partners of FTMs, VCR viewing parties, and the distribution and discussion of literature at upcoming meetings relevant to trans experiences. This literature includes "standards of care" from the Harry Benjamin Int'l Gender Dysphoria Association. The newsletter also reports meeting attendance between 10 and 20 people in the first eight issues, signaling a small, but growing group.

[13] See Malatino (2020, p. 9-24) for a discussion of Raj's activism.

In an interview with Jed Bell, a white, trans filmmaker, who was the original poster-maker for the first years of SFTFF, he tells me he moved to San Francisco to find other trans people in the mid-90s. He recalls that FTM International organized their first conference in the mid-90s at the historic "Women's Building" in the Mission District. Reflecting on the experience, he says:

> It was an amazing experience to be with that many trans guys in that room at that time. I can't explain to you how unique that was. You know you didn't have that many people in one city or state probably at that time that openly identified as a trans male, you know. It's like a room with 400 guys with beards asking the doctor on stage about their hysterectomy and we were just like what world am I living in. It was amazing (personal communication, November 11, 2018).

Bell recalls first meeting Christopher Lee, at an FTM International meeting, and describes SFTFF as unique for their dyke and trans lineage. Describing some of the intersections between these lineages, Bell states:

> …In the 1990s, dykes could still afford to live in San Francisco in numbers because the rents hadn't shot up yet … and Lou Sullivan was a gay trans man (who started FTM International) and that was incredibly unusual to identify that way, but the organization here, ever since I got here, in the mid-90s always had guys that identified as gay within it (personal communication, November 11, 2018).

In sum, the examples I have noted, including a declaration of a trans identity at a house party, the discussion about trans identities in "dyke" zines, desire to meet other people with trans experiences as a driving force to move to San Francisco, and the formation of the organization FTM International in the late 1980s, demonstrate a growing conversation, panic-driven and exclusionary at worse, and self-empowered and adjacent to liberationist ideology at best, about the shifting definitions of gender and sexual categories across race, ethnicity, and class in different geographic areas and punk publications in the nineties. Christopher Lee and the handful of founding contributors of SFTFF lived within these conversations and circulated among intersecting queer, punk,

and trans sensibilities and the artistic-activist formations they inspired. These queer, punk, and trans lineages informed discourses and modes of gender, cultural production, and coalitional organizing. SFTFF emerged within these overlapping developments and as such built their festival within two prominent aspects of a punk sensibility: DIY and anti-assimilation. In the chapters that follow, I continue to explore how a punk sensibility as related to queer and trans liberation has informed the exhibition, spatiality, and economic structure SFTFF.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined vectors of SFTFF's subcultural lineage, addressing intersections between punk and queer and pushing this scholarship in a new direction to consider how trans also overlaps with these investments and sensibilities. Tracing a lineage of queer, punk, and trans formations and their influence on activism and art, I have discussed how these sensibilities were salient to the emergence of SFTFF. I have argued that punk as a sensibility has influenced practices of gender that are not contained within discrete identity categories or a notion of community and I articulated genderfuck as a sensibility that informed practices of doing gender that emerged in discourse in the 1970s linking queer, punk, and trans as invested in destabilizing conventions of gender and sexuality. I argue these lineages remain present in SFTFF's ongoing resistance to assimilationist trans narratives.

CHAPTER III
THE FILM FESTIVAL FIELD AND CIRCUITS OF CARE

> "Practices of care are always part of an emergent ethos. Because care isn't abstract, but only ever manifested through practice - action, labor, work - it is integral to our ways of doing … this work - like all care work - is about fostering survival; it is maintenance work that must be done so that trans folks can get about the work of living."
> - Hil Malatino (2020, p. 41)

In this chapter I extend my theorization from chapter one to consider how SFTFF has mobilized intersecting queer, punk, and trans sensibilities in their exhibition culture. Specifically, I argue SFTFF challenges many hegemonic film festival practices salient to International Film Festival (IFF) and business-oriented Queer Film Festival (QFF) modes. I discuss the limitations of the metaphor of a film festival "circuit" and use Bourdieu's notion of a field to analyze specific hierarchies and prescriptive "rules of the game" inherent to the film festival system. The metaphor of a circuit suggests A-list and business-oriented QFFs have a greater effect on the festival field than the "minor genres" or "locally-oriented" festivals. Rather than debate quantifying effects or replicate these binary frameworks for understanding the film festival field, I analyze the ways in which SFTFF performs different kinds of work that deserve attention alongside the economic and symbolic capital typically associated with the work of market-oriented festivals. I redeploy the term "circuit" in my formulation of SFTFF to articulate what I term circuits of care. I situate SFTFF's lineage in broader circuits of care in the Bay Area and also articulate how the festival mobilizes their own forms of care to build new circuits. SFTFFs punk sensibility translates to characteristics of non-conformity, DIY, and experimentation which work to mobilize and collectivize anger and forms of resistance to the production, consumption, and exhibition of respectability, incorporation in mainstream institutions and cultural production, and the trap of visibility, whereby

increased “good” representation of trans people paradoxically contributes to greater violence (Gossett, Stanley & Burton, 2017). I articulate these characteristics of SFTFF’s punk sensibility and the circuits of care they foster as forms of collaboration versus competition.

This theoretical intervention is in dialogue with Malatino’s *Trans Care* (2020), a project that calls attention to the ways in which notions of care have been overly tied to heteronormative family structures and the domestic sphere. To challenge this focus, Malatino theorizes “the intricately interconnected spaces and places where trans and queer care labor occurs: the street, the club, the bar, the clinic, the community center, the classroom, the nonprofit …” (p. 42). I extend this list to include SFTFF as a site of care that challenges salient mainstream motivations of film festivals such as city planning, tourism, and increasing professionalization. Processes of differentiation and opposition between festivals within the dominant rules of the film festival field are an essential component by which all film festivals sustain and define themselves, and therefore not unique to SFTFF. What is unique about his case study, however, are the particular characteristics of SFTFF’s mobilization of a punk sensibility to build its exhibition culture.

A Brief History of International Film Festivals (IFFs)

The practice of an annual film festival event occurred after film had existed as a medium for four decades. Between 1895, when film was first exhibited, and the 1930s when the earliest film festival originated in Venice, film slowly transitioned from spectacle to a more respected art form like theatre and opera. Some early film festivals

strategically emerged as adjacent side projects of art expositions to attempt to legitimize the medium (Loist, 2016). As de Valck (2007) has articulated in her historical work on IFFs, film clubs and societies, founded by avant-garde intellectuals in European cities such as Berlin, London, Paris, and Amsterdam were the precursors for what we now know as film festivals. The first film festival originated in Venice in 1932 and was an attempt to remedy difficulties in European film production, distribution, and exhibition. According to Loist (2016), "What had formerly been disadvantages – language barriers, which came to the fore with sound film, and the onset of nationalistic sentiments, which had also contributed to the failure of the cosmopolitan avant-garde movement – were turned into advantages by offering national cultural pride an international platform" in film festival exhibition cultures (p. 54).

During this phase of film festival development, Venice invited nations to submit their best films which led to national film selection, exhibition, and competition, what de Valck (2007) refers to as an "Olympics of film" (p. 24). This competitive sensibility was adopted by other festivals and became commonplace through the late 1960s. Post-WWII, the European IFF festival format became a global phenomenon and competition prevailed throughout the 1960s.[14] In North America, San Francisco claims the title of the first American IFF, beginning in 1957 and was directed by Irving M. "Bud" Levine who had attended Cannes and Venice and wanted to build something similar in the United States.[15]

[14] See (Loist, 2016, p. 54) for a list of festivals that emerged between 1946 and 1959.
[15] See the San Francisco International Film Festival webpage for a brief history: http://history.sffs.org/our_history/

With the growth of festival locations, The International Federation of Film Producers Association (FIAPF), founded in 1933, controlled the regulation of film festivals in an attempt to protect the cultural capital associated with the first two documented events in Venice and Cannes. FIAPF was invested in ensuring the geographic and temporal (calendar) regulation of film festivals, fearful that global proliferation would diminish the cultural capital associated with Venice and Cannes. As such, the organization originally barred Berlinale from holding annual juried competitions and only allowed one festival in the Eastern bloc to hold an annual festival. Playing the role of gatekeeper allowed FIAPF to define top-tier film festivals, which is how the concept of the A-list festival originated (Loist, 2016). These early regulations demonstrate the impact of institutional power, a pattern that has now been largely dispersed to sales agents (Peranson, 2008), but which still reifies hierarchies in the festival field.

Despite the construction of hierarchies, not all festivals were motivated to earn the title of A-list status and regional and technique-specific festivals emerged, marking the beginning of differentiation in the film festival field. These festivals, often referred to as "minor genre" festivals, expanded between the 1960s to 1980s. During the same decades, film festivals proliferated across Asia, Australia, North America, and Africa (Loist, 2016). Identity-based festivals became prominent in the 1970s and centered around concerns pertaining to feminism, indigeneity, sexual identities, and Black culture and experiences, among others, a trend that has continued with diversification of identity politics. By the 1990s, film festivals became increasingly commercialized and terms such as "festivalization" and "festival epidemic" entered scholarly and popular literature

(Loist, 2016). In other words, with the rise of neoliberalism, the global arts and culture sector increasingly privatized and corporate logic influenced the agendas and practices of many IFFs (Rhyne, 2009).

Film Festivals as Circuits / Networks

Since the 1950s, film critics and professionals have used the metaphor of a "circuit" to discuss the film festival phenomenon. This metaphor is problematic for a number of reasons, one of which is the term's implication of "a kind of free circulation, an open system of film prints moving effortlessly around the earth" (Nornes, 2014, p. 258). The idea of a global circuit that accounts for all film festivals ignores the inherent hierarchies in the festival system. Film industry professionals use the term "circuit" to refer to top-tiered festivals the professional attends each year. Which festivals someone attends, often ten to fifteen per calendar year, depends on their investments as distributors, programmers, or critics (Loist, 2016). These motivations illuminate the economic framework underlying the term "circuit" and the way this term is used to highlight a system of prestige in which a select few festivals are awarded with the cultural capital of A-list or considered top-tier because they serve a business purpose (Loist, 2016). With estimates of over 6,000 annual festivals the circuit metaphor cannot account for the ways in which differently situated regional, local, thematic, or genre-specific festivals have their own forms of operational logic that may coincide or differ from other festivals. Regardless of this high degree of variance, the term "circuit" is still

used to connote the circulation of films or people according to film market logics (Loist, 2016).[16]

To this end, Damians (2017) argues that "circuit" has been used as a meta-theory to bypass defining what a festival is while at the same time upholding "a particular type of festival … that is not ephemeral and that partakes in the economy of film. In turn, this orientation towards festivals that matter assumes particular regimes of value against which the success or relevance of an event is measured – be it size, cultural influence, or position within the circuit" (p. 66). Both film industry professionals and scholarly approaches to film festivals tend to reinforce a system of prestige that define which festivals matter.

Nornes (2014) has also emphasized how the "circuit" metaphor reifies hierarchies and argues that sustained emphasis on A-list festivals and other top-tier IFFs reinforces the notion of "first Europe, then elsewhere" (p. 246). This colonial framework has resulted in what Nornes refers to as a short circuit – both a blockage to flow and simultaneously a spark that has led to numerous parallel circuits (i.e. documentary film festivals in Asia, LG/Q festivals). As a result of these critiques and limitations of the circuit metaphor, some film festival scholars have articulated a preference for the term "network" (Elsaesser, 2005; de Valck, 2007) which draws from Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT). However, as de Valck (2007) argues, ANT also has limitations because it does not account for the hierarchies which are undoubtedly a key organizing principle of

[16] Film festivals considered top tier often have a film market, such as the European Film Market (EFM) coinciding with the Berlinale, the Marche du Film coinciding with Cannes, or what Loist (2016) refers to as quasi-markets at Sundance and the Toronto International Film Festival (p. 50).

the film festival field. Not all actors in the network hold the same amount of power or even communicate with each other.

I am sympathetic with these critiques of the term circuit and network and appreciate Nornes' description of a "short circuit" as a process by which a current is both blocked and creates new flows. A key argument that I make in this chapter is that the creation of new flows and precarious resistance to prescriptive hierarchies and rules of the game in the festival system are salient features of the punk sensibility SFTFF's enacts as an exhibition culture. However, as I have noted, I am not concerned with quantifying the disruptive effects of SFTFF on the broader film festival field. Rather, I assert that SFTFF mobilizes a punk sensibility to extend and build circuits of care that are premised on defiance of many of the economically based rules of the festival system. To parse this out, I offer a brief introduction to Bourdieu.

Bourdieu and Film Festival Studies

Easily considered the patron saint of film festival studies, Bourdieu's theoretical trinity – capital, habitus, and field – provide frameworks to consider the role of tastes in everyday life and how material relations and cultural production are structuring devices. Although his empirical work was conducted in France between 1963-1968, his generalized findings continue to hold merit for contemporary and geographically diverse objects of study such as film festivals. Bourdieu argued that cultural goods (i.e. food, film, music, fashion) and a subject's taste for them are produced through social relations, namely education and social origin. People acquire forms of knowledge and ability through these social relations and this results in what Bourdieu refers to as cultural capital

(1984). Cultural capital, externalized and reinforced in society as particular tastes and competencies (i.e. artistic, literary) becomes just as much of an asset as economic forms of capital.

Cultural capital and economic capital share some characteristics such as transmission and regulation by institutions of power (i.e. museums, film festival hierarchies, art galleries, universities). Institutional classification has the power to add or detract value from cultural forms in discursive debates about what is "art" versus what is "popular," as exemplified in the medium of film across time. Furthermore, institutionally driven discursive debates seek to define legitimate ways of consumption that result in specific behaviors or mechanisms by which "art" or "entertainment" are meant to be appropriately consumed. Bourdieu's theory of habitus provides a way to deconstruct the social mechanisms of taste. He asserts that taste is not an individual preference or a gift certain members of society possess but is constructed and reinforced through social relations.[17] Occupational class and the education system are the two main mechanisms that mediate these relations.

The third key concept is that of the field. Bourdieu uses the metaphor of a field as a way to visualize physical space. Fields (i.e. academic, economic, artistic – i.e. film festivals) are dynamic and constituted by the relationships between agents within them. Fields bring a relational way of thinking to cultural production and as such afford

[17] In his classification of 1960s French society, Bourdieu argues there were three broad class brackets and corresponding taste cultures. First, the "bourgeoise" for whom taste is primarily motivated by a principle of "disinterestedness" wherein actors do not consider utility in their appraisal of cultural goods, but primarily make aesthetic judgements. Second, the "working class" whom Bourdieu refers to as "the culture of the necessary" wherein taste is appraised primarily in terms of functionality. Third, Bourdieu classifies the "petit bourgeoise" as "the culture of good will," a class bracket sandwiched between or straddling both the bourgeoisie and working class in their approach to aesthetic/functional judgements.

theorization that is anti-deterministic. In any particular field, different actors compete in what Bourdieu refers to as a "game." As outlined in *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), Bourdieu's sociological approach allows one to examine three levels of social reality: the position of the field of cultural production within the broader field of power (i.e. hegemonic power relations); the structure of the field of cultural production (i.e. positions occupied by agents competing for legitimacy in the field and factors of legitimization); and the origins of cultural producers' habitus (i.e. the structured and structuring dispositions that generate practices) (p. 14). These multivariate levels of analysis provide a wealth of opportunity for film festival scholars.

For example, from a Bourdieuian perspective, the film festival phenomenon can be theorized as a field with hierarchies and its own prescriptive "rules of the game." Elsaesser (2013) refers to the festival field as possessing a "grid of expectations" wherein "independent" or "art" films are made *for* festivals because "the festival circuit constitutes the exhibition dates of most independent films in the first-run venues of the world market" (p. 74). Thus, festivals not only exhibit films but produce filmmakers. de Valck (2014) writes that "filmmakers will continue to produce films for this particular exhibition outlet and newcomers will try to 'make it' on the circuit as well" (p. 78). Because of the hierarchy of festivals, filmmakers will often submit to a top-tiered festival for a debut and the film may then circulate middle-tier and locally oriented festivals over the calendar year. Likewise, festivals produce audiences because they cultivate taste cultures in the attention economy. With targeted branding strategies, each festival attempts to attract different demographics such as cinephiles, tourists, intellectuals, identity-groups, city planners, and film professionals. All of these functions and their

rules continue to produce and reinforce diversity, interdependence, and hierarchy in the festival field.

As I have noted, "A-list" and other top or middle-tier business festivals maintain the most stable position in the field, given they are the sites with the most influence and power. These festivals occupy a position wherein films accrue significant cultural capital that then serves as a gateway to possible national or local exhibition markets. As Elsaesser (2013) argues, "a festival is an apparatus that breathes oxygen into an individual film and the reputation of its director as potential *auteur,* but at the same time it breathes oxygen into the system of festivals as a whole, keeping the network buoyant and afloat" (p. 85). The laurels of an A-list festival used in paratexts of a film become a key marker of symbolic capital.

A-list festivals are what Mark Peranson (2008) refers to as "business festivals" - those that are well-known, competitive, have a market presence and are sustained by competition with one another.[18] As Elsaesser (2013) argues, "Competition raises standards, and adds value to the films presented" (74). Like other forms of corporatization, competition results in festivals both following similar modes of internal organization and seemingly disparate modes of differentiation through self-presentation and programming. Competition also informs sequencing to ensure that international clients – producers, filmmakers, journalists – can travel comfortably from one A-list festival to the next" (Elsaesser, 2013, p. 74). Competition is thus one of the key rules of

[18] Other festivals are typically divided along lines of genre, format, community/identity, and regional/national cinema. In Peranson's analysis, these festivals are not in competition with one another.

the game. However, the historically European IFF mode and subsequent demarcation of A-list festivals I have outlined began to dramatically shift in the 1990s.

1990s Corporatization

Early film festivals were influenced by strategies to articulate nationalist sentiments followed by a phase of festivals adapting to shifting political and social movements. What can be considered a third phase of festival organization is characterized by the infiltration of neoliberal corporate logic (Loist, 2016; Rhyne, 2009). In other words, the 1990s can be characterized by increasing professionalization of film festivals as well as resistance to this thrust. Although film festivals originated in Europe, it is far too simplistic to contrast a European festival mode with Hollywood, subsidized versus box-office, high art versus popular culture, or auteur versus star. Cinema in Europe has always been intertwined with Hollywood and "operates both with and against the hegemony of Hollywood" (de Valck, 2007, p. 15). Recall that Cannes itself was a result of French, British, and American efforts. What concerns me about this interdependence is the historical moment in which some "art cinema" became more economically viable. A commonly cited example is *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* (Soderbergh, 1989), which won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 1989 and was then distributed by Miramax. Not long after, Miramax became known as the leading "independent" motion picture production and distribution company, a title it held throughout much of the 1990s. This became a catalyst for what is often referred to as the Indie Blockbuster phenomenon or Indiewood, a term coined in the mid-1990s that Geoff King (2009) defines as "an area in which Hollywood and the independent sector merge or

overlap" (p. 1). The success of *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* led other production and distribution companies to create in-house indie divisions. In short, "the film industry for festival films became professionalized" (de Valck, 2013, p. 101). Success of new independent film companies led other multimedia conglomerates to want their share of the profits. Some studios thus acquired independent companies (i.e. Miramax became a subsidiary of Disney in 1993). "It was this 'independent' scene in the United States that perfected the technique of tailoring mainstream marketing techniques to fit the needs of art or quality cinema" (i.e. "indie blockbusters") (de Valck, 2014, p. 80).

Professionalization impacted the operation of film festivals as well, constructing an interface between Hollywood and "art" cinema. While the A-list or business film festival mode maintains significant similarities to Hollywood in that IFFs contain all the components of film business, they differ significantly in economic scale, media visibility, and ancillary markets, and can thus still be theorized as a partial-alternatives to Hollywood. This partiality relates to Dina Iordanova's (2013) point that film festivals are ultimately exhibitors and that some films are boxed into a festival enclave wherein they may travel a well-trodden festival path but are unlikely to get picked up for theatrical release. In other words, Hollywood or Bollywood do not necessarily depend on festivals to exhibit their films, but "independent" or "art" films generally need business festivals as a gateway to circulation. Some festivals have responded to these trends. Sundance, for example, became "one of the most important steppingstones for those talents seeking to make it in Hollywood" (de Valck, 2013, p. 102). Sundance has provided a platform for the film industry as a whole to develop more interest in "independent" films and filmmakers and is thus somewhat of an intermediary node between the business oriented

IFF path and Hollywood. Despite their differences, what a business oriented IFF mode and Hollywood share in common relates to the ways in which power is not wielded by the filmmakers themselves but driven by distributors and festival directors.

Since the professionalization of film festivals in the 1990s, each festival has had to increasingly diversify. To remain sustainable, film festivals must solidify their brand. One way of doing this is by funding particular "festival films" that fit the festival's identity (Falicov, 2016). A "festival film" can mean both a film exhibited at a festival, but also films produced specifically for festivals (Stringer, 2003). These films largely rely on auteur recognition. Given that business-oriented film festivals provide a market and audience for global art cinema, filmmakers seeking both symbolic and economic capital will continue to produce films for these exhibition platforms (de Valck, 2014). Professionalization of the film festival field has become a catalyst for the development of increased mechanisms of appraisal by which to award symbolic capital and crystallize festival hierarchy. Prizes and awards (i.e. cultural capital) are signifiers film festivals use to differentiate themselves, attract media attention, and construct audiences.[19] Given that festivals are programmed events, festival directors and programmers have agenda-setting power through their curatorial practices. This power is often hidden, however, because film festivals participate in the discourse of "art for art's sake" when in practice, the regime of cultural capital inherent to the festival system dictates where filmmakers submit their films for potential premiere and hides covert relationships between festival directors and programmers whereby certain films are solicited for a festival's cultural and

[19] Although audience studies is not my focus, it is important to note that film festivals are no longer just for elites or cinephiles in the way these terms have been defined in the context of European cinema.

commercial profits. All film festivals, whether classified as A-list, business oriented, or minor-genre, have overt and covert agendas and define themselves in opposition to something.

A history of film festivals reveals that most festivals have originated as counter-festivals (i.e. Cannes had Venice, Berlin had the Communist East, SFTFF has Frameline as I will go on to discuss, and many have Hollywood and the commercial film industry as their imagined oppositional other) (Elsaesser, 2013). However, there are distinctions between what any particular festival seeks to resist and why. Differentiation motivated for commerce-driven gains in the case of business-oriented film festivals is far different than differentiation as a means of subverting many of the rules of the festival system as a whole, as in the case of SFTFF. I elaborate this distinction in the following discussion of business-oriented queer film festivals.

Queer Film Festival Modes (QFFs)

Scholars debate if the term "circuit" is appropriate to use to understand the mechanics of "queer" film festivals (QFFs) (Damians, 2017; Loist & Zielinski, 2012; Richards, 2016).[20] My position is that the broad QFF field, like the IFF field, has rules and hierarchies. While all QFFs are categorized as "minor genre" or audience-specific within the economically defined circuit metaphor, each festival has different operational norms, varying relationships to IFF film festival modes and Hollywood, and some

[20] What are now referred to as "queer" film festivals often originated as "gay" film festivals and were primarily run by white cisgender men. I use the term queer film festival throughout this chapter because this is the most common phrasing at the time of writing. However, where appropriate, I attempt to highlight how and when nomenclature has shifted.

construct their own specific markets, distribution channels, audiences, and funding programs that are separate from but influenced by the top-tiered QFF and IFF festivals (Loist, 2016). Films with queer-themed political agendas and those that are low-budget and often aesthetically experimental have historically found exhibition platforms at GL/Q film festivals. However, similar to the phenomenon of Indie blockbusters, by the 1990s, some queer-themed films traversed into a "cross-over art house market and helped pave the way for a growing niche market for gay film" (Loist & Zielinski, 2016: 52). This crossover moment was concurrent with increasingly accessible video technology that reduced accessibility barriers to film production. This was also the era in which distribution companies that dealt exclusively with queer-themed films were formed. Over time, funding schemes for filmmakers have developed among larger QFFs that seek to ensure a steady supply of films and therefore build a sustainable QFF presence.[21]

Scholars continue to debate how QFF modes fit into the broader film festival field. Loist & Zielinski (2012) have articulated four useful categories for festivals that primarily screen queer-themed content. First, there are larger, well-known, and historically established business festivals (Peranson, 2008) wherein a film might get picked up for wider theatrical distribution or broader festival circulation. Second, medium-sized festivals tend to screen a selection of regional and international films and might moderately inform other queer festival programming. Third, locally oriented festivals may screen regional, national, and international content but are unlikely to inform broader festival programming. These festivals tend to have the smallest budgets

[21] Frameline started a completion fund as early as 1990, specifically for underrepresented parts of the LGBTQ community.

and least media presence. Arguably all trans film festivals exist in the last category, including SFTFF, TranScreen in Amsterdam, and Translations in Seattle. A category of its own belongs to cross-over films that screen and win awards at A-list festivals. The Berlin Film Festival is the oldest A-list festival to program what curators deemed queer content and it began awarding the Teddy in 1987. Berlin has been a top-choice destination for programmers to scout films and network with industry professionals. Thus, Loist & Zielinski (2012) argue that "the Teddy can be seen as operating within the network like a wholesale-queer film festival even though (or because) it is not a distinct queer film festival" (53). Twenty years later, Venice introduced the Queer Lion (2007) and shortly after Cannes introduced the Queer Palm (2009).

Following these categorizations, which provide a more nuanced picture than business (major) versus audience/identity (minor) formulations of film festivals, SFTFF is clearly locally oriented. Of course, there are nuances inherent to this single festival. For example, some of the programming has featured filmmakers who work in Hollywood or who fund their more aesthetically creative productions with employment in corporate tech industries. While SFTFF does not participate in the economic exchange of films, filmmakers, or talent to build cultural capital or professionalize according to market logic, the politics of their programming certainly attracts and may simultaneously repel certain audiences. Another challenge to Loist and Zielinski's categorizations is notable in the influence SFTFF has had on broader festival programming, both its agitation and impact on programming at Frameline, a business oriented QFF, and its impact on other trans film festivals globally, points I elaborate after situating a key role of QFFs in the 1990s.

The 1990s: New Queer Cinema

In terms of the cultural impact of QFFs, the 1990s has received a great amount of academic attention. According to Jenni Olson (2002), "1986 had seen a mini-boom that was dubbed the "Gay New Wave" by the magazine *Film Comment* (1).[22] In a 1992 publication in *Sight & Sound*, film funder, critic, curator, and scholar, B. Ruby Rich first used the term, "New Queer Cinema" to describe this "watershed moment." Despite the National Endowment of the Arts' (NEA) decision to cancel funding for the festival now known as Frameline, attendance doubled between 1991 to 1992. The films screened during these years diverged in aesthetics and political agenda, but Rich referred to this broad moment as "Homo Pomo." She describes films grouped in this categorization as, "Definitively breaking with older humanist approaches and the films and tapes that accompanied identity politics" and as "irreverent, energetic, alternately minimalist and excessive" (p. 32). Reflecting on this in 2013, Rich elaborates that her articulation of "Homo Pomo" as a class of film and video was a nod to the popularity of postmodern theories that were influenced by art and activism, and prioritized experimenting with new modes of production (p. xv).

From an historical perspective, it is imperative to think about the material and cultural mechanisms that contributed to the possibility of NQC. There are several, but Rich and others have pointed to the awareness of AIDS as a national issue and the numerous discourses circulating around this moral panic. Additional factors include the

[22] Films such as *Desert Hearts* (Deitch, 1985) and *Parting Glances* (Sherwood, 1986) were screened at major GL/Q festivals at the time, but the 1990s was a watershed moment of queer-themed films such as *Poison* (Haynes, 1991), *My Own Private Idaho* (Van Sant, 1991), *Paris Is Burning* (Livingston, 1990), *Swoon* (Kalin, 1992), *The Living End* (Araki, 1992), and *The Hours and Times* (Münch, 1991).

Regan-era, the use of queer as a term of political reclamation and as a catalyst to address the AIDS crisis, growing homonormativity, the fervor of the religious right, fairly cheap rents in urban areas such as San Francisco that enabled queer, trans, and punk artists and activists to live in close proximity to other minoritarian groups and to have greater access to resources such as newly affordable camcorders that allowed formerly excluded individuals to seize the means of cultural production and enact a DIY approach to filmmaking. As Rich (2013) writes, "Newly invented camcorders enabled easy production of electronic media at the personal level for the first time in history. A new generation emerging from art school seized the new tools to reimagine cinema with a video eye, revising the medium thrillingly from the bottom up" (p. xvii).

Affects such as outrage and grief were also arguably catalysts of NQC. These forms of raw energy need an outlet, and film and video production was one such outlet alongside other direct-action groups such as ACT UP, Queer Nation, and Trans Nation mentioned in chapter one. NQC, according to Rich, grew slowly between 1985 and 1991 and "reached critical mass and tipped over into visibility" between 1992-1997 (Rich, 2013, p. xix), the year SFTFF debuted. Rich, however, goes to great lengths to discuss how most of the films and videos from this movement that screened in San Francisco, circulated other mainstream QFFs or larger IFFs, were picked up for distribution, and had theatrical release, were by white (cis) gay men. While the late 1980s to late 1990s saw increased media awareness of more marginalized film and video makers, Rich wonders what might become of "the lesbian and gay filmmakers who have been making independent films, often in avant-garde traditions for decades already?" (p. 32). In other words, would increasing visibility of G/L art films erase the history of those filmmakers

and their films that did not follow the well-trodden festival path? While this is an important question, I am more invested in interrogating the ways Rich fails to acknowledge trans cultural production that occurred at the same time, not after NQC.

Cinematic Lineages of New Queer / Trans Cinema

To redress Rich's oversight, I want to revisit my previous argument that queer, punk, and trans share overlapping lineages that have been underexplored in terms of both NQC and QFF histories. Rich primarily focuses on sexuality as the motivating force of QFFs, as do other queer film festival scholars, but as I have argued, queer and punk sensibilities and the direct-action movements they informed, have influenced articulation, practices, and performances of gender. These same lineages can be traced in cultural production. John Waters and Jack Smith, for example, are often cited as significant influencers of queer avant-garde cinema, and I would also categorize these filmmakers as part of the broader queer, punk, and trans lineage I have outlined. Rich (2013) alludes to Waters and Smith when she argues, "What's rarely noted is that this early avant-garde is manifestly a gay cinema (though not lesbian), where artists shut out of other worlds could find expression" (p. 4). Rich's emphasis on sexuality and declaration of lesbian erasure, while valid, also neglects robust gender analysis and consideration of the ways in which overlapping queer, punk, and trans sensibilities influenced filmmakers like Waters and Smith. Genderfuck, a term I introduced in chapter one, was at play in queer avant-garde filmmaking and broader punk cultural production, influencing the first QFFs in the 1970s as well as the emergence of NQC and SFTFF in the 1990s.

Rich (2013), however, constructs a lineage in which trans filmmaking follows NQC. She writes, "The early energy of NQC was reborn as a cinema of transgender and

genderqueer identity formations and representations. The New Trans Cinema (NTC) brought the excitement, uncompromising demands, litany of oppression, new iconic representations, and yes, the youngsters, all back out in force again. Not only did the NTC stake out new territory; it also overturned the now settled theatrical and televisual norms that had arisen in the wake of NQC" (p. 271). In some ways, Rich's quotes reads as celebratory of trans visual cultural production and its agitations on form, content, audiences, and culture, but it is simultaneously an historical erasure to suggest that TGNC people and their cinematic productions followed on the heels of NQC. Rich (2013) draws on Frameline's programming as evidence of this new "trans" trend and writes, "In 2005 San Francisco Frameline's LGBT film festival made it official with a special program of trans cinema that announced a new presence" (p. 272). Based on this event, she concludes that "transgender is the new queer" (p. 623) and that "transgender and genderqueer kids have their own digital productions, their own favorite films, their own issues and chroniclers …" (p. 623). Rich's (2013) declaration centers and celebrates Frameline as the entity that legitimated trans cultural production and as such upholds both a festival hierarchy and an identity hierarchy that continues between L/G and T formations.

Rich's (2103) framing speaks to one of the salient consequences of the disproportionate attention paid to business oriented QFFs as the loci of cultural capital in the film festival field. TGNC filmmakers were making films at the same time NQC received so much hype within GL/Q formations and the broader culture. However, ongoing and compounded issues of exclusion and lack of access to resources, media platforms, and cultural awareness of TGNC identities, left trans cultural production with

few exhibition outlets. Horak (2021) also aptly notes that part of the reason NQC received so much scholarly attention at the dismissal of trans film and video production and exhibition that was occurring at the same time is "undoubtedly the stylish 35mm aesthetics and art cinema sensibilities of NQC, in comparison to the rough, often DIY video and 16mm aesthetics of the 1990s trans cinema" (n.p.). Many trans films at this time were also fairly straight-forward talking-head documentaries that often focused on either an individual trans person or a trans political or artistic cultural formation. Early SFTFF programming evidences an array of genres from trans filmmakers, including animation, hardcore pornography, music video, and non-narrative forms. The history of Frameline and Rich's (2013) formulation of NQC thus speaks to the urgency SFTFF organizers arguably felt to build a grassroots exhibition culture for their own productions as a means to resist incorporation into larger, well-known, and historically established business-oriented QFFs.

Rich's (2013) formulation of NQC, however, is not shared by all scholars and industry professionals. Marc Siegel (1997), for example, offers a slightly different history of Frameline's relationship to trans-themed content. Noting that QFFs are "sites for community debate" (p. 5) he argues that throughout Frameline's lifetime, the programmers have tried to respond to community demand for minority programming, often translating to "special evenings" held at the smaller, Roxie theater.[23] Siegel mentions a "transgender evening" held at the Roxie in 1995, sponsored by FTM International, ten years prior to Rich's citation of a special trans-themed program at

[23] Siegel (1997) mentions Jews, lesbians of color, Latin Americans, transgender people, Soviets, bisexuals, and Native Americans. Also, see chapter three for a detailed discussion of the history and symbolic capital of the Roxie Theater.

Frameline making a trans presence "official." Of the 1995 program, which was scheduled concurrently with an annual cis gay male program titled "Boy Shorts," Siegel writes that audiences who attended the traditional fare were "treated to a more sanitized, less expansive vision of gay male sexuality, one cleansed of images of drag queens, transsexual men, and butch lesbians" (p. 5). He describes this as an unfortunate consequence of QFF programming because it tends to "replicate pre-existing community structures – be they community political organizations or exhibition venues – [which] fosters divisions and inhibits debate as well" (p. 5).[24] Siegel's lament of Frameline's sanitized programming echoes similar critiques levied by queer, punk, and trans formations that fought against the thrust of rights-based G/L groups whose aim was to assimilate into mainstream, middle-class norms.

Going even further back than Siegel and Rich, trans historian, Susan Stryker (1996), writes that there was a trans-themed film screened at the first year of Frameline (then referred to as the "Gay Film Festival of Super-8 Films") in 1977. The first year was a series of four exhibitions that took place between February and October of 1977.[25] As part of Jenni Olson's edited collection, *The Ultimate Guide to Lesbian and Gay Film and Video,* Stryker (1996) writes a short history of Frameline. She notes that the first (free) screening in 1977 packed two hundred people in a room meant for one hundred and twenty-five, and that one hundred or more were turned away at the door. Describing the eclectic short film program, she references *Poodle Poo-Poo Miracle Mask* as "an obvious nod to underground icon John Waters" and that other films seemed "curiously

[24] Even in 2019, Frameline's forty-third year, trans, genderqueer, and intersex themed-content typically screened at the Roxie, the smallest venue and at typically low-turnout times (Sundays, weekday afternoons or evenings).
[25] The festival became known as Frameline in 1979.

contemporary in retrospect," such as the short film, *Changes* (unknown), "by a transsexual in transition from male to female [which] explored the intersection of feminism, personal identity, and state bureaucracy" (p. 365). Stryker's observations point to the intermingling of queer, punk, and trans lineages I have foregrounded and complicates discrete identity categories and "movements" of cultural production. Rich (2013) argues "trans was the new queer," came after NQC, and that Frameline made the Trans New Wave official in 2005. However, the lineages I have drawn point to the simultaneous overlap of queer, punk, and trans sensibilities that informed early QFFs.

For example, evidence of a punk sensibility is readable in the first program of The Gay Film Festival of Super-8 Films (1977), archived on the official Frameline website. The following blurb introduces the program:

> This festival was coordinated by reaching out to gay filmmakers in the Bay area through word of mouth, notices on bulletin boards and in laundromats, short articles in local magazines, etc. Therefore our viewpoints and perspectives are diverse. One thing brings us together - our love of making films and our desire to reach out to the community at large. We hope you enjoy our program.

Although there is an emphasis on "gay filmmakers," as I have argued, it is important to complicate this category and think more broadly about the ways in which queer and punk sensibilities informed gender and sexuality in the 1970s and beyond. This blurb highlights, along with Stryker's appraisal of the program, that the first festival of what is now known as Frameline was steeped in a punk sensibility, in terms of it's DIY approach and attempts to program a diverse range of filmmakers. As Siegel (1997) notes of the first debut, filmmakers were scouted by word-of-mouth, the festival was run by volunteers, and attendance was free with requested donations. The first screening was at a gay community center and as Stryker notes, packed in almost double its capacity.

This DIY mode, however, quickly shifted and the festival became a collective known as “Persistence of Vision” shortly after the first screening. By 1979, the festival name changed to Frameline and attained non-profit status. The festival moved the annual date to June to coincide with Stonewall commemoration and Pride festivities and became sponsored by the Pride foundation. Between 1979-1980 the festival was held at the Roxie Theater (seating 300), then switched to the Castro Theater (seating 1500). Programming continued at both venues, but these spatial relations led to divisions in content and focus, a point I elaborate in chapter three. The word lesbian (Gay and Lesbian International Film Festival) was not added until 1982. Contributing to this history, Stuart Richards (2016) writes that in 1986, the festival was run by employees rather than volunteers. In 1988, the festival received its first grant from the NEA, marking it with the cultural capital to legitimize it as a cultural organization. Frameline now employs full-time staff, is a multimillion-dollar enterprise with numerous internships and over 400 volunteers, screens over 200 films each season, has become a distributor that sells to academic institutions and created a home DVD-line, provides grants and filmmaking courses, has become a tourist destination, informs other QFFs globally, and helps construct modern-day queer identities (Richards, 2016). In other words, Frameline is an example of a festival that has focused on visibility, cultural legitimacy, and professionalization in the film festival field. The attention I have given to Frameline is not to celebrate it as “successful” or reify its centrality as a node of QFF scholarship, but rather to highlight aspects of its complicated history and development according to market-based logic.

SFTFF's Relationship to Frameline

As I noted previously, all film festivals tend to have one or more other festivals from which they must differentiate but with which they may also collaborate. This is particularly the case with festivals that occur in similar regions. Give Frameline is the oldest documented QFF and screens films in San Francisco, part of this research investigates how trans film and video artists in the Bay Area that are or have been associated with SFTFF view Frameline. In an interview with Jed Bell (2018), former SFTFF poster-maker and current filmmaker, I ask about his experiences of attending Frameline.

> Bell: Yeah, Frameline has premiered all of the movies that I've made, and it's a great festival too, a lot of trans content now, and way higher quality than it used to be because it used to have to take every stupid trans film that we gave them, you know (personal communication, November 11, 2018).

I then ask if he feels trans content is more integrated in the broader programming of Frameline than it was in the 1990s.

> Bell: It's more integrated in the sense that I think that not just trans people are interested in it and we don't just go out of a feeling of obligation. The movies are really good now, which is not on Frameline. It just became a category and then had to mature, you know, and it was, there were a lot of horrible trans films for years and then we would always be in the same programs at the same festivals and I'd be chewing my arm off seeing the same horrible thing the eighth time or whatever. But now there's enough of us making them, and it's been happening long enough that I think we're getting some you know numbers of good films … The trans program at Frameline this year (2018) was excellent … And Frameline is one of those festivals that programmers come to from all over the world and if they can't come, they get the list, and so if your film shows there, as with any queer filmmaker, but maybe particularly as a trans filmmaker, then you're contacted afterwards, and asked for your screener and then it starts to move around the world very quickly, so that's happened for me with all of my films, but the trans ones … move quicker and go more places because … it's a niche that it helps to belong to (personal communication, November 11, 2018).

Bell's quote speaks to the power of cultural capital that a business oriented QFF holds in terms of acting as a gateway to a broader festival path or other forms of distribution. Without discussion of specific films, Bell also asserts taste value by suggesting that trans-made films have increased in quality over time. From a Bourdieuian perspective, taste value is informed by the interplay of capital, habitus, and the rules of the field. These lenses of analysis help to break down Bell's appraisal as a subject, but it is also essential to consider my previous point about TGNC people at large having less access to resources in terms of film education and filming technology - factors that ultimately affect image aesthetics.

Bell's assessment of Frameline is overall positive and later in our conversation, he describes Frameline as community oriented. When I introduce the idea that some other filmmakers I have spoken to describe Frameline as assimilationist, too focused on privileged white cis gay men, too big, and too invested in corporate sponsorship, Bell expresses surprise and says he has not heard that perspective. After some thought, he replies:

> Bell: … I think of it as they have to sell the programs at the Castro Theater, you know the big one, to the gay men because that's what brings in the money, you know. And the Victoria gets the lesbian films, and the Roxie, which is the smallest, gets the trans films. And it's not because they wouldn't show a trans film at the Castro if they could, but could they sell 1250 tickets to that? (personal communication, November 11, 2018)

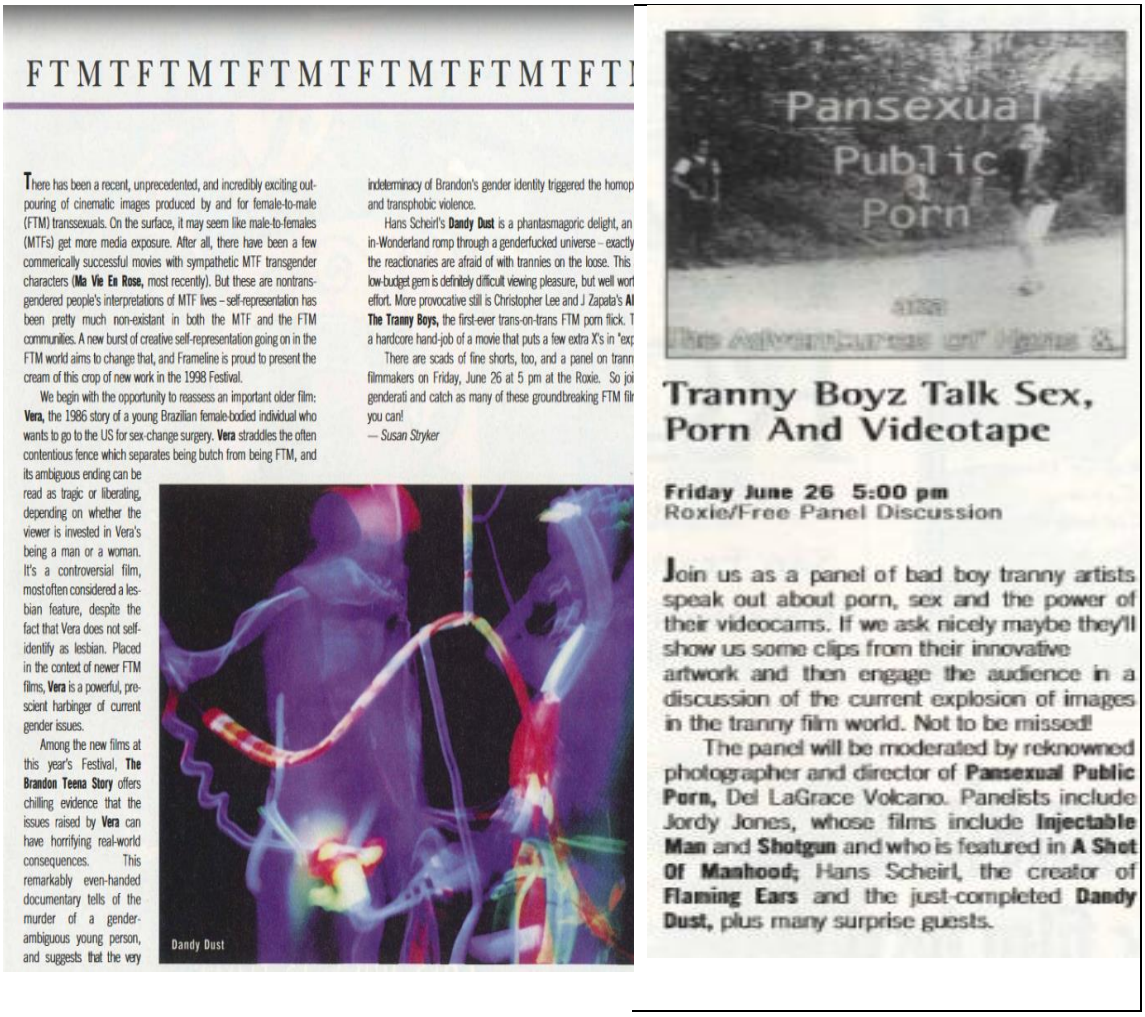
I interpret Bell's commentary as a move to situate Frameline as an inclusive institution by suggesting, to some extent, the festival has their hands tied in relation to programming trans content, either by lack of "quality" trans productions or by the limitations of audience demands and their purchasing power. These are important factors to consider and they can be further complicated with an analysis of the rules a business-

oriented film festival such as Frameline must play by to maintain cultural capital in the broader film festival field.

Bell is not alone in conceptualizing Frameline as inclusive of trans content. Film historian, Laura Horak (2021), outlines several examples of Frameline's inclusion of trans filmmakers and speakers. She notes that in 1992, Jenni Olson wrote about trans issues as a sidebar and Frameline screened *Clarke's Sex Change – Shock! Horror! Probe!* (Clarke, 1988) which Horak cites as the "first documentary about transsexuality made by a trans person" (n.p.). In 1993, Kate Bornstein, the influential trans author and performer mentioned in chapter one and four, gave a lecture on trans representation in film at Frameline. In 1994, FTM International and Transsexual News Telegraph sponsored their first programs. FTM International went on to sponsor a program at Frameline every year in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In 1995, Frameline screened a program called "TransGenderFuck Activism" and hired Susan Stryker to be on screening committees, which is another piece of evidence that highlights the queer, punk, and trans lineages I have outlined. In 1996, Frameline's twentieth anniversary, there was even more trans content.

Horak (2021) argues that by 1998, SFTFF's second festival run had an impact on Frameline and trans-themed films were "one of Frameline's core themes" that year (n.p.). Figure 1 is an image of the 1998 program that featured a sidebar about trans-themed content by trans historian, Susan Stryker. Stryker mentions controversy associated with the screening of Brazilian film, *Vera* (Toledo, 1986) which she says, "straddles the often-contentious fence which separates being butch from being FTM, and its ambiguous

ending can be read as tragic or liberating depending on whether the viewer is invested in Vera being a man or a woman."



FTMTFTMTFTMTFTMTFTMTFTMTFTI

There has been a recent, unprecedented, and incredibly exciting outpouring of cinematic images produced by and for female-to-male (FTM) transsexuals. On the surface, it may seem like male-to-females (MTFs) get more media exposure. After all, there have been a few commercially successful movies with sympathetic MTF transgender characters (**Ma Vie En Rose,** most recently). But these are nontrans-gendered people's interpretations of MTF lives – self-representation has been pretty much non-existant in both the MTF and the FTM communities. A new burst of creative self-representation going on in the FTM world aims to change that, and Frameline is proud to present the cream of this crop of new work in the 1998 Festival.

We begin with the opportunity to reassess an important older film: **Vera,** the 1986 story of a young Brazilian female-bodied individual who wants to go to the US for sex-change surgery. **Vera** straddles the often contentious fence which separates being butch from being FTM, and its ambiguous ending can be read as tragic or liberating, depending on whether the viewer is invested in Vera's being a man or a woman. It's a controversial film, most often considered a lesbian feature, despite the fact that Vera does not self-identify as lesbian. Placed in the context of newer FTM films, **Vera** is a powerful, prescient harbinger of current gender issues.

Among the new films at this year's Festival, **The Brandon Teena Story** offers chilling evidence that the issues raised by **Vera** can have horrifying real-world consequences. This remarkably even-handed documentary tells of the murder of a gender-ambiguous young person, and suggests that the very indeterminacy of Brandon's gender identity triggered the homop and transphobic violence.

Hans Scheirl's **Dandy Dust** is a phantasmagoric delight, an in-Wonderland romp through a genderfucked universe – exactly the reactionaries are afraid of with trannies on the loose. This low-budget gem is definitely difficult viewing pleasure, but well wort effort. More provocative still is Christopher Lee and J Zapata's **Al The Tranny Boys,** the first-ever trans-on-trans FTM porn flick. T a hardcore hand-job of a movie that puts a few extra X's in "exp

There are scads of fine shorts, too, and a panel on trann filmmakers on Friday, June 26 at 5 pm at the Roxie. So joi genderati and catch as many of these groundbreaking FTM filr you can!

— *Susan Stryker*

Dandy Dust

Tranny Boyz Talk Sex, Porn And Videotape

Friday June 26 5:00 pm
Roxie/Free Panel Discussion

Join us as a panel of bad boy tranny artists speak out about porn, sex and the power of their videocams. If we ask nicely maybe they'll show us some clips from their innovative artwork and then engage the audience in a discussion of the current explosion of images in the tranny film world. Not to be missed!

The panel will be moderated by reknowned photographer and director of **Pansexual Public Porn,** Del LaGrace Volcano. Panelists include Jordy Jones, whose films include **Injectable Man** and **Shotgun** and who is featured in **A Shot Of Manhood;** Hans Scheirl, the creator of **Flaming Ears** and the just-completed **Dandy Dust,** plus many surprise guests.

Figure 1: Frameline Program, 1998, p. 29, 38

The programming controversy around *Vera* (Toledo, 1986) speaks to a growing contention in relation to identity politics in the 1990s that I mentioned in chapter one. Stryker also mentions Christopher Lee and J Zapata's (1998) *Alley of the Tranny Boys*,[26] "the first-ever trans-on-trans FTM porn flick." She highlights Frameline's panel on

[26] As categorized by WorldCat, this 50-minute video features "Female to male transsexual pornography. San Francisco area transsexuals participate in genitally ambiguous acts including group sex, masturbation, fisting, irrumation, toe-sucking and S & M." The video also features the band Tribe 8.

"tranny boy filmmakers" (see Fig. 1) at the Roxie, including trans filmmakers, Jordy Jones and Hans Schriel. Although there's no documentation that Christopher Lee was on this panel, he was likely a key part of this conversation. Frameline's June 1997 festival occurred just a few months before the inaugural public SFTFF and screened Christopher Lee's (1996), *Christopher's Chronicles* and *Trappings of Transhood* (Lee & Hurwitz, 1997) in the "Gender Benders" shorts program, a new category addition to the on-going "Boy's Shorts" and "Girl's Shorts" programs. In 2001, SFTFF co-presented two shorts programs at Frameline, which suggests some form of relationship between the two festivals.[27] I am critical, however, of presenting Frameline as inclusive despite evidence that suggests the festival gave more attention to trans filmmakers and TGNC content. The programming move to include but maintain discrete trans-themed content recalls Marc Siegel's (1997) point that QFF programming tends to "replicate pre-existing community structures … [which] fosters divisions and inhibits debate as well" (p. 5).

I read the programming of trans-themed content as evidence of the discourses about identity politics at the time, and as an indication of Frameline's business-oriented motivation to increase audiences and professionalize. In other words, I argue that programming is always complexly motivated by economic and cultural factors. From a historical perspective, it is also important to note that Frameline did not change its name to include both the B and T of LGBT until 2005. Likewise, Frameline screened

[27] **Program 1** (Victoria Theater): **"Transformations"** (films by Mafer Suárez, Mako Kamitsuna, Shawna Virago, Luna Ortiz/Shawna Atkins, Melissa Regan). **Program 2** (Herbst Theater), originally screened at the Toronto Inside Out Lesbian & Gay Film festival): **"Tran'ce Romance"** (films by Brian Dawn Chalkley, Mirha Soleil-Ross/Mark Karbusicky, Max Volerio, Andrea Stoops, Annette Kennerley, Francine Shaw, Kaspar Jivan, Paddy Aldridge, Lynnell Long, Alec Butler/Gerri Roberton, Wayne Yung, Kate Jones-Davies/Pamela Hunt, Paddy Wivell, Cat Grant/Boyd Kodak, Del LaGrace Volcano, Rita Kung, Andrea Stoops). See: https://www.frameline.org/archives

controversial films throughout these years. In 2007 for example, Frameline programmed *The Gendercator* (Crouch, 2007), described by Crouch as:

> A satirical take on surgical body modification and gender. The story uses the "Rip Van Winkle" model to extrapolate from the feminist 1970s to a frightening 2048 where politics and technology have conspired to mandate two gender "choices": Macho male or Barbie babe. In this dystopian future, those whose gender presentation does not comply will be GENDERCATED.

In the film, lesbians are forced to transition to men which led to heated debates reminiscent of some tensions I mentioned in chapter one and still present today (Salah, 2011). This again demonstrates how trans and GL/Q cultural formations have a long history of both collaboration and division.

The ways in which identity politics can be traced through festival programming recalls Joshua Gamson's argument that film festivals are "warehouses of collective identity that involve ongoing and self-conscious decision making about the content and contours of the 'we' being made literally visible" (1996, p. 238). In other words, there is an ongoing dialectic between film festival programming and identity discourses wherein identities are constructed and reified in the projection of images and the exhibition event (Gerver, 1990, p. 201). Divergent opinions about Frameline's relationship to trans-themed content persist. I ask current SFTFF Artistic director, Shawna Virago, how she sees SFTFF's relationship with Frameline.

> Virago: We don't really have one. They've screened Christopher's films back in the day, short films, they've screened my films. I curated their trans program for two or three years, but I think there's some controversy about their funding, who they're getting funding from, and a lot of us just said, oh you don't have to accept this funding … trust hasn't been established … I feel like we're a little bit of an island given the programs we still have, we prioritize especially films that maybe some of the subject-matter could include police abuse and prison issues and also a lot of DIY films or experimental films (personal communication, November 17, 2017).

Similar to archival evidence, Virago's comment attests to some collaboration and participation with Frameline, but she also critiques the business-oriented mode Frameline has adopted. She provides a key economic argument here, wherein she positions Frameline's questionable (corporate) funding and programming content as oppositional to the punk sensibility SFTFF seeks to maintain. I parse out more of these economic arguments in chapter four.

Returning to the categorization of film festivals, my contention here is that relationships between film festival categories such as business-oriented and locally oriented are complex. Frameline's business-oriented mode does not preclude the inclusion of trans-themed content but has and continues to optically benefit from programming this content because in large part many of the debates about gender identity in the US throughout the 1990s are still prescient. While Frameline has supported the exhibition and funding of some trans filmmakers, such as Bell, it also comes with costs such as reifying identity categories, maintaining audience segmentation, relying on more corporate funding sources, and potentially neglecting to exhibit a diversity of genres and images from more marginalized subjects. These tensions must be considered when analyzing Frameline's relationship to trans-themed content within a historical and cultural context in order to challenge a singular reading of Frameline as inclusive and to counter the argument that "trans is the new queer" (Rich, 2013, p. 623). The emergence of SFTFF in the late 1990s is indicative of the inherent trend of film festival diversification, particularly salient to identity-themed festivals, and it also speaks to the possibility of alternative modes of exhibition that are motivated to challenge the trend of professionalization.

SFTFF is not the only exhibition culture in the Bay Area that has leveraged a punk sensibility. In 2019, on my third research trip to San Francisco, I unexpectedly come across Artists Television Access[28] as I walk around the Mission District. ATA has existed for thirty-five years and is a community ally of the mural project CAMP, which I discuss in chapter four. ATA curates video projections for CAMP's annual block party, originating in 1998, and hosts a queer and trans underground monthly film series, Periwinkle Cinema, founded by trans filmmakers, Lorin Murphy and Christopher Carroll. I met Lorin for an interview at ATA in June 2019, prior to Periwinkle's screening of *Kate Bornstein Is a Queer & Pleasant Danger* (Feder, 2014). I ask Murphy to reflect on how Periwinkle relates to Frameline.

> Murphy: So, Periwinkle Cinema, we always kind of consider ourselves to be like Frameline's gutter punk cousin who's kind of weird and is just at the family barbeque for the free food and booze. We play stuff that they won't play … We encourage first-time filmmakers and we have a couple that have screened stuff which has been really rewarding for me to just kind of be like hey, you've never made a movie, here step here, we'll just show it. Just send it to me and we'll show it. And we show like everything (personal communication, June 19, 2019).

Like SFTFF, Periwinkle has an animating punk sensibility that prioritizes a counter-hegemonic exhibition platform for emerging queer and trans artists whose work might not otherwise be included in business-oriented QFFs or find an appreciative audience attuned to non-narrative or non-documentary forms. Murphy, a Bay Area native, made his first film in 1997 and has attended SFTFF over the years. His music video, *Homosafe* (2018), screened at SFTFF in 2018. The film depicts the Bay Area band, the Homobiles,

[28] Artists Television Access is a San Francisco-based, artist-run, non-profit organization that cultivates and promotes culturally aware, underground media and experimental art. We provide an accessible screening venue and gallery for the presentation of programmed and guest-curated screenings, exhibitions, performances, workshops, and events. We believe in fostering a supportive community for the exhibition of innovative art and the exchange of non-conformist ideas (http://www.atasite.org/about/).

featuring Lynn Breedlove of the former queercore band, Tribe 8, discussed in chapter one. In the video, the band and friends, a cast of close to 70 people, fight off "Nazi intrusion" at the notorious 924 Gilman Street club, a music collective known for showcasing queercore and punk bands in the 1990s. Of all the festivals to which Murphy submitted the film, SFTFF was the first to screen it. In my analysis, Periwinkle and SFTFF align in their commitment to exhibition practices that foreground screening experimental and politically focused queer, punk, and trans content that is unlikely to find a platform at larger QFFs. These shared values reinforce the care work that both of these subcultural formations perform, which I detail below.

Circuits of Care

A key argument of this chapter is that SFTFF challenges many of the broader film festival rules by performing different kinds of work that deserve attention alongside the economic and symbolic capital ascribed to the work of business-oriented festivals. Again, the idea of a "circuit" suggests A-list and business-oriented QFFs have a greater effect on the festival field than the "minor genres" or "locally-oriented" festivals. I am not interested in quantifying effects or replicating these binary frameworks that uphold festival hierarchies. Rather, I am invested in redeploying the term "circuit" to think through other forms of work that SFTFF performs by leveraging and building what I formulate as circuits of care.

Care may seem at odds with the affects of grief and rage that I argued were salient to queer, punk, and trans cultural production and direct-action movements in the 1990s, but I theorize these three affects as interdependent and interconnected. I argue that care,

like rage and grief, is evident in SFTFF's punk sensibility. The specific care work that SFTFF performs relates to Malatino's (2020) theorization of trans care that is de-linked from the heteronormative domestic sphere and which considers how trans people specifically utilize the interconnected spaces of "the street, the club, the bar, the clinic, the community center, the classroom ..." (p. 42). I follow Malatino's articulation of care as steeped in the concept of mutual aid, which Dean Spade (2019) articulates as work that examines the conditions that create resource scarcity and that seeks to provide basic needs - housing, food, healthcare, transportation - to all subjects outside of State recognized kinship structures. Care work is interdependent and allows subjects "to repair, rebuild, and cultivate resilience" (Malatino, 2020, p. 43). Care work links to the mobilization of rage as transformative and defiant expressions of "anger that challenge(s) respectability" (Lugones, 2003, p. 103). SFTFF's embeddedness in lineages of queer, punk, and trans investments and sensibilities I have outlined, continues this important work of collectivizing rage as a form of protest against assimilation and as a means of building emergent practices of mutual aid.

SFTFF's existence and persistence as an exhibition culture is a form of protest. By challenging many business-oriented practices of film festivals such as collaboration with city planning and tourism, awards rituals, global festival competition, and increasing professionalization and corporate sponsorship, SFTFF redefines the concept of collaboration from the starting point of a punk sensibility or punk values, which Nault (2018) argues, "... emphasize non-conformity and individual freedom, as well as opposition to authority, capitalism, and mainstream success …" (p. 14). As I noted in the introduction, early SFTFF organizers were steeped in liberationist direct action

movements and punk forms of cultural production. These formations addressed HIV and AIDS response, prison abolition, healthcare, housing, police violence, and myriad other concerns relevant to the most marginalized, namely BIPOC trans people. Care and collaboration are evident in the first year's printed program that lists co-sponsorships with organizations such as Proyecto, the Tenderloin AIDS Resource Center, the Asian Pacific-Island Wellness Center, Umoja (Unified GLBT people of African descent for socializing and social action), FTM International, Intersex Society of North America, Lavender Youth, and more, all sites of care outside of the domestic sphere. The interpersonal care work and political organizing these organizations provide are part of larger circuits of care within which SFTFF is embedded and which arguably enabled the emergence of SFTFF in 1997.

Additionally, SFTFF enacts their own specific forms of care work that rhizomatically extend existing circuits of care. SFTFF is a material site of care, a place for TGNC bodies to gather, to exist, for some, with greater ease in public. While "safety" is undoubtedly a social construct, SFTFF has, from its inception, prioritized the use of ASL interpreters, captioning, a no-scent standard, sliding scale tickets, and has held screenings, panels, and installations at multiple venues in the Bay Area to increase accessibility. SFTFF is also committed to promoting DIY approaches to film production and exhibition. This ethos challenges the hegemony of slick images, film school as imperative, and the market-driven function of festivals as gatekeepers to distribution. Rather, the festival places emphasis on experimentation and opposition to mainstream notions of success. This punk sensibility invites and celebrates diverse content and

thereby builds an exhibition culture that challenges assimilation in terms of identity politics and what forms and images should be celebrated.

SFTFF also performs care work that expands the Bourdieuian concept of taste cultures. Antoine Damians (2017) argues that "queer films move between and across the highbrow of art cinema and the abject genres of pornography, between film and video, between community-based searches for new images and already institutionalized regimes of taste" which results in no single regime of taste, but the formation of what he terms "film cultures" (p. 86). For Bourdieu, culture and art are always in relation because culture is what defines and legitimizes what is considered art (Webb, Schirato &Danaher, 2002, p. 152). Divergent investments in regimes of taste largely define how film festivals situate themselves within the broader film festival field. The influence of taste, both in terms of content and aesthetics, is evident in the brief historical analysis I have presented regarding the relationship between SFTFF and Frameline, two festivals that have diverged in their programming, exhibition spaces, subcultural embeddedness, and economic funding, as means by which to build certain taste cultures.[29]

SFTFF has predominantly built a festival identity and correlated taste culture by leveraging their queer, punk, and trans lineages. These lineages have propelled the festival to mobilize and collectivize rage against the production, consumption, and exhibition of respectability and incorporation in mainstream systems and cultural

[29] Similar tensions are notable between other QFFs in the 1990s. Joshua Gamson (1996), for example, argues that a key tension in the film industry in the 1990s was that "the straight art-film world was not hospitable to gay and lesbian film, and the gay festival circuit emerging in the mid-1980s was not interested in experimental work" (p. 240). This is perhaps overly simplified, but it points to the work each festival must do to attract and build particular audiences, both industry and non-industry-based.

production. SFTFF builds a taste culture that centers on challenge, agitation, experimentation, and joy that inform their broader emphasis on liberationist politics.

SFTFF historically and contemporaneously privileges experimental and low-budget films and prioritizes content that critiques police, prisons, and centers the experiences of BIPOC trans people. At the same time, I have noted the festival has programmed films backed with corporate sponsorship and those made by filmmakers who work in or are adjacent to Hollywood. I mention this to acknowledge that no taste culture is pure or easily categorized. There will always be contradictions within any single festival, but overall, my research illuminates that SFTFF challenges many business-oriented cultural production norms and notions of "success." These characteristics have arguably remained present throughout the festival's lifespan and were evident at the twentieth anniversary festival in 2017. For example, in the Q&A session after the opening night screening of the short film, *Xanh* (Tran, 2017), producer, Tracy Nguyen states:

> I produced this film from a community organizing lens, right, and what that means is I took into account every step of the way to deconstruct that shit, right? When you organize, you organize your people to be empowered, to reclaim that space, so every step of the way, from where you get your food, to where you hire your lighting, who you hire to be your director of photography, we waited until the last two weeks because we were waiting for a black, queer woman to come back from Cuba to accept our offer to hire her …

Also in attendance, director of *Xanh,* Sal Tran, states:

> … we had a few folks who were in the film industry and we had a lot of folks who never had access to these types of spaces, so we were trying to collectively figure out, how can we make this accessible and utilize our resources and give people the skills to make film and learn things that they typically wouldn't because I think the film industry is so hierarchical and so male, white-dominated.

These quotes exemplify a punk sensibility in the form of DIY, care work, and the centering of marginalized bodies along lines of race, class, and gender. Additionally, this behind-the-scenes narration of the production practices are present on the film's website, which showcases the story from inception to film debut in a zine-like aesthetic framed as "radical queer and Asian filmmaking through behind-the-scenes photography."

This example highlights another core aspect of a sprawling punk sensibility which is the production of new producers. SFTFF encourages trans people to build connective tissue for the purpose of cultural production and continues a long tradition of collaboration with direct action liberationist struggle. These aspects of a punk sensibility echo the words of Walter Benjamin (1970) who writes, "The determinant factor is the exemplary character of production that enables it, first, to lead other producers to this production and secondly to present them with an improved apparatus for their use" (page unknown). Just as the 1976 issue of the punk-zine, *Sideburns,* showed the tablature for guitar chords A, E, G and had a caption that read: "This is a chord. This is another. This is a third. Now form a band," SFTFF, since the late 1990s, has been embedded in a circuit of care that supports the survival and resilience of TGNC people, and the festival has built an exhibition culture that expands this circuit of care to encourage other trans people to get a camera, recruit their friends, and make a movie.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented multiple ways in which SFTFF has taken up the intersecting ideological investments of queer, punk, and trans lineages to challenge hegemonic exhibition practices in the global film festival field, specifically European

International Film Festival (IFF) and business oriented Queer Film Festival (QFF) modes. Engaging with the commonly used metaphor of a "circuit" to describe the global film festival system, I have introduced Bourdieu's notion of a field to further analyze the hierarchies and prescriptive "rules of the game" that mark the broad and diverse festival system. By reformulating the term "circuit" I have argued that SFTFF challenges many of the dominant festival rules by enacting counter-hegemonic exhibition practices that are embedded within and enable a circuit of care.

This formulation of SFTFF demonstrates both the power and precarity of constructing and maintaining a counter-hegemonic festival mode. While traces of a punk sensibility such as anti-capitalism and anti-consumerism find materiality in a variety of punk productions and artefacts, the mythology is often that these artefacts are captured and ruptured by the forces of capitalism. However, SFTFF demonstrates Thompson's (2004) argument that perhaps what is most important is not the absolute escape from capitalism, which is impossible, but that punk desires – "impulses that the current mode of production cannot satisfy," continue to emerge (p. 78). I have theorized one of SFTFF's dominant impulses as care work. The specific forms of care work that SFTFF performs have less potential to be materially realized within the structure and rules of the business-oriented festival field. As Malatino (2020) aptly notes, "Practices of care are always part of an emergent ethos. Because care isn't abstract, but only ever manifested through practice - action, labor, work - it is integral to our ways of doing … this work - like all care work - is about fostering survival ..." (p. 41). Given there is no escape door to the ongoing violence of the State and its capitalist, imperialist, white supremacist, patriarchal underpinnings, one could claim that punk ultimately fails to make a

significant mark. Rather than quantify disruptive effects, what I have argued in this chapter is that SFTFF's exhibition culture mobilizes a punk sensibility to expand a circuit of care that motivates the production of new producers to continually challenge both the dominant forms and procedures of cultural production and queer and trans assimilation in society at large. In this sense, punk is relational and experiential, and SFTFF becomes a node within broader circuits and lineages of trans care that demonstrates, as Thompson (2004) argues, the ability for punk to "succeed on a daily basis" (p. 179).

CHAPTER IV
A "RIGHT TO THE CITY": SFTFF AS QUEER AND TRANS OF COLOR WORLD-BUILDING

"Just as none of us is beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings" (Said, 1994, p. 7).

"The dream of urban living has always meant a density of experience, that random moment on the street that changes you. But now, when people say increasing the density, they mean building more luxury housing for new arrivals who only want an urban lifestyle with a walled-off suburban mentality - keep away difference, avoid unplanned interaction, don't talk to anyone on the street because this might be dangerous" (Sycamore, 2020, p. 115).

According to the Film Festival Research Network's online bibliography of film festival studies, spatial theorization of film festivals has become its own sub-field and includes consideration of the ways in which festivals interact with cities, tourism, and publics.[30] The work of this subfield falls into two general frameworks: theorization of film festivals as prominent factors in "urban renewal," tourism, and city branding, and a "livable cities" approach that focuses on local articulations of place, identity, and community formations. SFTFF can be easily categorized as part of the latter division given its investments remain largely "off the map" to the broader film festival world. One of the reasons for this relates to SFTFF's claim to space for use value rather than exchange value. As I argued in chapter two, rather than operating as a marketplace for the exchange of cultural products, talent, and cultural capital, SFTFF is predominantly invested in the care work of building artistic, activist, and kinship circuits, promoting a punk sensibility to cultural production, and building a celebratory exhibition culture of

[30] http://www.filmfestivalresearch.org/index.php/ffrn-bibliography/3-festival-space-cities-tourism-and-publics/

self-expression and dialogue. As I will outline in this chapter, these values are deeply linked to histories of the Mission District where SFTFF debuted in 1997 and where it continues to gather at the Roxie Theater. This area is also significant to the festival's subcultural lineage. Although I primarily focus my discussion in the 1990s, I also survey a spatial-historical contextualization of the region.

Space and its uses are always about power. An analysis of SFTFF necessitates a history of spatialized forms of power and resistance. In this chapter, I chart a brief history of the built environment of San Francisco, the Mission District, and the Roxie Theater before analyzing the spaces of SFTFF as an exhibition culture. To theorize this multiplicity of spaces and their inherent contradictions, I draw on Lefebvre's theory of the right to the city as an urgent utopia and Muñoz's theory of the utopian performative as a mode of queer and trans of color world-building. My key argument is that despite existing on unceded land and amid waves of hyper-gentrification, SFTFF enacts a right to the city through its ongoing investments in the project of queer and trans of color world-building. In other words, SFTFF enables an ephemeral spatialized form of resistance that reveals the dialectical relationship between cities and inhabitants – the ways in which the use of material space can enable new modes of being as well as inspire future imaginaries. Throughout, I offer reflections from my ethnographic work.

On the opening night of the twentieth anniversary of SFTFF in November 2017, I sit as a participant observer in the audience of the sold-out Roxie Theater, located on the corner of 16th and Valencia Street. Shawna Virago, current Artistic Director, introduces the evening screening with the following words:

Welcome to the world's first and longest running transgender film festival.[31] We started out at a time before Mark Zuckerberg and Ed Lee destroyed San Francisco.

As a self-identified-folk-punk-singer-songwriter, Virago brings her personal ideological investments to narrate San Francisco's history and the festival identity. From a post-structural understanding of space, a city is both material and discursive, a process of encoding and decoding in a struggle to make meaning. What captures my attention about Virago's statement is the discursive move to articulate SFTFF as a film festival that started at a time before San Francisco was "destroyed." The word destroy connotes the city as a physical location, what urban sociologists refer to as a built environment, and as ideological, or cultural space of the everyday wherein modes of being have been destroyed. My aim is not to critique Virago, but to contextualize her discourse as one narration of a city among a multiplicity. There are as many versions of the city as there are inhabitants, tourists, and temporary or hybrid dwellers. Amid this plurality of perspectives, however, Virago is not alone in decrying the rapid change of the city or her demarcation of former Mayor, Ed Lee, and tech mogul, Mark Zuckerberg, as culprits who "destroyed" San Francisco. Virago arguably rallies a complaint against the local government's complicity with the "new economy" of internet and technologically-based business (also referred to as the dotcom boom) that began in the 1990s and arguably peaked during the years 1998-2002 (Casique, 2013, p. 1). These historical flashpoints are useful because I situate the majority of my discussion in the 1990s, but it is also imperative to begin with a broader lineage of space and its uses. Part of this historical

[31] As noted in the introduction, SFTFF emerged in 1997 alongside two other trans film festivals in Toronto and London, but it is the only festival of the three that has continued.

intervention necessitates awareness that the concept of gentrification has a much longer history throughout the twentieth century and ultimately descends from colonialist invasion.

San Francisco and the Mission District: Identity of the Built Environment

San Francisco is a forty-seven-square-mile region, residing at the northern tip of the San Francisco peninsula where the northern region is outlined by the Golden Gate, a strait that connects the San Francisco Bay and Pacific Ocean. Discovery of gold in 1848 contributed to San Francisco's emergence as the "primary industrial and manufacturing center of the western United States" (Casique, 2013, p.1). Urban centers were sources of tension between "vice" economies, tourism, immigrant communities, and other growing industries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What is now known as the Mission District is located in an east-central area of San Francisco and has undergone many waves of change through processes of gentrification and State-sanctioned "urban renewal" projects.[32] Architect and housing activist, Fernando Martí, defines gentrification as "the incremental displacement of a local population by those with more money" (2006, p. 8), but notes that this process needs to be historicized as part of a longer lineage of colonization.

Spanish colonialist invasion infiltrated the area now known as the Mission in 1775. The first recorded eviction occurred in 1776 when Spaniards forced the Native Yelamu Ohlone peoples, who had lived in the region at least 5,000 years, to flee or enter slave labor (Martí 2006). As Susan Stryker writes (2008), Mission Dolores, established

[32] See: (Howell, 2015) for a detailed study of the Mission District between the years 1903 to 1973.

by Spanish priests in 1776 and the Presidio, near the bay where ships came in, "formed the original instruments of California's conquest and colonization, one housing church, the other army" (p. 37). It is thus imperative to acknowledge that what is now called the Mission District is stolen Yelamu Ohlone land of the Abalone People. When land activist, Fernando Martí discusses his decolonized map project (2012), he notes that referring to this area as the Mission is "like calling a neighborhood in the South 'The Plantation' – the irony is not lost on native peoples" (n.p.). He also reminds us of the ongoing oppression and erasure of 80,000 Native peoples in the Bay Area.

Jumping ahead to the 1950s, a term known as "urban development" had gained significant traction and was backed by then mayor of San Francisco, George Christopher, to construct San Francisco as a financial center of the Pacific Rim. Part of this plan involved the renewal and renovation of "blighted neighborhoods," areas with abandoned or damaged buildings. Blighted was one of many code words for racial and ethnic diversity and these renewal projects were efforts to encourage high-income taxpayers to slow their exodus to the suburbs in favor of downtown city dwelling. The Mission was one of the many immigrant, economically poor neighborhoods targeted for "urban renewal" by real estate brokers, city planners, and government officials (Casique, 2013, p. 2). Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, urban renewal occurred in other major U.S. cities such as New York. Sharon Zukin (2010) argues that the cultural power of media and consumer taste drive gentrification as much as economic and state power. She claims that during these decades, cities were losing competitive advantage as more corporate headquarters and large portions of the workforce set up in the suburbs and along highways. Cities thus had an "image crisis" (p. 5) and needed to rebuild to maintain the

appearance of "safety" – a construct linked to whiteness and wealth – to attract this exact demographic. In other words, the term "urban development" attempts to obscure racialized undertones, namely that of "cleaning up" industrial areas to attract and retain majority white, middle class populations and their taste cultures.

Although the Mission was targeted for "urban renewal," in the 1950s and 1960s, the area's local government and inhabitants largely resisted. Part of this resistance stems from the region's history. From the mid-nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the Mission District was primarily an industrial area with several textiles, tanneries, foundries, breweries, and warehouses. Italian, Irish, German, and Scandinavian immigrant communities comprised the workforce and "firmly established the Mission as a working-class immigrant neighborhood" (Martí, 2006, p. 2-3). In the early 1900s, several unhoused and displaced communities arrived in the area after the destruction caused by the four-day 1906 earthquake. This event "marked a moment when San Francisco became a profoundly divided place" (Martí, 2006, p. 2-3) due to ensuing debates about how the city should be rebuilt. One proposed plan to rebuild San Francisco was based on a Parisian model, a "grand, unifying, neoclassical vision" (Howell, 2015, p. 2). Against such efforts, the Mission was one of the first districts to organize around resistance to this plan. James Rolph Jr., a lifetime Mission-dweller and the longest-serving mayor of San Francisco, (1912-31) became a prominent leader to speak against the discourse of unification and a neoclassical rebuilding program. In addition to this oppositional mayoral power, some Mission inhabitants engaged in several forms of decentralized activist formations such as unions and coalitions. Howell (2015) argues these formations helped to build the district into a collective actor that articulated a

counter-identity in relation to other districts and neighborhoods that did not have the collaborative power or will to fight against the hegemony of the city-state's "renewal" efforts. From the time of the 1906 earthquake, Mayor Rolph and activist organizations contributed to discursively constructing the Mission as "a city within a city" (Howell, 2015, p. 4).

This framework led to the development of the identity of "Missionites" who defined themselves in opposition to the Fillmore District, the Marina District, downtown, Los Angeles, and later, "Silicon Valley" (Howell, 2015). This Mission-versus-Money oppositional identity has continued, as exemplified in Virago's statement about Ed Lee and Mark Zuckerberg. While many forces were at play in materially and culturally constructing the Mission in the early twentieth century, Howell's (2015) research illuminates that Mission residents successfully forged a counter-identity through "festivals, architecture, ethnic politics, and the area's own newspapers" (p. 4). Although not emerging publicly until 1997, SFTFF is firmly embedded in this lineage of resistance.

Another prominent historical factor that influenced the Mission's identity development was construction of the Panama Canal in the early twentieth century and its official opening in 1914. This was one of the most expensive construction projects in the U.S. and it enabled mass immigration from Central America. The largest wave of Latinx workers arrived during WWII, a time when San Francisco became the city with the highest Central American population in the U.S. (Casique, 2013). While this mass migration had profound impacts on the ethnic composition of the Mission, in the prewar period, Howell (2015) argues that "planners, lenders, and realtors regarded Latinos as white" (p. 21) even while Latinx people faced a variety of prejudice in other institutions.

In contrast, African and Asian-descent populations were barred in most city development documentation and to date they continue to make up a fraction of the population. On a trip to meet with Black community members in San Francisco in 1963, James Baldwin declared, "There is no moral distance ... between the facts of life in San Francisco and the facts of life in Birmingham. Someone's got to tell it like it is. And that's where it's at."[33] Baldwin challenged the myth of San Francisco as a liberal, equitable city by revealing the rampant housing discrimination and ongoing racism that persists today.[34]

Housing discrimination and racial segregation heightened in the post-WWII era when banks helped returning white veterans buy homes in western Bay Area neighborhoods. This was a time when discursive constructions of race and ethnicity began to shift. With an increasing influx of Mexican and Central American immigrants, several urban planners wrestled with the difficulty of assimilating these populations to white, middle-class values. Latinx populations were thus increasingly constructed as a threat to property values, public order, and safety and became more overtly racialized. Simultaneously, the Mission grew into a multi-ethnic region and community organizers used this as an opportunity to build and strengthen unions and coalitions (Howell, 2015, p. 22-3). The Mission demonstrates how boundaries of ethnicity and urban planning politics have and continue to be complexly intertwined. Consider for example how power was leveraged when board officials demarcated the Mission as a Latino Cultural District in 2014, a gesture that arguably does more for the city-state's brand initiative of

[33] See: https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/sfbatv/bundles/187041 …: a broadcast that aired on February 4, 1964, at 7:30 p.m. on KQED Channel 9 in the Bay Area. This broadcast follows author and activist, James Baldwin, in the spring of 1963, as he is driven around San Francisco to meet with members of the local Black community.
[34] See: (Broussard, 1993).

"multiculturalism" while obfuscating a dark history of racial discrimination and colonization.

The Mission as Bohemian Sensibility: Queer, Punk, and Trans Intersections

Given the Mission district was a working-class, multi-ethnic, industrial area since the late nineteenth century and had strong networks of unions and working-class uprising, Martí (2006) argues the Mission developed "…not only as a Latino neighborhood, but as a true bohemia, a relatively affordable place where working-class immigrants, artists, punk-rockers, and gays and lesbians could find home" (p. 8). This mix of "outcasts" was enabled by the discursive and material history of the Mission as oppositional against "urban renewal" and the resulting, but temporary, greater economic accessibility. Rather than align with the idea of a "true bohemia" like Martí, I prefer Rebecca Solnit's (2000) discussion of bohemia as a sensibility and a spectrum that is enabled and enhanced by physical location. This looser definition affords more leverage to think through the dialectical relationship between geographic area and the everyday, ever-changing use of space. As an example, consider the white, queer, working-class writer and literary arts organizer, Michelle Tea, who I first mentioned in chapter one. Arriving in the Mission in 1993, Tea (2013) writes:

> I heard the Mission was where the queers lived. Not the gays — they lived in the Castro. The *queers.* It seemed like I should be there too. I got the room on Albion [and Valencia], hopeful that I could make the $250-a-month rent … There were some cool places … Red Dora's Bearded Lady was an actual San Francisco dyke coffeehouse, and I could not believe such a thing existed. But to hear the folks who'd been in town a little longer than I had, I'd already missed everything (n.p.).

As this quote attests, Tea followed word-of-mouth recommendations about the location that branded the Mission as accessible to her personal income bracket, artistic,

political, and libidinal investments. Tea also contrasts the Mission to its neighboring district, the Castro, which is common. Trans historian, Susan Stryker, describes the Castro as "homocentric" and the Mission as a "a spill-over zone for populations marginal to the gay male society that had rooted there [the Castro] in the 1960s" (2008, p. 37). Similarly, Shawna Virago has said she feels unsafe as a trans woman walking in the Castro district (Horak, 2021). I return to this tension when I discuss spatialized identity in regard to the relationship between SFTFF and Frameline.

The sources I have presented thus far paint the Mission as amenable to a bohemian sensibility and suggest overlaps wherein divergent marginal groups maintained at least some awareness of each other's existence. The mural culture of the Mission also evidences the overlap and awareness of marginalized groups. Solnit argues, "The Mission is home to the most significant concentration of murals in the country, and the murals represent an idea of art as part of everyday life, as a reinforcement of ethnic and sometimes feminist identity, a celebration of radical history, a populist art of the streets for those who use them" (2000, p. 77). A 1994 mural by Jesus "Chuy" Campusano (see Fig. 2) showcases intersections of queer, punk, trans, and multi-ethnic liberationist struggle.[35] This mural is part of the Clarion Alley Mural Project (CAMP), a community art project in the Mission since 1991 that has been maintained by community members for over two decades. Artists' commitment to its preservation highlights investment in maintaining traces of past signifiers of the Mission's oppositional sensibility despite the numerous ways in which the region has become increasingly unrecognizable.

[35] https://clarionalleymuralproject.org/

Figure 2. Clarion Alley Mural 1[36]

Aaron Noble (2015), one of the original six organizers of CAMP writes that the North Mission, where Clarion Alley is located just off Valencia, a stone's throw from the Roxie Theater, was, in the 1990s, "a favored landing spot for immigrants from Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, South America and the Middle East, on top of a latin/black/Chinese/bohemian and lesbian base, on top of an Irish/Italian/Eastern European history" (p. 3). Noble is another voice in the discursive construction of the Mission as an enclave of oppositional and marginalized identities. Diversity does not suggest unity, however, and my intention is not to argue that a bohemian sensibility collectivized the region and its groups toward similar aims. As Sharon Zukin (2010) notes, ethnic and racial communities can experience bohemian enclaves, particularly white artists, as impositions. This is a valid point, but it is also imperative to consider queer, punk, and trans artists of color who have and continue to move between and within

[36] Text reads: "Painted in 1994 by Jesus "Chuy" Campusano. This mural depicts the forces that Chuy saw in the North Mission at that time: punks, modern primitives, Raza organizers, xenophobic politicians & predatory churches. The mural is a reminder of constant struggle & the need to organize. Fists up! Farm worker, flag flying, high. For over 20 years, volunteers have restored this mural, inscribing it with renewed dedication & keeping it a foundational portrait for the alley." See chapter four for a discussion more context regarding the economic forces that helped this project materialize, namely the San Francisco Arts Commission Cultural Equity Endowment Fund.

marginalized identities and group formations and thus experience varying levels of belonging and Otherness.

What strikes me in the articulations of the Mission I have included are the linguistic constructions of identity groups – *bohemians, immigrants, gays, lesbians, dykes, queers, Blacks, latinos, Chinese, punks, modern primitives, raza organizers, feminists, working-class, and artists.* In the context of my research, a significant word missing in descriptions of the Mission is trans. This is not surprising given, as I argued in chapter one, more open discussions about gender as a category, mode, and experience gained momentum in the 1990s. As such, a reoccurring intervention of this research is to include trans in spatial and cultural narratives, in this case in relation to discursive constructions of the Mission.

The presence of trans history is not entirely absent in the built environment. A more overtly encoded mural in the CAMP collection is a small painting of text that acknowledges the trans-led Compton Cafeteria Riots in the Tenderloin District in 1996 (see Fig. 3).[37]

[37] Text reads: "The Compton's Cafeteria Riot happened in August 1966 as a result of police violence against the transgender community. It is the first recorded transgender riot in U.S. history, preceding the 1969 Stonewall Riots of New York. Although San Francisco continues to lead in the struggle for equal rights for the LGBTQI community, trans women's contributions are often overlooked. This mural is a dedication to the work of a few activists among many who have tirelessly fought for a more just, accepting, and righteous San Francisco.

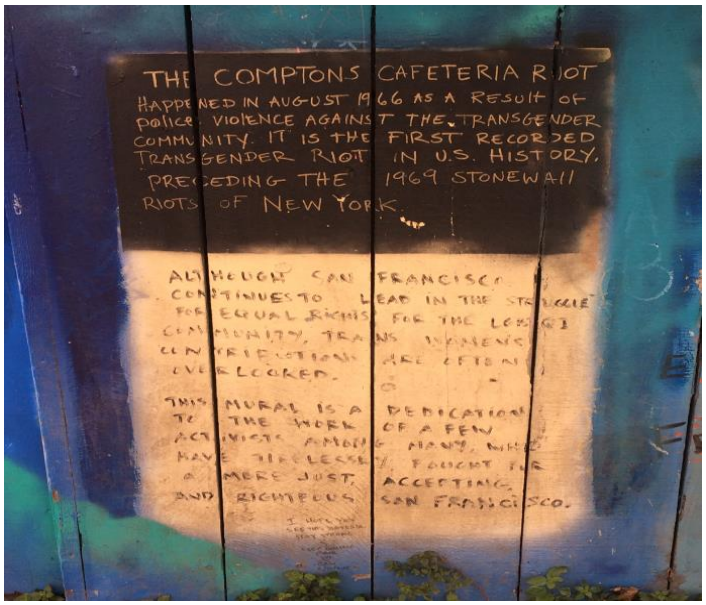


Figure 3: Clarion Alley Mural 2

I first encounter CAMP while doing ethnographic fieldwork, on a walk between screenings at the Roxie Theater during SFTFF's twentieth anniversary. Less than five minutes walking distance from each other, the mural project and iconic theater are both mainstays of the Mission and tell a story of the overlapping histories of multi-ethnic, queer, punk, and trans art and activism in the region.

Roxie Theater

The Roxie Theater, located at the corner of 16th and Valencia, is one of the oldest continuously operating cinemas in the U.S. The theater has undergone several name changes since opening in 1913 as "The Poppy."[38] It wasn't until 1934 that the name officially changed to The Roxie.[39] A small, single-screen theater, the Roxie seats 300.

[38] https://www.roxie.com/about/history/
[39] According to an excerpt from "The Roxie Newsletter of 1979" listed on the history page of the Roxie Theater website, "Roxie [was a] rip-off of the palatial Roxy Theater in New York City, which opened in 1927."

According to Jeffrey Escoffier (2009), in the 1940s the Roxie screened second and third-run Hollywood films, changing in the 1950s to exhibit a broader selection of international content, namely German-language films, in an attempt to lure television viewers out of their homes. To continually combat the changing neighborhood dynamics and to build alternative taste cultures, the theater started screening porn in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1969, when San Francisco became the first American city to screen hardcore films in cinemas, the Roxie was one of twenty-eight theaters to do so. Escoffier argues that five years after the Roxie first screened "beaver films," those that showed fully naked cis women, San Francisco was designated the porn capital of America.

This brief history of the Roxie highlights some of the tensions of the built environment and its uses. On the one hand, the Roxie's development highlights an entrepreneurial cinema palace sensibility of the early 1900s. The moniker "Roxie" itself is linked to the capitalist mogul, Samuel L. Rothaphel, and the theater's history of exhibition content, from foreign language films to porn, suggest the Roxie's investments in both building alternative audiences and maintaining economic stability by charging premium fees for this content. Although the theater owners and operators present aspects of this history on their website, they also actively work to brand the theater according to a taste culture associated with outsider status. The theater's website notes: "The Roxie received 501c3 non-profit status in 2009 and has doubled-down on its iron-willed dedication to showcase the coolest/weirdest/most thought-provoking films of the past, present, and future."[40] Adjectives such as cool, weird, and thought-provoking highlight the theater's attempt to align with aforementioned historical and contemporary bohemian

[40] https://www.roxie.com/about/history/

taste cultures that marked the Mission's identity. While the theater continues to prioritize local arthouse and independent content, an exhibition strategy it has managed to secure by means of non-profit status, it is important not to fetishize non-profits as somehow outside of capitalist ideology, a point I pick up again in chapter four.

Given this discursive construction, it is not unsurprising that SFTFF had its public debut in 1997 at The Roxie. Venue selection is important to the image of any festival. Although exhibition moved to the 500-seat Victoria Theater in 1998 (also in the Mission), it returned to the Roxie in 1999. I have not encountered any evidence that suggests why this shift occurred for a single year, but it seems likely it was an economic decision. Shawna Virago, current Artistic Director, recalls that during her involvement with the festival, there were years, "We couldn't afford the Roxie or any other theater. And then we did the LGBT community center for a couple years. Then we did small kinds of places that are mostly performance spaces that had the capabilities of screening films or DVDs or digital files and then we finally got back in the Roxie" (personal communication, June 19, 2019). The sentiment of "getting back" to the Roxie suggests a longing for this space and reveals the significance of the Roxie for SFTFF's identity as festival with queer, punk, and trans investments firmly rooted in histories of the Mission. Although I have already presented several sources that note the intersecting identities of the Mission, I now turn to a discussion of a film that I read as an alternative archive of queer, punk, and trans intersections in the Mission in the 1990s.

Representation of the Mission in *Valencia: The Movie/s*

Valencia: The Movie/s (Anthony et al., 2013) is a multi-authored interpretation of Michele Tea's Lambda Award-winning memoir, *Valencia* (2000) and is summarized as the following on Vimeo, the website where the film can be purchased for 72-hours of streaming:

> A collaboration between a national community of queer filmmakers to adapt the underground classic memoir into a kaleidoscopic vision of San Francisco's vibrant Mission District in the early 1990s, before the dot-com apocalypse, when the neighborhood functioned as a low-rent playground for a generation of punk lesbians who came of age during the birth of Queer Nation. Valencia documents the rise of punk lesbian diaspora through the experience of Michelle, a single rootless twenty-something searching for sex and love, drugs and adventure.

The film includes the contributions of twenty directors, with each individual or team taking on the subject-matter of one of the book chapters. As Clarke and Landberg (2016) note, the film production came together like a punk zine project through a mode of virtual collectivity in which Tea and fellow producer, Hillary Goldberg, put out calls for filmmakers on social media and the Radar Productions website, a queer, nonprofit literary arts organization founded by Tea. Some filmmakers were commissioned and others pitched their interest, but all filmmakers were required to raise their own funds. Many turned to online crowdsourcing. With the absence of physical shooting location and aesthetic stipulations, some, but not all chapter adaptations were filmed in San Francisco. Thus, the re-interpreted filmic text adds complexity and nuance to Tea's singular version of a queer-punk-dyke/lesbian Mission in the 1990s. Some filmmakers had no physical connection to the time and place of the memoir, and others who had been part of this 1990s Mission "scene" have since moved. Casting involved diverse racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities to play Michelle, her friend groups, and love trysts. Some

filmmakers cast cis men, trans men, genderqueers, and drag queens and kings. I agree with Clark and Landberg (2016) who argue these choices are reflective of ongoing changes in gender politics in the 1990s wherein the exclusionary definitions of gender and sexual categories such as "woman," "lesbian," and "dyke" were challenged by radical queer politics and a growing trans movement. This tension is residual in the film's summary which notes it depicts "punk lesbian diaspora" and the broader term queer. As such, the filmic text invites the viewer to see representations of who is often missing in narratives of the Mission in the 1990s – trans subjects, trans experiences, and trans histories that overlap with but are also distinct from queer and punk subjects, experiences, and histories.

Rather than focus on formal film techniques or the narrative arc centering around Michelle's love trysts, I engage with *Valencia: The Movie/s* through the framework of an archive to imagine the intersection of queer, punk, and trans lineages in the Mission in the 1990s. Part of the motivation for this archival framing arises during one of my sidewalk conversations on 16th Street, outside the Roxie, between Sunday screenings at SFTFF's twentieth anniversary in 2017. I strike up a casual conversation with a white-appearing trans woman, presumably in her sixties, about her experiences attending the festival since the late 1990s. She recalls looking forward to the event and gestures toward the upper loft space of a bar called "Kilowatt" across 16th Street (See Fig. 4) , a space where she used to live. She tells me she jaunted back and forth between screenings to change outfits and relax with friends. A seemingly insignificant anecdote, her story exemplifies the omnipresent sense of loss that resides within all queer and trans historical

projects. I am struck by the significations and ghosts embedded in that open-palm, ephemeral gesture toward a spatial past.

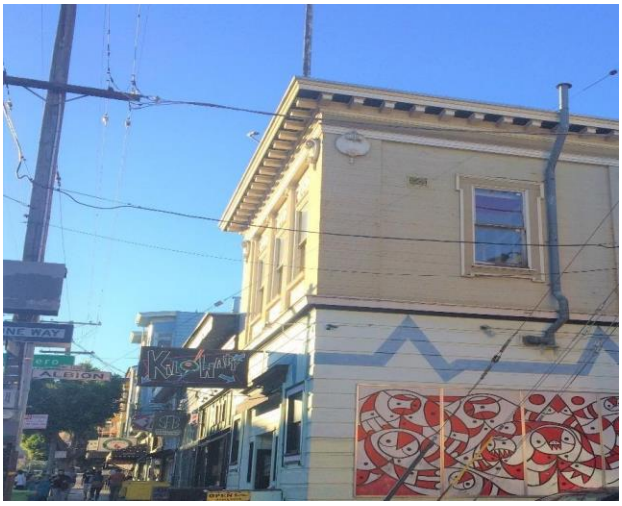


Figure 4: (photographed by the author) Kilowatt, November 2017

About a year later, the Kilowatt resurfaces, as did Michelle Tea's name, in an interview with Mission Local (Smith, 2010), an "on-going oral history and map project produced by [community members] and Mission Local, a daily news community site."[41] In the interview, Tea recalls, "The first place I kissed a female in San Francisco is now the Kilowatt, but back then it was a queer punk dance club called Paula's Clubhouse. Every Tuesday there was a night called Junk, and before that there was something called the Underground 99 Cent Video Club … [where you] pay your 99 cents, and Fabian [the name of the organizer's alter ego] would show all these weird short underground queer films" (n.p.).[42] Tea also recalls it was here that she first found "queer punk girls." She laments that "Paula's didn't last long," but notes, "it was magical." One of the performers Tea distinctly recalls seeing is Mx. Justin Vivian Bond, a now Tony-nominated white,

[41] www.missionlocal.org
[42] https://missionlocal.org/2010/07/my-mission-michelle-tea/

trans performance artist who I mentioned in chapter one as a central actor to queer, punk, and trans circles in San Francisco in the 1990s. SFTFF also held after-parties in the space which again highlights the presence of trans bodies and experiences in the Mission.

In the same interview, Tea notes the importance of the Bearded Lady Café, citing its start by "three punk queers with no resources [who were] pirating electricity half of the time, and making eggs in the espresso steamer" (n.p.). At least two of the original three owners, Harry Dodge[43] and Silas Howard identify as trans, yet the café is typically memorialized as woman/lesbian/dyke space, with more recent articulations of the café as queer space.[44] Again, these spatial articulations are not surprising given the café opened in the early nineties when it was still more common to use essentialist constructions of gender and sexuality (woman/lesbian and man/gay). I mention these two examples to highlight a persistent absence of articulating space with the signification of trans. These are two spaces of the built environment were relevant to intersections of queer, punk, and trans histories in the Mission.

Some of the production elements of the film also demonstrate the value in conceptualizing the text as an archive. For example, the mise-èn-scene in several chapters is bursting with queer and punk ephemera. Throughout the film, Riot grrrl and Queercore bands and song titles are referenced on t-shirts, posters, in dialogue, and provide the soundtrack for a number of scenes, including songs from bands such as Team Dresch, Spinanes, Excuse 17, Fifth Column, and Bikini Kill.[45] Despite this, I do not categorize

[43] Dodge played the role of Dinah in the John Waters' film, *Cecil B. DeMented* (2000) *and* collaborated with Howard in the film *By Hook or By Crook* (2001).
[44] http://lostwomynsspace.blogspot.com/2014/07/red-doras-bearded-lady.html
[45] A common origin story is that Riot grrrl started after the 1991 fatal shooting of a Salvadoran man by a police officer, leading to two days of Black and Latinx youth riots in Washington D.C. Parallel to this, Jean Smith is said to have written to Bratmobile band member, Allison Wolfe, stating, "We need to start a girl

Valencia: The Movie/s as part of a recent trend of Riot grrrl retrospective films.[46] While Riot grrrl was arguably an important movement for Tea and her peers throughout North America, this movement was never monolithic, stationary, or clearly defined, and bands that have been categorized as Riot grrrl, such as Tribe 8, who I discussed in detail in chapter one, never identified themselves as such. My reading of *Valencia: The Movie/s* as an archive thus depends on a post-structural interpretation. In other words, the twenty directors' diverse casting choices and spatial configurations signify multiple, hybrid, and shifting representations of the Mission District and subcultural formations in the 1990s rather than one singular authentic version or scene.

Given that many spaces, production cultures, and linguistic signifiers of identity have shifted since the era the film depicts, I agree with Clarke and Landberg (2016) that the film can be read as both nostalgic and anti-nostalgic. These authors argue, "[The film] displays a nostalgic ethos in its romantic longing for a past San Francisco that no longer exists as well as presents an anti-nostalgic sensibility that attempts to supplant or in some way revise and undo any sense of nostalgia and romanticism for such a past" (p. 165-66). As I've noted, casting choices present racially, ethnically, and gender diverse characters that signify much broader representation of the Mission than Tea's singular memoir.

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riot" (Nguyen, 2012, p. 175). With origins in D.C. and Washington state (notably Olympia), this feminist punk movement is often linked with articulating third-wave feminist politics.

[46] See: (Nguyen, 2012) who notes several recent Riot grrrl revival endeavors including Kerri Koch's 2006 documentary, *Don't Need you: The Herstory of Riot Grrrl,* the 2010 establishment of the Kathleen Hanna Papers at NYU, a conference on hip hop feminism, Riot grrrl and Latina music at Sarah Lawrence College, multiple academic books and journals on the subject, and the films *Who Took the Bomp? Le Tigre on Tour* (Kerthy, 2010), *Grrrl Love and Revolution: Riot Grrrl NYC* (Moser, 2011), *From the Back of the Room* (Oden, 2011), *The Punk Singer* (Anderson, 2013), and the 2017 documentary *L7: Pretend We're Dead* (Price, 2016) about the grunge band that heavily influenced Riot grrrl. This revival is not innocuous, however, and Nguyen (2012) draws our attention to the ways in which women of color did not have the same privileges as white women to engage in experimental expressions of gender non-conformity, sexual agency, and sex work.

Similarly, multi-genre and multi-modal aesthetic approaches create a heterogeneous rendering of the past. These production modes challenge viewers to consider the complex, multiply invested, and therefore uncategorizable experiences of queer, punk, and trans intersections in Mission in the 1990s.

Another aspect that favors an anti-nostalgic reading of the film is lack of representation of a clearly defined pre- and post-tech-boom despite the film's summary that states it depicts "the early 1990s, before the dot-com apocalypse." I read the film, both in its on-screen form and broader production culture, outside the bounds of space and time, even though it attempts to curate a particular time period as "before." Because the film was produced two decades after the era it depicts, I interpret one of its striking aspects as emboldening punk sensibilities in the present and future. As Clark and Landberg (2016) argue, the film is " … a call to inspire further experiments in productive, DIY collective practices…and suggests that subculture can live beyond a particular neighborhood" (p. 172-3).

To offset the risk of being too celebratory of this film, it is necessary to question whether the "scene" Tea wrote about in her memoir was as welcoming of the destabilization of gender categories as the film depicts. Similarly, the casting of actors and directors of color runs the risk of simplifying the lived experiences of intersecting identities of queer and trans people of color living in the Mission. This is not a novel critique, but it is necessary. Nguyen's (2015) argument about the erasure of cis women of color in punk retrospectives, for example, is essential to this discussion because it highlights the "impossibility of complete knowledge" (p. 17) in historiography. There are undoubtedly a number of queer, punk, and trans artists and activists who never knew or

didn't collaborate with Michelle Tea's circles, and the relative accessibility of the Mission for Tea needs to be contextualized as not separate from, but part of the complex processes of gentrification, racialization, and colonization.

Gentrification and its Complicities

Both Virago's quote that SFTFF started at a time before Ed Lee and Mark Zuckerberg destroyed San Francisco and the summary of *Valencia: The Movie/s* as depicting a time "before the dot-com apocalypse," begs the question of how one accounts for the implication and complicities of punks, queers, and trans people's role in processes of gentrification. Brian Godfrey (1988) offers a starting point. He suggests gentrification begins with the influx of "bohemian fringe," which he defines as "single people, counter-culturals, homosexuals, artists, feminist households, and college students," who start to make a place that was once discursively marked as dangerous (read: "ethnic") begin to feel both livable and hip. He argues this "bohemian fringe" has a ripple effect and invites a second wave of gentrifiers that compound the process of displacement for what once was ethnic majority communities and businesses (p. 60). His demographic categories are broad, so it seems more useful to return to the idea of bohemian as a sensibility enabled by certain geographic locations. Sharon Zukin makes a similar argument, noting that in the 1980s, predominantly immigrant areas of New York (but other cities as well) became "ethnic tourist zones" (p. 5) for a bohemian sensibility. Returning to Tea's (2013) reflections, recall that she came to San Francisco from a working-class background and a family with investments in unions. She acknowledges her precarious positionality as a

white, queer, working-class artist and notes that when she arrived in the Mission in 1993, "looking for her queer kin," she was ultimately:

> ...participating in a sinister trajectory that would end with the installation of outright *theme restaurants* on Valencia Street. I didn't know what to do about it. The Mission looked like where I belonged, looked like the places where I'd always lived (n.p).

As this quote attests, Tea was aware of her own participation in the process of gentrification by choosing to live in the Mission even though it was precisely the multi-ethnic, oppositional, bohemian sensibility that rendered the Mission more economically accessible to Tea and other queer, punk, and trans artists and activists. While the Mission's history enabled subcultural formations, anti-capitalist performance cultures, coalition building, and alternative kinship formations, one effect of this bohemian sensibility was complicity with waves of gentrification, whether conscious or not. As Rebecca Solnit (2000) argues, "… gentrification is like air pollution, a lot of unlinked individuals make contributions whose effect is only cumulatively disastrous" (p. 100). Queer, punk, and trans people are thus part of this longer process to varying degrees.

As I have noted, during the 1990s San Francisco experienced what is often referred to as a high-tech or dotcom boom, venture capital, and the new economy. What all of these descriptors point to is the infiltration of young, upper-middle class workers in the rapidly growing tech economies in California. From 1992 to 2000, Silicon Valley companies created upwards of 275,000 new jobs (Corburn, 2009). Many of these young tech (or "dotcom") workers chose to live in the vibrant urban enclaves of San Francisco rather than the San Jose area. The digerati's mass arrival in San Francisco accelerated gentrification in the mid-1990s and much of the early 2000s (Casique, p. 32). As Casique argues, these workers disproportionately relocated in working-class areas such as the

Mission, favoring the measured grittiness of an industrial aesthetic turning chic. However, this narrative should not be naively pinpointed as the origin of gentrification. Rather than pointing blame, I am more interested to think through the significance and impact of change as well as the ways in which resistance to change persists. To do so, I now turn to a more in-depth discussion of theory to provide a framework for my central argument that SFTFF, despite complicities with gentrification, enacts a spatialized form of resistance.

Lefebvre's Right to the City

I primarily put Lefebvre's theory of the right to the city in conversation with Muñoz's theory of the utopian performative as a mode of queer and trans of color world-building to consider how material and cultural aspects of space come together in complex and contradictory ways that both allow for the possibility of utopian revolutionary imaginings and reify State and capitalist power. Once a rural sociologist, in the 1960s Lefebvre began studying "the city" and urbanization as a process with its own autonomous force. Perhaps his most ubiquitous phrase is "the right to the city," first published in 1968 as a treatise of the same name, in French, *Le Droit à la ville.* Mark Purcell (2016) offers a useful reflection on the rapid uptake and "conceptual bloat" of this phrase by academics, NGOs, and activists. Purcell astutely comments on the ways in which this phrase has been misinterpreted. Namely, he argues that contemporary institutions and initiatives understand this phrase according to liberal-democratic ideology, a framework in which the nation-state grants its inhabitants limited access to democratic elections, parties, and laws. From this tradition, the notion of the right to the city tends to mean greater access to existing liberal-democratic rights - a slice of the

already established pie. Lefebvre's analysis, however, calls for moving beyond the state, capitalism, and consumer society.

Key to Lefebvre's formulation of the right to the city is a distinction between *the city* and *the urban*. Per Lefebvre, capitalism shapes the city according to exchange value which then manages the commodified space and largely prevents people from coming together in moments of encounter and play. *The urban* is best understood as a mode or process rather than as material structures (Purcell, 2016). Rejecting economic determinism as the singular formulation to understand the ways in which the city regulates its inhabitants, Lefebvre focuses on the lived everyday experiences of space. The urban, as a mode of being, is stimulated when inhabitants de-alienate space by coming together collectively, overcoming their separation, and creating meaningful interaction – primarily, envisioning more collaborative futures. A tangible example is an urban community garden, but the urban also exists in random encounters. As Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore writes in the quote that opens this chapter, "The dream of urban living has always meant a density of experience, that random moment on the street that changes you" (2020, p. 115).

Lefebvre's theory of the right to the city advocates for the appropriation of space. However, in this sense, to appropriate means to take something and embolden it for the collective good rather than an individualist, capitalist mode of taking and hoarding. He envisions this revolutionary process in both cultural and economic terms that reorient inhabitants toward the use value of space versus a traditional capitalist mode of exchange value. As I have argued, the work SFTFF does is fundamentally different from A-list festivals and business-oriented QFFs because it promotes use value primarily by building

from and extending circuits of care, promoting a punk sensibility to cultural production, grooming a taste culture that values experimental, non-narrative forms, and transmitting liberationist ideology inherent to the queer, punk, and trans lineages from which it was birthed. These are some of what I conceptualize as SFTFF's utopic imaginings.

Lefebvre's right to the city is a utopian ideology, wherein the urban is something on the horizon.[47] For Lefebvre, utopia is not a bureaucratic socialism ruled by a worker's party – an ideal society that is already formulated – but an opening toward a future always in the state of becoming. Lefebvre is careful to distinguish his theory of the urban as distinct from the formulation of an ideal utopia, such as Moore's, that only exists in the abstract. Lefebvre prefers the term "urgent utopia," and defines this as "a style of thinking turned toward the possible in all areas" (p. 288). This formulation is also distinct from an unimaginative realism that accepts existing structures as inevitable and fixed. An urgent utopia acknowledges the tensions between the existing and the possible and every space in the city contains the potential for these urgent utopias to emerge through ephemeral moments of play, connection, and collective imagination. Despite the undoing of the potentiality of the urban due to processes of colonization and gentrification, queer and trans formations continually challenge these changes by building material and ephemeral sites of care. SFTFF, as an exhibition culture, is one such site of care that is invested in offsetting increasing alienation in the city by fostering contact and exchange.

[47] Utopia is conceptually linked to Thomas Moore's use of the English-translated word "utopia" in his 1516 book written in Latin, *De Optimo Republicae Statu Deque Nova Insula Utopia.* Utopia is derived from the Greek prefix "ou," meaning "not," and topos meaning "place." Combined, this is often translated as "nowhere," which constructs its fictionality. In the translation from Latin to Greek, the prefixes "ou" and "eu," meaning "beautiful or good place" collapsed to a single "u." Thus, in the English translation, "utopia" contains both possible meanings (Zielinski, 2008).

Queer Space, Queer World-Building, and Utopias

Theories of space have always been critical to scholars of race, gender, ethnicity, ability, nationality, and sexuality. I am particularly invested in theories of queer and trans world-building as a means to think through the potentiality of spaces appropriated by queer and trans people. The concept of world-building, or world-making, is outlined in Berlant & Warner's article, "Sex in Public," in which they define queer culture as a "world-making project" (1998, p. 558). They distinguish between a world and community or group, arguing the difference is that a world "includes more people than can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond a few reference points" (p. 558). A queer or trans world is not an identity or localizable in a particular space. It may include aspects of these concepts but must also account for virtual sociality and bodies that gather together in space and time (558). A queer or trans world is also divergent, not unified.

Christopher Reed's article in *Art Journal* (1996) helps to elucidate this plurality.[48] He argues that queer space is not concrete because queerness itself is fluid, contingent, and oppositional. If queerness is both an historical identity and a self-proclaimed ontology, any space can become queer through a process of inhabitation or the gaze. However, Reed rightly notes there is never a singular reading of a space. He writes, "The term I propose for queer space is *imminent:* rooted in the Latin *imminere,* to loom over or threaten, it means ready to take place … queer space is space in the process of, literally, *taking place,*

[48] I find Reed's writing about queer space as imminent provocative and productive; however, I cannot ignore his published transphobic remarks in 2018. See: "Conversion Therapy v. Re-education Camp: An Open Letter to Grace Lavery." My engagement with his work does not condone his transphobic commentary. https://blog.lareviewofbooks.org/essays/conversion-therapy-v-re-education-camp-open-letter-grace-lavery/

of claiming territory" (p. 64). This plurality suggests queer space is possible materially and culturally, but an analysis of any particular space and its uses necessitates its own detailed analysis.

Both Berlant & Warner (1998) and Reed's (1996) formulations echo Lefebvre's (1991) notion of the right to the city. In the case of Berlant & Warner's (1998), queer world-building is not limited by capitalism's imprint on the normalization and legitimization of heteronormativity. Rather, the queer world develops its own codes, language, and kinship formations and these components mark its inventiveness and fragility. Like Lefebvre's notion of the urban as a mode of daily interactions that de-alienate a city's inhabitants, queer world-building often exists in mobile and ephemeral gatherings (i.e. performance, cursing, parades, protest marches, film festivals). Mobility and ephemerality make queer world-building possible, but simultaneously render it and its effects difficult to recognize. Reed's formulation of queer space as imminent – on the horizon and always looming – also relates to Lefebvre's notion of the right to the city because queer space is not about assimilation within normative structures, but appropriation of those structures. My research, a process of searching for "traces of trans encounters" (Miller, 2012, p. 77) in the overlapping worlds of the built environment and ephemerality of the festival's exhibition event also parallels Lefebvre's notion of "urgent utopia" – an orientation toward the future rooted in an awareness of the tensions between the existing and the possible.

It is important to note that Berlant & Warner's (1998) publication has its limitations. Notably, the article has a singular focus on sexuality and sex panics as a disciplining power that led to zoning laws that prohibited spaces of public sex.

Furthermore, it emphasizes whiteness by not theorizing racial difference. Queer and trans of color critique is thus essential to theorize space and its uses because this mode considers connections between queerness, race, and political economy (Ferguson, 2004). Queer and trans of color critiques of space highlight how Berlant & Warner's (1998) focus on public versus private has notable racial and economic oversights. As Chandan Reddy (2011) argues, formulations of home regulate not only gender and sexuality but also race and class. Referencing the representation of ball cultures and houses in *Paris is Burning* (Livingston, 1990), Reddy reminds us that Black and Latinx queers (and trans people) defy the normative models of home that white queer scholars often take for granted. This again highlights how care work for queer and trans people tends to occur outside of the white domestic sphere.

Queer phenomenologist, Sara Ahmed (2006), is also useful to a discussion of queer and trans spatiality in her theorization of the effects of white space. She argues that "spaces acquire the 'skin' of the bodies that inhabit them' (p. 132). This acquisition creates a feeling of being "around whiteness," rendering nonwhite bodies to "feel exposed, visible, and different when they take up this space" (p. 133). Ahmed's argument parallels Lefebvre who writes that: "Activity in space is restricted by that space" (1991, p. 133). In other words, material space has pre-formed limitations about what may occur within its architectural bounds, but bodies that inhabit space have the power to, at times, change these limitations. I want to extend Ahmed's theory to consider the exclusionary effects of being "around cisness" for TGNC people, wherein the collective skin of cisness forms both material and affective restrictions that constrain the movements and sense of belonging for TGNC bodies. For SFTFF's co-founder, Christopher Lee, a Chinese and

Polish-American, majority white and cis space, such as Frameline, was likely experienced as exclusionary. Arguably, this became an impetus for him to co-create a more fully realized space in which he and other trans people of color could center and celebrate trans audiences, filmmakers, and art when trans cultural production remained on the periphery of predominantly white gay and lesbian cultural production.

This move of differentiation has not led SFTFF to embolden itself as a business-oriented film festival. Rather, as I have argued, because of its intersecting queer, punk, and trans lineages, SFTFF largely remains "off-the-map" in contrast to business-oriented QFFs such as Frameline. In an impromptu conversation with Shawna Virago on opening night of the twentieth anniversary of SFTFF in 2017, she mentioned an interview for the website, Shondaland, in which Molly Savard wrote, "A few friends in Northern California got together to launch a scrappy, start-up film festival that would better represent their point of view." Virago noted:

> We got interviewed by this magazine, *Shondaland*. Shonda Rhymes has a magazine and they called us a scrappy little festival. And there's some truth there. We're scrappy and I also think we really try to prioritize, keep an alternative vision of our gender rebellion. And I think we try to hold true to that … I think it helps that Christopher [Lee] and I both come from kind of a punk rock place …(personal communication, November 10, 2017).

Virago's acceptance of the framing of SFTFF as "scrappy" and the way she links this to "alternative visions of gender rebellion" and a "vision of punk scenes" recalls a key argument that the festival emerged from the intersections of queer, punk, and trans lineages. These lineages also translate to the festival's spatiality. The "alternative vision of gender rebellion," that Virago articulates is clearly reminiscent of the Missionite identity I previously outlined.

It is useful to return to a spatial comparison between Frameline, which predominantly occurs in the Castro District and SFTFF, which occurs in the Mission District. Writing about Frameline, film festival scholar, Stuart Richards (2016), puts the relationship between the Castro and Mission succinctly when he writes that "the Castro and Mission has given us a spatial map of homonormativity" (p. 225). Although Frameline invites what Zielinski refers to as "endorsed transgression" – a momentary disruption of the "castro clone" (white, affluent, cis gay man), as I have noted, much of Frameline's "diverse" programming tends to occur at the Roxie Theater, which highlights Susan Stryker's description of the Mission as "a spill-over zone for populations marginal to the gay male society that had rooted there [the Castro] in the 1960s" (2008, p. 37). I find these spatial formulations compelling and it is imperative to avoid oversimplification and acknowledge that both the Castro and Mission districts have complex histories and diverse populations, including intersecting identities within gay male communities.

Frameline commonly screens their trans-specific programming at the Roxie, maintaining an ongoing demarcation between Mission District/Roxie Theater and Castro District/Castro Theater. Recall Jed Bell, trans filmmaker and poster-maker for SFTFF's, assessment that the Castro Theater is for "gays," the Victoria Theater is for "lesbians," and the Roxie Theater is for "trans people" (personal communication November 4, 2019). In 1997, Marc Siegel wrote about the contentions between lesbian-identified and gay-identified film producers and festival audiences and suggested the Roxie became the place for lesbian content in the late 1990s, in part because it was closer to the historical Women's Building and in a neighborhood with a richer history of queer cis women. These two anecdotes of the cultural significance of exhibition spaces reiterate how space

is symbolically demarcated and depends on the narrator's positionality. Siegel's demarcation of the Mission as an enclave of queer cis women echoes my previous discussion of the erasure of trans identities in narrations of space and its uses. My intent is not to suggest there is a clear spatialized division because I contend that queer, punk, and trans content and identities overlap and destabilize the rigidity of these categories. However, it is worth noting that relationships between identity and content, to some extent, have spatial demarcations that have persisted.

Demarcations of space also enable liberationist potential. José Esteban Muñoz (1999) theorization of utopic imaginings helps to elucidate the power of queer and trans bodies of color that gather and make use of space for their own ends. One of his central arguments is that queer and trans of color performance cultures, which include performers, venues, and audiences, enable a project of queer and trans of color world-building that defies the limitations that white queer bodies imprint on space. For example, he discusses the Los Angeles bar, Spaceland, a predominantly Black gay, lesbian, and trans space on the outskirts of the West-Hollywood gay map. It was within this venue that Muñoz crossed the "metaphorical threshold between the punk world and gay life" (2013, p. 105). Punk and queer intersected at Spaceland to embolden experimentation that Muñoz experienced as movement between "identifications, lifeworlds, and potentialities" (p. 105). In other words, queer and trans of color appropriation of space can enable a sense of futurity wherein other worlds become imaginable.

Muñoz's theorization of queer world-building broadens Berlant & Warner's (1998) focus on sexuality and space because Muñoz's use of the term queer includes analysis of both gender and sexual deviance in the performers and artists he analyzes.

This is why I refer to his theory as queer and trans of color world-building. For example, he writes about the Black, LA-based artist, Vaginal Davis. While he refers to Davis as a drag performer, his discussion of drag of color performance engages with drag beyond the oft-cited Judith Butler's discussion of drag in *Gender Trouble* (1990). Because the history of SFTFF includes a multiplicity of subjects who have moved within and between various modes of gender performance and identification, I want to linger on this point for clarification.

Succinctly, trans scholars have aptly critiqued Butler. Vivian Namaste (2000), for example, argues Butler and her successors often focused on drag queens as signifiers of the contingent nature of sex/gender relations through their performances but critiqued transgender or transsexual ontologies as mimetic of a hegemonic sex/gender system. Namaste argues that transsexual and transgender bodies and experiences are viable, lived experiences that exist outside of performance venues. Jay Prosser (2013) also critiques Butler's analysis of drag and argues one of the effects of her work was to yolk queer sexuality to trans experience in a formula wherein transgender equals queer equals subversive. This ignores that not all transgender subjects identify a queer sexuality or politic (Prosser, 2013). Added to these critiques, my reading of Muñoz's analysis of queer of color performance venues, cultures, and performers of color such as Vaginal Davis, is a rejection of the notion of authenticity forthright. In other words, queer of color critique rejects gender and sex essentialism and considers how race, gender, nationality, sexuality, and class are irreducible components of identity and experience. Thus, in my reading, queer of color critique and the utopic imaginings articulated by Muñoz productively work to challenge both gender and sexuality.

As an analytical mode, queer and trans of color critique asks us to consider the ways in which bodies of color have historically never been granted full accessibility to normative gender or sexual categories. In other words, this mode of theorization claims that a drag queen or king of color or a trans person of color is part of an emergent social formation that exceeds the racialized boundaries of sex and gender (Ferguson, 2004). That bodies of color use cultural production, performance, and performance spaces to enact multiple modes for doing gender and sexuality, for creating circuits of care, new kinship norms and structures, and for embodying gender ontologies other than those accounted for within a colonial gender binary system (Lugones, 2007), highlights only a few examples of the ways in which queer and trans bodies of color creatively transgress limitations of material and cultural space. Therefore, I read Muñoz's articulation of queer of color world-building as accommodating to theorization of multiple gender formations.

Muñoz also extends Lefebvre's theorization of utopia. He articulates a theory of "utopian performatives" as a politics of emotion in queer and trans of color performance cultures. He writes, "Utopia is an ideal, something that should mobilize us, push us forward. Utopia is not prescriptive; it renders potential blueprints of a world not quite here, a horizon of possibility, not a fixed schema" (2009, p. 97). Similar to Lefebvre, Muñoz argues that utopia is not a critique of the here and now, but a vision of futurity that is "against capitalism's ever expanding and exhausting force field of how things are and will be" (2009, p. 99). Queer and trans of color performance cultures and spaces enable world-building in a collection of encounters, gestures, and affects that continue to live into the future as signifiers of what may come. Although Muñoz predominantly

writes about live performance cultures and visual art, his theories translate to my analysis of SFTFF as an exhibition culture that mobilizes queer and trans of color world-building.

The Spaces of SFTFF

Muñoz's (2013) formulation of queer and trans of color world-building as a utopian performative provides a framework for spatial analysis of SFTFF. I contend that SFTFF's appropriation of the Roxie Theater affords queer and trans of color world-building as a future imaginary while also linking to a rich history of the Mission District's past as oppositional space. In a material sense, the Roxie is still in continuous operation in what was once largely an immigrant, working-class, and bohemian neighborhood and therefore maintains a sense of staying power amidst the violent and ongoing waves of displacement. SFTFF could screen films in many locations – a community center, library, home, or gallery. Any of these spaces could arguably afford a utopian performative, but the consistent and deliberate choice to screen at the Roxie is also a form of protest. Through its rich lineage of queer, punk, and trans activists and artists, SFTFF continues to spatially embolden resistance to capitalism, the State, and consumer society, characteristics that are in line with Lefebvre's articulation of claiming a right to the city, even while these forms of resistance remain precarious given the complex and ongoing processes of colonialism and gentrification that are inextricable from the festival's history. Each year since 1997 that the festival has appropriated space in the Mission, queer, punk, and trans bodies and their histories have appropriated space for their own utopic imaginings. Below, I offer a few ethnographic reflections to demonstrate this trans appropriation of space.

Figure 5: (photographed by the author) Ticket table SFTFF, November 2017

Friday, November 9, 2017, 7 p.m.

I sense the power of SFTFF's historically spatialized form of resistance as I sit on the sidewalk of 16th Street and help hand-rip a roll of red tickets to distribute to attendees of the twentieth anniversary festival. When I look up, I note the frequent side glances and gawks of passersby as they read the makeshift sign taped to the table that reads: "transgender film festival." Some indulge in long gazes or second takes at the bodies gathered on the sidewalk outside the Roxie as if somehow none of us belong, as if our appropriation of the space is imminent. This juxtaposition between here and not here reminds me that even within the space of the festival, reminders of what is "not festival," what exists elsewhere, all the places to which attendees must return, lingers. What feels safe to one, may feel exclusionary, violent, or precarious to another.

Friday November 9, 2018

A year later, I enter the Roxie again and sit next to a Latinx trans man in his forties, something I learn later in our further correspondence online. He informs me he has attended the festival "several years," and after a pause, leans in closer to say, "They

used to screen porn, but it's a little tamer these days." We settle in for the screening and I am anxious to get to the last short – "Happy Birthday, Marsha!" (Dir. Tourmaline, Sasha Wortzel, 2018), starting Mya Taylor (Tangerine).

Happy Birthday, Marsha! (Tourmaline & Wortzel, 2018) premiered at Outfest Fusion in LA in March 2018, and played at two trans-specific festivals, Translations (Seattle) and SFTFF in 2018 (among other QFFs) before being purchased by Amazon Prime. The SFTFF program summarizes the film as follows:

> This film commemorates Black trans activist and performer Marsha "Pay It No Mind" Johnson and her role in instigating the 1969 anti-policing riots at the Stonewall Inn, a watershed event for the gay liberation movement. The film interweaves imagined scenes with found archival footage to counter the endemic erasure of trans women of color from narratives of political resistance.

The film's website goes further into the significance and vision of the film:

> Our work addresses the systematic erasure of rich legacies of trans and queer activism and art by creating artworks that revisit and re-imagine these stories. We mine existing archives and create new ones to address how our relationship with the past shapes our understandings of the present. We look back in order to dream a way forward . . . trans women of color are on both sides of the camera.

The utopian performative lives in this quote and the intention to mine existing archives and create new ones as well as dream a way forward. Marsha P. Johnson is a known, respected, and revered elder to many TGNC people, but the work of cinematically centering her life of resistance, activism, and creativity is only beginning to emerge and ripple out into other dimensions queer worlds. This short film project also carried significant political weight, exemplified in the controversy about director, David France's documentary, *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson* (2017), which screened at several queer film festivals and was picked up by Netflix. On Saturday, October 7, 2017,

one day after France's film was released on Netflix, Tourmaline, co-director of *Happy Birthday, Marsha!* wrote on Instagram:

> [T]his week while I'm borrowing money to pay rent, david france is releasing his multimillion dollar netflix deal on marsha p johnson. i'm still lost in the music trying to #pay_it_no_mind and reeling on how this movie came to be and make so much $ off our lives and ideas… This kind of extraction/excavation of black life, disabled life, poor life, trans life is so old and so deeply connected to the violence Marsha had to deal with throughout her life.[49]

By centering Tourmaline's comments, my intention is to give trans women of color the platform in this situation (France denies these allegations) and to highlight the ongoing erasure of trans people, and trans women of color in particular.

With the opening sequence, the audience erupts into applause at the sight of Mya Taylor dressed in Johnson's famous headpiece regalia. In this moment of recognition and applause, a utopian performative emerges. The first scene invites the viewer into the past, into trans ancestry, a place and time where one does not exist, yet simultaneously exists in real space, the theater and communal viewing experience, and historical spaces of archival footage. This utopian performative allows audience members to insert themselves within a lineage of grief, rage, and care, critical affects I have highlighted as central to intersecting queer, punk, and trans lineages. In one of the last scenes of the film, a reenactment of the Stonewall Inn riots, Taylor-as-Marsha hurls her drink in the face of a white police officer. Another eruption of applause ripples through the theater in this moment of recognition at the mobilization of anger and defiance in the face of

[49] See: (Anderson, 2017). This write-up in the LA Times features the controversy, including Twitter comments by France: https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-marsha-p-johnson-doc-reina-gossett-david-france-20171009-htmlstory.html

systemic violence. I read this applause, this raucous moment, as a utopian performative and poignant reminder that indeed, trans people "bash back."

These moments of applause, something I imagine only occurring in an audience of TGNC people, highlight a key argument in Halberstam's article "Imagined Violence/Queer Violence" (1993). Halberstam discusses counter-possibilities that are opened on screen and in theaters, spaces where subjugated minorities find pleasure in taking revenge against systems that oppress them. Halberstam relates the representation of revenge to activist group, Queer Nation's, "Bash Back" rhetoric and writes, "The power of the slogan … is its ability to represent a violence that need not ever be actualized. There is no 'real' violence necessary here, only the threat of real violence" (p. 193). Although I would argue that real violence is at times very necessary, the threat of violence is also powerful. Halberstam's formulation recalls Reed's (1996) definition of queer space as imminent and extends Muñoz's theory of the utopian performative through a depiction of a historical act of defiance envisioning a better future for everyone sitting in the cinema audience and for generations to come.

This single film is one of many that exemplifies how SFTFF emboldens a utopian performative by screening films that center trans histories, trans people seizing the means of production, trans people having affirming sex, laughing, dancing, reflecting existentially, resisting the trope of an autobiographical imperative, and bashing back against systemic form of oppression. The material, screen, and spectatorial spaces that SFTFF emboldens, as utopian performatives, envision new worlds in which queer, punk, and trans lineages are not erased, but discovered, emboldened and extended to the

potentiality of more imminent horizons in which trans bodies, particularly BIPOC youth, get to grow up.

Sunday, November 11, 2017, 4 p.m.

The twentieth anniversary festival ends after the last screening on a Sunday afternoon. I ascend the stairs of the neighboring "Little" Roxie Theater to the projection booth where my carry-on suitcase is stowed next to a stack of film reels. I hug Shawna Virago and some of the organizers I met. They all sit tiredly eating cake in the lobby. As I reluctantly wheel my suitcase out the door, turning away from the festival space, but oriented toward the worlds envisioned in the utopian performative the festival enabled, I begin walking down 16th Street to catch the BART to the airport and ask myself: where am I, now?

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined spatial theorization of SFTFF. In film festival studies, spatiality has become its own sub-field and film festivals are typically understood according to two general frameworks: as prominent factors in "urban renewal," tourism, and city branding, and through a "livable cities" approach that focuses on local articulations of place, identity, and community formations. SFTFF is part of the latter division given its investments remain largely "off the map" to the broader film festival world. As such, I have argued that SFTFF predominantly claims space for use value rather than exchange value. This is evidenced in its investments to provide care work that builds artistic, activist, and kinship circuits, promotes a punk sensibility to cultural production, and provides a celebratory exhibition culture of self-expression and dialogue.

I have outlined how these values are deeply linked to and aligned with intersecting histories of the Mission District where SFTFF debuted in 1997 and where it continues to gather at the Roxie Theater.

Drawing from Lefebvre's theory of the right to the city and Muñoz's theory of the utopian performative as a mode of queer and trans of color world-building, I have analyzed how material and cultural aspects of space come together in complex and contradictory ways that both allow for the possibility of utopian revolutionary imaginings and reify State and capitalist power. Following Muñoz, I have argued that queer and trans of color performance cultures and spaces enable world-building in part by transforming and transporting audiences through collective gestures and affects emboldened on screen and within SFTFFs exhibition culture more broadly. Continuing its rich lineage of queer, punk, and trans intersections in activism and art, SFTFF spatially emboldens resistance to capitalism, the State, and the ongoing displacement of marginalized populations, providing opportunities for spontaneous encounter and world building that imagine the world otherwise, even if ephemerally and precariously given colonization and its evolution into forever waves of gentrification.

CHAPTER V
SELLING OUT OR HOLDING OUT?

From the outset of this research, one of my primary curiosities was why this festival changed its name in 2011. I encountered stories about the festival name change in my interviews, archival research, and a process of historicizing cultural policy and arts funding in the United States and San Francisco. Both cultural and economic factors were at play in the pivotal nomenclature decision, and in this chapter, I link the story of the festival's name change to the role nonprofits have played in queer arts and cultural production as well as broader cultural discourse about the T-word. The case study of this festival's name change serves as a reminder for how cultural and economic forces are always shaped by and influence each other.

The long-standing debate between Cultural Studies and Political Economy as divergent methods for studying media with little to no intersection is demythologized through this case study of the festival's name change and by contextualizing this case study with a brief history of arts funding in America, specifically heightened debates now labeled as the "culture wars." The theoretical approach I take in this chapter aligns with Raymond Williams who writes that a materialist critique is concerned with people "working on physical things and the ways they do this, and the relations they enter into doing it" (1983, p. 200). A blend of economic and cultural analysis also aligns with Critical Media Industries (CMIS). A CMIS approach is useful because emphasis is placed on the importance of case studies that "examine strategies (larger economic goals and logics of large-scale cultural industries) and tactics (the ways in which cultural workers seek to negotiate, and at times perhaps subvert, the constraints imposed by institutional

interests to their own purposes" (Havens, Lotz & Tinnic, 2009, p. 247). What emerges in this case study elucidates the dialectical relationship between power and resistance, infrastructure and politics, and the ways in which punk, as a sensibility, manifests as a tactic by which SFTFF performs care work and navigates the precarity of nonprofitization as a hegemonic framework in the arts world.

The Arts in America: Federal Level

In 1778, the first president of the U.S., George Washington, said: "Arts and science are essential to the prosperity of the state and to the ornament and happiness of human life" (Henderson, 2005, p. 10). Each subsequent president has, to differing degrees, contributed to discursive debate about the meaning of art in America. President Buchanan founded a National Arts Commission, Taft created a Fine Arts Commission, and Roosevelt helped employ actors, musicians, writers, and other artists as part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) of the New Deal, a program that sought to keep as many Americans employed as possible to restore the pre-Depression economy. Eisenhower's State of the Union address advocated for the government to officially recognize arts and cultural activities, and by the 1960s, Kennedy pushed to establish the first official federal arts agency. In 1964, Congress established the National Council on Arts to make recommendations regarding cultural development in America and by 1965, under the presidency of Johnson, the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) was established as part of the Arts and Humanities Act (Henderson, 2005).

Unlike several other countries, the U.S. does not have a Ministry of Culture that directly funds the arts and culture sector. Rather, the U.S. operates according to a hybrid

funding model. The U.S. exemplifies a *Patron State* model because it funds arts through arm's-length arts councils. For example, since its inception, the NEA has disbursed appropriations to states with official arts agencies. Not surprisingly, within a few years of the NEA's emergence in 1965, nearly every state had developed an arts agency in order to receive these funds (NEA, 2012). Within the *Patron* model, the government distributes a yearly specified allotment to arts councils (which exist at regional, state, and local levels) but has no direct input regarding what subsequent organizations or which artists receive appropriations. In this arm's-length model, politicians claim a level of distance from artistic production and thus denounce responsibility for "artistic failure" or controversy about content. The NEA is the primary federal arts funding agency and has largely persisted over time because of this framing of governmental non-interference with the arts. An ideology of non-interference aligns with the first amendment that claims the U.S. protects dissent and minority views and that this protection decentralizes power. I refer to non-interference as an ideology, and thus challenge the idea that the government truly remains at arm's-length. For example, consider that each president can appoint an NEA chairperson and that NEA appropriations are determined by a rotating panel of actors. Federal power structures largely define the role of the NEA and debates about its function become a channel for deeper questions such as what it means to be American, what constitutes democracy, the function of art, and how symbolic power should or should not be regulated. These debates were particularly prevalent during the period commonly framed as the "culture wars," an era I go on to discuss at length later in this chapter.

The second arts-funding model the U.S. enacts is that of the *Facilitator State*. The *Facilitator* model funds arts primarily through tax expenditures, determined by individual and corporate donors. The general role of the *Facilitator State* is to promote diversity within the nonprofit "amateur" and fine arts. In other words, creativity and access are centralized as more important than certain styles of art or the notion of "excellence." The premise follows that corporate, foundation, and individual donors will leverage their tastes and steer arts engagement through their tax-exempt donations. The *Facilitator* role is historically linked to three U.S. traditions: the notion of a competitive market economy with its own fluctuations and forces, the separation of church and state, and a long history of private philanthropy, which, after income taxes were established, represented the greatest source of arts funding (Chartrand & McCaughey, 1989). A facilitator funding model makes up the lion's share of arts funding in the U.S. This is unsurprising given that since 1917 donors have received tax exemption for financial appropriations to nonprofits.[50] This scheme aids the U.S. tax system and sustains the ideology of arm's-length funding. Combined, America's hybrid *Patron-Facilitator* model has both strengths and weaknesses. Debates about these models often fall along party lines. One of the most prominent ideological battlefields regarding arts funding and the role of the NEA emerged in the era termed the "culture wars."

[50] The IRS determines what organizations receive nonprofit, or 501(c)(3) status. To claim tax-exempt status, nonprofits must have one or more characteristics: "Charitable, religious, educational, scientific, literary, testing for public safety, fostering national or international amateur sports competition, or the prevention of cruelty to children or animals" (NEA, 2102, p. 19)

The "Culture Wars"

The "culture wars" are often periodized between the late 1980s and mid-1990s and are thus contextually significant to an analysis of SFTFF's emergence in 1997. The discursive arguments that took place in this era had their own cocktail of buzz words like censorship, propaganda, and pornography, and these are debates that both preceded and follow the temporal demarcation of the ideological framing of a discrete period. As I noted previously, since the NEA's inception in 1965, philosophical questions about what it means to be American, what constitutes democracy, the function of art, and how symbolic power should or should not be regulated have been persistent. These debates were notably publicized in national news media in the late 1980s to early 1990s because a handful of NEA-funded artists and exhibition venues challenged American hegemonic values. As Richard Bolton (1992) outlines:

> Between 1985 to 1990, artists were increasingly … creating work that some considered to be obscene, pornographic, blasphemous, politically motivated, or degrading of national symbols. Those artists – whose work addressed specific social issues such as war, economics, racism, environmental concerns, immigration, multiculturalism, gender representations, sexuality, and AIDS – and by extension their sponsors (the NEA, state arts councils, foundations, museums, and so on), were criticized by Congress and the national media for the content of their outspoken work (p. xv).

There is a long history of art as an outlet for political dissent that subsequently drew public and governmental scrutiny. What is unique about the 1980s and 1990s is the overlapping social issues that inspired swells of direct action, activist art, and increased scapegoating and moral panic from influential conservative groups.

Between 1989 and 1990 the NEA became a national talking point as it came to signify the meaning of art and morality in America. At the federal level, the loudest voices in this debate were divided along political party lines that became the stand-in

frameworks for media reporting. Liberals asserted the first amendment should protect the rights of artists to produce their work and that any NEA interference was censorship and a violation of those rights. Conservatives rallied around the argument that NEA appropriations were forms of sponsorship, that Congress needed to wisely spend tax dollars, and that provocative art backfires on federal funding because it offends taxpayers. As such, conservatives argued that limited NEA funding was one way to regain power over liberal and leftist artists' agendas to question the government, promote multiculturalism, feminism, sexual liberation, and recruit people to a gay and lesbian "lifestyle." To conservatives, these so-called agendas were moral atrocities that renounced family values, were anti-government, anti-religion, and therefore anti-American.

From a Bourdieuian perspective, the liberal positions I have outlined broadly align with the idea of "art for art's sake" whereby artists are positioned as visionaries who can reveal social ills, make social commentary, or simply indulge in the creative forces of their own imaginaries. This aligns with notions of the avant-garde, which since the twentieth century, in terms of cultural production, typically refers to new or experimental art forms. In the eighteenth century European Romantic era, "art" was based on a premise that objects and practices should be primarily appraised for their aesthetic value versus their functional value even if they provide something such as "entertainment." From this notion "art" was considered symbolic rather than material. Film festivals had origins in this philosophy of "art for art's sake," and as such prioritized aesthetics versus functionality (de Valck, 2016, p. 103). Even in their origins, however, film festivals had to contend with the notion of "art for art's sake" while also

maneuvering within material constraints of governments, economics, industry, and technology. These tensions between ideology and materiality are why Bourdieu breaks with the romantic notion of "art for art's sake" and argues that art is like any other cultural field, with its own historically contingent rules, discourses, agents, institutions, capital, and so forth. As I noted in chapter two, for Bourdieu, culture and art are always in relation because culture is what defines and legitimizes what is considered art (Webb, Schirato & Danaher 2002, p. 152).

In the U.S., the "art for art's sake" ideological position demands that artists should be protected by the first amendment. However, as Bolton (1992) argues, conservatives know that "Government subsidy helps to free artists from the pressures of the marketplace, and this helps create a space where alternative views of the world can be articulated. This situation is feared precisely because it gives the artist independence, and furthermore, some means to critically examine the marketplace, and its social and ethical underpinnings" (p. 12). While federal funding cannot grant absolute independence, it can loosen the degree by which an artist or group of artists must engage with the commercial marketplace, even while artists and their representatives are required to quantify and report on their impact and justify the timeliness and importance of their work.

To see how these ideological debates played out during the era framed as the "culture wars," I focus on two flashpoints that are salient to contextualizing SFTFF because of the ways in which they sparked discussion about "deviant" gender and sexuality. In 1987, the Southeastern Center of Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem, North Carolina received $75,000 from the NEA. These grants enabled ten artists to showcase a traveling exhibition, including Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ,* a photograph

that depicts a small plastic crucifix submerged in a small glass of the artist's urine. In 1988, the year Reagan was succeeded by George W. Bush, the University of Pennsylvania received an NEA grant of $30,000 to exhibit retrospective works. The Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia showcased Robert Mapplethorpe's *The Perfect Moment,* a collection of twenty-five years' worth of his photography including nude portraits of Black men, flowers, and sadomasochism. Serrano and Mapplethorpe became signifiers of a national debate about the NEA's role in arts funding and these events catalyzed print headlines and broadcast news to report on the "culture wars" for the next several years. According to Richard Bolton (1992), "Most of the public was informed about the NEA debate through the exaggerated statements of legislators, activists, and editorialists, and through one-line 'summaries' of the works and artists in question slipped into the evening news" (p. 16). The topic of arts funding doesn't always make headlines, but when confrontational art that addressed sex, sexuality, race, gender, and religion intersected at this particular moment and within a conservative government's agenda, art became a gateway to focus on broader ideological debates.

Alongside this media sensationalism, Congress debated the NEA's funding procedures and the House passed a bill to reduce NEA funding in 1990. In 1991, Senator Jesse Helms introduced what became known as the Helms Amendment. This legislation restricted the NEA from funding what he defined as "obscene" – defined as that which depicted "sadomasochism, homoeroticism, the sexual exploitation of children, or individuals engaged in sex acts and which, when taken as a whole, do not have serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value" (Bauerlein & Grantham, 2009, p. 94). This legislation was modified to coincide with *Miller v. California,* the 1973 Supreme Court

decision that stands as the legal definition of obscenity (artists, as citizens, are subject to the *Miller* ruling whether they receive funding from the NEA or not). After the Helms amendment passed, the NEA asked future grantees to sign statements promising not to produce "obscene" works. As a result, some artists protested, resulting in the rejection of hundreds of thousands of NEA dollars and lawsuits against the NEA (Bolton, 1992).

By the mid-1990s, an independent commission formed to study the NEA's grant-funding procedures with the goal to determine whether there should be standards for the funding of privately versus publicly funded art. With conflicting demands playing out in the realm of the NEA, this was not an easy task. The commission concluded that "freedom of expression is essential to the arts" but that "obscenity is not protected speech." The commission declared the NEA was "prohibited from funding the production of works which are obscene" and that the NEA was an "inappropriate tribunal for the legal determination of obscenity" (Bauerlein & Grantham, 2009m p. 107). Given the obscurity of the commission's declarations, controversies raged and for the first time in U.S. history, the NEA was a centerpiece issue of a national election campaign.

Patrick Buchanan ran on a "culture war" platform and called for the abolishment of the NEA. In a 1992 presidential campaign commercial, Buchanan ran an ad with rolling text over "graphic" clips of *Tongues Untied* (Riggs, 1989), an experimental documentary that features personal accounts and poetry that depicts the specific silences, injustices, and erotic power of Black men loving Black men. The rolling text in the television commercial states:

> In the last three years the Bush administration has invested our tax dollars in pornographic and blasphemous art, too shocking to show. This so-called art has glorified sexuality, exploited children, and perverted the image of Jesus Christ. Even after good

people protested, Bush continued to fund this kind of art. Send Bush a message! We need a leader who will fight for what we believe in. Vote Pat Buchanan for President.[51]

Given these ideological tensions, John Frohnmayer, then chairperson of the NEA, became the first of his rank to resign. With Republicans in control of the House and Senate in 1994, a call to fully eliminate the NEA ensued and in Richard Jensen's history of the "culture wars," he writes that these debates reached a pinnacle in 1995 as Republicans sought to defund and privatize the NEA, the National Endowment of Humanities, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Massive budget cuts followed as did the ongoing ideological wars, but the NEA was never completely defunded. It was, however, severely reformed. Between 1996 and 1998, Congress initiated several procedural changes to the NEA. The number of grants dropped from 4,000 in 1995 to 1,000 in 1997, the year SFTFF held its first public exhibition event. Additional economic downturn impacted the arts after the 9/11 attacks in 2001 given a severe drop in donations to nonprofits, reduced state and local arts funding, plummeting tourism and travel, and disappearing audiences.

While the effects of this era framed as the "culture wars" lingered into the new century, the ninth chairperson of the NEA, Dana Gioia, who served between 2003 and 2009, began focusing on the role and importance of public art, particularly in high schools and at regional and local levels. Coinciding with U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, Gioia worked to mobilize the military and their families in arts and storytelling (i.e. "Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experiences). His focus on youth literacy, regional arts, the military, and family values all contributed to attempts to rebuild the NEA as bipartisan and for the first time in several years NEA budgets

[51] https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4679699/user-clip-pat-buchanan-ad-featuring-tongues-untied

increased in 2007 (Bauerlein & Grantham, 2009). When the 2007-2009 recession hit, federal and state arts funding again plummeted, followed by fiscal year 2009-2010 during which the NEA's annual appropriations went up again as a result of Obama enacting the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to create and protect jobs after the recession. In 2011, NEA appropriations once again decreased, and during Trump's presidency, he repeatedly called on Congress to defund the NEA yearly between 2107 and 2019.

The purpose of this brief history of the role of federal government in arts funding in America is to show how vulnerable the NEA is to shifting power structures at the federal level, as well as to provide some background to consider the "culture wars" as a periodized receptacle of ideological debates about the meaning of art and arts funding, particularly definitions about "obscene" art and corollary representations of "deviant" gender and sexuality. While these years were formative in terms of these debates, ideological tensions are ongoing. Queer and trans artists were both the catalysts of the sensationalization of the "culture wars" in mass media and the scapegoats of the regressive policies that ensued. I now turn to think about how these ideological debates played out for queer and trans cultural production in media industries, particularly in San Francisco.

The "Culture Wars" and Queer and Trans Cultural Production

First, it is useful to briefly contextualize how the framing of the era known as the "culture wars" affected Frameline. Recall that Frameline is a non-profit media arts organization that produced the first documented Gay Film Festival of Super-8 Films in

1977, which became known as The San Francisco International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival by the early 1990s, and which now simply goes by the name Frameline. While this dissertation is primarily about SFTFF, I have previously shown there is a relationship between these two festivals. Given Frameline's size and prominence, it is easier to trace the impact the ideological debates of this period had on this organization. Frameline received its first NEA grant in 1988, a year before the conservative uproar against the exhibition of Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* in 1989. Alongside Republican politicians, the fundamentalist Christian non-profit, The American Family Association (AFA), founded in 1977 and originally named the National Federation for Decency, spearheaded much of the movement to defund queer expression, block queer rights, and push for defunding the NEA. The AFA was particularly vocal during this period known as the "culture wars." In 1991, Frameline received its fourth consecutive year of NEA funding and was attacked by the AFA. According to a 2001 press release issued by Frameline, then president of the AFA, Donald Wildmon, wrote to members of Congress stating that NEA chairperson, John Frohnmayer's, support for "the homosexual film festival shows that he is totally out of touch with the vast majority of American taxpayers" (Frameline, 1991, p. 1). Per the press release, Frohnmayer allegedly responded to Wildmon's charge in his own letter to Congress, in which he wrote, "The Endowment does not blacklist nor does it give or refuse grants on the basis of sexual orientation" (Frameline, 1991, p. 1). The films for the June screening in 1991 had not yet been selected and Frameline used this as evidence to argue that Wildmon's outcry was not based on the artistic merit of the films themselves. Frohnmayer's statement accused Wildmon of adhering "only to his 'values,' [and] excluding the diversity which has always been protected in America" (Frameline, 1991,

p. 1). Frohnmayer's use of the word "diversity" is key in this statement, as this became a buzzword in terms of arts funding in the nineties.

The attack on Frameline came after Senator Jesse Helms requested a General Accounting Office (GAO) audit of Frameline's 1990 programming in order to determine if the organization violated the aforementioned Helms amendment that prohibited the funding of "obscene" works of art. This six-month investigation allegedly led the NEA to conclude that Frameline produced "one of the premiere [film] festivals in the world" (Frameline, 1991, p. 2). Per this press release, Frameline audiences and then Executive Director, Thomas DiMaria, saw the AFA's attacks as pure "homophobia." This press release elucidates how Frameline was on the front lines as an media arts non-profit during the era framed as the "culture wars" because of their association with queer rights and visibility.

Individual filmmakers were also recipients of this vitriol. The aforementioned director, Marlon Riggs, associated with the movement termed "New Queer Cinema" I discussed in chapter two, came under attack for his film, *Tongues Untied* (Riggs, 1989). Winning best documentary at Frameline and several other national and international film festivals, Riggs' experimental documentary also screened on POV, television's longest-running broadcast of independent non-fiction films, hosted by PBS. The film was partially funded by a $5000 grant from the Western States Regional Arts Fund, a re-granting agency that distributed NEA appropriations. That year POV also received $250,000 in funding from the NEA (Deane, 2011). AFA President, Wildmon, and several U.S. Senators attacked PBS and the NEA for airing *Tongues Untied* but also rallied around the idea that the American public should see it because it would increase

awareness of how their tax dollars were being spent. As noted previously, Pat Buchanan used images of this film as part of his anti-NEA presidential campaign in 1992. Consequences were complex in that conservatives cited Riggs' text as proof that the NEA sponsored morally corrupt art and were therefore part of the "gay agenda." At the same time, increased attention to Riggs' film also built a broader, appreciative audience, challenging both normative white L/G audiences and validating experiences shared within black queer communities. After Buchanan's illegal use of images from *Tongues Untied,* Riggs won a copyright infringement case and the presidential campaign commercial was removed. Riggs' film remains both celebrated and vilified to this day.

On the ground, queer and L/G artists had intra-constituency debates about the politics of NEA funding. One example involved the "NEA Four" scandal that included vetoing peer-reviewed NEA grants of four performance artists in 1990. After the artists took their case to the Supreme Court and won in the 1993 *National Endowment for the Arts v. Finley,* they were awarded the grant money amounts in question but Congress stopped funding individual artists after this controversy. Reflecting on this, Sara Schulman, writer and activist, called on arts and activist communities to come together to face more pressing issues such as AIDS, homelessness, immigration and healthcare among queer and L/G people rather than NEA funding and censorship among elite artists. In an 1990 opinion piece for *Out Week,* she writes:

> While we must support lesbian and gay arts, we must also refuse the distortion of calling "censorship" of the rewarded while ignoring the thousands who are systematically excluded from support because they don't fit the profile for privilege. Every out gay artist loses grants, gigs, and opportunities and faces bias and limitations throughout his or her career for being gay. This needs to be addressed politically with a recognition of how homophobia works on all levels, not only in the cases of the most visible … ACT UP and Queer Nation are arising. Despite the historically apolitical stasis in which many artists

> have festered, we can still rise to the occasion and participate as activists in these movements, instead of working to maintain an exclusive, tokenizing NEA (n.p.).

Titling her piece, "Is the NEA good for Gay Art," Schulman ultimately responds to her own question in the negative, contending that artists and activists need to fuse into broader coalitional politics that fight not just for federal arts funding for the elite few, but that address ongoing, complex, and rampant disparity of all marginalized identities, particularly queer people of color. Schulman's arguments recall a key point I made in chapter one in which I introduced the direct-action groups of Queer Nation, ACT UP, and Trans Nation and asserted that these direct-action movements animated a punk sensibility that mobilized anger against both hegemonic society and its institutions as well as against normative gays. As I argued, these lineages were key to articulating anti-assimilationist ideology, and are deeply embedded in the organizing principles of SFTFF as an exhibition culture.

Ultimately, what emerges from an analysis of the debates that have been periodized as the "culture wars," particularly at the cultural level of artists and activists within L/G, queer, and trans constituencies, is a familiar tension between leftist, radical approaches to activism and art versus more assimilationist agendas that are motivated in large part by a desire for inclusion within hegemonic systems of power. I return to this familiar and ongoing polarization when I discuss nonprofitization. Now, I turn to an analysis of how arts funding at the level of the state of California and city of San Francisco played out during the nineties.

Arts Funding in San Francisco

Diversity, access, and community are words that circulate in arts funding discourse in San Francisco. Recall NEA chairperson, Frohnmayer's declaration that Frameline represented diversity and that diversity has "always been protected in America." A focus on diversity in the arts world popularized in the 1960s. Prior to artists from minority groups and their representative corollary organizations pushing for greater access to fiscal support, the San Francisco Arts Commission, established in 1932, played a key role in linking arts to the city's desired image of prosperity (Wels, 2013). Beginning in 1932, San Francisco received financing to build the Golden Gate Bridge and the San Francisco-Oakland bridge with the goal of creating a cultural center, or the Paris of the West as I noted in chapter three. City initiatives financed beautification of the city with post-Depression era murals, art as morale boosting after the Japanese attacks of Pearl Harbor, tree planting, the nation's first outdoor artwork exhibition post-WWII, and the fostering of jazz cultures through music venues throughout the 1950s. In terms of film, recall that San Francisco was the first American city to inaugurate an International Film Festival in 1957, which aligned with the city and state-level incentives to build San Francisco as a cultural and artistic landmark according to Western European standards.

Between the 1930s and into the 1960s San Francisco became a spatial locale for growing tension between advocates of "high" art (symphony, opera, ballet, art film) and more diverse, experimental, and challenging "urban art." This dispute came to a head with the 1965 ballot measure Proposition B: Civic Center War Memorial Center Bonds, which, if passed, would include $29,000,000 "for additions and improvement of the War

Memorial Center of the City and County of San Francisco."[52] The Civic Center had an Opera House and Veterans Building that were the birthplace locations of the United Nations and Japanese Peace Treaty. The proposition called to renovate the Opera House, Veterans Building, and add a Musical Arts Building. The mayor at the time linked Prop B to keeping San Francisco as the "Paris of the West," but Wels (2013) notes this ideology was controversial. She writes that "the *Chronicle* reported about whether public funds should subsidize cultural activities that were largely enjoyed by elite audiences or those that were designed specifically for a wide public and reflected changing attitudes and demographics" (p. 72). Prop B lost and Wels defines this as a major turning point in San Francisco's arts and cultural investments. Following this and throughout the sixties, art funding focused on the idea of accessibility and community, and appropriations were directed toward building neighborhood arts facilities, arts instruction in elementary and secondary schools, and adult, college, and professional arts education programs (p. 73).

Access, as a trend, continued with the emergence of the Artists Liberation Front (ALF) in 1966. This group focused on racial minority artists and started hosting free weekend arts festivals in the Tenderloin district. This district is historically known for its enclaves of TGNC people and was the location of the Compton Cafeteria Riots in 1966, one of the first commemorated queer uprisings.[53] In 1967, the Commission funded a Neighborhood Arts Program (NAP) that granted funds and other resources to marginalized community artist groups and sponsored 450 neighborhood arts events between 1968-1969 with city funding, private donations, and NEA support (84). These

[52] https://webbie1.sfpl.org/multimedia/pdf/elections/November2_1965.pdf
[53] In 2019, the City of San Francisco officially commemorated the Tenderloin as the first Transgender Cultural District in the world (Veltman, 2019).

busy early years of activism and minority group demands for greater access to arts funding continued throughout the 1970s until a recession hit in the mid-1970s. By the 1980s, debates continued about access to art in the city, but with the exponential increase in rents, several artists, who had not already, started migrating to Oakland or out of the Bay Area.

The 1990s, overall, ushered in louder minoritarian outcry about the inequity in municipal funding along lines of difference. In response, the San Francisco Arts Commission introduced a Cultural Equity Endowment Fund, one of the first of its kind in the U.S. This was created to support underserved art communities. By the mid-1990s, despite the cultural and economic impact of the "culture wars" era, minority community arts in San Francisco received more funding. This demonstrates how state and local level art communities can experience varying degrees of impact based on funding patterns at the federal level. Sels (2013) writes that in the mid-1990s, "Mission School artists - inspired by graffiti, murals, and the street culture of the Mission District – created whimsical urban artworks using found materials, spray painting, and other nontraditional media. Transgender artists of color, prison and disability groups, and other art subcultures were coalescing into new communities" (p. 139). Recall in chapter three that I discussed the Clarion Alley Mural Project (CAMP) in the Mission District and included an image of a mural originally painted by Jesus "Chuy" Campusano in 1994. Known as "Raza," this mural depicts the coalitional movements of the North Mission at the time. The key insight here is that San Francisco spearheaded cultural equity in arts funding during the "culture wars," in large part because of the vocal and robust minoritarian constituencies that had been fighting for their rights to arts funding and self-expression for years.

Lest I paint San Francisco as some mythological beacon of inclusion and diversity, it is first imperative to note that what we call San Francisco now is stolen native land, and the Mission District is specifically stolen land from the Yelamu Ohlone peoples who had been stewards of the land at least five thousand years prior to Spanish colonial invasion in 1775. Flash forward to the nineties wherein San Francisco, alongside growing American conservatism, enacted repressive policies that targeted intersecting communities of color, immigrants, and gender and sexual minorities. For example, in 1994, Proposition 184 passed, increasing prison sentences, and exacerbating racial disparities in the criminal justice system. In the same year, Proposition 187 passed, declaring undocumented immigrants "ineligible for public and social health services [and] education" (Hosang, 2010, p. 3), a move that Lisa Cacho (2000) describes as being motivated by white injury. The nineties also included many regressive policies in terms of civil rights gains. In 1996, California passed Proposition 209, outlawing affirmative action in "public hiring, contracting, and public education" (Lipsitz, 2006, p. 230). This proposition further disenfranchised members of communities of color who sought access to higher education and employment. The increased funding of arts for communities of color and marginalized groups must therefore be considered within this broader context of regressive policies in the nineties. My key intention here is to highlight how marginalized artists and their adjacent organizations have a long history of fighting for fiscal sponsorship amid regressive policies and how the city and state's response to increase inclusion and financial support needs to be interpreted as both a performative gesture of tokenism as much as one of sincere inclusion.

This brief history of arts funding in San Francisco alongside the regressive policies affecting civil rights, immigration rights, and increasing criminalization of communities of color in the 1990s, provides context for SFTFF's emergence in 1997. What I intend to highlight is that this festival emerged when there was a particular window of opportunity for minority arts. Thus, it arguably profited from the growing coalitional movements of minority artists and their representative organizations that fiercely advocated for marginalized communities across a range of social issues. Similar to arguments I have made in the preceding chapters, the window of opportunity within which SFTFF emerged in the late 1990s is a result of various forces related to queer and punk subcultural formations, space and placemaking, the affordability of new film technology, accessible training and production facilities, and as I have added in this chapter, uproar regarding repressive policies and an increasingly vocal constituency of minority artists and activists.

While ideological debates about the role of the federal government in arts funding and the moral imperatives of the NEA became a platform for presidential candidates and conservative constituencies such as the AFA during the nineties, San Francisco and particularly its Arts Commission reacted by moving in the direction of another list of buzzwords – diversity, inclusion, access, and equity. The introduction of a Cultural Equity Endowment Fund demonstrates how federal, state, and local levels of funding don't always operate on the same trajectory, but also demands critical analysis. Queer of color scholars such as Roderick Ferguson (2004) and Chandan Reddy (2011) rightly argue that performative liberal discourses and their corollary buzzwords like diversity and inclusion are also used to obscure or legitimate forms of state violence and exclusion.

SFTFF and Arts Funding

All of this contextual history demonstrates how SFTFF emerged within a mix of regressive federal and local policies, on the receding tide of the "culture wars," and at a moment when San Francisco was moving toward greater fiscal sponsorship of minority artists. SFTFF's original co-founder, Christopher Lee, was immersed in local and national arts communities throughout the nineties as I have noted. Specifically, Lee's involvement with Dyke TV, hardcore pornography productions, and documentary films about being a trans person of color, highlight salient intersections between his artistic and activist commitments during the "culture war" era. His history is firmly steeped in the growth of DIY, community-based media arts organizations that began receiving more priority and fiscal sponsorship in San Francisco while national debates about art related to gender, race, and sexuality, as in the case of Robert Mapplethorpe, was used to recirculate moral panics about "obscenity" as a threat to American values.

Per Lee's resume, he was also "House Manager/Reception relief" at Film Arts Foundation (FAF) between 1994-1999. The Online Archive of California (OAC) houses FAF archival materials and the collection description describes FAF as "a non-profit organization founded by independent filmmakers in San Francisco, California in 1976, providing services such as professional training, equipment, information, consultations and exhibition opportunities to support artists across the Bay Area. FAF offered a film festival, exhibitions, workshops, grants, fiscal sponsorship programs, and an equipment rental facility. They also published the magazine Release Print. In 2008, they were absorbed by the San Francisco Film Society." Lee's resume lists he received a grant from FAF (year unknown) and archival documents evidence that FAF became the first fiscal

sponsors of SFTFF in 1999, a point to which I will return. Below, I focus on a specific piece of evidence from the collection at the GLBT Historical Society that is useful to explicate some of the ongoing tensions that arose in the nineties between federal, state, and local levels (see Fig. 6). This is a Proclamation by then San Francisco Mayor, Willie Lewis Brown, Jr., and the City and County of San Francisco. It was awarded at the first SFTFF gathering on November 22, 1997 and several subsequent years.

Proclamation

City and County of San Francisco

WHEREAS, throughout history, Transgender people have made major contributions to arts and the human rights movement; and

WHEREAS, **Tranny Fest** is a monumental event that brings diverse communities together including artists, youth, families and people of different ethnicity; and

WHEREAS, **Tranny Fest** is an international venue that promotes the Best of San Francisco by generating and raising standards of positive Transmedia by and about Transgender people; and

WHEREAS, **Tranny Fest** excels in Trans –education through arts, media and performance, expanding this education into universities, health centers and family organizations, thereby changing the hearts and minds of thousands of people; and

WHEREAS, **Tranny Fest** leads the galaxy into a more just and bright future; now

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that I, Willie L. Brown, Jr., Mayor of the City and County of San Francisco, honor Festival directors Christopher Lee, Al Austin and the entire **Tranny Fest** staff and do hereby proclaim November 17, 2001 as…

TRANNY FEST: TRANSGENDER FILM FESTIVAL DAY
in San Francisco!

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the City and County of San Francisco to be affixed.

Willie Lewis Brown, Jr.

Figure 6: Mayor's Proclamation 1997

This artifact can be read as a signifier of the city's ideological investments during the nineties, during which, as I argued, San Francisco was actively involved in constructing an image of its values as progressive, inclusive, and accommodating for minority artists even while extensive regressive policies targeting immigrants, communities of color, and gender and sexual minorities were enacted. One key question

is to what degree this proclamation, a signifier of legitimization by the City, mattered to SFTFF organizers. Steeped in a punk sensibility, it seems likely that there would have been minimal investment in such recognition. As Thompson (2004) argues in *Punk Productions,* "The entire field of punk can be understood as a set of problems that unfold from a single contradiction … between punk, understood as a set of cultural productions and practices that comprise an aesthetic field, and capitalism and the commodity, an economic field and an economic form in which punks discover that they must operate" (p. 2). I have expanded the notion of punk beyond aesthetics and primarily focus on punk as a sensibility in regard to activism, identity, and cultural production, and it is useful to further analyze the economic tension present in the City Proclamation.

One could argue this Proclamation tokenizes SFTFF and trans cultural production more broadly. Such a move by the City can be read as a means for the City to accrue cultural capital in a decade when the City was actively attempting to rebrand itself as accommodating minority artists by setting up new funding pools for diversity. From this vantage point, it makes sense that the City would benefit by discursively awarding SFTFF its own "day" given that, in the nineties, trans was largely considered a "new" minority group. This move by the City can be seen as adjacent to Frameline's focus on "inclusion" of trans cultural production in their business-oriented film festival, as I discussed in chapter two. Both of these examples can be read through a celebratory and critical lens. My intention is to note these tensions rather than attempt to resolve them.

If the City Proclamation is read as a strategy – a larger economic goal motivated by City branding in this case, then how might we interpret SFTFF's corelated tactics – "the ways in which cultural workers seek to negotiate, and at times perhaps subvert,

the constraints imposed by institutional interests to their own purposes" (Havens, Lotz & Tinnic, 2009, p. 247)? I turn to a primary source to help answer this question. Reactions to the presentation of this City Proclamation are showcased in Christopher Lee's rough-cut, choppy home videos of the festival in 1997, which were in the GLBT Historical Society collection and which I had digitized from Hi8 tapes.

The first 35 minutes of footage of the 1997 festival includes images of people gathering in lines outside the Roxie Theater on 16th Street, the taping of Hollywood-esque star cut-outs with trans people's names on the sidewalk outside the venue, attendees sexualized flirtations with the camera (primarily operated by Lee), casual conversations, kissing, close-up interviews and jokes with volunteers, dancing, sky tracker lights, cuts of a few films, telephone poles plastered with posters, and the reactions of people in cars driving by and looking at the gathering. About thirty-five minutes in, co-Director, Al Austin, is behind the camera and Lee enters the frame. Lee, seemingly distracted, states, "The mayor, the mayor, will you continue, the mayor's gonna, the mayor's, will you go up there and film us when we get our little stupid proclamation?" Austin agrees, with a casual, "Sure."

I suggest we read Lee's choice of words as a reflection of his ideological position in regard to being "legitimized" by the Mayor and City. While the Proclamation likely helped publicity given its formality and presentation at SFTFF by a gay-identified cis man who stood in as a liaison to the Mayor, Lee's comment suggests SFTFF extracted little value from this document. Lee's language also highlights SFTFF's punk sensibility that aimed to provide an exhibition platform by and for trans video and filmmakers, to

incite future producers in the spirit of DIY subcultural formations, to enact circuits of care, and to challenge assimilation.

About four minutes later in the footage, Dean Goodwin, who introduces himself as the LGBT liaison from the office of Mayor Willie Brown states, "I'm here to acknowledge the contributions of transgender people to media, art and history." He then introduces a spokesperson (name unknown) from the Film Commission (now Film SF) who co-presents the Proclamation. This actor states:

> I just wanted to say that Tranny Fest joins a whole host of film festivals that go on in the city throughout the year including the lesbian and gay film festival, which celebrated its twentieth year, the International Asian American Film Festival that celebrated its fifteenth year, Film Arts Foundation, Italian-American. So many film festivals that go on throughout the city because this city *loves* film festivals and on behalf of the Film Commission, I hope Tranny Fest is gonna grow, become internationally recognized, and become an annual event.

The audience claps and the two presenters then collaboratively read the proclamation after which Lee and Austin hold two framed reproductions of the proclamation. Lee states, "Thank you. Appreciate it. Everybody, it belongs to you.

It is noteworthy that the Film Commission representative links SFTFF to Frameline, twenty years its senior, and by that time, more prominently entrenched in a business oriented QFF. As I noted in chapter two, Frameline received federal, state, and local arts funding with NEA appropriations in the 1980s. Between the years 1995 and 2008 Frameline began to shift into a market or business-oriented mode. Regan Rhyne (2007) argues that Frameline capitalized on "pink dollars" during this period, a term that refers to the process by which increasingly visible gay and lesbian communities became a niche market. As Frameline grew, the organization "create[d] new forms of consumer

value," Rhyne argues, which included accepting corporate sponsorships. Recall Shawna Virago's note about Frameline's questionable funding. Arguably, Frameline was an active player in helping to brand San Francisco as a creative city and tourist attraction by contributing to the month-long promotion of Pride festivities (p. 53-7). In other words, Frameline predominantly assimilated with the hegemonic film festival rules and became entrenched in San Francisco's project of city branding as diverse and inclusive. Given this history and the ideologies that the Film Commission representative represents, it is not surprising that he situated SFTFF within a lineage of identity-based film festivals while reiterating a framing of San Francisco as loving film, which links back to the 1950s-framing of the city as the "Paris of the West."

The Film Commission representative's statement, "I hope Tranny Fest is gonna grow, become internationally recognized, and become an annual event," also exemplifies a teleological sentiment of a business-oriented film festival trajectory wherein what might start as an identitarian, grassroots, or "niche" festival ultimately outgrows this incubation stage and merges with the rules that govern the broader film festival world. Returning to the theoretical framework of Critical Media Industry Studies, these sentiments in the "award/legitimization" moment highlight the notion of strategies, or larger economic goals and operational logics of large-scale cultural industries.

These strategies exist in contradistinction to tactics. As this dissertation attests, SFTFF has not followed a business-oriented teleological trajectory, and the sentiment captured in Lee's two statements about the Mayor's Proclamation provide another piece of evidence of the festival's link to queer, punk, and trans lineages and the sensibilities they fostered. Lee's second comment, in which he turns the significance of the

Proclamation back to the audience can also be read as a punk tactic within the moment of City legitimization. In a side conversation Lee referred to the event and documents as a "little stupid proclamation" and in front of the audience, his tactic is to announce, "Everybody, it belongs to you." Austin follows Lee's commentary with, "Mainly what I want to do is just say that it took so many people, so many organizations to make this day possible. We are continually astounded by the generosity of these communities. We thank all of you." Austin's words echo Lee's sentiments that the festival operates according to a collaborative, horizontal structure that does not need City legitimization. Rather, Austin gestures toward SFTFF's embeddedness in a rich lineage of community activism queer, punk, and trans circuits of care that have been providing mutual aid for trans people for decades. In other words, neither Austin nor Lee riff off the idea of becoming bigger or praise the City for its gesture of "inclusion."

Austin's comment, which mentions "many organizations" and "community" as the true locations of the festival's emergence, is exemplified in the festival programs. Even in the first year (1997), SFTFF lists sixteen co-sponsors. Most co-sponsors are non-profits and individual media companies. Given the prevalence of non-profit structures in the proliferation of art and activism and Lee and Austin's involvement in these structures, I now turn to give more attention to the role of these organizations. I introduce Myrl Beam's (2018) use of the concept nonprofitization to think critically about the role of non-profits in queer and trans constituencies. I then offer a detailed case study of the festival's name change to SFTFF in 2011, a move that I argue was implicated within the structure of nonprofitization, and thus had both economic and cultural motivations.

Nonprofitization

Within the U.S., nonprofits achieve legal status with a tax-exempt code, 501(c)3, with a few exceptions to this rule such as non-profit status through fiscal sponsorship, for religious communities, and institutions such as hospitals (Beam, 2018, 21). As early as 1917, a donation to a nonprofit qualified an individual donor for tax deduction and by 1936, corporations received tax incentives for supporting the arts (NEA, 2012). To claim tax-exempt status, nonprofits must be aligned with one of the following attributes: "charitable, religious, educational, scientific, literary, testing for public safety, fostering national or international amateur sports competition, or the prevention of cruelty to children or animals" (NEA, 2012, p. 19). To give a sense of how much this sector has grown, there were approximately three thousand 501(c)3 organizations in 1960 and over 1.56 million by 2015[54] (Beam, 2018). Recall that the U.S. system is a hybrid *Patron-Facilitator State* and thus "favors decentralization of not-for-profit activities, rather than any particular conception of what a not-for-profit should do" (NEA, 2012, p. 18). Individuals can start a nonprofit and build their organization with federal, state, and private donor appropriations as well as benefit from volunteer labor, which makes up a large portion of nonprofits' economic structure. In 2011, for example, 1.3 million adults volunteered 65 million hours to arts and cultural organizations alone, which account for 10.9% of public nonprofits (NEA, 2012, p. 19).

In *The Nonprofitization of Queer Politics* (2018), Myrl Beam argues "the nonprofit form is used on a massive scale by social movements as a way to organize

[54] See The Urban Institute's National Center for Charitable Statistics. Note that all nonprofits must register with the IRS, excluding those with a budget of less than $50,000 and religious congregations.

resources" and these organizations "monetize the idea of 'the movement' in order to capture the hearts and pocketbooks of potential donors" (p. 6). The term nonprofitization is useful because it accounts for the ways in which this institutional form operates as a structuring device of social movements and benefits from a political economy of affect. Beam follows in the tradition of affect studies scholars such as Ahmed, Berlant, Gould, and Cvetkovich who explore the economy of feelings, the ways in which capitalism is felt and experienced, and how affect is mobilized to form social movements. In the non-profit realm, the economy of affect extends to funders, participants, staff, and volunteers, all actors who, to varying degrees, buy into the logic of the nonprofit mode to carry "the movement's" thrust. This logic links to ideologies of compassion and community and suggests these affects or desires are best realized through capital, whether in the form of economic donations, promotions, or volunteer labor. Alongside their proliferation, nonprofits have increasingly practiced business-like structuring, corporate-style management and discourse, and market-driven principles (Beam, 2018, p. 11). Despite merging with corporate modes, nonprofits are still often mythologized as the "third sector" – that is, somehow separate from the state and market despite being deeply embedded within both. Of course, this sentiment depends on who you ask and where any particular actor is situated in the nonprofit field of relations.

In terms of gender and sexual identity formations, there has never been a singular "movement," yet nonprofits must speak to broad audiences for financial and cultural support. As such, nonprofits tend to circulate shorthand such as LGBT and associated arts and culture formations that fall under this broad heading have been transformed by the structuring device of nonprofits. Beam (2018) asserts that dominant groups, typically

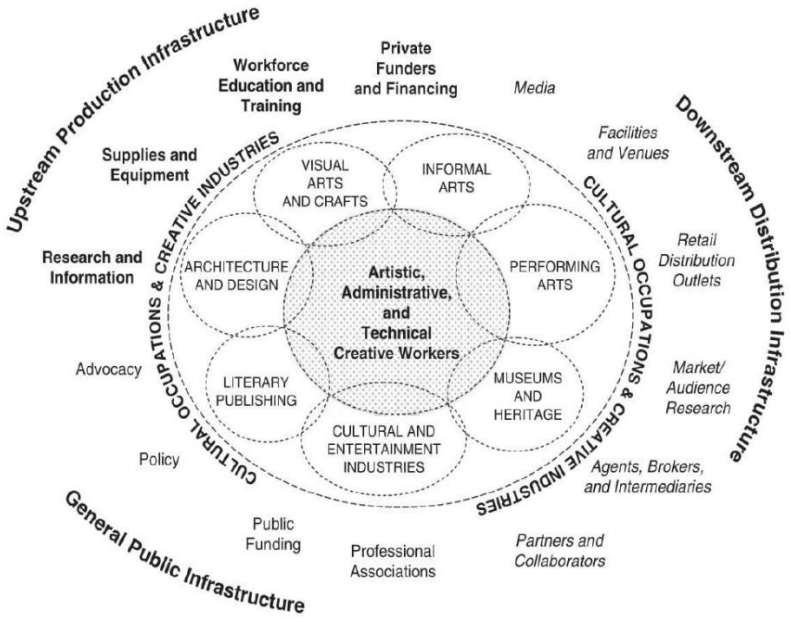
white, cisgender, economically advantaged, gay men, use their monetary power and charitable donations to non-profits to set the LGBT "agenda." This argument shares similarities in terms of LGBT taste cultures within business-oriented queer film festivals and the politics of programming that play out at particular "queer" film festivals. In other words, both "the movement" in terms of political agenda (often rights-based issues such as marriage or military rights) and taste cultures (often the dominance of films about white, gay, cisgender men, particularly in early gay film festivals) are disproportionately determined through the economic structure of nonprofits. This is not to say that radical, queer left politics and grassroots community organizing modes do not exist as alternatives to the broader nonprofit field, but they ultimately have less influence in changing the hegemonic structure nonprofits hold.

In a fragmented and decentralized power structure such as the U.S., the nonprofit becomes yet another node through which governance is distributed. This diffusion of power, despite foregrounding ideologies of compassion and charity, supports disciplinary functions. All nonprofits, whether at the grassroots, local, state, or national level, must operate within similar constraints of federal power and neoliberal discourses. While Beam (2018) largely focuses on the ways in which issues of housing and health are mobilized through the nonprofit structure, I am interested in how "queer" artists, particularly filmmakers and film festivals are embedded within the constraints of nonprofitization. Focusing on a case study of the festival's name change to the San Francisco Transgender Film Festival in 2010 illuminates how and to what effect nonprofitization became a determining structure of this film festival. Although specific to

SFTFF, this case study is applicable to questions about the cultural and economic impacts of nonprofitization in the arts sector, particularly for gender and sexual minorities.

As noted, the *Patron-Facilitator State* model of arts funding in the U.S. is a mode by which the government maintains their proclaimed position as non-interferant or arm's-length funder. The NEA distributes appropriations to state and regional granting agencies that then distribute funds through non-profit nodes at regional, state, and local levels. Recall as well that arts funding plays out differently by geographic region and that the San Francisco Arts Commission responded to increasing demand in the 1990s for funding along lines of difference, resulting in a Cultural Equity Endowment Fund and similar schemes in other nonprofit arts organizations. This was a material and cultural shift that contributed to SFTFF's receipt of grant funding, fiscal sponsorship by the Film Arts Foundation, and the City Proclamation, presented by a LGBT liaison and the San Francisco mayor at various times in the festival's early years.

I have characterized how SFTFF relates to the broader film festival world in chapter two. Below, I refer to Wyszomirski's model of the cultural industries (creative sector) to illustrate that SFTFF can be categorized as an "Informal Arts" cluster. This cluster includes "amateur, community-based, and unincorporated arts and culture activity such as community theater, music clubs, and participatory folk arts groups. While these informal arts activities may not generate economically significant revenues, they often generate public good in the sense of identity and social cohesion" (Cherbo, Vogel & Wyszomirski, 2008, p. 15).



1-1. The Creative Sector. (Wyszomirski 2008)

These authors also note that the "Informal Arts" are the least studied from a scholarly point of view, the same of which is true of "minor genre" film festivals such as SFTFF in contrast to A-list, well-known IFFs, or business-oriented QFFs. The authors suggest that economically smaller arts communities should be studied because they elucidate something about "social cohesion" and "public good." I take up the question of what minoritarian arts *do* in this chapter. As I've articulated, arts organizations that are run by and for marginalized identities can become attractive targets for State-City and corporate power as a means by which to capitalize on difference for the purposes of branding and performative gestures of diversity and inclusion. The overall the model presented in the above figure presents the "Informal Arts" sector, comprised of nonprofit organizations that fall within the U.S. model of decentralization and the ideology of community arts, affect the mobilization of "prosocial" behaviors such as charity and benefit from association with buzzwords like access and diversity over excellence and

exclusivity in the arts. Although I remain critical of the ways in which performative discourses about art that is considered "public good" and aligned with "social cohesion" ultimately benefit City-State agendas and corporations, I have to acknowledge that these discourses and their material effects in the arts sector have also, in some cases, afforded more inroads to economic and cultural support for marginalized artists. Each case study will have its own particularities, so I turn now to focus on how these cultural and economic trends in the arts sector have affected SFTFFs.

To fund itself, remain economically viable, and build audiences, SFTFF was granted fiscal sponsorship by the nonprofit, Film Arts Foundation (FAF), in 1999 and co-presented screenings with several local businesses and nonprofit organizations that catered to different demographics among the broader "queer" constituency. Lee's involvement with FAF, as noted on his resume, seemingly explains FAF's role as fiscal sponsor. The collection at the GLBT Historical Society archive includes a FAF "Project Sponsorship Agreement" document from 1999. There is no documentation that suggests SFTFF was sponsored prior to 1999.

According to the National Council of Nonprofits, "Fiscal sponsorship is often used by newly formed nonprofits that need to raise money during the start-up phase, before they are recognized as tax-exempt by the IRS. Using a fiscal sponsor enables a program or organization that does not itself qualify as tax-exempt to attract funding for its operations that will – through the fiscal sponsor – be tax-deductible to donors. Therefore, fiscal sponsor arrangements benefit organizations or programs that are not tax-exempt by providing a flow-through pathway for revenue that the organization may not otherwise be in a position to receive" (National Council of Nonprofits, 2020). I interpret SFTFF's

sponsorship by FAF as an economic and cultural tactic for SFTFF to increase their visibility, grow their audience, and improve eligibility and competitiveness for grants and donor appropriations under the hybrid, *Patron-Facilitator State* model in the U.S.

Based on archival documents, in 1999 SFTFF received three letters of support for their grant applications: one from Frameline, one from FAF, and one from The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, who in their letter, listed themselves as co-sponsors since 1997. Per archival documents, SFTFF also applied for grants from The San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC), Grants for the Arts (GFTA), and The San Francisco Foundation for the fiscal year 1999. The San Francisco Arts Commission offered a Special Project grant in 1999 for "volunteer-based, not-for-profit arts groups" that had "successfully completed at least two arts activities accessible by the general public in San Francisco within the 18 months prior to application" and with a budget that "does not exceed $20,000 per year in expenses." I did not find the application materials for this grant in archival material, but I did find documentation of SFTFF's full application to The San Francisco Foundation, an organization founded in 1948 when, after WWII, the racial demographics of San Francisco greatly changed with significant increases in racialized minoritarian subjects. The SF Foundation's inaugural press release noted the foundation was established to provide the community with "a contemporary agency sensitive to current social needs, and one which will help build a future which will magnify the opportunities of generations yet to be born."

In SFTFF's application for a San Francisco Foundation grant, they list fiscal sponsorship by FAF as pending. They note their "collaboration with various community-based non-profit agencies and member organizations" and list only 10% of their board as

white. Regarding diversity, they note, “Tranny fest has a large diversity of gender representations in the gender spectrum besides simply Male or Female. For example, folks who identify as third gender, intersexed, multi-gendered and Female-to-Male, Male-to-Female, boydykes, transfags, two-spirited, femme, butch, metamorphs, hermaphrodite, cross-dressers, drag kings and queens.” In addition, they note, “30% of our staff has a physical disability challenge,” “all our events are wheelchair accessible, scent-free, ASL interpreted,” and “Tranny fest regards 80-90% cultural, religious, age and gender diversity in staff and volunteers to be a standard.” This elucidates that highlighting diversity was key to this grant application, which contextualizes the cultural and economic climate in which it was written. An emphasis on diversity is also evidenced in SFTFF’s letters of support.

The San Francisco International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival’s then Co-Director, Jennifer Morris, wrote: “Tranny fest boasts representing transgendered people of color in the programming of films and videos by an overwhelming 80%” and “with a staff of 90% people of color and much cultural diversity, Tranny Fest is like no other film festival anywhere in the world…” Again, this demonstrates how diversity and access were key buzzwords in San Francisco arts funding in the late 1990s. In other words, the culture of nonprofitization and it’s thrust toward performative inclusion at the City-State level was so entrenched in San Francisco by the 1990s that a perfect window of opportunity existed for SFTFF to tap into both material and discursive networks to position themselves as a legitimate identity group. Aligning with nonprofit discourses and the City-State’s performative inclusion vis-à-vis arts funding were two tactics SFTFF strategically employed to build the festival and its audiences.

While film scholar and political economist, Regan Rhyne (2009), argues that the notion of a festival industry is upheld by myriad stakeholders that include filmmakers, studios, journalists, press agents, volunteers, programmers, local councils, nonprofits, tourist agencies, cinephiles, and audiences, SFTFF benefitted and was engaged mostly in a web of other nonprofits, local arts funding organizations, and the sprawling queer and punk subcultural affiliations and circuits of care of the original organizers. As noted in chapter two, many gay and lesbian film festivals start as more intimate and informal screenings much like SFTFF, but over time they often develop relationships with the commercial film industry, corporate sponsors, and mainstream producers and distributors, a trend that became prominent between 2001 and 2006 (Rhyne, 2007). As I have argued, SFTFF never pursued a similar trajectory and has largely maintained its funding by relying on donations and in-kind support, grants, and ticket sales. Certainly, SFTFF has benefitted from the thrust toward nonprofitization, has benefited from collaborating with, but remaining on the periphery of Frameline, but has also rejected building corporate sponsorships like the larger transgender film festival, Translations, in Seattle. In its early documentation, SFTFF also notes paying all of its organizers. I do not know if this practice has continued for some or all organizers of the festival. One festival organizer told me in 2017 that everyone that helped organize the festival was paid a small stipend. If this is a consistent practice SFTFF employs, it certainly marks the festival as unique when unpaid labor is often a norm (Rhyne, 2007).

SFTFF's refusal to corporatize is another piece of evidence that reveals its ongoing commitment to the queer, punk, and trans subcultural formations within which its original founders and collaborators were entrenched. Current Artistic Director,

Shawna Virago, recalls taking the role of Artistic Director in 2003 but notes she attended the first festival in 1997 to talk about "police accountability," one of her activist beats at the time. She describes her activism included "building a map of police abuse" around the city and educating trans people that "fifty percent of all hate violence comes from law enforcement" (personal communication, November 10, 2017). This form of activist work, which remains top of Virago and SFTFF's broader agenda, can be contrasted with film festivals that form co-sponsorships with corporations such as Skyy Vodka or more conservative LGBT organizations that promote rights-based forms of inclusion in institutions such as marriage and military.

SFTFF's activist roots can be categorized as what Beam (2018) calls "antiracist, intersectional, antipoverty, anti-imperialist, revolutionary organizing" (p. 34). This mode of organizing is distinct from three other types of organizing Beam outlines: "(1) service-based organizing, including healthcare, poverty, homelessness, HIV/AIDS, (2) youth, electoral, legal, rights-focused organizing, and (3) community centers" (p. 34). Beam argues all of these strains still exist, but that leftist queer radical organizing has largely disintegrated. This disintegration largely results from professionalizing forces of nonprofitization that have significantly changed infrastructure to include increased staff, funding, and more widespread use of media and communication. All of these factors have been used to secure donors and raise funds according to less accessible, specialized tracking practices that have "demobilized ordinary activists" (p. 40). Beam argues that given the dialectic between infrastructure and politics, organizations whose structures and procedures have formalized tend toward a more conservative politics because agendas are

often catered to and determined by the social and economic investments of the most privileged members of the broad gender and sexual minority landscape.

Pairing Rhyne's historical categorization of gay and lesbian film festival organizing eras with Beam's classification of streams of activism offers a useful framework for understanding SFTFF according to Virago's description of the festival as representing "the hold out." I contend that SFTFF's quer, punk, and trans lineage accounts for its resistance to the trend of professionalization and mainstreaming strategies. Despite *punking* the broader film festival rules and business-oriented QFFs thrust toward corporatization, SFTFF is only able to "hold out" to the degree that it does because it maintains ongoing support of a fiscal sponsor, *Fresh Meat Productions.* This is a trans and queer performing arts collective that was established in 2002 by Artistic Director, Sean Dorsey, partner of Shawna Virago. Fresh Meat obtained tax-exempt status in 2009. Additionally, SFTFF "holds out" and maintains its radical queer leftist activism and punk subcultural influences because Virago and likeminded comrades still largely oversee its vision. Many of the co-organizers of SFTFF also work with Fresh Meat and SFTFF maintains ongoing collaboration with at least twenty to thirty film, media, and social justice nonprofits in San Francisco. These organizations fit into all of Beam's four activist categorizations. I do not have access to a detailed economic skeleton that supports SFTFF, but clearly this film festival is steeped in and benefits from a broad web of nonprofits and their sponsors and donors, all of which have to navigate the precarious work of existing within capitalism. It is arguably only because of this broader web that SFTFF has been able to secure funding opportunities and ongoing collaborations that

help the festival rely less on formal public relations, marketing, corporate sponsors, and wealthy donors to sustain itself.

SFTFF, in large part, is afforded freedom to enact its punk sensibility because it reaps the benefits of larger-scale funding that Fresh Meat receives, including grants from the NEA and major foundations, individual donor contributions up to $10,000, publicity in forums such as *The New York Times, Time Out, The New Yorker, Dance Magazine,* and the *LA Times,* and an international touring circuit. Without the fiscal sponsorship of Fresh Meat, it seems likely that SFTFF might not have survived all these years, or it would not have been able to as readily maintain its punk ethos and build and sustain audiences that want to experience multi-genre, experimental, and non-normative trans film and video. I thus read SFTFF's fiscal sponsorship arrangement with Fresh Meat as one of the prominent tactics by which it builds and maintains its punk sensibility. This example elucidates some of the precarity in employing tactics within capitalist structuring devices, and to continue a discussion of this precarity, I turn now to an analysis of the festival's name change.

The Festival Name Change

The case study of the festival's name change, in which the T-word was dropped in 2011, occurred within a time period, namely the mid-2000s, during which there was heightened debate about this word. Discourse related to identity and identity politics is debated within cultural formations. As such, while this case study is particular to SFTFF, it also speaks to broader themes. Notably, the name change exemplifies that discursive debates between intra-identity categories can be just as contentious as inter-identity

debate. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw contends that, "The problem of identity politics is not that it fails to transcend differences, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite – that it frequently conflates or ignores intra-group differences" (1993, p. 1242). Given that I have limited access to these historical debates, some of which took shape on the internet and some of which occurred in ephemeral gathering spaces, I do not claim to have an authoritative or representative sample of voices. In fact, what became strikingly apparent while searching for evidence of debates about the T-word was the lack of attention given to the particularities of race and class among white TGNC people, notably the ways in which the T-word arguably has significantly different material consequences for BIPOC trans women and nonbinary people, particularly sex workers.

I start this discussion by outlining some of Kate Bornstein's opinions regarding the T-word. As noted in chapter one, Bornstein is a prominent white trans author and performer. Bornstein received notable attention in the nineties, is considered a trans elder to some, and used various platforms to vocalize her opinions about the T-word. In a blog post titled, "Who You Calling A Tranny?"[55] dated July 12, 2009, Bornstein recalls a first encounter with the T-word from Doris Fish, described as "San Francisco's pre-eminent drag queen in the 1980s," originally from Sydney, Australia. Bornstein recounts Fish's stance that drag and "male-to-female (MTF)" culture in Sydney in the 1960s and 1970s was a cultural formation with such a strong bond that "they invented a name for the identity they shared: *tranny.* It was a name that said *family*." Arguably Bornstein's access to and identification with this narrative influenced the 1994 book, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*. In this anthology, Bornstein challenges a binary gender

[55] http://katebornstein.com/who-you-calling-a-tranny/

system, promotes rebelling against binary constraints, and encourages the term gender "outlaws." Recall that in my previous discussion of SFTFF lineages, Virago mentions Bornstein as highly influential to her own sense of identity and that I placed Bornstein in a broader lineage of genderfuck as a sensibility.

A month prior to Bornstein's blog post, on June 7, 2009, a white trans man and collaborating author with Bornstein, S. Bear Bergman, posted a call for submissions for *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation,* a follow-up to the original book. The submission call was listed on a LiveJournal blog and originally included the T-word (now removed). As evidenced in the comments, by the next day several users expressed discontent with the term. One user ("fall of sophia") wrote:

> (sad face emoticon) is the use of the word "trannies" really necessary/appropriate? the use of it has really gone over the edge of "radical" spheres to the point that cis queers think it's just fine to call us that.

Bergman responded, "Hey, would you like to write about that? I hear some people are putting together an anthology." The commenter, "fall of sophia" responded that "A friend has already written about it much better than I could have" and links to a WordPress blog,[56] authored by an unnamed writer who describes hirself as "a Chicago transsexual queer/woman."

There are a few key things to highlight about this blogpost which I interpret as signifiers of some key themes related to intra-group debate about the T-word. The blog title, "'Tranny" and Subversivism: Re-claiming 'Tranny' (or not) part 1," dated

[56] The main blog is titled, "Taking Up Too Much Space: Trans Misogyny, Feminism, and Trans Activism." See the blog post of discussion, "'Tranny' and Subversivism: Re-claiming 'Tranny' (or not) part 1" (November 10, 2008): https://takesupspace.wordpress.com/2008/11/10/tranny-and-subversivism-re-reclaiming-tranny-or-not-part-1/

November 10, 2008, begins with the line, “My jumping off point here is a conversation I took part in at Camp Trans 2007.” Camp Trans is an early-nineties response to transphobic exclusion at the Michigan Womyn’s Festival, a festival I mention in chapter one in my discussion about the band Tribe 8. The blog author writes that ze used the T-word, up until that experience at Camp Trans, “as a gender neutral signifier for trans people, with a connotation of rebellion, genderqueerness, and radical/“radical” politics. Specifically, my usage of it identified me with the subversivist, gender variant, queer/anarchist/punk scene in the West Bank & Seward neighborhoods in Minneapolis.” The author continues to reflect on the word:

> I had even used it over other trans people’s–trans women’s–objections, and it was precisely through the intersection of subversivism and trans misogyny that I was able to do it–by constructing her as conservative, backward-, medical- & binary-thinking, I was able to push aside any concern about the specificities *this term* and pin her objection on a lack of understanding the concept of reclamation. In short, anyone–no, any *woman*–who wasn’t on board didn’t need to be listened to because they–she–could be immediately positioned as having bad politics.

After rejecting the use of the T-word, the author notes the same arguments ze levied against other TGNC people were cast up hir. What I find relevant about this quote is the correlation the author makes between the T-word and queer, punk, and trans cultural formations and the sensibilities they fostered. This articulation of lineage aligns with Bornstein and her adjacency to genderfuck sensibilities and serves to situate SFTFF’s original festival name within a particular discursive location.

A selection of trans women and nonbinary people were not the only advocates of using the T-word. Clearly, trans co-founders of SFTFF, Christopher Lee and Al Austin, were invested in using the word, as was the aforementioned author, S. Bear Bergman. Defending his position, Bergman writes a response to the online users who argued he

should remove the T-word from the call for submissions for *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation*:

> I hear that you don't care for it. On the other hand, Kate and I do. Certainly for me, it's part of the identity I claim (I won't presume to speak for Kate). I want to be clear that I think this book has room for a lot of ideas about a lot of things. But I also think that these particular struggles around language are ultimately a good thing - for the first time, transpeople and gender non-normative people and actively gender-fucking-around-with people and all the rest of us have the agency to name and describe ourselves. To create and choose and sometimes even insist to outsiders upon our own language. It seems reasonable that there will be discussions about who likes what word, or doesn't, and why. Regional, race, class, and other kinds of variations will be considered. People will disagree for totally valid reasons. But the fact of the conversation remains exciting to me. So, no - I am not going to remove the word "trannies," or any other word from the CFS. I believe it's clear from the text that one would not have to claim that identity in order to submit work to the book. I hope you can see your way clear to supporting the project, even if you disagree with my diction.

I read this call for submissions as a desire to converse with other TGNC people about not only the T-word but gender nomenclature, experiences, and politics more broadly. The call for submissions mentions “regional, race, class, and other kinds of variations" as impactful and something the authors, both white, want the collection to explore. The published anthology does include a number of diverse voices. It is noteworthy that three of the contributors to this anthology have or continue to be associated with SFTFF - Shawna Virago, StormMiguel Florez, and Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhrán. I read this as further evidence of adjacency between some SFTFF actors, Bornstein, and a broader queer, punk, and trans lineage.

Bornstein also comments on the controversy surrounding the use of the T-word in the call for submissions to the anthology in her July 2009 blog post. She summarizes the following stance on the T-word:

1. Tranny *began* as a uniting term amongst ourselves. Of course it’s going to be picked up and used as a denigrating term by mean people in the world. But even if

we manage to get them to stop saying *tranny* like a thrown rock, mean people will come up with *another* word to wound us with. So, let's get back to using tranny as a uniting term amongst ourselves. That would make Doris Fish very happy.

2. It's our first own language word for ourselves that has no medical-legacy.
3. Even if (like gay) hate-filled people try to make tranny into a bad word, our most positive response is to own the word (a word invented by the queerest of the queer of their day). We have the opportunity to re-create *tranny* as a positive in the world.
4. Saying that FTMs [female-to-male] can't call themselves trannies eerily echoes the 1980s lesbians who said I couldn't use the word woman to identify myself, and the 1990s lesbians who said I couldn't use the word dyke.

Bornstein argues that "labels aren't bad when they're used consciously" but that they have the unfortunate consequence of creating "us-versus-them scenarios." I read this as awareness of intra-identity debate. These summarized points highlight Bornstein's stance on the word's origins, the notion of reclamation, and the argument that no person's use of the term should be gatekept. The suggestion that the term was "invented by the queerest of the queer" reads as similar to the unnamed Chicago-based blogger who argued that the T-word carries a "connotation of rebellion, genderqueerness, and radical/"radical" politics." This blogger's stylistic questioning of "radical" with the use of quotation marks, however, astutely pinpoints a key question regarding the T-word specifically and political investment more broadly. Who defines what is or is not radical? In my assessment, radical politics must consider material and cultural implications of language and practices.

Not surprisingly, there was backlash to Bornstein's summary, including a blog post written by academic Katherine Cross, titled, "An Open Letter to Kate Bornstein" on November 17, 2010.[57] Cross accuses Bornstein of internalized transphobia in her use of

[57] https://quinnae.com/2010/11/17/an-open-letter-to-kate-bornstein/

the term "gender outlaw" and contends that Bornstein's assertion that the T-word can be claimed and used by all TGNC people ignores the history of the word's use primarily against male-assigned people such as drag queens and trans women. Cross contends the T-word is not for female-assigned people who identify as trans or "gender deviant." Bornstein replies to the open letter on the same day it is published:

> OK. You make a whole lot of good points. I could quibble with a few of them, but your letter to me is by and large an intelligent, compassionate, non-snarky analysis of my use of the word tranny. I'll stop using the word. It has never been my intention to knowingly cause a rift in the trans community. And you've made it clear to me that I've been doing just that by using the word tranny as cavalierly as I have been. I'm sorry. I'll try my best to stop using it.

Rather than focus on this response, I am interested in Bornstein's updated blog post titled, "Tranny, Revisited," published five years later, on May 25, 2014. In this article, Bornstein clarifies her use of the T-word over time, addressing common arguments and restates her stance in favor of the word. I quote a section at length because I contend that it captures a sense of Bornstein's specific evolving thoughts between 2009 and 2014 and illuminates how discourse changes over time:

> I understand "tranny" to be a radical, sex-positive gender identity. Tranny is to trans person as fag is to gay man and dyke is to lesbian. More to the point of agreeing or disagreeing with tranny as a gender identity for oneself: I've been saying since I wrote the book, *Gender Outlaw* 20 years ago, that the only person who can name our gender identities is ourselves… Tranny is not a reclamation. Tranny has been our word for nearly half a century. Some trannies in Sydney, Australia came up with the term as an umbrella term to unite with love and as family the disparate communities of transsexuals and drag queens. This makes it unlike words like n* (my alteration) and slut. These, and other words invented by haters, have been reclaimed and are being reclaimed with great difficulty… Policing words out of existence will not stop transphobic violence. At best, it might change the words used during that violence… Nothing I've said here or anywhere else should be taken as permission to call another person tranny until you know that's a word they use for their own identity—some people find the word extremely hurtful. So, please err on the side of caution and compassion… Association [of tranny] with sex and sex workers is often a means of denigrating people. Classist sex negativity is no reason for me to cease celebrating my sex positive identity… It's more than an edgy word.

Tranny is a valid, vibrant, and vital identity. Protecting that identity is what I'm making the fuss about.

Bornstein's reflection suggests she took to heart her previous declaration to not use the T-word "cavalierly," and reasserts some of her earlier argumentation. She re-emphasizes the point that in her assessment the T-word was originally a non-medicalized word "used to unite." She adds that "policing words" don't end transphobic violence, but "at best might change the words used during that violence." While not specifically naming or reflecting on the ways in which race and class more significantly alter one's experiences of becoming the target of the T-word, Bornstein gestures towards the word's embeddedness in transphobic violence. However, she does not offer structural analysis and neglects to discuss the broader sex work industry and the ways in which these industries situate and must be navigated differently according to race, class, and gender presentation. Bornstein eschews consideration of the materiality of language and its effects and makes a seemingly rights-based argument suggesting intra-group members have a right to their own terms. I interpret Bornstein's updated summary as indicative of my aforementioned point that structural analysis of the T-word was lacking during the mid-2000s. My struggle to find BIPOC trans voices contributing to this debate can be read as a structural failure that repeatedly ignores and silences BIPOC trans women and nonbinary people.

A few more examples assist in highlighting ways in which the T-word is discussed in a selection of popular media texts during this time period. On March 25, 2010, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), self-defined as an

LGBT media watchdog organization[58], publishes an article on their website calling on Tribeca Film Festival to pull *Ticked-Off Trannies With Knives* (Israel Luna)[59] from the schedule, referring to the T-word as "a pejorative." GLAAD writer, Taj Paxton, argues:

> By marketing *Ticked-Off Trannies with Knives* as a "transploitation" film, by using the word "trannies" (a pejorative term for transgender people) in the title of the film, by casting transgender women in some roles, and by citing the murders of Angie Zapata and Jorge Mercado in the trailer, Israel Luna has attempted to place his film squarely within a transgender narrative. Because of its positioning as a transgender film, viewers unfamiliar with the lives of transgender women will likely leave this film with the impression that transgender women are ridiculous caricatures of "real" women.

On October 29, 2010, in an article titled "Glee Episode Hits the Wrong Note," author, Matt Kane of GLAAD, writes a critique of the use of the T-word in the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*-themed episode:

> Glee certainly isn't the first network TV show to use the word, and it popped up as recently as last week in the October 18th episode of CBS' *How I Met Your Mother*. Nor are LGBT-oriented TV programs exempt from using transphobic language, as demonstrated repeatedly by the gay men on Logo's reality show, *The A List: New York*. In fact, the catch phrase "hot tranny mess" was widely popularized by gay *Project Runway* winner Christian Siriano, who later apologized. GLAAD urges all entertainment industry creators to stop using the word tranny for a cheap laugh. GLAAD has reached out to Fox and Glee producers to discuss how to move forward with this matter.

A few weeks later GLAAD also demands an apology from MTV after the reality series, *Jersey Shore,* uses the T-word. The controversy surrounding use of this word is picked up by various popular culture news outlets as well, including *Vulture,* the *New York Daily News*, *Bustle*, *Huffington Post,* and *PinkNews* around the time of the *Glee* episode. By November 14, 2010, *Out* magazine writer, Noah Michelson, writes a short piece titled: "The Trouble With Tranny" that begins with the line: "It's been a long couple of weeks for

[58] According to GLAAD's website, GLAAD was formed in 1985 as a small collective of writers and journalists in response to the New York Post's sensationalized HIV/AIDS coverage. Later that year, almost 1,000 people protested outside of the New York Post.
[59] As of March 2020, this film is available on Amazon Prime Video.

the word tranny." Citing the GLAAD blog post about the *Glee* incident, Michelson notes that *Out*, an American LGBTQ news, fashion, entertainment, and lifestyle magazine, is also the recipient of GLAAD's condemnation after using the T-word in "a story about President Obama's gay drag queen nanny." Michelson writes that several people requested that the word be deleted:

> While I agree with GLAAD that too often (especially within mainstream media/culture) the word is used pejoratively, we must always take into account the context in which the word is being used and who is using it. In the right hands and mouths (hint, hint: ours) the word becomes powerful -- liberating, even -- and loses the sting and stigma others want us to feel when we hear or read it. I am also of the mindset that we should look for opportunities to open up discussions about difficult subjects instead of simply erasing or deleting something (or maybe even worse -- replacing letters in a word with asterisks or hyphens in a misguided attempt to soften the word's blow, which, in my opinion, just makes it look that much more perverse and thuggish).

Michelson, a white gay cisgender man who went on to become the editor of "Queer Voices" at *Huffington Post*, makes the claim in this article that the T-word can be used by anyone in the broader "queer" landscape. He claims, "Bornstein was quick to give me permission (and her enthusiastic blessing) to run a version of her piece "Who You Calling a Tranny?" which was originally published in July 2009 and which I think eloquently explains the word's origin and argues for a reclaiming of it by 'gender and sex positivists.'" While there is no way to verify if Bornstein agreed to or was aware of a cis white man's argument that he should also have access to the T-word, this example reveals one of several possible outcomes of a rights-based argument to the T-word. In other words, if a word belongs to no one, can anyone use it?

Rather than painting a comprehensive picture, this small selection of sources provide evidence of discursive debates across a range of texts. They also suggest there was not a single event in the 2000s that sparked debate about the T-word, and in contrast

to Bornstein's claim, I have no intention to argue the word has a particular origin. What interests me is the increased use of the term in mainstream media during this time period and the affordances the internet provided for discursive debate. However, access to and amplification within discourse is always unequal and as I have stated repeatedly, BIPOC trans voices, particularly those of sex workers, are strikingly absent as a result of structural inequities, despite this demographic arguably suffering the most violence and hatred associated with the T-word.

By offering this contextualization, I am acknowledging that contemporary attendees of SFTFF might not know the festival used the T-word until 2011. I learn about this part of the festival's history when, during my first impromptu meeting with current Artistic Director, Shawna Virago, in the empty pre-screening lobby of the Roxie theater at the festival's 20th Anniversary in 2017, she brings up the name change right away. After a very brief history in which she tells me about Christopher Lee and Al Austin starting the festival in 1997, how she begins as Artistic Director in 2003, and how she and Lee come from "a punk rock place," she casually notes, "we changed our name." I take this as an opportunity to ask when and why that happened. Virago replies:

> I think we changed the name, I really don't remember. I could find out. Maybe around 2010, partly because, oh basically Al Austin, as a lawyer, not a rich lawyer, but could front some funds to get everything off the ground in the early days and then ticket sales and you recoup, but then for us it was trying to get grants and people just didn't know what Tranny Fest was. So, we just said make it simple, so we changed the name to make it really easy on people (personal communication, November 10, 2017).

It is curious that Virago makes an economic justification first. I read this quote as acknowledgement of the precarity of legibility within capitalist frameworks wherein subcultural formations must contend with economic constraints. Part of becoming economically viable involved a process of "making it simple" for funding agencies and

one tactic the festival used to address this was to make their organizational title more easily recognizable to cis people. Also curious about the cultural implications of the T-word to Virago, I ask her what the word means to her:

> The word tranny for me is, I try to honor people who are offended by it, you know I'm not out to trigger anybody, but it's also a word that I feel, obviously this was called Tranny Fest, that for a certain generation of people was very much like a greeting to each other, it was one of our words. You know what I think happened? The internet really got popular and that word got appropriated by a lot of hate-filled people and unfortunately that became this word that got associated with hate and dissing people and I mean I would always get emails from trans people and try to explain this and I'd usually get like despite your rationalizations, I for one, will not be attending this year's festival. And I'm like, okay, I don't care (personal communication, November 10, 2017).

Filmmaker, musician, and festival organizer, StormMiguel Florez, joins our conversation, adding his thoughts about people against using the word:

> I think those were people who didn't come from queer community … because the thing about queer community is, we're all about taking the names and making them ours, but I feel like a lot of folks do not have that, and maybe came out later (personal communication, November 10, 2017).

Unfortunately, the original co-founders, Christopher Lee and Al Austin, are not present to comment about their particular relationship to this word and why they chose to use it in the festival's original name or their stance on its use in the present day.

As I noted earlier, Virago and Florez both contributed to Bornstein and Berg's 2010 edited anthology, *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation.* Their articulations to me in 2017 as well as their anthology contributions highlight an alignment with Bornstein and queer, punk, and trans lineages more broadly. Recall that in another conversation I had with Virago she noted, "One of the most important works for me personally was *Gender Outlaw* by Kate Bornstein" (personal communication, June 19, 2019). Virago's personal essay in the anthology, *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation* (2010), titled

"She-Male[60] Rising," discusses her punk mentors and experiences as a trans musician. Equating the policing of punk musicians as "not punk enough" to similar experiences of being called out by "alternative" trans and queer identities, she writes:

> Since coming out as she-male, I've encountered my own version of this phenomenon of self-appointed gatekeepers who sit in judgement of anyone they feel has strayed from the flock. I like to call them the Tranny Police … I've received several critical emails from the Tranny Police, expressing their anger at me for using the term she-male … accus[ing] me of setting the movement back … I think they're setting the movement back! I might not understand a transgender woman who identifies as heterosexual … but I wouldn't send a nasty email to her. Instead, I say, Go, Sister! Be Yourself! Just let me do the same (p. 234).

Virago, like Bornstein, promotes a rights-based argument that suggests language should not be gatekept by other TGNC people. I have outlined this argument as circulating within queer, punk, and trans intersections that positioned the T-word at various historical points as one of kinship and subversiveness. I have also noted that these discussions during this time period de-centered discussions of race and class. However, just as discourse changes, Bornstein and Virago adjusted their public use of the T-word in what I interpret as efforts to acknowledge the debates surrounding its use. This adjustment is evidenced in SFTFF's name change in 2011 and Virago's comment that she does not want to "trigger anyone," a gesture I interpret as aligned with the broader care work SFTFF performs. In my assessment, this decision signifies the adaptability of punk as a sensibility to respond to feedback.

SFTFF is not the only Bay Area cultural formation that had to publicly contend with the organizational use of the T-word. In 2014, Trannyshack, a drag performance art

[60] In contrast to Virago's advocating for the reclamation of "she-male," an article in *The Advocate* called out RuPaul's Drag Race and LOGO TV for their use of the term in their segment, "You've Got She-mail" (Molloy, 2014).

event and club that started in 1996, one year prior to SFTFF, changed its name to "T-Shack." The original founder and performer, Heklina, announced the name change in a Facebook post on May 20, 2014 (see Fig. 7).

Heklina is with Brian Peters and LA Kendall LaBree.
May 20, 2014 · San Francisco, CA ·

First, a little history about the name Trannyshack, and the club itself. When I started the club (waaaaaay back in 1996) the word "tranny" did not have the charged weight to it that it has today. Simply put, it was not (arguably) considered a slur word, and not even thought of on the same level as the words "dyke" or "faggot" (two words which, maybe ironically, have somehow become less charged and have been "reclaimed" to a certain degree-for instance, leading the Pride Parade in San Francisco every year are the Dykes On Bikes. I can't imagine in this day, a contingent called Trannies On Bikes). There are people who might argue this, but I'm sorry it just was not a word thought of as a slur on the same level as today. It was just not. I considered the name transgressive, and cutting edge.

The club itself? It became a legendary San Francisco institution. A bastion of alternative drag and diversity. Every walk of life came to, and performed at, Trannyshack. Gay men, lesbians, drag kings, drag kings, M to F's, F to M's, Faux Queens, and yes, even straight people. It won every award for Best Drag show in SF every year, and is generally thought to have redefined drag on the West Coast. It didn't matter (and still does not) what gender you were, or what you had between your legs, if you were a great performer you were welcome on the Trannyshack stage. It grew to mean a great deal to a great many people.

When will the full rebrand happen? Most likely not until the beginning of the new year. In San Francisco, it's going to require focus groups, a press campaign, all that stuff. It really is that big of a deal here. Also, I have not as of yet decided what the final name will be. I used T-Shack for the Seattle event because that is what the insiders of my circle of friends have always called it, so I'm trying it out. Other names have been thrown around. Drag-Shack does not seem right. Maybe simply The 'Shack. I don't know, that's why it will take a few months.
I am in the business of (hopefully) entertaining people. It's never been my intention to hurt people. I am not another Shirley Q. Liquor, wanting to offend just for sake of it. Also, on a purely business level, I don't want to be viewed as archaic, out of step with the times, like an ostrich with my head in the sand.

OK, a rebrand. How to go about it? Time to test the waters. But, where to start? When Brian asked me to bring Trannyshack to Seattle for Pride, I thought this was a good place to start. I suggested the name T-Shack. Let's see how this works, I thought. As expected, many people familiar and loyal to the Trannyshack brand were up in arms, and I received several messages along the lines of "You caved in to pressure" and "You sold out" (? Not sure what that one means). OK. I can deal with this.

But, I was taken aback by the response from many in the trans community. It seems I cannot win with some people. They are not happy when I call it Trannyshack, and they are not happy when I try to rebrand (granted, there were some aspects of the roll-out for the Seattle event that were a bit clunky, but still). This to me does not seem right.

Figure 7: Excerpts from Heklina's original Facebook Post announcing T-Shack's Name change, May 20, 2014

In this post, Heklina writes that the T-word was not considered a slur in the late nineties but was considered "transgressive and cutting edge," a point that has been made in a selection of sources I have addressed. Heklina attests, "It has never been my intention to hurt people … also on a purely business level, I don't want to be viewed as archaic, out of step with the times, like an ostrich with my head in the sand." This quote,

like Virago's discussion of economic implications regarding SFTFF's name, speaks to the complicated ways in which culture and economics intersect. This intersection affected T-Shack and SFTFF, both organizations that were implicated within discursive debates about language, identity, and politics, and responded by dropping their use of the T-word. This is a move some might read as progressive and others might frame as a process of mainstreaming.

I read SFTFF's shifting nomenclature as indicative of their broader commitment to care work which I have argued is part of their manifestation of punk as a sensibility. The name change was both a means to maintain legibility to "outsiders" who might become potential funders and thus enable the festival's materiality, and a symbolic gesture to acknowledge discursive debates and reduce potential harm across various intersections of diverse TGNC communities. SFTFF's decision likely received backlash, as was the case for Heklina who notes she came under fire for "selling out" after changing the performance culture's name to "T-fest." Although Virago never mentions a similar anecdote, it seems likely that given the queer, punk, and trans subcultural lineages and the sensibilities that informed SFTFF actors, there may have been a similar critique from some people who used the T-word.

Selling Out or Holding Out?

Given the cultural and material factors embedded in this case study of SFTFF's name change, I introduce two frameworks of analysis. First, the notion of "selling out" is useful because this term is salient to punk subcultural formations and sensibilities. In *Queercore,* Curran Nault (2018) writes:

> Punk values emphasize non-conformity and individual freedom, as well as opposition to authority, capitalism, and mainstream success, with one of the biggest offenses in punk being to "sell out" to corporate interests … punk's "revolting style" serves to undercut capitalist imperatives to make slick, profitable work and to compulsively consume the same (p. 14).

Punk is frequently pitted against capitalism and corporate, market-driven modes. Merging toward this mode or a business-orientation in the case of film festivals could be aptly critiqued as "selling out." The term "selling out" implies a mode of value extraction and exchange value. *Selling* links to commodities and the process of commoditization. *Out* implies a thrust toward something external, a market "out there" with its own rules that any organization seeking to merge with its logic must follow. A critique of "selling out" informed by queer and punk investments may claim that any market-driven tactic is ultimately motivated by a desire for commercial gain, mainstream legibility, and thus incorporation into a hegemonic system.

My contention is that the notion of "selling out" is a more nuanced critique that will have historical, spatial, and medium-specific variability. A band signing to a major record label or a filmmaker working with a major Hollywood studio are rather obvious examples that would elicit a "selling out" critique. The case study of SFTFF's name change, however, is more subtly layered. A critique of the festival's name change as a means of acquiring legibility and support by grant funders, personal donors, and audience members needs to be contextualized within a capitalist framework. Recall the framework of nonprofitization I introduced earlier in this chapter, which suggests that organizations addressing sexual and gender minorities have become increasingly conservative and created a mirage of an LGBT "movement." From this vantage point, SFTFF's name change in 2011 could be interpreted as signifying a move toward nonprofitization and

therefore a turning away from radical, grassroots organizing that embodies the queer, punk, and trans lineage and sensibilities that informed the festival's emergence. However, I interpret the name change as a continuation of a punk sensibility and liberationist discourse wherein the economic backing of more conservative funders was a means by which to continue the broader care work SFTFF enables.

As such, I want to add more nuance to the notion of "selling out," by introducing another framework, that of "holding out," to understand the festival's name change. Recall that Shawna Virago referred to SFTFF as representative of a "hold out" at the twentieth anniversary and that in this chapter I linked Virago's historical involvement as an activist to Beam's categorization of "antiracist, intersectional, antipoverty, anti-imperialist, revolutionary organizing" as distinct from nonprofitization. While these historical activist investments remain central to SFTFF's stated mandates, the organization does not exist outside of discourse or the economic thrust of nonprofitization. The notion of "holding out" thus offers a more nuanced analysis than the false dichotomy of "punk" vs "selling out." The word *hold* connotes stabilization, stasis, and agentic power while *out* again acknowledges external forces, in this case the momentum of nonprofitization and rapidly shifting identity politics as powerful economic-cultural forces that alter the contours within which any individual subject or organization must exist.

I read Virago's articulation of SFTFF as representing a "hold out" according to the idea of tactics. The name change was one tactic that provided a strategic move within a particular set of economic and cultural constraints. As Stacey Thompson (2004) contends:

> If Frederic Jameson is correct and our "political unconscious" harbors the desires that capitalism represses, then punk is one of the cultural fields in which repressed desires take material shape. It is worth remembering, at this point, the reason that particular desires must be repressed to begin with, which is that they cannot be realized within the parameters of capitalism. In short, 'punk' is the name that can be assigned to an organization of radical desires that, combined, express a wish for a non-capitalist structuring of social reality (p.78).

Conceptualizing SFTFF as a cultural field that embodies and enlivens lineages of queer, punk, and trans modes of desire is useful because desire is life-force within constraint. SFTFF's lineage and punk sensibility is an accumulation of desire for the world to be otherwise, for TGNC people's bodies to be decriminalized and de-medicalized, for those bodies to have access to filming technologies, to build their own worlds, and to have exhibition cultures to share their self-imagined representations. In order to create this exhibition culture, SFTFF has employed numerous tactics to ensure the conditions by which it can continue to enact a punk sensibility. These tactics, while precarious, enable the ongoing care work SFTFF performs, work that cannot be fully captured by the forces of nonprofitization, City-State legitimization, or business-oriented film festival teleology.

The notion of "holding out" illuminates the tension between desire for one's self-autonomy and the ways in which care work must consider the greater good. Thus, while Virago and Bornstein's positions on the T-word signify a sense of individualism and lack structural analysis, in my appraisal, they also both acknowledge and are committed to the broader work of "antiracist, intersectional, antipoverty, anti-imperialist, revolutionary organizing" (Beam, 2016). Tensions between investments in individualism and coalition are present in this case study. Ultimately, I argue that SFTFF's punk sensibility has manifested as economically and culturally adaptive, as a mode by which care work and a

range of desires for both individual expression and coalitional liberation find expression. Although the festival's name was changed in part to gain legibility within the logics of nonprofitization, this was simultaneously a responsive move to reduce harm to TGNC people. Both frameworks for understanding the name change signify a "hold out" in which punk sensibilities precariously and imperfectly adapt and respond to both material and cultural constraint. As Malatino (2020) writes, care work is interdependent and adaptive, allowing subjects "to repair, rebuild, and cultivate resilience" (p. 43).

Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the historical significance of SFTFF's name change in 2011 by contextualizing this case study within a brief history of arts funding in America, specifically addressing the significance of the "culture wars" for gender and sexual minority artists, as well as discourses in the mid-2000s regarding the T-word. By addressing these frameworks, I analyzed both cultural and economic factors that were at play in the pivotal nomenclature decision. This analysis is in line with the ways Critical Media Industries approaches take up Raymond Williams' contention that materialist critique must also consider how subjects and subjects-in-relation navigate material and cultural constraints. As such, I have addressed the notion of strategies (larger economic goals and logics of large-scale cultural industries) and tactics (the ways in which cultural workers seek to negotiate, and at times perhaps subvert, the constraints imposed by institutional interests to their own purposes" (Havens, Lotz, & Tinnic, 2009, p. 247). This case study serves as a reminder of the dialectical relationship between infrastructure and

politics and demonstrates how punk sensibilities can shift over time in response to discursive intra and inter-identity debate and economic structures and constraints.

CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

In a footnote of his dissertation, *Furtive Steady Glances: On the Emergence and Cultural Politics of Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals,* film festival scholar, Ger Zielinski, notes an endless fracturing of festivals according to identity groups, citing shifts from gay, to gay and lesbian, to LGBT, to queer film festivals. He asks, "Will the festival ever be able to accommodate fully transgender and transsexual concerns? How interested are transgender and transsexual persons in associating with such a festival" (2008, p. 173)? Although this dissertation, written over ten years later, is not a direct response to these questions, by centering SFTFF as its primary object of study, it asserts the value and importance of trans cinema and trans film festivals as having their own histories and exhibition cultures adjacent to but distinct from gay and lesbian or queer film festivals. Rather than attempt to lump together trans film festivals and describe this phenomenon more broadly, I have centered SFTFF because it is the longest-running documented trans film festival, has a robust history that should be documented, and offers a number of key features that mark its uniqueness and demonstrate its ongoing influences arising from and furthering the intersections of queer, punk, and trans lineages.

This dissertation acknowledges that film and video made by trans filmmakers or films with trans themes made by cis directors have been programmed at film festivals since the first documented gay festival, what is now known as Frameline, in San Francisco in 1977. However, I have argued the incorporation of a few films by or about trans experiences or "special" trans-themed programs, a growing phenomenon since the 1990s, is problematic for a number of reasons. One contention I have made is that some film scholars have inaccurately portrayed "trans cinema" as following on the heels of

"queer cinema" when trans filmmakers were present and making films at the same time. This historical inaccuracy is one of the salient consequences of the disproportionate attention paid to business oriented QFFs, such as Frameline, as the loci of cultural capital for "queer" films.

Susan Stryker writes in her review of SFTFF's debut in a 1997 *San Francisco Bay Times* article, that the events of the festival and its correlated week-long offerings of panels, photo exhibits, readings, performances, and receptions offer newcomers "a thorough introduction to living on the edge of gender" and for "the genderatti, they offer a marvelous opportunity to step back, enjoy, and take pride in the vitality and diversity of the local transgender scene." As I reflect in 2021 on the spatial and temporal specificity of SFTFF's beginnings, I am struck by Stryker's use of the phrase the "edge of gender." I find myself curious about what variables might constitute an edge in 2021.

Although US mainstream media outlets have and continue to repeatedly cash in on a transgender beat such that it has become commonplace to encounter legacy and digital forms of media that feature trans celebrities and spectacularized medical transition stories, conversations regarding gender as malleable and anti-essentialist, as culturally specific, and as an effect of colonization and anti-Blackness still arguably define an edge of gender that is repeatedly ignored or actively silenced while some of the most conservative trans stories and personalities have been largely incorporated within mainstream American media.

The analysis I offer in this dissertation, an examination of the spatial and temporal specificity of SFTFF, contributes to global conversations about gender. While I am aware of the limitations of a single case study, I have also repeatedly defended the importance

of the focus on SFTFF as an object of study as a way to parse out some of the unique ways in which a subcultural formation, in this case an exhibition culture based in protest, emerges and sustains itself within myriad constraints. The blend of historical and ethnographic methods I have used to study this festival's mechanics over its lifespan has illuminated the connective thread of punk as the festival's primary sensibility. As such, this dissertation analyzes how and to what effect the festival's mobilization of punk as a sensibility translates to insights about identity, exhibition, spatiality, and economics. The layered histories that have emerged make contributions relevant to film festival scholarship, queer and trans studies, and cultural studies. The four frameworks from which I examine this exhibition culture also reveal the complexities one encounters when attempting to discreetly consider either material or cultural analysis. Ultimately, this case study demonstrates material and cultural constraint and possibility cannot be disentangled.

Regarding identity, chapter one outlines vectors of SFTFF's subcultural lineage, addressing what scholars, activists, and cultural producers have articulated as salient intersections between punk and queer. My analysis of SFTFF pushes this exciting scholarship in a new direction to consider how trans also overlaps with queer and punk subcultural formations, activist investments, and sensibilities. By tracing SFTFF's lineage of queer, punk, and trans formations and their influence on early organizers' activist and artistic locations, I have articulated how trans shares an imperative yet under-analyzed overlap with queer and punk.

I have argued that punk as a sensibility has influenced practices and articulations of gender that are not contained within discrete identity categories or a notion of

community. Tracing the notion of genderfuck, what I articulate as a punk method of doing gender, to its discursive use in the 1970s, I have demonstrated how an intersection between queer, punk, and trans lineages reveals a non-conformist sensibility that is concerned with practices that destabilize conventions of gender and sexuality. Lineages of the festival's queer, punk, and trans investments informed the original actors and programming politics that when compared to current-day curatorial practices, programming, and exhibition norms, illuminate how a punk sensibility continues to motivate SFTFF's ongoing hold out - it's forms of protest as resistance to assimilationist trans narratives and rules of the dominant film festival field.

In chapter two, I reflected on the ways in which SFTFF's queer, punk, and trans lineages have and continue to influence its exhibition culture. Contributing to the growing scholarship of film festival studies, I analyzed SFTFF's exhibition practices in contrast with the prescriptive rules of the film festival system and its historically established hierarchies. By centering SFTFF as a case study, I challenged the hyper focus on IFFs and business oriented QFFs. Specifically, I considered the multiple divergences SFTFF takes in contrast to market focused IFF and QFF modes. Preferring Bourdieu's notion of a field over the commonly used metaphor of a "circuit" to describe the global film festival system, I have reformulated the term "circuit" in the context of the care work that SFTFF performs. I argued that SFTFF's mobilization of a punk sensibility destabilizes the rules of the festival field by enacting counter-hegemonic exhibition practices that are embedded within and enable circuits of care.

I linked care work to the affects of grief and rage that I argued were salient to the formation of intersecting queer, punk, and trans cultural production and direct action. The

specific care work that SFTFF does is spatially de-linked from the heteronormative domestic sphere and as such builds its own rhizomatic webs in which TGNC people contact and support each other through forms of mutual aid on the streets, in community centers, and the exhibition practices of the festival event. I linked care work to historical formations such as ACT UP, Queer Nation, and Trans Nation, all of which mobilized rage into transformative, defiant, and expressive forms of cultural production. One of the many ways SFTFF performs care work is their continuation of collectivized rage as a form of protest against assimilation.

I asserted that SFTFF's consistent resistance to mainstream film festivals rules, noteworthy in their refusals to collaborate with city planning and tourism, awards rituals, global festival competition, and increasing professionalization and corporate sponsorship, demonstrates how a punk sensibility informs the care work they perform. Notably, SFTFF's punk sensibility translates to their focus on DIY production and collaboration versus competition. There is no secret escape door to the ongoing violence of capitalism, but my formulation of SFTFF's investments in circuits of care ultimately reveals that this exhibition culture motivates the production of new producers to continually challenge both the dominant forms and procedures of cultural production and queer and trans assimilation in society at large. In this formulation, punk is relational and experiential, and SFTFF becomes a node within broader circuits and lineages of trans care that demonstrate on a daily basis the many ways punk desires continue to manifest and take material shape.

In chapter three I considered how SFTFF's lineage and animation of a punk sensibility translates spatially. This theoretical lens was motivated by spatial theorization

becoming its own sub-field in film festival studies and by the importance of spatial analysis for queer and trans studies. Similar to the ways in which SFTFF enables care work through their investments in building and nurturing circuits of care, the festival also claims material space as a part of its resistance to capitalism, the State, police violence, and societal marginalization of trans bodies. Drawing from Lefebvre, I asserted that SFTFF, as an exhibition culture composed of and for TGNC people, claims a right to the city. Key to Lefebvre's formulation of the right to the city is a distinction between *the city* and *the urban*. Per Lefebvre, capitalism shapes the city according to exchange value which then manages the commodified space and largely prevents people from coming together in moments of encounter and play. *The urban* on the other hand is best considered as a process - one that invites spontaneous encounters and possibility for collaboration. By rejecting economic determinism as the singular formulation to understand the ways in which a city regulates its inhabitants, I have theorized SFTFF through a lens of lived everyday experiences that must constantly negotiate with the material effects of capitalism.

Similar to my articulation of intersecting queer, punk, and trans lineages that informed the emergence of SFTFF, by offering historical spatial analysis of the region known as San Francisco, the district known as the Mission, and the Roxie Theater, where SFTFF has gathered almost yearly since its inception, I have situated the festival culture within a broader context of colonization, waves of immigration, gentrification, and various modes of activist and artistic resistance and complicities with these forces. The ideological significance of the Roxie Theater's location in the Mission District carries more valence when considered in light of these spatial histories and I highlight this in my

comparative discussion of the Mission District and Roxie Theater in relationship to Frameline's spatiality primarily in the Castro District.

Ultimately, I have argued that SFTFF ephemerally de-alienates space through collective gathering - a process wherein actors overcome physical separation, engage in spontaneous and meaningful interaction, and envision future potentiality. These effects of SFTFF's appropriation of space highlight Muñoz's articulation of the ways in which queer and trans of color performance cultures and the spaces they occupy enable world-building. Trans and queer bodies, particularly BIPOC bodies, transgress some of the limitations of material space when they gather to celebrate modes of gender performance and expression other than those accounted for within a colonial gender binary. These spaces enable what Muñoz refers to as a "utopian performative" - a non-prescriptive world-building process that envisions the possibilities for structural change beyond the constraints of capitalism. SFTFF is one such queer and trans exhibition culture that does the work of world-building through material and symbolic affordances emboldened on screen, within its curatorial practices, the spontaneous interactions on sidewalks and in lobbies it fosters, and its embeddedness in broader liberationist and coalitional care work. Combined, all of this work envisions a differently structured world in which queer and trans people, particularly those of color, get to grow up and thrive, a sentiment that Susan Stryker highlighted in her 1997 review of SFTFF when she wrote, " … the San Francisco festival has its gaze firmly set on the future."

Lastly, in chapter four I theorized how SFTFF's enactment of punk as a sensibility manifests as a tactic by which the festival has and continues to navigate the precarity of nonprofitization as a hegemonic framework in the arts world. I

contextualized SFTFF's emergence in the late nineties within discourses of the era referred to as the "culture wars." I traced this era, which included buzz words like censorship, propaganda, and pornography, back to the NEA's inception in 1965 in order to situate the NEA's role as a powerful gatekeeper of arts funding and discourse that contributes to defining what it means to be American, what constitutes democracy, the function of art, and how symbolic power should or should not be regulated.

Highlighting a brief history of arts funding in San Francisco, I contextualized the nineties as a decade that ushered in louder minoritarian outcry about the inequity in municipal funding along lines of difference. This was the decade in which the San Francisco Arts Commission introduced a Cultural Equity Endowment Fund, one of the first of its kind in the U.S., a move meant to support underserved art communities. By the mid-1990s, despite the cultural and economic impact of the "culture war" era nationally, San Francisco started to fund more marginalized artists. I highlighted this history to contextualize the support SFTFF received from the City, including a Proclamation by then San Francisco Mayor, Willie Lewis Brown, Jr., and the City and County of San Francisco, awarded at the first SFTFF gathering on November 22, 1997 and several subsequent years.

I read the City Proclamation as a signifier of the city's ideological investments during the nineties, in which San Francisco was actively involved in constructing an image of its values as progressive, inclusive, and accommodating for minority artists while simultaneously enforcing regressive policies that targeted immigrants, BIPOC communities, and gender and sexual minorities. I read the City Proclamation as performative inclusion in a decade known for increasing awareness of trans identities as a

"new" minority group. This analysis was enhanced by reading primary evidence in the form of home videos made by original co-founders Christopher Lee and Alex Austin at the first three festivals. Lee and Austin's curatorial commentary and side conversations about the City Proclamation revealed disinterest in being "legitimized" by the Mayor and City and their preference for and articulations of circuits of care that enabled the festival's emergence.

I concluded the last chapter with a case study of the festival's name change in which the T-word was dropped in 2011. I discussed both cultural and economic factors that were at play in the pivotal nomenclature decision, linking the name change to effects nonprofitization has had on "queer" arts and cultural production. The term nonprofitization, coined by Myrl Beam, accounts for the ways in which the institutional form of the nonprofit operates as a structuring device by monetizing the idea of a "movement" in order to accrue resources through the attraction of funders, participants, staff, and volunteers. I also examined the ways in which nonprofits have increasingly enacted business-like structuring through corporate-style management, discourse, and market-driven principles.

Focusing on a case study of the name change illuminated how and to what effect nonprofitization became a determining structure of SFTFF. In addition to the need to become more culturally legible for potential funders, I contextualized the name change within ongoing discursive debates about the T-word in the mid-2000s. Drawing a link between queer, punk, and trans lineages that informed early festival actors, I contextualized use of the T-word in the festival's original name as aligned with queer and punk reclamations of this term. Although the name change was in part motivated by

economic interests, I did not interpret this decision from a framework of "selling out" - a phrase often levied at "punk" formations who to some extent or another are vilified for merging toward a mode of business or market-orientation. Rather, I reformulated SFTFF's punk sensibility as primarily invested in care work wherein the name change attended to the harm caused by the T-word, particularly for BIPOC trans women and nonbinary people. I interpreted the name change as signifying an ongoing commitment to the queer and punk sensibilities and liberationist ideology that informed the festival's emergence and referred to this decision by introducing a framework of "holding out" to explore the nuanced tactics SFTFF has used to persist.

SFTFF has always existed within layers of cultural and economic precarity and as such has creatively strategized to ensure the conditions by which it can continue to embody and enact a punk sensibility. The case study of the festival's name change serves as a reminder of the broader care work SFTFF has been invested in since its inception in 1997. A framework of SFTFF as "holding out" acknowledges that the festival event and its sociality may be in part fiscally backed according to logics of nonprofitization, but that punk desires are experimentally and playfully enacted in the improvisational spaces of the sidewalk, the lobby, the theater, the screen, and the broader punk circuits of care within which the festival is embedded and which it continues to build. These punk desires cannot be fully captured or incorporated within capitalist logics.

As I noted, this dissertation research is the first known of its kind to center and assert the cultural importance of SFTFF as the world's longest-running documented trans film festival. SFTFF's queer, punk, and trans lineages have influenced its counter-hegemonic exhibition practices. Notably, SFTFF mobilizes punk as a sensibility to

embolden and promote care work. Care and rage are linked in SFTFF's punk sensibility and inform the festival's adaptive and interdependent tactics to creatively and resiliently respond to the constraints of capitalism and mainstreaming of privileged and palatable trans identities. Building an exhibition culture based on protest, SFTFF resists incorporation in mainstream society and cultural industries more broadly, representing a hold out that *holds on* to liberationist ideology that centers anti-racism, sex positivity, anti-capitalism, housing justice, and prison abolition. A historical analysis of SFTFF reveals the festival's unique embeddedness in and continuation of circuits of care that continue to creatively navigate and envision these liberationist aims despite myriad constraints. This dissertation is part of my contribution to this ongoing care work. It is my hope that future scholars, activists, and cultural producers will continue to expand and extend the worlds we build.

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