



## Film Festivals on the Small Screen: Audiences, Domestic Space, and Everyday Media

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Since March 2020 in the UK, the coronavirus pandemic has vastly reduced opportunities for people to gather together in proximity. Film festivals have moved to a variety of broadcast, video-on-demand (VOD), and VOD-like forms of film exhibition. The space of the festival has been reconfigured from a consolidated material space of co-presence to the distributed spaces of audiences' homes. Film viewing takes place on home television sets, laptops, and mobile devices and, due to the often flexible form of film scheduling, the film festival comes to sit within and against the rhythms of everyday media use. In this new context, direct contact with other audience members is drastically reduced and contingent on the specific execution of individual festivals, albeit taking place exclusively

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across digital media. Overall, attendance at an online film festival has come to hold much in common with the domestic consumption of video in the post-broadcast era of television.

This chapter offers a conceptual framework to theorize film festival audiences as festivals have shifted to digital forms of exhibition. We argue that any account of online film festival audiences should take into consideration the relationship between film festival viewing and other media practices. From mediascapes (Alasuutari 1999) and media ecologies (Fuller 2005) to media convergence (Jenkins 2006) and transmedia studies (Guynes and Hassler-Forest 2018), a whole host of researchers have argued that media practices are best understood at the intersection *between* a constellation of technologies, platforms, and devices rather than in isolation. Accordingly, we suggest that existing film festival research on audiences can be enriched by perspectives from television studies and research on other domestic and everyday media. This body of research understands the audience as an active participant in the production of meaning that is deeply contextualized within the social and embodied (domestic) space of the viewer while remaining geographically distant from one another and from the source of the transmitted content. By placing this account of the audience in dialogue with existing film festival literature, we propose a relational approach that locates film festival audiences at the intersection of multiple media practices within the texture of everyday life. This also builds on the work of Jancovich et al. (2003) and Klinger (2006), who examine the relationship between different forms of film exhibition and different modes of televisual viewing. Here, we are particularly interested in how distinctions between media practices work to “frame” (Couldry 2004, 25) the online film festival as a media event. Ultimately, we argue that it is in the connections and the distinctions between different media practices that this framing of the online film festival is performed, negotiated, and, in some cases, felt to be lost by audience members.

The connections and distinctions between different media practices can be observed in three different sites: “space, time, and social relations,” as Selberg (1998, 106–107) states. These sites are significant because spatial and temporal distinctions, as well as the social interactions between audience members, are central to the experience of attending an in-person film festival. As many film festival researchers have noted, particular configurations of space and time, as well as specific interactions between audience members, are key to the performance of “liveness” and festivity—the making of the film festival as an event distinct from ordinary theatrical

exhibition (Dickson 2015; Harbord 2016). In an early piece of film festival scholarship, Bazin ([1955] 2009) describes the spatially and temporally predicated rituals of the Cannes Film Festival, likening the experience to that of attending a religious order. De Valck et al. (2016, 9) similarly emphasize the centrality of the conjunction between (material) festival space and time, stating that the “festival takes place in the here and now. They [festivals] invite people to engage with cinema in ways that are uniquely tied in with the space and time of the festival event.” Yet, as Dayan (2000) notes, space and time is also the product of multiple performances, scripts, and improvised interactions from audience members and festival organizers. In Loist’s words (2014, 40), “the festival is a performance, in the anthropological sense of a ritual; or an act of performance in the theatrical sense of the term with a focus on the transient, ephemeral, live event, which hinges on bodily presence of various actors.” Accordingly, the concept of liveness as a performance, and its associations with unpredictability and contingency, has thus come to form a central node in understandings of the film festival event. To point to the performativity of the film festival as a live event is to note its historical, spatial, and technological contingency and, subsequently, its potential to be otherwise under different conditions. By examining the online film festival through the lens of television studies, it is therefore possible to cast a new light on this concept of performativity and to open up a conceptual space in which liveness and festivity can be understood even as the film festival has been radically reconfigured.

As such, we recognize both the contraction and expansion inherent to film festival audiences during the pandemic, the relationship between these phenomena, and the contradictions this may engender in terms of audience experience. For example, while many have experienced lockdown as a shrinking of social life and participation, others have never felt more connected. As Brunow (2020, 339) notes, for previously excluded audiences, “hybrid or online formats can offer new ways of participation, providing the festivals are reflecting on their access strategies.” Such an approach allows for a re-imagining of audiences and community in the context of the film festival that is not necessarily contingent on the material co-presence of bodies or established notions of film festival time and liveness as they have previously been conceived. This is particularly important as these emerging forms of audienceship will shape festivals as they move increasingly toward hybrid and blended forms of film exhibition in the future.

## MEDIA AND DOMESTIC SPACE IN THE POST-BROADCAST ERA

Spatial distinctions are at the center of the film festival as an event and as a (potential) political platform. In a 2015 study of audiences at Glasgow Film Festival, Dickson (2015, 703) finds that festival attendees characterize their experiences “primarily in spatial and corporeal terms,” emphasizing the centrality of embodied practices to festival audiences. Brunow (2020) similarly acknowledges the significance of co-presence, material space, embodiment, and affect, particularly at LGBT+ film festivals, which provide vital opportunities for cruising, community building, romance, and friendship. Loist (2014, 39) supports this perspective, stating, “unlike artefacts or texts, performances are events and, thus, transient and ephemeral. An important aspect of the materiality lies in the embodiment through the participants, which affect body, voice, and spatiality of the event.” Similarly, Wong (2011, 159) notes how the co-mingling of festival bodies “constitute the crowd and the buzz of festivals, the local and wider imagined global community of cinephilia.” In studies of queer film festivals, Schoonover and Galt (2016) and Heath (2018) likewise emphasize the centrality of unique spatial configurations and festival bodies at film festivals and their connection to liveness and the affective experience of attending the event. Schoonover and Galt (2016) note how exhibitions and art installations at MIX NYC, for example, often act as corollary to the events unfolding in diegetic space, while Heath (2018) argues that the type of “spatio-textual curation” identified by Dickson (2015) may form the foundation of a queer politics of space reclamation. Put simply, co-present space has been central to the performance of film festivals and their publics as social, political, and cinematic bodies.

During the pandemic, creating this space of co-presence has not been possible for most film festivals in the UK. Instead, the online film festival unfolds within the experiential space of audiences’ homes while simultaneously establishing a networked digital space of film exhibition and consumption. Over the past year, the home has become the primary space of everyday life as well as the site of work, leisure, socialization, and care. While the pandemic has vastly reduced the spaces of everyday life, it has also greatly increased the presence of digital media within everyday experiences, most notably in connection to work but also the social. However, the home is not experienced equally by all. It is a space of tension, conflict, and inequality; the home is a political and gendered space, and these inequalities affect the distribution of various activities that take place

within the home, particularly the relationship between gender, work, and care. In turn, these relationships shape individuals' use of media and their experience of place.

Theorizing film festivals in the context of audiences' homes necessitates a sensitivity to the ways in which multiple media are part of the place-making and contestation of the home by different groups (Morley 2000). Home, as a place, can be understood as the product of multiple overlapping practices, rhythms, and flows (Massey 2005). Media are constitutive of these practices, and they both work to shape the space of home as well as provide a resource for the performance of home as a space of security and refuge (Silverstone 1994; Pink and Mackley 2013). People "make and experience place with media technologies by helping to create environments that 'feel right' in creative, diverse and innovative ways" (Pink and Mackley 2013, 689) and arguably this role of media has been intensified since the pandemic. Furthermore, media are responsible not only for the making of home, but also the drawing of the boundaries between the private and the public and the routes between the two (Lloyd 2020). In doing so, media produce what Scannell (2000) describes as the "double-ness of place." That is, media within the home function as a way of participating in public. In the context of film festivals, they work to connect the space of the home to the space of other audience members and to the space of the festival. Accordingly, this section and the following section deal with the "double-ness" of film festival space, examining the relationships between different visual and broadcast media within the home before connecting the home to the public space of the festival by examining the relationships between different forms of public address.

While the relationships between different media within everyday life have always been important, this is particularly significant now as television has become radically distributed across digital media (Sanson and Steirer 2019). With the rise in popularity of VOD services for film and television, we are currently living in a post-broadcast and post-network era of television (Lotz 2007). This era of television is characterized by media convergence, flexible watching schedules and individualized continuous flows of content, algorithmically curated individualized recommendations, and fragmented transnational audiences (Jenner 2018). The television screen has become the site of media convergence through which terrestrial TV, "catch-up" VOD, video streaming platforms, video games, music, and radio are all consumed. At the same time, audiences traverse multiple devices, platforms, and digital spaces in search of content (Jenkins 2006).

The routinized schedules of terrestrial TV described by Silverstone (1994) and Scannell (1996) have been supplemented by new flexible modes of watching, extending the choice of cable TV and the “time-shift” capacity of the VCR (Jenner 2018). As a result, the living room television for many households no longer sits as the privileged domestic site of visual media consumption, the “hearth of modernity” around which the family gathers (Turner and Tay 2009, 3); rather, it becomes one site among many for multiple rituals and routines. In the post-broadcast era of television, the living room as a media space has, for many households, been remade around the ideals of “portability, modularity, [and] malleability” (Sterne 2003, 239). This is not to suggest that the television does not still play a major role in many households, but that it is no longer the sole way in which television is consumed or enters the home; instead, the post-broadcast era of television is characterized as much by individual watching and portable screens as it is by co-present modes of viewership.

Within these proliferating spaces of viewing, there has been a rapid multiplication and overlapping of “body-technology-place relations” (Richardson and Wilken 2012, 182), the modes through which particular bodily routines and media practices constitute experiences of place. Particularly, the modularity and malleability of post-broadcast domestic media space allows media to serve ever more as a resource for individuals within the home. This is most explicitly observable in the use of media in the “background.” As Tacchi (2009) notes, broadcast media are often used to produce an affective texture to housework, care, and study that enables people to feel like they’re performing a social or quasi-social part of themselves while doing activities that may be otherwise isolating. This role of broadcast media within the home is intensified by the mobility and temporal flexibility of mobile streaming video media (Steiner and Xu 2020, 92). Dibben and Haake (2013) similarly show that, in the case of work-place media use, media can be used to reassert a sense of control over one’s sensory environment and one’s identity in spaces that threaten to undermine it. Research conducted during the first lockdown has shown that in times of personal stress, many individuals move away from information and news-based media and increase their use of streaming-based video media (Pahayahay and Khalili-Mahani 2020). In the context of the home during the pandemic, media can be used to manage anxiety-inducing intrusions from the public into the private (Silverstone 1994) as well as help to draw the boundaries between different activities that take place within the same space.

The online film festival necessarily participates in the production of this malleable and mediated domestic space. The film festival may be used both to re-establish the living room as a space of co-present household leisure and to remove audiences from an environment that may be overwhelming and claustrophobic. It may be part of the performance of spatial and affective distinctions within the house, or it may become largely integrated into existing televisual and broadcast experiences of domestic media space. What is important to note is that, while audiences' existing mediated home space will be structured along lines of gender and age, audiences maintain an active role in the performance and contestation of domestic space. This, in turn, will affect how the event of the film festival is experienced as part of, or framed as separate from, everyday life. Thinking of the film festival as both a structuring condition and a resource within the media space of the home has implications for how we understand the relationship of the home to the public (digital) space of the festival. In order to connect these two spaces, it is necessary to examine the relationship between the spaces of viewing and the modes of public address used by film festivals.

#### ADDRESSING THE HOME: RECONFIGURING THE PUBLIC IN PRIVATE SPACES

As noted above, film festival publics have been (understandably) located predominantly within public space and in terms of the co-presence of bodies. Indeed, Wong (2011, 163), drawing on Habermas' concept of the bourgeois public sphere, argues that it is "the physicality of many festivals as they take over public venues and spill over into lobbies, streets, and coffeehouses [that] evokes the vivid spatialities of Habermas' first examples of the bourgeois public sphere itself." Wong (2011) further draws upon scholarship by Warner (2005), who emphasizes the centrality of modes of address to the constitution of both the public and the counterpublic. However, while Wong (2011) cites the physical co-presence of bodies as underpinning the relationship between film festivals and the public sphere and, by extension, specific publics, Warner (2005, 66) argues that publics may equally "come into being only in relation to texts and their circulation." A public may, then, be constituted within co-present material public space, but it may also occur in a distributed and imaginary discursive space (Warner 2005, 87). Reframing festival space in terms of discursive space in

which forms of address are mobilized allows us to shift emphasis from physical to digital forms of co-presence, and from public to domestic space, in order to theorize the digital spectator as not necessarily any less a member of a unique festival public than those participating in a non-digital event. Moreover, collapsing distinctions between domestic space and public space is not new in film festival practice; as Barlow (2003) highlights, the 1975 New York Women's Video Festival created a dimly lit Pillow Room complete with sofas, pillows, and blankets in an attempt to map the comfort of domestic space on to the public sphere. This strategy has more recently been adopted by activist film festivals such as Scottish Queer International Film Festival (SQIFF), Leeds Queer Film Festival, and Wotever DIY Film Festival, seeking to work within queer feminist frameworks and improve disabled access.

Nonetheless, the possibilities of geographically diffuse yet relational publics are dramatically expanded when we turn to the standard modes of address, and approaches to these modes of address, which have characterized domestic broadcast technology and its field of study. As Scannell (1996, 2000) and Marriot (2007) argue, the mode of live address typically observable in broadcast radio and television emerged in the middle of the twentieth century in Europe and the US as one of intimacy and individual address, what Cardiff (1980, 31) calls the "domestication of public utterance." Scannell (2000, 12) describes this as a "for-anyone-as-someone" mode of address that creates in principle "the possibilities of, and in practice express, a public, shared and sociable world-in-common between members of an audience." It is directed toward a broad public (for-anyone) but is sonically characterized by a mode of directness and intimacy that has become coterminous with the domestic sphere of media consumption (as-someone). As Morley (2000) has rightly demonstrated, this world-in-common is in reality defined along national lines and tacitly along lines of class, race, and gender. Nonetheless, it has become the predominant way of addressing distributed broadcast publics, and many podcasts incorporate this form of intimacy, enabling audience members to feel a sense of proximity to the podcast creator as well as to each other (Swiatek 2018). Crucially, Marriot (2007) argues that this mode of address is performative and historically contingent. The mode of publicly directed intimacy is far from the only way of being addressed. It interpellates individuals into a public that was considered compatible with middle-class, nuclear forms of domesticity based around the primacy of the home as a site of refuge and safety. It is the product of a number of bodily and technological



techniques that come to make particular types of images, sounds, and symbols seem natural and domesticable.

With the broad transition to VOD and streaming platforms, this anyone-as-someone mode of address has changed to the plural “YOU [sic.]” of digital platforms and algorithmically generated taste recommendations (Chun 2016, 19–21). The “YOU” becomes a datafied and quantified you of “you-as-user” (Bratton 2015, 260). It is a “YOU” produced by the audience’s practices of viewership and the cycles of feedback produced by the platform. It is also, as Jenner (2018, 127) states, a “you” that coalesces around genre, format, and tone as platform algorithms are particularly sensitive to these parameters. This individualized form of address has become dominant across social media platforms as well and is arguably the main form of user address within the digital platform ecology.

Traditionally, modes of address at the film festival event have consisted of live, direct address to audiences in auditoriums at opening galas and welcome events, at the commencement of screenings, after screenings as part of a Q&A session with filmmakers, or at side bar and social events. Attendees are further interpellated into the wider festival community through paratextual material, namely, the printed or digitally accessed program or brochure and, more recently, as a result of following film festival accounts on social media. As festivals have moved to digital platforms, modes of address have become more diffuse and unpredictable; while some festivals have attempted to maintain a sense of liveness by running live screening events complete with real-time welcome speeches, others have opted to pre-record introductions and welcome speeches, which are then made accessible to audiences for a period of several hours along with the related film program, or for the duration of the festival. Similarly, paratextual material is, for the most part, accessed digitally and at the attendee’s leisure. Yet, while the mode of address of online film festivals is often pre-recorded and asynchronous, there are still strong distinctions between the mode of address of film festivals and the mode of other domestic media.

The “YOU” as individualized and quantified user is certainly absent, as is the intimate “anyone” of Scannell’s (2000) phenomenology of broadcasting (or podcasting). Instead, the film festival shares a mode of address not dissimilar from MUBI or BFI Player, highly curated VOD platforms that address the audience as part of a distributed online community characterized by “the new cinephilia” (Hessler 2018); MUBI’s tagline “Your Online Cinema, Anytime, Anywhere” resonates with the increasingly transnational, or at least translocal, public of online film festivals. This is a

curatorial mode of address, shaped as much by programming decisions and the issues and identity categories that they attempt to interpellate. This is particularly important when one considers, once again, the distributed geography of audiences in their homes. Although we do not have the space here to deal extensively with the issue of disabled and other forms of access, it is vital to note that the flexibility and spatial relocation of the online film festival to the home makes the content more accessible to people who are, for many reasons, less able to attend an in-person screening (Brunow 2020).

Within this context, the dual role of media as both structuring the space of the home and providing a resource for negotiating this space have significance for the modes of address and belonging described above. Audiences may choose to be addressed as a member of a curatorial or social public to inflect their home space with a particular affective structure that is not otherwise a part of their daily life or to recognize their household as part of a larger festival audience. In other cases, modes of address and audience desires may not line up, and televisual or broadcast forms of address may interfere with experiences of the festival as a particular event or of their relationship to a festival public. Either way, the “doubleness” of place creates a network of spatial relationships and distinctions that can be mobilized and negotiated by audiences in the daily making and remaking of their home lives.

### RECONFIGURING THE TIME OF THE AUDIENCE

Much like space, particular forms of temporality have long been part of the in-person film festival. The film festival is often understood as a unique yet cyclical event, encompassing and collapsing both synchronous and diachronous modes of time (Harbord 2016), and which thrives on contingency and the possibility of failure, shock, or surprise for its unique “buzz” or dynamic energy (Burgess 2020). “There is a movement from continuous time into the instant of the live event that in some way misfires” (Harbord 2016, 70). The order of temporal complexity at film festivals increases in magnitude when we consider the diegetic space of the films shown and programming schedules. Thus, to the convergence of the cyclical time of the annual event and the contingency of the “here and now” can be added the screening and/or events schedule and run times in addition to the periods of time covered in the multiple diegeses of the films shown (Mennel 2019). To this highly complex temporal matrix, we might

further add the unique temporalities of festival bodies, each of which operates according to external schedules and pressures, and internal rhythms and bodily requirements.

Since the pandemic, viewing practices are now situated within, and are far more inflected by, the rhythms and temporality of the domestic and everyday. In order to understand the temporality of film festival audiences as they move online, we therefore need to understand the existing temporal structure of everyday media practice. This will, naturally, differ from household to household enormously, but it is possible to isolate a number of key differences. Broadcast media, in particular, play an important role in the constitution of everyday temporality and the routines and rhythms of the home. As such, they contribute to what Scannell (1996, 161) calls “dailiness,” where broadcast media disclose “the public world in its eventfulness” within the routines of everyday life. Broadcast scheduling has historically been tied to the industrial rhythms of domestic life, as well as the gendered distinctions that mark out the spaces and times of home (Andrews 2012). As continuous schedules, they produce what Williams (1974) refers to as “flow.” This continuous flow of content produces a very particular type of “now,” one that takes place within a sequence of planned media events and routines. Continuous broadcast media are part of what makes everyday time feel particular yet organized and, most of all, ordinary. It is a synchronic yet highly structured time.

The flow of broadcast media differs from what Jenner (2018, 125) refers to as the insulated flow of streaming video such as Netflix. The forms of circulation colloquially referred to as “binge-watching” or “bingeable content” remediate the DVD box-set approach to television in which the series takes on the organizational role for content rather than the individual episode. By removing the intro credits and automatically sequencing material following an episode (from the same series or material tagged as similar in genre or tone), these platforms operate around an asynchronous, *continuous* form of flow that is structured more around the narrative time of the series or film than the industrial and gendered rhythms of everyday life. In this way, they take on a semi-event structure. Jenner (2018, 157) details the ways in which prolonged periods of binge-watching may become a social event imbued with interpersonal significance. Supplemented by the proliferation of fan paratexts, this asynchronous form of media consumption still generates the “buzz” characteristic of major broadcast televisual events and can still take on huge social significance within the everyday lives of viewers.

Simultaneously, as has been outlined above, post-broadcast television can be made to cohere with the rhythms and routines of everyday life as background television. Just as media can be used to remake the space of the domestic sphere, media are used as a resource to maintain and delineate the boundaries between work, leisure, socializing, and care. Streaming television can be understood as exhibiting a flexible, asynchronous, and continuous temporality that can be *both* a social, quasi-event and a resource within the making of the ordinariness of everyday life. This duality arises from a dialectic of attention and inattention (Pilipets 2019) that lies at the heart of the changing forms of production and distribution of television content and their different approaches to scheduling and continuity; both commercial broadcast and streaming video media rely on this attention economy in which different forms of flow attempt to routinize and habituate forms of media consumption (Chun 2016). In the case of VOD, these services hope to fold users into “scripted interactivity” (Chamberlain 2011) with the platform, folding multiple forms of attention and inattention into the data-driven recommendation algorithms. On the other hand, film festivals often present an opposition to forms of continuous viewing. While they may take on a live broadcast or VOD relationship to time, they attempt to capture a different type of attention based around discrete viewings. As Harbord (2016) suggests, film festivals and audience practices attempt to “make time matter.”

Suddenly propelled into the rhythms and structures of everyday life, the film festival is both a familiar and an unfamiliar guest. Just as the introduction of VHS in the 1970s fully brought film consumption and cinema into domestic space (Herbert 2011), so too has the proliferation of digital platforms and necessities of lockdown caused the public film event to be integrated into the home and domestic sphere. Nonetheless, as with television programs to which viewers live tweet along on social media, film festivals, particularly those encouraging audience interaction and participation, cannot be said to be fully domesticated; as we have demonstrated, they are both part of the private sphere *and* connected to (and constitutive of) a potentially global digital public. In this sense, film festivals share the temporal rhythms and “eventness” of television programs that have a strong digital component or following. Yet, film festivals consumed in domestic space are not “ordinary” occurrences and, despite sharing something of the eventfulness of the box set binge, they are not usually available on demand for long periods of time. This sets

digital film festivals apart from many VOD services which can still be streamed at a later date.

Consequently, while the digital film festival shares many similarities with contemporary forms of domestic media consumption, it remains resistant to the ubiquitous provision of on-demand content in its insistence on discrete watching experiences, instilling a pre-digital sense of exclusivity and a more clearly and rigidly delimited time-frame. Unlike VOD services that take on an unstable yet archival dimension as precarious stockpiles of content (Roy 2015), online film festivals operate as far more ephemeral temporal events. While their programs, including the digital versions of programs, certainly take on an archival dimension (Damiens 2020) as inscriptions of cinematic and cultural history, the platforms that are used for film exhibition do not. The online film festival is thus a discrete event that sits somewhere between the immediacy of broadcasting and the asynchronous flexibility of VOD. Once again, there is a curious similarity between the temporality of MUBI after it moved to the current form of a highly curated 30-day window for each film (Smits and Nikdel 2018). Both encourage a particular type of curatorially inflected discrete viewing and both employ short rental windows to encourage engagement. The distinction, or framing, is in the time window of the rental window.

The phenomenological experience of attending a digital film festival is therefore heavily contingent on the strategies pursued by individual organizations; some will recreate a sense of urgency in that one must sit down at a particular time to catch the film. *Africa In Motion*, for example, specifically invites viewers to attend a screening at an initial time. Others provoke the excitement of directly and personally engaging with a film's director after the screening. In contrast, the experience of attending other forms of festival may be more akin to the box set binge, where the viewer sets aside time in their own schedule to watch films back-to-back. Consequently, when considering forms of audiences at digital film festivals, and their relationship to other forms of media and broadcast technology, it is necessary to take into account the multiple ways in which film festivals have broached and negotiated the digital sphere. Once again, it is in the distinctions and connections between these different media temporalities that the audience's experience of the online film festival is reperformed, reconfigured, or potentially blurred with other media forms.

## REMIEDIATING AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

The event of the in-person film festival is characterized by certain scripts and bodily performances (Dayan 2000; Loist 2014). This is true both in events such as Q&As and discussion panels in which particular discursive structures of audience-programmer interaction are performed, adapted, and contested as well as in film screenings where audience reactions become part of the performance of liveness. These may be sounds and actions of affirmation or expressions of dissent. As Fischer-Lichte (2008) notes in performance studies, the interaction and co-presence between actors and performers brings about a unique, discrete event which is contingent on this relationship. Loist (2014), drawing on Fischer-Lichte (2008), subsequently argues that film festivals can equally be understood within such a performance framework; even though the films themselves will not change, the screening is a unique event produced through the interaction of various festival actors, namely, the film, organizers, audience, and any filmmakers who may be present.

On the other hand, television studies and fan studies have a long history of understanding how audiences who are *not* physically co-present participate in the meaning of texts. D'Acci (1994) demonstrates how audiences reworked the images portrayed of women in the 1980s television show *Cagney & Lacey* in the context of their everyday lives and social interactions. Fiske (1992) also points to the textual production of fans who remake and contest the diegetic meanings of popular television shows through the circulation of various fan paratexts. Recently, with the rise of certain social media platforms, these fan practices have moved from the fringes to more widespread everyday practices (Jenner 2018), particularly around a number of long-running, high-budget television shows such as *Breaking Bad*, *House of Cards*, and *Game of Thrones*. Forcier (2017) points to the ways in which fans operate across multiple media to interpret, contest, and often extend the narrative texts of television shows. This takes place both during episode premieres and shortly afterward. These fan paratexts—from instant responses on Twitter to fully-fledged character “wiki” encyclopedia entries—are an important part of the context of the consumption of certain texts as taking on a special significance. Crucially, they occur across multiple media, and within multiple temporal frameworks, as relates to the temporal nature of the original text. These multiple forms of audience interaction create what Couldry (2004, 360) describes

as “rival forms of liveness,” different temporalities of continuous connection that compete with the primary text’s temporality.

As the film festival has moved online, reconfigured somewhere between a live broadcast medium and a VOD service, the forms of audience participation possible are both limited and expanded in unexpected ways. As above, modes of film festival audience participation vary from festival to festival and between different events. Some festivals, such as SQIFF, have promoted the use of the chat function for audiences to chat among themselves before, during, and after screenings and also to interact with filmmakers who may be present. As such, the festival attendee plays a live, active role in the unfolding of the screening as performance. However, other festivals, such as Edinburgh International Film Festival, opted for a more VOD-like experience due to lack of time to pivot (although the festival will in 2021 operate a blended, hybrid event). Of course, social media and film-specific platforms such as Letterboxd as well as online journalism can still serve as a platform to discuss festival events and create the sense of “buzz” that surrounds the event of the festival, here acknowledging the ephemerality of festival “buzz” as a source of festivals’ experiential and cultural capital value (Burgess 2020).

What is different is that live screenings and festival events that use video conferencing platforms such as Zoom also incorporate novel spaces of audience participation. In addition to participating in Q&As and discussions, viewers are able to type in the chat and discuss as films are playing. This can take several forms; for example, at Africa in Motion and SQIFF online events, it is common for audience members to remediate the expression of “applause” through congratulatory sentiments at the end of the film. Furthermore, audience members often share affirmative and celebratory proclamations, particularly during emotionally intense beats in the film. These forms of communication may be considered inappropriate during an in-person screening in which audiences are encouraged to keep quiet during the main screening. In this way, digital film festivals enable new performances of liveness, characterized more by Couldry’s (2004) “continuous connectedness” or Moores’s (2012) understanding of simultaneity than spatial proximity. Paratextual spaces become key places in which audience members are able to perform “presencing,” forms of mediated interaction that are concerned with signaling one’s presence to another (Richardson and Wilken 2012); that is, while intense discussion and debate can still take place, conversation in the Zoom chat often takes the form of often-phatic or emotional communication that are more

concerned with making the presence of oneself known to others than with the exchange of novel ideas. In this way, the simultaneity of digital media constitutes a form of intimacy at a distance. Again, the distinctions and connections between different modes of audience interaction can blur the experience of online film festivals and other media but they can also work to carve a novel space, framing it as distinct from other forms of media consumption.

### CONCLUSION: REFRAMING THE FILM FESTIVAL AUDIENCE

We have argued that in order to understand film festival audiences in the digital, online context, a relational approach to media and audience practice is needed. Audienceship has been understood as a temporally structured ensemble of practices and performances that constitute complex place-body-technology relationships. Online film festival audiences exist as a series of connections and distinctions that sit at the intersection between the remaking of post-broadcast domestic space, modes of public address, rhythms and routines of consumption, and forms of audience participation and inactivity. If media events stand apart from the everyday by virtue of their framing (Couldry 2004)—understood here to be a product of audience practices, programming decisions, and media structures—it is in these different sites that the frame of the film festival is performed and negotiated. We have also shown that these different sites for the performance of liveness vary enormously between festivals and between different audience demographics. In some cases, online film festival audienceship very much elides with both broadcast and post-broadcast televisual modes of watching. In other cases, it takes on a new space and temporality, of a multi-temporal event that offers viewers the possibility to participate and to remake their domestic space—however temporarily—in the process.

These distinctions create a web of audience agency and festival structure within which audiences participate in the performance of film festivity by making certain choices within the nexus of their existing media practices, rhythms, and rituals. While film festivals set the terms within which temporalities of audienceship and the forms of participation may take place, audiences play an active role in the realization of festival temporality, space, and online audience presence. These multiple forms of audienceship, from those that are closer to televisual modes of watching to those that carve out a new space of festival interaction and community, are variously characterized by experiences of loss of community and physical



sociality, as well as excitement and new connections. Understanding the diversity of online film festival audiences is particularly important because, as festivals move forward and many take on hybrid forms of film exhibition (employing online and in-person film exhibition), the connections and distinctions outlined in this chapter will play a role in how audiences navigate hybrid programs and in which context they choose to view content. Film festivals, going forward, have the option to cater to emerging forms of audienceship and digitally constituted publics, post-broadcast televisual types of audiences, or to revert to trying to foster traditional in-person forms of festivity. Or to adopt a blended approach which spans and draws from both everyday media and the liveness of the in-person cinematic experience.

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