



## Vidéo de Femmes Dans le Parc: Feminist Rhythms and Festival Times Under Covid

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Vidéo de Femmes dans le Parc (VFP) (Women’s Videos in the Park) is a summertime open-air screening of independent short videos, held annually since 1991 at Parc La Fontaine in Montreal, Canada, by Groupe Intervention Vidéo (GIV), an independent feminist/queer distribution center “dedicated to the promotion of videos created by women (in its most inclusive definition) by distributing and presenting them” (GIV).<sup>1</sup> Each year, VFP is hotly anticipated by Montreal’s feminist and queer communities for its program showcasing the latest trends in video-art

<sup>1</sup>GIV’s mandate to promote work by women invites artists in their catalogue who have transitioned or who no longer exclusively identify as women the autonomous choice to remain within their representation. The essay reflects this inclusion, using “women” in keeping with GIV’s current self-description.

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from Quebec and Canada, in a convivial environment where the wider public encounters experimental work outside rigid models of spectatorship: sitting on the grass, eating, drinking, and spontaneously reacting out loud to the works. For GIV, VFP integrates feminist and queer art into Montreal's urban context, in line with its mandate to disseminate independent videos promoting community organizing and social change. This work builds on the important legacy of the alternative video collectives and artist-run centers since the 1970s in Canada that aimed to create a counter public sphere through accessible media and direct, democratic forms of organization, production, and dissemination.<sup>2</sup> In this essay, we consider VFP 2020 under Covid. While VFP falls outside of many normative festival typologies, we adapt Antoine Damiens' (2020) notion of "ephemeral festivals" to account for VFP's punctual impact in dialogue with GIV's sustained history as a feminist artist-run center. We explore VFP's historical use of public space and its reimagination under Covid's urgent sanitary crisis and chronic social inequities. We rethink the scale of festival analysis through the impact of a one-night festival synthesizing distributed affects and actions particular to feminist organizing. After situating VFP within GIV's wider mandate, we analyze VFP's "visual architecture" under Covid, assessing its cinema publics both online and off and conclude with questions of embodied labor and affect. GIV's creative decision to move VFP online during the Covid crisis belongs to a longer history of alternative media's unconventional exhibition modes that address social inequalities.

Since 1991, VFP has been *the* summer rendezvous for lovers of video art. This free, public outdoor screening is always followed by a more intimate after-party back at GIV's headquarters. A program of recent short

<sup>2</sup>GIV was part of a wave of alternative video collectives that exploded within the 1970s Canadian media ecology: grassroots production and distribution centers aiming to create a counter public sphere within a McLuhanesque cultural climate that saw electronic media as catalyst for social change. The artist-run center model prioritizes decision making by artists for artists, who were involved at every aspect of the organization from accounting to programming to community building. In Quebec, Robert Forget, a producer at the National Film Board, founded Vidéographe in 1971 to provide community groups with free access to video production and distribution, active today as an artist-run center that promotes experimental video art. Moreover, paralleling the rise of the Women's Movement, feminist media collectives were born, including Vidéo Femmes (1973–2015) and Groupe Intervention Vidéo (1975–) in Quebec (Bociurkiw 2016; MacKenzie 2004).

independent media artworks solicited each year from Canada-based artists through an open call with no entry fee, VFP reflects contemporary concerns emerging from the artworks and grounds them in the convivial ethos of one of Canada's oldest artist-run centers. Nik Forrest, whose work has screened multiple times at VFP, describes VFP as GIV's "family" event (Forrest 2021). This characterization should be understood within GIV's intersectional queer and feminist frame: family is not established kinship relations, but a labor of love, the product of care work thanks to which a 'chosen family' of programmers, Montreal-based artists, and audiences can mingle in community-based cultural events. VFP helps to sustain and reproduce the soft spaces of arts labor, in a field (experimental video) sorely lacking sustainable remuneration. Conviviality is a cultivated resource, as critical to the work of production as access to technical equipment or means of dissemination. In this respect, VFP is not simply a screening of video-art, but a catalyst for social relations within Montreal's feminist and queer communities.

For thirty years, VFP has rewritten public space as feminist, vibrant, and experimental. Co-artistic director of GIV Anne Golden remarks that "we used to call (VFP) our flagship event when we wanted to make each other laugh, because we're so not corporate," and the annual event, a pioneer in building Montreal's now thriving outdoor cinema scene, has influentially spread its community-focused ethos. Montreal's outdoor cinema scene largely remains within a framework of free, open access screenings oriented toward community and permeable boundaries, rather than commercial, for-profit screenings. The Covid pandemic raised the question of how social distancing would intersect with the summer culture of intensive gathering that was a critical part of VFP's longevity and success.

Quebec has Canada's highest Covid death rate; to date (May 2021) it remains under multiple restrictions on movement and gathering, including a curfew. Montreal's social distancing measures took effect on March 13, 2020, and kept indoor cinemas mostly shuttered, forbade indoor assembly outside of work or school, and constantly changed guidelines on outdoor assemblies in public space beyond household bubbles. Large collective gatherings were banned or faced complicated requirements beyond the capacities of small organizations. One example of the fraught desires artists and local government sought to negotiate is a summer 2020 call by the Conseil des Arts de Montreal, "Art Out in the Open/Quand l'art prend l'air" for socially distanced outdoor art interventions, which forbade public advertising of funded events and required "non-traditional

locations”: that is, no existing outdoor arts infrastructures including parks (“Conseil”).<sup>3</sup> The forms of radical relationality undergirding VFP were challenged by Covid restrictions, concerning both the one-off of pandemic programming and practices that contest and critique the often-invisible restrictions and durable inequities of what counts as “public space” and “public interest” that feminist sociability, creativity, and rapport seek to redress.

### INSISTENT EPHEMERALITY: VFP AS FEMINIST FESTIVAL PRACTICE

Founded in 1975 by a group of independent videomakers during Quebec’s alternative media movement of the 1960s and 1970s amidst a wave of new organizations that were artist centered, non-commercial, and focused on documentary and contemporary art, GIV is exceptional both for its longevity and its mandate. As Sedano Alvarez, communications and special projects coordinator, puts it, “we put all our efforts in giving visibility to independent video artists that identify as women, supporting and giving visibility to voices that otherwise wouldn’t be heard or wouldn’t find space” (Golden and Sedano Alvarez 2021). GIV is both highly professionalized and still characterized by a format where, as Golden says, “everybody does everything”; while funding from three levels of government (municipal, provincial, and federal) has supported consistency and structure in their paid organizational roles, a feminist DIY ethic still pervades their non-hierarchical, horizontal method of working (ibid.).

In “La vidéo comme médium féministe et social : partage d’expérience du Groupe Intervention Vidéo (GIV),” GIV artistic co-director and VFP programmer Annaëlle Winand describes how GIV’s mandate has shifted historically through and alongside the pragmatic and philosophical concerns of their practices ([Forthcoming](#)). At the beginning of the 1980s, GIV, through the efforts of Albanie Morin, Diane Poitras, Nicole Hubert, and Nancy Marcotte, officially reorganized its mandate around the production and dissemination of work by women, in close dialogue with the social and cultural concerns of the day, feminist community organizing, and the particular affordances and accessibility of video art (ibid.). Then, GIV began to distribute experimental videos by women, adding to its

<sup>3</sup>The call specified that artists could organize events in “outdoor urban space that do not require a municipal occupancy permit”; public parks require permits and were thus off limits.

catalogue works in English and collaborating with artist-run centers in Canada and Latin America (Olibet [Forthcoming](#)). “It was post-October crisis, the era of Marxist-Feminist cells’, said Anne (Golden). [...] Petunia (Alves) [adds], ‘the group took up its calling as a tool of social change’” (Lehmann 2010).<sup>4</sup> GIV has maintained an activist approach to video distribution, fostering participatory modes of exhibition outside theatrical circuits and privileging instead local-scale spaces (from unions to church basements) to catalyze community involvement.

In her history of Canadian feminist video art collectives, Marusya Bociurkiw qualifies this transitional era as that of “big affect” and embodied feelings; for GIV, this period marks an expansion from socially engaged documentary work to a wider palette of artistic and creative responses to women’s lives (2016). GIV’s creation of VFP in 1991 aligns with the center’s interest in inventive dissemination of video art. GIV’s curatorial practices both showcase the artists they distribute, granting them visibility and remuneration, and re-interpret works in its collection, fostering the circulation of women’s video work and their histories. Throughout the years, the accumulated works have made GIV an accidental archive of women’s video-art. GIV actively assumes this archival role through curated programs such as “The Vault,” dedicated to revisiting their archives, and the “Carte Blanche” series of invited curators, exhibited in its headquarters and online. Rosanna Maule ([Forthcoming](#)) sees GIV as an important actor within networks of feminist film and video collectives proposing “non-linear approaches to film historiography” and to the memory of feminist and queer moving image culture.

VFP is considered a signature event among GIV’s activities. It represents a crucial turning point in GIV’s attempts to broaden engagement with local communities in the city. Golden notes that

one of the strengths of GIV is really our curatorial practices, whether that’s in-house or collaborations with other curators and artists. It’s something that we’ve developed really intensively, especially in the past 15 years. And ... when government or funding structures asked us about outreach and things like that, we’ve been doing that for decades, you know, taking videos out on the road, going literally going to church basements, I kid you not, in rural Quebec and all around Canada. So I just think of the number of people we

<sup>4</sup>“C’était le post-Crise d’octobre, l’époque des cellules marxistes-féministes”, dit Anne. [...] groupe a pris sa vocation d’outil de changement social” (our translation).

reach in a year, which, for independent video is pretty impressive. (Golden and Sedano Alvarez 2021)

Golden continues “I feel very strongly that as much as I love festivals, the shelf life of a work is about two years, if you’re lucky. And so the idea with our in-house activities is to look at all decades of video production and all durations too beyond five minutes or seven minutes or 10 minutes, you know, the more unwieldy things.” VFP is thus an outlier in GIV’s in-house programming, in that it replicates this “festival” time frame for submissions, soliciting work from the last two years and, currently, under eight minutes. VFP’s uniqueness brings together GIV’s longevity with the currency of the festival “now.” Though GIV presented multiple programs online under Covid, VFP both came with and presented unique affordances in its relation to online eventness.<sup>5</sup>

The 2020 edition of VFP exceptionally took place well after summer’s end, from September 24–27, 2020. This desynchronization relative to the event’s usual schedule indexes Covid’s disruption of normal festival rhythms and also signals persistent survival notwithstanding the unfolding conditions of pandemic precarity. In one way, film festivals participate in producing chrononormativity, which queer theory defines as the normative organization of time embedded in our bodies by institutional forces (Freeman 2010). Festivals recurrently punctuate the arc of the annual, curving and bending time with anticipation, preparation, and desire. At the same time, they create a suspension of the regular and habitual, carving out eventness from the everyday. Covid has interfered with the usual temporality of festivals, presenting major challenges for smaller art organizations compelled to find alternative solutions to provoke the eventness that is a critical part of festival feelings. So, how *does* an online festival screening differentiate itself from the all-encompassing global window that our computer screens became during the pandemic?

<sup>5</sup>Prior to Covid, GIV employed online distribution via streaming platforms Vimeo and [Vucavu.com](http://Vucavu.com) (a VOD service for eight Canadian film and video distributors), part of the organization’s historical endorsement of media technology to address social and political issues and adaptation to the continuous format shifts that video entails (even before the digital turn) (Olibet [Forthcoming](#)). Savvy about the relation between women and technology, GIV exploits these streaming platforms to foster its curatorial practices in a global digital media ecology.

## VFP @ 29: CREATIVE SOLUTIONS TO ONLINE EXHIBITION

By the time GIV decided that VFP 2020 would be held online through Vimeo Pro, we film scholars were used to replacing our usual movie-going with online group watching sessions and Zoom Q&As with filmmakers, while grappling with the effects of social distancing on our personal relations and mourning missed opportunities to assemble in Montreal's queer spaces. We imagined ourselves emotionally prepared to renounce our in-person rendezvous with VFP and to instead click a link to an hour of experimental works on our laptops. When VFP launched on September 24th, we were surprised to see on our screens the GIV team introducing and welcoming virtual spectators to the 29th VFP, as they used to do in-person.

At outdoor screenings, start times come with the slow set of the sun, bringing a lazy energy to the schedule. At VFP, the event begins when programmers take their place before the screen, signaling the infrastructure—human and otherwise—making such encounters possible. Recently, the outdoor theater where VFP normally happens has closed for renovations, and VFP has instead employed a pop-up inflatable screen in the middle of the park. Co-programmer Winand notes that “the most joyful moment of the summer is when this giant inflatable screen just pops up from nowhere” (Winand 2021). Winand says that in planning the online edition, they hesitated between prerecording a welcome or doing a live intro on Facebook “to keep that link with the people watching”: “I was already seeing myself seated on my chair and being like ‘hello everybody, welcome’ ... very static, kind of robotic and boring ... And I don’t remember who had the idea, but ‘let’s go to the park! Let’s be there!’” (ibid.).

*Visual architecture* is Damiens’ term for those elements—trailers, accreditations, posters, iconography, and so on—that demarcate the unique identity and space-time of festivals as events, assembling affective and actual environments (2020, 159). In rethinking the thresholding practice of introduction, like the transformative magic of an inflating screen as a lure for curiosity, GIV found a timely way to mark a shift into festivity from the flat landscape of Covid media: an introductory video to the program that is itself a work of art, grounded in their particular history, testifying to the embodied and affective labor that makes VFP possible. When the idea of going to the park hit, Winand recalls:

the good thing is we had Manon (Labrecque) with us, an excellent video artist/ filmmaker. So she brought to life that video ... it's almost like a piece of stand-up comedy ... and it's through her artist lens that we got that beautiful piece that actually opens ... the entire program. But the idea was really to keep this introduction: the moment where we can say we're proud of our work, we're proud of our community, we're happy to be with people and we are excited to show what artists have created. (2021)

In this video, even the credits are leaky, capturing that thresholding effect, as GIV's logo crossfades into a bright blue sky through leafy green tree branches. This porosity works differently than simple branding and underlines how GIV's mission understands dissemination within the network of production and distribution. The video begins with a short pixilated sequence showing the organizers arriving at Park La Fontaine and then a very funny high-speed blooper reel of failed attempts to speak seriously in front of the camera. In lieu of birdsong, we hear a lighthearted soundtrack of robotic beeps and bops, and panning down, five women—the GIV team—move through the park in stop motion, as the shadows and colors of the video image morph around them. Labrecque, herself a mainstay of GIV screenings, is also a dancer, and she masterfully uses the affordances of video to create a new movement vocabulary of the glitched image. Already we are crossing a threshold, rejecting the illusion of normative human liveness for a novel liveliness of video's technoembodiments. Thus, this intro playfully incorporates the glitchiness of our everyday reality of assembling under Covid, a ludic testimony to this “new normal.” We cut to the women seated together, holding small purple catalogues with the VFP logo, and immediately they burst into manic laughter, as an accelerated image races through the high pitch of their delirious hilarity. There is no pretense of business as usual—everything is scrambled and out of order, and emotional and even hysterical responses are given their needed space. Visible over their shoulders is the Théâtre de Verdure, the usual scene of VFP screenings. For *habituées*, we are thus in familiar territory that never stops being strange. VFP's visual architecture is reworked under the sign of aberrant movement to better share Covid's odd feelings.

Working off outtakes and recomposing performance through manipulating speed, Labrecque makes the edges of eventness—welcoming, labeling, situatedness—all part of the artful reworking of the mediatic visual architecture. The demands on art organizations to simply move online during Covid has often hidden the extravagant costs of extra time and



lived labor that falls out of the bean counting of festival and funding metrics. Here, processed and reprocessed by video art, these organizers are essential and not tangential to what is onscreen. The online screening thus retains a critical affordance of outdoor cinemas: the radical permeability of “what will count as part of the show” (Thain 2019, 251). An artful collective joy interrupts the introduction, folding it into the program; the question remains of whether Labrecque’s uncredited video will make its way into GIV’s vault as an artwork of its own. After a series of false starts and dissolves into laughter, the intro restarts—seriously this time! The programmers—Golden, Winand, and Verónica Sedano Alvarez—take turns bilingually introducing the program, welcoming viewers to the 29th edition, happening “not under the stars” but online. Petunia Alves and Liliana Nunez, the remaining core team of GIV, wish the spectators “bon visionnement” from the back row as VFP’s logo, a scribbled tree, fills the screen (Fig. 8.1). But the show doesn’t begin. We cut back to a sequence of interstitial moments of the silent and seated team, in the moments around speaking and before action, through a series of jump cuts that string together awkward pauses and uncertain transitions—another



**Fig. 8.1** “GIV’s staff members” Screenshot by authors. From left to right: Anne Golden, Liliana Nunez, Annaëlle Winand, Petunia Alves, and Verónica Sedano Alvarez in the trailer (dir. Manon Labrecque, 2020) introducing the 2020 online edition of VFP

familiar artifact from Covid's media ecology. As a microcommentary on laboring under Covid and a way to give a festival feeling to audiences to reenchant the computer screen, this short video of speeds and waiting, all the off-times that fringe the normal, and all that has gone unsaid as we try to survive, is a little masterpiece born out of almost three decades of playing in the park.

This intro has three functions: it reworks a familiar visual architecture of VFP for a new setting; it inscribes the body of GIV's staff members within the video program to transmit their presence despite physical distancing; and it thematizes the labor of adaptation during Covid. Indeed, if the pandemic presented challenges for major film festivals, it has further disrupted the functioning of alternative circuits of exhibition, especially feminist and queer community-based screenings in which the affective dimension of sharing a precarious and improvised space is as important as the artwork shown. While the online event allowed the show to go on, this question of community remains unresolved. As Golden notes, in person "you experience a program and you have all kind of affective things happening, and you turn to somebody next to you and go "fuck!" ... This dimension is completely missing ... let's put it online is great, but it only goes so far. And we haven't really thought through this audience" (Golden 2020). The strategic adaptation of VFP invites a reflection on the affective labor required in adapting digital technologies to reinvent nontheatrical modes of community-based screening events.

VFP 2020 drew on past experiments with non-traditional screening venues to underline the differences and continuities involved in moving online. Labrecque's video bookends a program that aims to stay leaky and to blur the boundaries of work and play—a familiar festival feeling for those who love independent media arts. A video where organizers have playfully inserted their own bodies bends the mediating structure of Vimeo to GIV's care work, creating a welcoming atmosphere for its "family." Exploiting digital technology's sensuous capacities, most videos in the 2020 program likewise mirror care work's concerns: feelings of proximity and touch that foregrounding the materiality of and contact with the body in different ways. Echoing this, the program found a "natural" end in the final video, Elaine Frigon's *Clap, Claque & Cheers* (Clap, smack, and cheers): two hands clapping against a white wall, replicated through multiple overlays into a crowd of clapping hands before resolving back into the single pair. It captures the fraught intimacy of social distancing under Covid, the brutal tenderness of inadequate ways to assemble, and



**Fig. 8.2** “Clap, Claque & Cheers” (Elaine Frigon, 2020), part of the VFP 2020 program. (Screenshot by the authors)

acknowledging the hollowness of the after-zoom as blank void. In less than one minute it creates loops back to the program’s start, reminding spectators of the exceptional conditions of attending VFP online. Indeed, reproducing the idea of a cheerful audience reacting to the program, the passage from singularity to multitude proposed by Frigon’s work embodies applause’s contagious affect in live encounters, from one person quickly propagating to the whole audience. The video’s transmission of affect reminds spectators that we are not supposed to clap alone in front of our screens, shortcircuiting back to the awkward pauses of Labreque’s opener. This circularity brings together the actual bodies of GIV’s programmers and organizers and, by synecdoche, the body of the audience, engraving in the program itself GIV’s grassroots ethos of creating community (Fig. 8.2).

## OUTDOOR CINEMA AND SOCIABILITY IN MONTREAL

Outdoor cinema screenings are ubiquitous in Montreal’s summer landscape, marked by the festivalization of the city (Diamanti 2014) and a particular confluence of domestic and cultural spaces. In Montreal’s densely populated urban center, where for many years housing remained affordable and socioeconomically diverse, parks function as an extension of people’s living spaces. The importance of a feminist intervention via public outdoor screening thus acquires a particular sense.

Covid's impact is inseparable from VFP's longer history within the media ecology of Montreal, feminist art practices and organizing, and the volatility of public space. While the relatively limited risk of transmission outdoors might have made VFP's usual format possible, GIV's existing expertise in outdoor cinema events and feminist organizing raised other concerns. In fact, under sanitary restrictions during summer 2020, no Montreal outdoor cinemas held their regular programming. Many festivals and screenings were canceled, while some moved online via streaming services. A small handful of one-off events took place live, under highly restricted conditions. An evening of experimental film (*À l'ombre des astres*) projected against the huge wall of the National Archives in Montreal by the collective La Semaphore in September used portable radios to encourage social distancing.<sup>6</sup>

Covid saw the widespread "privatization" of outdoor space enforced by sanitary regulations in the new language of "security" bubbles, rooted in presumptions of normative family structures, access to adequate private housing, and a homogenized view of art practices as easily transferable across mediums. Globally, drive-in cinemas saw a resurgent popularity, with a scramble to re-open abandoned infrastructures and market them as ideal sites of social distancing replicating the safety of the home (Brandon 2020; Rothkopf 2021). In an era where "staying home" has become an "active" endeavor, the drive-in built on its pandemic legacy in North America: in the 1950s during the flu and polio epidemics, drive-ins explicitly marketed themselves as secure alternatives to risky mingle of indoor theatrical spaces (Cohen 1994, 482). Indeed, the most significant innovation for outdoor screening under Covid in Montreal was the return of drive-in cinemas. A suburb on the West Island paid \$15,000 for a 160-person, two-night pop-up drive-in in the parking lot of a mall (Kastler-D'Amours 2020). Montreal's Festival du Nouveau Cinema (October) planned a series of drive-in events for their 49th edition, programming real and sci-fi dystopias at the Montreal airport's parking lot. This creative repurposing of the airport as found dystopia, when flying felt impossible and dangerous, was a bold response to the demands of festival

<sup>6</sup><https://zoom-out.ca/view/a-lombre-des-astres>.

socialization.<sup>7</sup> The Royalmount, described as “Canada’s 1st Drive-in Event Theatre” opened on the site of a controversial new development, programming mainstream feature films.<sup>8</sup> While the Royalmount was available for rental and could have hosted alternative screening events, the costs were prohibitive: \$12,000 per night for non-profit organizations. This re-privatization of “open-air” screenings runs counter to the accessible culture of Montreal’s outdoor cinemas’ largely free screenings in spaces explicitly coded as public, mostly parks. The initial brilliance of VFP was to take advantage of the powerful desire to be outdoors as much as possible in the summer and to create a festival combining the minor form of video art with a popular public culture of social joy. Golden recalls how, as a recently appointed co-director of GIV in 1991, she came up with the idea for VFP, taking feminist video art outdoors to an open-air theater in the heart of Park La Fontaine in Montreal’s Plateau Mont Royal neighborhood, and remarks that:

there were no public screenings in Montreal. Film festivals had not yet moved outdoors ... [T]he plateau back in 1989 was [...] more a working class neighborhood ... more left wing. And that’s transformed completely, as we all know. So I think that VFP was conceived as ... something for the

<sup>7</sup> Most FNCxYUL screenings were canceled due to unfavorable weather, during a period where Montreal’s “red zone restrictions” (effective Sept. 28, 2020) were extended, reshuttering multiple art spaces including GIV to the public. <https://nouveau cinema.ca/en/fnc-x-yul-drive-in>.

<sup>8</sup> The Royalmount cinema, now concluded, is archived on their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/driveinmtl/>. The Royalmount itself is a mixed use development from Carbonleo planned for a large section of the Town of Mont Royal in Montreal, at the intersection of two major highways. The initial plan, including housing, commercial spaces, and an “open air agora,” attracted significant criticism; specifically that it encouraged car culture by devoting large areas to parking in a congested neighborhood, and for not including social housing when Montreal is undergoing a major housing crisis (1.5% vacancy rate in 2019, 2.7% in 2020 with rising costs) (CMHC 2021; Olsen 2020). The developers claimed that predicted revenue from taxes and shopping would allow the city to “build social housing elsewhere,” even as they branded itself as creating “public space” (ibid). The “one-time” summer drive-in also hosted promotional presentations of the revamped design and replicated the “privatized” public model built on car culture and costly threshold for admission that has led to the project being delayed and re-imagined multiple times. Currently it is slated to open in 2023. The drive-in producers have pivoted to opening “Les Jardins Royalmount,” an “event garden” and drive-in entertainment venue (movie nights, but also private events such as weddings) where “the presentation starts from the moment you come through our laser-cut gates” (“The Suburban”).

larger public, but we weren't programming in terms of trying to win over a new audience. ... VFP transformed a lot of things. And what I liked about it is [...] that it inspired tons of other screenings outside, all these kooky, great ways of trying to reframe the kind of screening venues. (2021)

The history of VFP is one of opportunism, adaptation, and itinerance, even before Covid forced a move online. In 1991, VFP began screening at the Théâtre de Verdure (TDV), an open-air theater established in La Fontaine Park in 1956. For more than 50 years that theater served as a site for public performance (music, dance, theater, and more) showcasing local and international artists. It holds up to 2500 people in an amphitheater format. Most events were free and formed a critical part of Montreal's summer rhythms. Since 2014, the theater has been closed for renovations with an anticipated reopening in 2022.

Without missing a beat, GIV pivoted to a proximate screening space and a contingent solution: a pop-up inflatable screen and a more casual encounter with the public. In 2015, they moved VFP to Old Montreal outside the Darling Foundry art gallery. The following year VFP returned to La Fontaine, squatting a green space adjacent to the shuttered theater amidst an array of picnickers, buskers, kids running around, joggers, and dogs: creating an arts space out of thin air and conviviality, but without the enclosure of the open-air theater. In 23 years of screenings, TDV may have attracted a new crowd to VFP and to GIV through encounters with the habituées of that more formal theater space. There, independent media art by women might be preceded by Les Grands Ballets Canadiens or followed the next evening by a classical music concert. TDV brands its contents as a pre-approved part of Montreal's showcase of culture, and VFP may have attracted audiences who arrived on faith that the venue equaled "legitimate" art. The move to the adjacent, informal screening space shifted the quality of the encounter, restoring a greater openness to the accidental audience who may happen upon VFP without knowing what to expect. Yet, in both situations, in a theater or loose on the terrain of Park La Fontaine, VFP retains a transformational force. As Winand insists:

This is the one we always do. Even when there's a pandemic, we had to stop doing other things, we had to rethink some other ways. But VFP stays ... because it's like a *carte de visite*. We reached not just the community from the indie art world or the video artist world or whatever. We reach also

people that are outside of the world ... You can just say to your friends, come have a drink in the park with me and we'll watch videos. And then maybe the people who would never go to festivals or things like that come with you and watch it. (Winand 2021)

VFP also runs on the energy of the artists involved with GIV to attract spectators from Park La Fontaine's bordering Centre-Sud neighborhood, historically a poorer area that includes the Gay Village, students, sex workers, and more. Golden described the "guerrilla tactics" used to target audiences there through "blueprinted posters" and "flyers" distributed by local artist: "So, yeah, we totally took advantage of the kindness of artists that we distributed or exhibited to kind of get the word out. That was a very cost-effective way when we didn't have money at all for advertising" (Golden and Alvarez 2021).

These informal strategies are integral to VFP's community building through public spaces in the city, involving and activating their existing audience. Yet, the loose nature of VFP also stimulates what Golden terms VFP's "grab bag" of an audience:

part of the fun and the joy of VFP is ... an audience by chance, or passers by; so [we have] a core audience, but also ... people [that] are going to walk in. They're probably going to see only two or three maybe works. They're going to go 'weird' and they're going to go. But we got them for a little while, at least. And that's the fun of VFP. It always has been that attempt to create a different type of audience that wouldn't go to a screening at GIV or to a museum or an art gallery or so forth. (ibid.)

While VFP's informality could hardly be reproduced on Vimeo Pro's regulated space, the online edition was actually quite successful. GIV recorded 250 views on Vimeo, about the size of the audience for the park screenings outside of the TDV. Yet, these numbers say little about the dilemmas that VFP's organizers had in moving online. In particular, Sedano Alvarez notes the limits of the presumed "accessibility" of internet screenings:

We have also very specific audiences and I have also an unscientific feeling that when we go online, we are also missing part of that audience, even if it's a small segment, because Internet and online platforms just reinforce social inequalities. (ibid.)

Such absences were of a piece with GIV's restricted ability to work with vulnerable groups during Covid in the wider community. Although the implicit promise of going online is that new audiences will access the festival, this overlooks GIV's labor of audience cultivation and activation subtending VFP's longevity. According to Golden, VFP's afterparty archives this impact:

VFP is ... the family event of the year where lots of people will come. But the ones who remain will be ones that have long standing associations, usually with GIV. And that's always so, so great to see. A lot of that has to do with the fact that ... Petunia and I, but not just us, other people who worked at GIV, we always tried to think about how we would like to be treated if we went to an event. So what do you do? You give people something to eat and you give them a drink ticket and you make the space nice and interesting. So those are things that aren't about curating, but they're sort of about how do you do community? ... those are things that we don't talk about, because they're not quantifiable and finite. Granting agencies don't care about stuff like that. They care about numbers, but they don't want to hear me spout my theories about what makes a good party. (ibid.)

That casual convivial element of VFP is an integral feature that makes this event a special festival. If funding agencies don't care about these festive aspects, it is partly because they don't know how to think about the forms of social reproduction that an event such as VFP entails. And yet nothing would be sustainable without exactly this labor. The everydayness of social reproduction subtends the festival quality of VFP. If an ephemeral festival is one defined by Damians in his work on queer film festivals as a festival that failed or only happened once, underlining the critical importance and legitimacy of ephemerality in queer methods and lives (2020, 40), GIV's queer feminism adds an insistence on social reproduction as an invisibilized aspect of the labor of becoming visible. VFP's one night only annual micro-festival, about to hold its 30th edition, operates at an iceberg's scale—small in eventness but with a wealth of hidden support.

As such, the successes and failures of VFP require different metrics, attentive to questions of labor and care that are feminist values integral to GIV's mission. While the decision to go online reflected the pragmatic constraints and the limited support they had to do such work, it was also a question of risk. Golden notes that the decision:



comes from all of us having associations and relationships where we care for people, and thinking, well, are we going to ask our audience members to do that as well? So, yeah, I think we could (screen outdoors) this year technically, if there were twenty-five of us outside and everybody had masks on and we put orange cones down and said ‘this is your spot, this is your spot’ it could work, but that’s a lot of responsibility too. And that’s a lot of policing of people. (ibid.)

Sedano Alvarez echoes this reflection: “in terms of the overload of work that that may imply for us ... at some point it’s not feasible. It’s like burning ourselves out and it’s still too risky” (ibid.).

This care for preserving their audience’s wellbeing is mirrored by a working ethics that ensures adequate remuneration for the artists. GIV co-director Petunia Alves had to stretch and juggle budgets to ensure artists were fairly paid. The move online changed the normal pay scale; instead of one screening, the works were streamed for four days, increasing the artist fees. With the shorter submissions of eight minutes, down from the usual ten, more works were screened, which meant more expenses for GIV. While emergency Covid government funding was available, this often took the form of funding for “more events” and rarely had sophisticated metrics to account for the additional labor of programmers (i.e., no overtime) or the cost difference between live versus streamed events.

All these aspects of the organizers’ affective labor (audiences wellbeing, artist remuneration, and self-care) merge with the curatorial dimension of VFP as a responsive event. It evokes festival feelings because of the active way it composes novelty and familiarity. The program’s open call, sent out in April or May, attracted over 100 submissions in 2020. The expanded programming team of Golden, Sedano Alvarez, and Winand for the online version watched separately and then met together to assemble the final program. They don’t impose a theme on the open call. However, Winand points out that often, a thematic emerges from submissions in dialogue with what is in the air. In 2020, such concerns were clearly evident in the politic turn of many works, responsive to social inequity and global movements around racialized violence and discrimination, as well as the questions of care, sociability, and isolation sparked by Covid. In the final program, works such as Lamathildhe’s *Chants d’amour* (Lovesongs), which tenderly animated global slurs for queer folks into colorful title cards and a sustaining rhythm, kimura byol-nathalie lemoine’s *Youdoyou* succinct commentary on Asian visibility and vulnerability via masks as

protection and self-care, or Katherine Nequado's *Wamin/La Pomme* (Apple) which plays out the violence of colonization and racial categories on the tender surface of the skin, all spoke to how Covid's reduced contacts have amplified our unequally distributed affective vulnerabilities.

While we can only speculate on spectators' solitary reactions to the 2020 edition, the programmers know that by moving online they are missing the audience's impromptu reactions that constitute a critical way of assessing the program's success. Despite the impossibility of recuperating that extemporaneous and affective dimension of the event, GIV nonetheless demonstrates resilience in creating a sustainable event for its community that accounts for the different aspects of this festival's brevity and intensity.

## CONCLUSIONS

VFP's festival temporality and traits entail affective organizational labor intensified by the shift to online exhibition. Looking ahead to the 2021 edition, GIV has already decided, from within Covid's third wave in Montreal, to hold the event online, with the hope of a live screening at GIV later in the fall. Golden speculates that they may receive submissions that are "more glitchy or have things built into them that are telling us, oh, my wi-fi is not working" and she hopes for a better technological interface: "a more sustainable platform for us, something that was driven by us, perhaps with a few other artist-run centres." GIV's collaborative artist-centered ethos informs this vision of moving out of Covid's long tail into an uncertain future. VFP provides a snapshot of how its festival eventness helps chart the complexity of what counts as community and the sustainable practices of minoritarian art. In the absence of the chance for informal exchange, VFP has nonetheless sought to animate the intangible effects of eventness. In documenting this work, we have sought methodologies not just to pin down the intangible, but also to bear witness to it.

Winand writes: "We are often asked another question, since the 1980s: why an artist-run centre for women? We think this rather pointed question otherwise. Because our feminist concerns are community-based: they are situated in the services we give to artists, in the communities with whom we interact, and in the programs that we develop. These aspects are the driving force of our activities. They are the result of a constant reflection which renews itself across our interventions" ([Forthcoming](#)). Part of GIV's mandate of dissemination of video-art through a queer feminist

ethos, VFP has become a critical part of Montreal's summer infrastructure. Approaching GIV's fiftieth anniversary, Winand notes that we still see the same concerns around being a woman in society reflected in the work that GIV produces, distributes, and disseminates. The importance of VFP's open airing of such voices cannot be underestimated. Though a one-off event, it is part of a rhythm of occupying public space that is insistent and necessary. Outdoor cinemas not only screen representations of "other" worlds: they can be what the Design School for Social Intervention calls "productive fictions" (Thain 2020, 26), "an interactive chance to experience the world in a new way by creating a micro-space where that world already existed" (*DS4SI (Design Studio for Social Intervention, Lori Lobenstine, Kenneth Bailey and Ayako Maruyama)* 2020, 143). Glitching the move to online, the work of mounting VFP testifies to the value and embodied knowledge of GIV's queer and feminist practices: the ephemeral festival as a productive fiction. At the time of this writing, the call for participation in the 2021 edition of VFP has just gone out. The regulation of public space and the intense chrononormativity of the Quebec government's response to Covid, including one of the only curfews in the global response currently in place, have effectively annulled the possibility of open-air screenings that rely on the darkened night. Quebec is also living through a hideously regular wave of femicides: 13 so far since the beginning of 2021. Finding ways to amplify women's voices is part of a larger sociability that cares for and makes space for women in the world.

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