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<AT>Film Festivals of the 1970s and the Subject of Feminist Film Studies: Collaborations and Regimes of Knowledge Production

<AA>Antoine Damiens

<TXT><SC>In her 1998 history of feminist film criticism<NM>, Chick Flicks, B. Ruby Rich notes the role played by friendships and collaborations in academic knowledge production. Adopting the retrospective gaze of the autobiography, Rich documents her own encounters with key scholars, filmmakers, and curators—historicizing feminist film criticism through the people she met on the conference/festival circuit. Instead of providing a linear account of key paradigms in feminist film theory and criticism, Rich mobilizes the register of the personal as political. Her history ultimately archives affective, embodied attachments to festivals (and the women who frequented them), refracting the role played by friendships and collaborations in both community building and academic endeavors.¹ As she eloquently argues, “[k]nowledge can be acquired and exhibited in a variety of ways. To read and then to write: that’s the standard intellectual route. In the years of my own formation, though, there were many other options. Journals and journeys, conferences and conversations, partying and politicking, going to movies and going to bed” (Chick Flicks 3).

In taking us behind the scenes of feminist criticism/festival organizing, Rich’s opus opens up a new methodology for festival scholars. Instead of defining festivals through the circuits they

correspond to or as both relying on and being realized through the competing performances of various stakeholders (the most common methods in festivals studies), Rich's memoir hints at the role played by friendships and affective encounters forged at festivals in the symbolic economy of knowledge production.

This article seeks to explore what could be gained from taking seriously affective encounters as a method for historicizing the interplay between festival organizing and academic scholarship. Building on Rich's opus, conference reports, and canonical texts in feminist film theory, I explore the role played by various festivals in shaping 1970s feminist film criticism/theory. I focus on three case studies—the 1972 “Women's Event” at the Edinburgh Film Festival (EFF), the 1979 Alternative Cinema conference at Bard College (New York), and the 1979 EFF “Feminism and Cinema” program/conference. Although these case studies clearly point to major differences in geographically situated economies of knowledge, I do not aim to make an argument about the national specificity of various strands of feminist theory and/or regimes of knowledge production, nor do I seek to draw a comprehensive history of the evolution of feminist film criticism. Instead, I am interested in the various forms of articulation between scholarship, festival organizing, and community building that these three events reveal.

This article crucially departs from Rich's methodology—in particular from her use of the autobiographical. As a cisgender gay white man in his late twenties, I have not experienced the events to which this article hopes to pay homage. In reconstituting some of the encounters described by Rich, my aim is twofold: (1) to further Rich's insights on the role played by friendships constituted at and through festivals in shaping 1970s feminist film criticism/theory and (2) to propose a reconceptualization of festival studies' theoretical apparatus tuned into the relationship between academic knowledge production and community engagement.

Scholars traditionally argue that festivals are realized through the competing performances of various stakeholders (Rhyne; Dayan; de Valck). In analyzing the relationships between various professional groups (policy-makers, scholars, attendees, curators, filmmakers), this framework establishes festivals' role in the political economy of film. This anthropological approach to the competing performances of various groups of people attending a festival presupposes, however, that one is a festivalgoer or a critic or an organizer or a policy-maker or a scholar. In arguing that festivals come to be realized through competing performances and that one's investment in or use of a festival is predicated upon his or her credentials, the stakeholder model largely reifies the boundaries between cinephilia, film criticism, scholarship, and curating.

In contrast, this analysis focuses on a time prior to the institutionalization of both the festival format and the discipline of film studies. While the stakeholder model might be sound, the reality is—as always—messy. As Thomas Waugh and Chris Straayer remind us, “the existence of the pure critic/scholar who has not tried curating or film/video making is as rare as the curator who has not directed a film or written film criticism (though both animals do exist, of course)” (599). One might be a critic and/or a festival organizer and/or a policy-maker and/or a scholar. One might even move from one of these professional occupations to any other.

In shifting the focus from festivals' role in the political economy of film to the symbolic economy of knowledge production, this analysis pays attention to the interplay between various institutional locations—tracing out the careers of and collaborations between festival participants whose forms of cultural and intellectual labor cannot be reduced to a single entity. To that end, I understand festival participants not as stakeholders but as subjects whose institutional positions simultaneously constitute and are constituted by festivals. Subjects are produced discursively; the meanings covered by the subject-positions “critics,” “scholars,” “filmmakers,” and “curators”

not only are historically specific but also depend on their articulation to the larger symbolic economy of knowledge production. In analyzing the subject-positions presupposed in various 1970s feminist film festivals, this article reveals the modes of knowledge production that have structured the development of feminist film studies. Ultimately, I argue that the three festivals I analyze specified or redefined the “subject” of feminist film theory/criticism.

<T1HD>Edinburgh’s “Women’s Film” Event and Its Legacy: 1972-76

<TXT>Feminist festivals of the 1970s constitute a privileged vantage point for theorizing the relationship between academic knowledge production and festival organizing (Barlow; Armatage; Heath). Indeed, festival organizing enabled both the uncovering of a women-centered cinematic canon and the constitution of feminist film theory. As I have argued elsewhere, festivals can thus be thought of as a method for the creation of academic and community-based cinematic knowledge. As a curatorial practice, festival organizing participates in the necessary accumulation, presentation, and dissemination of a coherent corpus of film. As sites centered on cinematic and identity-based communities, festivals constitute a meeting ground where theoretical and political issues can be collectively crafted and debated.

The role festivals can play in shaping academic knowledge is particularly clear in the case of the Edinburgh Film Festival. Created in 1947 as the International Festival of Documentary Films, the EFF “became notorious for its provocations and interventions into [British] film culture” by the early 1970s (Stanfield 63). Filmmaker Murray Grigor was recruited as director in 1968 and soon enlisted Lynda Myles and David Will (who were then undergraduate students at the University of Edinburgh, bringing with them a deep appreciation for the *Cahiers du Cinéma*) and Peter Wollen (who had been working for the Society for

Education in Film and Television [SEFT], an organization publishing the journal *Screen*).

Unable to compete with Cannes, Venice, and Berlin or to secure major international premieres, Grigor, Myles, Will, and Wollen opted for innovative programming strategies, often in the form of retrospectives centered on new or avant-garde filmmakers. These screenings were generally^a complemented by various symposiums and the publication of monographs. Quite famously, contributions made in Edinburgh symposiums were often later published in *Screen*. Thus, Edinburgh “gave a platform to film theory, experimental film, new European and world cinema” (Stanfield 63).

In 1972, Myles, Laura Mulvey, and Claire Johnston co-organized the Women’s Film Event (also known as the Women’s Event)—the first European retrospective on women’s cinema. Its program “attempted to highlight films that seemed to offer a particular thrill, a reflection of female fantasy that did not usually find an explicit means of expression” (Mulvey, “British Feminist Film” 70). Building on the politics of the women’s movement, the Women’s Event largely echoed the practice of consciousness-raising: films were often followed by intense debate sessions. Participants both discussed the exclusion of women from the film industry and reflected on the tremendous amount of work that went into curating these otherwise unknown women directors (Mulvey, “Feminism, Film and the Avant-Garde” 4).

Benefiting from the cultural capital associated with the EFF, the Women’s Event was particularly successful. Most of the films were shown at the Film House, one of Edinburgh’s most prestigious theaters. Packed screenings signaled the need for women to “occupy a place in the film world and in the cinematic imaginary” (Heath 4). The festival was abundantly covered

^a It appeared that a section of text was accidentally deleted somewhere along the line. I added this language from the original PDF that was supplied. Thank you!

in the international press, and a rerun was organized at London's National Film Theatre (Mulvey, "British Feminist Film" 70; Kamleitner). Unfortunately, the Women's Event wasn't properly archived: most of the documents produced by the festival (including a documentary for BB2) were lost.

Although the Women's Event was the first European retrospective on women's cinema, it did echo several US-based initiatives, such as the publication of the first issue of Women and Film and the first edition of the New York Women's Video Festival (also in 1972). Taken together, these initiatives testified to the emergence of a feminist network marked by the circulation of women-centered cinematic discourses. This network enabled new forms of transnational collaborations among feminist cinephiles/activists and participated in the diffusion of a new cinematic canon. For instance, Dana Sardet participated in the organization of both the New York festival and Paris's 1974 Musidora—France's first women's film festival, initiated by the Vidéa collective. Unsurprisingly, Musidora's program was largely inspired by (and shared many of the films of) the New York festival. It featured and invited one of the cofounders of the New York festival, Susan Milano (Barlow 37; Isarte 72-77). While a description of these early transnational networks and how they shaped the politics and programs of various local feminist festivals exceeds the scope of this discussion, the fact that Musidora was primarily indebted to the New York festival (rather than Edinburgh) appears to be quite fascinating.

These festivals did not necessarily share the same politics. The New York festival focused primarily on representation, echoing the politics of Women and Film. Organized at the Kitchen Center for Video and Music, its program featured many collective tapes and intermedia performances (Barlow 15). Musidora's program included many heated debate sessions ("Women in the Film Industry," "Women Pioneers," or "Co-Directing with Men"), most of which revolved

around the role played by women (or lack thereof) in the film industry. Films for Musidora were screened at two separate venues in Paris—the Olympic theater and the Museum of Modern Art. Because screenings held at the Olympic were open only to women, the festival was accused of participating in the “segregation” of women and of enacting a “new [form of] racism” against men (Isarte 75).²

The type of debates held at Musidora and the focus on representation at the core of the New York festival contrast quite well with the Edinburgh Women’s Event’s insistence on film “criticism.” As festival organizer, film critic, and director Mulvey notes, debates in British feminist film criticism cohered around a central issue: whether one could speak of a feminist cinema beyond “the superficial levels of women as content” (“Feminism” 5). Building on the debates held at the Women’s Event and capitalizing on the monographs published by Edinburgh as part of its retrospectives, feminist film critics addressed this issue on two fronts: (a) the question of whether feminist films could constitute a form of counter-cinema and (b) the absence of “woman as woman” in Hollywood films.

Most notoriously, the Women’s Event led to the publication of Notes on Women’s Cinema (1973), a forty-page volume edited by Johnston—a filmmaker, activist, and curator who was actively participating in the London Women’s Film Group, the British Film Institute, and the SEFT. Notes on Women’s Cinema capitalized on debates held at the Women’s Event, with its structure—combining interviews, articles, and interviews with directors—reflecting Johnston’s position as a curator for the EFF. As Fabian argues, Johnston’s “interest in creating festival programs that foregrounded different genealogies of women’s cinema—as well as the connections among them—sheds light on her editorial framing of Notes on Women’s Cinema’s diverse interventions” (256).

This form of collaboration is also clear in another foundational volume edited by Johnston and Pam Cook—The Work of Dorothy Arzner: Towards a Feminist Cinema (1975). As such, the organization of the book reflects Johnston's commitment to collective authorship: it features not only several analyses of key films (by both Cook and Johnston) but also an interview with Arzner herself. On a theoretical level, the book was largely influenced by earlier Edinburgh retrospectives and debates, notably those on Brecht and Russian formalism (Mulvey, "British Feminist Film" 72). Furthermore, Johnston and Cook's opus is emblematic of the scholarship born out of the Women's Event; steering away from the "lost and found" approaches of earlier feminist criticism or from calls for "realist" depictions of women, it tackles the cinematic language employed by Arzner.

Laura Mulvey's canonical "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) can also be understood within this framework. Developing a critique of the language of film through psychoanalysis, Mulvey sought in her theoretical pamphlet to "prob[e] dislocation between cinematic form and represented material, . . . investigating various means of splitting the established rapport between screen and spectator" ("Feminism" 8). In so doing, Mulvey aimed at moving beyond the "lost and found" approach that characterized the first feminist film festivals—highlighting the historical absence of "women and woman."

Here, I do not aim to fully sketch a linear history of British feminist film criticism, nor do I want to engage with the details of Mulvey's and Johnston's arguments. Rather, I am interested in Johnston's and Mulvey's position—as filmmakers, critics, theorists, and festival organizers. Perhaps because of their theoretical lingo, Mulvey's and Johnston's scholarship has often been described as somewhat disconnected from the social movements they emerged from—as creating a gap between feminist practice and theory. Crucially, these texts were inspired by their

respective authors' curatorial and artistic practices. They were envisioned as portable manifestos for the emergence of new feminist film works. Fabian, for instance, notes that the title Notes on Women's Cinema "frames the pamphlet's contents as 'notes,' reflecting its spartan quality and suggesting that the volume is primarily an informal tool for discussion which [sought to] develop theoretical models and production strategies to advance the political goals of the women's liberation movement" (244).

Mulvey's call to dismantle cinematic pleasure similarly originated from the margins of academia: "Visual Pleasure" was explicitly written as a manifesto—one that built on earlier issues of Screen (and notably its republication of modernist manifestos in 1971-72, also based on an Edinburgh retrospective) and captured the collective energies of its time. Mulvey was not (then) recognized as a scholar: she was a curator, "feminist activist, part-time filmmaker, occasional bookshop worker, housewife, and mother who had never attended graduate school or held a teaching post" (Merck 2). The article was conceived not as privileging theory over practice but rather as a call to action in the context of the material domination of women in the film industry. Significantly, "Visual Pleasure" was "featured in Screen as the statement of a filmmaker" (Merck 9).

The canonization of early feminist film criticism/theory often conceals its relationship with the Edinburgh festival (White 145). Mulvey's manifesto (and to some extent Johnston's career) has been analyzed as the cornerstone for the establishment of feminist film theory—obscuring both the material realities of 1970s British feminist film critics and the specific articulation between theory, practice, and curation that was at the core of the period. The cultural work performed by Mulvey and Johnston also reflects a gendered division of labor: many 1970s feminist activists/theorists were not employed in academia. They typically performed several

forms of labor at once: in addition to writing articles, they often directed films, curated cinematic programs, and worked as film critics. These multiple activities not only built on one another but also enabled a form of horizontal collaboration that helped define feminist film culture^b. The fact that these multiple activities were underpaid, if paid at all, largely echoes Haidee Wasson and Lee Grieveson's description of the role played by 1930s-60s critics, educational institutions, and cinephile organizations in enabling cinematic knowledge: film studies relied on the intellectual labor of practitioners.

To some extent, the erasure of para-academic labor performed by Mulvey and Johnston—a result of the separation between criticism and scholarship—obscures the historical importance of festival organizing, curation, and collective debates at festivals in shaping feminist cinematic knowledge. Characterizing 1970s British feminist film criticism primarily as theory did, however, “grant academic and intellectual legitimacy that in turn allowed for tenure and programs” (Juhasz 54). In taking Mulvey and Johnston's early careers as a case study, I thus do not seek to conceal the contributions made by other feminist critics. My focus on these two authors betrays the weight of history and discipline formations—the ways in which the institutionalization of film studies as an independent discipline prioritizes people whose work falls (retrospectively) under the category of scholarship/theory.

<T1HD>The 1979 Alternative Cinema Conference

<TXT>The Alternative Cinema conference illustrates a different form of articulation between academic and intellectual labor. In June 1979, over four hundred critics, scholars, activists,

^b In this sentence structure, you have the “multiple activities” performing the action of “participating in the idea of a feminist film culture.” This seems a bit awkward and unclear. I recommend revising. Revised.

and/or filmmakers and video makers met at Bard College in New York. Organized by, among others, Peter Biskind with the support of Jump Cut, the conference endeavored to “bring together people actively involved in the production, distribution use or criticism of films, videotapes and slideshows whose primary purpose is to address social issues and concerns” (US Conference for an Alternative Cinema; emphasis in the original). Billed as “the most important national gathering of progressive media workers since the 1930s” (“Alternative Cinema Conference” 34^c), it featured workshops and panel discussions, as well as an extensive screening program curated by the attendees.

Participants soon “recognized that their needs were not being adequately addressed by the structure and organization of the Conference, whose Organizing Committee was dominated by white, male straights from New York” (“Alternative Cinema Conference” 34). As a result, participants formed several groups and caucuses that aimed at increasing the visibility of minorities (among them, “Third World,” “Lesbian and Gay Male,” and “Feminist” caucuses). While the organizers did attempt to diffuse the controversy, they were largely unsuccessful: several participants described a confrontation between “the real conference (of the third world, gays, lesbians, and feminists) . . . and the official conference” (Michelle Citron, qtd. in Biskind et al. 37^d). Thomas Waugh, who participated in the Lesbian and Gay Male Caucus (with, among others, Jan Oxenberg and Rich), recalls,

<EXT>[O]ur struggle seemed relegated once again to a kind of second priority. We didn’t want

^c Here and in the first sentence of the next paragraph, please supply page numbers for the quotations. Done. This is a bit complicated as Jump Cut’s online archive does not indicate page numbers.

^d Here and at the end of the subsequent extract, please provide page numbers for the quotations. I had to guess, see above.

to have to convince the conference of anything about our cause, or to have to compete for audiences for our screenings . . . But the competitiveness seemed built into the conference organization: I projected TRUXX, an important Montreal film showing gay resistance against the police, for only a half-dozen people at 1 a.m. the second night . . . (qtd. in Biskind et al. 39-40)

<TXT>In that context, participants enacted a politics of solidarity, building coalitions across caucuses and establishing a list of demands directed at the organizing committee. These collaborations included non-academic attendees—among them, film critics, filmmakers, distributors, and producers. For instance, Rob Epstein presented a workshop on collective filmmaking based on his experience producing *The Word's Out* (1977). Rich recalls, <EXT>The Alternative Cinema Conference . . . was an earth-shattering, decade-shifting event. It never would have been confused with the Flaherty . . . [I]t had too much in the ways of politics, activists, grassroots, struggle-oriented politics that saw film as a means more than an end. We cheered each other and fought with each other, and even cried together before the damn weekend was through, but power was always contested and anyone who dared to assert authority over the group was at risk: nobody had “invited” us to Bard. (“Salon des refusés” 307)

<TXT>My choice to include the Alternative Cinema conference in this survey of feminist film programs and festivals might seem counterintuitive. After all, the event wasn't billed as a film festival or a screening series. While the previous section focused on symposiums organized within festivals, I am here interested in a forgotten practice: screening cycles and festivals organized as part of foundational conferences. From the 1970s to the late 1980s,

conferences organized by academic professional associations (such as the annual meetings of the University Film and Video Association and of the Society for Cinema Studies) often included extensive screening programs, conceived as an integral part of the event. These screening series, festivals, and/or programs served not only as a platform for furthering intellectual debate but also as a mechanism for including academically minded practitioners.

As such, the controversy around the Alternative Cinema conference was emblematic of the debates at the core of the emergence of film studies in the United States. Steering away from auteurism and impressionistic surveys of cinema, scholars located in or calling for new film studies departments sought to develop new methodologies harnessed onto leftist critical cultural work. The journal Jump Cut, which was one of the main stakeholders in the Alternative Cinema event, exemplified this shift toward a new form of film scholarship: inspired by Third Cinema and structuralism, it largely hoped to invest the nascent discipline with a Marxist perspective. Conscious that “most advances in film theory and criticism in near future probably will not take place within US film departments but will be accomplished by people . . . coming to film from other [academic and non-academic] disciplines” (“The Last Word: Film Studies”), Jump Cut both used film analysis to create theoretical tools for leftist intellectuals (including cultural workers) and advocated for a new relationship between universities, artistic practices, and social movements (see also “The Last Word: Left Cultural Work”).

In addition to reflecting a new form of alliance between scholars, activists, and practitioners, Jump Cut featured a relatively diverse array of perspectives. In 1974, for instance, editor Julie Lesage published a critique of British feminist film studies’ reliance on Freudian psychoanalysis. Similarly, Jump Cut’s surveys of radical US film cultures regularly included nods to video works made by minorities (see, for instance, Hess). In 1977, the journal released

two special issues on minority film cultures (women's cinema in Jump Cut issue 14, gay cinema in issue 16). The journal's collective organization echoed this debate on the place of minorities within the emerging discipline of film studies: its modes of production and diffusion, documented in several editorials, testified to the emergence of the "committed" film scholar, defined as acting in solidarity with and relation to social movements ("Editorial: Jump Cut History and Production"). This commitment to minority perspectives clearly reflects what Rich identifies as the difference between 1970s American and British feminist film criticism: while the former was "speaking in one's own name," willingly adopting minority perspectives as a theoretical tool, the second spoke "in the name of history," crafting "objective" methods for analyzing film ("The Crisis of Naming").

Read in this light, the Alternative Cinema event marks a turning point in the history of North American film studies: the protests over the overrepresentation of white, male, New York-based perspectives can be understood as emblematic of the emergence of the figure of the committed scholar. While the conference wasn't billed as a women's event, it enabled "over 100 feminists in the media [to] strategiz[e] within the Left" (Rich, "The Crisis of Naming"). For instance, many participants active in the Women's Caucus were also involved in the Lesbian and Gay Male Caucus (including Oxenberg and Rich)—a group that called for an exchange of information between gay and lesbian media workers and scholars, as well as for the creation of "[a]lternative distribution centers which must seek out, distribute, and encourage the production of media made by lesbians and gay men" ("Alternative Cinema Conference"). The recommendations made by the Lesbian and Gay Male Caucus ultimately led to the creation of the National Association for Lesbian and Gay Filmmakers (NALGF), a group whose membership "include[d] producers, directors, writers, editors, cinematographers, video artists,

film exhibitors, film organization administrators, critics, and film and video students” (“Dear Friends . . .”). Symptomatically, the NALGF’s mission was directly inspired by the feminist cooperatives, activists, and filmmakers who attended the Alternative Cinema conference: it aimed to serve as a “service organization with a distribution base [akin to Women Make Movies], [a] professional lobbying association for lesbian and gays working both as independents and in the industry, [and a] trade association representing and supporting independent gay and lesbian media” (NALGF, “Meeting Minutes, June 28th”).

To that extent, the Alternative Cinema conference/festival was emblematic of new forms of collaboration—among the various caucuses, but also between scholars, critics, activists, and film professionals. This praxis corresponds to a particular historical context: with the creation of film studies departments, several critics and filmmakers were hired as scholars. The rapid institutionalization of film studies in North America contributed to an increasing separation between the labor of criticism, scholarship, filmmaking, and festival planning. The exact form taken by film scholarship was not, however, fully defined. Jump Cut, for instance, described the work performed by film scholars as varying “from heavy production orientation to studying film as communication or film as humanities. . . . With the increasing importance of film studies, film criticism within academe [was] reaching a point of major change” (“The Last Word: Film Studies”).

The conference (and Jump Cut) partly aimed at answering the question of whether newly created film studies departments should rely on practitioners, aim to develop new scientific methods and theories, or adopt a hybrid format. It built on this definitional uncertainty, advocating for a politics of alliance and collaboration that defined film criticism as articulated with both theory and practice. According to Jump Cut,

<EXT>the task of developing film theory and criticism in this country must grow out of our own practice of film criticism and out of an analysis of our own culture and political situation . . . bring[ing] media people out of their isolation, . . . bring[ing] them into dialogue with one another—a dialogue out of which organization and struggle can grow. (“The Last Word: Theory/Criticism/Reviewing/Practice”)

<T1HD>Edinburgh’s 1979 “Feminism and Cinema” Event

<TXT>In the same year as the Alternative Cinema conference, Angela Martin, Mulvey, Myles, and Johnston organized a second feminist film program within the EFF. Like the 1972 Women’s Event, the 1979 “Feminism and Cinema” conference/festival included several film screenings, workshops, and keynotes. Although only seven years separated the two events, the situation and institutional location of feminist film theory had changed tremendously: the differences between the Women’s Event and the Feminism and Cinema festival reflect the institutionalization of film studies as an independent academic discipline and the development of various new modes of feminist film criticism (notably, Jump Cut’s redefinition of the relationship between activism, criticism, and leftist cultural work).

This institutionalization of film scholarship and its separation from practice is particularly clear in the documents associated with the Feminism and Cinema event. Whereas participants at the 1972 Women’s Event often performed several types of cultural and intellectual labor, the 1979 Feminism and Cinema festival established a distinction between theory and practice. The

^e The language at the end of this sentence does not make clear sense. The event itself could not have performed the editing of documents. Please revise to attribute the editing of documents to some group or individual or to replace “edited by” (e.g., “the documents associated with”).

festival roster, for instance, grouped attendees in several distinct categories (including theorist, technician, and student), each corresponding to a different form of cultural labor. Significantly, Rich describes the event as “one of the last . . . to permit the mingling of women from all sectors of film activity. Filmmakers, distribution collectives, journalists, scholars, festival committee members, film editors and composers, even would-be filmmakers” (Chick Flicks 163). Johnston similarly argues that the festival enabled “film-makers, film theorists and women involved in distribution and exhibition, . . . through the papers, forums, and workshops, to generate discussions and analyses of the conditions of existence of each of these practices” (“The Subject of Feminist Film Theory/Practice” 27; emphasis added).

This separation between various forms of feminist film labor was a clear consequence of the institutionalization of film studies. In particular, the creation of film studies departments and the constitution of feminist film distribution networks/cooperatives entailed a redefinition of the relationships between practice, criticism, and theory. The evolution of and the role played by early British feminist film criticism is here quite instructive. As Mulvey rightly notes, “the origin of feminist film theory coincided with the first wave of interest in establishing film studies in British universities” (“Unmasking the Gaze” 18). Conscious of the need to distinguish film studies from other fields of inquiries and academic disciplines, scholars sought to establish the autonomy of the cinema. British feminist film criticism’s use of psychoanalysis and emphasis on medium specificity were fully compatible with this effort. Mulvey and Johnston’s interventions, which originated outside of academia, helped (re)define the labor of film studies: though they presupposed a synchronicity between criticism, theory, and practice, the interventions made at the 1972 Women’s Event came to be primarily understood as film theory.

Camera Obscura, a journal created in 1976, is symptomatic of this shift in the position of

feminist film scholarship. Created from and in opposition to Women and Film, the journal was explicitly conceived as addressing “a need for theoretical study of film . . . from a feminist and socialist perspective” (“Feminism and Film” 3). According to Camera Obscura’s first issue, feminist film scholarship should thus aim toward “the study of film as a signifying practice . . . [which] contributes to an understanding of how ideology determines and is determined by representation” (“Feminism and Film” 3f). Privileging textual analysis and semiology, Camera Obscura never used the word “criticism” in its definition of the labor of feminist film scholarship. Rather, it aimed to pursue the line of inquiry opened up by Johnston and Mulvey—described as the first “theoretical work[s] in the area of feminist analysis of film” (“Feminism and Film” 3g; emphasis added). Significantly, Mulvey describes a workshop held in May 1978 at the London Film-Maker’s Co-op as “three women from the [Camera Obscura] collective . . . presenting their work . . . for discussion with English film-makers (men and women) and feminists interested in the cinema” (“Feminism, Film and the Avant-Garde” 8; emphasis added). This emphasis on theory, defined in opposition to criticism, partly explains why Rich situates Camera Obscura in the tradition of British feminist film studies—despite the journal being based in the United States (“The Crisis of Naming in Feminist Film Criticism”).

In this context, the Feminism and Cinema conference was explicitly conceived as a debate on the usefulness of psychoanalysis in feminist film theory. The event’s structure aimed to highlight the division between two versions of feminist film criticism/theory. The event

f Does this quotation also come from page 3? Please review. Yes

g MLA style does not use “Ibid,” so I have replaced it here, but please double-check the edited citation, to be sure it is correct (i.e., that 3 is the correct page number and that you are indeed quoting the Camera Obscura source here and not Johnston or Mulvey). Yes correct

featured several panels on journals (*Jump Cut*, *Camera Obscura*, *Frauen und Film*), representing different positions in feminist film theory/criticism. In addition to Mulvey's keynote address, two sets of debate structured the conference, and each featured two speakers, one arguing for psychoanalytic film theory, one criticizing it (Cook versus Rich, Johnston versus Christine Gledhill). Unsurprisingly, participants did not necessarily agree on the methodologies and orientations that a feminist film theory and/or criticism should take: the Feminism and Cinema debates relied on the opposition between psychoanalysis and cultural studies—two different conceptualizations of the relationship between and definition of theory and practice. Rich recalls, "I realized that Pam Cook, whom I'd never met but whom I'd already attacked for her work with Claire Johnston in my Naming article, had been paired with me in the expectation that we would come, if not to blows, at least to public disagreements" (*Chick Flicks* 160).

Here, I do not want to overplay the differences between these two positions, nor do I want to imply that they were irreconcilable. To some extent, the Feminism and Cinema event brought together geographically distant distributors, scholars, critics, filmmakers, and activists. Similarly, friendships and collaboration did occur behind the scenes. More importantly, participants did find a point of unity: although Rich's description of Akerman's film, Johnston's analysis of the "subject" of feminist film theory (published in 1980), and Gledhill's theorization of the relation between feminist subjects, readers, and audiences (expanding on the article she had published in 1978) did not necessarily adhere to the same vision of what a feminist film scholarship should be, all participants sought to address the increasing separation between feminist theory and practice. In that context, the screenings organized as part of the Feminism and Cinema event provided a much-needed point of unity that enabled scholars to reframe the question of a feminist film practice. Rich recalls, "[W]e'd never seen anything like [these films]

before, and women were wild with excitement over their demonstrated integration of feminist analysis into highly sophisticated cinematic forms. [They] further advanced the sense of a new feminist cinema in formation” (Rich, *Chick Flicks* 164).

<T1HD>Conclusion: Festivals, Cultural Labor, and the “Subject” of Feminist Film Studies

<TXT>Taken together, these three events fundamentally speak to the complex history of feminist film studies, a field of inquiry marked by its conflicted relationship to practice and/or theory. From Johnston and Mulvey’s role as curators, critics, and activists to the Alternative Cinema’s emphasis on a committed scholarly practice to the debates held as part of the Feminism and Cinema festival, each of these events envisioned the “subject” of feminist film studies. In so doing, they tuned us into various modes of knowledge production, corresponding to historically situated forms of cultural labor.

Arguably, the articulations between festivals and feminist film studies at the core of this article correspond to a specific historical context. The malleability (some would rightly say “precarity”) of the subject-positions “critics,” “scholars,” and “curators” enabled particular regimes of knowledge production—through curation and cooperation—that do not neatly fit with contemporary academia (in particular with the search for research outputs that are not only quantifiable but also identifiable as scholarship). Furthermore, these forms of critical and academic labor reflect a gendered economy that largely kept women outside of stable academic or curatorial positions.³

In that context, I do not aim to argue that one should emulate the past and/or reclaim 1970s feminist film critics’ vision of the relationship between theory and practice. As several scholars have noted, the rubric of “history” has often been used to either celebrate past modes of

articulation between feminist theory and practice or sidestep the issue altogether. Jane Gaines, for instance, reminds us that

<EXT>any new historical writing on women . . . will also be an intellectual history of feminism and film theory—and the one will be written for the other. Knowing what we know about the way the historically distant functions to legitimate the proximate, . . . the “historical turn” in film feminism is also even, and as much about, feminist film theory. (117)

<TXT>Similarly, Alexandra Juhasz argues that the question of history in feminist film criticism/studies emerged at a particular historical juncture: it “is an outcome of three understandable moves made by the field as it matured and faced the increasing requirements of professionalization: a marked turn to and embrace of theory in isolation from practice, a preoccupation with mainstream forms, and a detachment from feminist politics” (Juhasz 54). Though historical research is often tainted by our nostalgic attachments to past modes of activism, we should be careful not to read this interplay between practice and theory as a thing of the past. Juhasz continues:

<EXT>[Y]eah, I (like you?) missed that glorious moment and have spent a significant part of my academic energies documenting and theorizing its memory. But such nostalgia obscures the feminist organizing and media work that is happening now. Back in the day, there were scores of women’s film festivals and an active feminist community supporting them, one that included feminist film scholars who created context, theory, and analysis for the films and their feminist audiences. Currently, feminists make mainstream narrative films and HBO documentaries, they run distribution companies and film festivals (granted, usually gay and lesbian or experimental; the American women’s film festival is largely a thing of the past), they teach media-production

skills to younger feminists, and they show their media work at festivals, college campuses, and on the Internet. (53-54)

<TXT>While Alexandre Juhasz focuses here on practitioners' theoretical endeavors, we should not forget the various para-academic activities and events organized by scholars. Feminist film scholarship^h is rarely detached from the communities it emerges from or seeks to serve. If the labor performed by feminist scholars is often both theoretical and practical, non-theoretical work is often ignored by the metrics used by our institutions (publications and presentations). Alternative modes of knowledge mobilization and outreach (such as film curation and screening organizing), disproportionally adopted by women, queer, and non-white scholars, are still mostly ignored by tenure review and hiring committees. In focusing on a time prior to the institutionalization of film studies as an independent discipline, this article thus hopes to remind us of the role played by practitioners in shaping the discipline, respectively justifying alternative modes of knowledge production (or curation) as theoretical in their own rights.

<N1HD>NOTES

<NTXT>1. For a more detailed analysis of the role played by festivals in fostering friendships and artistic collaborations, see Damiens, "Incestuous Festivals."

2. Screenings held at the Museum of Modern Art were open to both men and women (French legislation states that publicly funded cultural institutions cannot restrict access to a subset of the population). The fact that Musidora was accused of "segregation" is not surprising: France's universalist doctrine largely prevents the expression of minority-centered discourses.

^h I recommend revising to avoid the awkwardness of "studies is." Replaced by scholarship

Social movements must appeal to the “nation” as a whole.

3. On the gendered economy of contemporary film criticism and feminist labor, see Siccondolfo 175-76.

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