Editorial

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Back in 2021, when film studies scholar Émilie Cheyroux and I discussed the possibility of including a guest-edited section on film festivals in the fourth issue of the Journal of Festive Studies, we realized that many of the submissions we would receive would probably deal with the impact of the COVID pandemic: festival cancellations or postponements in 2020; responses to lockdowns and international border closures; experimentation with new (online or socially distanced) formats in 2021; the return to either in-person or "hybrid" events in 2022.

What we could not foresee was that some film festivals would recover from this health crisis only to be thrown into a second, even more perilous, one. The roundtable organized by Skadi Loist and Marijke de Valck, the script of which you will discover in this issue, testifies to the sense of disbelief that seized the Ukrainian film festival community on February 24, 2022. It also highlights the kind of healing or activist work that festivals can perform in times of war—and in its aftermath. All of this indubitably takes us away from notions of joy and pleasure, but then, our journal’s position has always been that elation is never divorced from issues of power, conflict, and indeed war. The recent FIFA World Cup hosted by Qatar was yet another reminder that festivity, or in this case the celebration of the world’s arguably most popular game—football—can be overshadowed by myriad concerns (the human rights record of the host country, the environmental impact and cost of the tournament, the treatment of fans and journalists, scheduling issues, geopolitical concerns), producing an altogether “joy-free” event.¹

The entirety of our "Close-up on New Film Festival Research” is permeated by this tension between pleasure and pain, exhilaration and vexation. While some articles in the section showcase the crucial community-building function of festivals in bridging the gap between academia and the rest of civil society (Ana Rosa Marques), in providing small spaces of freedom in prisons (Carole Roy and Lindsey McVicar), or in promoting cultural identities in the absence of a nation-state (Alan Ali Saeed), others explore the inherent power dynamics of the festival circuit (Heshen Xie), the frustrations caused by COVID among small festival organizers (Émilie Cheyroux), or how hard it can be for festivals to escape state control or dependence on economic partners—especially stakeholders in tourism development (Cyril Cordoba). Émilie Cheyroux’s

introduction provides a thorough examination of how these issues relate to the larger literature on film festivals, which has grown considerably since the 2000s.

As usual, our issue also includes nonthematic material—in this case, three articles by a combination of scholars and educators: Panayotis G. Kimourtzis and Anna Mandilara; Ivy Rieger; and Jody H. Cripps, Ely Lyonblum, and Anita Small. In their essay on public ceremonies under the rule of King Otto of Bavaria (1832-1862), historians Kimourtzis and Mandilara analyze the establishment of public holidays in mid-nineteenth-century Greece and try to understand why the steep cost of these celebrations was never questioned by either the monarchy or its subjects, despite the country’s dire financial situation. Their meticulous archival investigations fuel larger debates on the sources we use when tracing the history of festivals, the function of protocol and etiquette in court ceremonies, the role of national symbols in processes of state formation, and the complex relations between official and popular cultures—from competition to occasional appropriation.

In her study of disfrazado performances in Mixtepequense communities located in Oaxaca, Mexico, and in Kern County, California, anthropologist Ivy Rieger highlights the importance of embodied practices such as fancy dress to Indigenous identities in a globalized world. Utilizing Peggy Levitt’s well-known concept of “social remittance” and Diana Taylor’s equally famous distinction between archive and repertoire, she specifically elaborates on the role of this carnivalesque tradition in the construction of cultural capital for the transnational Mixtepequense community. She also furthers the conversation on how carnival traditions constitute privileged sites for the negotiation of authenticity, traditional norms of social organization, and gender roles.

The last nonthematic contribution explores the topic of signed music in the deaf community via the study of a signed musical, The Black Drum, performed in 2019 at Festival Clin d’œil, an annual event held in Reims, France. The three authors, who embody different subject positions in relation to the deaf community—insider, outsider, and mediator—start by providing the requisite cultural context for the development of signed music as an art form. Then, on the basis of a six-month participant observation, they describe the community-led artistic process by which The Black Drum came to be performed “without any reliance on audible sounds.” Finally, they analyze the impact of the piece on festival attendees on the basis of interviews. Their conclusion is that festivals provide an environment that is particularly conducive to experimentation and to the dissemination of new forms of performance art on an international scale. In this particular case, Festival Clin d’œil has fostered growing acceptance of signed music as a musical genre among deaf people in their communities and beyond.

Issue 4 ends with a series of seven book reviews. Spanning a wide variety of topics—from the development of queer film festivals (Ylenia Olibet) to the role of festival performances in the construction of “Europeanness” (Mariann Vaczi), from women’s contribution to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century world’s fairs (Ellen Litwicki) to the way events “do gender” (Cora Gaebel), from everyday festivity in various African nations (David Murphy) to the divisive nature of Independence Day commemorations in the post-Reconstruction US South (Elijah Gaddis), not to mention the politics of drumming in Martinique (Jerome Camal)—they epitomize the multidisciplinary nature of festive studies that this journal has been celebrating since 2019.
Aside from working on issue #4, the editorial team has been laying the ground for future iterations of the journal. Editor extraordinaire Ellen Litwicki decided to step down earlier this year to focus on other scholarly and nonscholarly pursuits. We thank her for the amazing work she has performed at the service of the journal since 2017 (when it was just an idea floating around in H-Net circles) and wish her the best on her post-retirement adventures.

Joining me as coeditor is Isabel Machado, whom some of you may remember as a guest editor for our third issue, on the materiality of festivity. She will bring her terrific organizational and scholarly skills—as well as constant enthusiasm—to the position. Also joining the team are Dr. Emily Joan Elliott, H-Net’s new associate director for Research and Publications, who has efficiently guided the production of this issue, and Dr. Emily Ruth Allen, who will henceforth assume the position of reviews editor for the Journal of Festive Studies.

Finally, we want to announce a few new arrivals to our editorial board (now fourteen members strong): Drs. Evelyn Annuss, Antoinette DeNapoli, Elijah Gaddis, Barbara Grabher, Skadi Loist, Miguel Valerio, Alessandro Vari, and now Ellen Litwicki, whose expertise we will continue to rely on in future years.

The fifth issue of the journal is already under way, and we have just published a call for papers for a guest-edited section on sports and festivity that will be part of issue 6. We are hoping that you will check it out, share it, and continue to follow our work into 2023 and beyond. Thanks for your support of open-access journals and open scholarship in general!
AUTHOR BIO

Aurélie Godet is an associate professor of US history at the University of Nantes and is currently at work on a political history of festivity in New Orleans from the eighteenth century through today, tentatively titled “Festive City: The Politics of Play in New Orleans from the Colonial Period to the Present.” She has been the coeditor-in-chief of the Journal of Festive Studies since 2019.

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