Urban Space and Queer Identities:
The LGBTQ Film Festival as Heterotopia

Elena-Larisa Stanciu
University of Southern, Denmark

Abstract

This article seeks to examine and critically discuss the dynamics between private and public space in an urban context, in relation to meanings and structures identified as components of queer identity and culture. Starting from theoretical interrogations regarding urban space and sexual identities, I will analyze the role and function of a specific socio-cultural practice: the LGBTQ film festival.

Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia is central to the placement of the film festival in the larger context of urban queer identity formation. The division line between private and public is explored, as it facilitates the understanding of contemporary social attitudes and practices, while illuminating clashes of meaning and subjectivity in an urban setting.
Key Words: urban space • queer identities • LGBTQ film festival • heterotopia

Introduction

My aim in this article is to discuss and examine the dynamics between private and public space in an urban context, in relation to meanings and structures identified as components of queer identity and culture. The discussion originates with the occasion of the LGBT Film Festival *Mix Odense* 2014[1], part of the MIX international circuit, including Mix Copenhagen. A film festival focused on themes and topics that surround homosexuality and queerness in a contemporary context represents a landmark within local, national and international visual culture. I will examine what role the LGBT film festival plays using Michel Foucault's (1997) concept of heterotopia, as an attempt to identify and explore modes of urban existence, and investigate various correlations between space, alternatives to it, and queer subjectivity. Zygmunt Bauman's (2011) perspective on the public-private divide and its recent mutations represents another important point of inquiry, as it illuminates contemporary social attitudes, while allowing for debate and dialogue.

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[1] Official website: http://mixodense.dk/

As an enclave of cultural production, the film festival isolates cinematic works and envelops them with particular discourses, inviting a necessarily alternative decoding. The structure and internal evolution of this socio-cultural phenomenon act towards the appropriation of certain segments of urban space and time, constructing an alternative, timely place of reflection, consumption, and cultural interrogation. This allows the understanding of the film festival as a heterotopia, an aspect that will be discussed later, with focus on its mechanisms and relation to urban space, time, and subjectivity. The fine line between public and private reflects complex dimensions of social life. The public – private binary, inherited from the early experience of modernity, is contained within a larger web of such dichotomies fostered by contemporary urban space, and perpetuated by everyday performances: inside/outside, right/wrong, I/Other, center/periphery. These contrasting categories of urban existence stand as indicators of urban fluidity, of an inherent and contradictory placelessness of urban space, fragmentation, and interdependence of resulting fragments. In this context, films incorporate the self-reflective nature of urban life, attempting to simplify or complicate, hide or expose, perpetuate or subvert knowledge.

Through the medium of a dedicated festival, films descend to a street-level dimension, becoming a "knowledge-making institution," (Lee 2011; Lee 2012) which embraces and celebrates an "elasticity of meaning," (Ivakhiv 2011) opposing the static, seemingly impenetrable structures of the city.

In the first part of the article, the central notion will be the urban space, with questions regarding its particular ethos, and modes and structures that inform cultural production and social reflectiveness. The city is seen as both cause and effect of a myriad of meanings and vectors of identity formation and performance. Queer identities and homosexual performance will be particularly analyzed as inherent elements of an urban web of social existence, with critical focus on ontological boundaries between public and private spaces.

The second part of the article discusses the function of the LGBTQ film festival, as a cultural phenomenon, with social and axiological ramifications. The particular element of analysis is the MIX Odense film festival, a rather new festival, taken out of the big-city context, and brought into a rather small urban area (Odense is Denmark's third largest city, a university center, with nearly 200.000 inhabitants). A few of the questions I will

consider are: How does this festival incorporate local space and cultural activity? What features of urban life interact with the LGBT festival? What type of discourse does Mix Odense create about urban queer culture? Where does the festival stand along the borderline between public and private space? How does the LGBTQ festival incorporate practices of self-reflection and mirroring performed by the city, as a self-standing entity? These matters will be addressed by looking at the meta-structure of the festival, in relation to artistic practices, audience production, and engagement with structures of the city.

Following these lines of inquiry, I seek to conclude that the line between private and public space in an urban display of homosexual culture is very fine, allowing for many intersections and juxtapositions of meaning, performance, and subjectivities. A segment of the real world of the city is taken over by the imagined world contained in a film festival, a heterotopia of sorts, which requires categorization and exploration, in order to be fully understood and instrumentally integrated in a genuine comprehension of queer urban subjectivities.

Space

Urban space is signification. It is a process, which reveals its own dense material and symbolic presence. The impact of this presence upon itself and upon those who reflect their existence in the city they inhabit is central to any effort of grasping the socio-cultural formative potential of the city. Urban space is interpretation – of values, of moods and desires, image and projection of what it has been and what is to become. Urban space is as fluid as time, flowing between compact structures of concrete and steel, glass and mirrors; a "liquid" entity floating among individuals, witnessing and inspiring their bonds (Bauman 2000). The city might seem a mirage, simultaneity of meanings and realities, which require either acute awareness, of place or self or a liberating merging with structures and mechanisms. Any given urban space has been endowed a pattern, but has not necessarily been given order. The city might appear to be a conglomerate of immutable elements, self-sustained by repetition – buildings reflect one another, individuals reflect their bodily image (and selves) in colossal mirrors, which seem to absorb urban life, only to return it to its former place, but not always its former structure. By projecting a state of being immovable, the city often creates an impression of being

favorable to the development of a sense of place, of belonging, which ultimately reverberates in individuals' self-recognition as members of a community. The concept of community follows an inherently human need to create clusters, symbolic (and often physical) territories of association and attachment, based on perceived commonalities. Mike Featherstone acknowledges this as element of a conflicting discourse on postmodern urban life (Balshaw and Kennedy 2000). In his view, identities are composed and recomposed following a discursive practice of conflict and difference, which institutes fragmentation and disruption as necessary counterparts of community and solidarity.

Urbanism, urban experiences, heterotopia.

Historically, there is little doubt that cities in and by themselves could not have existed; take, for instance, the ancient city-states – the polis, incumbent upon it to foster the first traces of democracy. Millennial notions of citizenship and discourse appeared within the confinements of these archetypal "free cities", influencing in their own right the very architecture of the city. The Agora, the place of gathering and democratic, free debate soon became a definitive part of the city structure, setting for centuries to come, the foundation for analyzing the relation between physical space and its cartographic representation, and the political space, rich in symbols that could at almost any time, materialize into powerful social and cultural structures. Nevertheless, the question of whether "physical structures follow political structures, or the other way around" has been and still is a good place of inquiry, when investigating the forces that might participate in the production of urban space (Daylight 2008). The relationship between community, as a main consequence of political relations, and the space to foster it is a rich and enlightening one; for one, it leads to a distinction between the *structure* of the city and the *function* the urban environment has. Acknowledging the unmovable feature of the former, one realizes the fluidity of the latter. However, this dichotomy still leaves room for discussion – are we to see the city as portrayed by a the cartographic representation – streets and neighborhoods, buildings and parks, alleys and sidewalks, all meandering and creating an independent entity, devoid of human element, or, on the contrary, is the city to be seen as created through the walks people take on the streets, the stories they created around buildings, the views they treasure and places they visit most? It seems that this is not an "either-or" type of situation, and a way of really understanding the city and how it is constructed is to find

the middle ground between the two spheres of perception – the relation between the city and its inhabitants, the point of meeting between two probably equally important forces. Rather than focusing on the whole of the city as a result of a coming-together and complete merger of various elements, many scholars invite us to focus on the "urban experience" (Daylight 2008) as a process, a continuous struggle for "meaning and progress" (Campbell and Keane 1997). This struggle for meaning lies underneath a deeper ontological and epistemological sphere, namely the construction of the city through discourse. This idea, bred at the school of post-structuralism, inspires the "reading of the city" (Campbell and Keane 1997) approaching the city as a text implies the search for meaning, for narrative as inherent to the urban experience. As a working definition, we are to understand the notion of *discourse* as "the manner through which the city is represented to us in language and related frames of reference and definition"(Campbell and Keane 1997). Such discourses have, the authors suggest, the role to "regulate" the perspective the viewers have of the city, employing the discursive act as a device of *creating* the urban reality, beyond its mere description. The American community created by the English colonists in the seventeenth century was seen to become "a City upon a Hill" an "absolute perfect place" (Campbell and Keane 1997) in other words, made visible in the light of its flawless existence, a *vision* of urban perfectibility, root of representations and screen surface for projections. Moreover, the newborn city was to be "made a story and a by-word through the world," (Campbell and Keane 1997) constructed through both its narrative and various processes of interpretation. Despite its creation founded on a prescribed logic of visibility and legibility, the city grew into a kind of entity with no precise grammar, a narrative with no plot, a self-reflexive story more and more difficult to contain within the frames of epistemic capacities of individuals (as social subjects). Thus, the city was to be defined, just as the post-structuralist tradition would imply, by its fragmented characteristics, dissociative structures and a certain predisposition to deconstruction, as a consequence of the lack (or loss, thereof) of a unity of meaning and existence. This leads us to Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia, which has "the power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other"(Foucault 1997). It is in this process that we can observe the gradual transformation of space into a *place*, a physical entity endowed with a certain *locality* which becomes a common ground for "inner space" and "exterior space," and manages,

despite its apparent discordance, to foster community, insofar as "it provides the space for self-expression and the possibility for dialogue" (Campbell and Keane 1997).

Space, Gender and Sexuality. Homosexual urban cultures.

This alternative understanding of 'community' is informing of the relationship between urban space and sexuality. Sexual identities and performances inhabit the public space of a city, as simultaneous causes and consequences of particular communities. Homosexuals and lesbians, transsexuals, drag queens – these categories exist only on the basis of recognition, visual identification and labeling, necessarily carried out in a public space. Delimitations of categories might seem set in stone – the discursive regime generates various notion of truths regarding what a lesbian is, how a transsexual acts and so on, but it needs to be mentioned that the very public space that conspires to such restrictive structures of meaning is the same space that permits negotiation. Queer subjectivity makes use of the urban space, acting towards liberating performances, by re-reading cultural claims, inverting of knowledge, and challenging instrumental elements of normativity.

Quoting Fredric Jameson, Russell Daylight discusses the "placeless dissociation" specific to late modern and postmodern urban environment, further describing the individual's inability to "map himself" – this is connected to an "alarming disjunction between the body and the built environment"(Daylight 2008). Given that the construction of identity begins with individuals' relation to their own bodies, it becomes even more relevant within an urban environment – body-sized experience in the big city resembles the mythical story of Daedalus, who built the labyrinth and eventually could not find his own way out of it. Nevertheless, the theme of disorientation, displacement and perpetual movement within an unknown and unknowable environment might be proved rather frail when confronted with urban queer experiences. The very disorientation and sense of displacement that informs fragmented and disruptive contemporary urban subjectivities might prove beneficial for the formation of queer identities. Queer identities have been discursively defined as subverting, denaturalized and non-normative structures of sexuality, identified and categorized essentially within the public space. The city fosters the interplay of anonymous and distinctive sexuality, visibility and invisibility, here and nowhere, place and no-place, allowing queer subjects to explore their own selves, within

and outside of space, in a perpetual *in-betweenness* that escapes categorization and restrictive encapsulation. In his informing article, Robert Aldrich discusses *Homosexuality and the City*, applying a historical view upon instances of urban habitation and sexual queerness. Making the case for the city as a favorable space for "subversive" sexuality, he writes: "Cities have provided venues where men who have sex with men (and women who have sex with women) can meet: pubs and clubs, café´s and cabarets. In times of clandestine homosexuality, public baths and toilets, parks and back streets were especially hospitable to trysts" (Aldrich 2004) The city is thus seen as a conglomerate of structures and meanings that allow phenomena, discourses and processes to coexist and interact with their counterparts. Violence and protests against violence, racism and freedom-rights manifestations, class and race segregation and attempt at inclusion – these binary existential instances rely on the possibility of urban space to be appropriated, redefined, integrated in discourses that can shift into counter-discourses. This may explain the paradox between an ontological containment that the urban space performs on senses and bodies and the sense of liberation and autonomy that homosexual identities find in a city. This urban ethos of countering and challenging the norm is inherent to gay cultures, as a double understanding of the city emerges: the city is seen as both "space and text," (Aldrich 2004, 1728) granting access to discourse and offering a site for creative performance and investigation of identities.

As Michael Sibalis contends, a significant gay subculture depends on urbanization and its characteristic social structures, which allow the subculture to slide into counterculture and embrace counter-normativity (Aldrich 2004, 1728). In this sense, the homosexual couple, for example, as social element in a given urban scenario, may be seen as a site of transgression, as it challenges established heteronormative political and social understandings and it becomes an agent of queering the space it inhabits. The queer couple and the bodies that compose it are heterotopias, marked by the impulse to create "other spaces," territories of performance that allows individuals to regain agency and reduce mainstream views that deem them incompatible. It might be argued that queer identities and everyday performances of queer subjectivity attempt a disintegration of the public-private divide, which more often than not has solidified acts of violence and homophobia. As George Chauncey argues, the historical "isolation" and "invisibility" forced upon homosexuals pervades contemporary mindsets, perpetuating and

celebrating the endurance of the private-public binary: "the *closet* is a recent and time-bound construction, but it falsely conveys the impression that homosexuality took shape in private, rather than public spaces"(Cohen 1997).

In the following section, I will discuss the matter of the public-private dichotomy and the attempted queering of it, by focusing on questions of identity formation, the interplay of secrecy and public spectacle, and the re-appropriation of public sites and discourses by gay cultures. These points will resurface in the second part of the article, where the LGBTQ film festival will be analyzed as an artistic and socio-political expression of these various theoretical points and as itself a heterotopia.

Public and Private

The perpetually modified (and essentially modifiable) public space paves the way for a new web of social relations, characterized by commodification, commercialization, and a seemingly universal struggle to set the border between public and private. Consequently, formation of self-identity and inter-subjectivity seems to be gravitating around this yet undefined and constantly transgressed border. Queer identities and urban subjectivities make no exception from being impacted by various political or creative processes that bombard the line between public and private with alternative meanings and structures. The underlying question regarding such transformations is in which circumstances could the individuals' innate struggle for identity (and further assertion of it) be dependent on what authors Mimi Sheller and John Urry (2003) call the "hybridization" of the public and private life. This "hybrid" is described as the only functional understanding of contemporary society. The notion essentially proposes a conceptual break with the tendency to comprehend and define places and spaces as static. Spheres and spaces should be reanalyzed starting from the fluidity and "liquid" feature of modern life, which informs despatialization and the possibility of merging previously incompatible spaces. This hybrid public space needs to be understood as process, rather than structure. Consequently, urban identities stem from a flowing of the city, its meanings, symbols and self-assertions, rather than from clashes of subjectivities and static, immovable city structures.

In a short article from 2011, Zygmunt Bauman (2011) discusses his previously coined term of "liquid modern life", in relation to the tendency to cross (in both directions) the line between private and public. Bauman takes a radically critical position towards

this tendency, addressing the "confessional society" as an "inconceivable kind of society" (Bauman 2011), a threat to a functional democracy. This particular type of social arrangement of dialogue consists of virtually all private aspects of human life made public, in what eventually is an attempt of the individual to define himself and acquire a sense of selfhood. *Secrecy* undergoes a powerful process of transformation, alarmingly close to its own dissipation, given that "in order to exist, [secrecy] needs to be acknowledged by others" (Bauman 2011), and at the same time respected as an entity defined exactly by those borders between private and public. Lately, Bauman observes, secrecy tends to dissolute under the willingness of more and more individuals to offer their particular lives and experiences as objects under the public's scrutiny. Private aspects of human life become "shared property" (Bauman 2011), to be sold, bought, and consumed at ease. However, Bauman argues, individuals are not entirely victims of a seemingly oppressive mercantile system, but they themselves engage in a peculiar sort of self-exposure, as a device in creating (new?) self-identity: "*We seem to experience no joy in having secrets*, unless these are the kind of secrets likely to enhance our egos through attracting the attention of researchers and editors of television talk-shows, tabloid first pages, and the covers of glossy magazines"(Bauman 2011). In other words, the only type of secrecy desired in contemporary society is the one always on the verge of turning into a publicly consumed matter, a spectacle. Bauman clearly appoints a great ontological role to invisibility – the possibility of individuals to remain invisible, should they desire that, should remain a value of the contemporary world. The author speaks against self-exposure, which would reinforce the "assault on the public-private frontier." This frontier is constantly pushed back by forcefully making visible aspects of private life that should remain invisible. Visibility is a social category highly relevant in the construction of the social subject; it acts as both an ontological category, impacting the very formation of the self, and as an epistemic dimension, defining relations of power, aesthetics, politics and, by extension, knowledge. More clearly, "the field of visibility ... lies at the intersection of the two domains of aesthetics (relations of *perception*) and politics (relations of *power)*" (Brighenti 2007, 324). The social image is in part politically constructed, and it can be argued that it is just as much politically *consumed*. This implies a minimum of dialogue, the type that necessitates the split of the subject, being *one* and the *other* at the same time, in the attempt to interpret and decode symbols and images. A critical question here rests

with the reliability of politically produced images. Necessarily, they come to the visible field of public sphere already infused with their lines of decoding, that is, at the very moment of their production, the mode of decoding and interpretation is designed and suggested through at different stages of the discourse surrounding them in the "field of vision" (Stuart Hall). The question to be asked here is how social images affect subjects' process of identity construction. How, for example, are urban queer identities enacted following an already encoded set of meanings, derived from various cycles of production, consumption and reproduction and what is the effect of these pre-inscriptions on the individual? Social images associated with gay culture pervade understandings of it. There often is no first hand encounter of social knowledge – meanings are already put in motion, circulated within a field of visibility that drives on superimposed notions of difference and subjectivity. This regime of visibility establishes its own supremacy, managing to transform at will everyday public experiences into what Bauman calls "spectacle." Judith Butler analyzes drag performances as intricate public experiences of one's own body that essentially restore individuals' positions as agents of their performative selves. Following a Foucauldian frame, Butler writes: "drag is a site of a certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted and, hence, of being implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposes"(Butler 2011, 85). Drag performances invert "heterosexual privilege," challenging the idea of an "original gender," thus attempting to regulate visibility and solve any underlining crisis of gender and sexual identity. The self-exposure, much condemned by Bauman, works, in this case, towards a grappling with anxiety, a socially constructed and perpetuated angst, which slowly dissipates when appropriated, performed and re-inscribed by individuals as queer subjects. In his historical analysis of gay culture in the first decades of the 20th century New York, George Chauncey discusses the "fairy," a type of male homosexual performance identified through the 1930s. The fairy, Chauncey writes, was the "only visible role model for gay men." However, some men refused to appropriate this image and "struggled to forge an alternative identity and cultural stance, one that would distinguish them from fairies and *normal* men alike"(Chauncey 1994, 100-101). This is yet another instance of the interplay of visibility and invisibility, which aids the construction of identities and counter-identities and rests on the endless possibilities of an urban space. The "drag queen" and the fairy are

manifestations of subjective intentions, self-awareness and agency over the body. These practices actively invite a form of voyeurism, while embarking their subjects upon a quest for legitimacy. They act towards a collapsing of any clear distinction that might exist between private and public realms. These various performative instances act as signifying processes – they stand in as reminders and exhibits of private acts, which might as well have been carried out in public. A complication of boundaries occurs, which challenges the fine line between subject and object of looking, questioning norms and even inverting them. Gay culture expressed through various media – of which the queer body is one – finds thus in the urban space a source and favorable site of negotiation, reclaiming of meaning through agency, and a recovering of discourse and performance. On this topic, Peter G. Goheen comments on the modern urban space and its various transformation with respect to human connections. He notes that while the modern city becomes inhospitable and its public spaces "are to be feared, even when they are full of people," it may morph into a viable site for gay culture: "the practice [of gay culture] was often visible in public space where it found a certain sanctuary from attack. … Public space was a crucial resource in gay culture" (Goheen 1998). The next section will analyze one particular manifestation of queer culture – queer film culture in the form of queer cinema gathered within a LGBTQ film festival. The analysis seeks to illustrate topics of sexual identity and use of urban space, the shifting boundary between private and public, and the connection between this cultural practice and formation of urban subjectivities.

The Film Festival

Cinema is essentially a public form of art. Although reviewers and critics many times set as focal point of film its subject matter and various artistic and technical choices, the meeting with the public constitutes a just as significant part. For its mere existence and endurance as masterpiece or just cinematographic hit, film depends on consumption – the moment when the public is somehow appropriated by the film and becomes an audience is essential for the successful completion of the cycle of production-distribution-consumption. Films act as socio-cultural reflections and points of emergence for values and meaning, but this instrumentality is fulfilled only following recognition and acknowledgement from the audience. When gathered and celebrated under the auspices of a film festival, cinema acts at its utmost public feature. The film festival is about films

just as much as it is about audiences. Organizing a film festival and participating in one brings together individuals from across society, in an effort to reduce distance, create community, and participate in a self-reflection of the world itself. As Adrian Ivakhiv writes, cinema is "a means by which the world has become other from itself," an instrument of both mirroring and challenging knowledge (Ivakhiv 2011). The underlining otherness of cinema might appear simultaneously hostile and favorable – it complicates the process of meaning making through visual representation and codification, but it manages to "present the world to itself" in a manner that invites intersubjectivity. In this sense, cinema is an instrument of identity building, juggling space, time and knowledge. Cinema creates alternative spaces, inverting and challenging the real ones, while allowing a more real understanding of them. Ivakhiv refers to cinema as to a "space of discontinuity," a site of placelessness that nevertheless reflects realities it appropriates (Ivakhiv 2011). Can it be argued that a film festival seeks, among other things, to reduce discontinuity and solve the issue of placelessness, by grappling with space the specific manner it does? Film festivals offer particular ties with time and space – they are temporary phenomena, occupying relatively isolated areas of a city. However, the film festival transcends these ties by becoming at the same time despatialized and atemporal. In their effort to review the discipline of film festival studies, Marijke de Valk and Skadi Loist note that "film festivals are sites of intersecting discourses and practices," (de Valk and Loist 2009) producing a rich flow of images and overtones that eventually engender a "particular manifestation of the way that space is produced as practice" (de Valk and Loist 2009) The film festival appropriates already existing space, but it consequently produces new meanings by applying specific takes on visibility, the public-private divide, community and identity. If structural and conceptual repetition is often the central feature of the city, mirroring itself into expansion in time and space, then the film festival, among other cultural phenomena, represents a short disruption. The film festival breaks down an established pattern and invites inhabitants of the city to become participants into an interplay of (re)production and consumption – of films, but also of their own urban routine, their role and function in the community, the uncertainty of being inside and outside the city at the same time. To enter the rhythm of a film festival is to exit, shortly, the urban rhythm – constituted by time, various sites or frames of mind. A film festival hails the general public of a given city into becoming audiences – an act of self-aware

separation from a large body of autonomous individuals and identification with a select community. Conversely, communities are also able to appropriate the commoditized film festival, engaging at various levels – the film festival is a medium that carries and distributes cultural products under certain codes, but it is in itself a cultural product, to which the audiences may be producers. By its capacity to create, claim, and maintain for a given period a particular site (mental and physical) within the city, the film festival may be identified as Michel Foucault would describe heterotopia: a culture's impulse to create "other spaces" (Foucault 1997) These features of a film festival point to its tight involvement with the urban space. Moreover, it can be argued that the LGBTQ film festival is a subgenre that illustrates the most the heterotopic role of the film festival in formation of urban subjectivity. With its specific subject matter and history of connecting political and social issues with artistic practice, the LGBTQ film festival aims at developing a relation between cultural event and political framework. In this sense, the festival becomes a "counter public sphere," an inversion of Habermas' well-known concept of "public sphere."[1] In recent years, however, the LGBTQ film festival has been endowed a rather central position in Western culture, following similar political trends of integrating gay culture issue in mainstream socio-political discourse. The vector has shifted, from the festival being a tool of resistance through artistic practice, to being a celebration of such historical resistance, and a reinforcement of community. However, the LGBTQ film festival can still be analyzed as a particular social and artistic phenomenon that affects the urban space, and invites audiences to critically reflect upon the structure and meaning of various sites within the urban layout. Part of this impact on the city may be identified when looking at how the film festival attempts various negotiations on the public-private dividing line.

2.1 The Film Festival: Urban Engagement and Participation. MIX Odense 2014.

As Ger Zielinski writes, "the concept of heterotopia helps show how sexual identity and community mark and distinguish such [LGBTQ] festivals from others" (Ger 2012) In his analysis he goes further to identify essential conceptual features of heterotopia as they appear in the practice of film festivals on queer topics. In this section, I will attempt to

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[1] Craig Calhoun, "Habermas and the Public Sphere" (The MIT Press, 2000). Briefly, the public sphere is to be understood as "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be ormed." Public sphere lays the basis for a democratic forum, where "access is granted to all citizens", thus ecoming a manifest structural entity in all instances of *conversation*, from the mere dialogic monologue an individual may produce, to the most complex processes of public debate.

apply this frame to the MIX Odense LGBTQ film festival. My aim is to investigate the role of this particular cultural phenomenon for the development of urban subjectivity, following a manifest intention to complicate the assumed distinction between public and private.

As the first country in the world to grant permission of legal union between individuals of the same sex (1989), Denmark has a tradition of highly prioritizing the civil rights of LGBTQ individuals. Same-sex activity has been legalized as early as 1933, but it is only in 2012 that same-sex marriage law came into effect. Odense is the third largest city in the country, with a population of circa 200.000, and temporary home to thousands of international students every year. The city is an interesting blending of old and new. Intense Danish traditions and social norms collide with diverse and often contrasting cultures, due to high numbers of immigrants from around the globe. However, the meeting of the two elements does not produce disruption, but, to the contrary, is easily turned into a celebration of diversity, cultural curiosity, and unique views on life. In this urban space with a particular ethos, the MIX Odense film festival represents yet another celebration of diversity and creativity. The festival is an extension of the MIX Copenhagen festival, and the both resonate with MIX New York Queer experimental film festival, thus participating in a larger dialogue and pool of transnational cultural production.

The festival took place during four days – 8 – 11 October 2014, and was hosted by several venues. An underlining feature may be identified at this point – the nomadic character of the festival. By involving multiple venues, the festival engages in a half-way isolation as a practice. It refuses the visual metaphor of a one-place enclave, with steady boundaries that reinforce difference, and embraces the fluidity of the city space. A mix of mainstream and alternative venues for cinema screening is generated, which functions as resistance of classification and breaking of boundaries. If alternative spaces might cultivate a sense of secrecy, containing gatherings that are outside of public display, the choice to conduct the festival in multiple sites challenges the traditional divide, inviting the public in what might be considered obscure space of performance and existence. Conversely, by using high-traffic social places like a cinema, the festival seeks to reach mainstream audiences. The private-public division that might have been in place for this type of festival is blurred in this case, and substituted by a hybrid form of urban engagement: the multi-placed festival creates a sense of being outside of the city, while

forcing attendants to use the city as space that contains their bodies and movements. At this point, the film festival acts as heterotopia – it "presupposes a system of closing and opening that both isolates them and makes them penetrable" (Ger 2012). The festival is open to the public, yet the simple physical admission does not grant a full admission in the sense of identification with the community. As a discursive practice, the film festival employs codes and canons that inform and direct participation.

Along with the particular appropriation of urban sites it performs, the film festival develops a specific connection with time also, thus marking another element of a heterotopia. As Foucault puts it, heterotopias become "slices of time," proposing a "break with traditional time"(Foucault 1997). The film festival, in this case, spreading over four days of screenings and adjacent events, is a fleeting entity, not directed towards the eternal. Participation in the film festival is a once in a year occurrence, which interrupts only shortly the flow of urban time. The LGBTQ theme makes the festival into a tool of intense, albeit short, visibility, serving a particular matter, in this case sexual identities and queer subjectivity. A dividing line can be observed here, involving the fleeting time of the festival and the rest of time as counterparts. The choice to isolate a topic in a condensed temporal frame generates necessarily a long-term connection with the rest of time – the short-lived discourse of the film festival may produce ripples in the collective memory of the community, thus reinforcing intersubjectivity and a sense of established belonging. In this sense, the film festival answers to another feature of heterotopia – "it admits the possibility of history and change,(Ger 2012)" by creating a spatial and temporal frame to follow local or national politics, on particular matters. The MIX Odense festival, for instance, is a creatively manifested example of a national history of democratic and inclusive attitude towards sexual minorities. The blurring of the public-private reduces invisibility that crippled sexual and gender minorities in the past (and still does, in different parts of the world). Public sites of the urban space foster self-involvement with one's own visibility, endorsing the emergence of the "confession society," characterized by self-surveillance and self-affirmation. As noted above, Zygmunt Bauman speaks strongly against this social trend; however, it is worth questioning the role privacy (individuality, autonomy, self-definition, and self-assertion) as it is carried out in a public sphere. In the case of subversive performances of identity, it is not privacy becoming violently public, but a performance of privacy set in motion by the subject within a public

space. Counter-discourses on body and gender emerge, as acts of reclaiming agency over one's own subjectivity. Privacy, explored at a public level, becomes a tool of liberation and manifest subjectivity.

The LGBTQ film festival carries, as Ger Zielinski writes, following Bakhtin, "the promise of the unruly carnivalesque", as it is centered on the "festivality of sexual identities" and the necessary transgression of the public-private binary (Ger 2012). The sense of otherness peaks in this feature of the film festival, supporting the argument that the LGBTQ film festival may be considered a heterotopia of deviance[1], closely connected, at a political level, with the city: the festival needs city council approval and recognition of legal terms. As Zielinski observes, "the carnival does not just happen, but is awarded permission from a higher authority"(Ger 2012). By receiving permission and functioning without any interventions, Mix Odense festival is instrumental for the cultural community's impulse to "create other spaces," thus working as a heterotopic mirror that juggles presence and absence, putting in motion "mechanisms of recognition of resemblance, empathy, identification, repulsion" (Ger 2012). These mechanisms articulate and redraft the role and place of audiences in relation to the film festival. Essentially, the film festival is a non-commercial cultural event – films are screened for purposes other than financial gain, which differentiate clearly the audience from mere consumers. However, the viewing act is a form of consumption, endowed with non-commercial values. The LGBT film festival invites a threefold consuming practice. Firstly, audiences engage with the films – they aesthetically enjoy or critically analyze the subject matter of each film, and establish intertextual ties with other productions. MIX Odense film festival screened a total of six films, accompanied by events such as a writer talk, a concert, and opening and closing receptions. These elements came together as a discourse, underlining current and historical issues such as the civil status of homosexual couples or crises of identity in young people, and enveloped them in a metadiscourse of participation and awareness. This leads to the second level of consumption, which refers to the festival as itself a product – all elements are tied together, and perceived in dialogue with each other, constructing a wider narrative. The third level or participatory consumption involves the audience as both consumers and products of the process. If the cinema in general is a site of examining how knowledge of the world is created, then it can

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[1] Explain all categories.

be argued that participation in a film festival becomes a site to examine how intersubjectivity is created through artistic practice and involvement. In this sense, the film festival, set in a space favorable to exploring urban subjectivity, acts as a heterotopia, "a space that has a function in relation to all other spaces that remain"(Foucault). Although it employs an apparent isolation, the film festival, and the participation patterns it generates, reaches into other zones of social and intersubjective engagement. The inherent heterotopic celebration of difference emphasizes the possibility of coexisting divergent subjectivities, which underlines attempts at queering the urban space, as an expression of queer identity.

To conclude, The LGBTQ film festival is an artistic phenomenon, with enhanced social and political correlations. In itself and through the cultural products it puts forward for consumption, the festival participates in the larger web of cultural life of the city, incorporating local space in a manner that allows participants to place themselves in space and time, in relation to their identity and subjectivity. MIX Odense may be seen as a discourse on queer urban culture, and not only a representation of it. Through means specific to such practices (selection, programming, organization), the film festival reflects upon its own role and hails the public into becoming community-aware audiences. The film festival represents a merger of private issues and public life, using various city spaces as both source and projection site of various enunciations it articulates, visually and discursively. The LGBTQ film festival acts as an instrument of self-reflection and mirroring performed in an urban setting, as means of constructing, interrogating, or investigating subjectivity. The festival plays in the dichotomy of here and there, being an enclosed space, a tool of "othering," subverting, or challenging norms and established meanings. The LGBTQ film festival is an illustration of heterotopia, a place within the fluid space of the city, which is simultaneously celebrated and challenged in relation to its role for establishing and reinforcing queer bonds and identities.

Conclusion

The city contains its inhabitants; it directs their routines, shapes their bodies and interferes with their movements. Nevertheless, the city often succumbs to strong ties, kinship, and undeniable identities. In Jennie Livingston's documentary *Paris is Burning*, Pepper LaBeija, mother of the House LaBeija, articulates the endurance of kinship and

community, celebrating the city as an open stage for performance and formation of identity: "New York is wrapped around the name LaBeija." This article sought to investigate vectors and forces behind such relationships between urban space and queer identity building. A theoretical examination of the dynamic of public-private showed that this boundary stands to be challenged, as individuals seek self-affirmation and reclaiming of visibility. Modern urban spaces redraft the dividing line between private and public, allowing queer identities to appropriate public space as a hospitable site for performance of private issues. If some critics would argue that this is symptomatic of a crisis of privacy and demise of a coherent public space, it can, however, be maintained that the urban structure prevails despite this disruption. Moreover, various transformations of visibility prove to be beneficial, as they produce hybrid sites, which in turn host processes of inversion of established meanings, subversion of heteronormativities, and allow challenges to established modes of understanding gender and sexuality. Public manifestations of such intents – among which, the LGBTQ film festival – thrive as the private-public boundary is blurred, suggesting that alternative practices and meanings successfully define the meeting point between urban spaces and queer identities.

The concept of heterotopia, applied to the LGBTQ film festival, as symptomatic for queer urban culture, brought to light characteristics of this phenomenon that help understand its role in a larger narrative of the relationship between the city, formation of identity, and artistic practice. The film festival acts as a coming together of private matters and public life, as it appropriates city spaces in a twofold manner: as both source and projection site of various enunciations it articulates, visually and discursively. The LGBTQ film festival represents an invite to self-reflection and mirroring performed in an urban setting, as means of constructing, interrogating, or investigating subjectivity. As an illustration of heterotopia, the LGBTQ film festival simultaneously celebrates and challenges the role of urban spaces and the role they play in creating and maintaining queer bonds and identities.

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