

## Networks, locations and frames of memory in Asian American film festivals\*

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### ABSTRACT

Ascribing to the premise that film festivals are crucial to the production of cultural memory, this article explores different parameters through which festivals shape our reception of films. In its focus on the Asian American film festival CAAMFest, the article reveals that festivals are part of a complex *network* of actors whose different agendas influence the narratives produced around the film, direct its role as memory object and encourage memories to travel. What is more, it shows that festival *locations*—from the city in which a festival takes place to the concrete venue in which a film is screened—play a significant role in shaping our experience and understanding of films. Finally, it establishes that festivals create *frames* for their films, constructed through and circulated by the various festival media and live performances at the festival events. Bringing together film festival studies and memory studies, the article makes use of an interdisciplinary approach with which to explore the film festival phenomenon, thus shedding light on the complex dynamics of acts of framing, locations and networks of actors shaping the festival's memory production. It also draws attention to the understudied phenomenon of Asian American film festivals, showing how such a festival may actively engage in constructing and performing a minority group's collective identity and memory.



### KEYWORDS

Film festivals; films; Asian American; heritage; memory networks; locations; exhibition spaces; reception; memory frames; commemoration

### Introduction: film festivals and memory production

Through their staging of representations of the past, film festivals play an important role in the production of cultural memory and in the shaping of historical understanding.<sup>1</sup> Along with other cultural institutions such as museums or cinémathèques, film festivals select and retrieve (sometimes long-forgotten) memory objects, performing, framing and commenting on them. In this respect, they are part of John Storey's so-called "memory industries",<sup>2</sup> producing "representations ('cultural memorials'), with which we are invited to think, feel and recognize the past" (2003, 104). They also play a role in the process of canonization, not only attributing value—that is, cultural capital—to films, but also recovering films from the archive and bringing them into circulation. Asserting that they bring communities together "for the purpose of reflection and renewal", Thomas Elsaesser points to the similarity between festivals and commemorative events: They have ritualistic qualities in terms of their "iterative aspect, their many covert and overt hierarchies and special codes", their exclusivity and engagement with performative acts, such as red-carpet walks and award ceremonies (2005, 94).

One of the film industry's central exhibition spaces, festivals function as cultural 'enablers' and offer a platform to films that would otherwise find no or only little distribution so that these can be seen by cinephiles, tourists, critics, scholars and industry members. Thus, many of these events allow for niche films to become memory objects: Considering that memories need to be activated by human interaction with the carrier, i.e. the storage medium, it is vital to consider the festival's role in shaping the encounters of audiences with such films. As Astrid Erll points out: "Without such actualizations, monuments, rituals, and books are nothing but dead material, failing to have any impact in societies". Film festivals provide an opportunity for activation through their programming and exhibition of films, allowing for audiences to activate the films' "memory potential" (2010, 5). Film archivist and co-founder of the Cinémathèque Française Henri Langlois similarly believes that "preserving is good, but screening is essential", setting a guiding principle for both film archives and film festivals ("Langlois"; own translation). Moreover, film festivals create movements of memory, encouraging films to move across national and cultural borders, as they travel the festival circuit. In light of Erll's assertions that memories come into being through and are dependent on their "travels",

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\*This article emerged from the DFG-funded project "Migration and Transcultural Memory: Literature, Film, and the 'Social Life' of Memory Media".

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film festivals constitute a significant way in which cinematic representations of memory travel (2011b, 11).

CAAMFest, an annual Asian American film festival<sup>3</sup> hosted in San Francisco since 1982, provides an especially interesting case study, connecting processes of remembering and forgetting to experiences of migration and diaspora. In its exhibition of diasporic films, it also touches upon the travels and locatedness of memory. As a community-based festival representing Asian minorities, it further functions as a counter-public sphere.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, CAAMFest is both a transnational and a local event, encouraging movement across diverse borders and cultures, yet firmly grounded in San Francisco, interacting with histories and memories of the city, neighborhood and specific venues. After a brief introduction to CAAMFest's memory work and activism, the article will shed light on the festival's embeddedness in a complex network of actors, all of whom actively shape the event's memory production. It will further reveal that festival locations play a significant role in shaping our experiences of films and thus also engage in memory production. Finally, it will point to the festival's involvement in acts of framing, asserting that festivals create frames which guide us in our experience and understanding of films and which are circulated through the various festival media and events.

### CAAMfest as case study: heritage and activism

Run by the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM), CAAMFest constitutes one of the non-profit organization's central activities and feeds into its mission of producing, distributing and exhibiting media products integral to the "Asian American experience" ("About the Center"). As the largest and one of the longest-running Asian American film festivals in North America, CAAMFest shows about 130 films and averages 26,000 visitors per year. Its program consists of documentary and narrative competitions featuring films either produced or situated in the US, a section dedicated to the international Asian film scene as well as shorts programs, special presentations and retrospectives ("Sponsorship Deck" 2015).

The organization CAAM emerged on the heels of a 1967 report entitled *Public Television: A Program for Action*, published by the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television. Stemming from a period of social unrest and activist movements, the report acknowledged a "troubling lack of multicultural diversity on commercial television" and the necessity to give "voice" to communities which might otherwise be "unheard" (Okada 2015, 1). A few years later, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) emerged to

counter these silences and make visible the country's diversity. The era of civil rights movements and minority activism also resulted in the development of five Minority Consortia—organizations dedicated to the development of ethnic media and financed by the government-funded Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). One of the Minority Consortia was National Asian American Telecommunications Association (NAATA), renamed CAAM in 2005 ("Sponsorship Deck" 2015, 1–2).

In creating awareness for an Asian American history and heritage,<sup>5</sup> CAAMFest—along with other of CAAM's initiatives—continuously recalls silenced and forgotten political events. While neither remembering nor forgetting is "inherently good or bad", the "disappearance" of the past becomes problematic when it is connected to violence and/or trauma (Assmann 2014). Asian-origin groups were exposed to hostility, suspicion and racism in various periods of US history, resulting in acts of self-protection such as the renouncement of Chinese citizenship and the abandonment of ethnic enclaves to blend in and demonstrate loyalty to the USA (Chun 2000, 10). In screening and, at times, even producing films such as *Resistance at Tule Lake* (2017) or *The Chinese Exclusion Act* (2017), CAAM challenges the self-imposed silences that followed experiences of racism, segregation and internment. Here, the mutually beneficial work of CAAM as a non-government organization and CAAMFest as a film festival are most apparent, augmenting each other in their purpose of encouraging purposeful creation, circulation and transformation of memory.

Moreover, CAAMFest programming<sup>6</sup> proudly acknowledges traditions and rituals surviving or emerging from these hardships, ranging from a Filipino serenade to a Chinese-only streetball game (cf. CAAMFest 2013, 52; *Destination* 2015, 36). Similarly, CAAM retrieves Asian American films that have been out of circulation and brings them into the present. In 2014, the *Out of the Vaults* retrospective presented two films by Chinese American filmmaker Joseph Sunn Jue which had not been screened in 67 years. As they become actively circulated memory, such films may open up to new meanings and interpretations. In the context of the *Out of the Vaults* program, the two films were discussed as products of a "legendary" film producer. The festival emphasized Sunn Jue's crucial role in producing films for the Chinese community in the US, thus representing "a unique era in diasporic cinema". What is thus actualized is the memory of a "new generation" of Chinese Americans, as in *Black Market Couple* (1947), or of cultural life in American Chinatowns, as in *White Powder and Neon Lights* (1947) (CAAMFest 2014, 20).

Importing films from the Asian "homelands", CAAMFest also makes sure that Asian Americans

are able to consume films that not only relate to their own experiences of migration and life in the diaspora, but that also shape their images of the homeland. Generations who have never experienced the homeland themselves conceive of it through narratives—that is, through family stories, but also in the form of films, television programs and literature.

As an identity-based festival,<sup>7</sup> CAAMFest is strongly focused on community-building and community outreach, highlighting its mission to engage, document and represent the diverse members of the Asian American community. Originating from a social movement, CAAMFest offers the Asian American community spaces for mobilization and strategizing, conforming to Roya Rastegar's conception of identity-based festivals as formative for minority identities (2012, 312). Largely dependent on community support and voluntary work, CAAMFest is characterized by its ongoing interaction with the community, reaching out to equally receive and give support, expressing its intent to take control of its community's media representation through programming, but also through its funding, production and distribution of educational content.

As a minority festival, CAAMFest also gives those ignored by history-writing a place in memory through programming. In 2014, the festival dedicated itself to two such figures: farm labor organizer Larry Itliong, featured in the documentary feature *Delano Manongs: Forgotten Heroes of the United Farm Workers* (2014), and activist, author and philosopher Grace Lee Boggs, featured in *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs* (2013). Both Boggs' involvement in the African American movement and Itliong's central role in the Delano Grape Strike of 1965 and the creation of the United Farm Workers Union hardly find any mentioning in official accounts.

In its exhibition of films, CAAMFest enters discourses of Asian American history, heritage and activism, providing new angles from which audiences may relate to a film. It also actively constructs and negotiates Asian American identity and culture, functioning as a gatekeeper in its selection and labeling of Asian American films. Through narratives and labels, the festival not only finds, but creates audiences for its films and sets the viewer's expectations, producing an intricate network of films, whose body is diverse, yet coherent in that it revolves around these fixed sets of meanings.

### The film festival as memory network

In order to understand how CAAMFest interacts with memory, one has to take a closer look at the complex phenomenon that is the film festival. On the one hand, there are the components that constitute the festival itself: its structure, media forms and players. On the other hand, the festival is embedded in a complex system of networks, each of whose actors

have agendas that affect the festival's content, reception and memory production. Although the festival's individual components alone comprise a rich object of investigation, the perspective of network analysis is an important addition because as Marijke de Valck writes, film festivals are not “unified, closed phenomena” but, in fact, open up to an assemblage of performances and agendas”, constituted not only during the festival, but also “in relation to year-round presences” (2007, 33).

CAAMFest's most visible memory agents are the non-profit organization's directors, the festival director and programmers as well as the various cultural, political and educational institutions engaging with the festival as sponsors or co-presenters.<sup>8</sup> While CAAM's directors influence and oversee the overall direction of the organization, the festival director and programmers develop the festival content. Sponsors help fund the festival, either through general promotion or through sponsorship of a specific program or film. Co-presenters often function as mediators, providing access to the festival's target groups. Important to note is that behind these actors are also other entities that tug and pull at them, influencing their decisions to sponsor or promote the festival and complicating the agendas that shape a cultural event such as CAAMFest.

Next to various human memory agents, the festival makes use of *pluri-media networks* (Erl and Wodianka 2008) to shape the audience's viewing experience of a film, thereby transmitting, reworking and creating memory. Supporting the festival's attempt to create coherent narratives, media texts such as the catalog or program guide help frame this narrative, as do festival trailers, advertisements and the venues in which the events take place. In light of these narrative attributes, it is easy to construe CAAMFest as consisting of and belonging to networks of texts, media and institutions.

A term that has come to dominate film festival studies is that of the international film festival circuit.<sup>9</sup> As Skadi Loist points out, the term has produced a wide variety of definitions, referring to, for instance, both the entire festival landscape and a select few “top-tier” events. The term may also describe the “trajectory of a specific product through a global network of festivals” (2016, 49). The latter emphasizes the circuit's function as a distribution and exhibition system for independent and arthouse cinema, creating platforms through which such films may accumulate “symbolic capital” and “cultural legitimization”, most visibly through prizes and awards, but also through the attraction of critics and the possibility of a theatrical release (De Valck 2016b, 105–106).

Within the circuit, different types of festivals exist. De Valck asserts that big festivals “generate an abundance of media coverage” and create the dominant images of glamour, red carpets and stars; however,

they comprise merely a “fraction” of film festival events world-wide (2016a, 1). Alongside these mega-events, a multitude of smaller events such as CAAMFest take place, catering to specialized audiences and/or specific communities (2016a, 2–4). Varying in their size, power and visibility, festivals are exposed to fierce competition and marked by “hierarchical stratification” within the circuit (Loist 2016, 49–50). The existence of hierarchies within the festival circuit, however, does not mean that the system is not dynamic; in fact, the festival sector is defined by the constant movement of people, circulation of films and interaction between festivals, thereby shaping the specific dynamics of memory the festival produces.<sup>10</sup>

A consequence of the continuous growth of the festival industry is the rise in competition within the circuit. According to Elsaesser, competition has forced festivals to continuously reinvent themselves through innovative programming, while equally retaining a stable brand image, that is, remaining consistent in their image and mission (2005, 86–87). Thus, festivals are situated between celebrating the new and honoring the old—digging up gems from the past, but also exhibiting emerging filmmakers; drawing in new audiences, but also pleasing regulars.

Film festivals such as CAAMFest interact with and are influenced by the international film festival circuit. For instance, CAAMFest may program films which have successfully traveled the circuit, thereby making use of the prestige bestowed to these films and adding value to its program. For the most part, however, it chooses to program films which have not yet traveled and most likely will not have the opportunity to travel the international film festival circuit, thus actively distancing itself from the festival “mainstream”. However, CAAMFest also needs to be considered within the sub-circuit of Asian American film festivals (AAFFs), which came together in two waves: while the first editions of AAFFs were hosted by community organizations and film collectives born from the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the second wave began in the late 1990s, by which time the earlier festivals had become established events and the genre of Asian American cinema had begun to enter the mainstream.<sup>11</sup> The development of AAFFs can thus be tied to several factors, from the context of activist movements, to academic debates, to a worldwide boom of the festival industry. Moreover, these two waves are embedded in larger developments in film festival history: The first wave reflects the emergence of specialized and independently organized festivals that serve “both as protectors of the cinematic art and as facilitators of the film industries”; during this time, festivals begin to move away from nationalist agendas, curating instead according to categories such as theme, form or genre

(De Valck 2007, 19). The second wave coincides with a period of expansion, in which festivals continue to spread across the globe, becoming increasingly “professionalized and institutionalized” (2007, 20). As Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong asserts, these new festivals are now “closely aligned” with the cities in which they take place (2011, 60).

Festivals within the Asian American film festival circuit are well-connected: Festival directors and programmers of AAFFs may not only visit other AAFFs in order to scout films, but also come together at summits during CAAMFest to discuss their work (Niwano 2016). Since the annual output of Asian American films is limited, the programs of AAFFs also show much overlap. For instance, CAAMFest 2017’s opening night film *The Tiger Hunter* (2016) also opened AAFFs in San Diego, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Chicago. Certain themes have continued to dominate the sub-circuit, most visibly Japanese-American internment; in recent years, Korean trans-racial adoption has also received heightened attention.

As films travel from festival to festival and memories move through the festival network, they continually cross national and cultural borders, encountering layers of local and global culture. In order to understand how festivals produce and shape memory, festivals should be conceived of as living, breathing entities that grow, change and are integrated into a complex, dynamic system—a *memory network* with nodes, flows and exchanges.<sup>12</sup> This view lets us look beyond the memory object, incorporating the actors, performances and movements surrounding the memory object and influencing its reception and travels.

### Festival locations and the locatedness of memory

On the one hand, film festivals are transnational and transcultural events, encouraging the movement of films, people and national, regional and local cultures. On the other hand, they are firmly grounded in their urban locales, interacting with city profiles, tourism and the venue neighborhoods (cf. De Valck 2007; Elsaesser 2005).

The significance of location<sup>13</sup> is only starting to gain ground in memory studies. Scholars such as Annette Kuhn (2002; 2011), Susannah Radstone (2011), Philippe Meers, Daniel Biltereyst and Lies van de Vijver (2010) and Paul Basu (2013) have broached the subject, usually combined with a call for an interdisciplinary or “multi-sited” approach to memory, in which other variables next to the specific text or site of memory are considered. In her essay “What Place is This?”, Susannah Radstone explores the multidimensional *locatedness* of memory—the relevance of place and time in “instances of

transmission [of memory]" (2011, 117). Here, the contexts of where and how we encounter and produce memories come into focus, from concrete, physical space, to one's situatedness in history, culture and discourse, influencing the "processes of encountering, negotiation, reading, viewing and spectatorship through which memories are, if you like, brought down to earth" (2011, 110–111). In *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory*, Annette Kuhn asserts that "place is extraordinarily insistent in memories" (2002, 17). This "investment in place" is especially visible in memories of moviegoing. According to Kuhn, one of the most prevalent forms of her so-called "cinema memory" centers on the "social act of cinemagoing"—the journeys and routes traveled as well as the location, decor, companions and audience members. Here, "the essentially *social* act of 'going to the pictures' is of far greater consequence than the cultural activity of seeing films", and place functions as both the "prompt and *mise en scène* of memory" (2011, 93).

Thus, CAAMFest should also be seen in the urban context of San Francisco. As Michael Guillén points out, San Francisco and the Bay Area have a long-standing film festival culture: Not only is the San Francisco International Film Festival the longest-running festival in North America, but the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival and the International LGBT/Q Film Festival are also "pioneers" of festival specialization (2010, 151). San Francisco's festival culture connects to the city's profile, which stands in stark contrast to other US-American cities. According to Rebecca Solnit, the city's density creates the "possibility of a public life, a pedestrian life" (2010, 19). San Francisco is also unique in that it retains a multitude of historic movie theaters, exemplary of the "evolving style and scale of film venues in the first part of the twentieth century" (Petrin 2010, 35). Finally, according to Guillén, the city's ethnic diversity is mirrored by the multitude of community-based film festivals (2010, 151). Keeping in mind its diverse, demographic profile and large Asian community,<sup>14</sup> it makes sense that San Francisco is in a "key position" to serve as a center for the distribution of Asian and Asian American cinema via its film festivals (2010, 153). Often, the choice of venue responds to the location of the communities that the festival targets.

In recent years, CAAMFest has hosted the majority of its events at six festival locations, situated in the Mission District, the Castro, Chinatown and Japantown, each venue offering a different viewing experience. According to festival director Masashi Niwano, festivals "curate the venue" (2016). One of CAAMFest's goals is to integrate into different Asian American communities, making venues in Japantown and Chinatown logical choices. Also, films thematizing the Chinese diasporic experience or Chinatown residents' biographies may have what Niwano refers to as a "natural audience" in

a Chinatown setting (2016).<sup>15</sup> Thus, the context of each location may actively influence the placement of a specific program within a certain venue, such as an activist documentary screened in the Castro—a neighborhood known for its history of activism and as the birthplace of the Gay Liberation Movement—or a live performance of a Japanese-Filipino filmmaker's home movies in Japantown. Surrounded by the various histories of the city, neighborhood, community and the specific site, movie theaters are, according to Daphne Pi-Wei Lei, "like writings on a palimpsest. The current meaning cannot be achieved without some erasure of previous memories, but since erasing is never complete, the current cultural memory is always multilayered" (2006, 184). Thus, festival locations are the arenas where different memories intersect, bringing memories specific to the venue and neighborhood to the fore, as well as historical memories of moviegoing experiences of the past, which then interact with the memories shown on screen and experienced in the movie theater.

### Festival frames: navigating the festival program

In creating *frames* for their films, film festivals influence audience reception and memory production. Tied to the festival identity and mission, frames often take the shape of narratives and media texts such as festival catalogs, blogs or trailers, influencing how we see and read films.<sup>16</sup> Frames guide us in our perception, leading us to approach a situation, narrative, subject or object in a certain way. They may also influence processes of remembering. Within memory studies, frames are constantly brought to attention, highlighting the specific contexts in which memories emerge as well as pointing to new perspectives on processes of remembering and forgetting. Central to these discussions is the idea that memory is embedded in social structures, that is, that memory emerges through—and thus cannot be separated from—social contexts. As Astrid Erll points out, Maurice Halbwachs' concept *cadres sociaux de la mémoire* is the forerunner of such thought, revealing that "even the most personal memory [is] ... a collective phenomenon", shaped and framed by our social environment (2011a, 14–15). In discussing the dynamics and construction of collective memory, Iwona Irwin-Zarecka further asserts that processes of framing are marked by the involvement of multiple intermediaries who open up "possibilities of reinterpretation". As a result, collective memory is susceptible to an "overlaying of different frames" and characterized by constant "shifts in meaning" (1994, 7).

In its acts of framing, the film festival actively chooses to draw attention to certain (narrative, aesthetic, generic) elements of the films it programs. It may also draw out latent meanings that are not the

focus or even an overt part of the film narrative or bring forth meanings that can only emerge in retrospect, providing a new context through which the film is framed. The festival's highlighting of such elements constitutes acts of interpretation and meaning construction.

Festivals frame their films in their mission statement and festival image, in sections and programs, in moderation and Q&A sessions, each of these performances and texts highlighting different aspects of the master narrative and allowing it to circulate further. Festivals may provide yet another element of navigation in their presentation of "staff picks", ticket theme packs and overview sections, allowing them to take on the role of tour guides for their audiences and establish new levels of connection between programs and films. Important to note is that these frames are flexible, porous and interchangeable; they are offerings, providing different angles from which audiences may relate to a film, rather than enforcing fixed readings.

In 2013, CAAMFest introduced *CAAM Tides* as a new strategy for making sense of its program and strengthening its master narrative: Presented both in the catalog and on the website, *CAAM Tides* compiles films from the program. In its identification of "key themes" in the program, it functions as a navigation tool and serves as an alternative to the festival sections. As CAAMFest asserts, *CAAM Tides* further guides the festival-goer towards the "new waves of culture that are hitting shores both in the Bay and beyond" (CAAMFest 2013, 14). The rich metaphor of the shoreline and tide in relation to memory and forgetting has been explored by Marc Augé in *Les formes de l'oubli* (1998) as well as by Jay Winter in "Thinking About Silence" (2010). Winter asserts that, in order to move away from the binary approach distinguishing between memory and forgetting, we need to think of the dynamic "creation and erosion of the shoreline". He compares the "deposits below the surface of the water which emerge with the tides" as with *silences* that are "part of the cartography of recollection and remembrance", shifting between concealment and exposure (2010, 3).

The image of the tide points to a powerful movement pushing new images, narratives and representations to the shore, washing away the old. In 2013, two such "tides" were *Agent/Advocate: Brave Creators* and *Beyond Boundaries: On the Anniversary of the Armistice*. While the theme *Agent/Advocate* puts a more general emphasis on provocative "visionaries" confronting audiences with controversial topics and "troubling realities" (CAAMFest 2013, 14), the theme *Beyond Boundaries* specifically brings memories of the Korean War to the front (15). Challenging the "historical amnesia" surrounding the Korean War, this CAAM Tide "serves as a cogent reminder that for survivors and their families, it has remained anything but forgotten" (37). An example of Henry Jenkins' convergence culture, this configuration of

programs encourages the flow of memories across the multiple media platforms offered by the festival, allowing audience members to interact with them in different ways.

## Conclusion

In their role as celebrations of film, film festivals commemorate central moments of film history and position the current state of film against the medium's past. Reflecting the history of cinema and regularly staging representations of the past, film festivals are actively involved in producing cultural memory. Moreover, they inform our reception of films, constructing frames—from texts, to locations, to live performances—that provide specific angles from which to look at a film and that are tightly connected to the individual festival's identity and mission.

As an identity-based film festival and part of an Asian American non-profit organization, CAAMFest has a particular interest in shaping memory production, exhibiting seldom-seen versions of US-America's past and celebrating Asian American heritage. Functioning as a market, a cultural institution, an art space, a community space and a platform for activism, the film festival presents a complex weave of private, institutionalized and commercially produced, fictionalized memories, which are both firmly rooted in local culture and constantly on the move. It blurs the lines between producers and consumers, as filmmakers, curators and audience members interact with the films and create new memories. Part of an intricate network of agents, media and texts, the festival creates narratives that center on the representation of Asian American minorities by Asian American minorities, connecting it with the diasporic community's history and heritage and thus actively helping construct an Asian American identity.

Whether memories rise to the surface by a generational interest in retracing the past or are forcefully brought to light through the work of activist movements, the extent to which festivals can engage in memory production depends on a variety of factors. For one, film festivals interact with other memory industries and react to current 'trends' in remembering, from anniversaries to political events citing the past. They respond to the interests of specific memory communities, be it on a national, regional or communal level. Caught between various interests, and struggling against a lack of financing, film festivals further need to draw in highly diverse crowds. Dependent on funding from both government and non-government organizations as well as private investors, intricate networks of memory agents influence the direction, overtness and extent of their activism. Finally, festivals' memory

production is marked by both locatedness and travel, as different layers of location as well as the constant movement of films and the narratives that surround them influence our experience and memory of films.

## Notes

1. The significance of film festivals for memory production has slowly taken hold in film festival studies. For example, Ana Grgic asserts that archival film festivals in particular are a “material, symbolic and functional manifestation” of Pierre Nora’s *lieux de mémoire* (2013, 55). The challenge and aim of this article are to understand the film festival as “memory site” in terms of the recent transnational and transcultural turn in memory studies.
2. According to Storey, the “memory industries” are a niche within the culture industries which are “concerned with articulating the past” (2003, 104). Storey cites not only heritage sites and museums as examples of this practice, but also media such as film. Storey’s definition, on which I base my use of the term, is therefore separate from and should not be confused with definitions that describe a “scholarly industry”, that is, the interest in memory within academia (Rosenfeld 2009), or that critically examine the commodification of, for instance, Holocaust memory (Finkelstein 2000).
3. In its self-promotion as an Asian American film festival, CAAMFest touches upon Asian American identity politics, creating the image that—among the numerous Asian diasporic communities in the US—there is a unified Asian American identity. Moreover, CAAMFest’s identity leads to the assumption that there is a genre of Asian American cinema. Both of these topics are very much present in current scholarly work. See, for instance, Zhou and Gatewood (2007), Lee (2015), Lowe (1996), Okada (2015), Feng (2002), and Mimura (2009).
4. For a discussion of festivals as both public and counter-public spheres, see Wong (2016), Richards (2016), and Loist (2014).
5. Although emphasizing the community’s diversity, CAAM and CAAMFest make continuous use of the unifying label “Asian American”. As Lisa Lowe asserts, the shared experiences of discrimination and exclusion from US-American national culture have been central to the emergence of an Asian American identity, one which functions as an “alternative cultural site and the place where the contradictions of immigrant history are read, performed, and critiqued” (1996, ix-x). Through their activities, the organization and festival shape and strengthen the construct of Asian American identity.
6. My discussion of CAAMFest’s programming and self-presentation stems from an in-depth study of the film festival’s catalogs and website materials. This material is by no means neutral: instead, it is carefully staged, following the agendas of the festival’s diverse agents. In my dissertation, I go into detail about the festival’s “performances” and highlight the numerous acts of framing the festival engages in through its texts, live screenings and choices of location (Högerle 2019).
7. Based on Skadi Loist and Marijke de Valck’s (2017) categories for specialized film festivals, Asian American film festivals can be classified as genre-based film festivals, identity-based festivals, or national and regional showcases. CAAMFest embodies characteristics of all categories, displaying an interest in activism and social justice, making visible aesthetic, stylistic and thematic trends in Asian American cinema, and defining Asian national cinemas. However, it shares the most similarities with identity-based festivals such as LGBT/Q festivals, whose primary concern is community outreach and self-representation.
8. My discussion of terms “director”, “programmer”, “sponsor” and “presenter” is based on CAAM’s specific use of these terms in the festival catalogs.
9. Although productive in many ways, the term and concept of the festival circuit has also sparked criticism. Implying a “cohesive whole” (Rhyne 2013, 135) and creating the impression of “free circulation” within the circuit (Nornes 2014, 259), the term has given rise to alternative concepts such as “network”, “archipelago” and “rhizome” (Loist 2016, 51–52).
10. This movement is visible in the festival route of films such as *Gook* (2017), premiering at Sundance in early 2017 and screening at several Asian American film festivals, and *Abacus: Small Enough to Jail* (2016), oscillating between big festivals such as Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) and small festivals such as CAAMFest.
11. This observation is based on my research, in which I collected data from festival websites and/or print materials as well as conducted expert interviews with CAAMFest’s festival director Masashi Niwano and San Diego Asian Film Festival’s artistic director Brian Hu. The first wave of AAFs overlaps with the emergence of other identity-based film festivals, revealing not only a general move towards specialized programming within the festival sector, but also an increased visibility of minority organizations.
12. My discussion of festivals as memory networks connects to earlier work on film festivals as networks, conceptualized by Elsaesser (2005) and De Valck (2007) and further explored, for instance, in Hagener (2014), Robbins and Saglier (2015) and Robinson (2016).
13. Recent discussions on the “location” and “locatedness” of memory are responses to what Erlil describes as the third phase of memory studies, in which memory has been conceived of as “dynamic”, “travelling” and “trans-cultural” (2011b). They should be seen as separate from explorations of places as “sites of memory”, set into motion by Pierre Nora’s seminal work on *lieux de mémoire* (1984–1992).
14. According to the statistics of the USA Census Bureau, the population of San Francisco city was estimated at 805,193 in 2010. 33.3 percent identified as Asian alone, and 4.7 percent identified as of two or more races (“San Francisco City”).
15. While the festival also draws in typical film festival audiences, CAAMFest is largely visited by members of the local Asian American community. According to Niwano, CAAMFest has always focused on its appeal and outreach to what it conceives of as an actual, targetable Asian American community. Its audiences are on average about 50 percent Asian American, while the other 50 percent comprise a mix of Caucasians and other communities of color (Niwano 2016).

16. Based on concepts of framing from both memory studies and film studies, I develop and explore the concept of *festival frames* more fully in my dissertation (Högerle 2019).

## Notes on contributor



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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Funding

This work was supported by the Goethe University Frankfurt am Main [-].

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