

Recentering Festival Studies

Report of the 2nd Annual International Symposium on Festival Culture (ISFC)

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Over two days in June, researchers and practitioners from different fields discussed current trends in festival cultures at the 2nd Annual International Symposium on Festival Culture (ISFC). Setting themes of power, empowerment and disempowerment in festival culture, the keynote lectures focused on Caribbean Carnival, including scholars from institutions across North America, Europe and the Caribbean itself. This report seeks to identify the commonalities in approaches to festival culture presented at the event and to show how a perspective taking the Caribbean and, in particular, its cultural form of Carnival as focal point benefits the discussion of contemporary global festival cultures.

As a region and cultural space, the Caribbean is characterised by its forceful subjection to early

globalisation processes located at the beginning of modern racism and colonialism. Consequently, experiences of diaspora, mobility, ethnic diversity and racial inequalities have been at the core of its socialities. Situating the Caribbean at the centre and as a counterpoint can provide insights into power dynamics of the present moment. Applied to global festival cultures, this perspective highlights inequalities laid bare in the pandemic as well as the creativity and agency of social actors in festival cultures faced with the enforced restructuring of public culture. Thus, the inclusive space of the symposium—much like Caribbean Carnival itself—made it possible to negotiate and understand current changes, while at the same time remaining grounded in the specificities of different festival cultures.

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