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## The business of audience festivals – Calgary International Film Festival 2012

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- noncisgender gender identities, such as transgender, transsexual, transvestite, genderqueer, genderfluid, non-binary, genderless, non-gendered, third gendered, trans man, trans woman.
2. Steinbock 2011.
  3. [www.transgenderfilmfestival.com/about/](http://www.transgenderfilmfestival.com/about/)
  4. [www.transcreen.org](http://www.transcreen.org)
  5. [www.rozefilmdagen.nl](http://www.rozefilmdagen.nl)
  6. Loist 2011.
  7. Butler 2009.
  8. Anderson 2006.

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## The business of audience festivals

### *Calgary International Film Festival 2012*

Brendan Kredell

In differentiating between two 'ideal' models of 'business festivals' and 'audience festivals', Mark Peranson offers a useful heuristic for thinking about the film festival ecosystem.<sup>1</sup> He describes how the hierarchies of power and relationships among festival actors vary significantly across the two models, a schema that proves very helpful when considering the film festival circuit as a system. In his inversion of Tony Montana's classic formulation – first you get the power, then you get the money (as Peranson asserts in the title of his essay) – he calls attention to the ways that network externalities determine the relative value of film festivals on the international circuit. The importance of international festivals in cities such as Cannes, Berlin, and Toronto derives in large part from their central status

within what he describes as a 'core-periphery' system of business and audience festivals. However, Peranson's model begins to show blind spots when we step back to consider fluidity within the larger festival ecosystem. There is a certain stasis implied in the hierarchical models that Peranson describes: two concentric circles, perhaps, like rings of electrons. In focusing his attention on the differences between business and audience festivals, he relegates the interplay between the two to an occasional aside.<sup>2</sup>

Peranson is hardly alone in making this leap. The preponderance of scholarship on film festivals focuses on large events such as Cannes, Berlin, Sundance, and Toronto for good reason. These are the most important film festivals in the world. Understanding how they function and the role they play within the broader film culture is of crucial importance not only to the project of film festival studies but also to contemporary cinema studies writ large. We might say that the critical and scholarly attention paid to these festivals is yet another network effect reinforcing their centrality to the system.

The festival 'community', such as it is, convenes each year at business festivals. When we discuss festivals as sites of business and transaction we are specifically talking about the kind of business that happens at the places where that community convenes: markets, film funds, international co-production negotiations, etc. The business functions that smaller festivals have are important in a much different way. These functions do not register when we go in search of the usual exponents of the business festival (i.e., those catalogued by Peranson). There are typically no sales agents at audience festivals and no distributors; there are no film funds nor is there an extensive international media presence. In its archetypal form, as defined by Peranson, the ambitions of audience festivals would seem modest: for a week or two each year they screen the best films that their programmers are able to secure to an audience of mostly local filmgoers, who will likely never have the opportunity to see any of these films in a theatrical setting again. However, under close examination we can see how these festivals are themselves sites of a different kind of film business.

The Calgary International Film Festival (CIFF)<sup>3</sup> would meet Peranson's standard of an audience festival. Like many cities of its size, with each passing year Calgary finds itself with fewer and fewer screens available for first-run arthouse films. In such an atmosphere, where even Palme d'Or winners struggle to find anything beyond the most limited of theatrical releases, festivals like CIFF play an increasingly important role in bringing international cinema to a local audience. Judged by this measure the 2012 festival was a success, screening 150 films over the course of ten days. CIFF opened with a gala presentation of Deepa Mehta's *Midnight's Children*, the Salman Rushdie adaptation that had premiered only weeks earlier at Toronto. The festival included other highlights of the 2012 festival

season, such as Michael Haneke's *Amour*, Leos Carax's *Holy Motors*, Julie Delpy's *2 Days in New York*, and Yaron Zilberman's *The Late Quartet*. Sidebar programs focused on American independent cinema, documentaries, 3D filmmaking, and contemporary Japanese cinema. The program also included a late night cult film series and a presentation of Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992) to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the film, which was produced locally.

From a programming perspective, CIFF is significant insofar as it provides the largest forum of Canadian cinema for Calgary audiences each year. In part, CIFF serves as a showcase of homegrown auteurs who have gone on to achieve international attention, presenting local premieres of Canadian films such as Mehta's *Midnight's Children*, Xavier Dolan's *Laurence Anyways*, Martin Villeneuve's *Mars et Avril*, and Brandon Cronenberg's *Antiviral*. One of the more well-attended screenings of the festival was a showcase of short films produced in the province of Alberta (where Calgary is situated).

This emphasis on the local is not only a programming strategy or a means of differentiation, but also a part of the mandate of the festival. Telefilm Canada – the agency tasked with both funding the production of feature films in Canada and also promoting Canadian cinema at home and abroad – supports 49 festivals across the country, which in their sum represent the diversity of the contemporary international festival circuit. Funds are awarded to festivals that target specific audience niches (Sprockets Toronto International Film Festival for Children, St. John's International Women's Film Festival), festivals that focus on particular kinds of cinema (Hot Docs, Ottawa International Animation Festival), and festivals that showcase individual cultural and regional film traditions (Winnipeg Aboriginal Film Festival, Festival international de Cinema Vues d'Afrique).

Apart from these festivals there is a separate group of what we might think of as 'official' audience festivals. Here, I refer to the historical circuit of international film festivals in cities across Canada that begin in the late summer and stretch into early autumn. This season opens with the Montreal World Film Festival and the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), and continues in subsequent weeks with the Atlantic Film Festival in Halifax and the international film festivals of Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver in late September and early October.

The relationships between these festivals is not directly within my purview here, but as Peranson would predict, Toronto's status as the only business festival of this group gives it immense influence over the programming throughout the circuit. It would not be uncommon for the same film to premiere at TIFF and then screen in gala presentations at the Atlantic Film Festival and CIFF in subsequent weeks.<sup>4</sup>

My argument is that by focusing our attention solely on the films showing at audience festivals we miss the significant cultural work they perform within local

film communities. These festivals function as important gatherings for regional film scenes. I spoke with CIFF executive director Steve Schroeder in the aftermath of the 2012 edition (his first year leading the festival) to discuss this very issue and quickly discovered that he was quite familiar with film festival studies literature in general and Peranson's argument in particular. When asked about the business/audience dynamic, he responded:

I find [Peranson's] scheme very useful for thinking about the internal dynamics or business model ... of what each individual festival might be. But applying that? Asking, 'is this a business festival or an audience festival?' On a case-by-case basis that's actually a lot more subtle an exercise than that scheme would suggest. Within his framework, we would have to be understood as an audience festival, but everything needs to be understood within its regional context. We are not a large festival compared to many. But we are the largest festival of its kind between Toronto and Vancouver. You might be able to say that we are becoming the business festival for our region. Yes, we're not a business festival compared to Cannes – we're microscopic in a business sense compared to Cannes or TIFF. But we're not actually inconsequential as a business festival if you are talking about the Alberta/Prairies film world. If we can't be the Annual General Meeting of the film industry in this region, who will be?

Here, Schroeder gives voice to an alternative way of thinking about the business of audience festivals. By this way of thinking, the festival is not only an occasion for local audiences to gather and view the best of the previous year's world cinema (as in Peranson's model), but it is also an opportunity for participants in secondary and tertiary film production markets to convene and perform the kind of cultural work upon which these communities are founded and thrive. To be sure, much of this work is informal – chance conversations outside of a theater before a screening serve as conduits for the circulation of knowledge about who in the community is working on what, and can potentially lead to future collaborations – but a great deal of this business is formalised as well.

Telefilm's funding for Canadian festivals is tied to different parts of its mandate. For example, its Canada Showcase program is intended to promote and develop Canadian film; it also helps finance Canadian festivals that feature Canadian productions. In addition, Telefilm's Industrial Professional Development Fund is organised to provide ongoing training to media industry professionals in Canada. Programming at film festivals is an increasingly important component of this training. Thus, the back pages of the programs of Telefilm-sponsored festivals will

typically list professional development opportunities for the local media industries, scheduled to coincide with the festival.

Schroeder's description of the audience festival as an 'annual general meeting' is apt. Even if local industry participants have no involvement with films in the festival it is in their social and professional interest to attend in order to stay abreast of developments in the regional film scene. Panels with titles such as 'Working with Unions in the Indie Film World' (sponsored by the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television, and Radio Artists), or 'Film & Money – How Do I Find It?' (sponsored by the Director's Guild of Canada) give us a sense of the presumed audience at CIFF: emerging filmmakers and those working on micro- to low-budget projects – precisely the kind of filmmakers who comprise the regional film scene centered around Calgary.

George Baptist is a Calgary-based producer and frequent participant on industry panels at CIFF. His credits include films such as *Waydowntown* (2000) and *Fubar: Balls to the Wall* (2010). As he explained, the importance of the festival's industry events is in some ways inversely related to the scale of the regional media industry itself.

[CIFF] is about the only forum [in Calgary], and I think this is what film festivals have become, especially in smaller markets. There is so little access to this information [about film production] that because the film festival brings together filmmakers ... it offers them a venue to get together and discuss things.

Without the easy access to resources that filmmakers in cities with larger media industries enjoy, participants in the Calgary media scene instead coalesce around events like CIFF. As Baptist points out:

[i]f Telefilm comes out and does an information session on what's changing in film financing, or the Alberta Motion Picture Industry Association puts on a meeting with regard to changes in provincial planning or provincial funding, you'll see all the usual suspects at those meetings, and those are usually extremely valuable to network and connect with each other.

From the perspective of the festival and its funders, this is an advantageous arrangement. Canada's film industry is closely linked to the state. Organising information sessions around film festivals allows Telefilm to increase the visibility of Canadian cinema in its home market while at the same time investing in the professional development of Canadian filmmakers.

In closing then, we can see how even the seemingly modest audience festivals such as the Calgary International Film Festival serve important business functions for their regional film scenes. By appreciating the distinction in the kind of cultural work performed at these festivals versus larger 'business festivals', we can better understand the complex arrangements and interconnections between festivals in the international ecosystem.

## Notes

1. Peranson 2009, pp. 23-37.
2. To be fair to Peranson, he acknowledges as much in his essay, suggesting that the binary he describes may only exist as a theoretical construct. Given his background as a programmer at the Vancouver International Film Festival, he speaks from a position of experience about the nuances of audience festivals.
3. <http://www.calgaryfilm.com/>
4. It should also be noted that Montreal, the only FIAPF-accredited competitive film festival in North America, stands somewhat astride the rest of this circuit.

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## About the author

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## Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival

*Between the national and the global*

Murat Akser

The first edition of the Antalya Golden Orange International Film Festival<sup>1</sup> was launched fifty years ago in 1964, at a time when the international success of the director Metin Erksan<sup>2</sup> ignited national support for the creation of a Turkish film festival. Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival has primarily been a national film festival, despite occasional claims to internationality. The history of the festival is also tainted by political aspirations. Antalya's rivalry with the Golden Boll Film Festival in neighboring Adana<sup>3</sup> provides an interesting case study for understand-