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Film festival management and programming
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Notes

1. Nine of the ten essays were published within the special issue and reprinted in this volume, with one additional essay previously published in another journal.
2. Weber 2009.
3. Mitra 2013.
4. Dewey 2012.
5. See Kim 2012.

References

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About the author

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Film festival management and programming

Greg de Cuir, Jr

St Andrews Film Studies publishes the book series Films Need Festivals, Festivals Need Films under the editorship of Dina Iordanova. The series is now in its 6th edition in as many years, with the two newest being *Coming Soon to a Festival Near You: Programming Film Festivals* edited by Jeffrey Ruoff (St Andrews Film Studies, 2012) and *Sustainable Projections: Concepts in Film Festival Management* written by Alex Fischer (St Andrews Film Studies, 2013).

Ruoff's is a somewhat traditional – if a tradition can already be said to exist for film festival studies – mixed bag of essays, interviews, diaries, and theoretical reflections assembled into one discursive volume. This positions it within the lineage of Richard Porton's capital anthology *Dekalog 3: On Film Festivals* (Wallflower Press, 2009), which features a heavy-hitting line-up of writer/curators like

Kong Rithdee, Quintín, James Quandt, Adrian Martin, Olaf Möller, Jonathan Rosenbaum, and others. Fischer's book pushes film festival studies into the terrain of management theory with a diagrammatic and business-centered approach. This work seems to have no precedent, judging from the 'Festival (as) Organization' sub-section in the Film Festival Research Network Bibliography compiled by Skadi Loist and Marijke de Valck.[1]

In the introduction to his edited volume Ruoff likens festival programmers to circus ringmasters, which harkens back to the early days of a cinema of attractions. Indeed films festivals come close to the spirit of early cinema presentations, which were multi-part spectacles that promised a full experience and a somewhat cohesive narrative. Feature films, short films, music, maybe a performance or two – this is what early cinema exhibition offered to the spectator, as do film festivals. It would seem that early film exhibitionists functioned as proto-programmers, particularly those that operated small theaters and who enjoyed a relatively free hand in assembling their repertoires. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the historical rise of film festivals corresponds to the disintegration of the Hollywood studio system and the emergence of the post-classical era of production, distribution, and exhibition. The experience of film festivals would need to be programmed – or curated, as it is now popular to say – and such a creative intervention is the thematic focus of this volume.

One of the ironies that immediately presents itself in Ruoff's volume is that in

spite of the stated focus on programming there are no anthologized festival cata-logue essays, also no in-depth critical considerations of programming practices. When we do get contributions from critics or programmers themselves they usual-ly write from a first-person perspective about their work and the journeys they have taken to reach whatever position they maintain. This is valuable as testimony but it makes the volume skew a bit heavily to the anecdotal rather than the analytical. As Sean Cubitt has written, an anecdote's value can be assessed by the depth of its revelation.[2] He has also written that the anecdote can be judged by the breadth of motives it brings into play. The following two examples indicate where the volume falls short in this measure.

The film critic Gerald Peary writes a festival travelogue diary that while inter-esting is ultimately too broad and scattered to be useful. Peary's writing is overly journalistic, hastily pasted together, and not indicative of the analytical rigor that should be demanded from a scholarly publication. Given his status as a main-stream newspaper journalist and the mode of address he is well-versed in, this should have been a concern for the editor. Richard Peña, former director of the New York Film Festival, contributes what is essentially a personal narrative of his career arc. Though revelatory from an autobiographical standpoint, the value of what Peña offers is limited to the reflections of an insider. There is no larger connection to some of the concerns of film festival studies.

One of the stronger chapters in the book includes de Valck on the historical perspectives of programming. She considers programming a cultural practice that demands to be investigated as such (p. 26) – in terms of the culture of programming itself and also the diverse cultures (or lack thereof) represented by programming choices.[3] Another strong chapter is written by Loist, who dissects queer program-ming strategies and their complicated nature. These highlights are not an effort to say that scholars are the only ones fit to write with lucidity on the phenomenon of film festivals, or that the anecdotal should be avoided. Rather, it seems that maybe there are opportunities missed to include more writers that blur the boundary between theory and practice, who work simultaneously as researchers, critics, and programmers. However, it would be ideal when those individuals write about the work of their colleagues rather than their own, which would expand the frame and offer a truly intimate picture of the practice of programming.

The interview with Bill and Stella Pence, co-founders of the Telluride Film Festival, really gets the mixture right in terms of blending the personal and the professional. Ruoff conducts this interview himself and is able to penetrate to the heart of what it takes to initiate, operate, and program a film festival. This chapter is particularly relevant given the recent headlines Telluride is making as a result of its unannounced sneak previews, which have been blunting the privileged pre-miere status of very big films at very big festivals like Toronto and Venice. Ruoff

feels that 'the fundamental distinction for festival programming is the first-time-ness of a film' (p. 4). This may be the case with Telluride, Toronto, and Venice but it also belies the mainstream, feature-length film bias in the mode of inquiry structuring this volume.

Perhaps a more well-served focus on programming would be small or medium-sized non-commercial festivals, which often have a stated curatorial line and the independence to pursue it. Large festivals are masses of political, economic, and artistic compromises that often muddy their profiles – but maybe concise sections within larger festivals are instead ripe for programming analyses. Towards this, a couple of very important oversights in the section on themed festivals are documentary and avant-garde programs. This is odd, particularly because animation festivals are allowed two contributions in the volume: one by Marcin Giżycki of Animator in Poland and another by Sayoko Kinoshita of Hiroshima Animation Festival in Japan. Documentary festivals like IDFA in Amsterdam and Hot Docs in Toronto are mammoth affairs that include hundreds of films, while avant-garde festivals have a dynamic history that stretches back to the 1960s. In short, a generic diversity could have been preserved with more care in this volume.
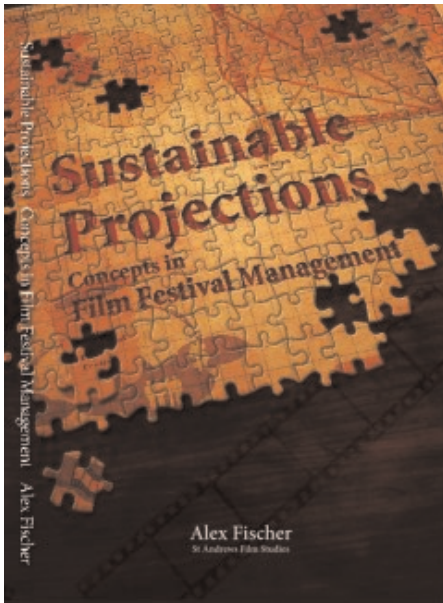
Alex Fischer's book is a brief schematic on establishing and operating film festivals. Its brevity makes it close to the feel of a pamphlet or an evening course for moonlighters; there are only four chapters in the entire book and it is written to be easily consumable in one sitting. Fischer's work is based on his doctoral thesis. Though there are some useful takeaways on the business strategies of film festivals

the main shortcoming of the book is its remedial voice of address, which may be inviting for non-specialists but at the same time seems to be aimed very low.

As mentioned earlier, anecdotal evidence would seem to be a major feature of film festival scholarship, and this book also opens with such a personal case study. The author comes from Australia with experience running the Gold Coast Film Fantastic, also the Brisbane International Film Festival. He draws on these experiences in the creation of an Open System Paradigm (borrowed from the book *The Social Psychology of Organizations* [John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1966] by Daniel Katz and Robert L. Kahn) that can be applied to film festivals and which includes such principles as the transformation of energy, systems as cycles of events, and others. This is the methodological frame of the book. Fischer's aim is to provoke festival organisers to use scientific thought to logically link action to results (p. 14). Indeed film festival studies are inherently interdisciplinary and have much to offer to arts management studies and cultural policy researchers. However, such prospects are not explored in any detail in this book and the space allotted is barely satisfactory for the various graphs and charts that are included and that would simplify the Open Systems Theory.

Regarding those charts and graphs many of them are practical to a fault, such as a drawing of a bucket with the words 'film festival' printed on it, followed by the same drawing with water leaks accompanying symbols for money, films, and people (p. 29). This would illustrate, albeit in a mundane manner, the various forms of entropy that can afflict film festivals. There are other over-simplified efforts such as identifying the various festival external participant groups as filmmakers, audiences, critics, etc (p. 3). Perhaps rudimentary information of this type is necessary to clear the terrain and set the parameters of the field. Still, it is in danger of leaving the seasoned reader uninterested.

Ultimately, it feels as if this book is written as a primer for entrepreneurs or investors who do not know anything about film or film culture. For example, Fischer takes the time to mention that cutting the closing credits or misspelling film titles could have dire consequences (p. 18). This satisfies the stated aim to 'present a basic yet comprehensive conceptual framework of film festival functionality' (p. 12). It is a worthwhile endeavor overall but one deserving of more nuance, and more than a scant 100 pages.

Ruoff's volume features a strong layout and cover design, which makes it a more well-produced affair than many of the other St Andrews Film Studies publications. Fischer's book by contrast feels rushed and a bit erratic, with one chapter numbering less than 10 pages and another more than 50. It seems that the lasting contribution to the field will be Ruoff's work, while the other, similar to its cover image, is missing a few pieces of the puzzle in an attempt to create a thorough investigation of the intricacies of film festival management.

Notes

1. Loist & de Valck 2010.
2. Cubitt 2013.
3. As a brief point for contemplation, recall the criticism leveled at the Cannes Film Festival for the lack of women directors in their competition programs over recent years. The decision-makers at Cannes ostensibly attempted to address this cultural shortcoming by announcing Jane Campion as jury president for the 2014 festival. Coincidentally, Campion is the only woman in the history of the festival to win the prestigious Palme d'Or. She is the second woman to preside as jury president in the past decade. In defense of the overall lack of gender diversity in their competition program, Cannes programmers have taken refuge under the idea that they only reflect the state of the industry. Of course, this is problematic, because to believe this claim one would have to subscribe to the notion that not only are there an incredibly scant number of women filmmakers operating in the feature film world today but also that the Cannes programmers do not have a free hand in making their selections. It would also require one to believe that Cannes is not influential enough as an institution to foment change, which is also problematic given that the festival has never shied away from the tag of being the single most important and influential exhibition outlet for international cinema.

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Cinema, postmedia, and resolutions

Donatella Valente

Resolutions 3: Global Networks of Video edited by Ming-Yuen S. Ma and Erika Suderburg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012) and *Cinema and Postmedia: Contemporary Film Territories / Cinema e postmedia: I territory del filmico nel contemporaneo* by Miriam De Rosa (Milano: Postmedia Press, 2013) provide two complementary perspectives on the moving image in the postmedia