Practitioner Talks

1. The Red and the Black: The State and the Privateers, Different Approaches to Organizing Film Festivals

Piers Handling

Abstract: The state was the dominant force in the creation of the world's first major film festivals, the majority of which were European. State control and/or funding, enhanced by a symbiotic relationship with the Fédération international des associations de producteurs de films (FIAPF), ensured a similarity of purpose, regulation and structure. However, in the immediate postwar, a concurrent situation developed. Festivals grew from private initiatives and while some of them took on the characteristics of the FIAPF sanctioned events, many of them did not. These outliers included events in North and South America, Asia, and the British Isles. Forced to rely on individual initiative and creativity they evolved in different ways and brought significant change.

Keywords: state festivals, private festivals, 1932-2000

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THE RED—The State and the Creation of the First Major Festivals 1932–70s

In the beginning—of the film festival world—the state had its fingerprints on almost all of the first events that popped up in both the prewar and postwar world. Without delving into the subtleties, of which there were many including pressure from the tourist sector made up of hotel owners, virtually all of the first festivals were state-funded and state-organized affairs of one sort or another, from Venice, Moscow, and Cannes in the prewar years to Mariánské Lázne/Karlovy Vary, Berlin, Brussels, the International Film Festival of India in New Delhi, San Sebastián, and the revived postwar Moscow.

These state-organized events, designed in different ways to project national objectives, both cultural and diplomatic, were all essentially set up in the same way involving diplomatic channels. The awarding of prizes became central, although interestingly Venice and Berlin flirted with audience awards in their first years. They were, in almost every sense of the word, highly structured, quite formal projections of national prestige wrapped in solid, albeit standard, verbiage about the importance of film to further understanding etc. in the context of international relationships. Numerous diplomatic incidents ensued, the Soviets boycotted various years, and films were pulled as they offended various national sensibilities. Rubbing shoulders with the diplomatic were the more prosaic issues of tourism, an essential by-product of festivals whose importance cannot be underestimated nor overlooked.

To provide a postwar structure due to the proliferation of events, the producers, who were after all providing the films, revived a prewar institution, the Fédération internationale des associations de producteurs de films (FIAPF) in 1948. One of its key functions would be to regulate the growing world of film festivals, and the history of almost all of the festivals of the forties, fifties, and sixties who aspired to join the growing "club" is inextricably tied up with FIAPF. There would be a few exceptions.

One of the by-products of the rules and regulations imposed by FIAPF was a uniformity of purpose and structure. The various festivals all began to look and sound and act alike. Initially, they did not even control their own

selections; that was done by a variety of national selection committees, or by state bodies in the Soviet bloc countries. Although challenged in the fifties, this process would not effectively change until the sixties. That decade saw many changes—political, social, economic—which invariably was reflected in the world of arts, although the film festival world was stubbornly resistant, largely due to the power still wielded by the producers via FIAPF.

It was clear to many that the major state festivals needed a rethink, but institutions are famously slow to change, and their glacial response would result in well-documented fireworks around the Cannes and Venice editions of 1968, and Berlin 1970. To be fair Cannes had instituted the Semaine de la critique in 1962, an invaluable addition, as reference to its early programming will attest. But, in light of the crises that each of the so-called Big Three would eventually be forced to confront, all fiddled before fires threatened to burn down the city.

The other FIAPF-sanctioned festivals of the era experienced different challenges. Those who existed outside the Big Three were essentially consigned to the margins, and found it difficult to fill their competitions with quality films due to the restrictive rules of the game. Most who adopted the FIAPF model struggled: San Sebastián, Locarno, Punta del Este, Mar del Plata, San Francisco and, on into the future, Cairo, Tokyo, and Montreal.

There were two major innovations introduced by the major events in their early years that spoke to their split identities and dual purposes. Venice launched major historical retrospectives as early as 1948 via modest homages which developed into full-blown, impressive programs in the years that followed. This allowed some rebalancing towards the artistic standards that were their raison d'être. San Sebastián would also follow this lead. But, the most important development occurred when Cannes hosted its first Exposition-Marché as early as 1950, and established a more institutionalized Marché in 1959. Venice struggled with the idea in 1950, but the new MIFED (Il Mercato internazionale del film e del documentario/ International Film and Documentary Market, Milan) a decade later conveniently offered an excuse not to start their own, while Berlin added a formalized Film Fair in 1978, although market activity also went back to the fifties. Art and commerce had existed in uneasy tension since the first festivals, but the balance initially had undeniably rested with the former. The slow, but inevitable, growth of the market side of festivals pointed to a different recalibration, whereby financial transactions, deal-making, and the buying and selling of films would assume importance. Cannes and Berlin would embrace this development while Venice tore itself apart in the sixties trying to wrestle with this particular dilemma, ultimately rejecting it outright for decades.

THE BLACK—The Privateers and How They Reinvigorated the Festival World 1946–90s

As the postwar festivals were emerging, events appeared that did not fit the neat, tidy pattern of the state-sponsored film festivals. In 1946, virtually concurrent with Mariánské Lázne/Karlovy Vary's first edition, another new festival appeared, this time in Locarno, a private initiative prompted by a local exhibitor and a film distributor, working with a privately run tourism association. A year later, in August, Edinburgh mounted a very different kind of film festival—as did, over the following years, events in Melbourne (1952), Sydney (1954), the peripatetic Southeast Asian festival (1954), Stratford, Canada (1956), London (1957), San Francisco (1957), Vancouver (1958), Cartagena (1960), Montreal (1960), New York (1962), Chicago (1965), and assorted others—almost all of them private initiatives, free of state control, and for most, of state money.

Locarno, while private, leaned towards the competitive model and reached out for state and FIAPF support, while remaining a private corporation. Edinburgh would strike out on a quite different path. It began life as the Edinburgh International Festival of Documentary Films. Like Locarno, it was not created by the state, nor beholden to it. Thematically driven, a result of John Grierson pushing the documentary, and hence Britain, to the forefront of this new form of cinema, it had an agenda, somewhat political, but more social and educational in its shape, that captured the postwar mentality of Europe. Essentially the creation of two men, backstopped by the dynamic but financially strapped Edinburgh Film Guild, this was the first festival that stepped to one side of the FIAPF structure and model. Unlike Locarno, and the other major festivals, an official competition was not in its plans.

There are a number of things notable about this parallel wave of new festivals. They moved well beyond the traditional European core, touching North and South America, Asia, and the British Isles. Virtually all of them were the brainchilds of individuals, or small groups, who had no national state interests at heart. They were free of ideological rhetoric and diplomatic constraints. Driven by cinephilic instincts, these were the dreamers, motivated by the desire to bring the sparkling films of the postwar era to their various cities. All were essentially privately funded, dependent largely for their existence on the revenues generated by a paying public. Tourism, which was a prime concern of many of the state festivals, was almost entirely absent from their visions. Most were non-competitive (Melbourne, Sydney, Stratford, London, and New York), while the others invented a prize-giving system suited to their events. Commercial marketplaces for buying and selling films were virtually invisible. At first, their survival was precarious.

Almost all of them experienced financial crises of different magnitudes in their early years; a few fell by the wayside (Stratford, Vancouver, and Montreal) to be revived in different incarnations years later.

Some of the new festivals fell uneasily into the FIAPF orbit; in order to create legitimacy for their events in the eyes of local and international film suppliers their approval seemed an essential step. Sydney and Melbourne were driven to paroxysms of frustration in the sixties by the Paris-based association. San Francisco ran a FIAPF-sanctioned official competition in 1964, an attempt to create a Cannes or Venice in California, but dropped the idea after only one year, realizing it was a failure, and reverting to its former status. Chicago simply turned away all requests from FIAPF to join (as would most of the North American festivals).

It was clear by the sixties that the major state-run/financed festivals were undergoing a kind of mid-life crisis. A sclerosis was clearly visible. 1968 was a watershed year (but not for everyone as the North America festivals remained untouched). Cannes was forced to abandon half-way through, Venice was full of disruption and uproar. Berlin would escape the crisis until 1970 when their jury resigned, amidst controversy, awarding no prizes. Out of the chaos two new initiatives were born: the Quinzaine des réalisateurs in Cannes and the Forum of Young Cinema in Berlin. Venice underwent a different kind of calvary, abandoning its competition for a decade, skipping two editions during the seventies, and producing a variety of "screening programs" that sometimes did, and other times did not, resemble a traditional festival. While in no way denigrating the importance of the two new Cannes and Berlin sidebars—both barely tolerated by the institutions who "allowed" their births—the equally significant innovations of the decade, often predating the events of 1968, came from a variety of mostly new events, some avoiding the very use of the word "festival," replacing it with "show," "encounter," "review," or "days." The key ones were based in Europe, the British Isles, Africa, and South America.

The innovations began in surprising places—in the fifties, documentary festivals in Leipzig and the SODRE event in Montevideo, and short film festivals especially in Oberhausen and Mannheim. In the early sixties there was a flurry of new events in Italy, all in reaction to the Mostra in Venice. The Rassegna del cinema latino-americano held five editions in Santa Margherita Ligure, Sestri Levante, and Genoa between 1960 and 1965; the Mostra internazionale del cinema libero in Porretta Terme began in 1960; and the Incontri del cinema in Sorrento followed three years later. But the most influential would be the Mostra internazionale del nuevo cinema held in Pesaro, formed in 1965. These "festivals," along with Edinburgh (having by now long abandoned its documentary moniker), all upended the status quo, and for a short period,

they changed the face of the festival world. Pesaro, led by a film critic and academic, set out to be an anti-Venice (i.e., anti-FIAPF) event. Edinburgh hired a number of young, bratty, cinephiles in 1968. All these events were engaged, committed, and political in every sense of that word, advocating for new, independent voices and overlooked cinemas, consciously avoiding the trappings of the competitive events. They embraced the theoretical debates of the period, themed their annual conferences ("For a New Critical Conscience of Cinematic Language," Pesaro 1966; "History/Production/Memory," Edinburgh 1977) to feature rigorous debates and discussions, with some supported by impressive publications. Edinburgh pivoted towards the brash and the disruptive (Roger Corman, Sam Fuller, the New Hollywood cinema), and programmed a seminal Women's Event in 1972, while Pesaro rounded out its annual festivals with groundbreaking national cinema programmes. They deliberately set out to be the polar opposite of the state-funded traditional festivals, who had wrapped their increasingly commercial events in a veneer of paparazzi, glamor, parties, black tie, and starlets.

At the same time other festivals of note emerged, in Africa—the Festival international des journées cinématographiques de Carthage (JCC), first held in 1966, and the Festival du cinéma Africain de Ouagadougou (1969), and in South America—Viña del Mar, renowned for two editions in 1967 and 1969, and the Muestra del cine documental Latinoamericano in Mérida which presented three events (1968, 1970, and 1977). To these can be added the transgressive *Marcha* festivals in Montevideo of the late sixties. These "militant" festivals marked a new development: their agendas were as political as they were aesthetic.

The African festivals were totally state-run. They decided to give prizes but quickly narrowed their competitive focus to the region. To avoid FIAPF's rules, their competitions would only allow African productions, a first for the global film festival circuit. This flew in the face of the international assumptions that had underpinned the entire notion of what a film festival should be; but its transnational goals were entirely defensible when it came to creating a profile for their emerging, financially challenged, post-colonial cinemas. Viña del Mar, sadly short-lived at this point (it would not be revived until 2001), born out of a film club, and Mérida, presented by the Universidad de los Andes, were also regionally focused, becoming magnets for Latin American filmmakers dedicated to making their own, often highly politicized, indigenous cinema. Decades later, the South Korean tiger-festival situated in Pusan, inspired by this model, would focus entirely on Asian cinema, giving it a laser-sharp mission that its older rival in Tokyo, trapped into the international FIAPF competitive model, lacked.

The seventies saw a further explosion. New major events arrived almost annually, among them: LA Filmex (1971), Rotterdam (1972), Tehran (1972), Telluride (1974), Toronto (1976), Cairo (1976), Festival du monde, Montreal (1977), Utah (1978, renamed Sundance in 1984), Hong Kong (1976), and Havana (1979). Tehran, Cairo, and Montreal would become FIAPF competitive festivals while others (Havana, Sundance) would adopt a hybrid model. All of them, except Tehran, Hong Kong, and Havana, were privately organized, started by individuals or small groups. They had to be creative or risk failure. Amongst this group some would finally arise to challenge the hegemonic power of the European festivals.

Edinburgh, largely overlooked in the academic literature, cast an emulative shadow. It, as well as London and the British Film Institute, acted as aspirational models for many: New York, Filmex, Hong Kong, Toronto, even Telluride. The competitive model of the Big Three was consciously avoided, and indeed entirely upended—no prizes, no jury, no market, no black-tie—to become audience, not industry events.

A renegade, freewheeling "cowboy" attitude appeared. Rotterdam, Pesaro, Edinburgh, the Quinzaine, and Berlin's Forum set up a rival organization to challenge FIAPF, the Fédération internationale des festivals indépendants. This breakaway attempt was short-lived but illustrative of a desire to challenge the status-quo. Other initiatives the "privateers" introduced would dominate the next decades of explosive growth around the world. San Francisco hosted extensive on-stage interviews with major directors and stars that inspired early Telluride; thematic programming accompanied by publications became a standard part of not just Edinburgh and Pesaro but also Hong Kong, Toronto, and Pusan; women's programming began to appear, prompted by Edinburgh's 1972 initiative, resulting in amongst other things the creation of the women's festival in Creteil; women were appointed festival directors of a number of key events around the world (Edinburgh, Toronto, London, Rotterdam, Melbourne, Sydney, Locarno, Sundance), notably never emulated in the FIAPF sanctioned competitive events of Cannes, Venice, Berlin, San Sebastián; video was added to Sundance and Toronto; LA Filmex staged massive movie marathons, some lasting fifty hours, celebrating genre cinema; production funds were created (Rotterdam's Hubert Bals Fund being the first and most famous); organic, non-official but highly effective sales markets emerged in Toronto and Sundance; Rotterdam started its groundbreaking pre-production CineMart emulated by Pusan and Hong Kong; Toronto shifted the focus away from juried prizes with its prestigious Audience Award, prompting many others to follow; Chicago and LA Filmex introduced eye-catching, modern marketing methods to attract audiences; and production and training labs in many festivals followed Sundance's lead.

Amidst these innovations was the transformation of the financial model. While the European festivals essentially remained wards of the state, relying for virtually all their funding on a combination of municipal, regional, or national governments, the North American and Australian festivals relied on self-generated income, earned revenues from box office income, occasional donations from wealthy benefactors, and finally, funding from private corporations.

These different financial models had repercussions. The government-funded organizations built their festivals around a somewhat different set of imperatives: national prestige, cultural showcases, mixed in with commercial trading. Increasingly, the media played an outsized role, titillated initially by the Silva/Mitchum scandal in Cannes 1954, and Bardot; more recently amplified by the arrival of the red carpet. For the privateers, the audience drove the bottom line and, if one identifies a split between the elitist, high art idea of a film festival and its populist, commercial counterpart, herein lies its origins. But public box office revenues were not enough to feed the growing appetites and ambitions of many festivals. The shift towards corporate fundraising, and its consequences, was perhaps the most significant evolution that the privateers, especially in North America, brought to the table.

If the early history of film festivals witnessed the Europeans establishing the rules—competition, prizes, juries, state funding—these codes were challenged almost immediately, eventually reaching a tipping point in the sixties and seventies, a period of flux, innovation, and change. Informality, experimentation, flexibility, and disruption became the norm, ultimately affecting the future structures of the competitive festivals. The privateer's needs for different revenue streams brought money into their operating budgets that came with different sets of demands. The public wanted to be challenged, but also entertained. Corporations invested for commercial results, not for reasons of philanthropy. Walking this tightrope would provide a growing challenge for festival directors of all stripes committed to an innovative, independent, and diverse cinema.

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About the Author

Piers Handling was the Director and CEO of the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) 1994–2018 and previously its Artistic Director. He began his career at the Canadian Film Institute, taught at Queen's and Carleton Universities before joining TIFF. He has published extensively on Canadian cinema.