Film festivals: history and theory of a European phenomenon that became a global network

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Conclusion

Successful or Safe?
The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Film Festival Network
“Does the festival network offer a safe environment for the vulnerable films in our societies...?” p. 222

Figure 7: Carol White retreats into her “safe” cabin. © 1995, [SAFE].
Three of my four case studies began with a film-related anecdote. Thomas Vinterberg’s *It’s All About Love*, Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11* and the Coen Brothers’ *Intolerable Cruelty*. None of these films were chosen because they have extraordinary artistic qualities or because they had made a particular deep impression on me. The reasons for choosing them were not cinephile, but circumstantial; the specific performances related to the screening of these films at the film festivals in Berlin, Cannes and Venice, provided me with the appropriate examples to start my case studies. In retrospect it is telling that I intuitively selected those films that touch upon the more ambiguous sides of festivals: the borderline between success and failure in the case of Vinterberg; the intertwinement of political and economic interests in the case of Moore; and the Janus-face of the media in the case of the Coen Brothers. The ambiguity in my anecdotes points to the fact that festivals are, to paraphrase Vinterberg, not all about love for the cinema. Of course these examples are not representative for all festival films. There are numerous films with outstanding artistic value that premier in the festival circuit. Let me therefore balance this uncinephile image presented thus far by beginning this conclusion with an analysis of a great festival success, a cinematic masterpiece and my personal first festival favourite. The example will also allow me to introduce the topic that will be central in this concluding chapter.

I was a cinephile by the time I attended the premier of Todd Haynes’ *Safe* (UK/USA: 1995) at the International Film Festival Rotterdam in 1996 and had devoured a substantial number of film classics that had refined my taste. Yet this particular film “blew me away” like none of the classics had done before. It conveyed suspense, psychological depth and contemporary social criticism. Cinematography and mise-en-scène were in complete harmony with the protagonist’s alienation, transforming the well-known imagery of American suburbs – the geometrical grid of the street, the well-kept lawns and lavish mansions – into a disconcerting setting, forecasting depravation instead of sustainable comfort. Carol White (Julianne Moore), an affluent housewife in LA, becomes allergic to her environment. Car fumes, milk, the...
new couch, even a young girl sitting in her lap at a friend’s baby shower cause her to have allergic reactions that the doctors cannot explain nor cure. She finds affirmation in a meeting for victims of “Environmental Illness” and decides to travel to the secluded Wrenwood Center in New Mexico to shelter from the toxic, harmful chemicals that threaten her in daily life. While engaging in self-help group sessions, Carol, at the same time, closes herself off from social obligations and family life, looking for salvation inside her own mind. The film ends with a particular eerie scene, in which we see Carol retreat into a white, sterile cabin that resembles an igloo. She sits on the folding bed, folds her jumper and takes some breaths from the oxygen tank she has started to carry around. Then she gets up and walks to the mirror. “I love you,” she repeats four times in a soft voice, but the expression on the face of the pale woman looking straight into the camera remains blank.

Haynes’ second feature is a typical festival film and cinephile favourite. The film gets under your skin by means of its startling images, juxtaposed soundtrack and intelligent, ambiguous narrative on the relativity of the comfortable life of the well-to-do, the cultural obsession with health issues, the danger of pollution, and the growing number of people turning to New Age as main means of spiritual support, as if it were a substitute religion. It encourages the viewer to reflect on his/her own beliefs. “Is the 20th century making us sick?,” the promo-video that raises Carol’s awareness of “Environmental Illness” rhetorically asks its unhappy target audience. She embraces the suggestion wholeheartedly, albeit quietly at first. Carol is desperate, this much is clear. She has blocked herself off from the routine of her life – managing the household, aerobics classes, meetings with girlfriends, sex with her husband – while keeping up appearances with idle chatter and apologetic smiles. Most of all, Carol is keeping up appearances for herself. She grasps the opportunity to hide behind allergic reactions and seizures; she refuses to show her emotional despair while sending a clear message that things are not as fine as she keeps reiterating. Instead of trying to improve her social relationships, she withdraws further and further, finding a new identity in her illness. SAFE ends in ambiguity. On one level we have been led to sympathise with Carol. At the same time, however, Carol not only alienates herself from her family and friends, but also from the viewer. The question any viewer is left to answer at the end is whether this inhibited woman has succeeded in finding a safe place to recuperate or, on the contrary, has regressed into the “safe” condition of illness to such an extent that it seems unlikely she will be able to get herself together and resume a normal life.

At the end of this dissertation I am confronted with a similar question with regard to my research topic of film festivals. Does the festival network offer a safe environment for the vulnerable films in our societies, where they can shelter from commercial interest and, instead, be appreciated on their own (cultural and artistic) terms? Or does it merely provide a pseudo-cure that allows filmmakers to remain marginal by sinking deeper and deeper into the secluded festival network, assimilating to its discourse while losing the ability to connect to the film world outside? In my thesis I have described the
historical development of the film festival phenomenon and analysed the emergence of a global film festival network that is self-sustainable. Throughout the study I have, preliminarily, referred to this capacity for self-preservation as successful. Film festivals succeeded in establishing vital links with various other entities, such as European governments, Hollywood, the Avant-garde and city marketeers. The effect was that film festivals were opened up to a variety of agendas and that the number of people and parties that benefit from the annual organisation of such events multiplied, strengthening the pillars under their foundation and leading to institutionalisation and global spread. However, the question that remains to be answered at the end of the research is whether these developments can, in fact, be understood as signs of success, or should rather be interpreted as symptoms of a permanent condition of sickness. “I’m on artificial respiration,” Werner Herzog said with a critical eye towards the negative effects of the European system of film subsidies. The parallel between his “oxygen” metaphor and Carol’s progressing reliance on her oxygen tank and sealed cabin is obvious: both convey the message that it is not very healthy to depend completely on artificial support systems for one’s survival. Like Carol’s situation, the condition of the film festival network is ambiguous. On the one hand, film festivals provide global exhibition opportunities and exposure for many wonderful films that would probably fail to find an audience otherwise. On the other hand, they have not resulted in the creation of stable, financially-independent industries for such films, and have, arguably, even prohibited initiatives for economic independence. The international film festival circuit is self-sustainable, but the future of most of the films and filmmakers that pass through its channels remains highly uncertain and their success, one could argue, somewhat artificial. Successful or safe? A straightforward answer cannot be given. In my conclusion I want to look back at some of the key modalities in the film festival network that emerged from this study and address to what extent these appear as strengths and to what extent as weaknesses.

The Larger Network
In order to understand how festivals relate to Hollywood, Avant-garde practices, city policies and other entities I suggested moving away from notions such as “art,” “auteur” and “national.” Although these terms represent the dominant discourse by which European cinemas have been framed (not in the least by film festivals themselves), they often result in thinking in binary oppositions and do not offer any starting-points for considering the transnational dynamics, the multiple agendas, nor the complex spatial and temporal dimensions of the international film festival circuit. Instead, I introduced the concept of the festival network. Drawing on Actor-Network Theory, in particular Latour, film festivals can be analysed in terms of an interrelated dependence between other actors, such as Hollywood’s use of the festivals as platform for marketing campaigns for big-budget productions or the incorporation of festivals in municipal policy plans.
for city marketing. In this larger festival network the international film festivals take nodal positions. The greatest advantage of the concept of the network over notions such as “auteur” and “national” is that it allows for a broad analysis of a complex cultural phenomenon without being narrowed down by the biased discourses that have been so essential to the festival phenomenon’s historical development. Although these discourses are included in the analysis as stratifying forces, they do not prevent one from considering antagonist presences and the interplay between contradictory interests as well. In this way I was able to analyse the function of glamour, glitter and stars at festivals as well as typical programming practices revolving around “auteur cinema,” or, for example, the commercial boom of the festival film markets alongside the surge of film festivals adapting the leftist ideology of a politics of intervention.

With an ANT approach, all these different actors are not simply considered as parts of the larger network, they are the festival network that may fall apart when one of the vital relations is broken. This implies that, although, in ideological discourse, oppositions between the actors may be played out, they are too much intertwined as a network for anyone to risk putting words into practice. Let me give an example. Suppose Cannes took a more direct and provocative position against US interference in Iraq and all Hollywood companies and stars would decide, as a response, to withdraw their productions from the festival for a period of, say, five years, then the festival would surely lose media attention and business activity, which would negatively affect the prestige of its competition programme and cause the city to fall into an economic crisis. In reality, it is unlikely that these opposing political views will escalate at the expense of the festival’s leading position on the circuit, simply because the stakes are too high. All actors – the festival, Hollywood companies, the city of Cannes, filmmakers etcetera – benefit from a strong festival. Therefore, Cannes will continue to use anti-Hollywood rhetoric and foster anti-American sentiments to cultivate its self-image as an independent, politically correct and leading centre for “alternative” film culture, while, at the same time, knowing better than to damage the relation and risk a lethal exsanguination of the festival network’s coronary artery.

Throughout my dissertation I have argued that the larger festival network will always work towards stability and its own survival. In theoretical terms this means that Latour’s idea of the network has to be complemented by Luhmann’s system theory. The festival network’s capacity for self-preservation – its systemic tendencies – relies to a great extent on the ability to adapt to transformations and shifts. In post-war Europe festivals catered to nationalist sentiments. In the 1970s they responded to youthful rebellions world-wide and supported young film talent and political struggles. In the 21st century they close professional sponsorship deals and seek industrial partnerships in order to grow bigger and to remain competitive. Festivals, thus, are not only concerned with films and filmmakers, bestowing upon them cultural prestige, but also their own survival. They constantly redefine their position in the larger festival network
and adapt to transformations. This is both a weakness and a strength of the festival network. Because festivals depend on many other actors for their survival they necessarily have to compromise. Multitasking and negotiating between the various interests makes them less sharp as cultural institutions. Whereas Hollywood can straightforwardly pursue one clear agenda (maximised economic profits), film festivals are kept back by the necessity for give and take between different agendas. At the same time, the presence of multiple agendas provides a safe foundation for the network-system. The assurance of widespread support legitimises film festivals’ existence in the absence of financial independence. In other words, it is the larger network that guarantees festivals’ sustainability.

**Found in Translation**

In order to come closer to an assessment of whether successful or safe is the more appropriate word to describe this self-sustainable festival system, it is necessary to zoom in on two key moments of transformation. Firstly, the shift towards independent programming after 1968. Taking the notions of “auteur” and “new wave” as their strategic discourse the festivals began participating in film culture through programming in the late 1960s and 1970s. They framed selected films by clustering them in “specialised” and “themed” programme sections. In this way they could raise public awareness for political issues and stylistic movements. Whereas the old festivals remained more conservative in their programming choices and relied mostly on tried and tested talent for the main competition, the new alternative sections and specialised festivals offered room to new talent, experimentation and explicit political content. In addition to the screenings, short catalogue descriptions and interview opportunities, some festivals, such as the Edinburgh International Film Festival and Pesaro Film Festival, published extensive documentation and organised leading seminars that contributed to a flourishing international cinema discourse. The greatest strength of such independent festival programming was that it made the international film festivals into renowned centres of expertise. They became cultural gateways that could legitimise films and filmmakers, for example, new national waves that needed the international recognition of the festivals (prizes and/or debates) before they would be considered to have any cultural value at home. The weaker side of the coin was that the festival model became self-referential. The festivals depended on a constant supply of “discoveries” – new trends, new authors and fresh new waves – to keep the festival machines running. The festival system became more and more boxed-in, a safe zone that depended on standardised (autopoeitic, Luhmann would say) input/output channels and was closed off for developments in the rest of the cultural industries. With the passing of time the focus on independent talent, art cinema and avant-garde turned into an artificial and outdated dogma that provided the criteria for determining who would qualify for subsidies. The danger of such internalisation is illustrated most clearly in SAFE. After some time Carol seems to lose the ability and will to connect to the world outside.
Wrenwood Center. When her husband visits her, she shuns away from his embrace with the excuse that it might be his cologne, although he replies that he is not wearing any. That night she delivers an impromptu speech for the Wrenwood community. She talks about environmental illness — “because it really is an illness” and “it is out there” — as if she were defending her retreat into the igloo and her new self, not only to her husband but also to herself. A similar mechanism appeared to be at work in the festival network. Although “artistic independence” and “the freedom of cultural expression” are justified concerns — just as environmental pollution is in Carol’s case — and although the overstretching of protectionist measures and the regression into ones’ own subsidised circuits have successfully sheltered filmmakers and national film industries from the power and competitive advantage of the Hollywood studios, these developments have also imposed unnecessary restrictions on the filmmakers and national film industries that are equally harmful to them, albeit in a different way. Contemporary filmmakers can become trapped in a cultural ghetto, depending on subsidies and festival prestige.

Thus far, “safe” appears the better description for the festival network. However, from the 1990s onwards, a number of key shifts took place that announced the coming of a new festival era. The most important of these was the discovery that “art cinema” could be economically viable as well. Miramax unleashed a cinema revolution when their low-budget SEX, LIES AND VIDEOTAPE won the Golden Palm in 1989 and became a box-office success afterwards. The Weinstein brothers combined festival prestige with provocation and aggressive marketing techniques and created the “Indie blockbuster,” quality film hits that were profitable in the art cinema niche market. The economic opportunity of “art cinema” was also recognised by the new multimedia corporations, who started in-house art divisions (or bought independents like Miramax) in order to benefit from the development. With the rise of the multimedia market and the increased opportunities for financing a film through presales to the various (ancillary) markets, the film industry for festival films became professionalised. Sales agents and lawyers were the new key players at the negotiation table. The transformations in the festival network that were the result of these shifts have — until now — become predominantly effective on the edges of both sides of the established model for cultural legitimisation: on the back-end, festivals started to co-operate with the industries to provide training and facilitate or fund production deals, while, up front, festivals reached out to broader types of audiences. In the middle, the competitions continue to occupy the agendas of the festival programmers, juries, and press and media representatives in ways not so different from the years before. Most festival organisations still use the European discourse of art and auteurs, national cinema and new waves, and discoveries and canons. However, with Latour in mind, the current condition can be analysed as a first move away from the situation in which the festivals regressed into safe zones.

In *The Pasteurization of France*, Latour describes how Pasteur was able to galvanize competing social forces and conflicting interests to support his own
research programme. He argues that "what was peculiar to Pasteur was a
certain type of displacement that enabled him to translate and divert into his
movement circles of people and interest that were several times larger." Pasteur
succeeded in convincing those concerned with the macrocosmic problems of hygiene that his research on the microcosmic culture of the bacilli
would solve these. Key to the success of this "translation" was his ability to
divert the problem to the place where he was strongest: the laboratory. In the
current festival network one can also observe important diversions taking
place (in both programming and pre-programming practices) that result in
the inclusion of larger interest groups, namely the industries and the
audiences. Of particular interest is that the "new" festivals in North America
and Asia predominantly lead these trends. The Sundance Film Festival in
Park Utah is the quintessential example of a festival that was established to
foster independent filmmaking and that turned into one of the most
important stepping-stones for those talents seeking to make it in Hollywood.
Another success story is the Pusan International Film Festival in South-Korea,
which has taken advantage of the economic boom of the country as well as
the surge of Cinemania in its national youth culture to establish itself as a
window onto the Asian cinema world. What is important to note about both
examples is that these festivals responded to actual developments – industries
developing an interest in independent filmmakers in the case of Sundance;
and young people using the cinema to create a new identity for themselves in
the case of Pusan – instead of only using standardised input/output channels.
It seems Europe (in particular the group of major international film festivals)
for a long time was so comfortable in its role of Carol White, a victim who
claims that the cause of her illness is "out there," that it proceeded to retreat
into the safe environment of film festivals as if it were an Art Cinema
Reservation instead of responding directly to the transformations in world
cinema like other festivals did. Once the example had been set, they followed.
The question, however, remains whether these current shifts and diversions
can be considered successful. In order to answer this question it is imperative
to, firstly, assess what the festival interests are and, secondly, scrutinise if
these are furthered in their "translation" into the positions of industries and
audiences.

Adding Value and Agenda Setting
Traditionally, festivals emphasise that they attend to the interests of those
films and filmmakers that are of particular artistic, cultural, national or socio-
political worth. They remind one that festivals were created as a separate
zone, where such films could be exhibited outside of the normal film
industrial facilities and where the commercial conventions did not apply. At
festivals films did not have to generate revenues. Their first function in the
festival setting was not to make money (as commodities), but to show "the
best" of national cinema productions (as artistic accomplishments and
expressions of cultural identities). But film festivals never intended to merely
be the stage where others could shine and show off their splendour. Film
festivals did not simply want to be an alternative exhibition space. Soon it was clear that they would put their stamp on film culture. What set film festivals apart from the beginning was their capacity to add value to films and filmmakers. Competition programmes, international juries and prizes were used to bestow honour on selected films and filmmakers, lifting them above the gross of yearly national productions. Essential to the process of value addition was the presence of media representatives, because the local festival events could only acquire global exposure for their international competitions via media coverage. Moreover, the media added another layer of selection, of independent quality criteria being imposed, and thereby increased the cultural value of the films and filmmakers that were reported upon.

The development towards independent programming was of great importance to the festivals’ capacity to add value. The upheavals of the late 1960s and early 1970s were an attempt to purify the festivals from the distraction of glamour and the temptation of money, and give more weight to the films as art and the filmmakers as auteurs. The major film festivals adjusted their selection procedures and began programming films themselves instead of inviting nations to send in festival entries. In addition, parallel sections such as the Quinzaine des Réalisateurs in Cannes and Das Forum des Jungen Films in Berlin were established to accommodate the young, innovative and experimental directors. From this point onwards, festivals were not only able to add value through competition programmes and prizes, they could also intervene more directly in film culture by setting the agenda as media events. The issues that were put on the agenda ranged from cinematographical innovation and narrative experiments to political freedom struggles and taboo topics such as (homo)sexuality, race and gender. In the contemporary international film festival circuit, some festivals have specialised in themed programming (e.g. in science fiction or queer cinema) to maximise their agenda setting effect. The increased competition on the festival circuit had made it necessary for film festivals to emulate, on the one hand, the festival format of premiers and prizes (in order to keep attracting media representatives) and to distinguish themselves, on the other hand, from other festivals by specifying the area where they would (try to) intervene in film culture. The interest of festivals is thus twofold: firstly, they work towards self-preservation and, preferably also, amelioration of their position in the festival network; and, secondly, they use their power of value addition and agenda setting for a politics of participation, advancing those films and filmmakers they deem to be of particular artistic, cultural, national or socio-political interest.

Are these interests furthered by co-operating more closely with industry partners and attracting more popular audiences to the festivals? Let me start with the former trend. In the recent years, film festivals have professionalised. They have developed more and more initiatives that involved local companies (e.g. sponsorship) and international film industries (e.g. “match-making” markets, training and funding) in the festival network. Nowadays, commerce is no longer dogmatically considered the “evil other”
and festivals fully recognise the potential of cultural entrepreneurship for expanding their strategic influence. Most interestingly, they have begun moving into pre-programming activities. Festival-related film funds – such as the Hubert Bals Fund in Rotterdam, the World Cinema Fund in Berlin and the Balkan Fund in Thessaloniki – use the festivals’ position as established institutes for cultural legitimisation to not only add financial resources, but also cultural value, to film productions before they are completed, giving them a head-start in the festival circuit. Many of these supported films indeed appear in the prestigious competitions and receive major prizes. With training and “match-making” markets, moreover, festivals give (young) film professionals the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the international film business and make contact with key parties that could help them realise their projects. What happens in these initiatives is that the festivals’ key competence to recognise “quality” is “translated” to the promise of sufficient economic value for industry professionals to invest in the pre-selected or supported projects. The reasoning behind this translation is that a project will probably find distribution and audiences in the network that revolves around film festival events when one of these established festivals has already expressed its support for the project. Most interestingly, Latour emphasises that his notion of translation can be applied to correct understandings between agents as well as misunderstandings or disputes. As long as they result in a joint movement, he argues, the translation has achieved its purpose. It other words, it does not matter whether the industry partners have practical and economic interest in mind and the festivals aim at ideological and aesthetic objectives, provided that they support the same films and filmmakers, the translation has achieved its purpose – a simple, but refreshing solution to overcome the persistent art/commerce dichotomy. To conclude, I would therefore argue that the festival/industry joint ventures have successfully furthered the festival interests, because they expand the 1970s tradition of the politics of participation beyond programming and discourse; many contemporary festivals intervene in cinema production on behalf of the films and filmmakers that are, to them, first of artistic, cultural, national or socio-political interest.

What about the trend towards broader audiences, then? Can this translation also be considered a success? Let us take another look at the process of professionalisation. Film festivals shook off their dusty image of elitist events for cinephiles that gather in small and smoky theatres to obsess over somewhat unworldly issues. The “new” festivals were more inviting to the lay public. Their programming became broader and the “dressing” more sexy. The growing popularity of film festivals with a broader audience was also fostered by the larger cultural trend towards an experience or attention economy. The festival context added another layer of experience to the film screenings to which an increasing amount of citizens (the growing creative class) was susceptible. Nowadays, the average festival visitor is no longer a classic cinephile, whose main interest concerns the “films” shown in the programme. The festivals are visited for different reasons by a variety of
cinephiles, and for some the experience of being part of the “festival,” its unique setting, the spectacle, the hypes and the premiers are just as important as (and sometimes more important than) the films. Many regard this primarily as a weakness. Especially when the growing popularity of festivals is matched with expanding numbers of films in the programme, as was the case in Rotterdam, critics tend to lament the potential marginalisation of the “more difficult, but artistically challenging” films within the lavish and broad supply of films. I, however, argue that the contemporary situation can also be considered a smart (and necessary) move on the part of the festivals that increases the reach of their agenda setting powers. By attracting more people to the festivals, they give more people the opportunity to familiarise themselves with “other” cinemas and give the individual, so to speak, an easy landing from where his/her personal cinephile taste may find its own course. One should not forget that the films and filmmakers that touch the festival interests the most are those that request a more than averagely refined understanding. And, in order for audiences to refine their taste, they need lots of exposure and critical mediation. Festivals can provide exactly these while also having the authority to submit “quality” suggestions. After all, it is quite easy to preach to the converted and argue that the festival community should focus on the protection of art and auteur cinema and only cater to the serious cinephile – even Carol could speak up in front of the Wrenwood community – but for festivals to expand their strategic influence and encourage some of the newcomers to explore the unfamiliar, the less culturally “safe” (and more daring) programming practices could very well prove the more successful in the end.

Implications and Limitations

This dissertation has shown that the implication of working with ANT for cinema studies is one that can include new objects of study and forms of evidence. Latour’s obsession with complex configurations and infrastructures in his case studies suggested to me that the study of the international film festival circuit would benefit from a focus on spatial and temporal dimensions and that I should investigate, in particular, the complexity of these modalities. Thus I studied both the human and non-human agents in the festival network, scrutinising the strategic use of festival locations, the interconnections between the local and the global, the phenomenon of films travelling the circuit and much more. My historical research and analyses led me to believe that the success of international film festivals can also be explained – on a systematic, abstract level – in terms of their spatial and temporal concentration, on the one hand, and their embedding in the festival circuit and festival calendar on the other. The former generates what I called an implosive boiling pot; the concentration of people at the festival site, the news value of the programmes, the ritual character of performances, the pressure of deadlines, the practices of spatial segregation: all contribute to that special festival atmosphere where expectations, buzz and exclusivity inevitably lead up to an implosion of the event into cultural value for films
and filmmakers. The embedding of the festival within the larger network, then, ensures that this value can transcend the confinement of the individual event. Media provide global exposure, while films and filmmakers can travel from festival to festival to acquire more exposure and prestige. The festivals are, as indicated, sites of passage, locations from where filmmakers can be inaugurated into the festival network that may be of vital importance to them throughout their careers. When one looks at the international film festival circuit from a spatial point of view, its complexity can be understood as an interrelation of the local with the global; the city with the nation; and the place of the event with the space of the media. From a temporal perspective the festivals revolve around both current affairs (programming as a politics of participation), the latest discoveries, news value, and around historicity, as the oldest festivals rely on their glorious past and city history to maintain nodal positions on the circuit.

A limitation of the ANT approach is that it offers few critical tools for assessing power relations. Using the notion of “obligatory points of passage,” one can assert that some festivals assume more powerful positions than others, but the analysis becomes problematic when one wants to explain what the effects are of the inequalities that are an intrinsic part of the festival network. With ANT, one could describe the relations in the network as a task division between major and smaller festivals. The major media events, the ones that attract most media representatives and industry professionals, are the central nodes in the festival network, while the smaller festivals perform specific functions, for instance supporting new talented directors, paying attention to specific genres or serving as a cultural-political platform for (ethnic) minority groups. Together, the festivals offer a heterogeneous, spatially-dispersed system in which every film can find an event somewhere that suits its interests best and filmmakers, in addition, can grow within the system to different levels of establishment. However, overlooked in this description are the neo-colonial tendencies that persist in the new configurations. Other theories are needed to formulate such a critique. Following, for example, Hardt and Negri’s notion of empire, it becomes possible to assess the current forms of domination that characterise the transnational dynamics of the festival network: Western festivals continue to be the most important gateways for the cultural legitimisation of world cinema; Western funding has a disproportionate influence on international co-productions; and the primacy of Western taste results in the “ghettoisation” of cinemas from developing countries in the less prestigious programme sections of the festivals. The question, however, remains whether this is an issue of representation or repression. Does the festival network provide the much-needed representation of world cinemas, offering opportunities for international exposure, and standing up for neglected or censored socio-political problems and cultural identities in independent forums where artists are free to speak out? Or does it repress the autonomy of economically-vulnerable cinemas, appropriating achievements such as the festivals’ discoveries, and sanctioning the internationally-appreciated “festival hits” as
the standard for new national productions? As my concluding discussion of the "successful or safe" issue has shown, the festival network is too complex and ambiguous to give a straightforward answer. Further research on this element of the festival network is therefore most welcome.