## BRIDGING THE GAP: FILM FESTIVAL GOVERNANCE, PUBLIC PARTNERS AND THE "V

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# BRIDGING THE GAP: FILM FESTIVAL GOVERNANCE, PUBLIC PARTNERS AND THE "VEXING" PROBLEM OF FILM DISTRIBUTION

Résumé: En 2004, des préoccupations au sujet de la gouvernance des festivals de films et l'essor d'un cadre de travail fondé sur la mesure de la performance ont incité Téléfilm Canada à reconsidérer le support que l'organisme accordait aux festivals locaux. Une série de rapports a tenté de délimiter les facteurs de succès pour établir la valeur de l'évènement. Cette initiative a malencontreusement donné forme à une intervention malhabile auprès du festival de Montréal et a conduit à réviser le programme Le Canada à l'affiche. Parce que leurs fonctions incluent le développement professionnel, la mise en marché ainsi que l'accès à la culture, les festivals de films se sont avérés diffi ciles à situer sur l'échelle de valeur d'une industrie définissant l'audience nationale à la fois comme public et comme marché. Cet essai examine la relation entre le financement fédéral et la gouvernance des festivals, en particulier à travers les rapports L'analyse des grands festivals de films canadiens (2004), Pratiques exemplaires pour le financement des festivals (2006), Évaluation de l'aide octroyée par Téléfilm aux festivals audiovisuels canadiens (2007). Des tensions non résolues entre, d'une part, les objectifs stratégiques visant à construire l'industrie et, d'autre part, ceux visant à construire les audiences apparaissent dès lors informer les visées trop englobantes d'une politique culturelle de stimulation du cinéma national.

ilm festivals are significant contributors to the Canadian cultural scene, serving as sites where industry connections are forged and support is rallied for national cinema. And yet, there has been persistent uncertainty about issues of governance, particularly as regards the management of stakeholder interests on an increasingly crowded domestic circuit. As non-profit organizations, Canadian film festivals are hybrid public-private enterprises, reliant on state support as one of several key revenue streams but with a fiduciary duty to their own board of directors. For their public-sector partners, the need to rationalize funding requires tangible outcomes, which can be difficult to pinpoint when considering how festival acclaim translates to return on investment. Sparked by concerns about the governance of the Montreal World Film Festival and the ongoing realignment of support mechanisms for performance measurement, Telefilm Canada embarked on a comprehensive review of domestic audiovisual festivals in 2004. Informed by a series of consultancy reports, the process unfolded with a messy multi-year intervention into the Montreal festival scene, the revision of the sponsorship model of Canada Showcase and its eventual replacement in 2008 by the Festivals Performance and Skills and Screens Funds, designed to target audience size and

CANADIAN JOURNAL OF FILM STUDIES • REVUE CANADIENNE D'ÉTUDES CINÉMATOGRAPHIQUES VOLUME 21 NO. 1 • SPRING • PRINTEMPS 2012 • pp 2-20 industry capacity. Also at stake in these reports was the role of Telefilm itself as a cultural investor. While the failed attempt to disrupt the operation of a major festival represents an overestimation of their potential role as overseer of stakeholder interests on the domestic festival circuit, a more troubling policy blind spot obscures the value chain from film festival to box office. Federal policy defines the national audience both as a public joined through their consumption of cultural texts and as a market targeted by industry initiatives. An examination of the relationship between federal funding and festival governance draws attention to unresolved tensions between the strategic objectives of building the industry and audiences, and the overarching cultural policy goal of fostering national cinema.

Distribution remains a key sticking point in the development of Canadian screen culture, and the longstanding production stimulus of the Capital Cost Allowance tax shelter, and the State's refusal to impose discriminatory box office quotas or levies, have not helped improve access to the theatrical market. The issue of the availability of Canadian films to mainstream audiences is, in many ways, a defining characteristic of Canadian cinema such that it can be invoked without citation or lengthy explication. In his examination of policy transformations of the early 1980s, including the re-structuring of the CFDC into Telefilm Canada and the launch of the Canadian Broadcast Development Fund, Peter Urguhart explains that the "shift towards a model that emphasized broadcast over theatrical release would seem on the surface to provide a partial solution to the vexing problem of distribution."1 Urquhart's use of this particular turn of phrase points to a shared understanding of Canadian cinema that confounds policy analysis and delimits film studies discourse. "Vexing" is a preferred descriptor that also pops up in Zoë Druick's discussion of "the vexing questions of Canadian cinema,"<sup>2</sup> in Charles Acland's nod to "the vexing concept of national cinema,"<sup>3</sup> and even in Telefilm's Corporate Plan, which mentions the "often-vexing problem [of] how to reach the audience."<sup>4</sup> These shorthand references capture the complexities of limited access, absence of awareness, and thwarted popularity while alluding to a problem that is both fiscal and cultural. In the Canadian context, the value of national cinema is both a vexatious economic issue in that indigenous films consistently earn less than a five percent domestic box office share and a symbolic one to the extent that lacklustre theatrical performance is seen as an indication of the chronic absence of a popular national cinema.

Film festivals, on the other hand, are venues that offer a counterpoint to the "vexing" persistence of mainstream distribution barriers. Marijke de Valck characterizes film festivals as "an alternative to distribution," noting that their emergence in post-war Europe enabled national film industries to bypass the American stranglehold on commercial exhibition.<sup>5</sup> She compares festivals to turn of the century itinerant movie shows (of the era before distributors emerged as intermediaries), that screened prints in transitory public spaces, an elaboration that appears to collapse the operational distinctions between distribution and exhibition. Kenneth Turan offers a similar perspective in his explanation of festival proliferation, concurring with Cannes' Pierre-Henri Deleau that "theaters aren't doing their jobs to show films from the rest of the world" and then with TIFF CEO Piers



FILM FESTIVAL GOVERNANCE 3

Handling that festivals comprise "an alternative distribution network."<sup>6</sup> Much as these comments muddle the complex terrain of the political economy of film consumption-from theatre ownership to vertical integration to market dynamics and the behaviour of cinemagoers-the crux of each argument rests with the film festival's ability to elude Hollywood's economic and cultural hegemony. De Valck concludes that "[t]he growth of film festivals and their positioning as alternative exhibition sites has resulted in the institutionalization of a non-profit distribution system in which festival exposure constitutes a substitute for commercial distribution."7 Her formulation is simultaneously richly insightful and highly problematic as it both captures and conceals the economic ramifications of the festival's symbiotic relationship with the commercial sector. While the connotations of separate-ness evoke the successful creation of a public space for cinephilia, it is a precarious substitute for filmmakers who risk becoming "trapped" in a subsidized network that offers limited financial return.<sup>8</sup> For public partners, this scenario is particularly vexing when they fund festivals as a mechanism to expand the national film industry as a whole. This conundrum raises the question of whether the film festival constitutes an alternative venue or a gap that must be bridged.

#### WORLD CLASS CINEMA AT HOME AND ABROAD

Policy goals for film festivals gain further significance in light of Telefilm's limited funding resources, as evidenced in the aforementioned consultancy reports. Secor Consulting's Analysis of Canada's Major Film Festivals lists film professionals, the general public, and public partners as the three main stakeholder groups whose expectations inform assessments of festival performance.9 For each of these groups, the Secor Report delineates a series of success factors that can be used to analyse event value. Taking this model one step further necessitates adding the film festival itself as an organization with distinct needs inflected by these success factors. Topping the list in the Evaluation of Telefilm's Support to Canadian Audiovisual Festivals: Findings and Recommendations report is the observation that the "Program objectives are overly broad and diffuse" with the subsequent recommendation that Telefilm must "tightly focus their support programs" unless they "wish to indiscriminately encourage all of these activities and types of events."<sup>10</sup> Faced with an array of stakeholders whose expectations encompass programming quality, networking opportunities and cultural diversity, these reports compelled Telefilm to hierarchize event value, even though the cultural investor had previously embraced the nascent circuit's inherent hybridity.

The Canadian international film festival developed contemporaneously with the emerging national feature film industry. In the decade and a half that preceded the passing of the CFDC Act in 1967, an industrial discourse about feature film production blossomed alongside (and intertwined with) the cultural nationalist discourse about federal cultural policy that was fostered by the Massey Commission. This period also witnessed the emergence of several internationallyfocussed film festivals.<sup>11</sup> Launched in 1958, the same year as the Vancouver Film Festival, the Stratford International Film Festival ran until 1961 and then was revived ten years later under the stewardship of Gerald Pratley and the Ontario

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Film Institute. In 1960, Pierre Juneau, Guy Côté and Rock Demers organized the Festival international du film de Montréal, which lasted until 1967; a competitive Festival du cinéma canadien was added in 1963, which awarded the Palmarès du film canadien. Several years later in 1971, Claude Chamberlan and Dimitri Eipides, from the Coopérative des cinéastes indépendants, started Montreal's Festival international du cinéma en 16mm which would eventually become the Festival international du nouveau cinéma et de la vidéo in 1984. The predecessor to the Genies, the Canadian Film Awards, began in 1949 and combined public screenings with the presentation of juried awards. In an article commemorating the Awards, inaugural CFA juror Gerald Pratley recalled the presence of Liberal M.P. Robert Winters at Ottawa's Little Elgin theatre with the exclamation that "[i]t was considered quite an achievement in those days to be able to persuade a politician to attend a film event!"<sup>12</sup> He noted that the following year the awards were presented by Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent and then in 1951 "'real' glamour came to the CFA with the arrival of Mary Pickford and her husband, Buddy Rogers."13

This particularly vibrant history has left us with a potentially over-crowded fall festival calendar, one that necessitated establishing priorities for Canadian events for federal funding decisions. In 1976, a Cinema Canada headline proclaimed "Festival Fever Takes Hold of Toronto" as scheduling overlap between the CFA and the first Festival of Festivals generated competition over moviegoers' "time, loyalty and entrance tickets."14 Brian D. Johnson wrote that co-founder and inaugural Director Bill Marshall's plans for the Festival of Festivals generated a "turf war with the local custodians of Canadian film" (Marshall referred to it as "'a huge donnybrook with all the entrenched interests'"), including the CFA and the Ontario Film Institute.<sup>15</sup> Pratley reportedly returned from Cannes that year to discover that the Stratford Film Festival had been cancelled as a result of a drop in funding from both the federal Festivals Bureau and the provincial government.<sup>16</sup> Stephen Chesley speculated that "Stratford had been considered less than necessary in the scheme of things, mainly because of its relatively small attendance and disregard for Canadian films."17 In his discussion of the initial funding of FoF, Marshall wrote that "the federal government told us the Festivals Bureau's job was to place Quebec films in international festivals abroad."<sup>18</sup> This comment referenced the relative absence of English-Canadian cinema at that time<sup>19</sup> and may also have reflected some lingering animosity that would intensify between the Montreal and Toronto festivals.

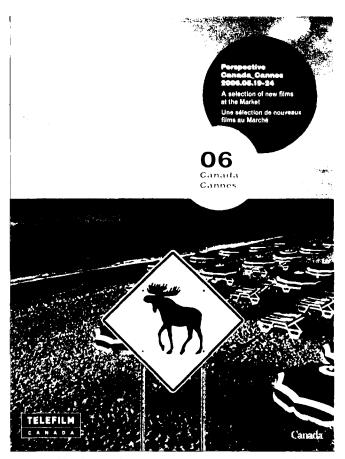
What is significant though, despite Marshall's obvious embellishments, is the extent to which his recollections draw attention to uncertainty regarding the federal government's role in funding Canadian festivals (as opposed to promoting participation overseas). Marshall proceeded to note "regular battles" with Michael Spencer, head of the Canadian Film Development Corporation, about following the Moscow-Karlovy Vary model and holding the Toronto and Montreal festivals in alternate years.<sup>20</sup> After the launch of Montreal's World Film Festival in 1977, critics joined in the debate over whether two world class festivals was one too many. While *Cinema Canada*'s Connie Tadros argued that "[t]wo festi-

FILM FESTIVAL GOVERNANCE 5

vals can only water each other down,"21 Maclean's Joan Fox concluded that "[d]uplication is our historical habit and geographical necessity."<sup>22</sup> In a Cinema Canada editorial, film professor and broadcaster Clive Denton considered the "doubt as to whether Canada should have two officially supported festivals in one summer" as evidence of a "nervously divided country" as well as "a debasement of the original 1930s festival idea."23 Beyond the issue of anxiety over Quebec separatism, Denton argued that festival proliferation, which was already underway in Europe, undermined the notion that "film enthusiasts were actually supposed to travel to the main events" and instead created a series of locally supported gatherings.<sup>24</sup> Jean Lefebvre, the former head of Telefilm's Festivals Bureau, explained that "'in the beginning, the intention-to the extent that there was one-was to have at most one or two international festivals in the entire country."25 However, by the mid-1980s, Canada already hosted "roughly onetenth of all the film festivals in the world" and the Bureau's ad hoc "first-come, first-served'" granting structure failed to make a positive contribution to the debates over what the domestic circuit should look like.<sup>26</sup>

In contrast to the anxieties over the evolution of the domestic circuit and the lack of a clear festivals policy, coverage of festival participation overseas demonstrated greater clarity in the nationalist articulation of goals for industrial development. Tadros explained that at Cannes "one gets a sense of 'Canadian films' and...one can judge by the sales and the reception if 'Canadian films' are doing well or not by international standards."27 In a 1976 article entitled "Why go to Cannes in the first place?" Tadros noted that the Secretary of State's Festivals Bureau sent twenty people to the festival in 1975 and rented a theatre for market screenings of fifteen films. She argued that not only did this approach offer a better showcase than the Canadian Film Awards but also that the annual gathering in Cannes of over 200 Canadian film professionals resulted in the temporary disappearance of regional differences. In other words, prior to the launch of the Festival of Festivals, the identity of the Canadian film industry was expected to coalesce as a national subset of an international film scene. Producer David Perlmutter concurred that "[t]he efforts taken by the Canadian government... have, to a great extent, lifted the cloud of provincialism under which many Canadian producers have had to operate."28 But, beyond building an international industry profile and creating networking opportunities, Perlmutter attributed the significance of the Cannes's market screenings for Canadian films to the fact that "95% of an average film's income potential is outside Canada, with almost 50% outside North America."29

Ten years later, as the Festival of Festivals prepared to celebrate its tenth anniversary, Jacqueline Brodie, former assistant director of the Festivals Bureau, described Cannes as "the symbol of success in cinema" and also observed that 1985 seemed to be "The year of the ministers."<sup>30</sup> The Minister of Communications of Canada and the Minister of Cultural Affairs of Quebec were in attendance along with Ministers of Culture from West Germany and France and MPAA President Jack Valenti. Telefilm Canada had three offices at the Carleton Hotel—an interview room, marketing office and an information centre run by the Festivals



Promotional brochure for the inaugural Perspective Canada Cannes showcase, a series of screenings organized by Telefilm Canada.

Bureau; a nearby office was shared by the Ontario Film and Video Office and the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation, both of whom were promoting their indigenous and service production sectors. These promotional initiatives were pre-cursors to Canada Pavilion and Perspective Canada which now combine to fulfill Telefilm's dual role as facilitator for international sales and a de facto national cinema diplomat. On the home front, the outlook was far less rosy. As 1984 drew to a close, the fourth Atlantic Film Festival and the thirteenth Festival du nouveau cinéma had barely survived severe budget shortfalls, while the twentieth Yorkton Short Film and Video Festival was met with ambivalence encapsulated by producer Stephen Onda's assessment that the event neither harmed nor helped regional production.<sup>31</sup> Questions swirled regarding shaky festival governance, the role of public partners and whether Montreal could (or should) sustain competing events. Two decades later these same core issues would continue to shape the development of domestic festivals policy.

FILM FESTIVAL GOVERNANCE 7

#### **OBJECT OF POLICY: FESTIVAL AS PLATFORM MARKET(ING)**

According to the Evaluation of Telefilm's Support, funding for domestic festivals "helps to ensure that venues are available for the Canadian audiovisual industry... to promote and show Canadian works, as well as for networking, sales and professional development opportunities."32 With the rapid emergence of smaller festivals, it became critical to navigate the distinction between the cultural provision of audience access (a symbolic measure) and the pursuit of box office share (an industrial measure). Following a remark on the excessive number of festivals worldwide and their role in addressing accessibility shortfalls in the exhibition sector, VIFF Director Alan Franey raised the issue of sustainability as "'many festivals are struggling to become viable."33 This financial strain had also been felt by Telefilm with "the demands from existing program participants, as well as new festivals, outstripping the available budget resources."34 Over the course of five fiscal years, grants to "smaller festivals" rose from \$891,000 in 2001-2002 to just over \$1.48 million in 2005-2006-an increase from 35.7% to 45.4% of Telefilm's total commitments to Canadian festivals.<sup>35</sup> Faced with the objective of implementing a comprehensive performance measurement framework, how might return on investment be calculated? According to the International Festivals & Markets 2006-2007 Report's investment analysis, "for every dollar committed to international markets, Canadian companies reported \$5.11 worth of completed sales" with the return on investment reaching 1 to 100 if likely sales were included.<sup>36</sup> In the domestic context however, market access has tended to be more strongly associated with the development and promotion of industry capacity.

Telefilm's Corporate Plan (2006-07 to 2010-11) makes the connection between film festivals and creating awareness for Canadian cinema, but includes this material in a section on Audience Development rather than as part of the overview of Canadian Cinema.<sup>37</sup> The Canadian Cinema section focuses on national and international market access in terms of box office performance, with a reference to expanding performance measurement targets to ancillary markets and digital platforms. In contrast, Audience Development, which raises the issue of designing strategies for festival participation, is grouped with Talent Development and Financing and Sales under the heading of "Building the Industry." This grouping is consistent with From Script to Screen's designation of a Complementary Activities Program aimed at increasing "the national and international profile of Canadian films."<sup>38</sup> Along with domestic and foreign festivals, Complementary Activities lists "alternative distribution networks" as part of the effort to "ensure that Canadian films reach more Canadians in every corner of the country."39 The implication is that improved access would achieve the cultural nationalist goal of binding together the nation's symbolic space, such that the overarching goal here is to reach citizens rather than consumers. A similar separation into industrial and cultural categories is made in Telefilm's Performance Measurement Framework. The strategic objective for building audiences for Film is to have "[g]reater numbers of Canadians enjoy distinctive Canadian films in Canadian theatres" while for Festivals and Awards it is that "Canadian cultural products are promoted to audiences in Canada."40 Only the former goal invokes a connection to the com-

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mercial sector through its indirect reference to theatrical box office.

The delineation of different performance indicators for Festivals and for Film yields a fragmented picture of the viewing of Canadian cinema that both limits the potential of a multiplatform strategy to address all channels for building audiences and sets up challenges for approaching the film festival as either an alternative exhibition site or a nodal point of a non-profit distribution network. Instead, the allusive cluster of performance attributes or desired outcomes falls short of defining exactly what a festival is and what it does. Festivals do not act as distributors per se, even though the linked activities of their print traffic departments function to transport films along the circuit from one event to the next; nor do festivals bypass the business activities of distributors. Mark Peranson argues that distributors and sales agents exert a powerful if not decisive influence over which festivals will play the films they represent.<sup>41</sup> He further notes that sales agents arose as necessary intermediaries for navigating the international festival circuit and that this involvement comprises an extension of their control over the art film market. Being viewed as an exhibitor offers a limited perspective on the festival's role in mediating the symbolic value of films that may be prerelease and pre-canonical, seeking ancillary or foreign market sales, or striving to accumulate critical acclaim that triggers investment in future projects. Crossover to the commercial sector is a critical step in converting this symbolic capital. It could be argued that festivals share an indirect financial stake as intermediaries given that a film's success helps to boost the festival's status (as evidence of a wise programming investment) and may also attract increased stakeholder activity (from industry, media and cinephiles) at future events. If this is indeed the case, then the process by which the festival secures its return on investment requires that the screening event not be the final destination in the film industry value chain.

The consultancy reports set out two models for classifying domestic festivals, both of which involve a split between business and audience festivals.<sup>42</sup> The three categories that emerged from interviews with film industry professionals are "(1) TIFF, (2) large regional festivals, and (3) all others."43 The Toronto International Film Festival stands out due to the event's capacity to attract both "world attention"44 and "influential international industry players."45 Also included in Evaluation of Canada Showcase Program: Summary of Stakeholder Interviews is the shared assessment that "the smaller festivals (category 3) are more cultural events and don't serve any real industrial purpose."46 Following on this differentiation between festivals of cultural interest and those with industry potential, the industry professionals felt that "Telefilm's role should be to support industry."47 Yet, they also argued that "Telefilm's role should be to get the public out," both as a function of the Corporation's audience-building mandate and in recognition of festivals as "an important platform to raise awareness of film."48 The tacit assumption appears to be that increasing the profile of Canadian cinema builds audiences. Without a clearer understanding of how festivals increase demand for Canadian films or impact other distribution platforms, the bridge from film festival to box office persists as a policy blind spot and program objectives appear to remain trapped in the previous federal policy aim of building a national film industry.

FILM FESTIVAL GOVERNANCE

The Evaluation of Telefilm's Support includes a small section on international festival support programs which draws attention to a two-tier approach used in the U.K. and Australia. This approach "effectively separates festival support into two tracks," one which targets "industrially-oriented venues [used] by industry professionals" and another which focuses on audience access to "alternatives to mainstream commercial audiovisual fare." 49 Taken together, these processes rationalize funding support by classifying festivals in terms of strata or tracks that set up dichotomies of audience access vs. industrial development and national/regional reach vs. local focus. The implication of this classificatory framework is a re-articulation of the apparent incompatibility of cultural and industrial objectives. As such, the component parts of the festivals' roles of fostering the film industry and providing access to Canadian cinema are positioned on opposing sides of a policy divide, thereby limiting the potential to conceptualize festivals as alternative distribution platforms for national cinema. Not only is access separated from industry but regional and national reach are prioritized over local focus for sustained funding. Major festivals also would have to contend with standardized performance measures that seek to quantify their impact, an issue designated as "requiring further examination" at the end of the Evaluation of Telefilm's Support.<sup>50</sup> The Best Practices report recommends that funding support be stratified to two different "levels of event"-those of "national or regional relevance" and "local, culturally specific and emerging events."<sup>51</sup>

#### PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND IRRECONCILABLE INTERESTS

As part of the examination of festival support in other countries, Best Practices notes that "most assistance is in the form of sponsorship and does not necessarily fall within the parameters of a set programme."52 The connotations of this support model are clearly negative as the subsequent overview in that report refers to France's multiple initiatives from different programs as having "[n]o set criteria" while Germany has "[n]o set policies for film festival support, though it supports the Berlin Film Festival."53 A reliance on sponsorship arrangements corresponds with limited formalized policy development such that there is "no common strategy" and "very little policy direction."54 The Evaluation of Telefilm's Support is critical of the inclusion of "branding and visibility" as a program objective for Canada Showcase. The recommendations for program design include the stipulation that the procedure for applicant assessment be changed such that "while festivals are obliged to recognize Telefilm's support, such recognition is not a criteria used for evaluation."55 While the same section about "recognition" occurs in both the 2002-2003 and 2006-2007 general program guidelines with the requirement of a "plan for dealing with sponsors' acknowledgement,"56 the criteria have been removed from the 2006-2007 evaluation grid. Funding acknowledgement is still required, but attention is directed at measuring the outcomes of funding support rather than the visibility of the sponsor, thus ensuring a stronger focus on the Feature Film Fund's primary audience building goal.

Prior to internal restructuring that resulted in the creation of an Industry Development Department, Canada Showcase was administered by Telefilm's



Communications Department, a model that reinforced the program's re-doubled role of promoting Canadian cinema and corporate branding. With the reformulation of the evaluation grid, Telefilm re-positioned itself as arbiter of the domestic festival circuit, taking up the role that the Festivals Bureau had been chided for shirking back in the 1980s. At the same time, although the Secor Report of 2004 positions public partners as one of three main stakeholder groups, Telefilm's use of the resulting success model further positions the Corporation as the overseer of everyone's interests. The Report's language subtly reflects this hierarchy as the general public and industry professionals are described in terms of their attendance and use of the festival's resources whereas public partners are seen as playing an active role in facilitating festivals, which implies a level of control. Furthermore, the discussion of the government's film sector objectives incorporates stakeholder involvement or the "capacity to rally and involve the local community, the business world, public partners and, especially, film industry professionals."57 This meta-role, which seems to include public partners rallying their own participation in the film sector (most likely via partnerships between levels of government), subsumes all of the differing stakeholder expectations within one overarching set of success factors. Given the study's objective "to provide public partners...with an analytical framework that will allow them to evaluate the impact of their film festival investments,"58 it is not surprising that the delineation of success factors is skewed through the lens of the broad interests of government agencies.

With sixty percent of the revised Canada Showcase evaluation grid focussed on governance structure and positioning, success factors garner less than half of the points while the interests of public sector partners appear to reach beyond overseeing stakeholders' expectations. Instead, the weighting of the assessment criteria suggest that Telefilm may be attempting to stand in for the regulatory body FIAPF (International Federation of Film Producers Associations) in monitoring the Canadian festival circuit. After the Montreal World Film Festival's accreditation lapsed in late 2002,59 TIFF became Canada's only accredited event; and since "no American event belongs to the Federation,"60 FIAPF remains focussed almost exclusively on Europe and Asia. Yet, aside from Telefilm's potential role as domestic festival arbiter, there is a separate question as to whether the assessment of governance structure makes a fundamental error in overestimating the festivals' reliance on, and accountability to, the federal funding agency. In terms of their legal status, Canada's major festivals are non-profit corporations, which means they "must demonstrate a high level of transparency and effective governance," and that they are "independent organizations that do not report directly to public authorities."61 In contrast, the Festival de Cannes operates under the auspices of the Ministries of Culture and Foreign Affairs while the Berlinale is a division of the German Ministry of Culture. Consequently, for Canadian festivals, their fiduciary duty is overseen by a board of directors while a public/private funding structure makes them selectively answerable to multiple stakeholders.

With the Secor Report, specific attention was directed toward the Montreal World Film Festival. According to the announcement that accompanied the release

FILM FESTIVAL GOVERNANCE

of the study, Telefilm and Quebec funding agency SODEC (Société de développement des entreprises culturelles) commissioned Secor Consulting to analyse the success factors of Canada's four major festivals "[o]n the basis of a shared wish to critically assess Montréal's World Film Festival."62 A Background Report that was prepared for the Minister of Heritage in 2006 offered a slightly less accusatory perspective by contextualizing the Secor study in relation to corporate planning that was aimed at "optimizing the impact of [Telefilm's] funding activities"63 and thus included a reassessment of Canada Showcase. In addition, as noted in the Background Report, the 2002-2003 Canada Showcase guidelines stipulated that festival funding is "conditional on Telefilm's right to 'audit all accounts and records of the applicant to ensure that funds provided were used for the purposes intended'."64 The Montreal World Film Festival management and Chair of the Board refused to participate in the study<sup>65</sup> and, during the same period, disrupted an audit of their books by Richter & Associés.66 The Secor Report observes that the WFF management was "overtly criticized by the local industry" for a "lack of openness and generosity" while foreign professionals "cite[d] flaws in the quality of the hospitality and overall organization."<sup>67</sup> As for public partner expectations, the festival's "organization and its governance" fell short, mostly due to "a lack of transparency" but also because of a lack of evolution in its financial structure which was deemed to have relied disproportionately on public funding in comparison to the other three major festivals.68

Based on the Richter audit, over \$125,000 in funding was withheld from the 2004 WFF as a partial reimbursement of funds for the 2003 event.<sup>69</sup> Shortly thereafter, Telefilm and SODEC issued a Call for Proposals that would re-direct their funding support to a film event in Montreal that would "ensure Canadian cinema 'a national and international platform...that offers the best in terms of programming, promotion, and business development, including sales and coproduction'."70 Four proposals were submitted and the Background Report details the ensuing selection process that resulted in funding approval for l'Equipe Spectra, a firm previously known for organizing Montreal's jazz festival.<sup>71</sup> The Spectra proposal was mandated by a group of eighteen high-ranking industry professionals (referred to in the Background Report as "Regroupement") that included François Macerola, Denise Robert, Christian Larouche and Victor Loewy and an endorsement from NFB Chair and Government Film Commissioner Jacques Bensimon.<sup>72</sup> Meanwhile, in December of 2004, the World Film Festival filed a lawsuit in Quebec Superior Court "alleging that its reputation had been unjustly besmirched"73 and seeking \$2.5 million in damages. In 2005, WFF also filed in Federal Court for a judicial review of the Call for Proposals and the decision to select one of the proposals.

It is interesting to note that these events coincided with other international examples of public sector intervention into festival governance. In April 2005, the Greek Ministry of Culture removed the president and artistic director of the Thessaloniki International Film Festival from their posts as part of "sweeping changes to state subsidised film institutions" that followed the election of a new Conservative government.<sup>74</sup> That same year, the firing of the director and program manager of the Buenos Aires International Film Festival by the city government

sparked an international protest that included a petition written by French filmmaker Claire Denis and *Cahier du Cinéma* editor Jean-Michel Frodon.<sup>75</sup> Thus, the issues of festival accountability, government control and programming autonomy undoubtedly were topics of discussion for those directly involved with the international festival circuit. Given that the complexities of the WFF controversy would not be illuminated more fully until the following year when the federal government "asked for a detailed report on the way funding from the federal cultural agency was funnelled to a fledgling film festival,"<sup>76</sup> it appeared that the ultimate objective was to unseat WFF Director Serge Losique.

As the 2005 festival season unfolded, "[t]he conventional wisdom was that, after Telefilm Canada and SODEC yanked their funding from the WFF, it would fold."77 But this did not happen and instead the fall of 2006 saw three international film festivals in Montreal within an eight-week period-WFF, FNC and the new Montreal International Film Festival; Losique sued over naming rights and Spectra's event became known as the New Montreal FilmFest. Playback reported that filmmakers were confused regarding which festival would provide their work with the best possible public and media exposure.<sup>78</sup> Industry concerns about the New FilmFest spread as distributor New Line withdrew the closing night film (Domino, Scott, 2005), noting that "no talent was set to accompany the film to Montreal" and "there was no point screening the pic...so far in advance of its commercial launch."79 The Variety article proceeded to mention "near-empty cinemas" and to quote public squabbles between the festival's president and program director over the event's organizational shortcomings.<sup>80</sup> On closing night, the festival apologized for the poor attendance and admitted that "'this edition did not measure up to expectations'."81 Screen Daily noted "gleeful competition among Montreal journalists trying to find cinemas with the fewest paying customers."82 Five months later, the New FilmFest folded with L'Equipe Spectra president Alain Simard explaining that "'we wanted at all costs to avoid having Montreal again project an incoherent image internationally with the holding of various competing festivals."83

In a 2007 Globe and Mail article about WFF's "stormy two-year hiatus," James Adams summarized that "SODEC and Telefilm together pulled more than \$1-million in investments from the World Film Festival in 2005 and essentially redirected that money, along with an additional \$750,000, to what turned out to be the ill-fated New Montreal FilmFest."<sup>84</sup> The contributions of Telefilm's review of domestic festival support need to be interpreted in relation to two key timing issues. The launches of TIFF and WFF occurred after the evolution of programming autonomy on the international circuit, which set the stage for the development of a hybrid private/public governance structure within independent non-profit organizations. As a result, major Canadian festivals are best understood in terms of a relational perspective on stakeholder struggles, as no one group predominates. In addition, the impetus behind Telefilm's attempt to re-define its role from sponsor to arbiter probably had more to do with the perceived need to rein in a major festival run amok than with the realignment of strategic objectives vis-à-vis the Corporate Plan. The *Background Report* prepared for the Minister of Heritage

FILM FESTIVAL GOVERNANCE 13

points to the alleged mismanagement of government funding (even though most of the details are blacked out for confidentially reasons), a scenario that was exacerbated by the intervention of Telefilm and SODEC. The untenable festival traffic jam and the failure of the new event selected for funding provide little positive support for Telefilm's initial efforts to take a proactive role with the domestic circuit. Consequently, the shoring up of festival policy and the direction taken with the new guidelines have to be read against the Montreal festival funding debacle.

### POSTSCRIPT: NEW POLICY DIRECTIONS OR SAME VEXING DEADENDS?

In 2007, the Montreal World Film Festival celebrated its thirty-first anniversary by declaring that "everything is back to normal."<sup>85</sup> SODEC contributed \$270,000, Telefilm returned as an investor with a modest commitment to subtitle twelve films, major distributors like Seville Pictures "restored relations," FIAPF A-status was restored, "Losique quietly dropped the \$2.5 million lawsuit," and the festival seemed to have "regained the lustre it had in the late 1970s and early 1980s as Canada's premiere film fete."86 A couple of months later, Telefilm announced that additional financing of up to \$249,000 would be provided for the thirty-first WFF. According to Telefilm's official statement, "negotiations between the two parties featured extended discussions concerning the WFF meeting the Corporation's terms and conditions, including the immediate implementation of measures to enhance corporate governance and strengthen financial controls."87 This listing of the WFF's health indicators, including the return of its lustre, indicates that the balance of stakeholder interests appears to have been restored. At the same time though, this resolution is also consistent with the assessment that stakeholder responses in interviews concerning Canada Showcase "were filtered through a lens of self-interest,"88

Faced with the proliferation of festivals on the domestic circuit, it is important to consider the impact of these seemingly irreconcilable interests. A key finding of the study of stakeholder interviews relates to the "disparity between how festival professionals perceive their events, and how film industry professionalsproducers, directors, distributors-perceive events."89While festival directors share a common view that their events provide valuable exposure and instrumental professional opportunities,<sup>90</sup> industry stakeholders provide a "more nuanced"<sup>91</sup> perspective. Although events like VIFF and the Atlantic Film Festival can facilitate regional release schedules or provide networking opportunities at specific forum sessions, TIFF comprises "a world-class event" of a size and scope that make it "a platform for 'virtually anything'."<sup>92</sup> Opinions diverge on the topic of audience access with the opportunity to obtain feedback balanced against the concern that festivals "deplete the audience for Canadian film without providing financial benefits to producers or distributors."93 At the same time, it is characterized as "'a bit of a false audience [because] people who go to film festivals are not typical moviegoers, they are enthusiasts."94 For the catchall third category of "smaller festivals," participation is seen as increasingly "burdensome in terms of time, money and overhead."95As a result, given the recommendation that "[a]udiences should bea critical factor in evaluating festival support,"96 it is necessary to clarify how the

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audience is being defined and by whom. Is it a "false audience" of cinephiles or a valuable promotional tool or a lost portion of commercial revenue? How does the issue of access to a diverse range of cultural products factor into the mix? Finally, for the sake of Telefilm's primary objective of audience building, how does all of this affect domestic market share? The question of whether (or how) festival support builds domestic audiences for Canadian cinema is a vexing one that remains unresolved in Telefilm's new funding guidelines.

In 2008, Canada Showcase was replaced by two new programs-the Festivals Performance Program and the Skills and Screens Program. The performance envelope model places the bulk of its emphasis on market success, targeting events that "achieve a minimum of 100,000 in overall attendance at the screening of feature length films,"97 and eliminates elements from the Canada Showcase evaluation grid that addressed aspects of cultural impact, such as "program quality and calibre," and of community impact through the "enhancement of the existing local cinematic menu."98 Instead, the implication is that the "predictable core funding" set as a policy outcome<sup>99</sup> will accrue on a multi-year basis to the major film festivals, in keeping with a recommendation noted in the stakeholder interviews. As a complement to the audience-focus of Festivals Performance, the Skills and Screens Program targets the objective of building industry capacity, as filtered through the key strategic outcomes of increased "awareness and accessibility of Canadian talent and content," "foreign sales and financing opportunities" and "practical training opportunities" for "new talent and diverse voices."100 Funding support is determined through an annual competition held in each of Telefilm's four regional offices. The evaluation criteria, which do not stipulate relative weighting, include a business plan aligned with Telefilm's strategic objectives and the region's "unique needs," fiscal stability and "track records" of the event and team.<sup>101</sup> Finally, it is interesting to note that "Visibility" returns to the evaluation grid, making Telefilm branding once again a criterion for festival support.

The selective nature of the Skills and Screens competitive application allows for some discretion in influencing the development of the domestic festival circuit; but the sense of regulatory panic inspired by the WFF controversy has subsided. With \$2.5 million set aside for the selective component, as compared to \$1.2 million for the performance envelopes, Skills and Screens takes up almost seventy percent of the funds allocated for domestic festival support.<sup>102</sup> Taken alongside the concentration on industrial outcomes, this suggests that Telefilm policy reflects a conceptualization of regional festivals as intermediaries in the industry value chain. The third category of local cultural events, defined by the relative absence of professional opportunities, seems destined to have to look elsewhere for public support (ie: Canada Council). For the major festivals, the implications are less clear. Popularity as a signal of event value points to Telefilm's stated "[belief] that the extent to which Canadians watch and use the products it helps finance is the key measure of success in meeting its mandate."103 But it also raises the spectre of market share without reconciling the split between theatrical and festival audiences. There is no explanation of how festival

FILM FESTIVAL GOVERNANCE 15

audiences in excess of 100,000 contribute to the primary audience-building goal of the Canada Feature Film Fund, which is measured as industrial market share. Instead, the vestiges of a cultural mandate to build industry render an incomplete view of the film commodity value chain. The festival eludes the grasp of federal policy due to its range of functions from professional development to marketing and cultural access that straddle the gap between production and consumption. Faced with the proliferation of these alternative exhibition sites, including the investment of major festivals like VIFF and TIFF in bricks and mortar, there is a missed opportunity here to consider what role these venues might play in addressing the distribution problems that have long plagued Canadian cinema especially given that the festival circuit is the one area of distribution that federal regulators can (and already) influence. Ultimately, the federal policy review resulted in a re-packaging of the same vexing anomalies rather than a dynamic re-visioning of the myriad screening locations that comprise Canada's multiplatform environment.

#### NOTES

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- 58. Ibid., 12.
- 59. James Adams notes the lack of clarity as to whether the accreditation was "withdrawn" at the request of World Film Festival organizers who felt the ranking "'was of no use'" or denied by FIAPF because the event's 2003 dates were set without their approval. In 2003, the dates of the Montreal festival were set to overlap with those of Venice and Toronto. James Adams, "Montreal Film Fest Absent Its A-list Status," The Globe and Mail, 18 June 2003, http://www.globeandmail.com.
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- 64. 1bid.
- 65. Secor Consulting, 2.
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- 70. Ibid., 14.
- 71. Although the process initially had favoured a proposal from the Festival de nouveau cinéma (FNC) (Telefilm, *Background Report*, 17), the applicants were asked to re-submit more fully developed proposals (19) at which time Spectra stood out for "organizational expertise" while FNC was recognized for "in-depth knowledge of the industry" (21). After an attempted strategic alliance with Spectra was rejected by the FNC board causing Board Chair Daniel Langlois to join the Regroupement board, the Spectra proposal was approved (24).
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FILM FESTIVAL GOVERNANCE 19

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