

INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVALS AS PRODUCERS OF WORLD CINEMA

Dorota Ostrowska, Birkbeck College – University of London

In the last ten years major international film festivals such as Cannes, Berlin and Rotterdam have established special funds and film-makers' residence programmes to support particular film-making projects. Cannes' Cinéfondation, Berlin's World Cinema Fund and Rotterdam's The Hubert Bals Fund and Cinemart champion film-makers who come from "developing countries" (The Hubert Bals Fund, Rotterdam), "transition countries" (World Cinema Fund, Berlin) or simply those who are "the next generation of international film-makers" (Cinéfondation, Cannes)¹. The existence of these funds raises a number of questions about the ways in which these film festivals shape contemporary production and distribution practices of independent cinema on the global level.

Firstly, though the film festivals have no funds to invest in film production, they help a select-group of film-makers and independent producers to navigate and access the complex network of film industry contacts. Why did the film festivals become so interested and involved in talent development in recent years? What caused the shift in their primary role as exhibitors and programmers to that of *de facto* creative producers focused on project development?

Secondly, being picked up by Cannes, Berlin or Rotterdam means a chance for a film-maker of becoming a "Cannes," "Berlin" or "Rotterdam" director and being nurtured by the particular festival and its extensive network of contacts. By developing talent the festivals also exercise a high degree of quality control over the projects, which often become successful on the festival circuit and achieve theatrical distribution. What impact does being selected by a major film festival have on a filmmaker's career and how does the selection affect the chances of festival or even theatrical exhibition of certain films?

Thirdly, the projects supported by the festival funds are always co-productions involving a producer from the director's home country and European and sometimes North American producers. The projects come from different parts of the world, often from places which have a very weak film culture, particularly as regards auteur, arthouse and independent cinema. What is the profile of a typical film-maker who receives funding from one or another of these festivals? Do the projects privileged by the festival have specific characteristics formally and in terms of the themes they treat?

Fourthly, there appears to be a correlation between the debates around "world cinema" and the projects enabled by festival funds². This correlation is related to the timing of scholarly debates around the category of "world cinema" and to the role of the festivals in actively fostering non-Western arthouse film-making. How are the festivals, through the funds, instrumental in generating interest in "world cinema?" What is the impact that this interest has had on how "world cinema" is understood today?

I am not able to consider all of the funds here or analyse in detail the connections which exist between them, as they form a complex and extensive map. I will instead discuss the Cannes

Cinéfondation in some depth. I want to look closer at the Cannes initiative for three reasons; firstly, Cannes is a trendsetter in the world of arthouse cinema and a destination of choice for many independent film-makers and producers. For this reason it is interesting to see how the Cinéfondation partakes in developing the Cannes film and Cannes film director – all part of the Cannes festival's global brand. Secondly, Cannes has the biggest and most important industry market among all major film festivals, which was critical in the decision to set up the Cinéfondation³. Thirdly, Cannes Cinéfondation has been resisting the label of “world cinema” and “developing world” embraced by other funds. Instead it champions the idea of arthouse and auteur cinema with a global dimension. Since the films promoted by Cannes also circulate at Berlinale and the Rotterdam Film Festival, it is very peculiar to see Cannes resisting the “world cinema” label. It appears that through the Cinéfondation Cannes is promoting a particularly French kind of world cinema which could be called “French-global cinema.”

I will argue that film festivals' funding initiatives are instrumental in enabling production of arthouse films made by transnational auteurs who come from developing countries or find themselves marginalised in their countries of origins. The role of the film festivals has intensified in the last ten years because of shifts in the global film industry, in particular in relation to the independent sector. The festival films are as much rooted in their directors' countries of origin as the places from which their funders come. What makes these films different from the films usually considered “world cinema” is that it is very difficult to see them as examples of national cinema or products of national or indigenous cultures, although they more often than not come to represent that culture internationally. Rather, they are products of the transnational film festival circuit, which is driven by the arthouse cinema ethos, and for which the most important exhibition circuit is that of various film festivals.

Cannes Cinéfondation: Film School Competition (La Sélection), Résidence, Atelier

Cannes Cinéfondation consists of three distinct but interconnected initiatives: La Sélection, the festival competition of films from film schools; Résidence, a writing lab in Paris; and Atelier, an opportunity for certain film-makers and producers with a project to secure funding.

The first part of the Cinéfondation, the selection and competition of the film school films, began in 1998 and is devoted to finding new film-making talent. More than 1500 student films are sent every year to the Cinéfondation. From this number, the Cinéfondation selects 15-20 short and medium-length films each year⁴. The attraction and prestige of the Cinéfondation comes from the fact that its selection forms part of the Official Cannes Film Festival Selections. The films are judged by a distinguished jury headed by an accomplished filmmaker. The further attraction of the Cinéfondation are monetary prizes for the top three films awarded in order to help the prize-winners finance their next film projects. The first prize winner of the Cinéfondation is also guaranteed that his or her first feature film will be presented at the Festival de Cannes. For these reasons becoming part of the Cinéfondation and winning the prize means entering into a relationship with the Cannes film festival which is important in the career development of the young auteurs.

The festival's efforts to draw film-makers from all over the world is a rather difficult matter, as the great majority of the film schools that have submitted films to La Sélection are either North American or European. This problem is in part resolved by inviting to the competition foreign students studying at various national film schools.

Another section of the Cinéfondation, called “Résidence” was set up almost concurrently with La Sélection. This programme offers film-makers an opportunity to spend four months in a Parisian flat and to devote themselves to developing a script for their feature film, usually their

first or second work. The selection is based on the quality of the proposed projects. The recurring and shared characteristics of the film-makers chosen to participate is the fact that they have won prizes at major festivals for previous projects and that they were participants at the Berlinale Talent Campus, Rotterdam Cinemart or Sundance writing lab. Whilst in the case of the short films selected by the Cinéfondation for the Cannes competition, the quality was assured by the film-makers' association with a particular film school, in the case of the Résidence it is the link to the A-festival network which serves as a quality control mechanism. Among 120 film-makers who have participated in the Résidence programme in the last 10 years, 21 had their student films selected for the competition in Cannes earlier on⁵. This is quite a large group of film-makers with whom the Cannes festival continues its relationship and whose talent it fosters.

The organisers of the Résidence assume that a participating film-maker will have the traditional profile of an auteur filmmaker – that of a writer-director. According to the Rules and Regulations of the Résidence programme, “every film-maker is accompanied in the development of his or her script” and given advice on how to get the project to the production stage⁶. There are opportunities to interact with producers through forums organised by the Résidence, which give these film-makers insight into the co-production systems of France and Europe. The relationship with the Cannes festival Cinéfondation is not terminated when the Résidence is finished. The scripts are presented for consideration by the producers at Rotterdam (Cinemart), Locarno (Open Doors), and Cannes (Marché). The Cinéfondation continues to work with the film-makers and assists them with the development of their projects, which may include help with the translation of their scripts, or inviting the film-maker to the Cannes Atelier. Nearly 50 of the Résidence participants have made their films, which were mostly shown at festivals but in some cases did manage to reach theatrical distribution. The opportunities for theatrical distribution are more readily available to the award-winning films.

Launched in 2005 “Atelier” is the newest edition to the Cannes’ talent development initiatives. It functions very much like the Cinemart in Rotterdam, where a film-maker who has a project and their producer are invited to a series of meetings at the time of the festival, giving them a chance to find financiers for their project. Each year about 15 projects are invited. The film-makers are selected on the basis of their existing portfolio of films and the progress made on the financing of their current project. Significantly, a film-maker cannot apply to enter the Cannes Atelier. Rather, an artist is invited by the Cinéfondation to take part. This means that a film-maker or his/her producer must already be part of the Cannes or the wider film festival network in order to attract the attention of the Cannes Cinéfondation. It is not surprising that among the 97 Atelier participants of the last 5 years, 15 have actually participated in the Cannes Résidence programme⁷. The ambition of the Atelier organisers is to actively foster the development of the projects which could gain acclaim in Cannes or at other festivals.

Cinéfondation and Marché du Film at Cannes

The timing of the Cinéfondation funding, training and networking initiatives has been particularly important to the Cinéfondation’s success. The interest that the Festival or, to be precise, its president Gilles Jacob took in the development of the new talent coincided with an important moment in the history of independent and arthouse cinema. This moment was defined by the changes brought about by the introduction of video as an alternative way of distributing films and fostering cinephilia, and the rise of companies such as Miramax, which were ready to invest in independent films and came up with a formula for low-budget blockbusters. Furthermore, the growing awareness of talent outside

Europe and the West in the form of the Chinese 5th Generation in the late 1980s and Iranian cinema in the 1990s expanded in new ways the definition of auteur, independent and arthouse cinema. In addition, the volume of production coming out of India, Bollywood, although very different from the Western arthouse, was important because it created an acute sense in the independent sector that there may be some ways to challenge Hollywood's hegemony.

The Cinéfondation signalled Cannes' decision to foster a type of cinema which could be described as "festival film." This production-oriented strategy, focussed on film development, made a lot of sense not only due to the global trends in the film industry but also because of the exponential growth of the Cannes Marché du Film, which positioned itself as a meeting place and a focus for the independent sector of the increasingly globalised film industry. The success of the Cinéfondation and to a large degree its very existence were closely interwoven with the fortunes of the Marché du Film.

Established in 1959 Marché has been around for over 50 years. Traditionally, it has offered an opportunity for film distributors and producers, mostly French, to gather and network. Jérôme Paillard became the Director General of the Cannes Film Market in 1995 and took it in an international direction. This was possible because Paillard's term coincided with an increase in the market for independent films produced in different corners of the world. The Cinéfondation programmes coincided with these new developments.

In 2004 the Marché launched an important new project – the Producers' Network – which became an annual meeting place for about 550 producers from all over the world. Access to the Network is granted to a selected group of producers who meet the Marché's criteria. The producers must have a portfolio of projects when coming to Cannes, including at least one film which has had theatrical distribution. The Producers' Network was established because of the realisation that independent film projects nowadays require international funding⁸. The Marché became the place for the international funders to meet each other and to take their projects off the ground. The Festival seemed to "piggy-back" on this new strategy and founded the Atelier – which became a boutique part of the Marché where the Festival can exercise a great degree of quality control over the projects it is backing.

It is clear that the Marché and the Cannes Festival are not one, but they are interlinked in a number of interesting ways. We see the Festival dipping into the resources of the Marché in order to promote a certain type of auteur and arthouse project. They are a fraction of what is being sold, discussed and proposed at the market. But when we take into account the fact that there are other markets in operation (Cine-Mart, Berlin Co-Production market and various regional ones), then we see that collectively the festival circuit is very strongly implicated in the film production which is being presented and promoted via these markets. It is also important to note that the out-of-Cannes address of Marché and Cinéfondation is the same: 3, rue Amélie 75007 Paris, which suggests that the Marché and Cinéfondation managers are able to continue to communicate all year around, not just in May at the time of the Festival. This is important for taking particularly valued projects forward during the year.

World cinema, national cinema or "French-global?"

The projects fostered by the Cannes festival Cinéfondation have an ambiguous relationship with the audiences in their film-makers' countries of origin and with those countries' national cultures.

The festivals offer film-makers not only a career path but also more attention than they might have received in their countries of origin. This suggests that the festival circuit creates a unique environment for film-makers and their films, thus begging the question: Is the Cannes festival really a transnational cinematic utopia – a "republic of cinema" – as it likes to call itself? As we

will see the festival funding structure does support the claim of the festival's financial independence, which in turn has an impact on the festival's talent-development programmes.

The Cannes festival has a budget of about 20 million Euros, half of which originates from public funding. This financing is completed by contributions from a number of professional and institutional groups along with the Festival's official partners. With half of the financing coming from private sources, it is clear that the festival has been working towards greater financial autonomy but also towards independence from different obligations and pressures which come with the reliance on public funders.

Through the Cinéfondation programmes the festival is cultivating and encouraging the idea of cinematic transnationalism, which the financial structure of the festival facilitates. One could presume that the more independent the festival is from French public funding bodies, the more flexibility it has in the kind of projects it ends up promoting and supporting. What seems to be paramount for the festival is to find and "sign up" the highest calibre of film-makers from across the globe and help them with their projects, whose box office value or connection with French culture might be insignificant but whose artistic quality is hard to question. The transnationalism underpinning the festival's objectives is evident in the selection of short films, which are submitted by various national film schools. These national film schools often apply with films by young directors who come from different countries than the country in which they studied. The participants in the Résidence and Atelier programmes had similarly transnational backgrounds. Although it is probably incorrect to claim that Cannes singles out these transnational figures to participate in their programmes, the fact that the works of individuals with such complex profiles are selected and present in such high numbers eventually shapes what arthouse cinema gets exhibited on the festival circuit. Importantly, these artists are likely to make films which are aimed not just at national but also at foreign and transnational audiences.

In a similar way, the projects of film-makers participating in Atelier whose projects originate in and are thematically linked to their countries of origin nonetheless have immediately apparent transnational dimensions. Although all of the films in the Atelier section have a producer in their country of origin, these producers, in taking the project to Cannes Atelier, are already thinking about their projects as transnational – with local stories, made in the local language, but attractive to the festival and global arthouse audiences.

This internationalising tendency of the Cannes Festival is complicated by the presence of many French characteristics in the Cinéfondation programme. The very ethos of *cinéma d'auteur* is a French invention. The idea of arthouse cinema as French *cinéma d'auteur* is given a particular spin in the context of the Résidence programme. The script projects selected by the Résidence are evaluated by a jury which has been invariably headed by a French auteur director.

A very important French stamp on the Résidence is the link between the projects for which the festival is the vehicle and French producers. For instance, the projects participating in the Résidence compete for a 20,000 Euros prize called "The Opening Shot." The prize is awarded to the best script, which has to have a French partner attached to it⁹. The presence of French production partners has also been very high in the case of Atelier projects. It is important to note that all the films which had French co-producers were also distributed in France. At the same time only the ones which won major festival prizes were able to secure distribution in territories other than France. This means that these international co-productions fostered by Cannes stimulate the French industry and provide a steady flow of "world cinema" for French screens.

The interlocking which exists between the idea of international arthouse cinema promoted in Cannes and French culture is also apparent in regard to the projects which are part of the "Cinéma du monde" programme. Launched in 2005 in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs and the South Cinema Fund¹⁰, this program's aim was "to illustrate the vitali-

ty and diversity of cinema throughout the world, the dynamism of its young creative talent and the involvement of its institutions in promoting *cinéma d'auteur*"¹¹. The "Cinéma du monde" initiative was the first time when the Cannes festival explicitly linked the notion of world cinema, very broadly defined, with that of auteur cinema. Films grouped in the Cinéma du monde category were housed in a special pavilion where meetings, talks and screenings involving "world" film-makers took place with a different set of countries featured each year. The fact that four films which were screened in the Cinéma du monde pavilion in 2010 came through the Cinéfondation network is a reflection of how different development strands of the festival are interlinked in working towards a common objective – helping *cinéma d'auteur* to survive and grow.

Various funding strategies and talent-fostering programmes of the festival, marked by various degrees of French inflection, coalesce in creating a particular type of a festival film, which could be called "French-global" arthouse film. The films are essentially transnational projects with a strong French flavour to them acquired through the association with the international film festival funds and development programmes. The problematic aspect of these films is their often being treated as expressive of the film-making cultures and traditions to which their makers and producers belong – while in fact what they are expressions of most of all is a very committed and successful film-making and programming culture developed by the international networks of film festivals such as Cannes.

The proactive role of the major international film festivals as creative producers needs to be seriously and carefully considered in the debates about world cinema. The process of film development, the sources of funding, exhibition and distribution practices are as important to shaping the "identity" of films as the stories they tell on screen. The exploration of the development and production strategies of the film festivals may help us understand better the complex nature of the contemporary arthouse production, which spans different countries and cultures but finds its focal points at the film festival circuit.

- 1 http://www.filmfestivalrotterdam.com/en/about/hubert_bals_fund/; http://www.berlinale.de/en/das_festival/world_cinema_fund/wcf_profil/index.html; <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/cinefondation.html>, last visit 21 September 2010.
- 2 The category of "world cinema" was introduced in the context of the marketing label of "world music." See Teresa Hoefert de Turégano, "Transnational Cinematic Flows: World Cinema as World Music?," paper presented at "Media in Transition 2: Globalization and Convergence," MIT, Cambridge (MA) 2002, available at the address <http://web.mit.edu/cms/Events/mit2/Abstracts/wcwmart2.pdf>, last visit 21 September 2010.
- 3 <https://www.marchedufilm.com>, last visit 7 October 2010.
- 4 <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/cinefondationRules/cinefondationRules.html>, last visit 21 September 2010.
- 5 My analysis of the data available on the Cinéfondation's official website.
- 6 <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/cinefondationRules/cinefondationRules.html>, last visit 21 September 2010.
- 7 My analysis of the data available on the Cinéfondation's official website.
- 8 "Le Marché du Film, les Producers Network et Cinando.com," in *Festival de Cannes*, <http://www.festival-cannes.fr/fr/article/55931.html>, last visit 21 September 2010.
- 9 <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/theResidence/residenceprogram.html>, last visit 7 October 2010.
- 10 "La France aime tous les cinémas du monde" (14 May 2010), in *Latitude France*, <http://www.latitude-france.org/La-France-aime-tous-les-cinemas-du.html>, last visit 7 October 2010.
- 11 "All the Cinémas of the World" (2005), in *Festival de Cannes*, <http://www.festival-cannes.com/en/archives/evenement/Presentation/id/4350761/title/evenementOthers/year/2005.html>, last visit 7 October 2010.