

Film Festivals and Counter-hegemony

Radical Screening Practices in the Neoliberal
City

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This thesis is submitted to the Department of Media, Edge Hill University, in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August, 2017

Abstract

This research focuses on the counter-hegemonic spatial and cultural reproduction of film festivals. Specifically, it investigates the extent to which film festivals produce spaces of resistance to neoliberalism- the current formation of capitalism- while operating within the spatial, temporal and ideological boundaries of the contemporary neoliberal city. Using a critical framework that combines the public sphere and colonisation theories of Jürgen Habermas with David Harvey's analysis of neoliberal urbanisation, this research examines three film festivals in different localities throughout the western hemisphere: the Workers Unite Film Festival, New York; the Liverpool Radical Film Festival, UK; and the Subversive Film Festival in Zagreb, Croatia.

Emerging in the wake of the 2007/8 financial crash, these festivals comprise a diverse range of localised practices that have sought to bring attention to some of the social, spatial, political and cultural problems arising from neoliberalism as such. The practices they have developed are in many ways forged through a relation with an unsympathetic, if not totally oppositional, urban environment that is increasingly profit-oriented and privatised. Thus the research investigates the possibility of film festivals as sites of resistance, and aims to map these spheres onto neoliberal modernity. The purpose is not simply to provide a critique of neoliberalism or the film festivals under analysis, but to offer some insight on these forms of local assembly- wherein neoliberalism and capitalism are not a given necessity- in the hope of contributing to a praxis that facilitates their transgression.

KEYWORDS: Film Festivals, activism, neoliberalism, social movements, hegemony, political economy, urban development, anti-capitalism.

For

My parents
Peter Killick and Patricia Killick

And for

Sally, Beryl, Catherine, Michael and John

Whether the twenty-first century will be the most radical of times or the most reactionary-or will simply lapse into a grey area of dismal mediocrity-will depend overwhelmingly upon the kind of social movement and program that social radicals create out of the theoretical, organisational and material wealth that has accumulated during the past two centuries of the revolutionary era.

(Bookchin, 2015: 1)

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Introduction

This research focuses on the counter-hegemonic spatial and cultural reproduction of film festivals. Specifically, it investigates the extent to which film festivals produce spaces of resistance to neoliberalism- the current formation of capitalism- while operating within the spatial, temporal and ideological boundaries of the contemporary neoliberal city. As such, it understands the city and its institutions as increasingly marketised spaces that exist in a tension vis-a-vis forms of cultural activity that resist subsumption by systems whose primary motivation is to make a profit. Over the past forty years, institutions have been subjected to a process of what Jürgen Habermas calls colonisation by market forces (1984). This has been part of a new and on-going phase of global urbanisation that is characterised primarily by uneven geographical development, that is, the implementation of a relatively standardised, neoliberal form of globalisation across a range of specific and diverse localities, resulting in differential outcomes and effects. The most thorough examination of neoliberal urban development can be found in the work of David Harvey, who points to a global process of urbanisation through which existing power relations are etched into the landscape of cities, while “local and cultural developments and traditions have become absorbed within the calculi of political economy” (Harvey, 2013: 100). Thus the reproduction of space under neoliberalism is carried out with the specific aim of consolidating and solidifying existing forms of power while subsuming all cultural activity within the sphere of the market. These two processes (colonisation and neoliberal urbanisation) are the cornerstones of the theoretical framework that guides this research.

The relation between neo-liberalism and colonisation is, primarily, that the former (indeed, capitalism as such) must necessarily carry out the latter in order to sustain itself via continued growth. As Harvey (2013) notes, this form of expansion is one of three urgent and potentially fatal contradictions of capital. The economic requirement for endless growth is bolstered by western liberal democracy and a system of social relations based on instrumentalism, and the development of subjects as objects (Adorno, Horkheimer, 1995). This particularly urban form of consciousness has an influence on the structuring of the lived environment. The works of Habermas and Harvey provide a framework through which we can better understand, and practically work through, problems of spatial reproduction, colonisation, and resistance. One of the advantages of this framework, for example, lies in Habermas’ modernist understanding of public space as created and sustained by the reflective effort of individuals who evaluate the validity of existing norms through practical discourse. Insofar as this is carried out- among, for example, a film festival audience- public spaces become sites in which norms built on an established societal rationale are transgressed, discrete perspectives are made public, and the dialogical voice of autonomous spheres counters the

monological voice of neoliberal capital. Thus Habermas' understanding of public space precedes his theory of colonisation, foregrounding the role of urban city dwellers in countering hegemony through their interrelated sites of cultural production and their respective practices.

The conditions under which film production and exhibition take place are also subject to colonisation. Yet the history of film as a mode of resistance is well documented (Solanas, Getino, 1969, Dickinson, 1999, Eshun and Gray 2011, Presence, 2013). Where film festival scholarship is concerned, however, little has been done to address the fact of colonisation or the relationship between film festivals and resistance to neoliberalism. Using a mixed methods approach that combines interviews and archival research with political economy, the research aims to develop an understanding of the relations between total systems and the localised nuances of organising practice. The first chapter outlines a critical framework wherein film festivals are positioned in terms of their local and/or globally oriented forms of spatial and cultural reproduction. It explains how the festivals that are analysed in this research have been chosen for two reasons. First, their geographical position across three separate regions in the western hemisphere reflects the movement and development of neoliberalism- from its inception in New York in the 1970s, to de-industrialisation and "regeneration" in the UK since the 1980s, to "globalisation" and the push of capital into the Balkan region from the 1990s onwards. Second, because the forms of resistance to neoliberalism they enact differ from each other to the extent that they represent a discernible local/global spectrum between what Harvey has referred to as "tangible solidarities understood as patterns of social life" and "more abstract conceptions that would have universal purchase" therefore allowing them to move beyond specific geographical localities (Harvey, 1994: 33).

The research therefore acknowledges the distinction between a "vision of the world as a sphere which encompasses us, or as a globe upon which we can gaze" (Harvey, 1994: 37). It does not pretend that film festivals can be strictly delineated into the categories of locally tangible or globally abstracted forms of resistance. It does, however, posit a critique wherein these two positions constitute a dissoluble binary. For example, a totalised concern with locally directed, dwelt-in, practical forms of resistance negates a world that lies beyond direct local experience, and suggests a global patchwork of hermetically sealed, individualised struggles with no discernible common cause – in other words, no understanding of neoliberalism as global phenomena, and the risk of developing into a reactionary parochialism (Bookchin, 2015). Conversely, the same focus on globally directed, detached and observational forms of resistance negates the locally specific effects of neoliberalism, and suggests only an imagined participation in some form of struggle via the consumption of media texts and film festival attendance – in other words, no understanding of

neoliberalism has having locally specific, imminent effects that should be challenged at the local level. Each of the film festivals analysed in this research has its own critical point of departure and modes of practice. Yet their similarity lies in their grappling with neoliberalism (and in some cases, capital as such) as a local and global problem. This research looks at the different ways in which this problem is fleshed out, and investigates the possibility of film festivals as sites of resistance. The purpose is not simply to provide a critique of neoliberalism or the film festivals under analysis, but to provide some insight on these forms of local assembly- wherein neoliberalism and capitalism are not a given necessity- in the hope of contributing to a praxis that facilitates their transgression. Given the demonstrable capacity for capitalism to not only subsume, but actually require and utilise, forms of dissent, the magnitude of such a task should not be understated, nor is it the suggestion of this research that the film festivals under analysis accomplish this. Instead, the research presents a sharper definition of the ways in which these film festivals both resist and/or participate in neoliberal spatial and cultural reproduction.

The first case study situates the Workers Unite Film Festival, New York, in the historical context of the city's fiscal crisis and the emergence of neoliberal policies in response to it. Given the festival's pro-union, pro-labour stance, it counters the dominant anti-union narratives that run throughout the industrial history of New York, while at the same time engaging a critique of the Finance, Insurance and Real Estate (FIRE) nexus that is responsible for the privatisation and commercialisation of space in the city. One of the main problems faced by the festival is the reconciliation of a culturally conservative, suburban dwelling, predominantly white union membership demographic with marginalised communities such as migrants and gay people. The festival aims to do this by highlighting the common struggles faced by all workers.

New York was not the only place to suffer from the new global division of labour that emerged during the ascendancy of neoliberalism. Throughout the 1970s and 80s Liverpool, UK, an industrial port city, suffered drastically as capital divested from the area, leaving unemployment, closed factories and poverty in its wake. The struggle over which form the city's regeneration should take is reflective of the broader re-alignment of the British Labour Party, and the newly emerging, private-sector and culture-led model of urban renewal. Yet Liverpool has a history of autonomous groups and communities advocating their own forms of regeneration. It is in this tradition of DIY culture that the Liverpool Radical Film Festival stands. The festival's organisational mode of practice and its resistance to institutionalised structures such as large funding bodies are key points within this case study.

The final case study discusses the Subversive Film Festival, Zagreb, Croatia, within the context of neoliberalism's push into the Balkan region, primarily through the privatisation and financialisation of various banking sectors. Here we see how this drastic initial shift from communism to neoliberalism has led to forms of spatial redeployment that entail a reduction in public space and the privatisation of Croatia's assets as it became integrated into the European Union. Thus Subversive Film Festival operates in an increasingly hostile political landscape characterised by domestic right-wing ethno-nationalist discourses on one hand and European neoliberal discourses on the other. However, the festival asserts a critique of neoliberalism and capitalism, as well as seeking to maintain Croatia's anti-fascist legacy. This case study focuses on the ways in which the festival succeeds and fails at this endeavour.

In presenting a critical analysis of each festival this research highlights a range of localised responses with which film festival activists have sought to bring attention to some of the social, spatial, political and cultural problems arising from neoliberalism as such. Their common position is, therefore, a critique of the system, as opposed to any one of its symptoms. Operating within a system that is perceived as fundamentally destructive and unjust presents its own set of idealistic and pragmatic issues. As we will see, the development and execution of an annual film festival (in many cases accompanied by sporadic, year-round screening events) has necessitated the development of practices that are often guided by an uncomfortable awareness of some degree of "collusion" with neoliberalism. This research aims to map these counter-public practices onto the wider public sphere, taking into account the ways they have developed in relation to their limitations and antagonists. Each case study attempts to highlight the links between text, audience, and festival space by engaging in some filmic analysis and the ways in which it relates to what Pierre Bourdieu (1985) refers to as the "habitus" of the audience and the goals of the festival organisers.

It is also one of the purposes of this research to highlight the distinctions between the chosen film festivals and those that could be seen as more "mainstream". To this end the research looks at the history and development of film festivals. Scholars such as de Valck (2007) and Loist (2016) break this history into phases: from the establishment of the first major film festivals, to their recalibration in the wake of protest movements throughout the 1960s, to their proliferation and marketisation in the neoliberal period. The festivals analysed in this research fall clearly within the last two categories, as they can be seen as acts of resistance that are also part of this wave of proliferation. It is therefore important to stress that the main focus of this research is anti-neoliberal film festivals (emerging within neoliberalism), as opposed to those that fall into the first phase of film festival history. If the whole array of film festivals can be visualised as a spectrum, constituted at one end by

an “A-list” of huge, globally oriented and well financed events such as Cannes and Berlin, then the anti-neoliberal festivals featured in this research constitute the other end of that spectrum. If (as has been most prevalent) festivals can be visualised as a “circuit”, then the festivals analysed herein reside at the margins of that circuit, if they can be said to participate in it at all. The early history of film festivals as nodes in hegemonic networks of influence exercised to a large extent by nation states places them immediately on the geo-political stage, a platform that is orders of magnitude above the local level on which the anti-neoliberal film festivals with which I am concerned operate. The obvious difference in size and financial capability presents different sets of limitations, and therefore gives rise to different sets of practices and relations through which these festivals are programmed and executed. Firstly, the festivals analysed in this research are rooted in a conception of the film festival as an activist undertaking oriented towards achieving political objectives that are a response to neoliberalism. For example, the Liverpool Radical Film Festival aims to solve the perceived problem of working class de-politicisation and social stratification by bringing political films to local audiences within their communities, as opposed to inviting people into city centre cultural hubs, which are thought to be largely unappealing, if not inaccessible, to working class people.

As Miriam Ross (2013) notes, these sorts of community screening space differ from the kind of cinematic space that has come to characterise well established film screening practice, and therefore has the potential to elicit different responses. Although the festivals examined in this research make use of a cinema where and when possible, at least some part of their programme (to varying degrees, according to the festival), takes place in settings that require the creation of a makeshift cinema, often done using a laptop, some speakers, and a pull-down screen or even a bare wall onto which the film is projected. The imperative to include some form of audience discussion after the film is grounded in ideals of participatory democracy and the potential for film to mobilise an audience response that moves beyond the screening event. The extent to which they achieve this latter aim is questionable. Nevertheless, it is within this less restrictive community space that political possibilities may present themselves, and it is the task of the festivals analysed herein to facilitate this presentation. These activist aims take the place of a heavier involvement with the film industry that is a major part of A-list festivals. According to Skadi Loist

Festivals have always interacted with the film industry, giving them a platform to network and showcase their work. But from the 1980s onward, festivals underwent a major shift. They moved from passive platforms and facilitators of the film industry to becoming intermediaries and increasingly active players in all aspects of the film industry

themselves...Since the mid-2000s festivals have moved increasingly into various segments of training and funding of all stages of film production and distribution, adding markets, talent campuses, and script writing labs, while also facilitating co-production markets, and distributing film funds (Loist, 2016: 59).

Thus the festivals I am concerned with differ largely from the older, major A-list festivals in their different conceptions of a film festival's purpose and their desire and/or capacity to engage with a globalised film industry. They are more likely meeting places for local residents, students and activists than industry professionals. Conversely, in some cases these festivals do replicate "traditional" film festival practices. For example, both SFF and WUFF have competition strands with prizes, while the latter is involved in the training of filmmakers and the production of short films via its Films from the Frontlines initiative. Yet even here the idea is to use filmmaking as a radical pedagogic tool, giving the initiative a political purpose that is lacking from A-list film festival "talent campuses". Thus practices familiar to anyone who attends or has studied film festivals become oriented towards goals familiar to those who take part in or have studied leftist social movements.

As will be extrapolated throughout this research, the main goal of these festivals is to enact some form of (however miniscule) resistance to neoliberalism. For this reason they try to subvert the commercial and marketised logic imposed on cultural institutions, and the question of funding becomes all the more complex. Loist notes how the ideological shift brought about by neoliberalism

Directly impacted festivals by introducing a neoliberal corporate business logic into cultural institutions...After the financial crisis of 2008 hit the markets and the cultural sector lost further funding opportunities, the drive to neoliberal corporate models has seen a further push (Loist, 2016: 58).

Anti-neoliberal film festivals resist the logic of neoliberalism primarily through their non-profit status. In the case of WUFF this is officially incorporated through its recognition as a 501(c) charitable organisation, a position that organisers view as being threatened by the Trump administration. The public funds received by SFF are also being slowly diminished by right-wing and neoliberal policy makers, while LRFF doesn't even attempt to apply for public funds. As this research will show, private sponsorship is also a contentious issue for these festivals, and they primarily rely on solidarity (often in the form of cheap rents on the space of the festival and/or reduced/revoked screening fees) as well as ticket sales and donations in order to "break even". The amount of economic capital being circulated at these festivals is of course tiny in comparison to a Cannes or Berlin type festival. If, as Loist points out, the film festival "circuit" could be viewed as one that

primarily involves the circulation of capital (an assertion the present research agrees with), “for instance in the form of distribution revenue or film production funds flowing through the increasing number of markets and production workshops on the film festival circuit” (Loist, 2016: 52), then the festival analysed in this research can be seen as outside of the film festival circuit insofar as they are not commercial spaces. In fact they are spaces in which there is hardly any detectable flow of economic capital. Relatedly, are not large enough to play any significant role in local tourist economies, unlike niche festivals that are smaller than their major international counterparts, and who play a lesser role in the film industry, focussing instead on “tourism or leisurely exploration of the host city” as an “ancillary attraction” (de Valck, 2016: 2).

By the same token, anti-neoliberal film festivals negate the practice of “city-marketing” that has become key for attracting inward investment into cities in the contemporary period, as public funds for services are increasingly revoked by neoliberalised governments. As this research will show, film festivals have become a vehicle for city marketing campaigns, and are therefore woven into the calculi of neoliberal political economy. Rather than participate in this economy, the festivals under analysis in this research aim to distance themselves from it, in the process working out ways to subvert the limitations that arise from operating as an anti-neoliberal cultural organisation within the neoliberal city.

Critical Framework

Film Festivals and Counter-hegemony

This chapter establishes a critical framework wherein film festivals are discussed in relation to their counter-hegemonic spatial and cultural reproduction. Since neoliberalism is a global system that has different effects across unevenly developed localities, the festivals analysed in this research are positioned within a local/global framework that addresses their understanding of the world and the practical solutions they develop. The production of film festival space can be seen as a form of communication, particularly in the selection criteria of films. This research draws on political economies of communication insofar as these are concerned with questions of how power is constituted through media frameworks such as ownership, production and circulation. Such a perspective enables a critical analysis of the ways in which terms such as “activism” and “social change” have been used throughout a period wherein, as Jane Gaines notes in her essay, *Political Mimesis*, “‘social change’ has been decoupled from ‘revolution’” (Gaines, 1999: 87). The problem here is that scholars writing about activist film festivals have failed to address the fact that liberal democracies rooted in capitalism not only tolerate but *require and assimilate* opposition in order to present the appearance of a properly functioning democracy (Winlow, et al, 2015). Research on film festivals must, therefore, provide a more thorough analysis of what is meant by “activism” and precisely what “social change” it engenders that actually challenges, rather than benefits, western neoliberalism. This is not to destroy the possibility of activism nor an effective opposition to capital in the neoliberal period, but to stress how “activism” and “social change” are increasingly delineated by neoliberalism, and thus require a deeper qualification in order to explain how and where they actually oppose it. Finally, this chapter offers a critique of some of the existing scholarship on film festivals and activism, and discusses the international film festival circuit as a system primarily oriented towards the circulation of capital. The festivals that will be analysed in this research are subsequently positioned as sub-alternative (Fraser, 1997) or counter-public (Warner, 2005) spheres that act as sites of resistance within the neoliberal urban environment.

The film festivals analysed in this research are best described as counter-hegemonic. This by no means connotes a single set of intentions, methods or ideology. Attempts to counter some aspects of neoliberalism do not necessarily imply a desire to move beyond capitalism as such. For example, it could be argued that the pro-labour, pro-union stance of the Workers Unite Film Festival in New York could be best placed within the boundaries of New Deal social democracy rather than anti-capitalism. The diffuse (albeit clearly leftist) ideas of the Liverpool Radical Film Festival’s organising team complicates the designation “anti-capitalist”, as does the structure and organisation of the

Subversive Film Festival in Croatia. Yet these festivals can be called counter-hegemonic insofar as they came about as a reaction against neoliberalism and its hegemony in the wake of the 2007-8 financial crash, wherein systemic injustices of neoliberal globalisation were laid bare to western audiences. While each festival has its own critical point of departure, they are all rooted in a critique of neoliberalism. There are some points at which this moves towards a critique of capital and capitalism as such, and for many festival organisers anti-capitalism is undoubtedly a primary motivation. Yet it would be a simplification to say that the festival organisers featured in this research had a thorough-going critique of capitalism at the root of their work. For the most part, then, the primary focus of these festivals is to develop forms of spatial and cultural resistance to the hegemony of neoliberalism. While the concept of hegemony was originally outlined by Antonio Gramsci, Gramsci himself never mentions “counter-hegemony”, but articulates culture as a site of contestation in which the hegemony of the proletariat is the primary force militating against that of the bourgeoisie (Gramsci, 1999). For the purposes of this research, counter-hegemony is used to signify practices that resist neoliberal colonisation, and it is in the work of Habermas and Harvey that we find a way of articulating colonisation through an analysis of the city and the forms of activity that take place therein.

While noting this anti-neoliberal motivation, however, it is important to stress that the discourses enacted by the festivals analysed in this research are distinctly not of the western liberal Left as it exists in what Simon Winlow et al have called the “post-political present” (2015). In this section of the Left discourses a have moved away from the economic sphere and have become centred on cultural equality and the advancement of personal freedoms. As Winlow et al argue, however

A huge amount of intellectual effort has been applied to charting cultural opposition to authoritarianism and oppressive social structures....Strangely enough, though, despite the huge effort, all this counter-hegemonic cultural activity hasn't borne a great deal of fruit on the political stage...The juggernaut of capitalism remains with us. Indeed, in many respects it appears more secure in its position and destructive in its relentless expansion and colonisation than it has ever been (Winlow et al, 2015).

The de-politicisation of the economic field and the shift in the Left throughout the 1980s towards “the battle against biological predestination and oppressive social conventions” (ibid) may have led to the emergence of an “identity politics” that belies an engagement with capitalism as such. However, that is not the reason why these festivals engage neoliberalism instead of capitalism. The subjects who participated in this research consist of unionised “red-diaper babies”, working class northern Englanders, and Croatian communists. Such groups have, over the past forty years, had

their capacity for global-stage political representation totally revoked. At best, then, they aim to facilitate counter-hegemonic discourses within their localities, and tackle some of the material effects of neoliberalism, such as the privatisation of space and social stratification. For the most part, their discourses are not shaped by terms such as identity, micro-politics, sexuality and safe spaces, but class, community, jobs, housing and politics. If they fail to move beyond a critique of neoliberalism, it is more to do with the fact that this Left has been on the defensive for the past forty years. The material and ideological conditions in which these festivals operate are increasingly restrictive. Their budgets/funding are under constant attack, and it is difficult to organise as an anti-capitalist organisation when most of your potential allies on the so-called Left won't even take this position seriously.

Yet, as noted, these festivals do posit a critique of neoliberalism that is underpinned by a perhaps less-discussed understanding of capitalism as such. Since neoliberalism is implemented through a global system of localities with specific formations and effects, the film festivals analysed in this research are viewed as comprising various spatially and culturally reproductive activities that are locally specific, but which also take into account global problems and solutions that are abstracted beyond the immediately perceptible locality. The primary aim of this research is to examine how, if at all, the film festivals under discussion resist neoliberalism through their deliberative local engagement and effects. At the same time, this research rejects any system of measurement upon which cultural activities can be said to have had an "impact", a term which has recently become part of the neoliberal bureaucratic lexicon. Instead, it should be acknowledged that spaces that resist neoliberalism are not impervious to it, since the broader world in which they operate remains structured by its spatial temporal and ideological command (Harvey, 1985). It is an intellectual dead-end, therefore, to suggest that forms of spatial and cultural reproduction that aim to resist neoliberalism do not also, to some extent, reproduce neoliberalism. This does not, however, destroy the very possibility of resistance, in the same way that, as Gramsci notes, hegemony can never be completely established. Instead this research is concerned with the different ways in which neoliberalism is and has been implemented within cities, and the capacity for film festivals to foster counter-hegemonic spheres within neoliberal modernity. The case studies have been chosen for two reasons: First, their geographical position across three separate regions in the western hemisphere reflects the movement and development of neoliberalism- from its inception in New York in the 1970s, to de-industrialisation and "regeneration" in the UK since the 1980s, to "globalisation" and the push of capital into the Balkan region from the 1990s onwards. Second, because the forms of anti-capitalist resistance they enact differ from each other to the extent that they represent a discernible spectrum

From tangible solidarities understood as patterns of social life organised in affective and knowable communities to a more abstract set of conceptions that would have universal purchase [which] involves a move from one level of abstraction to another capable of reaching out across space (Harvey, 1994: 33).

However, in the move from tangible to abstracted forms of resistance “something [is] bound to be lost” (*ibid*), namely, the concern with a place-based politics that is built on local class and gender familiarities. The problem, according to Harvey, “is not only the level of abstraction at which the world view of socialist politics gets constituted, but of the very different structures of feeling that can attach to those different levels of abstraction” (Harvey, 1994: 36). To further extrapolate the issue, we are not only dealing with the levels of abstraction, but also “the *kind* of abstraction achievable given different ways of acquiring knowledge in the world” (Harvey, 1994: 37). The epistemological value of film exhibition, that is, film as a producer of certain kinds of knowledge, is such that film festival audiences can potentially develop an understanding of the relation between local and global forms of resistance. As a medium of knowledge dissemination, film festivals also perform an educational function by bringing together disparate perspectives and facilitating discussion among members of the public. Such forms of community-led discussion can be seen as a counter-point to dominant neoliberal narratives. For example, Roya Rastegear (2016) highlights community-based film festivals as sites in which filmmakers can address the specific concerns of communities.

Community-based film festivals are like incubator labs, places that nourish and encourage filmmakers to develop their voice in dialogue with eager audiences from specific communities who are hungry for images and stories that present a different vision of the world (and themselves) than that of the dominant order of representation (Rastegear, 2016: 182).

In this context film festivals can be understood as locally situated, non-profit events carried out for the public good and *in co-operation and solidarity with* other community-based organisations.

The concept of resistance that this research draws on argues against a raft of scholarship dedicated to so-called “resilience”. According to Mark Neocleous (2013) Resilience “has in the last decade become one of the key political categories of our times. It falls from the mouths of politicians...urban planners are now obliged to take it into consideration and academics are falling over themselves to conduct research on it” (Neocleous, 2013: 3). The term refers to the capacity, primarily of the state, to return to a previous form of existence, having endured some form of major disaster. It emanates

from national security strategies, but has become inculcated in the social fabric via references to “human and social resilience” and “community resilience” as well as playing a role in the constitution of the neoliberal subject through “personal resilience” – the ability to “bounce back from whatever life throws, whether it be cuts to benefits, wage freezes or global economic meltdown” (Neocleous, 2013: 5). Global institutions such as the IMF and World Bank now see resilience as a tactic for increasing the wealth of the poor.

Resilience has been recognised by these organisations as a means of further pursuing an explicitly neoliberal agenda and has become one main way of managing the “disaster” that is the global financial crisis. Not only is resilience coming to replace security in political discourse, then, but it is doing so by simultaneously becoming one of the key ideological tropes underpinning accumulation (Neocleous, 2013: 5).

Where resistance aims to negate the possibility of personal, environmental and economic disaster through reflecting on systemic faults in the dominant socio-economic order, resilience seeks acquiescence to a state of “sustained adjustment” engendered by endless crisis. Moreover, as Wolfgang Streeck (2016) notes, the development of resilience on the part of the subject is an entirely personal, as opposed to social process, and this exacerbates the atomising tendencies of neoliberalism, since

The more resilience individuals manage to develop at the micro-level of everyday life, the less demand there will be for collective action at the macro-level to contain the uncertainties produced by market forces – a demand that neoliberalism could and would not fill...Everybody is reduced to fending for themselves, with *sauve qui peut* as the foundational principle of social life (Streeck, 2016: 40).

As this research will show, however, there are various conceptions regarding counter-hegemonic resistance as embodied in a film festival. However, one similarity between the festivals analysed here is that their critique of neoliberalism is entwined with an experience and critique of the politics of austerity that have taken shape in Europe and (to a slightly lesser extent) the US since the financial crash. Thus “resistance” often takes the shape of defensive activities such as campaigns against community-centre closures, wherein there is often minimal time and space for reflection on global capitalism as such. It is not the intention of this research to judge the efficacy of locally or globally oriented forms of resistance. Rather, it is to build a critical framework wherein film festivals are analysed as tackling local and/or global problems arising predominantly from neoliberalism, but more broadly from capitalism as such. As Tim Ingold notes

The local is not a more limited or narrowly focussed apprehension than the global, it is one that rests on an altogether different *mode* of apprehension – one based on an active, perceptual engagement with components of the dwelt-in world, in the practical business of life, rather than on the detached, disinterested observation of a world apart. In the local perspective the world is a sphere...centred on a particular place. From this experiential centre, the attention of those who live there is drawn ever deeper *into* the world, in the quest for knowledge and understanding (Ingold, 1993: 41, cited in Harvey, 1994).

This research acknowledges the distinction between a “vision of the world as a sphere which encompasses us, or as a globe upon which we can gaze” (Harvey, 1994: 37). It does not pretend that film festivals can be strictly delineated into the categories of locally tangible or globally abstracted resistance. It does, however, posit a critique wherein these two positions constitute a dissoluble binary. A totalised concern with locally directed, dwelt-in, practical forms of resistance negates a world that lies beyond direct local experience, and suggests a global patchwork of hermetically sealed, individualised struggles with no discernible common cause – in other words, no understanding of neoliberalism as global phenomena.

Conversely, the same focus on globally directed, detached and observational forms of resistance negates the locally specific effects of neoliberalism, and suggests only an imagined participation in some form of struggle via the consumption of media texts and film festival attendance – in other words, no understanding of neoliberalism as having locally specific, imminent effects that should be challenged at the local level. While these are forms of resistance in and of themselves (although the latter is merely symbolic), each can and has been accommodated (and in some cases even favoured and perpetuated) by neoliberalism. According to Harvey (1989 cited in Mosco, 2009), the breakup of social classes into “flexible” labour does not signal the obsolescence of analytical forms that interpret societal fluctuations in terms of collective agency, particularly as capital has become even more rigid in the neoliberal era, despite its naturalisation and disappearance from immanent consciousness. This research therefore often refers to collectives, particularly in terms of classes and activist groups. Broadly speaking, in the local sense, the last forty years have seen the gradual erosion of class solidarities and the emergence of an infinitely divisible series of interests, which often falls under the term “identity politics” (Winlow et al, 2015)¹. In the global sense, forms of

¹ The present manifestation of this socio-cultural trajectory is an online “culture war” perpetuated by clashes between the liberal and radical left, and the emergence of an “alt-right” that is characterised by a mockery of liberal and left cultural sensibilities, as well as a darker tendency towards white nationalism and neo-Nazism (Nagle, 2017). This can be seen in the “identitarian” movements that have co-opted identity politics, and whose function, whether consciously or not, is to deflect critical attention away from capital.

resistance to neoliberalism that are wholly abstracted beyond their localities may produce spaces that are accessible only to a certain class of people who can afford entry to the space, but who have no desire for any practical engagement with the unsavoury struggles of local populations. In this case the organisation of “spaces of resistance” merely reflects the incentives of neoliberal capital insofar as it reproduces the conditions whereby those at the lower end of the socio-economic strata are barred from the city.

To re-iterate, it is not the intention of this research to argue for one or the other form of resistance. Rather, it is to analyse film festivals as a relatively new form of resistance through which reconciliations between local and global concerns could be made. Although this perspective requires an understanding of local concerns, it is not one of a reactionary or regressive parochialism. Murray Bookchin (2015) argues that too narrow a focus on the concerns of a locality can engender a damaging “localism” that actively negates knowledge of the wider world. His ideas around confederalism and interdependence aim to re-constitute power at the municipal (as opposed to state) level, while stressing the need for co-operation among different municipalities. At the same time, then, considering abstracted issues, theories and questions “does not entail the abandonment of class politics for those of the “new social movements”, but the exploration of different forms of alliances that can reconstitute and renew class politics” (Harvey, 1994: 41). In this way, the research aims to make a contribution to the incorporation of geographical and socio-cultural questions around “spatial scales of social theorising and political action” (*ibid*) into the field of film festival studies.

Film Festival Studies

Film Festival Studies is a relatively new area of scholarly investigation. In 2008 Marijke de Valck and Skadi Loist launched the website for the Film Festival Research Network, which “aims to make festival research more available, to connect its diverse aspects and to foster interdisciplinary exchange between researchers as well as festival professionals” (FFRN, 2017). The website posts updates on festival related events, and includes a rich bibliography comprising numerous areas of film festival research. De Valck’s (2007) seminal work deserves extensive analysis, as it situates festivals within a geo-political history that accompanies the development of capitalism throughout the 20th century and into the 21st. De Valck’s history of film festivals can be summarised thus: The founding of film festivals in Europe just before WWII resulted from a mixture of interests. The emerging spirits of the European avant-garde that had fostered cine-clubs and film societies in the first decades of the 20th century briefly crossed over with the desire for nations to exert geo-political influence. Following the demise of the avant-garde, film festivals became heavily

commercialised, with programs favouring Hollywood films and a few domestic features. Avant-garde films did retain some presence in festival programming, but as “specialised” or “thematic” events. After WWII New York replaced Paris as the home of the avant-garde, and increasing political tensions in the early sixties were reflected in the desire for a politically charged cinema and a new kind of film festival. When worldwide revolutionary movements forced dominant powers into making some concessions, this was reflected in the changing structure of film festivals on a global scale. While those in the mainstream were forced to acknowledge dissenting and/or independent productions, bringing them into their fold to a minor extent, the establishment of the Pesaro Film Festival in Italy in 1965, as well as the 1969 Pan-African Film and Television Festival, signalled the creation of platforms that were openly and primarily devoted to combatting forms of cultural and political subjugation (Willemsen, 1981). Although the neoliberal offensive of the 1970s and 80s led to a renewed focus on city marketing, this, as de Valck notes, had been a motive of film festivals since the establishment of Venice in 1932.

Dividing the history of film festivals into three distinct phases allows de Valck to present these relatively hermetic events within their broader socio-political contexts, which helps when attempting to develop an understanding of film festivals as a series of historical, political and economic practices that relate to urbanisation and the colonisation of physical space. The practice of city marketing – a city’s broadcasting of positive representations of itself in order to attract tourism and inward investment - for example, “may simply lead to the establishment of a touristic and commodified aesthetic”, a tendency that has been “a vital, if underexplored aspect of the festival circuit since the beginning (Stringer, 2001: 140). City marketing is a practice municipal planners engage in so as to “compete in the global arena” of uneven geographical development for finance. Cities have always used film festival in the “construction of a positive image”, as this is, and remains “one of the key elements in promotional strategies for attracting inward investment and tourism (de Valck, 2007: 75). This is one example of a variety of conscious planning processes through which cities become synonymous with industries such as global finance (the City of London, New York or Hong Kong, for example) while others might have lesser global prevalence as cities of culture (Berlin or Liverpool, for example).

City marketing carries out two functions that are essential to the survival of capital. First: it partially resolves the capital surplus absorption problem (Harvey, 2011), since city marketing is basically a way of advertising surplus re-investment opportunities. Second: the opportunity for investment also means the opportunity to garner monopoly rents, that is, the possession of some uniqueness for which the owner can charge a price for its use (entry price at festivals, for example). Thus “film

festivals market both conceptual similarity” between themselves, and the “cultural difference” of their respective locations (Stringer, 2001: 139). The question, however, is that in an area as heavily populated - not to mention as culturally, racially and economically diverse as a city - which uniqueness becomes celebrated and which is subsumed, displaced and/or disrupted by the supposedly unified identity that is perpetuated by city marketing. Consider, for example, the branding of a city as having some relation to processes whereby its institutions are colonised by neoliberal interests. In this sense, as Miriam Greenberg notes, the branding of cities “may be seen as a broader social formation, one in which an emphasis on image and media integration is tied to the extension of market priorities into new social and political realms” (Greenberg, 2012: 116). Thus city marketing/branding can act as a vehicle for the interests of capital, and so, by proxy, can film festivals. As de Valck notes, the Venice Film Festival was established in 1932 in order to extend the tourist season. In the 1980s the decision to re-locate the Berlin Film Festival to the Potsdamer Platz (supposedly the symbol of Germany’s reunification) came after city marketing had failed to capture the prolonged corporate interest that could turn it into a financial centre. Instead

It was decided that the Potsdamer Platz would become the audio-visual entertainment heart of Berlin. Cinema multiplexes and a modern establishment for the film museum were erected on the grounds. The relocation of the Berlinale there guaranteed the requisite international attention and prestige” (de Valck, 2007: 77).

The subsumption of marginal identities for the sake of constructing an image of the city as unified (that is, branded) is essential to probing the relationship between film festivals and city marketing. Importantly, the tendency to seek inward investment via city branding has global as well as local implications, as it has cities competing with each other. As Harvey notes, “uneven geographical and sectoral development [facilitates] a divisive competitiveness between places defined at different scales (Harvey, 1994: 42). Therefore certain cultural practices can be (and are used) in tandem with capital in order to diminish others as part of an on-going project of neoliberal colonisation.

The history of film festivals is closely entwined with the historical tension between capital and dissent, although de Valck largely overlooks this dimension of the story. On the question, for example, of why the European avant-garde dwindled in the face of a flourishing film festival circuit, she offers the answer that the former was incapable of surviving the crisis wrought by cinemas transition to sound and the technological, not to mention linguistic, barriers now in place. Film festivals, on the other hand, weathered this crisis “by inviting nations to participate in an international showcase” where different languages were an “unproblematic given” (de Valck, 2007: 24). This answer, while undoubtedly true, is, however, derivative of a more fundamental issue: By

what means were film festivals superior to the avant-garde? This question involves class, social positioning in relation to dominant power, and the often overlooked issue of finance. One of the answers is that film festivals are far more capable of attracting large swathes of inward investment than those practicing modes of avant-garde filmmaking. You can imagine the differences in economic, time-related and technological capabilities between a gang of mostly broke surrealists, and an emerging film festival industry with a mandate to solidify nationalistic sentiment in the lead up to war. From their beginnings film festivals have been sites of contradiction, keeping “one foot planted in the model of avant-garde artisanship, while the other steps forward to the beat of market forces within the economy” (de Valck, 2007: 25). Clearly there is a tension here. If, as de Valck notes, the avant-garde’s non-commercial screenings “were organised in order to nurture an intellectual vanguard and more or less directly interfere in the film industry business by promoting alternative products and places of exhibition” (de Valck 2007: 25-26) then this suggests that the historical function of film festivals as establishing and broadcasting a unified, business friendly image for the purpose of city marketing has had the side effect (or intentional motive) of purging dissenting movements.

The 1968 Cannes film festival, for example, was the setting for an action that contributed to a re-orientation of the direction of film festivals altogether, to the extent that they were forced to respond to the political as well as the aesthetic avant-garde. Here again this research draws on de Valck’s historical analysis, though with different conclusions. When the French government dismissed Henri Laglois as head of the French cinemateque, which housed the largest collection of films in the world at that time, Jean Luc-Goddard, along with several other filmmakers including Francois Truffaut, founded the Committee for the Defence of the Cinemateque. Against a background of almost three million striking French workers they occupied the 1968 Cannes Film Festival, eventually forcing its closure. This kind of alignment between cultural producers (such as filmmakers) and the broader revolutionary movement forced the film festival circuit to pay serious attention to the political and economic grievances of the times. Film festivals were able to accommodate marginalised sections of society without changing their fundamental structure or orientation. The inclusion of marginalised elements therefore represents a kind of synthesis between dissent and capital, but one that takes place on capital’s terms.

Since the 1980s film festivals have proliferated in tandem with neoliberal globalisation. Drawing on de Valck’s three phases, Loist (2016) summarises the changing status and orientations of film festivals throughout this period

Whereas the first phase was majorly influenced by national diplomatic strategies, and the second by new politics and social movements, this third era has been most impacted by a complex shift of several interlocking cultural and economic agendas. One major trend that has had significant impact on arts and culture was the rise of neoliberalism, which pushed the welfare state to start using the business logic of privatisation...Today, global cities compete for funds and economic gains...As public funders are increasingly interested in tourism profits and elevating the public cultural image of a city, festivals are funded with the logic of the creative industries...These shifting interests are directly observable in changes to funding models, which have moved both money and focus from arts and culture to business development funds (Loist, 2016: 58, 59).

Over the same period, discourses around “activism” and “social change” have been subject to depoliticising processes. For example, As Jane Gaines notes in her essay *Political Mimesis*, “‘social change’ has been decoupled from ‘revolution’” (Gaines, 1999: 87). The subsequent colonisation of these terms by quasi-neo-liberal incentives has been actively detrimental towards campaigns for social justice. For example, the Lets All Be Free Film Festival, which combines a spirit of entrepreneurialism with a philosophical discussion on the concept of freedom. Its organisers, however, saw no problem in holding their 2014 edition of the festival at London’s Ritzy Cinema while its workers were in a dispute with management over their refusal to recognise the London living wage (BECTU, 2014). Increasingly “social change” is becoming one with “social entrepreneurialism”, as can be witnessed in the confluence between business leaders and film festival board members evident in the Chicago Social Change Film Festival, whose co-founder is described as a “social entrepreneur”, and whose films are selected by a financial analyst at the Northern Trust, a wealth and asset management firm (CSCFF, 2017). This is not to detract from the good work these festivals and their employees do, but to highlight the potential limitations of their view on “social change” in terms of Gaines’ argument.

Although some film festival scholarship attempts to bring “political” questions into the fold (Wong, 2016), the perspective tends to be one of liberal pluralism, the type of which seems to have filled the vacuum left by the downfall of the Marxist left from the 1970s onwards. The liberal leftist critique of capitalism has shifted towards a cultural analysis that is rooted in postmodernism and identity politics. The proliferation of film festivals during this time is reflected in the emergence of an increasingly divisible series of interest groups, sexes and genders that address the world through a micro-politics wherein the “political” sphere is integrated into the fabric of everyday life. Simon Winlow et al (2015) have argued that these occurrences have been disastrous for a sincere and

effective critique of neoliberal democracy, as this new politics occludes larger questions around “fundamental antagonisms...and the basic economic and social coordinates of our shared future” (Winlow, et al, 2015: 8).

If graffiti is political, if cross-dressing is political, if pop songs are political, if buying fair-trade coffee is political, then what is the name of the field upon which we determine the structure of political economy?...Could it be that, since the arrival of neoliberalism, the extent of the Left’s defeat has been such that key constituencies within it have strategically withdrawn from an analysis of global political economy, preferring instead to focus on micro-resistance and minor acts of insubordination?...Capitalism welcomes this kind of insubordination, because the real locus of power lies elsewhere (*ibid*).

Thus a liberal pluralist perspective is inadequate for properly addressing film festivals in the context of an ever expanding system of capital, since it does not account for capital’s fundamental requirement for endless expansion and colonisation, nor the ways in which film festivals can and have been created and co-opted to serve this function. The research presented in this thesis focuses on studies concerning film festivals and their relations to “activism”, “human rights” and “social change”, since these are elements of the political public sphere which have been particularly subjected to colonisation over the past few decades. As noted, film festivals themselves have a history as facilitators of colonisation. In this respect they can be viewed in terms of contemporary hegemonic struggle within the neoliberal city. There is, however, an emerging swathe of film festivals that openly and explicitly seek to counter political and economic processes of colonisation through multifarious methods involving the creation and use of spaces which then become dedicated to the facilitation of radical democracy. These festivals are the main focus of this research. First, however, there needs to be an expanded critique of some existing film festival scholarship.

Leshu Torchin has been one of the forerunners of film festival scholarship, particularly in terms of the relations between film festivals and activism. Her work in this vein does, however, warrant some criticism, which emanates from the lack of scrutiny due to the term “activism”. The term refers to people’s active attempts to bring about political and social change. However, the flippancy with which terms like “activism”, “social change” and (to a lesser extent) “human rights” are conflated with broadly left-wing and “progressive” movements may lead us to believe that they are self-justifying terms. In fact, they are empty signifiers. They can only be qualified by the end/s to which they attach themselves (activism to *what* end, what *kind* of social change, *whose* human rights). Even those activists working towards something as specific as “long-term social change” need to recognise that this is also the goal of neo-liberalism and its progenitors. Indeed, scholars in both the

early and contemporary stages of the current neoliberal period have pointed to neoliberalism's ability to hijack progressive and/or revolutionary movements. Winlow, et al highlight how

Liberal capitalism has proven to be remarkably adept at assimilating opposition and using its energy to enhance its own functioning...*Capitalism today is ideologically reliant upon actual attempts to subvert its rule*; it needs manifested forms of cultural insubordination and a vocal but domesticated political opposition to convince us that democracy works and that what exists is the will of the majority (Winlow, et al, 2015: 3).

That the vocabulary of activism and social change is open to appropriation by the incentives of capital is well evidenced in our contemporary age of "lifestyle activism" and "social entrepreneurship". Thus these terms can just as easily apply to reactionary and neoliberal movements. Moreover, "progressive" organisations may offer solutions that are entirely acceptable (in some cases even favourable) to the forces they pertain to be campaigning against. The mechanics of colonisation, particularly with respect to "activism" and "social change", can be witnessed in the convolution of activist with consumerist discourse. Here political activity becomes represented through a series of commodities and consumer choices, including film festival attendance. Terms such as "lifestyle activism" and "social entrepreneur" emerge as the building blocks of a narrative that accommodates, accepts and even naturalises neo-liberalism. This is not to destroy the possibility of activism nor an effective opposition to capital in the neoliberal period, but to stress how "activism" and "social change" are increasingly delineated by capital, and thus require a deeper qualification in order to explain how and where they actually oppose it.

The activism carried out by the film festivals analysed in this research is delineated by repertoires. That is, the series of available skills, resources and contacts that are often formed with respect to the financial limitations of the festival and/or the personal time constraints of organisers, and which subsequently influence the development of working practices and, ultimately, the capacity for the festivals to engage audiences and facilitate counter-hegemonic discourses. In Bourdieuean terms, these repertoires exist and can be utilised as forms of socio-cultural capital that manifest in things such as screening equipment, contacts in certain spaces and venues, transport, reduced or waived screening fees (perhaps by filmmakers sympathetic to the festival's ethos) and the knowledge and experiences of festival organisers. Thus repertoires develop over time. However, it is clear that for the festival analysed in this research their activist repertoires are directed towards countering the effects of neoliberalism, and that at the very least the social change they advocate would be an end to this particular system. This is a more definitive approach to activism than film festivals who market vague appeals to "social change".

In her introduction to the (2012) edited collection, *Film Festivals and Activism*, Torchin's main point of reference is the human rights film festival as a genre or category that provides activists and filmmakers with the opportunity to network and exhibit films. Despite her awareness that "although for some it might seem that "activist" becomes interchangeable with "human rights"...the issues are much broader, as politics and industry also come into play" (Torchin, 2012: 3), these areas are paid little attention, and no effort is made to define "activist". As noted, the relation between activist and human rights warrants greater scrutiny, yet Torchin neglects to mention the body of literature that has problematised human rights discourse over the last few decades, overlooking, as Robin Blackburn notes, the ways in which "human rights" discourses have frequently presided over human rights atrocities, with the ostensible goal of restoring or maintaining human rights.

"Human Rights" can serve as a valuable watchword and measure. But because inequality and injustice are structural, constituted by multiple intersecting planes of capitalist accumulation and realisation more needs to be said - especially in relation to financial and corporate power and how these might be curbed and socialised (Blackburn, 2011).

The "activist", therefore, cannot be so easily placed within the human rights canon, unless we are talking about activism in terms of the degree to which it has been colonised by a neoliberalism which has sought to incorporate and/or neutralise dissenting discourses.

The lack of qualification regarding terms like "human rights", "activism" and "social change" is an oversight that runs throughout the film festival scholarship concerned with these issues, and is to some extent attributable to the seemingly vacuous and infinitely contestable nature of political terms and discourse in the neoliberal period. The work that has come closest to tackling this problem is Sonia Tascón's (2015) analysis of both human rights and film festivals as separate phenomena, in order to understand how the two discourses have influenced each other. Through a Foucauldian power-knowledge framework, Tascón ties human rights as a "system of knowledge that, through being aligned with powerful political forces, has imposed a certain view of "human" on the rest of humanity" (Tascón, 2015: 4) with the capacity for film festivals to screen certain films while leaving out others. Thus festival programming has the potential to disrupt the established discursive regime surrounding human rights. Tascón introduces the concept of the humanitarian gaze to explain how we view the troubles of others, particularly those suffering in distant lands, through a lens that is "configured through an axis of power and knowledge in which knowledge production reproduces a particular form of power" (Tascón, 2015: 38). The humanitarian gaze implies a separation between those watching and those who will be watched. "It organises who we will expect to see in these (humanitarian) circumstances, and includes who is not permitted into such a frame"

(Tascón, 2015: 35). As such, the humanitarian gaze is both universal and local. It looks outward from a particular context, seeking to apply ideals formulated within human rights discourse to “problematic” regions. “The idea of human rights, with its universality principle, thus appears to be encouraging programming that authorises a set of looking relations in which some may watch, while others are watched” (Tascón, 2015: 36). Tascón registers the historical and geo-political ramifications of this concept. By tracing the foundations of contemporary human rights discourse back to the American and French revolutions, she problematises the universalism inherent, for example, in the Declaration of Independence. Claims to a universal humanity, while enabling us “to recognise all peoples across the globe as “human”...and thus to imagine a bond...quickly breakdown beyond their abstracted idealisation”, subsumed as they are by local context (Tascón, 2015: 19). The claim to universality is, then, a mere justification for the revolution, “encasing it as a natural and God-given aspect of being-in-the-condition-of-human” (Tascón, 2015: 20). In short, a defensive measure against its furtherance beyond the paradigm of the newly established power.

In effect, human rights in contemporary terms were born to provide a moral narrative for conflicts that had been pernicious and deadly, but that had also left questions open as to their meanings. The ideal(s) of human rights were a means to give them meaning and also cement the new order...A universal humanity was invoked as a way of either naturalising the reason for the conflicts, or of mitigating their effects, or, more likely, both (Tascón, 2015: 21).

Applying the same logic to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed in 1948, universalism becomes an ideological tool used to naturalise and perpetuate Western modernity. Nation-states are the localities in which universal principles of human rights become practiced, necessitating a reduction in national sovereignty and a broadening of the “imagined community” to include all humanity, a feat, Tascón notes, which “is proving difficult to imagine” (Tascón, 2015: 26). Despite its problematic origins, human rights discourse, according to Tascón, can be transformed through its interjections with film and film festivals, which are “forever transforming human rights to reach closer to the principle of universality while remaining grounded within more localised meanings” (Tascón, 2015: 28). Film festivals are capable of transforming discourse, since they “have always been spaces of “organised unruliness”, or spaces for subversion of dominant forces” (Tascón, 2015: 30). Here, however, Tascón’s historical analysis is left wanting, and the consequences ripple through her entire theoretical framework.

The idea that film festivals have always been sites of subversion is, at best, a half-truth. While they have, as Tascón notes, played a historical role in the development of national cinemas as a

counterpoint and defence against Hollywood, this in itself hardly amounts to their being a subversive space, especially since film festivals have frequently been used to advance the socio-political aims of dominant power within their host nations (de Valck, 2007). The fact that the Venice Film Festival, established in 1932 in order to further the Italian tourist season and advance Mussolini's fascism, also subverted Hollywood to some degree, does not make it a space of "organised unruliness" either historically or in its present guise. Stringer (2001) notes that, as far back as the 1940s, film festivals could not even provide "a neutral background for the pure gaze of aesthetic contemplation" but merely a "location for the implantation of nationalistic agendas" (Stringer, 2001: 136). But there is a further omission in Tascón's analysis that goes beyond the nation state. Although she acknowledges the tension between a broad reaching human rights discourse, and the specific locality of human rights film festivals (that is, between globally abstracted discourse and the dwelt-in practicalities of specific locations), she fails to recognise how film festivals have been used as vehicles to perpetuate the interests of global capital. Thus her description of the tension between the local and global omits a deeper, systemic tension "between the appropriation and use of space for individual and social purposes and the domination of space through private property, the state, and other forms of social and class power" (Harvey, 1985: 13). Tascón does not consider these fundamental political questions surrounding urban struggle and the reproduction of space. Yet film festivals have always been nodes in geo-political networks of influence. Historically, they have served to perpetuate the hegemony of capitalist nation states. In the contemporary landscape, they play a number of roles that relate to the colonising function of neoliberalism, and they do so at least as much as they may disrupt established discursive flows through their supposed "unruliness".

The disruption of the humanitarian gaze is not, therefore, necessitated by the "disruptive discursive framework of film festivals" (Tascón, 2015: 41), since that discursive framework is just as ambivalent towards global capital as human rights discourse. Tascón's theory on localities overlooks the fact that in the entire "developed" world space and time is predominantly organised by capital, which standardises localities under the logic of exchange value. It is not the case, then, that merely by their intersection does the discourse of film and film festivals radicalise or even liberalise human rights discourse. The flipside to this critique is that Tascón performs a detailed analysis of the International Human Rights Film Festival of Argentina, and its relation to neoliberalism in that country. Throughout her book she notes the prevalence of the neoliberal paradigm, questioning "the extent to which neoliberal ideology penetrates the functioning of activist film festivals" and acknowledging the loss of the "revolutionary dimension" in human rights discourse (Tascón, 2015: 70). The idea that film festival discourse is inherently disruptive when it interjects with that of human rights is re-calibrated to some degree when she notes how the "social unruliness and limited

rebellion” of festivals always occurs “within the constraints set by some larger authority that permits it to take place” (ibid). Festivals therefore function within, and attempt to subvert, the restrictions set by the regime in which they are situated. The emptiness of the term “social change” is slightly alleviated when she notes how

The utopian ideal of “social change” that organises much of the impetus for activist film festivals can position these festivals to do that in relation to neoliberalism...that is, to change the parameters set out by neoliberal philosophy and practice (Tascón, 2015: 71).

How is it possible to integrate this framework of local/global forms of counter-hegemony to an analysis of film festivals? To do so, this research utilises a critical framework that describes how film festivals may develop a narrow fixation on either locally or globally directed forms of resistance. As noted, it is possible for these modes of apprehension to negate and even antagonise each other, leading to the formation of an either/or perspective. Resistance is either “based on an active, perceptual engagement with components of the dwelt-in world, in the practical business of life” or “on the detached, disinterested observation of a world apart” (Ingold, 1993: 41, cited in Harvey, 1994). The potential consequences of this situation have been outlined above in respect to resistance in general. Where film festivals in particular are concerned, this discrepancy elicits a narrow viewpoint that is reflected in the production of space – its organisational motives, film selection, the kinds of audiences the festival attracts and, finally, its deliberative local effects. This is important because anyone who is serious about countering neoliberalism (and certainly developing a broader alternative to capitalism as such) has to focus to some extent on resolving the tensions between the local and global.

The Film Festival Circuit

Yet the international film festival circuit is, to a large extent, a system of capital circulation and expansion. It is produced by (and reproduces) the spatial and ideological logic of neoliberalism. How might these boundaries be subverted? Julian Stringer’s (2001) work considers the need to move beyond a conceptualisation of the international film festival circuit as characterised by a “parliament of national film industries” towards one in which “cities now act as the nodal points on this circuit, not film industries” (Stringer, 2001: 138). The present research acknowledges Stringer’s efforts to shift the focus of the debate from a discussion on national cinemas and film exhibition to “considerations of the exhibition site itself as a new kind of counter public sphere”, as well as the “spatial logics of the historical and contemporary film festival circuit” (Stringer, 2001: 136, 138). According to Stringer

Inequality is built into the very structure of the international film festival circuit. In part, the astonishing growth of such events in the 1980s and beyond may be viewed as the logical result of the global economy's need to produce a large reservoir of other locations in other cities so as to continually rejuvenate the festival circuit through competition and cooperation (*ibid*).

It is worth emphasising that the proliferation of film festivals Stringer describes takes place at the same time as the neo-liberalisation of the economies of the Western hemisphere, and that the production of "other locations" under this specific logic highlights one of the means through which capital expands throughout this period. In this sense film festivals become integrated into the framework of neoliberalism, for example via the city marketing incentives that are often embedded within them. The cultural distinctions and festival brands that mark these supposed "unruly" events all have in common the fact that they are *marketed* for a profit. As well, therefore, as following up on Stringer's efforts to shift the focus of the discussion towards questions of counter public spheres and spatial-historical logics, this research argues for a need to conceptualise film festivals in relation to some of the fundamental effects of neoliberal globalisation: colonisation and uneven geographical development. This analysis acknowledges the logical boundaries in which discourse around film festivals has developed. For example, Stringer's analysis of the priorities and functions of local film festivals is constrained by the logical boundaries of the "international film festival circuit" he rightly criticises. Similarly to the compound growth incentives of capital, a film festival must constantly expand so as "not to be left behind by its rivals".

Consequently, the ambition of many festivals – regardless of their actual size and the catchment area they draw participants and audiences from – is to aspire to the status of a global event, both through the implementation of their programming strategies and through the establishment of an international reach and output...Another way of putting this is to say that as local festivals are forced actively to conceptualise themselves so as to compete for global financing, they have to create their own sense of community, and hence their own marketable trademark or brand image (Stringer, 2001: 139).

The discrepancy in Stringer's analysis can be found in the contradictory assertions that not all film festivals "are as market-oriented as the Cannes Festival" but that these days "festivals actually now market and project...a city's own "festival image", its own self-perception of the place it occupies within the global space economy" (Stringer, 2001: 140). However, the question that really should be asked in the context of the on-going neo-liberalisation of cities, the closing down of public space, the narrowing of our subjective and socialised horizon of possibilities in accordance with the

requirements of global capital, is not *what* element of a film festival is being marketed – whether it is stars, films, or locational uniqueness – but *why anything at all* should be marketed. From the perspective of the festivals analysed in this research the market constitutes more of a limitation than a useful and enabling instrument. Thus they aim to subvert the limitations it presents in respect to their own planning and execution, as well in the wider sense of carrying out other functions that are perceived to be of value.

Cindy Wong (2011) presents an analysis of film festivals in relation to Habermas' concept of the public sphere, the zone in which dialogical communication among members of a public leads to mobilisation and activism, and which Nancy Fraser (1997) has claimed to be a contemporary version of the Greek agora. Drawing on criticisms of the concept, she compares the exclusionary nature of the public sphere to the fact that film festivals "especially the most powerful ones, allocate major discursive roles to a selected few...in terms of class, many festivals build on an elite sense of distinction...working classes are rarely targeted as audiences or listened to except at "witnesses"" (Wong, 2011: 163). She goes on to write about Iranian cinema as a public sphere that challenges dominant power within that country. The problem with this is that Iranian cinema, as Wong knows, has primarily found an audience at high-end international film festivals, and that for Western audiences it is, or has been, primarily mediated through this sphere. Wong sees the confluence between a public sphere that challenges power in Iran, and a relatively elite Western public sphere only as a positive. She does not question the efficacy of such activism carried out by celebrities in relation to Middle Eastern governments, which is especially relevant when we question why similar engagement does not take place on a geo-domestic level. The much needed collusion between Iranian cinema and an international film festival circuit in the pursuit of equality and justice for Iranians (some Iranians, I might add) may constitute a significant, diasporic and transnational counter-public sphere², as far as addressing dominant power in Iran goes. However, congruent avoidance of injustices enacted by globally dominant powers tempers the emergence of a counter-public sphere in the West, giving only the appearance of an opposition via lip service paid to liberal ideals.

Herein lies one of the more complex ways in which larger film festivals take part in a liberalism that reflects the geo-political needs of dominant power, thus facilitating colonisation. Wong's analysis highlights a contradiction embedded within the functioning of human rights film festivals. "Most human rights film festivals" she states "see their mission as educating and empowering the audience

² According to Michael Warner (2005) counter-public spheres are those that exist alongside public spheres, but which understand themselves as subordinated via the assertion of established norms, and the hostility with which they are received by society in general.

about human rights abuses in the world...Voices of educators become...facilitators of the public sphere” (Wong, 2011: 174). Yet “human rights film festivals are still film festivals, and follow much the same logic and practices of other festivals, even as they constitute a special subset of that world” (Wong, 2011: 173). The contradiction becomes apparent if we take into account Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) theory of spatial reproduction, which argues that the logic of the mode of production (in this case neoliberal capitalism) is reflected in the kinds of space produced and the objects that fill it. Thus, in following the same profit-oriented logic and practices of the largest film festivals such as Cannes and Berlin, human rights film festivals primarily reproduce neoliberal space, albeit in a liberal humanist form. In failing to address the fundamental political and economic causes that give rise to many of the issues discussed therein, such spaces merely constitute what Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino (1969) have called the left-wing arm of capital, or what Wong calls, using a more a-political term, the “special subset”. The equation of human rights film festivals with concepts like “social change” and “activism”, where a significant proportion of actors within those latter fields self-describe in political terms as anarchist, socialist, communist or even just anti-capitalist, and who seek fundamental changes to “the system”, is therefore clearly problematic. More recently, Wong has written about “alternative festivals and counter-publics” (Wong, 2016: 90), conceptualising them in relation to the proletarian and feminist public spheres outlined by Oscar Negt and Alexander Kluge (1993) and Nancy Fraser respectively (1990), in response to Habermas’ public sphere theory. She argues that

Alternative film festivals, whether centred on women’s festivals, ethnic festivals, or any festivals that promote the voice of subordinated classes or issues should be examined as subaltern festivals...The very contradictory tendencies within film festivals can give rise to a better understanding of how different public spheres – bourgeois, counter, and subaltern – either complement each other or demand their own “spaces” within negotiated contestations (Wong, 2016: 90).

It is odd, therefore, that Wong then seeks to extrapolate this notion through an analysis of a “less vehemently oppositional forum” (Wong, 2016: 92) such as the AAIFF: Asian American International Film Festival in New York, giving only a few brief paragraphs to a more suitable subject such as the Subversive Film Festival in Croatia. Given that counter-public spheres have primarily been enunciated in response to specifically patriarchal and class based forms of oppression, it would seem prudent to formulate an initial analysis of subaltern and counter-public festivals based on these perspectives. The decision to analyse the AAIFF can only be justified by its designation as an “alternative” as opposed to counter-public or subaltern festival, as well as the assertion that it was

“guided by the Civil Rights Movement and movements around ethnic identity, gender, sexuality, and identity politics in all its manifestations” (ibid). The problem here lies in the assumption that a community or film festival can be counted as subaltern or counter-public simply because it is a public whose identity (whether ethnic, sexual or class-based) is non-dominant. This overlooks neoliberalism’s capacity to assimilate alterity within the sphere of the market, and suggests that mere cultural difference is the same as opposition to neoliberalism (Hall, 2008).

The AAIF, then, is “alternative” only to the extent that it enables forms of expression by a non-dominant public, which could just as easily be amenable to neoliberal capital. Taking this on board would entail a view of counter-publics that opposes the logic of capital and therefore neoliberal colonisation. Recent research has gone some way to addressing such questions. For example, an issue of the journal, *Cinergie* (2014), has been dedicated to various case studies that deal with the relations between geo-politics and film festivals. As the editors’ note, “the variety of approaches adopted here, tap into historical but also ethnographic and cultural analysis to unravel socio-cultural concerns that span from social activism, urban spaces, ethnic mobilization, film production culture and also cinephilia” (Acciari, Menarini, 2014). As noted, case studies on the relations between film festivals and broader power structures such as the state are traceable as far back as the 1968 Cannes Film Festival. However, Ludovico Fales’ ethnographic study of human rights and social change film festivals suggests that the film festival structure transformed by the events of 1968 is undergoing a further, contemporary synthesis with activism “in the light of the current transnational dimension of new media communication” (Fales, 2014). Highlighting the intersections between activism, social media and film festivals, Fales situates his three case studies in the context of protests that took place across the globe throughout 2011, particularly the occupation of Tahrir Square in Egypt. He analyses the “influence of the local (and global) civic agencies on the festival and especially on the decision of directors to choose a specific theme or guests” (Fales, 2014).

Enrico Vannucci’s comparative study of the Venice and Rome International Film Festivals brings Policy Studies into the discussion through an analysis of how and when state funds are allocated to festivals, particularly given the often frenetic pace of governmental change in Italy. Vannucci analyses documents obtained from Italy’s Ministry of Culture to identify shifting patterns and cycles in funding, and the relations these bear to wider political developments. In doing so, he shows how Italy lacks cultural programming practices that are coordinated by a supranational institution, detached from political influence. Political forces have indirectly administered cultural policies and practices, for a long time. Consequently this custom has led to a frequent change of managers in several cultural institutions each time a new government has been elected...this malpractice has

endangered, rather than strengthened, the several cultural institutions active in the country (Vannucci, 2014).

Skadi Lost (2011) draws on issues within labour studies in her examination of film festival funding and its impact on the conditions of workers who, as opposed to being “gatekeepers” of culture that “occupy highly remunerated managerial positions of great influence” (Loist, 2011: 268), for the most part operate under conditions of low to no pay and short term contracts.

Thus festival workers fit perfectly the model of cultural workers with precarious living conditions. Sociologists such as David Hesmondhalgh or Alexandra Manske, working on creative and cultural industries – seen by policymakers as the new job-generators and profitable sectors – have found that workers in this field are often in precarious working conditions characterized by low pay, project-based temporary employment and a lack of career objectives, benefits or retirement plans (Loist, 2011: 270).

Through a comparative analysis of the Hamburg International Film Festival and the Hamburg Queer Film Festival, Loist finds that the latter not only receives significantly less funding, but that the festivals are categorised by the city under different branches of public cultural funding. The Queer Film Festival is one of numerous events that are categorised under the heading “General Public Funding”, while the International Film Festival is a “declared city event” that makes a contribution to the economy through city marketing and tourism. It is therefore categorised as part of the creative industries sector (Loist, 2011: 272). Situating these festivals within the context of capital flows in the cultural economy brings up questions regarding who “the money that is flowing through the circuit [is] actually going to, if not to festival organizers or filmmakers? Who gains from this flow of capital and who should thus support the festival circuit and its workers?” (Loist, 2011: 273).

The film festivals that will be analysed in this research often screen films in both cinemas and community spaces such as union halls, bars, cultural centres, and even derelict buildings. Thus they move between what Miriam Ross (2013) identifies as the regulated space of the cinema, and the relatively deregulated space of the community screening. These spatial parameters elicit different bodily experiences and reactions. According to Ross

Much of the interaction that occurs between audience, exhibitor and film object is influenced by the physical parameters of the exhibition site. Within the movie theatre, there is often a systematisation of space where we are governed rather than asked to participate...community exhibition is an apt site for extending disorder through its use of *ad hoc* sites that are prone to extra noise and interruptions; a flow of audience members

coming and going; and distractions around by the space around the screening. The sanctity or solitude of the viewing space is further interrupted when community exhibition groups schedule debates and discussions whereby audiences are allowed to speak to the text and to one another (Ross, 2013: 452).

Finally, then, the present research seeks to probe this different form of spatial dynamic in terms of how the film festivals under analysis foster politically and cinematically disordered space, and the ways in which such spaces both resist and participate in neoliberalism.

Conclusion

The critical framework outlined in this chapter has situated film festivals within the context of a locally and globally oriented neoliberalism, and the desire to use film festivals as a means of resistance, as opposed to mere “resilience”, which accepts and seeks only to endure the endless catastrophes of neoliberalism. Much of the previous film festival and activism scholarship has, however, failed to account for the dynamic nature of capitalism, its colonising effects on culture and public space, and indeed its requirement for dissent in order to uphold the appearance of a healthy and functional system. Contemporary studies on “activism” and “social change” must take this dynamic into account. It is no coincidence that the proliferation of film festivals throughout the 1980s and 90s has taken place at a time in which neoliberalism has been in the ascendancy, and the identity politics that has accompanied it belies a focus on political economic questions around colonisation and uneven geographical development, as well as the ways in which film festivals can both perpetuate and resist neoliberalism. The research therefore engages film festivals in terms of their local/global activist orientations, their understanding of neoliberalism, and their relation to counter-hegemonic spatial and cultural reproduction in the neoliberal city.

Literature Review

This chapter is divided into three sections. Primarily, it offers a review of the literature surrounding Habermas' public sphere concept and the theorisation of counter-publics. The aim here is to show how forms of film and video activism have played a role in the establishment and facilitation of critical discourses that address capital and neoliberalism. Following this, the chapter carries out an extensive analysis of neoliberalism, its history, function and present forms. In the UK, neoliberalism's co-optation of culture has led to the emergence of the "creative industries" and "knowledge economy" paradigms, as well as increased efforts to marketise education, and the shift in arts subsidies from public to commercially oriented bodies. Finally, the chapter examines some of the existing research around spatial and cultural reproduction in the neoliberal city. Overall, the purpose of this chapter is to show how film festivals can act as counter-public spheres within neoliberal modernity.

I. The Public Sphere and Counterpublics

According to Habermas, throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, a newly emerging bourgeois public was constituted in part by its counter-positioning in respect to the state, and the possibility of holding the state to account through public discourse. Publicity facilitates the inter-subjectivity of the bourgeois public sphere, which, according to Habermas, emerges in tandem with a liberal capitalism that required a consistent, standardised flow of information. This "became imperative to the degree to which the exchange of commodities and of securities became continuous" (Habermas, 2009: 16). The mass migration of private concerns beyond the realm of the household into the now (consequently) publicly relevant "market" gives rise to commercial economics. Specialised newsletters, at this point inaccessible to the majority of the public but circulated among merchant capitalists, become profitable as information is transformed into a commodity. "It was therefore natural to increase the profits by selling to more people" (Habermas, 2009: 21). It is important to note that these occurrences herald the birth not only of the mass media, but of a politically mobilised mass media in the hands of private interests with the economic means to control and direct it. Meanwhile, the state's addressing of its own press to a public consisting mainly of bourgeois subjects that come together in literary societies (Germany), salons (France) and coffee houses (UK) facilitates the use of critical judgment in debates on culture. Those operating within this area, exclusively bourgeois males, gained recognition as a public person through mastery over their own private realm (oikos). In the context of increased outsourcing of social reproduction away from the private household, "the patriarchal conjugal family emerges as the dominant type within the bourgeois strata" (Habermas, 2009: 44).

These occurrences foment the dissolution of the public and private realms. As capitalism rigidifies from a liberal to a more organised mode, the state adopts a policy of intervention “guided by the interest of maintaining the equilibrium of the system which could no longer be secured by way of the free market” (Habermas, 2009: 146). Habermas points to Franz Neumann’s assertion that the state has only ever been as strong or weak as required by the bourgeoisie, and the consequences are evident in the continuation of protectionist policies adopted by the UK government in the wake of the economic crash of 2007/8. The state’s hostile relationship with the newly emergent bourgeoisie meant that it was “forced to adopt the interests of civil society as its own” (Habermas, 2009: 142). Here the dissolution of the private and public realms displays a certain irony, for the subsequent “interventions by public power in the affairs of private people transmitted impulses that indirectly grew out of the latter’s own sphere” (ibid).

Only this dialectic of “societalisation” of the state simultaneously with an increasing “stateification” of society gradually destroyed the basis of the bourgeois public sphere – the separation of state and society...it also led to the disintegration of that specific portion of the private realm within which private people assembled to constitute a public and to regulate those aspects of their commerce with each other that were of general concern, namely, the public sphere in its liberal form (ibid).

The dissolution of the private and public realms occurs via the changing political function of the state, leading to certain changes within a continuously eroded public sphere. For example, the public welfare state intervenes in the private realm of the home by way of individualised provisions. Each family member is treated in a systematised, isolated fashion indicative of a widening bureaucracy, and reflective of the enlightenment image of rational individuals making independent choices as to their own habits of consumption. The public sphere as a world of letters entered into and discussed at leisure becomes de-politicised through the interjection between public activity and private concerns in the reproduction of life. Thus the division between work and leisure becomes increasingly permeable. In Habermas’ account of the encroachment of the laws that govern commodity exchange into the realm of cultural production we have a tangible example of how instrumental rationality begins to transform society. As he points out “rational-critical debate had a tendency to be replaced by consumption, and the web of public communication unravelled into acts of individuated reception, however uniform in mode” (Habermas, 2009: 161). Later, however, Habermas will make a number of revisions to the concept of the public sphere, highlighting, for example, this changeover from rational debate to purely consumptive concerns as an oversimplification of the role of the media.

Since its first publication in 1962 *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* has been subject to widespread scrutiny (Calhoun, 1997, Sitton, 2003, Crossley and Roberts, 2004, Goode, 2005). Reformulations of the concept seem, primarily, to have been undertaken along the lines of class (see Negt, Kluge, 1993). A sustained body of feminist critique has debated over issues of class and the politics of cultural difference (Couture, 1995, Fraser, 1997), as well as globalisation and the transnationalisation of the public sphere (Nash, 2014). These areas of criticism have emanated from dissatisfaction with Habermas' historiography, specifically the central role he grants to the bourgeois male in the facilitation of the emergence of the public sphere, to the detriment of other social groups. Crossley (1996) highlights some links between the concept of the public sphere and Habermas' theories on the relation between the lifeworld (the background of meaning against which people make sense of reality) and subsystems (devised to manage reality in order to facilitate human flourishing). The shrinking of the public sphere as one of participatory democracy takes place as communicative action is undermined by the requirements of the nation state and the rationalised economy. Examples may include the neoliberal apprehension of political parties and increased disillusionment of large portions of the population with the processes of representative democracy. Once a desirable prelude to the alleviation of toil, systematisation takes on a pathological character, colonising parts of the lifeworld and re-orienting practices towards fulfilling the interests of dominant systems, "whilst leisure, sexual relationships, family life and even selfhood and psychological predisposition are increasingly incorporated into both the administrative gaze and the marketplace" (Crossley, 1996: 120).

Here the concept of the public sphere is useful in constructing an account of the increasing systematisation of the lifeworld. "The rise of the New Right" for example "has involved a shift in the rationality systems of certain national administrations, which has involved a "rolling back" of the welfare state and a re-marketisation or privatisation of once public sector domains" (Crossley, 1996: 123). Such developments, Crossley concludes, do not render Habermas' account incapable of providing "a concrete description of actual social systems" (ibid). However, he problematises the distinction between system and lifeworld, drawing on Fraser's (1997) argument that the lifeworld, posited as a sphere against domineering subsystems, is itself riddled with forms of oppression, which can be enacted via communicative action (that is, discourse oriented toward achieving mutual understanding) as much as they can by steering media (which instrumentalises discourse towards achieving its own aims). Since feminism is one part "resisting colonisation of the lifeworld" and "equally resisting inequalities within the lifeworld itself", the conception of system-lifeworld relations must be broadened, taking into account other, minoritised publics, or as Fraser (1997) calls them "counter-publics". This concept will be examined more closely later. For now, it will suffice to

note that the system/lifeworld dichotomy stands up only as a conceptual tool pandering to its own imminent collapse. As noted, a certain degree of systematisation of the lifeworld (rationalisation) allows for the separation of knowledge spheres and the subsequent institutionalised development of highly specialised knowledge. This rationalisation serves a different purpose than the more sinister colonisation of the lifeworld, as it enables, rather than maligns, communicative action.

To the degree that the institutionalised production of knowledge that is specialised according to cognitive, normative and aesthetic validity claims penetrates to the level of everyday communication and replaces traditional knowledge in its interaction guiding functions, there is a rationalisation of everyday practice that is accessible only from the perspective of action oriented towards reaching understanding- a rationalisation of the lifeworld that Weber neglected as compared with the rationalisation of action systems like the economy and the state (Habermas, 1984: 340).

Like the permeable relation between public and private, system and lifeworld do not constitute exclusively opposing forces. As Habermas points out, they are at once complementary and counteracting tendencies. This conceptual framework allows for the demarcation of the ambivalent processes and relations that facilitate our complex and fraught modernity. The porous distinction between system/lifeworld, private/public is further elaborated in the interdependent relation between institutions and practices within the contemporary city.

On a superficial level, the concept of the public sphere, which primarily delineates the realms of the public and private, is easy enough to grasp. However, in charting its emergence and structural transformation Habermas does not set out to sustain this dichotomy. Rather, it is a tool he uses primarily to explain the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie and its gradual absorption into the apparatus of the state. While charting the emergence, around the time of the Enlightenment, of a critical public making use of its reason, Habermas work on the public sphere can often become frustrating in its seeming ambivalence. This is due to his laying out of a multitude of overlapping historical forces that occasionally appear as contradictory, and “whose complexity precludes exclusive reliance on the specialised methods of a single discipline” (Habermas, 2009: 18). Hence Negt and Kluge’s assertion that “the unfolding of the dialectic immanent within the public sphere that enables one to determine the concrete relationships between private and public with more precision” indicates how the two are not mutually exclusive, but are “externally related to one another” and “produce their respective opposite from within themselves” (Negt, Kluge, 1993: 57).

In *The Public Sphere and Experience* (1979) Negt and Kluge foreground the public sphere as a symbolic organisation of collective experience that develops into an illusory synthesis of the totality of society. The distinction drawn between the bourgeoisie and the public sphere highlights the latter as a material framework and the former as a specific group in society with particular interests. The public sphere has a use-value, while the bourgeoisie has a character mask that enables its commandeering. This relation bears fruit, as I have noted, in the states protectionist policies and regard for bourgeois interests. Contemporary politics, according to Negt and Kluge, is revealed through its inability to “make a decision that runs counter to the interests of capital” (Negt, Kluge, 1993: 47). The authors therefore commit themselves to an analysis of the proletarian public sphere and its dialectical relations with the bourgeois public sphere. Dedicated to Adorno, *The Public Sphere and Experience* draws on the “excising of the incommensurable”, the equalising and/or destruction of life’s components under the laws of commodity exchange (Adorno, Horkheimer, 1995). For Adorno and Horkheimer, this problem can be traced back to the emergence of Enlightenment positivism. Anything that cannot be utilised within this new instrumental schema is destroyed. Thus the roots of totalitarianism can be found in the form of reasoning that has remained dominant within the “developed” world since its historical emergence during the Enlightenment. The universalising of the bourgeois symbolic order requires the “systematic negation – whether by political exclusion or economic and ideological appropriation – of larger realms of social experience” (Hansen, 1993: xv). Ironically, the idea of a critical public inherent in the bourgeois public sphere contributes to the dominant position of this sphere over others. The illusory synthesis of a totality of society results from the eclipsing of many cultural forms by a domineering group whose material and ideological position is strengthened through the continued enclosure of the state and its means of production. Put simply, the ideas of the emerging bourgeois strata become naturalised, or, to paraphrase Marx, the ideas of societies ruling class become the ruling ideas of society.

Although largely unacknowledged in much of the subsequent literature, Negt and Kluge’s relatively early critique of the public sphere provides a cornerstone to later arguments. Fraser (1997), for example, picks up their identification of the public sphere as a structure of dominance from a feminist perspective. Drawing on revisionist historiographies that challenge the bourgeois, masculinist conception of the public sphere as universal, Fraser points out how

This network of clubs and associations- philanthropic, civic, professional and cultural- was anything but accessible to everyone. On the contrary, it was the arena, the training ground, and eventually the power base of a stratum of bourgeois men who were coming to see themselves as a “universal class” and preparing to assert their fitness to govern. Thus the

elaboration of a distinctive culture of civil society and of an associated public sphere was implicated in the process of bourgeois class formation (Fraser, 1997: 114).

The formation of a public sphere not only initiates, but relies on the exclusion of other groups. However, Fraser is not concerned with simply dismissing or vindicating the concept. Rather, she challenges some of the basic assumptions of a public sphere that hides behind notions of universal applicability to the extent that it is naturalised. Primarily, the idea that deliberation within the public sphere requires the bracketing out of social inequalities among participants leads us to believe that “societal inequality is not a necessary condition for political democracy” (Fraser, 1997: 117). The pretence of already existing social equality becomes a tool used by the bourgeois sphere to avoid the fact of its dominance. The only way to address the problem of deliberation rooted in an unequal power relation is to strive for the elimination of social inequality through its explicit thematisation, “a point that accords with Habermas’ later communicative ethics” (Fraser, 1997: 120). Fraser sees this as a step towards fostering participatory parity in the public sphere. Challenging the assumption that “the proliferation of a multiplicity of publics is necessarily a step away from, rather than toward, greater democracy, and that a single public sphere is always preferable to a nexus of multiple publics (Fraser, 1997: 117), she argues that participatory parity is dependent on their being a plurality of interacting publics. Within the boundaries of a single public sphere that absorbs all subordinate groups, people are denied a space within which to define their own specific needs and interests. Their discussion always takes place under the supervision of dominant groups. Thus they are inhibited from voicing their thoughts. Fraser points to a historiography which records how “members of subordinated social groups- women, workers, peoples of colour, gays and lesbians- have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics” (Fraser, 1997: 123). She calls these “subaltern counter-publics...discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs” (ibid). Although Fraser looks at two more assumptions of the bourgeois public sphere (that it is an arena for the discussion of common good, as opposed to private interests, and that it requires a sharp distinction between civil society and state).

Within stratified societies, writes Fraser

Subaltern counter-publics have a dual character. On the one hand they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed towards wider publics. It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential lies (Fraser, 1997: 124).

The distinction Fraser draws between weak and strong publics facilitates a more specific examination of the relation between counter-publics and the state, retaining the flexibility necessary to engage such a topic while negating generality. As noted, she does not rely on a sharp distinction between civil society and the state in her formulation of the public sphere. It is this distinction, Fraser claims, which places certain deliberating publics outside any kind of decision making process, which is what makes them weak publics, as opposed to strong publics, which are embodied in sovereign parliaments. The problem with maintaining this distinction, as she points out, is two-fold. Firstly, strong publics left to their own devices tend not to place socioeconomic equality high on their agenda. Secondly, the requirement that weak publics should be separate from strong publics means that this conception of the public sphere

Will be unable to imagine the forms of self-management, inter-public coordination, and political accountability that are essential to a democratic and egalitarian society...What is needed, rather, is a post-bourgeois conception that can permit us to envision a greater role for (at least some) public spheres than mere autonomous opinion formation removed from authoritative decision making (Fraser, 1997: 136).

The strength of a public sphere theory that collapses the distinction between non-parliamentary actors and the state, as formulated by Fraser in the sense of weak and strong publics, is that it allows us to consider interactions between strong and weak counter-publics. Holst (2002) notes how social movement scholars have consistently focused on groups that contest power, often to the detriment of analysing their relations to those in power. These relations are examples what Fraser calls “hybrid cases”. In this respect we no longer talk about strong and weak publics, but stronger and weaker publics (Fraser, 1997:135). This gives rise to a theoretical framework that moves beyond mere relations between parliament and constituents, to interactions between a plurality of counter-publics. This is not to say that we shouldn’t take the problem of the proximity between an ostensible counter-public and the dominant public sphere seriously. McLaughlin (2004), for example, criticises cosmopolitan democracy as focusing on groups who are already included in the dominant public sphere and have been instrumentalised. The UN, for example, is a “weak organizational locus...because it represents a constellation of member states that have been instrumentalised, or at least intimidated, by global market forces” (McLaughlin, 2004: 170). McLaughlin also criticises feminist NGO’s for their contribution to the bureaucratisation of feminism resulting from their gaining access to the UN. Such access problematises their status as facilitators of “globalisation from below”, for

As several feminists have observed, to work within the existing structures of the UN system is to contribute to and maintain an institutional home in which “women’s issues” are mainstreamed into deeply gendered bureaucracies that co-opt the language of progressive social movements (McLaughlin, 2004: 170).

The task for both McLaughlin and Fraser, then, is the creation of a transnational, feminist counter-public sphere that can negotiate with, and even infiltrate, the dominant bourgeois public sphere without losing its radical edge. It is understood that contemporary public sphere theory must move beyond the bounds of the Westphalian nation state (Fraser, 2014) while taking into account the communicative access, or lack thereof, of minoritised groups, particularly in respect of the increasing colonisation of the media. As McLaughlin notes

The emphasis on trade within media and communications policy-making has had enormous consequences for the public sphere, as increases in commercialisation, concentration in media ownership and an unprecedented growth in large media corporations have been accompanied by an erosion of community and national control over media and a collapse in public expenditures that might otherwise be used to support non-commercial forms of media (McLaughlin, 2004: 162).

This research looks more closely at the political economy of communication in its methodology section. For now, it aims to contextualise film and video activism as a counterpublic sphere that in many respects is constituted by the ambivalent relation between anti-capitalist and liberal humanist forms of spatial and cultural reproduction. This perspective can be transferred to the context of Film Festival Studies, and also has some resonances in Social Movement Theory.

Counter-public Spheres: Film and Video Activism

The shift from public to private funding of cultural projects is a trend noted by Stephen Presence (2013) in relation to the contemporary landscape of video activism. This is a particularly important area, since it combines the analysis of the colonisation of cultural production and its institutions with the colonisation of perhaps one of the few remaining areas of public life that may engender a specifically oppositional political consciousness – activism. The question of the extent to which the aims, aesthetics and methods of video activism corroborate with those of dominant institutions has been at the forefront of much politically conscious praxis. However, since the 1970s the downfall of the classical Marxist narrative and its replacement by a Thatcher/Reagan inflected liberal pluralism has had a drastic effect on popular ideas regarding political legitimacy, action and protest. At the same time, the proliferation of cheaper film making, distribution and exhibition technologies does

not in itself make video activism a more viable tool of opposition, insofar as these developments occur under the spatial, temporal and financial command of neoliberalism. Thus the contemporary landscape of video activism is formed by the shifting relation between cultural production and domestic as well as geo-politics, with video activists carving their way through in as best a way they can according to their relative prohibitions.

According to Presence the landscape of “oppositional feature documentary” since the mid-2000s has been characterised by the emergence of the “liberal-humanist strand” alongside the relative neglect within the mainstream of “low-budget, activist oriented films and films produced by oppositional auteur filmmakers” (Presence, 2013: 168). Although these latter projects were given support from Channel 4 (whose main commitment to alternative filmmaking came through the Workshop Agreement in the 1980s) in the first half of the 1990s, this dried up as the channel was gradually re-oriented. Thus the main financial support base for the production of radical activist film was removed. The emerging liberal-humanist strand “tends to be distinctly less oppositional in outlook” characterised as it is by “a preference for individual solutions to social problems and limited to reformist arguments fundamentally amenable to the status quo” (ibid). Channel 4 remains key to this strand of documentary filmmaking, though now as the primary funder of the BRITDOC Foundation, the function of which is “to broker partnerships between filmmakers and a variety of funding sources, from charities and NGO’s to corporations such as Orange, Ford, Waitrose, Saatchi & Saatchi, Stella Artois, Nokia, Google, and Wal-Mart” (Presence, 2013: 176). As private funding opportunities continue to eclipse those offered by the public sector, corporations are turning towards “activist” films as a way to “make their activities appear socially and ethically responsible” (Presence, 2014: 174). Both Cause-Related Marketing (CRM) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) are now significant elements on the corporate public relations agenda.

However, while documentaries subject to CRM and CSR strategies undoubtedly benefit from the funding they receive, the “causes” do not. Corporations are beholden by law to act in the best interests of their shareholders, and therefore will not support documentaries which place social needs over corporate revenue (Presence, 2013: 175).

This mode of branded documentary thus brackets out the fundamental problems that give rise to the “issues” they claim to address. The problem inheres primarily in their liberal-humanist values. On one hand, liberalism’s focus on the rational individual occludes the notion that social reality is constructed primarily by systems that involve collectives or classes of people. On the other, the liberal idea of tolerance restricts its ability to mount serious challenges to “reasonable” systems. Thus we find in Presence’s example of such a liberal-humanist documentary, *The End of the Line*

(Murray, 2009), a film that responds to the catastrophic environmental effects of over fishing by advocating the consumption of non-endangered fish, instead of addressing the neoliberal imperatives that propel the system towards over-fishing in the first place. To round-off the connection between corporations and this documentary form, Presence reports how one of the film's major supporters, Waitrose, actually increased its fish sales by 15%, having secured the platform of a politically conscious documentary through which to advertise. "That a film about the dangers of over fishing could lead to an increase in fish consumption is so blatantly contradictory that the limits to liberal-humanist documentary are palpable" (Presence, 2013: 182). Presence contrasts these documentaries with those of oppositional auteurs and grassroots activists that engage with more radical solutions to social problems, as well as pushing formal boundaries and challenging dominant modes of practice.

The term "radical" is derived from the Latin "radix" meaning "roots". Thus radical film is that which challenges fundamental social norms, including, within filmmaking itself, the areas of content, production, distribution and exhibition. It is more distant from the mainstream media than the liberal-humanist strand, and typically shirks any alignment with corporate interests. However, it is impossible to sustain a rigid definition of the term "radicalism". It cannot be said, for example, that only films which self-identify as anti-capitalist can be labelled radical. This is because, primarily, there are very few of these. Many radical films concentrate on single issues or events as opposed to carrying out broader critiques of capital before advocating its dissolution. Moreover, challenging power in any given context could be considered a radical act. Liberal activist films that seek, for example, to expose the social malpractice of a corporation and cause it significant problems undoubtedly find themselves aligned to a certain degree with radicalism. Yet interpretations of, solutions to, and methods of solving issues between liberalism and radicalism have tended to differ greatly. For this reason, the physical space in which a film is exhibited, interpreted and discussed takes on a renewed importance, as this can become a space in which the single issues or events represented in films may be connected to deeper political, cultural and socio-economic problems. This is what is meant by consciousness-raising. In this context it is a result of the interactions between film, the space of exhibition and the audience, both with themselves and with the text. Although liberal leaning film festivals and video activism may be more prevalent in the UK, there are certain forms of radical video activism that can be more closely aligned to the tradition of Third Cinema that began in Latin America in the late 60s. Therein film makers were not only practitioners, they were cultural theorists and educators who saw themselves and their work as playing a role within a global, primarily anti-neo-colonial, struggle. The theoretical framework of Third Cinema is constituted by a typology of film that identifies mainstream Hollywood and its hegemonic, colonial

incentives as first cinema. Second cinema is characterised by auteurism, which moves away from the mass production and commodification of film, and sees the director as more of an artist than a mere cog in an industrial machine. However, according to Solanas and Getino

Real alternatives differing from those offered by the System are only possible if one of two requirements is fulfilled: making films that the System cannot assimilate and which are foreign to its needs, or making films that directly and explicitly set out to fight the System. Neither of these requirements fits within the alternatives that are still offered by the second cinema, but they can be found in the revolutionary opening towards a cinema outside and against the System, in a cinema of liberation: the third cinema (Solanas, Getino, 1969).

It may be possible to replicate this typology in relation to film festivals. First wave film festivals such as Cannes and Venice could be contrasted with their more “independent”, second wave counterparts such as Toronto or the Sundance Film Festival. Also included within this category could be activist and/or human rights film festivals that are more closely aligned to liberal humanism than anti-capitalism. These embody the outer limits of activist cultural production that seeks solutions amenable to capital in the same way the 2nd cinema concept identifies the limits of auteurist film. Finally, third wave festivals could be those that advocate the dissolution of capitalism and its multifarious oppressions, developing a praxis in the vein of counter-hegemonic cultural production. These are anti-capitalist film festivals that aim to interrogate the fundamental norms of neoliberal culture. They engender radical public spheres via the circulation of radical film and its given status as a precursor to dialogue among the audience - what Solanas and Getino refer to as the “dialogue of liberation” (Solanas, Getino, 1969). This framework must, however, be updated via its placement in relation to contemporary social movements. In this way it is possible to carry out a mapping of radical public spheres onto modernity as it is enacted within the neoliberal city. This view of film festivals draws on de Valck’s phases, but extrapolates them within the critical framework of radical film culture, offering a different perspective on film exhibition and the formation of counter-public spheres.

The Public Sphere: Revisions

Habermas (1997) responds to a broad array of criticism from a number of scholars. The current analysis limits itself to these key issues: the dialectic between the bourgeois and proletarian public spheres, revisions made to the Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere in accordance with the vastly different media landscape that had taken shape since 1962, when the book was first published, and Habermas’ defence of the concept of the public sphere against that of the global civil society. Habermas revises his historiography based primarily on his analysis of Eley’s (1997) critique,

which is rooted in Gramsci's concept of hegemony. The public sphere is an arena of conflicting meanings and ideas, "from which certain "publics" (women, subordinate nationalities, popular masses like the urban poor and working class, and the peasantry) may have been excluded altogether" as part of the "harnessing of public life to one particular group" (Eley, 1997: 326).

This slow and conscious hegemonic project, Eley contends, was enacted by bourgeois intellectuals: journalists, priests and party officials. The emergence of Jacobin radicalism in Great Britain in the late 1700's, and its relation with the lower strata of society, however, indicates a nascent counter-hegemony, that is, a commitment to chiselling out space within the public sphere through a pedagogical project of educating the masses. "Unlike the radicals of the 1780's, the Jacobins entered into a direct relationship with their putative public, and unlike conventional parliamentarians, they did so in a non-manipulative, non-demagogic way". Thus many of the texts produced within the bourgeois strata were dedicated to informing the proletariat. "A new "plebeian public sphere" emerged...nourished on the intense political didacticism of...a rich diet of pamphlets, tracts and political magazines" (Eley, 1997: 329). Habermas' acknowledges that the bourgeois public sphere, as a structure of communication from which certain discourses are excluded, is mutually constitutive of a plebeian public sphere. This brings us back to the initial critique of Negt and Kluge, in which there is a dialectical relation between the bourgeois and proletarian public spheres.

This culture of the common people was apparently by no means a backdrop, that is, a passive echo of the dominant culture; it was also the periodically occurring violent revolt of a counter-project to the hierarchical world of domination...If we apply the same perspective to the bourgeois public sphere, the exclusion of women from this world dominated by men now looks different to me than it appeared at the time (Habermas, 1997: 427).

This newly acknowledged plurality leads Habermas to revise his theory on the relation between the bourgeois public sphere and the state. The contradictory stateification of society and societalisation of the state is problematised by the fact that a plurality of publics enhances the resistant capacities of the public sphere. Competing interests within this sphere should now be thought of more in terms of platforms for potential self-transformation, while the revolutionary aim is no longer to supersede the capitalist state, but to "erect a democratic dam against the colonising encroachment of system imperatives on areas of the lifeworld" (Habermas, 1997: 444). This second point is made in hindsight of the failure of the state socialist project throughout Europe and subsequent levels of human suffering. States can "no longer be transformed democratically from within...without damage to their proper systemic logic and therewith their ability to function" (ibid). In Habermas' revision of the public sphere, the media now plays a more central role in disrupting and altering the dominant

discursive regime. Habermas emphasises a plurality of “conditions of communication under which there can come into being a discursive formation of opinion on the part of a public composed of citizens of the state” (Habermas, 1997: 446). The potential for media to foster relations among public spheres strengthens the democratic dam, a function all the more important in light of its counteracting potential “to procure mass loyalty, consumer demand and “compliance with systemic imperatives” (Habermas, 1997: 452). This emphasis on the importance of analysing the constitutive relations and interchanges between publics makes the political public sphere a more suitable framework than that of global civil society, whose “reference to a “supportive” spirit of differentially organised lifeworlds and their potential for critical reflection is not sufficient” (Habermas, 1997: 453). It should be noted, however, that while the pluralised public sphere is central to alliance formation, Habermas’ new imperative of constructing a democratic dam against, rather than working to replace, systems of capital, turns the public sphere into a mere defensive concept.

It also risks paving the way for a concept of civil society that puts an unrealistic level of distance between itself, the state and the market. This has led some scholars within the field of Civil Society Studies to argue that the so called “new social movements” that emerged after the late 1960s should not concern themselves with either reforming or revolutionising the state, but turn their energies toward defending civil society from the invasive tendencies of both the state and the capitalist market. Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, for example, define “civil society as

A sphere of social interaction between economy and the state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations...social movements, and forms of public communication. Modern civil society is created through forms of self-constitution and self-mobilisation. It is institutionalised and generalised through laws, and especially subjective rights, that stabilise social differentiation. While the self-creative and institutionalised dimensions can exist separately, in the long terms both independent action and institutionalisation are necessary for the reproduction of civil society (Cohen, Arato, 1992: ix).

Cohen and Arato’s analysis is taken up primarily as part of a search for a new “post-statist” politics. They identify two versions of regressive anti-statism that have failed in modern history. First, there is the defence of a “pre-modern network of communities, traditional solidarities, and collectives against modernity itself”. Second, “there are various conservative, neoliberal and libertarian initiatives...that identify “society” with the market economy”. However “there is no chance of the first trend registering even temporary success” while “the second trend...threatens to transform history into oscillation between economic liberalism and paternalist statism” (Cohen, Arato, 1992:

30). With these failures in mind, they posit a form of political orientation that also breaks the ostensibly defunct, traditional antinomy between reform and revolution. They advocate a “self-limiting revolution” or “self-limiting radicalism” wherein “the object of radical reconstruction and also its (multiple, non-unified) subjects shifts from the state to society” (Cohen, Arato, 1992: 72). It is clear that the self-limiting revolution should, according to Cohen and Arato, be carried out by and through civil society. However, it would be ridiculous to completely ignore the role of the state in the reproduction of social, cultural and material existence.

What, then, according to Cohen and Arato, is the relation between civil society and the state? The answer is that a “political society” acts as a mediator between the two, but remains distinct from civil society, insofar as the role of the latter is the self-limiting revolution of itself, as opposed to the reformation or revolutionising of the state. The general tendency among Civil Society theorists seems to be that this self-limiting revolution will lead to the democratising of social and political life, while keeping intact a properly functioning market economy. There are two fundamental problems with this theory. The first is that a capitalist market economy requires compound expansion (Harvey, 2011). This means that markets are constantly sought in areas of civic and social life that cannot defend themselves against marketisation without effective regulation as enacted by the state. This belies the second problem: Insofar as the task of social movements (whether older social movements (OSMs) such as trade unions and left-wing political parties or new social movements (NSMs), such as “third sector” organisations, and those more concerned with the assertion of identity and cultural autonomy) is re-oriented towards the self-limiting revolution of civil society as a sphere that is separate from the state, the capacity to put pressure on the latter to enact effective regulation of the market in defence of public institutions is degraded. The re-orientation from the state to civil society could be said to have granted leeway to neoliberal interests who never had any intention of committing a similar fallacy. Although undoubtedly well-intentioned, with hindsight we may identify bastardisations of Cohen and Arato’s theory in the policy implementations of New Labour’s “Third Way”, and former conservative prime minister, David Cameron’s, so-called “Big Society”.

Moreover, “the idea” as John D. Holst notes “that there is actually a civil society relatively free of the state and the market flies in the face of nearly all progressive social theory, from Marx and Engels (1976) to Gramsci (1971) and Habermas (1989)” (Holst, 2002: 55). According to Holst, Cohen and Arato’s civil society is, consequently, populated by social movements who refuse to engage with these fundamental questions around the state and the market economy. Thus

In the end, their theory is useless for anyone interested in emancipatory struggles. The state and the economy must be the main targets of a left serious about social change, and not ignored, as Cohen and Arato ultimately argue. That is why the left must include, but go beyond, the narrowness of NSMs that Cohen and Arato advocate, precisely because they do not challenge the state of the economy (Holst, 2002: 70).

The politics of social movements “refers to the perceived potential of social movements to be agents of social change” (Holst, 2002: 37). It can be divided into two main areas, each having their own stance on the emergence of NSMs.

Whereas the radical pluralists see NSMs as signalling the death of Marxism, the socialists see them as offering an opportunity to review and revise Marxism without giving up the ultimate goal of socialism...Carrol and Ratner (1994) argue that “the rigidities of Leninist views on socialist politics may have consigned orthodox Marxism to the status of historical relic, but equally problematic is the radical pluralist disavowal of any materialist-grounded, unifying basis for counter-hegemony” (Holst, 2002: 43).

Holst’s (2002) work on the origins and trajectory of Social Movement Theory charts the movement of sociology away from the basic tenets of classical Marxism, culminating in the formation of two theoretical poles within Marxist interpretations of civil society: radical pluralist and neo-Marxist. The former position, according to Holst, is best enunciated in the work of Cohen and Arato (1992), which is flawed in its attempts to formulate a theory of civil society that sits outside of the realms of the state and the economy, leading away from a historical materialist perspective towards mere “idealist wishful thinking” (Holst, 2002: 69). As noted, Holst dismisses this position. More interestingly, the retreat away from classical Marxism embodied in the neo-Marxist position is evident in the theoretical adjustments between Keane’s (1988) and (1998) works on civil society, wherein the “road to socialism” is replaced by the “road to democracy” (Holst, 2002: 72). The dismantling of the bourgeois state is replaced by a perpetual tug of war, in which the friction between state and civil society maintains the civility and decency of both. Holst clarifies the problem thus:

It is curious how the left looks at history and seems to want to punish itself for “going too far” when we have rarely ever gone far enough. The problem with Keane’s strategy is that in an effort to be more “realistic” by being less ambitious, it becomes less realistic and more utopian...the right would never permit this constant state-civil society stalemate that he thinks will prevent anarchistic or state excesses (Holst, 2002: 72).

The positions of both Keane, and Cohen and Arato are, therefore, based on a drastic oversight regarding the way capital functions. However, we can extract some useful components from Keane's (1995) division of the public sphere into micro, meso and macro public spheres.

I choose...to distinguish between micro-public spheres in which there are dozens, hundreds or thousands of disputants interacting at the sub-nation-state level; meso-public spheres which normally comprise millions of people interacting at the level of the nation-state framework; and macro-public spheres which normally encompass hundreds of millions and even billions of people enmeshed in disputes at the supra-national and global levels of power (Keane, 1995: 8-9).

This triadic model is in alignment with what Holst identifies as the socialist tendency of social movement theory, which advocates the forging of cross-organisational alliances between OSMs such as trade unions and left-wing political parties and NSMs. Moreover, it provides another way of conceptualising the relation between local and global forms of anti-capitalist resistance that are one of the focal points of this research. As noted, neoliberalism is a global phenomenon with locally specific formations and consequences. These include the different forms of film and media activism that have become central to micro and meso level political struggles. Thus there is an ever present tension between activist counter-public spheres and the neoliberal society in which they are situated, and which aims to subsume them within its own discursive parameters and acceptable outcomes. This remains true for the film festivals analysed in this research, which form part of a cultural geography of resistance to neoliberalism in both physical and symbolic senses. For this reason Bourdieu's theory of capital is a useful tool when analysing antagonistic spheres and their different modes of spatial and cultural reproduction. As James English notes, film festivals (particularly the larger, "A-list" festivals) "can be as much a field for the competitive accumulation and more-or-less exploitative deployment of symbolic capital" as they can be "a forum for the exchange of ideas and the construction of reasoned consensus around art and society" (English, 2011: 64). Thus, according to English

When we set out to articulate theoretically the relations between festivals, publics, and the struggle for democratised culture, we do well to cross-fertilise our Habermas with some Bourdieu, at least to the point of recognising that festivals are instruments of *economic* as well as of communicative action (*ibid*).

As I will show later in this section, the festivals analysed in this research utilise forms of symbolic capital that give rise to specific generative practices that are also a result of operating within a neoliberal habitus.

II. Neoliberalism and Colonisation

Neoliberalism comprises various schools of economic and philosophical thought (Plehwe, 2009). It is not a single set of ideas that is attributable to a single person or text, although of course there are significant works that have come out of the neoliberal thought collective. Some of the first, formative debates around neoliberalism took place within the Mont Pelerin Society³ (MPS). While it is unproductive to hold up any single strand of neoliberalism as representative of the entire debate, “the MPS network can be safely used as a divining in order to define with sufficient precision the thought collective that has created and reproduced a distinctly neoliberal thought style in the era of its genesis” (Plehwe, 2009: 4). For example, in *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) Friedrich von Hayek (who founded the MPS) links his critique of centralised, planned economies to the freedom of individuals. The role of the government is reduced to establishing and maintaining the conditions in which markets can operate. Any intervention beyond this parameter (such as financial regulation) is considered an attack on the freedom of the individual. “Free market” ideology and its proponents, such as the Institute of Economic Affairs, as well as academics, philosophers and politicians like Milton Friedman, was politically marginal until the late 1960s, at which point the post-war economic consensus combining Keynesian economics, the welfare state and the Bretton Woods system of global currency exchange began to break down. Growth in the real economy slowed, and productive capacity dwindled. Neoliberalism is capital’s response to this economic fluctuation. The specific type of neoliberalism that has since been administered (primarily in the US, and then throughout the world) is based on MPS doctrines such as minimal government, privatisation, and financial and trade liberalisation (Plehwe, 2009). It entails an extreme appropriation of social wealth by the upper classes via predatory financial opportunism, the privatisation and enclosure of the welfare state and its assets, and an environmental disregard that continues to induce catastrophic climate change.

³ It is important to note that the Mont Pelerin Society is still running to this day, having formed in 1947. Originally the group consisted of economists and some philosophers who thought that civilisation was being endangered by the forms of welfare state capitalism and of socialism that emerged in various countries after the Second World War. Over time, they have founded various think tanks and organisations dedicated to the advancement of “free market economics”. Many of these still run today, notably the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA). In 1981 members of the MPS founded the Atlas Economic Research Foundation, which is a think tank whose purpose is the foundation of other think tanks. Needless to say the MPS thought collective views politics as a long game.

“Neoliberalism” according to Duménil and Lévy, “conveys an ideology and propaganda of its own, it is fundamentally a new social order in which the power and income of the upper fractions of the ruling classes...was re-established in the wake of a setback” (Duménil, Lévy, 2004: 9). Here “setback” refers to the post-war consensus: the establishment of the welfare state and the distribution of social wealth more evenly among populations. Throughout this period, the Bretton Woods system fixed the US dollar as the global common currency. This allowed the US to strengthen its hegemony. US Policy makers, determined to avoid the kind economic depression the country had experienced in the 1930’s, created what Varoufakis (2015) has called “shock absorbers”, a “surplus recycling mechanism” whereby nations running at a financial deficit would be lent US surpluses to create markets and bolster demand for imported goods. This was not done out of philanthropy, but because policy-makers understood that it was in the interest of US corporations that the Germans and the French and the Japanese had the capacity to purchase their cars, their refrigerators and their fighter planes (Varoufakis, 2015). In this new, global plan, Germany and Japan would retain dominant surplus positions in relation to their own geographic localities (although, importantly, the US was to become one of the main importers of Japanese goods, one of the consequences being the ruin of Detroit’s auto manufacturing industry) while the US would hold a dominant surplus position vis-à-vis the rest of the world. This attempt to plan a capitalist system that would ameliorate the tendency for the rate of profit to fall ended in 1971 when the US simply ran out of surpluses to lend and Nixon declared the end of the Bretton Woods system. The convertibility of the dollar to gold was severed, and floating exchange rates were introduced. “In spite of the diminished comparative power of the United States in this context, the floating of currencies”, according to Duménil and Lévy, “represented a new tool in the hands of the United States, a first component of what became, in the subsequent years, the neoliberal framework” (Duménil and Lévy, 2004: 11).

From that point the US went from being a surplus producing to a deficit nation. Its manufacturing base began to disappear, although it retained immense financial power. The problem for planners now was how the country could hold onto its global hegemonic position while running up an exponentially increasing debt. Step forward New York investment banks, who began recycling Gulf State petrodollars through investment in developing nations, opening up new markets, a function often deployed along with some form of military intervention. Manufacturing corporations morphed into financial institutions as part of a process of financialisation that is, perhaps, the crux of neoliberal ideology, and which has had drastic consequences, not least at the level of individual households. With Reaganomics in full-swing in the US, and Thatcherism taking hold in the UK, laissez faire capitalism accelerated in time with debates about trickle-down economics. In 1986 the global stock market was tied to newly emerging financial trading markets (the so-called “big-bang”) that

deal primarily in asset values such as property and oil. As state regulation of markets slackened, a barely fathomable, complex and highly vulnerable “shadow banking system” based on rising bank assets relative to GDP, investment practices and the possibility of enormous short term gains replaced any notion of a global planned economy.

These financial activities and the corresponding power are concentrated within gigantic financial holdings...They combine the traditional banking and insurance activities with new functions, for example asset management, at an unprecedented scale...During the 1980's, finance did not oppose the power of the central banks but, instead, took control of them. Monetary policy became a crucial instrument in the hands of finance, for enforcing policies favourable to its own interests (Duménil and Lévy, 2004: 13).

As competition among financial centres increased, states were pressured to create favourable business environments so as to attract investment. Under the auspices of “globalisation” corporations were permitted to move their manufacturing centres to whichever developing country offered the best conditions for maximising the production and realisation of value, usually through the extreme exploitation of labour. This engendered a global recalibration of space that de-industrialised major cities in the north of England, for example, while catalysing a system of uneven geographical development that serves to discipline labour and preserve capitals freedom to move around the world. Thus one of neoliberalism's defining characteristics is its shift from demand to supply-side economics, which places more weight on labour's capacity to produce goods at a low cost than it does for labour to realise the value of those goods through consumption. Put simply, there is a shift from making sure labour has access to commodities, to ensuring that commodities can be produced at the lowest possible cost. Having made this swap, however, capital runs into a new problem insofar as labour, disciplined through measures such as wage freezes and poor working conditions, has less purchasing power and inclination to consume the goods it produces.

The problem of the production of value is therefore replaced by the problem of its realisation. As Harvey (2011) notes, one way capital has sought to ameliorate this problem is through an extension of credit that has seen household and individual debt rise exponentially, while real wages in the US and UK have steadily decreased. Both Duménil and Lévy (2004), and Harvey (2005) have shown how this has occurred in tandem with a restoration of wealth to the top 0.1% of society. This is a common tendency in states that have pursued neoliberal policies the world over. The appropriation of social wealth is can be made clear in the example of the US housing crisis, which gave rise to the global financial crash of 2007-8. Initially, the decrease in wages and reckless mortgage lending on the part of financiers led to a situation in which debt service payments eclipsed disposable household

income. By early 2007 nearly 2 million homes had been foreclosed, mostly in minority and lower-income communities. Meanwhile “those who stood behind the financing of this mortgage catastrophe initially appeared strangely unaffected. In January 2008, Wall Street bonuses added up to \$32 billion...The losses of those at the bottom of the pyramid roughly matched the extraordinary gains of those at the top” (Harvey, 2011: 2). The consequent economic slump in the US catalysed the global financial crash that has been used by many western governments to justify an even more extreme accumulation of wealth through austerity measures. This entails (in the UK at least) a renewed attempt to privatise and enclose the welfare state and its assets, an almost total revocation of public spending on education and the arts, and ceaseless disregard of the natural environment and other forms of life, to name but a few on-going tendencies. These occurrences may not be attributable to what Flew calls “neoliberalism...as a conceptual trash-can, into which anything and everything can be dumped, as long as it is done so with suitable moral vehemence” (Flew, 2014: 67), but are consequences of a complex ideological, economic and cultural transformation that has varying effects throughout the world, and for which many activists and academics use the term “neoliberalism” as a shorthand.

Financialisation

As noted, the turn toward neoliberalism was in part a response to the slowing down of the real economy. The processes of financial liberalisation that are a primary component of neoliberalism, and which represent the shifting focus from productive to circulatory capital, fall under the heading “financialisation”. It describes the increased prominence of financial institutions within the global economy and their ability, thanks to new technologies, to process highly speculative transactions within seconds “so that the future can be bought and sold by turning expected future income streams into negotiable securities [tradable financial assets] and through a host of derivatives, financial instruments which allow taking positions on future outcomes to either minimise risk of unexpected events or to speculate on their occurrence” (Tabb, 2007: 3). While capital has an existential requirement for continued compound expansion, financialisation provides the tools with which new territories, such as developing nations, can be primed for profit extraction, usually beginning with the entrance of profit-oriented foreign banks. As well as this, it entails a move toward financial expropriation from individual households. According to Costas Lapavistas, financialisation is a structural transformation of capitalist economies that comprises three key elements

First, large non-financial corporations have reduced their reliance on bank loans and have acquired financial capacities; second, banks have expanded their mediating activities in financial markets as well as lending to households; third, households have become

increasingly involved in the realm of finance both as debtors and asset holders (Lapavitsas, 2011: 612).

There is a degree of economic determinism involved insofar as financialisation has a specific set of characteristics and likely outcomes. However, the process of implementation and subsequent results may vary because of uneven geographical development. Theories around financialisation have described the relation between a booming financial sector and dwindling productive capacity that arises due to an over-accumulation of surpluses (Marx's theory of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall). However, as Lapavitsas notes, Marxist perspectives on finance have engendered a degree of confusion, particularly with respect to the global economic crisis of 2007-8, which

Emanated in the sphere of finance and spread to production through financial mechanisms. Its global character was largely due to securitisation, which encouraged investment banking practices among commercial banks. Above all, its proximate causes lay in mortgage lending to the poorest sections of the US working class. None of these features fits with the theory of over-accumulation (Lapavitsas, 2011: 613).

While there are numerous economic theories that stress the connection between declining production and the rise of the financial sector, the relation between the two, Lapavitsas notes, is "always mediated" by "a complex set of structures, often reflecting historical, institutional, political, customary and even cultural factors" (Lapavitsas, 2011: 617). Thus Lapavitsas proposes a molecular approach that analyses the relations between different industrial and financial capitals in their own right. Drawing on the approaches of Hilferding and Lenin, which emphasise how "the rise of finance capital [in the 19th century] led to the erection of trade barriers, export of capital, militarism and imperialism" (Lapavitsas, 2011: 619) he identifies a number of analogies between our current era of financialisation, and that of Hilferding and Lenin's time, such as the dominance of multinational corporations in the world economy and the reassertion of some form of imperialism, which "was not an arbitrary political strategy, but a phenomenon with specific historical content rooted in economic processes" (ibid). Nevertheless, an important difference between past and present eras of financialisation remains in that large corporations have not had to rely on banks for investment, having developed their own financial capabilities in areas such as foreign exchange trading. In response to this, banks themselves have turned from commercial to investment banking practices (a move ratified by the abolition of the Glass-Steagall Act in the USA in 1999) towards lending to individual households and trading mortgage-based securities. Thus the last three decades have seen the financialisation of workers revenue. This process is associated with

Real wages remaining stagnant, or rising very slowly, since the 1970s. It is also related to public provision retreating across a range of services: housing, pensions, education, health, transport and so on...Banks and other financial institutions have been able to extract profit directly out of wages and salaries, rather than surplus value. They have also been able to make profits out of workers' assets, particularly as public provision of pensions has retreated, encouraging the channelling of workers' saving to pension funds, insurance companies, money funds and thus to the stock market (Lapavitsas, 2011: 623).

Financial expropriation of incomes has been accompanied by government austerity policies that are, primarily, a form of protectionism for European core-country banks. The starkest example of this is the financial strangulation of Greece by the troika (comprising the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund) who threatened to cut off liquidity to Greek banks if the left-wing Syriza government refused to impose austerity measures (such as pension cuts) and a series of privatisations (such as that of Greece's ports). From this perspective, financialisation of the European Union banking sector and the following entry of foreign banks from core European countries into countries at the "periphery" can be seen as a process of colonisation via economic subjugation. For example, the credit boom in Balkan countries prior to the 2007 economic crash is associated with the expansion of foreign banks. In 1996 the Croatian state owned nearly 80 per cent of banking sector assets. A massive wave of privatisations meant that by 2009 91 per cent of Croatian banking assets were under foreign ownership (Ćetković 2011). The expansion of credit to these areas is based on a debt-led growth model that breaks down in the midst of financial crises. However, banks in core countries can protect themselves by withdrawing funds from those at the periphery, with disastrous consequences. The only thing that peripheral countries can do at this stage is to ask the banks not to do so. What follows is a trade-off. Banks agree to maintain the capital flow on the condition that their safety is guaranteed through the enactment of government policies (austerity). The key element of this relationship is that the banks have control over capital flows. Thus we see how the financial sector that caused the economic crisis of 2007 can also dictate the "solution". As Mark Blyth (2013) notes, this is exactly what took place during the liquidity crunch of 2008-9, wherein

Austrian, German, and Swedish parent banks decided to find the extra cash they needed by taking money from these local eastern European branches. But this meant that the eastern European countries had to watch helplessly as their money supplies flowed away. To staunch the bleeding an agreement was signed in Vienna in 2009 between the banks; the EU, the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission; and Hungary Latvia and

Romania. It committed the banks in Europe's core to keeping their funds in their Eastern European banks if the eastern European countries governments committed to austerity policies designed to stabilise the local banks balance sheet...The upshot of this agreement was that Latvian teachers and Romanian pensioners took massive income hits to guarantee the senior bond-holders of European core-country banks (Blyth, 2013: 54).

Financialisation can thus be viewed as having a vanguard function for neoliberalism. Broadly speaking, it carries out a process of colonisation on two levels: the financial expropriation of workers incomes via the direct extraction of profit from wages and salaries, and the expansion of credit throughout the continent, but especially to peripheral EU states that become dependent on capital flows from banks in core countries. This situation is formalised insofar as conditions for accession to the EU involve the creation by governments of conditions that allow for the privatisation of domestic banking sectors and the subsequent swathe of liberalisation and privatisation policies that ripple throughout society.

Neoliberal Governments

Theories on the neoliberal propagation of governments, therefore, cannot be dismissed as conspiracy or simplification, despite recent efforts by Flew (2010, 2014) to do just that. From the UK perspective, the turn to neoliberalism can be traced as far back as the dissolution of the Liberal party at the turn of the last century, and the subsequent shift of many of its free-market elements into the Conservative party, where they were marginalised until neoliberalism began to manifest as Thatcherism in the early 1970's. Hall (1988) notes how

Thatcherism, though it owes much to and integrates key elements of traditional Toryism, is a radically distinct political and ideological force, radically different from older versions of conservatism that have dominated the party throughout the postwar period...It gained ascendancy first by contesting and defeating the old guard – the party guardians, the patricians – and the old doctrines (Hall, 1988: 38-39).

However, Thatcherism itself did not suddenly appear out of thin air. The Institute of Economic Affairs “put many Thatcherite conceptions into public currency long before they were either fashionable or directly attached to any political party or faction” (Hall, 1988: 46). Thus this new form of Conservatism was able to take control of the party before coming into government and instituting neoliberal policies in the face of a waning Keynesian consensus. The aim, however, was (and remains) not just economic reorientation, but a total reconstruction of the social order and the formation of a popular consciousness that equates freedom with private over public gain. Thatcher's

“right to buy” scheme, for example, involved the sale of social housing, and framed the shift from public to private ownership of social wealth with a liberal discourse encompassing individual rights and freedoms. Policies such as this are exemplary of Thatcherism’s ability to realign existing political/ideological elements into a new framework that gained support among people who, historically, would have seen themselves at odds with the conservatives.

Conservatism, against the odds, came to exert a powerful hegemony over key sectors of the popular classes, one that it has not subsequently lost. Thatcherism thus poses for the classical Marxist theory of ideology a long-standing problem of historical analysis, only in a new and challenging form (Hall, 1988: 43).

Hall criticises the classical Marxist idea of “false consciousness” but stops short of throwing it out entirely. On one hand, false consciousness supposes an empiricist relation between the subject and knowledge whereby the real world imprints itself directly onto consciousness. Thus if we cannot see the truth of the real world it is because some force or system is obscuring it. This account, according to Hall, does not explain in any detail how the material forces involved in creating false consciousness “always reproduce their prescribed knowledge” nor precisely which mechanisms are involved (Hall, 1988: 44). Moreover, it assumes that populations can be “thoroughly and systematically duped into misrecognising entirely where their real interests lie” (ibid). Finally, false consciousness is a condition “entirely reserved for others” (ibid). It cannot overcome the argument that its proponents may themselves be susceptible to it. On the other hand, knowledge is still distributed through unequal class relations and various material factors. These are necessary but not sufficient points for explaining the movement of ideas through society. As Hall concludes

Ruling or dominant conceptions of the world do not directly prescribe the mental content of the illusions that supposedly fill the heads of the dominated classes. But the circle of dominant ideas does accumulate a symbolic power to map or classify the world for others...The “monopoly of the means of mental production” – or of the “cultural apparatuses”...is not, of course, irrelevant to this acquisition over time of symbolic dominance vis-à-vis other, less coherent and comprehensive accounts of the world. Nor do they have literally to displace other ideas with illusions in order to acquire a hegemonic position over them. Ideologies may not be affixed, as organic entities, to their appropriate classes, but this does not mean that the production and transformation of ideology in society could proceed free of or outside the structuring lines of force of power and class (Hall, 1988: 44-45).

Our material existence has a significant bearing on the horizon of possibilities that we perceive – our ideas regarding work, race, gender, nationality, family and the economy. This theory parlays any accusation of economic determinism that might be levelled at Hall, since it describes how ideas take hold over an entire social formation. Despite this, Flew insists on painting Hall (and Harvey, for that matter) with the brush of “orthodox Marxist political economy” (Flew, 2014: 59). He argues that flippant overuse of “neoliberalism” has led to it becoming a catch-all term that inhibits serious critical engagement. There are many forms of “flexible capitalism” (Flew, Cunningham, 2010: 8), the intricacies of which have been dismissed or hidden from view by labelling them all as neoliberalism. This is demonstrable insofar as countries such as China operate under a form of capitalism that cannot be said to display all the properties of a fully neo-liberalised economy. Thus the identification of neoliberalism as a global project is merely a caricature of an inherently benign capitalism that engenders variety and flourishing so long as the “market society” is allowed to be “governed at a distance” (Flew, 2014: 63). The strongest definition of neoliberalism, according to Flew, comes from what he calls the “neo-Marxist account” whereby neoliberalism has gained ascendancy the world over through political institutions.

According to Flew, this is a primarily economically focussed approach that falls within the category of “dominant ideology theory”, which sees neoliberalism as “the economic ideology of global capitalism or a set of false ideas propagated by economic elites to maintain class power” (Flew, 2014: 59). Notice the similarity between Flew’s “dominant ideology theory” and the theory of false consciousness which Hall himself criticises. Flew goes on to make a distinction between adherents to dominant ideology theory and those who have “drawn upon the more complex set of propositions about the relationship between ideas and power derived from the work of Michel Foucault” (ibid). This allows him to posit Foucault’s theory of governmentality against Hall’s interpretation of Gramsci’s concept of hegemony. Seeking a new, or perhaps more refined, definition of neoliberalism, Flew focuses on Foucault’s discussion of the German ordoliberalism that emerged in Germany just after the second world war, and which combined “market-conforming policies” with “a diverse range of policy interventions...that could include regional planning, policies to promote private home ownership, initiatives to support small businesses and environmental management policies” (Flew, 2014: 62).

This variant of neoliberalism sought to strike a balance between private and public power. Foucault’s lectures on the *Birth of Biopolitics* (1979), according to Flew, compliment Weber’s theories on tensions within market society “between egoist market relations on the one hand, and the broader functioning of civil society on the other” (Flew, 2014: 63). The problem, then, is to establish a set of

policy practices conducive with “governing through the market” or “governing-at-a-distance” (ibid). It is precisely this market sphere, this buffer zone between the egoist individual and civil society, which facilitates the emergence of social change and a different set of economic relations. Meanwhile the Marxist theorists remain caught in a binary between public and private, collective and individual, state and market, unable to see neoliberalism as the “project for institutional change” that it really is because of their narrow conceptions of it as an “expression of the zeitgeist of global capitalism, or as a conspiracy of ruling elites” (Flew, 2014: 67).

Flew’s analysis of Foucault overlooks one of the central purposes of the *Birth of Biopolitics* lectures: an attempt to foreground “the genealogy of regimes of veridiction” (Foucault, 2008:35). That is, not merely to point out the orthodoxies of a particular historical period, but to focus on the societal spheres (constituted by discourses) wherein the “truths” of a period are established. Foucault has analysed the emergence of “veridictional sites” (historically specific spheres of discourse) relating to psychiatry, sexuality and penal institutions. In *Biopolitics* his main focus is on the market, or, more accurately, the way/s in which the market “constitutes a site of veridiction...a site of verification-falsification for governmental practice” (Foucault, 2008: 32). Foucault posits a distinction between jurisdiction and veridiction. While the former is concerned with broader questions of morality, the latter constitutes a discourse in itself. Although they are fundamentally connected, the two spheres may create difficulties for each other.

In highlighting the “innumerable intersections between jurisdiction and veridiction that [are] undoubtedly a fundamental phenomenon in the history of the modern West” (Foucault, 2008: 34) Foucault notes the transformation of the pre-industrialised, merchant capitalist market as a site of justice or jurisdiction, into a post 18th century site of veridiction through which governmental practice is verified. Contemporary relations between governments and markets can thus be specifically framed by questioning the extent to which governmental practice is formed on jurisdictional or veridictional grounds, that is, the extent to which policy formation is refracted through the discourse of the market, with its own specific “truths” about what constitutes good governmental practice (non-intervention and protectionism, in the case of neoliberalism) and tendency to subordinate questions of social justice to the need to make a profit (the offsetting of “externalities” onto the public sector, for example). Thus “governing through the market” must, if it is to have any concern with social justice, retain at least some awareness of the processes of veridiction whereby questions around morality, environmentalism and human rights are subsumed and transformed via the newly established truth regime. Flew, however, seems so heavily embedded in market oriented discourse that he overlooks Foucault’s simple assertion that “the regime of

veridiction, in fact, is not a law of truth, but the set of rules enabling one to establish which statements in a given discourse can be described as true or false” (Foucault, 2008: 35). Thus he has swapped any sense that markets should be governed for the idea that governments should merely facilitate markets. Questions around social justice appear to have become irrelevant.

No doubt neoliberalism is a project looking to institute long term social change, though not the kind that is conducive with social democracy. Flew’s positing of ordoliberalism as a purer form of neoliberalism that is closer to what the system actually is “misrecognises”, according to Phelan (2014)

The contextually articulated nature of neoliberal identities...The idea that there is a real neoliberalism, which renders other attributions of the concept inauthentic...denies what Brenner and Theodore (2002) describe as the ideological impurity of “actually existing neoliberalism”, occluding how neo-liberalised regimes are often- if not always- politically institutionalised in ways that deviate from abstract doctrinal prescriptions” (Phelan, 2014: 7-8).

In practice neoliberalism consistently deviates from its theory, depending on how, where and when deviations serve the interests of elites, a key feature that is well documented by Harvey (2005). It is also true that neoliberalism produces a global environment of uneven geographical development, a requirement for the continuous and ever quickening flow of capital. The local effects of this global system are multifarious. Holding up one or another form of “flexible capitalism” (Flew, Cunningham, 2010: 8) as proof that neoliberalism is the theoretical concoction of stuffy old Marxists is an act of misdirection. Flew’s reduction of Hall’s theories to some form of orthodox Marxism overlook the latter’s criticism of Foucault, whose non-essentialist interpretation of a multiplicity of discursive practices occludes their contradictory unity, pushing us into the “gospel of absolute diversity” (Hall, 1988: 52). Flew cites Foucault’s observation that “economics can be *lateral to the art of governing*” [my emphasis] but “economic science cannot be a science of government, and economics cannot be the internal principle law, rule of conduct, or rationality of government” (Foucault in Flew, 2014: 64). It is unsurprising that Flew cites Foucault, given the formers propensity for a cultural postmodernism that is closely tied to the “creative industries” policies of New Labour. Both of these have proven to be little more than a veneer for corporate interests (Hesmondhalgh et al, 2015). This does not, however, solve what Hall calls “the deep and difficult problem of the relation between lateral powers in the sites of civil society and social relations and the vertical powers of, say, the state and political relationships” (Hall, 1988: 52). Hall’s analysis of Thatcherism shows how the various interwoven spheres that make up society can be recalibrated, engendering a plurality of discourses

that constitutes a new unity, “and there are different points of application”, he explains, “through which, in turn, this constituted regime of truth has been secured to certain political positions” (Hall, 1988: 53). This is a more detailed account of neoliberalism’s capacity to propagate itself across a broad social spectrum than the simplified Marxism that Flew ties to Hall. Flew’s ideas on ordoliberalism and market society fail to recognise either the reality of actually existing neoliberalism or the way it has reconstituted the social framework beyond the economic sphere. For example, “the particular ways in which Thatcherism”, according to Hall

Has stitched together a contradictory juncture between the logics of the market and possessive individualism on the one hand, and the logics of an organic conservatism, on the other, [which] are highly amenable to a Foucaultian type of analysis, provided we understand that it is the contradictory unity so constructed and held that rules – not the rules of diversity alone. The problem with Foucault, to put it brusquely, is a conception of difference without a conception of articulation, that is, a conception of power without a conception of hegemony (Hall, 1988: 53).

Flew’s own criticism of what he sees as Marxist dominant ideology theory involves questioning whether subordinate classes actually ever truly believed the “dominant ideology...given the uncertainty about what “society” can be said to “believe” at any point in time” (Flew, 2014: 58). The idea that all of society can hold a fixed set of beliefs at a single point, and that any proof that we are not in such a situation does away with (an already misinterpreted and misapplied version of) “dominant ideology theory” is a simplification that hardly warrants further comment, except to say that this view engenders an even more gross misunderstanding of hegemony. By definition hegemony can never be fully achieved. Dissent always plays a role in the realm of ideas within any societal formation. This capacity is exacerbated by neoliberalism’s inherent theory/practice disparity. Questions, for example, arise as to who is being “governed-at-a-distance” within “the market society” (Flew, 2014: 63) when students are being horse-charged for protesting the rise in university tuition fees, or indigenous peoples are being tear-gassed for the crime of attempting to protect their water supply from chemical contamination. Flew reproduces the big-state/small-state dichotomy, as put forward by Tony Blair in his support of a financially de-regulated small-state. But how does the theoretical requirement of a small-state tally up to the practice of endlessly bombing middle-eastern countries (possibly the largest, most drastic and expensive form of state intervention ever)? Flew presents us with a straw-man argument when he says that “critics of neoliberalism downplay the role of political institutions in their various accounts” (Flew, 2014: 53).

Identifying financial de-regulation as a key component of neoliberalism is, however, not the same as downplaying the role of the state. It merely highlights how the state adopts different policies with respect to specific groups in society. The big-state/small-state dichotomy suggests that when a state is small it plays less of an invasive role in the choices people make over their lives. Thus the small-state, going back to Hayek's philosophy, engenders greater individual freedom. The reality is that there is no small-state. This is merely a rhetorical weapon put to the service of dismantling government regulations that occasionally hinder the operations of a capitalist class amassing obscene amounts of social wealth at the expense of populations the world over. The state is always "big" insofar as it forms policies that affect people's lives (albeit in very different ways). Flew's attempt to provide a clearer definition of neoliberalism comes off as an effort to bracket out its key progenitors, while Flew himself seems unable to register a horizon of possibilities beyond the sphere of the market. For example, that a diverse array of variations on capitalism exist around the world is proof enough, for Flew, that "economic globalisation is not leading to policy convergence" (Flew, 2014: 55), while others would consider the acquiescence of the entire developed world to one or another form of capitalism as exactly that.

Neoliberalism and the "Creative Industries"

It is true, as it is of all concepts, that neoliberalism has been misapplied in the past. It is also true, as Flew points out, that discourses concerning neoliberalism have appeared in a diverse array of disciplines and subject matters. However, an abundance of use is hardly grounds for banishing an entire concept. Yet the same basic argument is used again by Flew to undermine a raft of excellent scholarship that criticises the creative industries concept as engendering neoliberalism within the cultural sphere. Such arguments can be dismissed on the basis that neoliberalism itself lacks "intellectual coherence" (Flew, Cunningham, 2010: 1), or because the debate around the creative industries has "moved on", consigning critique to a place called the past, from which nothing that might be drawn is of any relevance. As Flew and Cunningham state

The focus has shifted toward whether creative industries are loci of innovation and employment growth in increasingly knowledge-based economies; cultural policy is moving from arts subsidy and advocacy to the centre-stage of economic growth policies and post-industrial economies, at the level of cities, regions or nations (Flew, Cunningham, 2010: 6).

Despite their self-placement at the cutting edge of the debate, the movement of cultural policy toward the "centre-stage of economic growth policy" began much earlier than 2010. As Mcguigan (1996) and Bianchini (1993) point out, the fusion of cultural and economic policy began around the late 70s, and really took off in the late 80s to early 90s in the midst of de-industrialisation. Moreover,

in one of his many critiques of the creative industries concept Miller (2009) draws conclusions that are very much concerned with “industrial economies, at the level of cities, regions or nations”. Miller’s argument is that, rather than adopting the creative industries model, we should develop a deeper understanding of “culture” so that we might re-define the culture industries. On one hand, he endorses Mato’s (2009) expansionist interpretation of culture, noting how increasing literacy and the circulation of texts among working people took place in the context of urbanisation fuelled by the industrial revolution. On the other hand, Mato’s assertion that all industries are cultural because the goods they produce have a symbolic use-value for the consumer may be true, but we must also take into account how the “post-purchase life of the commodity sign” also

Relates to the division of labour, and how capitalism determines the distance between, in Hollywood terms, above-the-line and below-the-line labour; how it decides the relative pay scales of car engineers versus predators; how it regulates industries for the safety of their products, and so on (Miller, 2009: 92).

A focus on inputs and outputs is not sufficient in gaining an understanding of the culture industries. We must also look at how inputs and outputs are connected, as well as how they are influenced by forces that are external to the production process. Miller points out how the creative industries discourse began in the 1960s with the west’s realisation “that it’s economic future lay in post-industrial activities – not food or manufactures, but finance and ideology” (Miller, 2009: 93). Thus the humanities are re-oriented toward meeting the needs of industry. “The neoliberal bequest of creativity” according to Miller “has succeeded the old-school patrimony of culture, because economic transformations comprehensively challenged the idea of the humanities as removed from industry” (Miller, 2009: 94). Crucially, what distinguishes the creative industries discourse from other forms of industrial deliberation is

Its truly innovative claim: that what is made in a sector of the economy does not characterise that sector, but rather, what goes into it. So “creativity” refers to an input, not an output. This bizarre shift in adjectival meaning makes it possible for anything that makes money to be creative, just as Mato’s assertion that all industries have cultural components makes it possible for anything that makes money to be cultural (Miller, 2009: 95).

Thus creative industries discourse has laid claim to a supposed flourishing of small to medium enterprises (SME’s) which supposedly serve to regenerate urban areas, giving rise to the notion of “creative cities” and the coveted European Capital of Culture award. As Miller points out, however,

the evidence indicates that whatever economic growth may occur, the creative industries model is not conducive with a sustainable economy.

The European commission's evaluation of 29 Cities of Culture disclosed that their principal goal- economic growth stimulated by the public subvention of culture to renew failed cities- had itself failed...And there is minimal proof for the existence of a creative class in Britain or for the assertion that "creative cities" outperform their drab brethren economically (Miller, 2009: 96).

Miller's perspective on the transmutation of popular culture into the creative industries gives rise to some further observations. It is no secret that elites have always seen within popular culture the potential for mass political deliberation and involvement. The autotelic capacity of texts to foster communities has elicited some grim reactions from elites seeking to neutralise the politically fervent aspects of popular culture. Towards this end, the re-orientation of the humanities aims to put cultural producers in the services of industry, power and profit. A crucial element of the critique of this direction derives from Marx's assertion that the mode of production determines the mode of consumption, thus establishing the connection between input and output, encoding and decoding. The cultural exchange therein is one of the driving forces of history, and harbours the capacity to move history forward in line with dominant interests. If cultural production takes place primarily with a view to economic gain, then consumption is instrumentalised accordingly. "Commodities" such as art and education are excavated of all use-value, except that by which a subject may increase their individual financial wealth and social standing, thereby dispelling the collective and political consciousness they have been known to inspire.

In semiotic terms, this process is characterised by a displacement of the relation between signifier and signified, facilitating a degree of confusion about the meaning of words, as well as the creation of completely new ones, a useful method when drafting political statements and manifestoes attempting to garner popular support while minimising the requirement to make any real social democratic commitments. Employability smothers excellence, creativity becomes human capital, while the artist gives way to the social entrepreneur. The project of neutralising the threats to elitist power that are inherent in popular culture can be seen in the application of this dynamic to the sphere of activism. Unspecified "social change" replaces the working toward a socialist society, and "lifestyle activism" becomes the choice of the rational consumer. Moreover, the "gospel of absolute diversity" (Hall, 1988: 52), propounded by an overt concern with identity politics within activist circles, belies the contradictory unity of class struggle. If this is not taken into account, then identity

politics, far from focussing seriously on questions of race, gender, nation, family et al is easily apprehended as the left-wing of neoliberalism.

While the tendency to draw arts and culture closer to the economic sphere arguably began with Thatcherism, New Labour's cultural policy promised a "Third way" that was "neither neoliberal (the US) nor outmodedly social democratic (Europe), but based on a successful [according to Tony Blair] "mixed economy" of public and private (Hesmondhalgh et al, 2015: 38). It is also important to stress that the move toward justifying arts and culture on economic grounds was an international trend. Hesmondhalgh et al have documented how creative industries policy comprised a focus on the UK film industry, copyright and the "creative economy". The original "mapping" of the creative industries controversially included IT and computer software. This seems to have had two functions: firstly, it magnified the contribution made by the creative industries to GDP. Secondly, this created the possibility of increased government funding of arts and culture. Academic predilections, particularly emanating from the Creative Industries Faculty of the Queensland Institute of Technology (of which Flew is a member), that a sustainable "knowledge economy" can be built on the creative industries are partly attributable to questionable categorisations such as this, as well as a lack of "any meaningful engagement with questions of social justice" (Hesmondhalgh et al, 2015: 185). McGuigan (2016) notes how neoliberal economism is occasionally followed up with "reductively social claims" and how politically useful research can be when attempting to "justify an ideological distortion that deflects attention from the main thrust of public policy" (McGuigan, 2016: 170). The inclusion of Information Technology within the creative industries is also attributable to the fact that IT is "where the real money is made and power exercised – and not, sorry, by small business or entrepreneurs", a central assertion of the "creative cities" concept (Miller, 2009: 95).

Although much of New Labour's broader cultural policy rhetoric included a nod to access, education and excellence, the creative industries concept is a more ambiguous area, that was "shaped partly by the actions and interests of a policy group built around the interests of copyright –holding cultural institutions, specifically those with strong ties to the international and corporate level of the industry" (Hesmondhalgh et al, 2015: 103). The creative industries concept moves in and out of favour throughout the New Labour period. It is closely entwined with the creative economy. The rhetoric with which it was accompanied has proven to be a requestor for business interests. The most galling example of this is documented by McGuigan (2016), who notes how the Millennium Dome, New Labour's flagship creative industries project, which absorbed a billion pounds of public money, "was literally given away to a commercial consortium which has since made a great deal of money from it" (McGuigan, 2016: 180). McGuigan criticises US management consultant, Richard

Florida, for his theories on the rise of the “creative class”, a new breed of super-creative social entrepreneurs who are characterised by a mixture of the protestant work ethic and bohemian attitudes. It is these people, apparently, who will populate the “creative city” in the post-de-industrial age of culture-led urban regeneration. As McGuigan notes, in 2007 The Work Foundation was commissioned by the New Labour Government to write a report on the creative economy. The report cited Richard Florida as an inspiration. Florida perfectly emphasises the present cultural convulsion between universities, creative industries, governments and corporations. He is

Currently a professor at the Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto...He also runs a consultancy firm, the Creative Class Group, where his many clients have ranged from Absolut Vodka, through BBC Creativity and Audiences, Citigroup Investment Inc, Esquire Magazine, Goldman Sachs, IBM and Microsoft to a number of city and also, indeed, national governments including Dublin, San Diego, Seattle, Toronto, Washington and Wellington (McGuigan, 2016: 140).

Although inventing theories on imaginary groups of people may increase Florida’s standing in the eyes of governments and corporations looking for ways of portraying the creative industries as a driver of economic growth and regeneration, this practice hardly yields useful information regarding the contemporary international division of cultural labour. In an evaluation of the Work Foundation’s report McGuigan notes that

The economic and business-oriented rhetoric of the documents under consideration here is characterised by a pervasive blurring of the categories, indeed, quite possibly by a category error. Confusion is thereby introduced into thinking about the politics of culture. The buzzword “creativity” is used loosely to cluster together cultural production with production in general (McGuigan, 2016: 146).

Thus the term can be used to paper over the fact that much of the work done within the creative industries lies in ancillary, service positions, or those which are barely peripheral to cultural production and modes of artistic expression. Far from being a cornerstone of a stable economy, the creative industries are fraught with “typically stressful conditions of unpaid internships, lowly-paid and insecure jobs, short-term contracts and extremely uncertain futures in general” (McGuigan, 2016: 149). Florida’s “Creative Class” is an overly broad category that, according to McGuigan, is said to comprise 30% of the US workforce, “making up an astonishingly high proportion of the population” (McGuigan, 2016: 141). This 30%, comprising what is more routinely thought of as the professional-managerial class and university graduates, “no doubt share some distinctive qualities in

common, but it is stretching credulity too far to call them ‘creativity’” (McGuigan, 2016: 148). The tendency within the neoliberal rhetoric on cultural production to empty signifiers of their signifieds is an important stage for the mechanics of colonisation, as it provides grounds for contesting the meaning of words like “innovation”, “education”, “creativity”, allowing for further re-calibration of the social fabric (through something as thoroughly intravenous to our being as language) so that it is more attuned to the needs of business. With the complete revocation of public funding for the arts within education, and the subsequent waning capabilities of the publicly funded Arts Council, creative projects now rely on private finance more than ever. The diverging motivations between private and public funding are highlighted through a contrast of the opening statements of the Arts Council England strategic plan with that of the Creative Industries Council. In the former, entitled *Great Art and Culture for Everyone*, the council identifies itself as follows:

We are a custodian of public investment, and we are charged with getting the maximum value out of this: the enlightenment and entertainment arts and culture bring us; the enriching of our lives and the inspiring of our education; the vital contribution to our health and well-being and the powering of regional regeneration, tourism and our standing abroad (Arts Council England, 2013).

By contrast it is difficult to identify exactly who and what the Creative Industries Council is. Its diffuse membership comprises the secretary of state for culture, media and sport (Karen Bradley MP), the secretary of state for business, energy and industrial strategy (Greg Clark MP) as well as employees of a variety of multinationals including Warner Brothers and Facebook. Former members include representatives of BSkyB and Amazon UK. The introduction to the CIC’s strategic plan reads:

It’s an exciting and pivotal time for the UK’s creative industries. Recent statistics show the sector punches above its weight for the economy, generating £71.4 billion gross value added (GVA) in 2012 – a 9.4 per cent increase that surpasses the growth of any other UK industry (Creative Industries Council, 2013).

Far from nurturing creativity for the sake of enlightenment, enrichment, and the health and wellbeing of society, the CIC’s motive is laid bare repeatedly throughout the document as putting “the creative industries at the heart of the growth agenda”. The government describes the role of the CIC as such:

Setup to be a voice for the creative industries, the council focuses on areas where there are barriers to growth facing the sector, such as access to finance, skills, export markets, regulation, intellectual property (IP), and infrastructure (GOV.UK, 2014).

The creative industries must develop in tandem with the needs required to sustain growth. In other words, that which cannot be rationalised along monetary lines is considered a barrier to growth, and has no place within the creative industries, due to be consigned instead to the destitute realm of the arts as the value of human flourishing is calculated on the basis of economic growth. Barriers to growth can be found in education, where the idea of knowledge as an inherent social good struggles against the profit-motive. One of the CIC's long-term goals within education, therefore, is to increase "employer investment in and ownership of skills development meaning more and better ladders of opportunity" (CIC, 2013: 5). Therefore the industry will use inroads chiselled out by members of the CIC to make direct interventions into education with the goal of cultivating employable students. The fact that multinationals are strategising with respect the UK's education system is indicative of a broader shift within society, from a concern with maintaining the public interest, to a marketised rationale. These processes highlight the mechanics of enclosure and colonisation. They are development methodologies that facilitate a move away from democratic and publicly beneficial tendencies within cultural policy, towards private acquirement of resources for the purposes of managing access and extracting rents.

The above example demonstrates how the profit incentives that are characteristic of neoliberal capital manifest at an institutional level. Theoretical frameworks previously established by Habermas have since been utilised in order to gain further insight. As noted, system and lifeworld are interdependent. This interdependence "makes possible a kind of systemic integration that enters into competition with the integrating principle of reaching understanding, and, under certain conditions, has a disintegrative effect on the lifeworld" (Habermas, 1984: 342). The goal of reaching understanding is re-oriented toward the interests of steering media such as money and power. This is what is meant by colonisation, a process that must be countered through communicative action. "Only with the conceptual framework of communicative action", according to Habermas, "do we gain a perspective from which the process of societal rationalisation appears contradictory from the start" (ibid). Lee Salter (2012) identifies a gap in Habermas' analysis: "Although the lifeworld is seen as the major source of resistance to colonisation, beyond considering largely left-wing social movements and the latent potential of communicative action, he does not explain how specific practices might act as foundations for resistance" (Salter, 2012: 79). He suggests a supplementation of Habermas' theory with Alasdair MacIntyre's (2007) philosophical concept of practices. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre defines a virtue by discerning a series of core concepts from various seemingly disparate philosophies. "Truthfulness, justice and courage – and perhaps some others" he surmises "- are genuine excellences, are virtues in the light of which we have to characterise ourselves and

others” (MacIntyre, 2007: 192). Virtues are exercised in the course of practices, defined by MacIntyre as

Any coherent and complex form of socially established co-operative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved (MacIntyre, 2007: 187).

The virtues therefore help to sustain practices through their resistance to colonising forces, or as MacIntyre calls them, external goods. This requires that at least some of the individuals engaged in the practice exercise the virtues in their activities, in awareness of the corrupting vices of institutions. As Salter explains

Practices are colonised when pressured to adjust to the pursuit of external goods rather than their own internal goods and the goods of the communities in which they take place. When external goods dominate, the practices are prevented from facilitating human flourishing, and the practices in which they take part are instrumentalised and oriented to the acquisition of these external goods (Salter, 2012: 80).

Further confluences between the theories of MacIntyre and Habermas exemplify the complexity of the relation between practices and institutions. Just as the system and lifeworld are co-dependent, so practices are sustained through institutions. The possibility of colonisation remains open, as “the ideals and creativity of the practice are always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institution...In this context the essential function of the virtues is clear” (MacIntyre, 2007: 194). Importantly, practices are distinguished from techniques by their status as social goods that benefit the community (the practice of building houses, for example, is distinct from the technique of bricklaying). This distinction broadly corresponds to the Aristotelian division between *praxis* and *techne* (McGuigan, 1996), which separates the purpose of making something from the technique used to make it in order to better understand the *telos* of practices. Again, however, these are not mutually exclusive modes of activity. “Without *techne*” as McGuigan notes “nothing would ever get made but without *praxis* there would be no sense to the making” (McGuigan, 1996: 187). Binaries such as these are highly useful tools in the formation of a critique and potential realignment of cultural policy, especially in the context of a society in which *techne* is increasingly instrumentalised by capital, while the less profitable *praxis* fades from institutional curricula.

Spatial Reproduction

The tension between *techne* and *praxis* yields physical manifestations in the neoliberal city. In recent years the built environment has been a sponge for the absorption of surplus capital, and the contemporary urban environment reflects a tendency to fulfil the needs of capital over those of city residents. The reasons for this can be found in the fundamental machinations of capital, particularly the dynamic that has fuelled the uneven geographical development of cities worldwide. Within this context, contemporary regeneration is the flipside of de-industrialisation, both processes arising from capital's need to frequently move from one region of the world to another in order to maintain and reproduce itself. As Harvey (2014) notes, capital engenders cumulative causation, a process whereby regions with conditions favourable to capital attract investment over a sustained period. However, accumulation also ensures capital's flight from the area when local costs rise as a result of the original investment. Such costs can include wage demands from a newly organised labour force, rising taxes, increased tariffs and penalties on pollution, all of which serve to make the area "uncompetitive". The consequence is usually outsourcing of production to areas more favourable to capital's needs. In essence

Capital creates a geographical landscape that meets its needs at one point in time, only to have to destroy it at a later point in time to facilitate capital's further expansion and qualitative transformation. Capital unleashes the powers of "creative destruction" upon the land. Some factions benefit from creativity, while others suffer from destruction. Invariably, this involves a class disparity (Harvey, 2014: 155).

This cyclical process of construction/destruction allows for the absorption of over-accumulated labour as well as capital. Production facilities can be moved to regions where the wage rates aren't so high, or workers have fewer rights, for example, and this allows for the dispensation of some surplus capital while tapping vast and desperate resources of unemployed labour. This global, pendulum-like movement has cities competing with each other for influxes of capital investment in order to cauterise the wounds left by capital in the first place. As Harvey explains

Unleashing interurban, interregional and international competition is not only a primary means whereby the new comes to supplant the old, but a context in which the search for the new, billed as the search for competitive advantage, becomes critical to capital's capacity to reproduce itself (Harvey, 2014: 161).

Yet, space is not absolute, in fact "space is neither absolute, relative or relational in itself, but it can become one or all simultaneously depending on the circumstances" (Harvey, 2009: 13). Any

conception of space is, therefore, predicated on the objects within it, which bare relations to other objects. The problem of space is not about things in themselves, but the ways in which they hang together. Lefebvre (1991) points out how space is reproduced by the mode of production that takes place within it. Under capitalism the objects produced are reified commodities that mask the multitudinal process of their production. In other words, commodities become absolute, eclipsing the fact that space is

A product to be used, to be consumed, it is also a means of production: networks of exchange and flows of raw materials and energy fashion space and are determined by it. Thus this means of production, produced as such, cannot be separated either from the productive forces, including technology and knowledge, or from the social division of labour which shapes it, or from the state and superstructures of society (Lefebvre, 1991: 85).

Under the instrumental rationale of neo-liberalism the primary function of space is economic. Purchased land changes the value of that surrounding it. Exchange-value begets exchange-value, enclosing space and capturing monopoly rents for its owners in the process. For example, when industrialisation in Western countries reached its peak and manufacturing began to decline, new areas of investment needed to be opened up. Capital had to change tack, from primary, industrial capital, to fixed capital. That is, from manufacturing production to spatial production, hence the on-going global project of urbanisation (Merrifield, 2002). Yet capital's annual requirement of three per cent compound growth in order to sustain itself means it frequently runs into problems over the issue of capital surplus absorption (Harvey, 2011): A capitalist makes a surplus profit, which they can either spend or re-invest in new ventures. The problem is that if they sit on their surpluses until they run out their competitors will have gotten the best of them by continuing to garner surpluses through re-investment. Put simply, in a state of perpetual competition capitalists must keep moving their money into new areas, extracting further profits.

Like the Situationists, Harvey uses the 19th century re-building of Paris as an example of how the urbanisation process, whose very purpose was the absorption of surplus capital, merely etches existing power relations onto the physical landscape (Lefebvre, 1991, Merrifield, 2002, Harvey, 2013). Changes in the spatial dynamic have impacts on a subjective level. The post-world war two suburbanisation of the U.S., for example, performed a number of functions: it absorbed surplus labour and capital while appeasing a disillusioned working class with employment and new suburban homes (Harvey, 2011). This helped lay the groundwork for a backlash against increasingly powerful social democratic tendencies that had gained strength through Roosevelt's New Deal. Thus ideas regarding legitimacy, and solutions to social and political problems were reshaped through their new

living conditions. In the late 20th century “the urban process underwent another transformation of scale. In short, it went global...the consequences of the urbanisation process for the global economy and for the absorption of surplus capital have been huge” (Harvey, 2013: 12). However, our subjectivities risk being colonised by the ethics and motives that propel this mode of global urbanisation. “This is a world in which the neo-liberal ethic of intense possessive individualism and financial opportunism have become the template for human personality socialisation” (Harvey, 2011: 175).

We are dealing in the contemporary situation with a more subtle though highly aggressive colonising process that seeks a foothold in cultural policy, education, and the re-development of cities. The new value consensus on which this restructuring rests has accumulated a symbolic power “to map or classify the world for others” by “setting the limit to what will appear as rational, reasonable, credible, indeed sayable or thinkable” (Hall, 1981: 44). In this landscape the virtues that sustain practices are increasingly effaced, “though simulacra might abound” (MacIntyre, 2007: 196). As with the commodity form, the representation of space, mediated as it is by the objects within it, becomes absolute. Hence Debord’s modification of Marx’s notion of society as constituted by an immense array of commodities, to a point at which “life presents itself as accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation” (Debord, 2010: 1 cited in Merrifield, 2002). The physical consequences of this vacuous postmodernity can be found in the contemporary city and the policies through which it has been fashioned.

Since the 1980s capital has been able to reproduce itself to a large extent through the regeneration strategies that have followed de-industrialisation. Throughout Western Europe, these strategies have involved the deployment of the cultural industries, and the integration of cultural policy into urban and economic development. Whereas before the cultural arena was viewed as a political limbo by the establishment, its attachment to economic imperatives meant that the “cultural industries” could be put to use in solving the problems of a newly emerging services-based economy. The colonisation of cultural policy by economic concerns saw a move away from the social democratic rationale of the 1960s and 70s, which sought to “counteract trends towards social atomisation...by reasserting the function of the city centre as a catalyst for civic identity and public sociability” (Bianchini, 1993: 10) towards what Warpole (1992) has called a “retail revolution” involving “the appropriation and ownership of town centres by pension funds and insurance companies; creation of closed, private spaces in town centres” and “escalation of town-centre rents, so that only multiples can afford to be there” (Warpole, 1992:17). McGuigan (1996) sums up this

melting pot of government, corporate and cultural interests in a way that highlights the mechanics of colonisation:

Across Western Europe during the 1980s, public-private partnerships arose, allying local governments closely with business interests in the formulation and funding of urban regeneration strategies. And whereas creative cultural policies had originated generally on the Left, often deriving from 1960s and 1970s counter-cultural movements, the promise of cultural policy was appreciated increasingly by the Right, thereby forging a new consensus regarding culture, economy and polity at regional and local levels (McGuigan, 1996: 106).

Cultural investment as an economically geared regeneration strategy has, however, largely failed to address the needs of those people and subsequent generations dealing with the effects of de-industrialisation, as various studies have shown (Parkinson and Bianchini, 1993, McGuigan, 1996, Harvey, 2013). What is happening instead is that city governments continue to seek investment by constructing a veneer of cultural modernism. By investing in festivals, performance venues, galleries and museums, and by making general improvements to their built environments, these cities have, in effect, engaged in “city marketing”, which has indirect economic benefits that are difficult to measure. A few extra jobs in catering and occupations ancillary to cultural production, which are typically low-paid and casual, either do not eliminate high levels of unemployment, or do so by remodelling economies around precarious, zero-hours and self-employed contracts (McGuigan, 1996: 107).

Increasingly, hostile urban environments play a significant role in shaping our social-moral compass. As neoliberal ethics are etched onto the landscape of the city, so they become normalised within consciousness, insofar as our environment acts as a template of personality socialisation. As noted, the American model of city building embodied in BID’s forms a significant cornerstone of regeneration strategy in the UK post de-industrialisation. McGuigan points out how this model

Was pioneered by...Baltimore’s transformation from a blue-collar to a white-collar city with downtown financial institutions, luxury apartments, a plethora of restaurants, hotels and harbor marinas, only a short distance from dilapidated working class housing and industrial districts, a spatial mix which was to be replicated in similar places such as Northern English cities like Liverpool and Manchester (McGuigan, 1996: 98).

Thus BID’s play a central role in the transition from urban working class to middle class cities. As Coleman (2004) notes, they also position business interests as the primary definers of space and its purposes. Far from registering the potential dangers in following this model of city building, it seems

that UK cultural policy is increasingly geared towards following suit, abandoning “the 1970s emphasis on personal and community development, participation, egalitarianism, the democratisation of urban space and the revitalisation of public social life” (Bianchini, 1993: 13) in favour of using cities as a mere platform for unfettered, environmentally oblivious economic growth. It is telling, however, that cultural policy previous to this era emanated from “post 1968 urban social movements” who “saw cultural action and political action as inextricable” (Bianchini, 1993: 9). Activist groups comprising numerous concerns, tendencies and methods influenced European city governments throughout the 70s through their association with an “alternative” cultural universe, “encompassing experimental theatre groups, rock bands, independent film-makers and cinemas, free radio stations, small publishing houses, radical newspapers and magazines” (Bianchini, 1993: ibid), laying the basis for an expansion of radical democracy within the lived environment in accordance with the critique of bourgeois democratic forms in Habermas’ public sphere theory. As Kellner (2005) notes, the Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere

Inspired many to cultivate more inclusive, egalitarian and democratic public spaces and forums; others were inspired to conceive of more oppositional democratic spaces as sites of the development of alternative cultures to established institutions and spaces (Kellner, 2005: 8).

More recently, cultural activists the world over have sought ways of making interventions in the neoliberal urban landscape, paying specific attention to the “right to the city”. One of the forms these interventions have taken is anti-capitalist film festivals. The confluences between film festival space and activist space have led to various cross-overs of organisational praxis. These often depend on the various forms of social and cultural capital available to festival organisers, and to the sorts of habitus in which they operate.

III. Capital, Habitus and Festival Space

Similarly to Lefebvre, Bourdieu focuses on the ways in which the space is constituted through relations between subjects and their environment. In *The Forms of Capital* his main argument is that the construction of the social world is premised on differential allocations of capital between individuals and groups, but that capital is not purely economic, it can also be measured in terms of certain social and cultural aspects, and is transferable between these three spheres. Capital is both accumulated over time, and persists in ways that are neither spontaneous nor “natural”, but dependent on and perpetuating the objective social, political and cultural structures in which

subjects operate. Therefore, according to Bourdieu, capital is the “principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world” (Bourdieu, 1986: 15), and

The structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chance of success for practices (*ibid*)).

For Bourdieu, the reality of capital’s structuring function is hidden from view by the prevalence within a capitalist economy of monetary exchange. This prevalence forces all other forms of exchange into a particularly bourgeois category of “disinterestedness”, that remains outside of the sphere of economics. The assumption that exchanges outside of the economic sphere are almost by definition “disinterested” has prevented the pursuit of a science which holds economic or monetary exchange to be just one particular form within a totality of multifarious practices that utilise all the other forms of capital. The prevalence of economic exchange must therefore be superseded.

A general science of the economy of practices, capable of re-appropriating the totality of practices which, although objectively economic, are not and cannot be recognised as economic...must endeavour to grasp capital and profit in all their forms and to establish the laws whereby the different types of capital (or power, which amounts to the same thing) change into one another (Bourdieu, 1986: 16).

The efficacy and value of all forms of capital relies upon competition in a state of scarcity. As Bourdieu argues

The structure of the field, i.e., the unequal distribution of capital, is the source of the specific effects of capital, i.e., the appropriation of profits and the power to impose the laws of functioning of the field most favourable to capital and its acquisition (Bourdieu, 1986: 19).

Capital’s functional logic cannot be understood, according to Bourdieu, without recognising that the forms of capital are convertible, but that this conversion requires a process of labour, the undertaking of which is made permissible through an advantageous lot of economic capital. In this way Bourdieu reveals the myth behind the meritocratic discourse which has become central in contemporary neoliberal societies. All subjects are equal, but some subjects have more economic capital than others, and are therefore granted the time with which to convert this capital into its social and cultural forms. Although economic capital is, for Bourdieu, “at the root of all other types of capital”, a purely economic view “ignores what makes the specific efficacy of the other types of capital” (Bourdieu, 1986: 24).

Although this thesis is primarily concerned with the ways in which the film festivals under analysis interact with neoliberal modernity, it is worth trying to identify the type/s of capital they possess, which is largely attributable to the social and cultural capital held by their organisers, as well as a festival's ability to accumulate (and also to dispense and allow use of) capital, as an organisation that persists and operates over time. Because anti-neoliberal film festivals are, in an obvious way, a response to the unequal distribution of economic capital throughout society, the practices they develop are at the same time derived from, reproductive of, and critically engaged with the dominant structures that enable this unequal distribution. In this way the forms of capital they accrue and deploy are closely linked to their habitus, that is, "the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations" which "produces practices" in accordance with both the structures given by the pre-existing environment and "the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation" (Bourdieu, 1977: 78). There has been extensive film festival scholarship that utilises Bourdieu's theories, particularly from de Valck, who has focussed on issues such as the marketisation of film festivals (2014) and festivals as site of cultural legitimisation (2016). However, there has been little application of concepts such as cultural capital, habitus and dispositions to film festival as sites of resistance that make interventions into neoliberal modernity, and aim to foster and utilise forms of capital for socio-political purposes.

Since the film festivals analysed in this research are typically underfunded, for the most part they make use of social capital in order to achieve their aims. This can be contrasted with cultural capital (both are forms of what Bourdieu calls symbolic capital), which can be characterised as a series of dispositions, tastes, qualifications and possessions (particularly of cultural goods) that are wrought primarily through a subject's economic position within society. Although the term has become widely applicable through various social spheres, it is useful to remember that Bourdieu uses the term "cultural capital" primarily to

Explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from different social classes by relating academic success, i.e., the specific profits which children from the different classes and class factions can obtain in the academic market, to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class factions (Bourdieu, 1986: 17)

In this way cultural capital is inherited (as a result, for example, of being born and raised within a wealthy family) and acquired (insofar as it requires an often lengthy process of incorporation into the subject). Cultural capital is "linked in numerous ways to the person in his biological singularity and is subject to a hereditary transmission which is always heavily disguised". Moreover, it is "unrecognised as capital and recognised as legitimate competence" (Bourdieu: 1986: 18), due in

large part to the structuring socio-cultural systems that make possible the acquisition and transfer of capital in the first place. Objectified cultural capital is embodied in the subject as competences and dispositions that enable them to operate within fields of cultural production. Bourdieu evokes Gramscian elements of hegemonic struggle when he writes that cultural capital is only effective to the extent that it is “appropriated by agents and implemented and invested as a weapon and a stake in the struggles which go on in the fields of cultural production” (Bourdieu, 1986: 20). Within these fields of struggle, according to Bourdieu, “agents wield strengths and obtain profits proportionate to their mastery of this objectified capital, and therefore to the extent of their embodied capital” (ibid).

If cultural capital is inherited and acquired by the subject, as well as embodied and then utilised within a given field, social capital is a collectively owned source of capital to which the subject gains access through becoming a member of that collective or group. Typically, a subject’s entry into any capital wealthy group will have required possession and utilisation of their own cultural capital in order to gain access in the first place, thus pre-denying entry to those who lack capital (typically economic capital, meaning a denial of entry those at the lower end of the socio-economic strata). In film festival terms this relation is fleshed out economically through paid entry into festival screenings, as well as culturally through dispositions and competences that enable the subject to appreciate the festival’s content, as well as to identify themselves as one who is allowed to occupy festival space. The specifically social capital element is derived from the subject’s participation within the space, group and content of the festival, which symbolises their “credential” to other group members. As Bourdieu states

The exchanges [among the subject and their peers] instituting mutual acknowledgment presuppose the re-acknowledgment of a minimum objective homogeneity, and because it exerts a multiplier effect on the capital he possesses in his own right (Bourdieu, 1986: 21).

In this respect film festival attendance can be seen as a way to increase the subject’s cultural and social capital. This will apply particularly to the larger, mainstream film festivals such as Berlin and Cannes, particularly because the element of economic capital is far more immanent in structuring these environments than at, for example, the anti-neoliberal film festivals analysed in this research. Importantly, it is the ritual of exchange among group members that allows them to foster durable and meaningful relationships. For Bourdieu, “exchange transforms the things exchanged into signs of recognition and the recognition of group membership that it implies reproduces the group” (Bourdieu, 1986: 22). Although there are of course many forms of exchange that take place within film festivals and consecrate them as groupings of people, one of the the central forms of exchange is that between film and audience (festival content and festival group). Here the selection of films by

festival organisers can be seen as a desire to consecrate a specific type of group, with specific dispositions and competences. In the case of anti-neoliberal film festivals the desire would be to make an intervention into (and alteration of) the objective structures that perpetuate the unequal distribution of capital.

The organisation of film festivals is a process that, perhaps even more so than mere festival participation, requires a mobilisation of social capital. In this respect Bourdieu's pronouncement of social capital as a network of relations becomes more important, since festival organisers must make use of this network. In this research the lack of economic capital on the part of anti-neoliberal film festivals makes social capital all the more important. Here two forms of social capital are at work: that held by the individual organiser, and that held by the festival as an organisation, both of which are in a relation that perpetuates the expansion of networks and, therefore, social capital. Bourdieu argues that

The profits that accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible. This does not mean they are consciously pursued as such...The existence of a network of connections is not a natural given, or even a social given...It is the product of an endless effort at institution...The network of relations is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term (Bourdieu, 1986: 22).

In the *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu uses the habitus concept to explain how subjects and social groups internalise and externalise (reproduce) the social world. This includes cultural reproduction, and tells us something about the nature of the interventions film festivals make into public space. The concept of habitus, brings to light

Systems of durable, transposable dispositions...principles of the generation and structuring of practices which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them, and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor (ibid).

The social world is neither mechanistically nor randomly reproduced, but arises through the dialectic of internalisation of seemingly objective surroundings and the innate strategic assessment of subsequent needs and the possibilities for fulfilling them. For Bourdieu, potentiality arrives within

the purview of the subject or class as a series of “dispositions durably inculcated by objective conditions” which “engender aspirations or practices objectively compatible with those objective requirements” (Bourdieu, 1977: 77). This set of limitations on the horizon of possibilities differs between different social groups and classes, rendering certain practices improbable and even unthinkable. “Generation conflicts” occur through the clashing of

Habitus which have been produced by different modes of generation, that is, by conditions of existence which, in imposing different definitions of the impossible, the possible and the probable, cause one group to experience as natural or reasonable practices or aspirations which another group finds unthinkable or scandalous, and vice versa (Bourdieu, 1977: 78).

To give an example, Margaret Thatcher’s assertion that “there is no alternative” for social reproduction other than that produced by neoliberalism, could be contrasted with the core anti-capitalist ideal that “another world is possible”. Only in the latter slogan do we find a comparison in Bourdieu’s concept of de-fatalisation, which inscribes the possibility that nature, the world and the subject could be something other than what it currently is. This research highlights the form and content of film festivals’ modes of generation, and a generational conflict that is extrapolated to some extent through programs, publicity materials and festival reports.

The result of generational conflicts in Western societies has been to produce rigid forms of class domination that “no longer needs to be exerted in a direct personal way” because

It is entailed in possession of the means (economic or cultural capital) of appropriating the mechanisms of the field of production and the field of cultural production, which tend to assure their own reproduction by their very functioning, independently of any deliberate intervention by the agents (Bourdieu, 1977: 184).

Relations of subjection and dominance are riven throughout habitus at conscious and unconscious levels. Oppression, therefore, is both immediately felt and elusive. Insofar as the subject or social group objectifies institutions of domination, as opposed to analysing their embodied and subjective relation to them, the perpetuation of the dominant social order is guaranteed through an endless stream of “symbolic acquisitions which can then subsist without the agents having to recreate them continuously and in their entirety by deliberate action” (ibid).

To summarise, film festivals can be seen as sites where forms of capital are at play in the processes of organisation and execution. As noted, they have played a historic role in the reproduction and circulation of economic capital, but also the reproduction of dispositions and competences among audiences (subjects). The desired relation between space, film and audience is what constitutes the

film festival as distinct from others, and is largely attributable to the motives of organisers and the network of relations (social capital) they can utilise in order to make the festival happen. Thus film festivals cultivate certain political dispositions (whether “knowingly” or not). The film festivals analysed in this research employ generational practices that are rooted in social capital and the given habitus from which it can be derived (with enough skill, or what Bourdieu would call “competence) in order to cultivate anti-neoliberal dispositions among their audience. This process of organisation over time enables (but does not necessarily achieve) the acquisition of greater amounts of capital by both organisers and the film festival as such. Thus, along with concepts that are gathered around uneven geographical development and counterpublic spheres, Bourdieu’s theories of capital and habitus are useful in getting a grip on the ways in which anti-neoliberal film festival operate within the confines of the neoliberal city. Although the case studies in this research will have some recourse to Bourdieu’s theories, the aim is not to prioritise these or even to make them explicit. Rather, the aim of this section has been to establish a framework of critical analysis that is, subsequently, implicit within the following observations regarding the seemingly ordinary labour that goes into organising each festival.

Conclusion

The purpose of this literature review has been to provide some insight into the tensions that exist between neoliberalism and spheres of counter-hegemonic cultural production that exist within it. In this context film festivals can be viewed as potential sites of spatial and cultural resistance, and this has indeed been the purpose of much of the film and video activism that has emerged in the neoliberal period. In combining an examination of the research around Habermas’ public sphere concept with a brief history of neoliberalism and the spatial reproduction it brings about, the chapter has shown how counter-public spheres exist alongside neoliberalism, and may always be susceptible to colonisation by its incentives. This form of colonisation is evident, for example, within the “creative industries” and, increasingly, in the marketisation of education in the UK. It is also manifest in the urban environment, particularly in the privatisation of city centres and the emergence of business improvement districts. The film festivals analysed in this research all engage with neoliberal urbanisation and its effects, although often their different forms of engagement reflect the uneven geographical development of their localities, as well as the differential outcomes of implementing a relatively standardised set of political and economic policies therein. These festivals aim to act as sites of resistance to neoliberalism in its various forms, and can therefore be seen as formative of certain cultural geographies that exist in multiple sets of relations with each other. The geographical dimensions of symbolic capital can be further unpacked by what English

(2011) calls the “cross-breeding” of theories around communicative action and symbolic capital.

Liana Giorgi and Monica Sassatelli (2011) nicely sum up this relation when they write that

The communicative action approach is a theory of action - as its name suggests – and therefore places the emphasis on agency. By contrast, the field [Bourdieuian] approach is a descriptive-analytical theory, which is more interested in understanding patterns and structures and the power relations between them...The first approach demonstrates how ideas, beliefs and norms inform festival organisation, and shows that only on this basis is it possible to create content...The second approach shows the ways in which these contents (often idealistic) are embedded in the real world of industrial power relations, networks and scarce resources (Giorgi, Sassatelli, 2011: 5).

In the case studies that follow, this research makes some attempt at examining this system of relations.

The Workers Unite Film Festival



Fig 1: Outside the Cinema Village, East 12th Street, New York

This first half of this case study situates the Workers Unite Film Festival (WUFF) within three overlapping contexts: the development of the finance, insurance and real estate nexus in New York, the attack on unions that the festival seeks to counter and arts and cultural funding in the city. WUFF is situated within the complex set of relations that constitute New York's union makeup, as well as the relations between unions and workers centres, which emerged as a different series of tactics and forms of public engagement as labour began to lose ground to capital throughout the 1980s and 90s. Broadly speaking, the difference between unions and workers centres is represented in the difference between a culturally conservative, suburban middle class, and the more precarious, loosely organised conditions and response of service based and migrant workers. To a large extent the festival aims to reconcile these audiences through the advancement of solidarity and pro-worker, pro-union narratives. The second half of the case study therefore examines the festival's programming, its various venues across the city, partnerships, and the community engagements of the festival, wherein it seeks to use film as an educational tool, particularly among unionised workers.

In the case of the Workers Unite Film Festival, I was not able to attend, since I could not obtain funding to get to New York. I had access to a single organiser – the executive director of the festival, Andrew Tilson. My relation to this subject materialised through semi-structured interviews via Skype and a series of written questions which were answered via email. Here, my position was one of an outside observer, since I neither attended nor participated in the organisation of the festival. My

involvement in film festival as activist sites stems originally from activism outside of film festivals, and my subsequent co-founding of the Bristol Radical Film Festival (BRFF) in 2012. Since that time I have closely followed the development of the Radical Film Network, which was founded by a former colleague at the BRFF. My contact with Tilson developed through this network over a number of years, rather than being established purely for the purpose of this research. While this form of relation may be prone to inducing a certain critical lack (a problem addressed below) it also facilitates an understanding that moves beyond the merely scholastic position of an outside or “impartial observer”. The archival research carried out for this chapter has also served to alleviate the problems arising from my physical distance from the subject. The WUFF archive highlights the form and content of the festivals’ modes of generation, and a generational conflict that is extrapolated to some extent through programs, publicity materials and festival reports.



Fig 2: WUFF 2017 poster

Beginning in 2012 with two days of documentaries on labour and union issues, the Workers Unite Film Festival (WUFF) has since expanded into a week-long annual event taking place every May, screening in various locations throughout the “real estate capital of the world”. In collaboration with activist groups, striking workers, unions and educational institutions, the festival acts as an exhibitor, producer and distributor of labour oriented films whose audience extends beyond the traditionally white, blue collar and often culturally conservative demographic that makes up the bulk of New York

City union membership. Indeed, one of the central objectives of the festival is to facilitate discourse among this demographic and members of minoritised communities. Given the conservative propensities of a large part of its target audience, it would be counter-intuitive for WUFF to foreground a message of radical anti-capitalism. It is worth remembering that one of the major themes of US politics is anti-communism, and this has had a significant, if not hegemonic, effect on working-class political consciousness⁴. The manufactured hatred of communism can, and has been, be turned against unions (Yates, 2009), and WUFF aims to counter anti-union narratives by taking a more explicit, pro-worker standpoint. Although the central focus is labour issues, WUFF asserts that these are inseparable from struggles around housing, gentrification, climate change, LGBTQ issues, animal rights, anti-fascism, anti-racism, food production, media and geo-politics. Films are screened in the context of a festival whose primary aim is to “publicise the struggles, successes and daily lives of *all workers* in their efforts to unite and organize for better living conditions and social justice” (WUFF, 2017) [my emphasis]. The festival’s executive director, Andrew Tilson, posits a distinction between WUFF and human rights film festivals on the basis that the latter screen films that are outward-facing, that is, focussing on abuses of Other nations while omitting local struggles that may directly affect the festival audience. According to Tilson, this is part of an ideological tendency within human rights film festivals to avoid questions around labour rights.

It’s fascinating that you can have 25-30 films at a human rights film festival and not a single one will be about labour issues...to me that’s criminal because obviously so often the two overlap, and actually the crux of a lot of these labour issues is a basic attack on human rights...what I’ve seen is that human rights festivals tend to particularly focus on individuals, or ethnic groups, classes of people under attack, but rarely separate them out as workers or remotely discuss the idea of labour rights. WUFF obviously focuses on these issues, and we also tie as much of our labour struggle discussion to a link to human rights abuses happening concurrently with a strike or other labour action...Human rights festivals...often leave out the work and employment based component of the whole issue – such as the threats to health and safety in Indian sweatshops and how they fight back against this exploitation (Tilson, 2017).

WUFF focuses primarily on its locality, while dismissing false dichotomies between the local and the international. This is crucial to understanding the counter-hegemonic function of the festival, which is incremental, and enacted through complex, occasionally messy, ambivalent and locally specific

⁴ During Obama’s presidency, for example, it was not uncommon to hear right-wing media outlets such as Fox News (with the aid of US politicians) concoct scare narratives around “creeping socialism” in an effort to disparage the mildest of social reforms (see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODATXu_2m-c).

partnerships, albeit with a general understanding of neoliberal capital as a global force. Usually the festival works on a budget close to zero, and programming decisions are often made based on the potential to secure funding through collaboration. As Tilson explains

We try to find films that we know will be of interest to specific unions...and try to get them involved very early on...30 per cent of the time that happens. There's a direct connection between the union group and the film. But very often it's saying [to unions] that this is an important thing to do for the labour community, the workers in the city and the country, you should donate. You should be associated with this (Tilson, 2017).

A further 50 per cent of programmed films are targeted at groups that may or may not be officially union affiliated, such as housing action groups in specific neighbourhoods. Thus WUFF is situated between unions, workers centres and non-union groups, opening a potential line of communication between broadly different sets of demographics constituted by different class, gender and race experiences, as well as alternate working methods and structures. For all their differences, this demographic patchwork faces forms of neoliberal capital that are as multifaceted and complex as the Finance, Insurance and Real Estate (FIRE) nexus that dominates NYC's economy and government. However, as Tom Angotti notes, although the function of the real estate industry is heavily dependent on an "alliance of big and small players (banks, insurance companies, contractors, brokers, construction unions and civic groups)", the "money and power are concentrated in the hands of a few large players. For example, the top five commercial banks in the New York area account for 95 per cent of all financial assets" (Angotti, 2011: 40).

At the same time, and perhaps unsurprisingly given its location, the organisational structure of the festival appears to replicate the model of a typical US corporation, with a rigidly structured hierarchy headed by an Executive Director. This is as much a mode of organisation as it is a prerequisite for the festival's funding eligibility, since incorporation as an "official" organisation is compulsory in order to qualify for public funds. As the chapter following this one will show, organisations like the Liverpool Radical Film Festival resist involvement with large funding bodies for the very reason that incorporation into this official lexicon would go against the core principles of anti-corporatism harboured by the festival. With that said, WUFF's programming choices, as well as the process of programming itself, hardly suggests a tendency towards corporatism. This case study highlights WUFF's collaborations with striking workers, gay rights groups, and a host of other organisations to screen films both inside and outside cinemas. This level of decentralisation perhaps acts as a counterweight to the apparent rigidity of its organisational structure.

Context: The Finance Insurance and Real Estate Nexus

New York can be accurately described as the birthplace of neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005). The city was one of the first to suffer from the dissolution of the Bretton Woods system, and in 1975 underwent a fiscal crisis that left it bankrupt and prompted the government to enact a policy of “benign neglect” towards neighbourhoods, meaning the state would divest from providing services, particularly to communities of colour that were deemed unworthy of saving (Angotti, 2011). This small-state approach, whereby “government could no longer be relied upon to provide direct services as it had done since the New Deal”, and the “contracting out [of] projects and services was hyped as the antidote to a bloated bureaucracy and government inefficiency” is characteristic of what is now called neoliberal policy (Angotti, 2011: 77). However, despite large-scale de-industrialisation and multiform advances across the city by FIRE interests, New York remains a heavily unionised city and, according to Richard Steier (2014), public sector unions have even gained some strength over the past few years. Nevertheless, the capacity and incentive for capital to formulate weaponised, anti-labour narratives is particularly excessive in New York, given the huge commodity value of the land, and the close, personal connections between the FIRE nexus, media industries and government. Indeed

The [2007/8] crisis on Wall Street has brought a sudden surge of interest in public employee unions, although not for any reason they would encourage. Some labour leaders contend that there has been a concerted effort, by the titans of the financial community, the media properties of Rupert Murdoch, and [then] Mayor Michael Bloomberg to deflect attention from the cause of the city’s financial problems by focussing it on the benefits that public employees receive and how good they seem in comparison to what’s available in the private sector these days (Steier, 2014: xii).

In November 2014 media conglomerate, Conde Nast, moved its headquarters to the newly finished One World Trade Centre. While this has been represented as an industrial reorientation of Lower Manhattan from finance to the media industries, it primarily signals a strengthening of the relationship between media and the FIRE nexus that has seen spaces previously occupied by investment banks taken up by “technology firms, advertising agencies and media companies...Luxury retailers, like Brooks Brothers, Saks Fifth Avenue, Salvatore Ferragamo and Tiffany & Company, have opened shops. The local population has swelled to 61,000 from practically nothing” (New York Times, 2014). The area around One World Trade Centre was not a residential area to begin with. Thus it may be difficult to argue that what has taken place through the influx of residents constitutes “gentrification”. However, this influx of relatively well-off, young suburbanites into the urban

demographic does exacerbate the land-value and rental prices in surrounding areas, meaning less-wealthy demographics are being forced to the margins of the city⁵. As Angotti notes

Growth in the FIRE sector has a ripple effect far beyond its geographical centre in Manhattan's midtown financial districts. It creates excess capital that gets invested, in part, in local real estate throughout the city...Central locations are generally highest in land value, and as land values in central areas goes up, rents go up...this creates a ripple effect that forces people out and creates opportunities for redevelopment. This is the central dynamic underlying what is now called gentrification, a product of the normal operation of the real estate as it pushes out poor people and people of colour and brings in people who can pay higher rents (Angotti, 2011: 42, 43).

In this case Harvey's capital surplus absorption problem is fleshed out through real estate, with genuine consequences for people. Given the ways in which urban planning in New York has always been undertaken primarily in the interests of wealthy real estate owners and property developers, it is unsurprising to find anti-working class elements therein, as well as links between racial segregation and private property. In the 1960s, the post-war suburbanisation of areas surrounding New York, the loss of manufacturing jobs, and the racial fears accompanied by an influx of black people from the US south and Latin American immigrants, led to "white flight" from inner city areas – the migration of predominantly Irish and Italian people. These new suburbanites then adopted "exclusionary land-use and zoning policies to protect their property values", and thus became "the foundation for narrow, conservative community planning in the United States", an outlook that is reflected in the conservatism of New York's union membership (Angotti, 2011: 70). Nevertheless, the city underwent a real estate boom in the 1950s and 60s. Rising property values in Manhattan "created development pressures on many nearby low-rent neighbourhoods such as Chelsea, Hell's Kitchen and Greenwich Village" (Angotti, 2011: 72). The capricious and unstable nature of this boom can be seen in the fiscal crisis of the 1970s, which led to large scale housing abandonment and developers divesting themselves from entire neighbourhoods. The subsequent policy of "benign neglect" therefore predominantly effected black and Latino immigrant areas, which have more recently been targeted by FIRE interests for redevelopment. This highlights the link between benign neglect and the rezoning of areas such as Harlem. The geographic and demographic disparity between white, conservative suburbia and areas populated by black and Latino people is, to a

⁵ A 2016 report released by the non-profit Community Service Society of New York reveals that New York City is in the midst of a socio-economic transformation that is visiting severe hardship on the city's low-income residents. Eight years after the financial crisis of 2008, rent still consumes a median of 49 per cent of income for households with incomes below twice the federal poverty line, a historically high level (CSSNY, 2016).

certain extent, reflected in the contemporary difference between unions and workers centres (analysed later in this chapter). What we are seeing now is the children of those suburbanites return to these neighbourhoods in search of “authenticity” (Zukin, 2009), a unique urban environment that is distinct from that of the comparatively sanitised suburbia in which they grew up. Many of these people are joining the ranks of precarious “cultural” workers in the city.

The city’s new cultural strategies for accumulation are based around the arts, entertainment and media industries, and the development of a city-wide playground to accommodate the new influx of media professionals (Zukin, 1989). This urban makeup has been referred to as the “FIRE/themepark metropolis” (Parenti, 2000), and is currently being instituted through 72 Business Improvement Districts that have developed since the founding of the NYC BID association in 1995. The formation of BID’s can be seen as a continuation of neoliberal small-state policies that arose out of the 1970s fiscal crisis, as they are

Private, self-taxing, urban micro-states that do everything from cleaning streets and guiding tourists to floating bonds and arresting beggars...BID’s embody all the power and privileges of the state yet bear none of the responsibilities and limitations of democratic government (Parenti, 2000: 96).

With the coming of BID’s, the city developed a range of branding strategies that would attract inward investment, thereby sanitising the city’s “authenticity” in the service of attracting capital. Nevertheless, the official branding of New York as a metropolitan utopia populated by salt of the earth citizens occludes the fact that land value is constantly rising at a drastic pace, pushing poorer people out of the city. Here, according to sociologist, Miriam Greenberg, “branding may be seen as a broader social formation, one in which an emphasis on image and media integration is tied to the extension of market priorities into new social and political realms” (Greenberg, 2012: 116)⁶. A significant purveyor of this extension would be former mayor and billionaire media magnate, Michael Bloomberg, who has overseen “the integration of urban branding into political governance” as part of a “postparty” era in urban politics “through which the political party and its patronage-based machinery no longer hold sufficient power to sway elections and govern effectively” (Greenberg, 2012: 117-8). Thus city branding plays a role in concealing the politics of urban and economic restructuring perpetuated by New York’s CEO-politicians. Nevertheless, anti-gentrification struggles are an important aspect of the city’s activist history. Beneath the saturation of marketing

⁶ For an example of how the city is marketed to business via its new influx of young professionals see this report by the Downtown Alliance: <http://www.downtownny.com/reports/An-Untapped-Market-Lower-Manhattan%E2%80%99s-Young-Professionals>

campaigns that promote “a city of many harmonious ethnicities” (Angotti, 2011: 51, 52) in order to attract inward investment and tourism, lies a distinctly race oriented history of political conflict over housing that is reflected in the “battle for cultural equity” in arts funding (Davila, 2012: 73). In both cases, attempts by city planners to create a unified identity mask the fact that New York City is one of the most unequal in the world, while the negative side-effects of becoming a global city are overwhelmingly directed at migrant communities and people of colour, though not, in many cases, without eliciting a reaction. In the 1980s, for example,

New York’s Lower East Side emerged for a time as a crucible of resistance to the global city...community groups organised large numbers of residents, led angry street marches, and generated considerable pressure on developers and city officials to address issues of displacement and homelessness...But by the close of the twentieth century the battles, as well as the ambitions of activists, had been mostly curtailed: community housing initiatives bogged down; the police moved in, suppressing conflicts at the most contentious sites; and gentrification moved forward, transforming much of the community into an extension of affluent Manhattan (Sites, 1999: 101).

WUFF places an emphasis on this, both in their work with housing action groups and the festival’s motive of screening in various locations throughout the city. As Tilson explains

That’s one of our main focuses. Not just to get good audiences, but the connections that we make with community groups and workers centres...And we bring the festival to the community if it’s at all possible...we try to work with as many of these housing groups as we can (Tilson, 2017).

However, as forms of “flexible accumulation” continue it will become increasingly difficult for organisations such as WUFF to maintain their 501(c) non-profit status, which is what allows them to receive funding from private foundations. In the case of WUFF, this comes particularly from left-wing foundations, “which, strangely, do exist in the New York area” (Tilson, 2017). The newly inaugurated Trump administration is a particular source of concern for the festival. As Tilson explains

Trump and his sidekicks have already announced their intentions to...destroy our public broadcasting system and the National Endowment for the Arts. This was never a huge amount of money, but was critical to keeping many theatre and arts groups operating...I do feel that there will be an effort to go after organisations such as us, not only to harm the budget, but to remove our not for profit status as well. This of course makes fundraising almost impossible. So we will see what happens. It’s a scary time all round (Tilson, 2017).

Today the driving force behind city governance is the Real Estate Board of New York (REBNY) and the New York City Partnership “a group of corporate executives mostly from the financial sector, which was founded by David Rockefeller. Real estate drives the growth machine, government oils and repairs it” (Angotti, 2011: 39)⁷. Indeed, it is not the case that de-industrialisation in New York simply took place without agency. While change involves numerous complex relations and forces, this does not mean that certain forms of change are indecipherable or, according to postmodern mythology, organic and inevitable. As Angotti notes

New York City lost proportionately more manufacturing jobs than any other major industrial centre in the United States. But while these multiple forces pulled manufacturing out of the city, real estate speculation helped by giving a big push. Today a major goal of REBNY is to rezone industrial and waterfront site from manufacturing so that they can be redeveloped for commercial and residential purposes (Angotti, 2011: 50).

Manhattan has gained strategic importance for the completion of REBNY’s business objectives. As Angotti points out, “in response to 9/11, it [REBNY] declared that the downtown “should grow as a powerful engine of the city’s, region’s and nation’s economies”” (Angotti, 2011: 39). A recent report by the Downtown Alliance, the BID for Lower Manhattan, notes that the population of the area has risen drastically since 2000, and now numbers 30,000 people, 70 per cent of whom are young professionals, millennials with jobs in the “FIRE and professional services, such as advertising, media and technology”. This “untapped market” also comprises thousands of students, and residents reportedly spend \$1000 each per month on dining and entertainment (Downtown Alliance, 2016: 4-5). This is the “creative class” written about by Richard Florida (2002). However, the latest residential pipeline report by the Downtown Alliance displays an amount of newly converted and under construction condos that is hardly conducive with Florida’s description of an urban bohemia thriving on SME’s (Downtown Alliance, 2016). As Arlene Davila notes, the “apolitical vision” outlined in Florida’s work underpins a system of structures that serve to “promote the cultural and economic contributions of selected cultural workers and institutions while veiling those of the bulk of others”, particularly “cultural creatives from communities of colour in New York City who, while making up 65 per cent of New York City’s residents, remain at the margins of most considerations of the city’s creative economy” (Davila, 2012: 74). According to Davila, New York’s model of neoliberal governance values the arts on their capacity to generate profits. This is unsurprising. However, what

⁷ That organisations like this have a history dating back to the 1700s is indicative of New York’s fundamental symbiosis with its current form of CEO-governance. Put simply, the city’s institutions were designed to favour a model that we now identify as neoliberal. “This historic fact is especially significant because it suggests just how deeply rooted are the ties between local real estate and global finance” (Angotti, 2011: 56).

Davila highlights is the occlusion of non-profit cultural organisations, as well as “culturally specific and community-based institutions” (Davila, 2012: 74) by a multi-billion dollar commercial entertainment sector.

The effects of policy disparities that favour large gentrifying projects at the expense of local groups were amply evident in East Harlem, where in the span of a few years I witnessed a variety of cultural spaces...very quickly close. In their short life span, they nurtured artists, audiences and visitors from throughout the city, until they simply could not handle the higher rents (Davila, 2012: 78).

Despite a budget increase for the arts and a series of reforms, the funding landscape remains vastly unequal. As Davila reports, “there are over fourteen hundred recognised non-profit cultural and artistic groups in the city, which begs the question of why a mere thirty four institutions still receive 75 to 80 per cent of the city’s arts budget” (Davila, 2012: 83). Davila advocates a renewed conception of value whereby the mobility and educational function of organisations such as WUFF is registered by city planners, whose current conception of value does not include the production of social cohesion and relative contributions to the health and well-being of residents. However, it would be naïve to suggest that there wasn’t a political dimension to the delegation of funds. Tilson’s expectation is that, in the era of Trump, attacks on workers’ rights are likely to escalate.

On the other hand, the speedy attacks against workers, unions and worker centres, by trying to pass a national Right to Work law and attacking immigration centres, has both created a large amount of fear in the community, but also great activism. We’ve already seen this uptick in the upsurge in demonstrations and activism. Our own social media followers have dramatically increased since January [2017, when Trump was inaugurated] – so in an odd way having Trump as an enemy might also help us to grow (Tilson, 2017).

The Festival

Workers Unite is constituted by its position within the complex relation between capital and labour in New York. This is a situation in which capital has the upper hand, primarily because of the increased strength of the FIRE nexus engendered by neoliberal government policy dating back to the 1970s. While New York is, according to Ruth Milkman, “the most highly unionised city in the United States” and an example of “fortress unionism...a metropolitan region where union density also sustains a labour-liberal political bulwark”, it is also “marked by higher levels of income inequality than any other large US city, and it is home to a large and growing precariat” (Milkman, 2014: 3). In light of unions inability to organise workers, recent decades have seen “efforts of several New York-

based worker centres and union community partnerships to organise this expanding segment of the workforce”, while unions themselves, “began to recruit a new generation of organisers and staffers, many with experience in other social movements, who helped to infuse the labour movement with new ideas” (*ibid*). While it may be tempting to posit a dichotomy between traditionally conservative union membership and worker centres whose focus is mainly the precariat and immigrant community, WUFF has to “straddle the line between the two”. As Tilson explains

Worker centres can be great, and they are an incubator for activity, but their actual structures are very weak. They very often seem to depend on one or two charismatic individuals, and if those people are sick or distracted or go off to something better, then it seems to fall apart. So, what we're finding, I think, given the direction we're going, is to continue to really almost harass the bigger unions, like the plumbers, the electricians, and kind of force them to pay attention...So it is a tricky question. There is a role for worker centres, certainly. But financially they're underfunded, so they're always scrambling...On the other side, the bureaucracy of the unions is terrible, and the overload of business agents - Six vice presidents and all that - that's equally problematic. So there's no one easy answer (Tilson, 2017).

Although the festival attempts to reconcile these two different sets of interests and forms of resistance, this is tantamount to reconciling the conservatism of a predominantly middle-aged, white union membership (many of whom voted for Donald Trump, especially those working in the construction unions) with the cultural liberalism of a younger, metropolitan audience. As this case study will now show, one of the main vehicles WUFF uses is to place an emphasis on class and collective interests in precisely the way traditional unionism has historically resisted.

Tilson founded WUFF after finishing his masters in Labour Studies at the Joseph Murphy Institute at City University, New York (CUNY). He is a self-professed “red-diaper baby” who describes how “even as a child I was taken to administrations, picket lines...so I grew up in that background of labour and progressive politics” (Tilson, 2017). His working life, comprised of employment with healthcare companies, union organising and film production, provided the impetus and feasibility of the first edition. He began his Masters while shooting a film about the Taxi Workers Alliance and its transition to the Patient protection and Affordable Care Act (aka Obamacare).

As I got to the end of that, and going through it with my background in film and video stuff, I thought “there’s no labour film festival in New York” – It’s one of the few labour strong cities – and because of my healthcare connections I was able to raise enough seed money to

actually put on something. So I did a two and a half day festival...and foolishly succeeded...300 people showed up [to the first screening], we completely sold out the theatre. We had a lot of sold-out shows. We had shows in the afternoon that were wonderful and some that were terrible, so we learned both ways, but it was enough for me to move forward (Tilson, 2017).

That the original funding for the festival came from healthcare companies, as opposed to unions, displays a certain contradiction of capital, as well as the ambivalent (sometimes outright dismissive) stance OSM's hold towards cultural events as a form of resistance. In the first respect, healthcare companies wanted to be seen as supportive of such events, since "their client base is the NYC municipal union system" and "their big clients were health and pension funds". Thus they "were willing to put up the \$2000 dollar chunks that it takes to do one of these things" (Tilson, 2017). Only after witnessing this influx of funds did some of the bigger unions begin to support the festival. As Tilson explains

The unions are like dinosaurs In terms of how they operate in supporting anything different. Unless it's been done for fifty years they really won't...so once they saw I had some of these major healthcare companies on board that's when *they* were willing to come on board (Tilson, 2017).

In this context WUFF can be seen as a product of the tension that exists within supply-side capital, which, as noted in the previous chapter, produces a situation wherein workers must be allowed to sustain themselves in order to provide a market for commodities such as healthcare. Thus a situation arises wherein private healthcare companies are willing to fund a film festival whose politics are anathema to the existence of privatised healthcare. This is a microcosm of the tit-for-tat compromises that capital and labour often make with each other – a boost to public relations in exchange for some festival funding. That the unions have been so slow to register the potential of Workers Unite (and stump up funds from what, after all, would be the most appropriate and logical source) highlights a failure in the organisational capacity of OSM's, and suggests a need to begin taking cultural events seriously by funding them, lest they disappear into the commercialised and apolitical cultural fabric of the FIRE metropolis. Given the festival's position between union and non-union groups, it may also act as a conduit between OSM's and NSM's. The precarious nature of the funding situation has been exacerbated by the recent US presidential election.

Last season we had the Hilary-Bernie primary in New York, which they [the unions] threw a lot of money into for different sides, and that definitely hurt us. And what does it get done?

Nothing. This is the stupidity of the labour movement...[for example] the Hospital Workers Union: they're running scared because they supported Hilary and she got trashed...and now they're so scared they've cut their budget nationally by 30 per cent, which, of course, is the opposite of what they should be doing. And watch what happens, next time there's a presidential race they'll dump millions of dollars into centrist democrats who aren't labour friendly, rather than giving something to groups like mine...It's the shame of the left that the cultural stuff is not seen as equally important to the role of organising (Tilson, 2017).

Although some unions show support with letters, small amounts of money and printing costs, "New York state AFL-CIO [the umbrella union for American workers in the public and private sectors] won't even give me a letter of support, and yet they'll spend £2million on a golf outing for a bunch of old white guys" (*ibid*). Although there may be many reasons why union funding for organisations like Workers Unite is relatively sparse, compounding the issue is the tendency for leaders of public employee unions to "reflexively align with those who are best positioned to help *them* rather than living up to their mandate to act in the best interests of their members" (Steier, 2014: xvi, my emphasis). This is one of the major differences between unions and worker centres, as the latter often see the former as corrupted by their close entwinement with the government and corporate powers they supposedly aim to keep in check. Nevertheless "for all their flaws the unions represent the best shot that ordinary people in this nation have for fair economic treatment" (*ibid*). Unfortunately it may not even be in the interest of union leaders to fund events such as WUFF, although it is certainly in the interest of their membership. As Tilson explains, some unions have recognised this.

We have had greater success in reaching out to local area and national unions. I think it is a factor of surviving for several years and establishing ourselves as legitimate. I do think that unions have less funds for this kind of cultural endeavour, which I believe is short-sighted and out of date. Obviously we need to build more cultural awareness of worker/labour issues, not less, and projects like these festivals not only promote these stories, but serve as a key organising tool for union drives that are often represented in these films. I also think this difficulty represents the need for new leadership in many of these unions, leadership that understands social media as well as films, music and theatre (Tilson, 2017).

Thus the festival does not receive large amounts of funding from any single source. Although it is scheduled to apply for public funds from the New York State Council of the Arts (NYSCA), which specifically funds non-profit organisations, "the Council rarely funds more than 50 per cent of a project's entire budget, and in the case of requests for general support, the Council rarely funds

more than 25 per cent of an organization's budget" (NYSCA, 2017). Multiple funding sources constitute "the puzzle of putting something like this together" (Tilson, 2017), and the festival can pick up sponsors as abruptly as it loses them. Tilson explains how this form of precarity can impact the programming of the festival.

We depend on a variety of grants and sponsorships to actually make the festival happen. We actually lost one of our original sponsors this year [2017], and we had to scramble. At first I didn't know what we were going to do. And in the end we got a nice sponsorship from New York City State Cultural Group. Altogether we ended up getting three major sponsorships from major unions that I totally didn't expect...On the other hand with the worker centres we actually had to cancel, twice, a screening with somebody who's always been there for us, but they'd never been a financial supporter, which is the Taxi Workers Alliance. We had a movie that was really wonderful, that we screened before the festival in early April, about workers movements in Bangladesh - the women who organise garment workers. And we felt strongly that the only place that there really was an audience for that was in the Bangladeshi community, which is where the taxi workers have their offices. And we worked with them, we know them. But we couldn't get them to focus. We decided pretty close to the last minute that we were just not getting the kind of focus that we needed to guarantee, to make it worth doing the screening again. It was the only screening we actually cancelled, out of about 40 screenings (Tilson, 2017).

For example, the festival collaborates with the Workforce Development Institute, a "state and labour movement partnership" between New York State and the AFL-CIO that trains low-wage workers in the skills required to get higher paying trades jobs (*ibid*).

They have agreed with us that we will put on a mini festival. So basically we're going to teach each of the regions to do a 2-3 day festival...that's at least a way of getting into the [funding] system, because sometimes it take 2-3 years to get into that process...because here governmental processes are so byzantine (Tilson, 2017).

Here the festival makes a cultural-money capital exchange with the state and the union. The skills required to conduct a film festival are valuable to a local city economy that is currently centred around media and technology. Such conjunctures of interests (odd as they often seem, especially to ideological puritans) are vital to organising film festivals on a zero-budget, and indeed to low-budget cultural production generally, which takes place in large part through networks of solidarity. As noted, WUFF operates mainly through collaborations with local union and non-union organisations.

These facilitate what Tilson calls a ripple effect, wherein initial screening partnerships tend to multiply opportunities for further collaborative efforts. As he explains, “the connections we’re making now is where the future will be” (Tilson, 2017).

Venues and Screenings

At the forefront of this strategy is the festival’s relationship with its main venue, Cinema Village, an independent, 3 screen venue in Greenwich Village, Manhattan. Workers Unite moved to Cinema Village, “one of the last independent theatres” in New York, just after its first edition. Tilson describes how

It worked out because the guy [the owner of Cinema Village], this wild guy who lives in Crete, he came up to me smoking a big cigar and said “I’m a businessman but I’m also a Communist”. He gave us the theatre for a very reasonable price, which is why we’re able to do it [the festival] (Tilson, 2017).

Cinema Village is a long, narrow auditorium of around 150 seats. It was built in 1963 out of the shell of an old fire station, and the exterior of the cinema lays a claim to the uniqueness and “authenticity” of a bygone era. WUFF charges \$8-10 for entry, but all of its screenings outside of the cinema are free. Since WUFF repeats some of its films in various locations across the city, it is difficult to say that the programming choices are in any way affected by the venue in which they will take place. It is not the case, for example, that films screened inside the Cinema Village are more globally oriented than those screened in the bars, housing co-ops and union auditoriums that the festival also utilises. For example, the Cinema Village program consists of films as diverse as *Sunflowers of Nicaragua* (Jaguey, 2017) about Nicaraguan sex workers, *City of Joy* (Gavin, 2016) about women revolutionary leaders in East Congo, *The Coal Minority* (Butcher, 2016) a short film about the disappearance of the US coal industry and its effects on small towns, and *Detroit, Dog City* (Barbot, 2015) about dog rescuers in Detroit. This range of screenings also highlights the broad range of issues and interests that are faced by the labour movement.



Fig 3: Cinema Village

To the extent that WUFF exhibits films outside of the rigidly structured area of cinematic space, it engages in what Miriam Ross describes as “community film exhibition” (Ross, 2013), the spaces of which hold and perpetuate a different set of material and embodied relations with the audience, thereby eliciting different reactions. At the same time, the festival develops screening events designed to reconcile various, globally dispersed localities with the lives of its New York based audience. It does this through pairing local with what are seen as “global” films in the same event. For example, the festival’s screening of *Reykjavik Rising: Iceland's Untold Uprising* (Mitchell, 2015), about Iceland’s economic crisis and its differential response to that of the US, was screened at Penn South a mutual redevelopment housing co-operative just north of Greenwich Village, to which festival organisers brought and setup screening equipment. *Reykjavik Rising* highlights a range of possibilities that are contrasted with the US housing policies represented in the accompanying film, *Bullies* (Corporate Campaign Inc, 2017). This five minute long, locally produced short fuses animation with the motives of a public service information film to explain how REBNY manipulate high rents in New York. “The film also claims that the REBNY has been instrumental in the explosion of non-union building and construction, much of which has led to unnecessary construction worker deaths due to negligence and lack of safety standards on a union job” (WUFF, 2017).



Fig 4: Cinema Village, located between Greenwich Village and New York's East Side

Also featuring in this program was a film about undocumented immigrant workers in Los Angeles, *Solidarity* (Brown, 2013), and two short films by grassroots group, RethinkLink.nyc, which outline the concerns of tech experts regarding “Google's new smart city initiative, LinkNYC” which “is masquerading as free public WIFI...personal data will be collected and sold to businesses without the consent of the users” (WUFF, 2017). In this program we see WUFF’s desire to instil in the audience a consciousness of local problems as having global dimensions, as well as generating debates on how these issues might be resolved. Different solutions to the global financial crisis are connected to the development of housing in New York, which in turn reflects the space in which the screening takes place. Entrance to the Penn South screening was free, thereby removing any financial orientation. In 2016 the festival carried out a similar program with housing action group CASA (Community Action for Safe Apartments) in the Bronx area of New York. Again, this was a free entry, community screening that featured three short films: two on housing activism in New York, and one on the struggles faced by Guatemalan street vendors working in the city. The aim here is the connection of local and global struggles, and this programming tactic is a way of building an audience among New Yorkers for globally oriented labour films. As Tilson explains

In our own small way, our mission is to show these global films. To show that we're actually all fighting the same battle around the world. And we' do try, but it is a struggle to build an audience for some of the global films (Tilson, 2017).

An embodied address can be found in the programming decisions of WUFF, which are to a large extent a response to the perceived “dumbing down” of the mainstream media over the past thirty years. The aim is to utilise the language of popular as opposed to experimental or avant-garde film⁸. Although popular and avant-garde film languages are not mutually exclusive (nor does either festival completely exclude one or the other from its program), a festival can of course choose to upscale the prominence of either, depending to a large extent on the perceived requirements of its audience. On the other hand, as Tilson explains, WUFF does attempt to engage audiences with particularly troubling but nonetheless urgent issues by “forcing people to see”. In this practice the main film is often preceded with a short “hardcore documentary” that is more difficult to digest for an audience used to a film language that is built around the need to entertain (Tilson, 2017). Conversely, narrative films on the economic crisis have become important means of educating working class audiences. Yet there is another distinction to be made, according to Tilson, between films such as *99 Homes* (Bahrani, 2016) and *The Big Short* (McKaye, 2015) on the basis that the latter is “told from the perspective of the rich guys” (Tilson, 2017) whereas the protagonist of the former is an unemployed labourer, Dennis Nash (Andrew Garfield). While the familiar patterns of narrative cinema encourage self-identification with a film’s protagonist/s, underneath *The Big Short* lies a story about millionaire financiers seeking ways to profit from the impending financial crisis, while *99 Homes* begins with the suicide of someone who is about to be evicted from their home due to its foreclosure by a bank. These films tell different stories of the 2007/8 financial crash, but only the latter film displays any form of class consciousness by contrasting the lifestyles of manual workers with the real estate brokers who are evicting them.

⁸ As we will see in the final case study, this is a different form of address from that which takes place at the Subversive Film Festival, whose primary aim is the sparking of political consciousness through an aesthetic of subversion that draws on the theories and philosophy of the European political avant-garde in in the 1960s.

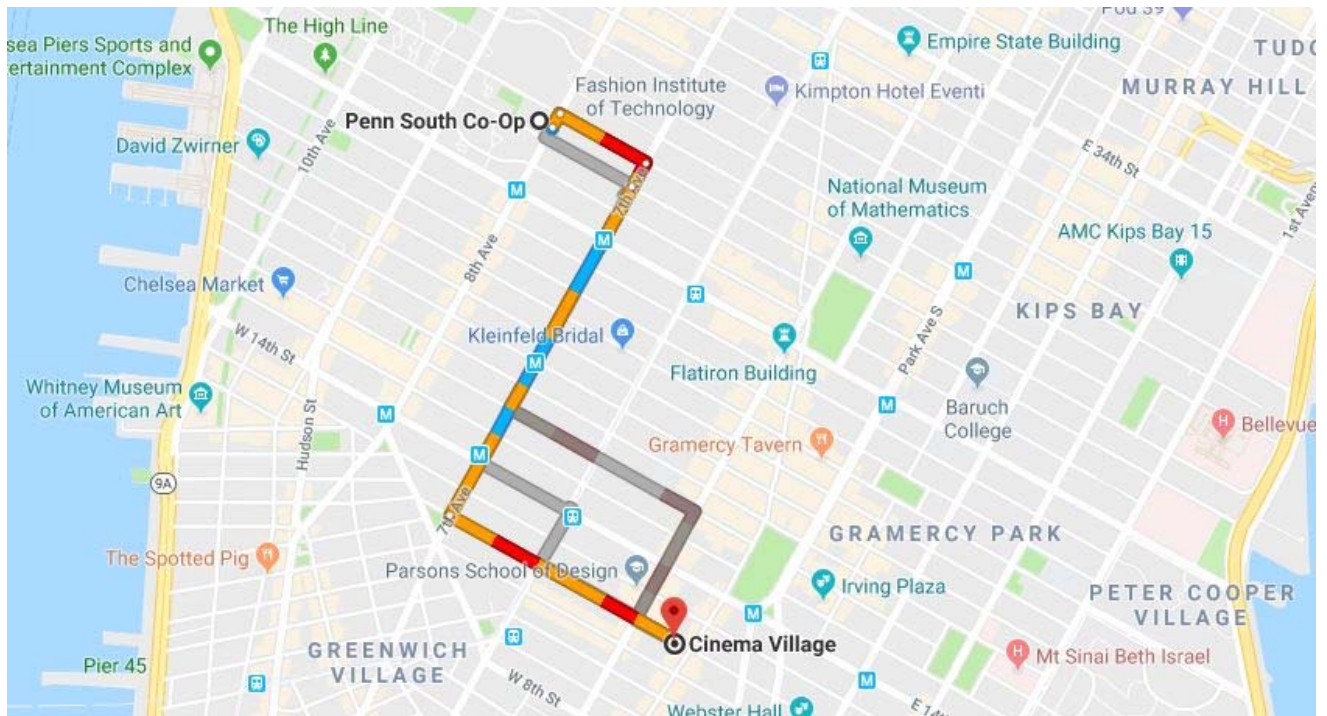


Fig 5: The distance between Cinema Village and Penn South Co-op

These are both major “Hollywood” productions that the festival tends to avoid simply because the contemporary mainstream rarely has anything positive to say about labour struggles. According to Tilson, *99 Homes* was selected over *The Big Short* because it more closely represents workers lives through the popular film languages to which this particular festival audience is accustomed.

Significantly, then, WUFF selects film on the basis of their material and embodied relation to the audience, and perhaps the capacity to elicit discussion through forms of self-identification with on-screen characters, especially those are suffering under the hard economic conditions wrought by neoliberalism, as portrayed in *99 Homes*. Post-screening discussions at WUFF encourage audiences to tell their own stories in the hope that commonalities can be found in both problems and solutions. This is an example of what Ezra Winton and Svetla Turnin (2013) identify as “community programming”, which aims to directly address the interests of local audiences, and is contrasted with profit-oriented “capital programming” (Turnin, Winton, 2013: 25). For example, in 2016 WUFF screened *Udita/Arise* (York, Majid, 2013) in collaboration with Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM), a South Asian organising centre in New York that

Represents the diaspora of the South Asian community – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Guyana, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Trinidad. In over a decade, we have built a unique model of South Asian undocumented workers, women, and youth led organizing for rights and justice from the local to the global (DRUM, 2018).

The film follows a group of garment workers in Bangladesh as they organise themselves into a union in order to fight for a decent living wage. In contrast to documentaries that focus on the various injustices perpetuated by globalised supply networks, this film engages with the daily process of workers organising to change the conditions of their labour, thus appealing to WUFF's core audience of workers interested in labour rights and consecrating the labour oriented/working class habitus of the festival. The throughput of consumer goods depicted in the *Udita* may initiate a debate around "conscious consumerism", which is the trajectory of many "human rights" films that, subsequently, appeal to the western film audience as ethical consumers, as opposed to workers who have mutual interests with the subjects on screen. Highlighting the shared struggle between its audience and workers such as those shown in *Udita* facilitates conversations about global solidarity, if only insofar as the Bangladeshi workers fight for a minimum wage is similar to that of the \$15 an hour movement currently sweeping the US.

In recent years the festival has screened a number of films with the specific intention of reconciling the cultural disparities between its two core target demographics – conservative union members and other, socially and culturally liberal workers. Focussing on the gay and transgender community, for example, WUFF screened *Woman on Fire* (Sokolow, 2016), a documentary about a third generation New York City fireman, who transitioned to being a woman. As Tilson explains programming choices of this sort can prove to be a delicate matter.

I mean the point is I think we can only push people so far. I think that we kind of know where the line is and we want to take it one step at a time. We can open up stuff like that [the film] during pride week, and do it in a place where there's trans stuff and trans culture going on, and that's what we'll do so that we can then take it to a bigger audience the next time... But we're still talking about whether the whole issue of transgender focus in the workplace is still too controversial for the New York labour movement (Tilson, 2017).

The film generated an internal debate within the festival's organising team, and did not receive a large audience at the screening (although Tilson explains that this could have been down to some bad weather on the night). This debate points to a wider range of tensions between a culturally conservative demographic and LGBT groups within New York. In screening the film, WUFF asks its core audience to allow some challenges to what could be deep seated beliefs around family structure and the role or placement of certain people in society. The film itself is a story about how a "traditional" family has its expectations disrupted through their son, George, coming out as gay then transgender, and eventually becoming a woman, Brooke. The audiences (potentially) uneasy proximity to the film's subject matter could be played out in their identification with the

“traditional” New York family, and particularly through the parents, who are initially horrified by their sons coming out. Even getting a conservative audience to acknowledge this subject matter (that is, to show interest by attending a film screening), much less to openly discuss these issues within an audience of strangers, would be an achievement for the festival. Its aim in this respect is to therefore provide a space in which a certain degree of social risk is alleviated through collective reception and discussion of the “disruptive other”. Thus the festival becomes a space outside the usual habitus of a conservative audience, wherein this other can enter their socio-cultural sphere.

However, the day before the festival screened two films that dealt with perhaps more familiar subject matter: *Ludlow, Greek Americans in the Colorado Coal War* (Vardaros, 2016) looks at migrant workers in the early 20th century, while *American Socialist: The Life and Times of Eugene V. Debs* (Strom, 2016) a documentary about the co-founder and later US presidential candidate of the Socialist Party of America. These latter screenings attracted an older demographic of mixed ethnicities, with perhaps more conservative socio-cultural leanings.



Fig 6: Screening of "American Socialist" at the Cinema Village, 2017

Recently the festival has formed a partnership with Verizon workers, after 40,000 went on strike nationwide over the continued outsourcing of jobs. The strike ended after 45 days with workers winning a significant pay rise and the first ever contract for Verizon’s wireless retail staff (CWA, 2016). The nature of the partnership was such that

They had a series of 1-2 minute videos that we played throughout the [2015] festival...We had benefit screenings for them and free screenings for their members...From that we picked up two new sponsors...so as you go forward these opportunities present themselves that are good for your survival, not just your programming (Tilson, 2017).

Community engagements such as this also allow the festival to use filmmaking as a pedagogical tool, particularly in relation to raising forms of class consciousness that are traditionally problematic in the New York labour movement, and in deed throughout the US. WUFF's *Films from the Frontlines* program screens films made by union members as part of Tilson's Labour and Film module at the Joseph Murphy institute for Labour Studies.

We started out by [dissecting] the way that television, especially in the US, and filmmaking to a lesser extent, frame the working class in such a way as to basically eradicate the idea of the working class in the US, and talk about the idea of how everybody is suddenly middle-class. And so we started off with these working class plumbers talking about the idea of class...The goal was to get them to make their own films about their own working life, daily experience, write a script and do a five minute film (Tilson, 2017).

Here the screening of films at WUFF becomes a catalyst for their production, which is used as a vehicle for workers education. According to Tilson, this is a vital task, since the a-political nature of US unionism means that the unions themselves do a terrible job of educating their members. Recently, this has translated into support among union members for Donald Trump on the supposition that his presidency would mean the creation of jobs. As Tilson explains, this goes

Right to the core of how their unions did a crappy job of educating them about the reality of a bullshit artist who said he was going to give us jobs...Half a dozen construction unions, labourers and stuff like that, thought, he's going to build lots of roads. He's a builder. He's going to have that oil pipeline, which is an awful, terrible thing. And it's a big lie when they say there'll be thousands of jobs [associated with the pipeline]. There may be a couple of thousand for like a year, but then it's like 40 jobs. And it's dangerous for the environment (Tilson, 2017).

The deliberative effects of WUFF activity can, therefore, be viewed to a large extent in the outcomes of its workers education partnerships with other institutions. The plumbers Tilson worked with, for example

All have this stupid story about jobs and whatever. But by the end of the year, except one or two, I think they all did these films and they all came out unbelievably well, very powerful.

And they were so powerful that it's now being used as a role model to roll it out to other unions like the electricians union, the carpenters the painters. So I'd say that was a high point of translating the whole idea of film, using film and using it to document daily lives of people who aren't celebrities or bankers of the 1 per cent. They totally got the idea, so it was great...We've seen how fast this cultural thing can work to change people's minds. I've had people in my plumbers class who voted for Trump and then at the end of the term they came up to me and thanked me because they saw how ridiculous it was, in just a matter of four months (Tilson, 2017).

In 2015 festival organisers conducted a series of screening events wherein \$2000 was raised and donated to a new labour scholarship fund being devised by the institute. Although this is not a relatively huge amount of money, it does give some indication as to the potential fundraising power of festivals like Workers Unite, their ability to fill an educational gap facilitated by a-political unionism, as well as the positive deliberative effects they might bring to their respective communities were an appropriate amount of government funds invested in them. Such organisations could, for example, become leaders in newly formed Social Investment Districts, a public and perhaps union funded counterpoint to BID's, whose task was to yield socialised as opposed to merely financial benefits. With that in mind, it is worth noting that of all the festivals analysed in this research, Workers Unite is the only one capable of paying some of its organisers. While Tilson works "full-blast over many, many months" for the festival and is happy to have nothing more than his expenses paid (a situation he can allow because he has other jobs) the festival currently has four part time employees, two of whom are paid, while two receive college (that is, university) credit for their work (Tilson, 2017). Aside from hiring students, the festival has also developed a partnership with the National Writers Union and created the Working Lives Screenplay Competition, which is aimed at high school and university students, as well as workers who have graduated from the school of Labour Studies. The competition invites written contributions that "can be about a union workplace/struggle, or stories which illuminate the lives of working people" (WUFF, 2017). As Tilson explains

We've always gotten probably no more than 20 scripts because this is such a niche area about workers and their lives...but out of that we've had writers judging the contest, some of whom are big screen people out in LA and have turned us onto other people who have supported us (Tilson, 2017).

The perpetuation of the festival through (predominantly union based) contacts and collaborations is understood by organisers as a "ripple" or "snowball effect", whereby the logics of proliferation are

based on political solidarity. If the festival can work with people at various levels throughout “the industry”, including “big screen people in LA”, this is partly attributable to undercurrents of leftist thinking and activism that run throughout the history of American film, and which at various points become more or less overt. Although film festivals play a role in sustaining this culture (the “independents” such as Sundance are perhaps the most famous in this respect), the contributions made by union labour to the production process often go unacknowledged. Workers Unite, on the other hand, foregrounds the relation between unions and the media in a way that is important for workers throughout the sector, especially those young professionals arriving en masse in the FIRE/themepark metropolis whose working conditions will be made worse without some kind of union presence. Although the audience and reach of Workers Unite is comparably miniscule to other festivals, its politics and presence causes ripple effects throughout the community, and it could potentially draw in some of this new influx of media workers.

Conclusion

WUFF is a film festival that aims to promote the interests and culture of working people and pro-labour groups within New York City. It does so primarily through engagement with unions and, broadly speaking, demographics that can be comprised into culturally conservative and culturally liberal groups. In making efforts to reconcile these groups through film exhibition, the festival seeks to highlight commonalities in both problems and their potential solutions. The main aim is to highlight the attacks on working people and their rights that emanate from the FIRE interests of New York’s business and political leaders. Of course, given the limited funding and resources of the festival it would be difficult to argue that it fulfils this objective to a large extent. Equally, however, it would be simplistic to argue that WUFF as an organisation has had no success whatsoever. While “success” in political consciousness raising is difficult (if not impossible) to measure, the festival’s program - specifically designed to pair the exhibition of more traditional, historical worker based issues with the contemporary concerns of a more socially liberal and less white demographic – continues to elicit audiences that number in the hundreds. Moreover, the festival’s *Film from the Frontlines* strand is an impressive demonstration of how filmmaking and film festivals can serve as a pedagogical tool to counter dominant political narratives, as shown in the way working class plumbers were able to use the medium as a mode of reflexive investigation into their own lives. The festival aims to utilise the language of popular as opposed to experimental or avant-garde film, since it feels that this is the most suited for the material and embodied situation of its audience. As the following case studies will show, each festival has its own perspective on this issue, based on what it perceives to be the requirements of its local audience. In the case of WUFF it is certainly the discussion of local as opposed to global issues which creates the initial impetus of the festival.

Nevertheless, it is understood by festival organisers that the attack on labour and its progenitors are global phenomena, and as such the festival is keen to engage with workers issues in other countries, although it finds it difficult to foster audience engagement at this level.

Liverpool Radical Film Festival



Fig 7: Organisers hang a banner for an LRFF event, 2016

In studying the Liverpool Radical Film Festival I take the position of what Uldam and McCurdy (2013) refers to as a “complete participant”, since I studied and participated in the organisation of the festival. I had close, easy access to the subject/s and was able to conduct in-person, semi-structured interviews with other organisers. My close physical proximity to the subject meant that I was able to utilise a method of what Toby Lee (2016) calls “deep hanging out”. In his study of the Thessaloniki International Film Festival (TIFF), Lee draws on the theories of anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, who stresses the importance of long term immersion in order to capture the tiniest ways of being in the world enacted by the subject/s, which then serve to illuminate their relations to objective structures.

In his [Geertz’s] understanding, the ethnographer does not take on these larger “webs of significance” from the top down, but rather by approaching such broader structures “from the direction of exceedingly extended acquaintances with extremely small matters” (Lee, 2016: 123).

Lee’s navigation of a series of interwoven habitus enables him to “put flesh on the bones of institutional structures” (Lee, 2016: 125). In this way he was able to situate the festival within Greece’s social and political climate. The ethnographic work of “being there” meant that “large

portions of my day were dedicated to reading newspapers and blogs; watching the news; talking politics with informants, friends, neighbours, strangers; attending marches, protests, sit-ins and occupations". However, "this ethnographic work led me to think about the proper role and function of the state" (Lee, 2016: 127).

My proximity to LRFF has allowed me to augment interviews and archival research with this method of deep hanging out. The main point here is that the degree of ethnographic immersion that is possible always changes, often due to circumstances beyond the control of the researcher, and this can affect the methods that are deployed. My position towards the film festivals examined in this research can be theorised in terms of a spectrum, the opposing ends of which are constituted by the insider (complete participant) or the outsider (complete observer). As Uldam and McCurdy (2013) notes, this is not a dichotomous, but a dialectical relation. The "grey zones" that exist between each position are such that they must be viewed as "a continuum", and that each of these roles "rarely exist in their extreme form" (Uldam, McCurdy, 2013: 943). According to the authors

Membership in social movements may relate to multiple levels and locations: the movement level, social movement organisations and/or social movement groups or networks.

Moreover, these are sometimes transnational in scope, involving both physical and mediated connections and practices...Therefore, when social movement researchers set out to identify and critically reflect on their participant observer position, they must be sure to recognise the multimodal nature of social movement connections, practices and memberships, and consider how their position may have evolved over time (Uldam, McCurdy, 2013: 944).

The first half situates the Liverpool Radical Film Festival (LRFF) in the historical context of capital's flight from the city- particularly from the 1970s onwards- and the various regeneration strategies that have been put forward by different political actors, factions and community groups. The second half focuses on the events, organisational practices, funding and politics of the festival. As will be shown, LRFF was founded in 2012 on the tail end of a city-wide initiative to highlight and explore Liverpool as a "city of radicals" (Belchem, Biggs, 2011). This followed the celebrated designation in 2008 of Liverpool as the European Capital of Culture. The award was established in 1985, and is designated annually by the EU. Although some of the projects official aims are to boost local economies and facilitate access to arts and culture, the prize has received criticism by some scholars as merely contributing the colonisation of culture through a neoliberal model of urban development (Miller, 2009, McGuigan, 2016). Broadly speaking, the two cultural strands mentioned above can be seen as representing the broader political landscape of the city. If the labour politics of New York

City can be characterised by a tension between cultural conservatism and liberalism, Liverpool- since the 1980s at least- has been reproduced through an oscillating and often hostile relationship between a declining socialist oriented radical autonomy dedicated to public sector-led urban redevelopment (with a primary focus on housing) and a (neo)liberalism that foregrounds culture as essential to private sector-led regeneration (with a narrow focus on the city-centre).

Although it is tempting to reduce this relation to a political conflict between Labour and New Labour, the existence of LRFF- as well as other, similarly structured and oriented social and arts projects within the city- problematises this dichotomy. Although miniscule in comparison to the public and private sectors, such projects have not been insignificant in terms of the reproduction of space within the city. These have arguably taken up some of the political and cultural space left by the dwindling Trotskyite presence within the local Labour council, particularly the ousting of the so-called Militant tendency in 1987. Yet many of these projects (LRFF included) remain autonomous from government as well as corporate structures. The festival has no long-standing relations with any union or political party (although broadly speaking is obviously on the left) and has only a slight (though important) engagement with the third sector as an occasional source of funding. Thus LRFF maintains a distance between the three sectors that are seen by many as comprising the political, social and cultural makeup of cities in the UK.

In its screening events the festival almost always collaborates with at least one other organisation, and has gained some status within Liverpool's network of grassroots and community-led projects. The primary aim of the festival is to support these using film screenings that create awareness of a certain space by attracting audiences to it, as well as through the raising of funds. Programming choices usually foreground issues that are relevant to the space and/or the partner organisation. To some extent, then, LRFF is a group of activists who use their expertise in setting up and managing film screenings to publicise and support organisations of a similar ethos. Screenings such as this take place throughout the year, and are often headed by one or two members of the six person LRFF team, while the organisation of the annual festival is decentralised, with a loose division of labour. As Haley Trowbridge, a member of the LRFF organising team comments

Everyone does everything. Everyone organises. Everyone programs films and proposes events...Everyone leads discussions. Everyone books film makers. Everyone helps out with the marketing, whether it's social media or it's updating the website, whether it's putting the programs out, whether it's word of mouth...Everyone sets up gear. Everyone does tech stuff...so there are no "roles" I guess is what I'm saying (Trowbridge, 2017).

While this mode of organisation can be seen as engendering a form of precarity for the festival, as identified in Presence's (2017) study of LRFF, this case study aims to position the festival in relation to its fluidity and sustainability. The festival's openness to new volunteers and its relaxed approach to "productivity" propagates a social relation among members of the organising team that is interdependent while allowing each member an almost complete autonomy in their programming choices. As this case study will show, unlike Workers Unite Film Festival, LRFF resists incorporation as an official company or organisation for the very reason that members feel this would detrimentally effect the social relations upon which the festival functions. As Trowbridge explains, to do so would involve the implementation of more rigid working structures, wherein "we might end up being more of a conventional organisation...but if we pushed down that path we'd lose the solidarity that we have. The mutual support, the trust" (Trowbridge, 2017). The politics of the festival are represented by a diffuse set of values and ideas that can be situated somewhere between anarchism and socialism. Although the team frequently engage in discussions involving appropriate festival practice, there is an only vague political/theoretical yardstick against which these are measured. This is, perhaps, one reason why LRFF is so capable of operating at the local level, but as an organisation neglects discussion of issues that are globally abstracted, more often leaving these to post-screening discussions among audience members.



Fig 8: Outside The Well space, a bicycle repair shop and LRFF venue 2014

Context: Devastation and Regeneration

The nature of globalised capital is such that shocks originating in the US and primarily effecting New York can have similar disastrous consequences for cities like Liverpool. According to Stuart Wilkes-Heeg, “in the two decades from the mid-1960s [UK] trade shifted decisively to the east coast ports with the result that Liverpool slipped from second to sixth in the hierarchy of UK ports” (Heeg, 2003: 48). Such changes in British trade patterns and the onset of this new international division of labour led to large-scale de-industrialisation and depopulation of the city. While local and national government attempts at regeneration were being made (Frost, North, 2013), “in the period 1975-78 alone some 50,000 redundancies were announced in the Merseyside Special Development Area” (Heeg, 2003:49). According to Richard Meegan (2003), the city was turned “inside-out”.

The regional and local policy initiatives of the 1960s and early 70s were swamped in their effects by the severity of the global economic recession in the late 1970s...Over the longer period, 1978-1991, 37 per cent of jobs disappeared (a loss of just under 9000 jobs per year). The local economy was devastated. Unemployment soared and out-migration accelerated (Meegan, 2003; 58).

Liverpool suffered the effects of “branch plant” closures, as corporations under no obligation to remain in the city re-located their manufacturing bases. A 1978 plan by the Liverpool Inner City Partnership for £48 million of public expenditure in the city was halted by Margaret Thatcher after her election one year later. As In New York, central government began to enact a policy of divestment from local council provision. Although conservative MP, Michael Heseltine, argued for an injection of public funds into the area, papers recently released by the national archives show that Thatcher was advised confidentially by some ministers to adopt a policy of “managed decline” towards Liverpool (Guardian, 2011).

Thus the conservative regeneration policy consisted of de-regulating the private sector in the hope that capital would somehow naturally float back to devastated areas, an approach that “had obvious limitations in a city [like Liverpool] suffering from mass disinvestment” (Frost, North, 2012). As the crisis grew, so did the radicalism of the city’s response. Throughout the 1970s factories were occupied and workers “refused to accept redundancy, arguing that under workers control and with state support to tide them through they could become going concerns” (Frost, North, 2013: 41). In the late 1970s and early 80s the council was “led by an unstable Conservative-Liberal coalition with the largest single part, Labour, refusing to take a lead” (Meegan, 2003: 61). In May 1983, however, Liverpool elected a Labour council that stood on “observably Militant” socialist and Trotskyite policies. Peter Frost and Diane North note that “while the rest of the country voted heavily against

Michael Foot's Labour Party and for Margaret Thatcher...Liverpool's voters went against the national trend and elected a Labour council pledged to confront the Tories (Frost, North, 2013: 48). This set the precedent for a struggle between two different models of urban regeneration (which in many respects implies economic growth more generally).

The question of whether regeneration should be driven by the public or private sector is fleshed out through the tenure of the Militant council. However, within Labour itself this period also represents an intra-party struggle between socialists and "moderates" that were beginning to move away from some of the party's long-held policies⁹. Broadly speaking, the former group were seen by the latter as dogmatic in their refusal to engage with the private-sector (particularly the culture-led model of urban regeneration) and the Merseyside Development Corporation (headed by Michael Heseltine, and in charge of regenerating the Albert Dock area). Meanwhile socialists argued that the moderates granted unacceptable concessions to Thatcherite policies such as the fire-sale of social housing and rent increases. Moreover, this group seemed to be placing faith in a private-sector whose profit orientation would always outweigh any commitment it had to the people of Liverpool, as was being demonstrated before their eyes by the flight of capital from the city. The municipal socialist "Urban Regeneration Strategy" (1983) focussed on the construction of social housing in identified priority areas (Meegan, 2013: 61), while the moderate strategy that emerged in the late 80s to early 90s foregrounded private-sector led development and the use of cultural strategies to attract inward investment. Ultimately, the Liverpool council of 1983 was defeated.

In the early 90s regeneration was driven by European funding obtained via strategic partnerships between the private, public and third sectors. In 1993 European Objective One funding (granted to regions whose per capita GDP is less than 75 per cent of the EU average) was obtained and a Merseyside European Liaison Unit was established, strengthening ties between local authorities and Brussels (Meegan, 2003: 63). In the context of a shift towards a services-based and/or "knowledge economy" the focus shifted to integrating socially excluded people into the labour market through "pathways" such as education, training and improved transport services (LCAP, 2013). The post 1987 acceptance of private sector-led urban regeneration, continued funding cuts from central government and the partnership model of governance has undoubtedly allowed the city to develop and improve in many ways. Yet, as more money is poured into the city centre, its outskirts remain neglected. At the turn of the century Liverpool was "ranked the poorest area in the UK in terms of average incomes with a high proportion of families surviving on around £8000 a year" (Coleman,

⁹ Perhaps the most significant consequence of this shift in terms of policy is New Labour's move away from its original intention of establishing common ownership over the means of production, as stated under Clause IV and adopted by the party in 1918. This took place in 1995 under the party leadership of Tony Blair.

2004: 147). The UK's 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation found that Liverpool is the fourth most deprived local authority area in the country (it had previously been the first) while the most severe deprivation is found in the "inner core" which surrounds the city centre (IMD, 2016). As Coleman notes, "for local marketers, the reality of the working-class city presents difficulties to the re-imaging process" (Coleman, 2004: 147). Information around such problems is, therefore, absent from the strategy documents put out by Liverpool City Council and Liverpool Vision (the public-private company tasked with the city's physical and economic regeneration). Therein, the focus is overwhelmingly placed on the city centre as the main driver of regeneration for the entire city region.

For example, in Liverpool Vision's 20 page long *Strategic Investment Framework Delivery Plan* (2012) the word "poverty" is not mentioned once, while major transformational projects and strategic initiatives are limited to the city centre and the immediately surrounding areas. There is no mention of the neighbourhoods outside of this area. The council's *Culture Liverpool Action Plan*, which outlines the city's apparent "aspiration to become a first class visitor and investment destination with an attractive, heritage-packed but very contemporary city centre and rich cultural offer" (CLAP, 2014: 16), grants a single, vague allusion to issues such as "public spending cuts, poverty, educational underachievement, unemployment, crime, ill health, loss of hope" (*Ibid*), but never mentions how these are to be alleviated through the present regeneration strategy. The Anfield Project, which aims to regenerate the heavily blighted area around the Liverpool FC football stadium, describes how "to date [it] has received overwhelming support from the local community", while omitting the fact that the council had worked with the club to buy up residential properties (sometimes through compulsory purchase orders) so that they can eventually be knocked down to make room for the club's stadium expansion. A recent *Guardian* report highlighted the level of tension between residents and the redevelopment plans.

A few residents are refusing to move, holding out against the council, which begins negotiations [for purchasing properties] with low offers. These homeowners believe they should be paid enough not only to buy a new house but to compensate for the years of dereliction, stagnation and decline, and crime, fires, vandalism, even murders which have despoiled the area. Their resentment is compounded by the fact that they are being forced to move so that Liverpool [FC], and their relatively new US owner, Fenway Sports Group, can make more money (The Guardian, 2013).

Thus Liverpool's urban regeneration policy seems to replicate the Thatcherite fallacy of "trickle-down" economics. If enough capital is pumped into the city centre then surely some of it will

eventually find its way to the poorest in society. The simple problem here is that corporate profits are not equally distributed among populations, but flow upward, and then outwards in search of further investment opportunities. They are hidden in offshore bank accounts, and stored in empty multi-million pound properties while land prices continue to rise. The idea that if the richest people in society are allowed to get richer then this will necessarily reap some kind of overall socialised benefit is nonsense (Blythe, 2013). This doesn't only apply to returns on private investment. For example, Darren Guy, an editor of grassroots activist publication, *Nerve*, and a member of LRFF's organising team explains what happened to the public regeneration funds put into the areas outside of the city centre.

The regeneration money that's come in [to Liverpool] is about two and a half billion, and there's a few projects been developed by local people, but by and large most of the money's been sucked up by businesses. Money did come into Kensington [a particularly deprived area of Liverpool], but it was spent on community consultants and what they thought about developing the area. I'd say the same about Toxteth as well (Guy, 2017).

Yet between the public sector-led regeneration advocated by the Militant Labour council, and the prevailing private sector-led model that came to be associated with New Labour, Liverpool also has a history of autonomous activity among residents who have frequently been dissatisfied with efforts across parties and throughout different periods. Thus there have been various community-led regeneration strategies. Kenn Taylor (2011) notes that

The radical spirit that has over the years fuelled protests, riots, strikes, occupations and takeovers, remains. As do the skills in organising, protesting, publicising and delivering action. Though much of this is still organised and influenced by those who were part of the labour movement, the landscape has changed (160)...the failure time and again of...grand plans and ideologies dreamt up by outsiders to improve the lives of the poor in Liverpool...has helped create a mistrust of such ideas...fostering instead a do-it-yourself mentality where disenfranchised communities have taken matters into their own hands (Taylor, 2011: 162).

Taylor demonstrates this using the examples of the Eldonian Village, a community-led housing regeneration project, and the occupation and subsequent self-management by parents of Croxteth Comprehensive School in 1982. As well as this, he points to the purchase of an old people's home by committee members, who had "pooled their redundancy monies to buy it and turn it into a community-based education centre" (Taylor, 2011: 163). More recently, the Granby Four Streets

project, a community land trust run by local residents, has continued its objective of securing ownership over, and renovating, empty houses in the heavily blighted area of Granby, near Toxteth. The project has recently raised £1.5million of grant and loan funds to renovate thirteen houses, and intends to sell or let them on assessment of housing need. In 2015 the project won the Turner Art Prize, and watched the announcement at the Liverpool Small Cinema, a non-profit exhibition centre built from scratch in the shell of an Edwardian courthouse in the city centre, adjacent to Liverpool One. In its stated aim of “creating cinemas not supermarkets”, the Small Cinema project voiced its alterity to the recent redevelopment of Liverpool’s city centre and those of other former industrial cities throughout the midlands and the north of the UK. In this context, the cinema offers a model of de-financialised growth and post de-industrialisation regeneration that is different to those offered by local and national government since the 1980s. In is in this tradition of autonomy and spatial intervention/reclamation that LRFF stands. Indeed, the three projects just cited frequently collaborate with each other, and the festival’s reputation in the city is such that it was invited to program the opening night of the Small Cinema, screening Goran Olsson’s *Concerning Violence* (2014). This case study foregrounds the festival’s practice of collaborating with organisations that exist in un-marketised and/or precarious spaces as being central to its politics. As we will see, the festival also has a history of venturing outside of the city centre in order to bring what are perceived as politically radical films to audiences that otherwise wouldn’t see them.

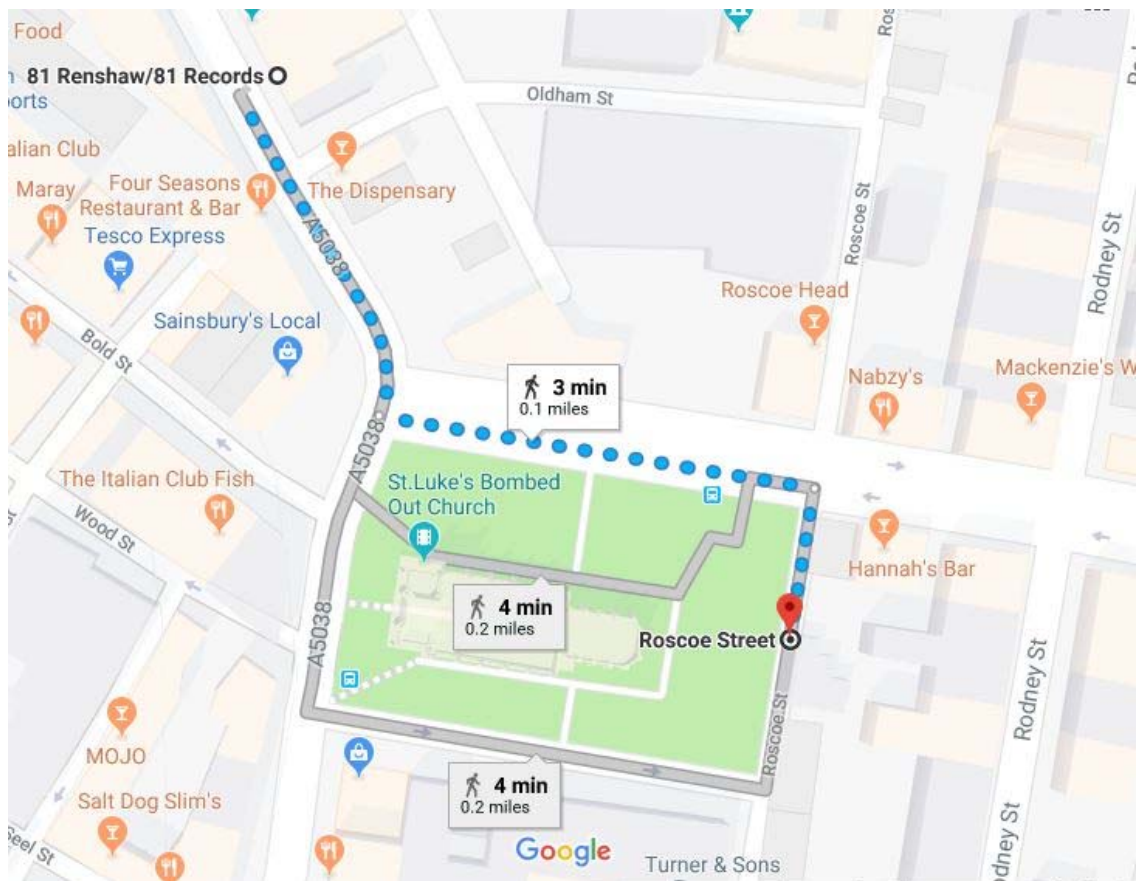


Fig 9: The distance between 81 Renshaw and Roscoe Street. Main venues for LRFF 2014.

The Festival

LRFF can be seen to have emerged from Liverpool's City of Radicals initiative due to the fact that some of the festival's founding members had been working on the City of Radicals when the idea for a film festival came about. For example, the work of David Jacques, an artist and founding member of LRFF, is featured in the academic publication *Liverpool: City of Radicals* (Belchem, Biggs, 2011), while one of the authors of that book, Bryan Biggs, had attended one of the first LRFF meetings, which was held in the Victoria and Albert meeting of Liverpool University. It is important to point out that in many ways the City of Radicals can be seen as a reaction to the way in which Liverpool's Capital of Culture tenure had been, according to many artists within the city, occluded by the interests of business. Darren Guy, a member of LRFF's organising team, explains that

When we [the city] won the Capital of Culture there was an idea that suddenly all these fantastic artists and arts groups were going to get some recognition for what they'd been doing, and maybe some finance as well. But it seemed as if the business community suddenly zoomed in on the Capital of Culture, and we were well aware that the reason they won Capital of Culture was that they claimed to be doing all sort of community projects. But when they won it those were swept aside...people were very pissed off (Guy, 2017).

One of the LRFF's foundational aims was, therefore, to move beyond the boundaries of the university and the city centre, and bring radical film to Liverpool's poorer neighbourhoods. Aside from Jacques, the festival's other two founding members are Brian Ashton, a retired mechanic, and Steve Eye, who at the time was an activist at the Next to Nowhere social centre, located below the News from Nowhere radical bookshop close to the city centre. Initially titled "Liverpool Radical Documentary Festival" and spread across two weeks of screenings (mostly run by one person, with occasional clashes of events), in its first years the festival can be more accurately described as a loose association of screenings, as opposed to a coherent, singular event.

In 2013 the original core group were joined by Grace Harrison, a curator with an interest in avant-garde film, Hayley Trowbridge, who at the time was a PhD researcher at Liverpool University, and Darren Guy, an editor of the grassroots activist publication, *Nerve*. Harrison had become involved in the organising team simply by attending the first year of the festival and talking to Ashton and Eye. Trowbridge became involved through her production of a series of micro-documentaries on women in Liverpool, which Ashton had wanted to screen as part of the festival. Guy's interest in screening radical film reflected the intentions of the festival, specifically in terms of using film as a form of intervention in neoliberal space. For example, in 2010 *Nerve* had managed to gain control of some buildings in the city centre which the council were "embarrassed by, so they offered them out to community groups" (Guy, 2017). The team organised a daily, six week program of screenings, music, poetry and discussions that were designed specifically to act as an alternative to the Capital of Culture. This method of using previously closed off and/or precarious space is coupled with LRFF's perceived requirement to move beyond the boundaries of the city centre. As Guy explains

The point is to bring radical films to new audiences...On a personal level I've always been against having them [film screenings] in weird, "alternative" venues...I've always wanted to take it to people, rather than expect them to come to us (Guy, 2017).

For example, in 2013 LRFF screened a series of short films on housing and regeneration in Toxteth's Mission Hall. The program included Patrick Keiller's *Dilapidated Dwelling* (2000), a film about housing problems in "advanced" economies, as well as a selection of Jacques's recent work. As usual attendance was free, and residents were invited to take part in a post-screening discussion. In the same year, however, the festival continued its motive of intervening in spaces closer to the city centre as a way of foregrounding an alternative to the neoliberal cultural model of city centre regeneration. Films such as *The Year of the Beaver* (Fox, Sprung, 1985), about the Grunwick workers strike that took in London from 1976-78 were screened in an abandoned warehouse that some activists were converting into a gallery.

Presented by the Other Cinema- a non-profit, independent film distribution group founded in London in 1970- *The Year of the Beaver* documents a turning point in the British labour movement towards a series of concessions to an ascendant Thatcherism and various processes of de-industrialisation. Here the setting of LRFF's screening becomes especially poignant, as the abandoned warehouse could be seen as an end result of the historical processes that were only just beginning at the time the film was made. The Grunwick dispute was an early defeat for the British labour movement (a prelude to the miners' strike of 1984-5), ending after two years when union leaders ordered their members not to protest, and the TUC (Trades Union Council) withdrew its support. The film sees this as an absorption of union leadership into an emerging neoliberal apparatus that also leads to increased corporate ownership of the media and the use of television as a weapon to sway public opinion during industrial disputes. As the films' narrator states, within the Grunwick dispute- a dispute which, in retrospect, bears "all the hallmarks of the way things were moving"- lies a larger story of "a Labour government giving way to something called Thatcherism" (1985). Given Liverpool's similar, and often bitter history of strike action and defeat, the connection between film and festival space would be felt quite consciously by the audience, and provoke a conversation among older and younger audience members that can be seen as a form of oral history telling.

In the same year LRFF screened films in the back room of The Casa, a city centre space that had been converted into a bar by a group of dockworkers, who had pooled their redundancy money after the 1995 strike. In both these instances the festival can be seen to collaborate with other organisations, using film as a means of support by drawing audience's attention (and spending power) to appropriate spaces. As noted, the festival almost always collaborates with at least one other organisation for its screenings. This could be out of necessity, but it is also a way of establishing and maintaining connections with sympathetic organisations at both the local and international levels. For example, in 2014 Harrison lead a partnership screening between LRFF, Lampedusa In Festival and Liverpool's Festival 31, to show films about communities, migration struggles and responsible tourism. These included *Special Flight* (Melgar, 2011) and *Hill of Shame* (Maggiore, 2012), both of which cover the struggles of migrants fleeing to Europe from various parts of the world. The screenings took place in the Gregson Institute, a community centre in Wavertree, Liverpool. At the time, many migrants were fleeing wars in Syria and other parts of the middle-east, as well as a rising tide of Islamic militarism in parts of Africa. Their reception in EU countries was generally hostile, as demonstrated in France, when migrants attempting to enter the United Kingdom were forced authorities to remain at Calais, leading to the establishment of a desperate community isolated between borders, which the media then termed the "Calais jungle". The

dominant, anti-immigration narratives pushed by large section of the political class were echoed by right wing media outlets across Europe, exacerbating the rise of far-right populist parties which continues to the present day. *Special Flight* aims to counter such narratives by telling the personal stories of migrants housed in a detention centre in Switzerland without trial or sentence. Often these are people who have lived in the country for periods as long as twenty years (as the opening scene of the film shows). Those who refuse to be deported are handcuffed, hooded, and forced back to their country of origin on a “special flight”. In screening the film LRFF aimed to start a conversation about the brutal nature of apparently “civilised” EU nations, and the ways in which blame for a neoliberal economic crisis was being shifted onto migrants.

In the same year, Guy partnered LRFF with local activist group, Liverpool Rise for Palestine (LRFP), to screen *Just a Child* and *Everyday Nakba* (Al-azza, 2012) at the Greenhouse Project, a charity in Toxteth that focuses on creative outlets for disadvantaged children. The primary aim of the screening was to garner support and participation among the Muslim community for LRFP’s weekly protests against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, which took place every Saturday in Liverpool’s city centre. The audience consisted largely of Muslim women, and the program was followed by a Skype conversation with Mohammad al-Azza, an independent Palestinian filmmaker and activist documenting the everyday struggles of living under Israeli occupation. As *Everyday Nakba* shows (“Nakba” being the Palestinian word for catastrophe, referring back to the original forced removal of Palestinians from their lands in 1949), such struggles could be as simple as the need to obtain water, which is cut off from certain parts of Palestine by Israeli forces. The film documents a day in the life of a Palestinian family as they navigate the critical problem of freshwater. In a similar way to the screening of *Special Flight*, the aim was to show the festival audience a level of brutality that is occluded from the mainstream media in respect to certain issues, thereby facilitating further discussion and the potential for mobilisation beyond the space of the festival. As well as activist oriented engagements with local groups, LRFF maintains a series of national partnerships, for example with the Bristol Radical Film Festival (BRFF), which Harrison attended in 2013. Upon meeting the directors of BRFF’s headline film, *On the Art of War* (Bellino, Luzzi, 2012), about a workers occupation of a factory in Italy, the film was screened in Liverpool as a fundraiser for LRFF 2014 at 24 Kitchen Street, an independent bar and community space that is under threat of closure due to the construction of a four star hotel nearby. As this chapter will show, the spaces in which LRFF screens often has some form of resonance with the content of the film. *On the Art of War* is as much an instruction manual of resistance for spaces under threat of closure as it is a documentary, and for this reason there is a strong link between the on-screen space of the film, the festival space of 24 Kitchen Street and the audience. Here the film plays a direct role in offering

some solutions to the immediate problem faced by the venue, while the festival acts as a mediator between the film and the venue/audience.

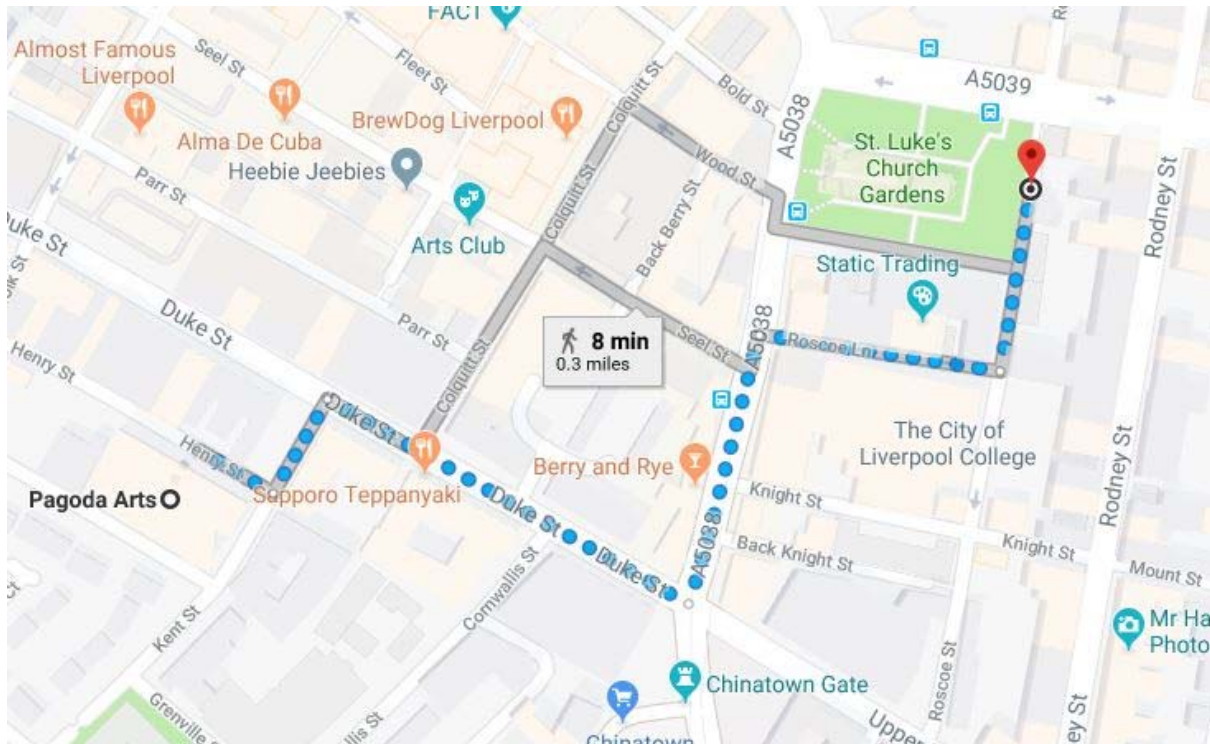


Fig 10: Distance between The Well space and the Pagoda Chinese Arts Centre. Venues for LRFF 2014 and 2015.

In 2014 Ashton and Jacques left the core programming team, and, although one off screenings continue to take place throughout the year, the remaining LRFF members condensed the annual festival into a long weekend, as opposed to running over two weeks. The main reasons for this were the appeal of organisers not having to commit every evening for two weeks, and the impracticality of continuously moving LRFF's screening equipment from one venue to another. This was also the year I joined the programming team, and my previous experience as a festival organiser working on the BRFF led me to argue the point that two weeks of screenings in spaces around Liverpool (most of which lacked decent heating facilities) in the evenings of November, could lead to ill-health if not burnout. The festival therefore made a distinction between its year-round one-off events that would take place for the most part in areas outside of the city centre, and its annual festival, which would be anchored by a main venue and two or three close-by satellite venues. Implicit in this structure is the desire to facilitate access to the city centre for residents living outside of it, thereby resisting processes of social and economic stratification that separate the core from the periphery. For example, while the above noted screenings took place in city-wide locations throughout 2014, the annual festival was held over a weekend in November at The Well, a bicycle repair shop and artist studios in the city centre. The use of a single space over a longer duration allowed the festival to

expand its format. Harrison in particular felt that the festival would benefit from embracing curatorial practices.

My interest in film is shaped more than anything by my background in fine art, and artist moving image in particular. I felt this could be a positive addition to the festival as it could create a new audience for artists work which addresses political subject matter, but which is often viewed in the gallery or online...I think the diverse approaches to film selection...has been an asset to the festival and its reach (Harrison, 2017).

The space consisted of a single, large ground floor room with no central heating. Organisers of The Well agreed it would be too cold to have audiences in the space at night for long periods of time, so they constructed a furnace out of spare metal parts lying around the shop. LRFF organisers obtained a temporary licence to sell alcohol in the space, which was then purchased from a local wholesale store and re-sold. The festival also served hot food. With the entirety of LRFF being free, this was how the festival funded its third edition, more often paying for films and speakers travel expenses in retrospect. For example, *The Film that Buys the Cinema* (various filmmakers, 2013), a 70 minute long series of one minute shorts made as part of a fundraising drive for Bristol's The Cube cinema, was given to LRFF at a reduced fee, and paid for post-screening. However, LRFF often receives films from activist groups who are simply looking to raise awareness of certain issues. *The Silent Revolution* (Garcia, Meseguer, 2013), about the female fighters in the Kurdish YPG, was given to the festival by London based Kurdish solidarity group. It's screening at LRFF 2014, followed by an audience discussion with Kurdish activists Sema Yildiz and Berivan Naz, led to the creation of a new Kurdish solidarity group in Liverpool, Liverpool Rise for Kurdistan (LRFK), and the establishment one year later of the Kurdish film festival. Guy, who took the lead on the screening, explains how Kurds in Liverpool had been "doing bits of their own thing and not connecting them really. So that event provided them the basis to do that" (Guy, 2017). Since then LRFF and LRFK have collaborated on various screenings. The relationship is one of mutual aid, constituted by the pooling of LRFF's equipment and experience of organising and promoting events with LRFK's contacts with Kurdish film makers both in the UK and further afield.

In 2015 LRFF was held at the Pagoda Chinese Arts centre on Duke Street, a street close to the relatively new Liverpool One shopping centre, but which has yet to see any of the benefits of regeneration. Despite Liverpool City Council's highlighting of Pagoda as an example of how "the cultural sector has proven that it can support attempts by diplomatic and business interests to develop and consolidate international relationships and trade" (LCAP, 2013: 12), one year later the council revoked all of the centres' funds. In an effort to help it stay open, LRFF rented the space for

£300, constructing a screen that was large enough for the space out of wood and sheets of white fabric. Again, many of the screening fees were waived by filmmakers out of solidarity with the aims of the festival.



Fig 11: Jengba members take part in a group discussion at LRFF 2015

For example, a screening of the brand new film *Sleaford Mods: Invisible Britain* (Hannawin, Sng, 2015) brought an audience of around 150 people, and was followed by a panel discussion with representatives from various activist groups in Liverpool, including the Blacklist Support Group (BSG), which provides a platform for blacklisted construction workers. The aim here was to garner support for the BSG and attendance of their protest, which would take place two weeks later. The debut feature documentary of two independent filmmakers, *Invisible Britain* follows the British electro-punk duo, Sleaford Mods, as they tour the “invisible” cities of the UK, that is, “the neglected, boarded up and broken down parts of the country that many would prefer to ignore” (SMIB, 2015). The cultural geography represented here is not that of “global cities” such as London, Manchester and Edinburgh, but the comparatively ignored and neglected spaces of Colchester, Wakefield and Northampton. Some of the “invisible” venues in which the Sleaford Mods play can be likened to the “invisibility” of the Pagoda Chinese Arts Centre that is exacerbated by the revocation of its funds. At the same time as following the band, the film presents a range of different working class cultural groups, campaigns and spaces from around the country, some of which are similar to LRFF. This connection between festival and on-screen space advances the consecration of working class

habitus and, potentially, a nationwide cultural geography that is also a geography of protest. The increased visibility of such spaces to working class audiences has the potential to generate new social, cultural and political opportunities that are off the table within the “mainstream” spaces of, for example, A-list film festivals, which for the most part are not areas to which the working class have access.

In one sequence the film highlights a debate around “joint enterprise”, a piece of UK criminal legislation that “allows for a group of people to be convicted of a crime regardless of which person committed it...80 per cent of people convicted are from black and ethnic minority backgrounds” (SMIB, 2015). JENGba (Join Enterprise Not Guilty by association) is a Liverpool based campaign co-directed by Jan Cunliffe, a mother of someone sentenced to life in prison under the legislation. As well as featuring in *Invisible Britain*, Cunliffe attended the LRFF screening and participated in the subsequent discussion. The anger felt by many working class people towards joint enterprise meant that, as well as offering the possibility of realising potentialities through dialogue, the discussion following the film also took on a cathartic dimension. In this sense both the film and the festival provide opportunities for “invisible” people to speak, since the spaces in which they will be listened to are increasingly maligned within the neoliberal city.

In 2015 the festival also partnered with Subversive Film Festival on a double-bill screening of films highlighting the impact of the financial crash of 2007-8 in the Balkan region. *On Shaky Ground* (Tarokic, 2014) was followed by *Married to the Swiss Franc* (Oremovic, 2012). Both these films deal with the effects of the economic crisis on the Balkan region, and in a similar way to that of *Invisible Britain*, reveal to the festival audience the “invisible” or “peripheral” people of Eastern Europe. *On Shaky Ground* is a social realist film that follows the disintegration of a Croatian family due to the father’s financial ruin after some bad decisions made within a volatile property market. This “fictional” narrative is made real in *Married to the Swiss Franc*, a documentary that follows Croatian citizens who had previously taken out loan in Swiss francs during the period 2000-07. When the economic crisis hit, loans denominated in Swiss francs became particularly difficult to repay, especially as the value of the Swiss franc rose against the Croatian Kuna, leaving many facing the prospect of losing their homes. The film also attempts to untangle the seemingly mystical economic machinations that can lead to such drastic personal outcomes. In keeping with LRFF’s original impetus of responding to neoliberalism, the screening of these film became part of a process of fostering “solidarity across borders”.

The LRFF/Subversive partnership came about through both festivals’ affiliation to the Radical Film Network (RFN) a broad, global network of activists, filmmakers, producer and exhibitors involved

with the production and distribution of left-wing film culture (Presence, 2014). The organisation of these screenings highlights a local/global tension within LRFF's organising team. While some organisers would argue the importance of broader collaborations that involve "other radical film festivals, and radical filmmakers and distributors" (Trowbridge, 2017), others see this as more of a distraction. Guy, for example, asserts that

I have no interest in making connections with other radical film festivals. My interest wanes once it goes out that way...The only thing I want to do is put films on...just because you've got to change things where you are before you even think about the need to build networks. You need to build where you are, basically (Guy, 2017).

In a move to address this concern, the festival took its 2016 edition out of the city centre and into Kensington, a dilapidated area of Liverpool that has seen nothing in the way of regeneration, despite signs dotted around the area proclaiming it to be a "regeneration zone". Among other things, the festival aimed to provide a hub for local filmmakers and activists to focus on problems within the city. For example, a shorts session screened a series of works in progress, including a film on the Granby Four Streets Project. The post-screening discussion was led by Ronnie Hughes, one of the projects leaders, and focussed on the housing problems currently faced by city residents. LRFF 2016 took place at the Bridewell Arts Studios, formerly a derelict police station until it was reclaimed by a group of artists in the 1970s. As one of the most deprived areas of Liverpool, Kensington sees little in the way of "cultural" events. Recently, however, Trowbridge has taken the lead on a series of screenings that partner LRFF with Treehouse Liverpool, an organisation that "try to support people to find their own way to well-being...it's about enabling people to connect to their own abilities and realise what they're capable of" (Trowbridge, 2017). These outdoor screenings take place at the Bandstand in Newsham Park, Kensington, and seek to primarily engage young people and families in "political" issues, albeit in a less direct way than the majority of LRFF events. Trowbridge outlines the community oriented function and purpose of the screenings.

So in the summer we run film screenings with Treehouse...and we basically get electricity over the fence of someone who lives on the park and who's happy for us to use their electricity. We run some outdoor cabling across the park, into the bandstand, and we show films. We started on a Friday night, showing Monty Python's *The Life of Brian*, and then we moved to a late Sunday afternoon and started blacking out the bandstand and showing films for the family, so animations that were child friendly. But the animations had been showing moral or ethical messages, mostly to do with the environment...So films that were fun to watch but have a message. So *Wall-E*, for example...It's not your typical LRFF content [but at

least has] messages that are aligned to the festivals kind of politics or vision or ethos (Trowbridge, 2017).

Thus while LRFF predominantly engages in community screenings that belie the rigid form and structure of cinema space (Ross, 2013) and the foreground overtly political content, the festival questions the efficacy of this content when it comes to the issue of engaging less politicised subjects such as families and children attending outdoor screenings in the park on a Sunday. Here the festivals central concern changes from the exhibition of radical content to the more general facilitation of cultural events. In an area such as Kensington this is arguably a radical function in itself, since the screenings aim to bring together people who are particularly susceptible to the stratifying and isolating tendencies of neoliberalism. The secondary function of events such as these is to make sure the festival expands its audience as opposed to consistently “preaching to the converted”. As Guy explains, while this mode of address does have value in itself, there is a risk that the festival’s focus on its core audience belies broader community engagement.

I would say the audience [of the festival] is a mix of people isn’t it. I think primarily it’s the usual suspects. Often I’ve seen students come to events, and people who have an interest in particular films. I haven’t seen anyone where you could say it looks like their eyes have been opened by that [film] (Guy, 2017).

This suggests that LRFF’s main function is not to “create awareness” or spark a previously non-existent political consciousness (hardly likely in a heavily politicised city such as Liverpool), but to use film screenings as a way of creating a space in which it is possible for people to build on previously existing knowledge and hold discussions that may lead to further action. As noted, however, one of the main functions of LRFF is becoming the facilitation of events in areas of the city that have been drained of “cultural” activity, such as Kensington. This reflects the kinds of developmental processes to which all such organisations are subject. The organisational structure of LRFF does, however, mean it is particularly open to these processes.

Funding and Organisation

For almost all LRFF events, screening equipment is transported to the space by a member of the team. Strictly speaking, the festival does not have ownership of this equipment. It was purchased through a grant from the Lush cosmetics company, who had developed a fund for helping local and grassroots community initiatives. Officially, the equipment is owned by the Activist Tat Collective, and is on permanent loan to LRFF on the condition that it is shared with similar organisations in Merseyside when not being used by the festival. For example, in 2015 LRFF members provided tech

support and equipment to Campaign Against the Arms Trade in Liverpool for an outdoor screening of Norman McLaren's *Hell Unltd* (1936) which was projected onto the side of a building associated with weapons manufacturing. The festival also frequently lends the equipment to the L15 Projector and Cinema Co-operative, to provide films and visuals for the parties it holds in the derelict Bakery Warehouse, Kensington, in order to raise funds for migrant solidarity groups. Some of LRFF's funding comes from partnering with organisations willing to provide funds for individual screenings. For example, an LRFF event in 2013 on the subject of "radical education" took place in Toxteth's Mission Hall, and was funded by IdeasTap (Trowbridge, 2017). One of the central distinctions between LRFF and the other two festivals examined in this research is that the former abstains from involvement with large funding bodies. For the organising team, this has become a defining point. According to Trowbridge, it is crucial to LRFF maintaining a particular form of social relation among LRFF's members.

We don't go for mainstream funding. We don't have the organisational status that would allow us to go for mainstream funding, and nor do we want that. That's not because we don't want to be accountable or to produce accounts...It's about if we formalise everything then this becomes a job, or it becomes something like a big grant guzzling, funding hungry organisation...And actually we've always been pretty radical in how we get things done and how we organise (Trowbridge, 2017).

Guy echoes the reluctance to view festival organisation as a paid role.

When there's money involved...when someone's getting paid, there's always a danger of people starting to get jealous and refusing to do things that they said they'd do because someone else is getting paid for doing stuff...It's okay that it's been done on a shoestring [budget] (Guy, 2017).

The closest LRFF has come to developing an "official" structure is setting up a bank account (since it is required to receive funding). The festival consciously negates this form of activity, and this is reflected in the way organisers see themselves more as a group of autonomous individuals with a common interest than a company. The group almost never meet in the months just after a festival, yet they maintain loose communications through one-off screening events. Meetings to discuss the festival proper usually begin in July-August, with the festival due to take place in November. Although this may entail a degree of what some outsiders see as disorganisation, Trowbridge explains that it is essential to the way LRFF operates.

In terms of our working structure and the organisation of the festival...there's no roles [and] there's no hierarchy, and I think I've described it elsewhere as organised chaos...But there is some level of organisation in that, and there is some level of thought, ethics and values and all the rest of it that underpin that (dis)organisation...It sometimes takes a long time to get a decision and to get meeting dates sorted and do things, because we like to make sure everyone gets their voice heard and has an opportunity to contribute. That might makes us look ineffective or unproductive sometimes. But if we sacrificed...arranging a time that's convenient for everyone due to work, childcare, education, all of those things...sure we might end up being more of a conventional organisation...but if we pushed down that path what we'd lose is the solidarity that we have...So I think it's better for us to be slower and less productive (Trowbridge, 2017).

The suggestion that an organisation could or even should be "less productive" is almost blasphemy at a time of fierce competition among various groups for different pockets of funding. It is part of festival organisers "politics through practice" that they choose not to enter this game, or rather, they simply have no interest in it. As noted, LRFF's structure as a group of autonomous individuals with a common interest means that it is more of a collective than a company. Members of the public with a similar interest are invited to get involved at any point. Indeed, given the voluntary basis on which the festival runs, the turnover of new members is essential. Thus the decentralised way in which the festival runs also gives it a fluidity that aims to facilitate a turnover of new members. Sometimes this has the desired effect, yet new volunteers can often drop-off, and there remains a core team that struggle with other commitments. Guy comments on the organisational structure that

The advantages are everyone is driven to do their own thing. So it's a group of do-ers...rather than coming along [to meetings], having a chat and it would take years to get something off the ground...[but] I think it needs new people really...It's got to be people who have already got a bit of drive and want to put something on (Guy, 2017).

The political positions of LRFF's organisers sit somewhere between anarchism, feminism and libertarian socialism, although Trowbridge is reluctant to make such designations, instead advocating a "politics through practice" that is more pragmatic than idealistic.

Honestly I'm not too sure what I'd say about the politics of LRFF. I think if I said it's socialist or it's this or that, or left or liberal or whatever there's going to be someone on board at the festival that says "that doesn't reflect my views, that label's not for me"...I'd say maybe our

politics are evident in our actions... I can't say what the *politics* are, but I can say what I think is the political or radical *way* we are (Trowbridge, 2017).

While these politics mainly take the shape of free screenings in community-led or precarious spaces throughout Liverpool, they also exist in who the festival chooses to collaborate with. For example, a recent offer by FACT Liverpool, a cinema and arts and cultural hub in the city centre, was turned down by LRFF because of FACT's association with Picturehouse, a company who is currently in dispute with workers at the Ritzy Cinema, London, over the London living wage (BECTU, 2014). As Trowbridge, explains, however, there were also concerns in the group about FACT itself.

At the time...the arts budget had been squeezed and funding is [now] not what it was...FACT had got rid of some job roles or cut some people's hours, and it seemed like they were being backfilled by volunteers or work placements or people on lesser contracts, things like that...So it would have been great to work with FACT because they're a well-respected, big organisation in the city. But the fact that there was a lot of feeling that people had been ill-treated and their employment rights hadn't been what we would have liked them to be...we decided that we couldn't partner with them because it would have been detrimental to what we do (Trowbridge, 2017).

Conclusion

Of the three festivals analysed in this research LRFF is the one that least engages with institutionalised structures such as funding bodies, unions and political parties. This may be one of the reasons why it is also the smallest festival of the three. While a degree of precarity does exist in its lack of size and funding, the trade-off is that this also grants the festival a freedom to choose its own organisational methods and practices. This cannot be said, for example, of the Workers Unite Film Festival, which is forced to structure itself as a charity company in order to become eligible for public funds. Because LRFF does not rely on any large source of funding, it may operate, as Guy points out, "on a shoestring", but its ability to exist and function as a community based film festival is only thrown into doubt by the personal constraints of the current organisers. Thus the festival requires a turnover of new members. The festival's transformation from a loose structure of broadly associated screenings over the course of two weeks, into a single weekend long event, have allowed it to continue various strands of one-off or programmatic events throughout the year, as well as maintaining its core annual program. This is reflected in LRFF's status as both a collective and a group of autonomous individuals with their own series of interests and contacts.

However, given the festival's clear capacity and desire to counter the effects of neoliberalism within communities, it is, perhaps, ill-advised that LRFF resists the sorts of funding resources that may allow it to grow and reach more audiences. In this respect, it is tempting to say that the festival risks falling into isolationism and becoming an end in itself, as opposed to expanding and continuing its remit of community screenings. However, organisers clearly think that this can be done without engaging large funding bodies, and their reasons for not even wanting to be paid are synonymous with the festival's values. Payment would, it is argued, disrupt the "less productive" social relations of the organising team. In terms of content and audiences, the festival is beginning to draw a distinction between overtly political films and a more "family friendly" program that allows it to bring political and ethical messages into seemingly less politicised arenas. However, this also has to do with the fact that communities in Liverpool have a history of taking the lead on developing their own areas, where local and national government has continuously failed to do so. The acquisition of regeneration funds by consultants who were identified by some Liverpool residents as "people who would just go from one city to the next and knew how to get the money" (Guy, 2017) is the latest wave of disappointment. However, as Guy points out, "things are developing now *despite* that. Because it created the illusion that someone else was going to do all this, because this money was there" (Guy, 2017). It seems, then, that for as long as the present, neoliberal mode of culture-led city centre regeneration continues at the expense of the rest of the city, organisations such as LRFF will play an important role in maintaining community-led activity in these areas.

Subversive Film Festival

With Subversive Film Festival, I was able to attend and carry out similar in-person, semi-structured interviews. However, given the time constraints and the fact that my subject/s were running a film festival during the time in which I was present, these “interviews” often took a more fleeting, conversational form. Moreover, there was a significant language barrier between myself and a key festival organiser. The knowledge gathering process was, in this case, mediated through questions that I sent in writing via email, post-festival. The questions and subsequent answers were then translated. In this study I remained an insider in a political sense, but given the spatial and cultural distance my position could more accurately be described as an “observer-as-participant” (Uldam, McCurdy 2013).



Fig 12: Subversive Festival Poster 2016: The Politics of Friendship

Of the three film festivals discussed in this research, Subversive Film Festival (SFF) is the oldest, and the one that draws most explicitly on the political theories and cultural aesthetic of the Marxist European left throughout the 1960s and 70s. It is also by far the largest of the festival’s analysed in this research, and so requires a slightly extended analysis. The film festival was founded in 2008 by the Bijeli Val (White Wave) Association, the Croatian Film Association and Croatian performance artist, Tanja Vrvilo (Devčić, 2016). In 2011 the film festival was partnered with an international conference and activist forum (which now collectively operate as Subversive Festival). However, this case study focuses for the most part on the SFF. The observational comments in this case study are

based upon attendance of the film festival in 2016. Primarily, the study introduces the theoretical underpinnings and broad structure of the SFF. It situates the festival in a context of dramatic social shifts and reconstitutions of space engendered by the swift move from communism to neoliberalism which began in the early 1990s. This has resulted primarily in the financialisation of Croatia's banking sector and the wholesale privatisation of state assets, as well as accession to the European Union (which the country entered in 2013). As will be shown, the political landscape of the country can broadly characterised as a mixture of Christian inflected ethno-nationalism emanating from the war that ended Yugoslavia, and European neoliberalism. Although Croatia's main "left" party, the social democrats, have proven incapable of providing an alternative to austerity in the country, recent years have seen the emergence of a new left that began with massive protests in 2009. A significant number of these were mounted by students against the privatisation and commercialisation of education. It is in this context that SFF emerges, and in which it finds its primary audience.

While the festival has undoubtedly made a positive and important contribution to counter-hegemonic (and in this case, specifically anti-capitalist) narratives, as this case study will show, the festival is not without its apparent contradictions. While professing an anti-capitalist politics, many of its practices seem to negate some of the core tenets of anti-capitalism and embrace film festival practices often associated with the mainstream festival circuit. To being with, the festival has largely failed to engage with the Croatian working class, engaging international(ist) audiences and discourses while neglecting local engagement with the effects of neoliberalism. Second, the introduction of festival prizes and awards in 2013 reflects a system of cultural "gatekeeping" and the initial granting of awards to directors such as Oliver Stone suggests a move away from anti-capitalism towards more normative practices and engagements. As well as this, the overall structure of Subversive Festival, as defined since 2010 by a rigid separation between a film festival and a conference strand, has engendered a problem of diverging audiences between cineastes and activists. This throws into question the status of the film festival as such as a producer of activism, as opposed to a mere primer for the conference strand which takes place the following week. While these are warranted criticisms, it should be noted that recent funding cuts to Subversive Festival by a hostile right-wing government have placed it in a highly precarious position. Thus, to some extent, recent changes to its practices can be seen as pragmatic adjustments designed to ensure the festival's survival, as opposed to capitulations to neoliberalism. The question, then, becomes one of a tension between pragmatism and the retention of the festival's core values.

Theoretical Underpinnings of the Festival



Fig 13: Outside the Cinema Europa

The term “subversive” is derived from the Latin *subversionem*, that is, to overthrow or destroy (often in reference to a dominant power structure). Thus the term potentially has as many applications as there are perceptible power structures and a desire to overcome their imposed limitations. For this reason subversion can be enacted through various methods.¹⁰In *Film as Subversive Art* (1974), German avant-garde film theorist, Amos Vogel, advocates “the subversion of existing value systems and social structures in political cinema” (Vogel, 1974: 18) while denouncing the tendency therein to use “bourgeois” aesthetic forms, and criticising film makers “who continue blindly in the use of outworn stylistic structures, pedestrian realism or naturalism, or pseudo-radical narration superimposed on dead images” (Vogel, 1974: *ibid*). According to Vogel, the aim of all political cinema is to “change the viewer’s consciousness” (Vogel, 1974: *ibid*). The only way to do this, however, is through the subversion of traditional film forms such as linear narrative. Vogel’s argument springs from the idea that the supposed decline of capitalist civilisation has “destroyed

¹⁰ Robert Stam (1989, 1997, 2003), for example, looks at the historical imposition of western language forms on Latin American, and the desire for filmmakers in the 1960s and 70s to address this as part of a broader anti-neo-colonial struggle by using “subversive” filmic methods such as cultural cannibalism and garbage aesthetics. Going back further, early surrealist cinema was primarily an attempt to “subvert” western rationality and the boundaries of moral discourse through various forms of symbolic disruption and re-positioning.

forever the myth of stability and permanence” (Vogel, 1974: 19) and that “poetry and non-linear art [are] more suitable to the complex fluidities of the modern world view” (Vogel, 1974: *ibid*). Although he never uses the term, the kind of subversive artistic consciousness Vogel advocates could, in hindsight, be viewed as a list of subjective requirements for adapting to neoliberal modernity.

As yet another example of his weak cognitive faculties, his [the subject’s] consciousness lags far behind existing realities. He therefore clings to such out-dated and comforting philosophical tenets as the predominance of Western civilisation, the supremacy of reason, the concept of simplistic causality, absolute truth, and fixed certainty; isolated identity and permanent states...far more appropriate symbols of the nuclear space age [are] a series of concepts almost sadistically designed to repel the conservative mind; relativity, probability, contingency, uncertainty, structure as progress, multiple causality, non-symmetrical relationships, degrees of difference, incongruity. To withstand these we need a new breed of man; flexible, tolerant, innovative, questioning” (Vogel, 1974: *ibid*).

Vogel’s work has been one of the main sources of inspiration for SFF. For example, film program director, Dina Pokrajac, acknowledges “Amos Vogel’s insistence on using the art of film as a means of raising the audience’s awareness” (Pokrajac, 2015). In the festival’s first edition Vogel’s philosophy was articulated through the screening of films by directors such as Chris Marker, Jean-Luc Godard and Agnes Varda. Pokrajac’s own interpretation of “subversive” is that it can be defined by “practices which through a dialectical process disturb the prevailing power structures” (Pokrajac, 2015). This kind of language and its intentionality is riven throughout the extensive literature that SFF publishes, particularly in the writing of film festival director, Nikola Devčić, whose occasionally florid use of language reflects the political avant-garde from which the festival draws inspiration. In the opening pages of the 2011 program, for example, he writes

The past is the material of the present in the way the present is the material of the past with the possibility of a future non-repressive society in which the principle of reality, rather than being opposed to the dominant principle of satisfaction, would be in harmony with it (Devčić, 2011:1).

Thus the primary aim of the festival has been to use filmic forms that are perceived to be “subversive” to both educate audiences and encourage their further participation in the political sphere. It is not the intention of this case study to engage in a discussion on filmic forms, nor to argue for the consciousness raising efficacy of some over others. The central thing to point out here is Vogel’s assumed connection between the subversion of traditional film forms and the raising of

political consciousness. Unfortunately the kinds of social stratification that exist in the contemporary neoliberal city mean that those who have the opportunity and resources to take part in this consciousness raising project (and the spaces in which it takes place) will be, for the most part, limited to members of a left wing cultural intelligentsia comprised of students and bourgeois cultural workers. Having attended the 2016 edition, this appears to be SFF's audience. This is not to denigrate its importance as an event that has, over the past ten years, played an undoubtedly positive role in terms of Croatian anti-neoliberal activism. Merely to point out that at present organisers do not seem overly concerned with developing specific practices in order to bring the city's working class to the festival. This may be because, recently, the festival has suffered significant time and funding constraints. Yet it remains a huge oversight, since a festival that pertains to anti-capitalism while neglecting the working class risks a descent into gross abstraction and artistic self-congratulation.

SFF primarily operates within a specific area of political avant-garde film exhibition, viewing this medium as "subversive" insofar as the films screened can offer counter-narratives to capitalism that engender political consciousness and action. While the festival's aims have been broadly consistent over the past ten years, each annual edition is characterised by a different critical theme. For example, the festival was founded in 2008 to celebrate "the 40th anniversary of the student protests of 1968" and to combine "political theory and film in an effort to examine their legacy and identify subversive practices that can lead to change of the prevailing societal-economic constellations" (Pokrajac, 2015). The second edition of the festival looked at the 60th anniversary of the communist revolution in China, showing classic and contemporary Chinese films and inviting Chinese dissidents to participate in roundtable discussions. In 2010 the festival looked at the history of socialism in the late 20th century, its manifestations in Croatia, and the critique of it mounted by filmmakers, particularly those of the "Black Wave" such as Želimir Žilnik and Dušan Makavejev. According to Pokrajac, this was the year that Subversive adapted its film festival to a huge international conference, the purpose of which was to

Raise the question of an alternative [to neoliberalism], because one thing is certain: further development of neoliberal capitalism can lead only toward total control and repression, the systematic negation of the active social participation in a world rocked by ecological disasters, megalomaniac projects and mass protests (Pokrajac, 2015).

The so-called Arab Spring of 2011 prompted Subversive to dedicate that year's edition to the "decolonisation of the Eurocentric viewpoint of film history" (Baras, 2011: 5). In 2012 Croatia's upcoming accession to the European Union necessitated the screening of films that countered

dominant media narratives that favoured accession. In 2014 the festival's theme was *power and freedom in the age of control: network – ideology – alternatives*, having been inspired by the public confession of Edward Snowden in regards to the US surveillance state. The following year of SFF saw critical engagement with topics such as *spaces of emancipation – micropolitics and rebellions*. In 2016 I was able to attend the festival while its central theme was *the politics of friendship*. This latter theme took shape in the context of the festival's first appeal for crowd funding in the context of funding cuts from a newly appointed coalition government led by the right-wing, nationalist Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). Most recently, SFF has leaned itself to critically engaging with the re-emergence of the right throughout Europe, positioning the "European Left" against the "New world (dis)order" (SFF, 2017).

SFF's specific understanding of film and its confluences with political theory is undoubtedly a result of the academic-artistic predilections of the festival's organisers. As the founder of Bijeli Val, film festival director, Nikola Devčić, has been working as a cultural activist within the civil sector for almost twenty years, while Pokrajac is a PhD researcher at the University of Zagreb. Devčić views Subversive Festival as

A sort of School of Contemporary Humanities [which was indeed launched as a side-project of the festival in 2014], a non-institutional educational program and a series of anti-establishment activities that want to create a nucleus of young people who will become initiators of new ideas and initiatives in their communities (Devčić, 2016).

Thus the festival can be accurately described as seeking to emulate the role of the university insofar as the latter can be seen as a site of critical engagement with the world. SFF's ambitions revolve around raising political consciousness through a transgression of traditional film forms - as well as its internationalist orientation that foregrounds the global dimensions of issues around neoliberalism and climate change. These could be viewed as an alternate orientation to the Workers Unite Film Festival, which primarily focuses on the accessibility of film form and local struggles. To some extent, SFF's internationalist orientation belies engagement with Zagreb's disenfranchised working class, and thereby perpetuates forms of social and spatial stratification that limit their right to the city. This level of abstraction beyond its own locality also demonstrates a movement

From tangible solidarities understood as patterns of social life organised in affective and knowable communities to a more abstract set of conceptions that would have universal purchase [which] involves a move from one level of abstraction to another capable of reaching out across space (Harvey, 1994: 33).

As this case study will show, SFF's resistance to neoliberalism can thus be found in the role it plays in the embattled cultural politics of Croatia at a national level, with frequent appeals to transnational, as well as global, forms of solidarity and co-operation. This conflict can be witnessed in the negotiations the festival is forced to make in order to survive, and the revocation of its funds by a hostile right-wing government.

Context: From Religious Nationalism to European Neoliberalism

For the past few years Croatian politics has been mired in corruption scandals and a deeply engrained public distrust of the political class. Since 2015 the slim majority of the voter share has been held by a party with historical ties to fascism and the militant nationalist rhetoric of the 1991 war – the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). Croatia's main opposition, the Social Democratic Party (SDP), which led the country from 2011-2015, has been unable to provide an alternative to EU austerity, conceding to its opponents on political and ideological grounds and losing its grip on government in the process. The country's "overnight" (as one festival organiser described it) shift from communism to neoliberal capitalism in the early 1990s has engendered a series of dramatic societal reconstitutions¹¹. However, Croatians have found little respite in the European neoliberal alternative to communism, or the accompanying discourse of "transition" that holds open in perpetuity an imminent reprieve from socio-economic hardship, if only a few more "reforms" can be made.

In spite of the rhetoric of incompleteness, we can observe that the free-market reigns supreme; post-socialist Eastern Europe is fully incorporated into the capitalist world with a semi-peripheral role. In practice this means the availability of cheap and highly educated labour in proximity of the capitalist core and a quasi-total economic dependence on the core and its multinational banks and corporations, and, finally, the accumulation of debt...In spite of that, the notion of an incomplete transition still dominates the media comments and the academic discourse and political elites are using it to justify yet another wave of privatisation of state or previously socially owned assets (Horvat, Štiks, 2012: 40).

The financialisation of banking systems and the expansion of credit to fuel a debt-based model of economic growth is a common story throughout the Balkans, as is the accompanying spatial shift toward commercialisation and privatisation. Zagreb in particular is being re-shaped through a "transitional politics" constituted by a balance of political power and urban planning that offers

¹¹ Although wholesale privatisation of Croatian public assets dates back to government legislation introduced in 1991 (Čučković, 1993) on-going privatisation has been a condition of accession to the EU for countries throughout the Balkan region (Horvat, Štiks, 2012).

opportunities for “investment and wealth accumulation through legal and illegal channels [that are] predominantly concentrated in housing and other attractive real estates” (Cavrić, Nedović-Budić, 2007: 399). These tendencies are common to the way cities have been shaped by dominant forces since the 1980s. Nevertheless, attempts to impose standardised models of spatial reconstruction consistently neglect the specific political and cultural make-up of localities. Since at least 2005, academics in the Balkan region have warned against a wholesale implementation of the “creative economy” described by Richard Florida and largely adopted in the UK under New Labour, since “the role assigned to newcomers into the [European] Union will certainly not favour the sector’s development, but at best the imports of the sectors products” (Petrić, Tomić-Koludrović, 2005: 18). Nevertheless, the idea that “kultura means business” is fast becoming the consensus among Croatian cultural policy makers, and across the Balkan region in general (ibid). With Subversive’s funding having already been drastically reduced, the festival finds itself in a more precarious position than ever.

Compounding all of this is a euro-scepticism that exists on both sides of the political spectrum. On the one hand, nationalists fear a return to Yugoslav multiculturalism that may be facilitated by Croatia’s EU membership (Fisher, 2006). On the other, those on the left (particularly the students who engaged in protests in 2009 against the commercialisation of education and real estate speculation in Zagreb) point to the negative effects of European neoliberalism. The period 2009-11, for example, saw the birth of the “right to the city” movement, which mobilised against the on-going sell-off of downtown Zagreb to business investors, particularly Flower Square. Occupations not only took place in universities, but public spaces, as the two were seen as linked by their susceptibility to commercialisation. As a student at the time, Pokrajac was involved in these protests, as was Srećko Horvat, one of the key organisers of Subversive from 2010-2013, and who has since become a globally recognised activist and academic. Horvat and Štiks (2012) write about the beginnings of the new Croatian Left.

Back then [2009] an independent student movement articulated a strong resistance to the privatisation and commercialisation of higher education...their protest against neoliberal forms in the field of education turned into probably the first strong political opposition to not only government, but indeed the general political and social regime...Besides a strong rhetorical shift (a strong anti-capitalist discourse unheard of in independent Croatia and the Balkans)...It was a clear example of how “invited spaces of citizenship”, designed as such by state structures and police for “kettled expressions of discontent”, were superseded by “invented spaces of citizenship” when citizens themselves opened new ways and avenues

for their subversive actions, questioning legality in the name of the legitimacy of their demands (Horvat, Štiks, 2012: 44).

This case study can be seen as a contribution to scholarship that has documented the re-emergence of radical politics within the context of a nationalist/neoliberal political and cultural landscape that was instituted after the breakup of Yugoslavia. As Maple Rasza notes, the anarchist inflected, anti-globalisation movement that gained momentum in the early 2000's was made up of a

New generation of activists from the northwest of ex-Yugoslavia [for whom] civil society had very different associations than it did for those involved in 1990's anti-war and human rights organisations. This younger generation saw in NGO's professionalisation rather than voluntary initiative; compromising dependence on foreign funding rather than autonomous self-organisation; and ritualised, polite expressions of dissent rather than creative direct action (Rasza, 2015: 9).

Although the anti-globalisation movement dissipated around the middle of the decade, SFF can be seen as a continuation of this radical tradition via different tactics and forms of organisation. The festival professes a socialist cultural identity that emanates partly from the Yugoslav partisan movement of WW2 and the perceived need to preserve Croatia's anti-fascist legacy. The festival articulates this through the revolutionary rhetoric of its literature, as well as its programming choices, particularly, as this case study will show later, in its 2010 edition. This is a particularly contentious issue in a country where contemporary mainstream politics can be broadly characterised by a tension between conservative Christian nationalism and European neoliberalism (Fisher, 2006), while anti-fascism is generally equated with communism, which has no influence in the mainstream.

Subversive Festival navigates within two political paradoxes: the first is domestic, while the second operates at the European level. Devčić, aptly sums up the former in describing how

Slobodan Milosevic wasn't far-off when he concluded that all post-Yugoslav societies are constituted primarily on anti-communist foundations. Croatia is paradigmatic in this sense. On the one hand an open, physical and institutional aggression towards anti-fascist legacy took place [during the 1991 war] through the destruction of over 3000 anti-fascist monuments, and through various curricular changes and omissions imposed on textbooks from grammar school to university level. On the other hand, we have a sort of cynicism applied by the state institutions which kept anti-fascism as one of the fundamental values in Croatian society, while openly negating it in reality (Devčić, 2016).

As well as providing a platform for countering the discourse emanating from the domestic political right, SFF adopts a more globally oriented, anti-neoliberal position. Paradoxically, then, the festival finds itself critiquing the very structures it relies on for its existence, especially the Croatian government. Thus we are led to our second paradox - the sad irony that EU technocrats with a constitutional commitment to eradicating racism are currently instituting a set of economic policies that foment nationalist and right-wing prejudice. Both these paradoxes are concerned with the difference (and distance) between constitutional commitments and flagrant deployments of idealistic lip-service that are common among politicians. While the HDZ and the EU may subscribe to completely different ideological visions of Europe, they are united in the motive of crushing alternatives to austerity offered by the so-called radical left and events like the SFF¹².

While the Croatian government continues a program of austerity, the country is undergoing a process of spatial reconfiguration. Kiril Stanilov (2007) reports that “the list of privatised properties, previously in public use, has included not only the majority of public housing stock, pieces of undeveloped land, playgrounds and segments of existing parks, but community halls, sports arenas and historical landmark buildings” (Stanilov, 2007: 272). In 2009 student protests against real estate speculation and the commercialisation of education took place across Croatia. The economic crash of 2007-8 gave new impetus to seasoned anti-globalisation activists, as well as other previously marginalised narratives emanating from (though not limited to) the radical left¹³.

During thirty-five days in spring and two weeks in autumn in 2009, more than twenty universities all over Croatia were occupied with students practically running them...the way they occupied and ran the universities deserves our attention for its originality in a much larger context than that of the Balkans or Eastern Europe. They invited to their plenums [plenary assemblies] not only students but all citizens to debate issues of public importance such as education and, in addition to that, to decide upon the course of the protest movement. The most active plenum at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb each evening gathered up to 1000 individuals deliberating on the course of action. This event gave rise to the movement for direct democracy, which was seen as a necessary

¹² In the HDZ this takes the shape of an ethno-nationalist politics that despises the left in general (and, like many similar groups across Europe, is sceptical of EU membership), while the EU’s commitment to austerity means that its uneasy preference is for an HDZ prepared to implement such policies, as opposed to any left-oriented government that might resist them.

¹³ The movement also included strikes by workers in the textile industries and shipyards, as well as farmers. Horvat and Štiks (2012, 2014) report that from February-April 2012 assemblies of 10,000 people took place in Zagreb every other evening.

corrective of electoral democracy and partitocracy and, possibly, a true alternative to it (Horvat, Štiks 2014).

SFF emerged as a plenum in its own right, and one of a range of attempts throughout the Balkans to provide space for previously marginalised movements to articulate their opposition to Croatia's new found neoliberalism. Festival organisers frequently voice their hopes that SFF played some role in the emergence of the Croatian New Left, particularly through the political education of students. As Pokrajac explains

The festival has always had a strong educational component; and has always been oriented especially towards students, trying to teach them to think critically and combat political apathy among the youth but also in recent years among otherwise socially engaged citizens (Pokrajac, 2015).

The orientation produces plays a role in the kinds of festival and activist spaces produced by the festival.



Fig 14: Inside the Cinema Europa

The Confluence of Film Festival and Activist Space

The main venue for Subversive Festival, Cinema Europa (formerly the Cinema Balkan) is owned by the City of Zagreb, which acquired it in 2007 after a successful joint campaign by the Zagreb Film

Festival and the Croatian Film Association (an independent body of non-professional film and video groups). The campaign, which became known as “Daj mi Kino” (Give Me the Cinema), demanded that

The authorities secure the continuity of cinema life in Zagreb and Croatia by rescuing (buying out) the remaining cinemas [that hadn't already been transformed under the wave of privatisations] and funding "facilities" and programs of the cinemas which could become screening forts of film festivals, film reviews, as well as of Croatian and culturally worthy international cinema which finds the suburban commercial multiplex cinema doors closed (Daj mi Kino, 2016).

In the past ten years Croatia has seen the revitalisation of old cinemas, and, in 2014, the founding of the Croatian Independent Cinemas Network, a non-profit organisation whose aim of creating a sustainable, independent Croatian film sector is supported by government funding. The network now comprises 35 cinemas throughout the country. Its understanding of cinema as a public service distinguishes it from the neoliberal rhetoric of the creative industries.

Independent cinemas conduct a public duty based on their status as public institutions, artistic organisations or missions they designed for themselves. This public duty can be defined as promotion of film as a work of art, representing film culture in educational programmes, critical and reflexive approaches, and catering to the cinema-related needs of local film production. This is why such entities need to develop strategies based not only on a commercial approach and find sustainable models to maintain their core direction and public function (CICN, 2017).

The Cinema Europa does not charge Subversive any fee for use of the space, but takes a half share of the ticket fees, which is usually £4-6 per person. The Europa is a huge, five hundred seat auditorium, which is impractical when attempting to facilitate discussions. Therefore these mostly take the shape of a typical audience Q and A session with those involved in the production of the films. Less rigidly structured forms of discussion take place in the festival's smaller venues, such as the Croatian Cultural Centre, which is an artistic space around the corner from the Europa. For example, the festivals screening in the cultural centre of *Money Puzzles* (Chanan, 2016), a film about the financial crisis and activist responses across Europe, led to a much more conversational discussion among audience members wherein they felt able to discuss their personal experiences on a level that is perhaps more difficult to do in a 500 seat auditorium. Thus the size and shape of the space in which the festival operates has an impact on the discussions that take place. This reflects the difference

between cinema space and community screening space that has been looked at in previous chapters (Ross, 2013). Once again it can be seen that audiences have an embodied response to the space as much as they do the films. Made by an academic and independent filmmaker throughout 2015, the transnational approach that *Money Puzzles* takes to its subject matter (focussing as it does on modes of organisation in Spain, Greece and the UK among others) ties in with SFF's internationalist outlook. However, the film also promotes forms of local organisation that are often occluded by the festival's global orientation, such as food banks and housing action groups. In this respect the film acts as a counter-balance, highlighting modes of practical activity that sit alongside the otherwise theory dominated space of the festival. As we will see, spatial questions such as these also apply to the festival's structuring as separate film festival and conference strands that, for the most part, use Cinema Europa as their venue.

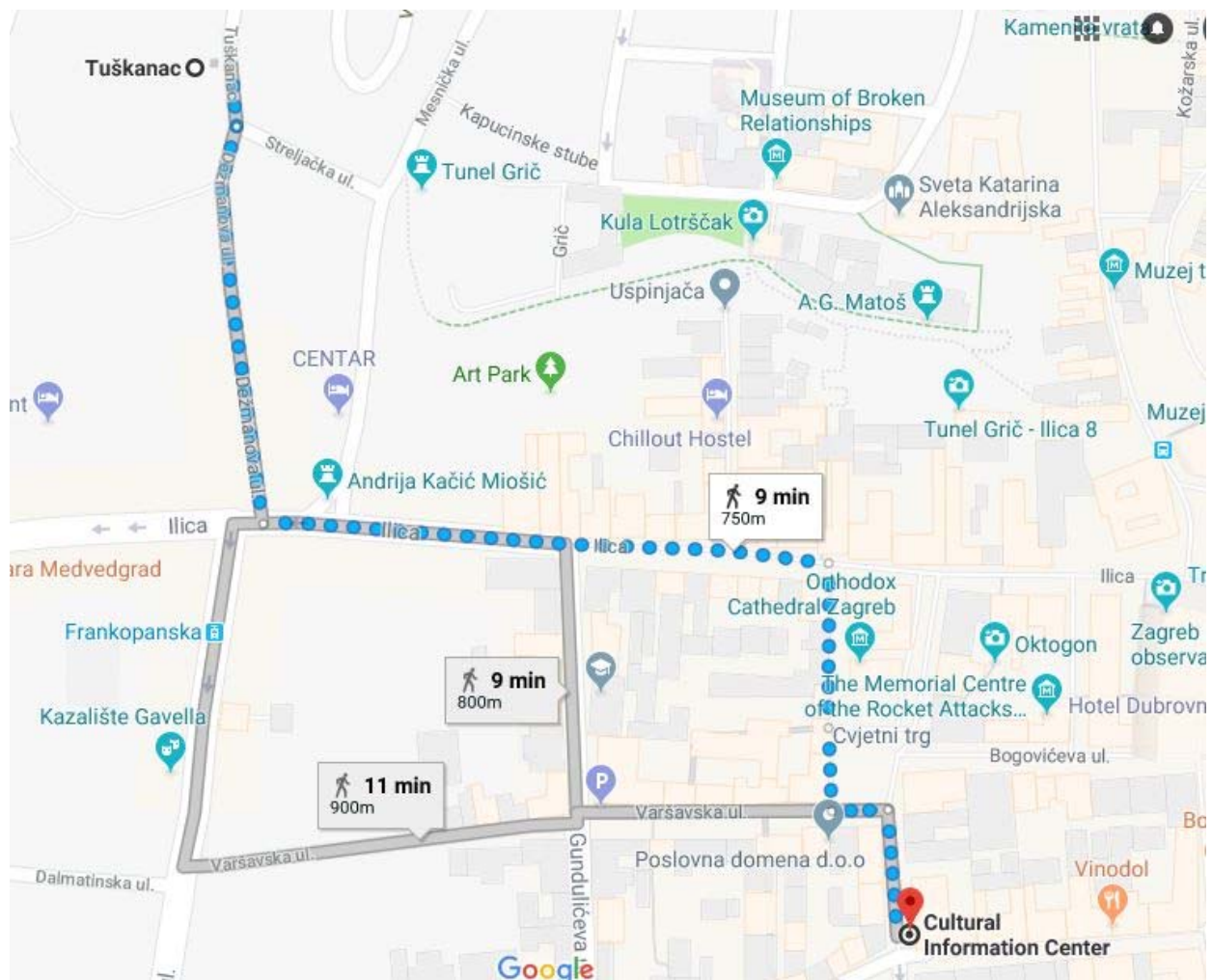


Fig 15: The distance between the Cinema Tuskanac and the Cultural Information Centre. The Cinema Europa is at the 9 minute marker.

Primarily, SFF was “conceived as an interdisciplinary, hyper-textual, political attempt of demystification of visual taboos and critical analysis of film as a powerful contemporary art form that can be used for subverting the neoliberal status quo” (Pokrajac, 2015). That 2008 also turned out to be the year of the global financial crisis points to the recurrent confrontation between capital and dissent, and the capricious nature of their forms and strategies. The initial purpose of the festival was to screen older films as works of subversive art (often banned, censored or seldom screened) to a younger audience. An overarching theme is designated for each edition of the festival, upon which it bases the selection of films.

The festival’s opening year was chosen to coincide with the 40th anniversary of the events of 1968. In this respect Subversive played a role in the transmission of urban struggles from one temporal and locational setting to another, wherein the students of Zagreb 2008 could identify with those of Paris 1968. It is no surprise that films such as Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* (1973) and *On the Passage of a Few Persons Through a Rather Brief Unity of Time* (1959) should appeal to students living in a city that had just undergone a dramatic shift from communism to neoliberalism via right-wing nationalism. Nor is it a shock that screenings of films such as *Far From Vietnam* (1967), the mammoth polemic against the Vietnam war directed by Jean-Luc Godard, Chris Marker, Agnes Varda, Claude Lelouch, William Klein, Alain Resnais and Joris Ivens, should attract large audiences of young people in a country where tensions from a twenty year old ethno-nationalist conflict are still present, both in the social and political spheres. Moreover, Agnes Varda’s *Black Panthers* (1968) would have appealed to students involved in a new movement against the dominant political class. Made in co-operation with the Black Panther Party, the film is as much a historical document of resistance as it is an artistic statement, and, as has been noted, it is one of the main aims of SFF to perpetuate this understanding of art as inherently political. As a screening at SFF, *Black Panthers* also bridges the geographical distance between the 1968 of Europe and the 1968 of the US, offering notions of a common history and cultural geography of protest. The film consists of a number of speeches from Black Panther Party members at their annual conference in 1968, which focuses in large part on the campaign to free the jailed leader of the party, Huey P Newton. Overall, it is a show of strength and resilience (as party conferences often try to be) on the part of the Black Panthers, and a potential initiator of debates for those seeking to form similarly oriented groups.

A typical example of the way SFF operates can be seen in its 2009 edition (dedicated to China on the 60th anniversary of the communist revolution), wherein an attempt to collaborate with the Chinese embassy (such collaborations are one of the ways Subversive funds itself) “proved to be unachievable in the end, because of the course for the reigning political regime in China, theses like

the cultural revolution, and especially the protest and massacre at Tiananmen Square, still remain a tabu” (Pokrajac, 2015). This situation points to the ways in which film festival programming can fluctuate in accordance with political wills beyond the control of the festival. The program that year comprised a selection of Chinese films, while dissidents Minq Li and Wang Hui participated in a discussion which questioned whether “the cultural revolution, with its brutal erasure of previous traditions, was unintentionally the shock that created the conditions for the subsequent capitalist explosion” (Pokrajac, 2015). The circulation of these texts in Zagreb at this particular time helped to solidify the festival as a public sphere of resistance to neoliberalism. This led to a cross-over of organisational praxis between the festival and university departments such as the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Zagreb, which in Spring 2009 was occupied for 35 days by students. In this way Pokrajac, who was a student at the university at the time of the occupation, became involved with Subversive.

I’ve been following Subversive Festival since I was a student, from its first edition that celebrated the 40th anniversary of the student protests of 1968 and screened the revolutionary films of the 1960s and 1970s (from Godard through Marker to Guy Debord). This effort to combine political theory and film to examine the legacy of 68’ (as both an artistic and societal phenomenon) and identify subversive practices that can lead to change of the prevailing societal-economic constellations, appealed to me straight on and it still remains the main motivation behind the festival through its various incarnations (Pokrajac, 2016).

The occupation’s media team also developed a newsletter, *Skripta*, which was published daily throughout the occupation. *Skripta* was

Not only a student newsletter, but also a newsletter for all those who wish to gain a critical insight into the state of society, politics and economy, and to get the basic knowledge needed for the strategy of social resistance to destructive processes. Its distribution covers, from the FHSS itself, a number of other faculties in Zagreb and other cities and other places like the Student Centre, Cultural and Information Centre, cinemas, libraries, copy shops, restaurants, etc (Occupation Cookbook, 2009: 73).

By 2010 the film festival had expanded to include an international conference and activist forum, and *Skripta* began filming these events as *Skripta TV*. In this expansion SFF moved beyond its original limitations in order to provide physical space for an independent student movement that was overflowing from the universities. At the same time, however, the festival program continued to

reflect an internationalist orientation that neglected its locality, particularly Zagreb's working class. There is no mention in the 2011 program, for example, of those disenfranchised members of the local population who are particularly vulnerable to the neoliberal reforms taking place throughout the country. Thus Subversive operated paradoxically as an isolated, anti-capitalist internationalist enclave with very little connection to the working class of Croatia.

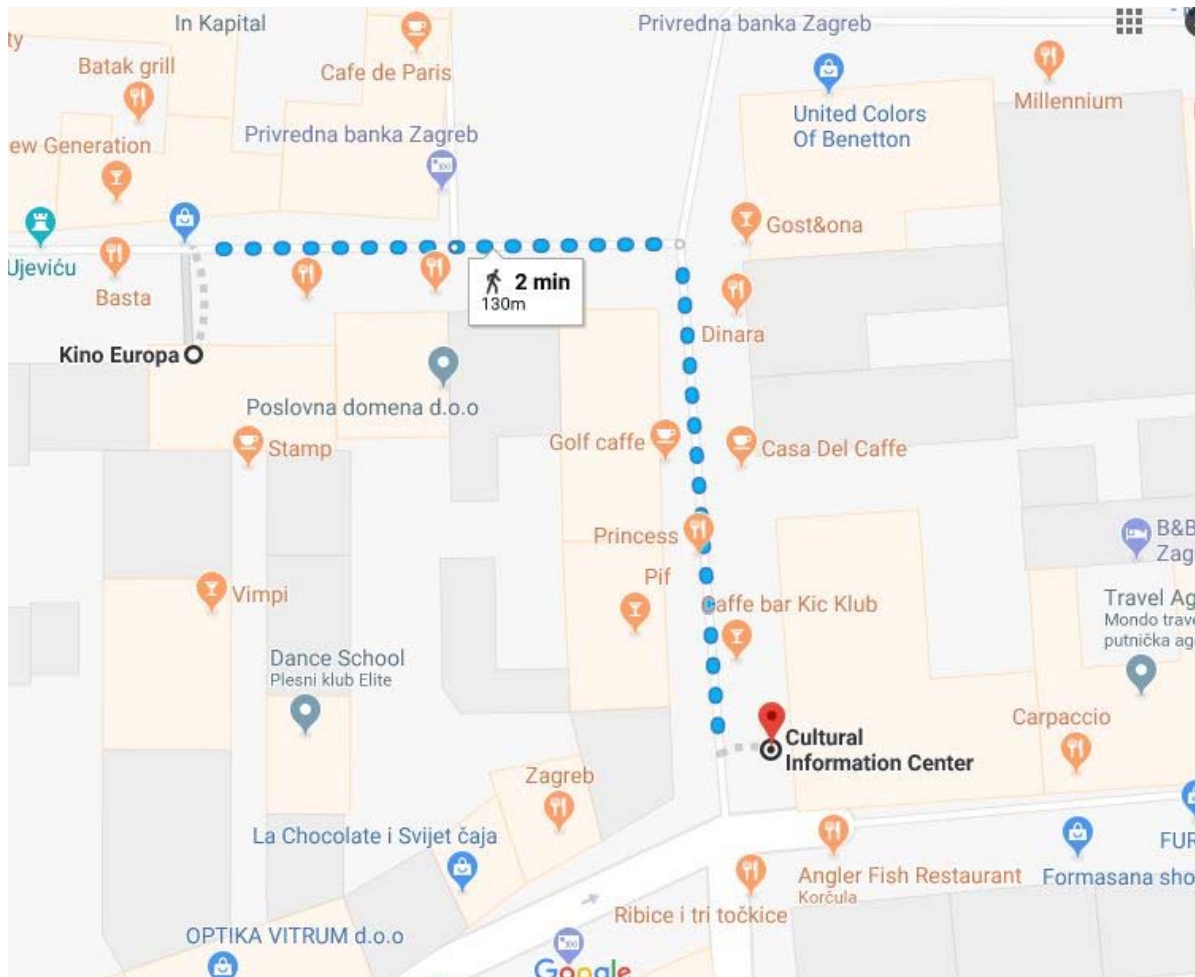


Fig 16: The distance between Kino Europa and the Cultural Information Centre

Instead the 2011 program, inspired by the Arab Spring, focussed on what art director, Dona Baras, called “a radical review of aesthetic innovations among the works of filmmakers of the Third World” (Baras, 2011: 5). Films such as Haile Gerima’s *Harvest: 3000 Years* (1976), Satyajit Ray’s *The Music Room* (1958) and Ousmane Sembene’s *Black Girl* (1966) were introduced alongside a film theory school on the “aesthetics of resistance”, which featured lectures from world-leading film academics such as Robert Stam. This program of film screenings and events took account of debates on the interstices between Third Cinema and third world cinema that have been going on among filmmakers and theorists since the late 1960s. In *Black Girl* Sembene offers a representation of the colonised mind-set of a black woman who moves from Senegal to France to work as a maid for a

white family. Sembene's depiction of the "mother country" from the perspective of the colonised person foregrounds the grotesque character of the white coloniser and, screened to a majority white audience at SFF, opens up a debate on the history of European-African relations. At the same time, Subversive's structure as both a film festival and a conference allows attendees of the latter to tap into visual representations of their subject matter. In the same year, the conference strand of the festival was attended by activist groups from all over the world. However, the conference strand comes *after* the film festival, and it is unclear how many of its audience actually attended the latter. This throws into question the activist efficacies of Subversive Festival's overall structure, as constituted by the rigid distinction between festival and conference. Pokrajac states, for example, that the 2015 conference edition of the festival was attended by

Members of Syriza, Podemos, Initiative for Democratic Socialism and the newly founded Croatian Workers Front [which] discussed the possibilities of forming the New International, because there is no real influence of the new left if it is closed within national borders. Common policy of European green parties was also discussed as one of the main festival themes, as was the coming together of red and green parties on common issues and solving their misunderstandings regarding transformations of conditions for social reproduction and emancipation. There is somewhat of a rise of the left in Croatia in the last few years which we hope Subversive helped at. The Worker's Front was founded in May (called Croatian Syriza) this year by a group of workers, trade unionists, students, activists and unemployed. Its goal is to create a broad progressive platform, combining the activity of a political party with direct action at the workplaces and political activism in general (Pokrajac, 2015).

Yet in 2016 Pokrajac highlights the issue of an audience diverging between the conference and film festival.

Regarding the audience, over the last few years there has been an increase of interest in the films, while the interest in the theoretical part has somewhat decreased (however this varies from edition to edition). It seems that two, divergent audiences have emerged – one that is primarily film-based, consisting of cineastes who come to see films they cannot see at other, more mainstream Croatian festivals and one that is more activist-based and only interested in forums and debates. I would love to see more of a convergence between these two audiences, and this would be an important goal for our future editions (Pokrajac, 2016).

Again, this is not to detract from the relevance of these events in highlighting the effects of globalised capitalism, nor the importance of film as a tool of resistance. The problem lies in the rigid

separation between cineastes and activists. Here, the film festival could be seen as a primer for the activist discussions that take place in the following week. But the question of whether the film festival as such produces any activist outcomes, or whether these are simply transmitted into the Subversive Forum, is one that is specific to Subversive, and made all the more diffuse given its size. The world-renowned academics the festival has previously sought out may exacerbate this problem, drawing the film screenings away from the *possibility* of being a localised point of resistance to neoliberalism by presenting it as a global event, engendering a contradiction between a film festival that proclaims anti-capitalism, and yet creates an intellectual distance between itself and capitalism's consequences in Zagreb itself. Here the local/global tension discussed in the opening chapters manifests as a tension between academic film theory and its inaccessibility to the majority of the population. A rebuttal to this argument can, perhaps, be seen in the localised engagement of the festival's 2010 edition, which showcased the first retrospective of Yugoslav cinema since the breakup of the union. This included films from the Yugoslav "Black Wave". Directors such as Želimir Žilnik and Dušan Makavejev were featured on the same program as Lazar Stojanović's *Plastic Jesus* (1971). This last film (Stojanović's thesis project) is the story of a young, out of work, nihilistic Zagreb worker, a figure who can be seen as the dionysian opposite to workers depicted within the canon of socialist realism. Yugoslav Black Wave filmmakers were heavily critical of the socialist states in which they lived, and the screening of these films at SFF perhaps aims to redress the lack of localised engagement, but also to open up historical debates around the history of state socialism among a leftist audience. Here the festival aims to inspire a critical engagement with, rather than a dogmatic acceptance of, socialism and its ideals, in an effort to avoid certain repetitions of history.

Again, however, in the purpose of screening these films we can see a tendency in the festival to bypass localised concerns in an attempt to foster transnational and global connections. Pokrajac:

These aesthetically radical and politicised films showed that Yugoslav cinema was in sync with such developments in European and other world cinemas as the French new wave and its radical political tendencies of the late sixties, such as the militant cinema of the Dziga Vertov Group or the political essays of the Left Bank authors but also with the revolutionary modernism of the 1960s Eastern European and Latin American cinemas (Pokrajac, 2015).

This suggests a certain desire on the part of SFF to legitimise Croatian cinema on the contemporary European stage. As noted, in 2013 SFF adopted some practices that are typical of film festivals, introducing a competition program dedicated to screening more contemporary films. This comprised three elements – a feature, documentary, and short film competition. The festival also introduced its Wild Dreamer Award for lifetime achievement, which was awarded to Oliver Stone. These measures

seem to have been an attempt to legitimise Subversive as a “real” film festival. The air of prestige they endow would undoubtedly have been useful as a justification for funding in an increasingly fraught financial situation. However, they can hardly be seen as reflecting the festival’s ostensibly anti-capitalist principles. It is unclear why the festival chose to do this apart from the requirement to make some money. However, the introduction of these practices may have been a point of contention that facilitated the leaving of some key program team members in 2013 (the most prominent being Srećko Horvat¹⁴). The awarding of prizes at festivals bestows a form of “gatekeeper” status on individuals that is not easy to square with anti-capitalist politics, especially when those gatekeepers are predominantly art-world intellectuals. The core programmer of the competition strand is film critic Dragan Rubeša, who is also a jury member at the Locarno Film Festival. Rubeša selects the films and passes them onto a jury. In 2016 the *Wild Dreamer* was awarded to Polish director, Andrezej Żuławski’s first film in thirty years (and, as it turns out, his last), *Cosmos* (2015), a metaphysical film noir which had also won Żuławski the best director prize at Locarno. This link between Subversive and the European art-house festival circuit that is, perhaps, a little too close for comfort in the view of anti-capitalist politics. While the transgression of “bourgeois” film form advocated by Amos Vogel could be seen as a subversive act, it would take a large stretch of the imagination to place a film like *Cosmos* in the category of political cinema, not to mention subversive or radical film. However, the issue of diverging audiences should not be considered out of context. Subversive’s desire to appear as a “legitimate” (albeit radical) film festival in tune with the European art-house is undermined by funding cuts that are undoubtedly put to the festival on the basis of its leftist politics.

While the programming of SFF occasionally overlaps with film festivals on the European art-house circuit, it exists within an informal network of activist organisations as much as it does any film festival circuit. The strands that accompany the main competition program: - homage, film essay, film philosophy and retrospectives – present greater opportunities for screening films that are more closely aligned with the festival’s politics. These are put together by filmologist, Tomislav Šakić, and Dina Pokrajac, who invite a variety of individuals and activist organisations to select films in accordance with their interests and objectives. For example, a strand in the 2016 program dedicated

¹⁴ In 2013 eight members of the program team left the festival, citing “differences in understanding the goals and direction of the activist platforms within Subversive Forum and, more generally, the general purpose of Subversive Festival” (Subversive Festival Facebook page, 2017). An open letter to friends of Subversive Festival signed by those leaving states that “through diverse programmes we have tried to dislocate this debate from academic circles into the general public sphere in order to inform a wider audience about progressive ideas and social, political and economic alternatives”. Thus the “difference in understanding” seems to involve the relation between Subversive Festival and academia. It is unclear whether this was also a matter for the film festival.

to the topic of whistleblowing was organised in collaboration with the Centre for Peace Studies, a non-profit organisation primarily committed to combating racism in Europe, but which also advocates the creation of laws to protect whistle-blowers. Many of the films in this strand were followed by panel discussions focussing on freedom of speech issues. For example, a film made by the Centre for Responsible Justice – Luna (COD Luna), *The Price of Justice* (2015), was followed by a panel dedicated to a Croatian perspective on whistle-blowers. As can be seen, many of SFF's screenings relied on multi-layered relations comprising a range of different activist and NGO groups. "We also try" according to Pokrajac, "to invite foreign selectors in order to strengthen our ties to similar initiatives in Europe and the region" (Pokrajac, 2016). This ties into SFF's funding sources throughout Europe. Over the years the Festival has been granted funds from the German, Italian and French governments on the basis that by showing films from these countries they are strengthening the presence of national cultures. It is arguable that the festival's taking money from national governments could hardly be considered a "subversive" act. Again, however, this is an example of how a festival on the financial back foot navigates a pragmatic path between its stated values and the reality of the situation. In the organisers view, these funds would not be used to strengthen the cultural identities of national cultures, but to screen radical agit-prop films whose directors just so happened to be of a certain nationality.

For example, the money received from the Italian embassy in 2016 was used to fund retrospect of films by Italian communist director, Pier Paolo Pasolini, held at SFF's second venue, the Cinema Tuškanac, a venue within walking distance of the Europa, but only slightly smaller than it. This further highlights the importance of spatial and theoretical contexts in which films are exhibited. From one perspective Pasolini's films can be considered quite simply as Italian art-house cinema and, in a nationalist sense, an example of a rich and variegated Italian culture. From another, they can be seen as communist cinema, screened by SFF as part of its assertion of a European anti-capitalist history and cultural identity. Although they can hardly be seen as mutually exclusive, each perspective has its own cultural background that is rooted in and perpetuated by the subjectivity of the viewer and the reality of overlapping systems and lifeworlds (to use Habermas' terminology) within which that subjectivity is continuously moulded. Thus, as an institution SFF impacts on social consciousness through its "branding" – its assertion of anti-capitalism in its locality through the spread of its publicity materials, and on transnational and global levels through social media. However, the festival's struggle to retain its identity has taken place in an environment of on-going spatial privatisation and funding cuts.



Fig 17: Oliver Stone and Yannis Varoufakis at Subversive 2013

Spatial Redeployment and Festival Funding

The transition from socialist to post-socialist cities in the Balkan region has heralded the privatisation of huge amounts of public space (Stanilov, 2007). Although socialist cities upheld a strong dispersal of public space throughout the urban fabric, they impeded the use of space as a market, “curbing private entrepreneurship and limiting commercial activities to a few state-run retail centres [which] drained from the socialist city the energy that has been invigorating urban spaces since the early days of Western civilisation” (Stanilov, 2007: 270). However, in the neoliberal post-socialist city, potential responses to questions of urban planning and management have been eclipsed by a single incentive to privatise. This has taken place through the restitution of urban properties and the selling-off of municipal assets. The sell-off of public spaces like community halls is particularly significant for the types of film festival examined in this research, which rely more heavily on mutual co-operation and political-cultural solidarity than financial transactions. Usually, if community halls seek a financial return on events it is directed towards the upkeep of the space and “breaking even” is considered a success. This allows them to be more open to non-profit projects. Private venues, on the other hand, are usually businesses looking to generate a profit, and are therefore not inclined to host less commercially viable films or events. Sweeping privatisations of public space, such as those carried out in Croatia, can be seen as constituting a form of market-based censorship that is highly

intangible because the market both sustains an appearance of cultural diversity (particularly as audiences continue to fragment) and acts as a filter for projects that, rather than seeking a financial return, yield more socialised benefits such as collective health and well-being. Co-operation between Subversive Festival and Cinema Europa points to a model of urban regeneration that counterweights the increasingly hegemonic creative cities discourse. As noted, the implementation of this model faces a number of barriers within Balkan countries, namely “the lack of Florida’s “3T’s” in specific localities” and “the generally unfavourable position of transitional markets within the global economy”. (Petrić, Tomić-Koludrović, 2005: 148). Croatia’s location at the EU periphery, as well as the fact that it is running an economic deficit, means that cities like Zagreb will find it exceedingly difficult to foster a local economy because of the constant inflow of goods and services from other nations, not to mention the effects of “brain drain” as cultural producers migrate to core EU nations. The creative industries model may be contrasted with the Central European idea of the Kulturstadt (city of culture), a term which carries its own set of problems.

On the one hand it points to the social democratic notion of a city with a rich and cultural life accessible to all citizens. On the other hand...in the hands of cultural conservatives situated on the political right [as exemplified in the current Croatian government] it can carry more sinister connotations, contrasting cities and nations rich in the products of high culture with those that are allegedly kulturlos (uncultured, lacking in culture) (Petrić, Tomić-Koludrović, 2005: 146).

Neither model can be applied without “fine-tuning” based on the socio-cultural and geographical requirements of localities. However, this is not what is taking place in Zagreb¹⁵. Although “one should be wary of suggesting a “universal” model that could help plan cultural development across the [Balkan] region...empirical evidence from the recent past seems to suggest that the “enterprise culture”-led models have had a disastrous effect on the cultural life of the communities in which they were applied” (Petrić, Tomić-Koludrović, 2005: 151). Thus a more balanced approach is required – one in which grassroots organisations play a central role in policy formation. According to Branko Cavrić and Zorica Nedovic-Budić “the future liveability of Zagreb and its neighbourhoods will depend in large part on the activities of such groups” (Cavrić, Nedovic-Budić, 2007: 402). The situation presents a range of opportunities for partnerships between civic and public groups, as represented by state support for Subversive Festival. However, “authoritarian segments of the city

¹⁵ The European Commission’s recent construction of the “House of Europe” building, a 1,800 sqm office just off the central square, plants an aesthetic of bland and imposing 21st century utilitarianism among the neo-Gothic architecture of the area, while posters bearing the phrase “Kultura means business” have been placed on various surfaces.

government are fearful of challenges posed by NGO's and the actions of community groups organised at the grassroots level in individual self-governing quarters" (ibid). The majority of Subversive Festival's funding comes from the Croatian ministry of culture. Over the years this has gradually been revoked and the question of funding has become more complex. The consequence of HDZ scraping together a coalition government in 2015 has been a more drastic reduction in Subversive Festival's public funding.

In early January 2016, the incoming culture minister, Zlatan Hasanbegović, immediately dissolved the Commission for Non-Profit Media and revoked all public funds for the sector¹⁶. As well as revoking funds for non-profit media, he re-directed funds away from leftist media. In an August 2016 report for the International Press Institute, for example, the author notes that

Within the context of the media, journalists and civil society groups describe an atmosphere in which certain politicians, including prominent members of the HDZ-Most coalition, have deliberately fostered mistrust in critical media, regulatory bodies and human rights defenders so as to undercut the credibility of these institutions... HDZ figures have expressed a desire to "get rid" of "leftist" media [and]...the delegation was able to witness these mechanisms of undercutting institutions first-hand...In April [2016] Nils Muižnieks, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, issued a statement containing strong warnings on freedom of expression and media freedom in Croatia (as well as on social cohesion and pluralism, ethnic intolerance, hate speech and impunity for human rights violations) (IPI, 2016: 5).

Subversive Festival's publication *Up&Underground*, for example, had its annual budget cut from around £1800 to £500. As well as this, budget cuts to the festival itself meant that for the 2016 edition organisers were forced to scale down the festival. However, since the formation of a new HDZ government in October 2016, and under the watch of an EU commission that had voiced concerns over press freedoms in Croatia, Hasanbegović has been replaced as culture minister by Nina Obuljen Koržinek, a former political scientist at the University of Zagreb who has also worked on the Council of Europe and the European Culture Foundation. Although there have been indications that she will reverse her predecessors cuts to non-profit media through funding from the European Social Fund, according to Pokrajac

¹⁶ As a former member of the fascist Croatian Liberation Movement, Hasanbegović has extolled the virtues of the Ustashe (Croatia's version of the Nazis) and attempted to revise history in a way that downplays the country's anti-fascist legacy (IPI, 2016).

There is a very big debate going on now about her policies and stance towards Croatian film industry and film festivals...Regarding Subversive concretely she's not a fan to say the least, and we got an even smaller [amount of] financial support for the programme than from the previous minister. She is perceived as more moderate by the public, and both left and right-oriented cultural workers and politicians. You can say she has a very EU bureaucratic vision of culture and cultural policy that definitely follows the neoliberal strand (as opposed to the former minister who was your typical cultural nationalist) (Pokrajac, 2017).

Compounding the precarity of Subversive's funding is a range of theoretical and moral questions about private sponsorship. While film festivals the world over draw a large share of their funding from private sponsors and advertising revenue, the politics of Subversive put it at odds with the ideology of corporate globalisation, not to mention the actions and practices of many multinational corporations. In this context, it could be (and has been) argued that Subversive's utilisation of such funding sources is hypocritical. As Pokrajac explains, however

On-going reductions in public funds means that the tendency to "go private" is insidiously becoming prevalent...This, however, doesn't imply sacrificing our subversive content...It's a question of how you negotiate, and which of your conditions are non-negotiable...Subversive Festival has been criticised by certain people on the left who resent the use of standard channels of promotion and financing...There has been controversy among the public as well as the organising team about how to be subversive if you are sponsored by a big telecommunications company like T-com, which sponsored Subversive for three years. However, over the years the artistic and theoretical content of the festival has never been compromised...The reality is that we are living in capitalism and we can't bypass it and pretend it's not there. The only subversion possible is to use the contradictions inherent in the system against itself (Pokrajac, 2015).

This is a rebuttal to a common criticism levelled at the festival from both left and right wing positions. What Pokrajac points out here is the need to recognise the context in which the festival operates – wherein private sponsorship is becoming less a choice than the only option available. Cultural producers and activists levelling accusations of hypocrisy at Subversive, as both a criticism (from the left) and a way of upholding the morality of private over public finance (from the right), must therefore recognise that they are not so much putting forward *arguments* as they are positions that are simply more amenable to neoliberal modernity and its rigid discursive frameworks, while the festival seeks to *subvert* these. That this particular debate is limited to Subversive's "co-operation" with the corporate sector, apparently overlooking its willingness to receive public funds

from a government with a neoliberal, conservative come ultra-right political ideology, it is mainly due to the predilections of the anti-globalisation movement that began in the early 2000's.

For its 2016 edition Subversive launched a crowd funding appeal, raising Just under \$6500 of their \$9000 goal, mostly in small, regional donations. Corresponding with this was the theme for that year- "the politics of friendship". As well as placing an emphasis on solidarity in the hope of eliciting donations, the festival focussed on the fragmentation of Europe and its handling of refugees coming From Libya, Iraq and Syria. As Devčić explains

The European Union is currently faced with challenges to both its credibility and sustainability through the way it confronts the waves of migrants from areas stricken by religious and civil wars...It is also facing the structural consequences of the neoliberal axiomatics of power in our global economy, which have led entire continents (such as Africa) towards disintegration in every conceivable respect...we wanted to negate the prevailing nihilism and try to be constructive by shifting the focus onto that which unites us, instead of that which separates us...we wanted to stress this joint thirst for new solutions and attitudes and bring the need for critical but receptive dialogue to the fore (Devčić, 2016).

The festival's "multicultural idea of Europe" is one built around "defence of the commons, workers solidarity...a heterodox economy, and the possibility and desirability of translation between cultures" (*ibid*). In many ways this is anathema to the Europe currently being created by governments whose response to the refugee crisis has been to argue about how to avoid taking them. In a desire to placate increasingly loud, belligerent and extreme elements within the political spectrum (such as UKIP in the UK, and the Front Nationale in France), the so-called "centre-ground" has adopted a rhetoric of anti-immigration that, along with austerity induced poverty, provides ample ground for forms of racism and nationalism to re-emerge in the political mainstream. In Croatia, according to Devčić, a part major of this project is the "revision" of history.

The past is being instrumentalised by the right-wing in order to change the future of Croatia and other former Yugoslav countries, which they want to see clericalised, isolated and in a constant state of feud. This attempt of course requires the total destruction of an antifascist legacy that is intertwined...with modernisation, secular society and co-operation among ex-Yugoslav nations. Given the deep economic and moral crises in which we find ourselves, the latent tensions between ecological and social demands have also emerged, harming the potential alliance of green and red initiatives on the left that can counter the fascistisation of our society (Devčić, 2016).

Conclusion

A critical engagement with SFF has to begin with its overarching philosophy. Amos Vogel's undoubtedly well intentioned fostering of political consciousness through transgressions of film form have been taken up by the festival, and its organisers feel passionately about the particular mode of practices that this entails. Given the political landscape of Croatia, and specifically the desire among both the domestic right and (to a lesser extent) the European neoliberals) to play down the anti-fascist legacy of the country, the festival has played a significant role in countering powerful discourses in an embattled cultural landscape. The assertion of anti-capitalist politics and left-wing film culture in such a context is of great importance in itself, and the orientations of SFF towards global as opposed to local politics is understandable. Nevertheless, this orientation belies a critical engagement between the festival and its local surroundings. This neglect can be seen in the programming choices of the festival, and its appeal to an audience of predominantly left-wing cultural intelligentsia and students. Changes to the structure of the festival have also engendered a number of tensions between SFF's practices and its apparent anti-capitalist politics. The addition of the conference strand in 2010 has strengthened the global orientations of the festival, while at the same time creating a divergence between cineastes and activists. If the film festival is to continue its attempts to use film as a means of education and the raising of political consciousness, this gap should be closed, perhaps through merging the conference and film festival, rather than structuring them in a linear fashion. This would necessitate (rather than simply allow) the confluence of audiences, and strengthen the status of SFF as an activist film festival as opposed to a film festival followed by activism. The festival is faced, then, with a paradoxical situation. On the one hand it aims to reach out across Europe in order to counter the rise of the far right. On the other hand, the festival apparently lacks the desire to engage with a local population among whom right-wing sympathies may pervade, and which are exacerbated by the neoliberal policies the festival claims to resist. Thus the globally abstracted outlook of the festival may well strengthen theoretical arguments against their political opponents, while "on the ground" there is little being done to reconcile the socio-cultural divisions of a city whose potential is well demonstrated in recent protest movements. With that said, SFF's main area of concern in respect of reconciliation seems to be the fostering of alliances between red and green movements on a transnational level.

Such alliances will be extremely difficult to foster, given the fact that Croatia's political landscape is dominated by the firm, but by no means ideologically coherent, alliance between Christian nationalism and European neoliberalism. Moreover, with the rise of right-wing populism in Europe many nationalist parties are beginning to adopt anti-austerity positions in a bid for mass appeal, thus appropriating one of the most poignant arguments of the so-called radical left. Meanwhile, EU

policies continue to be dominated by a commitment to austerity, and the union is facing an existential legitimacy crisis. Organisers of SFF work within these frameworks, seeking to exploit areas where socialist and environmental aims come into contact with those of more powerful institutions. As well as this, the festival can draw from a well of support among both the arts and activist scenes in Zagreb. It is also strengthened through multiple partnerships, most of which arise from the relations between organisers and various university departments. The festival's partnership with the Cinema Europa points toward a model of city planning that differs from that of the so-called creative industries. It is in these relations that the festival may have some bearing on the creation of the local environment, insofar as partnerships among cultural institutions may be capable of using their leverage to influence policy directives at the national level.

Conclusion

The primary aim of this research has been to investigate counter-hegemonic forms of spatial and cultural reproduction, as enacted by anti-neoliberal film festivals in the contemporary neoliberal city. Within this effort, however, lies an attempt to avoid simply reproducing a critique of neoliberalism and the so-called “politics and the antis”, and to instead offer a positive critique of these festivals that accounts for the limitations they face in terms of colonisation and uneven geographical development. These two theoretical cornerstones have enabled the object of study to be viewed in relation to the dynamic and subsuming capacities of neoliberalism, such as its ability to neutralise the potentially damaging effects of “social change” and “activism” through mechanisms such as commodification, consumerism, and an emergent “identity politics” that is both amenable to and resultant of these mechanisms. Thus, while the festivals analysed herein can be seen as both constitutive of and resistant to neoliberalism, any capacity they have toward the former as opposed to the latter can be seen in an analysis of their intentions relative to their deliberative outcomes and effects. In this respect they are not without a raft of faults and contradictions the type of which often beleaguer activist groups that operate between an idealistic vision and a pragmatic reality, that is, between the possible and the realistically achievable, as imparted through their positioning within the urban environment.

The film festivals analysed in this research constitute just one specific form in which an urban struggle against neoliberalism is implemented, often with diffuse and frustratingly immeasurable consequences and effects. Their working valuations of reality are tempered by relationships with multiple individuals and organisations, and while these rarely affect the idealistic aims of the festivals, they often shape their capabilities. Perhaps the starkest example of this can be seen in Subversive Film Festival’s dependency on public funds in a Croatian political and ideological context that is becoming less tolerant of anti-capitalist rhetoric emanating from the radical left. As has been shown, pragmatic ways around this problem have led to the festival seeking funds from national governments and some corporations, highlighting a contradiction between anti-capitalist rhetoric and actual practice. This case throws up the idea that the more a festival engages with these larger institutionalised structures, the greater its tendency and requirement to sacrifice idealism for pragmatic solutions. One way around this problem is demonstrated in the Liverpool Radical Film Festival’s negation of, for example, large funding bodies, which are seen to detrimentally effect the social relations on which the festival functions. Yet in doing this the festival cuts itself off from a financial resource with which to potentially expand its reach and audience. Here the important point is that different solutions produce their own sets of subsequent practical as well as ideological

problems. The incomplete task of this research has been to develop an understanding of the ways in which anti-neoliberal film festivals engage their relative limitations in different local contexts.

This has required a theoretical framework that accounts for politics and political economy in its local and global dimensions. Since neoliberalism (not to speak of capitalism as such) involves the expansion of capital into all spheres of life and what Harvey (1985) has called the “urbanisation of consciousness”, colonisation can be seen as moving incrementally across localities and throughout public spheres (Habermas, 1984). Yet the global aspects of colonisation are best viewed through the fluctuations of uneven geographical development, which describes how and why capital moves across the world. The point of outlining this framework in chapter one has been to stress the need for an understanding of neoliberalism as a local and global state of affairs, and to offer a critique of recent uses of the terms such as “activism” and “social change” that fail to account for the dynamic nature of neoliberalism and therefore the possibility that these are not necessarily good things in and of themselves. This seems to have been the assumption of much of the existing scholarship around film festivals and activism, which is astounding given due consideration of neoliberalism over the past forty years (specifically, as Gaines notes, its decoupling of social change from revolution), not to mention the history of film festivals as nodes in networks of geo-political influence usually operating in the service of nation states and capital. The confluences between film festivals and activism therefore require a much deeper interrogation that involves bringing in questions about the spatial, temporal and ideological command of neoliberalism. This research has made some contribution to opening up this line of enquiry, since it appears that previous film festival scholarship has been unable to view its object of study as a means of displacing what Mark Fisher (2008) has called “capitalist realism”- the inability of subjects, organisations and societies to imagine a world beyond capitalism.

To this end, the methodological approach adopted by this research has aimed to narrow the gap between mixed methods and political economy. This has been achieved in part through a dismissal of the “objective” position of the researcher and, conducive with this, an attempt to maintain a critical perspective on organisations whose politics I am, for the most part, in agreement with. The structure and methodological approach has been in alignment with the theoretical framework, and facilitated case by case analyses that outline the forms of spatial and cultural reproduction of each festival and question their efficacy in terms of resistance to neoliberalism. Each of the case studies warrants further research, and this should primarily take the form of a long-scale ethnographic study wherein the researcher engages in the type of “deep hanging out” that permits a more thorough explication of its habitus and that of its organisers. In this respect, time and financial constraints

have limited the scope of the present research, which has focussed primarily on the intentions and motivations of festival organisers, which have been drawn out through interviews and archival research.

In essence the research has, on one hand, tried to paint a picture of how each festival reproduces space in its locality, while, on the other, attempting to step back and look at how film festivals can be mapped onto neoliberal modernity in a transnational and global sense. The film festivals analysed in this research are not the only ones who aim to facilitate anti-neoliberal discourses and intentions. This research has consciously overlooked the global south, and, less importantly, negated the overbearing pressure within contemporary film and media studies to discuss “digital media” for the sake of discussing the physical as opposed to online aspects of film festivals and their forms of spatial and cultural reproduction. Further research may seek to pull together the disparate array of similarly oriented film festival, perhaps by way of mapping an “alternative” film festival circuit. This might also entail the development of a film festival typology, so as to establish some framework through which festivals on this circuit could be categorised and discussed in a coherent manner. A significant platform and resource for beginning this type of research would be the Radical Film Network, which has emerged out of the Bristol Radical Film Festival, and now comprises a range of producers, distributors and exhibitors of left-wing film culture across the world. While the present research has focussed mainly on individual case studies, it is hoped that in analysing them in relation to globalised systems such as neoliberalism, there can be found both difference and commonality, the latter of which will be crucial to moving beyond the infinitely pluralistic micro-politics that has developed in tandem with neoliberalism’s ascendancy.

For example, the Workers Unite Film Festival uses film screenings to attempt a reconciliation between a traditionally white, conservative and suburban based union membership, with more culturally liberal and marginalised social groups. It does this through foregrounding concepts of solidarity and “the collective” that move beyond, for example, racial distinctions, and have been treated with suspicion if not outright contempt in the history of unions and US society more generally (Yates, 2009). As well as cinemas, the festival utilises spaces such as bars, union halls and housing co-operatives to counter powerful and deeply entrenched anti-union and anti-labour narratives, thereby attempting to construct its own worker based counter-public sphere. The issue of using film festivals as sites of reconciliation of different, sometimes culturally and politically opposed, audiences, should be of interest to any activist or academic who is seriously concerned with countering the “divide and rule” functions of racism, sexism and classism that remain prominent among populations in the neoliberal era. There is also scope for continued research on

the relations between film, film festivals and New York's FIRE nexus, as well as the dissemination of cultural funds within the city. As we have seen, the election of Donald Trump poses a particular threat to organisations like WUFF, with the possible revocation of its 501(c) charity status and its ability to raise funds. Here a concentrated research effort on the Trump administration's position with respect to local and community based organisations would be very useful, especially given his rhetorical appeals to working class voters. That WUFF has had a degree of success in using film making as a tool through which union members (in this particular instance plumbers) have been able to reflect on why they voted for Trump, and to see past that rhetoric, is an example of the kinds of change the festival has brought about. The present research has only touched upon the issue of film making workshops at anti-neoliberal film festivals. More work needs to be done here, perhaps with a view to complimenting earlier research on counter-public media spheres that emerged in the wake of internet 2.0 and the rise and dissipation of organisations such as Indymedia.

The questions of a film festival's organisational structure comes into play when considering the difference between WUFF, with its division of labour and hierarchical makeup, and LRFF, with its decentralised and seemingly "chaotic" way of organising. A big part of this revolves around the question of how to obtain funding, but the fact that LRFF consciously turns away from large funding bodies so as to avoid the more rigid working structures of an "official" company, has the knock-on effect of imbuing a form of social relation among organisers that is more akin to a group of autonomous, mutually supportive individuals than a charity and/or company with a staff. While the efficacy of this structure is arguable, it clearly demonstrates the possibility for a film festival to run events without having to engage with funding structures and institutions on which it may become reliant. Thus what some might see as a form of precarity in the festivals lack of funding is actually considered a strength by organisers. What the two festivals share is an incentive to take films to their audiences- that is, to various cultural and community spaces- as opposed to remaining in a single venue. A large part of this is to attempt some alleviation of the socially stratifying tendencies of contemporary urban life, especially those which bar people at the lower end of the socio-economic strata from cultural centres. It is also an attempt to bypass the "culture industry" of stupefying mass media which discourages political engagement, if not actively, then by omission of important issues that affect people's lives. The purpose of these festivals, then, is to correct that omission, and this research hopes to have documented some of their successes and failures in that endeavour. While this study has purposefully disengaged from questions of audiences and reception for the sake of gaining an insight into the operations of the festivals as such, a continuation of the research could involve interviewing audience members in order to understand their reasons for attending them. LRFF's open ended organisational structure- wherein members of the public are

free to get involved at any point- also brings up questions of the ways in which audiences participate in film cultures as active and/or passive. In this way film festivals provide an avenue through which people can become more involved in politics and the arts, while also dispelling myths around cultural “gatekeepers”.

Such research could also look more closely at the issue of diverging audiences that is evident at the Subversive Festival, wherein the rigid separation of a conference strand from the film festival has led to a perceived separation between activists and film audiences. The central issue here is the confluence between radical politics and film culture. Ideally speaking the two should go hand in hand. Yet as the case study on SFF noted, given recent changes to SFF’s practices- such as the introduction of prizes- as well as some of its recent programming choices, it is perhaps unsurprising that this divergence is taking place. With that said, and in due consideration of the attack being placed on the festival, such changes appear to be a matter of pragmatism. That is, an attempt to legitimise SFF as a “proper” film festival so as to avoid further cuts to its budget. The question then arises as to how far radical politics could or should bend to its antagonists before it becomes just another trophy on the mantle of neoliberal colonisation. Further research in this area may seek to combine questions of diverging or fragmenting audiences with issues of how capital organises space in a way that is both fragmentary and homogenising under the laws of exchange value. This would be central to an understanding of how neoliberalism both provides and absorbs seemingly distinct spaces, identities, film cultures and forms of activism.

What Adorno and Horkheimer called the “excision of the incommensurable”- broadly speaking, the eradication of that which cannot be subsumed by the market- can be witnessed day-by-day in the privatisation of public space, the commodification of protest, the revocation of public funding for the arts, and the incremental, often tedious and dispiriting ways in which organisations are made to conform or die. This function of capital should be one of the baselines of future research on film festivals, and it would be helpful for researchers to maintain an awareness not just of particular issues such as audiences, labour, specific festivals, activism, and identity (to name but a few recent approaches within film festival studies) but of the underlying principles of capital and commodity exchange that ultimately govern space in the neoliberal era, particularly within urban centres. If issues such as these are being effaced from urban life, a function of the film festivals discussed in this research has been to provide spaces in which they are brought back into the socio-political imaginary. As we have seen, the size and difficulty of this task should not be downplayed. Nor, I hope to have shown, should the educational and community-building potential of film festivals,

acting as forms of local assembly, and organised by people with a genuine intent to use film as a political tool, and a means of counter-hegemonic struggle.

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Filmography

Title	Filmmaker	Country	Year
<i>Hell Unltd</i>	Norman McLaren	UK	1936
<i>The Music Room</i>	Satyajit Ray	India	1958
<i>On the Passage of a Few Persons Through a Rather Brief Unity of Time</i>	Guy Debord	France	1959
<i>Borom Sarret</i>	Ousmane Sembene	Senegal	1963
<i>Far From Vietnam</i>	Chris Marker, Agnes Varda, Claude Lelouche, Jean Luc Goddard, William Klein, Joris Ivens	France/USA	1967
<i>Black Panthers</i>	Agnes Varda	France/USA	1968
<i>Plastic Jesus</i>	Lazar Stojanovic	Yugoslavia	1971
<i>Society of the Spectacle</i>	Guy Debord	France	1973
<i>Harvest: 3000 Years</i>	Haile Gerima	Ethiopia	1976
<i>The Year of the Beaver</i>	Dave Fox, Steve Sprung	UK	1985
<i>Dilapidated Dwelling</i>	Patrick Kieller	UK	2000
<i>The End of the Line</i>	Robert Murray	USA	2009
<i>Special Flight</i>	Fernand Melgar	Switzerland	2011
<i>Hill of Shame</i>	Antonino Maggioro	Italy	2011
<i>Just a Child</i>	Mohammad al-Azza	Palestine	2012

<i>Everyday Nakba</i>	Mohammad al-Azza	Palestine	2012
<i>On the Art of War</i>	Luca Bellino, Silvia Luzi	Italy	2012
<i>Udita/Rise</i>	Richard York, Hannah Majid	UK	2013
<i>The Film That Buys the Cinema</i>	Various film makers	UK	2013
<i>The Silent Revolution</i>	Oriol Garcia, David Meseguer	Syria/Spain	2013
<i>Solidarity</i>	Dustin Brown	USA	2013
<i>Married to the Swiss Franc</i>	Arsen Oromovic	Croatia	2013
<i>Concerning Violence</i>	Goran Olsson	Sweden/Finland/Denmark/USA	2014
<i>99 Homes</i>	Ramin Bahrani	USA	2014
<i>On Shaky Ground</i>	Sonja Tarokic	Croatia	2014
<i>Reykjavik Rising: Iceland's Untold Uprising</i>	Danny Mitchell, Rose Weber	UK/Iceland	2014
<i>Cosmos</i>	Andrezej Żuławski	France/Portugal	2015
<i>The Price of Justice</i>	COD-Luna (Centre for Responsible Justice)	Croatia	2015
<i>The Big Short</i>	Adam McKay	USA	2015
<i>Detroit, Dog City</i>	Candace Barbot	USA	2015
<i>Sleaford Mods: Invisible Britain</i>	Paul Sng, Nathan Hannawin	UK	2015
<i>Money Puzzles</i>	Michael Chanan, Lee Salter	UK	2016
<i>The Coal Minority</i>	Helen Butcher	USA	2016
<i>City of Joy</i>	Madeleine Gavin	USA/Congo	2016

<i>Bullies</i>	Corporate Campaign Inc	USA	2016
<i>Woman on Fire</i>	Julie Sokolow	USA	2016
<i>Ludlow: Greek Americans in the Colorado Coal War</i>	Leonidas Vadaros	Greece/USA	2016
<i>American Socialist: The Life and Times of Eugene V. Debs</i>	Yale Strom	USA	2016
<i>Sunflowers of Nicaragua</i>	Florence Jaguey	Nicaragua	2017

Appendix: Questions

Andrew Tilson: Workers Unite Film Festival

- 1) When/why did the festival begin, and how has it developed over the years?
- 2) How do you plan your events?
- 3) Who do you collaborate with?
- 4) What role, if any, do you think the festival might play in anti-gentrification struggles?
- 5) Does the festival play any role in facilitating access to the city, particularly among working class and minority audiences?
- 6) How is the festival funded?
- 7) What is the make-up of the festival team? Paid workers? Full time/part time?
- 8) What concerns do you have about the future of the festival given the new Trump administration? Will there be a further reduction in arts funding?
- 9) Could you explain the difficulty of getting unions to help fund the festival?
- 10) What are the differences between WUFF and a human rights festival?

Hayley Trowbridge: Liverpool Radical Film Festival

- 1) How did you get involved with the festival, and what is your current role?
- 2) What kind of work do you do outside of the festival?
- 3) What would you say are the politics of LRFF?
- 4) How are these politics reflected in the structure/organisation of the festival?
- 5) Who does the festival collaborate with?

Darren Guy: Liverpool Radical Film Festival

- 1) How did you get involved with the festival?
- 2) What sorts of spaces did you initially screen in?
- 3) What is/was the difference between the City of Culture and the City of Radicals?
- 4) What is the idea behind LRFF? What is its point? What do you hope to achieve?
- 5) What do you think LRFF audiences get out of the screenings?
- 6) Do you think the festival needs to try harder to push out of the boundaries of the city centre and into neighbourhoods?
- 7) Have there been any outcomes from the events that you've done?
- 8) What are the politics of the festival?

- 9) What is the organisational process of the festival? Are there any advantage or disadvantages?
- 10) Do you think the festival is sustainable?

Grace Harrison: Liverpool Radical Film Festival

- 1) How did you get involved with the festival?
- 2) Why do you think it's important to screen avant-garde and art-house films? How does this tie in with the idea of a "radical" film festival?
- 3) What has been your favourite event/edition of the festival? Why?

Nikola Devčić: Subversive Film Festival

- 1) Who are you? What is your background in politics and film?
- 2) How did the first Subversive Festival come about? What was your original inspiration/motivation?
- 3) What do you hope to achieve with the festival?
- 4) The 9th Subversive Festival had the theme "the politics of friendship". Why?
- 5) Given the rise of the right-wing in Europe and specifically Croatia, what is the role of the festival? Has this changed at all since 2008?
- 6) Where do you see the festival in 5 years' time?

Dina Pokrajac: Subversive Film Festival

- 1) Who are you? What is your background in film and politics?
- 2) How did you get involved with the Subversive Festival? What is your role?
- 3) How do you decide what films to programme at the festival? Are there some criteria for picking films, and on what basis do you give out the awards?
- 4) How well do think this year's festival went in comparison to previous years (attendance, financially, etc).
- 5) If "Kultura mean Business" how does the festival avoid falling into this neoliberal conception of culture?
- 6) On the festival's website it states that Subversive doesn't work with sponsors, but looking over previous programs I can see that sponsors have included companies like DHL, and, in 2013, Peugeot. Can you please clarify what a sponsor means for Subversive?
- 7) What are your feelings on the new Croatian culture minister?

