

in a world where festivals and films also maintain Web sites for a constant virtual presence, enhancing the specific and localized festival event.

At the same time, these histories and sociologies of festivals insist that film festivals are not just about art cinema or cinema as art. From their very inception, film festival organizers and sponsors courted the glamour of Hollywood and the money of those studios as well as other national producers. More importantly, a well-rounded and nuanced understanding of cinema, both as a medium and a social practice, demands that analysts understand the constant negotiations to define cinema as both art and mass consumption.

While we can separate these themes analytically, we must remember that they constantly intersect in the creation, meaning, and experience of film festivals. Global connections cannot be appreciated without the local contexts, nor national industries without recognition of international canons and aesthetics. Larger questions on the relationships between festivals and their diverse communities as well as on the construction of film knowledge—looking backward at history and forward to new filmmakers—also warrant further considerations. By outlining the diversity that exists within film festivals, I have shown that festivals come in different forms and shapes; some share similar elements, while others set themselves apart by power, specialization, or genre. Nonetheless, through all these events and among almost all their agents, films remain the center. Films as texts are still the talk of the festival professionals as well as larger communities. Hence, as we move ahead, the next two chapters will address festival films and their meanings.

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The Films of the Festivals

While festivals bring together multiple, divergent structures of art, business, politics, spectatorship, and space, their primary building blocks remain simple and constant: films themselves. Films constitute the raison d'être of the festivals, although they are linked in special ways to the filmmaker, who is identified as the primary artist/creator within this world. In fact, festivals have solidified a special relationship between directors and films; within the festival context, it is difficult to separate the films from the auteur. With concerted efforts, auteurs and festivals have developed in a symbiotic relationship embodied by film, mediated by business concerns. New directors create films that festivals discover so that, over time, festivals and these maturing directors can rely on each other for support, recognition, and canonization; this complementarity underpins the reproduction of both film festivals and filmmakers. While each festival presents an array of new works every year mapping the breadth of world cinema, these films come from specific directors, film movements, and national traditions that provide continuity and control of festival exchanges year to year. This chapter addresses the textual elements of festival films, with some reference to the auteurs associated with these works, while the following chapter situates the auteur in the context of other extratextual elements, from reception to formation of a film canon. While "separating" films and filmmakers into two complementary chapters, in fact, I will show how deeply intertwined these building blocks have become in the creation of a global festival world.

In this chapter, I use a few carefully selected films to answer the general question: Are there specific films that fit the label "festival films"? On a pragmatic level, of course, all films shown in film festivals are festival films, solely based on exhibition practices. Thousands of films are screened in hundreds of festivals over the year; they range from the lyrical evocations of *Tropical Malady* (Weerasethakul, 2004, Cannes) to the "reflexive" comedy of *Tropic Thunder* (Stiller, 2008, San Sebastián), embracing the tense and sensual wartime thriller *Lust, Caution* (Lee, 2007, Venice) and the studied tale of mother and son that is *Alexandra* (Sokurov, 2007, Cannes). This array of feature films is stylistically and thematically diverse, and as we have seen, many festivals systematically showcase different kinds of films: shorts, avant-garde, experimental, student/grassroots efforts, documentaries. Moreover, some films screen in competition, some outside, some in retrospectives, and some only at the markets or at auxiliary events.

Despite such diversity, in Peter Wollen's conversation with Brazilian artist and video maker Artur Omar, Omar still posits "a whole new genre of films—the festival film genre," with its own "rules and traditions in order to win prizes at festivals."¹ This reminds me of a more cynical conversation cited by a programmer dealing with videographers from Nigeria's burgeoning Nollywood DVD market who was told, "Just tell us what kinds of films you want for the festival and we will make them." Winning prizes at festivals might be the ultimate goal (for both art and business), but there are few well-known film festivals and not that many prizes or even openings to spread around. For most filmmakers, to be included in a festival and to move into gradually more exclusive festivals and realms of competition is a long-term process that takes place over many films (again, the auteur as career binds films over time).

This elusive quest for such a category of works entails the analysis of textual and formal strategies of festival films that, in turn, reshape film production, festival selection, and film knowledge and valuation. This is also a "genre" in constant flux: as of now, festivals have not been receptive to Nollywood film—sensual melodramas that are very popular in Anglophone Africa and its diaspora, or most popular fares, consumed primarily by the local or regional populations all around the world. Yet festivals have also welcomed some more generic films, like gangster flicks from Hong Kong, even if these are attached to an auteur, like Johnnie To.

At the same time, most films in the world do not screen at festivals. Jonathan Rosenbaum tells us that festival film is "mainly a pejorative term in the film business, especially in North America. It generally refers to a film destined to be seen by professionals, specialists, or cultists but not the general public because some of these professionals decide it won't or can't be sufficiently profitable to warrant distribution." While *Around the World in 80 Days* played at Cannes to coincide with the festival and *Robin Hood* (2010) was screened in Cannes out of competition, these screenings represent different strategies of marketing and meaning for such mainstream films, even if few of this genre would attempt such ploys. Similarly, as Dudley Andrew notes in his foreword to a recent collection on global art cinema:

Every other year FESPACO (Festival du Cinema Panafricain) screens about 100 films from Francophone African countries, both sub-Saharan and Maghrebian, as well as an increasing number of titles from Senegal, Mali, and Burkina Faso whose work is funded in Europe and who expect to be screened on several continents, then distributed on DVD through the Parisian outlet Cine3mondes. Only one Nigerian film, however, has ever been showcased at FESPACO or treated to the chance, despite the fact that Nigeria produces an estimated 1,500 videofilms annually. *Ezra*, which took top prize at that festival in 2007, was, as you might suspect, an exception to Nollywood, financed as it was mainly outside Nigeria (by ARTE), with screenings in Paris and

a brief run in New York. Otherwise Nollywood has been an antiglobal phenomenon of stupendous proportions.

Festival films, therefore, also can be defined by what they are not.²

This chapter cannot survey all films shown at film festivals, much less those not selected. Instead, I have chosen certain kinds of films that represent major trends within dynamic choices of film festival programmers. I focus on feature films both because they receive more attention in the festival and festival press and because they are more likely to be known and accessible to readers who may want to screen them on their own. Oftentimes, shorts represent the most innovative works and newest voices; they are also launching pads for the directors' future feature presentations. Shorts later may be rediscovered in retrospectives as training grounds for established feature film directors, just as Ingmar Bergman's television commercials have been rediscovered for a festival and DVD market. Yet, their general inaccessibility makes them of less interest here as a focus of shared reading and analysis.

Similar issues emerge with regard to animated films, nonfiction, and avant-garde films. Documentaries represent a mainstay of festivals, especially Sundance, and occasionally prove to be competitors and winners on larger stages (e.g., *Fahrenheit 9/11* at Cannes in 2004). Yet more often, they stand apart because of their concrete themes, including those documentaries that deal with the making of feature films or with their auteurs. All these genres also have important independent festivals that celebrate their special characteristics, creators, audience, and funding—Sundance for documentaries and shorts, the international festivals at Clermont-Ferrand and Oberhausen for short films, Annecy for animation, or the Margaret Mead Festival of ethnographic films. Documentaries, ethnographic, and activist nonfiction films also have specific meanings to which I will return in my discussion of the public sphere.

My selection of works privileges films that have been deemed "successful" as well. This means that the films have gained wide circulation, at least in terms of the film festival circuit, and that they have been reviewed and critiqued a great deal. Thus, films and filmmakers become canonical, influential in their own right with regard to future films. This approach favors films shown at top-tier festivals, especially at Cannes, because these showcases remain the measure of success. In many ways, because Cannes constitutes the accepted standard of success in the festival circuit and to some extent the larger art house circuit, the very infrastructure Cannes has built over the years further consolidates the significance of certain films and auteurs who may have been discovered elsewhere and whose works at Cannes are picked up by other festivals. A mutual reinforcement exists among films (and auteurs) at Cannes, wider festival communities, and film studies scholars and audiences to propagate this success. Even so, this does not mean that there is a recipe for "festival success." Often, judgment on how "good" a film

is has as much to do with access, connection, taste, and luck as with essential artistic qualities. In following chapters, I will elucidate the business and cultural processes involved in securing success in the festival circuit and beyond to art houses, limited mainstream distribution, DVD, and video on demand.³

Within this delineation of the festival film by “successful” features, I begin the chapter with an evocation of what festival films are *not* before returning to the relation of festival and mainstream films that permeates this text as a whole. Here, crossover films and filmmakers as well as general questions of genre establish rough boundaries within which I turn to some basic characteristics of festival films: their seriousness/minimalism in vision and sound; their open and demanding narrative structures; their intertextuality (including their use of “stars”); and, finally, their subject matter, including controversy as well as freedom. Having established both limits and a paradigm, I then grapple with another almost contradictory demand of the film festival as a renewable event: the search for novelty, for discovery which challenges but confirms the meaning of festival films. I end with a detailed analysis of one recent festival success, the 2007 Romanian film *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days*, directed by Cristian Mungiu, as a concrete example of all these points.

As I noted, the characteristics of individual films, yearly panoramas, and innovations demand an awareness of the continuity created by auteurs. Auteurs, over time, guarantee the availability of films for the festival and transmute novelty and controversy into a canon, both moving forward and retrospectively. Film festivals also use auteurs to promote themselves; if Locarno boasts that it “discovered” Kiarostami, Rotterdam takes credit for the success of Cristian Mungiu because it funded *4 Months . . .*, even though both directors had had success in local and regional festivals before these European festivals. This chapter uses works by a few select auteurs as anchors, beginning with Robert Bresson (French, 1901–1999) for long-term association with classic festivals. Gus Van Sant (American, b. 1952), Aleksandr Sokurov (Russian, b. 1951), and the Dardenne brothers (Belgian, Jean Pierre b. 1951 and Luc b. 1954) exemplify currently established filmmakers who have screened multiple works in major competitions. Finally, Cristian Mungiu (Romanian, b. 1968), Lucrecia Martel (Argentina, b. 1966), and Apichatpong Weerasethakul (Thai, b. 1970) exemplify emergent global auteurs on the festival circuit. These case studies complement more detailed analyses of the auteur as social/discursive construct in the next chapter, with a particular focus on Michelangelo Antonioni (Italian, 1912–2007) and Abbas Kiarostami (Iranian, b. 1940) and the words and images they have created.

Outside the Mainstream: What Festival Films Are Not

The opening of *Godzilla* at Cannes (1998) certainly earned more media coverage and bigger box office receipts than the lyrical and reflective Palme d’Or prizewinner that year, *Eternity and a Day* by Theo Angelopoulos. Similarly, the screenings

at the Piazza Grande at Locarno always have larger audiences than films in competition for the Golden Leopard—the piazza’s capacity endorses the programmer’s placement of more “accessible” films in this central open urban space, works that merit an audience popularity award. However, in the larger, yet exclusive, festival world, which sees itself as only tangentially related to the mainstream commercial cinema, the defining works that garner the most critical and programming attention are the features in the main competition or select side events (e.g., *Un Certain Regard* or *Directors’ Fortnight* at Cannes), perhaps one hundred out of the thousands of films screened each year. As *Time* reporters Richard and Mary Corliss asserted about Michael Haneke’s Palme-winning film *The White Ribbon* (Cannes, 2009), “This is a pure art film, daunting and demanding, spare and unsparing, making no concession to the prevailing popular taste—except, perhaps, film-festival taste.”⁴

What, by contrast, is a mainstream film? In the weeks after Cannes closed in 2010, for example, multiplex cinemas worldwide were slow to book its oneiric discovery prize-winner, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* by Thai filmmaker Weerasethakul, even though the film proffers magic and monkey ghosts. Instead, mainstream publicity (even more than audiences) focused on *Shrek Forever After*, *Sex in the City 2*, and *Prince of Persia*. These Hollywood products offered clear, undemanding plots, established stars, rich decor, special effects, seemingly predictable audiences, and short titles that audiences and headline writers could wrap themselves around. Two were sequels with highly identifiable characters, one linked as well to a long-running television series; the third was based on a video game. The first had tie-ins at McDonald’s for family audiences driven by children’s demands.⁵ The second purported to connect to boutiques and fashionistas, gay and straight, and its director appeared on Jon Stewart’s *The Daily Show*. *Prince of Persia*, diametrically different from the Iranian films of the festival circuit even in its casting of an American Hollywood star as the hero, offered to an adolescent male mass audience many things that blow up. Whether they succeeded or failed, predictability, ease of understanding, mass intertexts, and high-budget effects were all part of the mainstream cinema that were inimical to the festival film.

Cannes prizewinners may have stars, but they lack complementary products at McDonald’s (Quikburger, Café de Coral). In general, they also lack sequels, unless one really wants to compare *Shrek* 1, 2, 3, and 4 to Antonioni’s *L’avventura*, *La notte*, *L’eclisse* (*The Eclipse*) and *Il deserto rosso* (*Red Desert*). The issue of budget will be treated later; yet, so far, CGI and similar expensive effects have been less common on the festival screen than in the multiplex. Emotions blow up more than buildings. And neat Hollywood endings are far from the enigmatic closures that often spark discussions of festival films after the lights go up.

The role of audience and discussion underscores contrasts between festival films and Hollywood and national film industries, whether the Italian Cinecittà,

Mumbai-based Bollywood, or Lagos's Nollywood. Festival films simply do not try to reach a mass audience. This is an issue of both scale and exclusivity, bound by circularity. That is, because these films do not need (and cannot reach) a mass popular audience, textually these films can choose not to follow the conventions commercial cinema deems necessary within a viable commercial model in specific historical and geographical junctures—from attractive romance to sagas of massive explosions. At the same time, because of these choices, such films do not appeal to mass audiences. Thus, festival films consciously complement mainstream cinema, marking the different possibilities of the medium and their respective distinctiveness vis-à-vis one another.

Festival/art films have a more critical dialectic relationship with Classical Hollywood cinema with regard to "truth." As many scholars have shown, mainstream Hollywood cinema, because of its spatial and temporal coherence, comprehensive narrative structure, signifying practices, and textual conventions, presents a world that does not invite inquiries. It presents a status quo that is natural, acceptable, and logical. Mainstream narrative cinema then becomes the Althusserian ideological state apparatus, or at least embodies the logic of Roland Barthes's "myth on the right," smug and unquestioned.⁶ Alternatives to Hollywood, for over a hundred years, have championed a cinema that is more "unsettling," films that question the formal textual properties, characterization, narrative, and subject matter of the mainstream narrative cinema epitomized by Hollywood. Festivals provide fora where the discourses of filmmakers, critics, and film scholars come to life, from the Italian critics who advocated neorealism for the film magazine *Cinema* in the 1940s, through advocates of auteurs at *Cahiers du cinéma*, to the German directors who signed the 1962 "Oberhausen Manifesto."⁷ Godard's counter-cinema or Lars von Trier's "Dogma 95—The Vow of Chastity" also represent strategies for serious, alternative, "truthful" filmmaking. These directors claim their films are more truthful because they are not dreams manufactured by the "factories." Truth, though, does not mean an unproblematic, transparent representation of what one sees in the world, but a reworking of a world where a truth can come out, often through the manipulation of the artists free of perceived immediate commercial interest.

Nevertheless, not all alternatives to Hollywood are oppositional, even if festival films oftentimes claim this aura. Festival-oriented cinema must appeal to other kinds of audiences: the festival cinephiles, the festival professionals, and the festival critical apparatus. As the previous chapter has suggested, film festivals are more complicated than the earlier version of film societies, but like these cinemas they offer products for viewing and discussion. Steve Neale stresses that art cinema is still a commodity, even though it circulates in a different circle.⁸ Such lack of accessibility to the mass audience itself becomes a claim of prestige for the film festival, producer, director, and audience—a position mainstream films sometimes parody.

Still, distinctions are not so absolute as ideologues might portray them. While festivals pride themselves in differentiation from Classical Hollywood cinema (and other mainstream traditions), they also screen crossover films. Among American productions, for example, *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Magnolia* (1999), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), and *The Wrestler* (2008) all have shared the laurels of the "A"-level festivals, including competition, with the stage at the Golden Globes and the Oscars.⁹ Many of these are American "independent" movies—the ostensible American answer to Hollywood. They are generally lower budget in comparison with regular Hollywood pictures (ranging in budget from \$6 million for *The Wrestler* to \$8 million for *Pulp Fiction* to \$14 million for *Brokeback Mountain* to \$37 million for *Magnolia*). While these works have captured major prizes in festival competitions, they also have major global distribution, including U.S. national distribution beyond the art house circuit and limited DVD distribution. Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain*, for example, which won the Golden Lion in Venice as well as a Golden Globe in the United States, grossed \$178 million worldwide; *The Wrestler*, which also received accolades at Venice, the Golden Globes, and the Academy Awards, earned \$43 million; *Pulp Fiction* earned \$213 million internationally, and *Magnolia*, \$48 million. While these are obviously not blockbusters, they are very profitable films. Despite their alternative qualities, these films are in English and are tied into the massive distribution and promotional network of Hollywood; their financial successes do not simply spring from the films' intrinsic qualities.

Crossover films tend to be offer good conventional narratives. *Pulp Fiction* and *Magnolia* are formally more interesting, with difficult characters, transgressive plotlines, and some play with temporality; *Magnolia* (1999, Berlin), for example, has a complicated plot where seemingly disparate events link together within a twenty-four-hour time frame. Yet, it is also classical in the sense that the movie ties up all the loose ends, providing explanations to the audience to orient them in terms of space and time. All of these movies also have very strong psychologically credible characters; they may be quirky or odd, but they are credible, at least in an intertextual generic sense. For Hollywood (or major American studios and distributors), these are "quality" products, not blockbusters. In fact, as I will continue to argue, they "represent" America well to a festival world conditioned to think of the United States through/in opposition to Hollywood.

These crossover films are also critical of mainstream ideologies, a significant extratextual contribution to their international reception. *M*A*S*H* (1970, Cannes) similarly lacked a tight plot, unfurling as a sequence of episodes that gradually ensconced us in the complexities of a military medical unit in Korea. This film established Robert Altman as an auteur with his use of overlapping sound and dialogue, an anticlassical device. *Apocalypse Now* responded to the Vietnam War, while Ang Lee's film reread an essentially American genre, the western, through gay men, an attractive entry for the festival with its reinterpretation of a genre

and gender. *Pulp Fiction* (1994, Cannes) self-consciously twisted genre movies and popular culture icons, a refreshing entry for the 1990s. But many of its actors returned comfortably to Hollywood products thereafter, their reputations enhanced. *The Wrestler* is not formally innovative; however, its subject matter—aging people at the margins of urban life—fits the demand of seriousness for festivals.

These films also have stars. Hollywood stars are ipso facto international stars because of Hollywood's distribution muscle, yet they, too, can alter their images through independent films. Robert Altman's *Prairie Home Companion* (2006, Berlin) offered Meryl Streep and Lindsey Lohan; Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (2009, Cannes) had Brad Pitt and Cannes/Oscar winner Christoph Waltz; and Steven Soderbergh's *Che* (2008, Cannes) won an acting award for Benicio del Toro. The list goes on and on, which in many ways suggests that U.S. entries to these "A" festivals are set apart from movies from the rest of the world for their ability to straddle both the more mainstream serious cinema arena and the more exclusive art film circuit.

Mainstream values are not solely the purview of Hollywood, however. One should not forget the Palme d'Or winner of 1963, Luchino Visconti's *Leopard* (*Il gattopardo*). This, too, was a lavish period court drama, co-financed by Fox, which insisted that a "star" be used for the role of Prince Salina. Fox and Titanus, the Italian production company, recruited Burt Lancaster, without Visconti's consent, although this turned out to be a memorable collaboration. *The Leopard*, too, is a linear narrative, with a sweeping story: the Risorgimento, nobility, rebellion. It has big sets—the forty-plus-minute ballroom scene—and major stars—Lancaster, Alain Delon, and Claudia Cardinale. The version that was screened at Cannes ran 205 minutes in Italian, yet the English version released by Fox was cut to 106 minutes, for which Visconti claimed "no paternity."¹⁰ This is obviously an interesting interplay between a festival film and its mass release version.

Looking at these few films, we see that festivals are not averse to fairly conventional narrative cinema and definitely welcome stars who will show up at post-screening events. These crossover films come closer to the Oscars' use of "quality" to describe winning works, but do not necessarily lack formal challenges or twists of gender, language, and outcome associated with festivals. But no one really confused *Brokeback Mountain* and *Shrek*, either, even if they might overlap on public relations junkets or billboards. And the publicity campaigns and mass media readings of such works emphasize this divergence, as do the ratings that construct audiences within the mainstream: festival films can be NC-17 or R, not necessarily G or PG. Most, if released in the United States theatrically, are not rated.

Festival films, finally, differ from mass Hollywood productions in that they are often works identified with specific directors, and, sometimes, with specific schools, groups, or countries more than genres, stars, or stories. Even the four

crossover films mentioned above are all considered to be products of America auteurs—Quentin Tarantino, Ang Lee, Paul Thomas Anderson, and Darren Aronofsky. If festival films are closer to art (which itself has its complicated logic to commodification) than to a mass market commodity, the long history of Western art demands that the art has a creator, be it a painter, a writer, or in terms of film, a director. This was the position taken by authors at *Cahiers du cinéma* more than half a century ago to be the *politique des auteurs*. Despite André Bazin's disagreement, François Truffaut asserted that Alfred Hitchcock and Howard Hawks were both auteurs who left their signatures in a highly industrialized system. Most festival films' directors, working in a less restrictive environment, would be more self-conscious candidates to become auteurs through film festivals. In smaller, non-studio-produced films, the director, while not autonomous, has more control over her work than their commercial counterparts, but she still is not an "isolated" creator like Michelangelo, Beethoven, or Virginia Woolf. "Sometimes, the distinction of auteur and non-auteur is subtle and grasped only in the viewing," as Liz Wrenn, of the British distributor Electric Pictures, suggests: "A film by Wong Kar Wai, say, you know it's immediately by him; or Jaco van Dormael's 'The Eighth Day,' it's clear it's by the maker of 'Toto the Hero.' But, fine director though he is, you couldn't identify, for example, a film by Michael Winterbottom if you chopped the credits off."¹¹

At the same time, the creators of many of these festival films have shared a formation and a subjectivity itself informed by the film festival world. They themselves have become imbued with the discourse of auteur. They are aware of intertextualities in form, allusion, and meanings that are heightened in the intense discourse of the festival, where films are often "about" or at least speaking to other films. Intertextuality, of course, informs production as well as reception, and it extends beyond the auteur to "schools of cinema": *Life and Nothing More* is not only a Kiarostami film, but also an Iranian film and a festival film. This self-conscious awareness of intertextuality as a textual strategy underpins and legitimates the search for family resemblances among festival films.

Festival films often are identified with art cinema. Yet, are festival films and art cinema interchangeable terms? David Bordwell's classic 1979 article defined European art cinema as an alternative to Hollywood cinema in its handling of "realism, authorship, ambiguity," which speaks to festival films as well.¹² Both art and festival films share difficulty and academic respect and a sense of critical interest that situates them in the film canon, from cineclubs to universities. Steve Neale, furthermore, has traced the development of art cinema in Europe and states squarely that international film festivals uphold art cinema's "status as 'Art.'" This status is then reproduced and regenerated "through the existence of prizes and awards."¹³

Yet, we may also be cautious here with regard to nuances. It is also important to recognize smaller, less immediately obvious distinctions between feature

festival films and avant-garde/art/experimental films. The latter screen predominantly in museums or galleries, and few museum films and video pieces face limitations on running time. They are also juxtaposed to other kinds of installations and works of art in these settings that establish new connections but alter conditions and practices of spectatorship.¹⁴

Another difference between these two art cinemas is their relationship to film as a medium and to its audiences. As Peter Wollen asserted in the 1970s, there are "The Two Avant-Gardes": the first being works that primarily question the medium of film, the other "an avant-garde within the feature film format."¹⁵ While many film festivals have sections on the avant-garde, it remains on the fringe of film festivals, rather than becoming a *pièce de résistance*. Often, these are films that invite study beyond the labored enjoyment of a compelling festival feature. Major festivals offer no golden animal/plant award for the experimental avant-garde.

The distinction may be hazy still within the range of a particular filmmaker: Andrew Pulver of the *Guardian*, for example, commented on Abbas Kiarostami's film *Shirin* (2008), when shown at Venice, writing, "The truth is that Kiarostami's film-making has become more and more pared down over the years, and he has in recent times acted more like an installation artist than a feature film-maker. *Shirin* might be happier sitting on a video monitor in the Pompidou Centre on 24-hour loop."¹⁶ Similarly, Ronnie Scheib at *Variety* described other Kiarostami works as his "mainstream oeuvre"—a stretch of anyone's concept of mainstream. Kiarostami's most recent work, *Certified Copy*, does bring the auteur back to the mainstream of European art cinema at least.

Finally, the difference between museum art films and festival screenings is an issue of institutional function within complementary discursive horizons. Museums build and hold collections and analyze art over time in permanent spaces; visitors to a museum have more control over how they view the selections. Most museum selections are not time-bound, even cinema. Film festivals, even those with permanent homes, do not have their space year-round, nor do they amass permanent collections. Festival audience visits are concentrated; they have been trained and expect to see serious, innovative films, but do not demand recursive examination or multiple intertexts screening alongside them. Even so, this remains a more ambiguous distinction than that dividing mainstream cinema and festival films, to whose defining characteristics we now turn.

Serious Film: Defining the Festival Film

While Rick Altman's image of genrification is valuable as a tool in the analysis of festival films,¹⁷ festival films do not constitute an established genre, even when we include all the questions posted about film genre as evolving processes. Instead, my objective is to look for patterns and to deal with exceptions so as to approximate a set of features, a family of resemblances that have proven to

attract festival programmers at different points in history. This entails textual dispositions and extratextual features that make certain films attractive for those who program festivals. Yet this "category" is constantly evolving due to social and cultural changes, historical and geographical differences, and the lack of any stable institution that arbitrates any specific standard. Moving through this dynamic and ever changing ambience, we can grasp certain tendencies that epitomize festival films before turning to the equally important balance of novelty and change. Here, then, I begin with tone (seriousness).

Tone: Seriousness, Austerity, and Minimalism

One clear hallmark of many festival films is their serious demeanor. This is often embodied by an austerity of sight and sound as well as a sobriety of themes and actions. Pain, death, loss, and questions are the stuff of festival films, even if skewed by a more mainstream auteurist comedy like Woody Allen's *Love and Death* (1975). Laughter and music may provide relief or ambience, but they rarely drive the festival film comedy.

As a corollary, film festivals also tend to avoid big, expensive productions in favor of stark minimalism. Their films are small movies—in budget, in scale, in sets, and in special effects. As I will show in chapter 4, this smallness also allows film festivals to take on a supporting role in production and distribution of these films.

Austerity imbues the motion of the film as well. Shots and camera movements, while often carefully executed, are rarely elaborate. Shots vary, of course, but festival film directors are not shy about using shots that are far away from the subject, and the durations are often long. Handheld roughness may be a mark of immediacy and truth, even if constructed with this meaning in mainstream films as well.

Sets are modest; many festival films are shot on locations that, in turn, comprise everyday homes, offices, or other readily accessible spaces. Set designs can be meticulous, but seldom baroque.¹⁸ Oftentimes, the quotidian is emphasized in festival films: the set is the site where deep human issues arise. These films are crafted without the bells and whistles that characterize the Hollywood blockbuster.

Yet, austerity is not simply absence or denial. Many of these movies demand concerted effort from the audience to actively seek the meaning that texts imply. Often, the filmmakers seem to beckon the audience to work with them to find meaning for themselves. Again, we see a symbiosis between film and audiences of critics and cinephiles who want more than relatively passive engagement for two hours.

The Son (2002, Dardenne), which was nominated for the Palme d'Or and won nine other awards in different festivals, exemplifies many of these points. It is a stark film about relationships bound by a past tragedy that remains an open



Figure 4. The everydayness of *The Son* (*Le fils*) (Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, 2002).

wound. As the film opens, a handheld Steadicam follows the everyday movements of the main character, the bespectacled Olivier, a carpenter. There is no traditional establishing shot, but only multiple medium shots of Olivier, wearing blue overalls, in his workshop, following him through his work and interaction with other workers. Since the camera is handheld, the shots are very fluid. They reveal Olivier's face, different parts of his body, his back, and his movements. This fragmented shooting style carries the whole movie. The audience only discovers that Olivier is some kind of instructor by witnessing him teaching other young men. The workplace set is equally basic with its tools, materials, and workbenches and bare corridors and stairs through which Olivier moves around the building.

The story is spare and elliptical. A woman, whom we later see working at an office in the workshop, asks Olivier if he can take on another young man; the camera lingers on Olivier reading the file, but he says he already has four working for him. The camera follows Olivier, from the back, a bit restless, lighting a cigarette, walking downstairs to look into the office where the woman works. He then gets into his car, goes home, opens canned food, and listens to his phone messages. His home is bare, with nothing on the white walls. The doorbell rings and a woman enters. The two characters obviously know one another although their initial silent interaction is awkward. The audience slowly finds out that she is getting remarried soon, and that she is pregnant. Olivier goes back to his workshop and asks to take on the new apprentice, Francis. He follows him, observes him, and teaches him carpentry. Olivier then goes to the gas station where his ex-wife, the woman who is pregnant, works. He tells her that Francis, the youth

who killed their son, has been released from prison. This moment of revelation—to the audience—is hardly exceptional; all is done in a quiet, controlled, and powerful manner.

The first hour of *The Son* exemplifies minimalist filmmaking. Information about characters and situations are presented to the audience without comments. Obviously the mise-en-scène—handheld camera, camera movements, basic bare sets, and the medium shots—entails choices made by the filmmakers to present Olivier as a character who is not at ease, but is doing what he is supposed to do without knowing why. This kind of observational cinema invites the spectator to explore for himself or herself the fairly mundane lives of an ordinary working man. One can argue that meeting the killer of one's son is dramatic, yet this is presented in such an off-handed way that it does not carry much narrative weight.

The rest of the movie follows Olivier trying to figure out who Francis is and to see if Francis feels any remorse. He finally tells Francis that he is the father of the child Francis killed. This is done through a few spare scenes, on the street, in an interaction where the two try to figure out, literally, the distance between point A and B, and on the final trip in the movie where Olivier takes Francis out to the lumber yard to learn about the different kinds of wood.

This austerity resonates with other festival intertexts: a festival genre builds on references as well as practices. For example, in Robert Bresson's *L'argent* (*Money*), which won the Palme d'Or in 1983, when Yvon is introduced, the audience sees him at work through a sequence of only three shots without his face, showing him disconnecting the hose, putting it back on the truck, opening the door, and walking away to a full shot of him handing the bill for oil to Lucien, the crucial exchange where he receives counterfeit money. This is not a moment of forced drama so much as one whose very unmarked quality makes the film resonate with wider experiences. Later, in the final murder scene, no direct killing is seen on screen—nor is Yvon even visible above the waist, resonating with the early introduction of him. Instead, we see only fragmented images: the ax, the frantic dog, Yvon's movement in entering the house, going upstairs, downstairs, his encountering the woman in her room, his asking her, "Where is the money?" a swing of the ax that knocks down the lamp, and splattering of blood on the wall. The ax drops into the water, which then turns red.

In both films, the audience comes to know the character by observing what he does, not by identifying with him or feeling the way he does. In no part of either of these two movies does Olivier or Yvon invite empathy from the audience. There is never any extreme emotion, even with extreme actions of a mass murderer. Since the audience is never told why characters do what they do, the audience has to look for the information within the careful yet austere presentation of "facts." Images are there not to shock the viewers with graphic violence or overblown emotions. Instead, using few shots, the scenes demand that the

viewer understand what has been presented to her (all meticulously shot, staged, and edited) and to find meanings herself.

Focus: Small Moments, Shots, and Sounds

Works by many of the great festival directors present small moments dissected in detail. In Aleksandr Sokurov's *Mother and Son* (1997), there are few shots. The film presents a son's care for his dying mother in her last days. The movie is an ode to Romantic painting where every shot is long and slow, covering the sparse landscape of the village where the two spend their last moments together. The austerity comes from the painterly landscape, shot with special filters and lenses, the sky, the leaves, and the wind. Though the landscape is distorted, it merges with the characters to form a complete picture that harmonizes the people and their surroundings.

In Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Syndromes and a Century*, by contrast, a film funded by the New Crowned Hope festival in Vienna in celebration of Mozart's 250th anniversary, the austerity is such that very little happens. Weerasethakul saw this film as a meditation on his parents' experiences as doctors, with the first part taking place in a rural hospital and the latter in an urban hospital in a fairly big city. There are no close-ups in the film's 105 minutes. Most of the shots are extremely long; the closest shots are medium shots from the waist up. The shots themselves are also very long, temporally, with static or very controlled slow camera movements. There are recognizable characters, but no forced encounters between audience and characters. This is a demanding movie because the text forces the audience to pay attention to subtle changes in the movie. It is also enigmatic, in that some events seem to happen twice, yet with some variations. The dreamlike tone of this film becomes part of Weerasethakul's auteurist signature.

Austerity extends to sight as well as sound. Sound has always been an important component in cinema. Hollywood blockbusters have "big" sounds that guide and heighten our responses; festival films have quieter sounds. The Dardenne brothers provide no music or background sounds in their films. The sound of rain builds a powerful ambience in Lucrecia Martel's *The Swamp* (*La ciénaga*), while in most Tsai Ming-liang films, the sound is only diegetic. In *The Hole* (1998), for example, the dripping noises become incessant and oppressive throughout the film and assume the power of a character in their own right. Similarly, the wind, the raking of leaves, and the dog barking all play important roles in *Diary of a Country Priest* (Bresson, 1951), creating an environment that explains the characters and their context.

One can also see the intersection between the use of sound and the stylistic hallmarks of an auteur. Antonioni, as pointed out by Peter Brunette, for example, always uses the sound of leaves in the wind. This is both an auteurist signature and a device that again asks the audience to pay attention to a sound that is fairly ordinary. Its meaning can be about nature, commenting on the state of affairs of

the specific scenes, but it also creates spaces for the audience to interpret and reflect upon certain moments of the film or their relations to other scenes.

However, there are exceptions. Emir Kusturica's works, from *When Father Was Away on Business* (1985) to *Underground* (1995), are "big" and "loud." Both have fairly high production values, especially by contemporary Yugoslavian or Croatian standards. Nevertheless, because of his subject matter and control, as well as associations with the turmoil of the late twentieth-century Balkans, Kusturica could be read as a truth teller from a land unlike those of the silences of Belgium, Scandinavia, or spiritual France.

Open Narratives

Festival films often confront classical ideas about narrative, whether in connections, temporality, order, or outcome. As Richard Maltby describes narrative in cinema, "every picture . . . needs a story to be constructed around it, to place it in a temporal context and provide it with a before and after."¹⁹ In Hollywood, these temporal clues are coherent: there must be causality between the act before and the act that follows. Festival films, by contrast, privilege the suggestive, evocative, spare, and nonlinear. Coherence must be constructed, not found. This does not necessarily mean that festival films are not narrative, only that they do not adhere to the straight "classical" mode.

This opposition has to be understood in relation to the dominant mode of cinematic language as practiced by Hollywood and most popular cinemas in the world. Alternatives to established Hollywood aesthetics have been present since the Hollywood style consolidated its global dominance in the late 1910s—whether Eisenstein's montage, German expressionism, or Luis Buñuel's surrealist works. Both ideological and pragmatic grounds intersect in this opposition. Mainstream narratives, through repeated established textual conventions, explain the world as it is, as natural, spatially and temporarily consistent, something that can be grasped and understood. Revolutionary and avant-garde cinema, on the other hand, forces the viewers to question the status quo, with the hope of arousing them to ask more questions about their everyday lives. The German studio UFA, which made works like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), understood that it needed to offer a product that could be differentiated from the films coming from the United States and hence challenged Hollywood's naturalistic style. Thus, UFA consolidated its reputation as makers of art films, and successfully transported *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* to the United States, making it different primarily through its use of expressionist sets. It became art.²⁰

This point echoes Peter Wollen's observation about Jean-Luc Godard's counter-cinema in *Wind from the East* (*Le vent d'est*), as an embodiment of "narrative transitivity versus narrative intransitivity."²¹ Psychological motivations that help to explain series of events in classic narrative films are simply absent in many festival films. For example, in *The Son*, the audience has to guess what is going on

with Olivier's life. The first half hour of the film simply shows what Olivier does, thus giving time for the audience to know him. There is no background, no histories, no psychological profile of why he does what he does. We simply see him working, eating, doing the most mundane tasks. By eschewing any linear sequence, many films become episodic, which again requires the viewer to link the different episodes in the film instead of following a straight causality. As in the case of sets, shots, and sounds, the reader must work to build the text, which becomes part of the festival experience.

Direct causality is avoided while ellipses are common. In *Pickpocket* and *L'argent* the audience eventually gets to know the characters, but not because Bresson tells us why they are who they are. We encounter Michel in *Pickpocket* and Yvon in *L'argent* in the present, Bresson gives us no explanation as to why the two characters became who they are. Bresson presents a step by step development of the fall of Yvon, but the film text provides no connection from one scene to another. Yvon loses his job because of the forged money; Yvon does not want to ask for the job back; Yvon is involved in a criminal act; Yvon is caught; Yvon is sentenced to go to jail. . . . While one event follows another, the latter does not necessarily explain the former and the motivation, and choices made of and by the characters are never explained. It is very hard to be empathetic to the characters. This technique, of course, brings us back to Brechtian theater, which asks the audience to disengage and is antithetical to Classical Hollywood Cinema.

The use of ellipse forces the viewer to fill in the gaps of the narrative. In Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest*, the priest goes to visit the village aristocrat, but the next shot is one of the priest saying goodbye to the aristocrat. No information is provided as to the content of the talk between the two, except their facial expression after the conversation. This suggests a note of discord that eventually foreshadows the rejection of the priest by the rural gentry community.

Besides ellipse, oftentimes, the diegetic reality is not relevant. In Lucrecia Martel's *The Headless Woman* (*La mujer sin cabeza*, 2008), the protagonist, Vero, thinks that she has run over someone while driving home. The film never explains what exactly happens at that moment when the car has two jolts. The audience sees Vero being distracted by the sound of the cell phone; there is a great deal of audio information, including the car hitting something. Vero knows that she has hit something and contemplates going out of the car to find out, but in the end she decides to just drive ahead. By withholding the information that would explain exactly what has happened, Martel deliberately leaves that fact open, thereby taking away its significance. Facts do not always need to be explicated, because what is important is how the characters create scenarios depending on their perceptions and for the audience to figure out why, not in a casual way, but in a deeper understanding of human relations. What is relevant is that Vero decides not to stay at the scene of the incident, and that this decision eventually leads to subsequent actions by her and her friends and relatives, who

may or may not have covered up the accident that may or may not have happened. Vero and her people belong to the bourgeoisie, while the boy who might have been hit or not is working class. The refusal to explain what transpired forces the audience not only to be forever unsure of the event, but also to infer, from the different actions the characters undertake, how class relations express themselves in Vero's world, and to a larger extent in Argentine society.

Narratives are also disrupted: the use of Super 8 footage in Gus Van Sant's *Paranoid Park* adds nothing to the narrative progression of the main plot line of what happens to the security guard—a plot line introduced about ten minutes into the film. This footage, however, adds to the feel of the place, the world of the teenage skateboarders and their angst. Weerasethakul, in *Syndrome and a Century*, inserts long shots of people and doctors walking along the corridor of the hospital that add no narrative details to the already scant storyline but complete its aesthetic installation.

Nevertheless, in most of Bresson's films, time, while not always connected, does move forward. In more recent works like those of Apichatpong Weerasethakul, linear time itself is challenged. For example, in *Syndrome and a Century*, it would make no difference in terms of narrative if the two parts were switched. Very similar scenes take place in both hospitals, with the same characters, engaging in the same activities. Time, therefore, is not there to explain causality, time is there to be experienced. If time moves slowly, it gives time to the audience to pay attention to different aspects of the *mise-en-scène*, information that may not advance the plot but adds to the feelings, atmosphere of the films.

In Aleksandr Sokurov's *Father and Son* (2003), the film opens with the father consoling the son after his nightmare. It ends with another dream, with the father, contented, alone on the rooftop in the snow. Formally, this is a tight structure with dramatic and sober images. The opening scene, without image, in black after the title, starts with a reassuring voice saying, "It's over; it's over," followed by heavy breathing. It then fades into a close shot of two male bodies struggling, with hands holding down the wrists. Three close shots of the body struggling, with the same voice saying "easy" and "it's over," are followed by the close-up, wide-angle shot of a mouth opening wide, and then a wider shot than the first three that introduces the faces of the two. The two then continue in this dreamlike state, where the father (the audience at this point would not know that they are father and son) asks where the son is now in the dream, and the son responds by saying he is alone in the rain, with a shot of him in a field with a tree, savoring the rain, running happily. The father asks if he himself is there, the son says no. Later the father says he is there too and the son says, "Yes, now I see you," but the scene cuts back to their embrace in the room.

The dream that ends the movie has both men dressed and going to sleep in their respective beds. Parallel editing shows the two going to bed, with the same camera angles and scales of the same act of sitting on the bed, lying down, and

falling asleep with successively closer shots. After close-ups of the father and the son falling asleep, it then cuts to the hillside and the tree the audience first sees at the beginning of the film, but with no one, then the son, naked, asleep in bed, then the father walking out of the window in the snow, intercut with another shot of one hand touching the other's body. Just like with the first dream, father and son carry on a conversation: the son asks if he is there, the father says, smiling, "I am alone here." We hear the sound of windows being shut and then a shot of the closed window. The camera follows the father in a wide shot, where it shows the back of the father next to the dome where father and son have played, now covered with snow, and it fades out. These intensely spare parallel shots, in the end, defy any real sense of beginning or end as dream time and real time merge and separate. The use of different state of mind, subjective reality, has been a fairly usual device in art cinema, exemplified by ancestral films like Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries*.²²

For film festivals, films relying on anticlassical narrative distinguish themselves from the mass cinema and elevate the status of all concerned, from producers, directors, and programmers to audience as people who are not afraid of demanding and difficult films. At the same time, the work does not lead to a single, conclusive reading. Festival films are both spare and open-ended, stimuli and vehicles for discussion of meaning rather than stories with undemanding mass appeal. If we look back at *The Son*, after Olivier tells Frances that he is the father of the murdered boy, the film simply ends with Francis coming back to Olivier and offering to help load the timber into the car. A small gesture of help concludes the movie, but the spectator is required to bring an ending to it. In Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry*, does the man succeed in committing suicide? Why does he want to kill himself? The film ends with video documentary footage of the filming of the film, with actors and crew on location. The audience again has to decide whether the main character has indeed avoided death because he heard the meaning of the taste of cherry, or if he indeed succeeds in his original quest. Even the final insertion of documentary footage makes explicit the films as artifact, breaking the diagetic coherence of the film.

Everydayness: Nonprofessional Actors and Stars

While press coverage of film festivals are all about movie stars (and some auteur stars), the films in competitions do not always have stars or even professional actors. Using nonprofessional actors is hardly a rule, but many filmmakers at festivals have embraced it. This is very much another aspect of minimalism and of distinction from the studio system and values of Hollywood and other mainstream national cinemas. Many filmmakers, not unlike the Italian neorealists, believe that stars have too much baggage. They are known; they embody sometimes-unwelcome intertextuality. Nonprofessional actors are ipso facto unknown and can offer a blank slate to the viewer.

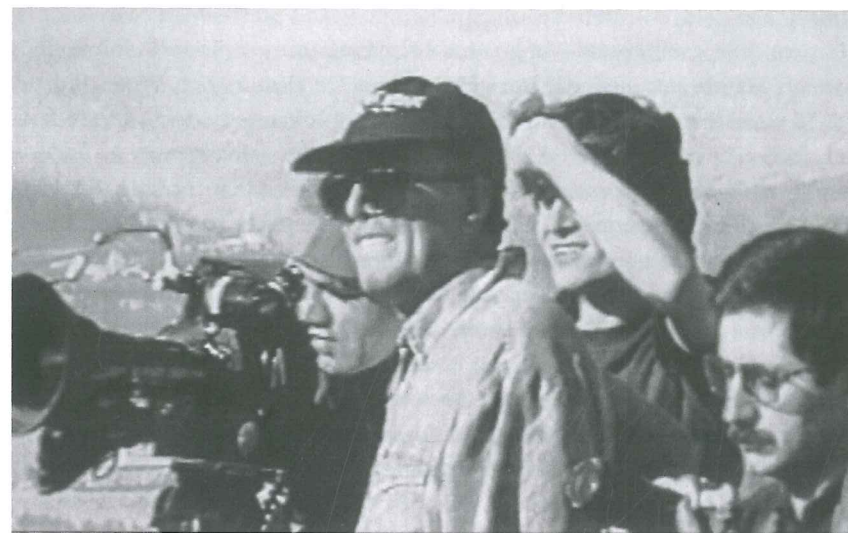


Figure 5. Last scene of *Taste of Cherry* (*Ta'm-e guilass*) (Abbas Kiarostami, 1997), with the camera crew.

Robert Bresson, for example, goes to the extreme of calling his actors models. This converged with his ideas of minimalist filmmaking in that the actors should not embrace big, expressive acting as dictated by mainstream cinema. While some of Bresson's lead actors have gone on to have acting careers, most of his leads are first timers. Claude Laydu was cast after Bresson rejected all nonbelievers to play the role of the priest.²³ Nadine Nortier of *Mouchette* was an unknown until the film received critical responses.

The 2010 Palme d'Or winner, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, also uses nonprofessional actors. Not only were the majority of his actors amateurs, they were from the specific area of northeast Thailand where the film took place and where a specific northeastern dialect is spoken. In the film press kit, Weerasethakul asserts that "to me, Boonmee is anonymous. So I could not use professional actors who have many public identities. I think the amateurishness is precious when you are aiming for early cinema's acting style. So I cast people from all walks of life. We ended up having a roof welder and a singer to play Boonmee and Huay."²⁴ The use of nonprofessional actors is then imbued with authenticity. Here, Weerasethakul seems to equate cinema with a special kind of everydayness, a complexly mediated truth.²⁵

Festival films also transform actors, deconstructing stardom and yet incorporating its allures. When Theo Angelopoulos cast Harvey Keitel in *Ulysses' Gaze* or Jane Campion used him in *The Piano*, Keitel was building his reputation as a serious actor. Antonioni always used famous actors—Marcello Mastroianni, Monica Vitti, Alain Delon, Vanessa Redgrave, and Jack Nicholson—while Bergman had

almost a repertory company of familiar, powerful stars—Max Von Sydow, Harriet Andersson, Ingrid Thulin, Liv Ullmann. Many American Palme d'Or winners feature international stars, like Robert De Niro in *Taxi Driver*. Indeed, De Niro's acting, as Travis Bickle, in many ways became the focus of the film, very different from the priest, the pickpocket, or the delivery man in Bresson works (again, expectations vis-à-vis Hollywood differ). More recently, Lars von Trier of the Dogma group has played with the public personas of Björk, Catherine Deneuve, and Nicole Kidman in his films while Juliette Binoche has appeared in works by André Téchiné, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Chantal Ackerman, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Abbas Kiarostami, and Jia Zhangke, negotiating prizes at Venice and Cannes as well as Oscars and Césars. Such stars definitely command more attention when they are on screen, and the films themselves lend more space to their star power as festival readings transform them.

The stars that interest "A"-level European festivals are also Hollywood and European stars; regional stardom has a very different meaning, even if it represents the internationalness of the films as well as of their actors. Hong Kong's Maggie Cheung exemplifies the conflicts of stardom and recognition facing the actor as well as the filmmaker. Early on in her career, she received a Golden Bear for her work as an actress in Stanley Kwan's *Yuen Ling-yuk* (1992). Her global fame grew with regular starring roles in Wong Kar Wai's films through the 1990s, but Cannes only recognized her with a best actress award for the unglamorous but transnational role of Emily Wang in Olivier Assayas's 2004 *Clean*. Cheung had been married to tastemaker Assayas from 1998 to 2001, and was living in France. Cheung, like other actresses and actors, has served on juries in Berlin, Venice, and Cannes—ironically, an accolade not generally given to the nonactors of festival films. Bollywood and Nollywood stars, for example, are generally absent on juries.

Furthermore, as some festival auteurs evolve, especially non-Western directors, they attract internationally known professional actors and stars. In his early career, Wong Kar Wai always cast local Hong Kong stars; however, as he became more established in the festival world, he turned to Rob Lowe, Rachel Weisz, and singer Norah Jones in *My Blueberry Nights*. His subsequent project, *The Lady from Shanghai*, was rumored to star Rachel Weisz, after Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman turned down roles. In the end, the project never materialized.

The collaborations between established auteurs and actors underline the contributions festivals and festival films make over time to actors, directors, and producers, who obviously value such endeavors with their willingness to invest. Unknown directors have little access to established actors and actresses. Once these auteurs have established their names through exposure at major film festivals, actors may aspire to work with them for different experiences. Acting for a festival auteur may not pay a great deal, but it puts the actors into a category very far from the mass media heartthrob and adds gravitas to the actors' reputations.

Directors also may be trying something quite new. Even if the director is not the one who always controls casting, the director, weighing different options, has to agree to casting choices in the end. Abbas Kiarostami started using professional Iranian actresses in *Shirin*. When asked why he would use professionals, he replied, "It was an ethical debt which I felt I owed to Iran's professional actresses, since I had never put them before my camera. It was a debt I owed to myself, too! I had denied myself two important and appealing aspects of cinema: not just beauty, but also the complexity that you find in women. Actually, I still don't know whether those actresses were giving a performance or if we did elicit a genuine reaction from them."²⁶ The reporter continued to ask why he cast Juliette Binoche in *Shirin*, and Kiarostami simply described the situation as one where Binoche was a guest in his house when the film was shot. She generously offered to play one of the 114 actresses in that film and he accepted. Kiarostami explained that Binoche wore no makeup and was not paid.²⁷ As Kiarostami and Binoche became friends, she starred in his first film shot outside of Iran (in French, English, and Italian). This, in turn, won her a best actress award at Cannes in 2010.

Nonprofessional actors, nonetheless, tend to provide the festival films more legitimate claim to authenticity, to substantiate the claim that a serious filmmaker does not want the audience to be distracted by the glamour of the familiar faces of the actors. In a way, the director is saying, "Do not look at the actors and actresses, look at how I am constructing my film." For some, the actors are of no more importance than the props; they are there to construct the film. On the other hand, established auteurs have had many more opportunities to work with established actors and actresses. This, of course, has to be supported by willing investors who see the value of these festival films and welcome the addition of recognizable actors and actresses to increase their potential to reach a larger audience than those of the festival cinephiles.

Genres/Anti-Genres and Themes

Not surprisingly, the rejection of narrative often leads to a rejection of specific conventions of reading that define particular mass genres and audience expectations.²⁸ Comedies and musicals simply seem to violate the serious tone of the festival forum: at most, one can live with the ironies of Pedro Almodóvar or the surrealism of Luis Buñuel: Woody Allen, by contrast, however distinctive an auteur and frequent a festival pick, has never been a festival favorite.²⁹ Again, festivals may differ in this, quite apart from those that are genre-specific (science fiction, animation—although nothing on this scale exists for popular genres such as Westerns, romance, or police/thrillers). Berlin, though it has recognized comic sensibilities on occasion with films like *The Wedding Banquet* (Ang Lee, 1993), could justify this film since it also brought gay issues into Chinese cinema. Berlin also presented its 2002 award to Hayao Miyazaki's bittersweet animated family

story *Spirited Away*. Gilles Jacob, in a 1996 interview, seemed almost wistful on this absence:

There are comedies that have the qualities of auteur films—intelligence, wit, humor, liveliness, characters, and structure. I don't want to single out a particular film from the Cannes selection this year, but take the examples of Ernst Lubitsch and Billy Wilder. Maybe in their time they were looked down on, but they're both immortals in the history of cinema—and they made comedies.

So, let's look around us to see if there are any Ernsts or Billys nowadays and, if there aren't, let's help the industry so that more of them can make films.³⁰

To some extent, the discovery of the darkly comic sensibilities of post-communist Romanian cinema may have answered this need.

Musicals prove problematic as well. Berlin selected Gene Kelly's *Invitation to the Dance* for a 1956 award; it is striking here that MGM actually had delayed the release of the film for four years out of justified concerns for its box office potential as an overly artistic dance film. And Berlin returned to an operatic musical with *U-Carmen e-Khayelitsha* from South Africa in 2005, the first and only sub-Saharan film to win such a major award. Cannes, meanwhile, has awarded the Golden Palm to two musicals—Jacques Demy's *Parapluies de Cherbourg* (1964), which took the genre to the extreme of excluding nonmusical interludes in a story of love and loss, and Bob Fosse's *All that Jazz*, which again turned the musical into a Felliniesque saga of self-destruction and mortality. Locarno and Venice have not smiled on such efforts, and even a handful of such awards scarcely balance the scores of "serious" dramas that have been selected instead; *All that Jazz*, for example, was actually part of an unlikely tie with Kurosawa's *Kagemusha*.

Darker genres like Westerns, science fiction, horror, or thrillers have only tended to gain recognition if so reflexive that they rupture expectations of the genre itself. Godard's blend of politics, sci-fi, and noir, *Alphaville*, won the Golden Bear in Berlin in 1965; Robert Altman blew up the Western for another Golden Bear in 1976 with *Buffalo Bill and the Indians, or Sitting Bull's History Lesson*; and Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* subverted the bonds of cowboys for the gaze of Venice forty years later. Again, the presence and career of the auteur insists that these are not "merely" genre films.

Genre crossing and hybridization can also make a film more novel, difficult, and acceptable. As mentioned earlier, Emir Kusturica's films are not particularly minimalist, but *Underground* is a good example of a mixed genre film. It combines comical farce, melodrama, politics, and war to create a dystopian vision. The films are self-reflective: characters speak directly to the audience, with a film and theater within the film, inserting documentary footage into the narrative, and commenting on different levels of reality and allegory. *Underground* is loud, full of

distinctive characters, both humans and animals, which complement Kusturica's vision of Yugoslavia and Milosevic's modern Balkans. *Underground* is far from austere, but it is extremely complex, weaving different levels of film forms and references to Kusturica's sense of history.

If a director becomes a master of a particular, self-reflective genre, his works are accepted as auteurial products, whether the surreal humor of the later Buñuel or even a reflexive, intertextual noir: Hong Kong director Johnnie To has had four films in competition at Cannes, although they are all generic thrillers. But this in itself invokes a kind of intertextuality with generations of Hong Kong films that established these conventions—John Woo, Ringo Lam—as they entered an earlier festival scene without prizes. Since many genres are considered to be popular and commercial, however, they are not the most welcome additions to film festivals.

Despite the limited appeal of some genres, festival films still cover all kinds of subject matter. There are grand period pieces, like Visconti's *The Leopard* (*Il gattopardo*, 1963), Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* (2006), or skewering portraits of the intellectuals and upper class of Fellini or Antonioni. There are the working classes of the Dardenne brothers and Paoli and Vittorio Taviani or Mike Leigh, the War on Terror in Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), gangster films like Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* or Johnnie To's *Vengeance* (2009), and films discussing the plight of educating women in Kurdistan in Samira Makhmalbaf's *Blackboards* (2000).

Given this diversity, it is hard to say that festivals prefer specific subject matter so much as that there is a tendency to include movies about issues that mainstream cinema normally avoids, again, a dialectic as much as an essence. Popular cinema avoids films where "nothing much happens": given the need for strong narrative structures, popular movies cannot simply be about a slice of everyday life which is not "exciting." Yet, in film festivals the everyday is elevated to a much higher ground, with winners like Nanni Moretti's *The Son's Room* (2001, Cannes) and Wang Quan'an's *Tuya's Marriage* (2006, Berlin). Both are about ordinary people, one Italian middle class, and the other Mongolian Chinese. The former lost a son and the film describes how the family copes with the loss; the latter is about a woman's quest to find a new husband so she can take care of her old husband.

Mainstream cinema tends to stay away from controversy, while festivals invite and savor films that tackle controversial subject matters. Many festival films from outside Western Europe tackle taboo social and political issues—especially if these are issues that are less problematic within a Western audience framework. Here, there is a clear negotiation of the gaze across space as well as form and subject—although we must be wary of questions of a colonial gaze that are raised around this selection. One even sees this in the turn to Eastern Europe following the fall of communism, where festivals have focused on the problems

of this regime and its aftermath. Emir Kusturica's *When Father Was Away on Business* (1995) portrayed the old communist rule in Yugoslavia in the 1950s. His second Palme d'Or winner, *Underground* (*Once Upon a Time There Was a Country*, 1995), was about the villainy of a later Balkan War; in the same year, Theo Angelopoulos's *Ulysses' Gaze* (1995) was also made in the Balkan war zone. *Underground* was hailed as a courageous piece on the Balkan war, yet many Bosnians saw it as pro-Serbian.³¹ More recently, another Eastern European film from Romania, *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, has presented the brutal experience of a woman seeking an abortion in the last days of Nicolae Ceaușescu.

Festivals also can leave history behind. One notes a rise and fall in interest in Spanish film around the end of the Franco regime—Buñuel's searing *Viridiana* was smuggled out to win at Cannes in 1961, although it cost him new exile from Spain. Berlin, in particular, celebrated the transition in Spain with awards to José Luis García Sánchez (*The Trouts* [*Las truchas*] 1978), Tomás Muñoz (*The Elevator* [*El ascensor*], 1978), Emilio Martínez Lázaro (*What Max Said*, 1978), Carlos Saura (*Fast, Fast* [*Deprisa, deprisa*] 1981), and Mario Camus (*The Hive* [*La colmena*], 1983). Yet as Spain has become more European, interest in its films has waned, despite the auteurial popularity of Pedro Almodóvar (whose entire cast won the best actress award at Cannes 2006 for *Volver*). This presents a striking contrast to the enduring presence of Ireland and its civil wars among prize films across Europe, including *In the Name of the Father* (Jim Sheridan, Berlin, 1994), *Michael Collins* (Neil Jordan, Venice, 1996), *Bloody Sunday* (Paul Greengrass, Berlin, 2002), and *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (Ken Loach, Cannes, 2006). In a similar vein, the Golden Lion in Venice went to *The Magdalene Sisters* in 2002. There is a niche for countries that are somewhat less "European" than the powerful European North, where the Balkans, Spain, and Ireland can be seen with a domestic inter-regional orientalist gaze.

Looking further afield, festivals, especially the dominant Western festivals, have always been fascinated with movies coming from "oppressive" regimes. The early wave of Chinese cinema that arrived at festivals, including Zhang Yimou's *Red Sorghum* and Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine* were fairly exotic. While magnificent films, they fit squarely with the expectation of the West, with overtones of Orientalism in terms of cultural values and gender. These works echo earlier Japanese films, such as *Rashômon* (1950), *Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*, 1952), *Gate of Hell* (1953), and *The Crucified Lovers* (*Chikamatsu monogatari*) (1954), all of which conformed to certain Western views about the Far East—set in the distant past on court lives, with lavish costumes or colorful samurai. Hou Hsiao-hsien's *City of Sadness* (1989) was one of the first movies that foregrounded the silent subject of the 228 massacre, where many native Taiwanese people were killed by the KMT (Nationalist Party from the mainland).

Such a gaze has consequences. After Zhang Yuan's *East Palace, West Palace* (1996) was invited to be shown at Cannes's Un Certain Regard, the Chinese

government confiscated his passport so he could not attend the screening. In discussing the issue of gay films in China, Chris Berry suggested that "I suspect Zhang Yuan would have enjoyed the little performance Cannes put on to address the Chinese government's actions. By placing an empty chair on the stage to symbolize his absence, they simultaneously made both him and his absence present to the audience."³² The work of another Chinese director, Lou Ye's *Summer Palace* (2006), takes place in 1989 during the Tiananmen Incident, with graphic depictions of the brutality at Tiananmen as well as explicit sex scenes, including full-frontal nudity. The film was initially invited to compete for the Golden Palm, but was withdrawn after the Chinese censor rejected it. His 2009 Cannes entry, *Spring Fever*, about a gay triangle, also created controversy on how Lou worked clandestinely in China. Though Chinese in content, the film is registered as produced in Hong Kong and France.

Many American films that win the Palme d'Or, as I have suggested, are in one way or another critical of the United States. Yet, they may also be limited in voice and dialogue. Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*, for example, generated quite a bit of buzz as a window on American racism, but Lee has never won a major festival prize. Nor has any other African American- or Latino-directed film gained top prizes at the major festivals.

Western European art films remain more about interior struggle, even though most are embedded within a veiled critique, generally, of capitalism. Neither Bresson's *L'argent*, Antonioni's *L'eclisse*, nor the Dardenne brothers' *Rosetta* is didactic, but all deal with money of different forms, from counterfeits, to money from the stock market, to the struggling lumpenproletariat; these films concentrate on the contexts within which the characters live as well as their actions to make statements about general human conditions. These films critique the consequences of a capitalistic world by showing the conditions, but do not use the difficult situations to elicit sympathy for the characters.

The most characteristic festival film may still be those personal journeys in which the subject matters are quite devoid of any direct political or social contexts. Films like Bergman's *Persona*, Haneke's *The Piano Teacher*, or Shohei Imamura's *The Eel* (*Unagi*) are fairly apolitical, but deal with basic, essential human emotions. When Abbas Kiarostami presented his 2010 Cannes competition entry, *Certified Copy*, it seemed to depart quite a bit from all his earlier Iranian-based films, but followed in the vein of an European art film about two European individuals' encounter and their relationship and meditation on life.

While mainstream cinema tends to avoid complicated subjects, festivals promote films that tackle volatile issues. Oftentimes, festival films are "political" when there are current affairs that indeed garner the attention of the international press. For France, its complicated relations with its former North African colonies and its present domestic encounters with a multiethnic society as a

result of this past colonization are repeated topics in its festival films. The 2008 Cannes Palme d'Or winner, *The Class* (*Entre les murs*), as well as the 2009 entry *A Prophet* (*Un prophète*), arrived at Cannes after the suburban ethnic unrest where television, press, and Internet images were translated into a meditation on ethnic relations in France. Politics has a long history in terms of film festivals, and recent French entries to Cannes includes movies that deal with the new multiethnic France. *The Class* is set in a multicultural Parisian school, a current and pressing concern of contemporary French society. In 2010, Cannes was also haunted by the specter of the Algerian war, with two controversial films on that theme in competition.

Festivals' embrace of more controversial subject matter follows a long tradition of seeing art as free and touting festivals as zones that champion that freedom. The early film societies and film clubs that I discussed in chapter 1 were set up because they wanted to show *Potemkin* from the Soviet Union, or *L'Âge d'Or* by Buñuel and Salvador Dalí: the first for political reasons, and the second for moral reasons dealing with sex and the Church. Festivals, then, have been ideologically constructed as free spaces where films of all subject matters are welcome, be they about taboo and politically sensitive subjects or excessive in their portrayal of sex and violence—bulwarks against the censorship real or implicit in Hollywood and national cinemas. The official selection at Cannes in 2009 included several films that have fairly uncomfortable contents, raising controversies about sex and/or violence as domains of pornography. Lars von Trier's *Antichrist*, for example, includes scenes on a variety of genital mutilations, torturous sex, and violence. The Ecumenical jury of the SIGNIS Award gave the film an Anti-Award, protesting its "misogyny." This was met immediately with a protest from the festival director deriding the jury's decision as close to censorship, and the film's primary actress, Charlotte Gainsbourg, won the best actress award.³³ Meanwhile, Brillante Mendoza's Filipino film *The Execution of P* (*Kinatay*), which won him the best director award, also has extremely graphic depictions of sexuality, violence, "torture, beheading, and disembodiment of a prostitute."³⁴ These are hardly mainstream cinema materials; many considered this film misogynistic as well. But they were validated at festivals by their screenings, by the awards they received, and by the debates they provoked as not belonging to the mainstream, celebrating the unbounded quality of art. This, too, is a tradition. Looking back to the 1960s, Antonioni's *L'avventura* showed a woman undressing while *Blow-Up* was considered extremely daring in its portrayal of sex and drugs.

Sometimes, extreme violence and sexual portrayal have become associated with specific national cinemas and auteurs. While not all Korean entries to top film festivals are R/NC-17-rated films, Park Chan-Wook and Kim Ki-Duk are the two Korean directors who have garnered the most nominations and prizes at the top three European festivals. Park is famous for his Vengeance Trilogy,

and Kim's films have also been criticized for having many masochistic female characters. These complaints do not seem to bother the selection committees of major festivals—if the films are artistic, sociocultural elements, especially those based on unequal gender relations, are considered secondary concerns. Kim has made films that include extremely graphic scenes of genital mutilations and "unusual" sexual practices. Park's latest Cannes's nomination, *Thirst*, has a devoted priest turn into a vampire after volunteering for a vaccine experiment. He eventually develops a relationship with the wife of a childhood friend.

Festivals, in the end, whatever their selections, are freer to show movies that would be considered extreme, because art demands this freedom. Programmers claim that the first quality festivals look for in cinema is aesthetics, and because art transcends mundane political and social issues, the resulting universality is what festivals yearn to show to their audiences. Yet themes as well as mise-en-scène constitute critical elements of the festival genre and the definition of a canon of great films against which new entries will be measured. Still, perhaps almost paradoxically, festival programs cannot simply repeat what has been successful before. As they respect and stabilize the old, festivals seek and compete in defining that which is new, albeit within the paradigms that programmers, filmmakers, and audiences have already constructed.

Novelty and Discoveries: The Opposite of Genre

After the long discussion of what constitutes festival films, I have to acknowledge that festivals are also about innovation and discoveries. The newness of the films, auteurs, and film movements is perceived because, first, it is current, and also because it is new in terms of its contribution to cinema, either formally, thematically, or the interaction among the two. Venice had Emerging Cinema and Best First Work awards in the 1980s; it gave Emir Kusturica the Best First Work award for *Do You Remember Dolly Bell?* in 1981. Cannes has had the Camera d'Or since 1978. The Camera d'Or has been given to Jim Jarmusch (who was first "discovered" at Sundance), Mira Nair, Jafar Panahi, and Naomi Kawasé, but also to the likes of Vadim Glowna and Nana Dzordzhadze, who have continued to work but have not gained more international recognition. The Tribeca festival has a section called Discovery that premieres both documentaries and narratives. Some of these films come from the Tribeca All Access program, which provides initial funding for promising works. Some small festivals also give awards to new directors, such as the Rhode Island International Film Festival and its Directorial Discovery Award. The Kolkata Film Festival in India and many other festivals also have sections called "Discovery."

This chapter so far has relied heavily on the films and auteurs who have shown their films at Cannes, the festival of all festivals. However, Cannes is not known to be the festival that really discovers talents; it affirms past festival auteurs after they have been discovered in other comparatively smaller or

regional festivals. Such films and filmmakers might appear initially in Un Certain Regard or the Directors' Fortnight, which is independent of the official festival. Subsequently, works by these auteurs, such as Loach, the Dardenne brothers, and Kiarostami, gained recognition and started competing at the major competitions. But this was scarcely their entrée to a festival world.

If discovery means the first to honor or promote this talent, then smaller festivals have been the place to locate them. Rotterdam's Tiger Award, for example, was specifically founded to promote directors' first or second works, and it has a reputation for discovering Asian cinema. The Pesaro festival is dedicated to new cinema, Locarno has a first film competition, and the Festival of Three Continents has a wider global gaze. These definitely showed more Iranian cinema before Cannes. Cannes, nevertheless, with its power, its ability to attract the most prominent international press, is able to substantively disseminate these "discoveries" to a larger audience even though other festivals discovered the films before they landed at Cannes.

Local and regional festivals also play a key role. Hong Kong and Chinese filmmakers were brought onto the festival stage at the Hong Kong International Film Festival, where programmers from Cannes, Berlin, and Locarno scouted them. Iranian filmmakers use Fajr as their springboard, while Romanian filmmakers make their debut at Transylvania before moving to Sarajevo and Thessaloniki. This is a delicate balance which has recently been challenged by programs to develop young global filmmakers in Europe, echoing the earlier migrations of auteurs like Wong Kar Wai and Jia Zhangke from Hong Kong to Cannes and Venice (or even the European migration of Sundance alumni like Steven Soderbergh and Quentin Tarantino).

Relations to place are complicated since films and directors from certain countries become identified (and even canonized) with specific film styles that reshape further discoveries. That is, discovery makes sense within the festival paradigm, but a film or director may find it difficult to escape festival expectations thereafter. Japanese cinema, for example, was "discovered" by Venice when it screened *Rashômon* in 1951. Textually, the film was "new" because it presented three versions of the same event, yet it was a fairly classical text in every other way. As a result, Cannes and Venice invited Japan to submit films to their competitions throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. Subsequently, Akira Kurosawa and Kenji Mizoguchi became prominent auteurs for these festivals. Japanese films that were exhibited at film festivals and eventually were distributed in art house cinemas and became historical dramas that took Western viewers to a different and exotic world. From 1952 to 1955, all of Venice's Japanese entries were directed by Mizoguchi, who is celebrated as a director sensitive to women's issues.³⁵ Subsequently, Indian films, represented by the work of Satyajit Ray, became the next "discoveries" of the mid-1950s—although, India's mainstream cinema—Bollywood—has never broken into the festival circuit.

By the 1960s, the new trends were French New Wave, New Italian Cinema, and New German Cinema and other Europeans. Japanese films only regained their festival status since the 1990s in new genres—the noir of Takeshi Kitano and the animated films of Hayao Miyazaki.

Chinese films have also been a site of continual discovery and rediscovery, as fifth-generation mainland filmmakers were linked to the rise and fall of filmmaking in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Some directors have become canonical—Wong Kar Wai, Jia Zhangke, Hou Hsiao-hsien—others have become more identified with popular films, like John Woo or Zhang Yimou. And festivals have looked farther afield, to find Chinese in Malaysia, Australia, and other areas as discoveries within a tradition. Meanwhile, filmmakers like Wong have left their regional base behind—as Thierry Fremaux proudly proclaimed in 2007: "Film has become global. The best proof is the opening film, *My Blueberry Nights*, directed by a Chinese man from Hong Kong, produced with European money, shot in America and in English."³⁶

Discovery still has its limits. In the case of Cannes, two-thirds of all winning directors since 1949 have held European citizenship (and another sixteen have had American citizenship). All but one have been male. And only Mohammad Lakhdar-Hamina of Algeria (*Chronicle of the Burning Years* [*Chronique des années de braise*], Cannes, 1975) and South Africa's Mark Dormford-May (*U-Carmen e-Khayelitsha*, Berlin, 2005) have gained prizes as African directors among all major festivals.

Once discoveries "become established," they become traditions through invitations to film festivals. Using Romanian cinema as a recent case, I will show how "discovery" took place within the film festival world and examine the textual elements of these films to find out what is "new" about this cinema to frame my final reading. I will also show how a school became established as a part of the festival world rather than a fringe.

Discovering Romania

Until Nicolae Ceausescu was executed in 1989, post-World War II Romanian cinema followed a trajectory similar to that of most communist bloc Eastern European countries' cinema: many propaganda films as well as underground films that did not see the light until after the 1989 Romanian Revolution. Romanian films were shown at the Balkan Film Festival, which wandered from Turkey (1979) to Slovenia (1980); they were also shown in China because of the ideological affinity of the second world. Meanwhile, Romania joined other Eastern Bloc countries in withdrawing its films from the Berlin festival in 1979 in protest of its showing of *The Deer Hunter*.

This period has taken on a certain mythic power in the story of Romanian cinema—not unlike the rivalry with Hollywood that shapes American independents. For example, a *Washington Post* article of 1990 spent almost more time on

what could not be shown than on the first Romanian films making it to Western screens:

"Ceausescu didn't really let people make contemporary stories," says AFI programmer Eddie Cockrell, curator of the festival. "They could only make fantasies or stories on historical figures. But the filmmakers coded things into the films—like, they'd make a medieval fantasy about an awful king who is overthrown by the people. You don't have to be a film school student to figure that one out."

Cockrell would visit Bucharest every year after attending the Berlin Film Festival. Each time he would ask officials at the state film office if he could see the highly regarded "Carnival Days," the festival's comedy, and, he says, "they always came up with some excuse. They couldn't find it or whatever. You read between the lines and know that the film has been banned."

This year, when he walked into the office, the film canisters were sitting on the desk. "They all looked so proud," he says, "finally being able to present this film."³⁷

By the early 1990s, with the breakdown of the communist bloc in Eastern Europe, many banned Romanian films and other films from Central and Eastern Europe gained wider exposures in different festivals, from the post-communist Karlovy Vary to Berlin. By the mid-1990s, Balkan films were gaining prizes, with Emir Kusturica winning his second Palme d'Or for *Underground* at Cannes in 1995. Lucian Pintille, a Romanian director, also scored festival accolades, including nominations at Cannes and Venice, with *Next Stop Paradise* (*Terminus paradis*, 1998) winning the Grand Jury Prize in Venice. However, regime change also posed a historical problem raised by a transitional official: "Every good film in Eastern Europe was an anti-Communist idea," said Adrian Sarbu, chief of the Bureau of Cinema and Television for Romania's governing National Salvation Front. "We have good filmmakers . . . now we have to find the ideas."³⁸

The Romanian cinema that became the talk of the festival circuit responded to this challenge through filmmakers who were very young when the revolution took place in 1989, including Cristi Puiu, Cristian Mungiu, Corneliu Porumboiu, Sinisa Dragin, Radu Muntean, Radu Mihaileanu, Catalin Mitulescu, and the late Cristian Nemescu. Their films screened at the local Romanian festival, Transylvania, before "graduating" to regional festivals in Sarajevo, Thessaloniki, and Karlovy Vary. From there, they were "discovered" by larger Western European festivals like London, Locarno, Copenhagen, Rotterdam, and Cannes. In 2006, for example, Corneliu Porumboiu's *12:08 East of Bucharest* reached the British Film Institute's London festival; it took the Golden Swan in Copenhagen in 2007, following Radu Mihaileanu's *Live and Become* that had taken the same prize in 2005.

Soon, discoveries became established on the festival circuit—becoming new knowledge to be shared with wider local audiences after the films had been

recognized by film elites. In North America, Toronto, Telluride, Chicago, and the New York Film Festival programmed new Romanian films. In 2008, the New York Film Festival also organized a special Romanian retrospective program that showcased eighteen features from 1965 to 2006. When a cinema is "discovered," it is not uncommon for festivals to search for old and new movies from this region, reinforcing the history and complexity of this national cinema. By 2007, Romanian film had become a canonical discovery for festivals outside the Euro-American context: that year, they were also showcased in Hong Kong as a discovery for the audiences of the HKIFF.

Films and filmmakers have been caught up in the process of discovery. After Cristian Mungiu received his Palme d'Or at Cannes in 2007, he noted in a press conference in Bucharest, "If I had presented the same film in 2002, the likelihood that I would have received the Palme d'Or would have been almost nil. . . . But I capitalised on the growing sympathy for Romanian cinema."³⁹ Mungiu articulated the fact that discovery is a process: the wave of successes gained by Romanian films in the previous years and the reception they received made it possible for *4 Months* to win the Palme d'Or. *California Dreaming* won the Grand Prize in Un Certain Regard that same year, following the tragic death of its director, Cristian Nemescu, before he finished editing his film; Cristi Puiu, whose *Stuff and Dough* (*Marfa și banii*, 2001) was one of the harbingers of the new wave, was on the jury that year. Subsequently, *Police, Adjective* won a Jury Prize in Cannes in 2009 and Florin Serban's first feature, *If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle*, won the Silver Bear in Berlin in 2010.

Is there any stylistic coherence in this group of New Romanian Cinema besides an historical one? According to A. O. Scott of the *New York Times*, beyond historical circumstances, a social cohesion among many filmmakers evokes the sociability of the French New Wave: "Mungiu, Porumboiu and Nemescu are all U.N.A.T.C. graduates, and Puiu currently teaches courses there in screen acting."⁴⁰ Many use the same pool of behind-the-scenes technicians as well as the same actors. In terms of basic style, they favor hand-held cameras (as well as long shots with stationary cameras) in many of their movies, but these qualities are hardly unique to Romanian films. Stylistically, the very fluid hand-held camera in *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* works very well with the chaotic and depressing environments Mr. Lazarescu inhabits, from his seedy apartment to the different rundown hospital emergency rooms he wanders through. Similarly, the one very long shot on the television show in *12:08 East of Bucharest*, which simulates bad television studio camerawork, is extremely well done and exposes the farce of the whole enterprise. As in many festival films, locations use different rooms in everyday people's apartments, drab offices, and bland cityscapes, but overall ordinary places. These create a sense that the New Romanian Cinema is a neo-realist cinema built on the absurd but actually debilitating lives Romanian people led before the revolution that have somehow continued since.

If discovery did not mean new styles, what about themes? All these films come from—and respond to—the same political, cultural, and social milieu. Many directly deal with Nicolae Ceaușescu and the Romanian Revolution of 1989, like *12:08 East of Bucharest*, or *The Paper Will Be Blue*. The former is a comedy about a festival in a small town, while the latter follows a soldier on the night of the revolution who decides to fight for the cause. Other films tackle the absurdity of Romanian transitional society, including the bureaucratic horrors of socialist medicine in *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* or *Police, Adjective*, where a small crime story is intertwined with meditations on language and action. The most recent films have a somewhat more global gaze: *If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle*, though set in Romania, centers on prison, family relationships, and European migration. *California Dreaming* deals with American and Polish peacekeepers in 1999 Yugoslavia, confronted by small-town Romanian bureaucracy. Reading the films as a group, they seem to have created a mythic Romania, where pre-1989 meant only a very oppressive communist regime, while since 1989 the country has become lackluster dystopia with a government that seems to have inherited many of the old communist ways of running things. Filmmakers thus echo the position of Cristi, the hero in *Police, Adjective*: “His position is a hyperbolically blunt statement of an impulse that drives much recent Romanian cinema, away from metaphor and toward a concrete, illusion-free reckoning with things as they are.”⁴¹

Further twists come in attitude. Many films insist that one way to deal with the unhappy situation of the country is dark comedy, an absurd humor that permeates *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu*, *12:08 East of Bucharest*, and *California Dreaming*, where corrupt buffoons run different institutions and other everyday people are incompetent, uncaring, or liars. Many of these characters are not particularly malicious; they are portrayed as they are because the society they live in tends to produce unthinking, selfish individuals who have ambiguous moralities. The individuals are not villains, but byproducts of a corrupted system that becomes a dark farce glimpsed through small, almost insignificant moments. In most places, when a sick person needs help from an emergency room, he is admitted, but obviously this is not in the case for Mr. Lazarescu. When there is a television talk show, one expects a knowledgeable host and guest, but in *12:08 East of Bucharest*, a retiree who once played Santa Claus and a drunken teacher are ingredients for great comedy.

Thus, many of the tropes of new Romanian film are familiar characteristics of the film festival genre—serious themes, meditative cinematography and texts, absence of closure and happy endings. Overall, there are more thematic similarities and innovations among these movies than purely formal elements that are considered new. The tastemakers of film festivals seem to be more excited about works coming from a “new” area, an area that has not experienced the kind of cinematic fervor, at least in the context of the festival world, that favored Iran in

the 1990s. There was little exposure to communist or post-communist Romanian life on the movie screen until these new films arrived at these Western European, then global festivals. Obviously, by all accepted standards, these are very good movies that brought a freshness both in terms of subject matter and style. Hence, discovery enriches and develops the genre and, ultimately, the canon of films we consider important in cinema as a field.

As these discussions show, there is no simple definition of what a festival film should be. I have identified certain formal, textual, and contextual characteristics in narrative feature films that seem to recur in many works that are either shown or have won prizes in the major festivals. In the following section, I use these different criteria to read a recent Romanian Cannes winner within the parameters of the festival film.

4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days: Reading the Festival Film

4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 2007 and went on to win twenty-three other prizes all over the world, in the Americas, Europe, and Australia. It was a low-budget film that cost only 600,000 euros to make.⁴² It was Cristian Mungiu's second feature; he had trained as a filmmaker in Bucharest and produced shorts before his first feature, *Occident* (2002), which had been included in the Directors' Fortnight at Cannes and had won a few prizes at local and regional festivals, such as Transylvania, Thessaloniki, and Sofia (Bulgaria). *Occident*, considered a bitter comedy, tells different stories about Romanian immigrants seeking the illusory happiness of the West. By contrast, *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days* is a dark, hopeless portrayal of an abortion in Bucharest, Romania, during the last days of communist rule. Mungiu's latest work, *Tales from the Golden Age* (2009), an omnibus comedy on life in late communist Romania, also premiered at Cannes.

4 Months focuses on two female university students, Gabita, who is pregnant, and her friend, Otilia, who helps her to make the illegal abortion happen. The film is minimalist even though there is a great deal of “action” and drama. The women have to get enough money, procure the supplies, and check into hotels: the first hotel will not let them in, so they must find another hotel that costs more. Otilia carries the movie because she is the one who runs around the city to help Gabita, all the while negotiating her relationship with her own boyfriend and everyone else in Romania. She also meets the abortionist in some street and must deal with his anger that there is a change of location and that Gabita is four months pregnant, rather than three months as she had told both Otilia and subsequently the “doctor.” He is abusive and demands more money and sex with both women. After the abortion, Otilia leaves to attend a dinner party with her boyfriend, where moral issues are raised in conversation against the offstage drama of the hotel room. Otilia returns to the room, drops the fetus in a trash

chute, and the girls end up at dinner, where they agree that they will never talk about this subject again.

The camerawork is austere, with very controlled camera movements, long takes, and lighting that projects a depressed, oppressive environment all through the movie. It was shot on location in a university dormitory, hotel lobbies and rooms, family homes, and the streets of Bucharest. The sets all share dreadful lighting and colors. The first two shots of the film last for about five minutes. The first is a hand-held medium shot inside the bland but lived-in university dorm room of the two women. The camera points toward the window, but moves slightly forward and backward to show specific actions, which situates the audience as witnesses of the story to be unfolded. Gabita and Otilia are packing, making small talk on what is needed for some trip away. The second shot follows Otilia out of the dorm room to look for the small things that Gabita needs. The hand-held camera takes the audience through the dark hallway of the university dorm and reveals some aspects of student lives, into the shower and bathroom as well as another dorm room that also serves as a general store for the students. A simple exchange between Otilia and another student in the bathroom reveals the everyday "rules" of this society. Otilia is told by the other student that the lady officer is looking for her because she was not there on Thursday—a form of constant surveillance. In that short exchange, Otilia ends the conversation by asking if the lady officer smokes and what brand—a minor act of bribery is anticipated and expresses the everydayness of corruption. The audience, without much probing, comes to understand certain aspects of Romanian life of the time—from surveillance and the power of people in certain positions, to the need to bribe someone in authority and the underground economy of the students on basic consumer goods. What is presented is the routine of that Romania world; minute details are expressed without specifically asking for the audience's attention.

The film has many long shots that last for three minutes or more. After the abortionist has sex with Otilia, she talks with Gabita and asks why they chose Mr. Bebe. It is a medium-profile shot of Otilia sitting across from Gabita, who is in bed. Another very long shot is filmed with Otilia sitting at the dinner table with her boyfriend's family and friends. Otilia has just been forced to have sex with Mr. Bebe in order to have him perform the abortion; Gabita is in the process of having the abortion. No one surrounding her knows or cares what she is going through. The one long shot simply lets the conversation take place without Otilia; the fear apparent on her unsettling face dominates the scene, yet all the minute gestures and small talk around the table meld together to sum up the oppressive environment of the last days of Romanian communist rule.

The film makes no direct political statements of any kind, but simply shows, with a great deal of care and craft, the quotidian tyranny people lived with under Ceaușescu. There is not a single government official of any kind in the movie; instead, the movie shows how ordinary people act under such a repressive

regime. The film is demanding because it presents situations and asks the audience to work with it to find the many meanings. For example, except for the two leads, most characters have an air of dictatorial authority and no empathy, whether hotel clerks, the families and friends of the boyfriend, or the abortionist.

While the narrative is linear and the film follows clear temporal and spatial continuity, it does not start or end with classical equilibrium. It starts with a crisis and ends with the conclusion of a horrific event that demoralizes all involved and which the characters are determined to erase from their memory. At the same time, the form, narrative, and questions of the film have made it difficult for spectators to do precisely that, sparking debates that have spilled out of screenings ever since. This, too, is part of the power of a great festival film.

Conclusion

The old Eastern Europe provided film festivals with a fresh area to explore in the twenty-first century. Even though it had been nearly two decades since the collapse of communism in the area, Western Europeans want to learn more about this area. Festival programmers want to explore the impact of communism in unknown sites, even though the festivals are only several hundred miles away, especially when "truth" is presented with a festival aesthetic and new twists by a strong group of young filmmakers. Communism and totalitarianism are favored topics and areas in film festivals; Chinese and Iranians have both received considerable successes at film festivals, in counterpoint to their regimes. Yet, even as Romanians relish their success, programmers are looking for the next wave, whether from Israel, Argentina, Malaysia, or some other vantage.

Overall, there is not a single formula for festival films or festival success. However, if we study the "successful" festival films, those that have won prizes and garnered a great deal of attention, we see that almost all are "serious" films, films that require work and do not allow the audience to just sit back and be manipulated. Carefully constructed rather than spectacular, austere and evocative rather than pedestrian, novel but referential, festival films may not constitute a genre per se but do constitute a process of genrification, to use Altman's terms. As mentioned at the very beginning of the chapter, it is far easier to define what festival films are not than what they are or will be. Nevertheless, they are anchored by their relationships to production, markets, discussion, and audiences, as we will see in future chapters.