

A History of the Sydney and
Melbourne Film Festivals,
1945-1972

Negotiating Between Culture and
Industry

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This one's for 'the Don' – Win Hinds.

*Moses
Supposes
His toeses
Are roses
But Moses
Supposes
Erroneously
Boop-be-doop-be-doobie!*

—Gene Kelly and Donald Stanley,
Singin' In The Rain

Certificate of Authorship of Thesis

Except where indicated in footnotes, quotations and the bibliography, I certify that I am the sole author of the thesis submitted today entitled —“A History of the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals, 1945-1972: Negotiating Between Culture and Industry”, in terms of the Statement of Requirements for a Thesis issued by the University Higher Degrees Committee.

Signature: _____

31st August, 2004

Abstract

This thesis is a history of the Sydney and Melbourne International Film Festivals, and covers the years from 1945 to 1972. Based primarily on archival material, it is an organisational history dealing with the attempts by the two Film Festivals to negotiate between the demands of ‘culture’ and ‘industry’ throughout this period. The thesis begins with a consideration of the origins of the Festivals in the post-war period —with the attempts by non-Hollywood producers to break into the cinema market, the collapse of the ‘mass audience’, and the growth of the film society movement in Australia. The thesis then examines the establishment in the early 1950s of the Sydney and Melbourne Festivals as small, amateur events, run by and for film enthusiasts. It then traces the Festivals’ historical development until 1972, by which time both Festivals had achieved an important status as social and cultural organisations within Australia. The main themes dealt with throughout this period of development include the Festivals’ difficult negotiations with both the international and domestic film trade, their ongoing internal debates over their role and purpose as cultural organisations, their responses to the appearance of other international film festivals in Australia, their relation to the Australian film industry, and their fight to liberalise Australia’s film censorship regulations.

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champagne and those finer things which only you and your gorgeous daughter (my mother) can afford.

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* * * * *

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Table of Contents

	Glossary of Abbreviations.....	viii
	Introduction	1
	1945-52: The Birth of the International Film Festival in Australia	10
1	1952-58: The Origins of the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals.....	38
2	1959-64: Expansion and Conflict.....	77
3	1965-68: Growth and Alliance	126
4	1969-72: Establishment and Success	179
5	Conclusion.....	236
	Bibliography.....	242

Glossary of Abbreviations

Abbreviations for Organisations

ACOFS	Australian Council of Film Societies
AFDC	Australian Film Development Corporation
AFI	Australian Film Institute
ANFB	Australian National Film Board
CFU	Commonwealth Film Unit
DOI	Department of Interior
FIAPF	Federation International des Association de Producteurs de Films
FVFS	Federation of Victorian Film Societies
MFF	Melbourne Film Festival
MPPA	Motion Picture Association of America (from 1945)
MPPDA	Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America
MUFS	Melbourne University Film Society
SFF	Sydney Film Festival
SUFG	Sydney University Film Group
SUFS	Sydney University Film Society

Abbreviations for Primary Source Materials

MFF – Min.	Melbourne Film Festival, Minutes of Meetings
MFF – Arch.	Other material (press clippings, etc.) from the MFF archives
SFF – Min.	Sydney Film Festival, Minutes of Meetings
SFF – Oral Hist. Arch.	Sydney Film Festival, Oral History Archives
SFF – Arch.	Other material (press clippings, etc.) from the SFF archives

Introduction

This thesis is an essay in what could be called ‘micro-history’. It is a study of the organisational history of the Sydney and Melbourne International Film Festivals, and moves from their origins in the post-war film society movement in Australia, to the early 1970s —by which time the Festivals had succeeded in becoming two of the premier social and cultural events in the country.

Before turning to the detailed historical narrative in Chapter One, it is first necessary to provide a brief outline of the main theme around which the narrative is structured: the tension between ‘culture’ and ‘industry’. As its sub-title indicates, the key argument of the thesis is that the organisational history of the two Film Festivals can be seen as the result of a continuous negotiation between two opposing sorts of demands. On the one hand, the Festivals were responsive to the need to maintain their cultural legitimacy —as exhibitors of non-mainstream ‘quality’ cinema and promoters of ‘film culture’ in general. On the other hand, the Festivals were also subject to various demands from the commercial cinema trade, both international and domestic.

It should be emphasised here that the purpose of this Introduction is simply to provide an initial outline of this tension between ‘cultural’ demands and ‘industrial’ demands, as it applies to the two Film Festivals. It therefore has no pretences to offer any general ‘theory’ of this tension, or to provide any historical account of the genealogy of the discourses of ‘culture’ that underlie it. This thesis is, as stated above, an organisational history, rather than an undertaking in theoretical cultural studies or a history of ideas. Hence, this Introduction only aims to offer a sketch of the central, organising structure of the history —the details of which will be filled in by the narrative itself.

The notion that the field of cinema is characterised by the opposition between ‘culture’ and ‘industry’ is not, of course, a new one. Indeed, since its inception in the early twentieth century, film theory has often been explicitly concerned with this issue —with its ambition to

prove that film could be a ‘genuine art form’, and thereby something more than a mere commodity.¹ And—to repeat the quotation that Geoffrey Nowell-Smith uses to open the magisterial *Oxford History of World Cinema*—in the 1930s the British documentary maker Paul Rotha referred to cinema as “the great unresolved equation between art and industry”.² Rotha was referring to the fact that film makers, if they were to succeed in creating ‘works of art’, needed to find ways of maintaining their artistic autonomy, and thus integrity, in the face of the demands of industry, which was itself driven by economic imperatives rather than artistic ones. In other words, the tension between the demands of ‘culture’ and ‘industry’ implicitly sets film practitioners a problem—an ‘equation’ which they need to ‘resolve’. In the terms of Rotha’s metaphor, then, this thesis is an examination of the two Film Festivals’ attempts to solve this equation.

It is the capital-intensive nature of cinema that makes the opposition between ‘culture’ and ‘industry’ particularly problematic in this field.³ This is for obvious enough reasons. To begin with, the costs of producing a film (in particular, a feature-length movie) is extremely high when compared with the costs of producing many other cultural products (such as literary works). Such cinematic production typically involves high levels of both labour costs (technical personnel, actors, and so forth), and capital investment in materials and equipment (cameras, film-stock, and so forth). Hence, typical feature films need to reach a large market if they are to make a profit. This, in turn, involves further expense in marketing and exhibiting. Taken together, this means that the field of cinema is highly susceptible to economic pressures.

While this susceptibility is a general truth about the field of cinema, there are some ways in which practitioners can achieve higher levels of autonomy (that is, greater freedom from economic constraints). One such method is to produce short (or shorter) films, as these are, for obvious reasons, cheaper. The ‘short’ is thus one of the typical sites for new film-makers.

¹ See, e.g., N. Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988, pp. 3-15. Unsurprisingly, the ‘culture’ / ‘industry’ opposition has been used to structure a number of major histories of cinema. See, e.g., G. Nowell-Smith (ed.), *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; and, with regard to the Australian context, the two volumes of S. Dermody and E. Jacka, *The Screening of Australia*, Sydney: Currency Press, 1987–8.

² See the ‘General Introduction’ to Nowell-Smith (ed.), *Oxford History of World Cinema*, p.xix.

³ It should be noted here that, as Pierre Bourdieu has argued at length, *all* fields of cultural production can be seen as characterised by the tension between ‘culture’ and ‘industry’ (or, in Bourdieu’s terminology, between the poles of ‘autonomy’ and ‘heteronomy’). The capital-intensive nature of cinema simply makes it a particularly heteronomous field (as compared, say, to the field of literature). For a summary statement of Bourdieu’s position, see his “The Field of Cultural Production” [1983], in *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. R. Johnson, trans. R. Nice, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993, pp. 29-73.

Another method is to use cheaper cameras and film-stock —such as 16mm rather than 35mm. In the period dealt with in this thesis, the 16mm format was widely utilised in areas such as experimental films and documentaries (neither of which could rely on obtaining wide commercial success). A third method is to obtain public funding for films —as government investment may not be as closely tied as private funding to the demand for profitability. As Chapter One will discuss in more detail, such public funding was one important reason for the increased experimentation found in post-war European cinema, and was also the major source of money for documentaries in Australia.

One drive behind the pursuit of greater autonomy is the quest for *cultural* legitimacy and *cultural* recognition (expressed, for example, in Rotha's 'unresolved equation' remark). Such legitimacy and recognition are not the same as —and, indeed, are often in conflict with— commercial success and profitability. Furthermore, whilst commercial success has reasonably unambiguous measures in the form of such things as profitability and market share, what constitutes cultural success is much less clear cut. In the case of cinema, it could include such things as the recognition and respect of one's peers (e.g., other film-makers), positive reviews in particular journals, acclaim from certain film critics, 'sanctification' by particular institutions (e.g., receiving awards from particular film festivals), and —importantly— being the object of consumption of certain exclusive audiences (such as the social elite, the intellectual elite, and so forth).

Not only does cultural success or legitimacy have less clear-cut indicators than commercial success, but it is also deeply contested. What some practitioners within cinema consider a cultural success (e.g., an 'artistic triumph'), may be considered a cultural failure by others (e.g., because it is 'apolitical' or 'stereotyped'). Indeed, it is possible to see cultural history as, in part, a struggle to establish particular conceptions of cultural legitimacy over others. However, for the purposes of this thesis, it is not necessary to examine any further the complex processes involved in the formation of taste and ideas of what constitutes the aesthetic and the culturally legitimate.⁴

What is necessary here is to point out that the notions of cultural legitimacy and cultural success that are utilised by the two Film Festivals do not comprise a unified, coherent, self-conscious doctrine. Instead, various conceptions of cultural legitimacy are utilised by the

⁴ For further discussion of these issues see, esp. the work of Bourdieu: "The Field of Cultural Production", and *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Harvard, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984. Cf. T. Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, London: Blackwell, 1990.

Festivals at different times, and expressed in various ways (often implicitly rather than explicitly).

It is important to offer a brief summary of these various conceptions of ‘culture’ here, because, as the narrative of the thesis will show in detail, they play a constitutive part in the history of the two Film Festivals. Conceptions of cultural legitimacy, shared to varying degrees by the members and organisers of the Festivals, play a number of substantive roles. Most importantly, they function as norms or ideals —helping to define just what an ‘international film festival’ ought to be, and what it ought to do. This affects all aspects of the Festivals —from dealing with the commercial film trade (both distributors and exhibitors), to the selection of ‘appropriate’ films to be screened at the Festivals, to the very structure of the programmes themselves.

Although (as noted above) there are various and competing conceptions of ‘culture’, they do share one common thread. All of them are differentiated in large part through their opposition to a notion of ‘industry’ —conceived of as the ‘other’. To put this another way, each of these conceptions of ‘culture’ derives a central part of its meaning by defining itself as *not* ‘industry’. The various notions of culture drawn on by the Festivals can thus be roughly sketched in the following table of oppositions.

CULTURE	vs.	INDUSTRY
‘quality’ or ‘art’ cinema	vs.	‘mere entertainment’ or ‘commercial cinema’
‘intellectually valuable’ or ‘educational’	vs.	(merely) ‘entertaining’ or ‘pleasurable’
‘aesthetically pleasing’	vs.	‘titillating’
‘unique’ or ‘experimental’	vs.	‘formulaic’ or ‘stereotyped’ or ‘genre’
‘for the public good’	vs.	‘for private profit’
‘enhances national or cultural identity’	vs.	‘supports cultural imperialism’
‘encourages internationalism’	vs.	‘encourages parochialism’
‘appreciated only by an elite’	vs.	‘for mass consumption’

‘encourages critical engagement’ vs. ‘encourages passivity’
 ‘politically liberating’ vs. ‘supports *status quo*’

In rough terms, this table of oppositions moves from the more purely aesthetic conceptions of cultural legitimacy (in which legitimacy stems from the innate aesthetic qualities of the cultural product in question), to conceptions in which legitimacy is conferred by social value (such as intellectual or educational content, or its value as an expression of national / local culture) to more highly politicised views (characteristic of Marxist cultural theory, for example).⁵

It should be noted that, in the period immediately following World War Two, the phrases on the right-hand (‘industry’) side of the above table were often held to characterise the contemporary products of the Hollywood studios. As will be discussed in Chapter One, this can partly be ascribed to the overwhelming commercial dominance of US cinema. In the immediate post-war period, Hollywood products were the mainstay of commercial exhibition throughout the English-speaking world. In addition, Hollywood was an unabashed commercial enterprise, with an explicit focus on profit-making and market dominance. It was therefore in a perfect historical position to be seen as the paradigm example of ‘industry’ in the field of cinema.

It is not surprising, therefore, that when the first Australian international film festival was held at Olinda, Victoria, in 1952, it essentially defined itself in opposition to the contemporary Hollywood film industry and its products. As will be discussed in detail in Chapter One, almost the only thing that unified the various films shown at Olinda was that they were *not* contemporary Hollywood films. Apart from this single source of unity, the programme was extraordinarily diverse, and appealed to a wide variety of concepts of ‘culture’.

The Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals, which in part emerged from Olinda, continued to position themselves as exhibitors of ‘non-mainstream’ cinema —that is, cinema that was not receiving wide commercial release within Australia. In addition, both Festivals were resolutely non-profit organisations. These two facts —the opposition to ‘mainstream

⁵ This view is characteristic of avant-garde film theory of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and will be discussed in a little more detail in the later chapters. However, for one early and canonical formulation of the view, see T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” [1944], in S. During (ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader*, London: Routledge, 1993, pp. 29-43.

cinema', and their apparent freedom from any taint of commercialism— sufficed to establish the Festivals' cultural legitimacy. As the historical narrative of the thesis will show, the Festivals felt an on-going need to maintain this legitimacy. Hence, the various notions of 'culture' listed above played a constant role (often implicit and unacknowledged) in all Festival policy deliberations throughout this period.

However, to return to an earlier theme, these efforts to maintain cultural legitimacy were occurring in the context of a field which was strongly under the influence of industrial and economic pressures. For example, the Film Festivals found that if they wished to obtain major European releases (i.e., 'quality' film), then they would have to ensure that they performed a useful publicity function for the commercial trade —and would thus have to bow to at least *some* of the demands of commercialism. (These pressures will, of course, also be discussed in more detail in what follows.)

As should already be clear from the table of oppositions given above, these concessions to industrial pressures were, *prima facie*, deeply threatening to the cultural legitimacy of the Film Festivals. Because 'culture' is defined in opposition to what it is not —namely, 'industry'— the industrial pressures on the Festivals threatened to open them to charges of 'commercialism', and thus undermine their claim to represent 'culture'. Given that the entire *raison d'être* of the Festivals was to be cultural organisations screening non-commercial cinema —and that their audience and (largely volunteer) organising committees were composed of people with a strong belief in this identity— such undermining in turn threatened the very existence of the Festivals. For these reasons —to reiterate the opening claim of this Introduction— the history of the two Film Festivals over this period can be seen as the result of an on-going negotiation between the demands of 'culture' and 'industry'.

This thesis thus focuses on the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals as organisations attempting to maintain a particular identity (as vehicles of 'film culture'), in a particular industrial context. This focus is quite different from most previous historical treatments of film festivals —which have tended to consider festivals almost as 'empty spaces' in which films were exhibited. In other words, film festivals tend to appear in histories of cinema (where they are mentioned at all) largely in the role of vehicles for particular films. Correspondingly, the fact that film festivals are organisations with their own histories, identities, and locations within a broader network of industrial relations, tends to be neglected. The major aim of this thesis is thus to redress this neglect, at least in the case of the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals.

A few examples will suffice to illustrate the absence of any real organisational history of film festivals in the literature. The *Oxford History of World Cinema* contains no discussions of international film festivals —and this is despite the fact that much of this work is dedicated to ‘art’ cinema.⁶ Even a work like Roy Armes’s *French Cinema*, which attempts to locate French films within their industrial context, contains no systematic discussion of the industrial role played by film festivals in marketing and promoting French cinema in the post-war period.⁷ This lack, common to most treatments of European cinema, is repeated in the historical literature concerning Australian film. For example, Shirley and Adams’s major work, *Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years*, mentions the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals only as vehicles for particular films (e.g., George Miller’s *Violence in the Cinema, Part I*), or film movements (e.g., the Australian avant-garde).⁸ A minor exception to this general rule comes in discussions of film censorship in Australia, in which the two Film Festivals are usually credited with playing an important role in the struggle for film censorship liberalisation.⁹ But even in this case, the industrial context within which the Festivals were operating, and their own internal dilemmas, are not discussed. Indeed, the only real attention played to the organisational history of the two Film Festivals is found in two short pieces produced by the Festivals themselves: *40 Years of Film: An Oral History of the Sydney Film Festival*, and *A Place to Call Home: Celebrating 50 Years of the Melbourne International Film Festival*.¹⁰ However, useful as these documents are to the historian, they are intended primarily as celebratory and promotional accounts, and are not a substitute for a genuine, critical history —which is what this thesis aims to provide.¹¹

This thesis is thus primarily focussed on giving an historical account of the organisational workings and industrial context of the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals up to 1972, rather than on providing a cultural analysis of the films they screened over this period. For

⁶ See Nowell-Smith (ed.), *Oxford History of World Cinema*. The index to this work does not contain the name of even the most prestigious international film festival —Cannes.

⁷ R. Armes, *French Cinema*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1985.

⁸ G. Shirley and B. Adams, *Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson and Currency Press, 1985, pp. 257 and 226.

⁹ See, e.g., Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*, p. 221; see also I. Bertrand, *Film Censorship in Australia*, St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978, pp. 181-5 and 194-5.

¹⁰ Sydney Film Festival, *40 Years of Film*, Sydney: Beaver Press, 1993; P. Kalina (ed.), *A Place to Call Home*, Melbourne: Melbourne International Film Festival, 2001.

¹¹ An examination of B. Reis’s monumental *Australian Film: A Bibliography*, London: Mansell, 1997, reveals a large number of discussions of Australian film festivals —but these tend either to be reviews of film content, or discussions of the censorship issue, and there is very little in the way of critical historical analysis.

this reason, the historical narrative is based primarily on the Festivals' own extensive archives—especially minutes of meetings and correspondence. The major themes dealt with in this history include the Festivals' growth as organisations, their relations with each other, their relations to the domestic and international commercial trade, and their relations to other film culture organisations. These themes provide the major focus of the thesis, as they are not only fundamental to the history of the two Film Festivals, but also provide the richest areas for examining the Festivals' complex negotiations between 'culture' and 'industry' over this period.

It should be noted here that a full treatment of the organisational and industrial role of the international film festival would need to be extended globally. It would also have to include a complex analysis of the relationship between various festivals and the marketing strategies of the non-Hollywood film industries. This, of course, is far too ambitious a project to be attempted here. It is, however, hoped that this history of the formative years of the two major Australian international film festivals will contribute in a small way to this much larger project.

* * * * *

The structure of the thesis is as follows. Chapter One deals with the years from 1945 to 1952—the period immediately prior to the founding of the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals. It discusses some of the major post-war developments in the international and domestic film industry, the growth of the film society movement in Australia, and Australia's first international film festival, which was held at Olinda, Victoria, in 1952. Chapter Two deals with the years from 1952 to 1958, and discusses the emergence of the two Film Festivals, and the early difficulties they experienced. Chapter Three deals with the years from 1958 to 1964. It focuses particularly on the Festivals' attempt to establish an 'Australian Film Festival', and their clashes with the film trade. Chapter Four deals with the years from 1965 to 1968. This period sees the appearance of David Stratton as Director of the Sydney Film Festival, the beginnings of the Festivals' public campaign to liberalise film censorship regulations in Australia, and problems caused by the emergence of other Australian international film festivals. The final instalment of the thesis, Chapter Five, deals with the years from 1969 to 1972, by which time both Festivals have successfully established themselves as major film culture organisations in Australia. This chapter focuses particularly on the continued story of the anti-censorship campaign, and the Festivals' problematic relations with Australian film.

Each of the five chapters begins with a brief essay on the historical context in which the Festivals find themselves in the period in question—that is, major developments in film culture and the film industry (both internationally and nationally). Two points should be made about these contextual essays. First, along with developments in the Australian context, the essays focus particularly on what is occurring in the US and Western Europe. This focus (and the consequent neglect of areas such as Asia) is not meant to imply that these are the only places where developments in cinema are occurring. However, the developments in the US and Europe were of primary relevance to the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals over this period. In particular, during this period the European film industries remained the dominant source of the most prestigious ‘festival fare’. Second, these contextual essays have no pretences to break new ground—dealing as they do with issues that have been extensively researched by others. Rather, their point is simply to offer a brief sketch of the relevant broader context in which the ‘micro-history’ of the two Film Festivals unfolds.

Finally, before turning to the narrative proper, a brief note about terminology should be made here. Except within quotations, whenever the words ‘Festival’ or ‘Film Festival’ appear in the text with a capital ‘F’ (and usually preceded by the definite article), then they are functioning as proper nouns—in other words, as short-hand for the full name of a festival, such as ‘the Sydney International Film Festival’. In these cases, the surrounding context should make clear which particular international film festivals are under discussion. If the words ‘festival’ or ‘film festival’ appear without capitalisation, then they are not functioning as proper nouns.

1945-52: The Birth of the International Film Festival in Australia

This first chapter deals with the emergence of what was arguably Australia's first international film festival, held at Olinda, Victoria, in 1952. The first section of the chapter examines the international and domestic context of this event. It argues that the advent of the international film festival in Australia was tied to a range of socio-political and economic trends in the post-war period—including the collapse of the old Hollywood studio system, the attempts by national governments to revitalise their film industries, and the flourishing of a film society movement in Australia. The second section of the chapter then examines Olinda in some detail, as this event lays much of the foundations for the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals.

* * * * *

On the Australia Day weekend of 1952, the Federation of Victorian Film Societies (FVFS), other affiliated and interstate film and cine-societies, the Commonwealth Jubilee Arts Subcommittee, and the local council, held what is considered to be Australia's first 'official' international film festival in the Victorian country town of Olinda.¹ A contemporary's account of the event demonstrates how community-driven this festival was:

five-scattered halls were engaged and Army engineers linked them with field telephones. Olinda school playground was turned into an open-air theatre by building a projection box at one side and erecting a 35 foot screen on the other. ... Every available piece of accommodation in the hills was obtained, and when all guest houses were filled we began billeting film-lovers in private homes.²

Olinda's claim to be the pioneer of Australian film festivals is more symbolic than factual. Melbourne University Film Society (MUFS) conducted 'film festivals' from 1949 as

¹ *Olinda Film Festival – 1952*, programme, p. 1.

² A. Heintz, "Miracle at Olinda," *Walkabout*, v. 30, 1964, p. 28.

part of their annual programme.³ The Sydney University Film Group (SUFU) also ran annual ‘classics’ festivals, acquiring overseas films from the National Library of Australia.⁴

Even the Australian film trade —drawing on marketing strategies already utilised in the USA— held what it called ‘film festivals’ in the years prior to Olinda. These ‘festivals’ were essentially week-long previews to provide commercial distributors and exhibitors with the opportunity to see (and ideally purchase) upcoming Hollywood studio releases. Arguably, American distributors were utilising the growing international kudos of the festival format developed in Cannes, which combined the glamour and prestige of the preview ‘event’ package with the practicalities of publicity and marketing.⁵

Although the term ‘film festival’ was thus in use prior to Olinda, it can nonetheless be considered as the first official Australian *international* film festival. This is not only because it screened overseas films, but also because the basic structure for later Australian international film festivals was implemented at this event. First, Olinda brought together a wide range of ‘other’ (i.e., non-Hollywood) films, and unified them with a self-conscious concern for broader social and cultural issues. For, unlike the earlier MUFS and SUFG festivals, the weekend included screenings of ‘art’ and ‘international’ cinema, as well as seminars on such topics as censorship, education and religion in cinema.⁶ Second, the Olinda Film Festival served as a centralised meeting place for a broad range of people interested in the potential of film outside the Hollywood sphere. The Festival was thus held in conjunction with the Annual Meeting of the Australian Council of Film Societies (ACOFS), the Convention for the Amateur Cine-societies, and the Commonwealth Jubilee Film Awards.⁷ Third, Olinda’s organisational structure —as a self-contained two day event designed to screen as many films as possible— mirrored the overseas international film festivals much more closely than prior events held in Australia. For these reasons, Olinda deserves its recognition as Australia’s first international film festival.

³ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1955*, programme, p. 8.

⁴ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Donaldson, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 10.6.1992.

⁵ *Film Weekly*, 12.7.1951, p. 21.

⁶ For a full overview of Olinda content, see the *Melbourne Film Festival – 1955*, programme.

⁷ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1955*, programme.

I. The International and National Context

In order to understand Olinda's appearance in 1952, it is important to provide a brief sketch of relevant developments in the international film industry in the immediate post-war period, and then to discuss how these affected Australia. As will be argued in more detail below, the immediate post-war years saw a major increase in non-Hollywood film production. This increase occurred mainly because of three developments. First, the 'Paramount Decrees' of 1948 led to radical changes in the investment and marketing plans of the Hollywood majors. Second, during this period many national governments expanded their investment in film as a way of promoting post-war reconstruction. Third, improvements in film technology made film-making less expensive and thus more accessible to a wider range of people. Taken together, these three developments led to the production of an increasingly rich and diverse range of films in the post-war years —and thereby enhanced potential for the development of distinct types of audience. In the Australian context, as will be argued below, these developments, along with the burgeoning growth of a film society movement, would provide the fertile soil from which Olinda emerged.

As noted above, the post-war years saw radical changes to the 'Hollywood system', leading to a significant increase in independent production. In 1948 the Supreme Court of the USA handed down the *Paramount* decision, in a ruling confirming a 1946 district court decree. As summed up by Tino Balio, this decision —known as the 'Paramount Decrees'—

outlawed unfair distribution trade practices and mandated that the five vertically integrated film companies divorce their theatre chains from their production and distribution branches. Thereafter, the Big Five could no longer give one another preferential treatment and usurp the playing time of the best theatres.⁸

The Paramount Decrees thus broke the monopolistic control of the Hollywood majors over exhibition venues. The Decrees also prohibited the practice of block booking, whereby the majors could force exhibitors to show a large number of class B pictures along with the higher quality ones. This, together with declining audiences which made extended runs less viable,⁹ meant that the Hollywood majors found it harder to fill all available screen time with their own productions.

⁸ T. Balio, *United Artists*, Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987, p. 41.

⁹ M. Conant, "The Impact of the Paramount Decrees", in T. Balio, (ed.), *The American Film Industry*, Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976, p. 349.

These antitrust regulations thereby reopened the door for independent producers. Indeed, as Michael Conant notes, the Paramount Decrees “can be regarded as a charter of freedom for the independent producers”.¹⁰ The majors, in a radical shift, began to invest in independent productions as a way of maintaining their profit margins. For example, the amount invested by Warner Bros. in independent productions rose 25 fold in the ten years from 1946-1956 (from US\$1 million to US\$25 million). Even without the Decrees, this change in investment strategy made good economic sense. Generous government tax incentives for independent producers, directors and actors, and higher levels of efficiency, meant that independent production was considerably cheaper than production by the majors.¹¹

This breaking of the Hollywood oligopoly system resulted in the post-war years seeing a proliferation of independent film companies —a trend commented on in 1955 by *Variety* in an article headlined ‘Look, Ma, I’m a Corporation’.¹² By 1949 about 20% of films released by the majors were independently produced, and this percentage would continue to grow. With this breaking down of the old studio system, the majors also found that their own distribution channels and production facilities were being under-utilised; hence in order to maintain their profit margins, they began to lease them to independents. These changes, stemming in large part from the Paramount Decrees, all led to a greatly increased production and distribution of independent films.¹³

The second trend leading to greater production of non-Hollywood films in the post-war period was increased investment of both private and public money in other national film industries (in particular, British and continental European cinema). This investment was partly a reaction to Hollywood dominance of the European market in the immediate post-war years, and partly linked to a perception amongst national governments that film could assist in post-war reconstruction.

The end of World War II meant that the continental European markets were open again to Hollywood films. The European film industries had been badly affected by the war, having suffered many cutbacks in production and much damage to equipment.¹⁴ Furthermore, in the immediate post-war period there was little excess capital available to rebuild these industries.

¹⁰ Conant, “The Impact of the Paramount Decrees”, pp. 348-9.

¹¹ Conant (“The Impact of the Paramount Decrees”, p. 352) estimates the savings as at least 25%.

¹² *Variety*, 16.3.1955, quoted in Conant, “The Impact of the Paramount Decrees”, p. 350.

¹³ See M. Conant, “The Impact of the Paramount Decrees”, p. 346ff, and Balio, *United Artists*, ch. 2.

This meant that the European film industries were in no position to compete effectively with the Hollywood majors, who seized the chance to maximise their share of the European film market.¹⁵ At the end of the war, Hollywood also had the advantage of possessing a substantial backlog of unplayed films to release internationally. Furthermore, the moves of the Hollywood majors into foreign markets were encouraged by the US government. Not only were US film companies exempted from anti-trust legislation in foreign markets (which thus allowed them to combine and fix prices), but US government departments actually played a role in distributing Hollywood films in Europe. As Thomas Guback remarks,

As Allied troops liberated Europe, American motion pictures followed in their path, with exhibition arranged by the Bureau of Psychological Warfare. The Office of War Information was handling the distribution of US films in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy, until American companies could reopen their offices.¹⁶

The US government was involved in such distribution because it perceived film as not only a profitable export for the economy, but also as having substantial propaganda value.

Hollywood films were seen as an effective way of projecting American and capitalist values, and thus combating any attraction to socialist politics in Europe —a perception which led President Truman (in 1950) to refer to films as US “ambassadors of good will”.¹⁷

This rapid expansion of Hollywood into the European market led the European governments to establish various measures to protect and revitalise their own industries, and prevent the depletion of their dollar reserves. Imported American films not only took market share at the expense of the national film industries, but they also had to be paid for in US dollars, which depleted the scarce dollar reserves of the countries in question. A UNESCO report of the period summed up the situation that had developed in Europe as follows.

The large number of cheap American films ... apart from adding to the dollar deficit, is only one of the factors prejudicing the development of national film production industries. These industries, unable to recover their outlay on the films which they produce, are stunted in growth, and become unable to meet the demands of the national market. The

¹⁴ T.H. Guback, “Hollywood’s International Market”, in Balio, *American Film Industry*, p. 394.

¹⁵ See P. Sorlin, *European Cinemas, European Societies*, London: Routledge, 1991, pp. 92-4.

¹⁶ Guback, “Hollywood’s International Market”, p. 395.

¹⁷ Quoted in Guback, “Hollywood’s International Market”, p. 396.

exhibitors, therefore, are driven to depend for their existence upon foreign, largely American, films.¹⁸

In response to this situation, a number of European governments passed various sorts of protectionist legislation, such as quota systems to restrict the dumping of cheap American films into their markets, and introduced tax incentives to encourage local film producers and exhibitors.¹⁹

Perhaps the two most important examples of such legislation in the immediate post-war period are the Anglo-American and the Franco-American Film Agreements of 1948. These agreements prevented the full repatriation of profits made by US firms.²⁰ That is, a proportion of such profits were frozen, and had to be reinvested in the local film industries. This meant that Hollywood began to engage increasingly in co-productions with many European studios (so that, for example, by 1956 about one third of the films made in Britain were joint US/British productions).²¹ The financial stimulus generated by such co-production agreements helped to reinvigorate the film industries of those countries, and the post-war period thus saw a substantial rise in film production in Europe.

There was a further source of increased funding for film in some countries: a growing perception amongst governments that film could serve as a useful vehicle for assisting post-war reconstruction and development. Film had been extensively used as a propaganda device during the war, and for many governments it had proved its worth as a tool for building and maintaining morale and a sense of national purpose. In particular, the documentary genre had been a central propaganda tool. As Charles Musser remarks, during the War, “documentary assumed a crucial propagandistic purpose —to instil domestic audiences with the will to persevere and win, and to shape perceptions at home as well as in Allied and neutral countries”.²²

It is thus unsurprising that these lessons learned during war-time were also applied to the task of post-war reconstruction by government departments of propaganda —which, in peace-

¹⁸ UNESCO, *The Film Centre in Six European Countries* (Paris, 1950), p. 21, quoted in Guback, “Hollywood’s International Market”, p. 396.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Armes, *French Cinema*, pp. 125-6.

²⁰ Guback, “Hollywood’s International Market”, p.397; Sorlin, *European Cinemas*, p. 94.

²¹ Sorlin, *European Cinemas*, p. 94; see also P. Lev, *The Euro-American Cinema*, Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1993, p. 20.

²² C. Musser, “Documentary”, in Nowell-Smith (ed.), *Oxford History of World Cinema*, p. 327.

time, were quick to transmute themselves into ‘departments of information’.²³ Many governments thus began either funding or producing films that could help to build and maintain a sense of national identity and national loyalty. Nowell-Smith summarises this situation as follows.

After 1945, government policy in many countries specifically favoured the making of films that would serve as vehicles of national cultural expression. Though these policies were often ambiguous, both in intention and in effect, they opened up spaces in which non-mainstream film-making could be financially viable, if not a reliable source of profit.²⁴

As will be discussed in more detail below, this source of funding for film production would prove to be important in Australia. In this country, in part because of the influence of John Grierson, it resulted in an increased production of documentary film—a genre which would constitute an important segment of the films shown at the Olinda Film Festival.

Having outlined two major trends leading to the greatly augmented production of non-Hollywood films in the post-war period (the changes to Hollywood investment and production strategies, and the increased role of government in film production) there is one other important development that is worth noting: the changes to film technology. John Belton writes that “in the post-war era professional motion picture production equipment underwent a transformation”.²⁵ In particular, the 1940s saw the wide adoption of new 35mm cameras, such as the Arriflex and the Cameflex, which were much smaller and lighter than previous film cameras. This change to the technology had at least two important effects. First, it made film production somewhat cheaper and thus more accessible to a wider range of film-makers, including amateurs. Second, it made cameras much more portable, and thus allowed film-makers to begin exploring novel subjects and styles of filming. Developments in camera technology in the post-war period thus allowed many new kinds of film to be produced by a broader range of people. In particular, it would be these changes that made possible the appearance of avant-garde and experimental film-making—movements, which, as Belton notes, “not only depend upon but are empowered by this new technology”.²⁶

²³ See, e.g., G. Jowett and V. O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1986, pp. 142-4.

²⁴ G. Nowell-Smith, “Art Cinema” in Nowell-Smith (ed.), *Oxford History of World Cinema*, p. 567.

²⁵ J. Belton, “New Technologies”, in Nowell-Smith (ed.), *Oxford History of World Cinema*, p. 486; see also J. Monaco, *How to Read a Film*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 79.

²⁶ Belton, “New Technologies”, p. 489.

The three economic, political and technological trends discussed above, all resulted in the increasing production of a wide range of non-Hollywood and non-mainstream films in the post-war period. This development constitutes a significant part of the international context for the appearance of the Olinda Film Festival in 1952. It is now necessary to examine the *national* context of this Festival's appearance. After giving a brief account of Australian government involvement in the film industry, and the growth of interest in documentaries and film for educational and other purposes (in part, because of the influence of Grierson), this chapter will turn to look in more detail at the growth of the Australian film society movement.

The Second World War, and the period of post-war reconstruction, saw the Australian government providing increased support for the production, distribution and exhibition of films, and, in particular, for documentary films. As mentioned above, both before and during the War many national governments had made extensive use of film (especially documentaries) for propaganda purposes. Britain was no exception to this—in the late 1930s the 'Imperial Relations Trust' had appointed a Film Committee which was required "to study the question of production and distribution of educational and documentary films of the Empire", with the overall aim of maintaining and strengthening "the ties that bind together the Dominions and the United Kingdom".²⁷ John Grierson, the famous pioneer of documentaries (who was, in fact, responsible for popularising the term 'documentary'), was appointed its first film officer.²⁸ Grierson had previously worked for the Empire Marketing Board, where he and his protégés made many documentaries which glorified the British Empire and were "paeans to British national purpose".²⁹ As part of Grierson's work for the Film Committee, in 1940 he made a missionary-like journey to the British Dominions in order to encourage cultural production and exchange, and thereby maintain the cohesion of the British Commonwealth.³⁰

In Australia, Grierson's visit led to the establishment of the State Documentary Films Councils,³¹ and in 1945 the Australian National Film Board (ANFB)³² was established by the

²⁷ Both quotes are from I. Bertrand, and D. Collins, *Government and Film in Australia*, Sydney: Currency Press, 1981, pp. 97, 97-8.

²⁸ Bertrand, and Collins, *Government and Film in Australia*, pp. 97-98; Musser, "Documentary", pp. 323-5.

²⁹ Musser, "Documentary", p. 324; see also Grierson's writings on the documentary genre, collected in F. Hardy (ed.), *Grierson on Documentary*, New York: Praeger, 1971.

³⁰ See Bertrand, and Collins, *Government and Film in Australia*, pp. 97-98.

³¹ See Bertrand and Collins, *Government and Film in Australia*, pp. 99-100.

³² Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*, p. 176.

Departments of Post-War Reconstruction and of Information.³³ This latter was an advisory board which funded co-productions. As its production arm, the ANFB used the Films Division of the Department of Information until 1950, when this department was abolished, and the Film Unit placed under the authority of the News and Information Bureau of the Ministry of the Interior (and, in 1956, it became the Commonwealth Film Unit).³⁴ Although, as Bertrand and Collins argue, Australian government interest in film remained somewhat “half-hearted”,³⁵ these new organisations nevertheless served as small but significant production and/or distribution loci for documentaries, educational films, and government information films. These organisations thus played a role in expanding the local availability of non-Hollywood and non-mainstream film in Australia.

Despite their ‘public’ status, the ANFB and the Films Division were clearly perceived as competition by the commercial film industry. The government had attempted to maintain a sharp distinction between the ‘private’ and ‘public’ cinematic spheres. Whilst government film bodies had previously accepted assistance from the private film industry and trade (who had Board members on the wartime National Films Council), the post-war Australian National Film Board implemented the policy that members should not be “financially connected with any film interests”.³⁶ Nonetheless, as Bertrand and Collins state, the government Films Division was considered “a threat in the eyes of commercial producers, an unwarranted intrusion by government into territory which was properly the responsibility and right of private enterprise”.³⁷ As they also state,

The more the supporters of Grierson’s idea of ‘documentary’ pressed the definition as being something more than mere reportage or instructional films and pointed out that audiences enjoyed such films as well as being educated by them in the broadest sense, the more threatened the commercial producers and exhibitors felt.³⁸

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the political atmosphere of the late 40s and early 50s, the commercial film industry accused the Films Division of being ridden with left-wingers, who, via the use of documentaries “have been able very cleverly to condition the minds of theatre

³³ Alan K. Stout, “Films in Australia: my 35 years’ saga”, interviewed by Ina Bertrand, 20.11.1979, 21.11.1979.

³⁴ Bertrand and Collins, *Government and Film in Australia*, pp. 114-8.

³⁵ Bertrand and Collins, *Government and Film in Australia*, p. 89.

³⁶ Bertrand and Collins, *Government and Film in Australia*, p. 103.

³⁷ Bertrand and Collins, *Government and Film in Australia*, p. 115.

³⁸ Bertrand and Collins, *Government and Film in Australia*, p. 102.

audiences to long-range socialistic ideas”.³⁹ This was an accusation that would also dog the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals in their early years.

In the post-war period, the ANFB and other government film organisations focussed on funding and producing films that would assist in the reconstruction of Australia, and promote the ideals of internationalism and active citizenship that were thought to be essential to such reconstruction. This relationship between films and the promotion of national goals is clear from the following statement of the ANFB’s official duty, which was

to promote, assist and coordinate the production, distribution and importation of films for purposes of school and adult education, rehabilitation, social development, international understanding, trade and tourist expansion and migration.⁴⁰

This conception of the role of government-supported film is made even more explicit in an outline from 1950 of the ANFB’s official guidelines for production support. This states that the Board will consider funding those films that are

- (a) for use within Australia on important matters of national interest and welfare, such as school and adult education, rehabilitation, social development, international understanding, trade and tourist expansion and immigration;
- (b) for dissemination abroad in order to:
 - (i) expand trade and commerce with other countries;
 - (ii) encourage tourist traffic within Australia;
 - (iii) improve Australia’s relations with other countries, and where necessary to explain Australia’s national policies;
 - (iv) encourage immigration.⁴¹

It is clear from both these passages that the establishment of the ANFB can be seen as part of the broader international trend, noted above, in which national governments had come to conceive of film (and documentaries in particular) as an effective way of assisting post-war reconstruction and economic development, and for promoting other national goals.

³⁹ Anonymous letter to the government, 1947, quoted in Bertrand and Collins, *Government and Film in Australia*, p. 115.

⁴⁰ Department of Information, Minutes of Film Conference, 20.9.1944, quoted in Bertrand and Collins, *Government and Film in Australia*, pp. 104-5.

⁴¹ Quoted in Bertrand and Collins, *Government and Film in Australia*, pp. 115-116.

In more detail, points (a) and (b.i–iv) quoted above show that the ANFB conceived of government-supported film as serving both internal and external functions. Its internal functions, listed under point (a), were identity development, community building, matters of national interest, and education. Implicit in this notion of education was an arguably ‘quarantined’ exposure of Australians to the world they inhabited. Its external functions, listed under point (b), were primarily public relations-based: namely, to ‘market’ the nation overseas by projecting a suitable Australian identity for the purpose of encouraging trade, tourism, immigration and international relationships.

At the time, the documentary stood as the most effective available genre for such marketing. This was because it combined sound with image, and information with the power of persuasion, on a comparatively low budget. The documentary was also considered to be a legitimate ‘public’ genre, and free from association with the world of ‘entertainment’. This was perhaps in part because it had historically failed to fill box-office coffers. But it was also because of the influence of Grierson, who (as noted above) had developed the notion of the documentary as a means of presenting social reality in a way that promoted national ideals. Thus, Stanley Hawes, head of the Films Division of the Department of the Interior (later the Commonwealth Film Unit), hoped to produce documentaries on Australian life that demonstrated “a sense of social conscience, and service to the community”.⁴² However, his vision was always tempered by government insistence that as international marketing vehicles, these films show only “positive aspects of the country”.⁴³

It is worth noting here that after World War II, both public and private industries utilised the documentary format as an indirect marketing tool.⁴⁴ These films were then legitimised as ‘cultural’ products by designing them as instructional and/or artistic films. For example, the Shell Oil Company’s film unit (which was largely staffed by Grierson protégés)⁴⁵ produced their most famous film, *Back of Beyond*, with the production brief to “make a film reflecting

⁴² I. Bertrand, “Stanley Hawes and the Commonwealth Film Unit”, *Australian Journal of Communication*, v. 24 (3), 1997, p. 90.

⁴³ Bertrand, “Stanley Hawes and the Commonwealth Film Unit”, p. 90.

⁴⁴ This included Shell Oil Company, the CSIRO and the Waterside Worker’s Federation of Australia. Others, like Milk Board NSW, Ford Motor Company and the National Road Safety Company contracted external companies for film production. (Taken from Sydney and Melbourne Film Festival programmes, 1952-1954).

⁴⁵ Musser, “Engaging with Reality”, p. 324.

the essence of the Australian character”.⁴⁶ Tracing the 300 mile drive along the Birdsville Track (hence the connection to Shell) by the outback mailman, *Back of Beyond* received the 1954 Grand Prix at Venice.⁴⁷

One major driving force behind such marketing of the nation (through film and other media), was Australia’s post-war immigration policy. For example, as the ANFB’s official guidelines (quoted above) stated, the Board was to disseminate films overseas that would “encourage immigration”, and to produce films that would educate the Australian public about such immigration, as an “important matter of national interest and welfare”. For the Labor Government, concerned with the problem of border defence against the statistical backdrop of an ever-declining natural birth rate, had argued for the expansion of Australia’s immigration intake —this time from the more controversial sources of southern and eastern Europe. Arthur Calwell, Minister for Immigration, argued that such a step must involve re-educating the public:

If we want immigrants we shall have to make Australia so attractive that they will want to settle here. An attractive Australia...will be friendly to newcomers.⁴⁸

Again, film provided a potentially effective vehicle —both to convince other cultures to make Australia their home, and to ‘educate’ a country that had historically been staunchly opposed to such immigration.

Another ‘public’ role for the documentary genre (as well as other types of film) in post-war Australia was education. Again, the ANFB’s guidelines had explicitly mentioned the role of film for “school and adult education” as another “important matter of national interest and welfare”. The post-war period of reconstruction in Australia had brought with it a burgeoning interest in the value of education. As Osborne and Lewis note, this period “encouraged some Australians to seek to understand better both themselves and the world around them through the development of better communication arrangements”.⁴⁹ This period saw the expansion of adult education centres across Australia. In this context, ‘instructional’ film was considered a useful teaching aid across a range of topics and issues. Indeed, in his Memorandum to the

⁴⁶ Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*, p. 194.

⁴⁷ Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*, p. 194.

⁴⁸ “How Many Australians Tomorrow”, in J. Lack and J. Templeton (eds.), *Sources of Immigration History 1901-1945*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988, p. 252.

⁴⁹ G. Osborne and G. Lewis, *Communication Traditions in Australia: Packaging the People*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 93.

Prime Minister, Grierson himself had recommended the expansion of 'non-theatrical' 16mm screenings, stating that

The congregation of the public in terms of its professional, specialist or social interests is all the more valuable an opportunity for public information in that the receptive mood of the audience for the consideration of the matters of public interest can be relied upon.⁵⁰

Grierson's recommendation clearly came to fruition, with non-theatrical exhibition increasing dramatically after World War II. As Bertrand and Collins note:

The 1947-48 Annual Report of the Victorian State Film Centre noted that its entire film library was turned over once every four days. In that same year the centre reached a total audience of 551,311 compared to 4,589 in the previous year.⁵¹

In addition, while in 1945 only two churches had projectors, by 1952 there were over 800 projectors in churches.⁵² Schools in some states saw a similar expansion. In 1944, only 106 NSW schools had projectors —this would increase to 893 in 1956.⁵³

For the reasons sketched above, the post-war period in Australia thus saw an increase in government involvement in film production and distribution, and a significant rise in non-theatrical exhibition. Another leading force behind this rise in non-theatrical exhibition, and one which would play a fundamental role in the emergence of the international film festivals in Australia, was the growth of the film society movement. Appearing gradually after 1944 in the major cities and surrounding regions, the film societies began as a disparate range of interest groups screening films related to their interests.

The growth of the film society movement in Australia in the post-war period was part of a broader international phenomenon. In Europe, in particular, the cinema was enormously popular in this period and played an important role in social life. This popularity resulted in the appearance of various magazines and journals concerned with cinema, and in the formation of a large number of film societies. Such societies provided forums for both

⁵⁰ Osborne and Lewis, *Communication Traditions*, p. 73.

⁵¹ Osborne and Lewis, *Communication Traditions*, p. 90.

⁵² *Olinda Film Festival - 1952*, programme, p. 22.

⁵³ Bertrand and Collins, *Government and Film in Australia*, p. 84.

watching and discussing film. The film society movement began in France and Italy, and then increasingly spread to Britain —and to Australia.⁵⁴

The Australian film societies reflected the broader cultural ambience of the post-war period. According to Clark, after the War “the whole labour movement, large sections of the intelligentsia, and religious groups at the universities were caught up in [an] optimistic and forward-looking mood”.⁵⁵ As discussed above, education, community, development and internationalism were privileged, and this engendered a sense among Australia’s intelligentsia that the world was, both culturally and physically, opening up to them. NSW Film Council librarian and original Sydney Film Festival member Allan Ashbolt captures this ‘awakening’ in his statement of the period:

People were very much aware, very much more aware than they ever had been, of the kind of opportunities there were to inform themselves, to educate themselves, to get a broader knowledge of the world and its problems.⁵⁶

Although the Australian film society movement as a whole can be seen as a reflection of these post-war concerns, it should be emphasised that it was not a unified ‘movement’ in the sense of sharing a common purpose, interest and ideology. Rather, the various film societies existed to serve a wide range of disparate interests, and the main material factor that they had in common was their use of film as a vehicle for those interests. For example, the Sydney University Film Society (SUFS) consisted primarily of engineering students, and was mostly concerned with the technology of cinema —projection, stage lighting, and so forth— rather than with filmic content.⁵⁷ The SUFS also served as a communal locus for social gatherings, rather than as a forum for art or education.⁵⁸ The Sydney University Film Group (SUFU), on the other hand, emerged from the Sydney University Visual Arts Society, and “had an orientation to art and intellect”.⁵⁹ Other groups, like the Realist Film Association in Melbourne (and later Sydney), were left-wing societies using film to engender political awareness. There was also the Sydney Film Society, started by members of the Films Division of the Department of the Interior (including Stanley Hawes), with “an orientation to

⁵⁴ See the discussion of the European film societies in Sorlin, *European Cinemas*, pp. 87ff.

⁵⁵ M. Clark, *A Short History of Australia*. Sydney: Penguin, 1995, p. 276.

⁵⁶ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Allan Ashbolt, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 2.10.1992.

⁵⁷ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Anton Crouch, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 4.9.1992.

⁵⁸ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Kevin Troy, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 21.9.1992.

⁵⁹ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Donaldson, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 10.7.1992.

social reform, and [government approved] politics”,⁶⁰ while the Melbourne Film Society (1944) catered to a broader audience by screening “documentaries and silent classics”.⁶¹ The Sydney Scientific Film Society screened only scientific film, and consisted mostly of members of the Australian Museum.⁶² WEA-style film societies, on the other hand, were designed to support the provision of adult education.⁶³

It is also worth emphasising here (as it reflects a difference that was to be important in the history of the two Film Festivals) that, with some exceptions, the tenor of the film society movement differed significantly between Sydney and Melbourne. For one, while a few Melbourne film societies had informational and educational purposes, there was a growing interest there in the idea of film as an art form. By the time of the Olinda Film Festival, many of the Melbourne film societies were dedicated to this notion.⁶⁴ Sydney film societies, on the other hand, tended to have more diverse interests in, and uses for, film. It has also been suggested that the Melbourne societies tended to have a more leftist orientation,⁶⁵ which was primarily not the case in Sydney. Finally, the Melbourne societies were more prolific than Sydney. Each of these factors would later impact upon the development of the two international film festivals.

Although the early Australian film societies thus had widely varying interests and purposes, they nonetheless shared some common features and experiences. These similarities are worth discussing in a little more detail, as they were to have an important influence on the emergence of the Australian international film festivals.

To begin with, each film society felt the sense of newness that came with public access to ‘other’ film formats. Prior to the Second World War, the availability of such films in Australia was restricted not only by an absence of non-commercial exhibition outlets, but also by rigid censorship laws and government ambivalence and/or mistrust in the medium itself.⁶⁶ However, the recommendations inspired by Grierson opened the bureaucratic door to a range

⁶⁰ SFF – Oral. Hist. Arch., David Donaldson, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 10.7.1992.

⁶¹ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1955*, programme, p. 8.

⁶² SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Patricia McDonald, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 3.11.1992.

⁶³ Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*, p. 175.

⁶⁴ Ray Fisher, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 7.9.2001.

⁶⁵ Ray Fisher, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 7.9.2001; also Gerry Harrant, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 14.6.1998.

⁶⁶ Cf., Osborne and Lewis, *Communication Traditions*, chs. 1-3.

of films from international sources. As early Sydney Film Festival member, Allan Ashbolt, said of these films:

suddenly you come across this world where it is reality, there's fast cutting, it's all confrontational cutting, and if you sit there as a soldier you think, what's this, Jesus! This is real, you can actually use this medium to make films about reality, not this fiction, girly magazine approach of film-making. I had never seen a documentary film until late in the war and in the post-war period. I had no idea what was going on in America or in England because there was nowhere to show these films.⁶⁷

Even though the post-war creation of the state film libraries led to greater availability, these types of films still remained rare, and sought-after. This was not only because they were 'new', but because they opened film societies up to the rich diversity of international cinematic possibilities that had not previously been screened in Australia. This led film enthusiasts to seek films from a range of sources, like the embassies, overseas contacts, and independent film distributors. Such a sense of potential and innovation is beautifully expressed in Sydney University Film Group member David Donaldson's recollection of seeking out film:

There was a kind of rumour that there was a film called "Ivan the Terrible" but nobody had seen "Ivan the Terrible". But it was sort of rumoured that the Russian Embassy ought to have this film. So we went to some place with a fairly high fence, having rung up first, and we went in. I can still see the two of us young fellows standing in the foyer of this 2-storeyed house. My recollection is that there were eighteen large people with dark suits standing around in idle postures just staring at us wondering what the hell we were doing inside the Russian Embassy.⁶⁸

It also led enthusiasts to create arbitrary theatrical venues. Thus, Ray Fisher set up a proscenium arch and theatre seats in his backyard in 1948 so that he could run a film society in his suburb.⁶⁹

Some film societies profited from this 'newness' by restricting screenings to 'members only'.⁷⁰ Under this rule, the importation of a popular film for a potential niche market could increase their subscription (and hence income). For example, the Sydney University Film Group imported the 1939 classic French feature, *Le Jour se lève*, as well as *Berlin Olympiad*

⁶⁷ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Allan Ashbolt, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 2.10.1992.

⁶⁸ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Donaldson, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 10.7.1992.

⁶⁹ Ray Fisher, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 7.9.2001.

⁷⁰ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Beverley Burke, interviewed by David Stratton, 11.6.1992.

for Film Art Associates —the former of which made a substantial profit, and the latter of which increased their subscription to around 1,700.⁷¹

Another experience common to the early Australian film societies was the enthusiasm engendered in the medium of film itself, by the availability of new films. This growing awareness of the medium's potential as a tool for communication, creativity and education (rather than entertainment or escape), will be discussed below in the analysis of the first festival programmes.

In addition, 'other' film tended to bring with it a sense of communicative freedom —a relief from the guarded intellectual atmosphere produced by the anti-communist hysteria of the early 1950s. As Allan Ashbolt remarked, in the early fifties, film was one place where the intelligentsia felt "free and open".⁷² Thus left-wing groups screened underground films in venues throughout the Sydney CBD. This included the New Theatre in Castlereagh Street, only known of by word of mouth "because the newspaper would not accept its advertisements",⁷³ as well as the Realist Film Association screenings on George Street, the "very crowded, very smoky" Russian Club near Railway Square, and Macabean Hall.⁷⁴

The film societies also provided a locus for the development of small communities with shared interests —both relating to, and beyond, film. For example, David Donaldson recalls that the Sydney University Film Society used to play jazz as part of their screening,⁷⁵ while Ed Schefferle of the Geelong Film Society toured regional Victoria, and made friendships, as part of the mobile film unit.⁷⁶

Another trait widely shared by the Australian film societies was their amateur nature. Most film societies were coordinated by volunteers, and, indeed, 'non-profit' was one of their base principles —a principle that became central to the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals. Any profits were officially used for film society purposes only, such as film importation costs, venue hiring, or to fund an annual party or weekend.

⁷¹ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Beverley Burke, interviewed by David Stratton, 11.6.1992.

⁷² SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Allan Ashbolt, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 2.10.1992.

⁷³ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Donaldson, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 10.7.1992.

⁷⁴ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Donaldson, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 10.7.1992.

⁷⁵ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Donaldson, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 10.7.1992.

⁷⁶ Edward Schefferle, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 10.6.1998.

Finally, although most film societies did not have membership restrictions, it was for the most part a white-collar community —with particular interest emerging from universities, the intelligentsia, and the political left. The age demographic tended to be younger, although older members were not uncommon.⁷⁷ This, coupled with the non-profit, community-driven dimension of the film societies, was reflective of a broader social concern with the value of ‘public’ culture, and the belief in its autonomy from the corruptive influence of cultural capital. As Osborne and Lewis note:

There was a persistent idea among some Australians that public cultural production should be the province of ‘more socially responsible elements of society whose motives were to inform, enlighten and uplift rather than to profit financially’ (Clark 1942).⁷⁸

As will be shown in more detail in the rest of this chapter, and the following chapters concerning the foundation of the Melbourne and Sydney Film Festivals, these common features of the post-war Australian film society movement were to have an important impact on the formation and history of the Australian international film festivals.

The proliferation of film societies in the post-war period eventually led to the implementation of centralised State and Commonwealth umbrella organisations. Both Victoria and New South Wales had Film Society Federations by 1949, while the Australian Council of Film Societies (ACOFS) was formed in 1950.⁷⁹ This formation of unified bodies representing the film society movement as a whole, necessarily led to a conscious synthesis of the various interests, beliefs, and practices which these diverse societies embraced. As will be discussed below, this was to manifest in public form in the first Film Festival programme.

II. The Olinda Film Festival

With such momentum behind Australia’s film society phenomenon, and with small annual ‘festivals’ held previously by various film groups, the emergence of the Australian international film festival at Olinda in 1952 is perhaps unsurprising. The immediate chain of events leading to this event are as follows. After the establishment of ACOFS in 1950, it was decided that convention of the Annual Meeting would alternate between states. In February

⁷⁷ Ray Fisher, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 7.9.2001.

⁷⁸ Osborne and Lewis, *Communication Traditions*, p. 120.

⁷⁹ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1954*, programme, p. 2.

1951, Edward Schefferle, a member of the Federation of Victorian Film Societies (FVFS), attended the NSW Federation's weekend function at Newport, and found it "disappointing".⁸⁰ Schefferle thus recommended to the FVFS that Melbourne's 1952 convention should be a more professional affair. Other members of the FVFS were in favour of this proposal for varying reasons. Alfred Heintz, Secretary of the Federation and a public relations man by trade, felt it would be good publicity for the FVFS, while State Film Centre Chief Neil Edwards, hoping to expand the Centre's profile, promised to supply technical support.⁸¹ The Festival would also be held in the same year as the first Commonwealth Jubilee Film Competition. Funded by the Federal Arts Sub-Committee, this competition was designed to promote and recognise Australian film production. All FVFS members felt that the presentation of the Jubilee Film Competition at the Festival would lend greater prestige to the event.⁸² The first Australian film festival thus utilised the resources and enthusiasm of the various individuals and organisations available. The organising committee selected the mountain town of Olinda, to continue Sydney's tradition of holding the annual ACOFS weekend meeting in an attractive town on the metropolitan outskirts.⁸³

Hence, as the above discussion suggests, the emergence of the first Australian international film festival at Olinda can be seen as the result of a number of trends in the post-war period. In this period there had emerged a cultural space for the proliferation of localised, non-theatrical film exhibition. In addition, the post-war years saw the gradual appropriation of film as a legitimate locus for the expression and reception of diversified messages. Art, politics, culture, instruction, science, identity, technology, development, health, education and amateur film all made their way into non-theatrical venues across Australia. As Lloyd Ross, Director of Public Relations with the Department of Post-war Reconstruction noted, there were in this period "new and growing audiences in libraries, community centres, mobile film units, rural concert halls, area schools, discussion groups and residential adult colleges".⁸⁴ And, as later discussion of the Olinda Film Festival demonstrates, many of these broader influences —cross-cultural exchange, internationalism, education, and art— also manifested as the cultural aims and parameters of future Australian film festivals.

⁸⁰ Edward Schefferle, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 10.6.1998.

⁸¹ Edward Schefferle, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 10.6.1998.

⁸² Edward Schefferle, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 10.6.1998.

⁸³ *Melbourne Film Festival Programme – 1953*, p. 2.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Osborne and Lewis, *Communication Traditions*, p. 122.

What is quite apparent both in this first festival, and those that immediately followed, is the substantial influence that all of the above forces had upon their structure and content. What is also apparent is that despite the apparently assimilationist, suburban, racist and middle-class “Australian way of life”⁸⁵ so often associated with the 1950s, there was a concurrent movement of individuals that utilised film to expand their knowledge of both their own culture and of other cultures.

Having thus outlined the international and national context of the occurrence of the first Australian international film festival at Olinda in 1952, it is now necessary to consider this event in greater depth. An important source for analysing the nature of Olinda is the Festival programme, as this represents the organisers’ attempt to create, unify, and legitimate a cultural institution dedicated to the exhibition of ‘other’ film. Through the selection of films, their division into specific areas, and the attempts to present these different areas as a unified programme, the Olinda organisers were shaping both the parameters and the cultural position of the Festival. An examination of the Olinda programme will show that, from the outset, this film festival established itself firmly and comprehensively as a ‘film culture’ event. In doing so it self-consciously attempted to position itself in opposition to the values of the film industry—despite the fact that, in some important senses, it was part of that very industry. Olinda thereby set standards—and sowed the seeds of conflicts—that were to shape the nature and history of the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals to a substantial extent for the next thirty years.

The first point that is obvious from the Olinda programme is the very broad range of films shown at the Festival. The programme contained documentaries, public relations films, animation, instructional films, feature films and amateur productions of every-day life. These films came from arenas as broad as science, religion and art, and were either made or sponsored by an extraordinarily diverse range of organisations. These included the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, the Australian Army, Films of Africa, International Realist Unit for the UK Ministry of Health, North-Eastern Film Studio of the Central Film Bureau (China), Shell Oil, the United Nations Film Bureaus, and Walt Disney.⁸⁶ However, their incorporation into one programme suggests an acceptance by the organisers that these films, despite their apparent variety, had something important in common. As noted in the Introduction, the

⁸⁵ White, R., *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987, p. 35.

⁸⁶ *Olinda Film Festival*, programme, *passim*.

essential thing that these films had in common was the fact that they were *not* Hollywood feature productions. Each was not receiving current commercial release; was produced for ‘artistic’, ‘educational’ or ‘instructional’ purposes; and each adopted a different approach to Hollywood production in format, style, length, and/or origin.

The Olinda Festival’s first programme makes use of the notion of ‘film culture’ as a way of discursively unifying these diverse films, and legitimising their selection. The broad definition of this notion incorporated three general areas: film as instruction; film as a vehicle for the enhancement of both ‘ordinary’ culture and art; and film for the exploration and expression of local/national identity. Thus ‘film culture’ served as a rubric for the usually distinct intellectual arenas of education, high aesthetics, anthropology, sociology and international relations. What made these arenas compatible in the eyes of the Festival organisers was their position against, or difference from, the ‘other’ of the commercial film industry. These arenas were compatible precisely because each one supposedly contained within it moral and/or social value considered lacking in the apparently bald commercialism of the products of the Hollywood majors.

Throughout the Olinda programme, terminologies were employed that assigned such value both to the Festival films themselves and to the Festival audience. Such phrases as ‘good film’, ‘films of merit’, and ‘quality film’ were used to refer to the films themselves, whilst the audience was referred to with such phrases as ‘intelligent layman’. This sense of an event with moral and social values was further reinforced by the particular selection of speakers for discussion sessions —a selection which included university lecturers, and representatives of public and religious bodies.

However, as the following analysis of the Olinda programme will reveal, despite these attempts to maintain a clear and distinct frontier between the commercial and the cultural, the line between the two was in fact a nebulous one. For the complex negotiation between the ‘us’ of culture and the ‘other’ of industry was present from the very first Australian international film festival, despite consistent suggestions within the programme to the contrary.

The Olinda programme focussed strongly on educational and instructional film, partly in response to the growing recognition of film as a viable tool for education, and partly because of the increased availability of such film resources in Australia. In the programme segment dedicated to ‘Films and Education’, Dr H.T. Coates, Lecturer in Education at the University of Melbourne, praised the potential benefits of film as an educational vehicle:

Films can illustrate ... processes at work, and can convey something of the spirit that moves in them. More vivid than mere words, and swifter than travel, good films are probably the most effective means of making the intelligent layman an up-to-date educationalist —and an up-to-date educationalist is precisely what the intelligent layman needs to be, for education is everybody's business.⁸⁷

A similar view was taken by G.S. Browne, Professor of Education at Melbourne University, in his introduction to the session on 'Classroom Films'. Browne too argued that film could create an emotional connection between the audience (students) and the subject matter, thus enhancing the reception and processing of the message. In his review of the experimental film, *Picture in Your Mind*, he states:

This film is a powerful statement on prejudice, drawing on anthropology, sociology, and myth and using an effective experimental combination of static painting and moving camera, music and spoken word. The film makes a strong plea for each individual to examine his own mind and see whether his mental picture of the other man is based on truth or on false and distorted information.⁸⁸

It is worth noting that Browne's session also included three short animations from Walt Disney, commissioned by the US government during war time. Despite Disney's commercialism, this link with the public sphere distinguished these animations from other Disney productions, and thus legitimised their selection for the Festival.

As part of its focus on education, Olinda also included sessions on 'Scientific Film', 'Instructional Film', 'Film and Religion', and 'Art and Films'.⁸⁹ In each case, the accompanying introductions bound education to the medium of film, hailing it as an effective means for the impartation of knowledge. In addition, the programme served another educational function —that of cross-cultural understanding. The inclusion of documentaries from countries such as France, Britain, China, the USSR, Canada, America and Australia, as well as a session from the United Nations, are evidence of this.⁹⁰ Finally, the Olinda Film Festival was designed to educate its audience about the medium of film itself. One of the six official aims of the Festival was to:

Bring together Australian film enthusiasts so that they may see films which would not otherwise be available, and to encourage these film

⁸⁷ *Olinda Film Festival*, programme, p. 18.

⁸⁸ *Olinda Film Festival*, programme, p. 19.

⁸⁹ *Olinda Film Festival*, programme, pp. 1-11.

⁹⁰ *Olinda Film Festival*, programme, pp. 1-11.

enthusiasts to talk films, think films, and exchange views to their mutual advantage.⁹¹

As noted above, along with film as education, film as ‘art’ and ‘culture’ was another key theme of the Olinda programme. Although the terms ‘art’ and ‘culture’ do not explicitly appear until later programmes, the acceptance of this particular framework is not only implicit in the first programme itself, but in the two discussion sessions scheduled at the Festival.

The first session, ‘Film and Society’, was conducted by Alan K. Stout, who was Professor of Moral and Political Philosophy at the University of Sydney, and an important and influential figure in 1950s film culture in Australia. Stout was founder of Australia’s first film society, the Workers’ Educational Association Documentary Film Group; he was also a foundation member of the Australian National Film Board, the Chairman of the NSW Documentary Films Committee, President of the Federation of NSW Film Societies and of ACOFS.⁹² Stout was a disciple of Grierson, and advocated film’s potential both as a medium of education, and as an art form. As Moran notes, Stout was “interested in the social and artistic possibilities of documentary film both as a realistic counter to what they perceived as the artifice of Hollywood and as a creative mode in its own right”.⁹³ Stout was also a vehement activist against Hollywood production, as the following passage from the Olinda programme makes clear:

The problem of the cinema is that it is both “big business” and at the same time one of the most powerful influences on character and outlook the world has known. But those who run the commercial cinema are not interested in education, in affecting people’s outlook, and in changing their habits of thinking and feeling and acting ... [rather, the] box office is the criterion by which films are judged, and the only influence movie moguls want films to have is to preserve a social and political order in which the industry can flourish.⁹⁴

As a modernist reformer, Stout believed that Hollywood’s agenda to maintain the status quo ran counter to genuine ‘cultural’ progress:

[Hollywood] film’s influence on character is insidious ... obvious examples are the assumption of idle luxury as an ideal, the common

⁹¹ *Olinda Film Festival*, programme, p. 2.

⁹² See A. Moran, “Media Intellectuals”, in B. Head and J. Walter (eds.), *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 116ff.

⁹³ Moran, “Media Intellectuals”, p. 117.

⁹⁴ *Olinda Film Festival*, programme, p. 8.

substitution of violence for reason [and] the caricaturing of artists, scientists or reformers.⁹⁵

In this latter excerpt, Stout reveals his concerns clearly: Hollywood discourages ‘Enlightenment’ progress, and undermines the cultural value of those who work towards such progress.

The second discussion session, ‘Film Censorship’ by John O’Hara, the Chief Officer of the National Library, adopted a similar approach. While O’Hara believed that censorship was necessary, he argued that:

Films of real merit which have a specialised appeal, but which the censor hesitates to distribute generally, should be given a special restricted classification instead of being banned altogether.⁹⁶

Although Stout and O’Hara were addressing separate issues, the passages cited above show that both supported the distinction between Hollywood and ‘other’ cinema on the grounds that the latter possessed cultural value or ‘merit’ which the former lacked.

Along with film as education, and film as culture, the third role assigned to film in the Olinda programme was as a means for the exploration and promotion of national identity. Prime Minister Robert Menzies thus wrote in the programme:

I would like to congratulate all who have helped to organise this splendid festival. I hope it will encourage even higher standards of film production in Australia and help develop in our people a love of good films of every kind.⁹⁷

Hence, as Menzies suggests, another of the cultural roles assigned to Olinda was to encourage the Australian film-making movement, and thus assist in the development and promotion of national identity. The inclusion of the first Australian film competition —the Commonwealth Jubilee Awards— acted as the cornerstone for this aim, although its incorporation into the programme was primarily driven by the potential publicity.⁹⁸

Along with the Jubilee Awards, Olinda was also the site for the Conference of the Amateur Cine Societies. The programme thus included a segment on amateur films from both

⁹⁵ *Olinda Film Festival*, programme, p. 5.

⁹⁶ *Olinda Film Festival* programme, p. 8.

⁹⁷ *Olinda Film Festival* programme, p. 3.

⁹⁸ Edward Schefferle, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 10.6.1998.

Australia and overseas. There were also two sub-programmes dedicated to Australian cinema. The first was retrospective and the second contemporary. Guest lecturers John Heyer (Shell Film), Stanley Hawes (DOI), and Geoffrey Thompson (Cinesound News Review) acted as Australian industry representatives for the session on ‘Making a Film’. This particular focus acted as a reminder of the history and impetus of the Australian film-making movement within an international context.

Olinda’s association with cine societies and public organisations like the DOI linked it to a national drive to improve the quality and quantity of Australian production long before the apparent ‘revival’ of the Australian film industry. This particular alignment differed from the situation in England, where cine-society screenings were separate from those held by film societies.⁹⁹

Having thus dealt briefly with the contents of the Olinda Festival programme —with its division into the three areas of film as education, film as culture, and film as an expression of national identity— it is now important to consider the reception and outcome of the first Australian international film festival. Olinda was considered by its organisers to be a surprising commercial and critical success. Based on the attendance at the previous year’s convention of film societies (in Newport, Sydney), ACOFS members initially estimated that the attendance at Olinda would be no more than 80. Because of this, they invested the entire funds of the FVFS (a total of £15) in hiring a “rambling old wooden guest house” called the Bella Vista, which could accommodate this number.¹⁰⁰ However, largely thanks to publicity from the *Argus*, the Olinda Festival in the end was to attract over 800 film enthusiasts.¹⁰¹ For this reason, a second festival was planned for the Australia day weekend in Canberra.

The Olinda Festival received broad and enthusiastic press coverage in Melbourne. *The Argus* headline read “Our Film Festival Earns Permanent Place”, while the *Sun* called it a “success”. More importantly, the Festival appeared to stimulate debate about a number of issues surrounding film culture and industry among local and interstate journalists including: censorship laws;¹⁰² the state of the Australian film industry;¹⁰³ the recognition of film as an art

⁹⁹ David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997.

¹⁰⁰ Heintz, “Miracle at Olinda”, p. 28.

¹⁰¹ Heintz, “Miracle at Olinda”, p. 29; MFF – Arch., “Olinda Film Festival”, *Guardian*, 9.2.1952, press cuttings. Box No. 1.

¹⁰² MFF – Arch., “Censorship Overhaul?”, *News*, Adelaide, 31.1.1952, press cuttings, Box No. 1.

¹⁰³ MFF – Arch., “Minister Hints Govt. Aid to Producers”, *The Film Weekly*, 31.1.1952, press cuttings, Box No. 1.

form;¹⁰⁴ Olinda's importance as a non-theatrical outlet, and the concurrent absence of 'art' theatre outlets;¹⁰⁵ and the prospect that Olinda might be the key to shifting the film culture focus from Sydney to Melbourne.¹⁰⁶

The commercial industry on the other hand had a mixed reaction to Olinda. In the trade rag, *Film Weekly*, the popularity of the Festival was seen by one journalist as an opportunity for trade involvement. The decrease in commercial cinema attendance since 1945 was of growing concern to the film trade, particularly with the impending arrival of television. In such an environment, ways of reversing audience decline, and avenues to curb the financial toll, were consistently discussed by the magazine. According to the *Film Weekly* journalist, the magnitude of the non-theatrical movement in Australia was a factor which could "not be overlooked". However, he added that it was "ironical that the commercial film industry should have been so violently and uncompromisingly attacked by official and unofficial speakers", considering that MGM, UP and British Empire Films had assisted the Festival non-gratis.¹⁰⁷

Another reviewer in *Film Weekly* was even less inspired by the event:

Several heated attacks, mostly communist inspired, were made on the commercial picture industry at the Olinda Festival this weekend. Such attacks were to be expected at the Festival, where film society and other enthusiasts gathered principally to see and discuss films of a very limited box office appeal. It seems unlikely that many of the films screened at the festival will have commercial release here. It is the old story of what's good for the "arty" critics is box office poison for the exhibitor who has to foot the bill.¹⁰⁸

Although Olinda appeared to cause a rift between film culture and film trade members, both groups made a remedial gesture. *Film Weekly* editor Eric Solomon encouraged trade members to play a role in Festival organisations because it was "now too important and widespread to be disregarded".¹⁰⁹ In response, John Heyer wrote on behalf of ACOFS to *Film Weekly* requesting the industry's active participation in the 1953 Festival. Heyer noted that the

¹⁰⁴ MFF – Arch., R. Dunstan, "Film Festival", *Herald*, 17.1.1952, press cuttings, Box No. 1.

¹⁰⁵ MFF – Arch., F. Doherty, "Our Film Festival Earns Permanent Place", *Argus*, 29.1.1952, press cuttings, Box No. 1.

¹⁰⁶ MFF – Arch., "Olinda Festival", *Age*, 12.1.1952, press cuttings, Box No. 1.

¹⁰⁷ *Film Weekly*, 31.1.1952, p. 12.

¹⁰⁸ *Film Weekly*, 31.1.1952, p. 20.

¹⁰⁹ *Film Weekly*, 24.7.1952, p. 6.

absence of industry representatives at Olinda was “conspicuous”,¹¹⁰ and added that the film trade played a leading role in film festival organisation in Europe and North America. Clearly, the arenas of both film trade and film culture felt that they could benefit from each other, despite their ‘difference’.

* * * * *

It has been argued in this chapter that the Olinda Festival emerged from the growth of interest in non-commercial cinema in Australia in the post-war period. This growth of interest, which was itself the result of a number of international and national trends which have been discussed above, led to the growth of the film society movement in Australia, and thereby to this country’s first international film festival.

Whilst the 1952 Olinda Festival established much of the discursive framework for the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals, it should be noted here that there were also important differences between this first festival and those that followed. First, the Olinda Festival organisers acquired its entire programme from Australian distribution sources. As a result, the programme offered only four feature length films. After Olinda, all Australian international film festivals would utilise overseas as well as local sources, and thus the number of features films would greatly increase. Second, the programme was not driven by audience demand, but instead by the interests of its organisers. Third, the arenas of education, science and religion would lose their privileged place as special segments of the Film Festival over the next three years. These arenas were either incorporated into other areas of the programme, or removed altogether. Fourth, the Olinda Festival was a collective effort, and did not have a directorial position. This would change for Sydney and Melbourne in 1956. In taking each of these four steps away from the model established at Olinda, the two major Australian international film festivals moved closer towards the overseas models.

In the following chapters, this thesis turns to examine this process. The next chapter deals with the birth of the Sydney and Melbourne International Film Festivals. As will be shown below, both of these organisations were to define themselves using the notions of ‘film culture’ which had emerged in the post-war period, and which had been expressed in the Olinda Festival programme. These notions, with their conscious opposition to the ‘other’ of commercial cinema, established the initial parameters of the Sydney and Melbourne Film

¹¹⁰ *Film Weekly*, 24.7.1952, p. 6.

Festivals, and set them off in the cycle of 'commercialism' and 'anti-commercialism' that was to be so important to their history.

1952-58: The Origins of the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals

This chapter deals with the emergence of the Sydney and Melbourne International Film Festivals, and their early years in the period from 1952 to 1958. As discussed in the previous chapter, 1952 saw Australia's first international film festival at Olinda. The second part of this present chapter will show how the success of Olinda led directly to the establishment of the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals. However, before turning to this history, the first part of this chapter will outline a number of important trends in the film industry—both internationally and nationally—that began in this period.

I. International and Domestic Developments in Film

The trends discussed in this section are as follows. First, this time period sees a drop in the audience for motion pictures, and the appearance of the 'teenage' market. This leads to changes in the types of product made by the Hollywood majors, with an increasing 'juvenilisation' and sensationalism evident. Second, the break in the Hollywood monopoly over exhibition venues (as discussed in the previous chapter), and the decline in the quantity of product, meant that exhibitors began increasingly to look towards non-Hollywood film sources. Third, this period also sees the development of the 'art' film movement in Europe. As will be discussed below, and in the chapters that follow, these three interrelated trends were to have important consequences for the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals' cultural identity, and their relation to the commercial industry.

The first trend noted above, and one that was to have ramifications throughout the international film industry, was the decline in the audience for motion pictures that occurred in the 1950s. In the key United States market, annual cinema attendance dropped

precipitously from 90 million in 1948 to 40 million ten years later.¹ At the time, Hollywood film director John Houseman stated that

The real problem with American films today is who you are making them for ... Most of us face the embarrassing dilemma that we are working in a mass medium that has lost its mass audience.²

This decline in cinema audience numbers has been ascribed to a number of causes. These include the demographic shift of the US population from the inner-cities to the suburbs; the changes in leisure activities caused by growth in disposable income and increases in paid vacations; and the growing popularity of television.³

In response to this decline in audience numbers, Hollywood reacted in three ways. First, the decline in audience converged with the effects of the antitrust regulations, and resulted in the Hollywood majors reducing their production levels substantially. Between the years 1945 and 1951, about 350 to 400 films were made annually; in 1958, only 258 films were made — and in 1960 only 151 films.⁴ This decline was to reduce the global dominance of Hollywood studio productions, and allow space for non-Hollywood films to begin securing themselves a market-share. As will be discussed below, this would lead exhibitors, both overseas and in Australia, to turn to other sources of film distribution. Second, the decline in audience numbers began to lead Hollywood producers away from the mass marketing of film products, and towards a niche marketing approach.⁵ In particular, Hollywood began to court the newly emerged ‘teenage’ market, which was to have important consequences for the types of films produced in this period by the Hollywood majors. Third, in an attempt to regain market share lost to television, Hollywood decided to utilise various technological innovations that created a spectacular ‘movie experience’ that television could not offer. These latter two points (the focus on the teenage market, and the use of special effects technology) deserve further elaboration.

The ‘teenage’ market had emerged in its own right in the United States after World War II. With the post-war American economic boom, young Americans had increasing amounts of

¹ See, e.g., Lev, *Euro-American Cinema*, p.14; and Guback, “Hollywood’s International Market”, p. 398.

² R. Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, p.139.

³ Belton, “Technology and Innovation”, p. 265; see also Guback, “Hollywood’s International Market”, p. 398.

⁴ Lev, *Euro-American Cinema*, p. 14.

⁵ See T. Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s*, Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988, p. 1.

disposable income. They were also growing in numbers over this period, with the 13 to 21 year-old market rising from 19.6 million in 1952, to 22.4 million in 1958.⁶ According to Doherty,

Newsweek labeled it “the dreamy teenage market” and *Sales Management* christened the thirteen to nineteen age bracket “the seven golden years”. In 1959, *Life* reported what by then was old news: the American teenagers have emerged as a big-time consumer in the U.S. economy. ... Counting only what is spent to satisfy their special teenage demands, the youngsters and their parents will shell out about \$10 billion this year, a billion more than the total sales of GM.⁷

In addition, the Bureau of Business Research announced that these billions were “largely discretionary”, with an estimated 16%, or around \$1.5 billion, spent on the entertainment industry.⁸ In other words, in the American teenager Hollywood had found a market with “the requisite income, leisure and garrulousness to support a theatrical business”.⁹ Two clear early examples of this targeting of the teenage audience are *The Wild One* (1953) and *Rebel Without A Cause* (1955), which both focussed on the newly-discovered subjects of teenage angst and rebellion. By 1956, a survey for the *Motion Picture Herald* Institute of Industry Opinion reported that films for the 15 to 25 year-old age group were considered the most important by both exhibitors and producers.¹⁰

One major fiscal benefit of this new teenage audience was its presumed lack of aesthetic discernment, which led the Hollywood majors to produce many low-budget, sensationalist films. As a *Variety* journalist reported at the time, teenagers were “immune to any sophisticated disdain of run-of-the-mill screen offerings”,¹¹ which potentially meant substantial profit from little investment. Hollywood thus began to produce ‘exploitation films’ that drew on “controversial, bizarre or timely subject matter amenable to wild promotion”. These films provided a sensationalist plot deliberately designed to appeal to the teenage market. They were also made on a B-grade budget —for example, unlike the highly-paid and

⁶ Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, pp. 230-231.

⁷ Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, p. 52.

⁸ Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, pp. 52, 54.

⁹ Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, p. 3.

¹⁰ Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, p. 65.

¹¹ Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, pp. 230-231.

better-known actors from the studio system, stars of exploitation films received only \$20,000 to \$30,000 per film.¹²

A sample of some of the titles of these films should provide a clear indication of the sort of fare they offered. For example, there is an extensive number of films from this period with the words ‘teenage’ or ‘teenager’ in their title, such as *Teenage Crime Wave* (1955), *Teenage Wolfpack* (1956), *Teenage Rebel* (1956), *Teenage Thunder* (1957), *Teenage Doll* (1957), *Teenage Bad Girl* (1957), *Teenage Monster* (1958), *Teenage Caveman* (1958), and the aptly-titled *Teenagers from Outer Space* (1959). A second popular teenage genre was B-grade science fiction and horror, or ‘weirdies’ as they were known in the trade,¹³ with films including *The Beast with One Million Eyes* (1955), *The Creeping Unknown* (1956), *I was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957), *I was a Teenage Frankenstein* (1957), *The Astounding She-Monster* (1958), *Attack of the Puppet People* (1958), *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (1958), *The Blob* (1958), *The Brain-Eaters* (1958), *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958), and the terrifying *Monster on the Campus* (1958). A third teenage genre was the ‘rock’n’roll’ film, which included such titles as *Rock Around the Clock* (1956), *Rockin’ the Blues* (1956), *Rock, Pretty Baby* (1956), *Rock, Rock, Rock!* (1956), *Shake, Rattle and Rock!* (1956), *Mister Rock and Roll* (1957), *Jailhouse Rock* (1957), and *Let’s Rock* (1958).

At this point it is worth noting that, alongside this Hollywood focus on the teenage market, there was also a concurrent shift in venue in the United States from the traditional movie theatre to the drive-in movie theatre. The popularity of the ‘drive-in’ theatre during this period is reflected in their increase in the US from 300 in 1946 to 4,500 in 1956, with a corresponding decline in traditional four-wall theatres from 18,719 to 14,509.¹⁴ The drive-in theatre was not only popular with teenagers (as it offered them the kind of privacy unavailable to them either at home or in standard theatres), but also with suburban families from lower socio-economic brackets.¹⁵ In addition, drive-in theatres tended to be more profitable than the traditional movie theatre—in part because such venues were able to make much of their profits from the selling of ‘fast-food’.¹⁶

¹² Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, p. 37.

¹³ Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, p. 146.

¹⁴ Conant, “The Paramount Decrees”, p. 367.

¹⁵ P. Lev, *History of the American Cinema: Transforming the Screen 1950-1959*, vol. 7, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2003, p. 215.

¹⁶ Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, pp. 114-5.

The growth in the popularity of the drive-in theatre runs parallel with changes in standard theatre exhibition technology —both of them aiming to provide a holistic ‘movie experience’ that was qualitatively different from television viewing. Having lost audience share to this new medium, Hollywood attempted to lure audiences back by introducing a variety of technological gimmicks that television could not provide. Doherty thus remarks,

to enchant consumers out of their living rooms, the studios ... ballyhooed a fascinating array of new cinematic devices designed to heighten the theatrical experience, thus diminishing the low-definition TV screen.¹⁷

In fact, many of these ‘new cinematic devices’ were old technology, which had been experimented with in the pre-war period, and were only now being put into wider use. As Belton remarks, “the falling off of this habitual audience [for the cinema] in the post-war years prompted a search for novel forms of presentation and led to the reintroduction of many ... earlier technologies”.¹⁸

In brief, some of the major changes to exhibition technology introduced in this period were as follows. One of the first attempts to enhance the movie-going experience was the Cinerama technology. This method used three linked projectors, which projected the film onto a huge, curved screen, in order to fill the viewer’s peripheral vision. The first Cinerama production (*This is Cinerama*) previewed in New York in September 1952, and went on to gross over US\$32 million.¹⁹ However, owing to the complexity of the technology involved, Cinerama was replaced by the more long-lasting wide-screen development of CinemaScope. As remarked by Spyros P. Skouras, president of 20th Century-Fox, in 1954:

In developing CinemaScope, we have had only one goal: to bring back the large masses of people to the motion picture boxoffice. Our aim at all times has been to keep the theatres of the world prosperous and open, because we know that their welfare is our own welfare and their success is our own success.²⁰

CinemaScope was much more successful than the earlier Cinerama technology: it led to the development of a variety of other wide-screen technologies (such as Panavision, Vistascope, Vistarama, PanaScope, and so forth), and by 1957, 85% of all North American theatres had

¹⁷ Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, p. 26.

¹⁸ Belton, “Technology and Innovation”, p. 265.

¹⁹ F. Lincoln, “The Comeback of the Movies”, in Balio, *American Film Industry*, p. 373.

²⁰ Quoted in *The Film Weekly*, 8.4.1954, p. 6.

been equipped to show CinemaScope productions.²¹ Another visual innovation was 3-D, which was briefly popular in the early 1950s. More generally, it should also be pointed out that this period saw the wider introduction of stereo sound in cinemas, and increasing production of colour films (in 1945, only 8% of Hollywood films were shot in colour; by 1955 the proportion was over 50%).²²

These developments in exhibition technology led the Hollywood studios to make films that could exploit the new possibilities offered by improved sound and wider screens. Genres popular during the 1950s include the epic, with its spectacular wide-shots and huge casts. Famous epics of this period include Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956) and *Ben-Hur* (1959). Another popular genre was the musical, with its songs and massed dance scenes. For example, the musical *An American in Paris* (1951), won six Academy Awards, including best picture. Other well-known musicals include *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) and *South Pacific* (1958). In general, as Andrew remarks,

after the advent of TV the film industry as a whole began to use this rhetoric of 'the unique experience,' hoping to lure audiences to fewer but bigger films. A familiar rule of adjustment came into play when many films began to advertise themselves on the basis of their uniqueness.²³

Having now discussed some of the major effects that the decline in audience numbers for motion pictures had on the producers —such as the shift towards 'teen' movies, and the changes in cinema technology— it is now important to outline the effect this decline had on the exhibitors. In summary, in what follows it will be argued that the urban exhibitors, in both the United States and Australia, were under increasing pressure to find alternative, non-Hollywood sources of film product —and one important source was the European 'art' film.

In the 1950s, many of the urban exhibitors in the United States found themselves confronted with a situation in which they had to reconsider their traditional methods of operation. To begin with, as noted above, this period saw a large demographic shift out of the inner cities and into the newly expanding suburbs. The urban exhibitors thus lost much of their local audience base, and found themselves in competition with the suburban theatres and drive-ins. Added to this problem was the fact that the new developments in cinema technology, such as more sophisticated sound and wider screen proportions, were expensive

²¹ See Lev, *History of the American Cinema*, p. 120; and Belton, "Technology and Innovation", p. 265.

²² Belton, "Technology and Innovation", p. 266.

²³ D. Andrew, *Film in the Aura of Art*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 5.

to install. Because of the Paramount decrees, the exhibitors were now separated from the major studios, and thus had to fund such technological conversions out of their own profits.

The large decrease in Hollywood studio production levels, and the deregulation of the exhibition market resulting from the Paramount decrees, further compounded the problems for the urban exhibitors. As noted above, in response to the decline in audience numbers and the fact that “they were no longer obligated to turn out enough films to fill the playing time of company-owned theatres”,²⁴ throughout the 1950s the Hollywood majors cut back production substantially. In addition, with the end of the practice of block booking and the break-up of the Hollywood monopolies, the exhibitors were directly in competition with one another for film product. As one exhibitor cited by Balio recalls, “[t]here was always at least four theatres competing for product, which was in short supply and everybody wanted these films first-run in their area”.²⁵ This deregulated the market for films, and the reduction in supply eroded the profit margins of the urban exhibitors even further.

However, the Paramount decrees’ deregulation of the exhibition outlets had perhaps more significant effects. In essence, it changed what it was to be an exhibitor. Prior to the decrees, most exhibitors had the comfortable (albeit constricting) stability of an exclusive booking relationship with a major studio, which thus dictated much of their annual screening schedule, and obviated the need to search independently for product. In the 1950s, the new, post-decree, environment for exhibitors was much more unstable. As Lincoln remarks, after the end of block-booking, an exhibitor

not only was unable to forecast what picture he would be showing next April; in order to have one to show at all, he had to enter into “ruinous” competitive bidding for a commodity that, he was convinced, was produced in minimum quantities so a higher film rental could be squeezed out of him.²⁶

Hence, to be successful in this new environment, the exhibitor could no longer rely on filling his or her screening schedule with the products of a major studio, but had to be entrepreneurial and resourceful in seeking out new sources of product.

The 1950s thus sees many of the urban exhibitors in the United States under financial pressure, and searching for alternative sources of film product. One important non-Hollywood

²⁴ Guback, “Hollywood’s International Market”, p. 398.

²⁵ Balio, *United Artists*, p. 224.

²⁶ Lincoln, “The Comeback of the Movies”, p. 377.

source was, of course, foreign films —and, in particular, European film. In this period, after the deregulation of exhibition resulting from the Paramount decrees, European films began to be distributed more broadly in the United States. As will be discussed in the following chapter, this was an important factor in the rise of the ‘art’ film. As Guback puts it, “[u]ntil the early 1950s, foreign films remained unknown quantities to most Americans”, but

[t]his realignment of relations between the majors and the exhibitors [sc. resulting from the decrees] allowed foreign films to penetrate the American market, and their broader distribution was linked with the rise of ‘art house’ circuits.²⁷

Evidence of the growing value of foreign film imports to the United States in the 1950s is suggested, for example, by United Artist’s purchase of Lopert Films, an independent art-film distributor, and the creation of a foreign film distribution subsidiary in 1958 called Lopert Pictures Corporation.²⁸ Of course, as discussed in the previous chapter, many of these ‘foreign’ films were either co-productions with, or partially funded by, American film companies. For example, in 1953 *Film Weekly* commented that,

More and more productions are going before the cameras in Italy under joint sponsorship of local and overseas interests. Particularly is the US-Italian slate growing. 23 films under this set-up probably will be made in 1953.²⁹

To take a further example, in 1954, Columbia Pictures allocated \$10,000,000 to financing independent productions, with a proportion of this money intended for overseas productions.³⁰

European films did not simply offer an alternative source of product to fill gaps left by the reductions in Hollywood production; they also provided a product that was distinctive and ‘sophisticated’. Unlike mainstream Hollywood productions, which “no longer corresponded to the increasingly complex world-views held by at least a part of the audience”,³¹ European films had more of an appeal to the educated, inner-city audience. As Schatz notes, in the cities there “was a core of younger, better educated, and more cine-literate viewers who were

²⁷ Guback, “Hollywood’s International Market”, pp. 391, 398.

²⁸ Balio, *United Artists*, p. 227.

²⁹ *Film Weekly*, “Outside interests tie with Italians”, 12.3.1953, p. 9.

³⁰ *Film Weekly*, 18.11.1954, v. 87 (1445), p. 11. See also “Hollywood International”, in Lev, *Transforming the Screen*, pp. 147-168.

³¹ Ray, *Certain Tendency*, p. 139.

attracted to ... more experimental, modernist, and foreign films”.³² Furthermore, imported films

offered a striking alternative to Hollywood’s slick products by revealing slices of life and dramatic elements that American films, following the strictures of the Production Code, had failed to develop. Imported films, moreover, were often made more on an artisan and less on a factory basis, and consequently seemed to present more personalised statements than the sanitised and anonymous Hollywood product.³³

The ‘strictures of the Production Code’ that Guback refers to in this passage, were the voluntary codes of conduct of the motion picture industry in the United States, which severely restricted the kinds of material that could be shown (including, of course, sexual and violent material). European-made films were not under such rigorous constraints, and could thus “capitalise on sexual content and frankness, which the Production Code rendered taboo and which television could not deliver into living rooms”.³⁴

These points about the nature of European films, and their contrast with the products of Hollywood, will be returned to in more detail below (and in the following chapter), when we examine the situation in Europe. However, before turning to Europe it is important to examine the Australian context, as the discussion so far has been largely restricted to the US. It will be seen that the developments in the 1950s in Australia parallel many of the trends in the US — both markets saw a decline in audience numbers, pressures on exhibitors to find product, and a turn towards European films as an alternative source to Hollywood.

Just as in the United States, the motion picture industry in Australia in the post-war period was faced with sharply declining audience numbers. This was, of course, of great concern to the industry. In a 1951 front page article in the Australian trade paper *Film Weekly*, entitled ‘Rydge warns on trade decline’, Norman B. Rydge, chairman of Australia’s Greater Union, pointed out that cinema attendance had dropped from a high of approximately 151 million in 1945, to 118 million in 1951.³⁵ Faced with this steep decline, *Film Weekly* in 1953 had a front-page article, entitled ‘Industry Must Get Up and Fight!’, that reads like a call-to-arms, as the following passage indicates. The editors write that

³² T. Schatz, *Old Hollywood, New Hollywood: Ritual, Art and Industry*, Michigan: University of Michigan Research Press, 1983, p. 24.

³³ Guback, “Hollywood’s International Market”, pp. 398-9.

³⁴ Guback, “Hollywood’s International Market”, p. 399.

³⁵ *Film Weekly*, 29.11.1951, p. 1.

distributors ... are failing to fulfil their vital responsibility of leadership in the spirit of optimism and ballyhoo that ... has always been the life-blood of show business. ... there is now a need for rejuvenated selling endeavour. The industry must start beating drums again, good and loud! The public must be given to know that we're not slipping into a state of cowed, pessimistic apathy and inertia.³⁶

This reduction in audience numbers and the decrease in the availability of Hollywood product, also led Australian exhibitors to search for new ways of attracting customers and alternative sources of film. Following the American trends, the Australian exhibitors adopted the new cinema technologies, in an attempt to draw back the motion picture audience. For example, in 1953, four of MGM's Sydney theatres installed panoramic screen systems for new wide-screen productions, and later added full stereophonic sound.³⁷ In another attempt to attract customers, and possibly as an attempt to mimic the idea of a film festival, some theatres adopted the publicity stunt of overnight screening sessions.³⁸

Like their American counterparts, Australian exhibitors in the major urban areas also began looking for alternative sources of film. One source of product was the retrospective. In a development paralleling the film societies, some of the major exhibitors began to screen old releases. For example, MGM reissued *Waterloo Bridge* to their Metro theatres in Melbourne, and these screenings were booked out every night.³⁹ In what was to be a more significant development, the exhibitors also began turning towards European sources to supplement their Hollywood offerings. For example, in 1953 *Film Weekly* noted that:

One of the most remarkable features arising out of a survey of films shown in Melbourne during the past three years is the rapidly mounting popularity of Continental films. At one stage in 1952, there were four Continental films showing simultaneously for the first time in Melbourne show history.⁴⁰

As further evidence, this article points out that the Savoy and the Australian (two large Melbourne cinemas), ran European films for 46 and 40 weeks, respectively, out of the 52 weeks of 1952.

³⁶ *Film Weekly*, 2.7.1953., p. 1.

³⁷ *Film Weekly*, 4.6.1953, p. 1.

³⁸ *Film Weekly*, "Interest in 1st all-night shows", 16.6.1955., p. 1.

³⁹ *Film Weekly*, "Making money out of revivals", 5.8.1954, p. 10.

⁴⁰ F. Sampson, "Upswing still in Vogue for Continental Films", in *Film Weekly*, 2.1.1953, p. 16.

Another reason lying behind this trend towards showing European films, was that during the 1950s the Australian motion picture industry became increasingly conscious of the recent growth of the migrant population, and its potential as a new audience. This was clearly noted in the article from *Film Weekly* cited above, which remarks that “[t]he reasons for the growing popularity [of European films] are not hard to find ... The growing numbers of New Australians here, most of them avid picture fans who appreciate the heavier music and drama of the Continental producers, is [one] reason”.⁴¹ Two years later, in 1955, another article in *Film Weekly*, entitled ‘Effect of immigrants on picture biz’, provides detailed statistics on recent immigration to Australia, including break-downs by country of origin.⁴²

Two further pieces of evidence that this shift towards European cinema was considered an important trend by Australian commercial exhibitors can be noted here. First, there is the opening of the ‘Paris Cinema’ in 1954. The old Park Theatre in Sydney was converted by Hoyts into a ‘Parisian-style’ cinema. This cinema was described in a publicity piece in *Film Weekly* as one with:

The gay dress and atmosphere of a Parisian picture-house: vestibule in pink and black; showcases and box offices surmounted by striped awnings; an ornate traymobile to dispense café-noir; behind it a boutique for Continental sweets; while a feature of the lounge is a large Herchfield mural containing sketches of seventy-five international stars.⁴³

Second, this period also saw Australian commercial exhibitors beginning to run their own foreign film festivals. These were used by exhibitors as a means of attracting the attention of local migrant communities. For example, in September 1954, the Rivoli in Camberwell (Melbourne) held a three-week British film festival—an article in *Film Weekly* remarking that “Camberwell residents are particularly British-film-minded” (implying, presumably, that there was a high proportion of British migrants in the area).⁴⁴ These festivals were not restricted to independent cinemas (like the Rivoli), as evidenced by the fact that major cinema chain Hoyts held an Italian film festival over six days in March 1955, in both Sydney and Melbourne. According to *Film Weekly*, the event was a sell-out.⁴⁵

⁴¹ F. Sampson, in *Film Weekly*, 2.1.1953, p. 16

⁴² *Film Weekly*, 27.1.1955, p. 3.

⁴³ “Charity Show launches Art House (Paris bows in)”, *Film Weekly*, 7.10.1954, p. 7.

⁴⁴ “Festival of UK pix in suburb”, *Film Weekly*, 23.9.1954, p. 10.

⁴⁵ *Film Weekly*, 24.3.1955, p. 10.

A good indication of the growing interest in foreign films from Australian exhibitors, is the appearance of specialist distributors of such film products. By 1957 there were at least six distributors specialising in foreign (primarily European) films: F. Castiglione, “Ciemme Italfilm Distributors”, Perth; Duc Brandt of “FB International Film Service”, Sydney; E. West, “London Films”, Sydney; Natan Scheinwald, Robert Kapferer and Sydney Blake (all in Sydney).⁴⁶ Also worth noting in this connection, is the appearance of film distributors specialising in 16mm format, rather than the standard 35 mm feature film format. For example, the General Films Distribution Company—which was based in Sydney but also had interstate channels in Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth—handled both American and local features on 16mm.⁴⁷ At the time, the 16mm format was the one predominantly used by film festivals, as well as by film societies and educational institutions.

Having outlined some of the changes in the American and Australian film industries in the 1950s, and the way in which these changes led to a broader distribution of European films, it is now important to examine briefly the European context itself. To recapitulate some of the key points made in the previous chapter, the post-war period saw concerted efforts by most of the major European governments to reinvigorate their domestic film industries. These efforts included direct government funding for film, as well as various tax-incentives to encourage investment. In addition, in this period the major Hollywood studios began to allocate substantial sums of money to financing independent productions—with some of this money going to finance European productions. Furthermore, for various reasons, the European industry did not experience the same drop in audience numbers that was a feature of both the North American and Australian markets. In fact, in Europe cinema audience numbers peaked in 1955, with a total of 3 billion tickets sold that year. Moreover, in the 1950s approximately 1,000 new cinemas opened in France and Germany, and 3,000 in Italy.⁴⁸ Nowell-Smith sums up this situation as follows.

In general the 1950s were a good period for European cinema. The impact of television and of changing patterns of leisure was slow to make itself felt. Audiences in most countries continued to rise until the middle of the decade ... and domestic industries recaptured much of the share of box-office they had lost to Hollywood in the 1940s.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ MFF – Corr., “Distributors of Continental Film”, 19.5.1955, Box No. 4.

⁴⁷ *Film Weekly*, “General Film Dist. new 16mm company”, 25.6.1953, p. 3.

⁴⁸ Both of these statistics are taken from Sorlin, *European Cinemas*, pp. 81-2.

⁴⁹ G. Nowell-Smith, “After the War”, in Nowell-Smith (ed.), *Oxford History of World Cinema*, p. 436.

Economically speaking, then, the European film industry was buoyant in the 1950s; and during this period there were also important developments in the culture of film making in Europe. The 1950s saw the beginnings of what would later become the ‘art’ film movement. This period saw the formation of a self-conscious group of film-makers and intellectuals interested in film, centred around the journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*, and the development of a common body of film ‘theory’ and aesthetic pronouncements. This movement had little direct influence in Australia during the period dealt with in this chapter; however, as later chapters of this thesis will show, the idea of the ‘art film’ was to play an important role for the Australian international film festivals —contributing to their formation of a coherent cultural identity, and their position in relation to the commercial film industry. It is thus worth briefly examining the beginnings of the ‘art’ film movement in the 1950s, and, in particular, the formation of *auteur* theory.

Since the early days of cinema, European film-making circles had discussed the relationship between film and art.⁵⁰ Members of the various modern artistic movements (such as neo-impressionism, futurism, cubism, Dadaism and surrealism) had been interested in the film-making process, and in exploring film as a vehicle for expressing the artistic tenets of these movements. This interest in film as art saw the emergence in the 1920s and 1930s of various specialist magazines and journals dedicated to the discussion of film. These included such titles as *Close-Up*, *Film Art*, *Experimental Film*, and *La Revue du Cinéma*.⁵¹ The latter, for example, considered both the language of cinema, and the evolution of film language.⁵² Many important film-makers themselves contributed to these discussions, and, in doing so, positioned themselves in relation to the major artistic movements of the period.⁵³

If film could thus be related to broader artistic movements, it naturally followed for many European film-makers that film should be conceived of as an art-form in its own right, aligned with other classical art forms such as painting and the novel. This view receives strong expression in the following remark by French film director and critic Alexandre Astruc, made in an essay published in the leftist magazine *Ecran français* in 1948.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., V. F. Perkins, “A Critical History of Early Film Theory”, in B. Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods*, vol. 1., London: University of California Press, 1976, pp. 401-421.

⁵¹ See A. L. Rees, “Cinema and the avant-garde”, in Nowell-Smith (ed.), *Oxford History of World Cinema*, pp. 95-105.

⁵² J. Hillier (ed.), *Cahiers du Cinéma: 1960-1968: New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Hollywood*, vol. 2, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 354.

⁵³ For example, Eisenstein’s discussion of the role of montage in film in 1938 in his *The Film Sense*, Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., New York, 1942.

The cinema is quite simply becoming a means of expression, just as all the arts have been before it. ... After having been successfully a fairground attraction, an amusement analogous to a boulevard theatre ... it is gradually becoming a language. By language, I mean a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary essay or novel. The filmmaker-author writes with his camera as a writer with his pen.⁵⁴

As this passage shows, a corollary of the concept of film as art-form, is the idea of the film-maker as artist —using the medium as a form of personal expression.⁵⁵ According to Astruc, this conception of the role of the film-maker entailed a rejection of the standard production methods, in which a team of people with separate roles (such as script-writer, director, camera technicians, etc.) collaborated in the film-making process. Rather, if the film is to be a true expression of an individual's vision, then, Astruc writes,

this of course implies that the script-writer directs his own scripts; or rather, that the script-writer ceases to exist, for in this kind of film-making the distinction between author and director loses all meaning. Direction is no longer a means of illustrating or presenting a scene, but a true act of writing.⁵⁶

This view of the film-maker as artist was to develop into a coherent body of aesthetic theory in the 1950s. This theory, known as '*politique des auteurs*' (or *auteur* theory), was closely associated with the most renowned film theory journal of the time, *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Founded in 1951, this journal published some of the central expressions of *auteur* theory, including, in 1953, French film-director Truffaut's famous polemical essay '*Une Certaine Tendance du cinéma français*'. David Puttnam describes this essay as "a declaration of war"⁵⁷ against the established cinema —not only in America, but in Europe as well. According to Truffaut, this war was against "authors of talent" who, when choosing to write for cinema,

⁵⁴ Quoted in D. Puttnam, *The Undeclared War*, Harper Collins, London, 1997, pp. 248-9.

⁵⁵ R. Lapsley & M. Westlake, *Film Theory: An Introduction*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988, p. 105.

⁵⁶ Quoted in the editor's Introduction to J. Hillier (ed.), *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, vol. 1, London: Routledge, 1985, p. 9.

⁵⁷ Puttnam, *Undeclared War*, p. 250.

deliver themselves rather to a curious temptation towards mediocrity, so careful are they not to compromise their talent and certain that, to write for the cinema, one must make oneself understood by the lowliest.⁵⁸

Truffaut argued that instead the medium of cinema should be utilised by only “a handful of men”, who would not be mere technicians, but rather “*auteurs* who often write their dialogue and some of them themselves invent the stories they direct”.⁵⁹

According to the *Cahiers*' conception of *auteur* theory, this process of invention incorporated not only the creation of the story, but also the techniques used to present that story—or the *mise en scène*. This was central because, according to this aesthetic viewpoint, it was in the *mise en scène* that the ‘signature’ of the artist could be located; or, in other words, where the artist’s creativity found its main expression. As Hoveyda writes, “*mise en scène* is nothing other than the technique invented by each director to express the idea and establish the specific quality of his work”.⁶⁰

Auteur theory is thus a powerful claim for the potential of cinema as a form of high art—as a new medium continuous with the great tradition of Western art—and for the privileged role of the film-maker in this process. In Artaud’s words, the film director ought to be the “unique Creator upon whom will devolve the double responsibility of the spectacle and the plot”.⁶¹ According to Lev, this aesthetic position,

had an enormous impact on the European art film. The idea that the director was, or should be, the artist, fit low-budget films far better than large-scale Hollywood epics. ... This romantic notion of individual creation affected not only criticism, but also film production. It became the rallying cry of Truffaut, Godard, and other members of the French New Wave, and then for would-be art-film directors around the world.⁶²

As this passage from Lev suggests, *auteur* theory was to play an important role in the ‘art’ film movement. As such, it would help to provide the rhetoric for the Australian international film festivals in forging a cultural position for themselves: aligned with certain notions of art and culture, and in opposition to the supposedly ‘assembly line’ methods and ‘inauthentic vision’ of the commercial studios. These developments begin, as will be shown in the

⁵⁸ François Truffaut “A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema” [1954] in B. Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods*, vol. 1, London: University of California Press, 1976, p. 233.

⁵⁹ François Truffaut “A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema”, p. 233.

⁶⁰ Cited in Hillier, *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s*, p. 9.

⁶¹ Cited in Hillier, *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s*, p. 9.

⁶² Lev, *Euro-American Cinema*, p. 11.

following section, to emerge in this period, and will be dealt with more extensively in the next chapter of this thesis.

II. Origins of the Melbourne Film Festival

As discussed in the previous chapter, the first Australian international film festival at Olinda was considered a great success by its organisers. Olinda's success raised the possibility of organising an Australian national film festival to be held in Canberra. This idea was argued for by ACOFS, but was rejected by the FVFS members of the organising committee. Instead, the FVFS decided to conduct its own festival in Victoria the following year.⁶³ Without FVFS support, the idea of an Australian film festival collapsed, and the Olinda Film Festival became the "Melbourne Film Festival" on 30 October 1952.⁶⁴ The Festival Organising Committee was dominated by FVFS members, who ensured that the festival retained its strong links with the film societies in the state.

The enormous success of Olinda inspired the Melbourne Festival organising committee to organise an even more ambitious event for 1953. This festival was to be held in the Exhibition Building in Melbourne over 4 nights and 3 days. The framework and content of the 1953 Festival remained close to the Olinda model. This can be seen from the official programme, which stated that the aim of the Festival was threefold:

- (a) To integrate films into programmes of significance, and each programme will be discussed by a relevant authority;
- (b) To hold discussions on controversial subjects ... making the Festival a sounding board for public opinion as represented by a diverse panel of experts;
- (c) To enable people to enjoy and appreciate films which they otherwise could not see, but [*sic*] it will show educationalists and others how to go about making and using visual aids to the best advantage.⁶⁵

These three aims clearly demonstrate that the Melbourne Festival, just like Olinda, was intended to have an important educational role. The first aim demonstrates the Melbourne Film Festival's conception of itself as an organisation bound to the Victorian film society

⁶³ MFF – Min., 24.7.52, Box No. 1.

⁶⁴ MFF – Min., Box No. 1. However, this change of name does not seem to have been well publicised at first, as *Film Weekly*, e.g., is still referring to it as the "Australian Film Festival" in 1953 (26.2.1953, p. 10).

⁶⁵ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1953*, programme, p. 3.

movement. For part of the purpose of creating 'programmes of significance' was to broaden awareness amongst the film societies of the range of films available, to increase their knowledge of these different types of film, and also to teach them the most effective ways to design their own programmes.⁶⁶ The second aim shows that the Festival was conceived of as offering a space in which films could be discussed as cultural objects, linked to broader artistic and socio-political ideas. Finally, the third aim concerns the Festival's role in teaching educators (as well as modelling) the most productive use of film as an educational tool. For example, the programme included a full-day conference entitled "The role of the film in public health".⁶⁷

Like the Olinda Festival, the Melbourne Festival also aimed to assist in the national goal of promoting and encouraging the Australian film industry. In a section entitled 'High Ambitions', the Festival programme announced that it wanted to "be a 'shop-window' for Australian productions, and act as a stimulus to film making in this country. Like other festivals also, it will tend to raise film standards everywhere".⁶⁸ However, despite the Melbourne Festival's 'High Ambition' to encourage and improve Australian cinema production, there was no specific programme on Australian cinema. This was left to the discussion session entitled 'Future of Film in Australia'. The description of this session in the programme reads:

Film in Australia *has* a future. The true concern is the quality and direction of that future. Past performance is certainly no assurance that at last film-makers are about to make the most of their Australian heritage. Everyone knows that film in this country has not yet reached its long expected maturity. Where has it failed?⁶⁹

Part of the difficulty that the 1953 Festival had in encouraging Australian film, was the lack of such product. As producer Cecil Holmes wrote at the time, "film-making was in danger of becoming a lost tradition in Australia".⁷⁰ As discussed in the previous chapter, the immediate post-war period saw increased government assistance for film production in Australia. However, the conservative Menzies government (which had come to power in

⁶⁶ Edward Schefferle, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 10.6.1998.

⁶⁷ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1953*, programme, p. 10.

⁶⁸ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1953*, programme, p. 3.

⁶⁹ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1953*, programme, p. 31.

⁷⁰ T. O'Regan, "Australian Film in the 1950s", *Continuum: The Australian Journal of Media & Culture*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1987, p. 1.

1949), had less interest in encouraging feature film production.⁷¹ Indeed, prior to the Festival, committee member Alfred Heintz complained in *Film Weekly* that not one feature film had been made in Australia over the past year —thus undercutting “one of the festival’s chief aims [which was] to boost local film production and encourage its development”. He went on to say: “We even had to ‘scrape the bottom of the barrel’ to get sufficient Australian documentary shorts for exhibition”.⁷² In other words, the attempt by the Festival to invigorate the Australian film industry was more programmatic than real at this time. Indeed, it was motivated more by the internationalist outlook of the Festival programmers, than by any particular desire to stimulate the domestic feature film industry. This thus supports Scott Murray’s claim that:

the concern of film societies [and festivals] in the 1950s were rather more with establishing the credentials of film as an art form worthy of the same consideration as other arts —than with espousing a program for Australian filmmaking. Yet polemical ideas about Australian film were in gestation in the 1950s. They needed to have film as art consolidated both institutionally and as a widespread community perception before any polemical program based on feature film as a cultural good could be espoused.⁷³

Again as with Olinda, the 1953 programme was dominated by documentaries, which were organised into a number of sub-programmes. There are two sub-programme additions worth mentioning here. The first, entitled ‘Public Relations’, was sponsored by the Ford Motor Company, and included five short documentaries. These documentaries were funded by companies such as Rolex Watches, Ford, and the Imperial Chemical Industries Company (ICI). Like those programmes coming from the Shell Film Unit, these documentaries were considered to hold a legitimate place in the Film Festival programme because of their artistic or educational merit. These films were not simply publicity pieces for the companies involved, but incorporated broader educational and cultural themes. For example, the documentary film *Opus 65*, funded by Ford, is an “attempt at discovering and expressing a relationship between music and the mechanical process”.⁷⁴ *The Story of Time*, sponsored by Rolex, is again an abstract animation film, “using various symbols and devices to dramatize

⁷¹ O’Regan, “Australian Film in the 1950s”, p. 3.

⁷² *Film Weekly*, “Solid Support for Melb. Film Festival”, 12.3.1953, p. 9.

⁷³ Quoted in O’Regan, “Australian Film in the 1950s”, p. 13.

⁷⁴ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1953*, programme, p. 21.

man's discovery and mastery of the hours".⁷⁵ It is perhaps worth noting here that some of the earliest funding for experimental film in Australia thus came from private companies.

Despite these thematic similarities to Olinda, the 1953 Melbourne Film Festival at the Exhibition Building was a much more ambitious —and problematic— project than its predecessor. While the Olinda film programme was taken entirely from national film suppliers, the 1953 programme began to look to overseas sources for films. In addition, the size and design of the Exhibition Building meant equipping it with the necessary technology. As Heintz recalls, the Festival committee

built a projection box for £1350 and tried to convert that vast auditorium to a film theatre. It couldn't be done. Special projection lenses had to be flown out from England to handle the long throw, vast quantities of hessian drapes purchased, fire-proofed and hung to dampen the echoes, CSIRO engineers worked on a time-lapse system for the speakers to keep the sound in synchronisation. But all in vain. Nothing worked properly. And to make matters worse, the films we could get were second-rate.⁷⁶

On top of these technical problems, "Australia Day in 1953 was as hot as the previous year had been chilly, and 2,000 subscribers nearly fainted in the airless heat".⁷⁷

In taking stock after the 1953 Festival, the organising committee considered that it had in fact been too ambitious. The Festival had a considerably higher attendance than at Olinda, but was not sold out. More importantly, despite the attendance the Festival still made a net loss of around £600, on an overdraft that had been personally guaranteed by the committee members.⁷⁸ This loss was due to the increased rental and technical costs incurred by the use of the Exhibition building. According to Heintz, "to all intents and purposes, the film festival was dead".⁷⁹

However, in response to the problems caused by the choice of the Exhibition building as a venue, the Melbourne University Film Society recommended that a 1954 Festival be held on their campus, where MUFS had been holding its own small festivals for the past six years. This change of venue made both practical and cultural sense —enough lecture theatres and halls already had the necessary technology for film screenings, while the university, as the

⁷⁵ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1953*, programme, p. 21.

⁷⁶ Heintz, "Miracle at Olinda", p. 28; also noted by Edward Schefferle, interview with Cathy Hope, 10.6.1998.

⁷⁷ Heintz, "Miracle at Olinda", p. 28.

⁷⁸ MFF – Min., Box No. 1, 1.7.1953.

⁷⁹ Heintz, "Miracle at Olinda", pp. 28-9.

city's most prestigious educational establishment, provided the appropriate environment and kudos for the event. As part of the arrangement for this change of locale, a financial contract between the FVFS and MUFS was arranged, which would last until 1972.⁸⁰ Under this contract, the greater proportion of any profits made by the Festival would be divided by a number of University organisations including the Melbourne University Film Society, The Melbourne University Union, and the Student's Representative Council.

The revenue problems of the 1953 Festival also led the organising committee to seek ways of improving its profile —mainly by adopting some of the attributes of major overseas international film festivals. One possibility that the committee considered was to turn the Melbourne Film Festival into a competitive festival like Venice and Cannes. This idea was debated at length by the committee. The debate, which is extensively recorded in the minutes of the July committee meeting, reveals the inherent tension between commercial and cultural imperatives. Arguing for the idea, public relations practitioner and committee-member Alfred Heintz pointed out that “producers and distributors of film would not feel inclined to send good films without the possibility of winning a prize”. Heintz also argued that the “publicity and public relations value of a competition was essential to the success of a Festival”.⁸¹ Other committee members argued that giving awards to ‘commercial’ films (i.e., films with distribution) would corrupt the tenor of the Festival —one member stating that “the cultural note of the festival should be maintained and improved, and that trafficking in awards for commercial films was not a step towards this”.⁸² Eventually, as a compromise between these two positions, it was decided that a feature film competition from international entrants would be held, with Ford Motor Company sponsoring the trophy. This idea was abandoned however, when Ford dropped its promised support from £250 to £75.⁸³

As another way of improving the Melbourne Film Festival's profile, the committee decided to extend its duration. Hence, whilst the previous years' Festivals were held just over the Australia Day long weekend, the 1954 Festival ran from 31 May to 19 June —a total of three weeks. This extended period was needed because the largest theatre available at the

⁸⁰ MFF – Min., 8.11.1972, Box No. 33.

⁸¹ MFF – Min., 1.7.1953, Box No. 1.

⁸² MFF – Min., 1.7.1953, Box No. 1.

⁸³ MFF – Min., 1.7.1953, Box No. 1.

University (the Union theatre) held a maximum of 500. It was thus believed necessary to provide more screening sessions for each film, in order to meet potential audience demand.⁸⁴

Having received no financial support from the State government, the Festival committee decided to conduct conferences to subsidise funding. The first of these, in 1954, was a one-day conference run by the Institute of Management in the Union Theatre, entitled 'Motion Film and Management'. In addition, the Melbourne Festival sold eight pages of advertising space in its 1954 programme.⁸⁵

As a result of these changes, the 1954 Melbourne Film Festival was a success. It made a net profit of over £1,200, with most of this profit coming from ticket sales. This profit was divided between the FVFS (approximately £500) and Melbourne University (approximately £700). Given the success in the new venue, it was decided to solidify the connection between the University and the FVFS, by inviting representatives from each of the university sponsors onto the committee.

Despite this success, at this point members of the committee were still firmly committed to the conception of the Festival as an event specifically for enthusiasts of 'quality film', rather than for the 'general public'. A retrospective critique of the 1954 Festival, from an FVFS publication, was recorded in the minutes of a committee meeting. This critique stated that while the Festival "was conducted with considerable efficiency in organisation ... some critics felt that the sombre atmosphere of the [University] made it impossible for the audience to enjoy the films with any festive spirit".⁸⁶ However, in response to this 'populist' view, the critique argued that

At this stage of film history in our country we cannot expect a film festival to be an all-community affair, with the participation of public bodies, civic, educational, religious, etc. together with the film-trade itself screening the best available films in all theatres. Such a festival — a cinematic *mardi gras*— would not be possible for a very long time. For the present at least, our film festivals could only be meetings of people who are seriously interested in the film medium for one reason or another, and who are prepared to spend the time and money needed to see the films chosen by the organisers as 'festival standard'.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Heintz, "Miracle at Olinda", p. 29.

⁸⁵ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1954*, programme.

⁸⁶ MFF – Min., 19.7.1954, Box No. 1.

⁸⁷ MFF – Min., 19.7.1954, Box No. 1.

This passage clearly reveals a perceived incompatibility between being a 'serious' film festival, and one that had broader popular appeal. As later discussion will show, this tension would continue to emerge in discussions about increasing ticket-sales, and the more general role that the Festival served as a cultural organisation.

III. Origins Of The Sydney Film Festival

The establishment of the Sydney Film Festival had both similarities to and differences from the establishment of the Melbourne Film Festival. However, it is worth noting here that lack of documentation makes it harder to get a clear and detailed picture of the events leading up to the first Sydney Festival, and its first three years. This is because minutes from meetings for the period 1954 to June 1958 are not included in the Sydney Film Festival archives, and their whereabouts are unknown. Most of the historical information about the Sydney Festival in this early period is thus drawn from the programmes and from oral history interviews. However, as these interviews were recorded nearly 40 years after the event, they tend to provide only the general outlines of internal committee relations and related matters.

Perhaps the most important distinction between the Sydney and Melbourne Festivals was the influence of film makers in Sydney. With the Department of Information, Shell Film Unit, and numerous independent organisations based in Sydney, the city was considered the hub of Australian film-making. For this reason, the Sydney Festival placed a much greater emphasis on amateur film screenings than did Melbourne. The Melbourne Festival instead structured its programme based on its close relations with the strong film society movement in Victoria (as represented by the FVFS). As later discussion will show, these different alignments were to have a significant influence on the content of the two Festivals in their early years.

It is thus not surprising that, while the Melbourne committee was primarily made up of film culture figures, the early Sydney organising committee contained many representatives from the film industry. These included John Heyer (Head of Production of Shellshear Museum film unit in Australia), John Kingsford-Smith (Kingscroft Productions), Stanley Hawes and Malcolm Otton from the Department of Information, and Frank Bellingham, President of the NSW Amateur Cine Society. As with Melbourne, the Sydney organising

committee also had connections with the State film library—in this case the NSW Films Council— via committee member Joseph Lonsdale.⁸⁸

The desire to conduct a Sydney Film Festival was in part driven by the existence of the Melbourne Film Festival, and in part by the decision of the FVFS not to participate in an Australia-wide festival. There was also a strong awareness amongst Sydney film makers of the importance of overseas film festivals for the non-commercial film movement. This must have been particularly present for John Heyer, whose film *Back of Beyond* (produced, as noted in the previous chapter, by the Shell Oil Company's film unit) toured overseas festivals in 1954, and would go on to win the Grand Prix in Venice.⁸⁹

While the Melbourne Festival organising committee consisted of members drawn from a single organisation (the FVFS), the Sydney Film Festival emerged from the interests of a variety of organisations—although some were members of ACOFS. The initial organisers were Joseph Lonsdale (NSW Films Council), John Heyer, independent film maker John Kingsford-Smith (Kingscroft Productions), Frank Bellingham, Ron O'Brien, and A. K. Stout. They also received support and assistance from Stanley Hawes at the DOI. The first Sydney Film Festival in 1954 was primarily funded by Kingscroft Productions—an outlay which, as Lonsdale pointed out, was a “considerable [amount] for a small organisation, because most of their producers ran on a very tight budget. So it was quite a gamble on their part too”.⁹⁰

Just as with Melbourne, the University of Sydney, as a ‘prestige venue’, was secured at no cost as the site for the first Sydney International Film Festival. This was achieved through the influence of Stout, who was a professor of philosophy at the University.⁹¹ The University remained the Festival's home for the next eleven years.

As the impetus for the 1954 Festival grew, other organisations began to show interest. These included the Film-Users' Association of New South Wales, the Australian Amateur Cine-Society, the Independent Film Group, Sydney Scientific Film Society, and the Sydney University Film Group.⁹² *Film Weekly* also attended meetings to discuss the Festival, although it appears that trade participation in the event was minimal.

⁸⁸ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Joseph Lonsdale, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 16.10.1992.

⁸⁹ Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*, p. 194.

⁹⁰ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Joseph Lonsdale, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 16.10.1992.

⁹¹ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Joseph Lonsdale, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 16.10.1992.

⁹² SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Joseph Lonsdale, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 16.10.1992.

The first Sydney Film Festival was held in 1954 at the University of Sydney over the weekend of 13–14 June. Continuing the educational theme that had emerged from Olinda, the Festival was patronized by R. J. Heffron, Minister for Education, as well as by the Lord Mayor of Sydney and the Vice-Chancellor of Sydney University.

As Chairman of the Festival committee, in the programme introduction Stout clearly expressed the aim of the Festival, and linked it expressly to the idea of cinema as an art-form:

It is the purpose of a film festival to bring together in a common experience those whose interest in cinema goes beyond mere entertainment (not that entertainment is forgotten!). Such an occasion is a reminder and a witness that both in content and in form the film can be an art worthy of serious study and criticism.⁹³

Out of 33 films in the 1954 Sydney Festival programme, there were four European features, one Buster Keaton film, and a science fiction film from Holland. Nearly a quarter of the screenings were Australian, while the remainder were independent and state-funded documentaries, avant-garde, abstract, animation and marionette films. It should be noted that the greater percentage of the Australian films in the programme were made by members of the Festival committee, including Hawes, Kingsford-Smith and Heyer.

The structure of the 1954 Sydney programme differed to some extent from that of the 1953 Melbourne programme. The primary purpose of the Melbourne programme design was to provide programmes each with an internal thematic and aesthetic unity. The Sydney programme, on the other hand, was broken up into 9 groups —each of which were designed to provide internal *variety* for the audience.⁹⁴

In conclusion, while the Sydney organising committee claimed the 1954 Festival to be a success, it did encounter a number of problems. A relatively scathing review of this Festival on the front page of *Film Weekly* highlighted the technical flaws, disorganisation, and its failure to meet audience projections. The technical and organisational difficulties were primarily due to the logistics of simultaneously organising screenings at several dispersed locations around the University of Sydney campus.⁹⁵ Perhaps more importantly, the Festival sold only 1,500 of the allocated 2,000 tickets.⁹⁶ Indeed, in one attempt to increase attendance

⁹³ *Sydney Film Festival – 1954*, programme, p. 1.

⁹⁴ Edward Schefferle, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 10.6.1998.

⁹⁵ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Joseph Lonsdale, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 16.10.1992.

⁹⁶ *Film Weekly*, 17.6.1954, p. 1.

numbers, the Festival offered tickets to the Royal Prince Alfred nurses for free —an offer which succeeded in attracting 20 or 30 nurses.⁹⁷

IV. Melbourne And Sydney Film Festivals, 1955-1958

The period from 1955-1958 sees the Melbourne Film Festival becoming an increasingly well-organised and professional organisation; the Sydney Film Festival, on the other hand, emerges as more amateur and University-based. While Melbourne emphasised the showing of ‘quality’ and ‘art’ films, the Sydney Festival retained its strong focus on screening Australian amateur productions. In this section, the developmental years of the Melbourne Film Festival will be discussed first, followed by Sydney.

Melbourne Film Festival: Professionalisation and Growth

After the success of the 1954 Festival, the Melbourne organising committee decided to modify its programme in an attempt to broaden the appeal of the film Festival. The 1954 programme had included a broad range of specialised, thematic screening sessions —on such topics as ‘New ideas in film’, ‘Science and Nature’, ‘People and Places’, ‘Science and Man’, and ‘Mental Health’.⁹⁸ For the 1955 Festival, it was decided to reduce this focus on specialised themes, and offer more aesthetically-based programmes, with broader artistic appeal.

In doing this, the committee decided to simplify the aims of the Festival. Previously, the Festival had inherited a number of roles from Olinda: including representing the cinematic interests of the film society movement, providing film sources for educationalists, and so forth. In the 1955 Festival programme introduction, the committee publicly announced that it had instead adopted a single guiding precept: that the Melbourne Film Festival existed primarily to programme films that would not receive commercial screening in Australia.⁹⁹ It organised these non-commercial films under the twin rubrics of ‘film as art’ and ‘film as culture’. Or, in the words of the introduction, the Festival will present films “demanding the interest and attention that is the right of artistic achievement” and “the widest range of films

⁹⁷ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Joseph Lonsdale, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 16.10.1992.

⁹⁸ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1954*, programme, p. 5.

⁹⁹ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1955*, programme, p. 1.

from all parts of the world, especially those which are unlikely to reach our local theatre screens".¹⁰⁰ This marks the adoption of a discourse that would continue to be used by the Melbourne Film Festival (and later, by Sydney), well into the 1970s.

Cementing these changes after the 1955 Festival, the committee passed the following resolutions:

- (i) On ... Saturday and Monday public holiday one outstanding program of general interest be shown.
- (ii) Proved successes of earlier festivals to be repeated, e.g., animated films, new ideas, films on art, work of a particular film-maker, avant-garde.
- (iii) Certain specialist programs to be presented but if possible to be such as still to be of general interest. This implies that program building is to take precedence over the category in to which the film is placed.¹⁰¹

As points (i) and (iii) emphasise, what was new about the precepts stated above, was the increased attention to the notion of 'general interest'. In particular, point (iii) suggests that even specialist programmes must be designed to contain films giving the session as a whole a broader appeal.

The results of these resolutions can be seen in examining the programme of the 1956 Festival. To begin with, the various film seminars and discussions, so prominent in the Olinda programme, have been reduced to a single 'feedback' session, held at the end of the Festival. The point of this session was not for academic discussion of particular film content, or for educational purposes. Rather, it was an opportunity to critique the Festival programming as a whole. As the programme states,

All are welcome to come and share their ideas or to measure their reactions against those of more vocal members, about the best and worst of our entertainment and documentary screenings. This should be both delightful and fruitful.¹⁰²

Furthermore, in the 1956 Festival the explicitly educational or scientific sessions have been replaced with sessions organised around more aesthetic criteria. This can be seen from their titles, which include 'Shapes and Shade', 'Nature', 'In Past Tense', 'Chiaroscuro' and 'Pot-

¹⁰⁰ *Melbourne Film Festival— 1955*, programme, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ MFF – Min., 28.10.1955, Box No. 1.

¹⁰² *Melbourne Film Festival – 1956*, programme, p. 29.

Pourri'.¹⁰³ This change brought the Melbourne Festival programme closer in line with the programmes of the major overseas film festivals, such as Cannes and Venice. This development was recognised by the Australian film-culture journal *Film Guide*, which wrote that:

1956's Festival not only eclipses all previous Festivals, but has become more international in scope and outlook. With its imposing line-up of features from thirteen countries —three of which entered official films— Melbourne is beginning to emulate the function of European festivals in providing a show window for the pick of the world's films. But —let us be thankful— without the social shenanigans which mar Cannes and Venice.¹⁰⁴

In a further attempt to model itself on such overseas international film festivals, the Melbourne committee decided, after the 1956 Festival, to elect its first professional Festival Director. This was Erwin Rado —who, by the beginning of 1958, was being paid a director's salary of £700 per annum.¹⁰⁵ Rado was a highly-cultured Hungarian immigrant, with a deep passion for classical music as well as European cinema. It would be good to provide a more detailed account of Rado's background here. However, an authorised biography is currently under preparation, so unfortunately the available biographical material was inaccessible during the writing of this thesis.¹⁰⁶

Rado wanted to increase the number of 'international' features shown at the Melbourne Festival, both to enhance its appeal as a cultural event, and to raise its stature as a world-class film festival. For the 1957 Festival, he wrote as follows to a number of Australian distributors, including those for Paramount, Universal and United Artists:

I wonder if your organisation might have a gem tucked away somewhere —a film of unusual artistic quality which has not yet been released in Victoria, and which, by virtue of its less tangibly exploitable artistic merit, could do with the extra publicity that the Festival inevitably brings with it.¹⁰⁷

In 1958, the committee also took a major step towards making the Melbourne Film Festival a major player on the international circuit: they contributed £1,000 to send Rado

¹⁰³ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1956*, programme, p. 5.

¹⁰⁴ *Film Guide*, 1956 in MFF – Arch., “1956 Film Festival”, press cuttings, Box No. 36.

¹⁰⁵ MFF – Min., 1.1.1958, Box No. 6.

¹⁰⁶ For various personal recollections of Rado, see Kalina (ed.), *A Place to Call Home*.

¹⁰⁷ MFF – Corr., Box No. 4.

overseas to attend film festivals and meet with international distributors.¹⁰⁸ This meant that, for the first time, the Melbourne Festival would no longer be solely reliant on local Australian sources for film product. Instead, it could now directly select films from overseas, and thus had a much wider range of current product to choose from.

All these changes worked to shift the Melbourne Film Festival's official focus from education to cultural representation and artistic innovation. As the 1958 programme states:

The Seventh Melbourne Film Festival will present 130 films from 21 countries. These films were selected for their achievements in the field of cinematography, or because they present a new point of view, use a new approach or explore a new technique towards rendering this youngest art more vital in its message and the most expressive of our age.¹⁰⁹

The drive to improve the quality of films shown at the Melbourne Film Festival also impacted on its Australian film content. A perusal of the programmes reveals that the percentage of Australian films included in the Festival between 1955 and 1958 was less than 10% —a substantial decrease from the Olinda Film Festival programme. This was justified by the lack of feature productions and 'quality' films produced in Australia. However, Rado and the other Festival committee members still felt it was their role to encourage Australian film production. In an article in *Argus* in 1956, Rado makes a point of noting that there was not one Australian feature film in their programme, a state of affairs which he describes as "deplorable".¹¹⁰ Thus, in 1958 the Festival held the first 'Australian Film Awards'. These Awards initially consisted of four categories: Documentary, Educational, Advertising, and Open. The judges then created a special category for Experimental Film, and in 1959 the awards were further expanded to include Public Relations and Teaching. Nonetheless, the Australian Film Awards event was kept separate from the main Festival programme.¹¹¹

All of these changes made to the Melbourne Film Festival put it in a stronger position to acquire official recognition from the powerful international producer's organisation based in Paris, the Federation International des Association de Producteurs de Films (FIAPF). FIAPF was an international umbrella organisation for film production companies and independent film producers, which aimed to protect and enhance the financial and cultural status of its

¹⁰⁸ MFF – Min., 27.5.1958, Box No. 3.

¹⁰⁹ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1958*, programme, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ MFF – Arch., *Argus*, 22.5.56, in "Melbourne Film Festival – 1956 Festival Folder", press cuttings, Box No. 3.

¹¹¹ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1958*, programme.

members. Since its inception, FIAPF had developed official relationships with some of the largest production and distribution companies and organisations in Europe, Asia, North and South America and the Middle East.¹¹² In order to screen films produced by any FIAPF member, international film festivals needed FIAPF recognition. Such recognition gave access to productions from almost all of the European and Asian Majors. In return, FIAPF-endorsed festivals were required to follow certain regulations governing festival structure and content, which were designed to control the distribution and exhibition of these films.

In 1958, the Melbourne Film Festival moved to secure its position as a recognised international film festival by pursuing endorsement from FIAPF. FIAPF agreed to recognise Melbourne, but this endorsement arrived too late to be utilised in sourcing films for that year's festival.¹¹³ Despite this, the 1958 programme announced proudly that “with the recognition of the International Federation of Film Producers' Associations, the Melbourne Film Festival has reached maturity”.¹¹⁴

The success of the Melbourne Film Festival between 1955 and 1958 is evident both in its physical and financial expansion. The Festivals in 1956 and 1957 were so popular that in 1958, owing to the existence of waiting lists, Rado recommended that the Festival move to the Rivoli Theatre in Camberwell, as well as to the Carlton Theatre for the more popular sessions on Saturday.¹¹⁵ Although the Festival's profit margin increased only gradually between 1954 and 1958 (mainly because of its accompanying physical expansion), its general subscription takings moved from approximately £3,000 in 1954¹¹⁶ to £9,622 in 1958.¹¹⁷

The success of the Melbourne Film Festival probably also played some role in contributing to the burgeoning Victorian film society movement (with which it was closely connected via the FVFS). In turn, this movement contributed to Melbourne's success, by increasing its potential audience —primarily because only film society members could purchase tickets for the Festival. In 1956, there were only 24 film groups and organisations that were members or affiliates of the Federation of Victorian Film Societies. By 1957, this

¹¹² In 1958, FIAPF members were: Germany, Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, USA, Finland, France, Great Britain, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Pakistan, Holland, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey. MFF – Arch., *Bulletin Mensuel D'information*, 12.6.1958, Seige de la FIAPF, Box No. 36.

¹¹³ MFF. – Min., 29.1.1958, Box No. 6.

¹¹⁴ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1958*, programme, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ MFF – Min., 1.1.1958, Box No. 6.

¹¹⁶ MFF – Min., 19.7.1954, Box No. 1.

¹¹⁷ MFF – Min., 3.12.1958, Box No. 6.

number had grown to 36; by 1960 it was 59; and by 1962, 68 film societies, groups and independent organisations belonged to the FVFS.¹¹⁸

Sydney Film Festival: The Harder Road

In its early days, the Sydney Film Festival was a smaller occasion than its Melbourne counterpart, and had a different emphasis. While the Melbourne programme over this period typically contained over 100 films, the Sydney programme only averaged between 35 and 40. However, the Sydney Film Festival's connection with the amateur cine-societies—a connection weaker in Melbourne—and, perhaps, the presence of Bellingham on the committee, meant the inclusion of a substantial amateur film programme.

In the same year as Rado was appointed director at Melbourne, the Sydney Film Festival also introduced a formal directorial role to its committee structure. However, unlike Melbourne, this was a dual-directorship consisting of a director responsible for programme management (initially, David Donaldson) and a director responsible for business management (initially, D.J. McDermott).¹¹⁹ However, these directorships tended to change regularly—and, in general, the directors did not enjoy the sort of weight and authority that Rado had in Melbourne. In 1957 Donaldson was replaced by Valwyn Edwards.¹²⁰ However, Edwards thought the Festival was 'amateurish' and returned to Melbourne the following year.

Before Edwards returned to Melbourne, she gave the committee a detailed critique of the organising of the 1958 Festival in her 'Director's Report'. It is worth examining the charges laid in this report, as it reveals some of the important contrasts to Melbourne. Overall, Edwards wrote that the Sydney Festival was "disorganised, confused, and amateurish". She blamed these problems in part on the Festival location at the University of Sydney—noting that the lecture rooms and halls were often unsuitable, and made for various technical difficulties—and in part on the fact that the Festival had little support from the film societies. She also criticised the content of the Festival programme, and argued that it lacked any real unity or coherence. She suggested that in order to improve matters, the committee should adopt the following two aims for the Festival. First, "raising the standards of film appreciation and educating a large number of people to it", and second, "where possible, trying to gain the

¹¹⁸ These numbers are taken from the *Melbourne Film Festival*, programmes, 1955-62.

¹¹⁹ *Sydney Film Festival – 1956*, programme, p. 1.

commercial release of films shown at the festival”. Finally, Edwards also strongly recommended that Sydney follow the Melbourne route of appointing a “fully professional organiser” for the Festival directorship (and recommended that this person be a “Public Relations man or woman”, rather than an ‘enthusiastic’ but untrained member of the committee).¹²¹

Perhaps partly because of these problems with organisation, venue, and content, the Sydney Film Festival did not see the increase in subscription enjoyed by Melbourne. During this period, the Melbourne Festival increased its membership ceiling from 2,000 to 3,000 in response to demand. However, the Sydney Film Festival was forced to retain its target membership of only 2,000, because while the 1955 Festival had 1,950 subscribers, by 1958 this number had dropped to only 1,350.¹²² Despite this drop in subscriptions, the Sydney Festival still managed to make a modest profit of over £800 in 1958.¹²³

There was another issue that impacted on the success of the Sydney Film Festival — namely, that the Sydney budget was much smaller than the Melbourne budget. Unlike Melbourne, which received financial support both from the FVFS and University-based organisations, Sydney did not have the same kind of consolidated financial support (although it was allowed to screen the Festival at the University of Sydney without charge). Unsurprisingly, at Sydney there was no budget allocation for overseas trips to source films (like those enjoyed by Rado). Instead, the Sydney Festival continued to acquire most of its programme either from the Melbourne Film Festival, Sydney organising committee connections, or on the advice of reviews in journals like *Sight and Sound* and *Variety*.¹²⁴

Despite these issues, or perhaps indeed partly because of them, the Sydney Festivals at this time were enjoyable experiences for many in the audience. Edward’s critique assumed that the Sydney organising committee wanted to establish a fully professional film festival — on the model of the major international film festivals. However, in fact many on the committee had a different vision for the Sydney Festival. It should be remembered here that although both Sydney and Melbourne were held on university campuses, the Sydney Festival drew strongly on the student body for its audience. Melbourne, on the other hand, attracted a

¹²⁰ *Sydney Film Festival – 1957*, programme, p. 1.

¹²¹ All quotes are from SFF – Min., Edward’s “Directors Report: 1958 Film Festival”, Box No. 1.

¹²² SFF – Min., “Directors Report: 1958 Film Festival”, Box No. 1.

¹²³ SFF – Min., 4.11.1958, Box No. 1.

much wider audience of film enthusiasts via its extensive connection with the FVFS. For some in the Sydney audience, the haphazard and logistically difficult nature of the festival weekend was arguably one of its more appealing aspects in these early years. Committee member Anton Crouch recalls that festival goers were “always wandering around with baskets or blankets”, and states that:

There was really an extraordinary feeling of camaraderie. And that was necessary because the conditions were primitive both with regard to the venues and the quality of the projection. The Annexe was notorious for the fact that it was freezing cold in winter time. It was literally a prefabricated asbestos shed. The Wallace Theatre was characterised by the fact that to get into the rows people had to stand up to let you in. What people used to do was walk on the writing platforms.¹²⁵

The extreme conditions and long running hours held its own appeal, which undoubtedly added to the sense of ‘camaraderie’. As the Sydney Festival was held over the June long weekend, the programme would sometimes extend until the early hours of the morning. According to another committee member,

They showed [one film] at one o’clock in the morning in the Great Hall. ... It was freezing there. When you sat down you felt the cold from the tiles go through your feet first. [The next film] finished about three o’clock in the morning. We decided it was a waste of time going to bed, so we went up to the Cross and had breakfast. And then came back at 9 o’clock to continue.¹²⁶

As the early Sydney audience consisted primarily of university students from a variety of disciplines, rather than of film society members with a specific interest in film, the films sometimes seemed to play a secondary role at the Festival. For example, Kevin Troy recalls that at the 1956 Sydney Film Festival the cans of film containing Kurosawa’s *Seven Samurai* were not numbered, and hence shown in completely different order at its many screenings. Despite this, no-one in the audience appeared to be concerned.¹²⁷

From an administrative perspective, in the early years the Sydney Festival may not have been as established or professional as Melbourne, but it nonetheless clearly had an atmosphere that many of its organisers remember with affection. Committee member Ross Tzannes recalls that

¹²⁴ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ian Klava, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 28.11.91.

¹²⁵ Anton Crouch in SFF, *40 Years of Film*, p. 5.

¹²⁶ Joan Saint in SFF, *40 Years of Film*, p. 5.

The university campus, that was the place to have the festival ... The idea of being able to picnic between the films and to be able to discuss films with other people like that created a much more relaxed atmosphere ... And of course the ambience was fantastic too.¹²⁸

IV. Relations between the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals

As later chapters in this thesis will show, a key part of understanding the history of the two major Australian international film festivals is to understand their relationship with one another. Lying behind this relationship are two main driving forces. Firstly, there was a drive towards *competition* with one another. This was not from choice, but simply out of industrial necessity: for Sydney and Melbourne were two new organisations both serving essentially the same function, in a situation where there was a relative scarcity of appropriate product. Secondly, there was a drive towards *cooperation*. Again, this was not a choice, but the result of another industrial imperative. Given the geographical isolation of Australia (particularly in this period prior to the arrival of cheap intercontinental flight and modern communication technologies), the cost of importing films from places such as Europe was very high. As the two Film Festivals were both non-profit, amateur organisations, the cost of importing product could not easily be covered by increasing subscription rates. Hence, there were obvious cost advantages if the Festivals could share product and thus importation costs—which in turn demanded that they cooperate in scheduling.

These two themes of competition and cooperation were evident from the beginnings of the relationship between Sydney and Melbourne. The first sign of this is when the Sydney committee decided to move the 1955 Festival to occur soon after Melbourne, in order to share product. In turn, the Melbourne committee passed a motion in late 1954 agreeing to cooperate formally with Sydney.¹²⁹ In February of the following year, this agreement begins to manifest itself, as the following passage from the minutes makes clear:

A letter from the Secretary of the SFF suggesting full cooperation between the two Festivals was read. Suggestions made were that there should be an interchange of minutes of Festival meetings and that an exchange of delegation be considered. Sydney offered to pay expenses here, but a more suitable arrangement should be possible. Mr Nicholls

¹²⁷ Kevin Troy in SFF, *40 Years of Film*, p. 5.

¹²⁸ Kevin Troy in SFF, *40 Years of Film*, p. 5.

¹²⁹ MFF – Min., 16.12.1954, Box No. 1.

will be in Sydney on March 15, 16, 17 and could attend a meeting of the Sydney Film Festival Committee on one of those nights. Later could send Mr Schefferle to Sydney to appraise films available there and a Sydney representative could come to Melbourne for the same purpose.¹³⁰

However, despite this apparent cordiality between the two Festivals, tensions soon began to develop over various administrative issues. For example, three months later David Donaldson (Convenor of the Sydney Festival Programming Committee) writes to the John Sumner (Director of the Melbourne Festival), regarding a clash over programming at the 1955 Melbourne Festival. In particular, Donaldson wrote to

protest ... at [Melbourne's] programming of *Jigokumon* for June 9/10/11. If any mishap interferes with our screenings starting Saturday night, there will be hard words. The current cool blast is enough to make most of our committee wonder why we moved to the June date anyway.¹³¹

The 'cool blast' mentioned in this passage suggests that, despite the need to cooperate, the relationship between Melbourne and Sydney was characterised by discord almost from the very beginning.

The 'cool blast', however, remained hidden from public view, and both Festivals continued to maintain an amicable and cooperative front. In his introduction to the 1958 Sydney programme, for example, Sydney Film Festival President Frank Bellingham writes that "This year sees a closer co-operation with the Melbourne Film Festival, a link which could well mean interesting developments in the future".¹³² In a further example, a group of Sydney committee members were personally invited to the 1958 Melbourne Festival, and an official reception was held for them. However, one of the Sydney members was confidentially informed by a Melbourne committee member, that the Melbourne committee had had to override the director Rado, who "hadn't wanted to recognise [their] presence there".¹³³

The negotiation between the two industrial imperatives of cooperation and competition, already evident in these early days, remained at the core of the relationship between the Sydney and Melbourne Festivals. As the two Festivals themselves grew in complexity, it necessarily followed that the relationship itself became more complex —as the following chapters of this thesis will demonstrate.

¹³⁰ MFF – Min., 28.2.1955, Box No.1.

¹³¹ MFF – Corr., Donaldson to Sumner, 19.5.1955, Box No. 4.

¹³² *Sydney Film Festival – 1958*, programme, p. 1.

¹³³ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., John Burke, interviewed by David Stratton, 12.6.1992.

V. Relations between the Festivals and the Film Trade in Australia

In this early period, these two themes of cooperation and competition also characterise the relationship between the Festivals and the film trade—in particular, the distribution and exhibition sides. While the trade provided assistance to Olinda and the first Melbourne Film Festival, there were also concerns about the Festivals' role as an alternative exhibition outlet. As the above discussion suggests, the commercial exhibitors in this period were screening many of the sorts of European feature films that made up the head-liners of the Festivals' programmes. Both the trade and the Festivals were thus competing for a share of the same limited audience. In order to counter this, the Festivals attempted to present themselves as a beneficial adjunct to the trade (for example, by acting as publicity devices for particular films).

For the 1953 Melbourne Film Festival, held at the Exhibition centre, the Australian film trade provided quite extensive support. This included supplying equipment and technical expertise to convert the centre, providing film products for screening and stills for publicity purposes. In addition, industry representatives took part in the discussions sessions held during the Festival. *Film Weekly* commented that “this will give the trade an opportunity to ‘answer back’ on questions it rarely has a chance to discuss publicly”.¹³⁴ Discussing the reasons behind this trade support for the Festival in another article, RKO's managing director Ralph Doyle states that he “is firm in his belief that any group anxious to advance interest in motion pictures, both as an art and entertainment, warrants the fullest support of film distributors”.¹³⁵ It thus seems clear that, at this stage, the trade is making gestures towards an alliance with the Film Festivals, thinking that perhaps such an alliance would be beneficial for the industry.

This initial support for the two Film Festivals soon diminished, however. One reason for this might be that, as discussed above, some Australian exhibitors were increasingly turning to European films to bolster their profits, and thus began to perceive the Film Festivals as potential competitors. This perception was possibly exacerbated by the poorly performing

¹³⁴ “Added mpi interest in '53 pix festival”, in *Film Weekly*, 26.2.1953, p. 10. All details in the paragraph are drawn from this article.

¹³⁵ “Warrants Distrib Support – Doyle”, *Film Weekly*, 26.2.1953, p. 10.

market for European films. By the middle of this period, an F.D. Brugler, ‘distributor of foreign-language product’, writes in *Film Weekly* that

contrary to earlier years when only a handful of Continental films were released with more or less outstanding financial success, the big increase [sc. in European film importation] did not bring with it an adequate increase of film hire earned by these films.¹³⁶

In this article, Brugler goes on to cite statistics that only 5 out of the 30 European films released in Sydney between mid-1954 and mid-1955 were profitable. He suggests that the reason for this is that distributors are flooding the market with “second-rate” product, rather than importing only the “cream” of European film.¹³⁷ Given the limited supply of such ‘cream’, and the niche appeal possessed by most of these films, it is not surprising that commercial exhibitors might begin to perceive the Film Festivals as direct competition.

The sensitivity of the commercial film-trade to non-trade competition in this period is evidenced by the objections mounted against even the smallest and most obscure exhibitions. Illustrating the twin pulls of cooperation and competition, such objections were occurring at the same time as the trade was offering assistance to the two Festivals. For example, in 1952, *Film Weekly* responds to a letter to the editor complaining about “damaging competition from non-professional screenings in the very hall [a commercial exhibitor] uses once a week at Oaklands, NSW”. The editors respond by condemning the distributors involved:

Our opinion, without being partisan in any way, is that distributors who rent entertainment films for use in competition with licensed showmen are being disloyal to the men from whom the vast bulk of their revenue stems. They are doing a disservice to the industry by undermining the habit of attending commercial screenings. Ultimately this must reflect on themselves as well as on the exhibitor. We would urge the distributors concerned in the Oaklands instance to reconsider their policy.¹³⁸

The film-trade’s concern with non-professional competition is also evident from the fact that *Film Weekly* in this period regularly published lists of licenses for screenings issued by the NSW Theatres and Films Commission —along with the final dates for lodging objections against such licenses. This was done no matter how obscure the screening might be, with examples including Goonellabah Public Hall (via Lismore), Tallong Memorial Hall (via

¹³⁶ “Caution for distribs of Continental films”, *Film Weekly*, 31.3.1955, p. 3.

¹³⁷ “Caution for distribs of Continental films”, *Film Weekly*, 31.3.1955, p. 3.

¹³⁸ “Should review policy on 16mm competition”, *Film Weekly*, 21.8.1952, p. 5.

Bundanoon) and Euchareena Soldier's Memorial Hall.¹³⁹ As one further piece of evidence, it is worth noting here that in 1954 the Theatrical Employees' Association lobbied to prevent films being shown in Sydney and Melbourne hotel bars and lounges.¹⁴⁰

In an attempt to counter the trade's growing perception of the Film Festivals as competition, representatives of the Festivals argued instead that the trade should see them as beneficial. The clearest illustration of this is an article by A. K. Stout, published in *Film Weekly* in 1954, and entitled "Why should the industry support Film Festivals?". Stout had previously been singled out for criticism by *Film Weekly* for his anti-commercial views. Reporting on one of Stout's speeches at the Olinda Festival, *Film Weekly* wrote that

he made his stock pedagogic attack on commercial entertainment pictures, slating Hollywood's product in particular. Attacking the American "film moguls" is one of the professor's favourite hobby horses. He's ridden it to death.¹⁴¹

In his own address to the *Film Weekly* audience, Stout argues that, in the face of the threat of television and the declining audience for motion pictures, the film trade and the Festivals should cooperate "to encourage the discriminating film-goer ... and to attract a new audience of this kind".¹⁴² What the Film Festivals can offer the industry, according to Stout, is three things. Firstly, the Festivals can function as a mechanism for recruiting such 'discriminating' film-goers, and thus increase the audience for the commercial exhibitors. Secondly, he argues that, by associating themselves with the Festivals, the trade will "demonstrate positively and practically its desire to raise standards, by co-operating with those who are known to care very much about such things". In other words, an association with the Festivals — as university-based organisations, expressly concerned with 'quality' — would be a good public relations exercise for the trade, and would assist in disarming conservative criticism of commercial film products. Thirdly, Stout also states that through cooperation with the Festivals, the trade would

gain influential allies to support it when it comes under fire, as a harmful influence on children, for example. For the serious student of films does know something about these conclusions reached on these matters by [such] people.

¹³⁹ "Notifications by Film Commission", *Film Weekly*, 26.2.1953, p. 10.

¹⁴⁰ "Union to Oppose Pub Screenings", *Film Weekly*, 17.6.1954, p. 1.

¹⁴¹ *Film Weekly*, 24.4.1952, p. 5.

¹⁴² All quotations in the remainder of this paragraph are from Stout, "Why should the industry support Film Festivals?", *Film Weekly*, 23.12.1954, pp. 32-3.

Stout concludes his appeal to the trade by assuring them that

festival committees would welcome the good-will and cooperation of the industry, and would do their best to ensure that the benefits were not all on one side. Festivals here are in their infancy, but they are growing up fast and may become a link between the industry and an increasingly important part of its potential theatre audience.

It is worth pointing out here that the trade did not need Stout to point out the public relations value of the rhetoric of ‘quality’ and ‘moral worth’. Replying to a general criticism of film and television entertainment by the Pope, the editors of *Film Weekly* produce in response the following magnificent battery of arguments:

We’d not for a moment presume to enter into contradiction of such an eminent authority. But surely one’s attitude to films ... is a matter of point of view. If films are not as enlightening and culturally uplifting as some folk wish, they are still a step ahead of public appreciation. The industry continues to produce art films, despite their repeated failure at the box office. An important thing to remember, particularly since it is the job of the educationalists, not the exhibitors, to develop taste and moral awareness.¹⁴³

Along with such public gestures as Stout’s article, the Festival committees were also attempting to link themselves to local distributors specialising in continental film. Their argument for this was similar to Stout’s first point above: that the Film Festivals could act as useful publicity for such films, and thus increase the potential audience for them. For example, Rado writes in 1958 to Sydney Blake of Blake Films, trying to convince him to buy the film *Albert Schweitzer*:

In view of its commercial success and its commercial rating overseas the Festival Committee felt that your organisation may be interested in distributing the film in Australia. If this should be the case we would be pleased to supply the address of the American producer.¹⁴⁴

The advantage for the Film Festivals in making such links with distributors was that, if Australian commercial distribution could be gained after screening at the Festivals, then this would encourage overseas distributors to give the Festivals more, and better, films.

In sum, even at this early stage in the history of the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals the relationship between them and the trade is marked by tension. As the Festivals grow in stature and influence, this tension between competition (for audience share) and cooperation

¹⁴³ “Films criticised”, *Film Weekly*, 7.1.1954, p. 10.

¹⁴⁴ MFF – Corr., Rado to Blake, 23.7.1958, Box No. 7.

(for audience development and film / publicity provision) becomes necessarily more intense. These developments will be examined in greater depth in the following chapters.

* * * * *

This chapter has examined the establishment of the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals, and their early period of development up to 1958. In the context of a declining audience for mainstream motion pictures, the ‘juvenilisation’ of Hollywood film, and the concurrent rise of European cinema as an alternative, the two Film Festivals had, by the end of this period, begun to establish an identity and role for themselves in Australian film-culture. The trends that began in this period become more marked and complex in the years to come, as will be examined in the following chapters.

1959-64: Expansion and Conflict

This chapter deals with the history of the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals from 1959 to 1964. At the beginning of this period, the two Festivals were minor, amateur film culture organisations, which screened a range of non-commercial films (such as documentaries, shorts, and educational films) of specialist interest to minor segments of the community. However, this period sees the Festivals attempt to establish themselves as more professional organisations, more closely resembling the major international film festivals. This required an expansionary program —both with regards to the quality and quantity of their programmes, and the size of their potential audience.

This expansionary program led the Film Festivals to be increasingly perceived as direct competition by the film trade. As small-scale amateur affairs, the Festivals initially offered no threat to the trade. However, the growth in size and prestige of the Festivals in this period (especially in the case of Melbourne) brings them into both direct and indirect conflict with members of the trade for the first time, over such issues as obtaining film product and competition for audience share. This conflict is exacerbated by the growing interest (already evident in the years prior to this period) in the commercial distribution and exhibition of non-Hollywood film.

Essentially, this period sees the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals emerge as a presence in the network of Australian (and international) trade relations. In other words, as the Festivals grow in size and stature, they lose the initial freedom they possessed to define themselves simply in cultural terms —as organisations dedicated to a certain vision of film culture— but must also take into account *industrial* pressures. In this period, the Festivals are thus forced for the first time to begin dealing seriously with the dilemma of negotiating between the demands of both culture and industry. Meeting the demands of industry is essential for their survival as organisations (for example, if they are to obtain quality product); but meeting the demands of culture is essential for their continuing legitimacy. For to ignore the cultural demands would reduce the Festivals to just another wing of the commercial trade.

In this period, the industrial demands placed on the Film Festivals take two forms. Firstly, they must locate themselves in a position that benefits both them and the commercial trade. The Festivals attempt to do this by trying to define their role as useful publicity and distribution tools for the trade. Secondly, they are implicitly forced into competition with one another. This is because of the scarcity of quality product—as such films are controlled by FIAPF, which has tight restrictions on screening and audience size. However, this need to compete is counter-balanced by the need to cooperate. This is partly for cultural reasons, as from this point of view both Festivals are dedicated to the same aim—the cultural promotion of film. But it is also partly for industrial reasons: the lack of quality film, and the costs of importation, mean that the Festivals are better off sharing both films and costs. This tenuous relationship of cooperation and competition between the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals will be an important dimension of their story from this period onwards.

As the history of the two Film Festivals from this period on will show, the demands of culture and industry are in constant tension with one another. In the period from 1959 to 1964, this dilemma establishes itself for the Festivals, and they are forced to consider some possible solutions to it. None of these solutions are stable, however, as each one involves the Festivals in sacrificing some demands from either culture (and thus undercutting their legitimacy) or industry (and thus undercutting their organisational survival). This period, then, is when the necessity of negotiating between ‘culture’ and ‘industry’—the central historical theme explored by this thesis—really starts to become a key issue for the Festivals.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. The first section deals with broader issues in the international and national film industries that impact on the Film Festivals’ history. Of particular importance in this period is the emergence of the New Wave, and the growing popularity of the ‘art film’. The second section then examines the Festivals’ attempt to establish a national film festival—the ‘Australian Film Festival’. The third section looks at the repercussions of this attempt, and the problems that it creates with the trade. The fourth section then considers the Festivals’ attempts to deal with these problems, and fashion a role for themselves that meets the needs of both ‘culture’ and ‘industry’. The fifth and final section gives a brief overview of the Festivals during this period.

I. International and Domestic Developments in Film

The relative success of the Melbourne and Sydney Film Festivals in these years must be considered in the context of broader trends in the international film industry. The most important new development in this period is the appearance of the first conscious ‘film movement’ in Europe: the *Nouvelle Vague* or ‘New Wave’. Inspired by *auteur* theory, the film-makers of this movement strove to construct films based on individual self-expression, and were to have a major impact on the ‘art film’ movement. The New Wave appears in the context of continuing declines in Hollywood domestic production, and a corresponding increase in US investment in overseas productions, and the rise of the ‘art-house’ exhibition circuit.

The New Wave was a movement which emerged in Europe in the late 1950s. Film-makers associated with this movement include such major figures as Truffaut, Godard, Resnais, Fellini, Antonioni, and Bergman. Some of the best-known films of this movement include *La Dolce Vita*, *A bout de souffle (Breathless)*, *Tirez sur le pianiste*, *Les Bonnes femmes*, and *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. As Monaco writes

The metaphor of the ‘New Wave’, then, was surprisingly apt: the wave had been building for a long time before it burst on cinematic shores. It was a result of the mutual reinforcement of a variety of wavelets — technological, theoretical, philosophical, critical— and its reverberations are still being felt.¹

Many of these ‘wavelets’ have already been briefly dealt with above. The key technological developments (discussed in Chapter One) were the development of light-weight cameras, which allowed a very different style of film-making. The other key developments were the formation of the body of work centred around *auteur* theory.

The intellectual origins of the New Wave lie largely in the emergence of a distinctive film culture movement associated with *Cahiers du Cinéma*, and encompassing not just film-making, but also film theory and criticism. The central theoretical and aesthetic ideas that define the New Wave can largely be seen as a natural development of *auteur* theory. As discussed in the previous chapter, this theory had argued that films were an art-form, in which the director was the artist; in order to be authentic art, the film should express the personal vision of the director. This entailed a rejection of the dominant modes of studio production, in

¹ James Monaco, *The New Wave: Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer, Rivette*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 11.

which films were produced in an ‘assembly line’ like manner —as the product of a team of technicians, each with his or her own specialty. The *auteur* theorists and critics tended to argue that such a conception of film-making led, as the ‘assembly line’ metaphor would suggest, to the production of standardised products, rather than films with that uniqueness that, according to them, was the mark of a true work of art.²

The film-makers of the New Wave took the *auteur* theory to imply that the director’s individual ‘style’ took precedence over such standard elements as plot and dialogue. Thus the regular insistence on the importance of the *mise en scène* in the film criticism associated with this movement. Truffaut captures this well in a 1967 interview on the evolution of the New Wave, where he says:

Again, my favourite film-makers are all scriptwriter-directors, because after all what is *mise en scène* exactly? It’s the *putting together of the decisions* made during the preparation, shooting and completion of a film. ... That’s why ‘partial’ directors, those who are only concerned with the one aspect of filming, even if they’re talented, interest me less than Bergman, Buñuel, Hitchcock, Welles, who *are* their films completely.³

It is this conception of what was needed for a film to meet the criteria required for authentic art, that lies behind the distinctive aesthetics and style of the New Wave films. Although by definition these directors had no explicit commitment to a common program of style and aesthetics —the point being to use the cinema as a mode of authentic individual expression— their films nonetheless share some common features. These include a freer use of the camera, such as handheld camera use and less reliance on studio shots. They also often contained highly ambiguous scenes and / or dialogue, which left the audience freer to determine the meaning for themselves.⁴ Overall, rather than being standard genre products, these generally low-budget feature films expressed the artistic, emotional and intellectual vision of their directors, and often explored new ways of presenting ideas through the medium of film.

The New Wave had an enormous impact on the international film scene in this period. As Armes writes, the New Wave were at

² See, e.g., Monaco, *New Wave*, *passim*.

³ ‘Entretien avec François Truffaut’, *Cahiers du Cinéma* 190, May 1967; quoted in Hillier, *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1960s*, p. 108.

⁴ See, e.g., Sorlin, *European Cinemas*, ch. 5.

the forefront of what was to be a worldwide reshaping of the whole notion of how a fictional feature film should be constructed. ... The example they set was to be followed by dozens of groups calling themselves 'new cinemas' or 'young cinemas' throughout the world in the 1960s.⁵

As will be discussed in more detail below, perhaps the key impact of the New Wave was that they produced a coherent and distinctive body of work, which stood in clear contrast to the products of mainstream Hollywood producers. Furthermore, this body of films was linked explicitly to a genuine intellectual movement in film theory and film criticism, which gave them the weight of being serious artistic productions, aimed at a sophisticated adult audience, rather than mere commercially-oriented 'entertainments'. As will be seen below, these characteristics of the New Wave films contributed to the growth of a distinctive exhibition circuit—the 'art-house' cinemas—which marketed this product to a particular niche audience.

The period in which the New Wave emerged was a transitional one for Hollywood—and, in many ways, one of the lowest points in its history. The trends noted in previous chapters—such as the demographic changes in the United States, the collapse of the studio system, and the increased competition from television and foreign cinema—all meant that the old ways of doing business were no longer viable. The cinema industry in the United States needed to reconsider all aspects of its operation: what films it should make, where these films should be made, and who they should be made for. As Nowell-Smith sums up the situation, “[b]y the early 1960s the Hollywood system was in severe disarray”.⁶

In terms of production, this period sees two main trends in Hollywood. The first was a substantial decrease in domestic production. In 1958, Hollywood had produced 258 films; in 1963 it hit an all-time low of 143.⁷ The second trend was a corresponding increase in shifting production and investment to foreign countries. By 1960, for example, over forty percent of films financed by the Hollywood majors were made overseas.⁸

⁵ Armes, *French Cinema*, p. 192.

⁶ G. Nowell-Smith, “The Modern Cinema 1960-1995: Introduction” in Nowell-Smith (ed.), *Oxford History of World Cinema*, p. 463.

⁷ Lev, *Euro-American Cinema*, p. 14; P. Monaco, *History of the American Cinema: The Sixties: 1960-1969*, vol. 6, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2001, p. 3.

⁸ Monaco, *History of the American Cinema*, p. 14.

There were a number of advantages to overseas production and co-production —or ‘runaway production’, as it was called. The major benefit was that it was less expensive to produce films outside the United States. Foreign labour tended to be cheaper, owing to lower costs of living and less unionisation. Furthermore, many European countries still offered tax incentives and subsidies for investment in films.⁹ For example, in 1962, Hollywood companies received over \$5 million in direct subsidies for the production of films in the UK, Italy, and France.¹⁰ This growth in runaway production was so substantial that, concerned at the loss of jobs in the domestic industry, the US government launched an inquiry into this practice in the early 1960s.¹¹

The growth in Hollywood investment overseas meant that the notion of the ‘national origin’ of a film was increasingly less clear. Hollywood money was invested in many European films —including some of the most famous films of the New Wave.¹² Monaco sums up this situation as follows:

As the national pedigree of many a particular movie was called into question, Hollywood’s motion-picture production provided a precursor for the globalization of the world’s economy that occurred in the last two decades of the twentieth century.¹³

A further reason behind Hollywood investment in European films, was their growing commercial success in the United States. As noted in the previous chapter, the decline in Hollywood domestic production in the post-war period had led distributors and exhibitors to turn increasingly to other sources, such as European film. But it is in the period covered in this chapter, that European films reach their peak of success in the United States. The US release of the Brigitte Bardot film *And God Created Woman* (1957) earned more than \$4 million.¹⁴ This trend continued, and “led to an unprecedented penetration of the American box office by European films in the period 1958–1963”.¹⁵ Gross receipts from foreign film rentals in the US rose from about \$16 million in 1957, to a peak of \$69 million in 1961.¹⁶

⁹ Monaco, *History of the American Cinema*, p. 11.

¹⁰ Monaco, *History of the American Cinema*, p. 12; see also Lev, *The Euro-American Cinema*, p. 23.

¹¹ Puttnam, *Undeclared War*, pp. 255-6.

¹² Lev, *Euro-American Cinema*, p. 24.

¹³ Monaco, *History of the American Cinema*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁴ Monaco, *History of the American Cinema*, p. 54.

¹⁵ Lev, *Euro-American Cinema*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁶ Lev, *Euro-American Cinema*, p. 15.

One reason for the profitability of many of these European films, is that they tended to be made on much smaller budgets than mainstream Hollywood productions. This meant that production companies could charge much lower rental costs, and still make a good profit on their investment. In turn, the lower costs of these films made them eminently suitable for niche exhibitors.¹⁷

The commercial success of European films, and their lower rental costs, led to the development of the American ‘art-house circuit’ in this period. This was a collection of niche exhibition outlets, usually small urban cinemas, specialising in non-Hollywood product. By the late 1950s, the art-house circuit had moved from a handful of cinemas, to hundreds across the United States.¹⁸

The heterogenous variety of films shown by the ‘art house’ cinemas —unified only by the fact that they suited the needs of a particular type of exhibitor— was to form the artificial genre of the ‘art film’, which drew much of its prestige from the critical success of the New Wave in this period.¹⁹ As Monaco writes,

By the early 1960s, labelling a cinema an “art house”, or promoting a movie by calling it “New Wave” could translate into considerable box-office profits for niche exhibitors in the United States.²⁰

The growth in the art-house circuit was closely linked to the growth of film festivals in the United States, which served as distribution and publicity mechanisms. As Nowell-Smith points out, “films made outside the mainstream were dependent for international success on showcasing at festivals”.²¹ Perhaps the most important of these festivals in the US was the New York Film Festival, which began in 1963, and soon became the “premier gateway into U.S. distribution for foreign films”.²²

The New Wave and the commercial and critical success of European cinema, was to have significant consequences for the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals in this period. The appearance of the ‘art film’ genre, and its commercial importance, meant that distributors and exhibitors in Australia were taking increased interest in such films. This was already evident

¹⁷ Nowell-Smith, “Art Cinema”, p. 567.

¹⁸ Lev, *History of the American Cinema*, p. 215.

¹⁹ Nowell-Smith, “Art Cinema”, p. 570.

²⁰ Monaco, *History of the American Cinema*, p. 54.

²¹ Nowell-Smith, “Art Cinema”, p. 570.

²² Monaco, *History of the American Cinema*, pp. 54-5.

in the period dealt with in the last chapter, and continues to grow throughout the early 1960s. *Film Weekly* noted in 1964 that “Continental films are facing an unprecedented boom in popularity. ... Today more than 20,000 people attend Sydney’s five continental film theatres each week”.²³ This meant that the Festivals could now be perceived as competition for what, in Australia in particular, was a small potential audience. The conflicts with the trade that developed out of this provide the main theme for this chapter’s narrative.

II. The Story of the Australian Film Festival

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Melbourne received recognition from FIAPF for the 1958 Festival (although this came too late to affect sourcing of film product). The Sydney Film Festival also wanted recognition. However, FIAPF regulations stipulated that only one international film festival would be recognised in each country. In order to circumvent this regulation, Sydney and Melbourne negotiated in order to set up an ‘Australian Film Festival’ (AFF), which would be held in a number of cities. This section deals with the attempt to establish the Australian Film Festival, and the troubles that it causes with the trade.

Establishing the Australian Film Festival

On 20 October 1958, a meeting was held between the Sydney and Melbourne organising committees to discuss the establishment of an Australian Film Festival. It was intended that this would bypass the ‘one festival’ requirements of FIAPF, while allowing for the films to be shown in various cities across Australia.²⁴ Theoretically, this development promised a number of advantages for both Film Festivals. Sydney, as the smaller of the two festivals, had little chance of winning FIAPF endorsement over Melbourne. Hence, participating in a unified festival was a way of ensuring they received such endorsement. For Melbourne, on the other hand, the Australian Film Festival promised to be a means of splitting the costs of importing films. It may also have been viewed by Melbourne as an expansionist move —effectively making other Australian film festivals branches of *their* festival (although this must remain speculation).

²³ MFF – Arch., Author unknown, *Sydney Gazette*, 18.3.1964, press cuttings, Box No. 28.

²⁴ SFF – Min., 3.6.1958, Box No. 1.

The idea of an Australian Film Festival was initially developed by ACOFS.²⁵ Their vision of this festival not only incorporated Sydney and Melbourne, but also the smaller centres of Adelaide and Canberra. Sydney was happy to embrace this idea, as is suggested in the programme for the 1958 Sydney Film Festival, which contained an announcement of the prospect.

This year sees a closer co-operation with the Melbourne Film Festival, a link which could well mean interesting developments in the future. Melbourne was awarded an international recognition for 1958 from the International Federation of Film Producers' Associations. Now it is planned to lay the foundations for an all-Australian Festival with every state participating. In this way it is hoped to win permanent recognition and place for the Australian film festival among the major film festivals of the world.²⁶

The purpose of the formation of the Australian Film Festival was to serve as an artificial construct, which would allow the separate festivals to bypass the 'one festival per country' policy of FIAPF. In order to give this construct a clearer unity, and thus more legitimacy in the eyes of FIAPF, it was determined to have it run, not by the festivals themselves, but instead by a nominally distinct and independent national film body. It was thus decided to adopt the British model and establish an Australian Film Institute (AFI). The idea of such a national institute had been floated by Melbourne four years earlier and for a similar reason, namely, to "facilitate films" from the British Film Institute.²⁷ However, this had come to nothing.

The new proposal would see the AFI based in Melbourne, and with a board of twenty governors drawn from across the east coast—all of whom had already played a substantial role in the development of film culture or film industry (but not film trade) in Australia.²⁸ The central role of the AFI was to administer the Australian Film Festival—including, most importantly, film procurement for the Festival. The Melbourne and Sydney Festivals would be considered as "autonomous divisions" of the Australian Film Festival.²⁹ The Director of the Melbourne Film Festival, Erwin Rado, was appointed as the first Director and Secretary of

²⁵ Edward Schefferle, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 10.6.1998.

²⁶ *Sydney Film Festival – 1958*, programme, p. 1.

²⁷ MFF – Min., 16.12.1954, Box No. 1.

²⁸ SFF – Min., 22.1.1959, Box No. 1. See also Rado's own article: "Australian Film Festival", *Meanjin*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1959, p. 104.

²⁹ MFF – Min., 10.12.1958, Box No. 1.

the AFI. Melbourne then contracted Rado to continue to act as its Director, with an increased salary of £1,500.³⁰ Hence, at this early stage, the AFI was effectively a bureaucratic fiction which served no function other than to help the Festivals overcome procurement issues with FIAPF.

Despite the formation of the AFI, FIAPF was not prepared to recognise the proposed 1959 Australian Film Festival as a single festival. On December 19, 1958, Rado received a letter from Mr Fournier, Secretary of FIAPF, stating:

that it was quite impossible to admit an itinerant festival. In fact, if the films are shown in every important city in Australia, what will be left for commercial release? Consequently, the recognition of your Festival is subject to the limitation to *one* city only.³¹

This correspondence clearly reveals FIAPF's awareness of the role of film festivals as exhibition outlets. The concerns underlying the 'one festival per country' rule were that, in a relatively small market for international film, if films were shown at more than one festival, then this might lead to over-exposure—which would in turn discourage local distributors from purchase.

Rado did not respond officially to this letter from FIAPF until February of 1959, when he replied to Fournier and accepted the conditions. This meant that, only five months before the Australian Film Festival was due to begin, only the Melbourne Festival had official FIAPF endorsement.³² Despite officially accepting FIAPF's conditions, Rado decided to ignore them, and conduct the Australian Film Festival anyway. At the beginning of April 1959, he announced that the Festival would go ahead as planned, and be held in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and Adelaide.³³

Word that the Australian Film Festival was still being held eventually filtered back to FIAPF, when they received a formal complaint from the British Film Producers' Association. On 30 April 1959, Fournier again wrote to Rado:

You, undoubtedly, remember that the approval was granted on the condition that the Festival will be held only in Melbourne. It seems that

³⁰ MFF – Min., 23.2.1959, Box No. 1.

³¹ MFF – Corr., 19.12.1958, Box No. 36.

³² MFF – Corr., 6.2.1959, Box No. 36.

³³ SFF – Min., 7.4.1959, Box No. 1.

you are trying to evade the assurance you gave to this Federation and we would greatly appreciate if you abstain from this indication.³⁴

By the middle of May, Fournier threatened never to recognise Melbourne again.³⁵ Rado's decision to defy FIAPF, and, indeed, the attempt to establish an Australian Film Festival, was to have a number of important ramifications for Sydney and Melbourne, and would impact significantly on their early relationships with the Australian distributors.

Before examining these ramifications, however, it is first important to look briefly at the effect the establishment of the AFI had on relations between Sydney and Melbourne. Despite Sydney's agreement to create an Australian Film Festival under the AFI, negotiations over the delegation of responsibilities and control soon created tension between the two Festivals. To begin with, not only was Rado the AFI's Director and Secretary, but its board was also dominated by Victorian members —many of whom, of course, already had close connections with the FVFS or the Melbourne Film Festival.³⁶ With the balance of power in Victorian hands, and the AFI based in Melbourne, the Sydney organising committee felt that they had little control over the development of either the AFI or the Australian Film Festival. In a letter from Sydney committee member David Donaldson to Frank Nicholls, the president of the Melbourne Film Festival, Donaldson wrote of his concerns that the AFI powers would "expand greatly", in which case (given Victorian dominance of the AFI) "Melbourne should *control* our Festival".³⁷ These concerns were further exacerbated when only Melbourne received FIAPF recognition for the 1959 Festival. However, the AFI tried to mollify Sydney by offering to apply for official recognition for both Festivals on alternate years —the Melbourne Film Festival in 1959, and the Sydney Film Festival in 1960.³⁸

Donaldson's concerns about the possibility of Sydney's autonomy being reduced by the establishment of the AFI were confirmed when Sydney received the Institute's 'Terms and Conditions Statement'. Worth quoting in full, this statement read as follows:

1. The Institute will be responsible for the establishment of a film festival to be known as the Australian Film Festival, 1959.

³⁴ MFF – Corr., 30.4.1959, Box No. 36.

³⁵ MFF – Corr., 14.5.1959, Box No. 36.

³⁶ SFF – Min., 22.1.1959, Box No. 1.

³⁷ MFF – Corr., 15.12.1958, Box No. 12.

³⁸ SFF – Min., 3.2.1959, Box No. 1.

2. The Sydney Film Festival and Melbourne Film Festival will be autonomous divisions of the Australian Film Festival. Australian Film Festival to be held in other centres.
3. AFI has already asked FIAPF to endorse the Australian Film Festival. FIAPF has stated that it will endorse a festival in 1959 in one centre only and the AFI nominated Melbourne as that centre.
4. AFI intends making further approaches to FIAPF with a view to obtaining endorsement of festivals in both Sydney and Melbourne in future years.
5. Australian Film Institute will acquire the films for the Australian Film Festival and will conduct all negotiations in that regard.
6. Before acquiring films, Australian Film Institute will consult with Sydney Film Festival.
7. AFI will decide which films can be made available for screening at the Sydney Film Festival and the period for which they are made available. This decision shall be taken after consultation with Sydney Film Festival.
8. To facilitate such consultation Sydney Film Festival will invite the Director of AFI to three policy meetings in a consultative capacity and meet the travelling expenses and reasonable out-of-pocket expenses involved.³⁹

It is clear from this 'Terms and Conditions Statement' that, if Sydney accepted it, then it would cease to be an independent festival. Although Term 2 stated that the Sydney Festival would be referred to as an 'autonomous division', it was autonomous in name only. For the real decisions—including film selection; negotiation for films with distributors, producers and customs; and festival programme structure—would be made by the AFI, with Sydney retaining only the right to be 'consulted' about such decisions. This reduced the Sydney organising committee's role to minor administrative, organisational and marketing duties only. Even the AFI's previous promise to seek FIAPF recognition for Sydney in 1960 (and alternate years thereafter) was not specifically stated in the Terms and Conditions—replaced instead by the more ambiguous proposal that the AFI would attempt to gain recognition for *both* cities in future years.

Given that this ultimatum was delivered in March of 1959, and the Australian Film Festival was to be held in a few months, the Sydney committee felt that it had no choice but to

³⁹ SFF – Corr., 3.3.1959, Box No. 1.

accept the AFI's Terms and Conditions Statement.⁴⁰ Unsurprisingly, however, it seems that there was some hostility to these terms among the Sydney committee members. This is clear from the fact that Frank Bellingham, President of the Sydney Film Festival, felt the need, when inviting Rado to a committee meeting, to assure him that "I am sure the meeting will be extremely friendly this time as we are all working for the same end".⁴¹ That this was insufficient to allay the anger of some of the Sydney committee is shown in Rado's later letter to the new director of the Sydney Festival, Sylvia Lawson, where he queries: "What exactly do I have to do to make your Committee realise that I am not the enemy?".⁴²

The AFF And The Film Trade

While Melbourne and Sydney struggled to maintain relations, the Australian Film Festival came under fire from members of the domestic film trade. Two independent Sydney distributors specialising in continental film, Robert Kapferer and Sidney Blake, launched a systematic attack on the new Festival. Both were concerned that the establishment of an Australian Film Festival threatened to undermine their distribution business. The proposal to hold the Festival in four cities could reduce the prospective audience for continental film. With the Festival screening major overseas films to larger numbers, these two distributors were concerned that commercial exhibitors would be less inclined to purchase their films.

One part of Kapferer and Blake's attack was to file complaints with film production companies, in an attempt to prevent the Film Festival from obtaining product. In early 1959, Kapferer wrote to Prima Film, a French production company, suggesting that the new Australian Festival was really commercial in intent.⁴³ Meanwhile, Blake informed the German organisation Export Union that he would not buy their new release, *Terminus Love*, if it was screened at the Festival.⁴⁴

A second part of the attack was to complain to both the Controller-General of Customs and the Commonwealth Chief Film Censor. In letters to these two officers, Kapferer and Blake claimed that the Film Festivals were commercial ventures and should therefore be

⁴⁰ SFF – Min., 7.4.1959, Box No. 1.

⁴¹ MFF – Corr., 2.3.1959, Box No. 12.

⁴² MFF – Corr., Rado to Lawson, 12.4.1959, Box No. 12.

⁴³ MFF – Corr., Berard to Rado, 5.5.1959, Box No. 36.

⁴⁴ MFF – Corr., 14.5.1959, Box No. 36.

treated as such under Commonwealth law.⁴⁵ Prior to 1959, the Festivals had come to an unofficial understanding with the two government departments. Accepting that Festival films were shown to a small and ‘educated’ audience, Customs processed the films more swiftly (due to the frequent late arrivals of imports), and imposed less rigorous censorship requirements than on films destined for commercial release. As a result of Kapferer’s and Blake’s complaint, this unofficial understanding was scrutinised. However, after a number of interviews with relevant officials, Customs and the Chief Censor decided to maintain the agreement with the Film Festivals.⁴⁶

The third part of this attack by the Australian distributors was fought out in the pages of the trade journal, *Film Weekly*.⁴⁷ The opening salvo was fired in the form of a front-page article, which laid out in detail Kapferer’s and Blake’s

Extreme concern at the development of profit-making film festivals to the detriment of the motion picture industry and particularly those sections concerned with the distribution and exhibition of continental product.

The main thrust of this article was an argument that the international film festivals in Australia were effectively commercial ventures, despite their guise of non-commercialism. However, the Festivals were not subject to the same requirements as other ‘genuine’ commercial exhibitors, which thus left the latter in an “invidious position”. For example, the Festivals did not have to pay Commonwealth duties on imported films, or entertainments tax —nor were they subject to the usual censorship process.

To substantiate their claim that the Festivals were really commercial entities, Blake and Kapferer made four points in this article. Firstly, whilst the Australian film festivals had begun by only screening films of a non-commercial nature (i.e., films that commercial exhibitors would not generally screen, such as documentaries and short experimental films), they were now screening more standard feature films. Secondly, in a manner similar to the standard commercial exhibitors, the Film Festivals now had multiple screenings of the same film in each locale —sometimes in defiance of the understanding under which the Festivals had secured the film. As an example of this practice, Blake “instanced the case of Kapferer’s *He Who Must Die* as one picture which had been secured on the understanding it would be screened only once, and then was shown several times at the one festival”. Thirdly, with the

⁴⁵ All quotes in the following two paragraphs are from *Film Weekly*, 14.5.1959, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁶ See MFF – Corr., Rado to Bellingham, 21.4.1959, Box No. 19, and SFF – Min., 5.5.1959, Box No. 1.

proposed expansion of the two Film Festivals into an Australia-wide festival, these films were being shown to a much wider audience than before. As they argue,

The distributors paid considerable amounts for the right to distribute certain productions throughout Australia, as well as physical material and customs charges, only to find that the identical pictures were to be shown to thousands of people at festivals in several States, thereby causing serious damage to the commercial box office potential of the pictures.

Fourthly, and most importantly, Blake and Kapferer pointed out that the Film Festivals were charging for admission in much the same way as their commercial counterparts. In support of this, they note that the Melbourne Film Festival had been so financially successful that it could afford to send its Director (Rado) to Europe to obtain film product.

In order to redress this problem, the two distributors claimed “that it was not the intention to stop film festivals”, but rather asked only for the “revocation of existing conditions”. What they recommended was that the Film Festivals’ audience be restricted to members and invited guests only, and screenings be limited to just one for each production. This, they argued, would return the Film Festivals to their original position, and prevent them from competing unfairly with genuine commercial exhibitors —and thereby harming the position of the distributors.

The Film Festivals obviously saw the damaging potential of these charges, as is shown by their swift response to this article. The very next edition of *Film Weekly* contained a lengthy rebuttal of Blake’s and Kapferer’s complaints, written by the Sydney Film Festival co-director Bob Connell.⁴⁸ This article rejects the over-riding suggestion that the Festival is a commercial venture, stating that “the Sydney Film Festival is an entirely non-commercial, non-profit making organization of interest and benefit to the motion picture industry”. Connell then proceeds to reiterate much of Stout’s earlier defence of the positive role that the Festival plays for the film trade. He argues that the Festival had increased audience numbers for non-mainstream films, and goes so far as to claim that “without the existence of the festival continental films would not have assumed the importance they held today”. Furthermore, according to Connell, the Festival “had proved a good testing ground for unusual films and had given exhibitors and distributors a fair indication of what could be expected when they were released for commercial use”. In other words, the Festival could function as a way of

⁴⁷ All quotes in the following two paragraphs are from *Film Weekly*, 14.5.1959, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁸ All quotes in the following paragraph are from *Film Weekly*, 21.5.1959, p. 3.

reducing the risk for commercial exhibitors in this particularly volatile niche of the film market. Finally, the Film Festival functioned as a publicity vehicle both for specific films, and for the medium as a whole. That is, not only did the Festival promote certain films, but in addition,

Press space devoted to the festival meant films were kept constantly before newspaper readers, TV viewers and listeners to radio with the results that they were aware that films were a vital, living medium—a factor of great importance to the motion picture industry in these days of television competition.

Connell then made the conciliatory suggestion that the Sydney Film Festival's mailing list of "more than 3,000 names could be of valuable promotional assistance" to the trade. The only concession the article makes to Blake's and Kapferer's charges is that the recent expansion of the festivals to Adelaide and Canberra may have adversely affected the industry. This reflects the ambivalence that Sydney must have felt towards the two new festivals, which not only exacerbated conflict with the trade, but were also potential competition for film product.

Rado was not one to allow Sydney to be the sole voice speaking on behalf of the film festivals, and soon followed Connell's article with a response of his own. Two weeks later, in a letter to the editor published in *Film Weekly*, Rado also addresses Blake's and Kapferer's concerns—but in a somewhat less conciliatory tone.

Had Messrs. Kapferer and Blake taken the trouble to ascertain the facts about film festivals in Australia and the Melbourne Film Festival in particular, they could have avoided making false accusations in your journal, to Governmental offices and film organizations overseas. Fortunately, the instigated 'investigations' can only reveal the true character of the festivals, which is a cultural mission.⁴⁹

Rado goes on to repeat many of the same arguments offered by Connell. He notes that the Festivals cannot be considered as commercial ventures because they do not "yield a single penny of private profit to the organizers". Rather, in pursuit of their 'cultural mission' the Festivals use their profits "to educate many more thousands of people to appreciate good film", and thus increase the audience for such films. Rado ends his letter with the remark that,

It is odd, that in these days of crisis in the industry, people connected with it should try and limit the growing interest in the very medium which is their source of income.

⁴⁹ *Film Weekly*, 11.6.1959, p. 7.

The Collapse Of The AFF

Despite the many difficulties faced by the newly formed Australian Film Festival, it was held successfully in all four cities over five weeks during May and June of 1959.⁵⁰ The Melbourne Festival's profits for this year were double that of the previous year (from £1,806 in 1958 to £3,571 in 1959).⁵¹ Sydney, however, although it increased its audience size substantially (from 1,350 in 1958 to 1,712 in 1959, with 1,000 of these being new subscribers),⁵² nonetheless incurred a net loss of £480. As will be discussed below, this loss was largely due to AFI policy.

The Australian Film Festival had thus greatly increased the audience for the Film Festivals, but it damaged their reputation with the film trade. As mentioned above, FIAPF had refused to endorse an 'itinerant festival' held at more than one city, but Rado had gone ahead with it anyway. In an attempt to salvage his chance of obtaining endorsement for the 1960 Festival, Rado wrote apologetically to Fournier, FIAPF's Secretary, and offered the excuse that FIAPF's protests had been received too late to change the original plan of the Australian Film Festival.⁵³ Fournier responded to Rado's letter simply by sending him a copy of the relevant FIAPF regulations, with article 8 —banning the screening of films in more than one city— highlighted.⁵⁴ Indeed, possibly as punishment for Rado's duplicity, the Melbourne Film Festival was not to receive FIAPF endorsement for the next two years.⁵⁵ To add to its trouble, the Festival found itself being sued when the German distribution company, Transocean, filed for damages for the "commercial exploitation" of their film *Terminus Love*.⁵⁶ The Australian Film Festival had thus incurred the hostility of both the domestic trade (as exemplified by the attacks of Blake and Kapferer), and of the international trade and its representatives.

⁵⁰ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1959*, programme, p. 2.

⁵¹ MFF – Min., 3.12.1958, Box No. 6; MFF – Min., 15.7.1959, Box No. 6.

⁵² SFF – Min., "Director's Report: 1958 Sydney Film Festival", 3.11.1958, Box No. 1; and SFF – Min., "Director's Report: 1959 Sydney Film Festival", (date not supplied), 1959, Box No. 1.

⁵³ MFF – Corr., 9.11.1959, Box No. 36.

⁵⁴ MFF – Corr., 20.1.1960, Box No. 36.

⁵⁵ MFF – Corr., Drury to Rado, 14.2.1962, Box No. 36.

⁵⁶ MFF – Corr., 24.6.1959, Box No. 36.

This broad-reaching hostility led the Sydney and Melbourne organising committees to reconsider their stance towards the commercial industry, and the roles their respective Festivals played. Their concern is clearly revealed in Rado's letter to Bruce Johnson, Director of the Adelaide Film Festival:

The depressing thought in connection with your success along with the rest of the festivals, is that their very success evoked the hostility of the trade in Australia, and through their representations overseas, the doubtful attitude of distributors towards an Australia-wide festival.⁵⁷

Members of the Sydney committee did not merely find this hostility 'depressing'; rather, they argued that it made cooperation with the commercial trade a necessity for the Sydney Film Festival. Co-Director Sylvia Lawson stated in her report on the 1959 Festival that:

If we make a mistaken attempt to enter into any sort of competition with commercial distributors and exhibitors, however minor, we are in the first place creating ill-will with the trade that cannot fail to damage us, and in the second we are serving neither our own interests, nor those of the film industry in general. With that industry in its present state its support should be one of our major aims. I see no point whatever in a festival which can be regarded as a mere extension of commercial fare.⁵⁸

This passage clearly advocates a return to one of the original aims of the Film Festivals: to encourage the expansion of the non-Hollywood cinema. She goes on in her report to propose three guidelines that would help prevent the Festival coming into conflict with the commercial operators. Her first recommendation was that the Festival should concentrate on screening films that, whilst "worthwhile", were "off the commercial track". Her second recommendation was that the Festival should avoid screening films "in which distributors are already interested commercially". Her third recommendation represents a major departure from previous Festival policy, for it proposes that the Festival establish a much closer relationship with the commercial trade. Lawson recommends that the Festival should

mail importers, distributors, exhibitors, etc. early in the festival preparations, seeking more or less to implicitly find out what *they* want from the festival ... This, incidentally, would really be the very least we could do for those OS prod'n companies which have been good enough to supply us with films and in many cases to pay the freight on them.

⁵⁷ MFF – Corr., 18.6.1959, Box No. 12.

⁵⁸ SFF – Min., "Director's Report: 1959 Sydney Film Festival", (date not supplied) 1959, Box No. 1. All other quotations in this paragraph are from this report.

In addition, she suggests that representatives of the commercial trade be invited to each Festival, offered front row seats, and allocated a member of the committee to accompany them throughout.

As the above recommendations illustrate, the experience of the 1959 Australian Film Festival had led to a new awareness amongst the Sydney organising committee concerning their relationship to the commercial industry. As Bob Connell wrote in *Film Weekly*, “[t]he film festival must inevitably take more interest in the trade”.⁵⁹ Indeed, it could be argued that this experience was a formative element in shifting Sydney’s self-conception from an amateur ‘get-together’ for film enthusiasts, to a realisation that they were now a presence in a broader national and international network of trade relations.

The Australian Film Festival forced Sydney to both reconsider its relations with the trade, and reclaim its autonomy from Rado and the AFI. To begin with, not only had they sacrificed much of their control over the programming of the Sydney Festival (in agreeing to the AFI’s ‘Terms and Conditions Statement’), but this had also resulted in financial loss. As noted at the beginning of this section, the 1959 Sydney Film Festival made a net loss of £480, despite increased subscriptions.⁶⁰ The Sydney Committee laid official blame for this loss with AFI policy. The AFI had forced Sydney to greatly expand its programme, which substantially increased the Festival’s outlay. In addition, Sydney had to pay a fee for all films procured by the AFI —£15 per hour of film if it was shared with the other festivals, or otherwise full costs.⁶¹ The Sydney committee had been prepared to accept these terms, because the AFI had promised to reimburse them if any loss was incurred. However, after the 1959 Festival, the AFI announced that in fact it could not afford to subsidise Sydney, and Sydney would thus have to pay the full costs after all.⁶²

As a result of these problems with the AFI, Sydney terminated its agreement to be part of an Australian Film Festival. In her Director’s report on the 1959 Sydney Festival, Lawson had noted that differences in attitude between Sydney and the AFI made “full or long-range co-operation quite impossible”.⁶³ In September of 1959, the Sydney minutes record that

⁵⁹ “Great Need for Trade, Festival Liaison”, *Film Weekly*, 18.6.1959, p. 3.

⁶⁰ SFF – Min., 7.9.1959. Box No. 1.

⁶¹ SFF – Min., 7.9.1959. Box No. 1.

⁶² MFF – Corr., Rado to Lawson, 27.7.1959, Box No. 12; SFF – Min., 7.9.1959, Box No. 1.

⁶³ SFF – Min., “Director’s Report: 1959 Sydney Film Festival”, Box No. 1.

It was agreed that the Sydney [AFI] governors should make known the Sydney Film Festival's concern that, because of unequal representation [sc. on the board], it should not be committed to the Institute's decisions.⁶⁴

At the AFI's Board meeting in October it was decided that the Institute would henceforth only manage the Melbourne Film Festival. Freed from its commitments to the AFI, Sydney announced that it would now seek FIAPF endorsement for its own festival, thus putting it into direct competition with Melbourne.⁶⁵ In a gesture to maintain relations and ensure some continued funding for the AFI, Melbourne promised that, if it received endorsement, it would nonetheless continue to procure films for Sydney.⁶⁶

In April 1960, the AFI officially announced that the Australian Film Festival would be discontinued.⁶⁷ However, the AFI continued to exist, and Rado attempted to keep it financially viable by maintaining control over Australian festival film procurement. For example, despite the collapse of the national festival, Rado still insisted that Sydney should pay the AFI for any films procured by them — a proposal that Sydney rejected.⁶⁸

In conclusion, the experience of the Australian Film Festival had done two things. It had alerted the Festivals to the fact that, whether they liked it or not, they now had to create a viable position for themselves in relation to the trade. Essentially, this would necessarily involve differentiating themselves from the trade (that is, keeping off the commercial turf), and / or marketing themselves to the trade as useful publicity devices. Furthermore, the conflict it had created between Sydney and Melbourne also made the Festivals aware that they were themselves in competition for scarce product. The ramifications of these developments are explored in the following sections of this chapter.

III. The Festivals and the Trade Post-AFF: 1960-1964

The Australian Film Festival had seriously damaged the trade's perceptions of the Film Festivals, and in the years that followed its collapse, both Sydney and Melbourne were forced to deal with this problem. This meant repairing relations with the domestic distributors —

⁶⁴ SFF – Min., 7.9.1959, Box No. 1.

⁶⁵ SFF – Min., 13.10.1959, Box No. 1.

⁶⁶ SFF – Min., 13.10.1959, Box No. 1.

⁶⁷ SFF – Min., 3.5.1960, Box No. 1.

⁶⁸ SFF – Min., 3.4.1960, Box No. 1.

Blake and Kapferer in particular. It also meant repairing relations with FIAPF. Indeed, as Rado discovered from an article in *Variety*, at the beginning of this period both Australian film festivals were officially investigated by FIAPF, which was deeply concerned that they were in fact a “commercial gambit”.⁶⁹ This section deals with the various strategies undertaken by Sydney and Melbourne to forge a working relationship with the commercial trade.

The Sydney Film Festival and the Trade

Following Lawson’s recommendations in her 1959 Director’s Report (discussed in the previous section), the Sydney Film Festival attempted to establish a cooperative and mutually-beneficial relationship with the trade. In general, this attempt was successful, and was capped with Sydney’s official endorsement by FIAPF in 1960 and 1961.⁷⁰ Indeed, in 1960 FIAPF also offered Sydney retrospective recognition for all their previous Festivals (for publicity and trade purposes).⁷¹

After the 1959 Festival, Sydney implemented Lawson’s major suggestions, and also took further advice from industry figures on how to improve its relations with the commercial trade. After the 1960 Festival, the committee considered that the outcome of Sydney’s efforts with the film trade were “on the whole very good”.⁷² Further suggestions were made to improve relations for the 1961 Festival, including enforcement of Lawson’s recommendation that each trade member invited to the Festival should be accompanied throughout by a Festival organiser —“seeing if the distributor understands where the halls are, reserving seats for him for each screening he wishes to attend and attending those screenings with him”.⁷³ In addition, the Sydney committee sent a list of potential Festival films to distributors, along with an offer not to screen a film “if your company plans to screen them or if your company has the rights”.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ MFF – Corr., Rado to Fournier, 23.6.1960, Box No. 36.

⁷⁰ *Sydney Film Festival – 1960*, programme, p. 1; MFF – Corr., Drury to Rado, 14.2.1962, Box No. 36.

⁷¹ SFF – Min., 3.5.1960, Box No. 1.

⁷² SFF – Min., 26.7.1960, Box No. 1.

⁷³ SFF – Min., 26.7.1960, Box No. 1.

⁷⁴ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ian Klava, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 28.10.1992.

At the end of 1960, Sydney invited Robert Graham, Managing Director of Paramount Pictures, to address the committee on ways to improve trade relations. It is worth noting that, in this address, Graham referred to the Sydney Film Festival as a “working” festival, and distinguished it from a mere “social” festival.⁷⁵ This perhaps indicates the extent to which Sydney had succeeded in improving its credentials as an industrial mechanism for the Australian film trade. At this meeting, Graham made three primary recommendations:

- (1) to improve relations with overseas distributors and producers, the Committee should ‘glamorise’ the Festival, while maintaining its independence;
- (2) it should attempt to import film personalities with the assistance of private sponsorship;
- (3) it should maintain more definite relations with important Australian film distribution companies.⁷⁶

The Sydney Festival made steps towards realising these recommendations. Sydney (jointly with Melbourne) invited Sophia Loren to attend the 1961 Festivals. In order to encourage her it was decided to screen the Italian film, *Persons Unknown*, as the Opening Night film.⁷⁷ Unfortunately, Loren declined this invitation. In a continuation and further development of this policy, the Sydney committee, after the 1961 Festival, decided to transform its Opening Night “more into the category of a Hollywood first night”.⁷⁸ No less a personage than Orson Welles was thus invited to attend the 1962 Festival—but he too declined.⁷⁹

The purpose of these changes to the Sydney Film Festival was not only to cultivate better relations with the domestic trade, but also to secure annual FIAPF endorsement. At the beginning of 1961, the Sydney committee sent out letters to the major Australian film distributors, asking for their official support for such endorsement. Sidney Blake—one of the two distributors who had filed complaints against the AFF—agreed on the condition that the Sydney Festival would not show films in which he had a commercial interest.⁸⁰ After some deliberation, MGM, Paramount and United Artists all eventually agreed as well.⁸¹ Perhaps in

⁷⁵ SFF – Min., 6.12.1960, Box No. 1.

⁷⁶ SFF – Min., 6.12.1960, Box No. 1.

⁷⁷ SFF – Min., 2.5.1961, Box No. 1.

⁷⁸ SFF – Min., 5.9.1961, Box No. 1.

⁷⁹ SFF – Min., 5.9.1961, Box No. 1.

⁸⁰ SFF – Min., 2.2.1961, Box No. 1.

⁸¹ SFF – Min., 5.5.1961, Box No. 1.

part because of this trade support, Sydney's bid to receive FIAPF endorsement for the 1961 Festival was successful.

Although the early 1960s thus sees the Sydney Film Festival developing its links with the trade, it should not be thought that this constituted a wholesale abandonment of its original conception as a culturally-focussed organisation. In fact, as part of its attempt to build good relations with the trade, it was necessary for the Festival to re-emphasise its role in encouraging interest in film as culture and film as art. In doing this, the Festival was reassuring the trade that it was not a commercial competitor—that it was, in other words, keeping off the trade's turf. In order to fulfil its cultural role, the Festival had to be able to secure a reliable supply of film product—and, as the experience of the Australian Film Festival had shown, this could not be done without the cooperation of the trade. Thus, in what might appear at first sight to be a paradoxical development, the Sydney Festival simultaneously made itself more commercially attractive as a vehicle for distribution and publicity purposes, whilst emphasising its non-commercial and aesthetic orientation.

These twin themes can be clearly seen when examining the sorts of narratives that the Sydney Film Festival told about itself. For example, in a 1962 'letter to the editor' published in the *Polish Catholic Weekly*, Ian Klava (then Sydney Film Festival Director) emphasised the non-commercial nature of the Festival, writing that:

Unlike the 120 odd other film festivals in the world, festivals in Australia are not organised by commercial interests promoting film as a commodity, or the venue of the festival as a tourist attraction, but are staged by film lovers. In this respect the Australian festivals are quite unique.⁸²

In another example, a Social Sub-Committee report from 1961 claims that Sydney's opening night "brings together men and women of artistic, critical and intellectual pursuits and interests, who must be considered our avant-garde of good public relations".⁸³ In this passage, the concept of 'good public relations' for the Film Festival is linked to the presence of Sydney's cultural elite—which would help to differentiate the Festival from a strictly trade function. The belief that the Sydney Film Festival could successfully comply with the demands of both 'industry' and 'culture' is perhaps best summed up in a reminiscence of Ian Klava's:

⁸² MFF – Arch., Letter to the Editor, *Polish Catholic Weekly*, 19.6.1962, press cuttings, Box No. 19.

⁸³ SFF – Min., 7.7.1961, Box No. 1.

We wanted to supply a source of films that people would not have the chance to see commercially and this has been the aim, ideally, of any film society and the film festival. ... Sure, we wanted to help distributors with their films —if there was a film that interested us we were happy to publicise it, give it a boost at festival screenings, so that eventually, when it came on commercially, everybody would be happy.⁸⁴

Such ‘boosting’ of commercial films is evident from Sydney’s decision to use *Dr. Strangelove* as its opening film for the 1964 Festival.⁸⁵ This film was rented from Columbia for a nominal fee. The fact that Sydney was prepared to rent commercial films distinguished it from Melbourne, which, as will be discussed below, maintained its ‘purity’ in this regard. *Dr. Strangelove* was a huge success for the Festival, and generated much press interest. This led Sydney’s director Ian Klava to recommend in his annual Festival report that the committee should consider renting one “good” feature from a commercial distributor each year.⁸⁶ Sydney followed this recommendation, and for the 1965 Festival allocated approximately £300 in its budget for film hire.⁸⁷

The Melbourne Film Festival and the Trade

In contrast with the Sydney Festival, Melbourne in this period was less focussed on ingratiating itself with the trade, and more focussed on developing its own image as ‘the premier film festival in the southern hemisphere’. However, in order to secure this image, Melbourne still had to deal with the industrial realities, and develop some sort of working relationship with the trade.

To begin with, the breach with Kapferer and Blake needed to be addressed. This was in large part because these distributors had cornered the New Wave film market in Australia — films which Rado believed were essential to the development of the Festival’s international prestige.⁸⁸ Indeed, according to Rado, Blake’s “films (unreleased) alone ... could make a Festival”.⁸⁹ For this reason, for the 1960 Melbourne Festival, Rado agreed to accept films from Kapferer and Blake, and also to abide by their conditions for screening. This, he hoped,

⁸⁴ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ian Klava, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 28.10.1992.

⁸⁵ SFF – Min., 5.1.1965, Box No. 1.

⁸⁶ SFF – Min., 4.8.1964, Box No. 1.

⁸⁷ SFF – Min., 1.1.1965, Box No. 1.

⁸⁸ MFF – Min., 12.4.1960, Box No. 6.

⁸⁹ MFF – Corr., Rado to Williams, 13.3.1962, Box No. 20.

“would help settle past disputes with Sydney distributors”.⁹⁰ However, Rado continued to refuse to pay any rental for these films.⁹¹ Rado believed that such payment to commercial distributors would set a dangerous precedent, and damage the financial viability of the Festival—in addition, it would of course eliminate one of the central differences between the Festival and the commercial exhibitors. In response, Kapferer demanded a written guarantee that the Film Festival was not a commercial undertaking, and insisted that his representatives be given explicit rights to observe whether the Festival was complying with FIAPF screening rules. In 1960, in a letter to Sydney Director Lois Hunter, Rado complained that he found these demands humiliating, and wrote angrily that “I can’t get used to being treated like a thief”.⁹² Rado rejected Kapferer’s demands—a decision which created a stalemate between the Melbourne Film Festival and the independent Australian distributors that would last for the next few years.

Melbourne’s lack of support from the domestic film trade was partly responsible for FIAPF’s refusal to endorse the 1960 or 1961 Festivals. FIAPF members, however, also had more general concerns about the proliferation of international film festivals around the world.⁹³ In response to this concern, FIAPF tightened its regulations for officially endorsed festivals in 1961. When Sydney received endorsement for its 1961 Festival, it had to abide by these new rules, which included the following: festivals had to be a maximum of 12 days long; they could show no more than two FIAPF films per day; and the audience limit for each FIAPF film was 2,000.⁹⁴

Concerned at the loss of FIAPF endorsement for its Festival, the Melbourne organising committee decided to try to improve their relations with the trade by reorganising the 1962 Festival so that it conformed with the new regulations. They thus decided to limit audience numbers, and reduce the number of screenings by moving the Festival to a single venue—the Palais Theatre at St Kilda.⁹⁵ These structural changes to the Festival show that Melbourne, perhaps for the first time in its history, had conceded to the realities of its position within the broader cinema industry. The Festival could no longer exist in splendid isolation from the

⁹⁰ MFF – Min., 12.4.1960, Box No. 6.

⁹¹ MFF – Min., 12.4.1960, Box No. 6.

⁹² MFF. – Corr., 3.3.1960, Box No. 11.

⁹³ MFF – Arch., FIAPF press release, 30.8.1960, Box No. 36.

⁹⁴ SFF – Min., 4.4.1961, Box No. 1.

⁹⁵ MFF – Min., 7.7.1961, Box No. 6.

commercial trade, but, if it wanted access to high-quality product, had to make some concessions to industrial demands.

Along with these changes to meet FIAPF requirements, the Melbourne organising committee also proposed to offer prizes at the 1962 Festival. This, they felt, would help to increase the international prestige of Melbourne, by mirroring similar prizes given by the most famous international film festivals (such as Cannes and Venice). It would also be attractive to the trade, both international and domestic. This is because such awards could be used by commercial distributors and exhibitors for publicity purposes, and might encourage them to allow the Festival to screen their films. The committee proposed that there should be nine prizes given out. Three of these were major prizes: the ‘Golden Boomerang’, for best film; the ‘Trailblazer Prize’, for the film “which contributes most to the advancement of the art of cinema”; and the ‘One World Prize’, for the film “which, transcending national barriers, can be universally understood”.⁹⁶ The other six prizes were for specific aspects of cinema, including best direction, performance, script, musical score and photography —as well as an Open prize which varied each year. The three major proposed awards demonstrate the Festival’s continuing explicit commitment to the aesthetic role of cinema, and to a vision of internationalism. However, the proposed judging panel was clearly devised as a concession to the trade. It was to consist of three judges: an overseas celebrity (thus having public relations kudos); a representative of the trade in Australia (thus keeping up trade relations); and an Australian film critic (thus forming relationships with local journalists, as well as maintaining the ‘non-commercial’ credentials of the award).

In mid 1961 Rado took the proposed new Festival structure, including the awards, to Sydney to seek approval from members of the film trade, including Kapferer, and various major commercial exhibitors. According to Rado’s report to the Melbourne organising committee, “all had reacted favourably” to the plans, and “expressed a willingness to support the 1962 Festival and future festivals on this basis”.⁹⁷ However, this ‘willingness’ did not translate into action. Kapferer and Blake did agree to withdraw their objections to the Melbourne Festival both in Australia and overseas.⁹⁸ But when asked by the committee to provide letters “stating that the Festival, by promoting interest in film, is in line with the

⁹⁶ MFF – Min., 3.8.1961, Box No. 6.

⁹⁷ MFF – Min., 3.8.1961, Box No. 6.

⁹⁸ MFF – Min., 3.8.1961, Box No. 6.

interests of the film trade”,⁹⁹ they declined to do so. Furthermore, the Motion Picture Distributors Association of Australia declined the invitation to nominate a judge for the 1962 Awards panel.¹⁰⁰ Hence, despite Melbourne’s efforts to develop a better relationship with the film trade, the connection remained problematic. This was still of major concern to the committee at the end of 1961, as evidenced by the fact that minutes from a December meeting warn explicitly of “the dangers of creating the impression that the Festival was once again enlarging its scope, and thus inviting further hostility from the trade”.¹⁰¹

These unresolved problems with the domestic trade needed to be resolved if Melbourne was to receive FIAPF endorsement. The Melbourne committee were thus forced to reach a compromise with Kapferer and Blake. These two distributors were still concerned that Melbourne was a commercial venture, and, before giving their formal support to the Festival, demanded access to information about its financial structure. With FIAPF endorsement contingent upon this, Melbourne capitulated to their demand. The minutes of a meeting held in December of 1961 thus record the committee’s decision that:

These two distributors, who would shortly be visiting European capitals, be given all the information which would create the desired impression in their minds (and) that the Director and Business Manager be empowered to provide Messrs Blake and Kapferer with any information they see fit for correcting their attitude to the Festival.¹⁰²

This attempt to create the ‘desired impression’ was successful, and Kapferer and Blake provided the requisite letters.

Despite this, FIAPF still had lingering concerns about the two Film Festivals. In response to Rado’s request for endorsement, Drury, the General Secretary of FIAPF, wrote in early 1962 that:

You will certainly remember that the main difficulty which didn’t give us the possibility to recognise your festival for the last years was the problem of the commercial character of your film presentation. The film distributors, as you know, have the impression that the Melbourne Festival could worsen the commercial exploitation of the films shown at the festival.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ MFF – Min., 29.8.1961, Box No. 6.

¹⁰⁰ MFF – Min., 16.11.1961, Box No. 6.

¹⁰¹ MFF – Min., 14.12.1961, Box No. 6.

¹⁰² MFF – Min., 14.12.1961, Box No. 6.

¹⁰³ MFF – Corr., 14.2.1962, Box No. 36.

In this letter, Drury also expressed concerns about the existence of *two* major international film festivals in Australia. In his reply, Rado defended this situation by stating that “Sydney and Melbourne are 700 kilometres apart which excludes the possibility of either city’s inhabitants visiting the festival in the other capital”.¹⁰⁴ However, in case Drury did not accept this argument for the joint endorsement of Sydney and Melbourne, Rado pointed out that, if only one festival could be recognised, then

It might interest you to know that the first festival to be held in Australia was the Melbourne Festival which was in 1952 and which still is, in the opinion of distinguished critics, the leading Festival in Australia.¹⁰⁵

In the end, Drury was persuaded by Rado’s argument, and exempted Australia from FIAPF’s usual ‘one festival per country’ policy. He did, however, reject Rado’s rather thin attempt to reanimate the corpse of the Australian Film Festival under a new moniker —the ‘Australian Cine-Parade’.¹⁰⁶ In the end, both Melbourne and Sydney were granted separate FIAPF endorsements for their 1962 Festivals.¹⁰⁷

Melbourne, Sydney and FIAPF: 1963-64

Despite the Film Festivals’ efforts to build more cooperative relations with the trade, its dealings with FIAPF would continue to be problematic. In 1963, Drury was replaced as General Secretary of FIAPF by André Brisson, who would retain this position for the next thirty-five years. Brisson was a strict and difficult character (indeed, David Stratton deemed him a “monstrous man”).¹⁰⁸ One of his first actions upon being appointed was to introduce a fee for FIAPF endorsement (which was £101 in 1963).¹⁰⁹ He also put in place a policy that FIAPF would only endorse six competitive festivals worldwide, while the number of endorsed non-competitive festivals would be substantially reduced.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ MFF – Corr., Rado to Drury, 2.3.1962, Box No. 36.

¹⁰⁵ MFF – Corr., Rado to Drury, 2.3.1962, Box No. 36.

¹⁰⁶ MFF – Corr., Rado to Drury, 2.3.1962, Box No. 36.

¹⁰⁷ MFF – Min., 4.4.1962, Box No. 6; SFF – Min., 6.3.1962, Box No. 1.

¹⁰⁸ David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.3.1998.

¹⁰⁹ MFF – Corr., Brisson to Rado, 5.4.1963, Box No. 36.

¹¹⁰ SFF – Min., 7.5.1963, Box No. 2.

Under this stricter regime, both Melbourne and Sydney lost their FIAPF endorsement for the 1963 Festivals. This withdrawal of FIAPF support occurred at almost the last moment.

The Melbourne minutes record that

at the beginning of the festival, a FIAPF letter had been received in which the executive of FIAPF spoke of an alleged avalanche of protest against the festival, which resulted in the withdrawal of the endorsement.¹¹¹

Although the Festivals were not to discover the fact until later, this ‘avalanche of protest’ was triggered by Blake. Blake, who believed that “a good festival is one which buys films from him”,¹¹² had filed a complaint, through the German Film Producers’ Association, about the commercial nature of the Festival.¹¹³ The FIAPF letter itself is worth quoting, as it gives some indication of both Brisson’s character and prose style. Brisson wrote as follows:

Dear Mr Rado, I informed you that the file of your manifestation, as that of the Sydney Film Festival, was to be examined carefully by our “Festival Committee”. As a matter of fact, we have been seized of protestations against your manifestation. The bits of information we have been able to gather being contradictory, it has been impossible to use to make up a definite opinion. Under these conditions, I regret to inform you that it was decided not to recognise the Melbourne Film Festival in 1963.¹¹⁴

The two Festivals dealt with this loss of FIAPF endorsement in different ways. The Sydney organising committee, now more confident of its relations with the domestic trade, turned to them for support. They ensured that their 1963 Festival was well-attended by numerous trade representatives from both distributors and exhibitors. These included Robert Kapferer and other independent distributors; MGM, 20th Century Fox, Warner Bros, United Artists and Universal; and representatives of the Gala, Lido, Savoy and Metro-Continental Theatres. After the Festival, the Sydney Film Festival President sent FIAPF a copy of the 1962 Balance Sheet, as well as numerous letters of support from the trade (but not, it should be noted, from Blake and Kapferer).¹¹⁵

Melbourne, in resolving the problems with FIAPF, took a dual approach. Firstly, Rado decided to visit Brisson in person. According to Rado, he had a “cordial and almost

¹¹¹ MFF – Min., 26.6.1963, Box No. 6.

¹¹² MFF – Min., Blake quoted in “Director’s Overseas Report”, 14.11.1963, Box No. 6.

¹¹³ MFF – Min., 14.11.1963, Box No. 6.

¹¹⁴ MFF – Corr., Brisson to Rado, 31.5.1963, Box No. 36.

¹¹⁵ SFF – Min., 5.11.1963, Box No. 2.

sympathetic hearing” from the FIAPF General Secretary.¹¹⁶ Secondly, the Melbourne organising committee looked at further ways of improving its relations with the trade. To this end, they held a special meeting that was attended by delegates from the FVFS, the AFI, and Melbourne University Film Society. At this meeting, several ideas were tabled. These included a regular conference with the film trade, and a bi-annual Festival News Sheet. The latter would contain information on up-coming commercial releases of films likely to be of interest to Festival members. This would effectively allow the trade to advertise its niche products to the several thousand Melbourne subscribers. In addition, a sub-committee was established “to find ways and means to improve relations with the film trade”.¹¹⁷

At this special meeting, the idea of Melbourne functioning as a ‘premiere’ festival was also discussed. This would have three potential benefits. First, it would enable Melbourne to serve the industry by attracting publicity for up-coming releases —particularly if it could attract special guest stars (such as actors or directors) to introduce the films. This model had proved successful for the larger international film festivals, such as Cannes and Venice. Second, it would enhance Melbourne’s image as a strictly cultural organisation, bringing important film culture figures to Australia. Third, and perhaps most importantly, it would ensure that the Festival had first screening rights to such films —thus not only enhancing its stature, but also improving its chances of securing an ongoing audience. However, the idea of Melbourne becoming a ‘premiere’ festival was rejected for both industrial and cultural reasons, as the following passage from the minutes makes clear:

The one obstacle in the way of development toward a “premiere” festival (which most overseas festivals are, after all) is that some of the largest distributors of foreign films in Australia refuse to participate in the festival except on a rental basis. ... It is conceivable, of course, that at some stage distributors will look to the festival as a natural promotion platform for art films, but this state of affairs still seems rather remote. On the other hand, a “premiere festival” is probably less attractive to the public than a programme of exclusives. Also, showing these, the festival attains its original function of filling the gap which exists between films produced overseas and exhibited here.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ MFF – Min., “Director’s Overseas Report”, 14.11.1963, Box No. 6.

¹¹⁷ MFF – Min., 29.1.1964, Box No. 14.

¹¹⁸ MFF – Min., 5.3.1964, Box No. 14.

The manoeuvres of both Sydney and Melbourne to quell FIAPF's concerns were successful, and they were both granted official endorsement for the 1964 Festivals.¹¹⁹

To conclude, throughout the period from 1960 to 1964, the two Festivals attempted to deal with the trade hostility generated by the Australian Film Festival. As has been shown, this involved attempting to find a balance between a number of conflicting demands. The experience of the Australian Film Festival had taught the Festivals that they needed to avoid the hostility of the trade. They thus had to make sure that they were not perceived as commercial competitors. Therefore the Festivals made efforts to reemphasise their distinctive aesthetic and non-commercial focus. However, in order to mirror the famous international festivals and thus make themselves *the* annual event in Australian film circles, the two Festivals needed to show the best non-Hollywood films available —such as those of the French New Wave. But, particularly in the context of the growing popularity of the 'art film', this of course made for potential conflict with the trade. One way of dealing with this potential conflict, was for the Festivals to redesign themselves so that they functioned as publicity devices for such films. In doing so, Melbourne and Sydney thought that they could be a useful adjunct to the trade, whilst still successfully fulfilling their cultural role.

The following section turns to consider this difficult negotiation between culture and industry in more detail —but as a way of summing up the present section, it is worth ending with *Film Weekly's* view. On 25 June 1964, a front-page article entitled "Festival Assumes Added Importance" states that:

The growing importance of the Sydney Film Festival to the motion picture industry was cited last week by executives from exhibition, distribution and production. They hailed the annual event as a means of stimulating attendance at commercial theatres and as a showcase for the presentation of new techniques and ideas which would later be seen in product in general releases.¹²⁰

This passage makes clear that the Sydney Festival, at least, had been generally successful in persuading the domestic trade that it was a benefit rather than a hindrance.

¹¹⁹ SFF – Min., 7.4.1964, Box No. 1.

¹²⁰ *Film Weekly*, 25.6.1964, p.1.

IV. Negotiating Culture and Industry: 1960-1964

As the above discussion has demonstrated, one defining characteristic of this period is the Film Festivals' loss of what could be termed 'cultural purity'. That is, the Festivals could no longer define themselves solely in cultural terms, but now had to take account of the requirements of industry as well. The negotiation between these two sets of demands did not just manifest itself in relations with the trade (as dealt with in the previous section), but also more broadly—in internal debates, and in relations with the press, and, indeed, with the Festivals' own audience. This section deals with these broader issues, and how they manifested in this period.

One key issue that the Festivals were forced to deal with in this period was the question of just what films they ought to screen. Given that a film festival (*qua* event) is essentially a sequence of films, this question concerns the *raison d'être* of the Festivals. When they began, the answer to this seemed relatively clear: the Film Festivals existed in order to bridge the gap between the broad range of film product available, and the comparatively narrow range that was commercially exhibited (where the latter consisted almost entirely of mainstream Hollywood productions). However, with the decline of Hollywood and the growth in popularity of the European cinema, this gap was now much smaller. A range of European and other 'art film' products were now shown by Australian commercial exhibitors.

This development thus created a dilemma for the Film Festivals in making programming choices. On the one hand, they could restrict their programmes to what remained in the narrower 'gap' that now existed. But this would mean that the Festivals could only screen films of very limited appeal—such as shorts, documentaries, and experimental films—and they would thereby become small gatherings of enthusiasts, and be events of only the most marginal importance in the Australian cultural scene. On the other hand, the Festivals could continue to show their usual fare of European and other 'art' productions. But in this case, they could no longer rely on showing just *any* such films. The Film Festivals' audience was now more sophisticated and knowledgeable about non-Hollywood film than it had been 10 years before; in addition, the festival was no longer the only exhibition venue for such films. This meant that the Festivals could no longer rely on the sheer 'difference' and novelty of such films to satisfy their audience. Rather, the Festivals had to show the *best* of non-Hollywood film. But these, of course, tended to be the very films in which commercial 'art-house' and 'Continental' exhibitors were interested.

By the end of this period, the Festivals were well aware of this dilemma. For example, a public relations document produced for the Melbourne Festival committee in 1964, noted the growth in popularity of ‘festival type’ films, and then argued that:

One result is the increased commercial release of the type of films which, only 5–6 years ago, were typical festival material. Consequently the festival is forced to look farther afield in search of films not yet bought by the distributors here. A parallel development in the trade on the other hand, i.e., big American distributors offering large sums of money for rights to foreign pictures, forces the independent local distributors too to look for off-beat material, still farther limiting the titles available for the festival.¹²¹

This passage highlights the problem posed by the narrowing of the gap caused by the fact that ‘typical festival material’ was now of commercial interest.

An even clearer example demonstrating awareness of this problem is the opening speech prepared by the 1962 Melbourne Festival committee for the Minister of Customs and Excise, Denham Henty. The speech claims that the film festival is largely responsible for the growth in popularity of the ‘art film’, and argues that the narrowing of the gap between the non-commercial and the commercial is in fact an intrinsic part of the festival’s role. In the words of the speech:

Bridging the gap is essential and audience awareness of good film has grown to the point where what was previously considered strictly festival material, is now cinema fare, at least in those areas where relatively sophisticated audiences exist. The result is the breaking down of the barrier between commercial and non-commercial exhibition.¹²²

Having educated audiences into accepting the art film, and thus making it commercially viable, the festival should continue to present “material more advanced than is generally marketable”.¹²³ In this way, the speech makes the cultural role of the festival—in educating its audience into a more ‘sophisticated’ appreciation of film—serve an industrial function, as a marketing tool. However, the speech also stakes a claim that the festival can legitimately continue to show art film—that although no longer “leading”, it can nonetheless “join” the drive to increase the exhibition of such film.

¹²¹ MFF – Min., “Public Relations Report”, 5.3.1964, Box No. 14.

¹²² MFF – Min., “Public Relations Report”, 5.3.1964, Box No. 14.

¹²³ MFF – Min., “Public Relations Report”, 5.3.1964, Box No. 14.

The problems faced by the Festivals in this period were also noted by the press. For example, Colin Bennett of *The Age* noted that, despite efforts by the committee, the 1961 Melbourne Film Festival was “not an outstanding festival simply because there were not enough outstanding films”.¹²⁴ Bennett goes on to state:

Generally speaking, the festival is now obtaining the minor entries of the overseas festivals. ... Ironically enough it is the past excellence of the Melbourne Film Festival as an institution in our cultural life which has helped bring about this situation. It has helped to popularise foreign-language films in Australia so that they are now accepted city fare. The number of these films and the variety of countries has quadrupled in Australia since the Festival began.

Bennett concludes his article by stating that the very ‘popularisation’ of foreign films had created a situation where they are now considered “box office”, and as such are “snapped up” by the local distributors, leaving the Festival to “make do with the residue”. Sylvia Lawson, film critic for *Nation*, made similar claims:

With film festivals springing up everywhere and scrambling over the plums, and with the expansion of commercial interests into the foreign language field, overseas producers are evidently much less anxious than they were five years ago to let Australian festivals show their films.¹²⁵

The problems that this dilemma created for the programming of the Festivals did not go unnoticed by their audience. As Melbourne committee member Ray Fisher noted in 1963, it had become “more and more difficult to satisfy the audience which is becoming more and more critical and selective each year”.¹²⁶ In other words, the Festival audience were not prepared to be fobbed off with the ‘residue’ left over after the trade had had its pick. Thus in this period, for the first time the minutes of the two Film Festivals begin to discuss the issue of audience complaints about programme quality. A revealing piece of evidence that this had become an issue for the Festivals, is the fact that Melbourne felt obliged, in its 1961 Programme, to include the apologetic statement that it is “not always possible for a non-commercial film organisation ... to obtain any film that it would like to screen”.¹²⁷ Furthermore, in response to the building criticism of Melbourne’s programme, it was recommended in 1962 that it conduct its first audience questionnaire, both to gauge audience

¹²⁴ MFF – Arch., “Summing up the Film Festival”, *The Age*, 17.6.1961, press cuttings, Box No. 11.

¹²⁵ MFF – Arch., *The Nation*, 16.6.1962, pp. 17-18, press cuttings, Box No. 11.

¹²⁶ MFF – Min., 13.8.1963, Box No. 6.

¹²⁷ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1961*, programme, p. 2.

reaction to the current Festival, and reveal possible areas for improvement.¹²⁸ Sydney followed Melbourne's lead the next year, with its own audience questionnaire.¹²⁹

Hence, in this period, the core issue for the Festivals was as follows: if 'festival fare' had increased in popularity, and was screening at local commercial cinemas (some now solely dedicated to this type of film), what role was left for the Festivals to fulfil? The rest of this section explores how the Festivals considered two possible solutions to this problem. The first solution was to attempt to construct the role of the film festival, not so much in terms of the content it screened, but rather as an elite social event — a key occasion in the social calendar. During this period, this option was most successfully pursued by Melbourne, which had a number of advantages over Sydney in this respect. The second solution, which was pursued by both of the Festivals, was to focus on the original vision of internationalism, and attempt to market themselves as a celebration of world cinema. This solution to the problem had a number of advantages. First, the theme of internationalism had elite cultural appeal. Second, such films promised a guaranteed audience drawn from the various migrant communities. Third, films from smaller film-making countries were still, at this period, part of the 'gap' left for the Film Festivals. For while films from major non-Hollywood industries (such as French, Italian, and British productions) were of commercial interest to the trade, films from other countries (such as India, Mexico, and Norway) still had little chance of being commercially exhibited in Australia. Thus the Film Festivals could safely and legitimately screen such films, without incurring any trade hostility. In what follows, the two solutions sketched here are considered in more detail.

The MFF and 'Snob appeal'

As the first potential solution to the dilemma sketched above, the Melbourne Festival considered fostering its image as an event dedicated to screening films for a cultural elite. If successful, this would have the advantage of developing a particular market niche for the Festival that would both appease the film trade's concerns, and ensure Melbourne's own sustainability as an organisation. This proposed shift towards a more 'elite' event would thus give Melbourne a clear sense of cultural legitimacy, whilst avoiding any conflict with the trade over audience share.

¹²⁸ MFF – Min., 16.7.1962, Box No. 6.

One step towards achieving this was the Melbourne Film Festival's move to a single, and more sophisticated venue —the Palais Theatre in St Kilda, Melbourne.¹³⁰ This move served both to quell industry concerns, and enhance Melbourne's cultural status. First, it undercut complaints of commercialism generated by Melbourne's use of local commercial exhibition houses (for example, in 1958, the Festival had hired the Rivoli and Carlton Theatres for extra screenings, while in 1959 they had also offered evening screenings at the Dendy Theatre in Brighton).¹³¹ In addition, as noted above, the number of available seats in the Palais made it easier for the Festival to support its argument that it adhered to FIAPF's maximum audience numbers of 2,000. Finally, the Palais served to enforce the more sophisticated image that the Festival was now trying to portray, because it was normally home to some of Melbourne's larger and more prestigious cultural events.

In order to enhance its prestige further, Melbourne decided to pursue appropriate delegates and 'special guests' for the Festivals. The focus here was on attempting to secure well-known directors as delegates, rather than actors. In accordance with the presumptions of *auteur* theory, the director was considered the genuine 'artist'. Just as Sydney had tried to secure Orson Welles for its 1962 Festival, in the same year Melbourne pursued one of the most renowned art directors of the time, India's Satyajit Ray. Unfortunately, Ray declined this invitation.¹³² Despite being unable to secure any renowned directors during this period, Melbourne continued to pursue this policy because, as the 1964 Minutes state, "Directors of films, even if less newsworthy, would be more preferred than actors or actresses".¹³³

In a further attempt to enhance its cultural legitimacy, Melbourne attempted to differentiate itself from the major international film festivals —arguing that they, unlike the Melbourne Festival, were essentially commercial entities. As the Melbourne Film Festival grew in stature both at home and abroad, comparisons between this festival and those held overseas were inevitably made. Members of the Melbourne Festival committee were conscious of this comparison, and indeed commissioned Alfred Heintz to produce a report on this issue in 1963.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ SFF – Min., 2.7.1963, Box No. 1.

¹³⁰ MFF – Min., 3.8.1961, Box No. 6.

¹³¹ MFF – Min., 1.1.1958, Box No. 6; MFF – Min., 23.2.1959, Box No. 6.

¹³² MFF – Min., 21.5.1962, Box No. 6.

¹³³ MFF – Min., 5.3.1964, Box No. 14.

¹³⁴ MFF – Min., "The Nature of a Festival", 26.3.1963, Box No. 6.

The most important aspect of Heintz's report is that he attempts to argue that there are two distinct types of international film festival: the 'commercial' and the 'artistic'. The more renowned overseas festivals (such as Cannes) are, according to Heintz, clearly 'commercial festivals'. Whilst the 'artistic festival' should be a "truly inspiring cultural experience", Cannes and the like were "something quite different" —they functioned as essentially promotional and marketing devices for the commercial trade. For these festivals were glamorous events with "gala openings, cocktail parties, processions through the streets, [and] the excitement of international stars being present in person", the purpose of which was to act as "a showman's device to interest the public in seeing his films". Heintz goes on to say that a 'commercial festival',

is a shop window by which the producer displays his product, just like a trade fair. And the success of a Festival to the trade can be measured by the number of distribution contacts signed during its duration.

What Heintz then goes on to argue is that it is not possible to have the 'glitz and glamour' of an event like Cannes, whilst remaining a purely 'artistic' festival. This is because:

the features which interest the cognoscenti —the art films, the experimental films and the films of scientific and educational interest— have little or no box office potential, and money spent on their promotion can never be recouped.

In other words, producers will not assist a film festival unless it serves a promotional or marketing role for more commercial films, for this is the "only part of it which can afford the extensive promotional activity that makes a Festival at all". Heintz thus concludes by arguing that if Melbourne seriously intends to become a prestigious social event then it will need to give up its pretensions and become a 'commercial' festival.

Unsurprisingly, Heintz's report was poorly received by the Melbourne organising committee. Given the context of Melbourne's recent difficulties with the trade, his proposals to commercialise the Festival were rejected. He was told that either he produce a more "relevant" document, or the committee would hire another public relations practitioner.¹³⁵

A year later, in 1964, a more 'suitable' report was produced by the Melbourne Festival's public relations sub-committee. This made a more fine-grained set of distinctions than Heintz's report —arguing that there were essentially four types of film festival. These were (1) *trade* festivals (such as Cannes and Venice), which were supported by producers with

¹³⁵ MFF – Min., 26.3.1963, Box No. 6.

“high degrees of trade promotion, large foreign delegations, stars, tendency to sensationalism and tremendous expenditure on press activity”; (2) *tourist* festivals, which functioned mainly as regional marketing devices; (3) *government* festivals (such as in the communist states); and (4) *cultural* festivals, staged by film societies with little government or trade support. The report argued that the Melbourne Film Festival, which had minimal trade support when compared with many other overseas festivals, naturally fitted into this last category.¹³⁶

In response to this report, in 1964 the Melbourne organising committee decided that the Festival’s character needed to be formally articulated. After debate, the minutes record that the following four statements were agreed upon:

- (1) that the character of the festival should be maintained on the same lines on which it developed over the years, i.e., a cultural festival with equal emphasis on documentary and feature film content.
- (2) that the programming, so far as possible, be kept balanced as in the past between exclusive importations and previews of films already bought for Australian distribution.
- (3) that, as far as circumstances permit, the competitive element be retained both in the short and feature section.
- (4) that the publicity attached and public relations programme planned for the festival be in keeping with the restrained cultural character of the event.¹³⁷

This formulation of the Melbourne Festival’s character represents a compromise between commercial and cultural imperatives. The committee agreed that the Festival would continue to screen films of commercial interest (point 2), but to appease the trade, they would also retain the awarding of prizes as useful publicity devices (point 3). Perhaps most significantly, point (4) makes explicit that Melbourne’s role as a ‘cultural festival’ rather than a ‘trade festival’ could function as a marketing tool —allowing the Festival to claim that it was a purely cultural event, uncontaminated by industry.

This appeal to “the restrained cultural character” of Melbourne can be clearly seen in Rado’s 1964 interview with *The Bulletin*, where he explicitly contrasts it with the ‘hype’ of the trade festivals. In this interview, Rado claims that the Melbourne Film Festival:

¹³⁶ MFF – Min., 5.3.1964, Box No. 14.

¹³⁷ MFF – Min., 5.3.1964, Box No. 14.

is one of the best film festivals in the world, of which there are 140. Only 18 are recognised by the Federation of International Producers' Associations [FIAPF], and the Melbourne Film Festival is one of these. Yet, compared with other festivals it is a sober, dignified affair. Erwin Rado, the director, will tell you that two years ago Berlin Festival's budget for flying in and entertaining the press was £64,000.¹³⁸

In this article, Rado further highlights the commercial nature of these 'other festivals' by noting "incidents" where, in order to attain publicity, "eager" film companies hired yachts on which to entertain the press. Then, "at a precise, delicate moment, in front of the photographers, a starlet had fallen overboard and lost her bra". After this description Rado adds soberly, "[w]e don't do that sort of thing at Melbourne". Clearly enough, topless starlets and other such publicity stunts would be inconsistent with Melbourne's attempt to construct an image of itself as a high-class event for the cultural elite.

In a comment not intended for public consumption, Rado reveals that he was well aware of the marketing function of developing Melbourne's 'high-class' cultural image. In 1964, he wrote a congratulatory letter to Klava, which includes the following remark:

I was thrilled to hear that the festival is becoming a social 'must' in Sydney too. This sort of snob appeal at least helps you fill your seats and lifts the burden of worrying about selling out!¹³⁹

Here Rado shows a clear consciousness that Melbourne's pursuit of 'snob appeal' could simultaneously serve two functions for the organisation. Firstly, it helped Melbourne to survive as an organisation, by appealing to a niche audience (and, it should be noted, one with considerable disposable income) and thus 'filling its seats'. Secondly, it gave the Melbourne Festival cultural legitimacy —and thus helped counter criticism that it had 'sold out' to industry.

The pursuit of an elite image did, however, present its own problems for the Festival. The Melbourne committee knew it was desirable that the Festival obtain widespread and favourable mainstream publicity. This would not only help the Festival to establish itself as a social 'must' (in Rado's phrase), but would also be useful in helping it obtain the best quality films from the overseas trade. This is because such publicity would demonstrate that the Festival had a public impact, and could thus function as a beneficial marketing tool for the trade. Given this, by the early 1960s, the lack of Australian press coverage had become a

¹³⁸ MFF – Arch., Author unknown, "Eyestrain for Art's Sake", *The Bulletin*, 13.6.1964, p. 36, press clippings, Box No. 28.

¹³⁹ MFF – Corr., 2.7.1964, Box No. 28.

concern to the Melbourne organising committee. To investigate the reasons for this lack, the committee commissioned Maurice Cavanaugh to undertake “An assessment of the public relations programme” of the 1962 Festival. In this assessment, Cavanaugh was asked to examine the current opinion of the mainstream media towards Melbourne.¹⁴⁰

In his report to the committee, Cavanaugh argued that the lack of media support for the Festival was due to a “climate of opinion” that it catered only to an exclusive minority. For example, Cavanaugh noted that the station management of a commercial TV channel had

bluntly informed [him] that not five percent of the programme’s audience was remotely interested in the Festival, and that commercial television could not afford to cater for a slim minority audience.¹⁴¹

Cavanaugh also reported that the *Herald Sun* film critic felt the Festival “was not newsworthy because it was a private club conducted for a privileged few”.¹⁴² Indeed, the *Herald Sun* was later to refuse to give the 1964 Festival publicity, as it did not issue tickets to the public at large.¹⁴³

Cavanaugh’s report demonstrates the dangers inherent in Melbourne’s marketing strategy. By pursuing ‘snob appeal’ it risked alienating the mainstream press and its audience. This was particularly so, given the strongly negative connotations associated with the ideas of a ‘cultural elite’ in Australian public life at this time.

The SFF and the MFF as ‘Windows to the World’

The second potential solution to the Festivals’ dilemma, was to construct a cultural (and industrial) role for themselves as a showcase for world cinema. In many ways, this solution was more in tune with the original conception of the Festivals than Melbourne’s ‘snob appeal’ approach. As a solution, this was also much less problematic for the Festivals. Indeed, the ‘world cinema’ aspect of the Festivals became one of their most important and stable roles for the remainder of the period dealt with in this thesis.

¹⁴⁰ MFF – Arch., M. Cavanaugh, “An assessment of the public relations programme of the 1962 Melbourne Film Festival, and some recommendations for the future”, Box No. 19.

¹⁴¹ MFF – Arch., Cavanaugh, “An assessment”, Box No. 19.

¹⁴² MFF – Arch., Cavanaugh, “An assessment”, Box No. 19.

¹⁴³ MFF – Min., “Aims of Festival”, Public Relations Report, 5.3.1964, Box No. 14.

Essentially, this solution involved placing less emphasis on the ‘art’ of cinema, and more on the international ‘culture’ of cinema. This could be justified by the Festivals in terms of both industry and culture.

In industrial terms, this solution had three benefits. First, it avoided conflict with the domestic trade. For, as noted above, while French and Italian art films were currently screening at commercial Australian cinemas, films from many other countries were still not considered ‘box office’ material by the trade, and thus posed no immediate threat to trade audience share. Second, it would assist the Festivals in sourcing product. For the Festivals could approach international distributors who represented minor film-making countries for such film, and use their prior track record of securing commercial screening for ‘art’ films as an incentive. Third, it would allow the Festivals to diversify their program and give them more programming autonomy, whilst adhering to FIAPF regulations. For if an international film festival wished to show a large number of films from one country (such as France), it had to follow tight restrictions on which films it could screen. However, if a film festival selected only a few films from each country, FIAPF allowed a much wider choice of films.¹⁴⁴ The purpose of this FIAPF regulation was to encourage international film festivals to diversify their film sources, and thus boost film distribution for the smaller members of this organisation.

In cultural terms, this ‘internationalist’ solution gave the Festivals a clear cultural role, that was distinct from other exhibition venues, and which could be legitimised as being one of their original functions. For the Festivals had made it clear since Olinda that one of their roles was to screen ‘worthwhile’ films from all nations. Every Festival programme from Olinda onwards had thus made a point of listing each film’s country of origin beside its title.

In 1961, there are clear signs that the Melbourne Festival had explicitly adopted this solution. In that year, the organising committee formally resolved to screen “as many films as possible from as many countries as possible”.¹⁴⁵ The results of this resolution can be seen in the introduction of the 1961 Melbourne Festival programme, which states that “[r]ecent films by Buñuel, Heifits, Pyriev, Ophuls, Ray, and Ramody are arranged along with new films from

¹⁴⁴ This is Article 8 of the FIAPF regulations, contained in MFF – Corr., Fournier to Rado, 20.1.1960, Box No. 36.

¹⁴⁵ MFF – Min., 7.7.1961, Box No. 6.

Spanish countries, new films from Holland, Denmark and Germany”.¹⁴⁶ The introduction goes on to argue that:

We in the Festival ... rejoice that our theatre managers now show films from countries that they would not have considered at the time of the first Melbourne Festival. If, this year, we show films from Argentina, Denmark, China, Holland, and Mexico, perhaps by 1971, our cinemas will have extended their interest to these countries. Yet we regard it as part of our function to continue this exploration of unknown sources.

This passage begins with the Festival’s usual claim to have led the way in popularising the products of the major European cinema industries, so that they were now shown by ‘our theatre managers’. It then goes on to suggest that the Festival hopes to repeat this popularisation with the films of other countries. This passage thus gives an internationalist dimension to the idea, discussed above, that the film festivals have the function of being a cultural vanguard. The continuation of this policy can be seen in the fact that, in 1962, the Melbourne Festival programme proudly announces that it would be screening films from “31 countries” — a fact that had not been thought worthy of mention in previous programmes.¹⁴⁷

While this internationalist approach helped resolve various industrial and cultural issues for Melbourne, it did clash with another of their cultural imperatives: the drive to screen film of the ‘highest quality’. This is because the policy privileged diversity of national origin over ‘artistic merit’ in the selection of films. Nonetheless, the organising committee decided that, on balance, the merits of this policy outweighed its aesthetic costs. As the 1964 minutes state:

The principle of screening mediocre films for their value as a record of the development of film or social conditions in a particular country was discussed and generally approved.¹⁴⁸

Like Melbourne, the Sydney Film Festival also took steps to adopt this internationalist approach. On the recommendation of the AFI, the Sydney committee in January of 1960 considered incorporating a “strong Asian slant” in its programme.¹⁴⁹ Despite the fact that there would be two small Asian film festivals in Sydney the following year —one organised by the Asian Student’s Association, and one by the Asia-Australia Association¹⁵⁰— the policy

¹⁴⁶ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1961*, programme, p.2.

¹⁴⁷ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1962*, programme, p.2.

¹⁴⁸ MFF – Min., 27.7.1964, Box No. 14.

¹⁴⁹ SFF – Min., 5.1.1960, Box No. 1.

¹⁵⁰ SFF – Min., 3.11.1959, Box No. 1.

was eventually pursued by the Sydney committee. As well as the general advantages already noted, this policy would also help Sydney differentiate itself from Melbourne. This in turn would help quell both FIAPF's and the domestic trade's concerns about possible over-exposure of films at the two Australian Film Festivals.

In following up this 'Asian' policy, the 1960 Sydney programme sub-committee recommended that the Festival offer a new category in the programme. This would be entitled "The Best of Two Worlds", and would incorporate both European and Asian films.¹⁵¹ However, in the end the organising committee decided not to follow this recommendation for the 1960 Festival. This was probably because it was unable to secure enough Asian films to justify this category.¹⁵²

Despite this initial set-back, the Sydney organising committee continued to pursue this policy over the next two years. The pursuit of FIAPF endorsement was an added incentive. In November 1961, the Sydney Festival's French agent, Catherine Duncan, attended the FIAPF Annual General Meeting. At this meeting, it was recommended to Festival representatives that if they wished to secure FIAPF endorsement, they should "consider developing a 'special character' or thematic programme that changed annually [as] it would reduce the problem of over-exposure in each country".¹⁵³ In light of these recommendations, the Sydney Festival pursued a subscription to *Far East Film News*, and at the end of 1961 sent to the editor a list of films it hoped to screen in its 1962 programme.¹⁵⁴

A further aspect of the Festivals' 'internationalist' approach was to focus on domestic film production. For if one of the cultural roles of the Festivals was to encourage 'national cinemas', then this should arguably include *Australian* cinema. Australian cinema was in a highly impoverished state in this period. An average of only two feature films per year were made in Australia in the period from 1946 to 1969, and in the years 1963 and 1964, no feature films were made at all.¹⁵⁵ Government support was minor, and available only for documentary and public information films. Hence, the support of the domestic film industry could provide the Festivals with a genuinely 'righteous' cause, and thus further cultural legitimacy. In

¹⁵¹ SFF – Min., 3.11.1959, Box No. 1.

¹⁵² See *Sydney Film Festival – 1960*, programme.

¹⁵³ SFF – Min., 20.11.1961, Box No. 1.

¹⁵⁴ SFF – Min., 20.11.1962, Box No. 1.

¹⁵⁵ B. Routt, "The Emergence of Australian Film", in Nowell-Smith, *Oxford History of World Cinema*, p. 426.

addition, such support would not impinge on trade territory, as there was little commercial interest in Australian film.

The Melbourne Film Festival had been pursuing this policy since 1959, when it had instituted the Australian Film Awards. In 1961, committee member Ed Schefferle argued that:

Local film production should be helped to the full by accepting films whether they received release or not. It was an aim of the festival to place good Australian films before the Festival members.¹⁵⁶

In pursuance of this aim, the Australian Film Awards were expanded in this period, and by 1964 there were 156 entries for 11 categories. The latter now included categories for television advertising, television programmes, children's films, and travel films.¹⁵⁷ As these categories make clear, one of the functions of the awards was to encourage and support domestic production. However, the absence of a specific 'feature film' category of award reveals the scarcity of such product in this period. Despite this, the Melbourne committee still expressed the "hope that, before long, we will be able to show Australian films of world calibre".¹⁵⁸

Another industrial incentive for the two Festivals to focus on domestic production, was the favourable publicity it could potentially generate for them. The ceremony of giving awards to Australian films would resonate with national pride, and thus naturally attract attention from the media. This benefit was explicitly mentioned by Cavanaugh in his public-relations report to the Melbourne organising committee. He noted that whilst the rest of the 1962 Festival received very little press coverage, "the *Sun* ... gave three-quarters of a page to the [Australian Film] awards". He thus recommended that the Festival continue to make conscious efforts to "appeal to the parochial pride" of the Australian public.¹⁵⁹

Although the Sydney Film Festival lacked the prestige provided by the Australian Film Awards, it also maintained a policy of screening Australian product. As noted previously, the Sydney Festival had always had a strong connection with local film-makers (both amateur and

¹⁵⁶ MFF – Min., 22.3.1961, Box No. 6.

¹⁵⁷ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1964*, programme, p. 30.

¹⁵⁸ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1961*, programme, p. 2.

¹⁵⁹ MFF – Arch., Cavanaugh, "An assessment", Box No. 19.

professional), and had continued to screen its amateur programme throughout this period, despite declining attendances.¹⁶⁰

This section has examined the ways in which the Melbourne and Sydney Film Festivals attempted to create a place for themselves in both industrial and cultural terms. The need to do this was forced upon the Festivals by two main developments. The first was their growth in size and stature, and the consequent need to develop relations with the trade. The second was the changed commercial landscape, in which major non-Hollywood feature films were now commercial fare. The difficulties the Festivals found in constructing a role for themselves in this period would continue in the years to come.

V. The MFF and the SFF 1959-64: An Overview

This chapter has examined the main themes in the period from 1959 to 1964. It has looked at the failed attempt to establish the Australian Film Festival, and the ramifications of this failure; it has also examined at some length the Festivals' attempts to establish themselves in relation to the trade, and thereby negotiate between the demands of culture and industry. However, it is worth stepping back from this examination of particular themes, and providing a brief overview of the general history of the Festivals in this period.

In general, this period sees the Melbourne Film Festival begin to establish itself as a professional, international film festival, while Sydney still retained its more amateur and small-scale approach. This difference between the two Festivals is nicely summarised by Sylvia Lawson (one of the Sydney Film Festival directors), in an article published in *Nation* in 1962.

This Festival [*sc.* Melbourne's] and Sydney's are twins in a sense, though not of the identical sort. One was born smaller, later and comparatively without endowment ... Within five years the Melbourne Festival had begun to increase its waiting list, had acquired a permanent director and office, and won its first official recognition from FIAPF. The Sydney Festival, organised independently of film societies in a community where they were very thin on the ground, struggled for years longer with poor technical facilities, lack of money, uncomfortable halls and shaky management.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ SFF – Min., 6.10.1964, Box No. 1.

¹⁶¹ MFF – Arch., *Nation*, 16.6.1962, p. 17, press cuttings, Box No. 11.

One of the important differences between Sydney and Melbourne was Sydney's lack of a permanent director. Whilst Rado continued as director at Melbourne throughout this period (and beyond), the Sydney Festival changed directors every year until 1962. In 1959 the Festival hired an external director, Garth Hay. However, the arrangement between the Festival and Hay ended swiftly when it was discovered that Hay was embezzling festival funds, and he was asked to resign.¹⁶² Sylvia Lawson and Robert Connell then took on the dual-directorship for that year. In 1960, the director was Lois Hunter, and in 1961 it was Patricia Moore. Sydney was not to have any real stability until Ian Klava took the directorship in 1962, and remained until Stratton replaced him in 1966. This regular change of personnel made two things more difficult for the Sydney Festival. Firstly, it made it harder for the Festival to establish a coherent policy and direction, and maintain it throughout this period. This was in contrast to Melbourne, where Rado developed a clear strategy to establish Melbourne's position as both a prestigious international event, and the pre-eminent Australian film festival. Secondly, the regular changes in directors at Sydney made it harder to foster and maintain relations with important figures —such as distributors, FIAPF, and, of course, Rado and the Melbourne organising committee.

Contributing to this problem, was the fact that during this period the Sydney director had a different administrative role from the Melbourne director. Rado wielded considerably more executive power than was possessed by the Sydney director. Rado had substantial control over programming and managerial decisions at Melbourne. In Sydney, however, the various sub-committees had more autonomy, and the director was restricted to being a sort of 'head administrator'. As long-time Sydney committee member Ross Tzannes recalls,

It was run very much on committee lines in the early days. It was all hands to the mill, I think. ... [The Director] was just another committee member who was doing their thing for a while.¹⁶³

Even when Ian Klava took the directorship in 1962, his vision for the Sydney Film Festival remained an administrative one —as he recalls, "I just wanted to make sure it was an efficiently run organisation".¹⁶⁴

In further contrast to Melbourne, which could afford to send Rado overseas to source film product, the Sydney committee had to rely upon more haphazard methods of film

¹⁶² SFF – Min., 7.4.1959, Box No. 1.

¹⁶³ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ross Tzannes, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 7.9.1992.

procurement. Prior to 1960, the Sydney Festival had relied for its films largely upon the NSW Film Council, and other Australian film culture organisations —and also drew, when it could, from other unrelated sources (such as the embassies). After 1960, Sydney attempted to establish a more autonomous and systematic method of procuring films. This included taking out subscriptions to trade magazines, and seeking advice from overseas contacts.¹⁶⁵ However, despite these attempts, by the end of this period Sydney's selection process still remained much less systematic and professional than Melbourne's.¹⁶⁶

The distinction between the two Festivals in this period is also made clear by the difference in venues. The Sydney Film Festival remained at the University of Sydney, and continued to be plagued with problems associated with inappropriate screening technology, and a confusing ticketing system.¹⁶⁷ In response to these problems, the Sydney organising committee made approaches in 1964 to Capitol City Theatres of Greater Union for weekend screenings, but were rejected.¹⁶⁸ Melbourne, on the other hand, had moved in 1958 from the University of Melbourne to a variety of local commercial exhibition houses (as discussed above). In 1961 they moved again into the Palais Theatre in St Kilda.¹⁶⁹ This meant that while the Sydney films continued to be shown in a rag-tag collection of lecture-halls and theatres, the Melbourne Festival occurred in a single, prestigious venue.

In terms of festival profits, there was great disparity between Sydney and Melbourne. Both of the Festivals were well-attended, but Sydney did not always sell-out its 2,000 tickets during this period, while Melbourne did. Although Sydney continued to make small profits (£448 in 1964),¹⁷⁰ this figure was minor when compared with Melbourne's 1964 profit of £3,279.18.8.¹⁷¹

All of these differences between the two Festivals created a clear distinction between them: by 1964 Sydney was still a university-based, largely amateur festival, while the Melbourne Film Festival had established itself as a prestigious event in the city's social

¹⁶⁴ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ian Klava, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 28.10.1992.

¹⁶⁵ SFF – Min., 3.10.1961, Box No. 1.

¹⁶⁶ See, e.g., SFF – Min, 'Statement of Duties' for the film selection sub-committees, 3.3.1964, Box No. 1.

¹⁶⁷ SFF – Min., 2.7.1963, Box No. 1.

¹⁶⁸ SFF – Min., 1.12.1964, Box No. 1.

¹⁶⁹ MFF – Min., 3.8.1961, Box No. 6.

¹⁷⁰ SFF – Min., 1.12.1964, Box No. 1.

¹⁷¹ MFF – Min., 10.10.1964, Box No. 14.

calendar. This distinction is beautifully expressed by Lawson, in the following passage from an article in *Nation*:

Melbourne is the Australian film-viewers' capital. Mutter "Antonioni" in a St Kilda espresso and you are surrounded by friends immediately. This helps to explain why the Melbourne Festival enjoys such prestige in its own city, and why the list of subscribers —4,000 not counting the waiting list— is twice as long as Sydney's. The Festival, too has always had strong support from Victoria's magnificently equipped State Film Centre; the NSW Film Council is only a pale shadow of it. But there are less tangible factors; film consciousness seems to be simply an attribute of the community. The Festival has hundreds of devoted subscribers who do not belong to film societies; the societies, in fact, seem to have grown with the Festival (the best way to get on the waiting list is to join one). The event has the prestige of a season of theatre or opera.¹⁷²

Before ending this section, it is worth briefly outlining the state of relations that existed between the two Festivals. As discussed above, the early years of this period had seen tension between Sydney and Melbourne develop over the issue of the Australian Film Festival, and relations with the AFI. The damage caused to their relations by the 1959 debacle took some time to repair —and this was exacerbated by the constant changes in the Sydney directorship. However, when Ian Klava became director of the Sydney Film Festival in 1962, he set out to re-establish a good working relationship with Rado. Soon after becoming director, he wrote to Rado in an attempt to heal the breach. Rado replied in the following terms:

I was very glad to get your letter of 20th January because I was starting to wonder what form of cooperation will exist between our Festivals this year. ... we will be very pleased to continue cooperating with you on the terms set out by yourself.¹⁷³

Correspondence surviving from this period shows the two directors negotiating amicably about sharing films and freight costs, and coordinating screening times. The improved relations between Melbourne and Sydney are also evidenced, for example, by the Sydney Film Festival Minutes in 1963, which note that "As in 1962, the Festival received excellent cooperation from Irwin Rado, Director of the Melbourne Film Festival".¹⁷⁴

The developing relationship between the two directors also led them to a joint appreciation of the pressures of their particular roles. In a letter, Rado, for example, remarks

¹⁷² MFF – Arch., *Nation*, 19.6.1962, press clippings, Box No. 19.

¹⁷³ MFF – Corr., Rado to Klava, 23.1.1962, Box No. 20.

¹⁷⁴ SFF – Min... 2.7.1963, Box No. 1.

to Klava that “life is anything but pleasant just now and I am sorry for you and for me. Festival directing is definitely an idiot’s pastime”.¹⁷⁵ This relationship between the directors would become essential to the dynamic of the two Festivals when Stratton took over the Sydney directorship, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

At the end of this period, then, Melbourne and Sydney found themselves in rather different positions. Both had been forced to negotiate a path between the dictates of industry and culture. But from similar beginnings as university-based gatherings of film enthusiasts, Melbourne had by this stage pulled ahead of Sydney to become a much larger, more profitable, and more prestigious social event. Although both organisations now had stable directors, Rado was a much more significant figure than Klava on the Australian film culture landscape. Not only was Rado still Director of the AFI, but Melbourne could also afford to send him regularly overseas to meet with international distributors and attend major film festivals. As the following chapter will show, this was all to change with the advent of a new director at the Sydney Film Festival: David Stratton.

¹⁷⁵ MFF – Corr., 17.5.1962, Box No. 20.

1965-68: Growth and Alliance

The main development in the period dealt with in this chapter was the establishment of the Sydney Film Festival as a genuinely professional organisation —comparable in size and stature to the Melbourne Festival. The main driving force behind this development was the arrival of David Stratton, who becomes the Sydney Film Festival Director in 1966. This chapter is thus dominated by the substantial changes that occurred to the Sydney Festival, and the role played by Stratton.

After outlining the international and national context in the first section, this chapter deals with three main themes and developments. The first of these is Sydney's move towards professionalisation, and the tensions that this causes within the organisation. Secondly, the chapter examines an important new theme: the proliferation of international film festivals in Australia. This proliferation created a new kind of competition for the two established festivals. In response, as this chapter will show, Melbourne and Sydney moved to restrict the newer festivals in a fashion that was analogous to the operation of an economic cartel. The third major theme considered is the issue of film censorship, which came to the fore in this period.

One central development that emerges in this period, and which runs through all of the three major themes just listed, is the growing relationship between the Directors of the two Festivals. According to Stratton, from his very first year as Director, he and Rado became “tremendous friends and tremendous allies”.¹ This was not only to facilitate closer cooperation between Sydney and Melbourne, but for the historian it has also left a rich source of material in the form of the regular correspondence between the two men. From 1967 onwards, the Stratton–Rado correspondence was extensive, and represents a tremendous increase when compared with previous Directorial correspondence.

¹ David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997.

This correspondence was not only more regular, but also markedly more personal. While the letters between Rado and the earlier Sydney Festival Directors were mostly diplomatic intercourse between the figureheads of two rival organisations, Rado's and Stratton's correspondence became a personal forum for empathetic mutual exchange. The Directors strongly identified with each other as two men of equal drive and standing. In particular, they understood the difficulties of having to negotiate with committees, organisations and individuals in order to achieve their personal goals. As Stratton wrote to Rado:

I have always treated our correspondence on a fairly personal and informal level. I often think that through this correspondence you know far more of the day to day work of the Sydney Film Festival than my own committee. On top of that my friendship and personal admiration for you has encouraged me to be quite uninhibited in my letters which, as you know, I type myself.²

This regular and personal correspondence between the two directors makes it possible to offer, in this chapter and the next, a richer story about the internal workings and tensions of the Melbourne and Sydney Film Festivals.

By the end of this period, the two Australian international film festivals had successfully established themselves not just as professionally organised exhibitors of film, but also as major figures on the Australian film culture landscape. For this short period at least, and for the most part, Melbourne and Sydney had found a way of reconciling the demands of both culture and industry.

I. International and Domestic Developments in Film

In many ways, this section dealing with the international and national context continues the themes already noted in previous chapters. Internationally, the crisis in Hollywood continued throughout the late 1960s. One way it seeks to redress this, is by making products aimed at the 'youth market', which draw increasingly on the 'art film' for inspiration. In avant-garde film circles, this period also sees the beginning of an increasing politicisation and radicalisation of film theory and practice. Finally, on the domestic front, Australian film production remains at a very low level.

² MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 13.2.1970, Box No. 50.

As discussed in the previous chapters, the late 1950s and early 1960s was marked by a virtual crisis for the old Hollywood system. With the collapse of the mass cinema audience, Hollywood had attempted to deal with this issue by reducing its domestic output, attempting to market to particular niche audiences (such as ‘the teenager’) and increasing its international market through both ‘runaway productions’ and increased overseas distribution. In the period dealt with in this chapter, further developments in the international film industry and domestic market force yet more change onto Hollywood. First, with growing experience in ‘runaway productions’, it began to become clear that they were not as cost-effective as they had first seemed. This led Hollywood to turn back to focus more on domestic production. Second, demographics had continued to change in the United States. The ‘baby boom’ generation was now older, and this period thus sees widespread decline in the ‘teen’ film market and the drive-in, and the corresponding shift to the suburban multiplex cinema. Third, in an attempt to tap into the urban youth market, Hollywood began to make films that drew on the style and content of the European ‘art’ cinema.

The previous chapter noted that one of the central trends of the late 1950s in Hollywood, was the shift to producing and co-producing films overseas. This trend towards so-called ‘runaway productions’ was originally driven by the lower labour costs, and government incentives that could be found outside the United States in the post-war period. However, this trend went into reverse in the mid-1960s. This was for two main reasons: firstly, runaway productions were not as efficient as had first been thought, and, secondly, the US government began to lure production back from Europe by offering various incentives of their own.

In this period it became clear that although producing films overseas appeared to offer greater cost effectiveness, in practice this was not so clear-cut. It was discovered that runaway production had a number of pitfalls. Overseas labour, although generally cheaper than its counterpart in the US film industry, was often less technically skilled and efficient. This in turn often meant that production schedules could not be completed as quickly. Furthermore, producing films in a foreign country could involve problems with language barriers, poorer quality infrastructure (such as transportation and communication networks), and over-complex negotiations with foreign bureaucracies. For these reasons, although Hollywood continued to invest money in overseas productions, “by the mid 1960s, evidence of a downturn in overseas production was clear”.³

³ Monaco, *History of the American Cinema*, p.15; see also Lev, *Euro-American Cinema*, p.25.

Encouraging this return of emphasis to the domestic film industry, in this period the US government began to offer various incentives to film-makers. The US government had been deeply concerned at the flow of investment into the European film industries, and its consequent impact on employment in the United States.⁴ Consequently, in 1963 the US followed the lead of many European countries and modified its federal tax code in order to encourage investment in the domestic film industry. These incentives, in conjunction with the growing US economy, saw increasing investment in domestic production.⁵

A further result of these government incentives was the growth of independent production in the United States. Following the lead set earlier by companies such as United Artists, the major studios in Hollywood were increasingly operating more as sources of investment funds for production, rather than being directly involved in the business of film production itself. Throughout this period, films were more frequently being produced by independent or nominally independent companies, with the funds supplied under a short-term contract negotiated with a major studio (who, in return for funding, would take a percentage of the profits).⁶

These changes to the structure of the US film industry were occurring at the same time as significant changes to the make-up of the domestic cinema audience. To begin with, this period saw the end of the 'teen film' boom of the late 1950s, and the associated collapse in popularity of the drive-in cinema.⁷ By the late 1960s, the main exhibition venue in the United States was the suburban multiplex cinema.⁸ Having multiple screens in the same venue allowed for substantial savings in both labour and operating costs.⁹ In addition, multiple screens with smaller seating capacity allowed for much greater flexibility in exhibition. It enabled films with niche appeal to be shown to a small audience; or, if the film was a 'block-buster' it could be shown on multiple screens.

This flexibility was particularly important, given the increasingly selective and segmented audience for cinema in this period. As has already been discussed in the previous chapters, the

⁴ See, e.g., Puttnam, *Undeclared War*, pp. 255-6.

⁵ See D. Cook, *History of the American Cinema: Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the shadow of Watergate and Vietnam, 1970-1979*, pp. 11-12; Monaco, *History of the American Cinema*, p. 26.

⁶ See Monaco, *History of the American Cinema*, pp. 24-7; see also Balio, *United Artists*, *passim*.

⁷ Monaco, *History of the American Cinema*, pp. 46-7.

⁸ As noted in S. Kochberg, "Cinema as Institution", in J. Nelmes (ed.), *An Introduction to Film Studies*, 3rd edn., London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 17-18.

⁹ Monaco, *History of the American Cinema*, p. 49-51.

cinema no longer had an undifferentiated or ‘mass’ audience. It was now just one amongst a rapidly growing range of leisure activities available to an increasingly affluent and diverse population in the United States. Hollywood could thus no longer rely upon making products that would appeal to the audience as a whole —it had to market its products to distinct niche audiences. As Robert Evans, the production chief at Paramount, said in 1967: “Today people go to see a movie; they no longer go to the movies”.¹⁰

One of the developing niche markets for Hollywood in this period was the so-called ‘youth’ market —which, with the aging of the ‘baby boom’ generation, had replaced the ‘teen’ market of the 1950s.¹¹ If Hollywood products were to succeed with this market, then they needed to adapt to its particular tastes and interests. Neither the simplistic sensationalism of the earlier ‘teen’ films, nor the standard suburban genre products, were likely to capture this audience. This ‘youth’ audience was largely urban, and, with the massive expansion in higher education, comparatively well-educated. It had grown up in a period of unprecedented economic growth in the USA, and was experiencing the so-called ‘sexual revolution’ (brought about in part by the invention of the female contraceptive pill in 1960).¹² Accompanying these social changes was a growing sophistication and cosmopolitanism amongst many young Americans, reflected in the widespread and rapid evolution of youth culture. This period sees the rising popularity of such figures as the ‘Beat’ poets and those they influenced (Kerouac, Ginsberg, Kesey, the ‘gonzo’ journalists, and so forth), and major changes in popular music, from the earlier simplicity of ‘rock’n’roll’ to the increased complexity of the music of figures such as Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix. Towards the end of this period, ‘youth’ culture was also increasingly characterised by its interest in radical politics and experimentation with drugs — although the former will be dealt with at greater length in the following chapter. These developments all culminate in the formation of what deserves to be called a genuine ‘youth culture’, with a strong sense of its own cohesion, identity, and power.

Unsurprisingly, these broad changes in social attitudes, and the development of ‘youth culture’, also manifested in the field of film. As noted in the previous chapter, by 1964 the ‘art house’ movement was well-established in urban America, and the ‘youth’ market made up a substantial proportion of the audience for European ‘art’ films.¹³ This market segment was

¹⁰ Monaco, *History of the American Cinema*, p. 43.

¹¹ Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics*, p. 232.

¹² Monaco, *History of the American Cinema*, pp. 5-6.

¹³ Monaco, *History of the American Cinema*, p. 45.

thus accustomed to thinking of film as a medium not restricted to commercial entertainment, but as one which could also be an adult vehicle for the expression and exploration of ideas — aesthetic, political, and cultural. This was both reflected in, and reinforced by, the growth of the film festival movement in the US, and the beginnings of ‘film study’ in the universities. The results of this change are well put by Monaco, when he writes that:

By 1966, when the film critic Stanley Kauffmann published an article identifying what he called the “film generation,” motion pictures were emerging as a flashpoint in American society’s cultural and generational conflicts.¹⁴

In order to appeal to this ‘youth’ audience, by the end of this period Hollywood began to produce films that drew on elements of the European ‘art’ cinema. In 1965, Dennis Hopper had commented as follows on the situation then existing:

Five years ago there were fifty art theatres in the United States; now there are six thousand ...

“Hey how can we get into their market? We cannot compete on their level of film. Hey! I’ve got a great idea! Let’s make art films. That’s something they’ll never think of!”

And of course we haven’t.

Fifty theatres to six thousand in five years.

No American film for six thousand theatres.¹⁵

Hollywood had started to redress this situation by 1967, as American film-makers began to adopt various aspects of the New Wave cinema. These included changes to aesthetic style (in such matters as lighting, camera use, and so forth), and a more explicit focus on issues of concern to the ‘youth’ audience.¹⁶ As Balio remarks, by this date,

The domestic market had undergone a radical transformation. As *Time* magazine put it in 1967, “Hollywood has at long last become part of what the French film journal *Cahiers du Cinéma* calls, ‘the furious springtime of world cinema’, and is producing a new kind of movie”. The New American Cinema, as it was called, enjoyed “a heady new freedom from formula, convention and censorship. And they are all from Hollywood”.¹⁷

¹⁴ Monaco, *History of the American Cinema*, p. 44.

¹⁵ Quoted in Ray, *Certain Tendency*, p. 268.

¹⁶ Monaco, *History of the American Cinema*, p. 81.

¹⁷ Balio, *United Artists*, p. 232.

Before Hollywood could compete successfully for the ‘art film’ audience, it was necessary to modify the strict censorship regulations of the ‘Production Code’. One thing that distinguished European from Hollywood cinema in the late 1950s —and was no small part of its rise in popularity— was its capacity to show more explicit violence, and deal in a reasonably frank way with sexuality. In contrast, Hollywood productions were tightly restricted with regards to the sexual and violent content they could show, owing to the Production Code (the so-called ‘Hays Code’). This was a system of self-regulation, which had been established by the Hollywood majors in 1930, as a way of avoiding the threat of government-imposed censorship.¹⁸ By the mid-1960s, this system of self-regulation was under severe pressure, and film production companies were agitating for change. In response, in 1966 the MPAA replaced the strict regulations of the older code with a new, more flexible code, in which controversial scenes (such as those involving sex and violence) were “noted as subjects for restraint, but interpretation in all cases ... including nudity, is left to the discretion of the administrators”.¹⁹ Along with this relaxation in self-regulation, the MPAA also developed the modern ratings system (with its classification of films as ‘G’, ‘PG’, and so forth), which came into effect in November of 1968.²⁰

With the freer hand granted to them by this relaxation of censorship, by the end of this period Hollywood had succeeded in winning back sections of the ‘art film’ audience from European products. This can be seen with such films as *The Graduate* and *Bonnie and Clyde*. The former —appealing to a college-age audience, with its coming-of-age plot and its focus on the themes of alienation and sexual experimentation— broke attendance records in 90% of the movie theatres that screened it.²¹ *Bonnie and Clyde*, which grossed more than US\$40 million world-wide, also had themes of alienation, and drew strongly on the New Wave — with its ambiguous characters and relationships, and its aesthetic style. Indeed, the producer and star of this film, Warren Beatty, had asked both Godard and Truffaut to direct, although they refused.²² As a final example, 1968 saw the release of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. As film historian Ethan Mordden remarked, “Not everyone attended *2001* —but just about everyone

¹⁸ Monaco, *History of the American Cinema*, p. 56.

¹⁹ R. Karney (ed.), *Cinema Year by Year 1894-2002*, Dorling Kindersley: London, p. 559.

²⁰ For a detailed discussion of film censorship in the US, see R. S. Randall, “Censorship: From *The Miracle* to *Deep Throat*”, in Balio (ed.), *American Film Industry*, pp. 432-457; cf., D. Copp and S. Wendell (eds.), *Pornography and Censorship*, Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1983.

²¹ Monaco, *History of the American Cinema*, p. 184.

²² Karney (ed.), *Cinema Year by Year*, p. 569.

under thirty did, solemnizing the development of youthful audiences as the decisive element in a [Hollywood] film's success".²³ By 1968, the peak of popularity of foreign films in the United States had passed, as they now had to compete with domestic products which dealt with similar themes, and with a similar level of explicitness.²⁴

Having considered Hollywood's turn to the 'art film' as a source of marketable 'youth' product, it is now important to examine developments within the 'art film' movement itself. The major change that occurs in this period in European film circles is an increasing shift away from the more purely aesthetic ideals inspired by *auteur* theory, towards a highly politicised vision of the role of cinema. Although the main impact of this change was to be seen after 1968 (and will be dealt with in greater detail in the following chapter), it is worth briefly sketching its earlier development in this period.

The rejection of *auteur* theory in France was closely linked to other intellectual and political changes that were occurring at the time. *Auteur* theory, as noted in the previous chapter, was essentially the view that film could be an authentic art form only if it served as the vehicle for expressing the uniquely personal vision of its director (the '*auteur*' in question). This Romantic view of art was premised on the notion that the value and meaning of a work (such as a film) resided in the intentions of its creator. The notion that an individual's intentions could control or determine the meaning of a work of art came under attack from structuralist thought, which was coming to play a dominant role in French intellectual life. Structuralism emphasises the role played by underlying structures (embodied, for example, in language, culture, and society), and the corresponding lack of autonomy possessed by individuals within those structures.²⁵ Hence, from a structuralist perspective, *auteur* theory is guilty of falsely privileging the role of the individual artist and his or her intentions, and neglecting the way in which the meaning of a work of art depends upon the structures it is embedded in. The structuralists thus announced the 'death of the *auteur*', and focussed their analysis on the semiotic 'codes' that a work expressed. This intellectual development linked to a growing political radicalism in France, which, under the influence of such thinkers as Althusser and Lacan, began to see 'structures' as forms of oppression that needed to be challenged.

²³ Quoted in Monaco, *History of the American Cinema*, p. 195.

²⁴ Balio, *United Artists*, p. 233.

²⁵ For an overview of French intellectual history in this period, see, e.g., V. Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, ch. 3.

For these reasons, many avant-garde film-makers in France and elsewhere began to re-conceive of film as a tool of political liberation and ‘consciousness raising’. As Hillier remarks, the New Wave had begun “as a concern primarily with new *forms*” (i.e., with aesthetics), and now it “began to become, and increasingly explicitly, an intensely *political* concern”.²⁶ A barometer for this development is the changing editorial policies of *Cahiers du Cinéma* —a key journal of the ‘new cinema’. In a special ‘Brechtian’ issue of the journal in 1960, a call was issued for an engagement in:

An interrogation of the economic structures in which the so-called seventh art is suffocating, the refusal to play the capitalist game ... It would mean ... our critics, above all our young critics, deciding to come down from that planet of co-called ‘pure cinema’ and look at the world around them, helping to transform it a little.²⁷

This call for film (and, indeed, film criticism and theory) to become ‘engaged’ as part of revolutionary praxis intensified in the years to come. In 1963, the Chief Editor of *Cahiers*, Jacques Rivette, wrote in an editorial that “it seemed to us that as well as continuing to fulfil its original role as an organ of culture and information, it was necessary to become once again an instrument of struggle”.²⁸ At the end of 1965, *Cahiers du Cinéma* announced a new editorial policy: in which American cinema (as representing ‘imperialism’ and ‘global capitalism’) would no longer be promoted by the journal, and film criticism would henceforth be based mainly on the new principles of structuralism.²⁹

This growing politicisation and radicalism led many in the avant-garde film movement to identify with the nascent cinema industries of the developing world. Encouraging film production in such countries could be seen as another aspect of the post-colonial struggle against ‘US imperialism’. As *Cahiers du Cinéma* announced in 1966, such ‘new cinema’ “finds itself at the sharp point of a struggle which is not only artistic but which involves a society, a morality, a civilisation: [they are] cinemas of revolution”.³⁰ Similar sentiments were expressed by Godard in 1967. In the press book accompanying his film about Maoist undergraduates, *La Chinoise*, he wrote:

²⁶ Introduction to J. Hillier (ed.), *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1960s*, p. 9.

²⁷ Quoted in Hillier (ed.), *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1960s*, p. 9.

²⁸ Quoted in Hillier (ed.), *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1960s*, p. 13.

²⁹ Karney (ed.), *Cinema Year by Year*, p. 546.

³⁰ In Hillier (ed.), *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1960s*, p. 14.

Fifty years after the October revolution, the American industry rules cinema the world over. There is nothing much to add to this statement of fact. Except that on our own modest level we too should provoke two or three Vietnams in the bosom of the vast Hollywood-Cinecittà-Mosfilm-Pinewood-etc. empire, and, both economically and aesthetically, struggling on two fronts as it were, create cinemas which are national, free, brotherly, comradely and bonded in friendship.³¹

As a counter-point to Godard's ringing declaration of the revolutionary purity of the 'new cinema', it is perhaps worth noting that the following year he was to sell the rights to his own films (as did figures including Pasolini, Truffaut, Bergmann, and Visconti) to the very 'empire' he decried (in this case, Columbia Pictures).³²

Although these trends were evident throughout the period dealt with in this chapter, the growing politicisation of avant-garde film was really to culminate in 1968, and the years that followed. For this reason, the student revolts of 1968 and the disruption of the Cannes Film Festival will be dealt with in the following chapter.

Having examined some of the main developments in the international context (that is, Hollywood and the European 'new cinema'), it is now necessary to consider the Australian context. In a sense, there is little to be said about this. As noted in the previous chapter, the 1960s were one of the lowest points in the history of Australian feature film production. In the five years from 1965 to 1969, a total of only twelve feature films were made in Australia — but two of these were visiting productions, while another four were either television spin-offs, or intended for television.³³ The impoverished state of Australian film production is nicely captured in the following remark from the *Sun-Herald* in 1968, which referred to the industry as "a perennial damp squib that has been threatening to explode for nearly forty years".³⁴

Despite this situation, during this period the Australian government did little to redress matters. There was more focus on the state of the Australian television industry. In the early 1960s there had been an inquiry into this, by the 'Senate Select Committee on the Encouragement of Australian Production for Television'. The results of this inquiry — the so-called 'Vincent Report' — were published in 1964.³⁵ Amongst its recommendations, this

³¹ In Hillier (ed.), *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1960s*, p. 18.

³² Noted in SFF – Min., 29.10.1968, Box No. 2.

³³ Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*, p. 227.

³⁴ Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*, p. 220.

³⁵ Dermody and Jacka, *Screening of Australia*, vol. 1, p. 51.

report argued that Australian feature film production should be encouraged —not for its own sake, but in order to support the television industry. Along with various other possible incentives, the Vincent Report recommended that the Australian government begin offering direct funding for film production.³⁶ The Menzies government, however, did not act on any of these recommendations.³⁷ Only when Harold Holt became Prime Minister was any action taken. In 1967, he set up the Australian Council of the Arts, and in 1968 a film and television committee was added to this body, to develop policy recommendations.³⁸ This development will be dealt with further in the following chapter.

II. The SFF: Growth and Professionalisation

As discussed in the previous chapter, by 1964 Melbourne had established itself as a major and professionally-run international film festival, whilst Sydney still retained much more of its original character as an amateur and university-based organisation. In the period discussed in this chapter, however, Sydney was to undergo some dramatic changes, so that by 1968 it had become a far more professional and prestigious event —rivalling, and in some ways, outstripping, the previously dominant Melbourne Film Festival. This section deals with this process of change, and focuses particularly on its catalyst —David Stratton, who became the Sydney Director in 1966.

The Appearance of Stratton

Born in Newbury, England, on 10 September 1939, David Stratton became interested in cinema at an early age, and was a “voracious film-goer” by his teenage years.³⁹ It was originally intended by his parents that he enter the family grocery business. He thus left school at 16, attending Bradfield College in Oxford to learn business management and salesmanship. After college, Stratton worked in Birmingham and London, and spent his spare

³⁶ Dermody and Jacka, *Screening of Australia*, vol. 1, p. 51.

³⁷ Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*, p. 213.

³⁸ Dermody and Jacka, *Screening of Australia*, vol. 1, p. 53.

³⁹ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Stratton, self-conducted interview.

time “catching up with old films”.⁴⁰ At the age of 17, he attended his first film society screening, where he saw Kurosawa’s *Seven Samurai*.

This experience inspired Stratton to establish a film society in his home town of Newbury. The first Newbury & District Film Society screening was held a week after his 19th birthday in 1958. Although Newbury’s small population made this society difficult to sustain, Stratton ran it successfully for the next four years. As a result, he was also invited to become a member of England’s Western Regional Committee of the Federation of Film Societies.⁴¹

In 1962, Stratton came to Australia under the government’s ‘£10’ immigration scheme. Originally, he intended to stay for only two years, and had no thoughts of becoming involved in Australian film societies. Indeed, as he himself noted, Stratton was surprised to discover that Australia had cities, let alone film societies.⁴² This was because his ideas about Australia were largely based upon Australian feature films (such as *The Overlanders* and *Smiley*) that focussed on outback life.

In 1964, Stratton was asked to join the Sydney organising committee. This invitation came from Committee member Ian McPherson, who had been struck by Stratton’s knowledge of film at a WEA Film Study Group. Stratton accepted the offer, and was elected as a member of the Film Selection Sub-Committee in March 1964.⁴³

Stratton brought a new perspective to the Sydney organising committee, for two reasons. Firstly, he possessed an up-to-date and encyclopaedic knowledge of both commercial and non-commercial cinema. This made him the authority in the Sydney organising committee on current trends in world cinema. Secondly, Stratton came to Sydney as an outsider, who lacked any prior links and loyalties to other committee members and associates. As will be shown, these two factors helped to give Stratton the freedom to carry out a series of wide-ranging changes to the organisation.

Stratton’s initial perception of the Sydney Film Festival was that it was “amateurish”.⁴⁴ He considered the University to be a crude and unreliable venue, the methods for film procurement outdated and unprofessional, and the Festival’s programme an embarrassment.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997.

⁴¹ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Stratton, self-conducted interview.

⁴² SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Stratton, self-conducted interview.

⁴³ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Stratton, self-conducted interview.

⁴⁴ David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997.

In particular, Stratton felt that the quality of the Australian programme was poor. After the 1964 Festival, Stratton lodged a formal complaint with Sydney Film Festival President Frank Bellingham concerning the opening night documentary. This was called *Music in the Making*, and was produced by the Commonwealth Film Unit (CFU), and directed by Maslyn Williams and Malcolm Otton (himself a member of the Sydney organising committee). Stratton was so “appalled” by this film that he requested that his name be dissociated from its selection.⁴⁶ He was informed that committee member Stanley Hawes was also the Producer-in-Chief of the CFU, and as such the Festival felt “obliged” to screen CFU films.⁴⁷ As Stratton recalls,

I thought the films made by the CFU were stinkers —especially seeing as it had been set up originally by Grierson, similar to the National Film Board of Canada (NFBC). And in the 60s the NFBC was making extraordinary films [while] the stuff they were making up at Lindfield was just terrible. And I thought probably Stanley had just capitulated to the governments, and just was turning out bland stuff. So he was sitting on the board of the Festival, and the implication was you’ve got to show the best of the Commonwealth Film Unit films.⁴⁸

In a sign that Stratton’s complaint about the CFU production had struck a chord with some members of the committee, and perhaps also feeling that the Festival could use someone of his energy, Stratton was elected to the committee at the 1964 AGM.⁴⁹

In 1965, Stratton raised the more contentious issue of censorship with the Sydney committee. At the 1965 Festival, he noticed that the Japanese film *Woman of the Dunes* (1964) had been censored. English film societies were exempt from censorship, and Stratton was outraged that a similar policy did not exist in Australia.⁵⁰ At the next committee meeting, Stratton presented a vehement case against film censorship, and recommended that the Festival fight for special exemption.⁵¹ According to Stratton, his pleas “fell on fertile ground”, and his recommendations were carried by a majority of the committee.⁵² Censorship exemption was pursued in two ways. First, the committee established a Censorship Sub-

⁴⁵ David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997.

⁴⁶ SFF – Min., 7.7.1964, Box No. 1.

⁴⁷ David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997.

⁴⁸ David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997.

⁴⁹ SFF – Min., 8.12.1964, Box No. 1.

⁵⁰ David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997.

⁵¹ David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997.

⁵² David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997.

Committee. Second, and more importantly, they voted to make the issue public, beginning with a letter to *The Bulletin* stating the Festival's aims and concerns.⁵³

Although Stratton had the support of the committee majority on censorship, a number of Festival members opposed his position. This included Director Ian Klava, who felt that public pursuit of censorship exemption could "rock the boat"⁵⁴ with customs, and create unnecessary administrative difficulties. Perhaps more fundamentally, Klava and this opposing group of committee members did not share Stratton's moral position, and believed that censorship of films was justified.⁵⁵ This was in line with general public opinion at the time, which held that censorship served a valid preventative function.⁵⁶ The issue of film censorship would become something of a crusade for Stratton; this development will be dealt with in a later section of this chapter.

The conflict over censorship probably contributed to Klava's decision to resign as Director. At the 1965 AGM, he submitted his resignation. This was not expected by the committee, and, according to Stratton, was met with "absolute stunned silence".⁵⁷ Klava had been the Festival's first long-term director, and was considered a valuable administrator. His official reason for resignation was "poor working conditions", although there is evidence to suggest the censorship issue also played a role in this decision.⁵⁸ In a later interview, Klava remarks that:

I may have been (shaken by the stance that David took). Maybe that's something that I've conveniently obliterated from my consciousness. It's just something I've chosen, consciously or otherwise, not to be concerned about. You may think of your own reasons for that.⁵⁹

Stratton had also intended to resign from the committee at the AGM, as he was to return to England the following week. However, Klava's resignation led him to apply for the position of Director instead.⁶⁰ He was nominated by both the President and Vice-President

⁵³ SFF – Min., 3.8.1965, Box No. 2.

⁵⁴ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ian Klava, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 26.10.1992.

⁵⁵ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ian Klava, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 26.10.1992.

⁵⁶ Bertrand, *Film Censorship*, p. 159.

⁵⁷ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Stratton, self-conducted interview.

⁵⁸ David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997.

⁵⁹ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ian Klava, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 26.10.1992.

⁶⁰ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Stratton, self-conducted interview; SFF – Min., 7.12.1965, Box No. 2.

and duly elected. Klava agreed to offer administrative assistance to Stratton in directing the 1966 Sydney Film Festival.

1966-68: The Professionalisation of the SFF

Over the next three years, Stratton worked to transform both the nature of the Sydney Film Festival and the role of the Director. He was the catalyst for Sydney's shift towards becoming a larger and more professionally administered event. This involved changes in methods of film procurement, a change of venue, and, perhaps most importantly, changes to the Directorial role. This path to professionalisation for the Sydney Film Festival, however, was not entirely smooth. These changes were met with hostility by some members of its committee, who charged the Festival with 'selling out' and becoming too commercial.

One of the first major changes that Stratton instituted was to initiate regular overseas trips for the purposes of film procurement (as Rado had been doing at Melbourne since 1958). As noted above, since his first encounter with the Sydney Film Festival, Stratton had been highly critical of the weakness of its programme. This weakness was, in turn, largely due to problems in the methods of procurement. Stratton recalls the process:

I mean they were selecting films by reading *Sight and Sound*. I mean that's what that silly Film Selection Committee would do. They'd sit around with copies of *Sight and Sound* and we'd say 'That sounds good'.

Stratton thus thought it was essential that Sydney develop a more professional method of film procurement.⁶¹ Hence, two months after accepting the position of Director, he requested a loan from the Festival funds in order to attend other film festivals while en-route to England after the 1966 Festival.⁶² Stratton's journey lasted for five months and included 16 countries. He met with 32 film directors—including Truffaut, Ray, Godard and Zetzeling—as well as independent film producers, film critics, film society members, archival curators, censorship authorities and film school staff. He also attended three film festivals.⁶³ In addition, during this tour Stratton secured Sydney's first 'auteur' delegates, namely, Hollywood director Josef von Sternberg and Sweden's Jorn Donner.

⁶¹ David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997.

⁶² SFF – Min., 4.4.1966, Box No. 2.

⁶³ SFF – Min., 3.1.1967, Box No. 2.

Stratton's tour achieved three main objectives for Sydney. First, it established a precedent that would become standard practice for the Sydney Director from 1966 onwards. Second, it increased the autonomy of the Sydney Festival. For, with Stratton now able to select potential films direct from overseas, Sydney was no longer reliant on Melbourne and overseas film reviews for its programme. Third, these overseas trips —combined with Stratton's capacity for networking and diplomacy— successfully raised the stature and profile of the Sydney Festival.

As part of building better relationships with the major distributors and producers on this tour, Stratton was persuaded of the need to adhere more closely to the FIAPF regulations. In particular, Stratton argued on his return that Sydney needed to follow the 'one screening per film' policy. This proposal was met with some resistance by the committee —probably because the Sydney Festival was held at numerous small venues around the University, and such a policy would seriously restrict the audience numbers for each film. Despite this, a majority of the committee was eventually persuaded by Stratton's arguments, and the 'one screening' rule was adopted as official policy for the 1967 Festival.⁶⁴

This tour had, in general, given Stratton a clear idea of what was required if the Festival was to obtain the major European releases: it had to prove its worth to the commercial industry by functioning as a useful aid to marketing and distribution. This perspective, and the need to modify the Festival to meet industry needs, is clearly stated in Stratton's Annual report, where he notes that:

There is no longer a guarantee we shall get the best films from any country unless we can improve our record of commercial sales. We must certainly concentrate on this aspect of the Festival, and try to overcome the hostility that a distributor like Blake obviously feels towards us.⁶⁵

In other words, to obtain the 'best films', Sydney needed to ensure that the Festival was an effective way of screening new films not just to film enthusiasts but also to a *trade* audience. This, in turn, would lead to 'commercial sales' —that is, would encourage Australian distributors to purchase such releases.

As part of this professionalisation, Stratton and other committee members argued that the Sydney Festival needed to find a more appropriate venue. The quality of the theatres and

⁶⁴ SFF – Min., 14.2.1967, Box No. 2.

⁶⁵ SFF – Min., 3.1.1967, Box No. 2.

screening facilities at the University, as well as the accompanying administrative difficulties, had continued to be problematic. In addition, Stratton felt that the Festival should now sever its links with the University. The alliance, he thought, was no longer beneficial. First, it tended to create the impression that the Festival was primarily aimed at students of the University of Sydney. Second, the alliance was not based on any real connections between the Festival and the University, and prevented the former from operating as a genuinely autonomous organisation.⁶⁶

For these reasons, the committee agreed to shift the 1967 Festival's main screenings to different venues. The choice of new venues was driven by two concerns. To begin with, in order to end the technical problems, it was decided to use purpose-built commercial venues for the larger screenings. Furthermore, these venues should be close to what was considered to be the major *potential* audiences for the Festival —the eastern suburbs and the north shore. These two areas had the most affluent and highly educated populations in Sydney, and were therefore considered to be the best target audience for the Festival. It was therefore resolved that the major screenings of the 1967 Festival would be held concurrently at the Orpheum at Cremorne and the Wintergarden at Rose Bay, with minor screenings at the University of Sydney and the Elizabethan Theatre in Newtown.⁶⁷

Despite these changes to structure and venue, the 1967 Festival was not entirely successful. The new and larger venues allowed the committee to increase the number of tickets substantially —and all 3,000 available were quickly sold out.⁶⁸ However, the Festival's adherence to the 'one screening per film' policy, combined with the multiple (and widely-scattered) screening locations, meant that for the first time it was impossible for anyone to see the programme in its entirety. Partly for this reason, and partly because of the perceived mediocrity of its programme, the 1967 Festival was panned by many critics (the ABC's John Hinde, for example, referred to the multiple venues as a "schizophrenic division").⁶⁹

As this was the first festival under Stratton's new program of professionalisation, he was distraught about the vehemence of the press reaction, and wrote to Rado as follows:

⁶⁶ David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997.

⁶⁷ David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997.

⁶⁸ SFF – Min., 14.2.1967, Box No. 2.

⁶⁹ MFF – Arch., "Radio and Television Coverage – 1968 – 15th Sydney Film Festival", Box No. 44.

Am feeling very frazzled and despondent today. Most of the critics (the dailies anyhow) severely criticised the Festival, finding fault with just about everything. ... I can expect some blasts from the Stanley Hawes types on the committee (probably from Merry too) and am not looking forward to the post mortem.⁷⁰

As this last remark indicates, Stratton's attempt to shift the Sydney Festival in a new direction had generated tension within the committee. Frank Bellingham had retired as President at the beginning of 1967.⁷¹ The new President was Dugmore Merry, who was less sympathetic to Stratton's initiatives. In addition, there was a minority on the committee who disapproved of the direction in which Stratton was taking the Sydney Festival. Stratton wrote to Rado in March of 1967 about this issue:

Somehow a certain amount of hostility and unease has started to creep into Director-committee relations —perhaps because Dug Merry is awfully hard to get on with, maybe because I am becoming less tolerant of some of our wet people. Anyway, the atmosphere is at times tense.⁷²

In the face of both this hostility and the poor reception of the 1967 Festival, Stratton maintained his position. In his 1967 Director's Report, he defends the professionalisation of the Festival —arguing that it is the only possible course of action if it wishes to maintain FIAPF endorsement (and hence access to the best film releases):

When the festival was first conceived, it was run along the principle that it was first and foremost a cultural event ... nobody perhaps fully realised it at this stage, but the emphasis of the Festival was going to have to shift if this recognition was to be kept; for FIAPF (like the average film producer) is a commercial organisation before it is a cultural one.⁷³

In this passage, Stratton demonstrates his clear awareness of the industrial realities of the Festival's position. As has been argued in the previous chapter of this thesis, as the two Film Festivals strove to become more significant organisations, it was increasingly hard for them to be run as purely 'cultural events'. As Stratton remarks, the commercial realities meant that the Festivals now had to choose between increasing professionalisation (and 'commercialisation') or marginalisation.

⁷⁰ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 29.6.1967, Box No. 40.

⁷¹ SFF – Min., 3.1.1967, Box No. 2.

⁷² MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 20.3.1967, Box No. 40.

⁷³ SFF – Arch., "Report of the Director", 1.8.1967, Box No. 2.

Stratton's commitment to the path of professionalisation is also evident from a front page article he wrote for *Film Weekly* after the 1967 Festival. Entitled, "Festival's Success Was Aided by MPI [Motion Picture Industry]", Stratton stated in this article that trade support for the 1967 Sydney Film Festival was "wonderful":

We had tremendous co-operation from all branches of the trade. Of the major companies, practically everyone had something in the festival. ... It had never been so good, and I think every pocket of resistance, if I can call it that, has been whittled away.⁷⁴

Stratton also worked at establishing better relations with figures such as Syd Blake and Robert Kapferer. Here he perhaps had the advantage over Melbourne of being a new figure, without Rado's history of enmity. By the end of this period, Stratton had established cordial working relations with these independent distributors —unlike Rado, who had not repaired the earlier damage caused to their relations. As Stratton wrote to Rado in late 1967,

[Blake] is as implacable as ever in his dislike of and mistrust of Mr Erwin Rado! All those subscribers in Melbourne, and that huge salary he gets and all the commission he makes from entering into the commercial side of the business ...⁷⁵

Rado replied that

I was amazed to read that Blake dares to make libellous statements about me to you —I could take him to court about that bit on commission, you know. Not that I would want to —no one can teach him a lesson on manners.⁷⁶

Stratton pursued the 'whittling away of resistance' not only externally —within the trade— but also internally. At the AGM held in November of 1967, the organising committee underwent, in Stratton's own words, a "bloodless *coup d'etat*".⁷⁷ Dugmore Merry retired as President and was replaced by Ian McPherson, with John Burke in the position of Vice-President.⁷⁸ The background to this 'coup' is recalled by Sydney University Film Group member Ross Tzannes. In 1967, he met with Ian McPherson, who told him that "important events are at play". McPherson asked Tzannes to attend the AGM, and promised him a seat on the new organising committee. As Tzannes continues,

⁷⁴ *Film Weekly*, 22.6.1967, p. 1.

⁷⁵ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 12.9.1967, Box No. 40.

⁷⁶ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 21.9.1967, Box No. 40.

⁷⁷ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 9.10.1967, Box No. 40.

It seems that the inner sanctum had organised some sort of coup whereby Ian was going to be the new President with a brand new committee that was going to take over and run the Festival from that year onwards. And sure enough, we all got elected.⁷⁹

At that AGM, the freshly elected committee put forward a program that would further cement Stratton's earlier initiatives. In order to address the problems of the 1967 Festival, and still comply with FIAPF regulations, it was proposed that the Festival would move to a single venue —the Wintergarden. In order to increase the Festival's cash flow (to pay for the growing costs incurred by venue rental and film procurement), the committee also proposed to raise the cost of tickets "substantially", to \$13.00 per subscription. As Stratton pointed out to Rado, this increase made Sydney "the most expensive" film festival in Australia —to which Rado replied, "My mouth waters when I calculate ... your top income ... it's immoral I tell you!"⁸⁰ The new majority on the committee also requested patience from their opponents —the Minutes record that "Members were asked whatever their feelings, to give the new format a trial".⁸¹

Despite this plea, there was simmering resentment from members of the Festival who were opposed to its increasing professionalisation. Stratton later told Rado that he was subjected to a "rather nasty personal attack" at the 1967 AGM, targeting in particular the move away from the University, and the supposed 'commercialisation' of the Festival.⁸²

Some other committee members later recalled this period as one in which the supposed earlier 'cultural purity' of the Sydney Festival was lost. For example, in a 1992 interview Pat McDonald recalls:

When David first came he wanted to make it a commercial showcase, and as I say I disagreed with him very strongly at a particular meeting and I think that mood pervaded the festival for a number of years.⁸³

This mood is expressed in remarks made by another committee member of the period, Anton Crouch, who remarks that, in his view, these changes were:

⁷⁸ SFF – Min., 28.11.1967, Box No. 2.

⁷⁹ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ross Tzannes, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 7.9.1992.

⁸⁰ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 24.11.1967, Box No. 40.

⁸¹ SFF – Min., 28.11.1967, Box No. 2.

⁸² MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 30.11.1967, Box No. 40.

⁸³ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Pat McDonald, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 23.10.1992.

the beginning of what I would call the years of professionalism of the Festival. I think going along with that professionalism there was also an element of what I could call bureaucratisation of the Festival. The battle, if that's the right word, for the aesthetics of film to be paramount with regard to the Festival's activities was lost in those years. The Festival didn't think they weren't, but they saw it as clearly subordinate to the proper functioning of the Festival as a commercial entity. We felt that movies were being chosen for screening more with a view to what the audience wanted, rather than what we thought was representative.⁸⁴

Crouch's remarks express a sentimentality about the Festival's loss of its earlier small-scale and amateur nature —with his complaints about the 'bureaucratisation' that was necessarily entailed by the growth in its professionalism. This passage also expresses a perception that the changes to the Festival involved a subordination of "the aesthetics of film" to commercialism. And as the final sentence makes clear, the concept of 'aesthetics' at work here is closely tied to one of the Film Festivals' original goals —to show films not because they were popular, but because they were 'representative' of the wide variety of non-Hollywood films. Crouch thus sees the advent of Stratton's Directorship as the time for the Sydney Film Festival when culture lost the 'battle' to industry.

The increasing professionalisation of Sydney was reflected in the success of the 1968 Festival. The problems of the previous year's Festival were solved by the move to a single venue; all tickets were sold out; and the Festival had its first high-prestige guest of honour, Satyajit Ray.⁸⁵ Stratton considered it to be "a smashing success",⁸⁶ and much of the press reaction was favourable. For example, Paul Frolich from the *Brolga Review* commented that the 1968 Festival was a "considerable improvement on its recent predecessors", and noted that "the Festival's style and organisation were much changed, and, I think, changed for the better".⁸⁷ ABC film critic John Hinde similarly remarked that "This year's Film Festival ... is going to be much more memorable than last year's rather dreary Festival".⁸⁸

The press also noted that the Festival screenings were more closely linked to commercial releases than had previously been the case. John Hinde pointed out that for the first time, a

⁸⁴ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Anton Crouch, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 4.9.1992.

⁸⁵ SFF – Min., 6.8.1968, Box No. 2.

⁸⁶ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 18.6.1968, Box No. 43.

⁸⁷ MFF – Arch., *Brolga Review*, 6.6.1968, in 'Radio and Television Coverage – 1968 – 15th Sydney Film Festival', Box No. 44.

⁸⁸ MFF – Arch., ABC Film Review, 9.6.1968, cited in 'Radio and Television Coverage – 1968 – 15th Sydney Film Festival', Box No. 44.

film screened at the Sydney Festival was released only three days after the Festival finished, thus breaking with what seemed to be “almost a law of nature that the general film going public can expect to wait months or years before they get a chance to see even the most commercial of Festival offerings”.⁸⁹

Another change in the Festival noted by the press was the difference in clientele that accompanied its new venue. Frolich remarked that, while the University-based festival had attracted mainly students and film enthusiasts, many in the audience at the Wintergarden were “well-to-do patrons concerned with foreign-language cinemas”.⁹⁰ However, it should not be thought that the ‘bohemian’ associations of the Festival had disappeared, as the following recollection of the 1968 Festival makes clear.

On the Saturday there were about half-a-dozen eastern suburbs matrons in twin-set, pearls and fur-coat —that sort of thing. And I remember David [Stratton], to my dying day —come the Sunday, David turns up with no shave, probably no wash, the dirtiest pair of cowboy boots you’ve ever seen, jeans that were practically falling off, and this horribly dirty sweater, and insisted on having his photo taken with them all. They never came back after that —that was the end of the eastern suburb matron attending the festival.⁹¹

Despite the success of the 1968 Sydney Film Festival, tensions within the organisation soon came to a head. Shortly after the Festival, on 17 June 1968, the committee held its first ‘Open Meeting’.⁹² This was a stormy affair, in which opponents of Stratton’s initiatives voiced their anger and concern over the direction in which the Festival was heading. President Ian McPherson, a supporter of Stratton, announced at a committee meeting the following day, that he was troubled about what had occurred at this Open Meeting. In particular, McPherson remarked that he was

disturbed that some members think

1. That the requirements of producers were being placed before film quality and cinema art (FIAPF was still a bogey);
2. That the move from the University was ill-chosen;

⁸⁹ MFF – Arch., ABC Film Review, 9.6.1968, cited in ‘Radio and Television Coverage – 1968 – 15th Sydney Film Festival’, Box No. 44.

⁹⁰ MFF – Arch., *Brolga Review*, 6.6.1968, in ‘Radio and Television Coverage – 1968 – 15th Sydney Film Festival’, Box No. 44.

⁹¹ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Bob Thorsby, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 23.10.1992.

⁹² MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 18.6.1968, Box No. 43.

3. That at the Open Meeting the Director, rather than sub-committee members, had been forced to defend and explain committee policy, and the Director hence became (undeservedly) even more of a monster figure to some members;
4. That such vehemence had been used by some members in expressing their views.⁹³

The first point noted by McPherson deserves further discussion. Opponents of Stratton were aware that the increasing commercialisation of the Festival was primarily driven and justified by the need to obtain FIAPF recognition. To counter this, they argued at the Open Meeting that FIAPF recognition was unnecessary —and pointed to examples such as the Edinburgh Film Festival, which were successful despite lacking such recognition. In a letter to Rado, Stratton remarks on his frustration in the face of such arguments: “It seems impossible to convince the Festival members that Hawes and Pattison are wrong —impossible to convince them that without FIAPF we wouldn’t have got films like *Le Depart*, *Young Törless*, *Rebellion*”.⁹⁴

The opponents of Stratton were concerned (as noted in McPherson’s first point, above) that this subordination of the Sydney Festival to FIAPF demands was closely linked to a change in the function of the Festival. This change was a move from being simply a cultural event dedicated to serving an audience of film enthusiasts, to becoming an industrial mechanism which increasingly served the needs of distributors. Thus their charge that, under Stratton, Sydney was becoming a “Cannes type film market”, where films were chosen on the basis of their potential commercial appeal, rather than purely on the basis of their ‘aesthetic’ qualities.⁹⁵ In the minds of the anti-Stratton group, it was impossible for the Festival to serve two masters —because “you can’t mix art with commerce”.⁹⁶ Stratton, on the other hand, thought that the industrial realities meant that the Festival had to serve industrial needs if it was to obtain the very best films.⁹⁷

The second point worthy of further discussion is McPherson’s remark that Stratton was increasingly being perceived by some members of the committee as a “monster figure”. The recent and dramatic changes in the nature of the Sydney Festival were closely associated with

⁹³ SFF – Min., 18.6.1968, Box No. 2.

⁹⁴ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 18.6.1968, Box No. 43.

⁹⁵ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Anton Crouch, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 4.9.1992.

⁹⁶ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 18.6.1968, Box No. 43.

⁹⁷ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 18.6.1968, Box No. 43.

Stratton's rise to the Directorship, so it is unsurprising that he came to be identified with these changes. This, in some ways, is a tribute to his energy and drive, but of course Stratton could not have accomplished these changes without majority committee support. And in any case, as this thesis has argued, these industrial pressures and their conflict with cultural demands, were intrinsic to the business of being an international film festival. The changes made in this period were as much a product of the Sydney Festival's industrial context as they were of Stratton's leadership.

The close identification made between Stratton as an individual and the policies followed by the Festival in this period, also stemmed from his attempts to change the balance of power between the organising committee and the Director. As has already been discussed, the Sydney Festival, much more than Melbourne, was run along committee lines —with the Director playing the role of a head administrator. Stratton, however, had a different vision of his role: he wanted creative control over Festival programming, and did not want to be bogged down in the mundane work of day-to-day administrative minutiae.

Stratton's pursuit of control over film choice necessarily meant that the Film Selection Sub-committee became redundant. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the head of this sub-committee, John Baxter, filed a letter of complaint (after the Open Meeting) which stated that:

Quite early in the year it became obvious that the Film Sub-Committee had become, in effect, a rubber stamp endorsing the decisions either of the Director or of some overseas authority. The Festival, with the help of the Director, largely programmes itself.⁹⁸

In other words, the sub-committee was no longer necessary, because the Festival's programme was being dictated by Stratton and commercial organisations such as FIAPF. Baxter went on to argue that, given this state of affairs, the sub-committee should be dissolved. Revealingly, his letter also notes that the sub-committee was, in any case, finding it increasingly hard to function owing to "vast differences in attitude" amongst its members.⁹⁹ The letter does not specify precisely what these differences were, but it is likely that the divisions between the older and newer visions of the Festival were finding expression within the sub-committee's debates over programming. Baxter thus recommended that, with regard to matters of film selection, "a single context be chosen and a single authority adhered to".

⁹⁸ SFF – Min., 18.6.1968, Box No. 2.

⁹⁹ SFF – Min., 18.6.1968, Box No. 2.

This proposal proved highly contentious. After the submission of Baxter's letter, Stratton moved to have the Film Selection Sub-committee dissolved, giving the Director final control over artistic direction.¹⁰⁰ Debate on this proposal was postponed. Eight days later, on 26 June 1968, the committee received a petition from Festival members, arguing against Stratton's resolution. This petition, which was clearly organised by the opposing group within the committee, argued that film selection by a sub-committee was preferable. This was because such a committee would better represent the broad tastes of subscribers, and would avoid the danger of the Director accepting films for public relations purposes.¹⁰¹ Finally, at the committee meeting on 6 August 1968, a nominal compromise was reached between the two camps, with two Film Selection sub-committees (overseas and Australian) formed, with which the Director would 'consult'.¹⁰² The reality of the situation, as Ross Tzannes recalls, was rather different:

the director was absolutely responsible for the creative content of the festival ... If [the films] were invited by David, they became basically rubber-stamp situations. If they weren't invited [the sub-committees] viewed thousands of hours of films, it seems, and they'd select a modicum and David would accept it or not accept it.¹⁰³

In other words, Stratton had won. He was free to choose the main programme, and the role of the sub-committees was restricted to short-listing the minor programmes.

At this August committee meeting, Stratton also systematically addressed the complaints made about the changes to the Sydney Film Festival in a 10 page "Appendix to the Director's Report".¹⁰⁴ In this Appendix, Stratton's key argument is that the changes he has brought about are legitimate because they do not represent a break with the traditional aims and values of the Festival, but are rather a continuation and development of them. Drawing on the Sydney Festival's historical records, Stratton pointed out that previous committees had regularly argued for the importance of greater distribution sales, positive relationships with the film trade, and FIAPF endorsement. In this sense, his directorship was not a 'radical change', but consistent with these old policies and thus with the core traditions and values of the Festival. Stratton then argued that many of the complaints were really driven by a romantic and

¹⁰⁰ SFF – Min., 18.6.1968, Box No. 2.

¹⁰¹ SFF – Min., 26.6.1968, Box No. 2.

¹⁰² SFF – Min., 6.8.1968, Box No. 2.

¹⁰³ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ross Tzannes, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 7.9.1992.

¹⁰⁴ SFF – Min., 6.8.1968, Box No. 2.

sentimental attachment to earlier aspects of the Festival —such as its amateur, informal, and haphazard nature— that were not in fact part of these core traditions and values. He points out that this period had now “passed by” —and had to ‘pass by’ if the Sydney Festival were to continue to develop.

III. Alliance against Upstarts

As discussed in the previous chapter, the period from 1959 to 1964 had been marked by the Festivals’ attempts to negotiate a position for themselves in relation to the trade. Although such problems continued, the period dealt with in this chapter sees a new sort of institutional pressure —competition from other Australian international film festivals. As the following will show, the development of these film festivals created two interconnected problems for Sydney and Melbourne. Firstly, the new festivals were competing for limited product. Secondly, by increasing the total festival audience in Australia, the growth in the number of festivals was found threatening by the trade. These two issues thus provided good *industrial* reasons for Sydney and Melbourne to perceive the new festivals as a threat. However, weighing against this was the *cultural* imperative that Sydney and Melbourne were ostensibly committed to: to encourage the growth of ‘film as art’. This section examines the negotiation between these two imperatives, and shows how, in the end, the industrial imperatives win this conflict. Under pressure from FIAPF, and deeply concerned about the continuing viability and stature of their own festivals, Melbourne and Sydney act together against the new festivals.

Over this period, new international film festivals appear in every state and territory in Australia. These include those festivals that had been part of the Australian Film Festival, Adelaide and Canberra. Other festivals appeared in Alice Springs, Brisbane, Perth, and Tasmania. In addition, this period also sees the appearance of international film festivals in New Zealand. This proliferation of festivals posed a number of problems for Sydney and Melbourne. First, as noted above, an increase in the number of festivals meant greater competition for the limited supply of quality film releases. This increased competition in turn threatened to reduce the quality of Sydney’s and Melbourne’s programmes. Second, by increasing total festival audience numbers, it could threaten the two established Film Festivals’ chances of continuing to receive FIAPF endorsement. Third, for the same reason, it threatened to reignite conflict with the domestic trade. Fourth, the expansion in the festival audience also threatened to undermine the ‘special’ treatment that Customs accorded to

festival films —as this had been granted on the condition that such films were shown to a very limited and special audience.

The oldest of these new festivals was the Adelaide International Film Festival, which had continued to run since its advent as part of the Australian Film Festival in 1959. For its first few years, Adelaide had been supported by Melbourne, which had assisted the former in matters of film procurement. However, with increasing pressure from FIAPF and the trade, this issue of film procurement became more and more problematic. At the beginning of 1964, Rado informed Eric Williams, Adelaide's Director, that the two festivals needed to "emphasise [their] separate identities", because "They are awfully touchy overseas about us three Festivals using rather identical films, no amount of talk or geography will change their attitude".¹⁰⁵ Williams knew that Rado's action would seriously damage the quality of the programme that Adelaide could screen. He wrote to Rado, suggesting a number of possible compromises, and ending with the obsequious remark that "Our feeling, as you know, is that our inception owes everything to your action, and we are anxious not to prejudice Melbourne festival in any avoidable way".¹⁰⁶ Rado, however, refused to back down on his decision.

For this reason, for their 1965 programme, the Adelaide organising committee decided to bypass Melbourne. At the 1965 Festival, a number of films sourced from countries represented by FIAPF (but not governed by FIAPF restrictions) were screened. Because the Adelaide Festival began earlier than its east coast counterparts, these screenings were the Australian premieres of the films in question, and were advertised as such. This action directly undermined the stature of the Sydney and Melbourne Festivals, which based part of their prestige on their role as premiere festivals. Unsurprisingly, Sydney Festival Director Ian Klava was angered by Adelaide's action; the Sydney minutes record that he was now "losing patience with the Adelaide festival", which was, in his words, just a "parasite" of Sydney and Melbourne.¹⁰⁷ In order to deal with this problem, the Sydney committee instructed Adelaide to alter the dates of future festivals, so that they would come after rather than before the Sydney and Melbourne Festivals. If Adelaide refused to do this, Sydney threatened to refuse

¹⁰⁵ MFF – Corr., Rado to Williams 3.2.1964, and Williams to Rado, 5.2.1964, Box No. 28.

¹⁰⁶ MFF – Corr., Williams to Rado, 5.2.1964, Box No. 28.

¹⁰⁷ SFF – Min., 6.7.1965, Box No. 2.

to share films in future, and would also attempt to use its influence in the trade to restrict Adelaide's programming choices.¹⁰⁸

Klava's concerns about competition from other Australian film festivals were further exacerbated by the appearance of an international film festival in Brisbane. A Mr Stathe Black, from the film society 'Brisbane Cinema Group', had written to Klava in May of 1965 requesting information about establishing and running such a festival. Klava did not provide the requested information. The minutes record that this was because he was concerned that the proposed Brisbane Festival would create problems for Sydney over film procurement and scheduling —and, in addition, might set a precedent that would encourage the proliferation of other local film festivals.¹⁰⁹ Klava summed up his decision with the statement that: "I would prefer not to make things easier for a potential rival, although one could say that the wider distribution of Festival films should be encouraged".¹¹⁰ This statement neatly encapsulates the pull of both the industrial (with its talk of 'potential rivals') and the cultural (with its talk of 'encouraging' the distribution of festival-type film), and expresses the tension between them.

The vacillation over what policy to take towards Brisbane continued. Having refused to give Brisbane any initial assistance, Klava then consulted Rado regarding this issue. Rado shared Klava's opposition to new festivals, and, after discussion, the Melbourne organising committee resolved on a blanket policy of not supporting the establishment of any new international film festivals in Australia. As part of this policy, it was decided that Entry Forms for films participating in the Melbourne Film Festival would contain a clause stating that screening at any other event outside Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide would only be allowed with written permission from the Melbourne organising committee.¹¹¹

Klava, however, was not able to persuade his own organisation —and the Sydney organising committee over-ruled him in favour of giving full cooperation to Brisbane.¹¹² The Sydney committee decided against following Melbourne's 'anti-sharing' clause in Entry

¹⁰⁸ SFF – Min., 6.7.1965, Box No. 2.

¹⁰⁹ SFF – Min., 6.7.1965, Box No. 2.

¹¹⁰ SFF – Min., 6.7.1965, Box No. 2.

¹¹¹ MFF – Min., 5.8.1965, Box No. 14.

¹¹² SFF – Min., 2.11.1965, Box No. 2; also MFF – Corr., Klava to Rado, 20.8.1965, Box No. 30.

Forms, because they believed that Brisbane “earnestly wished to avoid causing any trouble to existing festivals”.¹¹³

Sydney’s policy towards Brisbane, however, was soon to change. The impetus for this change was the potential damage that cooperation with Brisbane could have caused to Sydney’s relationship with Melbourne. After Stratton became Director of the Sydney Festival in late 1965, he began to develop a working relationship with Stathe Black (the Director of the Brisbane Festival). This development concerned Rado, who wrote to Klava in early 1966:

The big question now remains, what will happen to the future cooperation between the two Festivals? If David is such a great friend of Stathe’s ... how can I trust him not to divulge what I may tell him confidentially, on a strictly Melbourne–Sydney basis?¹¹⁴

Rado proceeded to inform Stratton that Melbourne would cease to exchange information with Sydney unless it was guaranteed that Melbourne’s interests were protected. Clearly recognising that Sydney’s relationship with Melbourne was far more important than the need to align with the fledgling festival in Brisbane, Stratton promised Rado that he would not share any Melbourne-derived information.¹¹⁵

Rado had further problems with the Brisbane Festival in early 1966. In April of that year, Rado discovered that Brisbane intended to screen *Daydreaming* —which Melbourne was also showing for its 1966 Festival. In addition, Brisbane’s first festival was scheduled to begin almost one month before the Melbourne Festival. Hence, in a repeat of the Adelaide Festival incident, Brisbane threatened to steal the glory of Melbourne’s status as a premiere festival.¹¹⁶

The Sydney Film Festival only came to take the threat of the new festivals seriously after the emergence of a direct competitor within its own city. This was the NSW International Film Festival, which was organised by students at the University of New South Wales. The NSW Festival was in part a reaction to what the Sydney Festival had become, as the first NSW Festival programme announces:

The old established patterns of passivity at festivals is being done away with and an exciting new atmosphere is being introduced at the New Festival. Spontaneous and uninhibited participation by festival devotees is being encouraged in a variety of means —for instance, when certain

¹¹³ SFF – Min., 2.1.1965, Box No. 2.

¹¹⁴ MFF – Corr., Rado to Klava, 25.1.1966, Box No. 30.

¹¹⁵ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 14.2.1966, Box No. 30.

¹¹⁶ MFF – Arch., *Brisbane Film Festival – 1966*, programme, Box No. 44.

screenings conclude —patrons will be invited to remain and engage in lively discussions with interesting ‘agents provocateur’ specially invited to lead these discussions. Each day there will be press conferences at which the critic will air their views and the public will be invited to participate as witnesses.¹¹⁷

In other words, the founders of the NSW Festival were positioning themselves as being more radical, authentic, and democratic than the Sydney Festival. As part of this, the new festival announced openly that they would be operating independently of FIAPF —and thus ideally working as a genuinely autonomous international festival (like that in Edinburgh).¹¹⁸ Of course, the NSW Festival could no more ignore industrial realities than any other festival, and promised a series of incentives to encourage the trade. These included prizes, commercial release to all entrants, and customs duty paid on all films.¹¹⁹

Stratton had no intention of allowing the NSW Film Festival to continue in direct competition with the Sydney Festival, and did all in his power to destroy it. After first hearing of the NSW Festival’s existence, Stratton wrote to Rado complaining that it had been established in “an aura of great secrecy” by “lone wolves”, and was deliberately “setting up in opposition” to Sydney.¹²⁰ Rado replied that

I am somewhat amused at your Committee’s sudden concern now that one has sprung up in your backyard, as contrasted with our thoughts about Brisbane.¹²¹

Seeking out information that could be used to discredit the new festival, in April of 1966 Stratton discovered that the Director (Peter Conyngham) and Secretary (Michael Robertson) of the NSW Festival had established a company, Perob(e), exhibiting films at a suburban Sydney theatre. This provided Stratton with evidence that the new festival might be a front for a commercial enterprise. Armed with this information, he wrote to FIAPF and requested their intervention.¹²² In May, the NSW Festival placed an advertisement in the *Sydney Morning*

¹¹⁷ MFF – Arch., *New South Wales International Film Festival – 1966*, programme, Box No. 44.

¹¹⁸ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Anton Crouch, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 4.9.1992.

¹¹⁹ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Anton Crouch, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 4.9.1992.

¹²⁰ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 20.3.1966, Box No. 35.

¹²¹ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 22.3.1966, Box No. 35.

¹²² MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 21.4.1966, Box No. 35.

Herald, and Stratton retaliated with a notice in the same paper dissociating the Sydney Festival from the new festival.¹²³

As events transpired, Stratton's concern was unnecessary, as the first NSW Film Festival proved to be the last. Held at the University of NSW from 12-22 August, only about 600 of the 2,000 tickets were sold; and the 'agent provocateurs' were clearly not provocative enough, as only a few stalwarts attended the discussion sessions. In a fitting tribute to the possibly Maoist inspirations of the NSW Festival organisers, Rado noted that, in the end, the new festival had turned out to be only a "paper tiger".¹²⁴ Furthermore, the new festival had also burnt its bridges with the trade. The promised commercial releases—which had led some distributors to withdraw their films from Sydney and Melbourne—never eventuated. Stratton ensured that this fact was widely publicised amongst the trade—vowing to "get a strong anti-NSW letter to every film source".¹²⁵

Along with Brisbane and the NSW Festival, a number of other new festivals also emerged in 1966. In mid April, the Melbourne organising committee received a letter from the Hobart Film Society asking for cooperation with the inaugural Tasmanian Film Festival; Rado replied in the negative.¹²⁶ In addition, the Alice Springs Film Society also held their first international film festival that year.¹²⁷

The appearance of so many new international film festivals in Australia forced Sydney and Melbourne to develop a joint formal policy for dealing with the situation. This began with an informal correspondence on the issue between the two directors. In April, Rado wrote to Stratton to try to persuade him to support a policy of not sharing films with any other film festivals.¹²⁸ In his reply, Stratton reluctantly agreed to participate, although he still felt that such a policy could aggravate other festivals into outright opposition.¹²⁹ Rado responded that this danger should be of little concern, as the new festivals were too weak to challenge the established festivals in Melbourne and Sydney (which were now over ten years old). Furthermore, Rado argued that this 'exclusionist' policy could enhance the prestige of Sydney

¹²³ SFF – Min., 3.5.1966, Box No. 2.

¹²⁴ MFF – Corr., Rado to Modesta Gentile (secretary of the SFF), 2.9.1966, Box No. 35.

¹²⁵ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 13.9.1966, Box No. 29.

¹²⁶ MFF – Min., 19.4.1966, Box No. 14.

¹²⁷ MFF – Arch., *Alice Springs Film Festival – 1966*, programme, Box No. 44.

¹²⁸ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 27.4.1966, Box No. 35.

¹²⁹ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 29.4.1966, Box No. 35.

and Melbourne —remarking that “Exclusivity makes it clear to overseas entrants that our two festivals are of a different stature [from the rest]”.¹³⁰

After this exchange of correspondence, the two Directors managed to persuade their respective committees of the need for such an exclusivity policy. Shortly after their 1966 Festivals, both Sydney and Melbourne agreed that from this point onwards, their Entry Forms would incorporate a clause binding entrants to participation in the two Festivals only. The justifications for this unanimous decision are recorded in the Melbourne minutes, as follows:

(a) Australian festivals are rapidly becoming a joke overseas, and there is evidence of a hardening attitude against participation by major producers on the grounds that the films entered here are “bled to death”.

(b) There is no precedent in the world of a major festival sharing its films with a number of ancillary events.

(c) The multiple festivals necessitate the retaining of prints in Australia much longer than necessary, which is against the interests of the producers.

(d) Attention could be drawn overseas to the fact that Melbourne and Sydney are the two major festivals in Australia, both endorsed by FIAPF. By demanding exclusivity, they could gain the distinction they deserve

(e) Programming and general admission would be considerably simplified.¹³¹

The proliferation of Australian film festivals was not only of concern to Sydney and Melbourne, but had also managed to attract the attention of FIAPF. In October of 1966, Rado received a letter from W.L. Morrison, Acting Secretary to the Australian Department of External Affairs. Morrison stated that he had been contacted by Brisson, the Secretary of FIAPF, who was requesting clarification about the number and status of the various international film festivals now being held in Australia.¹³² Essentially, Brisson had received a large number of requests for endorsement, and was now asking the Australian government — as a reputable source— to advise FIAPF as to which festivals deserved such endorsement. In particular, Brisson wished to know the nature of the groups financing the festivals (e.g., whether they were commercial or non-profit), and the sort of audience that the festivals screened to (e.g., whether this was the public at large or a select group). If this clarification

¹³⁰ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 4.5.1966, Box No. 35.

¹³¹ MFF – Min., 18.7.1966, Box No. 14.

¹³² MFF – Corr., Morrison to Rado, 4.10.1966, Box No. 35.

was not forthcoming, Brisson threatened that FIAPF would endorse none of the Australian international film festivals. In the meantime, he withdrew FIAPF endorsement for the 1967 Melbourne and Sydney Film Festivals, until (and unless) their status was ratified by the Australian government.¹³³

Faced with this request from the Australian government, Stratton and Rado discussed the best strategies for maintaining their FIAPF endorsement. In a letter sent to Stratton in mid October, Rado offers a sketch of their argument:

I would like to say that only Melbourne–Sydney are not renting films for their festivals, and this in itself, should separate the sheep from the goats. I believe it could be a fairly potent argument and demonstration of what sort of peculiarly hybrid concoctions the other festivals are. I would also like to spell this out to producers in the cover letter sent out with invitations, the one which would explain the exclusivity clause. Something to the effect that the other festivals are just not good enough company for us to be in ...¹³⁴

Clear in this passage is a consciousness of the common ground between Sydney and Melbourne —their status as the two oldest and most well-established international film festivals in the country.

Less than a week later, the Melbourne Film Festival announced the ‘exclusivity clause’ as its formal policy, and Rado wrote to the Brisbane, Tasmania and Adelaide Festivals justifying its adoption. In these letters, Rado argued that the recent “mushrooming” of Australian festivals may have been responsible for the withholding of important films by producers, who now considered Australia’s situation “a bad joke”.¹³⁵ To this, he added apologetically that:

This decision was made all the harder to come to, as all organisers of festivals in this country are closely connected with the film society movement, whose common aim is the propagation of good film. My committee is anxious that their decision should not be taken as an attempt to stifle the activities of other festivals. In fact, my committee hopes that the other festivals will continue to exhibit films which are in distribution in the country, but which would not normally reach the commercial screen in their respective cities.¹³⁶

¹³³ MFF – Corr., Morrison to Rado, 4.10.1966, Box No. 35.

¹³⁴ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 13.10.1966, Box No. 35.

¹³⁵ MFF – Corr., Rado to film festival Directors, 19.10.1966, Box No. 34.

¹³⁶ MFF – Corr., Rado to film festival Directors, 19.10.1966, Box No. 34.

The tension between cultural legitimacy and industrial imperatives manifests itself acutely in this letter. Rado justifies his decision to the other festivals on purely cultural grounds. His overall argument is that “good films” might be withheld by the trade from the Australian public if Melbourne does not adopt this exclusionist clause. Hence, the clause is in fact in the interests of film culture and ‘the propagation of good film’. He completes his statement by offering an alternative programming suggestion to the other festivals —to screen ‘art’ films held by local distributors which have not secured commercial screening to date.

Despite the diplomatic veneer that Rado gave his decision, the exclusivity clause was poorly received by the smaller Australian film festivals. This is unsurprising, seeing that it was likely to deny them the chance of screening major international releases —and thus effectively reduce them to being very minor players. When Rado attended the next ACOFS meeting in early 1967, representatives from Western Australia, Tasmania and Queensland “condemned the agreement”, while South Australia was “particularly aggressive” and threatened “reprisals”. Rado was informed at that meeting that the Melbourne Film Festival would receive a formal letter requesting that the exclusivity clause be abandoned.¹³⁷

However, neither Sydney nor Melbourne were prepared to withdraw this clause, as their endorsement by FIAPF now depended upon it. As Rado wrote to Stratton, “One hates to be kicked out of the club merely because others are knocking on the door for admittance”.¹³⁸ For throughout this period Sydney and Melbourne were corresponding extensively with FIAPF. Brisson had eventually agreed to reinstate the endorsement for the 1967 Sydney and Melbourne Festivals —primarily on the condition that they agreed to maintain their exclusivity clause. In other words, from this point on FIAPF would only endorse two Australian film festivals. Brisson also took this opportunity to raise the registration fee from \$500 to \$1,000, suggesting that this increase was justified as “a preventative measure for eager enthusiasts”.¹³⁹

Adelaide Director Eric Williams was not prepared, however, to accept the exclusivity clause and his loss of FIAPF endorsement as a *fait accompli*. After the 1967 Adelaide Festival, Williams flew to Paris to negotiate in person with Brisson. Williams held one drawcard over Sydney and Melbourne —namely, the Adelaide Film Festival was under the

¹³⁷ MFF – Min., 21.2.1967, Box No. 14.

¹³⁸ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 19.1.1967, Box No. 40.

¹³⁹ MFF – Min., 21.2.1967, Box No. 14.

patronage of the Adelaide Festival of Arts, which had both federal and state government endorsement. Williams was thus able to prove to Brisson that Adelaide had the government endorsement required for FIAPF recognition —something which neither Sydney nor Melbourne could lay claim to. Brisson, swayed by this, recommended as a compromise that the three festivals share their programme on alternate years, with one state holding a retrospective festival every third year to replace the contemporary festival.¹⁴⁰

Both Stratton and Rado were deeply concerned about the ramifications of Williams' actions. They agreed that Brisson's offer should be rejected.¹⁴¹ But if Adelaide received FIAPF endorsement independently, then, as Stratton suggested, "one of us will have to go!"¹⁴² Stratton was concerned that this in turn could lead Sydney and Melbourne into damaging competition for the second possible FIAPF endorsement. However, as he wrote to Rado,

I'm determined that nothing will affect relations between Sydney and Melbourne Festivals, and I hope that by working closely together as we are now we can together stay ahead of Eric's machinations.¹⁴³

Eric Williams continued to pursue his line of action. He made an overseas tour in 1967, which involved "energetic agitations" to secure films for the 1968 Adelaide programme. His success with the overseas trade resulted in the loss of a number of films for the Sydney and Melbourne Festivals.¹⁴⁴ Williams also formed an alliance with a major New Zealand film society, to run a combined Auckland–Adelaide Film Festival. According to Williams, this alliance was driven primarily by financial needs.¹⁴⁵

Williams combined these attempts to establish Adelaide as an independent film festival, with gestures towards improving relations with Sydney and Melbourne. At the beginning of 1968, he lunched with Stratton—who found Williams "affable" if "not entirely convincing".¹⁴⁶ These meetings led Stratton to promise to assist Adelaide in meeting censorship requirements, and—more significantly—show Adelaide's imports to Sydney distributors. Thus, as Stratton remarked in a letter to Rado, "if Eric takes the tone 'Well,

¹⁴⁰ MFF – Corr., G. L. Klein (acting AIFF Director) to Rado, 21.8.1967, Box No. 40.

¹⁴¹ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 24.8.1967, Box No. 40.

¹⁴² MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 19.9.1967, Box No. 40.

¹⁴³ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 24.8.1967, Box No. 40.

¹⁴⁴ MFF – Min., 22.2.1968, Box No. 14.

¹⁴⁵ Eric Williams, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 5.3.2001.

¹⁴⁶ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 16.2.1968, Box No. 44.

Adelaide sold more films than Sydney or Melbourne this year' we can always point out that without Sydney's help he wouldn't have sold any at all!"¹⁴⁷

While Stratton, although ambivalent, thus managed to establish some sort of relationship with Williams, Rado, on the other, found him offensive —indeed, Rado was later (in 1969) to refer to Williams as “an abominable pig, a blackmailer and an absolutely ruthless operator”.¹⁴⁸ In his reply to Stratton's letter, Rado warned the Sydney Director to be on his guard:

I don't trust the man at all. He needs your help just now, so he is friendly. When he'll find a handy knife to stab you with, he'll use it without hesitation ... Eric, incidentally, has not called on me, nor will he, nor do I have any desire to see him.¹⁴⁹

Another example of Rado's feelings towards Williams is evident in a letter sent a week later. In this letter, Rado tells Stratton of a telephone conversation he had with Williams —in which Williams “launched into a tirade” about how he had promoted the three festivals overseas, and “tells” Rado what he should say when he is overseas. Rado writes of this conversation, “The nerve of the man! He protesteth too much for my liking!”¹⁵⁰

This state of conflict and competition between the two established international film festivals, and the smaller festivals, would continue in the years to come. The challenge of the new festivals played an important role in the development of a close alliance between Melbourne and Sydney. In this development, an analogy to the formation of economic oligopolies can be seen: in which the most powerful organisations in a field are under industrial pressure to band together in opposition to smaller and weaker rivals. In the case of the film festivals, these pressures came (as has been argued at length above) from competition for film product, and the need to appease and maintain good relations with the commercial trade. Yet at the same time, unlike in a purely industrial context, the cartel-like behaviour of Sydney and Melbourne (in setting up the monopoly arrangement of the exclusivity clause) could not be justified in terms of naked self-interest. Rather, as cultural organisations needing to maintain their legitimacy, these decisions need to be justified in terms of cultural imperatives (such as the need to maintain access to ‘quality film’ in Australia).

¹⁴⁷ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 16.2.1968, Box No. 44.

¹⁴⁸ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 28.5.1969, Box No. 47.

¹⁴⁹ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 21.2.1968, Box No. 44.

IV. Censorship

Another important issue that arose in this period was censorship. As has already been noted, since their early days, the Melbourne and Sydney Film Festivals had reached an informal agreement with the Australian censors. The main reason for this was so that the Festivals were exempted from the usual delays in film censorship, in order to allow them to quickly import and screen films. This understanding was partly justified on the basis that the Festivals were aimed at a small and specialised audience of educated and thus ‘sophisticated’ film enthusiasts.

However, despite the streamlining of the procedure, there was no sense in which festival films were exempt from the strict censorship requirements then in place in Australia. Australian censorship policy was particularly rigid throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. Even the press was subject to the “D-notice” under Menzies, a self-censorship system that required gatekeepers to prevent publication on prohibited subjects.¹⁵¹ Cinema was no exception to this policy. The Commonwealth Censors made their decisions based on the belief that images of sex, violence and criminal activities were “undesirable in the public interest”.¹⁵² More specifically, in 1965 the Film Censorship Board released the following questions which it took into consideration when judging a film:

1. Is the film likely to impair moral standards of viewers by extenuating vice or crime or by depreciating social values?
2. Is it likely to be offensive to a normal audience of reasonably minded citizens? A normal audience, the Board considers, would not welcome as entertainment harrowing death or torture scenes, gruesome hospital and accident scenes, unnecessary brutality, cruelty to children or animals, indecency, vulgarity, etc.
3. What will be the film’s effect on children?¹⁵³

Not only were films subject to strict censorship regulations, but the deliberations and decisions of the Censorship board were largely kept from the public view —and the fact that a film had been censored was almost never advertised. This secrecy meant that the Australian

¹⁵⁰ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 29.2.1968, Box No. 44.

¹⁵¹ G. Davison, J. Hirst, and S. Macintyre (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*, Oxford University Press, p. 116.

¹⁵² This is the title of Bertrand’s (*Film Censorship*) chapter on the period prior to the SFF’s campaign.

¹⁵³ Quoted in E. Williams, “Cultural Despotism – Film Censorship” in G. Dutton and M. Harris, *Australia’s Censorship Crisis*, Melbourne: Sun Books, 1970, p. 56.

public at this time were, on the whole, very poorly informed about the degree of censorship that existed, and how the system functioned.¹⁵⁴ This began to change only in 1965, when the *Bulletin* published a list of all films banned in Australia since 1930 —after which, as Bertrand remarks, “tracing and publishing such lists became something of a national sport for journalists”.¹⁵⁵

In this period, with the appearance of David Stratton on the organising committee of the Sydney Film Festival, the censorship system —and its lack of transparency— was made into a public issue by the Film Festivals. Spearheaded by Stratton, it was actually the Sydney Film Festival that first drew public attention to this issue.¹⁵⁶

Prior to Stratton’s presence, the issue of censorship was widely seen as a necessary inconvenience rather than a challenge to civil liberties or artistic integrity.¹⁵⁷ However, Stratton held a strong personal view that films shown by film societies should be exempt from censorship policies —and that films should always be shown in the form intended by their creator. British film societies possessed such exemption, and this was perhaps one reason contributing to their popularity. Stratton himself was first drawn to join when he discovered that *The Wild One*, banned in mainstream English cinemas, was screening uncensored through the film societies.¹⁵⁸

As noted above, the trigger for Stratton’s concern with film censorship was the censoring of scenes from *Woman of the Dunes* at the 1965 Sydney Festival. Following this, Stratton persuaded the organising committee to establish a Censorship Sub-Committee, with Ian McPherson at its head. It was intended that this sub-committee have a dual role: to deal with administrative and legal matters connected to censorship (such as liaising with the government Censorship Board), and, perhaps most significantly, to begin a public campaign aimed at persuading the government to change the laws.¹⁵⁹

This public campaign began with a letter sent to *The Bulletin* (published on 21 August 1965), which complained about the censoring of *Woman of the Dunes*.¹⁶⁰ In response to this

¹⁵⁴ See Williams, “Cultural Despotism”, p. 55-8.

¹⁵⁵ Bertrand, *Film Censorship*, p. 183.

¹⁵⁶ Bertrand, *Film Censorship*, p. 183.

¹⁵⁷ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ian Klava, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 26.10.1992.

¹⁵⁸ David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997.

¹⁵⁹ SFF – Min., 3.8.1965, Box No. 2.

¹⁶⁰ MFF – Arch., Letter to *The Bulletin*, 21.8.1965, Box No. 44.

letter, the Commonwealth Chief Censor held a press screening, at which footage censored from recent festival films was shown.

The Sydney Festival then wrote a further letter, which was published by *The Australian* on 25 August 1965. This letter stated that

We deplore the attitude of the Commonwealth Film Censor when he recently screened to journalists a compilation of selected sequences cut from films —sequences which, taken out of their context, undoubtedly seemed very wicked.¹⁶¹

The rest of this letter laid out the Sydney Festival's main arguments about censorship regulations, and is thus worth discussing at some length. The letter begins by noting "that Australian film festivals were the only ones in the world where [*Woman of the Dunes*] was shown with any cuts by the censor".¹⁶² It then continues as follows:

The Sydney Film Festival would like to go on record in stating its regret at the attitude of the film censor towards film festivals and societies which screen only the world's finest films to a limited, adult and discerning audience.

Most festival and film societies overseas (which also screen to restricted, mature audiences) are not subject to censorship at all. This is as it should be, as the work of the world's major film directors should not be subject to mutilation.

It is especially disturbing that the work of the enormously talented Jean-Luc Godard should suffer so much in this country: two of his films have been banned entirely, and another suffered cuts in a key sequence. Godard's work is highly regarded overseas. ...

This section of the letter makes two points. The first is that the film festivals should not be subject to the same censorship requirements as general commercial cinema, because they screen works of art to a 'limited, adult and discerning audience'. The second point is that, in so censoring film festivals, Australia is out of step with the rest of the 'civilised' world. The letter then goes on:

In the 1920s, when great Russian classics like Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* were banned in England, film societies were formed in order to bring these masterpieces to a minority audience which would appreciate their artistry.

¹⁶¹ MFF – Arch., Letter to *The Australian*, 25.8.1965, Box No. 44.

¹⁶² MFF – Arch., Letter to *The Australian*, 25.8.1965, Box No. 44; all quotes in the rest of this paragraph are from this letter.

It seems incongruous that 40 years later in Australia, minority audiences are still not permitted to view some important films.

In recent years a highly commercial, but extremely sick horror film by a popular director has been widely shown to general audiences, while some major works of art cannot be seen by any audience, even one formed solely to study world cinema.

It just doesn't make sense.

It is to be hoped that Australian film censorship authorities may soon realise that there is a specialised audience for the art of cinema, and may view films for that audience accordingly.

Until then we shall continue voicing our protests over the Government's policy towards the films imported for festival screenings.

The Censorship Board, it should be added, has always cooperated in the speedy processing of films imported for the festivals.

We realise they are carrying out the present law on film censorship as they see it. We maintain this is a bad law which should be changed.

This section of the letter reinforces the previous points with further arguments. It suggests that film societies were first formed in Britain as a response to regressive censorship regulations. It also suggests that the current censorship laws in Australia incongruously censor festival fare (which may include 'masterpieces' and 'major works of art'), but allow 'general audiences' to watch an 'extremely sick horror film' from a 'popular director'.

Implicit in this letter are two interconnected distinctions: between two types of audience, and two sorts of creative intention. The first distinction is between an audience that is dedicated to the supposedly higher pursuits of intellect, culture and aesthetic delight (or, as the letter puts it, to the 'study of world cinema' and the 'art of cinema'), and a more general audience—which may well be driven by the baser pursuit of 'lower' forms of pleasure, that can be provided by the titillation and sensationalism of the popular cinema. The second distinction is between films that are produced with an artistic intent (which may thus contain otherwise shocking scenes, but for valid aesthetic or intellectual reasons), and those that are produced with commercial intent (where such scenes do not serve any higher purpose, but are simply gratuitous sex and / or violence). As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, this letter thus recapitulates the main lines of the classic distinction between 'culture' and 'industry'.

A few months after the publication of this letter, in November 1965, the Sydney Festival Censorship Sub-Committee reported its recommendations to the organising committee. In an audacious move, it was proposed that the Sydney Film Festival pursue a campaign to change the attitudes of both the Australian government and public towards the censorship of film.

More specifically, the Festival decided:

- (1) to obtain the freedom from censorship of all films screened to Festival and film society audiences;
- (2) to prepare for the wide acceptance of film as an art form by pressing for the teaching of film appreciation in schools;
- (3) to facilitate the speedy acceptance of a more enlightened censorship for adult audiences by pressing for State Govt legislation to prohibit children from attending films classified AO or X as in the UK;
- (4) to create an awareness of a subject which is neglected by the press to disseminate information on film censorship.¹⁶³

It is clear from this list, that the initial concerns over the censorship of *Woman of the Dunes* had now expanded into a much broader campaign. Although it still incorporates the primary aim of winning freedom from censorship for all festival films, it now encompasses public education (through both the schools and the press), and agitation for changes to the general film classification system.

This campaign opened with letters written by the Sydney Festival to a wide variety of organisations requesting written support for the four recommendations listed above. These organisations included various film societies and film organisations, cultural organisations, the Australian Journalists Association, government departments, and the Arts Council of Australia.¹⁶⁴ This barrage of letters met with little success: in the end, only 31 of the 146 organisations contacted bothered to reply.¹⁶⁵ In particular, the Festival met with a rebuff from the Prime Minister's Department, which replied that the festival audience was too broad to warrant special exemption.¹⁶⁶ Chief Censor Prowse agreed —and added that, in general,

¹⁶³ SFF – Min., 2.11.1965, Box No. 2.

¹⁶⁴ SFF – Min., 2.11.1965, Box No. 2.

¹⁶⁵ Bertrand, *Film Censorship*, p. 183.

¹⁶⁶ SFF – Min., 7.12.1965, Box No. 2.

neither he nor the general public would support a policy of giving censorship exemptions to certain select groups, for “we can’t make a *double* rule, you see?”¹⁶⁷

Significantly, neither the AFI nor the Melbourne Film Festival offered written support for Sydney’s demand for exemption. This was largely due to the opposition of Rado, who was Director of both organisations. In a letter written to Ian Klava in August 1965, Rado stated that such letters of support for Sydney’s stand on censorship would be pointless: “there is such general hostility to the festivals in Canberra that I cannot see even behind-the-scenes manoeuvres getting far; certainly not public statements”.¹⁶⁸ The ‘hostility’ to which Rado refers was probably due to complaints from the international and local film trade. To this he added:

Don’t get me wrong, I am as incensed against Festival films being censored as your people are ... the trouble is that all the well-meaning enthusiasts, the self-righteous crusaders will achieve will be difficulties for us professionals, whose responsibility it will be to face the music from the Censor’s office ... and when we can’t get the films through in time, it will be our fault. Right?¹⁶⁹

In other words, Rado felt that the only possible result of Sydney’s stand on censorship would be further friction with government bodies. The risks here were very real —Customs had the power to ban film imports altogether, which would of course have destroyed all the Australian international film festivals.¹⁷⁰

Given Rado’s importance, the Sydney committee felt that his support for their stand on censorship was necessary, and they continued in their attempts to persuade him. In particular, Rado and the Melbourne Film Festival were one of Sydney’s major sources of film, and thus the committee felt they should not pursue the censorship issue without his blessing.¹⁷¹ To this end, Sydney committee member John Burke lunched with Rado in Melbourne. According to Burke’s recollections, within three minutes Rado had “thrown his napkin down on the table and said ‘I’m leaving’”.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ Bertrand, *Film Censorship*, p. 183.

¹⁶⁸ MFF – Corr., Rado to Klava, 24.8.1965, Box No. 30.

¹⁶⁹ MFF – Corr., Rado to Klava, 24.8.1965, Box No. 30.

¹⁷⁰ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Stratton, self-conducted interview.

¹⁷¹ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Stratton, self-conducted interview.

¹⁷² SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., John Burke, interviewed by David Stratton, 12.6.1992.

Rado was so concerned about Sydney's attempt to challenge the censorship laws, that in early 1966 he flew to Sydney to talk to Stratton in person. This was the first time the two directors had met face-to-face. According to Stratton's recollections, Rado began their discussion in a very uncompromising fashion, saying:

Listen. Forget it. We're not going to oppose censorship, and so you aren't. Do you think you are going to bring films in apart from us? Of course you aren't.¹⁷³

In reply, Stratton brought up every supporting argument he could think of, and, in his own words, tried "to charm the pants off Erwin".¹⁷⁴ According to Stratton, in the end he was successful: Rado supported his stand on censorship from this day forth.

Despite Rado's change of heart, the Melbourne Festival's support for the attack on censorship regulations remained relatively muted. In an attempt to alert their audiences, both Melbourne and Sydney resolved to include in their programmes for the 1966 Festival, any details of cuts made to festival films.¹⁷⁵ While this policy may sound relatively insignificant, it did in fact represent a major breach with the prior secrecy that had surrounded film censorship. Furthermore, at the opening of the 1966 Melbourne Festival both Rado and President Robin Boyd openly criticised the government for denying the Festivals special exemption. However, still concerned about the possible ramifications of his stand, Rado's speech, although critical, was cautious.¹⁷⁶ As another further example of Rado's caution in this matter, when approached by the media in 1967 to comment on the banning of the film *Ulysses*, he refused on the grounds that he wished to stay "in the background as much as possible".¹⁷⁷

In contrast to Melbourne, Stratton and the Sydney Censorship Sub-Committee continued to actively campaign on the issue. They succeeded in bringing film censorship to broader public attention. Indeed, parts of the Australian press now began to pursue the issue independently. For example, the *Sydney Morning Herald* interviewed Chief Censor Prowse on 19 August 1966.¹⁷⁸ As Bertrand argues, Sydney's efforts "kept the issue constantly before the

¹⁷³ David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997.

¹⁷⁴ David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997.

¹⁷⁵ SFF – Min., 1.3.1966, Box No. 2.

¹⁷⁶ MFF – Arch., Colin Bennett in *The Age*, 11.6.1966, press cuttings, Box No. 33.

¹⁷⁷ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 17.5.1967, Box No. 40.

¹⁷⁸ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 2.9.1966, Box No. 35.

public, and the Commonwealth Censorship constantly on the defensive, in a way that Australia had never before seen”.¹⁷⁹

Despite agitation from the two Festivals, the Australian government continued to censor festival films. For the 1967 Festivals, the films *Climax*, *Love* and *Two People* were censored, and *The Amourist* was banned.¹⁸⁰ Stratton, also wary of the possible repercussions of too vocal a protest on this issue, wrote to Rado as follows:

Unless we hear strongly from you to the contrary, issue a carefully worded press release at the most appropriate time —viz., after all our films have gone through!!¹⁸¹

In other words, while Stratton was prepared to make bolder public statements than Rado on the censorship issue, he was still wary of the impact that such statements could have on the two Festivals’ capacity to import films through Australian customs.

After their 1967 Festivals, Sydney and Melbourne organised to prepare a joint submission on censorship exemption for the Minister for Customs. The energy for this came largely from Stratton; Rado himself still being somewhat pessimistic about the issue, as the following passage from one his letters shows:

You know me by now —I am a pessimist at heart, and I will be very surprised if the censorship developments will be as interesting as you expect or hope. The pressure from the wowser groups are much more potent in this country than you imagine: there is also a rampant feeling of anti-intellectualism which works against special privileges for long-haired groups, and actually exists in most Government departments, especially Customs.¹⁸²

Unsurprisingly, in the negotiations over the joint submission, Rado argued for a less extreme position than Stratton —namely, that the Festivals should pursue a compromise position by applying for ‘conditional certificates’ (i.e., weaker censorship guidelines), rather than complete exemption from all censorship.¹⁸³ If Stratton disagreed with this compromise, Rado suggested the possibility of separate submissions. However, Stratton was vehement that the Festivals make a joint submission, and argued that the ‘conditional certificate’ option should

¹⁷⁹ Bertrand, *Film Censorship*, p. 184.

¹⁸⁰ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 27.5.1967, Box No. 40.

¹⁸¹ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado., 18.5.1967, Box No. 40.

¹⁸² MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 12.9.1967, Box No. 40.

¹⁸³ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 21.11.1967, Box No. 40.

be a fall-back position if total exemption was rejected by the government.¹⁸⁴ In the end, Rado agreed with Stratton's position.

It is worth remarking that the joint submission made by Melbourne and Sydney in late 1967 sought exemption only for themselves and not for other Australian international festivals or affiliated societies.¹⁸⁵ It was clear that Stratton and Rado had decided that, at this point in the struggle, it was not worth attempting to win a general exemption for all Australian film festivals.

The Festivals' joint submission made its way onto the desk of the new Minister for Customs, Senator Scott. Like many of his predecessors, Scott was a member of the National Party —whom Stratton had heard was “a farmer from WA, nice bloke, a bit stupid, and probably never seen a film in his life!”¹⁸⁶ Scott was sympathetic to the Film Festivals' arguments —and quite possibly anxious to avoid further negative press— but was not prepared to modify the censorship legislation for them. Instead, the Minister consulted with Chief Censor Prowse, and the following procedure was agreed upon. The Festivals would submit an application for each film, including a synopsis, and a statement that the film was not currently under commercial negotiation. If any of the films were such as would normally be censored, then the Minister would intervene directly to allow the film to bypass normal Customs requirements. “Thus” as Stratton wrote to Rado, “we get freedom from censorship, within the regulations”.¹⁸⁷

Scott proposed that this arrangement would apply to the Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide Film Festivals —but his continued cooperation was subject to certain conditions. In particular, they had to “guarantee that the fact not be publicised by the Festival”.¹⁸⁸ Not wanting to endanger their new-found freedom from the standard censorship regulations, the Festivals not only kept this arrangement confidential, but, in addition, they also (temporarily at least) reduced their public anti-censorship campaign. For example, Melbourne abandoned their sponsorship of an anti-censorship booklet jointly written by the FVFS and the Victorian

¹⁸⁴ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 22.11.1967, Box No. 40.

¹⁸⁵ MFF – Arch., “Submission for Minister for Customs”, p. 3, Box No. 52.

¹⁸⁶ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 27.2.1968, Box No. 44.

¹⁸⁷ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 21.3.1968, Box No. 44.

¹⁸⁸ SFF – Min., 2.4.1968, Box No. 2.

Civil Rights group —the minutes stating that this was done “in view of the latest developments”.¹⁸⁹

The arrangement that the Film Festivals had reached with Scott did not remain a secret for long —and, when it was discovered, drew fire from both sides of the culture / industry divide. On the culture side, the Festivals were criticised for their ‘elitist’ stance on censorship. Colin Bennett, the left-wing film critic for *The Age*, argued as follows:

By all means attacks censorship ... Demand reform, an X-certificate system for Australia or, better still, total abolition of censorship for *all* adults. But don't let us encourage the idea of some kind of intellectual elite —one law for the (culturally) rich, another for the poor.¹⁹⁰

This critique was further developed in a number of later articles in *The Age*. This infuriated Rado, who, in a letter to Stratton, described Bennett as an “idiot”, and his articles as “stupid” and “enough to get anybody’s back up —he doesn’t visualise what an outcry such provocative stuff can create!”¹⁹¹ On the industry side, independent distributor Robert Kapferer also criticised the arrangement. Upon discovering that he could only import a heavily censored version of the film *Closely Watched Trains*, whilst the Festivals were able to show the uncut version, Kapferer complained to the trade journals that this arrangement was unfair to commercial interests.¹⁹²

By the end of this period, then, the Film Festivals’ censorship campaign had achieved its less ambitious aims, but not its broader ambitions. Although both Melbourne and Sydney had won an informal freedom from censorship for themselves, they had not succeeded in changing overall government policy. They had, however, successfully brought the issue of censorship to the attention of the broader public. In doing this, the Festivals had initiated the process that was eventually to lead to the appearance of the modern film ratings system, and a much less oppressive code of censorship in Australia.

¹⁸⁹ SFF – Min., 2.4.1968, Box No. 2.

¹⁹⁰ MFF – Arch., Colin Bennett in *The Age*, 11.6.1966, press cuttings, Box No. 33.

¹⁹¹ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 20.12.1967, Box No. 44.

¹⁹² MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 23.4.1968, Box No. 44.

V. The MFF and the SFF 1965-68: An Overview

As in the previous chapter, this final section will provide an overview of the general history of the two Festivals. In the period examined in the last chapter (i.e., 1959-1964) the Melbourne Festival had established itself as an important cultural institution, that was both professionally run and financially stable. In contrast, the Sydney Festival had remained much like it had been since its inception—a smaller, more amateur event, run primarily for university students.

In the period examined in the present chapter, however, with the advent of David Stratton, the Sydney Festival had followed in the footsteps of Melbourne—severing most of its ties with the University, and becoming a much larger and more professionally-organised event. Indeed, by 1968 it could be said that in many ways, the Sydney Festival now surpassed the Melbourne Festival. Sydney had a larger income, a more active Director—and was establishing a strong national and international reputation. This is perhaps best represented by the fact that it was Sydney, rather than Melbourne, that secured the presence of the Festivals' first major international guest—Satyajit Ray—for the opening nights of the 1968 Festivals.¹⁹³ This section will discuss this process in outline, by comparing and contrasting some of the key developments in the administrative history of the two Film Festivals in this period.

In respect of programming, the two Festivals continued much as they had done previously—offering a mix of 'art' films and other international films. This was in accordance with the Festivals' focus on the two themes of 'film as art' and 'film as culture', which had been part of their identity since the days of Olinda. The awkwardness of this mix of the two senses of film 'culture' was commented on by Bennett in his review of the 1965 Melbourne Festival:

Melbourne really had two film festivals. One for the cineaste. One for the world citizen who seeks involvement with other people and cultures. And seldom the twain meet.

The cinema student is irritated that there are (unavoidable) gaps in the festival's coverage of the world's best at Cannes and Venice while indifferent films and a few downright stinkers get an airing. He cries, "Down with slogans like '140 films from 30 countries!' Let's have quality, not debilitating quantity," and he walks out on poor films, whatever their sociological interest.

¹⁹³ MFF – Min., 2.7.1968, Box No. 33.

On the other hand the internationalist, who knows and cares little about the finer points of film art, demands every country in the book but walks out on indifferent essays in style.¹⁹⁴

One of the major administrative issues that came to the fore in this period for both Festivals, was the issue of public access to tickets. This was particularly so for Melbourne. Given the Melbourne Festival's strong links to the film society movement (represented by the FVFS), prior to 1965, all tickets had been reserved for film society members. With some newspapers refusing to give the 1964 Melbourne Festival publicity (as it was not a genuinely 'public event'),¹⁹⁵ the committee decided to begin offering tickets to the general public. For the 1965 Festival, out of the 4,000 subscriptions available, only 3,500 were reserved for film society members, with the bulk of the remaining 500 being available to the general public.¹⁹⁶ Although, as the Melbourne committee noted, only a "residue" of the total ticket numbers was thus being sold to the public, this decision nonetheless marked a significant break with prior policy, which had seen the Festival remain an event exclusively for film society members. This new policy of offering a small number of tickets to the general public was maintained throughout this period, despite the pressure of intense demand from film society members (for example, 1,000 film society member applications for subscription were refused for the 1968 Festival).¹⁹⁷

Although there continued to be very high demand for the limited supply of Festival tickets, Melbourne was not able to capitalise on this by large price increases. Indeed, the only raise in price that occurs in this period is a small increase of 10/- before the 1966 Festival.¹⁹⁸ This is because of Melbourne's position as a cultural organisation, which was not only tied to its film society base, but also wished to avoid any charges of 'commercialism' that could have been prompted by substantial price increases. Hence, throughout this period, the overall surplus of the Melbourne Festival remains reasonably continuous with the previous period (e.g., the 1966 Festival made a net surplus of \$7,169.76).¹⁹⁹ However, much of this surplus

¹⁹⁴ MFF – Arch., Colin Bennett in *The Age*, 26.6.1965, press cuttings, Box No. 29.

¹⁹⁵ MFF – Mins, "Aims of Festival – Public Relations Report", 5.3.1964, Box No. 14.

¹⁹⁶ MFF – Mins, 14.9.64, Box No.14; also noted by Colin Bennett: see MFF – Arch., Colin Bennett, *The Age*, 1.5.1965, press cuttings, Box No. 29.

¹⁹⁷ MFF – Min., 2.7.1968, Box No. 33.

¹⁹⁸ MFF – Min., 2.2.1966, Box No. 14.

¹⁹⁹ MFF – Min., 17.10.1966, Box No. 14.

was still being divided up amongst various other organisations, including the FVFS and the AFI.²⁰⁰

In contrast to Melbourne, by 1968 Sydney was in a very strong financial position. This was partly because the Sydney Festival had not grown out of a strong film society movement, and therefore was not tied to an audience of society members. This independence allowed Sydney to offer tickets to the general public, and thus to charge higher prices. For its 1968 Festival, Sydney did three things to increase its profits substantially: it raised the price of both tickets and programmes sharply (to \$13 and 50c respectively),²⁰¹ and drastically cut back on the number of free tickets that were given out.²⁰² As noted in an earlier discussion, Stratton wrote to Rado informing him of these changes, and remarking that “we’ll easily be the most expensive film festival in Australia (a fact we won’t advertise)”.²⁰³ Rado replied as follows:

My mouth waters when I calculate that your top income is around \$52,000. How did you get away with such steep rises? ... The solution is brilliant ... I’ll use you to lever a few more pennies from my miserly Committee, if I get into trouble. \$20,000 a year more income than Melbourne —it’s immoral I tell you.²⁰⁴

Given that more money was always useful—to bring in prestigious delegates, and so forth—yet being tightly restricted in the number of tickets they could sell by FIAPF audience restrictions, both Festivals turned in this period to the government as another potential source of income. For the 1965 Festival, the Melbourne organising committee approached the Victorian state government for funding. Despite the plaintive appeal that such government funding would “conform with international practice”, Melbourne received “no response whatsoever” to its request.²⁰⁵ The next year, the Sydney Festival made a similar request to the NSW state government—asking for sponsorship of \$2,000, and / or permanent space for the Festival office in a government building.²⁰⁶ The Sydney requests were slightly more

²⁰⁰ MFF – Min., 2.7.1968, Box No. 33.

²⁰¹ SFF – Min., 28.11.1967, Box No. 2.

²⁰² MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 22.11.1967, Box No. 44.

²⁰³ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 21.11.1967, Box No. 44.

²⁰⁴ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 24.11.67, Box No. 44.

²⁰⁵ MFF – Min., 17.2.1965, Box No. 14; and MFF – Min., 24.3.1965, Box No. 14.

²⁰⁶ SFF – Min., 5.4.1966, Box No. 2.

successful than those made by Melbourne —as they were at least dignified with a reply from the government, although this was a polite rejection of their two requests.²⁰⁷

One other possible source of additional income and assistance for the Festivals was corporations. For their 1967 Festival, the Melbourne organising committee requested free tickets from Qantas for their international delegates; Qantas, however, refused.²⁰⁸

The final notable development in this period is the Film Festivals' role in relation to Australian cinema, which becomes more pronounced. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, during this period there are murmurings in Australia about the impoverished state of the Australian feature film industry. With this growing awareness (exemplified, for example, by the Vincent Report), the Film Festivals provided a natural site for the promotion of Australian film. Since Olinda, the Film Festivals were the predominant exhibition outlets for such film, and had always seen the promotion of domestic production as part of their cultural role. However, the main problem this posed for the Festivals was that throughout this period there was still very little feature film production in Australia, and the quality of the films made was not high. This created a conflict between the two different conceptions of 'culture' that largely defined the programming choices of the Festivals: film as art, and film as a cultural document. Whilst the inclusion of Australian films could clearly be justified from a sociological perspective (and as a way of encouraging domestic industry), their inclusion could not be defended on artistic grounds. In this period, the Festivals' solution to this problem was as follows: firstly, the AFI awards were separated from the festivals proper (in order to avoid the embarrassment that they could generate, whilst retaining the Festivals' claims to be supporting Australian film); secondly, the Festivals increasingly used their public status to provide a platform for gaining better publicity for the issue of improving the state of Australian cinema.

First to the AFI awards. Originally instituted by the Melbourne Film Festival in 1959, for the 1966 Festivals it was agreed that Sydney would co-host the awards.²⁰⁹ However, in the process of film procurement, the organising committees realised that there were so few feature films available for the awards, that the event was likely to be something of an embarrassment. For this reason, it was decided that the AFI awards from that year on would

²⁰⁷ SFF – Min., 3.1.1967, Box No. 2.

²⁰⁸ MFF – Min., 30.3.1967, Box No. 14.

²⁰⁹ SFF – Min., 1.11.1966, Box No. 2.

no longer be held within the Film Festivals, but would be held separately, and later in the year (in November).²¹⁰ As the minutes note, the lack of films “meant that the Awards were superfluous, because you could almost always predict who could win”.²¹¹ This absence of competition, of course, undermined the publicity value of the AFI awards for the Festivals — which, after all, had been one of the main reasons for setting them up in the first place.

The lack of Australian product also created obvious problems for the Australian content within the Festivals. For the 1966 Festivals, the Melbourne organisers were driven to show a retrospective of “Damien Parer films and 1 or 2 old Australian feature films”. The minutes note sadly that

This programme would obviate the necessity of the Festival selecting suitable recent material. ... In discussion, regrets were expressed at the absence of currently produced Australian films.²¹²

For the 1967 Melbourne Festival, it was recommended that Australian films no longer be presented in groups, “but be distributed throughout the programme”²¹³ —perhaps on the grounds that diluting the films in such a fashion would be less painful to the audience than a concentrated dose. In a similar fashion, for its 1967 Festival, Sydney was driven to break its policy of premiere screenings (i.e., screening films that had not been seen before by a Sydney audience) for Australian films because the situation was so poor. In the minutes, this decision was justified on the grounds that it would act as an “encouragement of Australian films”.²¹⁴ Unsurprisingly, the Sydney Festival ‘Australian Film Advisory Panel’ —the portentous name given to the sub-committee that short-listed Australian films for Stratton to choose from— found itself with very little to do. After the 1968 Sydney Festival, the Panel decided to follow Melbourne’s lead and abolished the separate Australian programme.²¹⁵ In addition, this panel sent a letter to every film producer in Australia requesting information on forth-coming films.²¹⁶ However, the response to this canvas was “nil”.²¹⁷

²¹⁰ MFF – Min., 23.2.1966, Box No. 14.

²¹¹ MFF – Min., 23.2.1966, Box No. 14.

²¹² MFF – Min., 23.2.1966, Box No. 14.

²¹³ MFF – Min., 3.8.1967, Box No. 14.

²¹⁴ SFF – Min., 14.2.1967, Box No. 2.

²¹⁵ “No Australian Program for Syd. Film Festival” in *Film Weekly*, 29.5.1969.

²¹⁶ SFF – Min., 6.8.1968, Box No. 2.

²¹⁷ SFF – Min., 7.1.69, Box No. 2.

If the lack of quality Australian feature films in this period thus created problems for the Festivals in their role as an exhibition venue, it nonetheless was a cause to which they could usefully give publicity. As already noted, encouragement of the domestic film industry not only fitted their cultural role, but would also be viewed favourably by sections of the commercial trade. In addition, by serving as a publicity site for this issue, the Festivals would be able to attract mainstream press coverage. For the issue of regenerating the Australian film industry appealed not only to the culturalist views of the broad-sheet film critics, but also to the more parochial nationalism typical of the tabloid press.

By the beginnings of this period, the two Film Festivals were well-established and significant organisations in the field of Australian cinema, so they served as a natural site for lobbying for the promotion of domestic film-making. For example, at the 1964 Sydney Festival, there was an entire forum dedicated to the discussion of the topic “The Australian Film Industry: What of its Future?”.²¹⁸ At this forum, Senator Vincent (who gave his name to the Vincent report) made an influential speech about the state of the Australian film industry. In this speech, acknowledging the Festival’s potential power as a lobbying group, Vincent “told the audience that his Report would only be implemented if members of the public and organisations continued to make their wishes known in Canberra”.²¹⁹ A second example of the growing influence of the Festivals is the 1967 screening of Tony Buckley’s film *Forgotten Cinema*. This was a commentary on the state of the Australian film industry, and

it caused a sensation. As a result Doug McClelland organised a screening at Parliament House and that resulted in the famous quote from Hansard, where he stood up in the House and asked the members to hang their heads in shame for what had not been done for the Australian film industry. He was called to order, but as a result the lack of support for Australian film became a political question.²²⁰

In a similar fashion, the AFI awards also became a natural forum for discussing the state of Australian cinema. This gave the award ceremony more publicity —and, indeed, the poverty of the competition in this period served to underline the points being made. For example, at the 1968 Sydney AFI award ceremony, the President of the British Screen Writers’ Guild gave a speech in which he argued for increased government support — remarking that “the government’s present attitude towards the Australian film industry was

²¹⁸ Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*, p. 213.

²¹⁹ Dermody and Jacka, *Screening of Australia*, vol. 1, p. 52.

²²⁰ *40 Years of Film*, p. 15.

like sending an athlete to the Mexico Olympic Games with a sack of coals on his back”.²²¹

This speech was thought significant enough by the trade to warrant a front-page article in *Film Weekly*. The same year, at the conclusion of the 1968 Melbourne Festival, Barry Jones (then a member of the Australian Arts Council) gave a speech arguing for government support for domestic film production, which also received substantial coverage in *Film Weekly*.²²² Finally, at the end of this period, the Australian Film Council was formed to act as a lobby group, with much of the impetus for this development coming from the two Film Festivals and the AFI.²²³

* * * * *

By 1968, both the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festival had achieved a certain stature and level of influence within the Australian cultural scene. Both were now professionally-run organisations with a public profile, and influential figures at their heads —Stratton and Rado. Sydney and Melbourne had cemented their positions as the pre-eminent international film festivals in Australia by working together to defeat the potential challenge of newer festivals. They had also succeeded in mounting a public campaign to bring the issue of film censorship to public awareness. Further developments of these trends will be discussed in the following chapter.

²²¹ *Film Weekly*, 14.11.1968, p. 1.

²²² *Film Weekly*, 20.6.1968, p. 1.

²²³ Dermody and Jacka, *Screening of Australia*, vol. 1, pp. 52-3.

1969-72: Establishment and Success

This final chapter deals with the history of the two Film Festivals in the period from 1969 to 1972. As the previous chapter has shown, by 1968 both Festivals had established themselves as professionally-run film culture events. In the years that followed, the Festivals began to acquire a broader cultural importance in Australia. This importance stemmed from, first, the growing significance of the Festivals' relationship with Australian film (which, in this period, was just beginning to see signs of a renaissance), and, second, their public campaign to liberalise Australia's film censorship regulations.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. The first section deals with major developments in the international and national context of film industry and culture (such as the continued importance of the 'youth market' to Hollywood, and the growing radicalisation of the avant-garde). The second section discusses the Festivals' relations to Australian film. This relationship was still problematic throughout this period, owing to the poor state of the domestic industry. However, by the early 1970s, government incentives were assisting the Festivals to better fulfil their role as promoters of local product. The third section deals with the Festivals' continued campaign for film censorship change. The fourth and final section examines the roles of the two Festival Directors (Stratton and Rado) over this period, and other aspects of the history of the Festivals as organisations.

I. International and Domestic Developments in Film

During the brief period dealt with in this chapter, the major trends noted in the last chapter further develop and intensify. In this period, Hollywood's financial position becomes yet more parlous, and there is a continuing move away from overseas production, and towards independent producers. The relaxation of film censorship, the rise of Hollywood's own *auteurs*, and the continued importance of the 'youth market' in the US, means that there is no longer a clear distinction between the products of Hollywood and the products of the European film industries—a factor which contributes to the virtual collapse of the 'art film'

market. In Europe itself, the film culture world is rocked by the events of May 1968, and avant-garde film becomes more heavily influenced by developments in political and philosophical thought. Australia felt some of the impacts of these various changes, although the domestic film industry remains almost non-existent. However, this period does see the growth of small fringe groups of avant-garde film makers in Sydney and Melbourne —which receive some encouragement from the minimal amount of government funding that is just becoming available.

In this period, the major Hollywood production houses were still attempting to deal with the massive changes that had occurred since the collapse of the mass cinema audience in the post-war period. During the late 1960s, Hollywood's failed attempts to restore profitability had resulted in one of the worst recessions in its history. Overproduction in such areas as big-budget musicals and 'spectaculars', and reduced revenue from overseas productions, resulted in losses of nearly US\$500 million between 1969 and 1971.¹ Some major studios (including Twentieth Century-Fox and Columbia) came very close to bankruptcy, whilst others were forced to sell off many of their assets.²

By the early 1970s, it was clear to the major Hollywood studios that the collapse of the mass audience for cinema had made film production a much riskier financial business. In the earlier days of Hollywood, when 'going to the movies' was one of the few available leisure activities, the studios could expect most films to reach a certain sized audience, and thus generate a predictable level of profit. By the 1970s, however, film audience sizes could vary wildly —some films would 'flop', whilst others would be extraordinarily successful. This meant that, increasingly, the income of the Hollywood studios was being generated by a disproportionately small number of films (the so-called 'blockbusters'). For example, in 1971, it is estimated that less than one-tenth of the total films made by the major Hollywood studios generated more than half of their income.³ And in 1972, whilst seventy films grossed over US\$1 million in the US, the combined revenue of the top ten films was more than US\$120 million. In this year, *The Godfather* alone grossed more than US\$40 million.⁴

¹ Cook, *History of the American Cinema*, p. 10.

² Puttnam, *Undeclared War*, p. 262.

³ Cook, *History of the American Cinema*, p. 26.

⁴ Schatz, *Old Hollywood/New Hollywood*, p. 192.

These risks associated with film production further contributed to the post-war trend in which the major studios increasingly withdrew from the business of producing films directly. As noted in the previous chapter, throughout this period the major studios were functioning more and more as financiers and distributors of film, rather than as producers, with the business of production itself being performed by independent companies.⁵ In 1969, 75% of US films were made directly by the major Hollywood studios, with the remaining 25% being produced independently. But the next year, in 1970, the independents made over 40% of US films.⁶ In this ‘outsourcing’ of production it is again possible to see the ways in which Hollywood prefigured many modern developments in business practice. One advantage of such outsourcing was its flexibility, as the studios no longer had to maintain extensive ‘in house’ production facilities and staff. However, in the context of the growing reliance on the ‘blockbuster’, another important advantage of the system was that it reduced the potential risk for the majors —for some of the financial risks could now be borne by the independent production company (with its limited liability structure), rather than directly by the major studio itself. This development —the true end of the old ‘studio’ system— meant that by 1979 James Monaco could write that “Film used to be an industry ... Today, film is clearly a business ... far more interested in profit than product”.⁷

In this period, the burgeoning independent production houses in the US were able to draw on an important new source of talent: the graduates of university film-making courses. Unsurprisingly, given the cultural fascination with films of the 1960s, by 1970 there were over 300 film courses being offered by universities and colleges in the US.⁸ The students of such courses were educated in almost all areas of film. They were taught about film history and film theory, and, of course, about all aspects of the film-making process —from scriptwriting and directing, to filming and editing, to budgeting and marketing.⁹ From the point of view of the independent production companies, many of the recent graduates from film-studies courses also had the great virtue of being willing to work for very low wages (in order to ‘break into’ the industry).¹⁰

⁵ Cook, *History of the American Cinema*, pp. 20-21.

⁶ J. Toepfritz, *Hollywood and After: The Changing Face of American Cinema*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1974, p. 38.

⁷ J. Monaco, *American Films Now*, New York: New American Library, 1979, p. 31.

⁸ Schatz, *Old Hollywood/New Hollywood*, p. 203.

⁹ Schatz, *Old Hollywood/New Hollywood*, p. 204.

¹⁰ Schatz, *Old Hollywood/New Hollywood*, p. 205.

The film-studies schools were also the source of many of the major Hollywood directors of the 1970s. These, the so-called ‘whiz kids’ of Hollywood —such as Francis Ford Coppola, Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, Brian de Palma, and Martin Scorsese— deserve to be called Hollywood’s own *auteurs*.¹¹ Although many of these directors do not really step into their own until after the period dealt with in this chapter, this period does see the release of such films as *MASH* (1970), *McCabe and Mrs Miller* (1971), and *The Godfather* (1972).

Many of the best-known products of these directors in the 1970s were largely aimed at the ‘youth market’, which continued to be the most important cinema audience in the US. For example, a survey conducted at the end of 1968 revealed that nearly half of all box-office admissions in that year were aged between 16 and 24. This survey concluded that “being young and single is the overriding demographic pre-condition for being a frequent and enthusiastic movie-goer”.¹² Hence, as the Vice-President of Fox concluded in 1968: “We are tied to the youthful market of the future, we have to keep up with the rhythm of young people”.¹³

As noted in the previous chapter, one fundamental way in which Hollywood attempted to ‘keep up with the rhythm of young people’, was in making products that drew upon many of the themes that had earlier distinguished the European ‘art film’. These included a more explicit treatment of sex, violence, and drug-taking (a development facilitated by the relaxation of film censorship in the US), and an engagement with ideas and themes of interest to youth culture.

One phenomenon that deserves particular mention here is the growing political radicalism of much of ‘youth culture’ in the United States during this period. This period saw the growing strength of the so-called ‘New Left’ on US campuses, and an increase in all forms of student radicalism. The ‘New Left’ drew on many earlier modes of radical political thought, but was predominantly driven by opposition to the escalating conflict in Vietnam. This

¹¹ See, e.g., M. Pye and L. Myles, *The Movie Brats: How the Film Generation took over Hollywood*, London: Faber and Faber, 1979.

¹² Cook, *History of the American Cinema*, p. 67.

¹³ Cook, *History of the American Cinema*, p. 68.

movement culminated in the 1970 shooting of four students by National Guardsmen at Kent State University, Ohio.¹⁴

Hollywood's attempt to appeal to the 'youth market' in this period meant that the clear differences in style and content that had earlier distinguished the products of Hollywood from the European 'art film' were no longer so apparent. A revealing sign of this blurring of the differences between Hollywood and 'other' cinema came in 1969, when Dennis Hopper won Best Director at Cannes for his film *Easy Rider*.¹⁵ One of the consequences of this development was the virtual collapse of the market for the 'art film' in the US. In 1972, for the first time since 1966, no foreign-language film grossed more than US\$1 million in the US market.¹⁶ The changed cinema landscape in the US is perhaps best summed up in the following passage from *Variety* in 1972:

No longer does the elitist end of the American audience look solely to foreign films as the source of intellectual stimulation in the 'wasteland' of U.S. commercial 'trash'. Domestic product, even from major companies, has passed cinematic puberty in record time, offering films with themes and treatment so adult as to knock the bottom out of what once was an art house market. Foreign films must now compete for bookings and playing times with domestic features and can no longer depend on that audience who once supported their local art house just because it was a local art house.¹⁷

Turning now from developments in the US to those in Europe, the key event for film makers—and perhaps European intellectual culture itself—was May 1968. Just as had occurred in the US, youth culture in Europe had become deeply politicised by this time. The May 68 events began with student unrest in the cities of Nanterre and Paris, which was suppressed with great brutality by the police. Over nine million French workers went on strike in support of the student revolt—the largest general strike in European history. With conditions in Paris veering between an atmosphere of carnival and a virtual state of civil war,

¹⁴ See, e.g., P. Brauntstein and M. W. Doyle (eds.), *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s*, New York: Routledge, 2002; D. R. Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1994; M. Isserman, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

¹⁵ For further discussion of the significance of *Easy Rider* and other US films of the early 1970s, see P. Lev, *American Films of the 70s: Conflicting Visions*, Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2000, esp. ch. 1.

¹⁶ Balio, *United Artists*, p. 232.

¹⁷ Balio, *United Artists*, p. 233.

President De Gaulle dissolved the National Assembly, brought in the army, and calm was eventually restored.¹⁸ As Vincent Descombes writes,

In May 68 the French acted out an abridged version of the principal modern revolutions, with props borrowed from the Parisian insurrections of the nineteenth century (barricades, 1848-style feats of oratory). In Act One, the old regime is denounced and invited to withdraw; in Act Two, ‘everything is possible’; in Act Three, enthusiasm wanes and a new order appears, more rigorous than the last (and so it is said that ‘the revolution is betrayed’).¹⁹

The events of 1968 had an important impact on radical thought in Europe. In particular, they contributed to a loss of confidence in the traditional Marxist political model, in which revolutionary change was achieved through mass political action. This was for a number of reasons, including the swift restoration of normality and order in France after the student revolts, and the failure of the French Communist Party (PCF) to support the students’ call for revolution. The August 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops further contributed to stripping the official communist movement of much of its legitimacy.²⁰

These developments led some political thinkers to conceive of oppression as rooted not so much in particular economic and political structures, but rather in the structure of the human psyche itself.²¹ This period thus sees various attempts to synthesise the insights of Marx with those of Freud—in the widely-read works of thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse and, at the end of this period, Deleuze and Guattari’s *L’anti-Œdipe*. This latter work (published in 1972), argued that people did not consent to their exploitation because they suffered from ‘false consciousness’ (as traditional Marxists had argued), but because people *desired* to be exploited —“and it is this perversion of gregarious desire that requires explaining”.²² This new political orientation in turn meant that new stratagems of subversion and revolt were required by the radical Left —stratagems which focussed on liberating human beings from internal repression, rather than external oppression.²³

¹⁸ K. A. Reader, *The May 1968 Events in France*, New York: St Martin’s Press, 1993, p. 1.

¹⁹ Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, p. 169.

²⁰ See, e.g., L. Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: The Breakdown*, vol 3., Oxford University Press, 1981, ch. xiii.

²¹ See Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, ch. 6.

²² G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *L’anti-Œdipe*, Paris: Minuit, 1972; *The Anti-Oedipus*, New York: Viking, 1977, p. 37.

²³ See also, J. Stephens, *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

These developments in radical political thought were reflected in European avant-garde film circles in a number of ways. As noted in the previous chapter, in the years prior to 1968, avant-garde film-making, along with film theory and criticism, had become deeply politicised. In the 1960s, radical film criticism, in particular, had shifted away from a focus on evaluation, towards becoming a supposedly ‘scientific’ analysis of the ideologies embedded in the semiotic structure of a film.²⁴ The events of May 1968 served to intensify this politicisation of film and film theory—the aim of both, in the eyes of many in the European avant-garde, was to subvert all existing social and intellectual structures, and their accompanying hierarchies.²⁵

The turn towards psychoanalytic interpretations of social oppression after 1968 was also reflected in avant-garde film circles. In particular, the increasing focus on explicit sexual content in many avant-garde films—which partly reflected the revolution in sexual mores that had occurred in the 1960s—could now be justified as a form of *political* radicalism. That is, explicit depictions of sex, and transgression of sexual taboos, could be seen as part of a revolutionary project, aimed at liberating the film audience from supposedly oppressive notions of ‘normality’ and forms of psychic repression. This can be seen, for example, in films by Helmuth Costard (such as *Particularly Valuable*, 1968, which contained extreme close-ups of a ‘talking’ penis), Visconti’s *The Damned* (1969), and the works of US avant-garde film-makers, such as Paul Morrissey’s *Trash* (1970), and *Heat* (1972), and Stan Brakhage’s *Lovemaking* (1969). Indeed, in the US in particular, avant-garde work overlapped in some ways with the products of the rising pornography industry (with this period seeing the production of Gerard Damiano’s seminal film *Deep Throat*, 1972, Bill Mosco’s *Mona*, 1970, and Ruskin’s masturbatory epic, *The Man from Onan*, 1971).

Perhaps the paradigmatic example of this trend in avant-garde film making is the work of Otto Muehl, one of the leading members of Austrian avant-garde art group, the *Wiener Aktionists*. Muehl’s films (such as the infamous *Sodoma*, 1970) contained disturbing scenes of sado-masochism and coprophagia, and drew analogies between sexual repressiveness and Nazism. Muehl makes his artistic credo clear in the following passage:

My work is psychic subversion, aiming at the destruction of the pseudo-morality and ethic of state and order. I am for lewdness, for the

²⁴ Lapsley and Westlake, *Film Theory*, p. 2.

²⁵ See I. Aitken, *European Film Theory and Cinema: A Critical Introduction*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001, ch. v. See also S. Cannon, “‘When you’re not a worker yourself ...’: Godard, the Dziga Vertov Group and the audience”, in D. Holmes and A. Smith (eds.), *100 Years of European Cinema: Entertainment or Ideology*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, pp. 100-108.

demythologization of sexuality. I make films to provoke scandals, for audiences that are hidebound, perverted by 'normalcy', mentally stagnating and conformist ... The worldwide stupefaction of the masses at the hands of artistic, religious, political swine can be stopped only by the most brutal utilization of all available weapons. Pornography is an appropriate means to cure our society from its genital panic. All kinds of revolt are welcome: only in this manner will this insane society, product of the fantasies of primeval madmen, finally collapse ... I restrict myself to flinging the food to the beasts: let them choke on it.²⁶

This passage shows that Muehl, and like-minded members of avant-garde film-making circles, were making angry and volatile films, containing images that were deliberately intended to shock and subvert all notions of 'normality'. Works like *Sodoma* were a long way from *La Dolce Vita* and other standard festival films of the earlier 1960s. The avant-garde were now producing many works that were often unpalatable to an audience raised on the products of the *auteurs* of the New Wave.

In the world of cinema, the intense politicisation of avant-garde film circles and the May 1968 events, led to the virtual collapse of both the Cannes and Venice Film Festivals in that year. In a surreal fashion, the Cannes Festival began with a showing of *Gone With The Wind* at the very time that pitched street battles were occurring in Paris. The Festival was quickly disrupted by radical film-makers and actors, who, to show their solidarity with the student protests, withdrew their films and resigned from the judging panels.²⁷ The Venice Festival, watched by a dismayed Rado, was boycotted by FIAPF for breaching regulations, had its programme criticised on political grounds by figures such as Pasolini, and was threatened with a boycott by the Italian screenwriter's guild. Tensions ran so high that the Opening Night of the Festival had to be delayed for two days after a bomb attack, despite a heavy police presence.²⁸

Turning finally to the domestic context, the growth of campus radicalism and the various protest movements in the US and Europe had some influence in Australia during this period, but the domestic film industry continued to languish. While there was some minor outbreaks of campus radicalism, Australia saw nothing like the protest movements occurring in Europe

²⁶ Quoted in Amos Vogel, *Film As A Subversive Art*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974, p. 187.

²⁷ *Cinema Year by Year*, p. 579.

²⁸ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 30.8.1968, Box No. 43.

or the US.²⁹ And just as in the previous period, the years from 1969 to 1972 saw very little domestic production. It was only at the end of this period, with the introduction of some government funding, that the Australian film industry began to revive.

Despite the impoverished state of the domestic film industry in this period, the late 1960s does see some signs of life amongst independent film makers, with the formation of two small groups of avant-garde film-makers in Australia. These groups were 'Carlton Cinema', in Melbourne, and the 'Ubu Group', in Sydney. Based around the use of light-weight 16mm cameras, and often screening their films at local hired venues, these film-makers shot a variety of low budget films including documentaries, short fiction pieces, and experimental works.³⁰ According to leading Ubu Group member Albie Thoms, the Carlton Cinema group in Melbourne had "affinities with those of the British Free Cinema movement of a decade before, more concerned with social conscience than personal expression or aesthetic experiment".³¹ The Sydney group, on the other hand, were more experimental, and tended to consider the Melbourne film-makers as conservatives.³² In order to facilitate distribution and exhibition of their films, these two groups formed the Australian Filmmakers' Cooperative. Although they were never to attain any genuine commercial success, Ubu and Carlton were nonetheless the first Australian independents to be producing 'art films'.

Along with some signs of life in Australian independent film-making, this period also sees the beginnings of government support for the domestic film industry. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Australian Council of the Arts had been established in 1967, and the Film and Television Committee had been added to this body in November 1968. In 1969, the Federal government allocated \$300,000 to this committee —funds which were earmarked to assist in the development of the Australian film and television industry.³³ This money was under the control of the newly created Australian Film Development Corporation (AFDC), which used \$100,000 to establish the Australian Film and Television School, and gave a further \$100,000 to the AFI, to administer an 'Experimental Film Fund', which began

²⁹ G. Bolton, *The Oxford History of Australia: The Middle Way 1942-1995*, vol. 5, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 170. See also S. Alomes, *A Nation at Last? The Changing Character of Australian Nationalism 1880-1988*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1988, ch. 6.

³⁰ Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*, p. 222; cf. Albie Thoms, "The Australian Avant-garde" [1972] in A. Moran and T. O'Regan (eds.), *An Australian Film Reader*, Sydney: Currency Press, 1985, pp. 279-280.

³¹ Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*, p.223.

³² Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*, p. 224; cf. P. Mudie, *Ubu Films: Sydney Underground Movies 1965-1970*, Sydney: Australian Film Commission, 1997.

³³ Bertrand and Collins, *Government and Film in Australia*, p. 147.

operating in July 1970.³⁴ In conjunction with the establishment of this Fund, the AFI also established the 'Vincent Library', "in which all films made with assistance from the Experimental Film and Television Fund are collected".³⁵

The Experimental Film Fund gave out numerous small grants to film projects that met the criteria for being 'experimental'. The ACA defined this concept in the following way:

The Australian Council for the Arts defined as "experimental" projects falling within the following three categories:

- (a) Experimental films, extending the frontiers of cinematic expression in content and technique;
- (b) Purely technical experiments;
- (c) Experimentation with the medium of film, by applicants with little or no experience, showing talent.³⁶

These categories could potentially have incorporated the avant-garde work of such groups as Ubu and Carlton Cinema. In practice, however, (as the Ubu group complained) the administration of the Experimental Film Fund tended to be driven by a more pragmatic philosophy, "that relegated it to be used as a 'proving' ground for future feature film producers".³⁷

This was hardly surprising, given that the Fund was primarily intended as a means of encouraging the creation of a viable Australian commercial film industry, than as a way of advancing the artistic frontiers of film *per se*. The small level of funding that the Fund received demonstrated that the Australian government had no intention of establishing a fully-fledged, publicly-supported film industry. Rather, the fundamental aim of the Experimental Film Fund was to encourage Australian film-makers, and thereby begin to build up a body of talent that could then be utilised by a commercial film industry backed by private enterprise.³⁸

However, despite the limited funding and ambitions of the Experimental Film Fund, its creation did represent a dramatic departure from previous government policy, and was a first step towards reviving the Australian film industry. The first fruits of this revival came at the

³⁴ Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*, pp. 148, 235.

³⁵ MFF – Arch., Box No. 56.

³⁶ MFF – Arch., Box No. 56.

³⁷ Mudie, *Ubu Films*, p. 17.

³⁸ Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*, pp. 234-235.

very end of the period dealt with in this chapter, with the commercial success of the AFDC funded film, *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie*, which was released in October 1972. The remaining story of the revival of the Australian film industry is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis —and has, in any case, been dealt with extensively by others.³⁹

II. Relations with Australian Film

Since Olinda and the founding of the two Film Festivals, one of their avowed cultural aims had been to encourage and support the Australian film industry. However, as discussed in previous chapters, this role had proved difficult for the Festivals to perform —largely owing to the paucity of Australian product (feature films in particular), and the poor quality of what product there was. In the period from 1969 to 1972 this continues to be problematic. The Festivals still felt under cultural pressure to act as promoters of Australian film, yet this conflicted with their need to screen a high quality programme. In the end, with the assistance of both private and government funding, the Festivals were able to find a compromise position on this issue.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Festivals had experienced difficulty in showcasing Australian film, because of the lack of both quantity and quality. By 1969, both Festivals had abandoned the idea of a separate ‘Australian’ programme, owing to the difficulties in filling it with material of reasonable quality. They had also abandoned their policy of showing only premieres of Australian films. There was a particular shortage of Australian feature films, with most domestic product entered into the Festivals being shorts and documentaries.

The problems with Australian films at this time are clearly demonstrated by the Festivals’ 1969 screenings of two feature-length Australian films: Tim Burstall’s *2000 Weeks*, and Albie Thoms’s *Marinetti*. *2000 Weeks* was the first fully-fledged Australian feature film that had been made for some years. The film had already received commercial release in Melbourne earlier in 1969, and had been panned by most critics.⁴⁰ However, despite its lack of critical success, and its prior commercial release, the two Festival organising committees felt compelled to screen it, as it was the first new Australian feature film for some time.

³⁹ E.g., Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*; Dermody and Jacka, *Screening of Australia*; and Stratton’s own summary of this period, *The Last New Wave: The Australian Film Revival*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1980.

Burstall's film was very poorly received at both of the 1969 Film Festivals. The *Sun*'s Anne Deveson reported that *2000 Weeks* was virtually "booed out of Melbourne", while "Sydney audiences ... just laughed".⁴¹ She went on to say:

Tim Burstall was in the audience ... and it must be pretty nasty to hear shrieks of laughter at moments you intended to be tender or profound. ...

And the acting could, I suspect, have been infinitely better had the wretched actors and actresses not had to cope with the hail of clichés that blasted them into ridicule every time they spoke.

According to Stratton's own recollections, at the Sydney screening the audience started laughing half-way through —causing the lead actress, Jeannie Drynan, (who was also in the audience) to burst into tears.⁴²

The 1969 Sydney Festival also screened what was perhaps the most ambitious project to date of the Australian avant-garde: Albie Thoms's *Marinetti*, a feature-length experimental film. The following passage from Shirley and Adams offers a good sense of the flavour of this film, which is,

right from its 10 minute opening sequence of black spacing, white flashes, and a multi-layered sound-track, another instant challenge to viewer involvement. The film is at its most vivid in a series of jittery 'freak-out' impressions of King's Cross at night. The images finally rain with multiple white scratches which punctuate, reanimate, and finally take over from what remains of any conventional image.⁴³

While Melbourne did not screen Thoms's film, the Sydney organising committee felt it had to screen *Marinetti*, as it was one of the major products of the Sydney-based Ubu group. However, because of concerns about audience reaction to the film, *Marinetti* was screened after the Closing-night —and thus, strictly speaking, was not part of the Festival proper. According to Shirley and Adams, the screening of *Marinetti* "prompted walk-outs and a stormy press".⁴⁴ The *Sun* cartoonist contemptuously referred to it as *Macaroni*, and the editorial described it as "a tin-pot film about nothing".⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*, p. 231.

⁴¹ MFF – Arch., Anne Deveson, "Give it a b- go..." in *The Sun*, 10.6.1969, press cuttings, Box No.66.

⁴² David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997. Cf. J. Baxter, *The Australian Cinema*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1970, pp. 105-106 (Baxter had previously worked on the SFF Film Selection sub-committee).

⁴³ Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*, p. 226.

⁴⁴ Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*, p. 226.

⁴⁵ Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*, p. 226.

After the debacle of the 1969 screenings of these two Australian films, the Film Festivals were forced to reconsider the place of Australian content within the festival structure. Initially, there were suggestions that the Festivals should cease to showcase Australian product. For example, the Melbourne President, Ray Fisher, argued that the products of young Australian film makers—in particular, the works of such groups as Ubu and Carlton—should not be included at all within the Festivals—as they were “not the place where such programmes should be presented”.⁴⁶ Stratton had held similar views for a long time—arguing that the Festival existed to show *quality* film, and therefore should not show Australian film merely because it was Australian. According to Ross Tzannes, Stratton’s position on this issue was strengthened by the poor reception of *2000 Weeks*.⁴⁷

Indeed, Ross Tzannes goes further, and accuses Stratton of being biased against Australian cinema:

He was against it. He didn’t really like Australian film and he didn’t want to show it. And we used to fight tooth and nail about that. And he used to show some Australian content, mainly because we used to push him. And of course it became very difficult because a perception grew in the film community that showing a film at the Festival was a kiss of death, and David used to use that as a major reason for not showing them as well.⁴⁸

It seems hard to believe this accusation—that Stratton was biased against Australian cinema merely on the grounds that it was Australian. It seems much more consistent with Stratton’s character and other actions as Director, to believe that he disliked much Australian cinema at this time simply because it was very poor quality (and was perhaps irritated by the tendency to ‘boost’ home-grown product). However, Tzannes’s recollection does perhaps indicate some of the feelings within the Sydney organising committee towards Stratton on this issue.

Australian film makers were also putting pressure on the Festival. Towards the end of 1969, the Sydney Film Festival received a letter of protest against its treatment of Australian films, and a petition (signed by sixty-four Festival subscribers) demanding that it showcase Australian avant-garde products.⁴⁹ The group behind this protest was the Australian

⁴⁶ MFF – Min., 4.9.1969, Box No. 14.

⁴⁷ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ross Tzannes, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 7.9.1992.

⁴⁸ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ross Tzannes, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 7.9.1992.

⁴⁹ SFF – Min., AGM, 21.10.1969, Box No. 2.

Filmmakers Cooperative (which was essentially comprised of Ubu and Carlton), who believed that the Sydney Festival was conservative in its programming choices.⁵⁰

The Festivals' difficulties concerning the screening of Australian content was discussed by Stratton in his report entitled "Into the 70's: Where do we go?". In this overview, Stratton wrote that:

An increasing difficulty in recent years has been the choice of Australian films. This is another area in which feelings run very high. Should the festival devote more time to Australian films? Are we prejudiced against Australian films? It can be said that it would basically be wrong for us to give undue emphasis to Australian films ... our subscribers come to see foreign films they may not be able to see outside the festival.⁵¹

In this passage, Stratton is effectively recommending that the Sydney Festival should abandon one of its earlier cultural aims. That is, the Festival should no longer be required to act as a publicity and exhibition device for Australian film (encouraging and showcasing domestic production). Stratton suggests instead that the primary role of the film festival should now be to screen 'foreign' films that may otherwise be unavailable.

In the end, under pressure from the committee, Stratton agreed to compromise on the issue of Australian films, and for the 1970 Sydney Festival, established an Australian short film competition.⁵² The initial idea for such a competition had come from Albie Thoms.⁵³ In its first year, the finalists were spread throughout the ordinary programme, but from 1971, a special day was dedicated to the competition.⁵⁴ This neatly resolved the Festival's dilemma over showing Australian content. Such a competition effectively insulated the Australian short films from the rest of the Festival (ensuring a more sympathetic audience), while serving as a prestigious publicity device for domestic film-makers.

The 1970 Australian Short Film Awards was also the Sydney Festival's first private sponsorship deal. The money for the prizes (\$1,000 for first place, \$500 for second place, and \$250 for third place)⁵⁵ was provided by the giant tobacco company, Benson and Hedges.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Barrett Hodsdon, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 12.10.1998.

⁵¹ SFF – Min., 3.2.1970, Box No. 2.

⁵² *40 Years of Film*, p. 16.

⁵³ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Stratton, self-conducted interview.

⁵⁴ *40 Years of Film*, p. 16.

⁵⁵ MFF – Arch., "Benson & Hedges Award for Australian Short Film" in *Script, Screen & Art*, 5.1970, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

⁵⁶ MFF – Arch., M. Thornhill, "Keeping up with the trends", in *The Australian*, 20.6.1970, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

The company stated that the Awards were intended to act “as a stimulant to the now vigorous growth of the Australian film industry”.⁵⁷

The conditions for entry to the Awards stipulated that only independent films could be entered, as their purpose was to act as an incentive for such film-makers. This condition meant that groups such as the Commonwealth Film Unit and the ABC could not enter their films into competition.⁵⁸ As noted in the previous chapter, Stratton had a long-standing contempt for the products of the CFU in particular, and was no doubt pleased to have a legitimate mechanism for reducing the presence of such films in the Festival. This was perhaps also facilitated by the fact that Hawes, the Producer-in-Chief of the CFU, had resigned from the Sydney organising committee by the end of 1969.⁵⁹

The figures chosen to select and judge films for the 1970 ‘Benson and Hedges’ Australian Short Film Awards represented both film culture and industry. Fifty-two short films in total were entered for the Awards, and these were cut to a short-list of ten to be screened during the Festival.⁶⁰ The short-listing panel consisted of Don Anderson (film critic of *Nation*), David Bairstow (visiting film producer from the National Film Board of Canada), and Phil Jones (managing director of Sydney’s Gala Cinema). According to Don Anderson, the short-listed “films were selected on the basis of creative originality, technical competence and editorial and productorial judgement”.⁶¹ The judge for the final awards was John Heyer, who had been a significant figure in both the Australian film-making world and the Film Festivals since the days of Olinda.⁶²

The winners of the 1970 Short Film Awards give further indication of the sorry state of Australian cinema in this period. First prize was won by a documentary on the dangers of drug addiction, entitled *No Roses for Michael*, and directed by 24 year old Christopher McGill. Third place was taken by six students from North Sydney Boys High School for their film *It Could Happen Here*. This third prize allocation led the *Sunday Telegraph*’s Kerry McGlynn to state:

⁵⁷ MFF – Arch., “Encouraging Talent”, press clippings, 1970, Box No. 66.

⁵⁸ MFF – Arch., “Benson & Hedges Award for Australian Short Film” in *Script, Screen & Art*, 5.1970, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

⁵⁹ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Stratton, self-conducted interview.

⁶⁰ MFF – Arch., *B & T: Advertising, Marketing and Media Weekly*, 14.5.1970, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

⁶¹ MFF – Arch., “Waiting and happening” in *Nation*, 30.5.1970, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

⁶² MFF – Arch., “\$1,000 prize for anti-drug short”, *The Film Weekly*, 16.6.1970, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

It is a sad commentary on the Australian film industry that half a dozen schoolboys using an old-fashioned borrowed camera and a budget of \$187.35 can pick up a third prize at the Sydney Film Festival ... As 18-year-old Ron Marton, the film's producer and cameraman put it to me: "Technically, our film was awful and we couldn't understand how we made the top ten —until we saw the other entries".⁶³

Despite the almost shameful quality of the finalists in this inaugural competition, Benson and Hedges maintained their sponsorship deal.

Standards had begun to improve by 1972, when one of the entrants to the Short Film Awards was *Violence in the Cinema, Part One*, by George Miller and Byron Kennedy. Stratton and the judges considered that this film deserved better company than it would have being shown as part of the Awards day, and thus moved it into the Festival proper. This led to the film's commercial release by Greater Union, and encouraged Miller and Kennedy to go on to make *Mad Max*.⁶⁴

Benson and Hedges withdrew their sponsorship of the Short Film Awards only after the 1973 Festival, when one of the finalists, entitled *A Motion Picture*, was found not to be consonant with the image the company wished to project. According to Stratton, this film "consisted of a single shot taken from inside a toilet bowl, looking up at someone shitting onto the camera". Unsurprisingly, "The B & H people were disgusted and withdrew their sponsorship immediately".⁶⁵

Along with their first corporate sponsorship, changes in the attitude of the Australian government meant that the Film Festivals in this period also began receiving some public funding. As noted in the previous chapter, the Festivals had made prior approaches to both the State and Federal governments for assistance, but with no success whatsoever. Indeed, the first allocation of public funds to the Festivals occurred in 1969 when the Sydney Festival received a cheque for \$75 from the Council for the City of Sydney. Announcing this success at a committee meeting, Stratton noted dryly that this was "a grant more valuable for its principle than its monetary value".⁶⁶

⁶³ MFF – Arch., "This is the life, say boy film-makers", 21.6.1970, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

⁶⁴ *40 Years of Film*, p. 16.

⁶⁵ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Stratton, self-conducted interview.

⁶⁶ SFF – Min., 21.10.1969, Box No. 2.

However, as discussed in the first section of this chapter, the Australian Council of the Arts had established a Film and Television Committee at the end of 1968, and in 1969 this Committee had been allocated \$300,000 towards the development of the Australian film and television industry in 1969.⁶⁷ One third of this money was dedicated to the Experimental Film Fund, which became the responsibility of the AFI—an organisation still under Rado's directorship.⁶⁸

This meant that, for the first time, there was a pool of public money which was potentially available to the Film Festivals. At the end of 1970, the two Film Festivals each received a \$3,000 grant from the Experimental Film Fund.⁶⁹ This money was intended as payment to the Festivals for the costs of screening films funded by the Experimental Film Fund.

The Melbourne Festival, however, was already intending to hold a two day screening of Australian films in 1971,⁷⁰ and decided that it could therefore not “incorporate more Australian material in its official programme”.⁷¹ Instead, Melbourne used its grant to set up a separate screening event, which was run as a joint venture with the State Film Centre. According to Melbourne committee member Ed Schefferle, who was also a senior administrator at the Centre, the primary reason for this separation was to ensure that the Experimental Film Fund films “received specific attention, and would not get swallowed up by the broader feature programme”.⁷² Undoubtedly there was also some concern in the Melbourne organising committee—and with good reason—that the films in question would be of dubious quality.

The Sydney Festival also spent its \$3,000 grant—although not quite in the manner that was perhaps originally intended by the ACA. Rather than using this money to hold an additional programme, Sydney used its grant to bring international delegates to the 1971 Festival (including Jerzy Skolimowski and Jörn Donner). This was justified by the organising committee on the grounds that these delegates were required as judges for the Australian

⁶⁷ Bertrand and Collins, *Government and Film in Australia*, p. 147.

⁶⁸ Bertrand and Collins, *Government and Film in Australia*, p. 148.

⁶⁹ SFF – Min., 7.7.1970, Box No. 2.

⁷⁰ *Melbourne Film Festival – 1971*, programme.

⁷¹ MFF – Min., 15.4.1971, Box No. 33.

⁷² Edward Schefferle, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 19.3.2001.

Short Film Awards, into which films funded by the Experimental Film Fund could be entered.⁷³

As a final note on the topic of public funding, it is worth remarking that at the end of this period (in late November 1972), the Victorian State government offered the Melbourne Festival \$5,000 in cash, to fund the prizes for the Australian Short Film Awards.⁷⁴

In conclusion, during this period the Festivals began to expand their promotion of Australian film, with the assistance of both private and public money. The Benson and Hedges Short Film Awards, like the Experimental Film Fund programme, and the AFI's Australian Film Awards, allowed the Festivals both to offer structural support for the domestic film industry, and simultaneously distance themselves from its products. This allowed them to obey one of their key cultural imperatives, whilst not compromising the quality of their main programme.

It is also worth noting that, by the end of this period, the Festivals needed to begin redefining their own cultural role to some extent—and an increased focus on Australian cinema would become part of this redefinition. As has been discussed throughout the past few chapters, what deserves to be called the 'standard festival fare' of the mid 1960s—European film—was by 1972 receiving relatively widespread commercial distribution in Australia. Hence, the cultural need for the Festivals to act as exhibition outlets for such films was reduced. Of course the Festivals continued to screen and promote such films over the following years. However, if this was the *only* role that they played, then there was a danger of the Festivals losing their cultural legitimacy, and coming to be seen as just a promotion device for the commercial trade. One way to retain this cultural legitimacy was by increasing their role in the promotion and support of Australian film. As Sydney President Ross Tzannes remarked in his 1972 Report:

The Festival has changed over the years so that there is no longer the urgent need to screen the many top quality Continental films which now obtain commercial distribution. There is need, however, to encourage the screening of Australian films ... Also to screen leading examples of new film of an experimental nature which gives local film-makers and others and opportunity to view those films which explore the outer limits of the medium.⁷⁵

⁷³ SFF – Min., 30.1.1971, Box No. 3.

⁷⁴ MFF – Min., 21.11.1972, Box No. 33.

⁷⁵ SFF – Min., AGM, 28.11.1972, Box No. 3.

III. Censorship

As discussed in the previous chapter, by the end of 1967 the two Film Festivals had negotiated an informal freedom from censorship with the Chief Censor (Prowse) and the Minister for Customs (Scott), and the 1968 Festivals went uncensored. However, this arrangement did not last long. In 1969, an incident occurred that was to create a full-blown censorship crisis in Australia.

While the 1968 Festivals, in accordance with the agreement reached with Scott, were not subject to any censorship, their 1969 programmes were to demonstrate how tenuous this agreement really was. The Festivals were both well aware that their freedom from censorship was a purely ad hoc arrangement, which depended upon the continuing cooperation of the Minister for Customs. As such, the Festivals continued to discuss the issue of censorship, and considered contingency plans in the event of the informal arrangement breaking down. In particular, at a meeting of the Melbourne organising committee on 22 May 1969, it was agreed that the Festival would no longer continue its policy of screening films that had been cut by the censors.⁷⁶ As Rado pointed out to Stratton, this meant that the censors now had to choose between letting a film through untouched, or, in effect, banning it entirely.⁷⁷

Nine days after this meeting of the Melbourne organising committee, the most controversial film censorship incident to date occurred. On 31 May 1969, Stratton received a certificate banning Swedish director Stig Bjorkman's *I Love, You Love*.⁷⁸ Stratton had been conscious that this film might create censorship problems for the Festivals, because the subtitles included the word "fuck".⁷⁹ However, it had not occurred to him that Bjorkman's film would be banned on other grounds, as in fact turned out to be the case.

The decision to ban the film was made by Scott, the Minister of Customs, rather than by the Chief Censor, on the grounds that it showed scenes of sexual intercourse with a pregnant woman.⁸⁰ Scott described the offending scene as follows:

⁷⁶ MFF – Min., 22.5.1969, Box No. 33.

⁷⁷ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 23.5.1969, Box No. 47.

⁷⁸ MFF – Min., "Report of the Convenor of the Censorship Sub-Committee – August 1969", Box No. 52.

⁷⁹ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 20.5.1969, Box No. 47.

⁸⁰ MFF – Arch., Editorial, "Comic Cuts" in *Daily Mirror*, 5.6.1969, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

The scene depicts a nude couple on the bed. The female is obviously seven months pregnant. She was sitting astride the male face to face with him. They were engaged in conversation and actions of a distinctly sexual nature.⁸¹

In response, the Festivals moved quickly to publicise and challenge Scott's decision. The day after receiving the notification of the ban, the Sydney organising committee held a crisis meeting. As a result of this meeting, they telegraphed a protest to Senator Scott, and informed Bjorkman (who was en route to Australia to attend the 1969 Festival as their guest) of the ban.⁸² The committee also set into motion a full-scale campaign of public protest.⁸³ In his official press release, Stratton wrote that "It is incredible that an audience known by the Australian Film Censorship Board to be adult and intelligent cannot see a major international film such as *I Love, You Love*".⁸⁴

This campaign was perhaps the most successful public protest ever mounted by the Festivals, and attracted a great deal of attention from the Australian media. On the 3 June 1969, Stig Bjorkman arrived at Sydney airport to face a barrage of questions from media representatives. The censorship issue also made the front page of many of the metropolitan dailies, and continued to attract substantial media attention in the days that followed.⁸⁵

The first thing that Bjorkman did in Australia, was attempt to have the ban removed. On 4 June, he flew to Canberra to meet Minister Scott to negotiate the removal of the ban. Bjorkman's main argument was that the offending scene did not contain any actual or implied sexual intercourse. To the press, he described the scene as follows:

There are no sexual organs visible and they are sitting so far apart they couldn't be doing anything that the senator would find objectionable. The man simply strokes his wife's face.⁸⁶

As additional support for his claim, Bjorkman also provided telegrams from the two principal actors involved in the scene, who stated that no actual intercourse had taken place during filming.⁸⁷

⁸¹ MFF – Arch., J. Perlez, "Swedish Director Withdraws Film", *The Australian*, 5.6.1969, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

⁸² SFF – Min., "Report of the Convenor of the Censorship Sub-Committee – August 1969", Box No. 2.

⁸³ SFF – Min., "Report of the Convenor of the Censorship Sub-Committee – August 1969", Box No. 2.

⁸⁴ MFF – Arch., "Commonwealth Censor Ban Welcomes Visiting Swedish Film Director", Sydney Film Festival Press Release, Box No. 2.

⁸⁵ SFF – Arch., press cuttings, 1969, Box No. 3.

⁸⁶ MFF – Arch., J. Perlez, "Swedish Director Withdraws Film", *The Australian*, 5.6.1969, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

In a press release, he further argued that the Australian censorship authorities were being too puritanical. According to Bjorkman, *I Love, You Love* was “an ordinary story about ordinary people”, depicting married love. As such it could not be considered pornographic or offensive in any way. Bjorkman suggested that in banning his film, the Australian authorities were attempting to ‘disinfect’ real life experience, and compared this to the spraying of pesticide on planes landing at Sydney airport:

Suddenly the door of the aircraft opens and a man looking like a creature from outer space rushes in disinfecting the arriving passengers with the aid of a neat spray bottle. “Keep Australia Clean” seems to be an overall motto. ... In Australia—and this is my limited experience so far—the authorities try to disinfect the Australians.⁸⁸

Despite the protests of the Festivals, and Bjorkman’s arguments, Scott refused to reverse his decision. In response, on 5 June 1969, Bjorkman announced to the press that he was withdrawing *I Love, You Love* from the Festivals.⁸⁹ The Festivals informed the press of their support for this stance by placing a protest advertisement, with nearly 400 signatures from Festival subscribers.⁹⁰ This galvanised widespread protest in Australia. Six of the nine Australian entrants showed their solidarity for Bjorkman’s action by withdrawing their own films from the Festivals.⁹¹ A group of prominent Australians—including Charmian Clift, George Johnston, Maggie Tabberer and Stuart Wagstaff—wrote to the press informing them that they supported Bjorkman’s stand, and had formally complained to the Minister.⁹² Scott was also contacted by the Swedish Embassy, who informed him that the ban was likely to cause “adverse comment” in Sweden.⁹³

In general, the Australian media were sympathetic to the Festivals, and ridiculed Scott’s decision. The *Sydney Morning Herald* interviewed a gynaecologist about the offending scene, who stated that the location of the actors made physical penetration impossible. This led the *Herald* to make the rather cutting statement that:

⁸⁷ MFF – Arch., J. Perlez, “Swedish Director Withdraws Film”, *The Australian*, 5.6.1969, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

⁸⁸ MFF – Arch., Press release by Stig Bjorkman, 4.6.1969, Box No. 66.

⁸⁹ MFF – Arch., J. Perlez, “Swedish Director Withdraws Film”, *The Australian*, 5.6.1969, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

⁹⁰ MFF – Arch., J. Perlez, “Swedish Director Withdraws Film”, *The Australian*, 5.6.1969, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

⁹¹ SFF – Min., “Report of the Convenor of the Censorship Sub-Committee – August 1969”, Box No. 2.

⁹² MFF – Arch., “Censorship of Film”, paper and date unknown, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

⁹³ MFF – Arch., “Censorship of Film”, paper and date unknown, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

It surely should be a minimum qualification for the Minister for Customs that he be able to recognise sexual intercourse when he sees it.⁹⁴

The *Daily Telegraph*'s cartoonist lampooned the incident with his scenario of a film director telling two naked actors in bed, "OK, now for the Australian edition —lights, camera, no action!".⁹⁵ In a more serious vein, the *Daily Mirror*'s editorial stated that "Surely this absurd hurly burly affair makes it imperative that our censorship laws were clearly defined for all time".⁹⁶ In a similar vein, Colin Bennett wrote in *The Age* that:

Film censorship has become a part of the Australian way of life. Guarding other people's morals is not just an official passion, it is a national disease. It is time to bury the notion that Australians are less worthy of being treated as adults than their fellows in Europe and America.⁹⁷

Even Bjorkman could not resist further comment on the censorship incident. With the help of Australian film-makers, the Swedish director made a four minute film entitled *To Australia —with love*. This short opens with a confrontation between a Customs officer and Melbourne actress Robin Bryning naked in a tin trunk.⁹⁸ This film was passed by the censor. Indeed, the entire Bjorkman incident had generated enough media interest to see this short screened on Channel 9 on Sunday night of 15 June 1969.⁹⁹

The public interest and concern generated by the banning of Bjorkman's film led to renewed discussion of Australia's film censorship regime as a whole. For example, at the 1969 Melbourne Festival, a major Censorship Symposium was conducted. At this symposium, journalists, psychologists, academics and even members of the clergy debated the broader social implications of film censorship.¹⁰⁰

The Bjorkman incident had also catapulted the Festivals' anti-film-censorship campaign to the broader awareness of the Australian public. As the Sydney organising committee noted at the time, it had generated "publicity beyond the wildest dreams of any PR man".¹⁰¹ In

⁹⁴ D. Chipp, *The Third Man*, Adelaide: Rigby, 1978, p. 101.

⁹⁵ SFF – Arch., 6.6.1969, press cuttings, Box No. 3.

⁹⁶ SFF – Arch., 5.6.1969, press cuttings, Box No. 3.

⁹⁷ Bennett in *The Age*, 4.6.1969, quoted in Williams, "Cultural Despotism – Film Censorship", p. 52.

⁹⁸ MFF – Arch., Allen Mapie, "Sydney's 16th Film Festival", *Script, Screen & Art*, August/September, 1969, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

⁹⁹ MFF – Arch., "Satire Film for TV", *Sydney*, 14.6.1969, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

¹⁰⁰ MFF – Corr., Rado to Allan Ashbolt, 13.6.1969, Box No. 47.

¹⁰¹ SFF – Min., 6.5.1969, Box No. 2.

addition, it led to the humiliating end of Senator Scott's position as Minister of Customs. Scott himself told Ross Tzannes (then a member of the Sydney organising committee) that the Film Festivals were "the single cause of the loss of my Ministry".¹⁰²

It is perhaps worth noting at this point that not all subscribers to the Festivals supported their stance on film censorship. For example, at about this time the Melbourne organising committee received the following letter from an outraged subscriber:

Sir, I was shocked to read you had selected Stig's film for the festival, as I though you had better taste, surely you cannot be serious in supporting these filthy films fit only for depraved sex perverts. Why dont you think of a better way to earn your bread, try for a change think DECENTLY MORALLY and get away from the sordid world of films and theatre as shown today ... Never has the industry sunk as low, they only think sex sex sex a filthy outlook on life corrupting the kids for the sake of money... you might like to take wife etc to see such filth but 80 percent of AUSTRALIANS arent perves so take your filthy pictures and go and join stig you wont be missed that's for sure. Give your brain a rest and think DECENTLY for a change you can if you try [*sic!*]¹⁰³

Capitalising on the publicity gained by the Bjorkman incident, the Film Festivals pushed on with their attempt to secure broader changes to the Australian system of film censorship. As discussed in the previous chapter, two major aims of the Festivals' anti-censorship campaign were (1) to establish legal exemption from censorship requirements for festival films, and (2) to see the introduction of an 'R' or 'AO' classification for films, restricting the audience to those aged 18 and over. Up to this point, the Festivals' main efforts had been directed towards (1), as the Australian trade were generally hostile to the idea of a restricted 'adults only' film classification. This was mainly for two reasons. First, the trade believed that such a classification could seriously restrict the audience size (and thus profits) of certain films. Second, the trade also argued that enforcing such restrictions would be costly and difficult for exhibitors. This is because additional staff would be required to enforce age restrictions; and exhibitors would also incur the risk of government fines for any breaches.¹⁰⁴

However, with the changes to film audience demographics and film content that were occurring in the late 1960s, trade opposition to the introduction of an 'R' classification began to decline in Australia. As noted in the previous chapter, this classification had already been

¹⁰² Quoted in Chipp, *Third Man*, p. 102.

¹⁰³ MFF – Corr., Author unknown to Rado, date unknown, Box No. 52.

¹⁰⁴ Bertrand, *Government and Film Censorship in Australia*, pp. 182-6.

adopted in the US and the UK —and, closer to home, in New Zealand. This was partly in response to the increasing commercial and critical success of ‘youth market’ films, such as *Easy Rider* and *Midnight Cowboy*. These films contained explicit scenes of sex, violence, and drug-taking —and had thus been given restricted classifications in the US. Films such as these promised to be lucrative commercial successes in Australia, but under the current censorship regime they would not be able to be shown without substantial cuts. This in turn threatened to reduce their commercial success. Hence, if Australian distributors and exhibitors were to extract full profits from screening such films, they had to appear uncensored.

This concern was to gain the Film Festivals important trade allies in the fight to change Australia’s censorship regime. For example, representatives of Columbia, the producers of *Easy Rider*, requested to meet with Stratton while he was on his overseas trip after the 1969 Festival. At this meeting, Stratton explained the Festivals’ stance on censorship —with the result that Columbia recommended their Australian subsidiary to support the Festivals on this issue.¹⁰⁵ There are a number of reasons why Columbia should thus have seen the Film Festivals as useful allies in promoting a new film classification system in Australia. To begin with, the Festivals were already closely associated with this issue. In addition, the leading presence of the Festivals lent a clear sense of cultural legitimacy to the censorship campaign —and thus avoided the possible taint of ‘commercialism’ that may have dogged an industry-led campaign. Finally, of course, by allowing the Festivals to remain as the public face of this campaign, and offering them only behind-the-scenes support (in persuading the domestic trade), Columbia also reduced the risk of any backlash against itself.

Similarly, United Artists —the producers of *Midnight Cowboy*— began arguing publicly for changes to the Australian film classification system in the pages of *Film Weekly*. The 1969 ‘Christmas Message’ from Ron Michaels, the Managing Director of United Artists in Australia, is worth quoting at length:

The tinsel world which satisfied the requirements of teenagers in prior generations is today nothing more than a blurred footprint in the sands of banality.

This switch in taste appears to have its genesis in the changing precepts of today’s permissive society. In short, it is a rebellion against the Establishment in every form of its existence. The only static factor emerging from the metamorphosis is that youth continues to be the

¹⁰⁵ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Stratton, self-conducted interview.

mainstay of theatre box-office. It is, therefore, axiomatic that we either cater to their specific needs or lose them to other forms of leisure-time activity.

Producers have met the challenge by making films of social significance, however, in bringing “life in the raw” to the cinema screen, many productions have come into conflict with our Censorship Board. Perhaps this is understandable when we remember that our censorship regulations have not been up-dated since 1936 ...

In 1970 we can anticipate an influx of films tailored for mature audiences. In the main they will be important box-office properties, assuming of course, that under existing censorship provisions, they are not emasculated to the point where they lose both coherent continuity and box-office appeal.

In world affairs, Australia enjoys the reputation of being a progressive nation. Let us get our censorship affairs into focus with this image.¹⁰⁶

This ‘Christmas Message’ shows a clear awareness of the recent changes to film audience demographics and the associated changes in film content. Alongside the final genuflection to the cultural need to be ‘progressive’, this piece also contains the argument of real interest to the trade —namely, that “unless the film industry caters for the specific needs of today’s youth, they will be lost to other forms of leisure activities”.¹⁰⁷

During Stratton’s overseas trip, Rado wrote to inform him of these changes of attitude towards an ‘R’ classification amongst the major distributors in Australia. In a revealing passage, Rado writes as follows:

I understand from Colin Bennett that the major distributors in Sydney got together and investigated the New Zealand scene; discovered that the introduction there of the graduated Restricted Certificate was of benefit to the box office, and now are going to force the exhibitors to go to their State Governments and demand the introduction of a graduated restricted category, and it is hoped that this will be operative within a year. This is good news on various counts ...¹⁰⁸

It thus seems clear that the major distributors were not only supporting the introduction of an ‘R’ classification —they were also placing pressure on the major exhibitors to support this.

It is thus unsurprising that when Stratton returned to Australia from his overseas trip, he found that attitudes towards censorship reform amongst sections of the domestic trade had

¹⁰⁶ R. Michaels, “Call for new look in our censorship”, *Film Weekly*, 18.12.1969, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ “Censorship, Youth Needs, are Problems for 1970”, *Film Weekly*, 18.12.1969, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton (then at the Cork Film Festival, Ireland), 12.9.1969, Box No. 47.

changed markedly.¹⁰⁹ This meant that the Festivals could feel less constrained about pursuing their broader agenda of censorship reform, as there was less risk of alienating the distribution side of the trade. As will be seen, however, there was still further to go in persuading the exhibitors of the benefits of such reform. Rado's prediction (in the passage quoted above), that an 'R' classification would "be operative within a year" proved to be slightly (but only slightly) optimistic.

With the momentum provided by the positive publicity garnered by the Bjorkman affair, the resulting departure of the Minister of Customs, and the shift in trade attitudes, the Film Festivals were well-prepared to mount a sustained campaign over the censorship issue. Furthermore, Scott's replacement as Minister for Customs and Excise was Donald Chipp, who was genuinely more sympathetic towards reforming Australia's censorship regime. Rado's initial estimation of Chipp was that he was "conceited, strong headed, but not stupid and younger [i.e., than Scott]".¹¹⁰ Chipp, on the other hand, was suspicious of the Festivals' motives, and believed that their censorship campaign was largely a means of attracting "cheap publicity".¹¹¹

Chipp's first move was to request a meeting with the Directors of the four Australian Film Festivals that imported films —Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, and Brisbane— to discuss the censorship issue. After all their efforts 'to separate the sheep from the goats', Stratton and Rado were not pleased at being forced to make a joint representation with Adelaide and Brisbane. Indeed, in January of 1970, Stratton wrote to Eric Williams (the Adelaide Director) and Len Thurecht (the Brisbane Director) to inform them that:

The interests of all Festivals would be better served if Sydney and Melbourne made separate representations to the Minister, and would be writing to Chipp accordingly.¹¹²

It is not clear from surviving records exactly why Stratton and Rado were so opposed to this joint meeting. However, it is likely that they wanted in particular to dissociate themselves from Williams. In a private letter to Rado, Stratton writes of Williams that "under no circumstances will we go to Chipp with him (Prowse —who hates Eric's guts, thinks we're

¹⁰⁹ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Stratton, self-conducted interview.

¹¹⁰ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 28.11.1969, Box No. 47.

¹¹¹ Chipp, *Third Man*, p. 102.

¹¹² MFF – Corr., Stratton to Williams and Thurecht, 30.1.1970, Box No. 50.

right not to associate with him.)”.¹¹³ Stratton’s and Rado’s personal dislike of Williams was perhaps exacerbated by their feeling that the Adelaide Director was attempting to position himself as a major figure in the debate on censorship—an issue over which Stratton and Rado felt a sense of ownership. In particular, Rado had been irritated by the fact that Williams had been asked to contribute a chapter on film censorship to a 1970 publication *Australia’s Censorship Crisis: The Uncensored Examination of Australian Censorship*.¹¹⁴

Whatever the personal feelings of Stratton and Rado, Chipp made it clear that he hoped to achieve a uniform policy for the Australian international film festivals, and thus would not accept a separate representation from Sydney and Melbourne.¹¹⁵ Stratton and Rado conceded to this demand, and a meeting was held between Chipp and the four festival directors on 16 March 1970. A detailed report of this meeting was prepared by the Melbourne organising committee. This report acknowledged that “From the outset it was apparent that the Minister had done his homework and was fully appraised of many aspects of the Festivals’ work”.¹¹⁶ However, Chipp made it clear at the beginning of this meeting that one of the Festivals’ aims—their *complete* exemption from censorship—would not be met “under any circumstances”, as this was “against the law”.¹¹⁷ He was, however, prepared to consider a more liberal censorship regime for the festivals.

In considering such liberalisation, Chipp was particularly interested in the composition of the Festivals’ audiences. This was because, as has been previously discussed, a key component of the Festivals’ arguments for censorship exemption was that they screened only to a ‘highly select’ audience. Sydney and Melbourne based their claim to be ‘select’ upon the fact that tickets were available by subscription only, and subscribers had to purchase an expensive season ticket (with no tickets available for segments of the Festivals). Adelaide, on the other hand, was selling \$3 tickets at the door for a ‘day and night’ session. Not surprisingly, Chipp stated that this ran “contrary to the spirit” of the Festivals’ claim to be an

¹¹³ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 20.1.1970, Box No. 50.

¹¹⁴ Williams, “Cultural Despotism – Film Censorship”. Rado writes sarcastically of Williams’s article in a letter to Stratton, MFF – Corr., 31.7.1969, Box No. 50.

¹¹⁵ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Chipp, 27.2.1970, Box No. 50.

¹¹⁶ MFF – Arch, “Report on the Minister and his Guests – 16th March 1970”, Box No. 52.

¹¹⁷ MFF – Arch, “Report on the Minister and his Guests – 16th March 1970”, Box No. 52.

exhibition device for a very select audience. He thus told Williams to “go home” and re-think Adelaide’s position.¹¹⁸

In general, the Festival Report concluded that Chipp was sincere in his desire to reform the Australian system of film censorship, and considered the Festivals a “useful ally”. It notes that the Minister “was very much in favour of liberalising censorship and wanted to help the Festivals as much as possible”. The Report also states that Chipp wished to use the Festivals as a “demonstration as to how adult audiences could be permitted to view films now denied them because of the failure of the States to adopt an ‘R’ certificate”. However, the Report did sound one note of concern, in remarking that Chipp was prepared to consider a non-uniform censorship policy, in which films could be passed in one State but not in another.¹¹⁹

Chipp’s meeting with the four Film Festival Directors occurred in the context of a debate between different sections of the domestic trade over the possible introduction of an ‘R’ classification for films. While the major distributors were largely in favour of this reform, most of the exhibition chains were opposed to it. As noted above, in late 1969 some of the major distributors had used the pages of *Film Weekly* to press the case for censorship reform. At the same time, the trade journal carried an article entitled “City circuits and censorship”, giving the exhibitors’ side of the argument. This article notes that “three of Australia’s four largest capital city theatrical film circuits are, at present, in favour of retaining the existing censorship system of classification”.¹²⁰ That is, Hoyts, Greater Union and the Perth group, City Theatres, were all satisfied with the existing system; the “sole dissident” being Roc Kirby of Village Theatres in Melbourne. Kirby’s support for the introduction of an ‘R’ classification “is understandable because so many of his hardtops show off-beat and artistic productions, suited to their small capacity and international policy”.¹²¹ In other words, unlike the major suburban cinema chains, Village Theatres drew more of their audience from the ‘art house’ and urban youth market. It is perhaps worth noting here that Kirby’s stance on censorship drew a congratulatory letter from Rado.¹²² The article in *Film Weekly* ends by arguing that the present system of film censorship should be maintained. At most, it results in

¹¹⁸ MFF – Arch, “Report on the Minister and his Guests – 16th March 1970”, Box No. 52.

¹¹⁹ All quotes in this paragraph from MFF – Arch, “Report on the Minister and his Guests – 16th March 1970”, Box No. 52.

¹²⁰ C.B. Searl, “City Circuits and Censorship”, *Film Weekly*, December 18, 1969, p.24.

¹²¹ C.B. Searl, “City Circuits and Censorship”, *Film Weekly*, December 18, 1969, p.24.

¹²² MFF – Corr., Rado to Mr R.H. Kirby, Chairman, Village Theatres Ltd., Melbourne, 10.12.1969, Box No. 50.

“the denial to Australian adult audiences of a few questionable adult films”¹²³ —a denial which does not justify the difficulties and costs of administering an ‘R’ classification. This opinion is also well illustrated by a conversation that Stratton recalled having with Dale Turnbull, manager of Hoyts in Sydney, two years earlier, in 1967:

And I said to Dale, “Wouldn’t you like to be able to show *Bonnie and Clyde* with an R rating? After all, it’s an adult film”. He said, “I would rather cut it down to five minutes than introduce an ‘adults only’ classification. My staff can’t tell 18 year olds from 17 year olds”.¹²⁴

Despite these concerns of the exhibition arm of the trade, after his meeting with the four Film Festival Directors, Chipp decided to hold a meeting with the relevant State Ministers, in order to request the national introduction of an ‘R’ classification for films. This meeting was scheduled for September 1970, and the intervening months were a period of intense lobbying by the Festivals and the exhibitors. Discussing this lobbying in an exchange of letters, on 16 April 1970, Rado writes to Stratton that:

We are just ready to go in a delegation about the R Cert., to our State government, and they beat us to it with a statement from both Bolt and Rylah [two major Melbourne exhibitors], saying that they are against it because it is impossible to administer.¹²⁵

Four days later, Stratton replies that he is experiencing similar difficulties in Sydney, writing that:

Hoyts and G[reater] U[nion] are still earbashing State Chief Secretaries and Chipp against our concessions. ... They are becoming even more paranoid about the very idea of an R certificate, even one given over to the Festivals.¹²⁶

In this intervening period, Chipp was careful to prepare the ground for his meeting with the States, by avoiding any further scandals over censorship. When the Commonwealth Censorship Board decided to ban not one, but two films from the 1970 Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals (*A Married Couple*, and *Like Night and Day*), Chipp refused to overturn this decision.¹²⁷ When he wrote to the Film Festivals informing them of this decision, Chipp also requested that they not cause any controversy over the incident. Unlike

¹²³ C.B. Searl, “City Circuits and Censorship”, *Film Weekly*, 18.12.1969, p.24.

¹²⁴ David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997.

¹²⁵ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 16.4.1970, Box No. 50.

¹²⁶ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 20.4.1970, Box No. 50.

¹²⁷ MFF – Arch., “Chipp bans festival films – and tells why”, *The Age*, 9.6.1970, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

the Bjorkman incident, hardly any discussion of this banning occurs in the minutes of meetings for either Sydney and Melbourne —a good indication that this was a tactical compromise that the two organising committees were prepared to accept.¹²⁸

In what was perhaps intended as another tactical manoeuvre, Chipp organised in June 1970 for special screenings of the two banned films. One screening was held in Canberra — the so-called ‘Blue Chipp’ night— and consisted only of the offending scenes; the other screening was in Sydney, and showed both films in their entirety.¹²⁹ These special screenings were attended by a small and select audience of federal and state politicians, film festival representatives and journalists.¹³⁰ Publicly, Chipp said that the purpose of the special screening was to encourage discussion of the broader issue of film censorship.¹³¹ To judge from press comment, the audience’s main reaction to the screening of the two films was one of boredom. According to Chris Pritchard of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, “more than 20 people in the invited audience left soon after the second film began —evidently they were bored”.¹³² This was possibly one of Chipp’s real intentions —to demonstrate how the censorship regime in its present form led to the unnecessary banning of films that whilst explicit, could hardly be described as titillating.

At the meeting of State Ministers in September 1970, Chipp achieved his major goal. Each Minister agreed to introduce legislation allowing a restricted classification for films.¹³³ As expected, this decision was met with protests from the exhibition arm of the trade. The Federal Council of Exhibitors’ Associations released a statement in October 1970, condemning the decision. This press release stated that the decision had been driven by a small and unrepresentative group of Australians. In addition, as Bertrand puts it, the exhibitors

expressed the fear that such a classification would result in a flood of pornography entering the country, bringing the industry into disrepute and reducing audiences, particularly in country areas where patronage had already fallen off because of ‘liberal films’.¹³⁴

¹²⁸ SFF – Min., 26.5.1970, Box No. 2.

¹²⁹ MFF – Arch., “Gerrymandered Audiences”, *The Australian*, 10.6.1970, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

¹³⁰ MFF – Arch., “Chosen Few See Sex Films”, *Sun-Mirror*, 21.6.1970, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

¹³¹ SFF – Arch., C. Pritchard, “Mixed reaction to banned film show”, 21.6.1970, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

¹³² MFF – Arch., “Mixed reaction to banned film show”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21.6.1970, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

¹³³ Bertrand, *Film Censorship in Australia*, p. 187.

¹³⁴ Bertrand, *Film Censorship in Australia*, p. 186.

Despite these last-ditch protests, the 'R' classification system was introduced throughout Australia —with so-called 'R day' being 15 November 1971. This achievement is the basis of Chipp's reputation as the first liberal Customs Minister in Australia. As Bertrand remarks, Chipp was:

perceptive enough to recognise the climate of opinion, intelligent enough to pinpoint the major anomalies in the Australian system, and determined enough to take on the trade lobbies at a game they had been playing successfully for fifty years.¹³⁵

Stratton to this day claims that Chipp was "the first Customs Minister that we'd been able to talk to. The rest had been buffoons".¹³⁶ Sydney Festival President Tzannes was less convinced by Chipp than Stratton and Bertrand —claiming that although, "to his credit", the Minister had given "concessions" to the Festivals, these still had to be "wrung" out of him.¹³⁷

The Film Festivals, with the assistance of Chipp, had thus achieved one of their major aims in the censorship campaign (the reform of Australia's film classification system); however, they had not achieved any special exemption for their own audience, and this remained a problematic issue in the years that followed. Although an 'R' rating had been introduced (which theoretically enabled the festivals to screen films with mild sexual references and more explicit violence), this did not really resolve the fundamental issues over the censorship of festival films. The Festivals were still dependent upon having all of their films passed by the Censorship board. This continued to produce two problems. Firstly, it created severe administrative difficulties and possible delays in planning programmes and importing films. Secondly, the criteria used by the Censorship Board to determine what was acceptable and what was not, remained extremely unclear.

For these reasons, the Festivals continued to lobby for a system of self-regulation. In November 1971, shortly after the implementation of the 'R' certificate, Stratton, Rado and Tzannes met with customs officials to try to establish a foundation for a system of self-censorship. This would allow them to bypass the Censorship Board, except in cases where the film was more extreme than that allowed by the 'R' certificate.¹³⁸ However, by February 1972 this proposal was rejected by the government. Instead, a two-tier system for festival film

¹³⁵ Bertrand, *Film Censorship in Australia*, pp. 188-189.

¹³⁶ David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997.

¹³⁷ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ross Tzannes, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 7.9.1992.

¹³⁸ MFF – Min., 30.11.1971, Box No. 33.

imports was agreed upon. The Liaison Officer for the Department of Customs and Excise would still watch all incoming films. The Officer would then divide the films into those that were of potential commercial interest, and those that could be classified as “avant-garde” or “experimental” —in other words, with little or no commercial potential. The former, if they were deemed to contain possibly “unacceptable” scenes, would then be passed on to the Chief Censor. The latter, however, would be “freely admitted” to the Festivals, without the need to pass the Censorship Board.¹³⁹ However, even this apparent concession for ‘avant-garde’ and ‘experimental’ films was undercut by the fact that

the Minister would not be prepared to register films which might encourage persons to resort to drugs, or which portray extreme violence, or pornography.¹⁴⁰

In other words, there was still an implicit threat of censorship for all Festival films.

The fundamental problem with this system of regulation, was that the key terms used to define the criteria of acceptability were extremely broad, and thus open to a wide variety of interpretations. The Minister was not prepared to commit himself to a specific and binding definition of such terms as ‘avant-garde’ or ‘experimental’; nor what constituted the ‘encouragement of drugs’, ‘extreme violence’, or ‘pornography’. Hence, despite the slight liberalisation of standards allowed by the ‘R’ certificate, the Film Festivals were essentially in a similar position to when they had begun their anti-censorship campaign. Namely, they remained at the mercy of a censorship regime that provided little in the way of clear and explicit guidelines for what counted as ‘pornography’ (etc.) for the purposes of film censorship. This in turn meant that the Festivals still had to battle the Censor on a case-by-case basis, with the absence of definitions of key terms making it difficult to rebut charges. As Stratton notes, these concessions were thus open to “constantly being redefined by the bureaucrats, by the ministers in a way that was more stringent”.¹⁴¹

The Festivals were well aware of this problem, and attempted to persuade Customs and the Censor to accept the results of a more systematic method for assessing festival films. This was the ‘Rembart Test’, which was a social value test designed in 1959 to analyse *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, which “weighed the artistic and literary value of a piece against its

¹³⁹ SFF – Min., 17.2.1972, Box No. 3.

¹⁴⁰ SFF – Min., 17.2.1972, Box No. 3.

¹⁴¹ David Stratton, interviewed by Cathy Hope, 29.9.1997.

prurience”.¹⁴² The Festivals argued that if they adopted the Rembart Test, then this would allow an ‘objective’ measure of the acceptability of a given film. This in turn, they argued — returning again to their persistent request for self-regulation— would enable the Festivals to act as their own censors. Once again, the Department of Customs and Excise refused to accept these suggestions.¹⁴³

A Sydney organising committee report records how things stood at the end of 1972. This report states that:

The final position taken by the Dept of Customs and Excise was that it:

- (a) refused to agree to the request that there be no censorship for festival films
- (b) refused to accept the Rembart test as the criteria for censorship
- (c) agreed that films must be judged in their entirety and not on the basis of individual scenes
- (d) stated that registration would be refused to films which might ‘encourage persons to resort to drugs or which portray extreme violence or pornography’.¹⁴⁴

It is clear from this list that, despite the Festivals’ great efforts over the past few years, little had been achieved with regard to obtaining exemption from censorship for festival films. Whilst (c) does allow for the ‘artistic merit’ of a film to override its use of explicit scenes, this criterion is stated extremely vaguely. For this reason, along with the further presence of (d) on the list, the Festivals were still in a weak position to defend their films against censorship.

From its beginnings in late 1965, to the end of 1972, the Film Festivals’ campaign against film censorship had achieved some notable successes. They had brought the issue of censorship to broad public attention in Australia, and (along with Chipp) had contributed to a liberalisation of the film classification system. Furthermore, in the process the Festivals had also achieved a great deal of publicity for themselves —which had helped to establish them as two of the major cultural organisations in the country. However, despite this, they had failed to attain their primary goal, and had not succeeded in producing fundamental reforms to the Australian system of film censorship. The election of the Whitlam Labor government in

¹⁴² SFF – Min., 17.2.1972, Box No. 3.

¹⁴³ SFF – Min., 1.8.1972, Box No. 3

¹⁴⁴ SFF – Min., “Report of the Censorship Reform Sub-Committee”, 1.8.1972, Box No. 3.

November of 1972, and the appointment of Lionel Murphy as Attorney General, did lead the Film Festivals to hope that this would be achieved. But in fact they were not to receive formal exemption from censorship until 1983.¹⁴⁵

IV. The SFF and the MFF: 1969-1972

The previous two sections of this chapter have examined two major issues of concern to the Festivals —Australian film and censorship— and this final section considers the remaining organisational issues that the Festivals dealt with in this period.

The first thing to note about this period is that both Festivals continued to be highly successful. Every Festival during these years was a sell-out, and had a large waiting list of hopeful subscribers.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, tickets to the Festivals were so sought after that problems of gate-crashing and ticket-hawking began to grow. At the 1972 Sydney Festival, a subscriber was “brutally kicked by a gatecrasher with no ticket on the first Saturday night and hospitalised”.¹⁴⁷

While both Sydney and Melbourne thus share in this general success, the stories of their two Directors, however, are a study in contrast. This section will now consider their stories in more detail. Stratton overcomes the final doubts of his committee, and continues to develop his profile and influence as a figure in Australian film culture. Rado, on the other hand, is increasingly under fire from the ‘young Turks’ within the Melbourne committee, and his dual-Directorships (Melbourne and the AFI) begin to weigh upon him. The final part of this section then examines the continuing difficulties experienced by the Festivals in relation to FIAPF and the other Australian international film festivals.

Stratton and the SFF: 1969-72

By this stage in the history of the Sydney Film Festival, there was a clear sense that it had ‘arrived’. That is, the Festival was now one of the premier social and cultural events in the city’s life. It received extensive coverage from the major press and magazines, and was regularly attended by the city’s social set (socialites, stars of television and theatre, and other

¹⁴⁵ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Stratton, self-conducted interview.

¹⁴⁶ This is based upon various reports in the MFF and SFF minutes for this period.

¹⁴⁷ SFF – Min., “1972 Sydney Film Festival – Director’s Report”, 14.12.1972, Box No.3.

celebrities) and various dignitaries (such as politicians, ambassadors, State Governors, and the like). The media coverage combined analysis and criticism of specific films as well as commentary and discussion of the programme as a whole. However, in what is perhaps the clearest revelation of the Festival's rise to social prominence, substantial media attention was now being paid not only to its role as a film culture event, but also to its role as a *social* event. The 'social' and 'gossip' columns of the press and magazines would now discuss the who's who of the Festival audience —and, of course, what they wore.¹⁴⁸

Two examples of this sort of coverage serve to give a sense of its nature. Diana Fisher, the social columnist for the 'Women's section' of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, described the Opening Night of the 1970 Sydney Festival as follows:

The Governor, Sir Roden Cutler, and Lady Cutler were there to give it their blessing —and I saw my old friend Tom Lewis, the Minister for Lands, in the official party, as well as many others from the world of films, radio and television.

Chips Rafferty ... Hazel Phillips nipping through the candlelit hall in a honey-coloured pantsuit, and towering tall and striking all in black, Maggie Tabberer. Harry Miller hobbled around, also in black, but worn with a turquoise evening shirt as did my husband H.¹⁴⁹

In a side-bar story in 1970, the *Sydney Morning Herald* also provided some recipes for "SFF ... rations which can all be prepared before the start of the siege and sustain you right through that long weekend". These culinary accompaniments for the Festival included such up-market picnic foods as "Spicy oven fried chicken", and "Almond and horseradish sauce" to accompany "truly MONSTER roast-beef sandwiches".¹⁵⁰

The 'social arrival' of the Sydney Festival brought with it some minor problems for the organising committee. For the Festival was now becoming a slightly schizophrenic event — drawing, as it did, two quite disparate audiences. On the one hand, there was the bohemian, largely student-based, young audience, who were interested in film culture. On the other hand, there was now also the audience of glamorous socialites and their ilk. The Festival found it quite difficult to serve the needs of both of these audiences. Sydney needed the socialites, as

¹⁴⁸ This picture is drawn from the MFF – Arch., press cuttings, Box No. 66.

¹⁴⁹ MFF – Arch., Diana Fisher, "Show Biz Invaded the Campus...", *Sydney Morning Herald – Women's Section*, 4.6.1970, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

¹⁵⁰ MFF – Arch., "Film Festival", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8.6.1970, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

their presence attracted considerable publicity; but it also needed the ‘film culture’ crowd, as they were the source of the Festival’s cultural legitimacy.

One sign of the tension created by the demands of these disparate audiences is the complaints made by the social press that the Festival (and its Opening Night, in particular) lacked the requisite glamour. Whilst Stratton had ambitious plans for holding the entire Festival at the Sydney Opera House, during this period the Opening Night was still being held at the University of Sydney, as the Wintergarden was not an appropriate venue for such a large function.¹⁵¹ As one journalist remarked of the Opening Night of the 1970 Festival, this venue meant that the affair was

sober-sided ... with frankfurters, meat balls and mulled wine in the University Refectory afterwards. Six bars of the National Anthem for the Governor-General. No guests of honour.¹⁵²

It is perhaps not surprising, then, to find Diana Fisher (in the article quoted above), complaining that

to me this opening night of the 17th Sydney Festival lacked everything that a film festival ought to be —or perhaps used to be. I missed the raz-ama-taz of it all. As a film festival —one thinks immediately of Cannes or Venice ... the glitter and sparkle of it all, bands playing, searchlights piercing the skies in 20th Century Fox fashion, and of course ... stars. ... It’s an occasion of some mad splendour. ... Perhaps, sadly then, the old-style grand occasion of film stars, spangles and schemozzles has passed its zenith and now we are having the cake without the icing.¹⁵³

The Sydney Festival, of course, had never really been the scene of much ‘mad splendour’. Fisher’s complaint drew a quick response from a columnist in the *Sunday Telegraph*, who replied that:

I was interested to read that a columnist from the Thingummy Morning Whatnot sadly missed “the raz-ama-taz of it all” at the opening of the Sydney Film Festival. ... Madam, you’ve led a sheltered life. Sydney turns on that sort of tripe for the gala premieres of zero-quality Hollywood money-spinners ... Good films don’t tart themselves up for publicity.

Along with the standard ‘film culture’ response —the suggestion that glamour and ‘raz-ama-taz’ was for ‘commercial rubbish’ only, whilst the ‘quality’ products of the Festival did not

¹⁵¹ SFF – Min., 10.11.1970, Box No. 3.

¹⁵² MFF – Arch., “Film Drama at Festival”, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

¹⁵³ MFF – Arch., “Show Biz invaded the campus”, 4.6.1970, press cuttings, Box No 66.

need to ‘tart themselves up’— this journalist also pointed out that Fisher had failed to mention a genuine touch of Festival glamour:

On our way out we saw that the Governor had been led to, and planted on, a small square of red carpet. “Aha!” we said. “A red carpet! A nice touch of raz-ama-taz, don’t you think?”¹⁵⁴

To give a further indication of the sense of two social worlds meeting at the Sydney Film Festival, it is also worth quoting at length from some of the media reviews of the 1971 Festival. Sandra Hall, in *The Bulletin*, described the Opening Night as follows:

The Sydney Film Festival moved off to a businesslike start last week. Opening night, a usually windy event, had its sense of ceremony pared down to one short speech from the president of the festival committee, while the customary champagne was missing, said to have been sacrificed in the cause of securing better films. ... The Festival’s director, Mr David Stratton, in safari suit, called upon the visiting star, Mr Jerzy Skolimowski, in khaki demins, to open proceedings, and Mr Skolimowski said he did. ... The new mood seems to suit these anti-black-tie times. And film festivals don’t look right without their dateless quota of duffle coats and desert boots.¹⁵⁵

One particular arena in which the clash between the two audiences manifested itself, was in conflicting views of what constituted appropriate behaviour during the screening of films. The bohemian and left-wing segment tended to hold that the Festival audience should be active, critical participants. As Michael Thornhill of *The Australian* writes of the 1971 Festival:

In future years the question of audience participation is going to loom large as political activists and film buffs become more and more vocal during and at the end of each film. Civilised people tend to complain about comments made during the film (a moot point) and don’t even care for hisses, boos and catcalls in the blackout period between films.

In response to this ... David Stratton made a paternal speech from the stage of the barn-like Rose Bay Wintergarden cinema, asking people to leave if they didn’t like a film and telling them their comments weren’t funny anyway.¹⁵⁶

Bob Ellis, writing for *The Review*, gives another view of this:

Apart from a trauma in the dark of the Wintergarden when an usherette espied me sitting in the aisle and holding hands with a young blonde and

¹⁵⁴ MFF – Arch., “Cool Reception”, *Sunday Telegraph*, 7.6.1970, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

¹⁵⁵ MFF – Arch., Sandra Hall, “Traditional Ways to View the New” in *The Bulletin*, 12.6.1971, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

¹⁵⁶ MFF – Arch., Michael Thornhill, “Cultural shell shock among the film buffs” in *The Australian*, 8.6.1971, press cuttings, Box No. 66.

ordered me to find a seat and sit in an upright position or get out, and then chased me around the theatre swiping at me with her torch until I obediently kissed the blonde goodbye and went and sat sulkily on my own eating peanuts loudly, and also a vigorous outburst of booing in the Pasolini film *Theorem* which led ... David Stratton to tell the assembled longhaired audience in the stiff tones of a school prefect that if they didn't like a film they should go outside and not disturb the sensitive souls who did, the Sydney festival has been a warming, invigorating experience that I wouldn't trade for, say, a month in a boat full of lepers chugging up the greasy Zambesi in the middle of a genocidal war.

It was, in short, atmospherically about average —about halfway between the off-cuts of a Fellini orgy and a traffic jam on the harbour bridge— but filmically it was wonderful.¹⁵⁷

A key factor in the improved social and cultural position of the Sydney Festival in this period was its increasing ability to attract prestigious delegates from the world of cinema — and this, in turn, was primarily driven by Stratton's capacity for diplomacy and networking. Stratton himself, in his report entitled "Into the 70s: where do we go from here?", identified this as a key Directorial responsibility, writing that "I have come to the conclusion that seeking films by correspondence will become more ineffectual and personal contact more important".¹⁵⁸ However, Stratton's focus on such networking, whilst it helped to raise the stature and prestige of the Festival, did create certain tensions within the organisation itself.

In particular, in this period there was growing concern amongst some members of the Sydney organising committee that Stratton was not performing his share of the administrative burdens, and was instead spending his time hobnobbing with film celebrities. Committee member, Ross Tzannes, recalls that:

There had been disquiet the previous twelve months over [the Committee's] perception that David was —at Festival time, in particular, having a really good time and not doing all the difficult work ... He was an absentee Director. You could never find him during the day. He was always at somebody's party at Palm Beach with the directors in tow, and some people on the committee felt resentment about this.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ MFF – Arch., Bob Ellis in *The Review*, 29.6.1971, press cuttings, Box No. 33.

¹⁵⁸ SFF – Mins, 3.2.1970, Box No. 2.

¹⁵⁹ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ross Tzannes, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 7.9.1992.

Considering this behaviour during the Festival, there was also growing suspicion that Stratton's increasingly lengthy overseas film procurement tours (at Festival expense) were really "just another jaunt".¹⁶⁰

This issue came to a head after the 1971 Sydney Festival, at which some on the committee felt that Stratton had overstepped the mark in his behaviour with the delegates. The delegates in question were Polish director Jerzy Skolimowski and Jörn Donner. According to Stratton, Skolimowski

proved to be a little bit difficult, because as he candidly said when he arrived, that showing the film was a good way of getting laid. We had programmed *Deep End* quite late in the Festival ... he wanted the film shown early so he stood a chance of getting laid.¹⁶¹

Stratton agreed to this demand, and exchanged the position of Skolimowski's film in the programme with Bertolucci's *The Conformist*.¹⁶² Stratton's manipulation of the programme to satisfy Skolimowski's carnal desires was perceived by some on the committee as high-handed interference, which revealed that the Director took his personal relations with Skolimowski more seriously than his responsibilities to the Festival. At a committee meeting after the 1971 Festival was over, the head of the Delegate Sub-Committee made the following speech:

If the delegates are personal friends of the Director, if they come to Sydney prepared for a wild time, if they and the Director are living on each other's doorsteps and if they are not seized with their obligation to the subscribers, then I consider that the role of the delegate sub-committee is extraneous —that the Director should do what he has many times in the past done unofficially.¹⁶³

Indeed, although there is no official record of this, Tzannes recalls that there was such concern about Stratton's behaviour at the 1971 Festival, that the Committee majority believed it may be necessary to fire the Director.¹⁶⁴ When Ian McPherson, a long-time supporter of Stratton, retired from the Presidency of the Sydney Festival at the end of 1971, the Vice President (Dorothy Holt) was asked to take over this role, and, as her first act, sack Stratton.

¹⁶⁰ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ross Tzannes, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 7.9.1992.

¹⁶¹ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Stratton, self-conducted interview.

¹⁶² SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Stratton, self-conducted interview.

¹⁶³ SFF – Min., 7.9.1971, Box No. 3.

¹⁶⁴ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ross Tzannes, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 7.9.1992.

She, however, refused to do this, so the organising committee then asked Ross Tzannes to become President.¹⁶⁵

Rather than immediately take the drastic step of sacking Stratton—for he was, after all, largely responsible for the Sydney Festival’s success— Tzannes offered the committee a compromise position. Stratton would be given a year’s grace, and if, at the end of the twelve months, Tzannes found just cause for sacking the Director, then it would be done.¹⁶⁶ Stratton recalls that, during this period, “I sensed that there was some feeling among the Board members that I needed to be kept in check. ... That I was a bit of a wildcard sometimes”.¹⁶⁷

In a formal attempt to keep Stratton ‘in check’, the organising committee made one last attempt to curtail the Director’s powers. At a meeting in December of 1971, whilst Stratton was overseas, it was proposed that the Festival administrative structure be modified. Rather than there just being a single Director, the new proposal was for three Directors: an Executive Director (in charge of administration), and two Programme Directors —of which Stratton would be one.¹⁶⁸ In response, Stratton tabled a special report attacking the proposed new administrative structure. Stratton’s chief argument was that such an arrangement would severely disrupt the close working relationship that he had built up with Rado. Stratton proposed, as a better alternative, that a position of Assistant Director be created, so as to manage the administrative tasks.¹⁶⁹

In the end, neither of these two options were actively pursued —partly because the proposals were too expensive, and partly because Tzannes and Stratton were soon to develop an effective working partnership. As Tzannes recalls,

We complemented each other in some ways. We were genuinely opposites in temperament, in personality, in colour, you name it. But we got on very well and we understood when to give, I think, in each case. He let me get on with what I wanted to do, which was to make the Festival a long-term, harmonious, creative and viable organisation.¹⁷⁰

Tzannes —who was trained as a lawyer— functioned as the corporate head of the Sydney Festival, while Stratton retained, and continued to develop, his position as its key public

¹⁶⁵ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ross Tzannes, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 7.9.1992; cf. *40 Years of Film*.

¹⁶⁶ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ross Tzannes, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 7.9.1992; cf. *40 Years of Film*.

¹⁶⁷ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Stratton, self-conducted interview.

¹⁶⁸ SFF – Min., 14.12.1971, Box No. 3.

¹⁶⁹ SFF – Min., 14.12.1971, Box No. 3.

¹⁷⁰ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ross Tzannes, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 7.9.1992; cf. *40 Years of Film*.

face.¹⁷¹ As various committee members of the time recall, Tzannes and Stratton worked so effectively together that the organising committee's qualms about the Director were soon quieted.¹⁷² This partnership was to last until Stratton's resignation from the Festival in 1983. Indeed, in a sign of just how successfully Tzannes had managed to heal the breach between the Director and the committee, when Stratton's replacement (Rod Webb, who directed the Festival from 1984 to 1988) came into conflict with committee members, an Extraordinary General Meeting was held, at which Stratton was asked to explain the proper methods for achieving good administrative relations.¹⁷³

By the end of this period, not only had the Sydney Festival's internal tensions reduced, but it had also professionalised its administrative structure substantially. In 1972, the Festival's voluntary treasurer John Burke left to work for the South Australian Film Corporation. He was replaced by the Festival's first full-time, professional treasurer and financial advisor —Kevin Troy. One of Troy's first acts was to insist that, for legal reasons, the organising Committee become an executive Board.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, at this point the Festival's administrative staff and records were still located at rented premises in Erskine Street. With the lease on these premises soon to end, Troy argued that the Festival use some of its savings to purchase an appropriate property.¹⁷⁵ At the end of 1972, the Sydney Festival thus purchased a terrace house in Glebe Point Road.¹⁷⁶ To assist in the financing of this purchase, the top storey of the terrace was rented out to Stratton's secretary, Modesta Gentile. In addition, Stratton also decided to begin holding 'Wednesday Night Screenings', which was a commercial undertaking separate from the Festival, and designed purely to increase the revenue of the organisation.¹⁷⁷

By the end of 1972, then, the Sydney Film Festival had established a professional administrative structure, and had become one of the premier social and cultural events in Australia. At this point, however, there was a new problem facing the Festival: namely, the

¹⁷¹ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Anton Crouch, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 4.9.1992.

¹⁷² SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Pat McDonald, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 2.11.1992; Anton Crouch, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 4.9.1992.

¹⁷³ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Anton Crouch, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 4.9.1992.

¹⁷⁴ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Ross Tzannes, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 7.9.1992.

¹⁷⁵ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Kevin Troy, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 21.9.1992.

¹⁷⁶ SFF – Min., 2.10.1972, Box No. 3.

¹⁷⁷ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., Kevin Troy, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 21.9.1992.

question of what films it should screen. Stratton himself, in his report “Into the 70’s: where do we go from here?”, stated the major issue succinctly:

During the 60s the art film boom has apparently been and gone ... numerous foreign language films piled up in the distributors’ shelves and those that are run ... do disastrous business.¹⁷⁸

In other words, as discussed previously, the context of film culture and industry in which the Sydney Festival found itself in 1972 was very different from what it had been only six years previously, when Stratton became Director. This meant that after 1972 both the Sydney and Melbourne Festivals would be forced to begin redefining their roles and purpose by focusing more on screening retrospectives and the products of lesser-known national cinemas —a development that is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis.

Rado and the MFF: 1969-72

During this period, while Stratton continues to expand his role and stature in the film culture world, Rado is increasingly perceived as an outmoded and even conservative programmer. In addition, with the growing role of the AFI, Rado begins to find himself unable to cope with the responsibilities of holding down two Directorial positions. In other words, whilst Stratton’s profile continues to grow, Rado’s own is in decline throughout this period.

In the years from 1969 to 1972, Rado’s workload and responsibilities intensified —and there was an increasing clash between the different roles he had to play. Rado had been Director of the Melbourne Festival since 1956, and Director of the AFI since its inception in 1958. Until this period, running the AFI had not proved to be an onerous administrative burden for Rado, as the organisation’s role remained largely symbolic. One major impediment to the AFI was its lack of funding. Relying as it did largely upon contributions from bodies such as the FVFS and the Melbourne Festival, by 1968 the AFI had found itself ‘in the red’.¹⁷⁹ However, as noted above, in 1969 the AFI was granted \$100,000 by the AFDC to administer the Experimental Film Fund.¹⁸⁰ As Rado wrote to Stratton at the time,

¹⁷⁸ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., David Stratton, self-conducted interview.

¹⁷⁹ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 26.3.1971, Box No. 53.

¹⁸⁰ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 12.9.1969, Box No. 47.

The money, of course, is a great shot in the arm for the Institute, which has been unable to do any constructive project in the past in the absence of funds.¹⁸¹

While this new source of funds greatly increased the potential importance of the AFI, it did mean that Rado's Directorial role at the organisation now involved substantially more time and responsibility. There was initial concern among some of the other members of the AFI's board that Rado would be unable to manage both of his Directorial positions. Rado wrote to Stratton of these concerns in September 1969, noting that

there are strong moves on the part of Stanley Hawes to force me to leave the Festival, but for the time being I'm not doing this and hope to carry on for at least another year, if not longer.¹⁸²

Although Rado does not mention this, it is possible that Hawes was also concerned that there could be a conflict of interest between being Director of the Melbourne Festival, and in charge of an important new source of national film funding. And it should perhaps be noted here that, as mentioned above, both Sydney and Melbourne received a grant (albeit a small one) from the AFI in the first year of the Experimental Film Fund's operation.

After little more than a year holding both positions, Rado found that he was struggling with his increased managerial and administrative workload. In February 1971, he complained in a letter to Stratton that "I have my headaches, and envy my colleagues in Sydney or even Adelaide, who don't wear multiple hats".¹⁸³

A particular problem caused by Rado's 'multiple hats' was finding time to fulfil his responsibilities to source films for the Melbourne and Sydney Festivals. This, of course, was perhaps the most important dimension of the Directorial role, for it was primarily through programming selection that the nature of the Film Festival was defined. Sourcing such film product was time-intensive, and relied upon regular and extended overseas travel. In March 1971, Rado wrote to Stratton about the difficulties posed by his new duties at the AFI:

The Australian Council for the Arts is still dithering about the administrative arrangements for the Experimental Fund, about money for the Vincent Library, about a subsidy for the AFI ... and it drives me up the wall that I can't plan ahead, especially for the trip If the ACA

¹⁸¹ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 12.9.1969, Box No. 47.

¹⁸² MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 12.9.1969, Box No. 47

¹⁸³ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 16.2.1971, Box No. 53.

should introduce major changes in procedures, I don't see how I'll be able to get away as early, or at all, if worst comes to worst.¹⁸⁴

At the same time as Rado was trying to balance his commitments to Melbourne and the AFI, he was coming under fire from within the Melbourne organising committee for his film selections for the 1969 Festival. This Festival received poor reviews from the press, and Rado's selection was also criticised by members of the Sydney organising committee. At the July committee meeting held after the 1969 Festival, Rado's film selection was extensively criticised by a number of members of his own committee. One Melbourne member stated that the programme

was not representative of various new trends in film-making ... there should be less mediocre films accepted and, rather than fill in the programme ... with films from developing countries, new developments in the art of film-making should be given greater prominence.

Echoing this complaint, a representative from the Melbourne University Film Society stated that the Society was disappointed with the selection of feature films, as they were not representative of contemporary trends.¹⁸⁵ In other words, the key complaint with Rado's selection was that 'international' film products were over-represented at the cost of avant-garde films.

At this meeting, Rado responded to these criticisms by arguing that avant-garde films were only a minority taste, and that—in any case—the Festival existed to show 'quality films' rather than simply follow modern trends. With regard to the first point, the minutes record that Rado

made the comment that only 5–10% of the membership were asking for avant-garde films and for examples of new trends, regardless of whether these films were really top achievements or not, and that it was necessary to keep a balance between the kind of films that were acceptable to a general audience, and those which pleased a small coterie.¹⁸⁶

Rado's remark deserves further comment. What was now 'standard' festival fare—the European 'art film'—had, in its time, been considered at the cutting-edge of taste. However, from the perspective of the contemporary avant-garde, such festival fare now appeared as 'mainstream' or even 'conservative' in both style and content. This was in some ways a

¹⁸⁴ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 26.3.1971, Box No. 53.

¹⁸⁵ MFF – Min., 15.7.1969, Box No. 33.

¹⁸⁶ MFF – Min., 15.7.1969, Box No. 33.

testament to the very success of the Film Festivals in popularising the art film. However, it did mean that the Film Festivals and their traditional fare now constituted an ‘old guard’ — and, in a natural cultural development, the new avant-garde could define themselves in opposition to them. This in turn created something of a dilemma for the Festivals. As has been discussed, one of their self-appointed cultural roles was to broaden the boundaries of popular taste, and act as a cultural vanguard. It is thus unsurprising that, within the organising committee, there was pressure on Rado to programme the works of the avant-garde. However, as Rado himself notes in the passage above, obeying this cultural imperative would tend to undercut the popularity of the Festival —as the majority of its audience had been raised on the ‘traditional’ festival fare.

Rado’s further response to the criticisms raised at the July meeting was as follows:

I have been attacked for having ruined the Sydney Festival’s programmes by the disastrous collection of films I managed to collect during my overseas trip ... I would like to put on record that I always regarded the Film Festival as an occasion on which we show top-ranking good films. Consequently, my task was to select such films which I regarded as good —partly also guided by lists supplied to me by both the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festival committees. ... An entirely different approach to the Festival is being taken by the young critics, and even David Stratton, who say that the Festival should represent current trends in filmmaking.¹⁸⁷

In this passage, Rado distinguishes between two alternative criteria that could be used to select films for the Festivals. On the one hand, the Festivals could be dedicated to screening the ‘top-ranking good films’; on the other hand, they could be dedicated to screening the ‘current trends’. This distinction cannot be taken at face value —for what constitutes a ‘good’ film is precisely what is at stake in this debate. What Rado is really pointing to here is that tastes among the ‘young critics’ were changing, and the products of the avant-garde and many European film-makers were very different from what they had been only six years ago. In this period, Rado’s own tastes were coming to seem conservative to many of the younger members of the Film Festival.

In order to deal with this problem, the members of the organising committee critical of Rado’s programming selection suggested at the July 1969 meeting that the Director cease to have sole responsibility for the Festival content. It was argued at this meeting that

¹⁸⁷ MFF – Min., 15.7.1969, Box No. 33.

the invitation and programming of the films should be prepared by an extra sub-committee of three or four who have the necessary knowledge about film.¹⁸⁸

The (surely deliberate) rudeness of the phrase ‘necessary knowledge about film’ —with its implicit suggestion that Rado lacked this knowledge— reflects the growing belief amongst some members of the organising committee that Rado was out-of-step with current cinematic trends. The committee decided that this recommendation should be considered by their policy sub-committee. This sub-committee reported its findings in September 1969, and recommended that:

a) a broader spectrum of films be selected, with a particular focus on reflecting new trends,

b) a programme sub-committee be established, and that these people have a diversity of knowledge of cinema.¹⁸⁹

Although the sub-committee thus supported the initial complaints about Rado, in the end these recommendations were not carried by the committee as a whole —thus demonstrating that, despite the problems of the 1969 Festival, Rado still enjoyed majority support.

In an attempt to quell the concerns of the organising committee, Rado suggested at the September meeting that the Festival establish a separate programme for the more experimental films. This had perhaps been suggested to Rado by Stratton —who also disliked the 1969 programme, but shared Rado’s concerns about recent avant-garde works. Rado’s proposal was to “label all these way-out, new-style films, and put them all in our secondary theatre”. However, this was rejected because

the young Turks on my committee thought that it was also a function of the Festival to educate its audience, and therefore the best of these avant-garde films should go into the Palais, and not be tucked away somewhere.

Stratton’s proposed solution to this problem was to import only 16mm versions of the more avant-garde works. This would have two advantages. First, the films could be shown at a subsidiary theatre rather than at the main Festival venue. Second, the 16mm prints would be considerably cheaper to import and exhibit —thus making it easier to justify an entire separate programme dedicated to such works.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ MFF – Min., 15.7.1969, Box No. 33.

¹⁸⁹ MFF – Min., 4.9.1969, Box No. 33.

¹⁹⁰ MFF – Corr, Rado to Stratton, 12.9.1969, Box No. 47.

In the end, the ‘young Turks’ on the Melbourne organising committee accepted Rado’s compromise position. The 1970 Melbourne Festival incorporated two separate programmes, an ‘American Experimental’ and a ‘European Experimental’, both of which were held at the Union Theatre at the University of Melbourne, rather than at the Palais. The press release for this Festival also announced the slight change in focus, with its mention of ‘opera prima’ (‘first works’):

By today, the pioneering role of the Melbourne Film Festival is changing direction. While still firmly adhering to its role of introducing films which are not otherwise available for evaluation by potential buyers, critics and students of the cinema, the Melbourne Film Festival now concentrates more and more on opera prima, the works of young talents and examples of many new cinematic styles developing the world over. Thus, the Melbourne Film Festival is not a string of gala premieres of films waiting to be released. It is a showcase of films, talents and trends of significant potential, inviting discovery on these shores.¹⁹¹

Discontent over Rado’s programming choices were not to surface again in this period — but largely because the responsibility for sourcing films came increasingly to rest with Stratton. Even prior to the problems with the 1969 Melbourne Festival, the idea that Stratton should travel abroad more often than Rado was being canvassed by Sydney. Initially, this proposal was met with concern by the Melbourne committee, who stated that:

If Sydney insists on sending David Stratton every two years and Melbourne sticks to the every four year pattern, Sydney will show the flag twice as often as Melbourne, which will create a lopsided impression abroad.¹⁹²

In other words, the committee was worried that the international prestige and stature of Melbourne would suffer if Stratton was seen overseas as the main representative of Australia’s film festivals. However, after the problems with the 1969 programme, Sydney decided that it would send Stratton overseas every year for three months — whether it had Melbourne’s agreement or not.¹⁹³ Faced with this, in April 1970 Melbourne came to an informal agreement with Sydney. Under the terms of this agreement, Stratton would source films for both Festivals, and Melbourne would contribute \$800 to the costs of his yearly trips. Rado would only travel overseas every three or four years, in which case Sydney would

¹⁹¹ MFF – Arch., Box No. 49.

¹⁹² MFF – Min., 18.2.1969, Box No. 33.

¹⁹³ MFF – Min., 17.3.1970, Box No. 33.

contribute in kind.¹⁹⁴ By this time, Rado was happy to agree to this proposal, as he was inundated with work relating to establishing and administering the Experimental Film Fund (as noted above).¹⁹⁵

The next two years of Festivals (1970 and 1971) were programmed by Stratton, and both were generally well-received. Even Rado was ready to admit that Stratton's programme was markedly better than his own 1969 programme. Of the 1971 Melbourne Festival, Rado wrote that "I regard the 1971 Festival of a high standard unequalled in past years, and a very difficult one to maintain in the future".¹⁹⁶

By the end of this period, Rado announced that he wished to withdraw from many of his responsibilities. This is unsurprising. By late 1971, Rado had been the Melbourne Festival Director for more than fifteen years. In 1969, he had been formally attacked by his own committee for his programme selection; and he had seen Stratton's selections in the following years warmly received. He was also balancing the responsibilities of two Directorial positions, for organisations that were growing in size and administrative complexity. Thus, on 30 November 1971, the Melbourne minutes contain the following record:

Mr Rado reported his impending resignation from the Australian Film Institute at the end of March. He indicated that he had agreed to continue with the Directorship of the Melbourne Film Festival on condition it was treated as a part time job and that he was free to use the rest of his time as he wished. He explained his plans for making a feature film next year, and that he would require times to be away from his office and possibly to go overseas for short periods. He desired to place his plans on record and to obtain the committee's approval. He assured the committee that he would carry out his duties as conscientiously as before, and that his film making activities would in no way interfere with his work for the Festival.¹⁹⁷

Having resigned as Director of the AFI, in February 1972 Rado committed to working (albeit part-time) as Director for Melbourne for the next two years.¹⁹⁸ However, unable to abandon his life's work, he did not in fact retire from the Festival until the end of 1979.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ SFF – Min., 4.4.1970, Box No. 2.

¹⁹⁵ SFF – Min., 3.2.1970, Box No.2.

¹⁹⁶ MFF – Min., "1971 Film Festival – Director's Report", 30.11.1971, Box No.33.

¹⁹⁷ MFF – Min., 30.11.1971, Box No. 33.

¹⁹⁸ MFF – Min., 7.2.1972, Box No. 33.

¹⁹⁹ Kalina (ed.), *A place to call home*, p. 10.

Rado's retirement from the AFI coincided with the termination of the long-term financial contract between the Federation of Victorian Film Societies (which governed the Melbourne Festival) and its partners —the Melbourne University Film Society and the AFI. In November 1972 the total assets of the Festival (approximately \$17,000) were divided up, with MUFS receiving one-fifth, and the FVFS and AFI receiving two-fifths each.²⁰⁰ The AFI immediately donated its share back to the Festival, but this money was insufficient to fund the 1973 Festival —and Melbourne was forced to seek a loan of \$4,000 from the FVFS.²⁰¹ However, despite the short-term financial difficulties that the termination of the agreement caused to the Melbourne Film Festival, it was to give it greater autonomy in the years to come.

FIAPF and Competition

One final trend in this period that needs to be discussed is the continuing problematic relationship between the Film Festivals and FIAPF over official endorsement. FIAPF endorsement had to be renegotiated annually, and (at the beginning of this period) only two Australian international film festivals could receive such endorsement. Hence, this necessarily involved competition with the other film festivals (such as Adelaide and Brisbane). Adelaide in particular, under the energetic Directorship of Eric Williams, was the biggest domestic threat to the two established Festivals. Williams was now travelling overseas to source films, and was thus able to begin building his own relationships with international producers, distributors and governing bodies (such as FIAPF). Williams, of course, was also continuing to work towards obtaining FIAPF endorsement for his own festival. The vexed issue of competition for FIAPF endorsement ended only in 1973, when Adelaide received a separate endorsement as a specialist festival.

This period began with FIAPF issuing a series of new and more rigorous regulations for international film festivals. While Rado was travelling overseas to select films for the 1969 Festival programmes, he collected details of these new policies. The costs of registering a festival were doubled from \$1,000 to \$2,000, while maximum audience numbers for a screening were reduced to 500 people. In addition, FIAPF now demanded that a film's musical soundtrack be turned off at film festivals, in order to improve its potential commercial

²⁰⁰ MFF – Min., 8.11.1972, Box No. 33.

²⁰¹ MFF – Min., 8.11.1972, Box No. 33.

value. Reporting these new regulations to Stratton, Rado wrote gloomily that “Never is there good news from these people. Disgruntled festivals should form an anti-FIAPF union”.²⁰²

The escalating expense and restrictions imposed by continued maintenance of their FIAPF endorsement clearly concerned some members of the Sydney committee. It is true that the minutes from this period do not contain any explicit suggestions that Sydney abandon seeking endorsement. However, at the March 1970 committee meeting, Stratton “reiterated the importance of working with Melbourne on the FIAPF issue”, for “if Sydney left FIAPF, both Adelaide and Brisbane would almost certainly apply for FIAPF recognition and one of them would almost certainly get it”.²⁰³ This shows that Stratton was under some pressure to justify continued engagement with FIAPF to the organising committee. It is significant that his main argument for this is the possibility of Adelaide or Brisbane taking Sydney’s place as a FIAPF endorsed film festival. In other words, FIAPF endorsement was not simply a means of obtaining high-quality European releases, it was also a way of maintaining the higher status and prestige of Sydney and Melbourne within the competitive world of Australian international film festivals.

After the 1970 Festivals, with the threat from Adelaide growing, Stratton set out to systematically sabotage any possibility of Williams’s festival obtaining FIAPF endorsement. Stratton’s first move was, whilst on his annual tour, to meet with FIAPF General Secretary Brisson in Paris to discuss Adelaide. Stratton knew full-well that the most damaging accusation that could be levelled against Adelaide (at least as far as FIAPF were concerned) was that the Festival was a commercial venture. Having been persuaded that Adelaide was indeed such a venture, Brisson proposed a range of punitive measures. According to Stratton’s letter to Rado in September 1970, these included the following:

To request the socialist countries not to send films to Adelaide on the grounds that Adelaide competes with Sydney/Melbourne! He will also advise the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I mentioned the commercial aspects (Adelaide buying films) and he said he’d discuss this with Valenti and see if some kind of head office memo can’t be sent from New York to the various majors in Australia.²⁰⁴

In this letter, Stratton asked for Rado to write to Brisson and give Melbourne’s support to Sydney’s position.

²⁰² MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 21.1.1969, Box No. 47.

²⁰³ SFF – Min., 3.2.1970, Box No. 2.

In his reply to Stratton, Rado wrote that he himself, whilst sharing Stratton's desire to sabotage Adelaide's chances with FIAPF, had to be much more circumspect. As Director of the AFI, the premier national film culture organisation, Rado was under greater constraints than Stratton. For in order to fulfil his role, Rado had to appear completely non-partisan and to support the expansion of film culture throughout Australia.

I am terribly in the gun for our stand against Adelaide ... in the Institute; I have Alan Stout being indignant because we refuse to share ... Stanley Hawes fulminates against FIAPF, and I have to live, forgive me for my sins. So I can't write to Brisson —if it somehow gets out that I "informed" against Adelaide, I'll lose my job.²⁰⁵

This meant that, in dealing with the threat of Adelaide, Stratton had to take on the role of 'enforcer' as it were, whilst receiving moral support from Rado.

At the beginning of 1971, the threat of Adelaide's quest for FIAPF endorsement became more urgent, owing to yet another set of FIAPF demands on Sydney and Melbourne. In January, Brisson informed Rado that the previous arrangements, whereby Sydney and Melbourne were allowed to screen the same FIAPF-endorsed films, were no longer acceptable. The FIAPF Secretary wrote that:

I understand very well the point of view of your two events and the economy of joint invitations, but in order to avoid any comments on the part of producers and our members, a temporary solution must be adopted for 1971 limiting to 20% the maximum proportion of films presented at both festivals.²⁰⁶

In his response, Rado argued against this new regulation on the grounds that the films for the two 1971 Festivals were already secured and programmed. As a short-term compromise, Brisson agreed to let the two Festivals share their entire programme for that year. However, he insisted that the new regulation would have to be implemented for the 1972 Festivals.²⁰⁷

The damaging implications of this new demand from FIAPF were the subject of intense discussion between Sydney and Melbourne in the months that followed. The new regulation threatened to derail the cooperative relationship between the two Festivals. If it was enforced, Sydney and Melbourne would have to compete with one another for many films, and would

²⁰⁴ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 11.9.1970, Box No.50.

²⁰⁵ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 23.9.1970, Box No.47.

²⁰⁶ MFF – Corr., Brisson to Rado, 13.1.1971, Box No. 33.

²⁰⁷ MFF – Corr., Brisson to Rado, 22.2.1971, Box No. 36.

be unable to share the costs of importation to the same extent. In addition, it would mean that the Festivals would have to source most films separately, thus incurring additional costs for overseas travel and the like.

These issues were the central subject of discussion at the Sydney committee meeting in February 1971. After this meeting, Stratton wrote to Rado to inform him that Sydney did not want to be forced into competition with Melbourne, and would attempt to negotiate with Brisson. If Brisson refused to compromise on the new regulation, then, Stratton wrote, Sydney would be left with two alternatives:

(a) both Festivals withdraw from FIAPF and continue as before as far as possible. Adelaide would certainly take our place. We would each save \$1,000 per year, but would face an uphill battle to get film from certain countries ... it is difficult to see how this would pan out in the long run.

(b) the Festivals accept FIAPF's dictum, stay on as FIAPF members, and share fewer films ... Presumably we could still share short films, perhaps also features from non-FIAPF countries, maybe too features from local distributors. ... If all this could be done the area of non-sharing would not be so severe after all, and we'd still be co-operating very closely.²⁰⁸

Neither of these two alternatives was particularly palatable. In his reply, however, Rado argued that continued FIAPF endorsement was not worth the sacrifice of the close cooperation between the two Festivals. As he remarked, accepting the new regulation,

would lead us to competing for films, which is the last thing either of us wants to do, I think. Furthermore, if we can't enjoy the advantages of cooperation fully, we might as well use the advantages of being free of FIAPF controls to the hilt, rather than compromise.²⁰⁹

In order to strengthen the two Festivals' negotiating position with FIAPF, Stratton decided to carefully assemble a detailed case against Adelaide's own application for endorsement, and in support of the dual endorsement of Sydney and Melbourne. If the two major Festivals refused to accept the new regulation, then one or both of them would lose endorsement. And, as Stratton had noted in the passage cited above, Adelaide could be the natural successor. In response to this danger, Stratton developed a twofold defence. First, if Stratton could demonstrate that the Sydney and Melbourne Festivals were of equal status, then it would make the choice between them effectively arbitrary—which could help encourage Brisson to continue the current arrangement. Second, if Stratton could convince

²⁰⁸ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 3.3.1971, Box No. 53.

Brisson that Adelaide was not worth endorsing, then this could perhaps encourage the FIAPF secretary to abandon the new regulation.

The Sydney Festival's first move was to establish an 'action group' (consisting of Stratton, Tzannes, McPherson, and Kevin Troy) to build the case for FIAPF.²¹⁰ In March 1971, Stratton asked "a friend" at *The Australian* to gather information that might help reduce Adelaide's chances of receiving FIAPF endorsement (including the Festival's regulations, sales record, and so forth).²¹¹ Having collected this information from the 'friend' in question, Stratton took it to a private meeting in early April 1971 with Rado and Ian McPherson (who at this stage was still President of the Sydney Festival). At this meeting, it was resolved that Melbourne would commission a professional market research organisation to prepare an independent report, while the Sydney 'action group' would continue to pursue other sources of information. The purpose of the report would be to highlight the extent to which Sydney and Melbourne were the only two cities worthy of FIAPF recognition.²¹² In addition, the meeting agreed to the following resolution: "if FIAPF should insist that the Melbourne and Sydney Festivals were not to share any films, the two Festivals would decide to forgo FIAPF endorsement". And, in the event of the FIAPF recognition being granted instead to Adelaide,

It was hoped that the market research report would probably point out the futility of such a move, and that FIAPF ... would be induced to endorse Melbourne and Sydney again.²¹³

After this meeting, there was some concern in the Festivals that the commissioned report would appear to FIAPF as just a piece of marketing propaganda. With this potential problem in mind, Rado wrote to Stratton, arguing that the report needed to be bolstered with support from the domestic trade. In this letter, Rado remarks that,

it may be possible to get some sort of supporting statement from people like Columbia, Village, Gala, Jarrett and the more the merrier. Whether these people are, in fact, prepared to stick their necks out and make certain statements, however oblique, against the venue of the Adelaide Festival ... I don't know, but I feel ... that this kind of statement would be far more valuable than a so-called "independent investigation".²¹⁴

²⁰⁹ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 4.3.1971, Box No.53.

²¹⁰ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 7.4.1971, Box No. 47.

²¹¹ MFF – Corr., Stratton to Rado, 26.3.1971, Box No.47.

²¹² This meeting was reported to Melbourne's committee in MFF – Min., 15.4.1971, Box No. 33.

²¹³ MFF – Min., 15.4.1971, Box No. 33.

²¹⁴ MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 8.4.1971, Box No. 55.

The Festivals' disquiet over the report commissioned by Melbourne was perhaps justified. The report (prepared by J.A. Cowl and Co.) used a battery of statistics, and made Sydney and Melbourne's case in a manner so overwhelming that it did indeed appear as a piece of propaganda. The statistics used in the Cowl report included relevant demographic information, such as the total proportion of the population that lived in Sydney and Melbourne, and the proportion of cinema-goers. It also included relevant industrial and trade information on each city, such as the number of cinemas and their total seating capacities, and the numbers of film distributors and producers. Finally, in a marvellous victory for quantification, the report concluded that Sydney and Melbourne "are 2.3 times more important than the rest of the Australian capital cities combined".²¹⁵ In addition, the report conveniently supported Sydney and Melbourne's quest for dual FIAPF endorsement by stating that

we could not find any substantive grounds for separating the two (so as to say one is more important than the other). Therefore in this report the two cities are often treated as a joint entity.²¹⁶

The Cowl Report, in conjunction with additional supporting documentation, was sent to FIAPF in July 1971, but the Festivals were not content to let matters rest there.²¹⁷ In October 1971, Stratton was still writing letters to various international producers' associations, asking for them to contact FIAPF in support of Sydney and Melbourne. The argument that Stratton proffers for dual endorsement in these letters includes the standard ground of the geographical distance between the two cities, as well as a supposed marked divergence in "temperament"—suggesting that Melbourne and Sydney offered distributors two distinctly different markets.²¹⁸

By the end of 1971, the efforts of the two Festivals had paid off, and FIAPF withdrew its initial demand. In December, Brisson accepted a compromise position proposed by the Festivals, and informed Melbourne and Sydney that he was offering them dual endorsement under revised regulations. These new regulations represented a substantial concession by FIAPF. The regulations stipulated that the Festivals would divide their programmes into two parts: an 'Official Section' and an 'Information Section'. In their 'Official Sections', the

²¹⁵MFF – Arch., J.A. Cowl and Co., "Market-Research Report", 1971, Box No. 53.

²¹⁶MFF – Arch., J.A. Cowl and Co., "Market-Research Report", 1971, Box No. 53.

²¹⁷ MFF – Min., 15.7.1971, Box No.55.

²¹⁸ MFF – Corr., Stratton to various organisations, 20.10.1971, Box No. 36.

Festivals would be restricted to sharing a maximum of one-third of the total number of films. However, in their 'Information Sections', they could share whatever films they wished.²¹⁹ The only constraint was that the films comprising the 'Information Sections' should be held during the day, rather than at the most popular night-time screening slots. This meant that the new regulations restricted sharing between the Festivals in what was really only a nominal sense. The two Festivals could continue to show almost identical programmes —so long as large parts were labelled as 'Information Sections'. In this fashion, Brisson could claim to have met the demands of producers (to restrict film sharing), whilst allowing the two Festivals to continue much as they had done before. Unsurprisingly, both Sydney and Melbourne were happy to accept FIAPF's proposal.²²⁰

Stratton was well aware of the nature of the compromise offered by FIAPF. In January 1972, he told the Sydney committee that the programme would include an "Information Screening of a feature film showing officially in the Melbourne Film Festival". He also noted that, in general

I think we should more or less confine information section films to 11am and 5pm sessions, but we must be prepared that some quite "popular" films find their way in.²²¹

Although, strictly speaking, it falls outside the period dealt with in this thesis, it is perhaps worth remarking here that in 1973 the Festivals' rivalry with Adelaide came to an end. This was because in that year Adelaide received its own independent FIAPF endorsement —as a film festival specialising in experimental works and 'opera prima'. This conveniently meant that Adelaide was no longer competing with Sydney and Melbourne for either a FIAPF endorsed position, or for similar film products. It also solved another problem experienced by both Rado and Stratton throughout this period —namely, what to do about avant-garde and experimental films. For now, thanks to FIAPF, screening such material had become Adelaide's primary role (and problem).

With the industrial pressures to compete removed, it became possible for the two major Festivals to establish a truce with Adelaide. In April 1973, after hearing of FIAPF's decision, Rado wrote to Stratton that

²¹⁹ MFF – Corr., Brisson to Rado, 20.12.1971, Box No. 36.

²²⁰ MFF – Min., 2.2.1972, Box No. 14.

²²¹ SFF – Min., 10.1.1972, Box No. 3.

I feel rather relieved about Adelaide ... I really hate fighting and all the bitchery that went on in the past.²²²

The same day, Rado also wrote to Williams, stating that

I welcome you to the new era of relationship between our festivals, which seems to me the logical outcome of your obtaining FIAPF endorsement at last.²²³

At a meeting in May, Rado informed the Melbourne committee that “the prolonged hostility between the Melbourne/Sydney and Adelaide Festivals was causing the loss of some good films, and it was suggested that harmony be restored”.²²⁴ To cement the new relationship, Rado invited Eric Williams (the Adelaide Director) and his wife to attend the Melbourne Film Festival Opening Night in 1973.²²⁵ Indeed, after the 1973 Festival, both Sydney and Melbourne changed their official ‘exclusionary clause’ to allow films to be shared, “in a limited number of cases”, with the Adelaide Festival.²²⁶

From 1958 to the end of the period dealt with in this thesis, the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals had been forced to accommodate and negotiate with the demands of FIAPF, as one of the most powerful film producers’ associations in the world. As has been discussed throughout, the Festivals’ relationship with FIAPF represented their rawest encounter with the demands of industry, unmediated by any appeal to issues of cultural legitimacy. It is a testament to the skill and diplomacy of the Festival organisers that they were able to manoeuvre successfully around FIAPF’s demands throughout these years.

Perhaps the last word on this matter should go to Ross Tzannes, who recalls that:

The truth of the matter is that FIAPF exploited us and we exploited FIAPF. And David exploited FIAPF and I exploited FIAPF. All at different times and for different purposes. And all with a degree of hypocrisy involved.²²⁷

²²² MFF – Corr., Rado to Stratton, 10.4.1973, Box No 60.

²²³ MFF – Corr., Rado to Williams, 10.4.1973, Box No. 60.

²²⁴ MFF – Min., 1.5.1973, Box No. 33.

²²⁵ MFF – Corr., Williams to Rado, 30.5.1973, Box No 60.

²²⁶ MFF – Corr., Rado to Williams, 15.8.1973, Box No. 60.

²²⁷ SFF – Oral Hist. Arch., R. Tzannes, interviewed by Graham Shirley, 7.9.1992.

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In conclusion, the period from 1969 to 1972 sees the Melbourne and Sydney Film Festivals become genuinely public cultural institutions in their respective cities. Through their growing engagement with Australian film, and their campaign to liberalise film-censorship, they had successfully developed a public profile in the cultural arena. By this time the Festivals had also travelled a long way from their amateur roots, and had established themselves as key events in Melbourne's and Sydney's social calendars. Much like the Sydney Festival itself, David Stratton had developed his own public profile throughout this period, and was on his way to becoming one of the key figures in Australian film-culture. Erwin Rado, on the other hand, who had dedicated the past fifteen years to building the stature of the Melbourne Festival, was now increasingly being perceived by his own organisation as out of touch with contemporary developments in the world of film. This chapter thus concludes the narrative of this thesis, at a high point in the history of both the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the history of the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals from 1945 to 1972. The narrative began with an analysis of their origins in the post-war film society movement, and Australia's first international film festival —the Olinda Festival of 1952. The thesis then considered the emergence of the two Film Festivals as small-scale, amateur events for local film enthusiasts, and their growth to become —by 1972— two of the premier social and cultural events in their respective cities.

As noted in the Introduction, the thesis has focussed throughout on the organisational aspects of the Film Festivals' historical development —in particular, their status as organisations dedicated to certain conceptions of 'culture' in a particular industrial context. That is to say, the historical narrative given here has not treated the Film Festivals as 'empty spaces' —the history of which is exhausted by an account of the films that they have screened. Rather, this history has focussed on the fact that the Festivals existed as organisations needing to engage in a continual negotiation between the various demands imposed by the pursuit of cultural legitimacy and industrial survival.

This Conclusion will now briefly draw together the various threads of the history of the Festivals' negotiation between 'culture' and 'industry'. For the purposes of this discussion, these negotiations can be grouped roughly into the following four issues: first, the relationship between the Festivals and the film trade; second, the relationship between the various Australian international film festivals; third, the relations between the two Festivals and Australian film; fourth, the Festivals' campaign to liberalise film censorship regulations in Australia.

Before examining these four areas of negotiation, it is worth briefly reiterating the original conception of 'an international film festival', which the two Film Festivals had inherited from Olinda. The Olinda Festival was originally conceived of as a non-commercial exhibition site —that is, dedicated to screening cinema not otherwise being exhibited by the commercial trade in Australia. This purpose was, in turn, bound up with various conceptions of 'culture' and its opposition to 'industry' —including notions of 'quality' cinema, and the educational, intellectual, and socially beneficial potential of film. This conception of the cultural role of a film festival also lay at the core of the identity of the Sydney and Melbourne

Film Festivals, and played an important role (often unacknowledged) in almost all their deliberations.

The Festivals' self-conception, and their accompanying need to maintain cultural legitimacy, set them a problem when they emerged into the broader network of industrial relations within the field of cinema. As the Festivals grew in stature, and moved beyond being simply an annual meeting of film enthusiasts, they increasingly came into conflict with the commercial film trade. These conflicts began with the Australian distributors specialising in European cinema, who were concerned that the Festivals could over-expose major films, and thereby reduce those films' potential profitability. This conflict, in turn, attracted the interest of FIAPF. This industrial entity posed the greatest threat to the continuing viability of the Festivals throughout this period, as it controlled access to most of the major European production houses.

The need to avoid the hostility of the commercial trade—which could result in the withholding of major releases—meant that the Festivals were forced into a difficult negotiation with the demands of industry. The Festivals, that is, needed to persuade the trade that they could perform a useful industrial function. An obvious role for the Festivals was to act as publicity and marketing devices not only for particular 'art' films, but also for 'art film' as a whole. As publicity and marketing devices for the trade, the Festivals could offer something which no industry-led marketing could bestow—namely, cultural legitimacy. As the Festivals were non-profit organisations, and associated with notions of 'culture', the very fact that they screened certain films could help to bestow cultural legitimacy (as being, for example, 'quality cinema' rather than 'commercial trash') on those products. By thus consecrating certain products in this fashion, the Festivals could also assist in expanding the horizons of what was acceptable to popular taste—or, at least, middle-class taste. In both these ways, then, the Festivals could prove a useful adjunct to the commercial trade (in particular, those sections of it specialising in 'Continental' film and other 'festival fare').

However, although the Festivals were thus able to justify their existence to the trade—by showing how they could complement rather than compete with the commercial exhibitors—this was in some ways a difficult line for them to tread. This is because the more they promoted themselves as marketing and publicity devices for the commercial film trade, the more the Festivals threatened to undercut their own cultural legitimacy—as this was premised in large part on their opposition to 'industrial' values (like profit and commercialism). In a vicious circle, any loss of cultural legitimacy threatened to undermine

the Festivals' value to the trade —for, as just noted, this value stemmed precisely from the Festivals' apparent freedom from any taint of commercialism.

Unsurprisingly, then, the Festivals' accommodations to the demands of the trade produced a certain level of backlash from within their own ranks. For those committee and audience members who believed that the Festivals should maintain a cultural 'purity', any such accommodation was tantamount to betraying their original ideals. However, if the Festivals had attempted to maintain such 'purity', and had refused to negotiate at all with industry, this would have severely restricted both the films that the Festivals could screen, and, consequently, the audience they could attract. For throughout the later 1950s and 1960s, commercial exhibitors in Australia began to screen an increasingly wider range of films —'art film', in particular. This meant that there was no longer such a clear need for an exhibition site dedicated purely to non-commercially available cinema. Hence, if the Film Festivals had attempted to retain this aspect of their heritage in its full purity, then they would have had to become events primarily dedicated to screening cinema with a very limited audience appeal (for example, the 'experimental films' of the avant-garde).

By the latter part of the period dealt with in this thesis, the two Film Festivals had managed to negotiate for themselves a relatively stable position within a network of industrial and cultural relations. In general, the Festivals successfully handled any conflicts with the trade, and were thus able to maintain a level of cultural legitimacy, and continue to procure the more prestigious 'art film' releases for their audiences.

Having discussed the area of relations between the Festivals and the trade, it is now important to examine the second area of negotiation —the problematic relations between the Australian international film festivals themselves. There were two primary sources of difficulty here: potential competition for a limited supply of films, and competition for cultural status and prestige within Australia.

Beginning with the first point, the availability of film product to the Festivals was tightly restricted, and therefore a potential locus of competition between the Festivals. This restriction on film supply stemmed primarily from FIAPF's policies to limit the festival exposure of the films under its control. The festival audience had to be large enough for the screening to function effectively as a promotional and marketing device; but if the audience was too large, then this could, especially in a small market, reduce the potential profitability of the film in question. Hence, the existence of *two* international film festivals within

Australia was of major concern to FIAPF —and this remained a point of contention throughout this period. There was thus considerable pressure on Sydney and Melbourne to compete with one another for FIAPF endorsement —and hence access to major releases. However, the two Festivals soon realised that such competition was likely to be ruinous. In particular, it would mean that the Festivals could not cooperate to share the costs of film importation and so forth. Furthermore, there was a cultural imperative that both Festivals should cooperate in promoting film culture in Australia. Hence, Sydney and Melbourne eventually managed to develop a good working partnership —but only after a series of difficult joint negotiations with FIAPF secured them both official endorsement.

The second source of difficulties for the relationship between the two Festivals was more straightforward: namely, the competition between them for cultural prestige. Initially it was Melbourne who had the upper hand in this. This was largely because the Melbourne Festival had a strong support base in the FVFS, and a more stable financial and administrative structure. Melbourne, however, overplayed its hand in the fiasco of the Australian Film Festival. Although this Australia-wide Festival appeared to promise Melbourne substantial administrative control over Sydney, it resulted in Melbourne losing its FIAPF endorsement to Sydney. After this, Melbourne realised it would be better to cooperate with the Sydney Festival, than attempt to compete with it. And indeed, once David Stratton became Director of the Sydney Festival, it soon moved away from its amateur roots, and achieved at least an equal cultural status with Melbourne.

Although the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals thus eventually formed a strong cooperative alliance, they were not prepared to extend this cooperation to the newer Australian international film festivals that began to emerge in the later 1950s. Given the tight restrictions on the supply of festival films, any additional demand from such new festivals threatened both to reignite the hostility of the commercial trade, and potentially damage the quality of the programmes that Sydney and Melbourne could offer to their audiences. Given this threat to their viability, and despite the lip-service they paid to the cultural value of promoting ‘art film’ across Australia, Sydney and Melbourne acted in a thorough and determined way to eradicate the threat posed by the newcomers. This was embodied in their formal policies (most notably, the ‘exclusionary clause’), and also in persistent behind-the-scenes attempts both to deny other film festivals FIAPF endorsement, and damage their relations with the commercial trade. In a sense, then, under the pressures imposed by the industrial context (namely, the restriction on film supply), Sydney and Melbourne acted much

like any other cartel —to deny the entry of any competitors into their own ‘market-place’ of cultural goods.

The third problematic issue for the Festivals over this period was their relation to the Australian film industry. Since their emergence out of Olinda, support for the Australian film industry had been one of the self-imposed cultural roles of the two Festivals. However, throughout this period, there was very little Australian film product to be shown, and the quality of what was available was often very poor. This left the Festivals with something of a dilemma, caused by the need to negotiate between two conflicting conceptions of ‘culture’. On the one hand, there was the aesthetically-driven idea that the Festivals should show only ‘good’ or ‘quality’ film; on the other hand, there was a more socially-driven idea, namely, that the Festivals should encourage local production as an expression of national identity. By the end of this period, both Festivals had achieved a workable compromise on this issue. They continued to show Australian films (despite their general poor quality), but insulated them within special award programmes. This not only prevented such Australian film from compromising the quality of the main programmes, but the awards also gave both the Festivals and the films added cultural prestige.

The fourth and final issue that needs to be discussed here is the Festivals’ campaign to liberalise film censorship regulations in Australia. This campaign not only succeeded in achieving some of its stated goals, but the publicity surrounding it also greatly assisted the two Festivals in gaining a broader public status as important cultural institutions within Australia. This story —which has of course been told before, from other perspectives— is another illustration of the relations between the cultural aims of the Festivals and their industrial context. For the censorship campaign was not conducted purely in the public sphere as a cultural mission —it also involved careful negotiation with both government and the commercial trade.

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If this history of the Sydney and Melbourne Festivals from 1945 to 1972 can be summed up in a sentence, it is that the activity of cultural organisations like the Festivals must be seen in its industrial context to be fully understood. Particularly within a field like that of cinema —the “unresolved equation between art and industry”— the demands of industry are a hard reality which any cultural institution —no matter how culturally ‘pure’ its aims and objectives—

must face and negotiate with. Over the period dealt with in this thesis, the two Festivals successfully charted a course from being small, amateur organisations to becoming two of Australia's premier cultural institutions. That this was done with so little sacrifice of their core cultural identity is a testament to the drive and strategic abilities of the organising committees of the Sydney and Melbourne International Film Festivals.

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