

‘Ah! Other Bodies!’: Embodied spaces, pleasures and practices at Glasgow Film Festival¹

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Summary

Over the past two decades film festivals have become an increasingly important area of scholarly interest, particularly within Film Studies. However, to date, much scholarly attention has focused on the industry, economic and/or political roles of film festivals with surprising little attention given to the significance and meaningfulness of these events to the general public who attend them in droves. Focusing on Glasgow Film Festival (GFF) – an event that defines itself as an ‘audience film festival’ – this article draws on empirical audience research to examine experiences and pleasures of film festival going, and the extent to which these may, or may not, differ from year-round cinema going. While acknowledging that the *raison d’être* for film festivals is to screen films, it argues that festival audiences articulate their experiences primarily in spatial and corporeal terms, as opposed to textual terms (via specific films). Drawing on audience testimonies, I examine the ways in which experiential vocabularies suggest a more embodied cinematic practice and alternative mode of spectatorship within the festival context, which contrast with traditional notions of disembodiment and immersion in the cinema space, as well as the resilience of shared cinematic experiences.

Key words: Film festival audiences; cinema audiences; spectatorship; cinema space; festival space; embodiment; community; Glasgow Film Festival

Introduction

Since the late 2000s, film festivals have gained an increasing level of academic attention. These events offer fertile ground for investigating film texts, film industries, film cultures and film audiences and, therefore, attract researchers from various disciplines such as

events management, tourism studies, film studies, sociology, history, anthropology and economics.² As a result, film festival studies has developed as an independent, multidisciplinary, research field with growing prominence within the international research community.³

Certainly, there is no shortage of festivals to research as the number of these events taking place – locally, nationally and internationally – continues to grow at an extraordinary rate, with the suggestion that somewhere in the world a film festival opens every thirty-six hours (Archibald & Miller, 2011, p. 249). The vast popularity of film festivals has been connected to the ‘increasing importance of “experiences” in contemporary culture’ (de Valck, 2007, p. 19). Joseph Pine and James Gilmore suggest that the ‘experience economy’ offers consumers a new value source that supersedes goods and services, and suggest that companies now ‘stage an experience whenever they *engage* customers, connecting with them in a personal, memorable way’ (2011 [1998], p. 5).⁴ Placing this view within the film festival context, these events arguably cater for an increasing demand, by film audiences, for experiences that extend beyond the film product (film texts). Nevertheless, despite a seemingly shared view, at least amongst researchers studying these events, that film festivals offer a unique experience that differs from cinema or home viewing, examination of the ways audiences experience these events – textually, spatially, socially or otherwise – has gained surprisingly little attention. Consequently, much is speculated about the value of film festivals to their audiences, yet beyond market research conducted by festivals themselves, little is known.

Indeed, most scholarship on film festival audiences has been principally concerned with debates around cinephilia and the possible identities of audiences. Some scholars present a rather grave outlook for the future of Anglo-American film festivals, suggesting that there is an assumption that only ‘a dwindling set of cinephiles’ now attends these events (Koehler, 2009, p. 81-2). In this view, films with ‘explicitly cinephilic goals’ are thought to stand in the shadows of in-competition films, premières and gala events with attending talent because festival audiences now ‘embrace noncinephiliac dispositions’ by becoming stargazers and highlight-seekers (Koehler, 2009, p. 82; Czach, 2010, p. 142). More optimistically, however, Marijke de Valck suggests that film festivals manifest new varieties of cinephilia (2005, p. 103). De Valck’s typology of festival cinephiles⁵ suggests that audiences cannot be defined merely by film taste, but by various festival practices inside and outside of the auditorium, for instance: selection practices, motivations for attending the event, attendance modes, and supplementary activities (volunteering, drinks and dinner afterwards) (2005, p. 103-5). However, again the audience is treated as a subject to be identified, labeled and profiled. Furthermore, methodologically, the researcher’s knowledge and observations of the event operate as a stand-in for the voice of the festival audience. That is to say, that in each of these cases (Czach, Koehler, de Valck) the audience is discursively constructed, yet never engaged with.

In contrast, audience research that examines the experiential aspects of cinema going has become a growing area of academic interest within Film Studies, leading some scholars to label this kind of research as ‘somewhat fashionable’ (Biltereyst, 2013).⁶ However, much of the work on cinema exhibition and reception involves sociohistoric accounts of cinema-going in the first half of the twentieth century (1900-1960s), including Biltereyst’s own work (Willinsky 2001; Jancovich et al 2003; Kuhn 2002, 2004; Allen 2011; Maltby, Biltereysyt & Meers 2011; Biltereyst, Maltby & Meers 2012). While this current undertaking is focused on contemporary film exhibition and consumption, historical accounts of cinema-going are instructive in light of their focus on the materiality and spatiality of cinema venues, and in their proposal that “‘location and physical sites of exhibition” are essential to an understanding of the meanings of cinema’ (Jancovich et al, 2003, p. 11). This article aligns with this notion, maintaining that space and place are vitally important considerations when examining audience engagement with film festivals, particularly because these events often play out in various and differing venues that audiences may, or may not, attend outside of festival time.

Indeed, a recent pool of contemporary studies of cinema audiences has also given due attention to the spatiality and sociality of cinema-going. This research includes studies of alternative content in cinemas which consider the ways in which live theatre and opera streaming fashions its attending public and shapes their behaviours in non-performance spaces (i.e. cinemas) (Barker, 2013, p. 9). Other studies have looked at community aspects of art cinema, and the formation of ‘indirect communities’ (Evans, 2011), as well as the ways in which social exclusion is manifest in independent cinema (Hollinshead, 2011). Focusing on a specific type of cinema audience, Karen Boyle’s research considers the transformation of cinema spaces for Watch with Baby screenings (Boyle, 2010). On the other hand, Phil Hubbard’s investigation of multiplex audiences, in which he uses human geography as a theoretical framework, suggests that ‘we can only understand the appeal of multiplex cinemas by considering the embodied geographies of cinema-going’ (2001, p. 255). Hubbard maintains that the spatial characteristics of the multiplex are key to understanding the value and meaningfulness of the experience for audiences:

Cinema going is about the consumption of place (e.g., the cinema) as much as it is about the consumption of film. This means that the ability of specific cinemas (e.g., multiplexes, art house or single-screen city centre cinemas) to appeal to particular audiences needs to be understood not only in terms of the films they show, but also the (often improvised and unconscious) forms of practice played out within the spaces of the auditorium, foyer and so on. (Hubbard, 2001, p. 259)

Like cinema, the central purpose of a film festival is to screen films to film audiences, whether they are film practitioners, critics, volunteers, judges or the general public.

However, wholly endorsing Hubbard's argument, I propose that 'festival-going is about the consumption of place as much as it is about the consumption of film' (Ibid). Furthermore, this article maintains that the 'forms of practices' that festival audiences adopt – both inside and outside of the auditorium – are key to understanding the mounting appeal of film festivals for the general public. In this context, I question: What are audiences practices like at GFF? What do audiences find most pleasing/displeasing about the event? And what factors shape their overall 'experience'?

Glasgow Film Festival and its audience

Launched in 2005, seventy-three years after the world's first film festival (Venice in 1932),⁷ GFF is a youth on the festival circuit. However, the event has matured and developed at a rapid speed with attendance growth of 551% in just nine years; increasing from just under 5,000 attendances in 2005 to just under 40,000 in 2013.⁸ The festival operates out of a hub venue, Glasgow Film Theatre⁹, an independent cinema and former art house built in the 1930s. It is currently supported at local level by Glasgow City Marketing Bureau and at national level by Creative Scotland and Event Scotland.¹⁰

The event's inception and current identity are inherently connected to Glasgow's historic profile as a 'cinematic city'¹¹ and its contemporary image as a 'media city' (GFF, 2004, p. 3).¹² Part of a larger initiative that sought to 'grow the shop window on Glasgow,' the event would enhance the city's image as a vibrant cultural and creative location and 'premier winter destination' (GFF, 2010, p. 36). From the outset, GFF defined itself as an open-access audience festival with a distinctively local identity but international in its outlook, as the 2005 brochure illustrates:

The range of films from all over the world should remind Glaswegians we are, and always have been, an international and cosmopolitan city and our origins go far beyond the boundaries of our city and our country. (GFF, 2005, p. 3)¹³

Aside from its ties to broader civic incentives, the festival's inception was also driven by Glasgow Film Theatre's local audience development aims under a project called the 'Cinezone' initiative. Cinezone involved three different types of 'institutionally and spatially located' sites of exhibition on a central strip within the city: a multiplex (now Cineworld, former UGC); a cultural cinema and former art house (Glasgow Film Theatre); and an art gallery and cross-arts venue (Centre for Contemporary Arts) (Harbord, 2002, p. 39). The event would programme a diverse range of films from 'mainstream to art house, vintage to futuristic' and map audiences across these three types of exhibition sites during 'festival time'. In this sense, the logic behind Cinezone was both cultural and economic. On one hand it would cultivate a more eclectic cinematic culture and complicate the mainstream-art film divide, yet it would also serve to increase box office figures at each venue outside festival time. It was thought that each space would become accessible, inclusive and familiar to

audiences through their festival experiences, increasing the likelihood of cross-cinema attendance year round. Hence, the festival was spatially characterised from the outset – in terms of its emplacement within Glasgow and a supposition of cinema audiences as being spatially structured around particular ‘types’ of cinemas. This raises interesting questions about the ways in which distinct audiences come together during festival time. To what extent do audiences view themselves as part of a festival audience, or various sets of distinct cinema audiences? And what factor does site/space play in shaping audience engagement with, and experience of, the festival?

In terms of what GFF knows about its audience, each year the festival commissions a consultancy firm, EKOS, to conduct an Economic Impact Assessment Report – a quantitative audience survey that generates data which is used for both audience development and funding applications. In these surveys, there is a similar preoccupation with audience identities found in film festival research (Czach, 2010; Koehler, 2009; de Valck, 2005), alongside some behavioural concerns (how much did audiences spend in the festival city, were they visitors to the city, if so where did they stayed etc.?). EKOS research suggests that the GFF audience is mostly made up of local audiences (around 80% of the audience is from Glasgow or Greater Glasgow) and that the audience is predominantly of white origin (97.5% average), and white-Scottish or white-British (87.7%) (EKOS, 2013, p. 5). In terms of age, GFF audiences range significantly but the dominant age group is 35-44 year olds. Little is known about occupation or social class, however, the festival’s hub venue, GFT, is known to attract mainly a ‘comfortably off’ demographic (educated, cosmopolitan, prosperous, professional, graduate/student) demographic (GFT, 2006, p. 262).

These data, while offering a useful snapshot of the demographic profiles of audiences, reveal little about the practices and pleasures of the event, for example, selection processes, key pleasures, uses of festival space, behaviours and etiquette. Again, a preoccupation with audience identity is apparent, particularly in terms of demographics, which leaves more qualitative questions – *why* audiences attend film festivals and *how* they engage with and experience these events – unanswered.

Methods

This article emerges from a larger PhD investigation. While the wider project adopts a mixed-method approach – fieldwork (participant observation, elite interviews and focus groups) and desk research (box office analysis, programme analysis and archival research) – to consider film festival exhibition and reception, this paper draws predominantly on a small-scale qualitative focus group study.

Focus groups took place in February 2012 during the eighth Glasgow Film Festival. I conducted seven focus groups, lasting one hour each, on-site in an office at Glasgow Film Theatre while the festival took place downstairs in the cinema. Focus groups were used – as opposed to interviews – to mimic the sociality of the film festival. The total sample

comprised of 40 festival-goers (16 males, 24 females) with an overall age range of 18-74 years old (see **Appendix A**).

Research subjects were recruited via two main channels: social media (in the lead up to the festival) and outside screenings (during the festival). On-site recruitment took place at two of the festival's lead venues, Glasgow Film Theatre and Cineworld Renfrew Street (19-screen multiplex), and covered various film strands (from British independent to world cinema). Recruitment was conducted at different times of day and on different days of the week to ensure that the sample included a mixed range of tastes and life cycles.¹⁴ However, the sample was not divided systematically according to any demographic or taste categories. Instead, festival-goers chose a focus group session suitable for them, and in this respect groups were self-selecting.¹⁵

A pre-focus group form was completed by each participant, which asked for the following demographic information: age, occupation, post-code and gender. I had very much hoped to attract a diverse group in terms age, gender, sexuality, religion, race, nationality, and ethnicity; however, I decided to omit the latter five categories from the pre-focus group form. My reasoning was two-fold. Firstly, I felt that many of these questions were invasive and unnecessary for the particular type of festival I was examining.¹⁶ More importantly, I did not want to homogenise participants or draw any conjectural connections between demographic profiles and participant accounts, following the principle that 'it is deeply problematic to emphasize [such] factors [...] for audience behaviour and experiences' (Smets, 2013, p. 107). In his research on diasporic audiences, Kevin Smets notes:

Through a process of de-essentialising, scholars of media and diaspora have advocated a de-ethnicization of their own subjects. This shift notwithstanding, diasporic audiences might still essentialize/ethnicize themselves in a process of differentiation. (2013, p. 108)

A central aim of this research was to give the audience a voice. Thus, de-essentialising my participants meant that if they themselves felt that race, religion, nationality, sexuality or ethnicity was important in the context of focus group discussions then they could offer that information and present its relevance. Thus, any experiential narratives that were connected to demographic factors naturally unfolded.¹⁷

All focus group participants were anonymised and give pseudonyms at transcription stage on the basis that identities would not add any more meaning to my findings. Also, given how difficult it is to recruit participants for focus groups, I did not want to add any unnecessary barriers, and assumed that people may have been more likely to attend if their identities were not revealed. Additionally, I hoped that audiences would be more forthcoming in the actual sessions, knowing that their identities would never be revealed to GFF practitioners.¹⁸ Each participant signed a consent form prior to the session.

As an incentive for participation, each person was given two free festival tickets for

his/her contribution, and in many cases participants left the session and went straight to the box office to book screenings with their free tickets.¹⁹

Cinema space vs. Festival space

Although this research is principally concerned with film festival experiences, it would be unproductive to wholly detach film festival-going from cinema-going. The reason for this is twofold: firstly, festival-going, like cinema-going, involves watching films in public spaces with other bodies – strangers. Secondly, more often than not festival-goers were in fact year-round cinema-goers. In terms of the research sample's involvement with film culture year-round, most individuals attended the cinema 1-2 times per month, while over half the sample attended the cinema once per week or more, indicating a rather 'invested' cinema audience. The pre-focus group form also asked participants to self-identify as either an avid, keen, occasional or rare cinema-goer, with 'keen cinema-goer' emerging as the dominant mode of identification for the overall sample. Interestingly, however, self-identification differed depending on cinematic allegiance, for instance, the most dominant category for multiplex-goers was 'avid', while independent cinema-goers mostly self-identified as 'keen' (only 2 out of 21 identified as 'avid').

In all focus groups, narratives about year-round cinema experiences emerged with participants linking, comparing and contrasting their festival experiences with cinema experiences. More interestingly, although participants seemed to embrace their unity as a cohesive 'GFF audience', many also segmented into particular types of cinema audiences, proactively sharing their 'preferred year-round cinema', which was more often than not a multiplex or an independent cinema. However, this segmentation was not framed by cinema programming – as many participants noted, multiplexes and independent cinemas often show the same films – but rather, it was space and the other people who inhabited these spaces that came to the fore as markers of distinction. This resonates with Janet Harbord's Bourdieu-inspired notion that identities are built around cinematic spaces:

Our tastes for film is suggestive of our relationship to these spatial sites and whilst we may not inhabit each of these sites exclusively, foregoing all others, patterns of consumption fall into familiar routines rooted in the social comfort of environments, the ease and familiarity of the habitus as a spatial framework. (Harbord, 2002, p. 3)

For instance, many participants noted a preference for independent cinemas because they offered a more 'comfortable environment'. In several cases, this was often related to anxieties around security and safety and was, in the main, articulated by female participants. When asked what cinemas they attended year-round, the following individuals – who enjoyed attending the cinema alone – noted that they preferred attending independent cinema, Glasgow Film Theatre, because they were less likely to be judged:

Iris: I find that when I'm coming to the GFT, I come on my own a lot more than I do when I go to Cineworld. Whereas with the more mainstream cinemas I feel that if you go on your own, people think you're weird! Whereas here [GFT], it's quite accepted... And it's safer here.

Leena: Yeah I love going to the cinema on my own but I would only do it at a specific kind of cinema, like GFT.

Researcher: Iris, what do you mean by safer?

Iris: I suppose I'm referring to one particular incident when I went to Cineworld and there were people throwing M&Ms²⁰ all the way through the film and they had just targeted our little group, I don't know why. And it was very intimidating and I've never felt like that here, and I often come on my own. I don't know if it's just the *different type of people* that come here or because you come here for a different reason, like people definitely want to see the film so you focus on that. Yeah, I don't know if it's *different type of people*. I don't want to sound like a snob or anything.

For these participants, cinematic sites shaped attendance practices and audience perception of cinematic sites and the people who occupy them. While Iris was keen to avoid presenting herself as a 'snob' – a tendency that Evans (2011) also found in her study of cultural cinema audiences – the repetition of 'different types of people' suggests that her perceptions of the multiplex and its audiences are shaped by this incident and have triggered a process of differentiation whereby she distinguishes herself from occupants in the multiplex space. This connects with Harbord's (2002) suggestion of the habitus as a spatial framework, whereby cinema audiences form judgments about spaces, and the people within them, based on their perceptions of shared or different tastes, sensibilities, dispositions and in this case behaviours. Interestingly, these accounts suggest that audiences are very visible and targetable in the multiplex, which contrasts Hubbard's (2001) claim that multiplex going offers audiences ontological security because the space offers a degree of anonymity and social distance.

This raises questions about perceptions and experiences of different cinemas during GFF. To what extent does the festival transform experiences of these spaces? And are these spatial frameworks still valid in a festival context? When asked about their experiences of different festival sites, several participants noted that they enjoyed spending time in the multiplex (Cineworld) during the festival because the top floor, which has been dedicated to the film festival since 2012, felt distinct from the rest of the cinema:

Rafee: For me personally, in non-film festival time, if a film is on at GFT and another cinema, I'll tend to pick GFT. However, during the film festival, the top floor of Cineworld is for the film festival and it's really good because once you

get up there it feels totally different from the rest of Cineworld.

Similarly, the following participants' accounts suggest that the spatial divide between multiplex and independent cinema/art house is reconfigured during festival time:

Ramiro: I remember the first movie I went to go see at the film festival in 2010. It was in Cineworld and I was used to the regular Cineworld experience and I went there and it was like the way they were getting the tickets and everything was different because it was a matter of the film festival and not Cineworld so that started different. Then I got in and it looked like it was an occupation. It was something totally different to what I was used to in Cineworld and then I watched a different kind of movie, it was a Danish movie. It felt good. As I say it was like an occupation!

Patricia: I found it was quite a nice welcoming space, but it felt a bit like a protected space. I know that sounds a bit odd, but it didn't feel like I was in the multiplex.

For these participants, the space was gratifying because of its disconnection from the rest of the multiplex and its reconfiguration as a 'festival space'. Particularly interesting is Ramiro's description of the space as being invaded or possessed by the festival: an 'occupation'. Similarly, Patricia's phrase, a 'protected space', suggests that the rest of the space is in some way threatening, unsafe and unwelcoming, which chimes with earlier points made about safety and security.

Connecting these accounts, a pattern of spatial distinction emerges. Audiences rationalise their attendance at the multiplex during festival time based on the fact that the space is distinct from the rest of the cinema. Indeed, debates about multiplex versus independent cinema (or art house) were recurrent in all sessions, which is interesting given Film Studies' enthusiasm to move beyond debates over the commercial-cultural cinema dichotomy.²¹ For cultural cinema-goers, there was a decisive opinion that 'their' cinema offered 'quality over quantity'. Indeed a dislike for the commercialism of the multiplex is something that Evans found in her empirical study of cultural cinema audiences in Nottingham, in which one of her participants suggested that non-cultural cinemas (multiplexes) were full of 'human detritus' and 'crap popcorn' (2011, p. 11). Likewise, in my sessions, the multiplex (Cineworld in particular) was described as 'a bus', 'a machine', 'a cheap suit', 'a guilty pleasure', or as one participant noted: the 'McDonald's of cinema'. On the other hand, avid Cineworld patrons vigorously defended their cinematic preference and identity as 'film lovers'. Then there were those in the middle, former independent cinema-goers who had converted to the multiplex because of loyalty card schemes which allowed unlimited attendance, yet were filled with guilt about their perceived 'betrayal'. Thus, while

the multiplex-arthouse discourse may appear tired to some scholars, audiences still segment and articulate their cinematic experiences in these terms, which I argue, reaffirms its ongoing relevance in academic discussion.

Vocabularies of spatial, social and embodied pleasure

In Barker and Brooks' work on audience pleasures of *Judge Dredd* they present a list of 'vocabularies of involvement and pleasure' (1998, p. 143).²² In their pleasure model – which they term 'a box of tools for thinking about practices of pleasure' – they give due attention to the ways in which viewing contexts effect film reception and highlight 'joining a crowd' and 'joining a spectacle' as key pleasures (1998, p. 143). They argue that vocabularies of 'community' and 'participation' occur during film viewing and that behavioural patterns, which are 'imposed by the external situation', emerge between strangers (1998, p. 143-4). In this respect, the audience is corporeally active, opting to join and take part an event, and acting in particular ways according to the 'external situation', which I take to include the physical environment and context in which they consume films.

As noted, focus group participants inscribed their festival accounts with aspects of the spaces in which they consume films, and their physical emplacement alongside other people within festival spaces. Nevertheless, while spatiality and embodiment remained thematic denominators within the dataset, these articulations varied somewhat. I now present four dominant 'vocabularies of spatial, social and embodied pleasure' at GFF.

1. Space-text-body-pleasures

GFF openly attributes its success to its local audience and its ravenous appetite for film. As well as increasing attendances, the event has also expanded in spatial terms, now presented across twenty-seven venues around Glasgow, creatively programming public spaces that we would not traditionally associate with the screening of films. The festival now employs a mode of programming which I term spatio-textual curation, which celebrates a connection between the 'spatial conditions' of the exhibition site and the 'narrative images' onscreen. Recent examples of this mode of programming are: the use of a subway station for a screening of Walter Hill's *The Warriors* (1979); and the use of the city's very own Cathedral for a screening of *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) with live musical accompaniment (see **Figure 1**). The qualifiers of this type of programming are space-text relations in which (usually repertory) content is presented in particular spaces that share some synergy with the onscreen narrative. Thus, with this mode of programming, festival practitioners are deliberately drawing attention to the material characteristics of space.

Since 2012 GFF has used a 19th Century Ship as a festival space. Berthed on the River Clyde, The Glenlee has been used for screenings of various films with maritime themes or settings; Disney's *Peter Pan* (Geronimi et al, 1954), *Jaws* (Spielberg, 1975), *The Maggie* (Mackendrick, 1954) and *Dead Calm* (Noye, 1989). Screenings involve a heated cargo hold,

filled with chairs and a DVD screened on a projector (see **Figure 2**). Thus, in terms of technical standard it is no better than home viewing. Rather, it is the fact that the ‘aesthetics of site create a homology with the content of the film’ – the spatial characteristics of the site and the homology between space and narrative image – that come to the fore as both a motivation for attendance and an experiential pleasure (Harbord, 2002, p. 67). As one participant attending a retrospective screening of *The Maggie* in 2012 notes:

Researcher: What motivated you to come to Glasgow Film Festival this year?

Brian: For me, it’s the special things, like I went to *The Maggie* the other night on the boat. It was great. You’re looking at a guy on the screen and he’s surrounded by rivets and you look around and there are rivets all about you! And the boat is creaking.

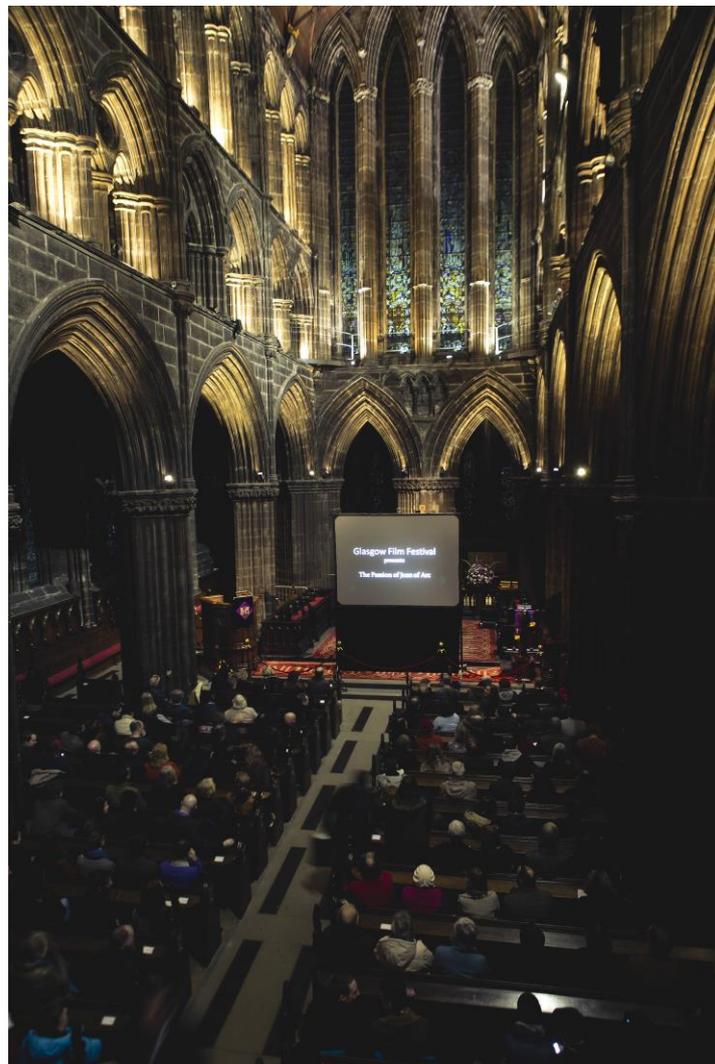


Figure 1: Glasgow Cathedral during the screening of *The Passion of Joan of Arc* at GFF 2013. Audiences were led inside the cathedral by church ushers (as opposed to GFF volunteers) and directed to their seats in the pews. Photo: Glasgow Film Festival, taken by Eoin Carey.

This experiential account focuses not on technical specifications or the film itself, but instead on the spatial qualities of the venue and space-text relations. This account indicates that gratification came from historical and thematic allegiance between the text and the space. In this context, spatio-textual relations were often the catalyst for audiences' decision to attend these 'novelty spaces', which aligns with Marijke de Valck's notion that 'it is not simply the artwork itself [film], but more specifically its spectacular exhibition that has become a commodified product in the cultural economy' (2007, p. 19). Furthermore, such accounts work against the dominant dark space narratives of cinema spectatorship within Film Studies. Here there is enough light for audiences to perceive detail around them and to interpret such detail as an extended narrative surround.



Figure 2: The room set-up for a screening in the hull of The Tall Ship.
Photo: Glasgow Film Festival, photo taken by Ingrid Mur.

2. Multi-sensory pleasures

Although there have been attempts to further problematise the notion of spectatorship, particularly with reference to the duality of onscreen and cinematic space, for instance, Amy Corbin's recent work on the cinema as 'virtual travel experience' (2014, p. 327), there remains a view that the darkness of the cinema space deems the audience 'physically immobile' surrounded by an 'obscure mass of other bodies' (Friedberg, 1993, p. 61; Barthes, 1989, p.349). However, this is problematic when considering programming in non-conventional cinematic spaces. In returning to the earlier audience account on the maritime venue, here an alternative form of practice is produced whereby this festival-goer not only observed the film text as the object of the gaze, but also fellow audience members as subjects of the gaze during the actual screening (rivets onscreen). This implies a synchronic extension of the 'text' to include the audience and the exhibition space.

However, this extended engagement went beyond the film screening itself:

Brian: There was actually a gentlemen there watching the film. My friend overheard him talking. He had sailed the Glenlee back from Canada. He looked about a hundred. And they've got an area for children where they can hit a wee button and it recreates the noise of the engines and you can go into a wee gantry. You want to have seen this old fella's face! They opened it up so that he could hit the button... aw it was beautiful!

The spatiality of the ship allowed this festival-goer to observe a personal moment which was experienced by another audience member (the gentlemen who was a former seaman), which compounded the overall experience as something special – a unique moment, a second-hand pleasure facilitated by spatial proximity and the material characteristics of the space. For the patron Brian observed, the spatial attributes of the ship arguably provoked perceived notions of nostalgia and memory through sight, sound and place, which in many ways aligns with Edward Casey's notion that 'places serve to situate one's memorial life' (1987, p. 183-4).

What is particularly interesting is that this occurrence in the gantry took place on the upper deck of the ship after the film screening. This suggests a more diachronic experience in which narrative meaning making occurs beyond both the screen and the duration of the film, and provides a vivid and materially-grounded version of the kinds of expanded interpretative timeframes detailed in the work of Janet Staiger (2000) on film reception.²³ As such, there is suggestion here that the festival experience extends beyond the visual pleasures of the screen, offering a more multisensory (physical/visual/aural/auditory), and temporally and spatially extended, experience for audiences.

3. Increased proximity

What should be clear by now is that festival audiences are acutely aware of their physical emplacement, and the emplacement of other bodies, within the festival environment. As geography scholars Nast and Pile note 'since we have bodies, we must be some place' (1998, p. 1). In other words, to be physically present we must be located in a particular place and time, thus we are temporally and corporeally present. In looking at the spatial aspect of the film festival, we must also look at how audiences physically occupy festival sites.

During the participant observation period of my fieldwork, one of the most noticeable changes I observed was how physically close I was to other audience members. I found myself in queues at box office, queues at the bar, queues in the restrooms, queues going into screenings. Ultimately, there was significant reduction in social distance between audience members, and more instances of actual physical contact with strangers (brushing by people, tightly formed queues, packed screening rooms). This is quite a contrast from experiences of the hub venue, Glasgow Film Theatre, year-round. Year-round the cinema is a place of dwelling where people go to have coffee or lunch, nip in to pick up and browse the brochure, or ask box office staff about a forthcoming film, or indeed casually stroll into a

screening. Yet in the festival context the tranquillity of the cinema is disrupted, as one participant notes: 'every screening I've been to here [GFF at GFT] has been queued out of the door onto the street. Whereas when you come here [GFT year-round] it's quiet and you just kind of saunter in and drift into the screening' (Peter, 24, Filmmaker).

In contrast, in festival focus groups participants offered highly physiological accounts of their festival experiences and a general acceptance, and enjoyment, of getting close to other people:

Nigel: I mean it's the fact that you're sitting so close to people during the festival. I mean GFT does good business but it always around 50% and you can leave your coat on the seat beside you, you're not rubbing up against people. However, at the festival there's an understanding that we're all here because we like films, so getting close isn't an issue.

Mark: Obviously a film is quite a passive medium but it [film festival] is the closest you can get to a gig because everybody is up for it. I go to the cinema all the time and you've got bams²⁴ talking, throwing popcorn at each other and you *distance* yourself. And then at the festival you've got people actually involved in it, talking about the film. It adds extra to it. And when you've got 300 likeminded people in a room, laughing and clapping at the same time it's brilliant!

Richard: It [the festival] gives a bit of counter-evidence to the 'Ah other bodies! I just want to watch it on my own because other people make noises and stuff', but actually there is something rather exciting about the sheer anticipatory buzz of a whole audience that there's to see the brand new Miyazaki film being released for the first time [...] the sheer buzz of the main auditorium being packed out with fellow Miyazaki devotees, that is one of the attractions of the festival, definitely.

As these responses indicate, audiences are acutely aware of being in a space alongside other people and are quite comfortable with the reduced distance that sell-out festival screenings permit. What is more important here, however, is that they are close to likeminded people: 'devotees' who are equally 'up for it'. This is interesting when we look at Hubbard's (2001) work on embodiment at the multiplex, in which he finds that increased social distance and anonymity emerge as key pleasure for multiplex-goers. In the festival context, reduced social distance and being visibly identified as 'a festival-goer', 'film lover', 'a devotee' or 'not a bam' emerge as key points of gratification.

Delimited spatiality across venues enables audiences to observe other audience members, and to allow themselves be observed. Taking pleasure in observing others was

not exclusive to non-conventional festival spaces, occurring in traditional cinematic venues also. In the following example, a festival-goer – attending a screening at Cineworld – demonstrates practices of watching/listening to strangers, taking pleasure in synchronised behaviours and forms of appreciation – practices facilitated by increased proximity:

Mandy: I mean I had this guy come to sit beside me the other night and it was just the two-seaters and he laughed at all the same bits that I laughed at, and by the end of it I felt as if I knew him. Never said a single word to him but I felt as if he was my festival pal because we found all the same bits funny and I felt we'd had a shared experience... and it really augmented the film for me.

This account contrasts Richard's earlier point that outside of festival time other people can disrupt the cinematic experience ('other people make noises and stuff'). Here, this participant is taking pleasure in the noises that a fellow festival-goer is making. Indeed, observing (in visually *and* auditory terms) other audience members was a key practice for festival-goers across cinematic spaces. In one sense they were under the gaze of the text, yet, on they were also acutely aware of other bodies in the busy auditorium. The reduced social distance of the frenetic festival environment produced a sense of collectiveness and communality, triggered multisensory awareness and allowed festival-goers to build kinship through visual/physical/aural/auditory practices.

These testimonies counter the notion of cinema as a quiet, dark immersive space wherein audiences experience individualistic moments. In the festival context, audiences are both individual and collective. Collectiveness is further augmented in the scripts circulating within festival spaces. For example, festival practitioner rhetoric continually reinforces this notion of unity by referring to audiences ideologically as a unitary being ('it's all about you, the audience') and also via physical instruction to reduce to the spatial parameters between them ('move closer to your neighbour and make a "festival friend"'). Festival patrons then live this out, and the collective experience becomes self-fulfilling.

4. Spatial freedom

Beyond being close to other audience members, festival-goers also took pleasure in the fact that GFF does not operate a policy of spatial segregation. Larger festivals such as Cannes or Berlin operate strict spatial regimes where only certain, often accredited, people can access certain spaces. However, at GFF, audience are given spatial freedom, which means that they often find themselves to be physically close to visiting talent:

Ross: I went to see *All Divided Selves*, a documentary about R.D. Laing, and I was actually thinking about him before I went into see the film because I'd seen other footage of him. Then I went to the gents before the film and his son, who was doing a Q&A at the film, was coming out of the gents. And he really looks

like him so it was kind of like I'd come to see the film with the image of him and his son just passed me on the way to the loo, and there's something about that. And that's part of the reason why I just like being around the place when it's [the festival] happening.

Brodie: Yeah, I mean you can sit next door [participant refers to GFT] and it's like; oh great there's Peter Mullan. There's just another person who is into film. It's not really that pretentious, which is Glasgow in a nutshell anyways.

Mark: I'm a smoker for my sins and outside everybody is talking and having a laugh speaking about the films and sometimes you see directors outside. I got a few autographs which was good and it just adds something extra to the experience that you don't get when you go to the cinema.

The liberal use of space at GFF allowed these participants to be close to visiting talent in and around the festival venue, and in all cases this reduced distance between them and the talent enhanced their festival experience. Also, for Brodie, who established himself as a regular festival-goer in the session by drawing comparisons between festivals such as Cannes, Tribeca and Toronto, GFF was one of the most 'modest' festivals (he later described it as an 'everyman kinda festival').

Conclusion

This paper argues that that in order to understand the popularity of audience film festivals we must look further at the ways in which spatial pleasure comes to the fore and how physical presence in space with 'other bodies' is one of the most gratifying aspects of festival culture, which sets it aside from year-round cinema-going (as suggested by Hubbard, 2001). During festival time, sites become crowded and chaotic as staff and audience members navigate busy foyers, and audiences are herded by front of house staff in and out of screenings. Festival spaces are crammed with bodies. My research suggests that audiences articulate their experiences of film festivals in spatial terms and place themselves and other audiences – these other bodies – firmly within their experiential accounts. They take pleasure in being close to other audience members and observing their experiences in multisensory ways, actively locating commonalities with strangers through modes of appreciation (laughing at the same parts, synchronised clapping). This is particularly interesting given that traditional notions of spectatorship assume negation of the body wherein cinema-goers leave the body behind and become immersed in the text. Indeed, festival-goers experience the event corporeally and spatially and are acutely aware of themselves as part of a collective audience. However, being part of the right kind of audience is crucial.

For some participants, pleasure was found in their emplacement within spaces that possessed some synergy with the narratives onscreen. In these cases, textual engagement could extend beyond film screenings outside of the auditorium. Others found pleasure in being in the presence of – and physically close to – visiting talent (actors, directors etc). For others it was the reduced distance between them and other festival-goers and the aspect of ‘seeing and being seen’ that was a key pleasure. In all of these instances, participants located themselves, physically and corporeally, within their narratives – they presented embodied articulations of pleasure and heightened spatial awareness.

Such findings may offer, albeit modest, counter-evidence to the popular notion that to sway viewers away from domestic or digital consumption, and out into auditoriums, requires technological innovation. Rather, I argue that the resilience of cinema in a festival context connects with the sharing of experience within a physical space, and that this particular mode of film consumption constructs a distinctly embodied mode of cinematic practice that extends beyond the screen.

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Notes:

¹ This paper was originally presented at Edinburgh International Film Audiences Conference (March 2014). It is based on research conducted for a PhD thesis at University of Glasgow (awarded August 2014).

² Although studies of film festivals emerged in the late 1990s (see Nichols, 1994), the subject gained real momentum in the late 2000s with the introduction of the Film Festival Yearbook Series (Iordanova et al. 2009-2014), the advent of the Film Festival Research Network (FFNR, 2008), and the publication of various monographs dedicated to the subject (de Valck 2007; Lloyd 2011; Wong 2011; Fischer 2013). For FFNR, see: <http://www.filmfestivalresearch.org/>

³ The FFNR coordinates panels/workshops at most major cinema/media conferences: Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS), European Network for Cinema and Media Studies (NECS), Screen Studies Conference (SSC) and European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA). Film festival studies now has two international research groups which meet annually: the Film and Media Festivals Scholarly Interest Group (SCMS) and the Film Festival Research Work Group (NECS).

⁴ Original emphasis.

⁵ De Valck's typology is based on audiences at International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR). The typology includes: The Lone List-Maker, The Highlight Seeker, The Specialist, Leisure Visitor, The Social Tourist and The Volunteer. See de Valck, 2005, p. 103-4

⁶ In a keynote address at ECREA Film Studies Conference in 2013, Daniel Biltereyst – whom programmes The History of Moviegoing Exhibition and Reception (HoMER) group – noted that audience research was becoming 'somewhat fashionable' in Film Studies (Biltereyst, 2013).

⁷ It is suggested elsewhere that the very first known film festival took place in Monaco in 1898, see SCMS Film and Media Festivals Scholarly Interest Group homepage:

http://www.cmstudies.org/?page=groups_filmfestivals. However, Venice is mainly acknowledged as the first recurring film festival. There is very little known about the event in Monaco.

⁸ The festival reported 6000 attendances in 2005 and 39,106 in 2013, indicating an increase of 33,106 (551%) (EKOS, 2013, p. 4)

⁹ Glasgow Film Theatre is locally known as GFT. It is sometimes referred to in this way in audience accounts.

¹⁰ Here I detail key funding partners in 2013 (the final year of my fieldwork). However, since 2014 GFF has secured more funding partners, most notably the British Film Institute.

¹¹ Historically Glasgow is considered a cinematic city. For instance, in the 1930s the city is reported to have had more cinemas per head of population than anywhere else in the world outside America (Historic Scotland, 2007, p. 6).

¹² In 2005 Glasgow was in the mid stages of the Digital Media Quarter (DMQ) at Pacific Quay, an architectural development on the River Clyde: Glasgow Science Centre and an IMAX Cinema had been completed in early 2000s, and the development of BBC Scotland and STV's new headquarters was underway (Lomholt, 2014: online). The DMQ would establish the city as a mixed media hub for Scotland.

¹³ The initial funding proposal for the festival positioned the event as a way of developing and marketing Glasgow's image as a 'festival city' and tourist destination. The proposal was framed by an argument that film festivals were proven to boost the image of their host cities: Thessaloniki Film Festival had 'injected new life into the city and, above all, contributed towards giving it an image abroad', Tampere Film Festival had 'enliven[ed] municipal policy on image and culture', Oberhausen Film Festival had contributed to the 'birth of a film production centre', Cologne Film Festival had advanced the city's profile as a media centre; Valladolid Film Festival was a 'benchmark for the image

and attractiveness of the city and the development of quality tourism'; and Cork Film Festival had increased tourism and improved the city's cultural image despite its long held struggle with 'second city syndrome' (GFF, 2004, p. 4). The inaugural festival in 2005 was supported by Visit Scotland (Scotland's national tourist organization), which suggests that the 'tourism' narrative was an effective one.

¹⁴ For instance, if I had recruited midweek daytime I may have missed out on audience members who had work commitments and could have potentially attracted a group of students and/or retirees.

¹⁵ Conducting sessions during the festival meant that audience members were restricted on when they could attend a focus group – many slotted their session in between screenings.

¹⁶ For instance, had I been investigating LGBT film festivals then perhaps sexuality may have been relevant demographic information.

¹⁷ While many of these responses do not appear in this particular paper, several participants chose to talk about their religion, nationality and race in relation to film choices.

¹⁸ The sample comprised of some very loyal Glasgow Film Theatre patrons who would have been identifiable by some cinema/festival staff.

¹⁹ The PhD from which this article emerges was funded under the AHRC's Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) scheme. The non-academic, industry partner on the project was Glasgow Film Theatre/Festival. Under the CDA agreement, the industry partner agreed to provide incentives for audience research. As such, GFF provided the free ticket incentive for focus group participants.

²⁰ M&M's are popular coloured chocolate candy often sold in large bags at multiplexes in the UK.

²¹ A common theme running through the New Forms of Cinema Exhibition Symposium held at University of East Anglia in November 2011, which many key academics working in cinema studies in the UK attended, was the need to move on from debates about the multiplex and art house, particularly in relation to high/low-brow culture.

²² Barker and Brooks' work refers to a specific film, *Judge Dredd*. For a full list the 16 pleasure categories proposed see Barker & Brooks (1998, p. 143-5).

²³ One of my referees wondered what difference site/space made to audiences' experiences of the films themselves; whether audiences were getting the same 'textual' experience, but under different circumstances?. In my research, participants were not asked about specific texts and so any text-specific accounts were naturally occurring. While there were no explicit points made by participants about festival spaces changing their engagement with texts, there is suggestion here that particular festival spaces provided an extended, arguably enhanced, textual experience. Certainly, exploration of the differing levels and modes of textual appreciation in the film festival context is something that could well be explored in more detail in future research. Indeed repertory content – texts that audiences will likely have seen outside of the festival context – might be a way of focusing such a research endeavour, offering a possible comparative dimension.

²⁴ Bam is a derogatory slang word, meaning idiot. It seems to have originated in Glasgow and may be a shortened version of the term bam-pot, also meaning idiot.

Appendix A: Focus Group Participants

FG Session	Name	Age	Occupation	Gender	No. Films GFF12	Self-identification	Yr-round cinema preference
1	Richard	50	Policy Advisor	M	3	Keen	Showcase
1	Gordon	27	Filmmaker	M	5	Avid	Cineworld RS
1	Marion	58	Retired	F	9	Keen	GFT
1	Olivia	32	Data Assistant	F	10	Keen	Cineworld
1	Thomas	18	Student – UGR	M	3	Keen	Cineworld
2	Ramiro	40	Researcher – Computing	M	2	Keen	GFT
2	Rafee	32	Software Developer	M	7	Avid	GFT
2	Leena	28	Student – PGR	F	5	Occasional	GFT
2	Iris	24	Student – PGR	F	7	Occasional	GFT
2	Irene	34	Student - PGR	F	15	Keen	GFT
3	Petya	30	Student – PGR	F	5	Keen	GFT
3	Mark	29	Party Planner	M	11	Keen	Cineworld RS
3	Charlie	48	Retail Manager	M	12	Avid	GFT
3	Carolina	31	Barista	F	7	Avid	Cineworld RS
4	Nadine	43	Physiotherapist	F	30	Keen	GFT
4	Peter	23	Filmmaker	M	6	Avid	Cineworld RS
4	Lillian	73	Retired	F	20	Avid	Cineworld RS
4	Chris	23	Student – PGR	M	10	Avid	Cineworld RS
4	Brenda	40	Nurse	F	5	Avid	Cineworld RS
4	Louise	56	Home-maker	F	6	Keen	GFT
4	Patricia	48	Charity Worker	F	9	Avid	GFT
5	Sean	63	Retired	M	30	Occasional	GFT
5	Nancy	60	Charity Shop Manager	F	9	Keen	GFT
5	Brodie	30	Self-Employed	M	3	Avid	GFT
5	Jing	23	Student – PGR	F	2	Keen	GFT
5	Elina	19	Student – UGR	F	3	Occasional	Cineworld RS
5	Rachel	42	Ward Clerk	F	4	Avid	Cineworld RS
5	Nigel	62	Retired	M	11	Keen	GFT
6	Brian	48	Self-Employed	M	4	Keen	GFT
6	Kat	31	Designer	F	3	Occasional	GFT
6	Georgia	24	Teacher	F	3	Keen	Cineworld RS
6	Valerie	32	Administrator	F	4	Keen	GFT
6	Tammy	31	Graphic Designer	F	3	Occasional	GFT
7	Blair	31	IT Technician	M	5	Keen	GFT
7	Ross	33	Student - PGR	M	6	Avid	Cineworld RS
7	Mandy	49	Area Sales Manager	F	16	Avid	GFT
7	Sylvia	42	Lawyer	F	21	Keen	GFT
7	Julia	33	Development Worker	F	3	Avid	Cineworld RS
7	Katie	32	Left blank	F	2	Keen	GFT
7	Pamela	31	Student - PGR	F	1	Keen	GFT
7	Tim	39	Volunteer GFF	M	10	Avid	Perth Playhouse