

Master thesis

RETHINKING THE CULTURAL DISTINCTION:

How the Dynamic of Film Festivals
as a Network Influences the Cultural Production
of South East Asian Independent Filmmaker

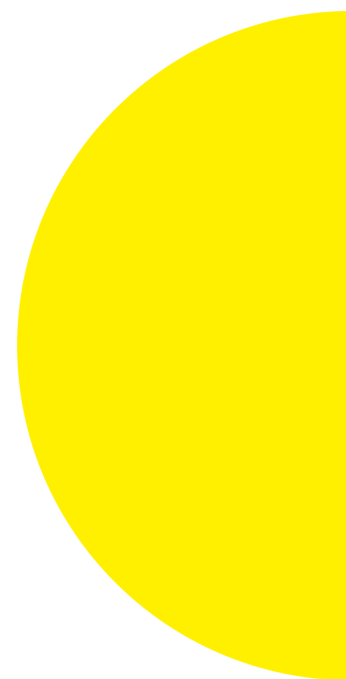
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ABSTRACT

Film festivals have long been occupying the foreground of film studies for its significance as the cultural gatekeeper of the arthouse film world. Drawing on a qualitative research project examining the artistic practices of South East Asian filmmakers – a vigorously rising region in the field of arthouse filmmaking – the analysis of this paper pays attention to trace the imprints of the film festival network’s strategies of cultural distinction multidimensionally shown in the cultural production process of independent filmmakers. It, thus, reveals that Bourdieu’s model laid out in “Distinction” is still in progress with inquiries into the inherently dynamic nature of cultural capital. On the one hand, it is undeniable that the SE Asian filmmakers have constructed their own artistic autonomy with their internal values being embraced by the network. On the other hand, at the same time, film festivals also have been internalizing their values of cultural distinction into the filmmakers’ careers. These two “actors” interact with each other, creating a dynamic in cultural production which is enabled only by and within the film festival network. Elaborating this point, the paper contributes the exploration of how the intersections of Bourdieu’s theory of cultural distinction and Latourian Actor-Network Theory enables film festivals to operate its self-sustainable system and cultural gatekeeping functions in the contemporary context.

Keywords: film festivals / independent filmmakers / South East Asian film industries / arthouse filmmaking / cultural production / cultural distinction / Bourdieu / actor-network theory / Latour / the film festival network / sociology of arts

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1. INTRODUCTION

Film festivals have long been occupying the foreground of film studies due to their expansion and growing influence in forming film canons, taxonomy and circulation (Vallejo, 2020). Accordingly, there are anecdotal evidences presenting the extensive power of important film festivals as cultural gatekeepers reflected in the artistic production of filmmaker. This is especially true and important to the case of independent filmmakers since the distribution of an arthouse film solely depends on film festivals as the main broker (De Valck, 2007; Hunter, 2008; Valejo, 2020), bridging the film to the audiences and private sectors who proceed them to their direct economic benefits as well as the network of film professionals (i.e. film critics, scholars, peer filmmakers of different roles, etc.).

The impact of curators as gatekeepers of the arts world has been studied in various fields (e.g. Power and Hellancreutz, 2006; Peterson, 2005; Balaji, 2012; Kawashima, 1999), and manifestations of this power exertion have also been occasionally discussed in the field of festival films, opening to fruitful dialogue. On the one hand, curators have been evolving into a kind of tastemakers who not only contribute in “intensifying taste boundaries” of increasingly privileged audiences (Friedman, 2014) through their practices of cultural evaluation but also indirectly constructively guide or manipulate the cultural production in many different ways with their specific aesthetic preferences (Balaji, 2012; Ihwanny & Budiman, 2019; Wong, 2011).

On the other hand, the composition of curatorial practices has expanded to areas of a cultural entrepreneur, making them active cultural intermediaries being able of intervening different stages within the lifecycle of cultural products by not only shaping notions of 'aesthetic preferences' but also 'economic success / viability' (Janssen & Verboord, 2015). Moreover, within the underlying social spaces of important cultural events, there is a stage of negotiating where meanings are discussed under subcultural settings before there is an artistic product as an outcome (Kruse, 1993; De Roeper, 2010) or it is multilaterally influenced by certain socio-political actors (de Valck, 2007; Vallejo, 2020), challenging the authoritativeness and autonomy of arts. In response, artists may tend to replicate the previously successful patterns so as to satisfy audiences and curators and, thus, secure another accomplishment (Ihwanny & Budiman, 2019; Hunter, 2018; Peterson, 2005 cited in Balaji, 2012).

While it is obvious that researches on film festivals exploring the side of the curators appears to be prolific, there seems to be relatively less published studies investigating the

phenomenon from the perspective of the cultural producers or the artists. Furthermore, while in film studies, researches of filmmakers' aesthetic strategies mostly adopt the use of qualitative content analysis to examine the content presented in the final cultural product, quantitative methods are preferable in cultural sociology when analyzing cultural stratification. Either of these methods cannot comprehensively dissect the unobservable underlying mechanisms of the making of an arthouse film or the hows of the cultural production. Therefore, interrogating the issue from the perspective of independent filmmakers would contribute much to the knowledge of the intersections of film festivals, which is of importance to the development of film industry, and encourage cultural stakeholders to take appropriate action supporting filmmakers and the sustainable development of the industry.

To fully comprehend how film festivals as the cultural gatekeeper continue to have a great impact on cultural production, it is necessary to revisit one of the most important areas of contemporary sociology – specifically Bourdieu's thesis of cultural distinction and the explanatory theory of cultural production (1984, 1993a). Despite the fact his theory is still prominent among the research field, he has generated debate over the significance of disparities in cultural stratification. Beside the traditional critique of Bourdieu being the notion of cultural omnivorousness, mapping the debate on the cinema world emerges the application of Latour's Actor-Network Theory in explaining cultural production. In this light, it is believed that film festivals in the contemporary contexts has grown into a complex network of actors (e.g. de Valck, 2007), cancelling the cultural distinction and offering filmmakers with more freedom and less pressures on compromising with the festivals' agendas in their artistic practices.

Drawing on a qualitative research project examining the artistic practices of 11 filmmakers coming from 6 South East Asian countries – a vigorously rising region in the field of arthouse filmmaking – the analysis of this paper pays attention to trace the imprints of the film festival network's strategies of cultural distinction multidimensionally shown in the cultural production process of independent filmmakers. Elaborating on the implications of this dynamic, I will then discuss how the intersections of Bourdieu's theory of cultural distinction and Latourian Actor-Network Theory enables film festivals to operate its self-sustainable system and cultural gatekeeping functions in the contemporary context, suggesting a potential theoretical reorientation in the study of cultural production in the contemporary context.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The impacts of film festivals on the artistic production of arthouse filmmakers can be delineated with a conceptual framework analyzing the festival's multi-dimensional power of cultural legitimization with consideration of cultural, economic and socio-political aspects prevailing in film studies. Accordingly, it can be generalized into two main influences of film festivals as the cultural gatekeeper and active cultural intermediary: film festivals (1) as the tastemaker whose choices shape film canons and define cultural capital; and film festivals (2) as the nodal points where exhibition values beyond those generated by the artistic production are added to the films and, thus, where filmmakers with the accessibility to this cultural space accumulate visibility and social as well as economic capitals.

Responding to these dynamics, the politics of taste at film festivals will be discussed and elaborated in order to trace the indicators of gatekeeping functions cultivating cultural distinction and implied in the artistic production. In the end of the section, the cultural space of film festivals will be examined in the light of Latour's actor-network theory with reflections of Bourdieu's paradigm of cultural distinction as the necessary conceptual backdrop to the analysis of independent filmmakers' cultural production in the contemporary context.

2.1. A conceptual framework of the power of film festivals as cultural gatekeepers

2.1.1. The cultural or taste-making gatekeeping function of film festivals

Arts curators in general and film programmer with their set of skills and knowledge hold the primary responsibility of distilling the standards of screening content (e.g. Janssen & Verboord, 2015; Hunter, 2018; Gaupp, 2019; Valejo, 2020). By operating practices of scouting and evaluating arts, they hold the power of gatekeeping by deciding which films to be excluded and which films to be promoted and to gain the following privileges. In specific, while the artist is the producer of cultural products, film festivals and their programmers are the one who discover, interpret and translate the cultural meanings implied in these goods. In other words, these cultural gatekeepers are the ones who add symbolic value to culture – the “hidden tastemaker” (Balaji, 2012).

Without film festival recognition and process of symbolization of cultural products, the legitimacy of a film will be left unresolved. Therefore, they play the key role in the articulation of cinema canons which is demonstrated their ability to shape film movements, including defining

genres and sub-circuits (Hunter, 2018). As an active agent for canon formation, one of the greatest contributions of film festival to film culture is their “processes of reception and interpretation of films from countries with cinematic traditions and socio-political frameworks unknown to the festival-goer” (Valejo, 2020, p.3), which is agreed by a wide range of film scholars (De Valck, 2007; Wong, 2011; Ihwanny & Budiman, 2021). By discovering new faces and elaborating theoretical frameworks for interpretation, film festivals as spaces of cultural translation (Gaupp, 2019) generate the new “tastes” through their lenses. It is therefore not surprising that film festivals as the tastemaker has the gatekeeping power of legitimizing certain artistic aesthetics and, thus, defining cultural capital in the arthouse film world. However, their setting is somehow still “a privileged space” which can lead to controversial politics of taste that will be discussed in the later part of the paper.

2.1.2. The economic and social gatekeeping functions of film festivals

There is a prevalence in findings of how arts curators exert their influence on various stages of a cultural product’s life cycle (e.g. Balaji, 2012; Janssen & Verboord, 2015) which can be simply generalize into two main stages of an arthouse film, namely the production and the distribution. As for the former, De Roeper (2008) pointed out that curators avoided being passive in curatorial practices and tended to proactively employ different strategies from going scouting talents with desirable attributes to assigning specific talents to make artworks for their particular programs. Janssen and Verboord (2015) added with other curators’ art intervention activities being “altering or recontextualizing works at different stages of the production process” (p.441) by giving feedbacks. To clarify this cocreating effort and connect it with the previously mentioned role of taste-making, Gaupp (2019) noted that this influence is to make sure the cultural goods would meet standards of artistic conventions or commercial expectations. These findings contribute to the fact that the process of cultural production is indeed a very collective action of a cooperative network (Becker, 2008).

Continuing on this social dimension of the arts world, scholars have explored different “cultural arenas” (Stringer, 2001) where films would be distributed with the cultural recognition of film festivals. Specifically, being distinct from more mainstream or commercial films, the distribution of an arthouse film solely depends on film festivals as the main broker (De Valck, 2007; Hunter, 2008; Valejo, 2020) bridging the film to the audiences and private sectors who

proceed them to their direct economic benefits as well as the network of film professionals (i.e. film critics, scholars, peer filmmakers of different roles, etc.) who provide them with necessary social capital and hence indirect economic benefits.

First, it is important to note that the nature of arthouse films is oriented towards a specific community of audiences with a certain level of arts appreciation and artistic intellectuality (Gemser et al., 2007). This is especially true with the case of developing film industries that the economic success of independent films from peripheral areas depends on the selection of the cultural hegemonies in the arthouse film world (or the top-tier film festivals which are mostly located in the Europe) for their international visibility. For example, there are many arthouse films had poor performances and limited recognition in their home country albeit being internationally well-acclaimed (Valejo, 2020). Moreover, beside the cross-border influences, film festivals also exert their power of film dissemination to the dimension of physical sales and online distribution (Hunter, 2008; Janssen & Verboord, 2015). To gain the attention of distributors from private sectors (e.g. online platforms such as MUBI) whose focus is on “niche and specialized content”, based on their reference to film festivals' selection, is critically of importance to independent filmmakers since their distribution opportunities are relatively limited (Smits and Nikdel, 2019). Moreover, they also acknowledge that, via film festivals in general and the following awarding policies in specific, filmmakers would also gain media exposure which is able to be translated into practical economic capital and give them the chance to better exploit their artistic product as a cultural commodity (Balaji, 2012; Janssen & Verboord, 2015; Valejo, 2020). Drawing on these notions, the selection and assessment of film festivals is certainly the prerequisite for an independent filmmaker to gain economic capital from their filmmaking career.

Second, film festivals are cultural intermediaries in the sense that they give the selected filmmakers the privileged access to the network of film professionals (De Valck, 2007). Gaupp (2019) clarified this notion by stating that: “It takes the social relations of a gatekeeper to introduce a cultural innovation, in the sense of an unknown aesthetic convention, into an art world” (p.147). Indeed, festivals are the place where different stakeholders in the film industry (i.e. other legitimate filmmakers, film connoisseurs and scholars, philanthropists, etc.) congregate for social networking, talent hunting, exchanging knowledge, opening up fruitful discourses and gathering collective action via activities such as conferences, workshops, panel discussions, etc. Being such a social encounter of cultural dialogue, this is where film conventions are negotiated, cross-

sectional collaborations embark, and funding opportunities for next projects are found (Thompson & Bordwell, 1994). To sum up, arthouse films with attributes matching with the aesthetic preferences and tastes of film festivals will achieve and/or increase the social status needed to be included in the network of film professionals with prosperity being further distribution and funding opportunities.

Overall, it is indisputable that film festivals as social and cultural spaces are influential because of their three gatekeeping functions (i.e. cultural/taste-making, economic and social functions) allowing them to intervene the artistic production as well as to decide the distribution fate of a film. This ultimate power of cultural legitimacy is multi-dimensional considering different cultural, social and economic aspects. To illustrate this power relationship, Stringer (2001) assumed: “[...] what are ostensibly distribution histories of world cinema too often masquerade as production histories” (p.135). Therefore, it would be no surprising to argue that filmmakers must be influenced to a certain extent by the acknowledgement of this gatekeeping power. Previous findings pointed out that filmmakers have a tendency to deploy certain formulas in their cultural production aiming at replicating generic festival success and employ other strategies to meet the expectation of film programmers (Ihwanny & Budinam, 2021; Hunter, 2018). In order to analyze these dynamics, it is necessary to analyze the politics of taste as markers of the gatekeeping impact implied in the cultural production.

2.2. The politics of taste at film festivals and its implications in the artistic production

The politics of taste at film festivals have been of central discussion between film scholars since Staiger (1985) arguing the criteria for film selection were revolving around the institutional framework of film festival settings, the politics of choices in response to socio-political issues and their distinct aesthetic principles. Janssen and Verboord (2015) clarified this notion by stating: “Driving forces behind gatekeepers’ decisions range from political and moral concerns, commercial interests, to ‘purely’ aesthetic motives” (p.441). In general, these dynamics revolve the dilemma between art for art’s sake and art for society together with new challenges posed by the interpretation of post-modern cultural consumption as the underlying mechanism of film programmers’ assessment process. Markers of the influence are expected to be detected following the three main components of a film being its theme, story and style.

2.2.1. The aesthetic preferences and tastes of film festivals

With their preponderant influence in the arthouse film world, important film festivals along with their network of active actors being institutional and cultural elites have privileged a new genre called “arthouse”, “auteur”, “independent” or, in a more negative sense, “festival” films constituting attributes distinct from more “popular” or “mainstream” movies (Hunter, 2018; British Film Institute, 2016).

Wong (2011) through her ethnography researches characterized festival films as ones that had a serious, dark atmosphere, auteurist approach in style with emphasis on minimalism (i.e. low-budget, no celebrities in the cast, etc.) but with expressionism in cinematography (e.g. difficult long shot, extreme hand-helds embracing naturalness, etc.). These qualities meet a lot of characteristics of classical highbrow art, namely the necessity of figurative art, technical skills and authorship or to be truthful with the absolute art itself (Hanquinet et al., 2014). This notion is also in line with Bourdieu’s thesis of “highbrow” culture which adopt Kantian’s notion of “disinterestedness” or the appreciation of form over function and art’s self-justification (1984). On the other hand, some studies argued that there was a sense of favoritism for radical subversion of conventional arthouse principles in an increasing number of film programmers in the contemporary context (Wong, 2011; Hunter, 2008). For example, Ihwanny & Budiman (2019) argued that the stylish approach of realism, which was used to be favored by Euro-centric film festivals, was now considered as obsolete by some areas of film programmers who sought to see more radical efforts and experimental elements such as the adoption of surrealism in storytelling and impressionism in visualization.

This re-orientation toward innovative cinematic languages in film evaluation can be explained partly by the pressure of curators having the access to just a limited pool of quality works in contrast to the accelerated proliferation of new competitive film festivals around the world (Hunter, 2018), and partly by new findings of the new modes of cultural consumption in the contemporary context (e.g. Hanquinet et al., 2014; Atkinson, 2011). In specific, Jarness (2015) argued that as the conventionally “highbrow” culture is increasingly more accessible according to the growth in population of the upper strata of society and other social development, cultural stratification embodies not only simplistically in the cultural products people consume but also in their mode of consumption (i.e. their perceptions of and attitudes towards arts). It emerges with

four main categories, namely the intellectual, luxurious, educational and practical modes – in which the first mode is most likely to reflect the attributes of the upper cultural fraction with high volume of cultural capital and appreciation to Bourdieu’s concept of highbrow arts. Notably, people sharing this mode of cultural consumption tends to enjoy common cultural goods in their unique way and be fond of quality goods featuring experimental elements in the production, mirroring film programmers’ favoritism towards contemporary arts.

Regarding the structure of story, Wong (2011) continued to describe festival films by arguing that they “privilege the suggestive, evocative, spare, and nonlinear” (p.79). This open narrative structure tends to allow the artist to have space for figurative and self-reflexive contemplation of the ontology of different things in life including those of unusual polemical subjects. While there is a sense of the necessity to maintain detachment and distance in art appreciation here, a signature trait of highbrow culture (Esquivel, 2008), other scholars also pointed out that this quality has now gone through an evolution and been additionally attached with a reflexive engagement with the current society to a certain level, especially those of controversial socio-political debates.

While some artistic principles regarding style and cinematic language may remain their position within the evaluation criteria, new modes of cultural consumption (Jarness, 2015), the remaking of cultural capital in post-modernism (Hanquinet et al., 2014) and different pressures, coming from both external forces of the current vicinity and internal forces of the institutional framework within the setting of film festivals, have challenged film programmers to adjust their aesthetic preferences and adopt various agendas (i.e. business, political, and aesthetic agendas) in their curatorial practices.

2.2.2. The complex system of film festivals

There are anecdotal evidences showing that the criteria of film assessment have been mediated by the position of film festivals and their programmers within the complex ecosystem surrounding them, challenging their goal of being the independent arbiter of taste. De Roeper (2008) encapsulated the scenario by pointing out the triple responsibilities a curator had to face (i.e. to the audience, the sponsor and the artist) and stating that: “The economic and social imperative drives predictable programming” (p.65).

Considering economic aspects, while it is obvious that film festivals may have certain influences on the festival's agenda, audiences play an important role in constructing the symbolic value and related economic merits of such a cultural event. Film festivals' prestige and exposure relied on the attitude and volume of attendants who increasingly expect to be fed with socially reflexive cultural products (Hanquinet et al., 2014). Therefore, it would be reasonable to see that film festivals may select films featuring social or political controversy, both in their content and context, to gain the attention from the audiences and the media. Agreeing on this argument, De Roeper clarified the strategies employed by curators by saying: "The goal is therefore to please audiences and win ratings by combining excitement and challenge with a sense of familiarity" (p.63).

Considering socio-political aspects as an extension of the socially-reflexive tastes, it is notable that the setting of festivals in general is very political in its nature. On the one hand, it is considered as a positive evolution of the art world to encourage artist to reflect on central societal issues and to shed light to minor communities, who and what were previously overlooked (Vallejo, 2020). Sub-circuits devoted to heated topics (e.g. gender inequality, LGBTQ+, freedom of speech, human rights, etc.) or geopolitical scope (e.g. films from countries suffering from wars, Korean films, oriental aesthetic films, etc.) seem to dominate film festivals' programs, award nominees and winners nowadays. On the other hand, film scholars also accused film festivals of losing their integrity as an arbiter of taste and choosing films in alignment with their political agenda to present them with the fashionable label of being the beacon of values (Ihwanny & Budinam, 2021; Gaupp, 2019; Halle, 2010; Hughes, 2010). This can lead to severe impacts on the cultural production and the general perception of the value of arts, especially with filmmakers from the Third World whose films' visibility heavily relied on international film festivals since "national origin as a way of categorizing films" can be interpreted as "an easy way out [for] pure exoticism" according to Huseman (2012, p.276). Vallejo interrogated this by arguing that "filmmakers from the periphery have to fit the double (and at times oppositional or even incompatible) goal of representing the cinematic production of a given country, region, nation or even ethnic community, while offering innovative aesthetic or narrative approaches that connect with international trends in auteurist film" (p.12). After all, vernacular components and subcultural context have transformed from "aesthetic barriers" into some artistic fantasies highly expected by film programmers from cultural hegemonies.

To summarize, because of the complexity of international film festivals and their need to satiate different programming agendas, film festivals' politics of taste has drawn attention to films with cinematic achievements in relation to not only auteurist approaches but also contemporary aesthetics (i.e. employing experimental and impressionist elements) as well as storytelling featuring cultural specificity and/or social relevance. In order to better understand these dynamics surrounding the cultural production, it is necessary to shift the current singular approach revolving around Bourdieuan theory of cultural distinction to a more pluralist approach which also considers the potential aspects introduced by Latourian Actor-Network Theory.

2.3. Film festivals as a network and cultural distinction

2.3.1. Film festivals and cultural distinction

To deeply understand how film festival sustains its influence on cultural production, it is necessary to primarily draw back to one of the most influential domains in contemporary sociology pertaining to Bourdieu's thesis of cultural distinction and its related explanatory theory of cultural production (1984, 1993a). The core of this theory is that cultural distinction is structurally associated with processes of "social exclusion and the monopolization of advantages and opportunities" (Jarness, 2014, p.65) embodying in the generation of specific artistic aesthetics/tastes and process of producing highbrow culture.

This is, in fact, reflected in the previously discussed institutional operation of film festivals which differentiate "festival films" from other genres by means of cultural gatekeeping functions and private distribution of opportunities and capitals to filmmakers with the accessibility. Concerting by a series of international film festivals with different scales and levels of influence, it emerges that cultural distinction is the underlying mechanism of this self-sustainable system or what called the concept of the "black box" by sociology scholars (e.g. Luhman, 1996; de Valck, 2007), which is said to gradually adjust in accordance to the ever-changing situation (Bourdieu, 1984). Born (2010) elaborates the reading of Bourdieuan field of cultural production by interpreting it as a "structured space of possible positions and trajectories" (p.177) where different actors involved in the field interact and compete for cultural legitimacy, which correspondingly cultivates the pre-existing cultural distinction. This, cojoining with the artist's cultivated habitus and socialized disposition within the structure, leads to the creation of arts. Therefore, an arthouse film being selected by film festivals is an embodiment of cultural distinction set up by film festivals

via their gatekeeping functions to secure their survival, as well as an artistic product of a filmmaker being nurtured by this very festival system.

2.3.2. *Film festivals and Actor-Network Theory*

Also mentioning and discussing about this “black box”, Latour (1996) establishes his key concept being Actor-Network Theory (ANT) which revolves around the interrelationship and interdependency between different entities within a network to mobilize various resources and exploit greater opportunities via processes of transformation and translation. There is, however, a crucial discrepancy between actor-network account and that of Bourdieu in explaining cultural production lying in Latour’s tendency to reject any conceptual distinctions or traditional dichotomies. Primarily, in the complex matrices of actors and networks, the imbrication of different or even apparently contradictory entities is unavoidable: human or non-human agencies, objects and (social) relations are hard to discern and all counted as the network’s subject matters. This leads to the notion of “flat ontology” (Harman as cited in Halsall, 2016, p.451) or the flattening effects allowing contemporary art to utilize anything (e.g. ordinary objects) as its medium and subject matter, and, similarly, practitioners to be omnivorous and unrestricted in their cultural production. Moreover, this theory tends to orient towards the cancellation of the autonomy of art in the contemporary context, which challenges Bourdieu’s highbrow mode of cultural production and consumption.

Mapping this theory onto the cinema context, Deleuze describes the institutional framework of film festival network in the contemporary context as “a ‘grass’ model instead of a ‘tree’ model” (as cited in de Valck, 2007, p. 31), offering filmmakers with more freedom and less pressures on compromising with the festivals’ agendas in their artistic practices. To illustrate, de Valck (2007) devotes her study to film festivals’ focus of canonization shifting from “national cinema” with emphasis on “the cinematic texts produced in a territory” to “auteur-cinema” focusing on the artist’s individualistic vision and eccentric artistic essence (p.30).

Wong (2011) together with de Valck (2007) also clarify the film festival network’s set of actors or internal entities including human agencies such as arthouse filmmakers, film programmers, critics, scholars, cinephiles, etc., and non-human agencies, namely festival rituals (e.g. film selection and programs, award policies, accreditation system, etc.) as well as related activities, ranging from filmmaking educative programs (e.g. workshops and script-development

labs) to fund-raising events (e.g. project markets and film grants). The network is, thus, an “abstract super-structure” (de Valck, 2007, p. 34) with circuits of international film festivals being capable of adding value to the films and the filmmakers positioned in the network via the interaction of them with other internal entities.

While these interpretations of Latourian ANT and Bourdieuan cultural distinction allude to consider “the art object as a social process”, it is also important to shed light on the approach of analyzing “the art object sociologically” when it comes to the study of cultural production (Zolberg as cited in Born, 2010). In other words, an anthropological approach featuring a probe into contemporary aesthetic conventions is a necessary to the understanding of artistic practices and choices. some contemporary aesthetics found potentially relevant are the so-called “social aesthetics” (Bishop, 2006) and “relational aesthetics” (Bourriaud, 2002). While the former highlights the social relevance of arts and the participatory element in the subsequent cultural consumption, the latter casts attention to the open-ended possibility of modelling new universes by artistically experimenting different materials coming from the reality based on their relational nature. This is, in actual fact, not only systematically in line with the explanatory power of ANT regarding cultural production in the film festival network, but also suggestive of cultural changes in accordance with generational cohorts as actors within this very network.

Accordingly, the ANT conceptual framework tends to foster openness in cultural production and allude to eclecticism regarding the impetus behind both the film festival network and the artistic practices done within that network. This sense of eclecticism implies a link to the notion of cultural omnivorousness, which persistently challenging the proposals of Bourdieu’s notion of highbrow culture (and cultural distinction). In overview, the previously discussed literatures principally revolve around the embodiment of cultural production, meaning the observable artistic outcomes and possible motivations as read of prevalent social and cultural changes.

However, it neglects the *modus operandi* or the filmmakers’ perspectives implied in their cultural production within the network as well as their corresponding reactions, which are initially of Bourdieu’s interest when arguing modes of practices (1990). Investigations employing this methodological approach is done in aspects of cultural consumption and areas of musical tastes (e.g. Jarness, 2015; Atkinson, 2011) but not yet in the field of cultural production in general and arthouse filmmaking in specific. Therefore, in due course, I aim at examining Bourdieuan cultural

distinction in dialogue with Latourian ANT in the contemporary context by analyzing the overlapping dimensions of filmmakers' artistic values and their perception regarding the film festival network in their cultural production.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. The case of South East Asian filmmakers

South East (SE) Asian region with its current dynamic environment of independent filmmaking is selected to be the scope of this research as it represents intriguing aspects of a rising film movement which is considered to become “the new Europe” regarding the field of arthouse film (Shackleton, 2022). First, there is a collective spirit emerging between SE Asian filmmakers as a whole with efforts of co-production and filmmaking funds as well as a wide range of cultural activities and events devoted to this specific location (e.g. regional film labs, workshops, film festivals, etc.). It is due to the fact that despite the remarkable development, the film industry in this area has been experiencing a shortage of quality film supply, limited pool of talents in different roles needed for the production and small markets when being considered in individual country unit. Especially, the authorities of many SE Asian members do not pay attention to cultural and entertaining sections, resulting in a large number of independent filmmakers being lack of adequate local support. Therefore, acknowledging their critical situation, SE Asian filmmakers will be more prone to express the spirit of independent filmmaking and offer fruitful dialogue regarding their collective practices.

Second, taking into account the previously mentioned favoritism of international film festivals with regards to contemporary aesthetics, SE Asia with its social and political instability and unrest serving as a potential source of controversial and/or interesting narrative materials tends to collide with film festivals’ expectations. In accordance with this backdrop, their distinct prism of society is said to be also reflected in their craftsmanship by “using new methods of storytelling and radical aesthetics” (Shackleton, 2022). As a result, studying the sample of SE Asian independent filmmakers would reveal the most vivid markers of film festivals’ influence as cultural gatekeepers.

3.2. Choice of method

To evaluate the subjective matter of underlying biases toward film festivals’ preferences embodied in the cultural production of arthouse filmmakers, an in-depth qualitative research using semi-structured interviews was conducted to reveal the elements that would otherwise be difficult to observe (Lamont & Swidler, 2014). This methodological approach is particularly productive in the case of this study considering the fact that while SE Asian filmmakers may be aware of some

film festivals' gatekeeping functions, their acknowledgement of how these processes of cultural exclusion and capital monopolization being internalized into their artistic practices may not appear as clearly. Especially, these characteristics cannot be explicitly demonstrated in results collecting from quantitative or ethnography researches since they may be implied in the way the filmmakers verbally classify and evaluate their works in their own terms (Jarness, 2015).

Additionally, although a quantitative research can concisely identify data relevant to the specific variables of film festivals' impacts on cultural production, it cannot disclose different dimensions of an individual filmmaker's complex artistic characteristics, aesthetic disposition, arts appreciation and critical self-reflection, compared to an in-depth qualitative research (Weininger, 2005). Essentially, a semi-structured list of questions stimulates more open and multidimensional answers from the interviewees (Lamont & Swidler, 2014) and, thus, transpires their underlying cultural habitus as well as socialized disposition, which are central to Bourdieu's inquiries into cultural production (1990). This methodology also allows the paper to grasp a more systematic attention while still exploring the influence of contextualization (Friedman et al., 2015) alike to the approach of ethnography.

3.3. Data and analytical strategy

The following analysis is based on semi-structured interviews with 11 SE Asian filmmakers whom are selected by the technique of purposive sampling following a specific list of criteria. Firstly, in endeavoring to study film festivals' gatekeeping functions manifest in both the film's content and artistic merit, it is fundamental to recruit filmmakers who are film auteurs taking the double roles of directing and script-writing in their films. Although I am aware of the differences in shades and meanings of the terminology regarding this area of film genre used, thoroughly distinguishing them is irrelevant in the course of this research. Therefore, the following terms are interchangeably used throughout the progress, alluding to the kind of cinema that is present at film festivals: "arthouse", "auteur", "independent" films or filmmakers (Hunter, 2018; British Film Institute, 2016). However, the term "festival film" will be used in the result and discussion parts exclusively when there will be a filmmaker specifically mentioning it in their answers since this word choice tend to imply aspects of classification being scrutinized in this research.

Secondly, an important filter of selection is that I only choose filmmakers who have their film(s) previously selected by acclaimed international film festivals. Especially, while there is no specific requirement regarding the number of short films that they have made, that of feature-length film is limited to just one. This is because of the fact that in the film festival network, there are major differences in filmmaking incentives and programs considering the filmmaker's experience in doing feature films. For example, there are more funding bodies for first-time directors, and big film festivals usually have a separate section or awarding policies for new filmmakers (e.g. the Directors' Fortnight section of Cannes Film Festival, the Encounters award of Berlinale Film Festival, etc.). Furthermore, this sampling criterion allows the researcher to choose the right interviewees with possibilities of acknowledging the beneficiaries gained from film festivals to an extent while avoiding interviewees being too experienced with the conventions that may distract the research interest of this study.

Thirdly, to better analyze the influence, an additional condition in sampling is to choose filmmakers who are developing their first or second feature project, leaving room for in-depth comparison and reflection. Another reason to add this criterion in sampling is that, after the success of their former shorts and/or debut feature film which tend to showcase their most original artistic instincts, more heightened pressures are posed on filmmakers regarding both artistic production and funding issues, opening up possibilities for artistic negotiations and compromises.

Following these criteria, the eventual sample consists of 11 SE Asian filmmakers, including: 5 Vietnamese, 1 Thai, 1 Burmese, 1 Indonesian, 1 Cambodian, 1 Filipino, 1 Vietnamese/Singaporean – all of whom agreed to participate and were ensured to be protected regarding anonymity. The average duration of each interview is approximately 90 minutes. Data collection is done within the spring of the year 2023 via an online video call platform called Zoom before the outcomes being transcribed (and translated) with all names being pseudonyms, and ages being generalized into an age range. This approach of qualitative virtual interviews allows the researcher to attain adverbial information about the filmmaker's critical reflection on their work and to reach to interviewees coming from different countries at ease. In order to facilitate comparability, a standard order and guiding strategies in semi-structured interviews such as vignette, interpreting and probing questions are applied (Bryman, 2012). At first, the filmmakers are asked to self-introduce and describe about their films, artistic practices and career to see how they naturally evaluate and classify their works before being probed into the artist's perceptions of

and attitudes towards their current conditions of doing arts in relation to the film festival network. In specific, the semi-structured list of questions is conducted with the aim to tap into the underlying mechanism of cultural production, some examples are: questions about the interviewees' self-evaluation of their first works as a beginner compared to now, perception of arts, positioning in the relationship with their audiences, priorities when making films, knowledge of film festivals and the following opinions, attitudes, and reactions, etc.

It should also be noted that I elaborate this study partly with the stance of an insider as I am a SE Asian auteur filmmaker myself. This can be considered as a privilege as it offers me the accessibility to the filmmakers and the ability to prolong the conversation, enabling the utilization of semi-constructed interviews and the emergence of in-depth responses (Hodkinson, 2005). Moreover, as this research's interest may be sensitive to some artists, with my set of knowledge and experience in the field, I am able to deliberately and spontaneously create interpretive leading questions and indirect questions as detouring strategies by recalling shared memories with the interviews at film festivals and related events or asking them about some specific filmmaking techniques. There are also, however, some limits coming along with this approach. The first and greatest one is shown in the size of the sample as despite of having the accessibility, my social network is still limited to some extent, and I could not reach to interviewees fulfilling SE Asia's complete list of 10 countries but just 6 of them. The second burden is the personal connection of me with the interviewees and their filmmaking social circles may create some hesitations in confronting sensitive topics, especially with their positionality being somewhat cultural elites in the field of filmmaking (Dowell, 1998). However, I have tried my best to neutralize this issue and constantly remind myself of my main position of being a scholar in this thesis.

Subsequently, a thematic analysis was carried out with the aid of the software Atlas.ti to map the sameness as well as differences found in filmmakers' inclinations towards artistic production and their connectedness to the film festival network. There are three main stages regarding the coding process. In the initial phase of free coding floating with the reading of the data, properties linked with the following three main domains are noted down as potential codes: (1) indicators of the artist's social and cultural habitus; (2) content and artistic elements being in line with film festivals' contemporary politics of taste; (3) mentions of film festivals and the film festival network's internal entities. These codes are, then, refined and consolidated into separate 48 codes which precisely represent not only the chief differences and similarities reoccurring in

the interviewees' answers but also their various manners and shades within one orientation or practice. Finally, I map the codes together and categorize them into 2 main themes with the use of 28 codes found most relevant which I shall further conduct a thematic analysis in the discussion part based on the proposed theoretical framework (i.e. Bourdieu's thesis of cultural distinction in dialogue with Latourian ANT in the contemporary context). Those two results are: (1) SE Asian filmmakers' artistic autonomy focusing on their internal values as an artist; and (2) how SE Asian filmmakers' careers embody the internalized cultural distinction under the influence of the film festival network.

4. RESULTS

4.1. The artistic autonomy and filmmakers' internal values as an artist

With no surprise, the opening and also the most unifying response the filmmakers shared is their merciless denial of making films with the intention of participating in film festivals. Despite the fact that the interviewees report to be influenced to some certain degrees in different areas of their cultural production process, which will be discussed later in details (section 4.2), they consider the creative process as somewhat sacred that they would not let any external force interfere. When being approached directly with this topic, the majority of interviewees would reject to have perpetrated any practice under any external influence of desires against their artistic autonomy by describing themselves as 'stubborn' (Kyaw), 'too lazy to care' (My), 'having no expectation' (Bayani), 'having no influencer that is great enough to persuade a change' (Steve) while attaching with strong conclusions implied in the frequent use of the adverb 'never'. Therefore, this section of result would first serve as a contextualization of the filmmakers' artistic autonomy with relevance to the genesis of their artistic motivations and choices of practice as well as their filmmaking environment.

To begin with, the previously mentioned denial is being exhibited most vividly in one case where the filmmaker seems to be sensitive with the term 'festival film' notwithstanding the fact that the interviewer had not directly mentioned anything related to film festivals but just aesthetic aspects namely 'vernacular materials' or 'social and political affairs' in filmmaking. He later reveals that his reaction was due to the fact that he had previously been charged for exploiting exotic elements in the quest for festivals' attention by many people but, for him, "no one would be foolish enough to spend so many years of their life just doing something for someone else such as a film festival since every filmmaker must embark on their project with a personal story that they intimately want to communicate" (as cited in Phat's answer). Moreover, in these cases, along with these statements are the filmmakers' trust in the process and confidence in their works which would be drawn most clearly in the following answer:

I'm very lazy at writing scripts so I would never adjust my scripts to momentarily please anyone. I would never change anything in terms of creative aspects according to any film festival or film fund. Especially film festivals because I don't make films to serve film festivals. I don't make films for Cannes, for Locarno or Berlinale. I write my script for the sole purpose of the film itself, and, afterwards, whoever receives it, receives it, who doesn't, doesn't – it's okay.

(My, early 30s, Vietnamese/Singaporean, in the development of the first feature film)

Beside this complete refusal of being affected by film festivals in the artistic practice, some conventionally admit that festival influencers are in activation, and they know some filmmakers are caught in such situations. However, they would then either reject to employ any similar compromises or consider this as ‘not’ or ‘not yet’ their case:

I think I’m not facing this problem. Actually, I am very lucky that people is still offering me the privilege of having an own space to do arts. It’s not large or vast but enough for me to do the things I want and the things to me that are right.

(Minh, middle 30s, Vietnamese, in the development of the first feature film)

Actually, I'm a director who doesn't know much about film festivals. Therefore, my stories are quite spontaneous. I think it's a stroke of luck when accidentally the stories I tell match the taste of film festivals or the type of films they are paying attention to. Well, I think it's just luck, I don't have a goal in mind that I have to be forced to tell anyone's story but mine. [...] I think there are a lot of artists making films that way [being creatively influenced by the conceptual tastes of film festivals]. I'm just starting out with a few small projects right now, so it hasn't really had a big impact on me that I have to trade my composition for something external. It is just the beginning stage and, in the future, it is possible that I will be working on bigger projects, subject to greater pressure, and, subsequently, it may inadvertently affect my practice to some extent that I will be no longer sincere in filmmaking. I don't know if it will be the case or not; but with the current scale of my projects, I feel it is still within my control.

(Oanh, middle 30s, Vietnamese, in the development of the first feature film)

As these statements manifest, all of the interviewees share a refusal of adjusting their creative property in order to appear more appeal to film festivals in different manners. It can come from ones who claimed to be completely ignorant of the institutional network surrounding film festivals in advance, as in the cases of Oanh and Phat, or it can be a proclamation of being exceptional circumstances notwithstanding the effects observed in the others, especially amongst those who are still in the early stages of their first feature films’ development such as Sikkha. In this light, the impression that filmmakers are now less likely to be manipulated by external forces in their artistic practice, compared to the findings in the previous researches on the vulnerability

in cultural production of filmmakers coming from peripheral regions (e.g. Dovey, 2015; Gaupp, 2019; Vallejo, 2020; etc.), can further be shown in the three following imperatives: (1) their individualistic disposition in their filmmaking, (2) their reflexivity upon their practice evolving with time, and (3) the ever-changing environment of the film festival network toward greater diversity or omnivorousness. The following sub-sections would elaborate in details how these three repertoires emerging from the responses of the interviewees, transpiring their artistic autonomy as well as their complex relationship with the significance of the film festival network.

4.1.1. Filmmakers' individualistic disposition in their filmmaking

As discussed in the literature review, there are basically two main allegations of festival biases. The first one is the inclusion of issues of topical debates (e.g. socio-political affairs, exotic elements, etc.) as a gesture to satiate the white gaze of film festivals. Meanwhile, the second is the deployment of practices trying to showing off the *terra incognita* with artistic characteristics being unfamiliar to popular culture (e.g. Impressionist visualizations, experimental filmmaking, etc.), which reflects Kantian's disinterestedness as a typical strategy of cultural distinction (Bourdieu, 1984).

In response, the first imperative to exonerate filmmakers' artistic practice from the suspicion of adjusting in accordance with the festival's cultural gatekeeping functions is the justifiable relevance between the films and their intrinsic artistic nature being nurtured by either the environment of their upbringing or the experience they have gained throughout their lifetime. This is relatively understandable when considering the dynamic context of the developing area being SE Asia where traditional, spiritual cultures integrate deeply to the ordinary life, and political and social turmoil seems endless. Accordingly, while the outsiders may regard this contextualization as oriental exoticization and, subsequently, cultivate the concept of the white gaze in film festivals' programming, SE Asian filmmakers interpret it as an ordinary state of affairs. For example, My once experienced cultural difference when attending a project market at a prestigious European film festival where she was allocated in a group of horror genre projects under the misapprehension of the programmers that her film was talking about a mystical ritual; in fact, it was just a common spiritual custom shared by not only Vietnamese but also SE Asian in general and, in the case of her film, genuinely served as a storytelling plot for a black-comedy film talking about domestic conflicts related to generational differences. Interestingly, the situation was

not repeated when, later on, she joined a script-development lab being operated in the Philippines. Reversing the argument, Phat elaborates this idea by questioning the definition and legitimacy of exoticism in the light of perspectivism:

We accuse films being foreign to our regional culture of having the privilege to be free from the need to represent their local cultural characteristics, but actually, they may subtly feature a lot of location-specific elements that we are ignorant of so we can't see it as specific. In other words, whether it is a sophisticated cultural input or an intentional exploitation of exoticism depends a lot on our available knowledge.

(Phat, early 30s, Vietnamese, in the development of the second feature film)

Moreover, filmmakers who have films with a vivid conceptualization of their immediate vicinity are all able to naturally give very detailed description of how their personal stories connected with the socio-political context being included in the film content as Phat recalls the nostalgia of seeing Africans on the bus during his school days, as Angelo was born to religious family in a rural area specialized in mining industries, or as Kyaw grew up being close to the underprivileged women suffering from sexual and domestic abuse in the politically chaotic society of Myanmar. In this sense, 'big issues' are inextricably parts of an artist's personal background or habitus that the filmmaker "cannot exclude [themselves] from what [they] experience in life" (Bayani). While some of them admit that they did not even realize that they have grown a predilection toward this area of topic until being asked (i.e. Kyaw, Angelo, Sarawut), some are conscious of their choice of content after thorough reflexivity:

I always want to put my point of view in my films. At first, I asked myself whether to tell stories of someone else or some political or heated issues but then I ended up at telling about just the things I felt curious about. They were the topic of uncertainty, our fear of the unseen things in the nature and [our avoidance of taboo subjects in the society]. I was challenging myself to confront these fears of mine and to contemplate them in the film.

(Sikkha, late 20s, Cambodian, in the development of the first feature film)

Actually, no matter how far away from reality it is, it still talks about the reality. It is still something related to the reality, being inseparable from the reality. Because once a director writes a movie,

it's already based on that person's worldview. And that person's worldview is based on the world that person has lived through. For example, there can be a very experimental film that is very distant from reality with a very extreme way of interpretation and has nothing to do with the real life, but the essence of the emotions contained in that story still have to operate in the social cohesion in the reality.

(My)

In general, it can be seen that the material of storytelling coming from the chaotic reality is a reflection of the filmmakers' 'curiosity', 'concerns', 'worldview', and 'images stuck in one's mind'. In other words, instead of being encouraged by film festivals' tastes in programming, their upbringing milieu and internal reflexive contemplation greatly contribute in the construction of their artistic prism that is thus encoded in their filmmaking practice. Sharing the same logic of My as quoted above, Phat elaborates on the bond between his internal world and his aesthetic and cinematic language in one of his short films which might be considered as quite 'experimental':

To me, that film is a special experience of the reality. For example, in the film, the location is covered with blue sand. That blue sand color comes from the fact that during that time I missed my mom very much. The blue speaks for the nostalgia in my heart. Therefore, I didn't try to bring out strange or impressionist images or experiment with this or that. It was a very natural blue coming from the real feeling in my heart. I don't know what the audience think. Actually, it's a very personal movie and I want to keep it for myself and later on I didn't even allow too many people to watch it. It is so real, so personal, that I even wanted to keep it private for myself.

(Phat)

A controlled and conscious mastery of cinematic language packed with a distanced relationship with external forces being film viewers seems to be the demonstration of the encounter between the artist's autonomy and the autonomy of arts. In other words, the adoption of awe-inspiring elements results from the filmmakers' reflexivity of their internal world and artistic values instead of stemming from the quest for validation from the audience or film festivals, making this artistic practice a personal and aestheticizing celebration of art for art's sake.

Furthermore, although film festivals programming can be volatile, some filmmakers tend to have trust in the taste of film festivals since it seems to reflect the legitimate standard of a

cultural product with artistic merits and serve as a “reliable filter”. Also believing that the beauty of cinema should always be the core of and the impetus behind these cultural spaces’ operation, Phat mentions that film festival curators are still ‘people who love cinema like us.’ Sharing the same positivity but in a different shade, some filmmakers interpret the dominant cultural paradigm and film festivals’ social and political agendas as something psychologically reasonable and universal:

Some Southeast Asian film got selected in a big film festival because it talks about sensitive stuffs. But I think it is reasonable, too. At first, I thought it's not fair but now I let it go because that's the reality. I even make joke with my friends about this so I don't I have any kind of problems with it anymore. Like, you know, we make films in the context of Asia and they come from far away, wanting to know about things happening here. So, I think that also makes sense.

(Bayani, early 30s, Indonesian, in the development of the first feature film)

I've never thought that it's very right to use the Western perspective as a standard, but I don't think it's a bad thing either. I think it sincerely comes from the desire to know, to understand, to share the compassion, and even the desire to satisfy curiosity. Also, it is undeniable that cinema, from its earliest years, was born to satisfy curiosity.

(Trang, 40s, Vietnamese, in the development of the second feature film)

These answers explicitly speak for the filmmakers’ belief in the autonomy of arts that correspondingly fosters the filmmaker’s artistic autonomy and confidence in making films in their own way. Overall, it can be observed that the SE Asian filmmakers are having a very dynamic social and cultural environment allowing them to interpret cinema in their local and personal languages with rationality and self-awareness of their positionality within the film festival network. Thus, the proclivity for individualism can never be taken out of context as it is an important impetus to filmmakers’ cultural production process and, at the same time, one of the most dominant factors affecting the artistic outcome compared to other forces such as a simplistic desire to be included in the network.

4.1.2. Filmmakers' replexivity upon their practice evolving with time

Regarding a more practical perspective and being inspired by the latest stance in the above sub-section, the filmmakers' mastery of story-telling and rationalist artistic direction are the second evidence of them cancelling the influence of film festivals in their creative process. Notably, half of the interviewees recognize that 'the white gaze', 'the white-centric axis', 'the crave for oriental exoticism', 'colonial perspective', 'the Western's cultural translation of the Eastern values' are matters that historically inculcated in the curating practice of prestigious film festivals originally established in the Europe, which "needs more time to see an actual revolution" (as cited in Minh's answer) and to which most of cultural producers coming from peripheral areas have been accustomed.

In specific, with his wealth of experience and industry knowledge, Steve – an independent filmmaker starting his directing career at a late age after years of working as a film programmer and critic – specifically points out his acknowledgement of film festivals' traditional favoritism or what he would call 'a menu of festival best-seller traps' that filmmakers may 'willingly' pick up and fall into, namely: sensitive political and social agenda to catch media buzz; the exploitation of exoticism by showing culturally specific elements (e.g. ethnic minority) in a touristy decoration way and portraying aesthetic film frames that are "not necessarily impressionist but very caress the viewer's eyes"; slow cinema emphasizing on sadnesses; etc. Agreeing on this, My sarcastically describe it as 'poverty porn'. Overall, there is an impression that filmmakers are possibly aware of film festivals' conventions but have a complex relationship to them: the more the filmmakers know how the cultural gatekeeping functions of film festivals would affect their artistic practice, the less the artists let them affect their creative process.

On the one hand, some filmmakers explicitly point out the fact that the choice of content and artistic approach can be deliberately 'exotic', 'experimental' or can utilize 'heated issues' without being personally connected to the artist's life as long as this specific practice is integral to the internal meaning of the film. Particularly, the filmmakers' question over and put emphasis on the true intention of using culturally or socio-politically vernacular elements or experimental approach: whether it is 'reasonable', 'necessary', 'fit', 'has a meaning' or simply whether it really makes the movie a 'good' one. To summarize, Phat said: "[...] if that's their life, that's their world, then they have the right to tell the story the way they want". On the contrary, if it is a deliberate attempt to target external factors such as to become more attractive to film festivals, this inclusion

will indisputably appear to be an intruder – to seem ‘forced’ and serve as 'decoration'. Illustrating this demarcation line are Oanh and Steve:

I feel like it's good to choose experimental filmmaking if the artist really wants to tell their story in a special way instead of trying to bring something special into their story. You know? Those are two different angles and when something is too much, it won't be good. It feels like an 18-year-old boy trying to talk like a 60-year-old man. They are not brave enough to tell their story in a special way but have to depend on borrowing the special things.

(Oanh)

I choose the most suitable way for me to tell the story because it needs to be like that. I can also make accessible movies that will make the audience cry. But I chose this [surrealism in my artistic approach] because the movie itself is supposed to be like that. It is not because I chose it because I purposely wanted to turn down the traps set by film festivals. It is also a very thin line and if a filmmaker is not astute enough, he or she will make people understand their choice.

(Steve, 40s, Vietnamese, former film programmer, in development of the second and third feature film)

On the other hand, being different from the above indifferent and objective attitude, there are filmmakers who knowledgeably and critically transgress film festivals' strategies of aesthetic distinction. Demonstrating rationalism in a different manner, they claim to have a desire to subvert the festival conventions including the white gaze:

I actively avoids those traps because I think my film should have a long-term life passing through time and still be watchable for decades to come. That means I have to get rid of the stereotypes of the times as much as possible. There will still be people who fall into the traps accidentally or intentionally but that is not the thing of the filmmakers I know. The filmmakers I know and respect are the ones who know how to choose the expression that best suits their story. [...] Fortunately, I have the chance to follow and observe the young filmmakers of Vietnam and the South East Asian region for many years. Fifteen years of watching their films I can see the confidence in them as well as the opportunities that open up to them so they can dabble in the industry by themselves, gain more confidence and be less likely to follow a certain standard or taste.

(Steve)

Being bored with the outdated depiction of “some poor, ugly, dirty countries” (as cited in My’s response) or “the intentional and accidental falls into the stereotypes of the times” to catch the attention of European film festivals in an area of (former or other) SE Asian filmmakers, they believe the contemporary artists should embrace their artistic autonomy, subvert the film festival canonized aesthetics and “do differently”. Encapsulate the counteraction is the following quote of Minh:

I think the filmmaker must either be very clever, or be out of the system. Because the current system of art and cinema doesn't support and help [foster the] honesty. The auteur must be very clever to take advantage of that system, or to stay out of that system, to avoid that system.

Interestingly, this deliberate rejection of film festivals’ aesthetic values mostly comes from filmmakers who are the most experienced with the “system” considering either their seniority (i.e. Steve, Trang) or involvement in activities and education of the film festival network (i.e. My, Kyaw, Minh). The implication is that filmmakers endowed with high volumes of capital gained from the film festival network, especially cultural and social capitals, are the ones who tend to sense the gatekeeping functions the most so that they are more likely to grow an anti-festival attitude and practice. This suggests the on-going influence of film festivals’ politics of tastes but, somehow, filmmakers tend to have distinct perceptions of and attitudes towards the film festival network with different degrees of commitment and may proactively grow different ways to counteract.

Despite sharing the desire to avoid the festival templates in different manners, these results clearly present some positive attitudes implied in the confidence of the filmmakers in the community they are attending by describing the phenomenon as: “the filmmakers [they] know and respect”, “the circle of SE Asian filmmakers whom [they are] having contact with”, their “different generation” and so forth. This solidarity also suggests that changes in artistic practice can be considered as part of the effects of generational cohorts rather than the cultural gatekeeping effects of film festivals on the creative process, which is illuminated most clearly below:

But at least in the circle of filmmakers I’m playing with, people generally seem to want to go against that. Like, why do I have to take things so seriously? [...] So I also see that our generation now is

different from the previous generations because they have many hidden and repressed things in the in the past. The network of filmmakers whom I have contact with interpret things differently: it is unnecessary to always be sadly sad but sadness can also appear in a bitchier or more sarcastic form. (My)

Steve agrees with this by previously mentioning the significant development happening in the section of arts and culture in SE Asia filmmaking industry. Besides social changes, another example for the effects of generational cohorts would be the way Trang explains the contribution of technological revolution and other contemporary aesthetic movements to her changes in cultural production process:

In general, when I was young, I had to go through a procedure of learning filmmaking which being shaped by a lot of social and technological movements – from the digital revolution to the introduction of TV drama series and suddenly the emergence of digital broadcasting platforms – we have to constantly get used to so many genres and different ways of filmmaking. That's why we didn't have time to argue, to decide whether we should do this or that or what was right and what was wrong. We didn't have time to reflect on our practice. We just felt like this might be an opportunity so we threw ourselves into it. [...] I think that for most filmmakers from the millennial generation onwards, they are being influenced by the operation of social networks and media to some certain extent, which establishes a very different set of aesthetics. [...] At first, you may think that you want to do something very close to your observation and you still believe that it is your very personal aesthetics but, in fact, we are all already immersed ourselves in a common aesthetic flow.

(Trang)

Reading Trang's response also transpires the confluence of different social and cultural changes in the making up of the common artistic challenges faced by a "generation" of filmmakers in the era of post-modernism. This stance seems to resonate more with generational cohort effects in establishing a filmmaker's artistic identity in the contemporary context, compared to the taste-making gatekeeping function of the film festival network.

Therefore, it would be fair to say that in a time of social, political, cultural fluctuations and proliferation of film festivals, filmmakers are probably aware of the possible institutional effects set by the film festival network. However, this acknowledgement does not compulsorily lead to

filmmaker's conformity to film festival norms but, in fact, prepares them with consciousness and rationality in their artistic practices. Regardless of their attitudes towards and counteraction strategies responding to the significance of the film festival network – whether to subvert or to utilize the stereotypes – it is fundamental for filmmakers to secure and to embrace their artistic autonomy in their practices.

4.1.3. The ever-changing environment of the film festival network towards greater diversity and omnivourousness

Switching the angle from examining filmmakers' perspective on their artistic practice to the operation of film festivals, the third imperative securing the authority of filmmakers over their creative process is in relation to the development of film festivals themselves. In a more explicit way, the perceived diversity of film festivals enables filmmakers to feel that their artistic values and cultural production is not compromised by having to fit in the network. It comes up with two ways of interpreting the diversity of film festivals traceable in the interview data.

The first group of filmmakers appreciates the fact that nowadays, there is a wide range of film festivals with very diverse and, spontaneously, distinguishable tastes, giving more opportunities for filmmakers to distribute their films instead of an all-in bet on just a few big film festivals or, as Sarawut, a Thai filmmaker, put it:

Because now we have a lot of different film festivals and each film festival has a different character. So, we know that this kind of film can be selected by International Film Festival Rotterdam and this one may fit more in Locarno. This kind of film festival they want something that is challenging and this kind of film festival is fond of an arthouse blockbuster (i.e. more accessible arthouse films done by big auteur filmmaker - TD), etc. So, film festivals are very flexible and it is okay if that film festival does not choose you, you still can submit it to the others. [...] Even if the film is not selected by film festivals but it stills makes it into Netflix and alike platforms can be very good, too, you know. [...] Like my film is being distributed in Taiwan now. So, it's not only about the festivals. But for sure, festivals help the film to establish a foundation to get to wider audience. It's the first step of your distributing journey but it's not the end; the more important one is what is going to happen after that festival round. But then even if we cannot have that commercial journey after the festivals and we still have our films being shown to audiences at least at festivals.

(Sarawut, middle 30s, Thai, in the development of the second feature film)

Practically, understanding the discernible artistic statements of specific film festivals also enables filmmakers to be in a more active role that they can not only increase efficiency but also effectiveness in the film release process. Moreover, Angelo and Sarawut together exhibit the flexibility offered by the expansion of the institutionalized filmmaking network by pointing out that film festivals, in fact, provides independent filmmakers with the freedom which is customarily unaffordable under the regime of South East Asian countries. Since the network of film festivals and its surrounding activities such as filmmaking workshops and film funds are growing with a rising statement of liberal values and the inevitable promotion of diversity (Dovey, 2015), reaching out to the assistance and the market of the international sets the filmmaker free from the constraints on talking about sensitive topics in developing countries. Agreeing with Sarawut and Angelo is Bayani who finds the proliferation of film festivals coming along with opportunities for mobilizing filmmaking resources that allows him to be creative in developing a project knowing that there would be at least some film festivals sharing the same interest of topic.

Conversely, some filmmakers describe film festivals programming process as ‘complex’ and ‘continuously being updated’ (My), ‘dependent on different year – different committee’ and ‘diverse tastes but as long as the film is good’ (Phat) that it would be difficult to grasp their predilections in selection. These descriptions tend to allude to the impression that some filmmakers finds it unnecessary to make films while navigating the tastes of film festivals as these programs are also increasingly oriented in direct line with openness and, apparently, omnivorousness.

Overall, these anecdotal evidences tend to present the distinct impression that film festivals were evolving to be more omnivorous in their curating taste. Spontaneously, most filmmakers coming from relatively peripheral areas namely South East Asia tend to prepare themselves with knowledge of film festivals’ institutional effects to either protect themselves from falling into the stereotypes or to proactively subvert the conventional expectations of prestigious film festivals. Crucially, notwithstanding that filmmakers may find these effects as activated or not, there is an explicit assertion of the internal relevance between the artistic merits and the filmmakers’ irreducible artistic and intrinsic integrity implied in their artistic motivation and direction. This is also linked to the filmmakers’ tendency of embrace individualism as well as the artist’s autonomy while mutually celebrating the autonomy of art with film festivals. However, in reflection to the literature review, this appears to be in line with Kantian disinterestedness focusing on the

aestheticizing celebration of aspects that are traditionally inherent to the highbrow culture or the intellectual mode of cultural production (Jarness, 2015).

Moreover, it should be noted that many of these answers were given under the context of them being asked directly about their perspectives on the network of film festivals, and the focus of this section is rather on aspects related to the artistic values of filmmakers. Therefore, probing into the filmmakers' careers and multidimensionally breaking down the interviewees' answers in detail would elucidate how the influence of the film festival has been deeply internalized in the filmmakers' artistic production via their socialization in the network established by this cultural space as well as its dynamic process of defining, translating and cultivating cultural and social capitals.

4.2. The internalized cultural distinction and filmmakers' careers under the influence of the film festival network

In contrast to the surface textures of the answers given and analyzed in the previous section, when closely investigating the filmmakers' evaluation of their careers, film festivals appear to be actually significant to their cultural perception and production. For example, although almost all of the interviewees manifest their rejection of being under the influence of the film festival network in the creation of their cinematic texts, when being randomly asked to name one's momentum moments in their filmmaking career, there is a discernible tendency among filmmakers to cite experiences that at least hint at a connection to a film festival or related events.

This gravitation toward film festivals manifest in different stages of a filmmaker's career, transpiring the fact that they have been deeply cultivated and nurtured by the complexity of film festival network. Accordingly, there is space for this social construction to operate its cultural gatekeeping functions and internalize their perceived festival values into filmmakers' artistic practices. Moreover, as mentioned in the literature review, the sustainability of the film festival network is based on the relationship between cultural distinction and cultural production which is structurally linked to the process of socio-cultural exclusion and the monopolization of advantages and opportunities. The purpose of this section is thus to point at the markers of film festivals' two strategies of cultural distinction being activated and shown in filmmakers' careers or cultural production as well as their perception of cultural classification in the dynamic of film festival network.

4.2.1. Film festivals' cultural distinction and filmmakers' careers

In the introduction to and learning of filmmaking

To begin with, it is fundamental to trace back to the interviewees' genesis and foundation of filmmaking, which transpire to be established by the film festival network as well as their internal entities (especially educational bodies like filmmaking workshops and academies). In other words, filmmakers are introduced to the area of arthouse filmmaking and learn about it consecutively via processes of cultural legitimization and socialization in the network. The wide spectrum of film festivals' imprints in the construction of a filmmaker's original artistic identity is shown in the following quotation:

Before becoming a filmmaker, I was a frequent audience of the film festivals in the region. I went there to watch films, to join workshops, etc. There I made friends with a lot of filmmakers and most importantly I met Davy Chou there – who later on introduced me to the field of filmmaking by offering me an assistant position in the production. So, events like film festivals are really meaningful to me, it helps me be a filmmaker now. Later on, when I have already become a filmmaker, networking at film festivals is meaningful to me in a sense that I can make friend with very inspirational people there. Keeping in touch with them even after the events, seeing them keep making films inspires me to keep going and make more films.

(Sikkha)

Accordingly, the first indicator of cultural distinction being internalized in the filmmaking custom is revealed in how film festival network's process of cultural legitimation marks a transition of socio-cultural positioning of filmmakers in the arthouse film world. It can be an 'eye-opening experience' watching films at film festivals that inspired them to find 'the kind of film that [they are] looking for' as in the cases of Sikkha and My, or it – especially amongst filmmakers who formerly pursued a non-artistic career – can be an incentive and encouragement to officially have an occupational twist to independent filmmaking after getting validation from film festivals as in the cases of Oanh, Bayani and Angelo. Specifically, Oanh explains her crave for 'recognition from film professionals' as a form of reassurance that she has the 'adequate artistic essence and ability' to sacrifice her former stable job and to switch to this new career path from scratch at the late age of middle-30s filled with uncertainty and responsibilities. The same is applied for the

interviewees who had had their origin being a filmmaker but in other genres and then changed to arthouse areas after being recognized by the film festival. One clear example is Trang who had worked for years in the field of commercial and television before encountering ‘an unprecedented success of Vietnamese cinema at film festivals’ with her debut feature-length film and deciding to follow the arthouse filmmaking direction.

Furthermore, the significance of the film festival network in shaping a filmmaker’s arthouse career can also be interpreted in the way its entities introduce the artist to the network and help locate his or her disposition within this social construction. Illustrating this point most vividly is Kyaw who considers the arrival and engagement of his producer – a highly reputed film programmer in the region – in his project as a landmark event in his arthouse career since before the appearance of this producer, he was lost in getting the access to film festivals’ resources. The multi-faceted significance of cultural legitimation is also present in the following response of Sarawut:

The moment that my film was selected for Venice was very special to me. Without [the participation in film festivals in general], I’m someone that never being claimed as successful. Yeah, I feel successful being included in film festivals. [...] You only need to be selected for Venice and then people will look at you differently (compared to some other prestigious film festivals but on a lower level like one of Rotterdam – TD) – you’re in a different position in the industry by attending some specific film festivals.

Obviously, beside encouraging new filmmakers to continue their pursuit of the arthouse path instead a commercial or mainstream one, film festival network contributes to the formation of their career by assigning the cultural status to them via its process of manufacturing the symbolic value of being included and esteemed. This process of allocating filmmakers’ socialized positions in the network also excludes them from the network’s outsiders who share different sets of values from that of film festival practitioners. Accordingly, it signifies the presence and significance of film festivals’ cultural gatekeeping functions as well as their hierarchical structure.

The second indicator of cultural distinction being internalized in the artistic practice is lying in the way the film festival network monopolizing cultural capital in the field of independent filmmaking. In specific, film festivals engage in the process of defining and distributing cultural capital by initially educating filmmakers on independent filmmaking, which is in line to

Bourdieu's model of cultural reproduction via education that put emphasis on institutionalized capital or the cultural capital gained from learning at schools (1984).

Significantly being the most unifying property found in all cases, institutionalized cultural capital is revealed obviously through the way the interviewees talking about the skills they have learnt from participating in filmmaking workshops, film academies and script-development labs usually organized by or with an aim at film festivals. It can flow from how 'to tell a story with a strong cinematic language', 'to identify [one's] cinematic identity and strengthen the script' – especially to those who did not attend film schools or used to follow another occupation before switching to filmmaking – to more practical matters such as 'presenting and pitching a film project' and 'networking'. Therefore, it is clear that film festivals and their related events can actively and directly endow the selected filmmakers with volumes of cultural capital – i.e. in the form of knowledge ranging from aesthetic, story-building aspects to practical techniques, know-how and necessary soft skills – which is primarily monopolized by the network.

A less direct but actually significant indicator of institutionalized capital is the way filmmakers learning cinema from watching films at film festivals (as in the cases of My, Sarawut, Sikkha, Phat) and watching films of well-known filmmakers who are the blockbusters in film festival circuits (Bayani, Angelo, Trang). Interestingly, these shout-outs may emerge when some filmmakers lack of words to describe their film cinematic language and then cite a big arthouse filmmaker's styles instead; for example, in Angelo's case, the references are films of Apitchapong Weerasethakul and Kore-eda Hirokazu – who both won Palme d'Or at Cannes. The only citation of films of the pop culture is in Sarawut's response (Terminator series) but serves for a comparison between the cultural products he consumed in the past and what he is consuming now.

Another dimension of learning filmmaking is that socialization at film festivals' activities allows filmmakers to connect with film professionals including other fellow filmmakers, opening up opportunities for updating their film knowledge. This is considered as a way of accumulating cultural capital since filmmakers tend to be inspired and learn from each other, leading to the point that these social connections are capable of generating new filmmaking knowledge – a unifying response appears in many interviewed cases (e.g. Oanh, My, Trang). Moreover, since independent filmmakers are able to handle different tasks in a film crew, they tend to learn more about filmmaking by supporting or participating in different film projects of other fellows from the same local or regional arthouse community (as mentioned in the cases of Sikkha and Bayani).

In this respect, the conceptualization of “a different generation” previously discussed in the filmmakers’ artistic autonomy (specifically in section 4.1.2) is being challenged as it now emerges that the circles of filmmakers are also having the same foundation nurtured by the film festival network. That means filmmakers do not escape from the cultural distinction cultivated by film festivals but become active actors and interchangeably cultivate each other within the complexity of film festival network and its ever-changing adaptive systems of cultural gatekeeping. Consequently, it raises a new argument over the legitimacy of the effects of generational cohorts: since the film festival network's cultural values are shifting and changing over time, there are “generations” of filmmakers emerging in accordance. Therefore, could the changes in filmmakers’ artistic practice be due to the fact that cultural capital in general and the film festival network's set of cultural values in specific are something inherently dynamic - instead of simply being the result of generational cohort effects following the confluence of arts movements and socio-political contexts as discussed in the previous section?

Crucially, the impact of the film festival network as a film educator is of great importance to SE Asian filmmakers for two reasons in relation to their particular context. Firstly, since the arts and cultural sectors are still neglected in many countries in the region (e.g. in the Philippines, Myanmar, Indonesia, Cambodia as being brought up consecutively in the answers of Angelo, Kyaw, Bayani, Sikkha), local filmmakers must rely on the international network to update knowledge regarding independent filmmaking, as Angelo put it:

I would say because we don't really have an industry in my hometown but in Manila only. Every of Filipino filmmakers coming from the rural areas who wants to develop their project or who really aims to go into an international process of project development struggles a lot. [...] There are still very few platforms for development [stages] and also there very limited support. The national agencies at best only can provide practical support regarding the production, like allocating budget for scouting; but for arthouse and especially short films, there is just one organization [in Manila] and that organization can only support very few projects each year, too.

(Angelo, middle 30s, Filipino, in the development of the first feature)

Secondly, it is also interesting to note that arthouse scenario in South East Asia is dominant with self-taught filmmakers, which is applied to more than half of this study’s interviewees, so it would be expected to see a greater influence of film festivals regarding film education. Without

attending any official film institutes, all of the unschooled filmmakers in the sample depend on the film festival network and its internal actors (i.e. workshops, film screenings and interaction with fellow independent filmmakers in the region) to guide their individual's artistic instincts and to learn how to utilize their interdisciplinary knowledge in filmmaking.

Overall, it can be seen that South East Asian filmmakers have been nurtured by the cultural capital which is originally manufactured, cultivated and exclusively distributed by the film festival network. That result in the fact that the network's cultural distinction is implanted in filmmakers' perception of cinema in general and the process of arthouse filmmaking in specific – especially amongst those coming from film industries which are not familiar with the field of arthouse yet. Another implicit finding of this section is that the dynamic of film festival network's internal actors, according to Latourian ANT, enables the monopolization of cultural capital in international film festival circuits. For example, considering the context of a filmmaker as a non-human agency in the network, the situation of SE Asian filmmakers with limited local support gives film festivals the opportunity to be the monopoly of cultural capital (i.e. film education) in the field of independent filmmaking.

In the institutionalized process of filmmaking

In a transparent manner, all of the interviewees reporting their priority in joining the film festival network is to gain resources necessary for their cultural production as a full cycle from the stage of building an artist's profile, script-development to filmmaking operation on set and the very end of distribution. During this institutionalized process based on a hierarchical structure (which will be further explain in due course), it appears that social capital is the most important resource because of its capability of transforming into opportunities and mobilizing other pragmatic resources including economic capital. The filmmakers call this procedure as 'international process/landscape of project development/arthouse film production', 'the process set up by the indie market', 'the process of making an arthouse feature' which is given an overview by Kyaw:

At first, there was no progress in 2 years since I kept sending my feature fiction project to different labs and got rejected one by one because I did not know about the industry, I did not know how to develop and write treatment and apply to film labs, and, especially, I did not have a strong right

profile myself. And then I met my producer (who is a well-known film programmer - TD) at a documentary film festival. He couldn't promise me anything but we discussed and tried to find ways to make this film come true. He said: "You have to go for this lab and you have to make another short film. And this short film is not going to be just a short film but it needs to go international and not just international film festivals of class B or class C but this short need to go to big film festivals like Rotterdam or Locarno, Venice, Cannes and so on. [...] So, you see if you have a script, still you cannot make the film in one or two year but it takes a long time because we don't have money and our country's government doesn't support us financially. [...] So yeah, there are a lot of struggles for me in fundraising and waiting to have co-producers and get co-production money.

(Kyaw, late 30s, Burmese, in the development of the first feature)

The interesting fact extracted from this answer (and many others being homologous with it) is that we can see how film festival network manipulates its dynamics of actors including both human and non-human agencies to interact with each other and conform to a procedure of specific consecutive steps based on the formation, transformation, translation and operation of social capital. Furthermore, this 'ladder of the film festival network' is not only manifest in one project's procedure of cultural production but also embedded in the cultivated disposition of a filmmaker and their plans for their upcoming projects as well as their long-term career strategies. Examples are the way Sarawut comparing different opportunities after being selected by Venice film festival and International Film Festival or the way My tells about her journey of going to international film workshops:

I had to apply many times. For example, I applied Berlinale Talents¹ 7 times to eventually being selected. Only later did I realize that the system of workshops and film festivals had an ascending rank. That is, for example, FLY will be your first destination a beginner and then on a slightly higher level is AFA². As for AFA, they just need you to have a good short that already went to at least a big film festival, and to have a good letter of recommendation. In that year, I was very lucky

TD's note:

¹ Berlinale Talents is a film talent development programme of the Berlin International Film Festival.

² FLY is shortened for ASEAN ROK Film Leaders Incubator and AFA is shortened for Asian Film Academy – both are filmmaking workshop/training institute organized by Busan Film Commission and in connection to the Busan International Film Festival.

to have a letter of recommendation from Locarno Academy³ that made me be accepted. Before that, I always asked for recommendation letters from my classmates, so they didn't accept me in the previous times. [...] At first, I really didn't know and I just applied mass and constantly got rejected until I knew the process of these systems.

To summarize, in order to strengthen one's filmmaking profile, a filmmaker must attain accreditation by participating in filmmaking workshops or trainings before developing and fundraising for a feature-length film. According to My, this institutionalized process of talent development in independent filmmaking also strictly follows a hierarchical system in proportion to the reputation and significance of film festivals as the hosts, as well as other specific requirements in relation to social capital such as reference from other reputed film professionals. Despite seeming already complicated, this is just the beginning – let alone the following subsequent processes of joining script-development labs, project markets and so forth which are parts of the project development and fundraising processes (as mentioned in the answer of Trang with her expression of weariness).

Generally, this complexity puts an emphasis on the translation of social capital into economic capital in accordance with the institutionalized structure of cultural production. Because of South East Asian's filmmaking situation, younger or fresher filmmakers solely depend on these international film festival circuits to make up their reputation and raise fund for their independent films. However, the situation is different amongst filmmakers who have accumulated a pre-existing amount of social capital (as in the cases of Trang who have over 20 years of experience and reputation in establishing the arthouse filmmaking landscape in Vietnam, and Steve who have over 10 years of being a renowned film programmer and film critic before switching to filmmaking). In specific, they consider the financial aids of film festivals are just 'cherry on the top' and 'a plus but not adequate to make any difference in terms of financial aspects'. For them, winning a film grant is actually meaningful only in terms of its symbolic values instead of economic ones. Steve illustrates:

Let's just say that I am relatively confident in the network that I currently have. That means I can consult them so they can give me feedback without spending time at script labs. [...] Participating

³ Locarno Academy is a professional training project of the Locarno Film Festival

in these international platforms has two meanings. The first is for the project itself because in the current context, arthouse projects need co-production, so joining these platforms will help the project find partners. The second is that bringing a project to a project market is extremely important because there I can observe whether my project has received any attention and how great that interest is. And about finding the financial resources from the film festival network to make the film – I feel that it is very difficult. It will be difficult and time consuming compared to looking for other private investment from the outside.

According to these observations of the on-going institutionalized process of independent filmmaking, it appears that people with different socialized position within the film festival network going through different speed/processes of transforming and translating various kinds of capital. Thus, the nature of “capital” in the habitus of film festivals is, again, proved to be constantly shifting and changing as there are always new ways of translating social capital into cultural capital and vice versa in accordance with the emergence of new actors (e.g. co-producers following globalization in filmmaking) and, inevitably, new value confluences and interactions. This dynamic is, hence, the impetus behind the effectiveness of film festivals’ self-sustainable system.

Another related important finding is that this “sustainability” has a somewhat interrelationship with the level of filmmakers’ dependence on resources and opportunities provided by film festival network. Specifically, because filmmakers with low profiles of capital depend on resources monopolized by the film festival network, they must conform to the festival institutionalized process of cultural production, including a sequence of steps to climb “the film festival ladder”. In order to gain enough resources for the making of their films, filmmakers cannot skip this process and, from this point, the model transpires to be “hierarchical”.

This is in stark contrast to the argument of Latour (1976) and de Valck (2007) about the emergence of a ‘flat’ or ‘grass’ model fostered by actor-network theory, which tends to subvert the traditional hierarchical structure proposed by Bourdieu’s thesis of cultural distinction. Accordingly, the quintessential example is the case of SE Asian independent filmmakers who have limited support from the local governmental/institutional bodies and have their background mostly being self-taught filmmakers. To conclude, film festivals’ cultural distinction is internalized into filmmakers’ artistic foundation via the dynamic within the festival institutionalized and hierarchical network, illustrated explicitly in their independent filmmaking careers.

4.2.2. *Film festivals' cultural distinction and filmmakers' cultural classification*

After talking about the foundation, it is reasonable to shift the examination to how this internalized cultural distinction set by film festivals is implied in their cultural perception and classification. This aspect is shown in the interviewees' answers following (1) their responses to the audience and (2) their film genre categorization – which tend to occasionally overlap each other throughout the discussion.

As for the first point, there is a relatively consistent tendency traceable in the way the filmmakers responding to their audiences: they conventionally begin the topic with signals of openness before manifesting a proclivity for film festival audiences with high cultural capital (e.g. Phat, Sarawut, My, Steve, Trang, Bayani). In specific, at first, most of the artists claims that they expect to reach the wide audiences notwithstanding their 'level of relevance to knowledge of arts and intellectual circles' or 'cultural, social, political, occupational backgrounds' (as cited in responses of Trang and Steve, respectively) when being directly confronted with the question. However, following along prolonged conversations, they then exclusively attached this propensity for omnivorousness to some certain expectation and even stipulation that are more usually associated with the privileged or the upper/middle strata of the society. For example, while Trang understands that she cannot expect 'everyone to share one level of perception or a perception that is alike to [her]' but she would feel glad if there are some audiences recognizing the 'Easter eggs' she implanted in her cinematic language, Steve subsequently clarify his 'global audiences' as the 'seniors' with an adequate amount of life experience allowing them to thoroughly interpret his film which talks about the concept of mortality. Sharing the same sense with the former and using 'the boat' as a metaphor to the 'audiences' journey of experience', although Phat tends to invite everyone to 'touch the boat' and have their rights to decide to embark on a journey with the film regardless of whether the audience are able to read the film or not, how differently they may perceive the film and whether they can consciously sense these interactions with the film or not, he then elaborates his critical aspect by saying:

But amongst the people on that boat, there will actually be only a few people in a small group knowing that they are standing on the boat, whereas the rest of them will feel the film without any particular awareness of the experience – no matter how close or distant they may feel about the

film. Those who know that they are already on the boat are the ones that need to have a certain sensitivity and an open heart to feel the film. In that moment of realization, the boat is back to the ground and they are able to keep a distance from the boat qua the film to really interpret it, while the rest will just drift through the film.

As the above statements show, openness to wide audiences and friendliness towards omnivoroussness are only inscribed in the filmmaker' generic attitudes towards their audiences, but skepticism is still apparent in their specific assessment of their desirable audiences, which is in line with hgighbrow culture's process of social exclusion (Bourdieu, 1990). In other words, audiences who have cultural goodwill at highly cultural spaces such as at film festivals are deliberately expected by arthouse filmmakers. In the light of the logic of "film festivals as sites of passage" (de Valck, 2007), the dominant interviewees reported to have a predilection to consider film festivals as nodal points where 'there are people who appreciate your films' (Sarawut), where 'the audiences are willing to enjoy [experimental or contemporary] kinds of arts' (My), or where 'audiences prefer a wide range of diversity in terms of tastes, like the nuances of spiciness found in Thai soup compared to that of Indian curry, rather than fast food' (Trang).

This leads to another related conceptualization of the desirable audience at film festivals being the intellectual, which inherently entails the persistent high/low (Bourdieu, 1979) or arthouse/commercial dichotomies (de Valck, 2007). Interestingly, there is only one filmmaker who draw the demarcation line most clearly of all:

TD: Personally, do you see your film as a film whose destination is the film festival circuit, requiring the audience to be on a higher level to truly understand and share with the film?

Oanh: I think that's for sure. Because as I said, my strength is to build up strange worlds that are separate from the reality and to tell surreal stories that ordinary people may consider them difficult to accept within their understanding. Of course, each work needs to have audiences with similar experiences to fully enjoy it. [...] Those who can't understand my language may feel offended and react with negativity – *I have learnt this lesson from the case of Phat's feature film*⁴.

⁴ The use of italics to emphasis is done by the researcher to give direction to a subsequent argument.

There is no surprise that not only in the above case but also many of the interviewees share one tendency to proactively draw a discernible line between ‘Hollywood blockbusters’, ‘popular’, ‘ordinary’, ‘commercial’ and more ‘strange’, ‘experimental’, ‘challenging’, ‘difficult’, ‘arthouse’, ‘a different market’, ‘auteur-cinematic’ films with or without any prior mentions from the interviewer. Some of them naturally and fragmentarily present that distinction throughout the description of their overall career (e.g. Angelo, Sikkha, Kyaw, Trang) and the explanation of their artistic practices (e.g. Steve, Oanh, Minh). However, apart from the case of Oanh, in other cases, it is not always clearly or directly recognized since they would make some detours before disclosing their specific visualization of the path they are following and the cerebral audiences they expect to see in the end. To illustrate, My tells of her interest in figuring out the ‘universal values and emotions’ that are shared by audiences from anywhere by means of ‘human nature and humanity’ under the cover of local cultural vernacular and the idiosyncratic talent of the auteur:

[Film festivals] help expose me to the audience that can understand my language better. Not to say that I'm doing something too abstract and deep that ordinary people don't understand. You've seen my movies so you might know that I'm not trying to do something academic that only people who watch a lot of movies can understand. But I mean, anyways, I still have some ‘Easter eggs’ I put in it – the so-called my individual cinematic language.

Later on, when discussing about the disposition of the artist in her relationship with the audiences during stages of film development, My compares the artistic language of Chinese cheesy erotic novels and to that of works of academically appraisal like books of Milan Kundera and Haruki Murakami as well as how one levels up by reading different things before pointing out her true audiences:

It's like you're a dancer specializing in classic plays – disclaimer that there's no regional discrimination – but, for example, you're going to a rural village where they love to listen to Chèo Tuồng but you're insisting on performing the ballet Swan Lake whose language they certainly won't understand. Of course, if you keep performing it many times, they will find it beautiful, but they still won't understand. It will be different if I perform the same play but in Russia or in France, for example. There, the people who come to see are either people who understand or people who want to understand and to update their consumption. It is the same if you're a very good athlete

that you must go to play the larger-scale tournament on a larger scale there will be more people, more challenges. But if you only play in my hometown, your main audiences are just your parents and friends.

At first, with My's reference to her non-challenging story-telling practice and her personal aspiration to be seen with her subtle hallmarks of artistic merits, it can be read that her orientation is towards audiences with cultural goodwill as in the case of Trang. But in actual fact, it is evident that she endeavors higher to get the exposure to the intellectual audience, which can be translated into greater symbolic value qua validation in the network.

However, it is important to interrogate the artistic legitimacy of this positivity toward the filmmakers' inclination for film festival audiences who allegedly perform cultural goodwill and levels of intellectuality. Beside reference to the case of Phat being cited in the previous quotation of Oanh (in italics) about intellectual incompatibility, national background transpires to be a considerable layer of cultural distinction when analyzing the following quotation from Sarawut's interview:

Actually, the film was screened in Thailand one time at a film festival. A lot of Thai students went there to watch but all of them didn't feel satisfied with the film. [...] Because they were Thai so they knew the social political context [being mentioned in the film] and they expected more than that. I felt terrible about myself and thought that maybe the film was not good enough for people in my country. [...] But then the film was selected for New York Film Festival. Oh shit! Fuck Thai audience! Fuck them! I'm the one to be here in the States. And of course, what you say is right. I can and I have to make a better film next time to also win over the audiences back home. But it's okay, it's life and I'm still learning.

What is implied in this answer alludes to the allegation that, in the light of Latourian actor-network theory, exoticism as an agency in the film festival network still operates in and contributes to the sustainability of this closed system. This in line with the empirical researches on socio-political and cultural agendas aligned with the concept of diversity and liberty in gatekeeping practices of international film festivals, which indicates the contradiction between an Eastern film's success at international stages and failure at national playgrounds (e.g. Gaupp, 2019; Govey, 2015; Ihwanny and Budiman, 2021). It is especially true by recalling the following two facts: (1)

the significance of film festivals to South East Asian filmmakers is signified in their repeated mentions of national government and turbulent society as somewhat burdens in financial and self-expression aspects; and (2) the selection committee curating the film and the cinephiles going to watch the films are also internal parts of the cultural space of international film festivals. Angelo tends to generalize this landscape by saying: “A festival can really dictate how people think about a film or how they see a film or how they see a community and a country”.

Therefore, it would be fair to say that South East Asian filmmakers’ openness regarding their categorization of film genres and audiences is socially constructed by the film festival network, and it is instilled only in their attitudes but not in their intrinsic desire and artistic practice. In this light, it should also be noted that these responses to the audience and genre categorization are in line with the (festival) strategy of cultural distinction (i.e. social exclusion) according to Bourdieu (1984) – once again, transpiring the internalized cultural distinction set up the film festival network in the artistic perspective of filmmakers.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Overall, although there are some evidences vindicating auteur filmmakers from being influenced by the cultural gatekeeping functions of film festivals, it would be erroneous to conclude that they now have a predilection for eclecticism and employ openness in their cultural production as assumed by contemporary critics of Bourdieu's "Distinction". The analysis of this paper pays attention to trace the imprints of the film festival network's strategies of cultural distinction multidimensionally shown in the cultural production process of SE Asian independent filmmakers in the contemporary context. Thus, it reveals the inherent dynamic of film festivals as a network of different actors interacting with each other in its ever-changing adaptive systems of cultural gatekeeping. This new interpretation of cultural distinction in cultural production recalls Bourdieu's original inquiries into the constantly transitional nature of cultural capital instead of simplistic recasts of the model on the current cultural terrains, and casts doubt on the following claims of the declining significance of Bourdieu's proposed structure of opposition in the contemporary context of cultural production.

When it comes to the study of cultural distinction, it is crucial to examine the habitus of the artist (Bourdieu, 1990). In the case of this study which chooses the analytical interest of the subjective matter of the artistic practices, distinguishing the habitus into individual habitus (i.e. concerning intra-individual coherence) and class habitus (i.e. concerning inter-individual coherence) effectively explains the multidimension of cultural distinction in the context of film festival network (Flemmen, 2010).

In terms of the filmmakers' internal values as an artist, on the one hand, it is undeniable that the interviewees' upbringing/cultural milieu and the subsequent reflexive contemplation inherently contribute to the construction of their artistic prism which is, thus, encoded in their artistic practice. On the other hand, findings of this paper point out that many of these "internal values" are not "internal" but actually being "internalized" by film festivals with their set of values pertaining to Bourdieu's original model of cultural distinction. For example, many interviewees associate their artistic autonomy with their rationality in artistic practices and mastery of cinematic language. However, in close inspection, it appears that the filmmaker's perception of the arts and knowledge of filmmaking come mostly and initially from the educational system associated with and monopolized by the film festival network. In other words, what they assume as the outcome of their objective reflexivity is in fact a result of film festivals' cultural cultivation. Therefore,

there is provenance to say that film festivals' strategies of cultural distinction are at work without the filmmakers' acknowledgement of such processes taking place.

As regards the filmmakers' careers amidst the institutionalized environment of filmmaking, the extent to which the film festival network influences the artistic practice of filmmakers is correlated with their socialized position in the system and the volume of capital they accumulated via their socialization in the network. In specific, the interviewees with a lower volume of capital tend to be more dependent on the film festival network in their quest for accumulating necessary resources for the making of their films. Since the network has monopolized advantages and opportunities, these filmmakers have no choice but to conform to the cultural production process following a hierarchical system established by the network. In turn, they become active actors in the network themselves, and become a part of the network's dynamic of cultural gatekeeping, multiplying processes of social exclusion and monopolization of advantages and opportunities.

This alludes to one of the most significant contributions of this study: the exploration of how the intersections of Bourdieu's theory of cultural distinction and Latourian Actor-Network Theory enables film festivals to operate its self-sustainable system and cultural gatekeeping functions in the contemporary context. The proponents of Latour conventionally consider that the relationship between film festivals and ANT would enable a flat model offering more diversity and orientation towards heterogeneity in cultural production (de Valck, 2007) – in the same light are advocates of cultural omnivores and post-positivist empiricism (Born, 2010).

Opposing to this, my proposal is that the combination of Bourdieu's thesis on cultural distinction and ANT cultivates the thriving of film festival network as the cultural gatekeeper in the arthouse film world, and fosters its processes of internalizing festival values into the cultural production of SE Asian independent filmmakers. In specific, the context of being a SE Asian filmmaker comes along with the emergence of an eccentric and varied set of new actors entering and being activated in the network of film festival during the filmmakers' cultural production process. It appears from these interviewees' accounts to be a case of the subjectivity and objectivity in evaluating socio-political/cultural exoticism, the positionality of self-taught filmmakers in a filmmaking environment being unfamiliar with arthouse areas and lacking of local financial/institutional support from the government, the sole dependence on resources offered by the film festival network and its highly institutionalized and hierarchical structure and so forth. All

of these playing out in the “cultural” space of the film festival network and its process of constantly changing the value and formation of cultural capital as an adaptive strategy of self-sustaining when facing the challenges posed by the contemporary context (i.e. a shifting field of cultural production, changing social conditions and generational cohort effects).

In other words, on the one hand, the SE Asian filmmakers’ internal artistic values are embraced by the network; on the other hand, film festivals are internalizing their values of cultural distinction in the filmmakers’ careers. These two “actors” interact with each other, creating a dynamic in cultural production which is enabled only by and within the film festival network. Reversely, the film festival network’s strategies of social exclusion and monopolization of privileges cannot be as effective without the presence of SE Asian “actors”. Although this dynamic in cultural production is especially attributed to the artistic practice of SE Asian filmmakers, the scope and scale of this thesis cannot clarify whether this is an exceptional case or a result of taking a region-specific analytical perspective. Therefore, I would suggest to expand the sample and to also take into account a proper transregional-comparative framework in the further researches on this research interest.

Moreover, my point is not to suggest a radical turn in theoretical analysis of cultural production in specific and cultural stratification in general as I acknowledge the limitations shown in this study. Some of them are the study’s narrow sample of SE Asian interviewees and the immaturity of the proposed new interpretation of Bourdieu’s cultural distinction combined with Latourian ANT. My intention is just to shed light on another potential way to examine the subjective matter of cultural production in general and the artistic practice of filmmaker in the film festival network in specific.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: Respondents characteristics

	Name / Pseudonym	Age	Nationality	Film education	Occupation	On-going project
1	Angelo	30s	Filipino	Self-taught	Full-time filmmaker	In the development of the 1 st feature film
2	Bayani	30s	Indonesian	Bachelor's degree	Former programmer Full-time filmmaker	In the development of the 1 st feature film
3	Kyaw	30s	Burmese	Self-taught	Full-time filmmaker	In the development of the 1 st feature film
4	Sarawut	30s	Thai	Bachelor's degree	Full-time filmmaker	In the development of the 2 nd feature film
5	Sikkha	20s	Cambodia	Self-taught	Full-time filmmaker	In the development of the 1 st feature film
6	My	30s	Vietnamese Singaporean	Bachelor's degree	Full-time filmmaker	In the production of the 1 st feature film
7	Steve	40s	Vietnamese	Bachelor's degree	Former programmer Full-time filmmaker	In the development of the 2 nd feature film
8	Trang	40s	Vietnamese	Bachelor's degree	Full-time filmmaker	In the development of the 2 nd feature film

9	Minh	30s	Vietnamese	Self-taught	Full-time filmmaker	In the post-production of the 1 st feature film
10	Oanh	30s	Vietnamese	Self-taught	On-project filmmaker	In the development of the 1 st feature film
11	Phat	30s	Vietnamese	Self-taught	Full-time filmmaker	In the development of the 2 nd feature film

APPENDIX B: Consent form

Project Title and version	Contemporary Aesthetics: Artistic Practices and Other Strategies of ASEAN Independent Filmmakers
Name of Principal Investigator	Thanh Doan (Doan Minh Xuan Thanh)
Name of Organization	Erasmus University Rotterdam – Erasmus School of History, Culture, and Communication.
Purpose of the Study	<p>This research is being conducted in the Spring and Summer of 2023 for the Master thesis of Thanh Doan. I am inviting you to participate in this research project about the artistic practices of independent filmmakers in South East Asian countries. The purpose of this research project is to comprehend the region’s contemporary film aesthetics in relation to global film movements as well as to consolidate a regional collective identity and its prospective potentials.</p>
Procedures	<p>You will participate in an interview lasting approximately from 60 to 90 minutes. You will be asked questions about your artistic motivations, practices and reflections on a wide range of issues regarding the topic of independent filmmaking in South East Asia with consideration of the context of globalization. Sample questions include: “How would you describe your artistic practice?”; “How would you describe the feature film that you are developing at this moment?”; What are the crucial decisions in your career as a filmmaker?”; “How do you see yourself as an individual artist and as an artist of a community?”.</p> <p>You must be at least 18 years old, holding the original birthplace of a South</p>

	<p>East Asian country, and currently in the progress of developing a debut or second feature film.</p>
<p>Potential and anticipated Risks and Discomforts</p>	<p>There are no obvious physical, legal or economic risks associated with participating in this study. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to discontinue your participation at any time.</p>
<p>Potential Benefits</p>	<p>Participation in this study does not guarantee any beneficial results to you. As a result of participating you may better understand the underlying logics of your cultural production and expectations for the regional film industry in general.</p> <p>The broader goal of this research is to contribute new perspectives to the scholarly film study and raise location-specific issues regarding independent filmmaking in the region that deserve more attention and support.</p>
<p>Sharing the results</p>	<p>Your plan for sharing the findings with the participants should be provided. If you have a plan and a timeline for the sharing of information, include the details. You may also inform the participant that the research findings will be shared more broadly, for example, through publications and conferences.</p>

<p>Confidentiality</p>	<p>Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. No personally identifiable information will be reported in any research product. Moreover, only trained research staff will have access to your responses. Within these restrictions, results of this study will be made available to you upon request.</p> <p>As indicated above, this research project involves making audio recordings of interviews with you. Transcribed segments from the audio recordings may be used in published forms (e.g., journal articles and book chapters). In the case of publication, pseudonyms will be used. The audio recordings, forms, and other documents created or collected as part of this study will be stored in a secure location in the researchers' offices or on the researcher's password-protected computers and will be destroyed within ten years of the initiation of the study.</p>
<p>Right to Withdraw and Questions</p>	<p>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalised or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</p> <p>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the primary investigator:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Thanh Doan</p> <p style="text-align: center;">E-mail: 658180md@eur.nl</p>

<p>Statement of Consent</p>	<p>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree that you will participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</p> <p>For research problems or any other question regarding the research project, please contact the coordinator of the Master Thesis Class – Timo Koren.</p> <p>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</p>	
<p>Audio recording (if applicable)</p>	<p>I consent to have my interview audio recorded</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> no</p>	
<p>Secondary use (if applicable)</p>	<p>I consent to have the anonymised data be used for secondary analysis</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> no</p>	
<p>Signature and Date</p>	<p>NAME PARTICIPANT</p>	<p>NAME PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR</p> <p>Thanh Doan</p>
	<p>SIGNATURE</p>	<p>SIGNATURE</p>
	<p>DATE</p>	<p>DATE</p>

APPENDIX C: Interview guide

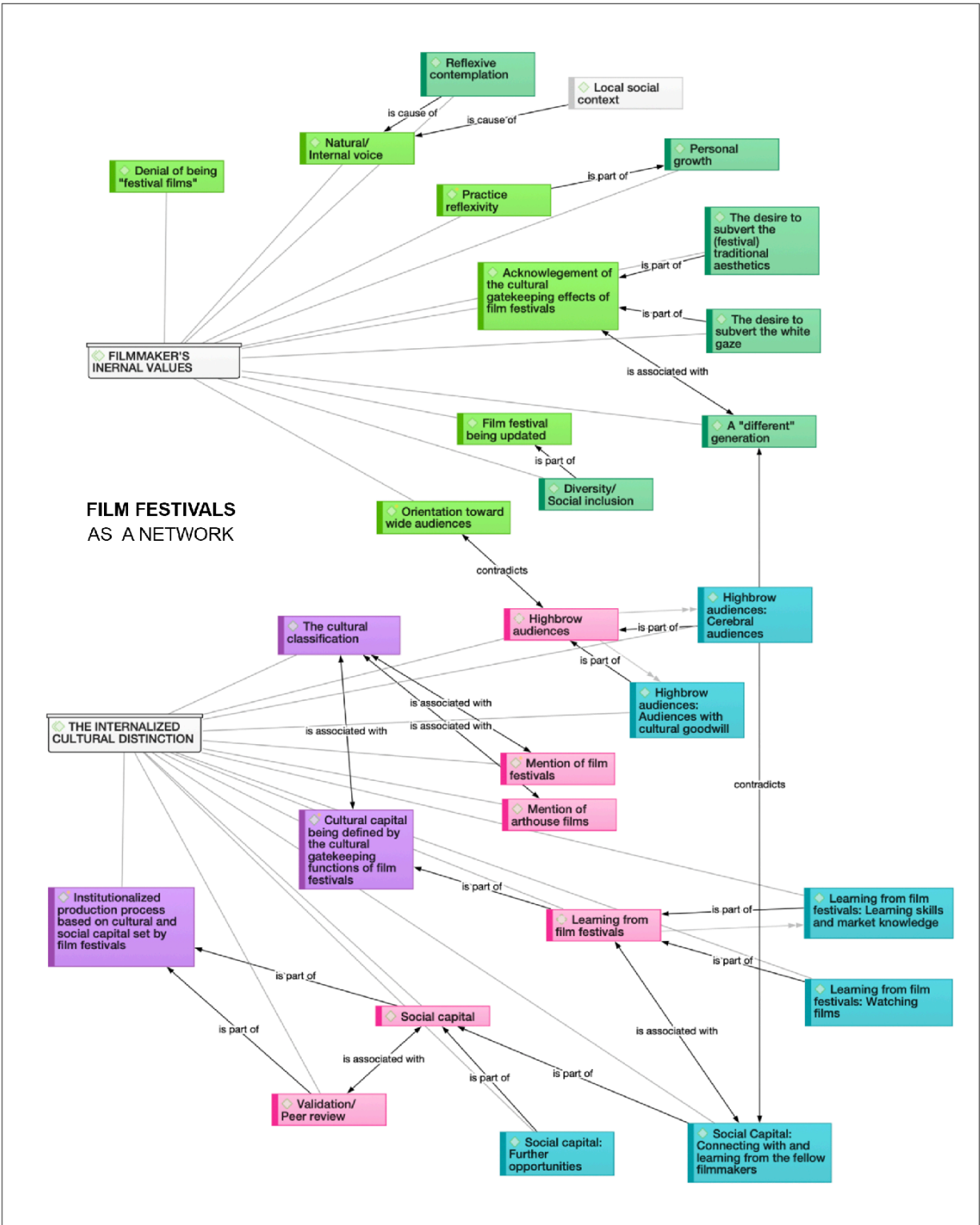
THEME	MAIN QUESTIONS	FOLLOWING-QUESTIONS
1 Career/ Life-story questions	Please tell me about how you started your filmmaking career?	How would you describe your debut film?
2		What are the momentum moments in your career
3	How would you describe your artistic practice?	What is your interest of topic?
4		How did you come up with this interest?
5	How would you describe your most recent work?	How do you see your transformation evolving with time when comparing you as a beginner and now?
6		What made you changed your practice?
7 Questions of artistic classification	In filmmaking, there is a practice called the alienation effect that by adopting this effect the artist aims to distance himself from the audience. What do you think about this and how you assess your practice reflecting on this concept of alienation effect?	Another “festival-fashionable” thing is experimental films. What is your opinion?
8		How do you feel about commercial films? Do you see yourself specifically as an arthouse filmmaker?

9		Have you ever thought of doing commercial films?
10	I see that there are many location-specific cultural elements in your film. Why are you interested in it?	Many people say that European film festivals aims at cultural diversity and expect to see not just great cinematic language but very local elements in an ASEAN film. How do you feel about this?
11	Some people directly consider arthouse films as festival films or films of highbrow culture. What do you think about this?	Do you consider your films that way?
12	Questions of film festivals	What are the momentum moments in your career
13		What was your first experience at a film festival or a film festival's related events?
14	As filmmaker who has made one feature and currently been developing your second project, how are you doing?	What elements you think that contributed to this success?
15	What is the best part and the worst part of being a filmmaker?	Have you ever adjusted your practice because of film festival's pressure? Especially when you are now in need of funding from film festival organizations.
16		What do you think about freedom in filmmaking?
17	How do you think about the need to do networking in filmmaking?	How can you deal with gatekeeping functions while maintaining your "freedom"?
		Do you feel the pressure to impress film programmers and film festivals?

18

What are your wishes to make the practice of filmmaking more authentic and healthier?

APPENDIX D: Code tree



APPENDIX E: List of codes

	Code
1	A "different" generation
2	A new mode of cultural production
3	Acknowledgement of the cultural gatekeeping effects of film festivals
4	Concern
5	Concern: All-around/ Multitasking filmmaker
6	Concern: Budget
7	Concern: Communication
8	Concern: Internal issues
9	Concern: Under the influence of film festivals_ Validation
10	Cultural capital being defined by the cultural gatekeeping functions of film festivals
11	Denial of being "festival films"
12	Diversity/Social inclusion
13	Festival influence
14	Festival influence: Distribution
15	Festival influence: Opportunities for the upcoming projects
16	Festival influence: The white gaze
17	Film festival being updated
18	Highbrow audiences
19	Highbrow audiences: Audiences with cultural goodwill
20	Highbrow audiences: Cerebral audiences
21	How to counter_Flexible adaptation
22	How to counter_Producer
23	Inclusion of political or social issues
24	Inclusion of specific cultures or aspects of exoticism
25	Inclusion of surrealism, impressionism or experimental elements

26	Institutionalized production process based on cultural and social capital set by film festivals
27	Intellectual mode of making films
28	Internal values in a more omnivorous environment
29	Learning from film festivals
30	Learning from film festivals: Learning skills and market knowledge
31	Learning from film festivals: Life experiences
32	Learning from film festivals: Watching films
33	Local social context
34	Mention of arthouse films
35	Mention of film festivals
36	Natural/Internal voice
37	Negative effects
38	Negative effects: Affect the creative process
39	Negative effects: Co-production
40	Negative effects: How to counter
41	Negative effects: The need to do networking
42	Negative effects: Time consuming
43	Orientation toward wide audiences
44	Personal growth
45	Practice reflexivity
46	Reaction to film festival cultural gatekeeping functions
47	Reaction to film festival cultural gatekeeping functions: Acknowledge and adapt accordingly
48	Reaction to film festival cultural gatekeeping functions: Acknowledge but do different
49	Reaction to film festival cultural gatekeeping functions: Indifferent
50	Reflexive contemplation
51	Regarding the cultural production process
52	Social capital
53	Social Capital: Connecting with and learning from the fellow filmmakers

54	Social capital: Further opportunities
55	Social capital: Media exposure
56	The cultural classification
57	The desire to subvert the (festival) traditional aesthetics
58	The desire to subvert the white gaze
59	The internalized cultural distinction
60	To be objective
61	To be truthful to the artist him/herself
62	To build a personal universe
63	To challenge the practice
64	To do differently
65	To have the spirit of an independent filmmaker
66	Validation/Peer review
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