

Instructions for use

These are notes from some documents we made during the process of assembling our programme in 2021. They are incomplete and don't record every conversation we had, but give a flavour of some of the things we were thinking about. The document is shifting, thoughts have moved and changed, some have cemented, and some, we hope, have turned into action.

You can view the final programme here:

<https://bfmaf.org/festival/2021/>

Please feel free to comment on the below, add questions, agreements, divergences, challenges to ideas and words, and converse with each other's comments.

After the document closes on the 22nd September it will be reflected on by Peter Taylor Festival Director, Jemma Desai, Head of Programming, and Writer and Programmer Abby Sun in [a live conversation on the 24 September](#) which will be open to all pass holders.

We hope this will help other programmers and artists think through the questions that arise from the work we do:

why do we have festivals?

who are they for?

how can we better work together to think through these questions productively?

We have also included resources sections throughout the document please feel free to add your own to share with others in the comments.

BFMAF 2021 Programming Team

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BFMAF 2021 – an unfolding community

Background & clarifications (added on 2nd June 2021 by Jemma)

Below are the underpinning assumptions that have gone into writing the unfolding document, programming considerations document (see below) and arranging the workshops on [decision making and group dynamics we attended with Resist + Renew](#).

My role is new, and I am new to Berwick but I'm not new to festivals and I have done a lot of thinking around what I think is good / bad / solvable / and unresolvable about them. My values are centred around the public face matching the internal work processes and that there is consistency with this so all decisions we make and all language we use doesn't contradict it. For me the call for entries, the juries, and the language of submissions/ entries somewhat contradicts the external projection of all 'progressive' festivals (this is not personal to Berwick but an issue with all festivals). What was interesting to me about taking this job was not to deliver a festival programme for a few months but to figure out if all that thinking that I'd done could be put into practice to change how we think about programming and festivals and what they can do. I think there is an interesting moment where (some) people (who I think are aligned with some BFMAF audiences & community) are interested in working structures and practices, this could be put to use to meaningfully rethink how we work. These are also themes that are showing up in much of the work that I am watching and responding to as a programmer at the moment.

Some of those things hinge on my personal value system (which we all will bring to this work) and my political position which I would sum up as rooted in principles of collective freedom and mutual aid.

For my role here this means:

- I am keen that we might work together not to replicate other festivals who have problematic work dynamics but reach for something different. I believe in working to support each other to do this. For example, sharing and listening to ways that the group can support decision making for different people with different needs and also sharing and listening to the ways that our different positionalities and places in the team might mean it's harder to speak up or easier to get our way.

- I am more interested in our material impact with artists rather than the reputation of the festival with other programmers / press / 'elites'. Obviously these things are deeply intertwined in a Festival (which is why bad things often happen at fests and get hidden). What is interesting about Berwick is that an "influential festival" that is useful to artists has been built. For this year that I am working on the fest, I am interested in building on that foundation to keep in mind the needs of artists first and foremost and trusting that the Festival has built enough good will to be brave enough to do certain things differently without losing that 'status'.

- that I am interested in centring the people who are most impacted by our decisions (in this case artists whose works we are programming) and considering ideas of 'marginality' (i.e. who is least attended to and why and how we might change that / care about that)

- Given the kind of work we programme (much of it politically rigorous), I would hope that we would be in the practice of interrogating the ways we are replicating imperialism / coloniality in the ways we work, manage and communicate as well as developing a political and cultural literacy when talking about the works we programme.

- To that end. I am interested in how the ways we work internally (through language we use, the attention we give different work, how we give feedback to work and to each other, who is included in decisions) matches with how we present ourselves to the public (to my mind - politically progressive, artist centred, internationalist)

I think it bears clarifying also that the unfolding document is an attempt at consensus decision making.

In consensus, we identify the problem(s) and lay out a proposal to address those issues. Then the group would feed in as you all have been doing, not to correct or copy edit rather to clarify "I am not sure I understand this" or productively disagree / problem solve "I am not sure that addresses the problem", or "I am not sure that would work but what about this" It is cooperative rather than adversarial or corrective.

Once everyone has fed in the proposal would be reworked, and then people would either say "yes that works I agree" or "I don't agree

with everything but I **stand aside** so the group can move forward" or "I **block** this from moving forward as it is against what I believe in" If there are blocks we reconsider and change the proposal.

It may be that in the time we have left, we will not have time to have the conversations we need to have to work in this way. It may be that consensus becomes 'advisory' but I think it's still worth keeping that conversation open.

Consensus decision making is hard for many reasons, one of the main reasons is that as people we have such little experience of working in groups where everyone makes decisions together (school, work etc are all coercive for the most part)

This is exacerbated by the precarity of working on freelance contracts where we might just want to keep everything 'simple' and conflict and question free so we can just get on with 'the work'

It may be that consensus feels exhausting and unproductive for us this year, but it may also be our best chance to hear from everyone concerned, address power dynamics and make decisions that best represent the wisdom of the group and that people within the group are invested in implementing.

Another reason is that we often don't have space for reflection and especially self-reflection to consider why we do or don't want to do certain things and so aren't always in the practice of giving productive and cooperative feedback, or we might become defensive if something is raised that challenges our belief systems or internalised value systems - this happens to me all the time while working in the arts because we are always having to be dissonant and survive in often unfair situations. This is in no way a search for a perfect, pure ethical festival (that would be impossible I think), but an invitation to reflect and understand the structural and relational ways we might uphold things we broadly disagree with, or in a more positive way, the ways that collective critical self reflection might set us all free!

I will be keeping this document open until the beginning of July and welcome any questions and discussions on it, but I will not force them. My main hope though is that those discussions result in really looking at the ways the festival could work even better to address the material needs of artists and that we find ways to work together, listen to each other and have moments of productive conflict that results in a generative thoughtful programme.

Some references for things above:

Solidarity Not Charity

Ep. 46: (Un)learning for Liberation w/ Joshua Virasami; Dylan Rodríguez; Sonya Childress; Asher Gamedze; Thenmozhi Soundararajan; Kelsey Mohamed; Camille Barton; Aditi Jaganathan – STANCE PODCAST

Festival 2021 suggestions

This model is based on the choice to pay artists more for their entries and the ongoing uncertainties of Covid-19. Its curatorial shape is both fixed and unfolding, confirmed for the event but in transition / incomplete or in fragments. It attends to the burn out and hyperstimulation of the last year, the need to come together but also the need for space and rest. It provides for those who want to gorge themselves in the gifts of the darkened cinema and those who might need respite in more light, communal or even solitary spaces.

It attempts to turn the Festival inside out and upside down in some areas. <<Being fully transparent about our finances and the uncertainties of live events & also attempting to disrupt hierarchies (without trying to say we are fixing everything)>>

We plan to have a statement about our values, articulate our concerns about programming ethics and also to highlight that although we strive for utopia, we are not there yet (we are part of an ecosystem of the art/film/festival world) so some concessions might be made, we are all complicit. But this year we commit to everything being questioned and undone, we welcome the productive conflict of disagreement and possible misalignment <<i.e. what does premiere status mean to us and to filmmakers, what is our competition for, why do we have a call for entries???? Why are we in Berwick?>>

Possibility: We could have this statement as a Google Doc or similar that is open for comment

Question: what are the resource / relational considerations of this approach?

Themes of: unfolding, transparency, accountability, care (!) & mutuality, transition, fragments, incompleteness

BEMAF 2021

■ Programming team values and ethics

"Ethics and aesthetics, while not identical, are inextricable. The ethical presenter knows that a good argument passes through the heart" **Laura U Marks**

"the magical and utterly unsubstantiated notion of 'quality' protects a curatorial agenda from critique." **B Ruby Rich**

How might our conversation about films be replicating the "imperialist, capitalist, white supremacist patriarchy" we live in?

What are our justifications for our aesthetic decisions?

What do we think about ideas like 'quality'? 'Good' and 'bad'?

How do we have better conversations about films that draw attention, but don't replicate "imperialist, capitalist, white supremacist patriarchy"?

What is our argument for quality? Against what are we measuring this? How can we make that clear and 'alive'?

Is ours an ethics of programming or an ethics of curating? What do we understand the difference to be?

What is the relationship of trust that Berwick has developed? Who has it developed it with? (see below on community)

What is our criteria for quality? Our criteria for pleasure? Criteria for broader significance?

How are these criterias sympathetic to the form of cinema?

How do we invite agreement, qualification and dissent?

How might we in the words of Laura U Marks avoid imposing “verbal intelligence on art” and move towards “learn[ing] a more inclusive kind of wisdom from art”?

☒ Who are we in community with?

How do we attend to and converse and care for the following people:

- The filmmakers who enter their films
- The filmmakers and artists we have a relationships with
- Our friends who might also make films and art, write and programme?
- Other programmers and artists who might attend and engage with our work? (local, national, international)
- Berwick locals (artists, maltings audiences, young people, people we don't know yet)
- International, National and Local audiences?

☒ Film selection terms / language

The way we talk about films is related to the ways we care for and view the work. What do we think of the following terminology - what can we get rid of / change?

Selection - A film that is selected to show in the festival. This is a confirmation on our end that we will show the film in the festival, as long as the filmmaker/contact agrees.

Option - A film that is considered a possible selection.

Strong Option - A film that is considered a possible selection and is particularly strong in its chances. Films can move from Option/Strong Option to Selection or Not Selected.

Not selected / Rejected - A film that we've decided not to show in the festival. We don't usually use the term 'rejected', but on FC there is a way to mark that the film is 'Not selected for festival' and all these films go into the 'Rejected films' list.

Submission - indicates the film was submitted to us in the open call, often (but not always) by a filmmaker/artist who the team

aren't in active dialogue with. These are all organized in the 'Call for submission entries' list on FC.

Requested Screener - usually indicates that we've asked the filmmaker/artist/booker for a screener of the film, rather than it being sent as a submission.

Curated film - Film for a special program, usually also indicates it's an older film but not always.

■ Film viewing processes and considerations

This year we will be working from lists on Filmchief as much as is possible.

Please use filmchief for:

- ❖ **Requested screeners** through this automated form as much as possible or add into Filmchief yourself
- ❖ Suggestions for Artist/Filmmaker Focus, Berwick New Cinema Competition, Propositions, Previews, Essential Cinema (by selecting the appropriate drop down in the "**program selections**" menu)|||||||\\
- ❖ Updates on the status of contact with filmmakers/ other intel in the "**film selection notes**" + any news about where the film might going (e.g " JD spoke with xxx on xxx they are submitting to Locarno but should have a cut for us by ...x and is also interested in Propositions"
- ❖ For your research and mark it with your name via the "**research source**" This has been sorted so multiple research sources can be added so we can track if a number of people are researching the same artist / have a deepened interest in them.

Viewing films, notes and scores

Every programmer will have a different way of viewing and collecting notes, but it's worth considering some things that might lead us to a somewhat cohesive approach.

There is a real tension between the open call where filmmakers and artists have paid to enter their films, and the personal subjectivities and research interests of us as a programming team. This is balanced alongside the trust we have built with our audiences and filmmaking communities as well as the consideration of our local context in Berwick.

We're a very small festival in terms of programming space—4 days, 2 screens, usually around 10 exhibitions, some events and performances in a usual year and likely smaller this year—so in addition to the above, our individual ability to advocate for work we feel passionately is just as important as our collective ability to listen to each other's opinions and expand on what we might immediately think of as 'good' or 'bad.' We're going to work on that this year, but we won't get it perfectly right as we all bring the outside world, our own experience of working in different places and our own understanding of taste and process with us.

This year we have a third more entries than in previous years, that means that we will be passing on many more films than usual and we will be the arbiters of judging whether a film is "good" enough for us from a third more filmmakers who have paid for us to view their work at a particularly precarious time for artists. We will be working hard and fast, sometimes with a sense of urgency, and that doesn't always result in the most democratic decisions. It's also true that there are lots of films we have to pass on every year and we have a really loyal audience base who respect the programming the festival has worked hard to achieve. We can't programme more work this year, but as a group of programmers with their own individual subjectivities and networks, we could commit to expanding what we collectively think are the 'qualities' of a film that results in inclusion in the programme.

Ratings

We use ratings to track the progress of viewing and what might be in consideration. This is an imperfect, slightly blunt instrument and it is imprecise and subjective how each person rates a film. It will quite likely change as we get closer to deadline (you might become more direct with your ratings towards the end and be more open at the beginning), and this is something to bear in mind especially in the very early and very later stages.

Ultimately, the ratings help us keep track of what are different priorities and options for consideration. So a way to think about the rating is to think of it as above or below 3.5.

Rather than thinking about good and bad, we might invite ourselves, to think about whether it's possible for us to grasp what the filmmaker is trying to do and how much we think it succeeds and then thinking about how much pleasure that gives us as programmers / how urgent it is to the programme.

❖ 5 - I'd be really sad if we lost out on this one

- ❖ 4 - I am very keen for this to be included
- ❖ 3.5 - Someone else should watch this so we can talk about it
- ❖ 3.0 - This film achieved what I understood it was trying to do, and I appreciated it, but we can let it go
- ❖ 2 - I can see what the filmmaker was trying to do but I don't think it succeeded in doing that for me
- ❖ 1 - I don't understand what this film was trying to do

You do have the option to give a film **no score**. There can be reasons for doing that, if you feel that you truly can't make a judgment, or perhaps you feel you have a conflict of interest or bias that should be noted, or if you have some other sort of problem with the film.

In the review box you might describe the film a bit to orient the person viewing next, or you might record what you thought unsuccessful about it. Or you might use it for writing what you loved, recording your first experiences and impassioned feelings ready for when you write your programme notes.

Programming Decisions Week

On the way up on your trains, please can you spend some time looking at the notes from the two workshops by Resists + Renew :Group Dynamics
Decision Making

Have a think about not just what you would like to achieve (programme lock and lots of great films in the programme) but how you would like to achieve it. We'll think about how we want to work and communicate as a first thing when we arrive in Marchmont. I would also like to add these texts to refer to on your way up which are from Decolonising Non Violent Communication. I will bring a copy for our reading desk! [meenadchi - Decolonizing Non-Violent Communication](#)

<https://www.mediateyourlife.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Feelings-vs-faux-feelings.pdf>

Interpretations and Observation Table		
Interpretation	Observation	Body Sensations, Feelings, and Needs
Rukmini ignores me.	Rukmini was looking down at her phone while I was talking to her.	Racing energy in my head, itchiness in my jaw. Feeling irritated. Unmet need for respect.
In this context, the distinction makes me remember that there may be any number of reasons why Rukmini was on her phone that have nothing to do with me. It also allows me to make a clear request (Will you put away your phone while we check in?).		
Roshan doesn't want me around.	I overheard Roshan tell Tyler "You should totally come to my birthday party." When Roshan saw me, they said "You're welcome to come if you want."	Empty tightness in my chest, light blue sensation in my gut. Feeling insecure. Unmet need for clarity and warmth.
In this context, I might not want to make any particular requests. It's helpful for me to understand what triggered my feelings of sadness and discomfort and to allow some time for reflection and self-empathy.		
Gowri values me.	Gowri and I were working together. I had a cup of water that was almost finished. She got up to go to the kitchen, and when she came back, she brought the water pitcher and filled my glass.	Soft warm feeling behind my shoulders trickling down to my gut. Feeling surprised and appreciative. Needs met for care and tenderness.
In this context, I might tell Gowri explicitly how happy I felt when she took this action and how it helped meet some of my needs. Giving people concrete examples of how they help meet our needs is an equally important practice in healthy relationship building.		

Things to note:

"You are a great friend!" and "You are a terrible friend" are both interpretations. We don't want to live a life completely free of interpretations. We need to be able to assess our relationships and environment. We do, however, want to develop the awareness to know when we are making an interpretation versus when we are making an observation.

[The Tyranny of Stuctureless](#)
[Solidarity Not Charity](#)
[The Politics of the Gaze](#)

BFMAF 2021 +++

“Scale, Speed and practicality are always coded arguments for keeping the existing system in place”

“Restoration can be considered the willingness to complete and eliminate the power out of the current story we have of our community and our place in it. This creates an opening to produce a new collective story. A new story based on a restorative community. One of possibility, generosity accountability.”

Peter Block, Community: The Structure of Belonging

Context

This paper was prepared to reflect on and articulate the ongoing concerns that have shaped and will shape the activity of the organisation. It is intended to be a point of departure for conversations about the ways the board might support the organisation moving forward and to identify what extra resources might be necessary to achieve our vision over the next few years.

We have been reading and sharing resources around new ways of working and have been particularly struck by a text by [Peter Block](#) called [“Community, the structure of Belonging”](#) which is a really expansive but also extremely useful book that has helped to articulate many of the ideas that the team have been trying to put into words for the past few years. Much of the framing and language below comes from this text and a summary of the book is attached.

Mission/ vision

BFMAF's vision during the last five years was ***to become the UK's leading festival for artists' moving image and new cinema.***

We would argue that this vision has been achieved. Through this process of growth, we have built an **“associational life”**¹ of participants locally, nationally and internationally, made up of artists, programmers, writers and audiences and other collaborators.

In recent discussions, we have been considering whether BFMAF would exist and have grown if it wasn't solving a 'problem' How is this 'problem' (perhaps articulated by a text like [City Projects' The Politics of Production](#)) a symptom of something bigger?

Our mission for the next five years asks us to consider how with the experience and reputation we have achieved, we can further attend to the fundamental problems in the industry and liberate resources more fairly?

¹ Peter Block [Community: The Structure of Belonging by Peter Block](#)

For the next 5 years our mission / vision will be to:

“address the structural inequalities, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally that create hostile conditions of production and exhibition for artists”

We will attend to this vision by building a culture of care and accountability that centres our associational life (our relationships) in all of our activities and processes

Questions

As an organisation we will travel with these questions in the next 5 years. These questions will be turned into aims and objectives, and will form the basis of our funding applications and activity.

How do we build connections and for what purpose?

How do we build partnerships that are not competitive? How do we create mutualities?

What are the systems we are building community in relation to (ACE, BFI, funders & partners. Other festivals and arts organisations?)

What are the systems we don't want to replicate?

How are we going to work with but also be free to work differently to our peers?

How can we be essential to community transformation rather than just 'important'? How can we move from community being a "means" (an audience) to it being an "ends" (true ownership & engagement) in itself?

Who are the 'citizens' that we need to mobilise to create an alternative future?

How do we gather - internally and externally?

How does the activity of BFMAF need to grow or change in order to address, advocate for and 'solve' the problems we have identified?

How does the 'story' of the organization hinge on deficiencies (under resourcing), interests (our defined values) and entitlement (the dissonances inherent in running an organisation in the arts which values individuals and spectacle over healing and community)?

How can we reframe our context and story to be liberatory?

For Discussion

For discussion as we write our business plan and articulate the growth of the organisation in the next 5 years we would like to consider with the board the following questions:

How do we achieve this mission?

- What clear aims and objectives do you see within the more expansive questioning here?

What structures need to be put in place to allow this to happen while staying true to our values?

- How do we defend our 'smallness' as a site for transformation whilst still securing the resources we need to be abundant?
- How are we changing the conversation about 'small organisations' (i.e. problems, fear, retribution) to one of the organisation we are imagining (possibility, generosity, restoration)?

(we are currently operating far beyond our resources, how do we care for this and not burn out?)

- Rooting social care and accountability in our work. What capacity do we have for this? How can we increase this capacity?

What is the board's commitment and how can we work best together?

- How is the 'transformation' in this strategy a 'conversation' - i.e non linear, iterative, emergent?
- How does this reframing impact the ways we work together as a Board / Organisation?

Resources / Additional reading

The Politics of Production:

Community: The Structure of Belonging by Peter Block Notes on the book

Conversation around Fatos Üstek's resignation from Liverpool Biennial Liverpool Biennial director Fatos Üstek resigns after run-in with board of trustees

References <<please add in comments>

Community: The Structure of Belonging by Peter Block

Online Training Tools

Resources by Seeds for Change

<https://resistrenew.com/podcast-2/>

Governance - the overlooked route to transformation: How can we best organise for change?

More Than Meanwhile – A collaborative project exploring long-term futures for artist-led spaces and workspaces in the North East of England

The default nonprofit board model is archaic and toxic; let's try some new models

Third Horizon Film Festival 2021 Mission Statement

https://onandfor.eu/_uploads_pdf/onandfor_2018_2021.pdf

About the Festival | Filma

ANNUAL REPORT

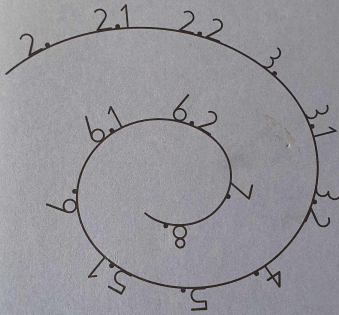
https://www.instagram.com/p/COo8TBM1mA5/?utm_medium=copy_link

PODCAST: Radicals in Conversation - 'Lost in Work' with Amelia Horgan

<https://futureartecosystems.org>

Jerwood In Practice: Introduction – Jerwood Arts

UNLEARNING EXERCISES



Art Organizations
as Sites for Unlearning