

# FESTIVALS & AWARDS

Roger Ebert has attended international film festivals and events for almost half a century, from the Kolkata International Film Festival to the Academy Awards. In addition to his coverage, our contributors report the latest from Cannes, Telluride, Toronto, Sundance and other movie showcases world-wide.

## HOT DOCS 2017: "WHITNEY: CAN I BE ME," "YOU'RE SOAKING IN IT," "A BASTARD CHILD," "SHINGAL, WHERE ARE YOU?"

by Matt Fagerholm

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Today's headlines so often seem to have been spawned from yesterday's cautionary science-fiction. [Steven Spielberg's](#) 2002 hit, "[Minority Report](#)," was much more than an escapist thrill ride. It was a prophetic look into the technology of our modern world, as evidenced by two documentaries screening at Hot Docs this year. Matthias Heeder and Monika Hielscher's superb "Pre-Crime" illustrates how data collection is being used to police people, a method fraught with as many glitches as the Precogs' visions of future perpetrators in Spielberg's film (a fact accentuated by the line, "Code doesn't have a conscience"). It's difficult to say just how dependable these algorithms are in determining the crimes a person will commit, not to mention the products they may purchase. I couldn't watch Scott Harper's "[You're Soaking in It](#)" without instantly being reminded of the scene in "Minority Report" where an advertisement scans [Tom Cruise's](#) retinas and addresses him by name as he walks past it. This sort of corporate invasiveness may have looked far-fetched 15 years ago, but it has now become commonplace online. In a span of 75 relentlessly info-packed minutes, Harper explains how the "freedom" of the internet comes at a major price, enabling advertisers to utilize our e-mail correspondence and social media posts to create a comprehensive picture of our identities as consumers. We are all essentially naked in the eyes of our glowing rectangular counterparts, always at our side, always watching. It was only a month ago that Congress voted to allow Internet Service Providers to sell the sensitive information of consumers to advertisers without their consent, thus increasing the urgency of Harper's film tenfold.

There's a telling moment when Keith Reinhard, chairman emeritus of DDB Worldwide, cites the wisdom of his agency's co-founder, Bill Bernbach, who he dubs "the Picasso of the ad world." Bernbach believed that the most persuasive advertising appealed not to the intellect but to the emotions, and the same could certainly be said of [Donald Trump](#)'s successful presidential campaign. Ethan Zuckerman pops up to apologize for creating the pop-up ad, while Gabriel Cabbage recommends that viewers prevent the intrusions of advertisers with his Adblock app, which has been endorsed by Edward Snowden as a prime method of evading Big Brother's prying gaze. Whereas ad agencies could rely on a majority of the American public viewing their commercials in the early days of television, the rise of the internet has fractured consumers' attention so dramatically that the Mad Men of Madison Avenue have gradually been replaced by the Math Men of Silicon Valley. We see slow-motion footage of analytically minded twentysomethings engaging in what appears to be Live Action Role Playing, I suppose in order to serve as a nerdy contrast to Don Draper. Deserving extra kudos is the elementary school teacher who guides his students in understanding the sinister effect of advertisements masquerading as harmless programs, such as LEGO's "The Build Zone" videos. Perhaps most troubling of all is the film's suggestion that world-shaking events could occur if data gathering is manipulated by rogue forces in order to influence institutions. Considering the Russian Twitter bots and foreign-made fake news that allegedly played a crucial role in electing Trump, this theory may have already come true.

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