

Reframing Film Festivals: Politics, Histories and Agencies

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Naming to Understand: Film Festival Studies and its Expanding Lexicon

Film festivals brand themselves as yearly rituals that set out to glorify the seventh art along with its makers. Blended in a rhetoric of universalist humanism, such a self-branding discourse has often concealed the actual variety and outreach of their agencies. Throughout their global and individual histories festivals have, in fact, done more than celebrating films, and have had significant impact in film culture as well as beyond, tapping into the domains of international diplomacy (Pisu 2013, Kötzing et al. 2017), cultural exchange (Razlogova 2020, Gelardi 2022) and local development policies (Fehrenbach 2020, Rasmi 2022), for example. It is because of their crucial role within the cultural histories of cinema that festivals have attracted critical attention since their outset, observed and theorized from different standpoints as sites of intersection, negotiation, circulation and sociability. In this vein, one can consider some of the early commentaries on these institutions, such as André Bazin's short essay (1955), in which he observed and questioned the sacred rules underpinning Cannes' religious "order" and its prestige, or the (little known) speeches by Tommaso Chiarini and Mino Argentieri (Anonymous 1966), who engaged with the controversial proliferation of festivals in Italy and Europe in the 1960s and argued for the "public value" of festivals' programming and discoveries.¹ Attention on festivals has not waned ever since and, throughout the last twenty years, it has become central to scholarly discussions on film and of its social, cultural, political and economic contours, including the historical developments of film aesthetics (Nichols 1994, Harbord 2002: 59-75, Bordwell 2008: 158-169), the understanding of national and world cinemas (Elsaesser 2005, Ostrowska 2010, Talbott 2015) and the study of cinema's *Histoire Croissée* and its transnational dynamics (Mazdon 2006, Hagener 2014, Salazkina 2020).

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1. The reference here is to Chiaretti's "I festivali come possibilità di rivelazione e di spinta ai corsi più vitali del cinema" (Festivals as opportunities of revelation and as driving forces of cinema's most vital flows) and Argentieri's "I festivali nell'ambito dell'organizzazione della cultura cinematografica" (Festivals within the organization of film culture). Both speeches were presented in 1965 (6-7 December) at the "Festivali cinematografici in Italia: utili o troppi?" (Film festivals in Italy: valuable or too many?) conference (Gambetti 1981), which was held in Bologna and organized by the Porretta Terme Mostra internazionale del cinema libero.

Film festival studies, when observed as an ongoing epistemic trend running both in and outside film scholarship, have been especially preoccupied with forging an *ad hoc* lexicon for themselves. Distinctively, this lexicon has drawn inspiration from a variety of disciplinary conceptualizations which range from sociology to anthropology, from economics to evolutionary biology. Such a terminological endeavor—especially for its multidisciplinary essence—is symptomatic of the difficulties researchers face in coming to grips with film festivals and their various forms of agency in a systemic fashion, particularly when moving from the “descriptive” level to the “analytic” (de Valck 2007: 37). Hence, instead of relying on a single theoretical framework—be that Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory (Elsaesser 2005, de Valck 2007) or the modern Open System Theory (Fischer 2013)—researchers have collected and patched together different conceptual tools in the form of terms or metaphors, harnessed for the purpose of discerning, describing, and classifying within the film festival phenomenon and its spatial and temporal complexities. Indeed, in the vocabulary of festival studies we find terms addressing the following phenomena: the spatial configurations of festivals, such as “network”, “circuits”, “sub-circuits” or “archipelago”,² the self-sustaining discourses and practices used by festivals to preserve their system, that is Niklas Luhman’s “auto-poiesis” (1986); the adaptive procedures festivals are equipped with to cope with internal and external factors of transformation, namely, “self-organization” (Elsaesser 2005: 83), and; the term “contingency”, which is used to describe the particular modes in which festivals historically *happen* (Harbord 2016), and that of “ritual”, which refers instead to the sacred-like eventuality of film festivals, and to their capacity to bestow momentum and cultural prestige to films (Mezias et al. 2008). Whilst the definition and ordaining of these conceptual grids remain an open and yet fundamental quest for film festival scholarship, the expansion of its lexicon is also symptomatic of another feature of this research field, that is, its enduring and thriving vitality of which this special issue bears significant evidence.

We take pride in presenting the essays included in this special issue, which is primarily intended to contribute to film festival studies by providing a stock of refreshing terms and concepts, as well as by shedding light on the history and agency of several festivals. In terms of its genesis, this special issue mainly draws from academic research presented at the Reframing Film Festivals (RFF) conference (Venice, February 2020),³ as well as from studies dedicated to more recent developments within the film festival world. This special issue is, in fact, the second output from the Reframing Film Festivals project⁴, aimed at steering scholarly attention and support toward research on film festivals within Italian academia and film culture. As for *Cinergie. Il cinema e le altre Arti*, it is a particularly well-suited platform for this issue, having accommodated, during the last ten years, several special issues and a variety of articles which have explored the position of festivals within cinephilia, film industry and circulation and, thus, represents an important site of discussion and study for film festival studies in Italy. Across the essays in this issue, although fragmented in different localities and historical formations, we have found a set of important term-concepts that we will move on to elucidate in the following sections. Particularly useful for honing the research methods of film festival scholarship and reframing certain topics or case studies from original viewpoints, these term-concepts are applied to several case studies and topics and, as such, offer important historical, theoretical and methodological insights.

Ideologies and Ideas

Opening this special issue, Rachel Johnson provides a better method for dissecting the public utterance of film festivals and unraveling their capacity to define and construct the status of films. By hinging on the specific case of *Fire at Sea* (*Fuocoammare*, Gianfranco Rosi, 2016) and its presentation and accolade at the Berlinale, Johnson’s essay stands out as a highly stimulating one for its treatise of “ideology” through a substantiated reading of Neo-Lacanian theories. Hence, bringing in a set of voices that have remained outside film festival

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2. For an extensive review of the metaphors used to describe the global-local configurations of film festivals and their modes of inter-relating, see: Loist, Skadi (2016). “The Film Festival Circuit: Networks, Hierarchies and Circulation.” In *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, edited by Marijke de Valck, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist, 49–64. London, New York: Routledge.
 3. For more information, see <https://www.unive.it/data/agenda/1/36818> (Last accessed: 12-12-2022).
 4. The first publication stemming from the RFF was the special issue dedicated to Nontheatrical Film Festivals, which was published in *Studies in European Cinema* in September 2022. For more information, see: Dalla Gassa, Marco, Andrea Gelardi, Angela Bianca Saponari and Federico Zecca (2022). “A Special Issue on Nontheatrical Film Festivals.” In *Studies in European Cinema* 19 (3).

scholarship thus far,⁵ Johnson draws from the work of contemporary theorists like Slavoj Žižek and Samo Tomšič to construct an original three-fold methodology that serves to unpack and address issues of agency and power at film festivals, putting in play three other term-concepts: “apparatus”, “paratexts” and “film text”. Whilst the essay is effective in debunking the “humanitarian” discourse used by the Berlinale for self-branding purposes and in demonstrating its impact on the reception of *Fire at Sea*, it also makes room for further experimentation of this methodology on different festivals and cases (e.g., filmmakers’ careers, films or national waves), given that “ideologies” are fundamental and yet unspoken components of festivals’ programming practices (Jordanova, in Brown 2009: 216–217) and, thus, of the emergence of certain film canons. Shifting from “ideologies” to the “idea” of the festival itself, Christel Taillibert and John Wäfler contribute to the history of film festivals by proposing a genealogy of the concept of “film festival”, taking into account various sources like posters, screening programmes, and newspaper articles from the first three decades of the 1900s, focusing mainly on Francophone and German-speaking areas. By using Foucauldian discourse analysis to interpret multifarious social forces (e.g., nascent cinephilia, educational filmmakers, film critics, film producers) involved in the emergence of this concept, Taillibert and Wäfler provide a detailed description of a moment of *Herkunft* in film festival history, namely, the period in which several conflicting forces negotiated and molded the distinctive functions and features of a film festival, which would later come to place in 1932, at the first edition of the Venice Film Festival. Through this meticulous reconstruction, the authors point out how the “idea” of the film festival did not make a sudden appearance in the Laguna nor was it a clever invention, but the outcome of a lengthy transformation rooted in the experiences of European music festivals and performances, local fairs, club meetings and commemorations.

Foundations

Much like the “idea” of festivals, the “foundations” of the Locarno Film Festival—among the oldest festivals—were laid into a ground of competing interests and ideological tensions, as Cyril Cordoba demonstrates in his essay dedicated to the creation of the Swiss festival in 1946 and to its developments up until 1976. In this piece of historical research, Cordoba problematizes the narrative of Locarno as an event created for “purely artistic motivations”, providing a detailed account of the local political forces, economic factors, ideological tensions and cultural ambitions at play in the early history of this festival, showing how they contributed to—or hampered—the festival’s climbing of the FIAPF’s (International Federation of Film Producers) ranking up to the A-tier. As Cordoba illustrates, the Locarno Film Festival not only stands out for its grassroots origins, but also its quest for autonomy and self-organization differed from that of other festivals, as it was aimed at gaining the authorities’ support and legitimization to emancipate itself from the pressures of national tourist and film industries. In particular, by retracing the hinge role played by the festival between the two sides of the Iron Curtain in the tensest years of the Cold War, Cordoba bears significant evidence of how productive the encounter between the methods of contemporary historical research and film festival studies can be. The theme of “foundations” is reversed in the essay by Konstantinos Tzouflas. Focusing on the Locarno Film Festival along with the Fribourg Film Festival and several other Swiss institutions, the author describes the ways these institutions bankroll, bestow prestige and visibility and, thus, contribute to lay the “foundations” of new cinematic waves from countries in crisis. Whilst the relationship between European film institutions and art cinema from so-called developing countries, namely, world cinema, has been covered on many levels (Falicov 2010, 2016, Ostrowska 2010, Shaw 2014, Talbott 2015), here Tzouflas illustrates how the Swiss festivals in collaboration with several national institutions have both contributed to the international success of the New Argentinian Cinema and New Greek Wave and helped to develop the local film industries in Argentina and Greece.

5. In fact, to tackle issues such as those of cultural hierarchies and power relations within the festival circuit, or to problematize the celebratory discourses of film festivals vis-à-vis canon making processes, film festival scholars have conventionally borrowed Bourdieusian sociological term-concepts like “capital”, “distinction”, “field” and “habitus”. For a comprehensive discussion of Bourdieu’s theories in film festival studies, see de Valck, Marjike (2014). “Film Festivals, Bourdieu, and the Economization of Culture.” *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 32 (1): 74–89; and de Valck, Marjike (2016). “Fostering Art Adding Value, Cultivating Taste: Film Festivals as Sites of Cultural Legitimization.” In *Film Festivals: History, Theory, Method, Practice*, edited by Marjike de Valck, Brendan Kredell, and Skadi Loist, 110–116. London, New York: Routledge.

Microhistories

As evidenced in Cordoba's essay, the historiographical reconstruction of film festivals, taken as single and closely-knit units embedded within multiple forms of relation, can be highly informative for its capacity to zero in on the interactions between different local social forces, while also shedding light on wider dynamics that occur at national and international levels. In a similar vein, Dunja Jelenkovic offers an excellent example of "microhistory" in her essay, tackling the Trieste Crisis and its reverberations in the present day by focusing on the discovery and current rediscovery of several films at European film festivals. Jelenkovic examines the early reception of a set of Italian and Yugoslavian feature and documentary films by focusing on the different forms of agency (e.g. selection and rejection, awarding, establishment) of the Venice, Cannes, Karlovy Vary and Pula festivals. Through a careful examination of film texts and paratexts, the author first charts the circulation of conflicting cinematic narratives through the festival circuit between the mid-1940s and mid-1950s, illustrating their ideological positioning and role within both Italian and Yugoslavian territorial claims over the Northern Adriatic region. This historical reconstruction is then coupled with an observation of the second circulation of these feature films and documentaries in the last two decades, moving the focus on festivals' retrospective strands and archival film festivals like Il Cinema Ritrovato and the Festival of Nitrate Film in Belgrade. Finally, by observing the rediscovery of these texts and their revamping in cinephilic and public memories, Jelenkovic unravels the important connection between festivals' "microhistories" and the making and re-making of cultural memories, highlighting the importance of considering these institutions, their agency and shifting ideologies within political, social and cultural historical accounts.

Intentions

Laura Cesaro directs attention to more recent developments occurring within Italian and international film circuits, charting the spread and development of ecological sensibilities across the European film festival circuit, and classifying the different forms of festivals' engagement with the environmental cause. After providing a much-needed historical mapping of festivals that have prioritized the issue of ecological sustainability within their identity and programming activities, the author introduces several distinctions between these festivals based on their distinctive practices and relations with filmmakers, NGOs and audiences. In doing so, Cesaro highlights how specific "intentions", emerged and gaining momentum within certain historical formations and sociopolitical debates, take shape and modify the conventional functions of festivals to meet the transformative demands of the public sphere. Concluding this special issue, Jean-Michel Frodon offers a passionate reading of the agency of film critics and festivals, describing how their "intentions" of resisting to and thus defying the commercial interests of the film industry brought about fundamental transformations in international film cultures, histories and canons. While critically acknowledging that film criticism and festivals have historically been dominated by a Eurocentric and white-masculine gaze, Frodon thoroughly explains how these two agents have been open to a ceaseless re-interrogation and can still play a crucial role in the development of international film cultures, protecting them from the control of the market and of ideologies.

Locating film festivals within a set of histories, practices, economic and political relations, and ideological tensions, this collection of essays will contribute an array of theoretical and methodological tools to film festival scholarship, and potentially provide course material for different disciplines, ranging from film studies to contemporary history, from destination management studies to post-structuralist philosophy. Finally, we take this chance to thank the authors, the peer-reviewers and the Cinergie editorial team for their passion, efforts and patience which have contributed to make the publication of this special issue possible.

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Film Festivals and Ideology Critique: A Method

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Abstract

Film festivals play an important role in the construction and circulation of not only individual films but entire taxonomies of cinema, from their “discovery of new waves” (Elsaesser 2005: 99) to their production of “hegemonic ...canons” (Vallejo, 2020: 158). The effects of this taxonomical power are felt across filmmaking, criticism, and scholarship, foregrounded in renewed calls to decolonize film festivals and film culture more broadly (Dovey and Sendra 2022[forthcoming], Shambu 2019). This article mobilizes and adapts “New Lacanian” theories of ideology critique to propose a methodology for studying the ways in which film festivals construct meaning for films and, cumulatively, entire canons. Outlining concepts such as the festival apparatus, the festival paratext, and the cinematic Real, I trace the coordinates of a three-tier critical procedure that brings into dialogue festivals’ operational and material contexts, their representation of themselves and their films, and the unruly, aesthetic qualities of the films that festivals exhibit. I demonstrate the application of this approach to a recent cause célèbre of Italian migration cinema, *Fire at Sea*, its awarding and representation at the 2016 edition of the Berlin International Film Festival instantiating the enduring legacy of Neorealism and a “brutal humanist” stance directed towards refugees in the new millennium (Schoonover 2012). Moving between theoretical discussions and the application of this method of ideology critique, I demonstrate how we might interrogate structures of meaning implicit within film festivals’ rhetorical operation, offering a ground from which to better understand film festivals and, if desired, advocate for change.

Keywords: Film Festivals; Ideology; Migration; Film Circulation; Film Canons.

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Introduction

Film festivals play an important role in the construction and circulation of not only individual films but entire taxonomies of cinema, from the “discovery of new waves” (Elsaesser 2005: 99) to the production of “hegemonic ...canons” (Vallejo 2020: 158). Scholarship in the field is as varied as the modes through which festivals play this role, ranging from ethnographies, political economies and, latterly, data-driven inquiries into the festival ‘network’ (Lee 2016, Vallejo 2017, Ahn 2011, Cheung 2016, Loist, 2020). The question of power is rarely far from these investigations. Film festivals exercise and endow power, for example through their conferment of prestige onto certain films in rituals of selection and prize-giving. They are also embedded in networks of power, geopolitical and economic, which condition their operation and programming (de Valck 2007, Ahn 2011, Dovey 2015, Winton 2020). Finally, taken as a network, film festivals are subject to uneven power relations, for example the hierarchies that exist between so-called “A-list” film festivals in the global North and global Southern and “small” festivals (Dovey, McNamara & Olivieri 2013; Loist 2016; Paz Peirano 2020). The effects of this power are felt across filmmaking, film criticism, and film scholarship, recently foregrounded in renewed calls to decolonize film festivals and film culture more broadly (Dovey and Sendra 2022[forthcoming], Shambu 2019).

This article contributes a methodology for studying the intersections of these different kinds of power at film festivals - the relationship between economic and geopolitical factors, shared norms or values, and film festivals’ representation of both films and themselves. My emphasis in this article is on representation: the ways in which film festivals’ production of texts and other pronouncements on films are at once conditioned by the factors I have just mentioned, and, in turn, condition the construction of ideas about cinema, as well as aesthetic value and political expression. As I discuss at length below, this lattice of material (e.g. economic) and discursive (i.e. representational) elements can be helpfully conceptualised as ideology, both from a theoretical standpoint and in dialogue with writing on film festivals’ *modus operandi*. Building on this conceptualisation, I propose a methodology of ideology critique adapted to, and created through, the study of film festivals.

Due to my focus on representation, the methodology I propose adapts theories of ideology critique with roots in poststructural analysis: in particular, contemporary reformulations of the psychoanalytical theories of Jacques Lacan. Outlining concepts such as the festival apparatus, the festival paratext, and the cinematic Real, I trace the coordinates of a three-tier critical procedure that brings into dialogue festivals’ operational and material contexts, their representation of themselves and their films, and the unruly, aesthetic qualities of the films that festivals exhibit. I use this method to analyse film festivals’ production of values around cinema – that is, their creation of canons, counter-canons and taxonomies of cinema, as well as their circulation of ideas about aesthetics and politics. Through ideology critique, the structures of meaning implicit within notions such as “quality,” fundamental to film festivals’ rhetorical operation, can be rendered explicit and thus interrogated, creating a ground from which we might better understand film festivals and, if we so wish, advocate for change.

1 Re-defining Ideology Critique

In an early international workshop for film festival studies, scholars highlighted research into these institutions’ ideological functioning as a crucial area for inquiry. Jordanova (in Brown 2009: 217) outlined a number of aspects of film festivals yet to be studied, and among these was the way in which “the choice of films at a festival reflects a certain ideological standpoint, be that entirely coherent or otherwise.” Another intersecting line of analysis was the situation of “film festivals as part of an enormous global culture industry” (Brown 2009: 217). Indeed, one of the most discussed points at this workshop appeared to be film festivals’ self-mythologisation.¹ Scholars such as Maty Ba and Slocum (in Brown 2009: 218-19) discussed this in relation to ideology and economics: “Film festivals always (seek to) represent something or someone (consciously or not, they reflect an ideology), and they always serve political (and economic) interests.”

1. A term that builds on Barthes’ theory of myth. Theories of ideology and myth have been taken as complementary by Barthes himself, and scholars who interpret and apply his theory (Barthes 2012[1957]; Lule 1995; Walton 2012).

As my brief introduction suggests, scholars have pursued fruitful inquiries into several of these aspects of film festivals, from analyses of programming practices to their participation in the global culture industry. Yet, since its brief utterance at the 2009 workshop, the term “ideology” and theories of it have remained relatively absent from such scholarship. Given the diversity of approaches and commitment to self-reflection that characterises the field (Loist 2020: 42), the latency of a methodology of ideology critique merits consideration. This method has remained conspicuously absent from qualitative studies of the festival phenomenon, and is often considered antithetical to the quantitative methods becoming more prevalent in film festival studies. The latter charge is likely grounded in twentieth-century Marxist anti-empiricist polemics, including in film studies (Horton 1972, Commoli & Narboni 2015[1971]), and later work on ideology and media (Taylor 2010). Yet, these theorists’ challenges towards empiricism have inadvertently given rise to the view that studies of ideology may be subject to imprecision, incapable of the kind of systematic rigour to which academic inquiry, quantitative or qualitative, is bound.

This view is epitomised in Carroll’s (1998: 360) charge that

ideology critique is not usually an investigation into the conditions of possibility of the objects of study [...] It is criticism, most frequently negative criticism - and not critique, properly so called.

Writing from a cognitivist and “post-theoretical” position, expressed in his and Bordwell’s polemical *Post-Theory* (1996), Carroll represents a common challenge to scholars seeking to study ideology and film. Carroll was writing of what he perceived as a trend in cultural studies to denigrate all forms of mass art as *a priori* politically and morally regressive – a position which would determine an investigation’s conclusions in advance. Following this challenge, Carroll suggests two features of ideology critique “properly so called”: it should investigate the “conditions of possibility” of its objects, and should not entail negative criticism for negative criticism’s sake.

That an investigation, conducted in good faith, should not conflate critique and criticism is, I hope, relatively uncontentious. Studies of certain phenomena may proceed from critique to criticism if one finds that criticism is necessary, as has been the case in the research into Eurocentric film cultures cited above. Yet, ideology critique has the capacity also to highlight the ‘wisdom and hope’ of communities or certain practices (Tuck 2009: 416), and thus to complement the orientation that characterises an emerging, important body of scholarship on “small,” and/or global Southern film festivals (Paz Peirano 2020, Sendra 2020, Olivieri 2011). To understand this expanded capacity of critique, one that does not necessitate denigration of its objects, it is vital to interrogate Carroll’s definition of “conditions of possibility.”

That which constitutes the conditions of possibility of an object is open to contention, and different approaches emphasise different factors. For Carroll (1998: 360), the “structure of economic arrangements” is the determining condition for the development (and ideology) of film. However, political-economic structures are not the only conditions of possibility for cultural objects, or even social formations.² Laclau’s (2014: 80) *Rhetorical Foundations of Society* argues that the conditions of possibility of any political formation are rhetorical: “each political institution, each category of political analysis, shows itself today as the locus of undecidable language games.” I will come to the nature of these “language games”, and their implications for an ideology critique of film festivals later. For now, it is worth noting that, while Laclau’s account of ideology favours the rhetorical over the economic, scholars such as Tomšič (2015: 61-62) have called for research to reinvigorate a “discursive materialist” approach founded on an understanding of the reciprocity of both economic and discursive structures.

While the economic conditions of possibility of formations, including film festivals, are relatively well-theorised, the notion of discursive conditions of possibility requires further elaboration. To do this, we must delve into poststructuralist and psychoanalytical theories that have come to underpin conceptions of discourse and ideology. Such theories range from Barthes, on whose “mythologisation” Marty Ba and Slocum draw, to the “*Screen* theorists” such as Commoli (as well as Mulvey, Metz, and Baudry) at whom Carroll implicitly takes aim. Yet today we find an important update: the recuperation of theories of ideology critique by “New Lacanian” scholars working since the 1990s: Žižek, Copjec, McGowan, Kunkle, Vighi and others.

2. For a discussion of the complexities of economic determination “in the last instance,” particularly in relation to culture, see Stuart Hall (2018[1977]).

This recuperation seeks to address the limitations of 1970s poststructuralist philosophy and film theory by re-articulating and re-theorising ideology, often through a re-interpretation of the works of Jacques Lacan.

In contrast with other theories of discourse (such as Michel Foucault's) and ideology (such as the *Screen* theorists'), recent Lacanian theory is organised around the concept of the "Real," the point of ideology's inherent, and constitutive, failure (Copjec 1994: 39-40). This requires discourse and ideology to take on different meanings, ones which avoid totalising conceptions of either. In Lacanian theory, discourse constitutes the "network of signifiers" explicitly used to describe phenomena (Lacan 2004[1964]: 43). These can range from the written word to moving images, to speech, gestures and so on. If the definition of discourse were to stop here, it would express the idea that our relationship to reality is constructed through a network of explicit meanings with straightforwardly observable effects (Vighi and Feldner 2007: 153). In this framework, ideology would function through our being "duped by" these explicit, and false, representations of reality (McGowan 2007: 3).

In contrast, recent Lacanian theories argue that the ideological procedure does not lie in the "false" representation of reality. Rather, all representation is inherently illusory, since the best it can do is stand in for its object, providing terms that offer communicative efficacy but are not the object itself. The implication of this understanding of representation is that all discourse is subject to the Real, the "inherent failure of symbolization," an inherent senselessness (Žižek 1997: 217). Turning our attention back to film festivals, we might recall scholars such as Rich (2003), Elsaesser (2005: 99) and Andrews (2010: 9) describing "the magical and utterly unsubstantiated notion of quality," the processes of "Eucharistic transubstantiation ... impervious to rational criteria," or even "bogus religiosity" that underpin these events. While Rich's and others' descriptions of festivals could sound harsh, through Lacanian theories of ideology it becomes clear that this kind of mystical irrationality – in other words, senselessness – is a feature of discourse, and festival discourse, *as such*.

Rather than the production of discourses that fail to represent their objects (that is, all discourses), the ideological procedure is distinguished by the concealment of the Real, the ways in which "ideology takes its own failure into account in advance" (Žižek 1989: 142). This concealment is effected through compensatory structures, collectively designated "fantasy," that constitute the "unwritten rules that effectively regulate our speech and acts" (Žižek 2000: 657). Such rules comprise a matrix of hidden associations that fill terms with meaning, and thus make a discourse appear sensible within a given context. For example, in the context of contemporary cinephilia, the otherwise senseless description of a director as an "auteur" is supported by implicit rules governing the meaning of that term – associations with artistic autonomy (Elsaesser 2016), individual genius (Baumann 2007) and even white masculinity (Shambu 2019, Johnson 2019). As this example suggests, although such associations may initially be implicit, they can be uncovered by certain modes of analysis. The one I offer below is, I believe, a relatively holistic method that apprehends both the material and discursive contexts of a festival's representations of films as well as their particular expression in a given text (the festival paratext). It then turns back towards the failure that generates these compensatory associations in the first place, opening a space for further understanding and, if desired, radical change.

2 Apparatus

The first stage of the method focuses primarily on the material side of the discursive-material intersection posited by Tomšič and other scholars of ideology (Žižek 2006). It investigates the organizational features of festivals, that which I term the festival apparatus. I follow Wong's (2011) use of the term "apparatus" to refer to the institutional structures and practices that constitute a film festival, including their: histories; models of funding; processes of selection; organisation of different programme sections; rituals of prize giving; cultivation of media attention; as well as the roles Festival Directors and other stakeholders play and the geopolitics of their location. This conception of these structural features of film festivals also profits from the association with poststructuralist definitions of the apparatus as a configuration of institutions and practices in and through which ideology functions (Althusser 2014 [1971]).³

3. "An ideology always exists in an apparatus and in the practice or practices of that apparatus. This existence is material" (Althusser 2014[1971]: 184). For updates to apparatus theory, see Agamben (2014) and Laclau (2014).

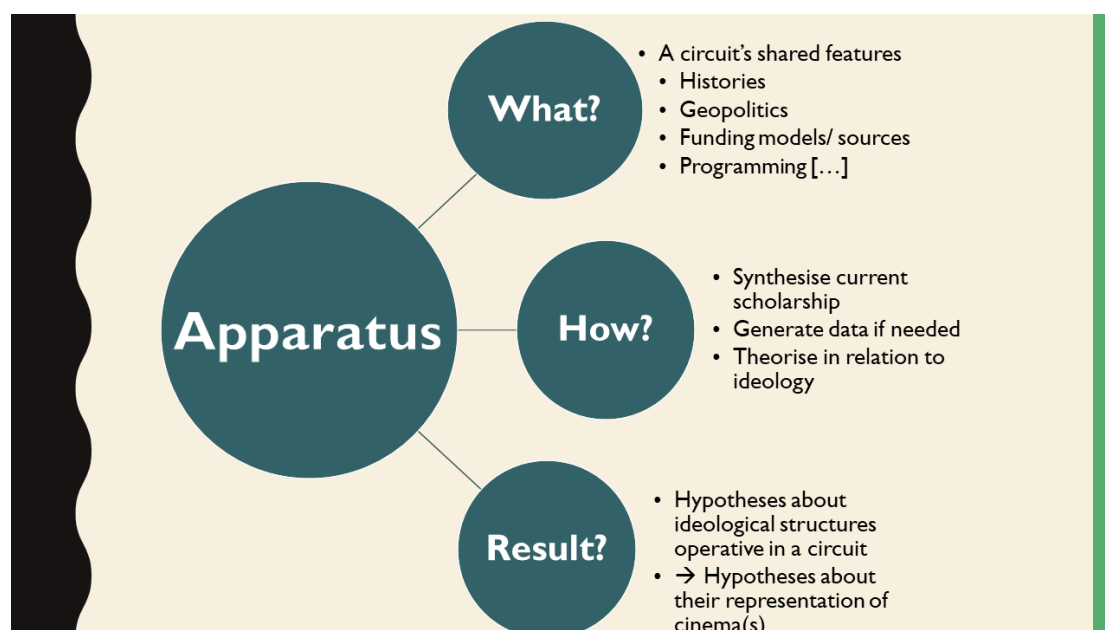


Fig. 1. First stage: analysing the film festival apparatus.

Analysing even one festival's apparatus is an ambitious task that can easily fill an entire study. Therefore, this stage of the method, as one part of a multi-faceted analysis of ideology, synthesises insights from existing scholarship, theorising them through the framework of ideology, to offer an account of broad institutional logics that characterise certain festival types or circuits.⁴ In focusing on shared logics and models, the analysis begins to theorise festivals at the structural level, producing a ground from which to analyse particular iterations such as a specific festival or singular edition. It traces how structural features might condition a festival's functioning or be transformed in a given context. Through the example of the 2016 edition of the Berlinale, I show how European "A" festivals' shared history and institutional logics takes a particular form in the context of the so-called "refugee crisis": a commitment to liberal humanism resonating and evolving from the 1946 edition of Cannes to the new millennium. Analysing the apparatus in this way produces specific research questions that can be tested and answered in subsequent stages of the method which focus on the discursive (and Real) aspects of a festival, above all its textual construction of films through paratexts.

We find a basis for this conception of the apparatus in studies of film festivals as "field configuring events" (Rüling 2009, Lampel and Meyer 2008, Strandgaard Pederson and Mazza 2011, Meziar et al 2011). These studies suggest that an important condition for film festivals' representations of films or construction of film canons is the very "institutional logics" by which they operate (Rüling 2009: 51). Strandgaard Pederson and Mazza (2011) trace the formation of these logics by analysing the development of the international film festival model: the institutionalization of practices and values first set out by "early adopter" international festivals, most of which today constitute the European "A-list" (Strandgaard Pederson & Mazza 2011: 145).⁵ Expanding Elsaesser's (2005: 91) claim that Cannes "set the template for film festivals the world over," Strandgaard Pederson and Mazza (2011: 159) conclude that early adopter festivals have "managed to define the field and invent tradition," to "create and institutionalize a model for international film festivals that appears to have become an 'unchallenged given.'" The notion of an unchallenged given resounds with conceptions of ideology

4. By "circuit" I refer to Iordanova's (2009: 30-32) definition of a circuit as grouping of festivals with shared agendas, target audiences, and pools of films. Elsewhere, I consider also geographical location, investigating the European "A" circuit (Author 2019).

5. The festivals Strandgaard Pederson and Mazza (2011) list are: Venice, Moscow, Cannes, Karlovy Vary, Locarno and Berlin. They also discuss Indian, Argentina and Australian festivals, but situate these in relation to the forerunners just mentioned. More detailed research into the extent to which festivals such as the international Film Festival of India straightforwardly adopted the model set out by Venice and others would illuminate or perhaps challenge the scholars' argument, particularly taking into consideration IFFI's founding in 1952, early in the proliferation of film festivals and shortly after India's formal decolonization in 1949.

as a system of common-sense propositions or, as defined above, “implicit rules”. These are concepts that have been afforded such salience that they remain broadly unchallenged, or even that challenging them appears inconceivable (Žižek 2004). In the case of international film festivals, this includes features instituted by early adopters: taking place in a fixed, usually tourist-friendly, metropolitan location; reliance on a mix of public (state) and private (commercial) stakeholders; the presence of awards and, in some cases, film markets; and the time-limited hyper-spectacularisation that Janet Harbord (2009) defines as the festival “time-event.”⁶

These constitute organizational features of international film festivals, while other festival types may operate according to other models, other “unchallenged givens” established by early adopters within their respective fields. An exploration of the models that certain kinds of festivals adopt constitutes the first level of inquiry into film festivals and ideology which, as I show later, offers a grounding for the analysis of the norms of representation that festivals might adopt. Indeed, we can begin to observe the effects of these features through an analysis that moves between the levels of festival type and individual festivals, considering the interplay of common organizational features and the particular historical or geopolitical conditions of a festival, or even a specific edition. Here, and in subsequent sections, I will illustrate this process by sharing a shortened version of an analysis that I have undertaken elsewhere (Author 2019, 2020): the programming and awarding of migration docu-fiction *Fire at Sea* (*Fuocoammare*, 2016) at the 2016 edition of the Berlinale.

The Berlinale is one of the “early adopters” and therefore shares the features of international film festivals outlined above. Its position as not only a European, but a specifically Western European film festival suggests additional features salient to our analysis. As a European A festival, the Berlinale occupies an important place in the shared history of economic reconstruction and soft power through film culture on the continent (Harbord 2002: 64). This is inextricable from the geopolitical contexts of North American investment influence, and European colonialism. For example, Cannes, although rhetorically claiming to act as a bastion against both Fascism and “America’s burgeoning cultural imperialism,” was primarily funded by American organisations (Rhyne 2009: 11). Likewise, the Berlinale was initiated by American film officer Oscar Martay, and conceived as “an American instrument in the Cold War” (de Valck 2007: 52). As Fehrenbach (1995: 234-6) argues, the festival was founded as “a celebration of Western values” and “proof of Western economic superiority and cultural dynamism.” In the post-war period, several European film festivals were created and supported by American organisations and, as such, were part of geopolitical manoeuvring undertaken with the aim of disseminating (North)Western values across the continent.

Such values included in a North-Western, humanist liberalism that Schoonover (2012: 10) argues first found its place in film culture at the 1946 edition of Cannes, in particular the festival’s celebration of anti-Nazi, neorealist film *Rome Open City* (*Roma città aperta*, 1946). Indeed, this edition of Cannes is often seen as a foundational moment for the European A circuit, expressive of the ethical orientation of the time (de Valck 2007: 49). Schoonover (2012: 10) elucidates this orientation, describing Bazin’s accounts of the film’s exhibition as “overt attempts to aestheticize a mid-century politics of liberal humanism, to find humanism’s aesthetic equivalent in filmic terms.” These politics of liberal humanism extend beyond the postwar period, setting the “template for the later large-scale humanitarian aid and structures of neo-colonialism” (Schoonover 2012: xxiv). This “brutal humanism” places the North-Western subject at the centre, in a position to offer aid or charity to beneficiaries who are often construed as suffering “others” (Schoonover, 2012: xiv).

This expansion of European agency through a humanist film culture suggests the intersection between post-war American patrimony and European colonialism. As Dovey (2015: 37) argues:

All of the early ‘A-list’ European film festivals [...] were created on a European continent that was not only at war with itself, but that felt the need (partly as a result of these wars, and the sense of threat the US posed) to assert its superiority over other parts of the world, particularly its colonies in ‘darkest’ Africa.

6. With the exception of hyper-spectacularisation, all of these features are discussed in Strandgaard Pederson and Mazza (2011). On Cannes setting a template for festivals and/as tourist destinations, see also Liz Mazdon (2007: 6); on a common third-sector funding model, see Rhyne (2009); on film markets and the ‘Cannes-Venice duopoly’, see Pisu (2018). These features are not necessarily exclusive to international film festivals: their unchallenged presence in other festival types testifies to the influence of the international film festival model across the network. See Akkadia Ford’s (2014) discussion of assumptions about film festival (and queer) culture taking place in metropolitan spaces – assumptions they challenge with the Queer Fruits Film Festival.

Here, Dovey synthesises three key dynamics of the European A festival model in which the Berlinale operates: postwar crisis and reconstruction, North American patrimony [itself experienced as a kind of “colonization” (Dovey 2015: 37)] and the colonialist assertion of agency over an “other” (in this case, Africa). Reading Dovey and Schoonover together offers a ground from which to consider European A festivals’ canonization of a certain kind of “ethical” cinema, epitomised by Italian neorealism, and rooted in structures of humanitarianism that characterised post-war film culture.

While the Berlinale has a specific place within these histories, not least because of its founding and development within a project of Western German soft power, the awarding of *Fire at Sea*, an Italian film whose title explicitly conjures Second World War, is highly evocative of this shared European A festival history and project.⁷ Yet the specific features of the festival – and the 2016 edition in particular – also play an important role in its legitimization of *Fire at Sea*. Although beginning with Cannes, the political and humanist project outlined above has been most keenly adopted by the Berlinale, distinguishing itself as a “social issue” film festival. In the new millennium, Dieter Kosslick (Festival Director, 2001-2019) led a strategy that “put the festival on the map by training its thematic spotlight on social and political issues such as human rights, climate change and migration” (Boutsko 2021). Indeed, the programming and awarding of *Fire at Sea* can be considered as one in a series of examples that demonstrate this strategy (see other Golden Bear winners such as *Esma’s Secret* (2006) and, most recently, *Alcarràs* (2022)).

Meanwhile, the 2016 edition of the Berlinale was characterised by the interplay between common institutional logics, such as the mediation of public stakeholders’ interests, and features specific to that edition. One of the Berlinale’s most important stakeholders is the German Ministry of Culture, a fact readily stated in the festival’s publicity. In 2016, this relationship found expression in a close alignment between the German state’s official position on migration and that adopted by the festival. Indeed, we might read the Berlinale’s decision not only to award *Fire at Sea*, but to offer free tickets to refugees as complementing a German state politics of humanitarian hospitality or *willkommenskultur* exemplified by Angela Merkel’s commitment to settle 80,000 displaced people (31 August 2015) (Karakayalı 2019). Merkel’s words were mobilised by the Berlinale, the festival’s 2016 edition report not only citing Merkel’s “we can do it” slogan as its inspiration, but explicitly stating that “It is before this particular backdrop that the full power of the International Jury’s decision about the winner of the 2016 Golden Bear [*Fire at Sea*] becomes apparent” (Berlinale 2016a).

While the 2016 edition of the Berlinale is a long way from the 1946 edition of Cannes, focusing on broad structures, such as those of Western identity and liberal compassion (or brutal humanism), allows us to see the legacies of certain values across time – including the time of European A festivals. Indeed, the festival’s embrace of a politics of *willkommenskultur* and awarding of *Fire at Sea* also took place at a historical juncture in which tropes of humanitarian compassion, the politics of pity and European crisis were prevalent in media discourse. This includes debates around the circulation of the famous image of the body of a refugee child, Alain Kurdi, sought to interrogate the power of images of dead or suffering bodies to evoke sympathy and humanitarian action (Waldman, 2015). That *Fire at Sea* won the Golden Bear in precisely such a moment suggests a legacy of brutal humanism that has endured and evolved through European film culture over the last fifty years, finding renewed expression in the figuration of refugees. Bringing all of these features together, we can begin to see the influence of several features of the Berlinale festival’s apparatus on its programming and awarding of a particular film about migration. This initial analysis also raises important questions about the ways in which Rosi’s film, and the migration of refugees from Africa to Europe, may be figured; the extent to which a liberal, humanist compassion that nonetheless affords ultimate power to Europe, is at play in the legitimization of certain films about migration.

3 Paratext

Analysing the festival apparatus suggests the ways in which the legitimization of certain films is conditioned by a festival, or indeed circuit’s, historical and geopolitical situation, as well as other factors such as its curatorial profile or relationship to the state. Yet to apprehend the significance and expression of this apparatus, its

7. ‘Fuocoammare’, as explained in the film, is the title of a World War 2 song, the ‘fire at sea’ referring the bombing of the ship *La Maddalena* by the British off the coast of Lampedusa.

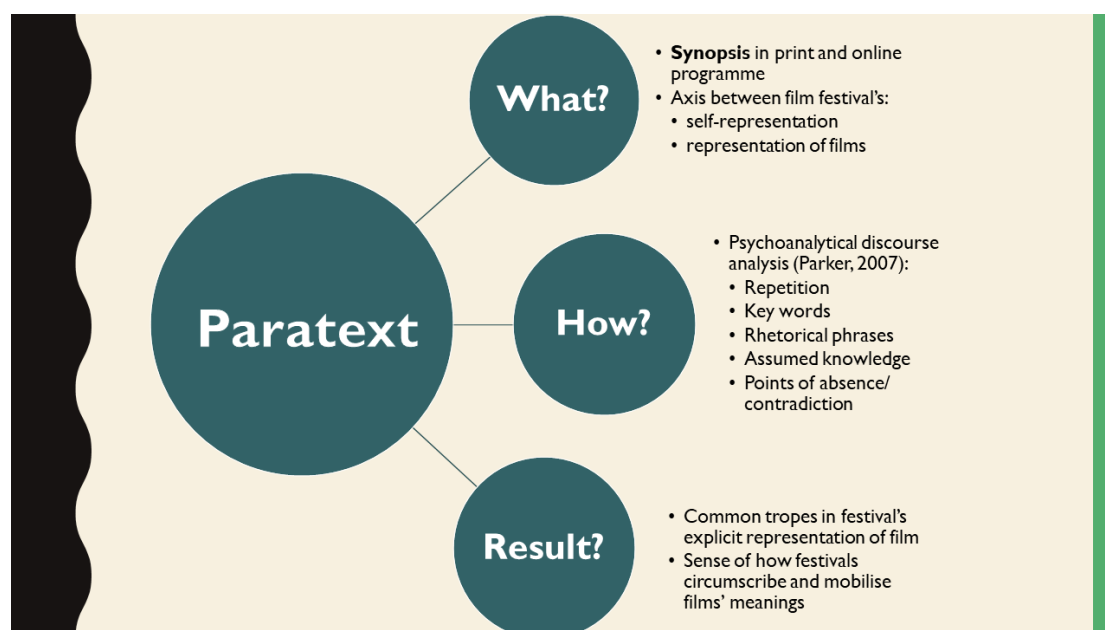


Fig. 2. Stage two: analysing paratexts.

implications for film festivals' representation of certain films and, cumulatively, entire canons, we need to take a further step. Building on approaches that emphasise the “verbal architecture” of the festival (Dayan 2001: 52), the second tier of this method brings into focus a key element of festivals and their role in global film culture – that is, their representation of films beyond the acts of exhibiting or awarding them.⁸ While scholars such as Wong (2011) have underscored the reciprocal relationship between a festival's representation of itself and the films it programmes, such analyses tend to sublimate this relationship into a study of the festival, the way that, through such texts, festivals ultimately construct a “festival image” (Stringer 2008: 53). In order to better apprehend festivals' role in constructing film canons, we must reverse this dynamic, emphasising how a festival's cultivation of its self-image conditions its representation of films.

Bringing a focus on the textual representation of films offers a bridge to other areas of film studies, and subtly shifts the emphasis of theorisations of the festival text discussed above. Not only festival architecture, or “ephemera” (Zielinski 2016: 138), the written matter that festivals produce can also be considered “paratexts”. Paratexts are conceived primarily in relation to artistic objects such as books (Genette, 1997) and, more recently, films (Gray 2010). Gray (2010: 5), in a foundational book on film marketing, argues that paratexts “create [film] texts, they manage them, and they fill them with many of the meanings that we associate with them [...] a paratext constructs, lives in, and can affect the running of the text.” Moreover, paratexts provide “filters,” or “early frames,” and our “first formative encounters” with a film (Gray 2010: 2-3). Developing Gray's theory, we can posit the “festival paratext,” a text that foremost constructs the film on exhibition, but that is conditioned by the festival at which it is produced. Festival paratexts mediate the reciprocal relationship between film and festival while being primarily oriented towards creating meanings for films.

While Gray's study also suggests the importance of fan-made paratexts – an intriguing and under-studied phenomenon in the case of film festivals – my focus on the institutional construction of films leads me to consider only those materials produced by the film festival. The paratexts that festivals produce for films are myriad, particularly in the digital era, which requires festivals to provide not only printed programme catalogues but websites (and thus online catalogues), and in some cases apps and social media promotion. The rise in film festivals' use of platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to promote both themselves and their

8. Damiens (2020) expands this to “visual architecture,” suggesting the potentiality of a multi-modal analysis. While Damiens' focus remains primarily on festivals' self-representation, this more holistic concept of visual architecture also offers a crucial area for development in the study of film festivals' representation of films and constructing film canons.

programmes offers possibilities for social media-focused discourse analysis, and even data-driven network analyses of festivals and those who engage with them online. For the time being, however, I would like to consider a more traditional paratext that, I argue, stands at the zenith of the reciprocal relation between a festival's presentation of itself and the films it programmes: the synopses that appear in festivals' print and online catalogues.

These short-form summaries comprise the majority of text in the catalogues that Rich (1998: 31-32) has argued are paramount to a festival's self-representation. The aim of these texts is not simply to give an objective summary of a film on exhibition: synopses are a crucial part of the marketing that takes place through festival brochures and websites. This is not a matter of misrepresenting films (within the framework of ideology outlined above, all representation is a kind of misrepresentation), but rather foregrounding aspects that match a festival's curatorial profile. For example, London Migration Film Festival aims to expand definitions of migration beyond the dominant tropes found in mainstream British media – suffering, racialised refugees travelling to the UK by boat (Parrot and Stahnke 2021). The programmers thus select films that might not fit into obvious categories of “migration cinema,” such as experimental movies about movement, or documentaries about displacement within a nation rather than beyond it. These aspects of the festival's aims and programming (its apparatus) are articulated through its textual representations of films: LMFF uses its synopses of such films to re-frame them, constructing their meaning in relation to the theme of migration. Appearing in print and online, edition after edition, the cumulative effect of these texts is the construction of tropes that help to define cinemas within the festival framework. Analysing a body of synopses – for example, synopses of migration films – can indicate the way in which certain cinemas have been constructed within such frameworks. In the interests of concision, I offer an analysis of just one synopsis here – the Berlinale's description of *Fire at Sea*.

Below, I present an annotated version of the synopsis that appeared in the Berlinale's print programme and website. To analyse the text, I adapt the Lacanian discourse analysis proposed by Parker (2005). This method identifies key terms which anchor representation: repeated concepts, rhetorical constructions, and the conclusions of sentences or texts (Parker 2005). I also draw on Parker's emphasis on agency, contradiction and knowledge – above all, which figures are ascribed agency both in and outside of the text (including the reader); points of antagonism between concepts or figures; and moments in a text which presume knowledge, suggesting points of “common sense”.

The synopsis of *Fire at Sea* is structured around a central point of antagonism, the division between an implied European perspective and that of African refugees. This is exemplified by the text's concluding reference to “two worlds [that] barely touch.” The synopsis alternates between the two positions throughout, from Samuele's activities on Lampedusa's port, to “men, women and children trying to make the crossing from Africa” (their contradictory presence emphasised by the “But” that introduces it), to the “inhabitants of Lampedusa” who are “bearing witness” to said crossing. While maintaining this structure, the text suggests a bridge across the division, primarily through repeated notions of looking. The synopsis moves from Samuele's seeming obliviousness to islanders' witnessing, and then, through a crucial slippage, to the “observations” of the film's director, Rosi. These observations, in turn, “bring us [the implied viewers of the film] closer” to Lampedusa, this site of “metaphor for the flight of refugees to Europe” (italics added). Yet, the power to look is afforded only to the European subject position: the Lampedusan islanders, the Italian director and the implied film spectator, who, if we follow to its logical conclusion the slippage from Lampedusa to Italy to “us,” is implicitly addressed as European. Meanwhile, African figures' relation to Europe and its subjects are depicted as one of either lack or passivity. They “try” to reach the continent, “long” for freedom and, finally, their “dead bodies are pulled out of the water.”

The hierarchy of looking/longing that the synopsis constructs also implies a hierarchy of agency with deep, and Eurocentric, roots. Witnessing, particularly when construed as an ethical act, recalls the cinematic, brutal humanism discussed above. Importantly for questions of agency, this mode of looking subtracts the power of a suffering figure as a means of activating that of the “ethical witness” – simultaneously a character in the film and the implied spectator (Schoonover 2012: 34, 152). Schoonover (2012: 218) suggests that this “brutal optic” underpinning neorealist aesthetics and ethics “remains at the core of aesthetic values that define quality and significance for film criticism, as well as its system of evaluation for subsequent emerging movements of world cinema.” Thus, moving between discourse analysis and a consideration of festival apparatus clarifies the

Samuele is twelve and lives on an island in the Mediterranean, far away from the mainland. Like all boys of his age he does not always enjoy going to school. He would much rather climb the rocks by the shore, play with his slingshot or mooch about the port. But his home is not like other islands. For years, it has been the destination of men, women and children trying to make the crossing from Africa in boats that are far too small and decrepit. The island is Lampedusa which has become a metaphor for the flight of refugees to Europe, the hopes, hardship and fate of hundreds of thousands of emigrants. These people long for peace, freedom and happiness and yet so often only their dead bodies are pulled out of the water. Thus, every day the inhabitants of Lampedusa are bearing witness to the greatest humanitarian tragedy of our times. Gianfranco Rosi's observations of everyday life bring us closer to this place that is as real as it is symbolic, and to the emotional world of some of its inhabitants who are exposed to a permanent state of emergency. At the same time his film, which is commentary-free, describes how, even in the smallest of places, two worlds barely touch.

Fig. 3. Early draft of an annotated synopsis of *Fire at Sea* (Berlinale 2016b).

significance of paratextual representations and their place within broader systems of political and aesthetic value. More obscure features of the paratext become apparent too. For example, the synopsis' opening on the child figure, Samuele, can now be understood as a further framing of the film within a neorealist legacy famed for its use of child protagonists as bearers of a privileged perspective (Deleuze 2005[1985]: 3). We are now in a position to better understand the relationship between *Fire at Sea's* legitimation at the Berlinale, the festival's "image" and its re/inscription of film canons. A crucial condition of possibility for *Fire at Sea's* legitimization via its exhibition, awarding and representation at the Berlinale is the continuing influence of a neorealist cinematic legacy, one that finds new expression via the brutal humanist optic directed towards refugee figures in 2016.

4 Film Text

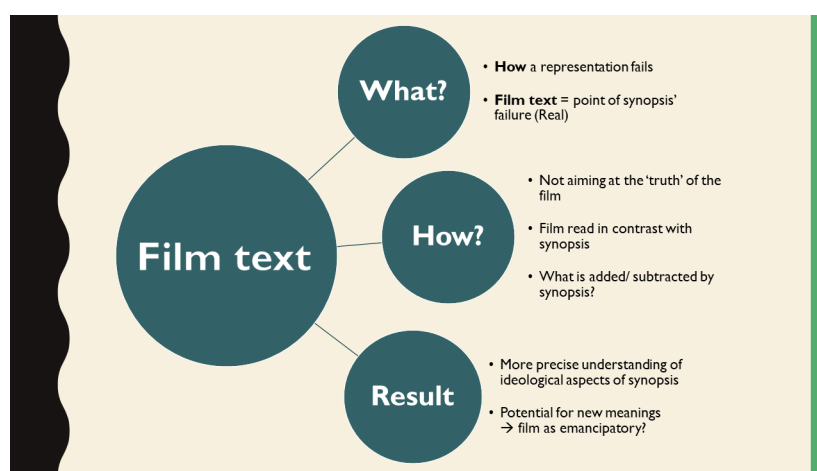


Fig. 4. Third stage: analysing the film text.

Above, I argued that festival paratexts instantiate a reciprocal relationship between the film festival and the film it exhibits. Analysing a festival's apparatus offered the ground from which to identify the ways in which a festival's institutional logics condition its representation of films. To apprehend the second half of this relationship, I now turn from the festival to the film. Yet my approach to analysing the films that festivals exhibit is a deliberately atypical one. It aims to emphasise the points at which the synopsis' representation of the film fails – irruptions of the Real that highlight the constitutive impossibility of paratextual representation. This stage further demonstrates the ideological procedure of the synopsis as such: the attempt to conceal its fundamental misrepresentation of its object. Moreover, by foregrounding the precise moments in which this failure becomes clear, my analysis offers further accuracy in interpreting the 'implicit rules' that govern a festival's representation of the films it exhibits.

My treatment of films as objects that can highlight the Real builds on studies that emphasise films' potential to make manifest the inherent failure of ideology. As McGowan (2007: 171) argues, "rather than seducing us into accepting our symbolic prison, film tends to show us the [R]eal openings within that prison." Yet these openings are ambivalent: because the Real also generates compensatory structures, the moments of failure we find in film can constitute *or* challenge ideology. This duality is summarised well by McGowan and Kunkle (2004: xviii):

the ideological dimension of film lies in its ability to offer a fantasy scenario that delivers us from a traumatic Real. At the same time, film's radicality lies in its ability to involve us in an encounter with this Real [...] the ideological and radical dimensions of film overlap; both involve a relationship to the traumatic Real.

The scholars define film in relation to the Real, highlighting its potential to either reinforce ideology through a compensatory "fantasy scenario" or radically challenge it by "involving us in an encounter with this Real."

To define films in this way is to define them in relation to a fundamental ambiguity: registering moments of failure, films can alternately reinforce or challenge a discursive formation.

While McGowan and Kunkle's focus is on ideological structures within film texts, we can shift the terms of their analysis slightly to facilitate a study of the relationship between films and their institutions. The "encounter with [the] Real" that films enable can also be re-defined as an encounter with the inherent fissure between a film and its institutional meaning, such as the meaning it has been ascribed by a film festival. To be clear, this is an entirely heuristic approach, which locates compensatory structures (fantasy) in the paratext and the Real in the film, and does so as a means of better interpreting the ideological procedure of the former. While this reading highlights the functioning of ideology, as well as the specific values that support representation, it does not aim at an interpretation of some truer reading of the film. Rather, I offer a deliberately partial interpretation which acknowledges the film's status as an ambivalent text, and uses that status as a means of critiquing the film's ideological representation at a festival. The analysis finishes on a moment of undecidability: intervening in the fissure in the meanings that festivals ascribe to films, the analysis opens a space of possibility, of new and impossible meanings.

I offer two brief examples to illustrate the application of this method to *Fire at Sea*. First, in contrast with the synopsis' construction of an antagonism between European and African figures, *Fire at Sea* presents a division internal to Europe through its opposition between the compassionate Dr. Bartolo and the de-personalised Frontex rescuers. While the rescuers appear momentarily in the synopsis as hands that pull refugees out of the water, Dr. Bartolo is omitted. This effectively obfuscates one of the primary sites of conflict in both *Fire at Sea* and, more broadly, Europe's struggle for identity in the wake of the "refugee crisis" (Ponzanesi 2016: 152). Through the figures, the film depicts two approaches to engaging with refugees: the official rescue effort, represented by faceless and pragmatic men, only ever seen in contagion suits, and a more personal, compassionate response, represented by the island doctor who treats and speaks to refugees, often with no more "protection" than his lab coat. The film's depiction of these figures is complex, not least through the ironic othering of the official rescuers and the continual framing of Dr. Bartolo in line with a framework of liberal compassion, and I discuss this complexity at length elsewhere (Author 2019). For now, I turn to a second example, one which challenges the very notion of ethical witnessing that is at the heart of the film's legitimation at the Berlinale.



Fig. 5. Refugee gazes into the camera. *Fire at Sea* (*Fuocoammare*, Rosi, 2016).

At several moments in the film refugee figures exercise the power to look. Moreover, when the characters do so, they look back at the viewer, directly intervening in the power relations between witness and suffering victim. The most striking example of this is a scene in which a young man is being photographed, and processed, in a detention centre. The film aligns the viewer's perspective with that of the photographer, implying our involvement in this scene of capturing a refugee's image. The man appears next to a number, signifying the dehumanizing nature of the procedure. Here is a palpable tension between the gaze of the refugee and the attempt to limit this gaze, signified by the number beside him and the mechanism of both the photo and film cameras. As the number repeatedly clashes with the man's face, the scene takes on a subtle violence: the clash between the objectification of refugees and the full subjectivity signified by their gaze breaks out on

screen. Although *Fire at Sea* has been justifiably criticised for its depiction of refugees overall (Austin 2019), the film contains moments that register not only its own failure, but that of the Berlinale's representation of it. In both cases, the notion of a unitary European identity afforded the power to look – a power today conflated with an ethical orientation towards postcolonial subjects – is challenged by the irruptions of the Real just analysed. These moments of failure offer a vantage point from which the ideological mechanism of the Berlinale synopsis become yet clearer. Most importantly, however, they open up a space for alternative possibilities to emerge: alternative readings of the *Fire at Sea*, and alternative orientations towards festival films, cinematic ethics, European identity and refugees.

5 Conclusion

In this article, I put forward a framework for the systematic study of film festivals as ideological institutions. I offered a definition of ideology that acknowledges the fundamental impossibility of an institution ever fully representing its objects, of film festivals fully representing films, cinemas, social issues and identities. This acknowledges, too, the inherent instability of the film canons that festivals produce. Drawing on insights from recent Lacanian theory, I identified festivals' main ideological procedure as that of concealing this fundamental failure through the evocation of entire matrices of hidden assumptions and meanings. While the notion of these matrices being hidden poses a significant methodological challenge, I put forward a three-stage method for not only establishing if such a compensatory procedure should take place, but identifying the implicit norms that it might draw on. This method grounds its analysis in a study of the material aspects of a festival, which I term the apparatus. It uses this grounding to analyse the specific ways in which a festival represents the films it exhibits, applying Parker's (2005) schematic for psychoanalytical discourse analysis to festival paratexts. I tested the findings of this second stage of the method through a heuristic analysis of the film presented in the synopsis, one that foregrounds the ways in which the film might escape the meanings ascribed to it.

To study representation in this way is to highlight the contingency of the meanings that festivals ascribe to films and cinemas. It is to situate these meanings within larger structures, discursive and material, from assumptions about race and gender to geopolitical power relations. Moreover, through its emphasis on the "Real," Lacanian ideology critique enables us to produce "a rift in the seemingly unbreakable consistency of ideological formations, from which the radical rearticulation of the very ideological framework suddenly appears possible" (Vighi and Feldner 2007: 156). Ideology critique aims to provide an (albeit limited) agency over the very structures of meaning making, intervening in the implicit rules that produce the impression of full meaning, or even rejecting the illusion of fullness itself.

In foregrounding the fundamental ideological operation as not the false representation of objects, but the attempt to conceal the fact that representation fundamentally entails misrepresentation, ideology critique thus opens up a particular space for change. It suggests the possibility of practices that embrace failure; a festival's inability to represent its objects can instead be turned into radical praxis. This might entail the creation of experimental paratexts that do not claim a film's meaning on behalf of the festival but foreground the impossibility of ever doing so, that foreground the instability of film canons, notions of quality and meaning itself. Such a move would be radical in that it challenges the very function of the film festival as an institution that produces meanings for films, offering the ground for a "radical rearticulation" of the festival framework. An alternative praxis also made possible by the Real is the strategic appropriation of misrepresentation: the self-conscious and explicit construction of partial meanings for films to advance certain agendas. This is the case in the London Migration Film Festival's synopses, which exploit the unstable meanings of both migration and the films they exhibit to produce alternative interpretations of each. This kind of intervention demonstrates the possibility to appropriate the Real into a kind of performative contradiction: the assertion of universality through a deliberately partial representation (Butler 2001: 38), in this case the assertion of "migration" as a universal term through which to define and legitimate films. As this latter example demonstrates, ideology critique can illuminate the representational workings of film festivals, whether they put forward the illusory certainty that underpins the Eurocentric film canons rightly challenged today, or embrace the instability of cinematic meanings that might enable us to do away with the very notion of canon altogether.

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From Music to Film: On the Emergence and Stabilization of the Film Festival Concept in the 1930s

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Abstract

This article explores the social history of film to shed light on the emergence and stabilization of the film festival concept in the 1930s and 1940s. The creation of the Venice Mostra in 1932 appears like the result of a slow process of legitimization both desired by the production representatives and by the nascent cinephile representatives. Nevertheless, if the device experimented in Venice will not be thereafter called into question, the concept of “film festival” does not appear stabilized at that time. It was not until the post-war period that FIAPF's activities allowed to the enshrining of the association between the concept of “festival” with the cinematographic media. This article highlights the social forces which helped to build and stabilize the film festival concept, on the basis of the analysis of the film press from various countries. Using discourse analysis, in the framework of a method inspired by the archeologic approach proposed by Michel Foucault, the article highlights discourses and controversies surrounding the adoption and the legitimization of this concept by the actors of cinematographic industry, cinephilia, popular education.

Keywords: Film Festival; Exhibition; Venice Biennale; Music Festival; Cinephilia.

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Introduction

To this day the history of film festivals remains one of the most significant and fertile research fields of Film Festival Studies. In particular, the concept of the “film festival” and of its adoption still generates a whole range of issues. For the scientific community, the first Venice Film Festival in 1932 is a referential point as the starting point of the history of film festivals. However, this assertion must be scrutinized at several levels. The first concerns the kind of events that served as models, knowingly or unknowingly, for the pioneers of the Venetian festival within the framework of the construction of the event structure. As a matter of course, we must take into account the diverse and complex history of the event models from the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century (and not only in the cinematographic field). We should also lend attention to the symbolic roots that accompany these processes, particularly the influence of the educational cinematography and of cinephilia, for instance, in order to understand the choices naturally made in Venice at the beginning of the Thirties (Taillibert and Wäfler 2016).

Another critical issue is nevertheless involved in this attempt to lay the groundwork of the earliest history of film festivals. The central research question of this article is the following: how was the concept of the “film festival” gradually adopted to designate the type of event experienced for the first time in Venice, while this expression had been previously used with varying meanings, and will continue to be used for more than a decade after the first Venetian opus? In order to answer this question, we will retain two working hypotheses that will structure the two successive parts of this article. The first poses that, in the early 1930s, the association between the word “festival” and the cinematographic world was familiar to spectators and resulted from the adoption of an organization essentially inherited from music festivals.

The second hypothesis will postulate that the Venice Film Festival organized in 1932 constituted a starting point for a transformation process – but not a breakdown – which will result years later in a consensus on the new meaning of the expression “film festival”.

The approach we adopted essentially followed the methods of historical research. We have questioned and discussed various sources linked to the activities of these film related events during the period considered: programming, posters, reviewing and analysis in newspapers, etc. Concomitantly, the existing literature about the history film festivals will be the theoretical framework of this article.

1 From Music to Film – the Emergence of the Festival Concept

In early 1929, the French newspaper *Le Temps* (1929: 4) announced a series of film festivals to be held in the *Salle des Agriculteurs*, a Parisian movie-theatre specialized in screening film classics:

Since the relationship between music and film has always been one of great sympathy, it comes as no surprise that the screen should borrow its methods from the concert. A series of festivals is to be organized at the *Salle des Agriculteurs* during the current season, with screenings dedicated to the works of the most justly renowned directors [translated from French].

In contrast to an approach that takes the first edition of the Venice Film Festival in 1932 as the starting point for a history of film festivals, an alternative approach assumes that the famous screenings held on the terrace of the Hotel Excelsior on Lido Island did not appear out of the blue, but were a continuation of existing event models. The advantage of such an approach, closer to a cultural history, is twofold. First, it brings a pre-existing festival culture into focus and shows its influence on the global film festival model. Music festivals are of particular interest, being the field within which the festival concept essentially evolved its modern format. The idea of presenting a series of works of art within the context of a self-contained event was no more an innovation of Venice than the combination of art performances with social events and a festive atmosphere. The glamorous character of the Venice Film Festival also conformed with the tradition of music festivals as established in Europe in the late 19th century. Second, this alternative approach also allows us to direct our attention to early film festivals, held before and after the first edition of the Venice Film Festival, and enables us to understand exactly how the festival concept was adapted from music to film. It is striking for instance that early film festivals were influenced by national traditions established by music festivals. Consequently,

when pertaining to film, the notion of the “festival” initially bore a wide range of meanings, closer to the more general understanding of the concept common in the field of music, and devoid of the more specific aspects that it would later develop in the wake of the Venice Film Festival.

1.1 The Festival Concept and its Modern Musical Roots

The festival first appeared as an autonomous art event in music. English cathedrals played a pioneering role in the late 17th century with the organization of festive musical events catering to the emerging middle classes for charitable purposes (Ory 2013). These usually consisted of a procession, a festive service based on a series of distinct musical performances, and a concluding banquet (Mohn 2014). Thus, they already contained three core elements of modern festivals: ceremonies, a series of performances, and social gatherings around a communal meal. The Haendel festival of 1784, celebrated in Westminster Abbey and the London Pantheon to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the composer’s death, seems to have been particularly formative, laying the foundation for the organizational model of modern festivals (Smither 2012). Over the course of several days, the festival presented a series of works composed by Haendel, one of the most revered composers of his time, performed by an impressive number of outstanding singers and instrumentalists. It was attended by a huge audience, including the King and Queen, members of the Royal family, many notables, and members of the clergy. With this event, the festival concept took on a new dimension. From then on, the term “festival” became synonymous with musical events that were exceptional in all possible aspects, be it in terms of the size and quality of the performance apparatus, the works presented or the audience. This is well reflected in the definition given to the word “festival” by the *Revue musicale* (1829: 353), the first French review dedicated to music, in 1829:

The English term *festival* large gatherings of musicians coming together at certain times of the year in important English cities to perform works by great masters, with a significant number of voices and instruments [translated from French].

The Haendel commemorations initiated a boom of music festivals in England, eventually spilling over to the continent in the early 19th century (Mackerness 1976, Loeser and Werbeck 2014). Germany and other Northern European countries with their expanding middle classes gratefully embraced the festival concept. In German-speaking countries however, these events were called “Musikfeste” (music festivals) until the late 20th century, when the English word “festival” was commonly used. German festivals were akin to the English variant in many aspects. They also presented a series of concerts, often over several days, usually concluding with a banquet. But they differed in one important respect. As noted by the English composer Herbert S. Oakeley in his contribution to the “Niederrheinische Musikfeste” (Lower-Rhenish musical festivals) in the *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, “the first object in England is to raise money: in Germany the great object is to benefit art.” (Oakeley 1880: 456). German festivals thus ushered in a small but far-reaching shift in emphasis for the future career of the concept. Their purpose was not primarily charitable, but lay in the common cultivation of music. They not only introduced the so-called “Künstlerkonzert” (artistic concert), but also aimed to acquaint the population at large with the music favoured by the middle classes (Butz 2014). Richard Wagner’s 1876 Bayreuth festival (a lyrical festival) marked the height of this development. In its wake the festival concept attained its full modern meaning as an autonomous art event, no longer conceived as a means for charitable purposes or middle-class politics, but as an end in itself, ideally with its own orchestra, programming, venue (such as Wagner’s *Festspielhaus*), rites and audience (see also Ory 2013).

In summary, one could say that the following aspects characterized the modern festival concept: a self-contained festive event set around a series of exceptional musical (or lyrical) performances celebrating a person, a genre or music as an art. In this generic sense, in the last quarter of the 19th century the festival became an integral part of the growing cultural industries of many countries inside and outside Europe. Germany, for example, experienced a real boom in music festivals - the press even complained of an “epidemic” (Weibel 2014). But there were still national differences at the turn of the century. In contrast to England and Germany, in France modern music festivals were a fixture of the regular programming of urban concert halls. ‘Festival’ became synonymous with one-evening gala concerts dedicated to a particular composer (Schaal 1955). A 1908 issue of the French newspaper *Le Figaro* (1908: 5) provides an impression of such events:

Next week, sensational programs every evening. Tuesday, Beethoven-Debussy festival; Friday, great Wagner festival with significant excerpts from the 'Twilight of the Gods'. Ticket sales for these extraordinary concerts are now open [translated from French].

Though they differed from the multi-day festivals in the English and German traditions, such French gala festivals nevertheless exhibited central aspects of the modern festival definition presented above: a series of works by renowned composers, often performed by a large orchestra and accompanied by a rich buffet during the break. It was not unusual for newspaper advertisements to highlight the large number of performers, as was the case in German and English music festivals. The term "festival" thus made sense to the organizers as well as to the audience. As we will show in the next section, it is these French-style gala festivals that had the earliest impact on film.

1.2 Two Early National Festival Models in Film

At the beginning of the 20th century, festivals had become firmly established in European cultural life as an important form of musical presentation. Consequently, the concept of the "festival" was closely associated with musical performance. But once film left its initial place at the fairgrounds and established itself as a permanent feature of the urban entertainment industry, it was among the first art forms to take over the festival concept. In the following, we will briefly present two different types of early film festivals. Two aspects are in the foreground of the discussion: first, the examples presented show a close link to national (i.e., French and German) music festival traditions. Second, even though we will not discuss the process, these examples illustrate that early festivals could easily evolve into a national model that could be emulated by other film entrepreneurs.

The French-speaking cultural area seems to have had a pioneering role in adopting the festival concept from music to film. There, a national film festival model emerged based on the gala music festival outlined above. A reference to such an event can be found as early as 1908 in the November issue of the French newspaper *Le Figaro* (1908:5). On the same page as the advertisement heralding a week of sensational music festivals (see quotation above), the newspaper announced a "grand festival cinématographique" (great cinema festival) to take place at the elegant Parisian *Femina* theatre on the Champs Elysées on November 14 and 15, 1908. The event was organized by count Henri de la Vaulx, a famous French balloonist, and consisted of a series of aviation films with live commentary. The ticket was sold for 3 francs. The event clearly mirrored the gala music festival, both in terms of the program (a series of thematically related films rather than the usual mixed program shown in movie theaters) and the choice of the venue (the *Femina* was a place of high culture, not a nickelodeon-type movie theatre). The relatively high price for a ticket (3 francs) as well as the spatial proximity of the announcement in the paper and the references to the music festival indicate that the event was intended to appeal to the same middle-class audience as the music festivals. The adjective "cinématographique" (film) was evidently necessary to clarify the festival's focus and to distinguish it from the more common musical events, whereas the term "festival" lent such a film event a touch of the extraordinary, a boon for promotional purposes. Much as was usually the case in music, such events could generate an above-average attention in the press because of their exceptional nature. In addition, the potential audience was familiar with the concept from music, so probably knew what to expect from such an event, which in turn guaranteed communicative efficiency. But the term "festival" did more than that; it also conferred a dignity not only to the works shown, but more importantly to film itself. Unlike music, which was legitimized as an art form, film was considered a medium of mass entertainment and was highly controversial among the middle classes for being supposedly morally objectionable. Consequently, film had a low status. The term 'festival' not only made an event seem exceptional, but gave it a crucial aura of respectability, thus making it attractive for a middle-class audience.

Over time, the organization of festivals seems to have become a regular practice in some movie theatres, both commercial and cultural. One commercial movie theatre that embraced the concept was the *Cinéma Palace* in Lausanne, in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. According to the local weekly film magazine *L'écran illustré* (1925c: 3), the *Palace* was "known for its comic festivals [translated from French]". In December 1925, for example, it dedicated an event to the American comedian Harold Lloyd, "the best comic actor in the entire world [translated from French]" (*L'écran illustré* 1925a: 4), screening three of his films twice each day for one week (December 11-17). For commercial film entrepreneurs, one advantage of the festival concept was no

CINÉMA-PALACE
Rue St-François LAUSANNE Téléphone 24.80

Du Vendredi 11 au Jeudi 17 Décembre 1925
Chaque jour en Matinée à 3 heures et en Soirée à 8 h. 30.

GRAND FESTIVAL
Harold LLOYD

Faut pas s'en faire !
Le Manoir Hanté !
Oh ! La Belle Voiture !

Fig. 1. Harold Lloyd Festival Advertising. (*L'écran illustré* 1925d: 4)

doubt the fact that it permitted the reintroduction of older films into the program which could be rented at more favourable conditions than new films, while at the same time presenting this as a novelty. Moreover, by adopting the film festival concept a cinema operator could distinguish itself from competitors. This aspect is well echoed in an article about another *Palace* festival held in 1925 and dedicated to Charlie Chaplin:

It is worth noting that the Palace is the only theatre to dedicate entire evenings to the comic genre. This novelty is much appreciated by the public, for many people wish to go to the cinema to be entertained solely by comedy. Next week, therefore, expect no drama, no tedious romantic comedies, nothing but comedy. The Kid, Pay Day and Shoulder Arms should keep the audience laughing all night long [translated from French]. (*L'écran illustré* 1925b: 4).

Cultural organizations such as specialized cinemas and film clubs, campaigning for the recognition of film as an art form, likewise adopted the festival concept. From the mid-1920s until the late 1930s, they staged numerous film festivals based on the gala music festival model. Cultural organizations often supplemented the film program with explanatory lectures, which reveals another link between the festivals in music and film. In December 1927, for example, a *René Clair Festival* screened three of the director's films for "the best possible tribute to René Clair [translated from French]" (*La Semaine à Paris* 1927: 64). Another example is the *Tolstoy Festival* organized in October 1928 at the avantgarde *Studio 28* in Montmartre (*Le Petit Journal* 1928: 4). The emerging film clubs sometimes acted directly as organizers of festivals like the *Albert Cavalcanti Festival* staged by the *Tribune Libre du Cinema* (Free Cinema Forum) on May 14, 1930 (*La Semaine à Paris* 1930: 63).

As we will see next, the German-speaking cultural area experienced a similar development, with organizers taking up the tradition of the German multi-day music festival and adapting it to film. However, this shift from music to film happened later in Germany than in France or the French-speaking part of Switzerland. One reason was probably that the organization of such multi-day festival events was more complex than that of gala film festivals. More importantly, it may have been due to the fact that such festivals were usually staged with the active participation of public institutions. The prerequisite would therefore have been the public legitimacy of film, which did not emerge in the German-speaking cultural area until the 1920s (Kreimeier et al. 2005).

The first to organize a film festival in the German-speaking cultural area was the *Bayrische Landesfilmbühne* (Bavarian state film stage), a film association supported by the city of Munich and other Bavarian towns. Its director and the main instigator of the event, Johannes Eckardt, later stated that he had hoped to establish a large-scale annual festive event for film in Germany, akin to those that had long existed for other art forms (Choy 2006: 94). The goal of the *Bayrische Landesfilmbühne* was the cultivation and promotion of so-called "good films", i.e., films that were morally sound, such as popular science documentaries called "Kulturfilme" (cultural films), but also high-quality fiction films. The *Bayrische Landesfilmbühne* organized its first *Film-Festwochen in München* (Munich Film Festival) in 1928 (July 3 to August 23). The goal was to provide a "comparative overview of the current artistic state of world cinema" by screening "42 top performances of European and American film" [translated from German] (Merrill C. Berman Collection 2015: 13) during six weeks. Each week focused on the film production of certain countries, with the last week dedicated to "Kulturfilme". Particular attention was paid to music. The American film trade journal *Film Daily* (1928: 2) announced the "best scores by Hugo Riesenfeld, Erno Rappe and Meisel". But the Munich Film Festival also reflected the tradition of German music festivals in several other aspects, such as its goal (promotion of middle-class taste), event structure (weekly, respectively daily focus, social events), content (outstanding art works), organizing institution (middle-class association) and the discourse surrounding the event (film, respectively music, as art). The hyphen in the festival name is noteworthy, as it expresses the still tentative rapprochement between the notions of "film" and "festival". In the following (and last) edition in 1929, the name was already written in one word: *Münchner Filmfestwochen*.

As was the case in the French-speaking cultural area, other similar events soon followed. In 1934 and 1936 the *Deutsche Gesellschaft Bild und Ton* (German Society for Image and Sound) organized the *Berliner Filmfestwochen* (Berlin Film Festival) in parallel to the Berlin Art Weeks, "in which masterpieces of German and foreign film art [translated from German]" (*Die Volksgemeinschaft* 1936: 2) were screened. Likewise, in 1939, under the patronage of the city of Basel and the Swiss Film Chamber, the local film club *Le Bon Film* ("The good film") staged the *Internationale Filmwoche Basel | Festival international du film à Bâle* (International Film Week



Fig. 2. 1928 Munich Film Festival Poster. (Merrill C. Berman Collection 2015:13)

Basel), “the most important film event in Switzerland [translated from German]” (Basler Nachrichten 1939:6). This instigated a series of other similar events in Switzerland in the following years, most of them organized by the growing middle-class film club movement. The announcement of the “Grosse Filmfestwoche” (Great Film Festival Week) in Arosa in 1943, a small mountain resort in Switzerland, once more reflected the tradition of the German-style music festivals based on a series of outstanding performances, explanatory lectures, and social events, all framed by a discourse of grandeur:

A first Film Week is to take place in Arosa from the 31st of January to the 6th of February. The rich and carefully curated program will consist of a series of noteworthy premieres, lectures by filmmakers, an afternoon tea, and a film-themed ball in the presence of the lead actress from a recent Swiss production [translated from German]. (Arosener Zeitung 1943: 1)¹

2 From Venice to Cannes – the Gradual Stabilization of the Concept

As we have just recalled, at the beginning of the 1930s, the audience was quite familiar with the association of the word “festival” with film related events. Then, the organization in 1932 of the Venice Film Festival contributed to the reworking of this term’s meaning and constituted a starting point, not a breaking point, to another meaning which would have overlapped with the other ones.² Based on the Venetian proposition, a new concept of global cinematographic event started to settle down and in numerous countries. Even though in Italy they had organized an “Esposizione” (an exhibition), the event was related in numerous papers in France as a “film festival”.

1. We would like to thank Reto Semadeni from the Arosa-Schanfigg Cultural Archive for his support in obtaining the newspaper article.
 2. The political dimension inherent in the organization of this event in the context of Benito Mussolini’s fascist regime, although central to understanding the evolution of the event in the following years (Paulon 1951, Paulon 1971, Taillibert 1999, Cowie 2018, Brunetta 2022...), will not be the focus of our reflection here.

2.1 The Venice Model: Identification of the Concept of “International Film Festival”

What are the elements characterizing the global model specific to the unprecedented film related event organized in Venice in 1932? The study of press materials, and the way the journalists reported the event help bring about a better understanding of the characteristics they showed off at this time.

The first element to note is the international scope of the event which distinguished it from the numerous national events observed in several countries. All newspapers reports emphasized the expression “international festival”, and we can say that it is the first break with the use of the word “festival” from a national or local scope, as we have observed earlier.

Then, a second important point is that this event publicized and gave substance to the will of some cinephile intellectuals. It recognized the cinema as an artform. If clubs and some specialized magazines were already places of consecration of the cinematographic art, the acceptance of this idea by the general audience was still lacking, and the press represented a major asset. For this purpose, the Venice Film Festival constituted a great sounding board. The organization of an event that showcased the best films from around the world, along with the recognized arts displayed at the Biennale, represented an impressive feat. In the columns of *Paris-Soir*, an anonymous journalist noted with satisfaction: “The cinema, as a synthesis of different arts, has its place among the glorious phalanx of the muses” (“Le cinéma à l’exposition biennale de Venise. La participation française” 1932: 8). In the same vein, in 1932 Charles Delac published a genuine plea in favor of cinema in *Le Temps*:

Venice, hotbed of art, which spreads its influence around the globe, is solemnly giving to the Cinema its artistic pedigree. From now on, *pari passu* with painting, *pari passu* with sculpture, *pari passu* with all the other manifestations of the spirit, the cinema has won its place among the arts. (...) This consecration will make a clean slate of all the prejudices that make shy away from cinema an entire galaxy of enlightened amateurs, for which the necessary industrial aspects of cinema hides all the acutely artistic part of its conception and realization [translated from French].

The Delac’s long text made a great impression on other French columnists, who enshrined its purpose in their respective newspapers. For example, Colin Saül-C. (1932: 6) wrote in *Comoedia*:

The impressive event in Venice, masterfully directed by the count Volpi di Misurata, constitute a high-quality event: an intellectual elite and the official representant of the cinematographic industry proclaim the legitimacy of cinema to join the major arts of humanity: painting, music, sculpture, poetry. If, one day, cinema triumphantly conquers this place of honor, it will be because of the faith and the action of those who, answering the president Delac’s call, gave to cinema its letters of nobility [translated from French].

This kind of article, at this time, contributed to a broad circulation of ideas, and spoke to their connection with an “international film festival” identity, that is the recognition of cinema as an art form. This was a central assumption of the Venetian event, organized apropos within the Artistic Biennale. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that in the same article Charles Delac offered a first assertion of “auteur politics”, in terms similar to the famous text of Alexandre Astruc (1948) written years later:

It cannot be disregarded that the function of each of these artists aren’t equally valuable, that the importance of their intervention in the process of the film making differs significantly. The director, for example, who manages the film, or edits the images with its own rhythm, really create the cinematographic style, as does a writer, a musician or a painter. He has an influence far more significant than other collaborator less involved [translated from French].

It is also interesting to observe that this first idea went hand in hand with the affirmation that the success of the first Venetian event was directly linked with the quality of its organizers. Delac defined this principle as “animator”, and established a direct link with the film clubs and their own “festivals”, framing the “artistic direction” as a founding element of festival mediation. In this regard Delac (1932) wrote: “That is the strength of a noble idea, when it has been conceived and prepared by exceptional animators like the count Volpi di Misurata, the sculptor Maraini and Luciano de Feo.” Furthermore, the recognition of cinema as an art is closely linked to the organization of a competition, known as a “referendum-contest” (Bauër 1932: 2). The choice to reward the deserving, talented works replicates the numerous contests organized since the beginning of the

century in the cinematographic field. This competitive aspect is clearly perceived as a way of putting pressure on producers, as an incentive to invest in ambitious projects. In the decades to come, competition would have represented a key feature of “film festivals”, as eloquently expressed by Charles Delac (1932): “It is too early to perceive all of the consequences of this enterprise, whose results will become apparent even in the industrial and commercial circle” [translated from French].

At the same time, all the columnists who covered the event insisted on the attractiveness of the location chosen for the it. The charms of Venice inspired lyrical flights, along with enthusiastic descriptions of the tremendous worldly parties which attracted the most acclaimed figures of the moment:

Night is falling on the lagoon, magical and ethereal, bathed in moonlight, and stumps its dream setting. The Lido gleams in a sea of glittering lights, and on the Excelsior’s terrace, an elegant and joyful crowd gathers. The inaugural session of the first film festival has just taken place (Delac 1932) [translated from French].

Thus, the event model proposed during the Biennale was characterized by a competitive event of international concern, celebrating the advent of cinema as an art, but nevertheless festive, attractive, and willingly worldly.

2.2 A Terminology Adopted by the Press: the Venice Film Festival is an “International Film Festival”

Even if the first poster of the Venetian event claimed that an “International Exhibition of Cinematographic Art” was organized within the Biennale, the journalists did not hesitate to highlight that the first “international film festival” was organized in Venice.

Arguably, the use of this term in this context was prompted by the combination of different phenomena. First, several festivals were held regularly within the Biennale. The Biennale was known for being an exhibition centre, but also, more recently, a festival centre: “The arrival of cinema within the Venice Biennale event, that for thirty years has hosted the most remarkable and undisputed works in its wonderful exhibits and festivals, will draw in a very particular way the attention of the artists to the cinematographic art form” wrote Charles Delac (1932). Logically, the concept was introduced into the Biennale through the music. Since 1930 it hosted the “International festival of contemporary music”, which became an annual event in 1937.³ And it is not by chance that the film festival organized in 1932 was dependant on the music festival. As we read in the September 6th issue of *Variety* (1932: 11), “The films were given on the line of a regular musical festival, with a programme fixed from the beginning and lasting right through fifteen days”. This accordance was viewed positively. For example, Gérard Bauër (1932: 2) wrote in *Paris-Soir*: “Cinema had preceded the music – useful council where filmmakers from France, Italy, Germany, and also America, could exchange some views and visions” [translated from French].

This deep connection made in Venice between musical and film related events provides a key for understanding the use of the term “festival” when used to characterize this new type of event. Indeed, for several years, music festivals would have offered a model, used to legitimate some projects of film related events. For example, in 1938, when Max Reinhardt expressed the desire to create a film festival in Hollywood, the columns of *Le Jour* (1938: 6) read:

The great Max Reinhardt project is to organize, each year, in Hollywood, a festival... akin to Salzburg. It would allow several actors to be applaud on the stage and, at the end, there are so many virtuosi attracted by cinema that music won’t lose its rights... in this American festival! [translated from French]

When the Cannes Film Festival was created, there were still some journalists who recalled the musical origin of the event model, even though the other roots of the concept were also outlined. Pierre-Gilles Veber (1939: 4), journalist for *Le Matin*, wrote: “[This event], as a will of Art and Peace, has lent the name of”festival” to music, dance, and agricultural fairs” [translated from French]. Thus, while during the preparation of the Biennale in

3. In 1934, it’s a theater festival who was created within the framework of the Biennale: the “Festival Internazionale del Teatro di Prosa”, which became annual from 1936.



Fig. 3. Poster of the Venetian Mostra - 1932.

1932 some newspapers referred to “the first international artistic cinematography event” (*Paris Soir*, 1932: 8), as soon as the event began, most of the French journalists described the event as a “festival.” We can observe the same phenomenon in the English-language papers. For example, in the abovementioned article of *Variety* it was proclaimed as “Italy’s Film Festival”.

2.3 The Thirties: the Advent of a “Film Festival” Model (Moscow, Brussels, Cannes)

The post-Venice period enshrined the event model proposed in 1932 as well as the term “festival” that was used to designate it. The year 1935 was especially important in this process, as different concomitant phenomena reinforced the use of this term in this specific context. On the one hand, the Venetian event became annual, gaining its independence from the Artistic Biennale:

As the name of Biennale implies, the events of the Venice Biennale (exhibits, theatre performances, concerts, international film festival) should in principle happen only every two years. However, the success of the film festival of 1934 film festival prompted the Biennale committee to depart to these rules and to organize an edition this summer in the same atmosphere of the gardens of the Excelsior Hotel, in the Lido (Sabatier 1935) [translated from French].

On the other hand, during 1935, two events of international concern were organized, and both were designated as “film festivals”. These were the “Moscow International film festival,”⁴ and the “International film festival” in Brussels.⁵ On the basis of this observation, we will now try to understand what unifying elements these three events shared that justified their designation as “film festivals”.

First, it is interesting to note that, as in Venice, the events in Moscow and Brussels established a link between the film screenings and the concept of “exhibition”. In Moscow, the film festival was tethered to an exhibition called “Fifteen years of the Soviet cinema”, hosted by the “House of cinema” to celebrate this anniversary. In Brussels, the festival which took place in the “Alberteum”⁶ was organized within the frame of the “Universal Exhibition”. On this event, an anonymous journalist of *Comoedia* wrote, “This Festival will happily complement the big artistic events organized into the Exhibition” (“À l’Exposition de Bruxelles. Un Festival International du Cinéma” 1935: 1).

Moreover, all the newspapers that reported on the event emphasized their international scope. That is arguably the main difference with the “film festival model” accepted before. These events also shared a program characterized by the high volume of films they screened.

We can also note that, as in the case of Venice, the role of these events in the affirmation of the artistic essence of cinema was emphasized by the newspapers, particularly in France. Indeed, French newspapers tended to glorify the “artistic quality”, the “Seventh Art”, the “great films”, and “the most relevant works of the great directors” presented at the festival (“À l’Exposition de Bruxelles. Un Festival International du Cinéma” 1935: 1), to promote the fact that films were screened in their native language, and so on.

The competitive nature of these three events was very important points in completing the model. From another point of view, the journalists consistently highlighted the worldly and festive aspects of these events based on the model of the Venetian celebrations. Large parties were organized and these soon became important components of communication between national representatives. For example, Pierre Anouil (1935), in *Comoedia*, made the following comment about the Moscow Festival:

It’s true that the Russian State has put the resources needed at the disposal of cinema. How much money will the Chambre Syndicale Française have for Louis Lumière? I do not even want

4. Moskovskiy myezhdoonarodniy kinofestival, 21st February – 2nd March 1935.

5. Festival International du cinéma, 29th September – 17th October 1935.

6. “The Alberteum – and the Planetarium which completed it – constitute one of the most interested scientific site never realize for a Universal Exhibition. The promoters of this enterprise reached to create in Brussels a Museum similar to the Kensington and Munich’s ones, dedicated to History and science popularization. The obtained the necessary supports in order to realize their work, gathering under the auspices of the King Léopold III, and called ‘Alberteum - Aedes Scientiae’ (“Alberteum”, quotation from the guestbook of the Universal Exhibition of Brussels 1935 [online] Site Worldfairs.info, accessed November 2020, 17th https://www.worldfairs.info/expopavillondetails.php?expo_id=29&pavillon_id=2318) [translated from French]

to think about it. It's also true that the French State certainly relies on the "improvisation" with which we used to be familiar, and of which we are the victims, because such parties should not create illusion; get to the bottom of things, and show the country that our effort is as good as anybody else [translated from French].

Thus, these the organizing States invested in these events as tools which served their ambitions for international prestige and could also be used to promote their own national film productions, so as to demonstrate their cultural superiority to the rest of the world. Progressively, the idea that these events were only interesting if they showcased previously unseen films became decisive. The discovery became an additional value. To that, we must add the idea of selectivity, which ensured that only quality films would be screened, but the truth is that it was not always the case at this time. And yet, journalists considered it to be both an essential and distinctive feature of this type of events. For example, Pierre Sabatier (1935) wrote at the end of the Venice Film Festival:

However, it is regrettable that, this year, the committee in charge, in each country, in order to choose the films for the Venice Film Festival did not limit this choice to new films, or at least to superior quality films. [...] It is true that it is only the third festival since the creation of the Biennale and we can hope that for those that follow, a more rigorous selection will be made, not only in the interests of the event, but also in the interests of the film production companies [translated from French].

This ambition was reasserted in 1939 during the organization of the Cannes film festival, in a regulation that stipulated that, "All the films presented at Cannes must have been produced during the last twelve months before the opening of the festival. In addition, fifty per cent of the feature films have to be unscreened in Europe" (R.F. 1939: 4) [translated from French].

As this excerpt suggests, the Cannes Festival, scheduled for 1939, definitively entrenched the concept of film festival, based on the model described before. Thus, introducing the Cannes event, Henry Barby (1939: 8) synthesized the "international film festival" concept in this way:

Since 1934, Venice was the place of a worldwide event called the "Venice Biennale", and, as a matter of fact, it became annual, a place where the big motion picture companies from the whole world came to present their films (three to four films per day) to an international jury [translated from French].

We can say that at this time, the concept, and the term chosen to designate it, seemed to be definitively adopted.

2.4 Permeability of the Concept During the Decades

In addition to these remarks, we must avoid thinking that this definition was only retained at the end of the decade. There are numerous examples that show that after 1932 the term "festival" continued to be used to describe a wide variety of events, as was the tendency during the 1920s (at club meetings, commemorations, and so on). It is important to keep in mind the commonalities between these two kinds of events termed "festivals". Cinephilia, for example, was added in the case of the other types of "film festivals" as a special interest in film history. As indicated by Jean Laury (1933: 5), writing for *Le Figaro*, these "film festivals" provided the advantage of a wider array of selections in their heritage programming choices:

Film festival is, in some ways, a compendium of the story of screen. This excellent formula offers an anthology and invite us to make our point clear. I prefer it to the one adopted by some movie theaters which offer, at the beginning of the show, old films chosen from among the worst. To be helpful, lessons from the past must be beautiful, not ridiculous, and invite comparison, without provoking laughter [translated from French].

Conclusion

The concluding definition of a “film festival” proposed by Jean Laury is quite different from the definition of the “international film festival” we have considered thus far. How else can we interpret the fact that only this second meaning survived until World War II? We propose two working hypotheses on this topic. First, the success of these international events during the 1930s helped to entrench this specific point of view and can be analysed at three levels: popularity (because attendance was important each time), critical (because they were accustomed to many journalists who could corroborate their views about cinema as an artform) and media success (because a lot a journalists, from all the countries invited to participate to the film festivals, were mobilized). The presence of prestigious guests in these international events attracted additional media coverage, thus contributing to the mediatization of these events to the general public.



Fig. 4. Some guests of the Venice Mostra, 1934. “Le Festival International du cinéma” (1934). *Comoedia* August 24th

The second hypothesis is that the interest of the FIAPF (International Federation of Films Producers Associations)⁷ for international film festivals had an extensive role in the process. During the post-War period, international film festivals in fact became sites where the producers exerted their influence and promoted their films. As Caroline Moine (2013) has demonstrated in her research, since the fifties, the FIAPF has played a behind-the-scenes role in the organization of these festivals by regulating their calendars, categorizing them, and setting an international hierarchy among them. These two combined hypotheses help to explain why, dur-

7. Created in 1933, the FIAPF is an organization in charge, among other tasks, of regulating international film festivals. Its Secretariat is in Brussels.

ing the post-War period, the use of the word “festival” in the cinematographic frame was standardized as an “international festival”, and the first sense of the word has been definitively abandoned.

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Between Politics and Economics: The Locarno Film Festival from Tourism to Cinephilia (1946–1972)

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Abstract

Renowned today as an international hub for emerging cinema, the Locarno Film Festival (LFF) was initially founded in 1946 as a touristic attraction managed by film professionals. This article examines the LFF's struggles to impose its cultural and artistic ambitions over the economic agenda of its main stakeholders and against the country's strong anticommunist climate from the 1940s to the 1970s. Underlining the difficulties met by this event situated in the peripheral canton of Ticino, it sheds light on the progressive involvement of the federal state as a mediator in the conflicts between the film and the tourism industries on the one side, and the so-called cinephiles circles on the other.

Keywords: Festival; Politics; Cinephilia; Switzerland; Anticommunism.

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Founded in 1946, the Locarno Film Festival (LFF) is one of the oldest film festivals in the world. Renowned as an international hub for emerging cinema, the Swiss event has often been portrayed as an alternative “to traditional commercial distribution” driven by cinephile ambitions (Kishore 2013: 738), notably because it pioneered the celebration of Italian Neo-Realism, Latin American and Asian Cinema, and especially Polish, Czech, and Hungarian New Waves. In fact, originally conceived as a touristic attraction managed by film professionals, Locarno had to fight hard to impose its cultural ambitions over the economic agenda of its main stakeholders and against an anticommunism widely shared among “the political, military, and judicial authorities [as well as] the vast majority of parties, associations and newspapers” (Fayet 2009). During its first twenty-five years, the LFF was thus caught between economics and politics and developed its identity through thick and thin.

If no film festival was ever created with purely artistic motivations (Taillibert and Wäfler 2016),¹ unlike other events founded during the same period, such as Venice (1932), Cannes (1939), Karlovy Vary (1946), or Berlin (1951), the LFF was not established nor initially supported by political authorities: it rather emerged, like the Edinburgh festival (1947), as a “grassroots celebration” (Stevens 2016). From the point of view of German-speaking Switzerland, where the political decisions were made and where most of the cultural and economic life was concentrated (especially in the field of cinema), the fact that the country’s main film festival was held in the peripheral and culturally minority canton of Ticino was the source of many conflicts.² That is why, contrarily to other competitions which gained legitimacy by emancipating from the control of the state, Locarno escaped from the grip of the tourism and the film industries precisely by obtaining the support of the government (Haver and Jacques 2003, Moeschler 2011).³

Considering film festivals as “mixed spaces crossed by commercial interest, specialized film knowledge and tourist trajectories” (Harbord 2002:60), we will analyze how the tensions between different stakeholders – particularly associations of film producers, distributors, and cinema operators as well as a tourist organization called Pro Locarno – affected the development of the LFF’s identity. To do so, this article will retrace the period during which the festival evolved from a small-scale, provincial celebration to an international platform for art house cinema. As we will argue, the economic tutelage and political pressures of the tourism and the film industries, as well as the uncertain support from the Confederation, had a determining influence on the shaping of the festival during its first twenty-five years.

State of the Art and Research Outline

Apart from some chapters in edited volumes on the history of festivals (Autissier 2009, Giorgi et al. 2011, Poirrier 2012, Fléchet et al. 2013), extensive works entirely devoted to film festivals by historians are still rare, especially if we consider the number of books written or edited by film scholars (Porton 2009, Wong 2011, Dickson 2014, Diesto-Dópido 2014, Valck et al. 2016, Vallejo and Paz Peirano 2017, Jenkins 2018), as well as critics, journalists, or festival curators (Turan 2002, Torche 2008, Lloyd 2011). Noting that, comparatively, historical works often focus on geopolitical, diplomatic, and ideological issues (Pisu 2013, Kötzing and Moine 2017, Moine 2018, Fehrenbach 2020, Bláhová 2020), this article will not only shed light on the political history of the LFF, but it will also underline the economic factors which played a key role in its identity building. We will consider that film festivals, situated “at the intersection of art, commerce, technology, culture, identity, power, politics and ideology” (Rüling and Strandgaard Pedersen 2010: 319), are not independent and autonomous entities created solely for art’s sake, but that they depend on various actors defending their own interests (Getz et al. 2007, Rhyne 2009, Getz and Andersson 2010). We will thus examine how diverse agendas

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1. Among the few events mainly supported by local cinephiles after the Second World War were the Sydney Film Festival (1954) and the San Francisco Film Festival (1957).
 2. As *Variety*’s film critic Gene Moskowitz explained, the LFF, “situated in the South is far from the Northern Swiss who dominates. [...] It also appears that many would like to have the festival take place in German speaking Switzerland”. Gene Moskowitz, “Locarno Fest Still Ignored by U.S.”, *Variety* 08.08.1962: 16. It is worthy of note that *Cinémathèque suisse* was situated in French-speaking Switzerland.
 3. The first federal law on cinema in Switzerland came into effect in 1963. Before that, the Confederation had no legal basis to support the festival.

shaped the construction of one of the first major European film festivals created after the Second World War, to begin to fill an historiographical gap about the LFF.

Despite a growing interest for the dynamic field of film festival studies since the publication of Marijke de Valck's *Film festivals* (2007) and the *Film Festival Yearbooks* edited by Dina Iordanova (2009–present), only a couple academic publications have been dedicated to the Locarno Film Festival (Casetti and Richeri 2004, Maggi 2005). Next to the (sometimes critical) commemorative volumes edited by the festival itself (Volonterio 1977, Schlappner et al. 1987, Cosandey 1988, Maire and Pesko 1997, Buccella 2014, LFF 2022, Buccella 2022), as well as several accounts from art historians (Volonterio 1997, Ambrosioni 1998, Lucchini and Catella 2004), only an article (Wäfler 2017) and a M.A. dissertation (Leoni 2020) proposed examinations of the economic and political issues of Locarno's history, going further than simply emphasizing which filmmakers or cinematographic movements were “discovered” in Locarno.

In order to propose a contextual analysis of the LFF, this article will rely on the archives of the festival and the touristic organization Pro Locarno held by the *Archivio di Stato* in Bellinzona, as well as those of the professional film associations deposited at the *Cinémathèque suisse* (Swiss Film Archive) in Penthaz.⁴ Additionally, documents from the federal administration, situated at the Swiss Federal Archives in Bern and from the national and international press (general and specialized) will be exploited. In the following pages, we will firstly focus on the initial years of the festival (1946–1949), when it was completely under the tutelage of the tourism and the film industries. Secondly, we will examine the ideological obstacles that hindered the event's cultural ambitions in the early 1950s. Thirdly, we will analyze how political and economic pressures grew as the LFF specialized in emerging cinema in the 1960s. Finally, we will demonstrate how Locarno's radical choices to become a hub for “new cinema” in the late 1960s clashed with the agenda of its main stakeholders.

1 Getting Rid of a Commercial Tutelage

Founded in a small seaside resort situated south of the Alps, the Locarno Film Festival was conceived as a tourist attraction by its founders (members of the tourist office Pro Locarno and professionals from the movie industry). In addition to the cocktail parties, receptions, beauty contests, and fashion shows, excursions to the surrounding valleys and to the islands on Lake Maggiore were integral parts of the festival. With its Mediterranean climate and romantic scenery set in the park of a 19th century palace (the Grand Hotel), Locarno shared many characteristics with others film festivals created during the same period on rivieras or in spa towns and did not stand particularly out as a “cinephilic” event.

Until the mid-1950s, only movies that were commercially distributed in Switzerland could be screened in Locarno.⁵ The festival heavily relied on the professional networks of vice-president André Mondini (owner of the town's cinemas). In fact, the film industry exerted such an important influence on the festival, that the press designed it as a “film market” that needed to “emancipate itself from the movie distributors.”⁶ From an artistic point of view, Locarno did not initially have a very good reputation, and many film critics accused this “trade show” of lacking “a sense of culture” and a real vision of cinema.⁷

Just as Cannes (Benghozi and Nénert 1995), in its early days, Locarno was deemed too touristic, too “commercial,”⁸ and not enough “cinophile” by those who regretted that “the state joyously ignore[d]” it and did not help it adopting a more cultural agenda.⁹ The LFF was generally depicted as being under the “tutelage” of

4. Contacted by email, the International Federation of Film Producers Associations (FIAPF) declined the author's request to access its archives.

5. Only a small fraction of the movies was proposed to the festival by foreign embassies in Bern.

6. AV, “Billet du Tessin”, *La Liberté* (07.08.1950): 4; Jean Thévenot, “Locarno a inauguré la saison des festivals”, *L'Ecran français* 159 (1948): 4.

7. Jean-Charles Tacchella and Jean Thévenot, “Locarno a inauguré la saison des festivals”, *L'Ecran français*, no. 159, 13.07.1948: 4; Virgilio Gilardoni, “Il terzo Festival internazionale del Film”, *Il Lavoratore*, 10.07.1948: 2.

8. ASCT, 3.1.15, C6: memo by the festival for Federal Councilor Philipp Etter, 23.08.1955.

9. Jean Nicollier, “Les débuts du VII^{me} festival de Locarno”, *Gazette de Lausanne* (07.07.1953): 1.

the movie and the tourism industries by film buffs,¹⁰ who noted that the most interesting part of the program (*films d'auteur*, documentaries and special sections such as the retrospective) were scheduled in the morning and the afternoon in local cinemas (when the locals were working and the tourists sightseeing) while the most commercial movies were screened in the park of the Grand Hotel in the evening, as pure entertainment products.

This situation was mainly due to the fact that Pro Locarno organized the first editions of the festival “alone and without any financial help from the local authorities.”¹¹ Consequently, in 1949, in order to diversify its funding sources and hopefully gain more independence in the artistic field, the festival became an association of its own, legally separated from the tourist office.¹² However, after this first step towards autonomy, the LFF met several difficulties in the early 1950s, mostly caused by conflicts with the film industry, which necessitated the progressive involvement of the federal state as a mediator.

The first of these incidents was the cancellation of the 1951 edition, caused by a lack of funding to restore one of the three movie theaters of Locarno. The renovation was demanded by film distributors, who required better screening conditions for their products.¹³ The absence of political support to overcome this obstacle was duly noted by the omnipotent International Federation of Film Producers Associations (FIAPF), the “king-maker of the international film festival circuit” (Ostrowska 2020, Moine 2013),¹⁴ which controlled (and limited) the number of film festivals with its four categories ranking: A (competitive international film festivals), B (non-competitive international film festivals), C (competitive specialized film festivals) and D (non-competitive national film festivals).

After the introduction of this classification in the early 1950s, the members of the FIAPF were instructed to boycott the festivals which did not follow the federation’s regulations, thus depriving them of their most crucial assets (the movies). One of the requirements to join Venice and Cannes in the A-list was for festivals to send invitations to film-producing countries via diplomatic channels. For the LFF, this would have meant a liberation from the tutelage of the distributors and the possibility of establishing a program based on more artistic considerations. Unfortunately for Locarno, the Swiss government refused to do so, in order not to give the festival some sort of officiality.¹⁵ Consequently, one year after being ranked B (like the newly founded Berlinale), the LFF was downgraded to the D rank in 1953.

This setback, a loss of prestige for Switzerland, triggered a reaction from Bern. The government, which still refused to financially support the festival, to transmit invitations via diplomatic channels, or to plead its cause to the FIAPF because it was an institution “of private nature,”¹⁶ recognized Locarno as an event of national significance in 1954.¹⁷ This meant that Swiss distributors could then import movies out of their annual quota specifically for the festival.¹⁸ In other words, from then on, the LFF’s program would no longer be composed solely of commercially distributed films selected according to profitability criteria. This decisive step allowed the organizers to stop relying mainly on major producing countries such as the United States, France, Italy,

10. ASCT, 3.1.15, C6: letter from Bolla to Calgari, 14.05.1954.

11. ASCT, 2.2.80, box 45: minutes of the general assembly of the executive committee of the festival, 11.01.1949.

12. Comparatively, Cannes was formally created as an independent association a couple of years earlier, while the Berlin film festival only did so in 1969. Besides the city of Locarno, the surrounding villages, and the canton of Ticino, other financial support to the LFF came from the hoteliers, transport societies, casinos, banks, etc.

13. ASCT, 3.1.15, C6: letter from the festival to the Association of film distributors in Switzerland, 12.04.1950.

14. Founded in 1933 and revived in 1948, the FIAPF promoted the free international circulation of movies, especially after the arrival of the Motion Picture Association of America as a member. Film festivals were initially seen as a good tool for this purpose, but as they proliferated, the federation established a categorization system in 1951 to restrict the events that could hold previews and competitions via a certification system.

15. ASCT, 3.1.15, C6: letter from the Federal Political Department to the Department of Education of Ticino, 08.02.1951.

16. ASCT, 3.1.15, V4: letter from the FDHA to Locarno, 12.11.1954.

17. AFS, E2001E#1970/1#1112*: Federal Council’s decision, 01.06.1954.

18. Since 1938, the import of feature films in Switzerland was subjected to a quota aimed at limiting the monopoly of big foreign companies (mainly American) and the diffusion of propaganda from Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the USSR. It was suppressed in 1992 (Haver 2004). ASCT, 3.1.15, V4: letter from the Swiss Associations for the Development of cinematographic culture to the festival, 30.12.1954.

Great Britain, and Germany,¹⁹ and to open up to other national cinematographies, especially those of Eastern Europe, which were experiencing a period of thaw and renewal.²⁰ In the words of English and French film critics, in the early 1950s, because “there was no question of asking the Federal Government for help [...] the Locarno Festival has developed a style of its own” by “calling directly on the countries of the Iron Curtain.”²¹

2 Facing Ideological Obstacles

Until the nomination of Vinicio Beretta as the festival's secretary in 1953, movies from socialist countries were rare in Locarno. This journalist developed relationships with Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the USSR, and East Germany, which were particularly enthused by the opportunity to take part in a Western film festival. This earned the LFF the reputation of being “the most open, the freest, the most eclectic” cinematographic competition, and to appear as a *détente avant la lettre* event where both blocs coexisted in the same program.²² From 1953 on, at least one East European movie was awarded each year in Locarno (except in 1957), a situation which displeased many Swiss German commentators, especially in 1955, when films coming from the other side of the Iron Curtain received more prizes than the Western ones. As for the Federal Political Department (i.e. Foreign Affairs), which still refused to collaborate with the LFF, it asked Locarno to take into account “certain political considerations” in the selection of movies.²³

In 1956, a hard blow illustrated the timid but growing will of the state to support the festival. The incident started as a commercial dispute between Swiss distributors and foreign producers.²⁴ When the latter considered that no satisfactory agreement could be found, the FIAPF sided with its members and decided not to recognize Locarno as a retaliatory measure, which led the festival to be cancelled for a second time. The federation's decision greatly surprised the Swiss authorities, which denounced a confusion between a private matter and a public national event.²⁵ Still, Bern failed to support the festival against violent attacks from the film industry concerning the selection in Locarno of movies coming from socialist countries or, as the festival put it, “films produced by countries that are not, for reasons unknown to us, at Cannes or Venice.”²⁶

While cinephiles praised Locarno's decision to screen those films, generally absent from most traditional cinemas theaters, many Swiss Germans commentators perceived it as an ideological threat.²⁷ After the repression of the 1956 Budapest insurrection, strong anticommunist reactions throughout the country led the Swiss association of cinema operators to call for a boycott of movies from the Eastern bloc and to leave Locarno's patronage committee.²⁸ Considering any East European production as worthless communist propaganda, the Swiss German press was particularly annoyed by the fact that, as for all participants, the anthem of socialist countries was played before the screenings of their films in the park of the Grand Hotel, and that their flag was raised during this ceremony. A member of the Federal Assembly even reproached the government having officially recognized the LFF, which he depicted as a mere showcase of communist propaganda. Those

19. Between 1946 and 1950, American, Italian, French, British and West German films represented 81% of the festival's main program. This share reduced to 66% between 1952–1957, 52% between 1958 and 1962 and 36% between 1963 and 1965.

20. After the death of Stalin and the questioning of the canons of socialist realism, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria welcomed a new generation of filmmakers whose works were awarded in several festivals around the world.

21. Francis Koval, “Locarno Festival”, *Sight and Sound* 19:7 (November 1950): 272; Pierre Michaut, “À Berlin et à Locarno: quelques films”, *Les Cahiers du cinéma* 38 (1954): 33.

22. Pierre Michaut, “De Berlin à Locarno”, *Les Cahiers du cinéma* 51 (1955): 30. See also Guido Aristarco's articles in *Cinema nuovo* no. 15 (15.07.1953), no. 16 (01.08.1953) et no. 40 (01.08.1954).

23. ASCT, 3.1.15, C5: letter from the festival to the FIAPF, 30.03.1956.

24. Foreign producers boycotted Swiss distributors to pressure them to abandon their mutual agreement to pay less for imported films.

25. ASCT, 3.1.15, C5: letter from the Swiss Film Chamber to the FIAPF, 03.05.1956.

26. ASCT, 3.1.15, C6: letter from the festival to the FIAPF, 11.07.1955.

27. Because any form of cultural exchange with the Eastern bloc was seen in Switzerland as a strategy to keep the population's vigilance at bay and because pacifist rhetoric was automatically equated with communist propaganda, Locarno was accused of playing into the hands of peaceful coexistence (Buomberger 2017, Bulcin 2019).

28. “Keine kommunistischen Filme in der Schweiz”, *Schweizer Film Suisse* 11 (1956): 5.

accusations led the Swiss intelligence services to closely monitor the festival,²⁹ and the Swiss authorities to suggest Locarno to select less movies from the Eastern bloc.³⁰

Nevertheless, the cancellation of the 1956 edition triggered a positive reaction from the Swiss government. In 1957, the Federal Department of Home Affairs (FDHA) finally dared writing to the FIAPF, to ask the federation not to do anything detrimental to the festival.³¹ Two years later, the LFF finally accessed the A-rank, after having been forced to change its dates to late July, during the peak of the tourist season. Fortunately for the LFF, the tourism industry was still very keen on supporting it and represented one of the main driving forces behind the festival's survival. Given the economic importance of the event for the region, Pro Locarno worst fear was indeed that another town could "steal" it after a cancelled edition.³² In fact, in the 1950s, because a great part of the management board of the festival was still composed of people representing the interests of the tourist office, which provided one third of its subsidies, Pro Locarno had no qualms asking:

"Who wanted the festival? Pro Locarno. Who made huge sacrifices to create it and make it a very effective means of propaganda for Locarno? Pro Locarno. Who still organizes the festival today? Pro Locarno. From whom does the main financial contribution to the event come after that of the [canton]? Pro Locarno. Who owns the material that the festival uses? Pro Locarno. Does Pro Locarno really have the voice it deserves on the festival's boards?"³³

Still subjected to the goodwill of the film and the tourism industries, the festival was in an increasingly difficult position, caught between the cultural and artistic ambitions of leading figures such as Vinicio Beretta, and the conservative views of distributors, cinema operators, and "the local bourgeoisie" ensuring its economic survival (Schlappner 1987: 45).

If, on the one hand, the festival began organizing highly acclaimed retrospectives in collaboration with the *Cinémathèque suisse*,³⁴ on the other hand, it proved difficult "to silence the criticism that the Locarno festival ha[d] no other purpose than to offer the tourists a form of entertainment out of the ordinary."³⁵ Additionally, Locarno's open door to the Polish, Czech, and Hungarian New Waves, which the organizers considered natural for an international meeting point situated in a neutral country, beyond political divides, was very badly received in anticommunist Switzerland.³⁶ This uncomfortable situation worsened in the early 1960s, despite the nomination a new president (Enrico Franzoni, mayor of the town of Muralto since 1952 and national councilor since 1959) chosen in the hope that he could defend and support the LFF in Bern.

3 The Conjunction of Political and Economic Pressures

If Franzoni became a key supporter of the festival at the national level, at the international one, Oscar Düby (FIAPF's general secretary since 1959 and head of the FDHA's Film Section from 1963 to 1969) occupied a strategic position that undoubtedly benefitted Locarno amidst growing competition between film festivals. The Swiss functioned as a mediator who defended the LFF's choice to specialize in "new cinema" (i.e. first and second movies of young filmmakers) when it decided, one year before Cannes introduced its *Semaine de la critique*, to be divided in two: a competitive section (for experimental movies and avant-garde cinema

29. AFS, E4329.01C#1996/203*: surveillance files of the LFF, 1957–88.

30. Consequently, the LFF apologized for having selected too much movies "that did not correspond to the spirit, the spiritual need, and the Swiss conceptions". ASCT, 3.1.15, C6: memo by the festival for Etter, 23.08.1955.

31. ASCT, 3.1.15, V4: letter from the Film Section of the FDHA to the FIAPF, 23.03.1957.

32. ASCT, 2.2.80, box 47: report by the organizational committee of the festival, 01.1953.

33. ASCT, 3.1.15., C5: internal document of the festival, 1956.

34. The first retrospectives were for example dedicated to Akira Kurosawa (1957), Ingmar Bergman (1959), Luis Bunuel (1960), Fritz Lang (1961), Jean Vigo (1962) or John Ford (1963).

35. ASCT, 3.1.15, C5: letter from the festival to the FIAPF, 30.03.1956.

36. In 1959, the president of the festival declared: "If the authorities were to officially or unofficially recommend that no films from Eastern European countries should be shown at the Festival, the Committee would abide by this wish, although, in the minds of the organizers, the international character of the Festival should not completely exclude productions from beyond the Iron Curtain". Cin, ACSR (CSL2), F10: minutes of the meeting between the festival, the Swiss Film Chamber and professional associations, 10.04.1959.

in the afternoon) and a non-competitive section (with more conventional or “classic” movies in the evening). This solution pleased both the film and the tourism industries, as well as the cinephiles, who recognized that Locarno had become “more than a simple tourist attraction [thanks to] the independence that preside[d] over the choice of the films presented.”³⁷

If Düby’s support certainly weighed in the FIAPF’s decision to rank Locarno in the A category in 1959, the decisive impulse to the internationalization, the professionalization, and the transformation of the festival into a meeting point for cinephiles with an artistic taste for avant-garde cinema came from Vinicio Beretta, who became the festival’s director in 1960. Under his leadership, the LFF was increasingly praised by film critics,³⁸ who appreciated his daring choice to promote young filmmakers instead of “society events, stardom or starlet shows.”³⁹ However, Beretta also received warnings from the film industry and the Swiss authorities, who asked him “to be very careful in the choice of subjects,”⁴⁰ to exclude films “that seem politically dangerous”, and to select only four or five East European films for each edition.⁴¹

In 1960, political pressure was exerted on the international jury, which was dissuaded from awarding the Golden Veil (the highest prize) to the Soviet movie *Foma Gordeyev*.⁴² This was apparently not enough to calm things down, since “in protest against the accumulation of awards for Eastern films and filmmakers, several theater owners and distributors walked out and did not attend the closing reception.”⁴³ At the end of that edition, the organizers, worried that they would have upset the government, asked the FDHA’s Film Section if they had acted with sufficient parsimony towards socialist countries.⁴⁴

Having gained cultural legitimacy with the creation of special programs such as *Cinema e Gioventù* (Cinema and Youth), supported by the cantonal Department of Education, Locarno finally received an organizational and financial support from the Swiss government in the early 1960s. The Confederation accepted to transmit official invitations to foreign countries via diplomatic channels in 1961. More importantly, thanks to the coming into effect of the first law on cinema in Switzerland, the government attributed Locarno a first federal subsidy in 1963. But when the festival definitively decided to specialize in “new cinema”, renewed tensions with the film and the tourism industries arose.

Locarno’s affirming identity was partly a product of the collaboration between Beretta and Freddy Buache, director of the *Cinemathèque suisse*. In addition to organizing retrospectives that were unanimously acclaimed (even by Swiss German journalists), their friendship facilitated the selection in Locarno of films that Buache had seen in Karlovy Vary, Moscow, Prague, or Budapest.⁴⁵ Because of the low commercial potential of the movies coming from the other side of the Iron Curtain and because of its strong anticommunism, the Swiss film industry showed a deep disinterest for them (Buache 2009: 177). Joining their voice to that of Pro Locarno, which was worried that these films would scare away the tourists coming to Ticino for entertainment,⁴⁶ cinema operators threatened to create their own international film festival in Zurich, the country’s economic capital

37. Gene Moskowitz, “Locarno”, *Cinéma*, no. 60, 1961: 50.

38. Freddy Landry, “Locarno inaugure aujourd’hui son XIIeme Festival international du film”, *Feuille d’Avis de Neuchâtel*, 09.07.1959 : 1 and 9.

39. ASCT, 3.1.15, MF12: letter from Buache to the newspaper *Le Peuple*, 08.08.1960.

40. Cin, SLV (CSL12): minutes of the Swiss Film Chamber, 07.06.1960.

41. ASCT, 3.1.15, V7: letter from Beretta to the FDHA’s Film Section, 10.06.1960.

42. This situation was the consequence of protests from the Swiss German press after the screening of a Cuban short film in Locarno. According to one film critic: “Swiss German circles began to accuse the Locarno festival of ‘selling out to the East’ and threatened to launch a vigorous press campaign against it if... This the jury knew and - freely - took into account”. “Que faut-il penser du palmarès du XIIIeme Festival de Locarno ?”, *L’Express* (12.08.1960): 10. This testimony is similar to that of Buache (2009: 130).

43. Jürg Bär, “Locarno: Goldenes Segel an Italien”, *Film Echo* 62 (03.08.1960): 1011.

44. ASCT, 3.1.15, V7: letter from Beretta to the FDHA’s Film Section, 10.08.1960.

45. As director Shirley Clarke explained to a French journalist, “the great interest of Locarno compared to other international festivals was that it was the only one where the organizers chose the films presented without the producer countries being able to impose their choice”. Isabelle Vichniac, “Le Japon triomphe au Festival cinématographique international de Locarno”, *Le Monde*, (01.08.1961).

46. ASCT, 3.1.15, C4: minutes of the executive commission of the festival, 23.12.1961.

city.⁴⁷ The antagonism between commercial and cultural interests, more flagrant than ever, then fueled violent political attacks against Locarno.

With the support of key figures of the Swiss German press, cinema operators launched a defamatory campaign against the festival and its director, whom they accused of being a cryptocommunist using the festival as a showcase for communist propaganda.⁴⁸ Reacting to these polemics, Hans-Peter Tschudi (head of the Home Affairs) suspended the transmission of invitations via diplomatic channels and suggested Locarno to program less “subversive” movies. Faced with persistent criticism, he then proposed a more constructive solution: the creation of a “national” selection commission – supposed to act “in favor of ‘western culture’” – including some of the festival’s most ardent detractors.⁴⁹

Even if Beretta considered that this compromise allowed the film industry to “practically control the festival,”⁵⁰ he eventually had to accept it. This political selection commission, which was perceived as a retaliatory and intrusive measure from German speaking Switzerland in Locarno despite the government’s insurance that its aim was not to create a “state festival [with] an official federal organization,”⁵¹ was fiercely criticized by the international press. More importantly, despite this rapprochement between the festival and the film industry, Locarno continued to be attacked for selecting and awarding too many East European movies in the following years. Also criticized for having given in to pressures from German speaking Switzerland, Beretta left the festival for good in early 1966.

4 An Impossible Breakaway between Economy and Culture?

Despite having gained the support of the state and the recognition of the cinephiles in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, the LFF still had to struggle to affirm its identity. In the late 1960s, the festival decided to assert its ambitions more drastically. Breaking from the tradition by putting an end to the open-air screenings in the park of the Grand Hotel, Sandro Bianconi (scholar, movie critic, and leader of the local film club) and Freddy Buache – the two new directors of the LFF – changed the dates of the event from summer to autumn (a decision appealing to apprentices, high school, and university students). This radical shift unsurprisingly displeased the tourist office Pro Locarno, which accused the directors of organizing a festival for film critics only.⁵² As for the Swiss film distributors and cinema operators, they called Locarno an “anti-economic” ghetto and an “anti-festival,”⁵³ whose “elitism” they considered contradictory with the financial support provided by the Confederation.⁵⁴ The tourism and the film industries thus asked Bianconi and Buache to put things back on an even keel by selecting movies that could attract wider audiences.⁵⁵

The FIAPF, noting “a significant drop in interest” in film festivals in general, prevented Locarno from specializing in Third World cinema because another event was already considering this option. As for Düby, who also explained that another festival (most likely Pesaro) was about to “become, with substantial financial resources,

47. Interestingly, the Zurich Film Festival created in 2005 has also been described as a competitor for Locarno (Valck et al.: 49–64).

48. Beretta was deeply affected by this campaign, which he designed as a “manhunt”. Also attacked for being of Italian origin, he constantly had to repeat that he was not a communist but only a member of the Social Democratic Party. ASCT, 3.1.15, V7: letter from Beretta to Tschudi, 16.12.1961.

49. For more about this commission, see Cyril Cordoba, “The Locarno Film Festival under the Influence? Programming Eastern European Movies in Anti-communist Switzerland (1946–1962)”, in *Contemporary European History*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000650>. ASCT, 3.1.15, C4: minutes of the executive commission of the festival, 23.12.1961.

50. ASCT, 3.1.15, V7, letter from Beretta to Freddy Landry, 27.09.1961.

51. It is notable that in 1961 and 1962, the head of the FDHA’s Film Section repeatedly expressed his desire to see more “constructive” (or optimistic) films replace “pessimistic” (or subversive) ones at Locarno. ASCT, 3.1.15, V2: letter from the head of the FDHA’s Film Section to Beretta, 13.08.1962.

52. It is worth noting that the new audience of the festival, mainly composed of students, was less profitable for the local economy, since they were less likely to stay in expansive hotels, eat in fancy restaurants and spend their money in luxury stores.

53. Cin, CSL011, box 12: minutes of the meeting of the Federal Film Commission, 18.11.1970; ASCT, 3.1.15, V14: letter from Bianconi to the FIAPF, 28.10.1967.

54. Bl, “Wird Locarno zur zweiten ‘Berlinale’?”, in *Schweizer Film Suisse*, no. 10, October 1970: 3–4.

55. ASCT, 3.1.15, C9: minutes of the executive commission of the festival, 27.10.1968.

the intellectual, artistic, and professional center of tomorrow's cinema,"⁵⁶ his support for the LFF became rather evanescent. Thereby, because they lost the support their predecessors had so laboriously gained, the directors had to negotiate hard to obtain the right to organize an international competition devoted to "new world cinema", a convoluted way to combine their interest for young filmmakers and Third World movies.

Having gained the reputation of turning Locarno into a "red festival", Bianconi and Buache knew that they had to "obey Düby on certain points in order to better preserve [their] freedom of maneuver on others."⁵⁷ However, after four editions marked by radical programming choices and some political unrest,⁵⁸ Bianconi and Buache quitted, discouraged by "the indifference, incomprehension, and hostility of public opinion" towards their vision for the festival.⁵⁹ In a private letter, Buache later explained his disappointment to see Locarno, which was becoming "one of the most original [film festivals] in world [for] young international cinema, disgusted by the commercial fairs of Cannes or Berlin and the Venice mess [,] returning to the open air, that is to say to tourism."⁶⁰ As it turned out, without proper political support, the cultural ambitions of Locarno were kept in check.

Immediately after their resignation, an *ad interim* management organized the return of the festival to the outdoor (on the Piazza Grande, in the center of the city) and to the high tourist season. This decision was encouraged and financially supported by Pro Locarno,⁶¹ which "feared that Chur, Lausanne, Lucerne or Zurich would jump at the chance to take their place."⁶² If, like Buache, many cinephiles considered that "the identity of Locarno had been sacrificed and betrayed" (Schlappner 1987: 69), the situation was in fact very different from that of the 1950s. The global disruption of the late 1960s had indeed opened the way for more independent programming (Moine 2011). Most notably, following the example set by Cannes and Berlin with their alternative selections for "new cinema" (Thévenin 2009, Cowie 2010), a *Tribune libre* dedicated to more experimental movies was created in Locarno in the early 1970s. This change was personified by the new director Moritz de Hadeln, who had founded the Nyon documentary film festival with his wife Erika a few years earlier.

In 1972, de Hadeln became the manager of the Swiss Society of International Film Festivals, a newly created administrative entity supported by the federal administration, allowing him to run Locarno and Nyon simultaneously (Hadeln 1988). Often described as a man of consensus, Locarno's new director successfully reconciled tourists, film professionals, and cinephiles during his six years in office. Next to the official competition and the screenings on the Piazza Grande, festivalgoers could then find what they were looking for in different sections, such as *Tribune libre*, the Critics' Week (by the International Federation of Film Critics), or *Information suisse* (an initiative dedicated to Swiss cinema launched in 1969 by Bianconi and Buache). De Hadeln also notably created a Film Market, an experiment only briefly attempted before in 1964 (by imposition of the FI-APF).⁶³ Aiming at specializing Locarno in young filmmakers and Third World cinema like his predecessors, he invented a rather vague formulation ("new cinematographic perspectives") allowing Locarno to stay in the FI-APF's A category. Therefore, despite some minor polemics, the relationships between economic and cultural stakeholders became more harmonious in the 1970s.

56. ASCT, 3.1.15, V14: letter from FIAPF to the festival, 13.11.1967.

57. Cin, CSL1-35/4: Buache to Bianconi, 14.03.1969.

58. Besides the general critics from the Swiss German press against the choices of both directors (who were known leftist), in 1968, Switzerland did not escape the protests that had previously shaken Cannes, Berlin, and Venice. Firstly, the international jury presided by Czech director Jiří Menzel – who initially considered boycotting the Soviet, Hungarian and East German movies to protest the crushing of the Prague Spring by the Warsaw Pact troops – decided to step down in favour of the youth jury. Secondly, the closing ceremony of Locarno was disturbed by young activists, who occupied the Kursaal cinema to protest against the bourgeois character of the event (a similar critic was addressed to Venice that year).

59. ASCT, 3.1.15, C29: letter from Buache and Bianconi to the festival, 04.10.1970.

60. ASCT, 3.1.15, S3: letter from Buache to Bixio Candolfi, 24.08.1971.

61. ASCT, 2.2.80, box 47: letter from the direction of Pro Locarno to the members of the executive committee, 20.07.1971.

62. René Dasen, "Locarno 1971: un festival de transition", in *Schweizer Film Suisse*, no. 9, September 1971: 17.

63. One year after Venice launched a similar initiative, Cannes' *Marché du Film* was first established in 1951, but it was only officialized in 1959. Comparatively, before Berlin launched the European Film Market in 1978, its *Film Messe* was created in 1973.

Conclusion

As a grassroots event without any political support, the Locarno Film Festival was originally dominated by the commercial interests of the tourism and the film industries. In the early 1950s, the festival embarked on a quest for autonomy and independence. But as soon as it demonstrated its artistic aspirations, partly contradicting the agenda of its main stakeholders, the LFF entered an area of turbulence. In a weak position because of a lack of support at the federal level, it was cancelled twice and was subjected to growing political criticism. These difficulties eventually triggered a reaction from the state, allowing the event to find a common ground with the FIAPF and to specialize in “new cinema” during the 1960s. Nevertheless, the radical attempt of transforming the festival into an alternative celebration of world cinema in the late 1960s met again with the resistance of the tourism and the film industries and eventually came to an end. Finally, Moritz de Hadeln succeeded in internationalizing and stabilizing the LFF during the 1970s. Thanks to a new balance between tourism and cinephilia in the global film festivals landscape, and with a strong support from the Confederation, Locarno made a fresh start under better auspices.

Locarno’s history illustrates eloquently that “creating the conditions for a cinephilic experience is not a film festival’s only consideration. These are, after all, film *festivals*” (Czach 2010: 144). Every film festival had to negotiate in order to impose its cultural agenda in a field deeply subjugated to economic and political pressures (Pisu 2017). But as this article argued, if Locarno’s claim for autonomy echoed similar aspirations from other film festivals during the 1950s and the 1960s, the peculiarity of the Swiss case certainly was that the struggle was not waged against the state, but rather was a quest for more recognition from the authorities. For example, while the transmission of official invitations via diplomatic channels (a requirement from the FIAPF to give national producers’ association a decisive role in the selection of movies) was considered by major film festivals as a constraint and a subjection to commercial logics, for Locarno, it represented one mean of gaining legitimacy and opening its doors to more diverse productions thanks to Switzerland’s neutrality.⁶⁴

In this respect, the LFF’s first twenty-five years appear as a period of growing discrepancy between the tourism and the film industries on one side, and the so-called cinephiles (film critics, film clubs, *Cinémathèque*) on the other, with the state playing an increasingly important mediating role in economic and political conflicts. Much research still has to be conducted to understand more precisely how cultural institutions, political organisms, and economic actors shaped Locarno’s identity. Thereby, we close our argument with a call to further exploration of the LFF’s massive archival material and to deeper analysis of the negotiations and the struggles that took place beyond the 1970s, with one quote from the *Cahiers du cinéma*, which still considered in 1982 that Locarno was caught “between a sincere cinephilic will on the part of its organizers, and a too directly economic calculation (tourism) operated by the regional authorities.”⁶⁵

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64. It should however be mentioned that Bern entertained no diplomatic relations with socialist régimes such as the German Democratic Republic, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Albania, and North Korea until the early 1970s.

65. Serge Le Péron, “Locarno 1982. Auteurs où êtes-vous ?”, *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 341, 1982 : III.

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The Cinematic Battle for the Adriatic: Film Festivals and the Trieste Crisis

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Abstract

This article analyses film festival practices related to the Trieste Crisis, the diplomatic struggle over the Northern Adriatic borderlands between (capitalist) Italy and (socialist) Yugoslavia (1945-1954). It explores how different forms of festival activities, from film selecting to establishing of film festivals, have shaped conceptions of national identities in the region, by symbolically labeling disputed territories as “national”. Focusing on the way the local populations have been presented in films on this topic that circulated in major film festivals, it demonstrates the changing role of film festivals as playgrounds for political propaganda, from the early Cold War to contemporary post-socialist, nationalist and populist societies.

Keywords: Film Festival; Trieste Crisis; Cold War; Yugoslav Cinema; Italian Cinema.

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This article¹ analyses film festival practices related to the Trieste Crisis, that is, the early Cold War diplomatic struggle over the Northern Adriatic borderland between Italy and Yugoslavia.² As Western forces attempted to place the boundary between capitalist and communist Europe as far towards the East as possible, between 1945 and 1954 this ethnically hybrid region was split into two zones, one under Western control, and the other under control of the newly created socialist Yugoslavia. Central to the conflict's soft power dimension, both Italy and Yugoslavia produced several films about these events, often using them to validate their territorial claims. As the conflict coincided with the spread of film festivals across Europe, these cinematic images reached from local to international audiences, as the films traversed the festival circuit. Taking festivals as examples of what Pierre Nora described as *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory, the article investigates how different forms of festival action, from film programming to the establishment of new festivals, have been utilised to forge conflicting cultural memories of the struggle for this territory, coterminous with the national and international priorities of the countries involved (Nora 1997 [1984], Assmann 2006). With this in mind, the article's central concern lies in exploring how the identity of local populations of this multi-ethnic region has been presented through film festivals in order to symbolically label the disputed territories as "national", from the times of the conflict until the present. By addressing these issues, the article explores film festivals' evolving role as a propaganda playground, from the early Cold War to more recent times in which television and the new media have overtaken the primary role in moulding public opinion on political issues of national importance.

Despite the growing scholarly interest in memory and identity in the Northern Adriatic (Sluga 2001, Ballinger 2003, Verginella 2008, 2015, Klabjan 2020), cinema's role in their creation remains largely unexplored. Film analysis, for example, is usually limited to articles about TV programs (Knittel 2014) or Western production (Pizzi 2016, 2019). There are also some non-academic publications, primarily in Italian.³ Regarding film festival studies, although the Trieste Crisis coincided with the creation of the first European film festivals after Venice was established in 1932, their role in this conflict remains largely unexplored. I touched on this subject in *Yugoslav Documentary and Short Film Festival, 1954-2004. From Yugoslav Socialism to Serbian Nationalism* (2022), where I connect the creation of the Pula Film Festival to the Yugoslav territorial claims over Istria.⁴ Although historical analysis of film festivals in the Cold War perspective is available in the solid body of work (Kötzing and Moine 2017, Moine 2014, Pisu, 2013, 2016), publications in English taking into consideration diverse kinds of film festival response to this particular conflict are still lacking. By offering the first analysis of how different forms of festival activities have contributed to the shaping of the cultural memory of this historical episode, the article aims to use this specific study to make broader points about the political use of film festival action linked to the construction of national identities related to ideological and military conflicts in 20th and 21st century Europe.

The article, developed within the H2020 MSCA project "The Cinematic Battle for the Adriatic: Films, Frontiers and the Trieste Crisis (CBA TRIESTE)" is a result of research in cultural history based on an analysis of the relevant national and festival archives and films that refer to the topic.⁵ After explaining the historical context and the main narratives resulting from it, the article proceeds to the examination of festival practices related to this conflict at the time of the events. It then compares these findings with the contemporary situation, demonstrating how the narrativization of these events, as well as the festivals' role in its creation and promotion, has moved from the political context of the polarized world in the early Cold War, to contemporary populist and liberal capitalist Europe.

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1. I would like to thank to David Archibald and anonymous reviewers for their invaluable comments on the draft of this article.
 2. Some sources use the term Trieste Crisis only for the most intense period within the broader term Trieste Question (Serbo-Croatian: *tršćansko pitanje*, Slovenian: *tržaško vprašanje*, Italian: *questione triestina*). In this article, the term Trieste Crisis refers to the entire period of negotiations regarding the demarcation between the two countries, *i. e.* 1945 to 1954.
 3. Alessandro Cuk's monographs provide information on the Italian films from the 40s and 50s (Cuk 2007, 2012).
 4. The book is the adaptation of my doctoral thesis defended at Paris Saclay University in 2017 (*Festival jugoslovenskog dokumentarnog i kratkometražnog filma. Od jugoslovenskog socijalizma do srpskog nacionalizma, 1954-2004*, Beograd: Filmski centar Srbije, forthcoming in 2023).
 5. Conducted at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, the project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 101020692 (MSCA-IF-GF).

1 Conflicting Memories of the Past

The multicultural and multi-ethnic region of Julian March has been a subject of long-term territorial aspirations of both Italians and South Slavs (Croats, Slovenes) and has undertaken multiple border redefinitions.⁶ The disputed area spans from the town of Gorizia and the port of Trieste in the Northwest, over the peninsula of Istria, up to the port of Rijeka/Fiume in the Southeast. Until the end of First World War the region was a part of Austria-Hungary. After the empire dissolved at the end of the war, South Slavic populations sought to incorporate it into their newly created state, the kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918), or etymologically, the country of the South Slavs, a nation state that included parts of Austria-Hungary where Slovenes, Croats and Serbs lived in great numbers.⁷ Italy had similar aspirations, however, and once the war was over it took control of the territory in question.⁸ Yugoslav resistance leader, Josip Broz Tito, used the context of the Second World War to try to resolve this question in Yugoslavia's favour. After the capitulation of Italy in 1943, in May 1945 Tito's partisans liberated the area from the Nazi occupation (1943-1945), planning to integrate it into the reorganized, socialist and federal Yugoslavia, which they had proclaimed two years earlier in the territories under their control.⁹ However, the Western Allies opposed the integration of this area into Yugoslavia, at the time a Soviet partner, in order to prevent the spread of Soviet hegemony towards the West. Instead, they divided it into two military administrations, separated by an administrative boundary: zone A in the West was under the control of the Anglo-Americans, while zone B in the East was controlled by the Yugoslav army. Particularly problematic was the status of the Istrian town of Pula, since it was placed under Allied control, although positioned in the middle of the Zone B. With the Paris Peace Treaty, Pula became a part of Yugoslavia, while a mini state named The Free Territory of Trieste (FTT) was created in the still disputed regions (1947).¹⁰ This territory, smaller than the original one, was also divided into A and B zones, under Western and Yugoslav control, until the signing of the London Memorandum in 1954. The Memorandum established the *de facto* border between the two countries, enabling Italy to regain most of the Northern zone, while most of the Southern zone was unified with Yugoslavia. Nonetheless, Italy refused to ratify it for more than 20 years, which testifies to their dissatisfaction with the division of this territory (Zaccaria 2019: 506).¹¹

War crime accusations by both sides and repeated migrations of local populations under political pressure, enabled the history of the struggle for this territory to become a fertile ground for the political use of cinematic images, resulting in the creation of contradictory cultural memories of these events. Frequent border changes had numerous social and cultural consequences, as well as an important influence on the demographics of the region. By the end of the Second World War there was a noticeable emigration of the Slavic populations from the areas under the Italian rule, to Yugoslavia. This was especially the case after fascists rose to power and began to implement repressive politics towards the non-Italian residents. After 1947 a reverse process happened, and numerous Italians migrated to Italy from the areas that were annexed to Yugoslavia, in the migrations known today under the term "Istrian-Dalmatian Exodus". Some were afraid of partisan retaliation against fascists and presumed collaborators, many of whom found death in deep natural sinkholes characteristic for this geographic area, called *foibe* in the local Italian dialect. Some fled influenced by the strong anti-Yugoslav and anti-socialist campaign on the Italian side (Altin and Badurina 2017: 321). Many of the ones who left, around a third, settled in the nearest city on the Italian side, Trieste (*Idem*, 322). The national structure of Trieste was therefore also modified. The complexity of national and political relations in the region

6. The region is known under the terms Julian March (Serbo-Croatian, Slovene: *Julijska krajina*) and Julian Venetia (Italian: *Venezia Giulia*).

7. Yugo – south. Slavia – the place of Slavs. Founded in 1918 as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes within the political project of Yugoslav unification, the state changed its name into Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929.

8. For a historical overview of the border changes in the region see Sluga 2001:11–63.

9. The only antifascist movement active in the Yugoslav area during WWII, Tito's partisans conducted a double, military and ideological struggle during the war. They also ended the war as the double victors, having managed to liberate the country from the occupation, and to take over the power transforming the Kingdom into a socialist republic.

10. FTT was established by the Paris Peace Treaty on February 10, 1947. Yugoslav Army entered Pula on September 15, 1947 when the Treaty came into force. As FTT was smaller than the originally claimed territory, this means that the conflict was partially resolved with the signature of the Treaty.

11. The territory's partition was confirmed and borders between the two countries definitely established only in 1975 with the Treaties of Osimo, which came into force in 1977. For more, see Zaccaria 2019: 503–520.

is additionally reinforced by the fact that not all the Italians left – many willingly stayed in Yugoslavia, and many of them had fought in Tito's partisan units. The memory of those who left, *esuli*, and of those who were thrown in *foibe* by the partisans, became the core of the tragic national and nationalist narrative of Italian sacrifice and expulsion from centuries-old hearths.¹² The memory of those who remained, *rimasti*, fit the official Yugoslav narrative of multinationalism and hospitality of the new socialist state, under whose cap equal rights and obligations are enjoyed by citizens of all “nations and nationalities” (*narodi i narodnosti*).

As these events coincided with the expansion of cinematographic activities in Europe, both countries found in cinema an important ally in their struggle for this territory and, within it, in the promotion and further construction of myths related to it. Between 1945 and 1954 both Italy and Yugoslavia produced a series of documentaries and newsreels about these events, as well as several feature films.¹³ These films often utilize similar footage – images of Yugoslav partisans in Trieste, Italians leaving the areas that were accorded to Yugoslavia, political protests – but frame them in conflicting ways: as occupation/liberation, migration/exodus, anti-communist/antifascist protests, depending on the needs of the narrative in question. The fast-moving creation of film festivals, a new kind of cultural event with notable geopolitical influence, provided novel opportunities for showing these images to public. However, in line with the imperatives of national and international politics of the involved countries, as well as with the development of other means of film display such as television, the reliance on festivals for promotion of these films has been unequal in the two countries and in different periods. Moderately present in the early Cold War film festivals (1945-1954), this production practically disappeared from festival screens in mid-50s. It kept very low visibility throughout most of the Cold War, until it re-emerged as a significant controversy after 1989.

2 Film Festivals as a Playground for Cold War Diplomacy (1945-1954)

Between 1945 and 1954 the festival circulation of Italian films about this conflict was rather modest. The territorial claims over the Northern Adriatic were a common point for both countries, but their position in the multifaceted international relations of the early Cold War was unequal. Namely, after the break with Stalin in 1948, Yugoslavia lost Soviet support in the Trieste Crisis and experienced a major diplomatic rift with the USSR – which threatened, similarly to the ongoing dispute with Italy, to become an armed conflict. Hence, having a strong international campaign justifying the country's territorial claims and ideological position was more important for Yugoslavia than for Italy, which, despite its dissatisfaction with some of the stipulations of the Paris Peace Treaty, enjoyed stronger international support in this matter. Consequently, introducing global audiences to films which were demonstrating the perceived rightfulness of the country's claims over the contested territory appears to have been a greater priority for Yugoslavia than for Italy at the time of the events.

Some Italian documentaries directly or indirectly linked to the topic appear sporadically in the programs of the festivals active at the time, shaping the image of the Northern Adriatic local communities in the eyes of the international audiences and film critics. Among them, the most important is the Venice award winner in the category of documentary films, *Bora over Trieste* (*Bora su Trieste*, Gianni Alberto Vitrotti, Lux Film, Italy, 1953).¹⁴ Depicting the strong north wind “bora”, one of Trieste's hallmarks, the film is celebrated for its exceptional camerawork, which is encapsulated in scenes of everyday life filmed with the wind blowing at speeds of up to 100km per hour. Although not a film about this political dispute, *Bora over Trieste* is still contributing to a political cause, by reinforcing the image of Trieste as an ethnically homogenous Italian town. Trieste is described as “a very Italian harbour” (*italianissimo porto*), its Roman past is duly mentioned in the narration, which, furthermore, only uses the Italian versions of the regional toponyms. At the same time, the

12. *Foibe* have become synonymous with the suffering of Italians in Yugoslavia, and today the term refers to all victims, whether in actual *foibe* or otherwise. This reinforces the tragic impression of these crimes and contributes to speculation about the number of victims. The general silence about the fact that the fascists too threw some of their victims into the *foibe* also contributes to manipulations with the number of partisan victims. See Altin, Badurina, 2017: 321, Knittel 2014: 173. For a detailed account see Pirjevec, 2009.

13. These films and newsreels are hosted in film archives in Belgrade, Gemona, Zagreb, Ljubljana and Rome. A selection of digitized material is available on the Istituto Luce's website: <https://www.archivioluce.com/archivio-cinematografico-2/> (Last Accessed: 15-07-2022).

14. *Premio per la Categoria A* in the group of documentaries on social problems and achievements.

other populations inhabiting the region, their languages and cultures are completely invisible in the film, as if they have never existed in this multicultural town, neither in the past or in the present. Finally, the impression that the political agenda of this documentary is elegantly hidden behind, at a first blush, a plain meteorological story, is reinforced by the fact that its screening in Venice occurred exactly when the diplomatic crisis between Italy and Yugoslavia looked like it might escalate to armed conflict.

However, in general, between 1945 and 1954, the interest of Italian institutions in positioning internationally their production about the struggle for the Northern Adriatic was humble. This is obvious from the limited festival circulation of the two principal Italian features about the contested territory, *The Suffering Town* (*La città dolente*, Mario Bonnard, Istria Film, Scalera Film, 1949), about an Italian couple from Pula trying to decide whether to leave or stay after the Paris Peace Treaty, and *Hearts Without Borders* (*Cuori senza frontiere*, Luigi Zampa, Lux Film, 1950), which focused on a town divided into two by the demarcation line, whose inhabitants, similarly, urgently needed to choose which side they would live in. These films were among the first to establish the cinematic myth, forged on the Italian side, of the barbarian Slav who is harming local Italian populations. Yet, neither one of them had a notable presence in the international festivals at the time of their production, although *Hearts Without Borders* was screened in Venice in 1950 as a part of the first *Mostra Mercato Internazionale del Film*.¹⁵ The Italian filmmakers seemed to be more preoccupied with other topics in the immediate post-war period, often, but not necessarily, related to the everyday reality of war and the post-war years.¹⁶ Therefore, despite these festival appearances, in this period, on the Western side it was Anglophone newsreels and not the local Italian production that played the primary role in moulding the narrative on the (non)autochthonic populations and political events of Trieste and the area (Turina 2019: 69). In addition, Western feature film production on Cold War spy affairs sometimes contributed to the anti-communist propaganda being heard outside the region (see *Ibid*). Therefore, on the Italian side there was less of a need for strong festival propaganda on this issue than in Yugoslavia, which, from 1948 found itself politically isolated on the map of the divided Europe. This difference in approach was also connected to the importance that the Yugoslav communists accorded to cinema as a promotional and propaganda tool – ever since they established the first film institutions in the liberated territories in 1944, their plans and undertakings in the field of cinema were methodical, regular and systematic.

3 The Narrative of Our Land, in the East and in the West (1945-1954)

Hence, on the other side of the administrative boundary the production of films about the contested territory was flourishing – some of the very first films made in socialist Yugoslavia were about the rightfulness of the Yugoslav demands for the Northern Adriatic.¹⁷ Yugoslavian filmmakers even crossed the demarcation line illegally to obtain the visual material commissioned by the Party.¹⁸ When the opportunity occurred to show these films internationally, it was not missed. Yugoslavia clearly used the new form of cultural event as an occasion to symbolically authenticate the status of disputed territories as Yugoslavian, at the same time ensuring the country's position in a larger conflict, the Cold War. In 1947, the year of the first Yugoslav participation in international film festivals, two out of six films sent abroad focused on the disputed areas.¹⁹ Introducing a similar contrast, the first one, *Mercury from Idrija* (*Živa iz Idrije*, Nikola Rajić, Avala film, 1947), which screened in Brussels and Venice, describes the improvement of conditions in one of the world's biggest mercury mines

15. <http://asac.labiennale.org/it/> (Last Accessed: 01-05-2022).

16. Films noticed in major festivals between 1947 and 1954 included neorealist features *Bicycle Thieves* (*Ladri di biciclette*, Vittorio de Sica, multiple nominations, among the awards: Locarno 1949, Best Foreign Film Golden Globe 1950), *Miracle in Milan* (*Miracolo a Milano*, Vittorio de Sica, Grand Prix, Cannes 1951), *Path of Hope* (*Il cammino della Speranza*, Pietro Germi, Silver Bear, Berlin 1951), *Two Cents Worth of Hope* (*Due soldi di speranza*, Renato Castellani, Grand Prix *ex-aequo*, Cannes 1952).

17. For instance, documentaries *Istria* (*Istra*, Branko Marjanović, FP DFJ-NR HR, 1945) and *Trieste* (*Trst*, Edvard Šelhaus, FP FNRJ, NR SRB, 1946), the fifth and the tenth film ever produced in socialist Yugoslavia.

18. Interview with filmmaker Puriša Đorđević, Belgrade, November 23, 2013.

19. In 1947 six Yugoslav films participated in the festivals in Locarno, Edinburgh, Venice, Brussels and Mariánské Lázně, the forerunner of the Karlovy Vary festival. They are all documentaries as the first Yugoslav feature, *Slavica*, was made in 1947 and ready for festival showings only in 1948. (Yugoslav Archives, AJ, 405, S13, „Učestvovanje na festivalima u inostranstvu 1946-1954 [Participation in festivals abroad, 1946-1954]”).

after it came under Yugoslav jurisdiction, while the second one, *The Truth about Pula (Istina o Puli*, Kosta Hlavaty, Jadran film, 1947) screened in Mariánské Lázně, expresses hopes that, after the retreatment of Western military troops, the Istrian town will experience progress similar to that experienced by areas already under Yugoslav rule.

The Yugoslav selection for international festival screenings was made by the federal government's Committee for Cinematography (*Komitet za kinematografiju Vlade FNRJ*) in collaboration with the existing production houses.²⁰ Until the creation of the first national film festivals (Pula in 1954 and Belgrade in 1960) where foreign programmers came to select films for their events, being a part of the selection proposed by the official institutions – Committee for Cinematography, and as of 1953/1954, Committee for International Cultural Relations (*Komisija za kulturne veze sa inostranstvom*) and Film Festival Committee (*Festivalska komisija*) – was a film's principal, if not the only road to film festivals abroad. After all, this was in line with the way the biggest festivals at the time invited films – the documentation from the earliest years of the Cannes Film Festival reveals that communication with representatives of foreign countries went through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and that governmental institutions of the invited countries elected their own representatives in accordance with the number of films commissioned by the festival.²¹ Such a selection process undoubtedly reflected state interests, and the decision-making power of the ones who proposed it was limited only by the judgements of the host festivals themselves.

In the Yugoslav case, these limits were tested the year before – 1946 marked the first Yugoslav attempt to participate in the Cannes Film Festival. Yugoslav Committee for Cinematography sent two documentaries, both signed by former partisan Radoš Novaković: *Julian March (Julijska Krajina*, FP FNRJ, 1946), Yugoslav vision of the situation in the contested area, and *In the Name of the People (U ime naroda*, Zvezda film, 1946), a visual testimony of četniks' WWII crimes.²² However, the two films were rejected with the explanation that the application was received too late.²³ This was not accepted well by the Yugoslav film professionals, and the Festival's organizers were accused of not having the same affability with Yugoslavia as with other countries that submitted their films after the deadline, such as Italy, Switzerland and the U.S.²⁴ In the manner of Cold War diplomacy, the magazine *Film* suggested that there was some hidden political agenda behind these decisions, writing that “[the rejection] was not a matter of pure rigid formalism and simple lack of prevenience, but of *something else*.”²⁵ While kindness shown towards Switzerland and the U.S. is described as “unusual”, the one shown towards Italy is described as “extraordinary”, pointing once again to the oddity of new post-war alliances.²⁶ Being rejected by Cannes was a heavy blow to Yugoslav propaganda abroad, as the French festival has been highly regarded in Yugoslavia from its very beginnings, as can be observed from reports in the daily and professional press.²⁷ That is why the opportunity to present the documentary *Julian March* to the highly esteemed audience in the French riviera was understood as an opportunity reveal the Yugoslav side of the story on the events in the disputed territory.

Denied in 1946, this opportunity was compensated for the following year in Mariánské Lázně, the forerunner of the Karlovy Vary festival. Screened as a part of the informative programme, a documentary with the indicative title *The Truth about Pula* (Kosta Hlavaty, Jadran film, 1947) marked the beginning of the international representation of the socialist Yugoslav cinematic narrative of the joint antifascist and anti-capitalist struggle of the local populations, tailored for both local and international audiences.²⁸ The film was made as Anglo-

20. AJ, 405, S13, „Učestvovanje...”, *op. cit.*

21. La cinémathèque française, FIF 118, B15. FIF 13, B4.

22. During WWII various national ideological and military groups from the Yugoslav space went into a civil war one against another. Četnik movement was a royalist and nationalist collaborationist Serbian army.

23. “Prvi međunarodni filmski festival u Kanu [The First International Film Festival in Cannes]”, Dušan Timotijević, *Film*, No 1, December 1946, 12–16.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Idem*, p. 13 („ovde [se] nije radilo o čistom krutom formalizmu i o običnoj nepredusretljivosti, već o *nečemu drugom*”). Italics by D. J.

26. *Idem*, p. 14.

27. See for instance *Ibid.*, and „Bioskop Balkan – Danas [Cinema Balkan – Today]”, *Politika*, 16 January 1947.

28. AJ, 405, S13, *op. cit.*

American troops, together with numerous local Italians, were leaving the town after the announcement of its incorporation into Yugoslavia in 1947. It focused on the confiscation of the machines from Pula's factories, showing Western soldiers loading them onto the ships that would take them to Italy. The narrator describes this as "the robbery of the entire town's industry" and as a "new great evil", brewed in the kitchen of imperialism, whose goal is "to destroy the economic power of Pula, in order to inflict an even greater damage to Yugoslavia."²⁹ However, the objects taken by the Italian refugees – such as parts of their houses – are also presented in the same context: as a prey of the greedy Westerners purposely working in the interests of capitalist Italy, and to the detriment of Yugoslavia. The Italian refugees are mentioned only once, in a brief sequence of a total duration of some 60 seconds, which is minimal bearing in mind the importance of their departure for the town, as well as the total duration of the film – 28 minutes. Furthermore, the film only talks about the ones who changed their mind and returned to Yugoslavia. Pula and Istria are repeatedly described as "*our* [Slavic] land", and the inscription at the beginning of the film announces a story of liberation from foreign rule. Despite this, by suggesting that the Italians who stayed in Pula made the right choice, the film does not put in an opposition Italians and Slavs, but those who share the same ideals no matter their nationality with those who do not – the 'imagined community' (Anderson 2006 [1983]) here is the classless socialist multinational Yugoslav society. On the other side of the spectrum: the imperialists and the fascists. Similarly, the film constructs the idea of unity of all the progressive people regardless of their nationality, when the narrator describes Pula as "a city of militant *Slavic-Italian brotherhood* [which] did not fall to its knees". In doing so, the opposition presented in the film, between on the one hand progressive people and, on the other, imperialists and fascists, also becomes an opposition between the Italian who stayed, *rimasti* and the ones who emigrated to Italy, *esuli*.

A similar image of (dis)unity is created through films sent to international festivals over the following years. Yugoslavia finally participated in Cannes in 1949, this time with an even more important film about the struggle for the Northern Adriatic – the first Slovenian sound feature *On Our Own Land* (*Na svojoj zemlji*, France Štiglic, Triglav Film, 1948). A story of the partisan liberation of the region of Slovene Littoral, the film depicts a group of Slovenian villagers in the final phase of the war. Exhausted after years of imposed Italianization, followed by German occupation, most of them eagerly help the partisans. One man is firstly reluctant, yet he finally joins the partisans. Only one character, his mother, a woman focused on her own interests, collaborates with the fascists. The supranational aspect of the antifascist struggle is highlighted by the scene where a captivated Italian soldier enthusiastically yells that he is for partisans while passing by a small group of locals. Such a "national division" along the lines of good and bad is typical for the socialist Yugoslav film production, where the enemy is regularly described in ideological and not in national terms. This is an outcome of a complex civil war that raged in the Yugoslavian space as a part of WWII, opposing various military formations fighting for the interests of particular national groups, to the partisans, as the only multinational and leftist movement. The creation of an idea of a conflict based exclusively on ideological and not national grounds was a way to enable former war enemies to identify with each other as members of the same imagined community in the times of peace. Such an approach also helped accentuate the nobleness of the partisan struggle, as a struggle motivated by universal reasons that go far beyond one's nationality and that concern all the citizens of Yugoslavia, and of the progressive world. In the case of Northern Adriatic, presenting the conflict as an ideological and not a national confrontation also made it possible to justify the country's official slogan of "Brotherhood and Unity of all our Peoples and National Groups" (which included an Italian minority), while at the same time defending Yugoslav territorial claims.

By forging an image of Slavic and Italian populations that are united in their struggle against the "Mussolini's servants", who – according to the narration of *The Truth about Pula* – included both Italians and Anglo-Americans, the Yugoslav participation in European film festivals between 1945 and 1954 promoted an idea of group belonging based on political convictions, and not on ethnic origins. In doing so these films seek to create an effect of "objectiveness" by comparing good and bad values, and not "good" and "bad" nationalities, despite the ancient Slavic presence in the area regularly being accentuated. By sending these films to the most prestigious festivals located on both sides of the Iron Curtain, the message of (inter)national unity around the common goal of creation of a more just society and thus of establishment of just borders, is sent to the various audiences throughout Europe.

29. „Prvi međunarodni...”, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

The culmination of the Yugoslav efforts to symbolically mark the contested territory as “our land” happened in June 1954 (24-30), when Yugoslavia organized its first ever national film festival, notably in the Roman Arena in Pula. Film festival culture was gradually developing in Yugoslavia, and between 1947 and 1954, a total of 60 Yugoslav films participated in 33 festivals abroad.³⁰ Consistent participation in worldwide festivals contributed to the international promotion of Yugoslavia and its values. Yet, for a quality international promotion, it was important not only to be able to attend the festivals abroad, but to invite foreign programmers and journalists to Yugoslavia, where they could have an even better insight into the local production. In addition, by inviting them to a *national* festival located precisely in Istria, the Yugoslav identity of this region was once again symbolically reaffirmed.

The festival was created at the initiative of the president of Pula’s Cinematic Enterprise, Marijan Rotar. Although it was not started from above by the government or a political institution, the reasons for the establishment of a national film festival in the heart of Istria were still political. Several archival documents underline the political importance of organizing an “entirely Yugoslav festival in this very region.”³¹ Furthermore, Rotar himself related the importance of choosing Pula as the festival’s host-town to the fact that “[w]e have been *at home in Istria* for only 10 years, and Pula even less.”³² Although in the beginning some were sceptical of success of such big open-air screenings in such a small town, when a demand was made to move the festival to Zagreb, as a more important and bigger town, this idea did not obtain the necessary political support. Not only did the festival remain in Pula, but in 1955 it was held under Tito’s official patronage.³³

The founding of the Pula Film Festival represented the peak of Yugoslav efforts to use film festival action to symbolically mark Istria as national territory, at the same time promoting a multinational ideological narrative on the struggle for this area. Only a few months later, in October 1954, the London Memorandum would be signed and Yugoslav propaganda around the struggle for the Northern Adriatic would begin to subside. In the late 50s, Yugoslavia’s position on the international political scene significantly improved. Diplomatic relations with the USSR were re-established in 1955, new diplomatic horizons opened up in Africa and Asia, and as the leading figure of the non-aligned movement, Tito became a partner of both the East and the West. In this new political context, the conflict over the Italo-Yugoslav border was pushed to the margins of cinematic production: both in Yugoslavia, whose priority became to promote its ‘third way’, as well as in Italy, which sought to avoid conflict with Tito. In their study on the presence of the “Istrian Exodus” in the urban space of Trieste, Roberta Altin and Natka Badurina remark that until the 80s “the atmosphere of the Cold War did not allow for a deeper political debate on the *foibe* and exodus, nor did it encourage historical research” outside of the popular publications and the *esuli* community (Altin, Badurina, 2017: 322). This was reflected in film festival dynamics, and during most of the Cold War, this topic was absent from the programmes, revealing the duality of the relationship between festival decision-makers and the context in which they operate – while by promoting or ignoring certain film themes in a particular political context the festival actors can make an impact on that context, it also goes the other way around, and the political dynamics of the context in which they operate also has an effect on the festival dynamics.

4 Contemporary Rediscovery – From a Cold War to a National Film Theme

The post-Cold War period introduced new dynamics in the construction of cultural memories related to this conflict. The fall of the communist states in Europe, dismantlement of Yugoslavia in the wars of the 90s, and strengthening of the right-wing political parties both in Italy and in the Yugoslav space, rekindled interest in this historical episode. In this new political context, the memory of the partisan violence, embodied in the

30. AJ, 405, S13, Written version of the speech on Yugoslav cinema, delivered before the screening of documentary films organised by the Italian and Yugoslav cinematheques, no signature, 5 December 1954.

31. AJ, 405, S36, “Filmski festival u Puli (informativni deo) [Pula Film Festival (informative part)]”, no signature, no date, p. 1 (pp. 1–10).

32. Zlata KLAPČIĆ, “Mario Rotar. Čovjek koji je osnovao Pulski festival” [Mario Rotar. The Man who Founded the Pula Film Festival], *Filmska kultura*, n° 87-88, 1973, p. 40. (pp. 39-45). Italics by D. J.

33. In line with the high interest in the events around the border, the first documentary to ever be awarded in Pula was *Our Documents – Okroglica (Naši dokumenti – Okroglica)*, Milan Kumar, Triglav Film, 1953), about Tito’s speech on the intensification of the conflict with Italy (September 1953). No official jury existed at the festival in 1954 and the film was awarded by the votes of the audience.

foibe killings and the “Istrian Exodus”, became useful again. On the right pole of the political spectrum – for the strengthening of national feelings and reckoning with the communist movement; and on the left – for supporting a struggle against ‘all forms of totalitarianism’, widely promoted by the European parliament in the 2000s.³⁴ Yet, this time Italy took the lead in prioritizing this theme in film festivals. This was supported by the establishment of the national Memorial Day, *Giorno del Ricordo*, which introduced a wave of contemporary memorial practices related to the struggle for the Northern Adriatic and generated by the Italian state. Created in 2004 by the Italian government, *Giorno del ricordo* is marked on February 10, the anniversary date of the signing of the Paris Peace Treaty, as the day of remembrance of the “tragedy of the Italians”³⁵ in Istria and Dalmatia, the territories that it lost to Yugoslavia. Its establishment has fuelled the rediscovery of this once-marginalized film theme and opened new financial opportunities for the restoration of old and the production of new films on this topic. This has resulted in their consequent reappearance in film festivals, as well as in various special events, often, but not exclusively, organised in the week of *Giorno del ricordo*.

In such a climate, the feature films *Hearts without Borders* and *The Suffering Town*, which did not receive major festival visibility at the time when they were made, started acquiring a significant attention in the public sphere, becoming referential. Their festival rediscovery commenced in 1989 with the 7th Festival Internazionale Cinema Giovani’s retrospective “Neorealism in 50 films” in Torino.³⁶ The two films continued their contemporary festival lives in the 2000s.³⁷ A restored copy of *Hearts without Borders* was shown at the Trieste Film Festival in 2001, together with a 1999 documentary about the making of the film.³⁸ It also was screened in festival Il Cinema ritrovato in Bologna in 2006, and in Festival Internazionale di Roma in 2009 within a retrospective of Zampa’s work. The restored copy of *The Suffering Town* was screened at the Venice Film Festival in 2008, and a decade later, in 2018, locals from Gorizia, together with many international guests, could see it in a local history festival, *èStoria*. In 2021, more than 70 years after its production, it was also screened in Pula, the very festival established in order to contest the Italian claims over Istria, now the most prestigious Croatian film festival. Programmers in the wider post-Yugoslav space also showed it, and the film was programmed in the 18th Festival of Nitrate film organized by the Yugoslav Film Archives in Belgrade in 2016. Indicating the reach of the film, it was also shown within some more alternative events, such as a two-day film event “Istria and Us: *Vogliamo vivere*” organized in 2013 in the Centre for Cultural Decontamination, also in Belgrade. Such a notable contemporary circulation of Italian films from the 40s and 50s in festivals on both sides of the former Italo-Yugoslav border demonstrates a clear rise of interest in cinematic depictions of this historical theme after the end of the Cold War, especially considering that between 1954 and 1989 not even the new films on this conflict had significant visibility in the film festival circuit.

Yet this festival revival has an ambivalent nature, as we can see from the circulation of the contemporary films on this theme, which emanate from both sides of the former Italo-Yugoslav border. Present-day production is introducing a new cinematic narrativization of the local populations’ role in the conflict, aligned with the current political realities of their countries of origin (Italy, Slovenia/Croatia). This insertion in the context is also reflected in their festival circulation – much more abundant than during the late Cold War, it is nevertheless limited and localized, being usually restricted to the region in question, as will be described later on. This is in keeping with the changing geopolitical importance of this historical episode – formerly a diplomatic argument that had a major influence on the drawing of the territorial and ideological map of bipolar Europe, the Trieste Crisis and the memory thereof is today a local issue that primarily concerns political and cultural actors of the countries involved. With these changes, resulting in the growing need to reach the local, and the decreasing need to reach the European audiences, we can also observe a change in the visibility of these films – they are more interesting to local festivals than to those outside the region. At the same time, filmmakers

34. The adoption of the Resolution 1481 on the need of condemnation of crimes of totalitarian communist regimes (2006), proclamation of 23 August as European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism (2008), adoption of the Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism (2009).

35. Article 1, Law of 30 March 2004, n92, published in the Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 86, 13 April 2004.

36. The festival was opened literally one day after the opening of the Berlin wall, on November 10. See <https://www.torinofilmfest.org/it/edizioni/7-festival-internazionale-cinema-giovani/7/> (Last Accessed: 01-05-2022).

37. Copies of both films were restored in 2000s, *Hearts without Borders* in 2000, and *The Suffering Town* in 2008.

38. *Hearts without Boundaries, Memories (Cuori senza frontiere, ricordi Ispomini)*, Martina Kafol, EuroWanderkino, ITA, 1999).

often work in cooperation with TV stations, which participate in the production of these films and therefore act as their display window, as outlined below.

Regarding contemporary Italian production, enhanced financial opportunities combined with the strengthening of the right-wing political parties have laid the ground for the promotion of a nationalist cinematic narrative centred around the memory of the lost fatherland on the other side of the Adriatic. The cinematic image of the Julian March (native) populations shaped by this narrative reveals a much more obvious division between heroes (good Italians) and villains (evil Yugoslavs) than the one constructed and promoted through film production from the early Cold War. Although the Italian films from the 40s and 50s, such as *The Suffering Town* and *Hearts without Borders*, usually portrayed Slavs as malicious and/or unrefined, at the time this image was nevertheless somehow nuanced, and a Slavic movie character would also have some positive characteristics. We see this process at work in *The Suffering Town*, in a scene in which a Yugoslav woman obtains milk for an Italian woman, as well as in the closing scene of *Hearts without Borders*, when Stefano, a progressive worker of Slovenian origin, gives up fighting for the affection of his fiancée for the higher cause of her own happiness. 70 years later, the image of the barbarian Slav chasing away the Italians, who are presented as the sole indigenous population, explodes into a caricature of pure evil, as demonstrated by the two best-known contemporary Italian productions on this theme, the feature film *The Red Land – Rosso Istria* (Maximiliano Hernando Bruno, Venice Film, RAI, 2018) and the television mini-series *The Heart in the Pit (Il cuore nel pozzo)*, (Alberto Negrin, RAI, 2005). Targeted for the widest possible audience, neither one of them has so far had a notable festival circulation. Instead, their public presence is assured, with variable success, through television screenings and various kinds of special events, organized sometimes, but not primarily within the film festival framework. The change observed in the contemporary Italian production is thus dual and includes the change in narrativization fostered by an important part of the mainstream production, and the change in promotional strategies reserved for this production.

This is best exemplified in the feature *The Red Land – Rosso Istria*, which was first shown to public in a small event organized for the press and the representatives of the *esuli* organizations at the Veneto stand during the 75th Venice Film Festival (2018).³⁹ The film's narrative focuses on the Italian student and daughter of a prominent fascist, Norma Cossetto, who was killed by the partisans in 1943, a case emblematic of the *foibe* massacres. Its title is doubly symbolic – it refers to Cossetto's graduation paper about the bauxite in Istria, the paper she never finished as she found death in “red” Yugoslavia. Cossetto was thrown in *foibe* after being brutally raped by the partisans, as we can see in an extraordinarily long 2-minute scene. Such a fierce and unnecessarily extended scene generates an idea of partisans as foreign invaders, in this case the conquest of the woman's body stands in for the conquest of land. Throughout the film, the partisans are presented as convinced supporters of xenophobic and racist ideas, despite national equality being among the core values of their ideology. Their crimes against political enemies, which as is established historically happened despite the nationality of the assumed enemy, and thus also included Yugoslavs accused of collaboration, are repeatedly depicted as ethnically motivated. The plot also includes Italian characters who joined the partisan movement. As we have seen, something similar was conducted in the Yugoslav production, where such characters helped deny national motivations behind one's decision to join the fascist or antifascist movement. Their inclusion in this film, however, results in a recognizably propagandist take on this historical moment as they are all presented as people of questionable ethics: the ones who betray their friends, deserters, people with no values. In doing so, the film suggests that joining the antifascist movement was typical for morally suspicious characters. In addition, the fascists and communists are both described as the ones who got ‘seduced’ by their governments. In an unsuccessful attempt to demonstrate the complexity of historical events in Istria in WWII, the film ends up using the crime against Norma Cossetto to join the current European trend of rewriting the history of WWII by equating fascism and communism, and by extension, equating fascism and antifascism.⁴⁰

39. The event was attended by the Presidents of the following organizations: FederEsuli, ANVGD, Associazione delle Comunità Istriane, Associazione Fiumani Italiani nel Mondo – Libero Comune di Fiume in Esilio, Associazione Italiani di Pola e Istria – Libero Comune di Pola in Esilio, Associazione Dalmati Italiani nel Mondo – Libero Comune di Zara in Esilio, Mailing List Istria, Arcipelago Adriatico. <https://www.triestepima.it/eventi/cultura/rosso-istria-film-norma-cossetto-festival-cinema-venezia-9-settembre-2018.html> (Last Accessed: 01-05-2022).

40. For the left-wing activists' criticism of this trend, see Milena Rapajić's text on the DiEM25 website “New EU Resolution: How Antifascism and Fascism became the same Thing” (6/10/2019) <https://diem25.org/new-eu-resolution-how-anti-fascism-and-fascism->

Although the event at the Veneto stand was marginal, the fact that the film was promoted during the famous festival gave more visibility to the statements surrounding it, such as the one by the regional councillor for education (*l'assessore regionale alla scuola*), Elena Donazzan, who described it as: “a moving work which brings truth and justice to the victims of *ethnic cleansing*.”⁴¹ Following its promotion at the Venice Film Festival, the film was shown in various special events organized by the political organizations, such as one in the Italian Senate in November 2018. The culmination of its promotion was the TV screening in RAI 3 at the occasion of *Giorno del ricordo* on February 11, 2019. With 871,000 viewers, this broadcast provided it with a national visibility much more significant than what a single film festival screening would generate.⁴² However, this represents only 3.7% of total viewers share, demonstrating that such a visibility was small compared to other programmes on air the same evening in primetime. Such a rating is a consequence of the programming decision to show the film at the same time as the most popular Italian song contest, the Sanremo music festival, is broadcast live on RAI 1 (scoring up to 46,1 % of share or 9,941,000 of viewers).⁴³ The choice to screen the film on national television and in primetime, but to do so on the night of one of the most watched shows in the history of Italian television, reveals the ambivalent nature of the contemporary revival of this film theme. Such a twofold approach demonstrates the existence of a power struggle between the (right-wing) initiatives to promote such content and the (left-wing) attempts to put certain limits on such a promotion, bearing in mind that RAI 3 has been known of their centre-left editorial policies. However, this thus also suggest that there is a certain acceptance of this historical theme in leftist circles as well, in line with contemporary European initiatives to fight against ‘all forms of totalitarianism.’⁴⁴

Regarding the post-Yugoslav production, the way this theme is approached is markedly different from the image created on the Italian side, as well as from the one generated in the Yugoslav films of the 1945-1954 period. After the dissolution of the socialist state, new, more personal themes started emerging as contemporary filmmakers became increasingly interested in individual experiences of people living in the borderlands, rather than in describing the destiny supposedly shared by an entire population in the manner of political pamphlets. In that sense the most prominent example is the work of Slovenian filmmaker Anja Medved, from the divided town of Gorizia/Nova Gorica. She has directed various documentaries and video-works both independently and together with her mother, Nadja Velušček, dealing with the impact of the imposed borderline on the locals’ lives, including *My Borderline* (*Moja meja*, Kinoateljje, RAI Slovenian Programme Trieste, SLO/ITA, 2002), *Town in a Meadow* (*Mesto na travniku*, Kinoateljje, SLO/ITA, 2004), and *View through the Iron Curtain* (*Pogled skozi železno zaveso*, Kinoateljje, SLO/ITA, 2010). They provide a valuable insight into the discrepancies between personal and collective memory of the main events related to the division over this area, such as the construction of Nova Gorica (New Gorizia) on the Yugoslav side once Gorizia was assigned to Italy in 1947. Very well known in the area, Medved’s and Velušček’s opus has had more significant festival exposure than any other artist’s working on this theme. This has included multiple screenings in the Trieste Film Festival, Festival of Slovenian Film in Portorož, The Kino otok – Isola Cinema Festival and the festival ‘A Film for Peace’, organized by the municipality of Medea (province of Gorizia). Yet, when it comes to presentations outside of the region, they are fewer. One of the most important ones is the screening of *Timeless River* (*Trenutak reke – Il tempo del fiume*, Kinoateljje, 2010), about the border-river Soča, in the London International Documentary Festival (Special Mention, 2011). Other than this, festival screenings of their work usually involve smaller and medium scale festivals, often in Northern Italy (‘It’s My Film’ home movies festival in Vicenza, Trento Film Festival, Sondrio Festival, Etnofilmfest in Rovigo, Sguardi Altrove Women’s Film Festival in Milan). Such a festival circulation confirms that the festival programmers’ renewed interest in this film theme is quite localized,

became-the-same-thing/ (Last Accessed: 05-11-2021).

41. Press release of the Veneto Regional Council [*Giunta regionale Veneto*], 7 September 2018, available: <http://www.regioni.it/dalleregioni/2018/09/07/veneto-mostra-del-cinema-assessore-donazzan-a-presentazione-di-rosso-istria-il-film-su-norma-cossetto-opera-commovente-che-restituisce-verita-e-giustizia-alle-vittime-577184/> (Last Accessed: 01-03-2022).

42. <https://www.rbcasting.com/flash-news/2019/02/09/ascolti-tv-venerdi-8-febbraio-2019-sanremo-quarta-serata-al-46-1-95-mln-rai-1/> (Last Accessed: 10-05-2022).

43. *Ibid.*

44. The leadership of the Italian national television has been for decades divided between the main political groups: RAI 1 is considered to be pro-government, RAI 2 centre-right and RAI 3 centre-left. See: <https://www.ilpost.it/2021/05/03/nomine-rai-politica/> (Last Accessed: 30-08-2022).

being significantly greater in the disputed area itself than in other Italian and European regions.⁴⁵

In keeping with the observation sometimes attributed to Mark Twain that humour equals tragedy plus time, the new political context has also made room for comedies. The new generation of filmmakers, unburdened by the necessity to prove its own nation's right over the contested territory, is open to critically questioning such tendencies in the local cultural and political life. That is the case with the Slovenian filmmaker Žiga Virč's graduate satirical short *Trieste is Ours* (*Trst je naš*, AGRFT, RTV Slovenia, 2009). Somewhere in between a parody of the partisan movies, and a criticism of the Slovenian dissatisfaction with the loss of Trieste, *Trieste is Ours* shows the efforts of a contemporary Slovenian man to again 'liberate' Trieste with the help of his own partisan unit. Despite it being a graduation film with festival circulation mostly limited to its homeland Slovenia, *Trieste is Ours* did prompt a top political reaction from the Italian side. Franco Frattini, serving as the Minister of Foreign Affairs (2009) condemned the film saying that it rubbed salt into Italian wounds, proving once again the importance of the memory of the struggle for the Northern Adriatic for the contemporary Italian politics.⁴⁶

Conclusion

As I have sought to demonstrate, various degrees of presence of films about the struggle for the Northern Adriatic in the public space throughout history are in accord with the political interests that marked different periods in the involved countries. Hence, with the passage from the early Cold War to the contemporary post-socialist societies, the level of visibility of this historical theme has changed, rising on the regional, and declining on the European level. Equally important, the approach to the theme has also altered, which is reflected in the way the local populations are presented in this corpus of films. On the one hand, in the Italian productions a less nuanced image of the Slavic populations has resurfaced, with simplified division between "good" (Italians) and "evil" (Slavs). Such a division serves the nationalist purpose of forging cultural memory that relativizes the fascist past, through glorifying the victims of one's own nation, while putting aside its own wrongdoings. Conversely, post-Yugoslav production has offered a more nuanced image of the events in question, with a more personal and varied approach to this theme than in the films made in the early socialist years.

Together with the evolution of the dominant narratives constructed through these films, the way they are promoted has also undergone certain modifications. Increased state support, improved production possibilities and multiple screening opportunities, including not only film festivals, but also television, as well as various special events within the marking of the *Giorno del ricordo*, indicate a clear change in priorities when it comes to cinematic memorial practices related to this topic. Growing popularisation of the memory of the struggle for the Northern Adriatic in Italy demonstrates how the role of film festivals in shaping cultural memories has changed from their beginnings to the present day. In the context of their rising number and development of both television and the new media, film festivals' impact is increasingly dependent on their size and prestige, but also on reliance on television and new media for the promotion of their programs as the audio-visual landscape fragments and diversifies. This is especially the case when it comes to smaller festivals that do not (yet) necessarily have the prestige in question. In such a situation, when it is necessary to quickly popularize a certain topic and present it as a theme of national importance, television, as a medium that quickly and directly addresses the largest possible number of viewers, emerges as a more obvious option to reach audiences than film festival screenings. Hence, despite the renewed film festival interest in this theme, the priority for showing the contemporary film production is given to a much more powerful display – television, which is also often providing significant funding for the production of these films, a signifier of the ongoing convergence across the mediums.⁴⁷

45. Medved has also presented her work in exhibitions in some of the world's biggest hubs of culture, such as Paris, New York and Moscow, however this does not encompass festival screenings.

46. <https://www.dnevnik.si/1042312886> (Last Accessed: 10-05-2022).

47. Both *Rosso Istria* and *The Heart in the Pit* are (co-)produced by RAI.

The functioning of film festivals has significantly changed from the early post-WWII period to the present: festival curators have much easier access to films and more options in selecting their programs. However, the shift in the presence of the theme of the Trieste Crisis at festivals, from its complete absence during most of the Cold War to the fact that today even the films from the 40s and 50s are being presented, indicates that there is a continuity when it comes to the influence that institutional support or lack thereof can have on programming practices. The example of the struggle for the Northern Adriatic therefore indicates that film festival organizers, in spite of what they might wish for themselves, operate in a milieu that is deeply enmeshed in politics: they stand somewhere in between being the subjects who are maintaining the political context in which they are working, and cultural actors trying to influence and change these contexts.

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Films from Countries in Crisis and Switzerland: The New Argentine Cinema, Greek New Wave and Swiss Film Institutions

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Abstract

This paper will explore the relationship between Swiss film institutions and cinematic New Waves that appear in countries which were or are in crisis. To this end, it will compare how the New Argentine Cinema (NAC) and Greek New Wave (GNW) were received at the Locarno Film Festival, the Fribourg Film Festival and the Visions sud est Fund (case studies). Argentina's wave emerged just before the country's default in 2001, while the Greek wave arose at the same time as the sovereign-debt crisis in Greece in 2009. Switzerland plays a role in their success, since it has always maintained a rich cinematic culture with historic festivals and producers, as well as government agencies and foundations assisting filmmakers from (semi-)peripheral countries. The first aim of this paper is to (i) investigate how the NAC and GNW were received at the Locarno and Fribourg festivals. By analysing the material in their official programmes, it will (ii) determine whether there is a proliferation of crisis-related terms in the way these waves are presented. Finally, this paper will (iii) expound on their support by Visions sud est Fund and other Swiss institutions and assess the impact of Swiss funding on the NAC and GNW.

Keywords: Film Festivals; Economic Crisis; Greek Cinema; Argentine Cinema; Switzerland.

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Introduction

The prime objective of this article is to explore the relationship between European film institutions and cinematic New Waves from countries that, on the one hand, have been hit by economic, social or humanitarian crises and, on the other, were well-received and generously supported by the aforementioned film institutions. These New Wave filmmakers have received aid that was crucial for them.¹ Such filmmakers are usually too young and inexperienced to attract private investors and have limited access to public funding, which is already scarce due to the crises.²

How do European institutions receive cinematic New Waves from countries in crisis? Does the international attention on their problems influence the often enthusiastic reception of their filmmakers? To what extent are these New Waves supported by European institutions and how does European funding impact their consolidation? This article will investigate these questions by comparing how the so-called New Argentine Cinema (NAC) and Greek New Wave (GNW) were received at the Swiss Locarno and Fribourg Film Festivals, as well as the support they offered along with the Visions sud est Fund (case studies).

The Locarno Film Festival (LFF) was chosen as the only A-listed Swiss festival, a prestigious institution of international repute. On the contrary, the Fribourg International Film Festival (FIFF) will serve as an example of a festival that focuses exclusively on films from developing countries, such as Argentina. As for Visions sud est, it only supports projects from developing countries and is an esteemed national film fund, equivalent to the Dutch Hubert Bals Fund or the German World Cinema Fund. Therefore, it was of prime importance to our research. Granted, the Locarno and Fribourg Film Festivals do not represent the totality of Swiss feature film festivals, e.g. the Zurich Film Festival is also an important hub of the film festival circuit. They can, however, give us an overview of the relationship between cinematic New Waves from countries in crisis and Swiss (and subsequently European) institutions in the limited space of an article and serve as a basis for further research.

This article takes a closer look at how the NAC and GNW films were received at the Locarno and Fribourg festivals based on the number of selections. Moreover, it analyses the material in their official programmes to determine whether there is a proliferation of crisis-related terms in the way the waves are presented. The final aim is to expound on the support they received from the Visions sud est Fund and other Swiss institutions, and assess how these affected the development of these waves as cinematic trends.

1 Comparing the New Argentine Cinema and the Greek New Wave

The New Argentine Cinema and Greek New Wave were chosen as case studies primarily because these two nations have become global symbols of crisis in the twenty-first century and represent two of the most recognisable New Waves in recent years. With respect to the economic crises, Argentina entered a period of recession in 1998 and eventually defaulted in 2001. A few years later, it was Greece's turn. In 2009, one year after the Global Financial Crisis, Greece's economy was raising alarms. In 2010, the Greek government requested international financial aid and, in 2015, almost left the Eurozone ("Grexit"). These crises have been followed by every major media outlet and the international public has come to associate both countries with financial troubles. Moreover, the two crises have often been compared by economists, journalists and politicians because of their similarities, including the involvement of the International Monetary Fund, the implementation of Capital controls and bank runs.

"The Greek crisis: a cautionary tale from Argentina" (Velasco 2012), "Can bankrupt Greece take lessons from Argentinian default?" (Seibt 2011) and "What can Greece learn from Argentina's default experience?" (Bennett-

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1. Other contemporary examples where filmmakers received aid include the Romanian New Wave that started in the early 2000s, and the Colombian New Wave starting in the 2010s.
 2. It is characteristic that the first films of the NAC (some of which were the first feature films of their directors) were funded by the Dutch Hubert Bals fund and later selected by Swiss festivals. To give a few examples: *Pizza, birra, faso* | *Pizza, Beer, and Cigarettes* (Bruno Stagnaro, Adrián Caetano, 1997), *Mundo grúa* | *Crane World* (Pablo Trapero, 1999) and *La libertad* | *Liberty* (Lisandro Alonso, 2001). Similarly, the Locarno Filmmakers Academy supported young filmmakers Jacqueline Lentzou and Christos Massalas, who were directing shorts at the time. However, it is important to mention that not all of these filmmakers share the same profile: their aesthetics and themes may vary, their perspectives on filmmaking might not be aligned and they might target different audiences.

Jones 2015) are only a few articles that compare these two nations. Nobel-prize winner Paul Krugman (Princeton University / London School of Economics) explained that the Argentine default could be viewed as a cautionary example for Greece and prompted readers not to “Cry For Argentina”, which “went through a brief severe downturn, but soon began a rapid recovery that continued for a long time” (Krugman 2011). Ha-Joon Chang (University of Cambridge) has also pointed out the similarities between the two crises and characterised Argentina and Greece as “debt colonies” (Chang 2012). Another example is the article “History repeating itself: From the Argentine default to the Greek tragedy?” by economists Cinzia Alcidi, Alessandro Giovannini and Daniel Gros for a publication of the European Think Tank CEPS (Alcidi et al 2011).

In this climate, it didn’t take long before the Greek and Argentine juxtaposition was discussed in Greek Parliament. In August 2012, Minister of Finance Giannis Stournaras insisted that, despite its misfortunes, “Greece has not become Argentina” (Iefimerida 2012). The living standard of the Greeks may have decreased, but it had not plummeted like that of the Argentines after 2001. Almost a week later, Alexis Tsipras, leader of the opposition at the time and a fervent opponent of austerity, responded: “I wish that Greece were Argentina” (To Vima 2012). He explained that the Argentines, who responded differently than the Greeks to the debt crisis, managed to stand on their own feet with dignity.

The constant comparison between the Argentine and Greek crises is all the more impressive since the two nations have considerable differences. Argentina is a large Latin American country in terms of territory, population, economic perspectives and its language, Spanish, is one of the most widely-spoken in the world. Argentine territory was recently colonised and settled by Europeans and subsequently has a history of oppression and violence towards its indigenous peoples. On the other hand, Greece is a relatively small European country, with symbolic significance as it is perceived by many as the “cradle of the Western civilisation”, albeit with a marginally spoken language. Nevertheless, the consensus is that their economies shared many characteristics during the 2001 and 2009 crises.

An additional similarity is that the Argentine and Greek film productions flourished during the economic downturns. Their New Wave filmmakers attracted attention from critics and festival programmers all over the world. For instance, *Pizza, Beer, and Cigarettes* (*Pizza, birra, faso*, 1997), dir. by Bruno Stagnaro and Adrián Caetano, one of the early NAC films, was presented at the Mar del Plata International Film Festival in 1997. Two years later, *Crane World* dir. by Pablo Trapero (*Mundo grúa*, 1999) won the awards for best director and best actor at the Buenos Aires International Festival of Independent Film (BAFICI). Some of the NAC films that followed, such as *The Swamp* dir. by Lucrecia Martel (*La ciénaga*, 2001), *Liberty* dir. by Lisandro Alonso (*La libertad*, 2001) and *Lost Embrace* (*El abrazo partido*, 2004) dir. by Daniel Burman, were selected for screening at A-listed international film festivals where they often won awards. After such a warm reception, it was clear that a new era was dawning for Argentine cinema in terms of film aesthetics, production and distribution, a phenomenon that has been thoroughly studied by Latin American Film Studies scholars internationally (Andermann 2012, Falicov 2007, Aguilar 2008).

Like their Argentine counterparts, Greece’s new generation of directors were introducing novel approaches to filmmaking (Chalkou 2012). In 2009, when the sovereign-debt crisis started, *Dogtooth* dir. by Yorgos Lanthimos (*Kynodontas*, 2009) won the Un Certain Regard prize at the Cannes Film Festival and, surprisingly, earned a nomination for Best Foreign Language Film at the Academy Awards (Oscars). This significant achievement brought to the forefront a group of festival-orientated films such as *Attenberg* dir. by Athina Rachel Tsangari (2010), *Plato’s Academy* dir. by Filippos Tsitos (2009), and *Alps* dir. by Yorgos Lanthimos (*Alpeis*, 2011), as well as *A Blast* dir. by Syllas Tzoumerkas (2014) and *Miss Violence* dir. by Alexandros Avranas (2013), which won several prizes at international festivals. Foreign critics and scholars, both Greek and international, quickly began defining and analysing these recent productions (Scott 2010, Papadimitriou 2013).

2 Why Switzerland?

This article concentrates on Switzerland because, despite the fact that it is a small nation with a limited production of fiction films, it has a rich cinematic culture that historically has been very open to new cinematic trends from peripheral countries. Furthermore, Switzerland boasts many international film festivals and internationally acclaimed institutions like the Cinémathèque suisse, as well as a number of arthouse cinemas,

cineclubs and Film Studies Departments. Switzerland’s pioneering tradition of connecting industrialised countries with the developing world in various fields has definitely included cinema. This is reflected in the work of Swiss festivals, which expose international films to the global film circuit, as well as by Swiss producers, government agencies, foundations and NGOs, which fund and distribute films from peripheral countries and/or the “Global South” (Asia, Africa and Latin America). Granted, there are larger European countries, such as France or Germany, which are more influential in film production and the international film festival circuit. Nevertheless, Switzerland plays a crucial role along with other small yet wealthy European countries, such as the Netherlands with the Hubert Bals Foundation.

3 Selections and Prizes at the Locarno Film Festival

The Locarno Film Festival is the most well-known film festival in the country. It prides itself for being one of the longest-running film festivals that has historically encouraged international dialogue and offered a safe space for persecuted filmmakers such as the anti-fascists under Mussolini. Moreover, despite being smaller than other A-listed festivals like Cannes, Berlin and Venice, Locarno is also known as a prestigious platform for art house films. In fact, the Locarno Film Festival has wholeheartedly embraced the “dogma of discovery”, not unlike the other A-listed festivals mentioned above. According to Marijke de Valck, most festivals follow the “dogma of discovery”, whereby new art/world films are found and new waves/cinemas from countries are recognised (de Valck 2007: 175). The LFF boasts a long tradition of selecting and supporting filmmakers that are young and/or from less wealthy countries. Discovering new talent is such a big part of the festival’s mission that its organisers characterise it as, “the world capital of auteur cinema. We discover new talent, give voice to emerging filmmakers” (Locarno Festival 2009). This is clearly reflected by their choice of key words for section titles, such as “emerging directors”, “from all over the world”, “explore film’s frontier territories” and shorts by “independent filmmakers” or “film school students”.

Let’s examine the different sections of the festival where films from the Argentine and Greek New Waves have been discovered. It is worthwhile to note, however, that some selections are not as “prestigious” as others. Nevertheless, their status and mission are worth noting. Piazza Grande in Locarno hosts open-air screenings that attract large audiences, including tourists, making it the most mainstream section. The International Competition is reserved for established filmmakers and is extensively covered by the international press. On the other hand, Filmmakers of the Present is “dedicated to emerging directors from all over the world and devoted to first, second, and third features” (Locarno Festival n.d.). Moving Ahead is smaller and showcases experimental and idiosyncratic films. Pardi di Domani “screens shorts and medium-length films by independent filmmakers or film school students,” which accounts for its limited press coverage (Locarno Festival n.d.). Additionally, the Open Doors lab organises screenings of films from foreign countries that it has helped produce. Lastly, there are popular screenings of retrospectives or non-competing films but they are not central to the festival.

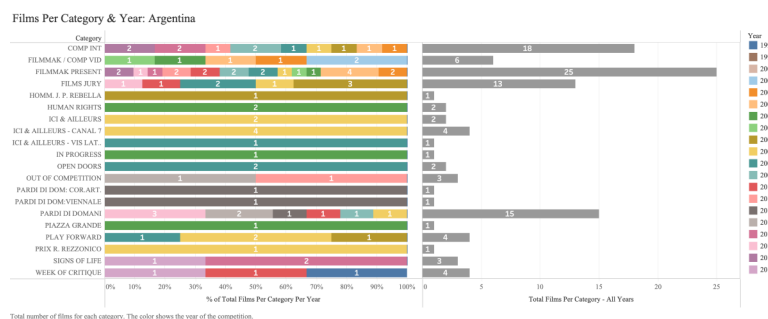


Fig. 1. Argentine films screened at the Locarno Film Festival between 1998 and 2017 (Source: Locarno Film Festival).

We will now explore how many films from both countries were selected and assess the importance of each selection based on the section that chose it. The data I retrieved shows that the number of Argentine films selected between 1998 and 2017 rose to a total of 85, most of which were directed by a new generation of

filmmakers. As one can see in Fig. 1, from 1998 to 2001, before the Argentine default, only three films were selected, mostly in “minor” sections, the Semaine de la Critique, and Filmmakers of the Present (Competition in Video). However, after 2002 there is a constant increase. In 2007, as many as 13 films were selected, some for the tribute to Argentina “Ici & Ailleurs – 200 años – Ciclo de telefilms argentinos producido por Canal 7”.

From 1998 to 2017, a total of 26 films from Greece were screened. As one can also see with Argentina, attention on Greek cinema increases, albeit on a larger scale (Fig. 2). Greece advanced from eight selections between 1998 and 2008, to 18 from 2009 to 2017. Most of these films were directed by the best-known young directors, including Athina Rachel Tsangari, Syllas Tzoumerkas and Filippos Tsitos, as well as new and emerging short-film directors like Konstantina Kotzamani, Loukianos Moschonas and Jacqueline Lentzou.

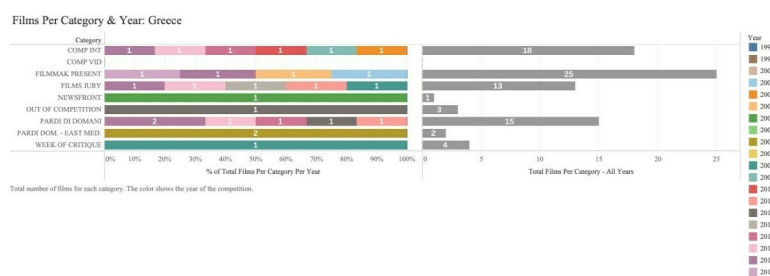


Fig. 2. Greek films screened at the Locarno Film Festival between 1998 and 2017 (Source: Locarno Film Festival).

Argentine and Greek Films projected at the Locarno Film Festival 1998-2017

Country	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
ARG	1	0	0	2	4	6	6	2	6	13	9	5	5	4	3	3	5	5	4	2	85
GR	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	2	0	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	3	5	1	26

Sum of Films broken down by Year vs. Country.

Fig. 3. Comparison of the numbers of Argentine and Greek films screened at Locarno chronologically (Source: Locarno Film Festival).

Not all of the films belong to the aforementioned waves, however. Some were directed by non-Greek or non-Argentine directors and were actually co-productions. This is especially true for Greece, where two of the films selected in competition were co-productions, e.g. *Slava* (Kristina Grozeva, Peter Valchanov, 2016). Moreover, like with Argentina, one Greek production was included as part of a tribute, in this case to films from the Eastern Mediterranean. Other films were selected as Jury’s Films, such as *Libertad* by Lisandro Alonso in 2010. Undoubtedly, not all Argentine and Greek films were selected in competition and every section is very unique. Nevertheless, I argue that organising tributes and selecting Argentine and Greek films at various sections is not contradictory, but rather indicates an increased interest in Argentine and Greek productions in the period during and after the crises.

4 Swiss Festivals, the Crises, the NAC and the GNW

Lydia Papadimitriou argued that the Greek financial crisis “[...] at the level of publicity at least, turned ‘Greece’ into a keyword that made people who would not otherwise have taken notice of Greek cinema, do so” (Papadimitriou 2013: 5). One could assume that the Argentine financial crisis generated a similar level of publicity. The international media’s extensive coverage of how local populations were suffering, as well as the extraordinary way in which the debts were restructured and could potentially affect millions around the world, helped create this phenomenon. The “corralito” in Argentina, Capital Controls in Greece,³ the “cacerolazos,”⁴ De la Rúa’s dramatic helicopter escape, the Syntagma square riots and infamous “bank runs” in both countries, were

3. The Argentine and Greek governments imposed capital controls on bank transfers from local to foreign banks to stabilise the economy.
 4. Huge masses of people demonstrated and expressed their anger by knocking on pots - *cacerolas* in Spanish - they had brought from home to show that they did not know how to put food on the table.

all unfortunate events that grabbed international attention and could indeed have boosted the popularity of Argentine and Greek productions at the Locarno Film Festival.

Actually, the way critics perceived the NAC and GNW films was compatible, if not directly associated, with the media's coverage. Initially, the former wave was received as "neorealist" by international audiences because films, such as *Pizza, birra, faso* and *Mundo grúa*, touched on social issues. Critics and scholars actually compared the Argentine wave to Italian Neorealism due to common themes like poverty and unemployment, the use of reality as a point of reference, the inclusion of non-professional actors and non-studio locations and the low-budget methods of filmmaking (Page 2009: 34, Aguilar 2008: 28). The LFF official programme confirms that there were several such films. This could represent a *clin d'oeil* to an audience that would be interested in a film from the crisis-stricken Argentina or, worse, that they would watch this film only to confirm the stereotype of Argentina as a symbol of economic problems. However, the film synopses in the official programme do not make overt connections to the crises, nor do they include many crisis-related terms.

Like these Argentine films, numerous Greek productions adopt a realistic approach that reflects a contemporary Greek society shaped by austerity measures and recession. Poverty, unemployment, migration, despair, xenophobia, crime, social deviance and rebellion are common themes shared by these films, including the two that premiered at Locarno in competition: *Plato's Academy*, dir. by Filippos Tsitos (*Akadimia Platonos*, 2009), and *A Blast*, dir. by Syllas Tzoumerkas (2014). Shorts by younger Greek filmmakers that premiered at Locarno can also be added to this category. The protagonists in shorts such as *Fox (Alepou)*, 2016 dir. by Jacqueline Lentzou, tend to be young and underprivileged. However, not all Greek films made references to Greece's socio-economic conditions at the time. In fact, the most well-known films of the GNW, namely Lanthimos' *Dogtooth* and Tsangari's *Attenberg*, are set in universes that seem removed from Greek socio-economic reality. They also adopt different aesthetics, coined as "weird" by critics from the English-speaking world, who named it the "Weird Wave of Greek Cinema." (Scott 2010, Rose 2011). *Attenberg* (2010), dir. by Athina Rachel Tsangari, was shown in the framework of the Special programme: Jury's films. Similarly, *Afterlov* (2016) dir. by Stergios Paschos at the section Filmmakers of the Present, was certainly not a statement on the Greek crisis, but a romantic comedy featuring two lovers isolated in a villa. Interestingly, even when there was no obvious reference to the crisis in the films, it didn't prevent many in the film world from interpreting them through this prism. As Erato Basea states, "more importantly, (some of) the Greek new wave films' opaque meaning encouraged film critics and scholars to read this cinema as an allegorical critique of neoliberal politics in crisis-era Greece" (Basea 2016: 63). Therefore, one could argue that there was an increased interest in Greek and Argentine productions during and after the crises, even those that were not overtly political.

5 Dogma of Discovery and the Importance of Being "Discovered" in the (Semi-)Periphery⁵

According to de Valck's "dogma of discovery", discovering new art films from (semi-)peripheral countries – with or without crises – has been the main objective of the film festival world since the 1970s. This tendency developed as a response to protests against the structure of the festivals in the late 1960s. During that period the major European festivals created sections such as Quinzaine des Réalisateurs at Cannes, or Forum at Berlin which not only showcased the achievements of Western directors but also highlighted cinematic cultures unfamiliar to Western audiences, including the Argentine and Greek. In other words, the festivals were "increasingly looking for mind-blowing discoveries similar to the one generated by the archetypal French New Wave" and they appropriated the notion of New Waves as strategic discourse (de Valck 2007: 175).

5. The concept of "periphery" is commonly used by scholars working on "World Cinema" and/or "World Literature". Thus, "world cinemas" are generally divided into three categories: the centre, semi-periphery and periphery, following the notions introduced by sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein in his "world-system" theory (see Wallerstein, 2004). In his famous articles on world literature, Franco Moretti adopts these three categories (see Moretti, 2000; Moretti, 2003). Similarly, in the collective work *Cinema at the Periphery*, several contributors interrogate their objects in terms of "cinemas of the periphery", confronting the theoretical issues that arise from using this concept (see Iordanova et al., 2010). Thus, Argentine Cinema would belong to the "semi-periphery", due to its importance for film industries in the Spanish-speaking world and irrespective of the crisis in the early 1990s.

If this is true, they likely consider other factors as well. Certainly, selecting films from countries in the limelight, such as crisis-stricken Argentina and Greece, helps festivals attract attention from audiences and media all over the world. This does not indicate that the festivals ignored aesthetics; they simply added another parameter to their decision-making process.

As the Locarno data confirms (Fig. 3), the numbers of selected Argentine and Greek films rose consistently after the 2001 and 2009 crises. This does not indicate, however, that there is a direct cause-and-effect relationship between an event of global scale in a country and the immediate development of its cinema. Even though crisis can be a decisive factor, it does not automatically spark unprecedented creativity in local filmmakers and subsequent New Waves. After all, many films were discovered and several New Waves were born in stable, wealthy countries, like Denmark's *Dogma 95*.

The festivals encourage these creative booms by honouring filmmakers who work under adverse conditions. The distinctions awarded at international festivals, such as Locarno, not only recognised the artistic value of new generations of Argentine and Greek filmmakers, they helped NAC and GNW films expand their distribution internationally, usually in arthouse cinemas. Thomas Elsaesser went as far as arguing that, since the vast expansion of the "film festival networks" in the 1990s, it is hard for art and world films to be distributed without winning a festival prize or gaining extensive exposure in the annual festival circuit (Elsaesser 2005).

Film festival recognition for NAC and GNW films is even more important for a few additional reasons. First, Greece does not have a tradition of "exporting" films, except for those made by directors such as Theo Angelopoulos and Michael Cacoyannis, who were considered masters and whose films often premiered at festivals abroad. Therefore, the emergence of an entire generation that systematically had its films screened at festivals abroad is a novelty.⁶ On the contrary, Argentine cinema has been very successful abroad. The Argentine film industry was one of the main exporters of films in Latin America until the 1950s. Moreover, Argentine filmmakers from the 1960s New Argentine Cinema and later have won many accolades at international festivals and impacted world cinema. This success also explains the tributes to Argentine cinema organised at the Locarno Festival and especially the Fribourg Film Festival (Fig. 1). Secondly, Argentine film production was stagnating towards the end of the 1990s, something that changed with the NAC.⁷

Last but not least, both films from these waves tended not to be watched by general audiences at home, despite being recognised by the local media as globally-renowned national cultural products. For the most part, these films had their national premieres at local film festivals and were screened at arthouse cinemas. Not anticipating commercial success, however, Argentine and Greek filmmakers relied heavily on government funding, European funds, co-productions and film festival funding instruments. As we will also see in the final part of this article, some festivals cooperate with national agencies to set up these funding instruments.

6 FIFF

Moving on, let's examine how the NAC was received by the Fribourg International Film Festival (FIFF), another Swiss institution quite different than Locarno. Primarily, the Fribourg is not A-listed, is much smaller and has a less established tradition since it was founded 1987, almost 40 years after Locarno. More importantly, the festival focuses on films from less wealthy parts of the world. The International Competition for feature films presents productions exclusively from Asia, Latin America, Africa and Eastern Europe. What's more, competition for shorts only includes films from Latin America, Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. In other words, apart from sections with screenings from around the globe, such as retrospectives on a country or filmmaker, Fribourg's main objective is to discover films from the so-called "Global South." Its programmers actively seek productions from these parts of the world that "stand out for their innovation and capability to touch the audience," including Argentina (Fiff n.d.). Specifically, the section "New Territory" aims

6. This could be partially attributed to the vast expansion of the film festival and the internationalisation of film culture.

7. Argentine film production has been remarkable over the years. Numerous films were commercially successful during the "Golden Age" of Argentine cinema until the 1950s and have greatly impacted Latin American cinema. The first New Argentine Cinema of the 1960s and Argentine cinema after the military dictatorship also left a mark on world cinema. Despite its great film tradition, Argentine film production was in significant decline towards the end of the 1990s.

to cinematographically explore one part of the world that the western public is less familiar with. The “New Territory” in 2022, for instance is Nepal (Fiff n.d).

Since its inception, Fribourg has showcased numerous Argentine films. Internationally renowned filmmakers from the 1960s and ’70s, such as Eliseo Subiela and Fernando E. Solanas, have presented their work at Fribourg. These screenings gave them an opportunity to highlight pressing sociopolitical issues, such as the impact of the 1976-1983 dictatorship as well as common themes among the older generations of filmmakers. Since the New Argentine Cinema of the 1960s took an overtly political stance, it fit right into the Fribourg’s platform to be identified as a festival that “gives preference to films that stimulate reflection and provoke discussion” (Fiff n.d). Furthermore, the festival presented Argentine screenings in various other sections as well as tributes to Argentina, such as the retrospective “El Tango en el Cine (1933-1944)” in 1998.

Combine this framework with the festival’s interest in “new territories”, and it is clear to see why the FIFF “discovered” the Argentine wave in such a timely fashion. As early in 1996, the festival had organised a tribute to Argentine shorts by young filmmakers such as Lucrecia Martel, Pablo Trapero and Adrián Caetano, who would become important figures of the NAC. Two years later, Fribourg became the first international festival to select what is considered the first NAC film, *Pizza, birra, faso*. In 2000, it also selected *Mundo Grúa* among other contemporary Argentine films, such as *Just for today (Sólo for hoy, 2000)*, and *Bolivia (2001)*. In other words, the Fribourg festival was instrumental in the NAC being recognised outside of Argentina before its films were selected at A-listed festivals, like with *La ciénaga* at the Berlinale or *La libertad* at Cannes.

Interestingly, this spirit of “discovery” is engraved in Fribourg’s history and aims, which are deeply influenced by the Swiss tradition in Non-governmental development organisations. In 1980, Magda Bossy, who was working for the Swiss Non-governmental organisation (NGO) Helvetas, organised an event for the 25th anniversary of this French-speaking Swiss association. Convinced that film would be an excellent medium for expressing cultural richness, she offered a platform for filmmakers from the “Global South.” Its success prompted a second edition entitled “Festival de Films du Tiers-Monde” (Third-World Film Festival). In the 1990s, Fribourg dropped the “Third-World” title and changed its name to Fribourg International Film Festival.

Two elements of its history stand out. First, its willingness to promote dialogue. According to the Fribourg’s website, it aims to promote “understanding between the cultures and more particularly between the so-called North and South” (Fiff n.d.). Secondly, the festival’s connection to Swiss NGOs, evidenced by their advertisements throughout the festival’s programmes, especially the first editions. A similar readiness to assist filmmakers in need and/or from countries in crisis also prevailed after the 2000s when Swiss festivals didn’t just screen films, but also supported and/or co-produced them.

7 LFF, FIFF and Other Swiss Institutions Supporting Argentine and Greek Productions

European Film festivals have played an important role in supporting film production because they fund filmmakers. This is particularly true for the Argentines and Greeks who were deeply affected by the crises. With state funding for film production significantly reduced, filmmakers had to explore different solutions. One of them was to find new, transnational funding instruments to finance their films. These included co-productions with international companies, funds, foundations and institutions such as the Visions sud est.

The Swiss fund Visions sud est was initiated in 2005 by the trigon-film Baden Foundation and the Fribourg Film Festival, along with the collaboration of Nyon’s Visions du Reel and the support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). In 2011, the LFF joined the fund, as did the short-film festival Internationale Kurzfilmtage Winterthur in 2019. In the end, the most well-known Swiss film festivals collaborated with a fund that supports film productions from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe (but excluding EU members, such as Greece). This fund gives films from these countries worldwide exposure and guarantees their distribution in Switzerland (keeping all distribution rights in Switzerland). Since 2005 the Visions sud est has supported the production of many Argentine films of the “Second Wave” of the NAC, including *La Flor* by Mariano Llinás (Aguilar 2015).

In the case of the LFF, the new, transnational funding instruments were the Locarno Filmmakers Academy as well as the Open Doors programme. Locarno's Open Doors was established in 2002 by the LFF in partnership with the federal government's Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). This programme is "devoted to raising the profile of film-makers from developing countries and at the same time making the best possible contribution to good inter-cultural relations" (Fust 2006: 320). From its inception, the Open Doors has focused on different regions, including Argentina in 2006. Specifically, the Locarno Film Lab collaborated with the Buenos Aires Lab (BAL), the Latin American co-production market for independent cinema, within the framework of the BAFICI (Buenos Aires International Independent Film Festival) and in co-production with TyPA (Teoría y Práctica de las Artes). The BAL's main goal was "to stimulate innovative, courageous, open-minded and original filmmaking", which it did (Locarno Festival 2006). This programme supported – among others – NAC directors Albertina Carri, Celina Murga and Pablo Fendrik. It is worth adding that the Open Doors programme currently consists of not just one, but three parallel activities: the Open Doors Hub, an international co-production platform; the Lab, a workshop for eight producers/filmmakers-producers and screenings from the Open Doors focus region, which we mentioned earlier.

Furthermore, there's the Locarno Filmmakers Academy, a "training program dedicated to young directors, industry professionals, and film critics, from both Switzerland and abroad" (Locarno Festival 2019). The LFF website states that throughout the eleven days of the festival, Locarno hosts a group of emerging talents and young professionals from all over the world expressly for training purposes. Several young Greek filmmakers, such as Jacqueline Lentzou and Christos Massalas, have enhanced their skills and extended their network thanks to this program. In 2016, the LFF solidified its commitment to up-and-coming talent by collaborating with the Thessaloniki Film Festival and establishing the Thessaloniki-Locarno Industry Academy, a training program for young cinema professionals from South-Eastern Europe.

8 Assessing the Role of Swiss Funding

Even though the creation of the European and Swiss funds, foundations and institutions can be attributed to cinephilia, a deep sense of solidarity or government policies, like with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), there is still room for criticism. For instance, could it be that the "discovered" Argentine and Greek films/new waves were not only screened at European and Swiss festivals, but also produced for, and to an extent, by them? A few researchers have already responded. In 2005, Thomas Elsaesser argued that funding instruments demand filmmakers follow the festivals' requirements (Elsaesser 2005: 88). This is because the festivals were no longer just exhibition sites for the films they were screening but also (co-)producers through their funding instruments. Interestingly enough, the FIFF, Nyon's Visions du Reel, Locarno Film Festival and the short-film festival Internationale Kurzfilmtage Winterthur are all partners of the Swiss fund Visions sud est. According to Elsaesser, festivals could use their funding instruments to impose their own criteria on filmmakers such as for aesthetics or themes, thus influencing which kinds of films will be on the market for other festivals (Elsaesser 2005: 88).

Miriam Ross takes a step further and critiques the role of film festival as producer through her famous analysis of the Hubert Bals Fund (HBF) of the Rotterdam Film Festival. Similarly to Locarno's Open Doors and Visions sud est, this fund "is a curatorial fund dedicated to supporting filmmakers from Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and parts of Eastern Europe in every stage of the filmmaking process – from script development to post-production" (Iffr n.d.). Indeed, the HBF played a pivotal part in the production of the earliest NAC films, and its name even appeared in most of their titles, including *Pizza, birra, faso* and *Libertad*. Similar support from Open Doors and Visions sud est was impossible because they weren't founded until 2002 and 2005, respectively. Despite the HBF's support of filmmakers from the (semi-)periphery and/or countries in crisis, Ross observes "the sense of an uneven, benefactor-beneficiary relationship at work when filmmakers engage in a working contract with the fund because filmmakers and production companies participate as both cultural producers and representatives of sites in need of first-world support" (Ross 2011: 263).

This sense of an uneven relationship between filmmakers in need and foreign institutions is apparent in the case of Argentina and Greece. Given their dire socioeconomic conditions during the crises, as well as the limited public funding for film production, it is safe to assume that European funds, foundations and institutions

not only influenced international reception but – to some extent – the production of NAC and GNW films. Interestingly, European institutions rushed to help Greek and Argentine film professionals and even created specific programmes, such as a bilateral funding initiative for co-productions with Greece (and Portugal) by the French CNC.⁸ As for the Swiss institutions, their support of Argentine and Greek cinema was limited to a few programmes, namely Locarno’s aforementioned Open Doors in Argentina, which supported *La Rabia* (2008), the Locarno Film Academy, which accepted several young Greek filmmakers and the Thessaloniki-Locarno Industry Academy.

Did the European funds, foundations and institutions actually favour specific topics and aesthetics when it came to Argentina and Greece? Apart from testimonies from Greek filmmakers that some European co-producers demanded poverty and crisis-related images be included in their films, one cannot generalise such an assertion (Koutsogiannopoulos 2021). There are, however, three things that the waves have in common. First, they received a great amount of attention at film festivals, including those in Switzerland. Secondly, the NAC and GNW films initially faced a rather lukewarm reception in Argentina and Greece. In other words, the “discovered” films were indeed produced to be screened at foreign festivals and for international cinephiles, not local audiences. This development is not problematic per se. After all, European funding freed many filmmakers from the expectations of local audiences, who may have preferred films with more narrative transparency and conventional aesthetics. Nevertheless, a number of “discovered” Argentine and Greek films that seem specially tailored for international audiences unjustifiably show a disproportionate amount of images revealing poverty, crisis and misery.

Lastly, the discovery of young Argentine and Greek filmmakers and their subsequent funding seems to have stimulated them and helped them develop artistically. To mention a few examples: Adrián Caetano, Pablo Trapero and Lisandro Alonso, who all received grants by Hubert Bals Fund for their first films, continued making their presence felt at the film festival circuit. Similarly, Yorgos Lanthimos and Syllas Tzoumerkas, who were both “discovered” at the Cannes Film Festival, have proved to be important voices of Greek cinema. The former is now directing English-speaking international such as *The Favourite* (2018), which have been selected at film festivals and nominated for Academy Awards. The latter continues to collaborate with foreign production companies such as *The Miracle of the Sargasso Sea* (2019) co-produced by companies in Greece, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands and presented at the Berlinale. By extension, the discovery and support of these key figures of the NAC and the GNW seem to have helped with the development of film production in terms of number of productions and co-productions in Argentina and Greece (González 2021, Papadimitriou 2018).⁹

These developments in Argentina and Greece seemingly contradict the otherwise convincing general assertion that the dogma of discovery does not bring lasting changes to local industries. According to de Valck, this dogma implies that “every new wave would inevitably have a limited life span at the festival circuit” (de Valck 2007: 176). After assisting a generation of filmmakers in one country, programmers and funding instruments usually move on to other generations and nations. This stance is systematically problematic and goes against the principle of sustainability revered by the European funding instruments, including those in Switzerland. How did Argentina and Greece achieve stable growth of their film industries? While the festivals and funds indeed galvanised a new generation of filmmakers, local authorities seized the momentum and took measures for film development: schools were founded to train technicians, new laws were passed to create opportunities (e.g. cash rebate scheme) and institutions were established to support local film production (Chalkou 2012, Aguilar 2008: 8-28).¹⁰ However, less wealthy nations may not be able to afford such initiatives. Undoubtedly,

8. Although the CNC has already been criticised for similar programmes in the past, it did help with the completion of a few NAC films, such as *Moon 66 Questions* (Jacqueline Lentzou, GR/FR 2020) (Halle, 2010).

9. Although we are analysing two comparable periods of crisis in Argentina and Greece, we acknowledge that the Argentine and Greek film industries have considerable differences. As previously mentioned, Argentina has a more important filmmaking tradition and the film industry is bigger than that of Greece. Argentine productions also have an important advantage in comparison to the Greek ones: the Spanish language spoken by millions. Additionally, the depreciation of the peso in 2002 made the financing of Argentine productions and foreign productions in Argentina more attractive, while the currency of Greece, namely the euro, was not depreciated during the Greek crisis.

10. Greece introduced a cash rebate system in 2018 and as a result many more foreign film and television productions opted to shoot in Greece (Nikolaidis 2022). Subsequently, there was an increased demand for Greek film production companies and professionals

further research on more New Waves and festivals is called for.

Conclusion

The Swiss Locarno and Fribourg festivals received the Argentine and Greek New Waves in a timely, positive manner, and helped expand their popularity. While crisis-related terms were not prevalent in the way these waves were presented in Locarno's official programmes, Fribourg's programmes featured advertisements by Swiss NGOs and relevant texts. Subsequently, NAC films ran the risk of being perceived as cultural products from "sites in need of first-world support", as Ross put it (Ross 2011: 263). The support by Visions sud est Fund and other Swiss institutions was limited and the impact of Swiss funding on both waves was minor compared to that of larger European countries, such as Germany or France, and the Netherlands, because of the Hubert Balls Fund's long history.

who, by applying their newly acquired skills, knowledge and international network, would help advance future Greek endeavours.

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Film Festivals and Ecological Sustainability in the Age of the Anthropocene

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, film scholars have offered new theoretical frameworks that define and strengthen ecocinema studies. In this regard, sensitive environments (Parikka 2015) are the film festivals that scholars mainly refer to as sites for promoting the consumption of ecocinema (Monani 2013). This contribution attempts to highlight what have become established practices aimed at educating an audience aware of the issue of environmental sustainability (Cubitt 2005). After a historical excursus, the author proposes an analysis of the Italian case: AFIC constitutes a space of discursive elaboration that has developed guidelines and parameters.

Keywords: Film Festival; Sustainability; Practices; AFIC; Audiences.

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This essay sets out to reflect on those festivals that are committed to the screening of films focused on the topic of ecological sustainability and have pledged to become green-sensitive environments in their practices (Parikka 2015).

It is well established that film festivals have played a crucial role in historical and critical studies as a vehicle and showcase for trends. Only recently, however, have they emerged as an autonomous field of research within film historiography. Until now, a theoretical perspective on festivals has been traced, often linked to their historical role, geopolitical and economic-geographical issues and their close link to reception studies (Dalla Gassa et al. 2022; de Valck, Kredell and Loist 2016; Iordanova 2013; Stringer 2013). With the rise, in recent years, of thematic film festivals/showcases, in which awards are granted and juries confer, an increasing number of film festivals have been transformed from a place and vehicle for the screening of completed films to a determining factor for the creative process - the conception, production and distribution of films (Iordanova 2015). In this regard, a good example to reflect on are those festivals that increasingly address the issue of ecological sustainability, first as a container of content and, secondarily, as an all-round ecocritical device.

Starting from an overview of these practices on an international level, we will conclude by focusing on a small number of case studies of environmental film events and festivals,¹ understood here as events with a cultural, economic, or touristic weight that cannot be ignored. They are places of knowledge, of discovery and, above all, alternative circuits that validate moments of reflection in a cohesive relationship between territories to be protected, ethnographies and tourist flows.

First and foremost, the paper will attempt to explore how film festivals have established themselves over time as privileged sites of eco-film and eco-documentary – transnational and cross-border (Acciari and Menarini 2014; Iordanova 2015): from the Sundance Film Festival to the latest practices adopted by the Biennale Cinema-Venice International Film Festival. This practice, which is still well established, has clashed with an increasingly pronounced demand for raising awareness. For example, the Ekofilm Festival is the longest-running European festival dedicated to environmental issues.² It was founded in Prague in 1974 by breaking away from Techfilm – International Festival of Films on Science, Technology and Art.³ Every October, the festival presents dozens of competing films and docufilms from all over the world and invites important Czech and international guests. These films show that the engagement and commitment of individuals is a major factor in changing the way we think about our planet. Since 2015, the festival has been held in Brno (Czech Republic) and is jointly organised by Key Promotion (advertising agency), Masaryk University and EkoInkubátor (employment agency). The president of the festival is Ladislav Miko, former and current advisor to the Minister of the Environment. Each year, the festival opens with a topical environmental theme. In addition to dozens of films, from various categories, both in and out of competition from the Czech Republic and abroad, the festival offers lectures and workshops with experts, discussions and debates with guests and directors of competitive films, an evening concert and other cultural programmes. These are the reasons why Ekofilm Festival is a valid interlocutor with more recent realities, precisely because it has transitioned from being an event more focused on raising awareness to an ecocritical device par excellence. It brings a wide range of viewers the latest findings about the condition of nature and the environment across the globe, which often expose serious issues. As a result, Ekofilm has been gaining increasing acclaim at an international level.

It is among the oldest environmental film festivals in the world and is a significant platform for encounters between the general public and filmmakers, experts and government administration. Foreign experts are often attendees, and in the last five years, more than 5000 films have been submitted to the festival.

1. Just as there is still no agreed definition of the festival phenomenon (cf. festival, review, award), the definition is also complex. The different ways in which festivals and sustainability dialogue create further confusion will also be considered: to date, these are referred to in literature as environmental film festivals; ecofilm festivals, ecological film festivals, sustainable film festivals.

2. <https://www.ekofilm.cz> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

3. <https://starfos.tacr.cz/en/project/LP01008> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

1 Becoming an Environmental Festival

Over the past two decades (Past 2019; Fay 2018; Wai Chu 2016), the growing number of films addressing environmental issues shows that environmentally conscious cinema is a powerful tool for disseminating knowledge, raising awareness, stimulating public debate and, hopefully, educational initiatives. But it is especially the space of the environmental film festival that not only draws attention to particular films as productive tools for public awareness and education on environmental issues, but also encourages us to adopt an ecocritically informed point of view (Bladow and Ladino 2018) towards all forms of film production, not just those that openly focus on environmental issues.

These festivals encourage us to become more ecologically conscious viewers as we adopt ecocritical perspectives in studying films as cultural products, as made and consumed by culture, and as a means through which culture re-produces itself, its values, and its worldviews.

Whilst ecocinema aims to impact audiences' environmental values and behaviours, and thus to inspire viewers to take personal and political action, information alone does not guarantee action.

Although assessing the actual impact of these films on environmental conduct is fraught with complexity, recent research in social psychology and the emerging field of community-based social marketing suggests that awareness and understanding of particular environmental problems have only a limited capacity to promote behavioural change in individuals and communities. According to environmental psychologist Doug McKenzie-Mohr (2011: 32), community-based social marketing works to identify the barriers that prevent knowledge from influencing behaviour. He argues that, since the barriers that prevent individuals from engaging in sustainable behaviour are activity specific, community-based social marketers can begin to develop a strategy only after they have identified a particular activity's barriers. Once these barriers have been identified, they can develop a social marketing strategy to remove them. The effectiveness of information in producing social change thus partially depends on how it is conveyed.

It is in this direction that the environmental film festivals proceed: they organize discussions, workshops, and playful activities from an ecocritical point of view. Understanding how information is conveyed visually is critical to its effectiveness in reaching audiences.

As of the field studies I have conducted, I propose an initial distinction between three dimensions that, to a greater or lesser extent, characterise and pertain to the environmental film festival.

The first one is a social dimension. These festivals increasingly strive to develop specific practices aimed at modifying and reinventing ways of dwelling in an urban context, of being in a group.

The second one is an intellectual dimension. It seeks antidotes to standardization, trends and accepted opinions that are closer to the approach "of an artist, rather than of professional psychiatrists who are always haunted by an outmoded ideal of scientificity" (Guattari 2014: 35).

The last one, an environmental dimension, can be understood as the context of relations that makes a phenomenon possible beyond the festival's circuit.

It is precisely from this interdisciplinary perspective that institutions view the film festival ecosystem, particularly in the last two decades. By way of its ability to consolidate diversified practices, the festival ecosystem warrants a complex categorization for its product: an articulate phenomenon, rich in continuous interconnections with the historical, economic, touristic and cultural context in which it emerges.

2 Categorizing Environmental Film Festivals

The dialogue between film festivals and environmental sustainability is deep-rooted, but in-depth studies are missing in the literature. As there is still no unambiguous definition of an "environmental" film festival, to study the phenomenon, we seek to clarify the trends detected by an initial historical mapping. Based on the assumption that supports what de Valck and Loist have argued, namely, that any categorization or mapping of film festivals is bound to be contestable (de Valck and Loist 2016), the study of the main film festival platforms

has led to the identification of three main trends: festivals with an entrepreneurial spirit, public sphere festivals, and performative social events.

2.1 Festivals with an Entrepreneurial Spirit

The first trend is related to entrepreneurial festivals, recalling Dina Iordanova's definition of "industry node" (2015):

Recently, a growing number of festival organizations have been capitalizing on the fact that filmmakers, producers, and other professionals congregate for annual festival events and have sought to exploit the presence of these production-oriented stakeholders. Many [of these] festivals provide forum space for interpersonal encounters and negotiations between companies and creatives, or hold special events (pitching sessions, development fund awards, sessions for additional financing rounds) that foster production-related activities as part of their festivals (Iordanova 2015: 8).

The Jackson Wild Film Festival (JWFF)⁴ and the Wildscreen Festival in Bristol⁵ are examples of this: places to "conduct business" and serve as a crucial marketplace where films are bought and sold. As a matter of fact, their main audience consists of delegates who can afford the expensive entry fees. In highlighting their ties to the filmmaking and environmentalist elite, these festivals validate and profit from corporate models of top-down competence and power. These corporate models also influence the communication strategies of these fair festivals: they seem to be less interested in exchanging information than in disseminating it.

Wildscreen describes its initiatives as follows: "All of Wildscreen's activities are about harnessing the best of the world's wildlife images and media to promote a greater understanding of the natural world."⁶ The Jackson Wild takes a similar approach: "Equally committed to education and outreach, the festival is dedicated to raising awareness and action through the innovative use of media. The webpage begins with "You're invited!" and suggests "No matter where you're from, whether you're a veteran or a newcomer, or a student, JWFF welcomes you!"⁷ These uses of direct speech invoke inclusivity, but these words are simultaneously limited by claims such as "All films submitted and screened have undergone a rigorous selection process prior to JWFF. When your film wins an award, it means something!"⁸ This rhetoric highlights how the word "you" is aimed at a specialized audience. But most interestingly, the inclusiveness they refer to involves a relatively high entry fee: up to \$450. Due to such models of top-down interaction, these festivals are substantially sponsored by corporate interests.

2.2 Public Sphere Festivals

The percentage of festivals that fall into the second category, that of public sphere festivals, are more focused on the representation of the *civic and socially legitimate*. Even if they turn symbolic value into economic value, unlike festivals with an entrepreneurial spirit they promote public participation through attendance - a mass audience, award ceremonies or panel discussions. The average audience, however, remains passive. These festivals tend to market themselves as prestigious events that attract large crowds and celebrities and are characterised by official government sponsorships. Jurgen Habermas' theory of the public sphere is applicable here, a way of examining how ordinary citizens "prepare to force authority to legitimise itself in the

4. Founded in 1991, Jackson Wild is a film festival based in Jackson Hole in the state of Wyoming, USA. The festival is held annually in September and consists of panel discussions, film screenings, workshops, and networking opportunities. It is noteworthy to mention also the Jackson Lake Lodge, typically held within Grand Teton National Park, an international conference for professionals in natural history filmmaking and media industry, as well as the Jackson Wild Media Awards, which recognize excellence in natural history filmmaking. Cfr. <https://www.jacksonwild.org>

5. The Wildscreen Festival was first held in 1982, in Bristol, UK. A Women's Leadership Organization with a dynamic team, every year, connects the creative filmmakers of the film, television and photography industry with environmentalists to raise awareness of the environmental crisis and inspire positive changes.

6. <https://wildscreen.org/about-us/> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

7. <https://www.jacksonwild.org> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

8. <http://wildlifefilms.org> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

face of public opinion.”⁹ Two types of festivals fall into this category. The first refers to film festivals that call themselves “environmental”, but upon closer inspection it becomes evident that their commitment to such notions is debatable. The second refers to circuits, major film festivals, that include spaces in their programming schedule dedicated to highlighting films in competition that have been made according to best practices and green certification.¹⁰ Among the most notable instances is the establishment of the Green Drop Award, given by Green Cross Italy to one of the films competing in the official section of the Venice International Film Festival that best interprets “the values of ecology and sustainable development, with particular attention to the preservation of the Planet and its ecosystems for future generations, lifestyles and cooperation among peoples.”¹¹ The award, made of blown Murano glass, contains a drop of water with a soil sample that is chosen from different countries each year. The link between land and water and the connection to an ever-changing place in the world is meant to symbolise the fertile humus in which future generations can reconcile development and ecology. The drop also symbolises the strength of every small action, including the very powerful one of a film.

Green Cross also promotes, among the various education and information initiatives on ecological transition, the “Screen in Green” competition together with the Ministry of Ecological Transition, the Sardegna Film Commission and Premio Solinas. The goal of this project is to promote new content and increased environmental awareness in film and television productions through the creativity of young talents between the ages of 18 and 30. A cash prize is established for three categories: short films, TV series subject and feature films.

2.3 Performative Social Events

Lastly, the final and most recent category is that of performative social events. As Stringer (2013) suggests, thematic film festivals often set out to both encourage a general audience (by promoting the notion of the official public sphere of the civic and the socially legitimate), on the one hand, and a specialised audience (celebrating “cult and social opposition”), on the other. Evolving from the second category and taking shape from the second half of the 1990s onwards, we are referring to festivals that have specified, structured spaces and time frames for gathering, discussion and exposure, while also helping to promote informal connections between programmers, audiences and creators. They are distinguished by a distinctive community nature and a sociocultural drive which operates through the theoretical framework of the public sphere, where these festivals, particularly in the last decade, have been the main promoters on an extended, ongoing process with the aim of publicly mobilising their audiences through the process that Monani calls “riot(ing) in the streets” (2013: 267), forging of a tangible form of environmental action.

These audiences address the perceptual modes of the individual, thus creating an immersive experience which is capable of reframing and readjusting the sensitivities of cohesive relationships between involved territories and ethnographies. Thus, this kind of festival offers tools for socio-cultural education through shared critical reflection in a culturalist perspective.

However, in addition to these all-embracing gestures, festivals also encourage dialogue on a specialised topic, the environment, in intimate contexts: screenings combined with seminars, workshops, roundtables and events as networking and socialising parties. Words such as resilience, environment and sociability are common to all websites.

As public and alternative spheres, film festivals highlight the democratic nature of participation. Audiences are notably encouraged to interact with festival organisers and filmmakers in contexts that inspire conversation. Ultimately, everyone takes their environmental missions seriously. These festivals are not simple forums for

9. Public sphere theory has been successfully applied to other types of film festivals by scholars such as Julian Stringer, Derek Ros and Soyoung Kim, because film festivals often present themselves as meeting spaces for expanding spheres of democratic and public engagement.

10. As Kääpä (2013) acknowledges, among others, there is still no precise definition of green film. On an international scale, there are certifications, protocols, and evaluation systems: these allow audiovisual production companies to certify that a given audiovisual work has been produced in an environmentally friendly and sustainable manner. Action on the following issues must be implemented: organisation of activities, use of resources, waste management, energy consumption, and atmospheric emissions.

11. <https://www.greendropaward.org> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

general entertainment but are structured so as to bring communities together to share a common cause. As a matter of fact, as Stringer has pointed out, most thematic film festivals are aimed at both specialized minorities and the general public.

The thematic areas being promoted are not only related to energy consumption, but especially to mobility (visiting and moving around the city with low-impact means of transport), merchandising, material recycling, and food sustainability; such dimensions, in particular the latter, are mostly related to cine-touristic practices.

This is the case, for instance, of the Finger Lakes Environmental Film Festival. It is an annual multi-art, interdisciplinary, cross-media festival in Ithaca (New York, USA), dedicated to showcasing global media projects that are related to sustainability issues. Launched in 1997 as an outreach project through the Center for the Environment at Cornell University in Ithaca, since 2005 it has been hosted by Cornell's Division of Interdisciplinary and International Studies, which has strived to raise the festival's profile as a regional event with an international appeal. It can be described as a successful operation, in its longevity but also in its attendance, which has exceeded 10,000 people in recent years. As Monani (2013) writes:

Significantly, FLEFF presents itself not only as an alternative ecocritical space, where different ways of thinking about the environment take centre stage, but also as an alternative public space. The festival's programs display a series of unconventional opportunities for audiences, artists, and organizers to exchange dialogue. FLEFF hosts galas and gatherings free to festival attendees, staff, and featured guests; a FLEFF lab, which is an all-day "unconference," open to any and all free of charge where you participate rather than observe: one credit mini-courses open to all Ithaca students: an internship program that engages over 100 students; and the Fellows program, which invites graduate students of color from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and institutions to spend three days at the festival [...] My observations and experiences suggested that most participants allow the festival's frames of "vigorous debate" coupled with "collective joy" and "safe zone" to forward amiable but critical exploration and negotiation (272-273).

Here, Monani explains that FLEFF's goal is to steer the festival as a link between intellectual enquiry and new media, as an additional platform for interrogating sustainability in all its forms: economic, social, ecological, political, cultural, technological and aesthetic. Through films, videos, new media, installations, performances, panels and presentations, the festival engages in a vigorous debate between media and disciplines. Each year, it hosts a large number of national and transnational artists for a week and showcases Ithaca College as a regional and national centre for thinking differently - in new ways, interfaces and forms - about the environment and sustainability.

3 Environmental Film Festival Network

We have already mentioned that the international schedule is too vast to be guaranteed a complete cataloguing of all the Environmental Film Festivals active on a global scale. However, over the years, as evidence of the strong link between cinema and sustainability, there have been attempts to create digital platforms (blog, sites) that could serve as showcases tethered to discussion sessions. As much as it is an open network, a major component is missing: minor festivals (as based on budget, audience, star system).

Returning to the structure of these digital platforms, there is one common characteristic: these networks seek to signal initiatives as well as the many open systems active on a global scale. In particular, the content is aimed at filmmakers or distributors, rather than the audience.

Active from 1999 to 2011, the first, rudimentary attempt to create an online showcase for this type of festival was the Environmental Film Festival Network (EFFN),¹² which contained links to about twenty film festivals worldwide. This blog functioned as a true glasshouse: it provided each festival with a dedicated space and a profile of its own. Information published at the request and recommendation of the festival itself, in addition to the title and link to the festival's official website, includes a short description and in some cases the opening of the call for entries. There are several other similar but less successful attempts to create a digital platform

12. The blog has not been updated since 2013, but is still visible. Cfr. <https://effn.wordpress.com> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

to facilitate access to environmental film festivals: for instance, the EcoIQ, which has remained a blog, and EcoFootage, the first to have a database architecture, was founded in 2006 but is no longer active.

Probably the most widely available platform is the Green Film Network,¹³ a recent initiative boasting a global reach: in 2012, in Turin (Italy),¹⁴ 39 directors (of annual film festivals focused on environmental issues) signed up to form an international organisation to promote exchange, communication and collaboration on environmental issues through film. Membership of the Green Film Network is open to any environmental film festival that adheres to the principles and practices recognised by the agency, which can be summarized in three points:

- to promote audiovisual products with ecological and environmental themes and encourage initiatives to safeguard the natural, social and cultural environment;
- to disseminate and promote artistic and cultural international production, in particular film, through events, debates, publications, television appearances;
- to realise audiovisual events and activities to contribute to the growth of a culture aware of the relationship between man and nature, and social and cultural environments.

Most of the aforementioned festivals seem to evoke categories pertaining both to the public sphere and to performance events, but without making distinctions with respect to their primary intents nor to their best practices. They welcome audience involvement, provide open invitations to attend screenings and use language that emphasises the second person or direct speech. Almost all of these festivals have either very low or no entry fees for filmmakers aiming to submit their work. The network examples mentioned above were born as international showcases.

But there are other types of containers that are based on a national dialogue. Unlike the previous ones, as in the production sector, these networks are operational in nature and move towards the definition of shared guidelines.

For example, these are moving under the aegis, first and foremost, of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The common goals include the fight against poverty, the eradication of hunger and the fight against climate change, to name but a few. Regarding the composition of the international system, the Italian network that is currently being set up is of interest.

4 The Italian Case: the Festival Green Protocol¹⁵

To reflect, we will now draw inspiration from a specific case study: the current Italian context. Indeed, over the past decade, Italian film festivals have largely focused on the spatiality of cultural events, to be understood as a cohesive relationship between territories, touristic flows and ethnographies involved in a perspective of sustainability. In line with the practices adopted across Europe, recent legislation has led to the signing of the Green Festival Guide (2022), a protocol that engages with the realm of the Italian festival by primarily focusing on the material impact that film and television distribution practices have at every stage (Vaughan 2019; Starosielski and Walker 2016): organisation, promotion and communication, and realisation and post-event activities in both socio-economic and touristic-cultural terms.

The Green Festival Guide protocol does not outline practices but rather (unlike the case of production, for example) formalize those that are already widely adopted. The festival protocol is not a starting point, but a programme already partly tested in terms of its feasibility. The fact that this protocol is in the making is demonstrated by the repeated statements of the Association of Italian Film Festivals (AFIC) President, Chiara

13. <https://www.greenfilmnet.org> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

14. Turin has been hosting the annual green film festival CinemAmbiente since 1998. It was set up with the aim of presenting the best environmental films and documentaries at an international level and to contribute, with activities taking place throughout the year, to the promotion of cinema and environmental culture. Founded by Gaetano Capizzi, the Festival is organised by the CinemAmbiente Association with the National Cinema Museum. CinemAmbiente is one of the co-founders of Green Film Network.

15. The contribution refers to ongoing work.

Valenti Omero, who speaks of ecological transition and adaptation, alluding to the practices that have already adopted and can be used as a point of reference to start outlining common procedures, at least on the national level.¹⁶

What is the starting point and what is the ending point? If a conclusion has not yet been reached (presumably the publication of a protocol), the start can be recognized through the statements of Laura Zumiani – representative of the Trento Film Festival and AFIC board member – who has claimed that:

The work began with a mapping of what exists in Italy, and of the good practices that were immediately available. We based ourselves on the Trentino eco-events specification, combined with some international tools, to create a guide, practical and operational, with advice divided into thematic areas. But also to lay the foundations of the Protocol, on which we are working in collaboration with the relevant Ministries and in synergy with all the festivals.¹⁷

In addition to the Trentino case, there are other festival directors who have been working for years on the realisation of festivals as environmentally sustainable social and performance events.

Under the coordination and supervision of Laura Zumiani, nine associated festivals took part. The green festivals working group consisted of Monica Goti (Trieste Film Festival),¹⁸ Marco Trevisan (Euganea Film Festival),¹⁹ Raffaella Canci (Trieste Science + Fiction Festival),²⁰ Luca Elmi (FCP - Porretta Film Festival),²¹ Gaetano Capizzi (CinemAmbiente),²² Renato Cremonesi (Lessinia Film Festival),²³ Riccardo Volpe (Biografilm Festival),²⁴ Rocco Calandriello (Lucania Film Festival)²⁵ and Sheila Melosu (Siciliambiente Film Festival).²⁶ By observing the makeup of this working group/team, it is worth noting the decision of establishing a dialogue between festivals – that we have defined – of the public sphere and those here identified as performative events, true devices of social sustainability before being environmental. In anticipation of the forthcoming protocol (expected to be issued on October 2022), the AFIC has outlined ten thematic areas²⁷ on which the team is working on, and not exclusively in terms of energy consumption. We propose the ten parameters by identifying them in the three previously proposed categories: 1) social (promotional materials, set-ups, social sustainability, guest management); 2) intellectual (training and communication, production of gadgets, sustainable mobility); and 3) environmental (energy and sustainable consumption, food sustainability, environmental culture, waste management).

16. The statements of Chiara Valenti Omero are available at the link: <https://italianpavilion.it/eventi/italy-supports-green-awareness/> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

17. My translation.

18. Trieste Film Festival is a film culture event held annually in January. The main aim of the festival is to encourage information, discussion and mutual cooperation between those working in the field of audiovisual production <https://www.triestefilmfestival.it> (Last accessed November, 2022).

19. Euganea Film Festival is an environmental film festival held annually in June. The festival is held in Monselice (Padova). <https://www.euganeafilmfestival.it/it> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

20. The main purpose of Trieste Science + Fiction Festival is to present and promote science fiction and fantasy cinematographic and audio-visual works. The festival held in November. <https://www.sciencefictionfestival.org> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

21. Every edition is dedicated to a famous director of the national and international scene. It takes place in Porretta Terme, in the province of Bologna, every year in December. <https://porrettacinema.com> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

22. CinemAmbiente is the first environmental film festival in Italy. It was started in Turin in 1998 with the aim of presenting the best international environmental films and documentaries, with activities taking place throughout the year. <https://www.festivalcinemambiente.it/> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

23. The festival is dedicated to the production of multimedia material on the life and history of mountain peoples. It is held every year in Bosco Chiesanuova, Verona, at the end of August. <https://www.ffdl.it/it/> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

24. Biografilm Festival - International Celebration of Lives is a film festival held in June in Bologna, dedicated to biographies. <https://www.biografilm.it> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

25. The Lucania Film Festival has been held every year in Pisticci - Matera since 1999. Every year it presents major film productions that have had Basilicata as their set. <https://www.lucaniafilmfestival.it> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

26. Siciliambiente is an international film festival related to environmental themes, sustainability and human rights. It takes place every year in July, in San Vito Lo Capo - northern Sicily. <https://www.festivalsiciliambiente.it> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

27. <https://www.aficfestival.it/2022/02/25/afic-guida-festival-green-transizione-ecologica/> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

An initial mapping of the outcomes, based on 47 festivals that have adhered to the guidelines, shows a positive increase in practices as of September 2022. In particular, we propose a focus on data relating to the “training and communication” section.²⁸ Bearing in mind that 2022 is the first year almost in full compliance after Covid restrictions, the involvement of the public has yielded excellent results: an average of 65% have claimed not only to have succeeded in realising environmental education initiatives involving the participants, but also to have succeeded in preparing a sustainable communication plan, demonstrating the strategies of sustainable activism. The response of festivals that are not environmentally themed but want to conform to these themes (second category) is still weak in terms of 1) activating forms of tutoring and mentoring with more experienced festivals (32%), and 2) in proposing environmental training for hired and volunteer staff (32%). An outstanding case in Italy, signatory of the ten guidelines, and promoter of the working team, is Euganea Film Festival.²⁹ It is a network of social sustainability and cultural inclusion in the interpretation of events, such as mobility (visiting and moving around the city by low-impact means), merchandising (social, creation of shared maps to discover the territory), and even food sustainability (with zero-mile products). A successful case, it fulfils most of the ten points in the AFIC’s guidelines. It is a case study that, based on thorough enquiry, has allowed us to being addressing the performative social events category.

5 Communicating and Avoiding Greenwashing: the Case of the Euganea Film Festival

“It is our conviction that cinema can lend a hand to understand, to comprehend, especially in the less clear moments, when the shortest road seems the only one to take.”³⁰

This statement by the Euganea Film Festival’s director, Marco Trevisan, perfectly sums up the intentions of the Euganea Film Festival which, since 2002, has managed to liaise with other sectors in the regional territory in promoting of local culture through audiovisual media.

The festival is the flagship of the activities carried out by the Euganea Movie Movement, an association founded in 2005 and which operates in the Veneto region to promote Italian and foreign film cultures through the organisation of events, courses, reviews and shows, with a special focus on regional productions. Its main expression is the Euganea Film Festival, which takes place in the Euganean Hills area during the summer and has offered, since 2002, a selection of over fifty submissions each year (a varied line-up of documentaries and shorts on the theme of eco-sustainability), of which fiction and animated documentaries and shorts are included, presented in evocative settings such as parks, villas and castles, accompanied by special events such as concerts, workshops, meetings with authors and theatre performances. Euganea Movie Movement collaborates with various exponents of the international film cultural scene and works with a dense network of organisations, municipalities, institutions and associations in the province of Padua and within the Veneto region. The association’s activity is oriented towards a dialogue between film and regional culture. In doing so, it promotes initiatives in unconventional contexts. It chooses to revitalise spaces and environments that are reconsidered and used in new and original ways, becoming splendid open-air cinemas: a unique cultural format that combines the high-level offer of the films in competition with the promotion of the territory.

In 2021, with the collaboration of WOWNature,³¹ Euganea Film Festival supported the Bosco Fontaniva area of the Brenta River by increasing its biodiversity and improving the provision of water-related ecosystem services to river habitats, wetlands and agricultural areas of the Natura 2000 site. For the 2022 edition, the festival, together with the support of Crédit Agricole Friuladria, aims to continue the path of environmental accountability by renewing the *Euganea Film Festival Climate Positive* initiative, which will generate positive impact by enhancing the environmental quality of the territory. To this aim, the festival plans to plant new

28. A full reading of the report is available at the link: <https://www.aficfestival.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Guida-Green-v290822.pdf> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

29. <https://www.euganeafilmfestival.it> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

30. Interview with the director Marco Trevisan, March 2022.

31. <https://www.wownature.eu> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

trees in the area of the Brenta River Park (roughly a 50-km-long stretch), which runs from Bassano del Grappa in the Province of Vicenza to Padua, as well as vowing to protect the Po River Woods.

By protecting the existing forests, the organizers aim to zero the festival's CO2 emissions; however, they intend to plant trees where they are most needed, thus helping reduce the impact of the climate crisis. Euganea Film Festival is also deploying another initiative to minimise their climate impact: the Solar Cinema, a van equipped with a photovoltaic system that reduces the emissions that a normal film screening inevitably entails. The Solar Cinema is also a tool for generating ecological knowledge and the diffusion of cinema. From the outset, the practices of tourism and territory promotion have a more international, rather than national, impact, thanks to original and pioneering initiatives: it opened a bike point to reach highly evocative and underused locations where screenings take place during the festival. This practice, initiated in collaboration with a local tourist agency, enables directors, producers, and audiences from all over the world to discover venues in the Euganean and Berici Hills during Euganea Film Festival.

An extension of this project is the creation of a cycling tourism webapp, *Euganea Film Tour*,³² a film tourism project created with the intention to discovering and visiting independently, or with guided tours, film and television production locations.

In an invaluable dialogue with the Department of Cultural Heritage of the University of Padua (Cinlands research project, 2014),³³ the web application responding to the objective of implementing a project of cultural dissemination in the area, in an honest enquiry into local realities. It combines the study of audiovisual products with the exploration of the hillside territory, advancing film tourism itineraries interested in an in-depth analysis of film locations in relation to places and monuments of interest. The webapp user can enter the territory in two ways.

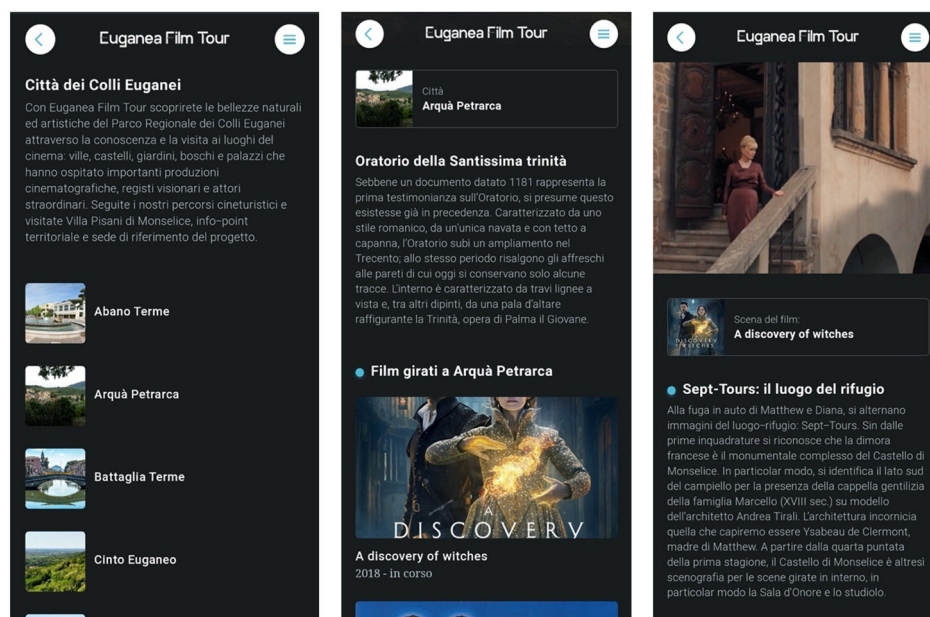
The first way to enter the territory is highly explorative, entailing the discovery of a location through three different approaches: from a historical point of view through the city history (fig.1); from a touristic point of view, in visiting monuments, places of worship, points of interest (fig.2), symbology and history; and from a cinematographic point of view: through a film of which the film review offers a detailed description, a synopsis and, in particular, a section dedicated to the relationship between film and territory. An analysis of the latter allows a further in-depth study with the analysis of sequences (fig.3) prompting, in the perspective proposed by Lavarone's studies (2021, 2018, 2016), an awareness of the films, as well as providing basic knowledge of film language to allow a more sophisticated reading of films as a means of communication, as a carrier of a messages. Hence, each sequence, shot in a specific location, was subject to census and georeferencing works. This process was useful for outlining heritage enhancement experiences with a positive benefit for the territory.

The second way of accessing the territory was developed in dialogue with a local tourist agency, the proposal of four film-related tours. These tours have been included on the webapp to provide users with gamification experiences, thus potentially strengthening the relationship between cinema and the territory on multiple levels.

The dialogue between the images visible in films and television series, on the one hand, and the naturalistic panoramas of the Euganean Hills Regional Park, on the other, allows the visitor to think about the changes the area has undergone. A landscape particularly marked in the last twenty years by the progressive urbanisation of the park, the destruction of the flora and the gradual disappearance of various species of animals that have migrated and/or become extinct. This latest practice adopted by the Euganea Film Festival broadens these considerations and encourages us to reflect not exclusively on the ways in which the media (in this case, the cinema) portray the theme of environmental ecology, but rather on the various ways in which environmental ecology is rooted in technological mediation, implying collective updates of perceptual paradigms, attention

32. <https://www.euganeafilmtour.it> (Last accessed: November, 2022).

33. Cinlands was created by Farah Polato and Giulia Lavarone across the Department of Cultural Heritage: Archaeology, History of Art, Film and Music (dBC) at the University of Padua. Cinlands is a research project examining media, landscape and tourism. Starting from the field of film, photography and television studies, this exploration has subsequently adopted interdisciplinary perspectives, involving computer science, tourism economics, geography, history of art and communication. <https://cinlands.beniculturali.unipd.it> (Last accessed: November, 2022).



Figs. 1-3. Some screens from the web application 'Euganea Film Tour'

(Citton 2014) and forms of knowledge. The festival, although providing an alternative service to the usual spaces, is a promoter of an ecological conception of experience, relevant also to social and mental sustainability spheres.



Fig. 4. Giardino Storico di Valsanzibio -PD-. Tours in September 2021. Marco Trevisan; all rights reserved; Fig. 5. Castello del Catajo, Battaglia Terme -PD-. Tours in September 2021. Marco Trevisan; all rights reserved

In analysing the Italian case, it is apparent how the exploration of environmental film festivals leaves room for the ecocritical examination of other film festivals, albeit not always focused on the environment.

Studies on film festivals have examined the festival space, but have mainly focused on interests: for instance, through a focus on the timing of the festival circuit and the importance of jury awards, or through an emphasis on how cities project their tourism appeal.

Green festivals provide an additional and valuable framework for reading both the methods and the linguistic and cultural choices of the entire festival world, which in recent years is becoming increasingly attentive to the combined themes of sustainability and ecology.

New festivals continue to spring up that link cinema and experimental forms of ecological sustainability in both practice and content. The model I have provided can thus be refined or redefined through case studies that reveal how public and participatory evocations are realised and practised. The terrain of the festivals I outline here and the interpretations I suggest lay the groundwork for initial steps for future research which, until now, has been lacking.

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Who's Choice? Who's Voice? Can Festival Programmers and Film Critics Stand Away from the Market Diktats but not from Societal Issues?

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Abstract

This paper aims to emphasize first the decisive role played by festivals in the creation and circulation of films according to other guidelines than those dictated by the market. With different tools, programmers and critics are the main agents of this inevitably asymmetric but nevertheless vital endless battle. In this context, this paper unfolds the necessary and sometimes counterintuitive strategies to remove the dominance of an archaic power built through decades (actually, since the origins of cinema) of masculine and euro-centrist definition of the art of cinema. This necessary purpose must be pursued without destroying the level of demand in terms of originality and ability to keep re-interrogating political, social et esthetical frames and therefore to resist the submission to pre-established market oriented or militant/propaganda patterns that constantly intends to overwhelm filmmaking and film viewing.

Keywords: Film Festivals; Film Criticism; Film Programming; Film Festival Circuit; Global Art Cinema.

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As we intend to map, understand and possibly criticize the film festival system today, I believe one should first remind the major effects and evolutions this pattern has today. It means that whatever comments we are likely to make about how film festivals work, they should be understood on the general background of what defines the presence and actions of Film Festivals in the present time.

The first aspect of this background is the incredible increasing of the number of film festivals, all over the world, a general evolution which goes with a comparable increasing of the natures of these film festivals, the way they work, the goals they give themselves, the economical, political, sociological, technological and aesthetical conditions they operate. One should remember *this* is the major phenomenon. And, with all the debates it may raise, this is basically good news. And then we ought to keep in mind in what context this expansion is happening: the context of major concentrations in the film industry, and the raise of new dominant ways of circulation for movies, online now mostly through SVOD – I am talking here only about legal movie accesses, which, I agree, is a limited view, but including the illegal or informal circulation of films would not change, unfortunately, the global picture, which is the growing control of choices, of tastes, by marketing techniques where algorithms and Artificial Intelligence already play a major role, and are meant to increase their dominance.

Together with other forces, limited forces but nevertheless existing and active, like independent theatres, alternative online platforms, and, on a different angle, educators of all kinds, teachers and professors to begin with, there are two connected resources to permanently build and rebuild other visions of what cinema could and should be, what it can offer and provoke, other than the one so actively and efficiently promoted by the market. These two apparatuses are film festivals and film criticism. Here I need to make an *aparté* about what I call film criticism: anyone, being professional or not, being paid or not, who dedicates time, work, knowledge, deep affective relation with films to write about them should be called a critic. This excludes both the immense amount of vernacular comments about movies that exist online through chats and social networks, as well as media people who only use films to promote glamour, or to discuss – potentially interesting – topics regarding society, history, etc. but without any attention to the cinematic device that relates with these topics.

Actually, there are many people who do respond to this definition of film criticism, most of them are young, and their number is, also, increasing. Mostly online, obviously. What film critics do is, in the principle, similar to what film festivals do, though not with the same tools. And that is to give visibility, prestige, recognition, to certain pieces of works we call films, among so many others. And then to give them and their filmmakers an opportunity, which will be or not turned into facts: public success – theatrically or otherwise, access to fame, echoes of the ideas as well as of the artistic proposals and the narratives by various authors, and, arguably the most important, opportunities to keep working and creating in such a competitive environment.

The questions I made the titles of this paper, “Who Chooses? Who Speaks?”, are about these two groups of people, festival programmers and film critics, who, together, play a major role in building what I would call a *chamber of recognition*. This symbolic space with very material effects has a story, or better said, belong to history – which is only natural, but of course this history, our history, can and should be questioned. It was built in tight connexion with the history of cinema itself, a history that, as we know, is not the accumulation of facts and objects but a certain construction based on these facts and objects. To put it simply, the history of cinema has been, till recent times, a massively dominant ideological discourse about the cinema of the world that was made of what was produced between Moscow and Los Angeles by white men.

When, during the last decade of the Twentieth Century, Jean-Luc Godard has dedicated a huge amount of work, of thinking, of passion to elaborate with his *Histoire(s) du cinéma* about interrelation between the History of cinema and the History of the world, only one film by a non-Caucasian (Mizoguchi) and only two made by a woman (Ida Lupino and Agnès Varda) appear among hundreds and hundreds of filmmakers and of films he calls on the screen.

At this moment, the last decade of 20th century, things had already begun to change, thanks to a specific dimension of what is called globalization, and to which film festivals and critic played a significant role. After a few Japanese directors (Akira Kurosawa and Kenji Mizoguchi to begin with), the solitary figure of Satyajit Ray from Bengal and the brief but significant attention toward Brazilian Cinema Novo, a vast array of works from all over the world had finally reached the “international screens” during the 1980s. “International” meaning

here the Western “chamber of recognition”, and the mentioned “works from all over the world” means they come from Asia, from Latin America, from Sub-Saharan Africa, from the Arab world, from black Americans, from immigrants of various origins making what Hamid Naficy calls *Accented Cinema* (2001) – and still very little from native peoples. This massive arrival meant an immense variety of encounters with stories, bodies, languages, landscapes, rhythms, etc. Encounters that were and are experienced by expanding audiences, due to the rise of the festival phenomenon. But clearly most of these films were chosen and discussed by programmers and critics who did belong to the old Western “chamber of recognition”, or if not most of the time they were educated according to its vision, wherever they would come from.

So, what did they do, as open minded and good willing those who were in charge of selecting and highlighting these films may have been? What kind of films did they choose? They choose films that allow to relate with the set of expectations toward cinema they have. And how could this be otherwise? Here we reach several distinct and rather touchy points. Are these expectations wrong, or at least not to be referred to outside the historical context in which they were elaborated? To a certain extent, this is a specific formulation of the general issue of universalism, it is like to wonder whether “freedom”, “democracy”, as principles, are valued everywhere, even acknowledging that in the name of these values an immense amount of crimes and destructions of all kind have been accomplished, and still are. This philosophical question has been, and is extensively discussed, but I would allow myself here to keep answering that yes, Freedom and Democracy are valuable *per se*. Not taking too many risks, right?

In the field of cinema, it means that films that are considered as opening eyes on various cultures, films that are perceived as giving time and space, visual and sound and rhythmic seduction to all kind of humans and non-humans, landscapes, situations, with emotion and thinking, should be seen and shared.

But according to which guidelines for choice? There is no, and hopefully there will never be a straight answer to that, only a vast modulation of options. The fact that most of the ways it actually functions was actually built and formulated by people born and raised in the area and the culture that did oppress and deny others for ages must have influences on their way of thinking and their taste, and should be questioned. But if it is acknowledged that, with all their flaws and bias, these people and the structures they work for globally meant and to a certain extent did actually improve the interest and understanding of other kinds of proposals, they should not be dismissed. They should be criticised and challenged any time they deserve, and this is obviously happening. They should share their positions with others from different backgrounds, but the need for the continuation of an effort that has proven to be significantly and efficiently fruitful should be increased and diversified, not sabotaged.

Simultaneously, it is more than obvious that there is a need for other visions, other sensibilities, other understandings based on different backgrounds, backgrounds that do include the memory and the contemporary experience of oppressions and un-equality. But it seems very unlikely that the unique fact of “belonging” (and the word “belonging” itself should be questioned) to a group of people who have different perceptions related with their racial and/or gender, or many other factors, entitles anyone to have access to decision position in terms of choosing and saying. The main issue is and should remain their personal capacity to implement different visions and discourses.

I am perfectly aware that saying this seems to avoid the fact that, here as anywhere, those who already occupy power situations are not likely to abandon them to newcomers, wherever they come from. Which means there is a need for procedures and regulations, proactive measures, to open access to much various personalities. Following the terms of the leading thinker in post-colonial studies Dipesh Chakrabarty said, there is a need to *provincialize* the inherited set of ways to understand cinema, not to destroy it. The obvious and very happy growth of ideas and of number of individuals who are making themselves heard and are, slowly, always too slowly, gaining means of action in whatever position is the best possible news. But only thanks to their merits and the merit of their skills and thoughts.

What has been happening in the recent relations toward films themselves is a very useful guideline here. Against the supposed domination of aesthetical choices dictated by the influence of the white male heritage, I would like to mention what I see as two major examples, and to my view negative examples of what has been used to promote alternative approaches. I believe they both embody the dangers of a systematic perception

of what is at stake here, which is the temptation to privilege certain films or type of films for reasons that have nothing to do with cinema.

The first one is about what is known as Nollywood. The huge commercial success of fictions on video originally made in Nigeria (and since in various other West African countries) has been used as a call for respect for the taste of African people, a taste that is not acknowledged and glorified by festival programmers and film critics. This did deserve attention, also since there was, and there is, a huge amount of products, and an apparent diversity due to the three major cultural and ethnical eras in Nigeria, each one moment building its own production (now almost disappeared in the Muslim part of the country), then replicas in several neighbour countries. But all this said, you had to do what programmers and critics should do: not to look at statistics, but to watch films.

Since its very beginning, programming and practicing film criticism was not meant to follow trends, but to influence, distort and challenge them. They had no legitimacy to do such thing other than to offer an alternative option to the dominance of forms, a dominance that is related with conformism and acceptance of the master discourse – of course I don't pretend this is what film festivals and film critics always actually did, but it is the ultimate reason of their existence and action, whether they fulfil it or not. The set of alternative proposals they were likely to support and promote should be based on something that has to do both with beauty as a defying strength against our habits, and rebellion against dominant patterns in society, including regarding storytelling and shapes. And this is what is actually happening whenever programmers and critics are not just loudspeakers for a government or a group with a specific agenda.

Programming, writing critics (and teaching) are essentially meant to disturb. And even if, to remain in the film festival field, each festival practically has to also welcome more conventional and socially desired elements, to attract financial, political and media support, its reason of being remains to provide disruption, innovation.

If, as we know at least since Tom Gunning (2006), cinema since its birth was about attraction, it never was only that, even in the very first years. Should it have been only that, there would never have been neither film festivals nor film critics – only commercial weeks and propaganda. And what happened with Nollywood turns out to be only based on attraction, being a type of entertainment that should maybe not even be called cinema.

There is a common but questionable belief about filmmaking which is that quantity will at one point generate quality: meaning that if enough terrible films are made, ultimately good ones will, somehow, naturally emerge from the lot. This may happen in certain conditions, a good example would be how South Korean “quota quickies” finally gave birth to good films and great filmmakers. But this is certainly not the rule, and to happen it demands a certain amount of factors that are not happening anywhere anytime. And certainly, twenty-five years or so after the appearance of Nollywood, it did not happen in Nigeria. The repetition of the same recipes, the simplistic stories, the over-use of a few tricks, the moral conformism (not to mention the sexism and the fascination for consumerism as driving forces) all together make more than legitimate that these products are, to a large extent, not in their place in film festivals and that they do not generate significant critical work. The repeated assessment that since it has popular success (soft drinks and porno websites and many other objects for sale also have popular success) qualifies them for film festivals is just wrong, and the idea that since their success is happening among non-white, formerly colonized people make them a significant comment against domination and colonialism is just meaningless.

Nollywood has been often used in polemics against what is known as “festival films”. The repetitive assessment that these so-called festival films, a very questionable notion, should be dismissed because they are not liked in the countries they come from, deserves at least three answers. First, many western films that are discovered thanks to film festivals, film critics and occasionally brave distributors and exhibitors are also not commercially successful in their own country. Does that make Philippe Garrel or Andrei Tarkovsky or Abbas Kiarostami a less important filmmaker? Second, many of these films (by far not all of them) are seen by others than the people from their country. So what? As it is said in *The Merchant of Venice*, do not festival goers have eyes and ears, and hearts, and brains? Who is to say that there is a territorial obligation for filmmakers? If Claire Denis is more popular in the US and in Japan than in France, these viewers from abroad have something to do with her films that is as fair and legitimate than anyone else. We, and this “we” is made of many, had to do

with Souleyman Cissé's work, with Youssef Chahine's work, with Tarik Teguia's work, with Lisandro Alonso's work, with Apichatpong Weerasethakul's work. And it is because *we* did have to do with their work that Jia Zhangke or Hou Hsiao-hsien or Idrissa Ouédraogo or Pablo Trapero at one point also became watched and appreciated by *them*, the inhabitants of their own country. And third, for films from the "South", this lack of response in their own country testifies more for the lack of infrastructure and film culture, which are never already there but can be built – as we watched for instance during the brief period when Thomas Sankara was able to make the FESPACO (*Festival panafricain du cinéma et de la télévision de Ouagadougou*) a huge popular event without diminishing the level of quality in films in Burkina Faso. Film festivals and film critics from all over the world are resources to help this being developed in places where it's missing. They are not the problem; they are part of the solution – together with political and economic local forces. More than once, they have been able to initiate changes they certainly cannot eternally carry on alone.

Another significant example of questionable appraisal of a film, also about Black people, is the huge praise that went together with the massive commercial success of Hollywood superhero blockbuster *Black Panther*. It was written thousand of times that this fiction was empowering black people, in terms that most of time implied, and sometimes explicitly mentioned, it was a better weapon for diversity that whatever film festival and critics support. It is a very important and complex issue to consider how and when movies may empower groups or individuals. But it makes sense only as long as what kind of power at stake is questioned at the same time, and to what extent the apparent valorisation of certain characters by the story and the directing really provides any increase of power (even limited ones) to real person who are likely to identify with the fictional characters. The Ryan Coogler film is based on the same simplistic patterns, in terms of story, image, sound, editing that are characteristic of the basic Hollywood comic based super-productions, except that the characters are black, as well as the director. This kind of film reproduces an imaginary and real set of representations that are part of the oppression of Black people in the US, and the dominance of the world that, among other misdeeds, marginalises and exploits African societies with the help of local despots. Not only it is similar to a drug that would make believe the dominated that they are not, but it conveys the idea that any discriminated person would destroy or at least diminish discrimination and injustice by acting as the oppressors do. It reproduces the stereotypes of consumerism and individualism that are the core of the domination system.

Now comes the next question: *who* is legitimate to discuss this kind of topics? The only acceptable answer, the only logical one actually is: everyone. Meaning that there is an urgent need that voices and choices from members of discriminated minorities (who are by far, all together, the majority, obviously at least since the women are already half of humanity). But that no one is entitled to claim that he (or she, or they) detain a privileged point of view. To provincialize a formerly, and still dominant group does not mean to build another one capital, but to dismiss the very notion of capital, dominant centre. Decisions should be made, procedures should be created, lobbying should be enforced to make this diversity happen, since it won't happen by itself or by the goodwill of those in charge at the moment – everybody knows that, as I do, being myself an old white man. Proactive decisions, in terms of artistic programming, in management, in communication have to be implemented, they work and they will work. The goal is to build access to more voices, more ways of feeling and of thinking, not to silence anybody – at least not to silence anybody who welcomes the diversity of presences and voices.

As an example, which could make sense in many other countries, in France since the blooming of #MeToo, filmmakers, professionals, the dedicated administration and activists created an initiative called the "Collectif 50-50", focused on the presence of women in every domain connected with cinema. It includes a chapter about film festivals. The important statistic survey implemented by the "50-50" movement shows, in this specific field, a significant improvement and, at the same time, that there is still much to do.^[1] Due to a much larger evolution, it already achieved in 18 months a very significant change though obviously by far not complete. And if it is unlikely that other groups of discriminated people can proceed exactly the same way the women and the feminist movement did, other methods of action have to be found, but the process is certainly to be continued.

But the main issue is not, by far, only a question of numbers. It is a question of what anyone does with these films. And this connects with the specificity of what is discussed here: films, works of arts, stories, sensitive objects. Going back to the 1980s and the discoveries in the West of Chinese cinema, Iranian cinema, South

Korean cinema, films from Mali and Burkina, etc. We – we the European festival programmers, critics, audiences – saw them and liked them a lot. Did we fully understand them? It's very likely that the answer is no. Then so what? What we did is actually what any film viewer should do and should be not only allowed but encouraged to do: we appropriated them, with our sensibility, our knowledge, our prejudices even. If we chose them, like them, discuss them with praise, it means that we had something to do with them, something pleasant and fruitful and enlightening to do from these movies. Including based on misunderstanding? Yes! Of course! Again: so what? This is anyway what we always do, with a vast amount of films of any kind and from anywhere, but we did it even more with objects arriving from a longer distance, a more different background than those we are used to. Again: so what?

There is nothing more depressing and frightening, regarding films, that the requirement of transparency. It is true about films, it is true about any work of art, it is even true about human relations at large, as the great pioneer of decolonial thinking Édouard Glissant wrote in his strong and poetic tone (and I quote):

I claim for everyone the right to opacity, which is not the same as closing oneself off. It is a mean of reacting against all the ways of reducing us to the false clarity of universal models. I do not have to 'understand' anyone, individual, community, people – i.e. to 'take them with me' at the cost of smothering them, of losing them in a boring totality that I would be in charge of – in order to agree to live with them, to build with them, to take risks with them. Let opacity, whether it be ours for the other or maybe the other's for us, not close down in obscurantism or apartheid; let it be a celebration, not a terror. Let the right to opacity, whereby Diversity will best be preserved and acceptance strengthened, be a lamp watching over our poetics. (2020: 16-17)

So here, to conclude, I have to go back to the second question in the title of this text: "Can Festival Programmers and Film Critics stand away from the market diktats but not from societal issues?" Of course, they cannot, and they should not even try, not only because they would be meant to fail but because it is a mistake, a wrongdoing. Films, festivals, texts about them are in the world and need to be. But they have the possibility and the opportunity to build specific approaches, away or even against the market driven forces – which is as well the dominant taste, since the massively dominant taste is determined by marketing. They can do so by constantly, restlessly recombining new high demands toward films, toward audiences *and toward themselves*, according to the contemporary understanding of our society, and especially of its dimensions of injustice. It is their very nature as well as their moral obligations to be permanently insecure and questioning, and, with a lot of slowdowns and resistance as one would expect, I believe this is exactly what is happening now.

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