

Zeitschrift für Kulturmanagement 1/2016
Cultural Management without Borders

Journal of Cultural Management 1/2016
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Die jährlich in zwei Heften erscheinende, referierte „Zeitschrift für Kulturmanagement“ initiiert und fördert in Nachfolge des „Jahrbuchs für Kulturmanagement“ eine umfassende wissenschaftliche Auseinandersetzung mit Kulturmanagement im Hinblick auf eine methodologische und theoretische Fundierung des Faches. Das international orientierte Periodikum nimmt nicht nur ökonomische Fragestellungen, sondern ebenso sehr die historischen, politischen, sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Bedingungen und Verflechtungen im Bereich Kultur in den Blick. Explizit sind daher auch Fachvertreter akademischer Nachbardisziplinen wie der Kultursoziologie und -politologie, der Kunst-, Musik- und Theaterwissenschaft, der Kunst- und Kulturpädagogik, der Wirtschaftswissenschaft etc. angesprochen, mit ihren Beiträgen den Kulturmanagementdiskurs kritisch zu bereichern.

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ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR KULTURMANAGEMENT
Kunst, Politik, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft

JOURNAL OF CULTURAL MANAGEMENT
Arts, Economics, Policy

Volume 2 | Number 1
2016

[transcript]

Fachverband
Kulturmanagement

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Recommended citation: TEISSEL, Verena (2015): Dispositive der Kulturfinanzierung. – In: *Zeitschrift für Kulturmanagement / Journal of Cultural Management* 1/1, 15-29.

Die „Zeitschrift für Kulturmanagement“ erscheint in zwei Ausgaben pro Jahr, im Frühjahr und im Herbst. Sie kann als Jahresabonnement direkt über den Verlag abonniert werden. Das Abonnement umfasst alle Ausgaben eines Jahres. Die Zusendung der abonnierten Exemplare erfolgt unmittelbar nach Erscheinen. Die Rechnungsstellung erfolgt jeweils zum Versand der ersten Ausgabe eines Jahres. Das Abonnement beginnt mit dem jeweils aktuellen Heft und verlängert sich automatisch um jeweils ein Jahr, wenn es nicht bis zum 1. Februar eines Jahres beim Verlag gekündigt wird.

Weitere Informationen finden Sie unter: <http://www.transcript-verlag.de/zkmm>

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Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

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Umschlaggestaltung: Hans-Dirk Hotzel, Kordula Röckenhaus, Bielefeld

Innenlayout: Hans-Dirk Hotzel

Lektorat: Carsten Wernicke

Satz: Stepan Boldt, Leona Söhnholz, Carsten Wernicke

ISSN 2363-5525

E-ISSN 2363-5533

Print-ISBN 978-3-8376-3435-8

PDF-ISBN 978-3-8394-3435-2

Gedruckt auf alterungsbeständigem Papier mit chlorfrei gebleichtem Zellstoff.

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“Form is when the substance rises to the surface”. Practices, Narratives and Autopoiesis of the Festival dei Popoli

Vittorio Iervese (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia)

Experts have been saying and writing that to gain a claim to fame among the general public and specialists, a festival needs to have an identity, define its project proposal, adopt a language, and develop a personality of its own. In this manner, a festival can establish stable and solid relationships with the local area and the professionals with whom it interacts. This has become an established line of reasoning, especially since the management of cultural activities has become a specific activity in which the skills specific to a variety of professional fields converge. One can sense a trace of corporate strategies for building a “corporate identity” in these recommendations, as well as certain considerations typical of the field of analytical psychology. A festival is discussed as if it were an individual or collective entity capable of acting consistently with its own objectives and according to its own style of the behavior. However, consistency is not enough, for what is needed is also the capability to have a flexible identity that is able to adapt to change and able to change over time. What is sought after is consistency in change or in very rare cases, consistency that is capable of producing change¹. This “paradox of changeable coherence” is not a prerogative of festivals, but it does manifest itself in a particular manner in the festivals.

According to Dayan: “a film festival is mostly spent answering questions about self-definition, identity, and character” (Dayan 2000, 45) and therefore should be seen as an encounter between competing definitions. Some of the early film festival research has already made it clear that film festivals are complex phenomena, operating in various areas and frequented by a variety of visitors, that are hard to describe using mono-disciplinary approaches. From the one hand, the study of film festivals requires a careful reconsideration of what counts as historical evidence. On the other hand, it is necessary to observe a festival as a system that ensures its existence by self-reproduction of its own daily operations.

Looking at the historical development of film festivals, one can discern key moments of transformation and understand why film festivals succeeded in developing into a successful network whereas the cinematic avantgarde. Looking at the self-reproduction of a festival, one

1 In these cases, though they may not become actual trendsetters, festivals strive at least to attract the attention of various audiences to works or artistic forms that are capable of indicating a trend or suggesting directions for change; to paraphrase a passage in Chris Gore’s (2010) manual: “independent festivals transcend the trends”.

can observe the recurrent, encoded practices and the discourses that define the value of these practices.

This paper is thus based on two general epistemological premises: how can a film festival be observed as a system? How can this system secure its own survival and preserve itself over the time?

Through interviews, historical documents, newspaper reports, catalogues and other materials, this paper will show the distance Festival dei Popoli (International Documentary Film Festival; FdP herein below), one of the oldest documentary film festival in the world, have travelled from their origins and how it has adapted to changing circumstances. The material utilised the analysis has been treated as if it were a record of communications developed by the FdP in 55 years of activity. This material is reserved for internal use (e.g. records of minutes of jury meetings or meeting of other types) or intended for external communications (e.g. catalogues of the various editions, essays and published interviews). In fact, one of the characteristics of the FdP is that of having built up valuable ongoing archives over the years, for they are never focused on the past, but always meticulously documenting the present.

1. A festival as a communicative system

The essentialist view that has dominated and continues to dominate cultural studies and the study of the organisation of culture, proposes an idea of festivals as “products” or “texts”. From the essentialist perspective, it is in this manner that culture is manifested, that is, by means of texts, behaviors and products that are epiphenomena related to pre-existing structures. What happens if we turn the tables and from a different perspective we begin to consider festivals as sense processing that is produced in the meeting, in the interaction of various entities? “How to observe a festival?” is therefore a necessary question, for it urges one to look at how and where a festival is formed, in the moment when it takes shape. It urges one to penetrate the “microphysics” of culture in the moment of its becoming.

In general, I believe that it is possible to identify three ways of observing a festival corresponding to three distinct objects of observation: practices, narratives and autopoiesis (Reckwitz 2002).

Starting from the *practice paradigm*, it is mainly the routines of a festival that are observed and analyzed, routines being defined as customs and traditions, but also as organisational and institutional practices. Each festival could be seen as an extended cultural performance during which “other” rules of engagement count and the commercial market rules of the film world outside are suspended (De Valck 2007, 37). Festivals display a variety of rituals and symbolic acts that contribute to the cultural positioning of films and filmmakers in the film world. Every festival has its own “liturgy” and some of these rites and rituals are so similar as to enable the most expert festival-goers to recognise and easily adapt to them. However, there are some practices that become actual trademarks that are capable of lending

distinctiveness to a festival. The Festival del Film Locarno is also its outdoor screenings in the piazza, just as the Q&A sessions often come to mind when we think of the Sundance Festival. The practices of a festival are often that which delimits its boundaries (for example, we realise that a festival is different from a screening of a series of films due to several encoded behaviors and in terms of how the works and authors are dealt with), but they are also that which defines the “format”. Practices are not to be confused with the identity of a festival, although it is certainly through the practices that the intentions, style and forms of a festival can be identified.

The *narrative paradigm* allows for analysis of the discourses, the processes and the semiotic structures in/of a given festival. The term “narrative” is used with reference to the interpretive tradition in the field of cultural studies, but also to the constructivist type of approach, which concentrates on the stories told, through which the meaning of the events, situations and “facts” is constructed.

“While the older interpretation of narrative was limited to that of a representational form, the new approaches define narrative and narrativity as concepts of social epistemology and social ontology. These concepts posit that it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities” (Somers 1994, 607).

Narratives are, above all, constellations of relationships (connected parts) embedded in time and space, constituted by what Somers (1994) calls causal enplotment. Narratives include all stories that guide actions (Baker 2006; Somers and Gibson 1994). This concept is inscribed in the more general epistemological stance of social constructionism, asserting that human knowledge is constituted in social relationships (e.g. Gergen 1991; Harré 1999). Narratives constitute rather than represent reality (Baker 2006), they are social constructions in which the observed reality is interpreted and storied, through different media. They depend on communication processes guided by cultural presuppositions. Cultural presuppositions define the space of interpretation of narratives, and narratives are the stories, which reproduce and produce cultural presuppositions. Attention to narrative identity involves locating social action in the network of relationships in which actors are embedded, and in the numerous cross-cutting storylines with which festivals identify (Somers and Gibson 1994, 67).

There is often a mutual influence and dependence between narratives and practices. One example among many possible examples brings me back to a personal experience. Documentarİst, a small but worthwhile documentary film festival held in Istanbul, was established in 2007. Documentarİst takes place in the Beyoğlu quarter and it is

organised with the participation of numerous volunteers and film enthusiasts. In 2012, the 6th edition of the Documentar1st festival was affected by the protests underway in the area of nearby Taksim Square in defense of Gezi Park and in general against real estate speculation and the violence of the Turkish police. The festival was literally overwhelmed by the conflict and tension in the streets, which, among other things, entailed the risk of jeopardizing the entire organisation of an event planned months before. The slogans and voices of thousands of people in the conflict out in the streets resounded inside the movie theaters. After much thought, the organisers decided to move the screenings to the center of Gezi Park, thus providing an opportunity for the demonstrators to gather together and discuss, and for the festival to make a choice that had an important impact in terms of the public, but also in terms of “narrative”. In fact, the Documentar1st festival justified this choice as an act of solidarity with the demonstrators, while also affirming the necessary political role that culture in general and documentary film in particular must have. In other words, the decision to organise public screenings free of charge in the epicenter of a spontaneous and heterogeneous social movement was an organisational act (practice) guided by cultural presuppositions communicated publicly (narrative). In this case, narratives and practices moved forward at the same pace and were mutually strengthened, providing an image and perception of a festival capable of facing the challenges coming from the outside.

The *autopoiesis paradigm* concentrates on the analysis of (self-)reproduction of operations within a given system such as a festival. Marijke De Valck (2007) used the term “autopoiesis” (Luhmann 1986) to refer to the ability of a festival to secure its own survival. In particular, De Valck stresses the operative closure of autopoietic systems:

“For Luhmann, the black box represents the self-sustainability of closed systems that are blind to the outside environment, apart from standardised input and output channels. This black box can be studied as a system” (De Valck 2007, 31)

The concept of system’s operative closure has attracted a lot of criticism, mainly because it was not fully understood by many scholars and academics. Autopoietic systems are operatively closed: there are no operations entering the system from outside nor vice versa. A system’s operative closure is a closure on the level of the operations of the system in that no operations can enter nor leave the system. In fact, a festival is a closed system in the sense that its operations bring forth further operations. The operative closure of the cognitive system means that the environment cannot produce operations in the system. The differentiation between system and environment is essential for the unity of a system. On the level of its operations the autopoietic system

does receive from the environment only perturbations (or irritations), which then might trigger internal operations in the system. In other words, external events may trigger internal processes but they cannot determine those processes. Luhmann (2000, 401) in this sense speaks of a “trigger-causality” [*Auslösekausalität*] instead of a “performance-causality” [*Durchgriffskausalität*].

In particular, the concept of autopoiesis indicates that the organisation of a festival consists in the reproduction of communication through communication. A festival is a system if it has the ability to organise itself in relation to needs that arise within it. This does not make the outside environment disappear, but as in the case of the Documentar1st festival reported above, this environment appears as a perturbation that the system must deal with by means of its operations. In this sense, operative closure is a precondition for interactional openness (Matura and Varela 1980). Ultimately, a festival cannot be interpreted as a simple system of actions that are interconnected, but as a *system of communications*. A festival is realised as an uninterrupted sequence of communications, each of which opens up the possibility for the next one, as an autopoietic system, which self-reproduces through interconnections between its elements. The concept of autopoiesis can appear to be very complex if one considers a festival only in terms of a set of events. However, it is sufficient to come into contact with the staff of a medium-large-scale festival to understand that the set of decisions made by a festival are dictated by other preceding decisions and projected onto future decisions. Though they may have broad discretionary power, even the artistic directors are always subject to compliance with the “logic of the festival”. These expressions refer to the concept of autopoiesis in less abstract terms.

The three paradigms of practice, narrative and autopoiesis are not contradictory paradigms and they overlap or complement one another. It is the observer’s perspective that chooses which paradigm(s) to use as the principal instrument(s) of observation. It is also true that festivals can be observed from other perspectives, for example considering the impact that they have (on the local area or on the market), the composition of the festivalgoers as a group or the quality of the works presented. These are legitimate perspectives and they are often very useful for understanding the sense and value of a festival. In this paper, I believe it is essential to place an emphasis on the three paradigms that focus above all on the *decisions* that a festival makes and on how these choices determine a change. In fact, despite the fact that one is led to think that some festivals continuously reproduce the same formula, it is actually possible to establish that these formulas are always the result of a choice that produces an effect, and thus a change. The point lies in understanding how and to what degree this change is perceptible. Sometimes it appears in the form of a sudden crisis, other times as progressive change, or even as adaptation to external conditions or as responses to internal needs. All of these

forms have been experienced by the FdP in the course of the 55 years of its existence, a story that is also a dialogue engaged in with the various forms in which cinema models reality. In the next pages I will show that, looking at the historical development of FdP, it is possible to discern key moments of transformation and divide the development into three main phases: a) the founding and the “presence” phase; b) the phase of Reflectivity and testimony; c) the phase of normalization and eclecticism.

2. The founding and the “presence”

Florence, 1959. A group of humanities scholars, anthropologists, sociologists, and ethnologists and mediologists founded a not-for-profit organisation named the Festival dei Popoli. At the end of that same year, the group of scholars of the first edition of a festival to be held on the 14th to the 20th of December, to which they gave an odd and complicated subtitle: *An International Retrospective on Ethnographic and Sociological Film*. This is a time when the Venice Film Festival is beginning to open up to film productions from more distant countries² and to support films characterised as acts of civic testimony, a direct offshoot of the Italian neorealist experience. In the 1950s, an emerging number of young Italian directors were to create one of the most brilliant periods of Italian cinema at the international level. In Venice, in 1958 Francesco Rosi presented *La sfida* (The Challenge) and Ermanno Olmi, his first film *Il tempo si è fermato* (Time Stood Still). These films reveal a clear focus on forms and content drawn from daily life. This is also a time when many other film festivals were flourishing throughout Europe, with the precise intention of utilizing the appeal of cinematographic entertainment to explore parts of the world, both near and far. This is a period when the main European film festivals began to seek a solution that would allow them a steady balance between the consolidated offerings of a cultural industry growing more and more aggressive and the search for new peripheral views.

The FdP was founded in this climate, taking a firm stand, privileging films that have as their principal focus «life itself, and daily observation of life» (FdP 1959, 3). Cinema was thus an instrument for knowledge and illustration of the world in everyday life. However, it was also cinema that on the one hand claimed its own independence in terms of style and form with respect to fictional films, while, on the other hand, affirming that it could offer “essential contributions to the ‘cinema’ phenomenon in all of its essential aspects” (7). From the beginning, the FdP was positioned in the midst of a turning point in the history of film

² Note that in 1951, the Golden Lion was awarded to Akira Kurosawa for *Rashōmon* (and who would also win the Silver Lion three years later for *Seven Samurai*). It was awarded to Kenji Mizoguchi for *The Life of Oharu* in 1952 and, among others in 1956, to Kon Ichikawa for “The Burmese Harp”. In 1957, the award went to Satyajit Ray, of India, for *Aparajito*, and in 1958, to Iroshi Inagaki for *Rickshaw Man* – a veritable explosion of films from beyond the European borders.

forms and not only those specific to documentaries. Technical experimentation and theoretical debates, linguistic innovations and new forms of authorship converged at this point. A glance at the composition of the jury for the first festival suffices to understand that this heterogeneity and freedom were already present from the start. The names of Ernesto De Martino, Edgar Morin, Jean Rouch and Cesare Zavattini are listed among the members of the first jury – a jury panel that in itself represents a compendium of the various possibilities for use of audiovisual means and a statement on interdisciplinarity.

At the time of the first edition of the FdP, Jean Rouch had just made *Me, A Black* (*Moi, un noir*, 1958), a film that depicts the young people of Abidjan (Ivory Coast) “caught between tradition and mechanization, Islam and alcohol, though they have not renounced their beliefs, they are devoted to the modern ideals of the boxing and film world” (from the director’s comments at the beginning of the film). Considered by Nouvelle Vague auteurs to be an essential reference, this film proposes an audacious hybridization of ethnographic documentary film cannons with a plot outline and the creation of recognizable characters. A few years earlier, Edgar Morin had published his famous essay *Le cinéma, ou l’homme imaginaire* (*The cinema, or The Imaginary Man: An Essay in Sociological Anthropology*, 1956), in which the relationship between cinema, imagination, and consciousness is addressed with a precise “non-realistic” description of this connection. Cesare Zavattini was already an accomplished screenwriter, having written the screenplays for several masterpieces of Italian neorealism. However, he was also a tireless innovator who considered film as a flexible and popular form of art, which he would have liked to bend to the purposes of civil renewal of society, saving it from market pandering. Moreover, it should be mentioned that the year after his participation in the FdP, Cesare Zavattini was to be among the founders of the Festival di Porretta.

It is the concept of “presence” introduced by Ernesto De Martino (1948) that perhaps provides the best summary of this first founding stage of the FdP. De Martino speaks of “presence” as the ability to keep in one’s consciousness the memories and experiences needed to respond adequately to a given historical situation, actively participating in it through personal initiative and moving beyond it through action. Presence thus means being there (cfr. Heidegger’s “Da-sein”) as persons of sense, in a context of sense. There are moments, De Martino maintains, in which a profound “crisis of presence” appears. In such cases, rites help people to manage this crisis of presence through encoded, collective behaviors.

Stretching De Martino’s concept, a festival can be conceived of as a collective rite that deals with disorientation in the world. The condition of disorientation is perceived the moment one loses one’s daily points of reference, which function as indicators of direction. It is in these cases, De Martino maintains, that individuals experience uncertainty, a radical crisis of their historical being, the impossibility of being in a human history (1977). In these cases, they find themselves incapable

of action and of determining their own actions. It is therefore from the concepts of disorientation and presence that one must begin in order to understand an experience such as that of the FdP in its earliest stage, which was, so to speak, a political act in the broadest sense of this term, a presentation of cinema at the margins of the culture industry with stories of people at the margins of the world.

Actually, rather than setting itself at the margins of the world, the FdP represented an attempt to bring those margins to the center of attention. Not coincidentally Alberto Folchi, director of the first edition of the FdP, was also the Director of the Centro Culturale Cinematografico Italiano (Italian Cinematographic Cultural Center), founded in Rome in 1955 with the intention of disseminating and promoting “scientific and artistic cinematography intended as an instrument for a developing a deeper understanding among peoples” (Contini and Visentini 1955, 84). Additionally and also not coincidentally, the Festival saw the collaboration of directors and scholars like Tullio Seppilli and Jean Rouch, the latter being, among other things, the Executive Secretary of the Comité du film ethnographique (Ethnographic Film Committee) founded in Paris in 1952, later to become the *CIFES – Comité International du Film Ethnographique et Sociologique (International Committee on Ethnographic and Sociological Film)*. This network of international contacts and the general cultural climate would lead to the establishment of the FdP in a period in which, on the one hand, Italy had not yet finished processing the war experience and its Fascist past, but on the other hand, it was beginning to feel the driving forces of movements that were to inspire the 1960s and 1970s. In this atmosphere, the Festival was sustained by an evident cosmopolitan drive and by strong political demands that were not always clear and/or shared by all members; in general, cinema was considered not only as a means of entertainment, but also an “instrument for learning the truth” (Folchi and Simonacci 1962, 31).

This presence period was a brief, but very significant stage from 1959 to 1964, the year in which the group of founders split up as a result of differences in opinions regarding the aims of the festival and the selection of films. What were the reasons for these differences, which were to lead to this irreconcilable breakup? In a decidedly Italian manner, the FdP in the beginning stages accommodated a tradition that we could define as “Christian Catholic” and another tradition of a “secular Marxist” type. Roughly defined here, these traditions translated into as many basic political groupings: one being institutional and Christian Democratic, and the other leaning to the left but in an unorthodox fashion. In the first case, specific institutional connections can be identified with national political figures such as Alberto Folchi, Minister of Tourism and Entertainment between 1960 and 1963, and Edoardo Speranza, was in charge of university centers for Christian Democrats. Connections with high institutional levels in Rome represented a political constraint, but they did give the FdP access to ministerial funding such as to permit a vast international program. The

first festival program included 120 films from 31 different countries, stepping up to 145 films from 35 nations the second year – a considerable number and variety for a young, specialised film festival. As regards the core group of “left-leaning” intellectuals, the point of reference was not as much the institutional political sphere, as it was the universities and the movements for change affecting this period. The strange alliance between the two spirits was also possible owing to the presence of a key figure on the political cultural scene of the times, that is, Giorgio La Pira, the Mayor of Florence in that period and a progressive Catholic who was very active in promoting dialogue between peoples in the Cold War years. However, this partnership was not to last long and was interrupted in 1964, creating a series of consequences that would condition the history of the Festival in the years to come (Tasselli 1982). The Festival chose to take on a clearer civic and political function that was plainly antiestablishment at times, while maintaining a close relationship with the city of Florence. This decision led to the stormy separation from the institutional component based in Rome, and as a result, to the creation of a series of problems due to the loss of funding.

The separation was caused not only by political issues or issues relating to affiliations, but also by concrete factors that can be observed and reconstructed empirically. In this case, the criteria introduced in the first section can be of help. The differences ascribable to cultural leanings and values can be understood if we observe the practices, the texts and the ways in which the FdP ensures its autopoiesis in the first 6 years of its existence. The controversies and disagreements began immediately, in relation to the practices (how to select the films, how to assign the awards, which forms of public participation to provide, etc.) to use in order to give shape to the festival days, and in relation to the narratives regarding both the festival and cinema in general.

An intense debate broke out for example in the Festival of 1962, between those who wanted to privilege the scientific documentary genre, focused on representation held to be objective and true-to-life, and those who preferred instead to focus more on film aesthetics and the various forms of construction of reality. That same year a specific *Colloquio Internazionale sul film etnografico e sociologico* (International Conference on Ethnographic and Sociological Film, Florence, December 12-15, 1962) was held, but it did not lead to any points of agreement.

In more general terms, in this first stage two perspectives coexisted, granting radically different roles to ethnographic film. Rather than investigating more urgent and pressing contemporary phenomena as some members would have preferred, the films presented in the early stages of the FdP tended to have a “conservative” role, that is, they neglected the processes of hybridization and change in favor of objective recording of ethnic identity set in jeopardy by the phenomena of modernisation and globalisation. In academic terms, these cases are known as “salvage ethnography” (Clifford 1989) or “urgent

anthropology”, indicating that an ethnic anthropological study should have a function that documents and protects cultural diversity. Beyond the jargon, an orientation such as this makes it clear that the practices depend on narratives and vice versa. Furthermore, both determine the reproduction of the operations of the festival system, that is, its autopoiesis.

The breakup of 1964 and the undermining of the “presence” stage was clearly a result of this process. In order to continue operating and to avoid remaining blocked by its own contradictions, the Festival intended as a system of communications had to make a radical decision consisting in preserving its own independence and freedom in the face of the considerable depletion of its economic resources and weakening of its political connections. The internal conflicts in this case should not be interpreted as a problem and weakness of the system, but as a way to stimulate an “immune system” so to speak (Luhmann 1984), which is capable of generating responses to the new issues that have emerged. In other words, a conflict within a system like a festival is not a problem, but rather a symptom of a problem. The conflict makes it possible to make the system aware of the problem in order to manage it, as was the case in the years after 1964, which ushered in a second stage of the FdP.

3. Reflectivity and testimony

Dividing over 50 years of the history of a festival into separate stages certainly may involve somewhat forced interpretations and there is a risk of simplifying something that is decidedly more complex. However, the philological reconstruction of the events is not what matters here. It is more important to draw from this rich experience of the FdP to identify the characteristics and elements that have enabled a festival system to survive for such a long period, but also to become something radically different from what it was in the beginning. In other words it is possible to pinpoint the beginning of several processes, identifying specific events that represent the breaking point between one process and another (milestones). Observation of the development of these processes is surely more complex and requires more time and detailed work. In fact, choices and selections of meanings made over time, do not enable, considered alone, the reconstruction of a process, which is also made up of the accumulation and reproduction of numerous choices and selections in one direction or another (Iervese 2013).

The first stage of the FdP ended little more than 6 years later because the founding process reached its peak with the clash between the two founding spirits described above. The more intransigent side prevailed concerning the “scientific” inclination of the presentations, at the expense of those interested in attending to institutional and strategic aspects as well. The 7th edition of the FdP therefore represents the beginning of a new stage, marked by a strong inclination to reflection and the testimony of political activism.

If reflectivity means looking inside the system, testimony is one way of building a relationship with an audience and more in general with outside observers (Luhmann 1984). In this case, reflection is intended as one or more actions that make a distinction between the system and its environment. In the case of reflectivity, one refers in a more specific manner to reflection on one's own specificity. Following the breakup of 1964, the FdP began a long and continuous effort of reflection and reflectivity by means of concrete actions that can be retraced by means of the documents produced during that period. First of all, the film presentation was accompanied by seminars and international conferences for a discussion of various aspects of ethnographic cinema, attempting to define its forms and functions. In particular, the *Colloqui Internazionali sul film etnografico e sociologico* [International Meetings on Ethnographic and Sociological Films] were organised on a regular basis and brought the leading experts in this field of study and the main European and non-European organisations together in Florence. As many as eight of these meetings were held between 1964 and 1974, and the FdP used them to consolidate its network of international contacts and to delve deeper into its reflection efforts which would enable the festival to define its own boundaries and to build a reputation based on a presumed difference with respect to its counterparts. The festival defined itself as a moment of "dialogue and effective discussion of expressions of civilizations and cultures that place man at the center" (Zilletti 1965) and began to make the transformation from being a special events agency to becoming a permanent public service. This process would only be completed many years later, but it was beginning to be outlined in that period of time. In this constant action of reflection accompanying the organisation of the screenings and the competition, the "scientific" leanings of the FdP's new stage can be perceived. However, this process of reflection was not only a result of the intention of the organisers, but also the Festival's response to numerous perturbations coming from the outside. Firstly, in response to objections as to the coherence and quality of the films selected in previous years, a public meeting was organised in 1966 to discuss the films selected and not selected by the Festival (CIFES 1966). Organised by the CIFES, the meeting was also an important moment of reflexivity, in which experts and non-experts participated with the intention of reestablishing in a shared vision the Festival's selection priorities and criteria. The audience thus became an active participant, challenging the positions of the Festival and influencing its decisions. The festival system responded to these requests by rethinking its practices and narratives, while maintaining its own autopoiesis in the attempt to renew its role on the Italian and international cultural scene.

In concrete terms, what are the actions that did denote a change in practices and narratives? Among them all, two are particularly significant. Above all, there was the decision to drop the 1968 competition with the intention of: 1) getting away from the competitive

way of thinking implicit in all competitions and 2) motivating the production and dissemination of lesser known works and authors not within a type of cinema “made hypertrophic by a greedy and cynical industry; in the late 1950s film became a burdensome, expensive, distant, and contrived machine. The utopia of Direct Cinema [...] lies exactly in trying to «(re)familiarize» film, to bring it back to the simplicity of its beginnings, and to mix it back with daily life” (Comolli 2006, 139). The political act was put before the cultural act, subordinating the elements of artistic and scientific quality in films. At the same time as the elimination of the competition in 1968, the establishment of a jury made up of the general public was accepted and though temporarily, this “people’s choice” substituted the role of the jury and judgement of merit with heated discussions focused on the political role of the films presented. This was an agitated, but stimulating stage, in which the festival was giving testimony, publicly affirming its participation in the emerging debate of the times.

This narrative entailed further decisions, such as that of defying censorship and taking the risk of screening films held to be “questionable” or even films that had been banned. This was the case of a protest film against the war in Vietnam, *Le ciel – La terre* (*The Threatening Sky*) by Joris Ivens, filmed in 1966, but banned for a few years and shown during the 1968 FdP, resulting in the police arriving, their attempt to confiscate the copy that had arrived in Florence and the director being conducted to police headquarters. Similar events occurred in the case of films exposing the apartheid regime in South Africa, with the South African ambassador then filing an official complaint with the Italian government, considering the films defamatory to the government in Pretoria. Even important films in terms of their aesthetic value and innovative cinematic language, such as *Marat/Sade* by Peter Brook (1966) or *Titicut Follies* (1967) by Frederick Wiseman were only shown in Florence in the wake of public protests against censorship and against the pressure exerted by “the Establishment”. In the early 1970s, the Festival was exempted from censorship. In spite of this, cases of films being contested or held to be particularly “inconvenient” did not disappear entirely.

The Festival underwent a transformation that mirrored what was happening in Italian society (and not only in Italy) at that time. However, there were also contingent local events that were to influence the life of the Festival. The disastrous flood that struck Florence in November 1966 for example caused extensive damage throughout the city and among other things, forced the FdP to move, giving up the Teatro della Pergola, which was unfit for use and until then had served as the location of the event. However, the flood was also an important experience in terms of solidarity and social cohesion, an experience in which the FdP also took part. This process left indelible marks on the identity of the FdP that have remained today. In that same period, the FdP changed its subtitle to “Rassegna Internazionale del film di documentazione sociale” (International Review of Social Documentary

Film), in keeping with the new name taken by the Istituto Italiano per il Film di Documentazione Sociale (Italian Institute for Social Documentary Film). This is one of the more evident signs of the stage of reflection and testimony of that time: the framework of academic disciplines was being left behind in favor of an approach open to broader issues, which film, with its particular forms, could contribute to and address. By renaming itself, the Festival took on a clear position in terms of the present reality. In fact, it set the objective of offering an “overview”, by means of documentary films, opening up “to one and all [...] the commitment to processing critical judgment” (Zilletti 1969, 21). It cannot be stated that these processes of transformation were linear or always consistent. It cannot even be said that the activity of reflecting and giving testimony came to an end in that period. By keeping its eye on the present, the FdP has preserved over time the distinctive trait of always being forced to carry out a process of ongoing reflection. In the same manner, giving testimony concerning outcasts, the oppressed or the imbalances of the world certainly did not stop at the end of the 1960s and 1970s. However, the end of this stage, which had provided the Festival with orientations and indications for action, can be identified as occurring at the mid 1970s.

The need to take stock of the situation and for a general rethinking was explicitly declared at the 12th edition of the Festival (Graziosi and Zilletti 1971). For this reason, works from the festivals of preceding years were re-proposed, as if a perspective were possible only through a retrospective. The year 1975 can be conventionally marked as the end of this stage and the beginning of the third stage, which was to last until the 1990s.

4. Normalization and eclecticism

In the 1970s, the FdP could consider itself solidly established on the international scene of film festivals, to the extent that it was seen as a benchmark for other similar events. To provide one example, the opening night of the first edition of the newly founded Parisian festival, Cinéma du Réel, was entitled “An Homage to the Festival dei Popoli” and Paris looked to Florence as a pioneering experience capable of setting out a path of the avant-garde. However, as often happens in cinema, “lifetime achievement awards” also proclaim the critical or even the endpoint of a career. This is certainly not to suggest that the 1970s was the time of the FdP’s swan song, but its driving force and its capacity as an essential reference point for experimental cinema dealing with the issue of addressing the contradictions of reality rather than the canons of the market were definitely declining.

There had already been a radical turnover of members of the board of directors and the selection committee in 1974 - a physiological change, which, however, also coincided with an abrupt change in direction. By means of a press release, it was clearly explained that there was a distressful need to reduce the length and size of the Festival due to drastic cuts in government funding owing to the general economic

crisis. From that moment on, this situation of insecurity was to remain a constant in the organisation of the Festival, and although it maintained its cultural independence, time and again the Festival would seek to share management of the Festival with government agencies and other private institutions. This is the case, for example, of the beginning of its collaboration with RAI (Radio Audizioni Italiane S.p.A., Italy's national public broadcasting company, which was to take charge of a section dedicated to videotapes (Breschi 1977). This collaboration was important also because it involved two new significant factors which the Festival would have to deal with: the spread of the television broadcasting system in Italy and the resulting introduction of digital supports in the production of documentaries.

The FdP was established at a time when the diffusion of television was beginning in Italy. For several years, the Festival succeeded in reconciling the interest in cinema with the needs for knowledge and information, which television was not yet capable of meeting. Following a long period of a public service monopoly, a law was passed in Italy in 1976 allowing local private networks to broadcast over the air and to become national networks constituting networks of local broadcasting stations. This was to lead to exponential growth of private television channels. In fact, as the years passed, the local broadcasts grew from 500 in 1976 to 1500 in 1979³. RAI's third television channel, Rai 3, came into being that same year. It was intended to be a channel offering public service programs and information-oriented programs, along with programming dedicated to the autonomous regions and provinces. The process of the spread of television, which had already increased in importance and pervasiveness in the 1960s, intensified in the second half of the 1970s. The Festival necessarily had to come to terms with this medium on a number of fronts. In addition to cultural and information-related aspects, the advent of television had a strong impact on the mechanisms involved in the production of films (especially of documentaries) and on the formats of such films. An "audience" issue thus arose, with one aspect concerning the forms of production, and another resulting from the change in language and technique. This was therefore a stage in which there was outside pressure subjecting the festival to strong pressure to adapt to the recently changed conditions of context. The reproach by some (e.g. Chiozzi 2009) regarding the strategies that the Festival chose to adopt during that period was based on two points of contention: 1) the Festival had begun to pursue the demands of the audience rather than offer an original project to the audience, and 2) the Festival was pursuing trends imposed from the outside and lending itself to "normalization". Although it may not be totally correct, this criticism was certainly founded.

³ The Fininvest holding was to acquire its first private television channel precisely in 1978, as it began to establish an actual media empire (an empire with other interests as well). The Berlusconi family was and continues to be the founder and leader of this empire called Mediaset.

The 20th Festival proposed a structural reorganisation of the program, now subdivided into different thematic sections covering different areas of interest identified for example as art (“the art screen”), music (“the music screen”) theater, etc. The attempt was to attract “a number of audiences” (Breschi 1977), devising the program as if it were actual programming. In this choice, it is not hard to see a change in practices owing to narratives and orientations originating from fields and systems external to the Festival. To ensure its own autopoiesis, which at the time was becoming a true struggle for survival, the FdP modified its own operations and to some degree its own function. The FdP realised that it was no longer the exceptional event drawing a bourgeois and intellectual audience interested in exoticism that used to fill the movie theater in the earliest years, or a place of grassroots participation where a focus on film went hand in hand with a focus on political activism. The FdP had to reinvent a field for discussion with the audience (or audiences). This proved to be more difficult than expected owing to the extreme complexity of the transition into the 1980s.

The many changes in and the variability of the decisions made during that period are sufficient to provide an understanding of the Festival’s difficult pursuit of a new direction and a newfound coherence. The 21st Festival in 1980 saw the return of the competition and the focus on the works of the past with the establishment of actual archives (Breschi 1980). It was not until the 25th Festival that private sponsors were allowed and then the 26th Festival that admission fees were charged. For a good twenty-six years the Festival had succeeded in maintaining its independence and ensuring free admission to all of its initiatives – an exceptional effort that became increasingly unsustainable owing to economic difficulties, and but also to changes in the political and cultural climate.

In spite of this, the FdP did not lose sight of its priorities and it maintained its prerogatives: an interest in other cultures and the various forms of cinema dealing with reality remained the central focus of the programs of the subsequent festivals. In the same manner, international collaboration efforts relating to film criticism and to scientific aspects did not decrease. With ups and downs, downsizing (in 1991 the program was markedly reduced due to lack of funds) and new openings (an important one was the opening enabling films making explicit use of hybridization of fiction and nonfiction to be accepted in the competition), the Festival retained its vitality and presence at the local and international level. However, its influence at the national level waned and thus also its impact and ability to initiate discussions on current issues.

Yet directors of high caliber, who were already or were to become famous, owing also to support offered by the Festival itself, had taken part in the FdP. Ken Loach, Alexandr Sokurov, Chris Marker, Johan Van der Keuken, Agnès Varda, Patricio Guzman, Amos Gitai, Chantal Akerman, and Werner Herzog are only some of the directors whose films received awards in that period. These were new films that drew

attention and esteem at the international level after being screened in Florence. Therefore the normalization of the Festival in terms of organisation did not coincide with a standardization of taste and choices. The Festival attempted to survive by updating itself, while continuing to maintain a high level of internal discussion and interest in bolder and more experimental perspectives. For this reason, this long stage that was to continue on through the 1990s is characterised by a need for normalization and an inclination for eclecticism, intended as an attempt to bring to synthesis different orientations, tendencies, and inspirations.

5. The map and the territory - Beyond the festival

Given that the world, in which a system exists, is constituted by infinite complexity, it is possible to orient oneself in it without forms of reduction of this complexity (Luhmann 1984). The problem of reducing complexity is not only a theoretical one, but also a practical problem because every system is forced to reduce complexity in order to survive. Complexity is reduced and at the same time reproduced by each operation of selection. To put these concepts into practice concretely, we need only keep in mind the numerous strategic choices that a film festival can make, selecting from the redundancy of options existing at the time when one must decide the direction to be given to a competition, which films to choose, how to present them, the priorities to be set for one's actions, which compromises to accept, the various figures to invite, the types of relationships to consolidate with the audience, etc. Despite the fact that film festivals have undergone a process of standardization in recent years, the forms in which they present themselves are still numerous and depend precisely on the ways in which they choose to reduce complexity.

To adopt a metaphor that is rather well known in the field of psychology and social sciences, every festival constructs a map of its own that defines the manner of orienting oneself in a territory referred to (Korzybski 1941). The success and more generally the sense of a festival's project lies precisely in the difference between the territory and the map (Bateson 1972). In this sense, film festivals perform essential mediation between the various entities and fields precisely by supplying maps that make it possible to explore parts of the territory that may or may not be well known, and even help to construct parts of the territory. In this manner, festivals can be considered to be instruments of mediation and catalyzing instruments within the film world, putting the writers, producers, the audience, journalists, etc. in contact and connection with each other. At least this is what happened to the FdP in the most recent stage, which spans from the end of the 1990s to the present.

The crisis period discussed in the preceding section (cfr. § 4) is largely attributable to the difficulties that the FdP encountered in devising a map in a territory that was growing more elusive and filled with grey

areas. This period reached its peak with the radical change in direction that took place in 2008. After 22 years, Mario Simondi left the management of the Festival in the hands of Luciano Barisone, an expert in the field with previous contributions to various international festivals. The Festivals of 2006 and 2007 had already been organised with extended participation, that is, with the active work of young collaborators including Maria Bonsanti (current Director of the Cinema du Reel Festival) and Alberto Lastrucci (current Director of the FdP).

In 2008, a long, structured cycle came to a close and a new cycle full of uncertainties began. The map that was beginning to take shape in the early years of this last stage was an attempt to introduce elements of a territory previously ignored or underestimated. Firstly, the main objective of the new course on which the Festival set out was to promote young or emerging filmmakers to bring to international attention. The practices and narrative by means of which the Festival sought to renew itself refers to a place open to all talents and to all orientations, attentive to various forms of quality films that thematise various aspects of reality, without this leading to relinquishment of innovation of the forms of cinematic language. Today the Festival receives approximately 2,000 new films per year from all parts of the world and it attempts to select works not only in a spirit of competition, but also so as to follow them on their path of achievement and development. This is a first interpretation of this new stage – the FdP is seeking to rid itself of the image of a specialised festival or thematic festival, so as to tackle the changed film scene in that borderland between fiction and nonfiction. Interest in bold, innovative films in terms of their formal aesthetics and as narratives has heightened in recent years (e.g. Iervese 2014).

Secondly, the FdP has gone beyond the festival, that is, it has extended its gaze beyond the actual days of the competition and the presentation of films, planning activities that are carried out year-round. A market project has been started (Doc at work – Industry), the training project (*Doc at work – training*) has been strengthened, projects are underway dealing with distribution (with the series of *Popoli.doc* DVDs) and publications (with the journal *Quaderno del Cinemareale*), and new relationships have been developed with national and international entities. The FdP has adapted to what appears to be a common trend among contemporary international festivals, that is, the transition from being events to cultural institutes with a plurality of functions. The most important transformations of the practices, narratives and communications that ensure the autopoiesis of the festival system are evident in these heterogeneous activities. The FdP is seeking to follow the entire “supply chain” of film production, from supporting a new idea to the distribution of a finished work. In between, there is an ongoing dialogue with the public and the experts, in an effort to activate a process that creates value and meaning. Therefore, it is no longer possible to see a festival only as a festive moment or a showcase for

works created as “closed” products for use in the darkness of a movie theater. The FdP today is a place of risk, where the expectations upon departure may be let down and where the map and the territory are drawn together. “Form is when the substance rises to the surface” says Victor Hugo, a principle that is as suited to documentary film as it is to a festival that proposes and presents films of this type. To give shape or form to something is to separate it from the indistinct rest of it and thereby make it communicable. From this perspective, the opposition between subjectivity and objectivity or between reality and make-believe becomes less interesting, although it has often engaged those who are involved with film (and images in general) as much as those engaged in social research. From this perspective, one can also think of the FdP as the ongoing attempt to bring a map into focus, taking care of the territory: discovering that substance and surface are indissolubly interconnected by a mutually dependent relationship.

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