"Form is when the substance rises to the surface"

Practices, Narratives and Autopoiesis of the Festival dei Popoli

VITTORIO IERVESE*

Department of Linguistic and Cultural Studies, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia

Abstract

This paper focuses on how film festivals research can be epistemologically framed and methodologically designed. 'How can a film festival be observed?' and 'how can a festival secure its own survival and preserve itself over the time?' are here the necessaries starting questions, for it urges one to look at how and where a festival is formed, in the moment when it takes shape. Drawing from the long story of Festival dei Popoli – International Documentary Film Festival, this paper aims to demonstrate that it is possible to identify three distinct objects of analysis: practices, narratives and autopoiesis, corresponding to three different but complementary ways of observing festivals (as interactions, narrations and organizations). This theoretical and methodological framework, inspired by systems theory, narratives and interaction analysis, can permit an uncommon observational perspective that is able to question what is often taken for granted.

Keywords

festival; film; management

It has been said 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 and maintain stable and solid relationships with the local area and the professionals with whom it interacts. This has become an established view, especially since the management of cultural activities has become a specific activity in which the skills specific to a variety of professional fields converge (PICARD/ROBINSON 2006). One can sense a trace of corporate strategies for building an "organizational identity" (HATCH/SCHULTZ 2014) in these recommendations, as well as certain considerations typical of the field of analytical psychology. A festival is thus seen as an individual or collective entity capable of acting consistently with its own objectives and according to its own style of the behavior. In this respect, Pratt (1998: 172) states that: "organizational identification occurs when an individual's beliefs about his or her organization become self-referential or self-defining". To put it with Dayan, this means that: "a film festival is mostly spent answering

* Email: vittorio.iervese@unimore.it.

questions about self-definition, identity, and character" (DAYAN 2000: 45). The reflexivity in organizational identity could therefore be defined as the process by which organizational members understand themselves as an organization. On the other hand, organizational identity has always been conceptualized not only as a reflexive identity, but also "as a relational construct defined by contrasts such as between 'how we are' and 'how others see us'"(HATCH/SCHUTZ 2014: 3).

From this perspective, consistency is not enough to define a festival, since 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 change.[1] Though not a prerogative of festivals, this "paradox of changeable coherence" or "adaptive instability" (GIOIA/SCHULTZ/CORLEY 2000: 74) does manifest itself in a particular manner in the festivals.

To analyse the forms of this adaptive instability, the study of film festivals requires a careful reconsideration of what counts as historical evidence. At the same time, it is necessary to use a multi-disciplinary approach because: "festivals are complex phenomena, operating in various areas and frequented by a variety of visitors" (VALCK 2007: 32) and should be seen as an encounter between competing definitions. In general, adaptability and stability tend to go arm-in-arm rather than sitting separately on the horns of the dilemma.

Looking at the historical development of a festival in terms of adaptive instability calls for discerning key moments of transformation in a festival while at the same time, accepting that external events may trigger and "irritate" – though not determine – internal processes in the organization. Looking at the reflexivity in terms of the self-reproduction of a festival, one can observe recurrent, encoded practices and discourses that define the value of these practices.

This paper is thus based on two general epistemological premises: how can a film festival be seen as a system that ensures its existence by the self-reproduction of its own daily operations? How can this system react and adapt to perturbations that are created by other systems? In other words, the main question is: how can festivals reach an "order through fluctuation" (PRIGOGINE 1976: 38-39). Or, using Luhmann's

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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".

words: "How does one get from one elemental event to the next? Here, the basic problem lies not in repetition but in connectivity" (LUHMANN 1995: 36).

In this context, the paper puts the main emphasis onto the *Festival dei Popoli* (International Documentary Film Festival; FdP), one of the oldest documentary film festivals in the world, and, more particularly, on the long way it has come from its origins and how it has adapted to changing circumstances. Through interviews, historical documents, newspaper reports, catalogues and other materials, this paper will show how FdP has changed over the years and how it has adapt to changing circumstances. The data used for the analysis is comprised of materials reserved for internal use (e.g. records of minutes of jury meetings or meeting of other types) and materials intended for external communications (e.g. catalogues of the various editions, essays and published interviews), and is used as a record of communications developed by the FdP over 55 years of activity. As a matter of fact, the FdP holds a continuously updated catalogues in rich archives primarily aiming at meticulously documenting the present.

1. A festival as a communicative system

The essentialist view that has dominated and continues to dominate cultural studies (HOFSTEDE 1991), puts forth 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, behaviours and products that are epiphenomena related to pre-existing structures. What happens if we turn the tables and, taken a different perspective, we begin to consider festivals as communicative systems based on a chain of communicative events? This is a "network of relations" that defines a festival as a unity, constitute the organization of a system and: "[...] determine the dynamics of interaction and transformations which it may undergo as such a unity" (MATURANA/VARELA 1980: 137).

A necessary question, therefore, is: "How can one observe a festival?", a question that urges us to look at how and where a festival is formed, at the moment when it takes shape. It invites us to penetrate the "microphysics" of culture at the moment of its becoming.

In general terms, a festival can be described as a "contingency formula" (LUHMANN 2004) that is produced within the system of art (e.g. visual art) and/or economy (e.g. film industry). Festivals are contingen-

cy formulas because they make possible the relation of oneself to the abundance of opportunities. Therefore, the main operations of festivals are decisions. According to Luhmann (1995) decisions are communications, which reveals that there are other alternatives that could have been selected instead (SEIDL 2005: 156). Every decision is the product of previous decisions and gives rise to following decisions. To sum up, festivals can be seen as decision-based organization (Tröndle 2010), with selection committees, coordinators and board of directors all working to reduce complexity and uncertainty through decisions.

However, festivals can also become addressable actors of communication, e. g. when they are referred to as representing collective action (DREPPER 2006: 182). According to Luhmann (1993: 81-100) interactions is one of three sub-types of societal systems together with societies and organisations. In this sense, festivals can be understood as interactions in particular, where interaction is the social system consisting of communications that are based on the perception of the physical presence of the participants (e.g. moderators, volunteers, audience, journalists, etc.).

Against this backdrop, it is possible to identify three ways of observing empirically a festival, corresponding to three distinct objects of observation: practices, narratives and autopoiesis (RECKWITZ 2002: 250).

Within the 'practice paradigm', it is mainly the routines of a festival that are observed and analyzed. They are seen not only as customs and traditions, but also as organizational and institutional practices. Individual festival can be understood as "extended cultural performance[s] during which 'other' rules of engagement count and the commercial market rules of the film world outside are suspended" (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 recognize and easily adapt to them. However, there are some practices that become actual trademarks and are capable of lending distinctiveness to a festival. For instance, the *Festival del Film Locarno* is also its outdoor screenings in the piazza, just as the *Sundance Film Festival* is famous for its Q & A. The practices of a festival represent what delimits its boundaries. That is, we realize that a festival is different from a screening of a series of films due to several encoded behaviours and in terms of how the works and authors are dealt with, but they are also that which defines the "format".

Though it is certainly through a plurality of specific practices that the intentions, style and forms of a festival can be identified, however, practices should not become confused with the identity of the festival. Hence, looking at practices means observing structures of interactions, that is systems of communications under condition of personal co-presence (LUHMANN 1982). This means that an interactional communication is shaped by the mutual awareness of the interactants, the topic selected and an interaction order (GOFFMAN 1974). To sum up, practices here include interaction systems that come to an end when the interactants leave.

The 'narrative paradigm' allows for analysis of the discourses, processes and semiotic structures in/of a given festival. The term "narrative" is used here 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 and 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, primarily, constellations of relationships (connected parts) embedded in time and space, constituted by what Somers (1994: 614) calls "causal emplotment". It is through the emplotment that one can connect different events and translate them into episodes. Narratives include all stories that guide actions (BAKER 2006; SOMERS/GIBSON 1994). They are social constructions, in which the observed reality is interpreted and 'storied' in plural and competing ways (BAKER 2006: 19). The basic idea here is that far from simply representing reality, narratives constitute the meaning of reality. Therefore, the same events and phenomena may be narrated through different sets of categories. Narratives are produced in communication processes (FISHER 1987), which can show the meaning of identity of the person or the organization who is narrating (BAMBERG 2005). This meaning however, is not an individual construction. Rather, it is construed in communication processes.

Narratives 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/GIBSON 1994: 67).

There is often a mutual influence and dependence between practices, decisions and narratives. One example among many possible examples brings me back to a personal experience. *DocumentarIst*, a small but worthwhile documentary film festival held in Istanbul, was established in 2007. *DocumentarIst* takes place in the Beyoğlu quarter and it is organized with the participation of numerous volunteers and film enthusiasts. In 2012, the 6th edition of the *DocumentarIst 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 organizers 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 *DocumentarIst 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 organize public screenings free of charge in the epicenter of a spontaneous and heterogeneous social movement (practice) was an organizational act guided by cultural presuppositions communicated publicly (narrative). In this case, practices, decisions and narratives (of practices and decisions) 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. An examination of festivals' narratives can also turn out to be an analysis of semantic, that are communicative forms or distinctions, which are typified and symbolized (LUHMANN 1980).

The 'autopoiesis paradigm' concentrates on the analysis of (self-)reproduction of operations within a given system such as a festival. Marijke de Valck (2007) uses the term 'autopoiesis' (LUHMANN 1986) to refer to the ability of a festival to secure its own survival through their own operations. De Valck has stressed in particular 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. (VALCK 2007: 31)

The concept of autopoiesis can appear to be very complex if one considers a festival only in terms of a set of events. This concept indicates that a festival consists in the reproduction of communication through communication. Festivals are social systems based on the reproduction of communication. If autopoiesis refers to the reproduction of the elements as such, self-organization refers to the determination of structures (LUHMANN 2000: 47). Autopoietic systems are operatively closed: there are no operations entering the system from outside nor vice versa. A festival is a closed, autopoietic system in that its operations bring forth further operations, which cannot be determined by the environment due to operative closure. Distinguishing system and environment is key to the unity of a system: whereas at the operational level the autopoietic system does receive from the environment only perturbations (irritations), these might trigger (and not determine) system-internal operations and processes (SEIDL 2005). Here, Luhmann (2000: 401) speaks of a "trigger-causality" (Auslösekausalität) as opposed to "performance-causality" (Durchgriffskausalität).

According to Maturana and Varela (1980) operative closure is a precondition for interactional openness. In this sense, a decision-based organization is a selection of constraints, which sets the conditions for future selections. A festival is a system if it has the ability to organize itself in relation to needs that arise within it and in this way can set the precondition also for its interactions. A festival can be observed as an uninterrupted sequence of communication, each of which opens up the possibility for the next one, as an autopoietic system, it self-reproduces through continuously ongoing acts of communication. Once we come into contact with the staff of a medium-large-scale festival, however, it is easy to see how the decisions are strongly influenced by previous decisions and have a major impact onto future decisions. Every decision is a communication that opens up a wide array of communicative options and reveals that it is also possible otherwise. Programmes, traditions, cultural orientations or the so-called "logic of the festival" are structural preconditions for future decisions (SEIDL 2005: 42). These decision premises (SIMON 1957: 201) have a bearing on and shape decisions at all levels, serving as: "a sort of anticipated, generalised uncertainty absorption" (LUHMANN 2003: 261). And in spite of their broad discretionary power this is also true of artistic directors. This does not make

the outside environment disappear, but as in the case of the *Documenta-rIst festival* reported above, this environment appears as a perturbation that the system must deal with by means of its operations.

The three paradigms of practice, narrative and autopoiesis are not contradictory paradigms. Rather, 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 or that considers the interplay between practices, interactions and organizational structures. While the organizational level focuses on connections between decisions, the practice level focuses on interaction and the narrative level on the distinctions used by a system for describing (internally) and presenting (to its environment) itself (BESIO/PRONZINI 2010: 17).

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. And yet, 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, at 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 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 decisions that are also key moments for practices and narratives. It is possible to divide the story of FdP into three main phases: a) the founding and the 'presence' phase; b) the phase of reflexivity and testimony; c) the phase of normalization and eclecticism.

2. The founding and the 'presence'

Florence, 1959. A group of humanities scholars, anthropologists, sociologists, ethnologists and mediologists founded a not-for-profit organization named the *Festival dei Popoli*. At the end of that same year, the group of scholars organized 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 the time when the *Venice Film Festival* took the first steps towards opening up to film productions from more distant countries[2] and supporting films characterized 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 Franceso 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 more and more aggressive cultural industry 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 at a turning point in the history of film forms and not only those specific to documentaries. Technical experimentation and theoretical

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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, from India, for *Aparajito*, and in 1958, to Iroshi Inagaki for *Rickshaw Man* – a veritable explosion of films from beyond the European borders.

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 to be an essential reference by Nouvelle Vague auteurs, 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 (practice and narrative at the same time). 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/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/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 selec-

tion 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, specialized 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 anti-establishment 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 organized, 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 favour of objective recording of ethnic identity set in jeopardy by the phenomena of modernization and globalization. In academic terms, these cases are known as "salvage ethnography" (Clifford 1989, 98) or "urgent anthropology", indicating that an ethnic anthropological study should have a function that documents and protects cultural diversity.

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 FdP 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 1995: 358), 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. Reflexivity 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 reflexivity is an act oriented to the system itself (LUHMANN 1995), testimony is one way of building a relationship with an audience and more in general a way of observing observers. 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 Conference on Ethnographic and Sociological Films] were organized on a regular ba-

sis and brought the leading experts in this field of study and the main European and non-European organizations 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: 17) 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 organization 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 organizers, 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 organized in 1966 to discuss the films selected and not selected by the Festival (CIFES 1966). Organized by the CIFES, the meeting was also an important moment of reflexivity, in which experts and non-experts participated with the intention of re-establishing 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/ 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 Reél*, 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 organization 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 1979.[3] 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 pervasive-

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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'.

ness 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 (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.

The 20th Festival proposed a structural reorganization 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. The FdP realized 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. To ensure its own autopoiesis, which at the time was becoming a true struggle for survival, the FdP had to reinvent a field for discussion with the audience (or audiences). This proved to be more difficult than expected, due to the necessary modification of the festivals' self-referential stand point. It had to change its identity without losing it.

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 organization 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 characterized 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 not possible to orient oneself in it without forms of reduction of this complexity (LUHMANN 1995). The problem of reduc-

ing complexity is not only a theoretical one, but also a practical problem because every system is forced to reduce complexity in order to survive (LUHMANN 1990). 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. Accordingly, the role and the identity of the FdP has changed over the years. More specifically, it has extended its activities beyond the actual days of the competition and the presentation of films to a busy calendar which hosts events all year round: a market project started (*Doc at work – Industry*); the training project *Doc at work – training* was 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 institutions and organizations. The FdP has therefore adapted to what appears to be a common trend among contemporary international festivals, that is, the transition from events to cultural institutes with a plurality of functions. To paraphrase Luhmann (2000: 398), festivals are become "Treffräume für Funktionssysteme" or site of interpenetration and connectivity between different societal systems (economy, education, religion, arts etc.). 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 documen-

tary 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 see 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.

Notes on contributor

Vittorio Iervese is assistant professor at Department of Linguistic and Cultural Studies, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, and vice president of *Festival del Popoli*.

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