

Cultural Transfer and Political Conflicts. Film Festivals during the Cold War

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Film festivals have gained much attention in recent years within the interdisciplinary academic research community. The main focus on film festivals in Media Studies or Ethnography lies on current developments in film aesthetics, taste cultures, film industry relations and trends in film circulation or festival organizations.¹ The recent conference expanded on these themes with a welcome emphasis on historical developments and broadened and intensified discussions that had been started at the „Pour une histoire des festivals (XIXe-XXe siècles)“ conference in Paris in November 2011.²

After a few welcoming remarks by Caroline Moine (Versailles) and Andreas Kötzing (Dresden), RÜDIGER STEINMETZ (Leipzig) set the tone for the conference in his introductory note, in which he emphasized the importance of a „contrastive dialog“ as methodological perspective for the study of cultural events and policies that goes beyond the confines of strict boundaries of ideological/political blocs of East and West. Here Steinmetz considered three levels of relevant communication: personal, official and mediated (e.g. via film and other media). In order to understand the cultural exchange during the Cold War, he urged, it is necessary to take a comparative stance that combines Eastern, Western, and other perspectives striving for the reconstruction of an „asymmetrical interwoven parallel history“ of cultural events and readings in East and West.³

The first conference panel was devoted to the Moscow Film Festival (MFF). After a brief positioning of the MFF by chair LARS KARL (Leipzig), SERGEI I. ZHUK (Muncie, IN) presented preliminary research from a book project on elite culture in Russia. He focused

on the specific cultural exchanges facilitated by the emerging discipline of American Studies, which initiated academic exchanges and the import of cultural knowledge and was utilized in film selection for the MFF and related considerations of commercial film import, distribution and exhibition of foreign film in the USSR. His analysis of discursive, ideological readings of films and the logic of import decisions served as interesting background to a different kind of ideological logic that OKSANA BULGAKOVA (Mainz) was presenting in her detailed discussion of the carefully balanced awarding of festival prizes to films screened in the MFF, which essentially reflected foreign political climates. During the discussion of these papers a recurring theme of the conference emerged, namely the call for oral history research on these festivals as a method to counterbalance the work with written archive material, which often only contains ideologically filtered communication and official memos.

The second panel turned the view on Western festivals. ELIZABETH WARD (Leeds) presented part of her PhD project on DEFA film, focusing on the difficult diplomatic terrain of East German film selection at the Cannes Film Festival and the specific contextual readings of Konrad Wolf's film „Sterne“ (1959) and its position within DEFA film production and festival strategy. STEFANO PISU (Cagliari) presented an analysis of the Biennale of Dissidence, a 1977 special program of the Venice Film Festival. He argued that a look at the line-up reveals interesting insights not only about who attended, but also about who was missing. While several Eastern European key figures inspired the event, only expat artists, who had migrated to the West did attend.

The first day of the conference was

¹For an overview of the field see the bibliography of the Film Festival Research Network: <<http://www.filmfestivalresearch.org/index.php/frrn-bibliography/>>, (12.8.2014).

²Anaïs Fléchet / Caroline Moine / et al. (eds.), Une histoire des festivals. XXe-XXIe siècle, Paris 2013.

³Christoph Kleßmann / Hans-J. Misselwitz / Günter Wichert (eds.), Deutsche Vergangenheiten. Eine gemeinsame Herausforderung. Der schwierige Umgang mit der doppelten Nachkriegsgeschichte, Berlin 1999.

rounded off by a fascinating and informative evening program that featured the work-in-progress screening of DIETMAR HOCHMUTH's (Berlin) documentary film „Kurzer Draht und lange Leitung. Filmfestivals im Spannungsfeld zwischen Ost und West“. The recounted experiences of West and East German film critics, actors and festival organizers attending festivals in Oberhausen, Leipzig and Moscow during Cold War times presented fascinating insights into behind-the-scenes processes of political regulation of festival attendance. This audiovisual document of an oral history project of festival culture was followed by a panel discussion of curators and cultural attachés of current and former film series and festivals. KAROLA GRAMANN (Oberhausen) and HANS-MICHAEL BOCK (Hamburg) shared experiences of curating Eastern European and East German film in West Germany in the 1980s. As former head of the DEFA film export, HELLMUT DILLER provided the inside institutional perspective of GDR cultural politics. DOK Leipzig documentary curator GRIT LEMKE (Leipzig) linked the historical question of political framing of film culture during the Cold War bloc ideology to current issues in transnational film curating. Similar problems of political positioning and the need for nuanced political standpoints arise today, when dealing with state politics and filmmakers from countries, such as China, Israel or Iran, for instance.⁴

The second day of the conference started with a panel focusing on alternative festivals, which are hardly known in general festival discourse. VACLAV SMIDRKAL (Prague) presented work on festivals of military films in the East and West during the 1950s and 1960s. While the Western festival in Versailles invited films from countries which had diplomatic relations with France regardless of alignment with military pacts and programmed with a focus on educational film and military PR, the itinerant festival of the Warsaw Pact only selected films from within the Soviet bloc and was oriented toward films with emphasis on artistic aesthetics and peace. Presenting work from a larger research project on Promoting Europe, ANNE BRUCH (Hamburg) discussed the efforts of the Coun-

cil of Europe in the 1950s and 1960s to promote the European idea by means of film production as well as the organization of a specific festival.

Like the previous papers, the fourth panel also started with a presentation utilizing original archival research. JOHN WÄFLER (Lucerne) presented research on „fiche“ (index cards) compiled by the Canton police in Switzerland, an unofficial practice that was only discovered accidentally in 1989 and investigated as the Fiche affair. Due to their alternative, left-wing politics and atmosphere the film festivals in Locarno and Solothurn were seen as „window of the East to the West“ and as counter-public spheres which posed as potential political threat in the eyes of state security agencies, which led to the unofficial surveillance of festival staff and attendants in the communist-suspicious climate of the 1960s. DRAGAN BATANCEV (Belgrade) discussed the development of the Belgrade FEST. Established as an alternative cinephile event in 1971, the festival of festivals developed into an interesting event under the patronage of Tito, which hosted an array of international guests before it disintegrated during civil war times in the 1990s. In the final panel presentation, ANDREAS KÖTZING (Dresden) expanded on his previous research focusing on the interrelation of East and West German film culture at pan-German film festivals and discussed the importance of personal connections between the film festivals of Leipzig, Oberhausen and Krakow.⁵

The final panel of the conference collected papers with a focus on specific film schools or new waves. Connecting to Batancev's presentation, DUNJA JELENKOVIC (Versailles) provided a different reading of film selection in Belgrade and discussed the reception of the Yugoslav Black Wave at festivals at home in Belgrade and abroad in Oberhausen. REGINA CAMARA (Vienna) traced the 'discovery' of the Brazilian Cinema Novo

⁴ For a detailed account of the history of DOK Leipzig see Caroline Moine, *Cinéma et guerre froide. Histoire du festival de films documentaires de Leipzig (1955-1990)*, Paris 2014.

⁵ Andreas Kötzing, *Kultur- und Filmpolitik im Kalten Krieg. Die Filmfestivals von Leipzig und Oberhausen in gesamtdeutscher Perspektive, 1954-1972*, Göttingen 2013.

on the European film festival circuit in the 1960s and stressed the significance of small-scale festivals such as Bilbao, Florence and Santa Margarita which first connected Brazilian filmmakers with European film culture and paved the way for later fame at A-list festivals like Cannes and Karlovy Vary. TOBIAS EBBRECHT-HARTMANN (Potsdam) talked about the internationalization strategies of the Film and Television University „Konrad Wolf“ Potsdam (HFF) in the Cold War period. Apart from foreign exchange student interaction, the presentation of HFF films at the festivals in Leipzig, Oberhausen and at the CILECT Student Film Festival were a strategy to stay attuned to trends in world cinema and to train East German students to interact as socialist filmmakers in a foreign setting.

The multi-faceted, compact, bilingual conference was closed by CAROLINE MOINE (Versailles), who ended with a preliminary summary of the issues discussed and a call for further research based on oral histories. She asserted the need to pay attention not only to discussions between East and West but also to nuanced inner conflicts within the blocs. She furthermore pointed to the emergence of various levels of analysis throughout the presentations, which covered institutions, such as state festivals in East and West, levels of circulation of films, critics and filmmakers, and aesthetics and the cross-influences of aesthetic waves and techniques.

In the final round of comments, the very productive conference was sketching out paths for future historical research on film festivals and considering apparent methodological challenges. One comment echoed debates in the larger film festival research field, namely to pay attention also to smaller festivals beyond the limited A-list in order to understand the larger picture and dynamics on the circuit. Along with the urge to look beyond the rigid institutional framing and to take into consideration personal networks of actors comes a strong desire for an extended oral history project. This way, various actors who were directly involved in the festival culture in various capacities can provide information that is missing from the official written archives. In a next layer, historical research would thus aim to reconstruct and under-

stand the collective experience beyond mere program notes. Another challenge pointed out in festival research was the integration of film texts into the analysis of festival culture, on the one hand this poses a methodological challenge and on the other hand points to the problem of lacking (access to) archives of festival films. Thus, this international conference leaves the audience with eager anticipation for productive future research in the field of film festival studies.

Conference Overview:

Opening Remarks

Caroline Moine (Versailles) / Andreas Kötzling (Dresden) / Günther Heydemann (Dresden) / Rüdiger Steinmetz (Leipzig)

Panel I: Ideology, Film Politics and the Moscow Festival

Chair: Lars Karl (Leipzig)

Sergei I. Zhuk (Muncie, IN/USA), American Movies, Soviet Americanists und Moscow International Festivals during the Brezhnev Era

Oksana Bulgakowa (Mainz), The Awards Politics of the Moscow Film Festival in the 1970s-1990s

Panel II: Political Tensions at Film Festivals in the West

Chair: Tilman Pohlmann (Dresden)

Elizabeth Ward (Leeds), The Cannes Film Festival as an Alternative Arena for Cold War Politics, 1957-1959

Stefano Pisu (Cagliari), A Dissidence Film Festival? The 1977 Venice Biennale of Cinema between Cultural Debate and Political Exploitation

Evening Event

„Kurzer Draht und lange Leitung. Filmfestivals im Spannungsfeld zwischen Ost und West“. Interview-Film by Dietmar Hochmuth (Berlin 2014, ca. 45 min)

Panel Discussion „Film Exchange in Times of Political Crises“

Karola Gramann (Kinothek Asta Nielsen, Director of the Internationale Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen 1985-1989) / Hans Michael Bock (Cinegraph – Hamburgisches Centrum für Filmforschung e.V.) / Helmut Diller (Head

of DEFA Foreign Trade Division 1973-1990) /
Grit Lemke (Head of Documentary Program
DOK Leipzig)

Film Screening

„Der Aufenthalt“ (GDR 1983, Frank Beyer, 95
min)

*Panel III: Alternative Actors in Film Festival
Politics during the Cold War*

Chair: Andreas Kötzing (Dresden)

Vaclav Smidrkal (Prague), Festivals of Mili-
tary Films in the East and the West

Anne Bruch (Hamburg), Between Political
Conviction and Subtle Advertising. Film Fes-
tival Politics in European Institutions in the
1950s and 1960s.

*Panel IV: International Dialog? Discourse and
Reality*

Chair: Caroline Moine (Versailles)

John Wäfler (Lucerne), Under Surveillance.
The Locarno International Film Festival dur-
ing the Cold War

Dragan Batancev (Belgrade), The Belgrade
FEST, or what happened when Peckinpah met
Wajda

Andreas Kötzing (Dresden), Between Dialog
and Rivalry. The Relations between the Film
Festivals of Leipzig, Oberhausen and Krakow
in the 1960s

*Panel V: Film Exchange between East and
West*

Chair: Fernando Ramos (Leipzig)

Regina Camara (Vienna), From Karlovy Vary
to Cannes. The Brazilian Cinema Novo at
the Important European Film Festivals in the
1960s.

Dunja Jelenkovic (Versailles), Film Festival as
an Arena for Political Debate – Black Wave
Films at the Yugoslav Documentary and Short
Film Festival in Belgrade and the West Ger-
man Short Film Festival in Oberhausen from
1967 to 1973

Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann (Potsdam), Social-
ist Competition or Window to the World? The
International Film and Television School of
the GDR and International Film Festivals

Closing Remarks

Caroline Moine, Andreas Kötzing

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