

5. <http://www.sff.ba/en/page/about-the-festival> (accessed on 22 December 2013)
6. With the 2014 edition the Berlinale Talent Campus changed its name to Berlinale Talents. <http://www.berlinale-talents.de/story/78/4378.html> (accessed 28 February 2014).
7. De Valck 2013, pp. 135-137.
8. <http://www.sff.ba/en/page/talents-sarajevo3> (accessed on 22 December 2013)
9. De Valck 2013, pp. 142.
10. http://www.fipresci.org/festivals/archive/2013/sarajevo/sarajevo_talentpress_13.htm (accessed on 22 December 2013)
11. *Sarajevo Talent Campus #7 Notebook* 2013, pp. 5.

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Past memories for a new future

The 70th Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica di Venezia

Enrico Vannucci

From 28 August-7 September 2013 the Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica di Venezia celebrated its 70th edition.¹ It is the oldest film festival in the world and the first 'international cinematographic art exhibition'² to reach that milestone. The 'Mostra' certainly does not need an introduction since it is a very well-known event to which several monographic studies have been dedicated.³ Therefore, I will focus on two main issues that have been brought forth during this recent festival edition: the celebration of the 70th anniversary and the innovations introduced by Alberto Barbera in his second tenure directing the Venice Film Festival.

The 70th Mostra celebrates its glorious past

According to Marijke de Valck the Mostra still retains an important position in the film festival ecosystem due to a value-adding process connected to its history. The Lido's spatial forms and locations continue to produce an inestimable value for the event due to segregation practices and celebrative moments engaged by the organisation. These practices and celebrations allow personal and collective memories of the festival to reappear every year as sparked by those historical sites.⁴ De Valck's case study analysed the 60th Venice Film Festival (the previous anniversary edition, which was held in 2003), and those segregation practices and celebrations she outlined are still appropriate today. Even though the most glorious location on the Lido – Hotel des Bains – has vanished since 2010⁵ the festival organisation has continued to implement this value-adding process in order to relive Venice's past glamour.

In this recent edition the celebrations seem more focused on the festival's uniqueness than those organised ten years ago.⁶ Venezia 70 – Future Reloaded aimed to commemorate the 70th anniversary by bringing 'together the past and the future of cinema – and of the Festival'⁷ through different forms. A collective film was commissioned: 70 directors who had previously participated in the festival were invited to shoot a short film of 60 to 90 seconds. On the opening day the 70 shorts were shown edited together as a two-hour collective feature film. At the end of the Mostra, 68 out of the 70⁸ shorts were posted for free on La Biennale's YouTube channel⁹ and on its website.¹⁰ Each short differs greatly from the others, spanning from conceptual artistic films to simple yet well-structured narratives. However, the final cut did not sufficiently accomplish the original aim. Since some directors seemed to have taken the task of presenting cinema's past and future less seriously than others, many films were disappointing.

Two other important forms for celebrating the anniversary appeared on a 'specific section on the Biennale website [...] with rare photos and unique documents conserved at the *Historical Archives of Contemporary Arts (ASAC)*, as well as with 40 footage excerpts taken from old films conserved at the *Archivio Storico Istituto Luce Cinecittà* documenting the various editions of the Venice Film Festival, from the very first'.¹¹ Each one of these Istituto Luce newsreels were screened before the main features in the Venezia 70 and Orizzonti sections. The documentaries revive a specific edition of the festival in one minute, from the fascist era until the 1970s, and depict classical images from the golden age: people on the Lido seaside, red carpet glamour, award ceremonies both on the Lido landmarks sites – Hotel des Bains, Hotel Excelsior, the Casino, and the Palazzo del Cinema – and in Venice on San Marco square. The clips often focused on the arrival of famous actors, actresses, directors, and all the other members of the jet set of a given decade. Obviously, much attention was dedicated to Italian guests and to the numerous American

stars that crowded the festival after the war. Less notice was given to other foreign guests, with the exception of French stars.

The Istituto Luce newsreel revival worked better than the collective film since, as de Valck argued, the representation of a glorious past helped restore long-forgotten moments of festival life. Thus, the evocative power of those *lieux de mémoire* ('memory sites', as the French historian Pierre Nora defined them¹²) was triggered by the on-site presence of the same halls where the festival is still staged and by the ghostly replicas pictured in black-and-white onscreen. Those lively reproductions stimulated collective memories of a past that, although far away in time, shined on the much less glamorous personal memories¹³ of the audience of today, making those attending the festival in 2013 feel part of a unique and continuous line of *grandeur* that has never been broken. Nostalgia here aims to constitute specific social identities,¹⁴ primarily of the festival and subsequently of its audience. The newsreels help to exorcise a present in which the festival seems to have lost a key position in the industry.

Past reloaded, or how the Mostra tried to reinvent itself

The cultural value of the Venice Film Festival has never been in question. The quality of films featured on the Lido has always been high, although the festival direction has witnessed more turbulence than its principal competitors in Berlin and Cannes. Since 1978 the Festival de Cannes has only had two *délégués général* – Gilles Jacob (1978-2001) and Thierry Frémaux (since 2001); at the same time the Berlinale featured only two *Direktoren* – Moritz de Hadeln (1980-2001) and Dieter Kosslick (since 2001). The Mostra's *direttore artistico*, on the contrary, has changed nine times since 1977.¹⁵ This turmoil at the top of the festival has always reflected Italy's political instability, as the festival is historically dependent on and controlled by Roman politics.¹⁶

Even though the historical value-adding process has prevented Venice Film Festival from losing cultural worth it has undoubtedly lost an important role in business. While its competitors have been attracting professionals to their respective markets in Cannes and Berlin for years, due to the frequent changes at the helm of the Italian festival and other issues¹⁷ the lack of long-term planning has prevented the Mostra from employing other value-adding processes associated with business and the industry. The only director who could have had a sufficient timeframe to programme industry projects is Marco Müller, who ran the festival for eight editions. Nevertheless, he was not able to achieve any goal other than cultural aims due to three different reasons: first, his future at the helm of the festival was questioned almost every year of his direction; second, insufficient funding from the Ministry of Culture¹⁸ prevented the festival from investing money on side projects; third, Müller himself seemed to focus primarily on the artistic side of the festival.

Despite all of this, the return of Alberto Barbera in 2012 has brought some innovations to the Mostra's stale structure. After only two editions it is possible to trace the new path Barbera has designed for the festival. The most apparent intervention tackles a spatial redesign. Since 2012 a portion of the infamous 'hole' – the excavation site in front of the old Palazzo del Cinema where the new Palazzo should have been built – has been overlaid in order to host a new meeting place for non-accredited audiences: a trendy bar, several ticket and info counters, plus other facilities have been located there under a wooden pergola and over a layer of green lawn. The festival also underwent other profound logistic changes that were praised by Barbera:¹⁹ the accomplished renovation of Sala Grande, Sala Volpi, Sala Pasinetti, and Sala Zorzi, and the future renovation of Sala Darsena and the Casino. The deficiency in restoring the Mostra's historical buildings almost risked compromising its image beyond repair. In 2010 an unexpected rainstorm caused serious damage to the structures of the festival, causing floods inside many buildings. The organisation was then required to alter its spaces, even transforming its historical structures, in order to run the festival. Will this strategy damage the historical value-adding process while promoting a new spatial reconfiguration process that will change the Venice Film Festival as we have always known it? Probably not. However, these spatial modifications have already influenced the experience of the festival.

Although hosting the Venice Film Market on the second floor of the Hotel Excelsior could be perceived as an attempt to rethink the festival space, the establishment of a proper market on the Lido must be conceived as a way for the Mostra to focus again on the industry. Toronto is now the key player in autumn regarding film business and trade. Denying *12 Years a Slave* (Steve McQueen, 2013) a world premiere in Venice in favour of a release in Telluride and then Toronto²⁰ clearly proves the Italian festival's loss of centrality as an agenda-setting event for the international press and the advertisement of films in North America.²¹ Even though the Venetian market offers some small theatres for Market Screenings, 'a Digital Video Library, a Industry Business Centre with information desk, Internet positions and Wi-Fi network, the Industry Club, a new and exclusive meeting area for producers, buyers and sellers and the Exhibition Area [...]',²² the attendance of both exhibitors and professionals was certainly meagre compared to other festivals. Since two preliminary editions cannot be considered a significant sample assessing the importance of this market event is not yet possible. Certainly this was a risky but desirable move for the Mostra in order to try to stop the evident decline in foreign guest attendance.²³

Other innovations inaugurated by Barbera concern the programme: Venezia Classici aims to look back at the past while Sala Web looks forward to the future. The former is a section of the festival featuring restored classical films. Program-

ming retrospectives of historical films is not a revolutionary practice, as many film festivals do just that. However, for the first time a jury of film students from various Italian universities awarded two prizes, making this section a competition of 'past glories'. The latter instead is a 'web theatre [...] that offers the virtual audience of the web the opportunity to watch, in streaming, the films of the *Orizzonti* section simultaneously with their official presentation at the Lido'.²⁴ For the first time a major A-list festival tried to attract new audiences using the web, letting those unable to visit the Lido be equally present while *in absentia*. Certainly the web screening room will not reinvent the Mostra, though it will open new opportunities for festivals alike around the world.

Conclusion

Although the new course has stimulated some criticism regarding the quality of the films, especially by the Italian press,²⁵ Barbera's second term at Venice will be remembered as an attempt to reinvent the festival. Some commentators may consider this effort a desperate move against Cannes, Berlin, and now even Toronto. However, Barbera's structural view seems to me the only possible and genuine chance for the Mostra to regain its prominent position in the film festival ecosystem and to revive the international glamour of the past.

Notes

1. <http://www.labiennale.org/en/cinema/archive/70th-festival/> (accessed on 29 January 2014)
2. This is a literal translation of the Italian name for the Venice Film Festival.
3. See Ivaldi 1982; Brunetta 1996, 2003; Cosulich 1997; see chapters 4-8, 12-14, and 16 dedicated to the Venice Film Festival in Ongaro 2005; Pisu 2013.
4. De Valck 2007, pp. 138-139.
5. <http://variety.com/2010/film/news/venice-festgoers-say-bye-bye-to-des-bains-1118023552/> (accessed on 29 January 2014)
6. de Valck recalls three different forms of celebrations set up in 2003: '[a] photo exhibition in the Casino entrance hall entitled "diamonds are forever" [..., showing] a collection of photographs of celebrities at the film festival, wearing diamonds. [...] a book on the history of the film festival. [...] the recycling of an old star, Gina Lollobrigida, who was included in the *Open 2003* exhibition.' (de Valck 2007, p. 139)
7. <http://www.labiennale.org/en/cinema/news/19-07b.html> (accessed on 29 January 2014)
8. Only the short films made by Amit Dutta and Frédéric Fonteyne were not published online.
9. http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2J3c5AtY5K_dINEXUacWHDW4C-NnIoIs (accessed on 29 January 2014)
10. <http://www.labiennale.org/en/cinema/history/directors/index.html> (accessed on 29 January 2014)
11. <http://www.labiennale.org/en/cinema/news/19-07b.html> (accessed on 29 January 2014)
12. Nora 1989, pp. 7-24.
13. In 2013 the Italian press argued about the lack of many celebrities from the selected films. Barbera disagreed with this idea. <http://www.ansa.it/web/notizie/rubriche/spet->

- tacolo/2013/08/25/Venezia-Barbera-poche-star-Bugie-_9197671.html (accessed on 29 January 2014)
14. Radstone 2007, p. 129.
 15. Venice Film Festival directors from 1977: Carlo Lizzani (1977-1982), Gian Luigi Rondi (1983-1986), Guglielmo Biraghi (1987 as curator, then 1988-1991 as artistic director), Gillo Pontecorvo (1992-1996), Felice Laudadio (1997-1998), Alberto Barbera (1999-2001, 2012-present), Moritz De Hadeln (2002-2003), Marco Müller (2004-2011).
 16. For a well-documented history of the relationship between La Biennale and Italian politics refer to Trezzini 2004.
 17. The lack of competitive prizes between 1969 and 1979 seems to have damaged the Mostra.
 18. The most notorious lack of funding is connected to the halt of construction on the new Palazzo del Cinema that should have been finished in 2011, in time for the 150th anniversary of the unification of Italy.
 19. <http://www.labiennale.org/en/cinema/archive/70th-festival/70/baratta.html> (accessed on 29 January 2014)
 20. <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/toronto-why-12-years-a-624089> (accessed on 29 January 2014)
 21. Considering director Steve McQueen to be a Venice favourite – he represented the United Kingdom at La Biennale Arte in 2009 and he competed for the Golden Lion in 2011 – the refusal by the distributor is an obvious sign of a certain malaise suffered by the Mostra.
 22. <http://www.labiennale.org/en/cinema/archive/70th-festival/vfm-70/> (accessed on 29 January 2014) Nora 1989, pp. 7-24
 23. Even though official data is unavailable, an empirical comparison of the audience turnout based on my personal meetings at the festival during the last five editions leads me to speculate that in recent years the public has dwindled. The lack of people from North America and Asia has been apparent, especially in the last two editions.
 24. <http://www.labiennale.org/en/cinema/archive/70th-festival/70/barbera.html> (accessed on 29 January 2014)
 25. <http://www.bestmovie.it/news/il-lido-delle-polemiche/252441/> (accessed on 29 January 2014)

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