

ARTICLE

The Locarno Film Festival under the Influence? Programming Eastern European Movies in Anti-communist Switzerland (1946–1962)

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The Locarno Film Festival (LFF), founded in 1946 by film industry professionals and local tourism promoters, is reputed as an international hub for emerging cinema. Built apart from, or in opposition to, traditional commercial cinema, the Swiss event gave particular attention to Eastern European movies, to the point that the LFF has frequently been presented as the place where ‘Westerners discovered the talents of Eastern Europe’. However, the presence of these films in Locarno, whose characteristic was the absence of official support from the state, exacerbated Switzerland’s anti-communism and led to the creation of a ‘national’ selection committee in 1962 to limit the programming of movies coming from the other side of the Iron Curtain. This article analyses how Swiss politics and ideological tensions conditioned the construction of the Locarno Festival’s identity through the prism of the (non-)interventions of the federal state.

The Locarno Film Festival (LFF), founded in 1946 by film industry professionals and local tourism promoters, is reputed as an international hub for young filmmakers and emerging cinema.¹ Since the 1950s, this Swiss competition, which has celebrated Italian neo-realism, Polish, Hungarian and Czechoslovakian New Waves, as well as Latin American and Asian productions, has largely been built apart from, or in opposition to, traditional commercial cinema. Early on, while most film festivals still selected movies via state organisms with a diplomatic agenda, the LFF adopted a more active selection process, based on more artistic criteria.² As such, Eastern European films, often perceived as the antithesis of Hollywood productions,³ have played a particularly important role in its identity building, to the point that Locarno has frequently been presented as the place where ‘Westerners discovered the talents of Eastern Europe’.⁴

If no Eastern European country was invited to the Berlin Festival before the 1970s, Soviet movies were in fact shown at Venice and Cannes. Despite the Soviet Union’s negative opinion about these bourgeois and cosmopolitan celebrations that Moscow considered too favourable to Western production, international film festivals proved effective for the promotion of socialist cinema on a world stage.

¹ Cindy Hing-yuk Wong, *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011).

² Marijke de Valck, ‘Finding Audiences for Films: Programming in Historical Perspective’, in Jeffrey Ruoff, ed., *Coming Soon to a Festival Near You: Programming Film Festivals* (St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2012), 25–40.

³ Thomas Elsaesser, *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005).

⁴ Parenti Claire, ‘Locarno 1972’, *Positif*, 147 (1973), 52. All translations from German, French and Italian are by the author.

Yet the presence of Eastern European films in Venice and Cannes led to some diplomatic polemics and political controversies,⁵ since those festivals

operated as official, government-sanctioned forums; their existence was dependent on the fiscal and ideological support of the state. [They were] characterised by their political allegiances and their top-down organisational structures. With their activities dictated by government agendas, these festivals became heavily weighted towards the pursuit of national, rather than cinematic, concerns.⁶

In this regard, Locarno, whose characteristic was the absence of official control from the state,⁷ can be considered as the Western festival where the participation of Eastern bloc countries was the most regular and the less diplomacy-oriented, but certainly not the most peaceful. In fact, the incompatibility between the event's ambitions and its political environment was blatant.

From the mid-1950s onward, when cinema experienced a period of thaw and renewal in the people's democracies which intrigued and even fascinated Western cinephiles,⁸ its showcasing in Locarno exacerbated Switzerland's anti-communism, a 'near state doctrine' that was widely shared among 'the political, military and judicial authorities [and] the vast majority of parties, associations and newspapers'.⁹ Depictions of the LFF as a 'red festival' became so prevalent that in 1962 a so-called 'national' selection committee, aimed at limiting the presence of films from socialist regimes, was imposed on the festival. In the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino, this intervention from the Swiss German part of the country, where political decisions were made and where most of the cultural and economic life was concentrated (particularly in the field of cinema), was badly received.¹⁰ Political suspicion against the festival, which was placed under surveillance by the Swiss intelligence services,¹¹ was an illustration of the delicate relations between the Confederation and Ticino, a cultural minority region located on the periphery of the Swiss geography, south of the Alps.

Conditioned by the federal structure and the linguistic divisions of the country, the mistrust of Locarno in German-speaking Switzerland was also a manifestation of the 'spiritual national defence'. This movement aimed initially at fighting fascism, Nazism and – especially during the Cold War – communism,¹²

⁵ Pauline Gallinari, 'L'URSS au festival de Cannes 1946–1958: un enjeu des relations franco-soviétiques à l'heure de la "guerre froide"', 1895, 51, 1 (2007), 22–43; Stefano Pisu, *Stalin a Venezia. L'URSS alla Mostra del cinema fra diplomazia culturale e scontro ideologico (1932–1953)* (Rubettino: Soveria Mannelli, 2013).

⁶ Kirsten Stevens, 'Enthusiastic Amateurs: Australia's Film Societies and the Birth of Audience-Driven Film Festivals in Post-war Melbourne', *New Review of Film and Television*, 14, 1 (2016), 31.

⁷ Even if the Venice festival was not created by the government in 1932, it was supported by the state since its third event. Francesco Bono, 'La Mostra del cinema di Venezia: nascita e sviluppo nell'anteguerra (1932–1939)', *Storia Contemporanea*, 3 (1991), 513–49.

⁸ After the death of Stalin and the challenging of the canons of socialist realism, a new generation of filmmakers emerged in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria, whose works were awarded in several Western and Eastern festivals. Karl Lars, *Leinwand zwischen Tauwetter und Frost. Der osteuropäische Spiel- und Dokumentarfilm im Kalten Krieg* (Berlin: Metropol, 2007).

⁹ Jean-François Fayet, 'L'anticommunisme est-il vraiment un sujet d'histoire', in Michel Caillat, Mauro Cerutti, Jean-François Fayet and Stéphanie Roulin, eds., *Histoire(s) de l'anticommunisme en Suisse* (Zürich: Chronos, 2009), 11–22. See also Luc van Dongen, Stéphanie Roulin and Giles Scott-Smith, eds., *Transnational Anti-communism and the Cold War: Agents, Activities, and Networks* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

¹⁰ An American film critic resumed: Locarno 'situated in the South is far from the Northern Swiss who dominate . . . It also appears that many would like to have the festival take place in German-speaking Switzerland'. Gene Moskowitz, 'Locarno Fest Still Ignored by U.S.', *Variety* (8 Aug. 1962), 16.

¹¹ John Wäfler, 'The Surveillance of Film Festivals in Switzerland: The Case of the Locarno International Film Festival', in Andreas Kötzing and Caroline Moine, eds., *Cultural Transfer and Political Conflicts. Film Festivals in the Cold War* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2017), 141–52.

¹² Igor Perrig, 'Geistige Landesverteidigung im kalten Krieg: der Schweizerische Aufklärungsdienst (SAD) und Heer und Haus: 1945–1963', PhD Thesis, University of Fribourg, 1993; Jakob Tanner, 'Switzerland and the Cold War: A Neutral Country between the "American Way of Life" and "Geistige Landesverteidigung"', in Joy Charnley and

motivated the creation of a Swiss Film Chamber.¹³ But the consultative functions of this meditative body between the state and the film industry, without any real decision-making power, were symptomatic of a policy that was largely ‘monopolized – and heckled or hindered – by the film industry’.¹⁴ It was only in 1955 that a Film Section was created within the Federal Department of Home Affairs (FDHA), allowing the Confederation to seriously intervene in film issues.

Considering the late investment of the Swiss authorities in the field of cinema, how should the creation in 1962 of a ‘national’ selection committee at the LFF, generally interpreted as a political intervention from the German-speaking part of Switzerland in the festival, be understood? While the other major European film competitions were moving towards increasing autonomy from the authorities in the 1950s and the 1960s,¹⁵ should this decision be considered as a step backwards for Locarno? In order to answer these questions, this article proposes to analyse how Swiss anti-communism conditioned the construction of the Locarno Film Festival’s identity through the (non-)interventionism of the federal state.

State of the Art and Research Outline

Historical works on festivals have multiplied over the last ten years, particularly in the dynamic field of film festival studies,¹⁶ pioneered by Marijke de Valck and Dina Iordanova.¹⁷ Within this production, dominated by film scholars, critics, journalists and programmers, historians stand out for their interest in the diplomatic and ideological dimensions of film festivals during the Cold War.¹⁸ Similarly, the present article will highlight the political issues that shaped one of the first European international film competitions created after the Second World War. Its ambition is also to shed a new light on a festival that established itself as the main producer of knowledge about its own history.

Since 1967, the Locarno Festival has published (or supported the publication of) several collections of interviews, journalistic columns, documentaries and other commemorative works.¹⁹ In the absence of substantial academic work on the LFF, these publications, generally focused on the cinematographic

Malcolm Pender, eds., *Switzerland and War* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999), 113–28. See also Bettina Blatter’s upcoming work about anti-communist organisations and networks in Switzerland (1945–90).

¹³ Created in 1938, this chamber originally limited the importation of movies from the Third Reich. *Film und Filmwirtschaft in der Schweiz. 1918–1968: fünfzig Jahre Allgemeine Kinematographen Aktiengesellschaft* (Zürich: Allgemeine Kinematographen Aktiengesellschaft, 1968).

¹⁴ Olivier Moeschler, *Cinéma suisse: une politique culturelle en action: l’Etat, les professionnels, les publics* (Lausanne: Presses polytechniques et universitaires romandes, 2011), 44.

¹⁵ Stefano Pisu, *Il XX secolo sul red carpet. Politica, economia e cultura nei festival internazionali del cinema (1932–1976)* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2017).

¹⁶ Lydia Papadimitriou and Jeffrey Ruoff, eds., ‘Film Festivals: Origins and Trajectories’, *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 14, 1 (2016); Christel Taillibert, ‘Les film festival studies, éléments pour une épistémologie d’un nouveau champ de recherche’, *Diogenes*, 2, 258/9/60 (2017), 139–53 and Olivier Moeschler and Olivier Thévenin, ‘Film Festivals: Metamorphosis of a Research Object and Field’, *Society and Leisure*, 44, 1 (2021), 1–9.

¹⁷ Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007); Dina Iordanova and Rhyne Ragan, eds., *The Festival Circuit* (St-Andrews: St-Andrews Film Studies, 2009).

¹⁸ Loredana Latil, *Le Festival de Cannes sur la scène internationale* (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2005); Kötzing and Moine, *Cultural Transfer*; Pisu, *Il XX secolo*; Caroline Moine, *Screened Encounters: The Leipzig Documentary Film Festival, 1955–1990* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018); Heide Fehrenbach, ‘The Berlin International Film Festival: Between Cold War Politics and Postwar Reorientation’, and Jindřiška Bláhová, ‘Political Significance of a Butcher in Love: The 1956 Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, *Marty* (1955) and the Restoration of Contact between Hollywood and Czechoslovakia during the Cold War’, *Studies in European Cinema*, 17, 2 (2020), 81–96 and 97–112.

¹⁹ Sandro Bianconi and Freddy Buache, eds., *Dal I al XX Festival del film, Locarno 1946–1967* (Locarno: Armando Dadò, 1967); Martin Schlappner et al., *Festival internazionale del film Locarno: 40 anni. Sei saggi critici* (Locarno: Festival del film, 1987); Roland Cosandey et al., *Festival internazionale del film Locarno: 40 anni. Chronique et filmographie* (Locarno: Festival del film, 1988); *10 ans 1988–1997: chronique et filmographie* (Locarno: Festival del film, 1997); Dalmazio Ambrosioni, *Locarno città del cinema: i cinquant’anni del Festival internazionale del film* (Locarno: Armando Dadò, 1998); Domenico Lucchini and Gregory Catella, *Un festival libero: una storia del cinema attraverso i film del Festival di Locarno* (Milano: Il Castoro, 2004); Lorenzo Buccella, ed., *Forever Young: Festival del Film Locarno 1997–2012* (Locarno: Festival del film, 2014); *Sguardi oltre il cinema. Critical Essays on the Locarno Film Festival* (Locarno: Armando Dadò, 2022); Lorenzo Buccella, *Locarno on/ Locarno off. Storia e storie del Film Festival* (Bellinzona: Casagrande, 2022).

'discoveries' made in Locarno and dealing only superficially with its most sensitive periods, remain essential to our understanding of the festival's evolution. Among those, the work of art historian and film critic Guglielmo Volonterio, who argued in 1977 that the LFF had to fight in order to make itself an 'autonomous space', remains particularly relevant.²⁰ Unarguably, the festival's history, which was initially conceived as a tourist attraction, was less calm and linear than its reputation would suggest,²¹ as Lucia Leoni demonstrated in her Master's thesis.²²

In order to understand the political and ideological factors that shaped the festival during its first twenty years, this article is based on research conducted in several archives: Locarno's internal documents, held at the *Archivio di Stato* of the Canton of Ticino (Bellinzona); those of the associations of distributors and cinema operators in Switzerland, located at the Swiss Film Archive (*Cinémathèque suisse*, Penthaaz); and those of the various federal entities in charge of cinematographic issues (Film Chamber, Film Section, Film Commission), accessible at the Swiss Federal Archives (Bern). In addition, this analysis makes use of the insights provided on the festival by the general and film press, collected in Swiss and foreign specialised libraries.

The following pages will focus on the first two decades of the LFF, from its foundation in 1946 until the creation of a 'national' selection committee in 1962, a period during which there was no legal basis for the Confederation to intervene in film affairs.²³ The next section will examine why the Locarno Festival's leaders became interested in Eastern European movies more pragmatically than ideologically. The section after that will explain how their ambitions were hindered because of their delicate relations with the federal authorities. Finally, the last section will detail why the solution chosen to put an end to this political crisis was interpreted as an ideological tutelage.

Seeking Recognition

Set in the park of a nineteenth-century palace, the Locarno Festival was primarily conceived as a tourist attraction. During its first ten years, its programme was based almost exclusively on works that were commercially exploited in Switzerland, which led Swiss and foreign journalists to refer to it as a 'commercial exhibition' at the service of cinema operators.²⁴ Some film critics, regretting the predominance of 'commercial' movies in Locarno,²⁵ recommended (in vain) that the LFF should set up a selection committee composed of 'jurors not linked by any interest to the film industry and trade'.²⁶ Decried, like Cannes, as an 'annual competition-market',²⁷ the Swiss festival was criticised by cinephiles, who described its dependence on distributors as 'its weak point'.²⁸ In fact, among the other international film festivals at that time, few were not primarily motivated by economic and/or political concerns.²⁹

²⁰ Guglielmo Volonterio, *Per uno spazio autonomo: Festival internazionale del film di Locarno* (Locarno: Festival del film, 1977) and Guglielmo Volonterio, *Dalle suggestioni del Parco alla grande festa del cinema: storia del Festival di Locarno, 1946–1997* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1997).

²¹ Conflicts between the LFF and the film industry have been particularly important in the festival's trajectory. Unfortunately, the above-mentioned publications do not provide any in-depth analysis of these episodes. On these issues, see Cyril Cordoba, 'From the Grand Hotel to the Piazza Grande: The Locarno Film Festival's Quest for Legitimacy (1946–77)', *Journal of Festive Studies*, forthcoming.

²² Lucia Leoni, 'Le Festival international du film de Locarno: entre culture internationale et politique nationale (1946–1971)', MA Thesis, University of Fribourg, 2020.

²³ The first constitutional article on cinema was accepted by popular vote in 1958 but came into effect in 1963.

²⁴ Jean Thévenot, 'Locarno a inauguré la saison des festivals', *L'Ecran français*, 159 (1948), 4.

²⁵ BD, 'Film-Locarno 1950', *Der Bund* (31 July 1950), 7.

²⁶ Jean Nicollier, 'Après le Festival de Locarno 1948', *Gazette de Lausanne* (14 Aug. 1948), 9.

²⁷ Claude Gorretta, 'Film de demain? Quelques aspects du IIe Festival international', *Journal de Genève*, (22 Oct. 1954), 9.

²⁸ Jean Thévenot, "'La Ferme des sept péchés" l'emporte à Locarno', *L'Ecran français*, 21, 3 (1949), 4.

²⁹ Colin McArthur, 'The Rises and Falls of the Edinburgh International Film Festival', in *From Limelight to Satellite: A Scottish Film Book* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 91–102; Forsyth Hardy, *Slightly Mad and Full of Dangers: The Story of the Edinburgh Film Festival* (Edinburgh: Ramsay Head Press, 1992); Stevens, 'Enthusiastic Amateurs', 22–39.

Yet, in Locarno, numerous observers particularly stressed ‘the need for the festival to emancipate itself from the film rental companies on which it has depended until now and which often sent the films they wanted to release [without regard to] artistic or moral value’.³⁰ Perceived as a film industry’s *entre-soi*, entirely ruled by private interests, Locarno seemed to lack a cultural dimension that a public patronage could have granted it.

In order to escape the ‘tutelage’ of Swiss distributors and improve the quality of the programme, the director of the festival sought to deal directly with foreign countries, bypassing the intermediary of ‘film rental companies’.³¹ Hoping to gain leeway in the selection of movies, the festival sent invitations directly to foreign legations in Bern and to production companies and professional organisations such as the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA). By comparison, the Venice and Cannes festivals invited nations with which their governments had diplomatic relations via official channels, and only addressed producers directly when it was not the case. In Switzerland, the Locarno Festival, which did not benefit from any recognition from the state, could not collaborate with Foreign Affairs. When the LFF asked the government to send invitations via diplomatic channels, the Federal Council refused on the grounds that it would be an ‘unusual’ procedure³² that risked giving the event a ‘more or less official’ character.³³ Still perceived as a provincial event without cultural dimension, the festival could not expect any help from Bern.

In the early 1950s, this lack of support was particularly problematic because of the categorisation system developed by the International Federation of Film Producers’ Associations (FIAPF), the ‘king-maker of the international film festival circuit’.³⁴ Aimed at limiting the growing number of film competitions around the world, this classification distinguished between international competitive festivals (A), international non-competitive festivals (B), specialised competitive festivals (C) and national non-competitive festivals (D).³⁵ Among the requirements of the FIAPF to join Venice and Cannes in the prestigious A category was the transmission of invitations via state channels.³⁶ Therefore, given that ‘the State happily ignore[d]’ the Locarno Festival,³⁷ the LFF, initially admitted in the B category in 1952, was downgraded by the FIAPF to the D category in 1953.³⁸

³⁰ AV, ‘Billet du Tessin’, *La Liberté* (7 Aug. 1950), 4.

³¹ Bolla to Calgari, 14 May 1954, Archivio di Stato del Cantone Ticino (ASCT), festival internazionale del film di Locarno (3.1.15), C6.

³² FDHA to Federal Political Department (Foreign Affairs), 29 Mar. 1951, Swiss Federal Archives (SFA), E2001E#1967/113#16392*.

³³ FPD to the Department of Public Education of Ticino, 8 Feb. 1951, ASCT, 3.1.15, C6.

³⁴ Dorota Ostrowska, ‘Producers’ Playground: The British Film Producers Association and International Film Festivals in the Post-war Period’, *Studies in European Cinema*, 17, 2 (2020), 130. Founded in 1933 and revived in 1948, the FIAPF promoted the free circulation of films around the world, especially since the MPAA became a member in 1951. Film festivals initially appeared as good instruments for this purpose, but their proliferation led the federation to establish a categorisation system to limit the number of events allowed to hold previews and competitions. Caroline Moine, ‘La Fédération internationale des associations de producteurs de films: un acteur controversé de la promotion du cinéma après 1945’, *Le Mouvement social*, 2, 243 (2013), 91–103.

³⁵ The FIAPF members (national associations of film producers) were asked to boycott events that did not respect the rules set by the federation, thus depriving festivals of their main resource, i.e. films.

³⁶ A and B festivals were required to integrate a FIAPF representative into their organising committee ‘in order to ensure a control from the producers over the selection and the programming’. Caroline Moine, ‘La strategia europea della Fiapf durante la Guerra fredda: i produttori, arbitri dei festival internazionali di cinema?’, in Stefano Pisu and Pierre Sorlin, eds., *La storia internazionale e il cinema. Reti, scambi e transfer nel 1900*, *Cinema e Storia. Rivista di studi interdisciplinari* (Roma: Rubbettino, 2017), 155.

³⁷ Jean Nicollier, ‘Les débuts du VII^{me} festival de Locarno’, *Gazette de Lausanne* (7 July 1953), 1.

³⁸ The struggle for a high-level ranking was a shared concern among small film festivals. In 1953, San Sebastian, São Paulo and Mar del Plata were admitted to the B category while Punta del Este was ranked D. Stefano Pisu, ‘A Transnational Love-Hate Relationship: the FIAPF and the Venice and Cannes Film Festivals (1950–1970)’, in Tricia Jenkins, ed., *International Film Festivals. Contemporary Cultures and History Beyond Venice and Cannes* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 109–31.

Depreciated at the national and the international levels, Locarno then sought a way to improve its reputation.³⁹ As a critic from the *Cahiers du cinéma* summarised: ‘threatened by a lack of films . . . the festival management was well advised to think of appealing directly to the countries of the Iron Curtain’.⁴⁰ Indeed, until the early 1950s, the number of socialist countries represented in Locarno was rather small. In 1949 and 1950, none of them was in the main programme (see Figure 2). The situation was similar in Venice and Cannes: the Soviet Union participated in the first post-war editions of both festivals, but Eastern European participation only became consistent in the early 1950s.⁴¹ In these festivals, this situation was due to the proportional selection system – allowing the largest film industries to send more films than socialist and Third World countries – and the disqualification of movies that offended the national sentiments of other states, which excluded vehement propaganda features. Because of the commercial and diplomatic issues raised by these dispositions (non-existent in Locarno), they were abandoned in the early and mid-1950s, allowing an increased participation of Eastern European countries and the appeasement of diplomatic tensions. By contrast, at the LFF it was the nomination in 1953 of the journalist Vinicio Beretta (1920–72) as secretary of the festival which marked ‘a decisive and courageous, although extremely cautious’ turn towards Eastern Europe.⁴²

An East Wind Blowing Over Locarno?

Born and raised in the Swiss town of Lugano, Beretta, an Italian citizen, was a respected film critic and a founding member of the Swiss Association of Film Critics. He was the host of the official ceremonies since the LFF’s creation, and soon became the festival’s secretary (1953), the president of the festival’s selection committee (1958) and finally the festival’s director (1960–5).⁴³ As the president of the International Federation of Film Critics (FIPRESCI) since 1959, he served as a jury member and jury president in festivals such as Venice, Mexico, Valladolid, Krakow and Mamaia. Beyond his left-wing convictions, he entertained contacts with representatives of Eastern European countries and travelled in socialist regimes for professional reasons.⁴⁴ The Swiss Federal Police, which had placed him under surveillance since the 1950s, rightfully concluded that he was not a communist.⁴⁵

In the early 1950s, under the impetus of Beretta, who became the very soul of the event, contacts were developed with studios and organisations in charge of exporting films such as Sovexportfilm (USSR), Deutsche Film (German Democratic Republic) or Hungarofilm (Hungary). Beretta frequently met with Eastern European delegations and with the diplomatic personnel of socialist countries in Bern to discuss and watch their films. For example, in 1955, with his help, the LFF’s director invited the People’s Republic of China to take part in the festival ‘to show to what degree [their] cinematographic production [had] evolved lately [by sending] a spectacular film of a high artistic level’.⁴⁶ Beretta was also in contact with Max Adolf Stierli, a Swiss entrepreneur involved in the import-export business with Czechoslovakia who was also the representative of *Československý státní film* (Czechoslovak State Film) in Switzerland.⁴⁷ Individuals like Stierli, not necessarily motivated by

³⁹ As one British critic put it: ‘There was no question of asking the Federal Government for help . . . and so it happened that the Locarno Festival . . . developed a style of its own’. Francis Koval, ‘Locarno Festival’, *Sight and Sound*, 19, 7 (Nov. 1950), 272.

⁴⁰ Pierre Michaut, ‘À Berlin et à Locarno: quelques films’, *Les Cahiers du cinéma*, 38 (1954), 33.

⁴¹ Gallinari, ‘L’URSS au festival de Cannes’; Latil, *Le Festival de Cannes*; Pisu, *Stalin a Venezia*.

⁴² Domenico Lucchini, ‘Introduction’, in Cosandey, *40 ans*, 16.

⁴³ While directors were the active managers of the festival (giving it a specific orientation depending on their artistic vision), presidents were generally consensual, respected personalities not specialised in cinema (a kind of moral caution with representational but also concrete operational functions).

⁴⁴ Report from the cantonal police of Valais, 5 May 1972, AFS, E4320C#1995/391#1456.

⁴⁵ Report from the cantonal police of Ticino, 14 Dec. 1961, AFS, E4320C#1995/391#1456.

⁴⁶ Bolla to the Chinese Embassy, 12 Mar. 1955, ASCT, 3.1.15, C5.

⁴⁷ SFA, E7110#1967/32#40235*; E4320B#1990/266#4884*; E2200.37-02#1967/102#307*.

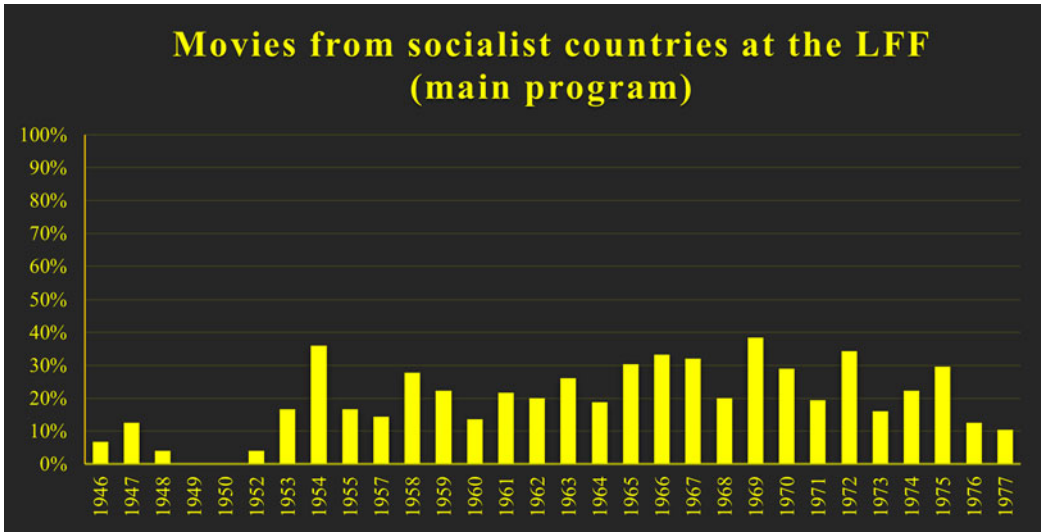


Figure 1. The nomination of Vinicio Beretta as the festival's secretary (1953) was a milestone in the LFF's history. From then onward, feature films from socialist countries – primarily from Eastern Europe – were always present in Locarno. It should, however, be noted that they rarely represented more than 30 per cent of the main programme. (NB: the festival did not take place in 1951 and 1956.)

ideological beliefs, served as intermediaries between the LFF and socialist regimes and gave Beretta advice about which movies were 'real festival film[s]' (Figures 1 and 2).⁴⁸

The fact that the LFF did more than just send out official invitations to these countries demonstrated that it was particularly determined to obtain quality films – and not just pure propaganda – from the other side of the Iron Curtain, 'in an effort to raise the level of the festival'.⁴⁹ Socialist countries, whose main cinematographic 'showcase' for fiction films was the Karlovy Vary festival in Czechoslovakia,⁵⁰ quickly understood that Locarno could help them access Western audiences. While the press noted the improvement of the Swiss festival thanks to 'the fact that [in Eastern European countries] only state organizations [chose] – well – the films to be shown in the West',⁵¹ the LFF gained the reputation of being 'the first festival to present . . . some productions from behind the Iron Curtain'.⁵² This statement was not strictly accurate, because socialist countries already took part – intermittently – in other festivals such as Venice and Cannes very early on.⁵³ Nevertheless, from then onward, at least one Eastern European movie received an award each year in Locarno.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Stierli to the LFF, 11.02.1955, ASCT, 3.1.15, C5.

⁴⁹ Bolla to Stierli, 1 Feb. 1955, ACST, 3.1.15, C5. Despite our research in the festival's archives, we could not find documents about the selection process or the deliberation of the selection commission.

⁵⁰ Bláhová, 'Political Significance of a Butcher in Love'.

⁵¹ Freddy Landry, 'Bilan du festival de Locarno', *Feuille d'Avis de Neuchâtel* (24 July 1959), 6. This comment illustrated the singular situation of Locarno, because at the same moment film festivals such as Venice and Cannes tried precisely to obtain more autonomy and independence from national producers associations during the selection process of movies, against the FIAPF's will. Pisu, *Il XX secolo*.

⁵² Joachim Robin, 'Notes sur Locarno', *Les Cahiers du cinéma*, 26 (1953), 41.

⁵³ The Soviet Union, considering film festivals as battlefields of a 'cinematic Cold War', exerted political pressure on Cannes and Venice in 1947, which led to the awarding of a Grand Prize to the Czechoslovak film *The Strike* (*Siréna*) and of a best female acting prize for Lyubov Orlova in the Soviet film *Springtime* (*Vesna*) in Venice. Tony Shaw, *Cinematic Cold War: The American and Soviet Struggle for Hearts and Minds* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010).

⁵⁴ It should be noted that until 1958 there was no official competition, and thus no official jury at the LFF (except in 1949) because of the rules imposed by the FIAPF. Therefore, all the prizes mentioned in the following pages were awarded by

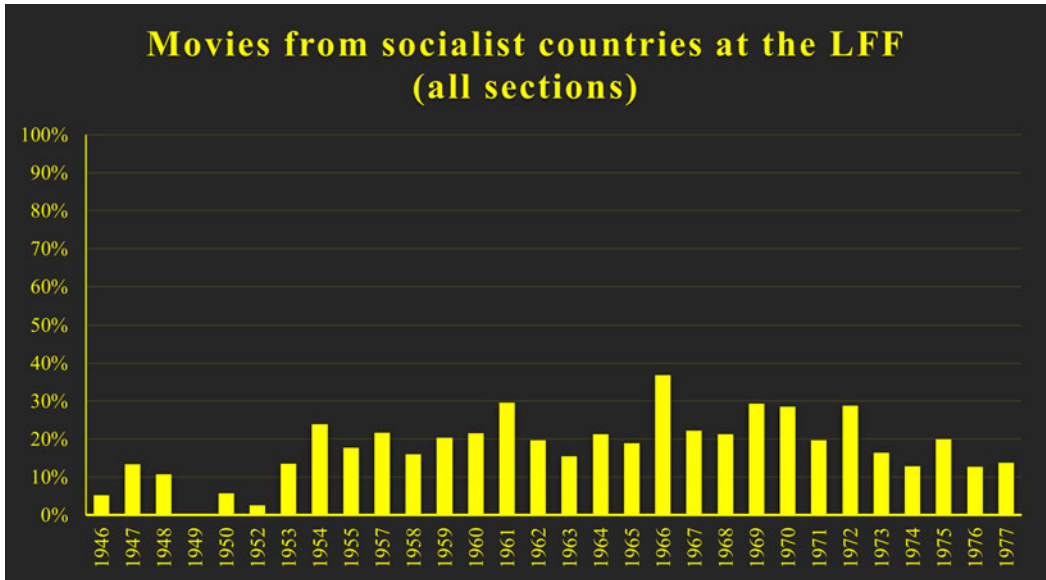


Figure 2. If we consider all the festival's sections throughout the years, the percentage of films from socialist countries selected in Locarno appears to be relatively constant ($\approx 21\%$) since 1953 (with a slight increase to 26% between 1966–71 and a slight decrease to 17% between 1972 and 1977). This excluded the retrospective and tribute sections, which were dedicated to Western filmmakers or Western countries, except in 1964 (Andrzej Munk), 1965 (Jiří Trnka) and 1967 (Soviet cinema). (NB: this graphic does not depict everything that was screened in Locarno but only the movies that appeared in the official programme. It is worth mentioning that a couple of sub-sections, such as the 1949 documentary section, could not be confirmed and may have contained movies from socialist countries.)

During these years, Locarno contributed to the international recognition of Czech filmmaker Jiří Trnka (1912–69), whose puppet animation movies such as *Old Czech Legends* (*Staré pověsti české*), *Prince Bajaja* and *The Emperor's Nightingale* (*Císařův slavík*) received awards at the LFF between 1953 and 1955. Trnka's work, based on fairy tales and folklore, was not particularly appreciated by the Czech authorities, not because it was overtly dissident but because its nostalgic and lyrical celebration of rural tradition did not really fit within the canons of socialist realism.⁵⁵ Animation was nevertheless actively used as a promotional instrument by Czechoslovakia to stand out in international film festivals. In Switzerland, film critics praised these movies, which they deemed technically virtuosic, sensitive and poetic, without really understanding the political signification of their allegorical and innovative style when 'formalism' was severely criticised within the Eastern bloc.⁵⁶

Trnka's work contrasted with more patriotic and grandiose features such as the Soviet movie *Composer Glinka* – a typical example of the biographical films produced under Stalin to praise Russia's great men – which was also given an award in Locarno in 1953. It is worth noting that the LFF was the first Western festival for fiction films to screen movies from East Germany in 1954 and 1955 (even if Switzerland did not establish diplomatic relations with East Germany before 1972),⁵⁷ most notably Wolfgang Staudte's *Rotation* and Slávan Dudow's *Stärker als die Nacht*. If both these movies about Nazism, awarded in Locarno, were parts of the country's agenda of rebuilding

one or several unofficial juries composed of regional (1946, 1953, 1955, 1957), national (1947–8, 1953–4, 1957) or international (1950, 1952–4) film critics. All of them awarded films from socialist countries, except in 1957.

⁵⁵ Adam Whybray, *The Art of Czech Animation. A History of Political Dissent and Allegory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

⁵⁶ According to David W. Paul, Trnka 'showed the way to cinematic innovation in the midst of the Stalin era'. Quoted in Peter Hames, *Czech and Slovak Cinema: Theme and Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 195.

⁵⁷ There were also East German films at the Mannheim documentary festival in 1954 and at the Oberhausen short film festival in 1955 but, in Cannes, East Germany was denied participation in 1956 for diplomatic reasons before being

a new socialist society on the basis of anti-fascism, *Rotation* proposed an undoubtedly more nuanced take on the matter,⁵⁸ which led some Swiss film critics to see it as a surprisingly anti-totalitarian and possibly transgressive allegory of socialism in Eastern Europe.⁵⁹

Despite their diversity and their cinematographic qualities, the presence of Eastern European movies in Locarno incited strong reactions in German-speaking Switzerland, a particularly fertile ground for anti-communism, where journalists wrote that the level of the competition had dropped significantly.⁶⁰ The latter blamed this so-called decline on the growing presence of films coming from the other side of the Iron Curtain, which they generally considered as propaganda products without any artistic value. Because any form of cultural exchange with the Eastern bloc was perceived in Switzerland as a strategy to keep the population's vigilance at bay, and because pacifist rhetoric was automatically equated with communist propaganda,⁶¹ Locarno was accused by the Swiss German media of playing into the hands of peaceful coexistence.

Compared by its opponents to the Berlinale, which was originally conceived as a political project to promote the capitalist system to East Berliners and Eastern European audiences, the LFF was portrayed as an open door to the West for socialist propaganda. These accusations resonated with the growing concern of the authorities about the movies exported to Switzerland by socialist countries via diplomatic courier.⁶² It also echoed the fears of the Swiss Film Chamber, worried about the supposed presence of 'crypto-communists' at the head of the newly created *Cinémathèque suisse*,⁶³ whose director Freddy Buache (a self-defined anti-Stalinist and anti-capitalist in close relations with Eastern European countries for his professional activities) began to collaborate with the Locarno Festival to organise retrospectives.⁶⁴

In the early 1950s, the political climate in Switzerland was particularly hostile to the LFF's opening to productions from socialist countries. This decision, which had been taken to improve the festival's artistic reputation, was interpreted as an ideological choice, supposedly betraying the political sensibilities of the organisers. In fact, the executive committee of the festival was predominantly composed of members of the Christian Social Conservative Party (*Partito Conservatore Cristiano Sociale*; PCCS), liberals, or radicals from the local bourgeoisie, and not at all of socialists, let alone communists. All of them agreed that an international festival should reflect the whole cinematographic production and serve as a meeting point across political divides, if it wanted to gain prestige.⁶⁵ But these

unofficially invited in 1957. Andreas Kötzing, *Kultur- und Filmpolitik im Kalten Krieg. Die Filmfestivals von Leipzig und Oberhausen in gesamtdeutscher Perspektive 1954–1972* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2013); Latil, *Le Festival de Cannes*.

⁵⁸ Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, [2002] 2008); Ulrike Weckel, 'The Mitläufer in Two German Postwar Films: Representation and Critical Reception', *History and Memory*, 15, 2 (2003), 64–93; Sebastian Heiduschke, *East German Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Jaimie Kicklighter, 'The Third Reich in East German Film: Defa, Memory, and the Foundational Narrative of the German Democratic Republic', MA Thesis, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2013.

⁵⁹ By contrast, in 1957, another East German film, *Lissy*, an 'avowed propaganda movie' about the rise of national socialism, was widely criticised by the Swiss press 'as being at the service of a political doctrine' and described as an 'artless [and] pathetic effort of East propaganda [that did] not belong in an official festival programme'. Jean Nicollier, 'Le 10^{ème} Festival International de Locarno', *Gazette de Lausanne* (10 July 1957), 4; Str, 'Filmische Koexistenz in der Schweiz?', *Der Bund* (30 July 1957), 4; Hr, 'Internationales Filmfestival in Locarno', *NZZ* (12 July 1957), 3.

⁶⁰ In 1954, when a record 40% of the programme was composed of Eastern European movies, these reactions were particularly intense. Some defenders of the festival, such as Freddy Landry (a film critic who held several positions at the festival in the 1960s), proved that there were actually fewer films from socialist countries in Locarno than in Cannes and San Sebastian, and about the same number as in Venice.

⁶¹ Thomas Buomberger, *Die Schweiz im Kalten Krieg, 1945–1990* (Baden: Hier und Jetzt, 2017); Hadrien Buclin, *Les intellectuels de gauche: critique et consensus dans la Suisse d'après-guerre (1945–1968)* (Lausanne: Antipodes, 2019).

⁶² Attorney General memo, 10 July 1951, SFA, E4320B#1974/47#347*.

⁶³ Minutes of the Swiss Film Chamber, 28 May and 10 Dec. 1953, Archives of the *Cinémathèque suisse* (Cin), SLV (CSL11), 12.

⁶⁴ Andrea Rusconi, "'La Cinémathèque c'est moi!'" Freddy Buache e la Cinémathèque suisse (1948–1975): progetti culturali e dibattiti ideologici', MA Thesis, University of Fribourg, 2007; Freddy Buache, *Derrière l'écran: entretiens avec Christophe Gallaz et Jean-François Amiguet* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 2009).

⁶⁵ Official review of the festival, 1953, ASCT, 3.1.15, S3.

arguments did not find favour with the Swiss authorities, whose mistrust was redoubled by the criticisms addressed to Locarno by the film industry in the second part of the 1950s.

Political Resistances

In 1954, after years of prevarication, the Swiss government recognised the LFF as a national event. This was Bern's reaction to the downgrading of the festival by the FIAPF from the B to the D category a year before (a 'punishment' from the international federation for its lack of public support at the national level), which was perceived as a loss of prestige for Switzerland.⁶⁶ However, the Federal Council explained that this recognition did not give any right to financial support, and in order to make clear that Locarno was not a state-sponsored event, Foreign Affairs still refused to invite foreign countries via diplomatic channels. In concrete terms, the recognition primarily allowed the festival to import films outside of the quotas imposed on Swiss distributors.⁶⁷ This meant that the LFF's programme would no longer be made up mainly of films that were commercially exploited in the country but also of movies imported especially for the competition, which would not necessarily have been selected according to profitability criteria. This allowed the organisers to reduce the importance of major exporting countries (the United States, France, Italy, the United Kingdom and West Germany)⁶⁸ and to open up to other cinematographies, whose audience had until then been limited to film clubs.

Despite the recognition of the LFF by the government, the Swiss German press continued to complain about the festival, particularly in 1955, when the participants from Eastern Europe received more prizes than their Western counterparts.⁶⁹ Similarly, in non-state-funded festivals such as Edinburgh, Melbourne and especially Oberhausen,⁷⁰ the introduction of socialist movies also led to suspicion from the government and accusations of 'philo-communism' or 'crypto-communism'.⁷¹ Comparatively, the awards received by Eastern European films in state-sponsored festivals like Cannes were far less controversial since they were more diplomatically motivated.⁷²

In Switzerland, the negative reactions from the German-speaking press could not really be counter-balanced by the comments of foreign specialised magazines. Those portrayed the LFF as 'the most open, the freest, the most eclectic [of festivals] because of Switzerland's tradition of neutrality [which exempted it] from any concern for balance and diplomatic dosage'.⁷³ Similarly, representing themselves as 'the first to present films from the other side of the Iron Curtain',⁷⁴ the organisers of the Locarno Festival, now officially recognised by the state, used Swiss neutrality as an argument for their choices:

⁶⁶ Federal Council decision, 1 June 1954, SFA, E2001E#1970/1#1112*.

⁶⁷ Since 1938, each Swiss distributor had a quota of foreign films that it could import each year (see notes 11–12). This measure, which was originally intended to fight against the massive importation of films from the Third Reich, was extended after the Second World War to limit the domination of the Swiss film market by the major producing countries (the United States, France, Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom). LFF's memo, 1956, ASCT, 3.1.15, C5.

⁶⁸ Between 1946 and 1950, films coming from these countries accounted for 81% of the main programme. This share decreased to 66% between 1952 and 1957, 52% between 1958 and 1962 and 36% between 1963 and 1965.

⁶⁹ That year, two juries of local film critics awarded two prizes to *Stärker als die Nacht* (East Germany), two prizes to *The Emperor's Nightingale* (Czechoslovakia) and two prizes to *Carmen Jones* (United States). While the composition of these juries is unknown, it is worth noting that one of them was put in place by the Italian Marxist critic Guido Aristarco from the film magazine *Cinema Nuovo*.

⁷⁰ In the late 1950s, the West German festival of Oberhausen adopted the motto *Weg zum Nachbarn* (Way to the Neighbour, i.e. East Germany) and followed a kind of cinematographic *Ostpolitik* avant la lettre.

⁷¹ Hardy, *Slightly Mad*; Stevens, 'Enthusiastic Amateurs'.

⁷² Latil, *Le Festival de Cannes*.

⁷³ Pierre Michaut, 'De Berlin à Locarno', *Les Cahiers du cinéma*, 51 (1955), 30. Swiss neutrality was also emphasised by the Italian magazine *Cinema nuovo*, which compared Locarno to 'a small Geneva of cinema'. Guido Aristarco, 'Deutschland', *Cinema nuovo*, 64 (10 Aug. 1955), 64.

⁷⁴ LFF memo, 30 Dec. 1954, ASCT, 3.1.15, V4.

Switzerland is both a neutral country and a country of absolute freedom, and . . . our authorities are opposed to any form of discrimination, particularly with regard to films produced by countries that are not, for reasons unknown to us, at Cannes or Venice, as long as these films do not shamelessly promote ideas or political conceptions contrary to ours.⁷⁵

However, faced with an increasing number of attacks from German-speaking Switzerland, the festival privately made a mea culpa to the conservative Federal Councillor Philipp Etter (often portrayed as the herald of spiritual defence) to avoid losing the official recognition of the government. The president of the LFF apologised for having programmed too many films 'that did not correspond at all to the spirit, to the intellectual need, to the Swiss conceptions', and proposed to create an award for the film that best corresponded 'to our spiritual conceptions [and] to our democracy'.⁷⁶ This attitude contrasted with that of the Oberhausen film festival, which decided to keep inviting socialist countries (and especially East Germany) despite the decision of the government to not support it financially.⁷⁷ The president of the LFF even suggested forming a selection committee placed under the patronage of the Swiss Film Chamber, but the latter refused, arguing that this task did not fall within the competence of a federal entity.⁷⁸ However, a few months later, Foreign Affairs had no qualms recommending that the festival take into account 'certain political considerations' when inviting foreign countries.⁷⁹

Political pressure on the LFF became more pronounced after the crushing of the Budapest Uprising by the Soviet Union in November 1956, when a violent wave of anti-communism flooded Switzerland. In an article entitled 'No Communist Films in Switzerland', the association of cinema operators (SLV) asked its members not to show a single metre of film reel coming from the other side of the Iron Curtain and left the LFF's patronage committee.⁸⁰ Anti-communists were particularly annoyed that, as was the tradition in Locarno, the anthem of participating countries was played during the screenings in the park of the Grand Hotel, and that their flag was raised during this ceremony. National Councillor Kurt Bücher (former president of the Radical Party of Lucerne) even reproached the government for having officially recognised the LFF, since he considered it as a mere showcase for communist propaganda. Similarly, in Germany, the Federal Minister of the Interior (Hermann Höcherl, from the Christian Social Union in Bavaria: *Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern*; CSU) publicly denounced Oberhausen as a 'red festival', even if most Eastern European movies screened there were more self-critical than dogmatic.⁸¹

Faced with such protests, the Film Section publicly reiterated that Locarno, as an event of national significance, could not refuse films from countries with whom the Confederation maintained diplomatic relations. The Social Democrat Federal Councillor Hans-Peter Tschudi (head of Home Affairs) even explained that

an international film festival [should] give the possibility to see new films and films of any origin for comparison purposes. It is not possible to exclude a whole part of the [cinematographic]

⁷⁵ LFF to FIAPF, 11 July 1955, ASCT, 3.1.15, C6.

⁷⁶ LFF memo to Etter, 23 Aug. 1955, ASCT, 3.1.15, C6.

⁷⁷ It is worth noting that the Oberhausen festival could nevertheless count on the support of the Social Democrat city council. Kötzing, *Kultur- und Filmpolitik*.

⁷⁸ This 'national selection committee [would have been] made up of experts in the field, men of letters, representatives of the FIAPF, film distributors, etc. . . . appointed by the Swiss Film Chamber'. The latter explained that 'the decisions of such a commission would undoubtedly be subjected to strong criticism. This in itself would not be a reason for rejection. However, the Office believes that [the Chamber], which cannot count on many sympathies anyway, cannot take on this extremely difficult task'. Minutes of the Swiss Film Chamber, 26 Jan. 1956, Cin, CSL11, 12.

⁷⁹ LFF to FIAPF, 30 Mar. 1956, ASCT, 3.1.15, C5.

⁸⁰ 'Keine kommunistischen Filme in der Schweiz', *Schweizer Film Suisse*, 11 (1956), 5. The *Schweizerischer Lichtspieltheater Verband* (SLV), representing Swiss cinema operators, had an agreement with Swiss distributors (*Schweizerischer Filmverleiher Verband*, FVV), stipulating that SLV members could only rent films from FVV members and vice versa. Because of such measures, the Swiss film market was highly cartelised.

⁸¹ Kötzing, *Kultur- und Filmpolitik*.

production. Eastern movies are also included in the programme of other film festivals. The West also participates in the Karlovy Vary Festival. It is all about a proportionate participation. The organizing committee cannot be blamed for the inclusion of Eastern [European] films.⁸²

However, in internal discussions, Hugo Mauerhofer (head of the Film Section since its creation in 1955), making ‘personal remarks, which he consider[ed] legitimate on the basis of his studies on communism since his student days and on the lectures given by the *Schweizerischer Aufklärungsdienst* [an anti-communist organisation close to the state],⁸³ acknowledged that there was a clear aversion of the Swiss public to films produced by socialist regimes (whatever their content) and that ‘the political attitude of the leaders [of the Locarno Festival] was obvious’.⁸⁴ These increasingly tense debates led the federal police to take an interest in the event, and to monitor every move of the delegations sent by socialist regimes to Locarno.⁸⁵

Competition and Strategies

In the late 1950s, the competition between international film festivals grew significantly, and the LFF lost the privilege of being the first to screen certain Eastern European movies.⁸⁶ Even Francoist and anti-communist Spain, which did not entertain diplomatic relationships with socialist countries, invited them to the festival in San Sebastian (which became an A category festival in 1957).⁸⁷ Consequently, Locarno programmed two literary adaptations from Miguel de Cervantes and Jules Verne – *Don Quixote* (USSR) and *Invention for Destruction* (*Vynález zkázy*) (Czechoslovakia) – only after they were screened in Cannes and Brussels respectively. In 1958, the West German-Polish coproduction *The Eighth Day of the Week* (*Ósmy dzień tygodnia*) was even pulled from Locarno at the last minute in order to be shown in Venice.⁸⁸ Most importantly, the LFF screened the Soviet film *When Cranes Are Flying* (*Letyat zhuravli*) – the most emblematic product of de-Stalinisation and the revival of Eastern European cinema – only after it received the *Palme d’or* in Cannes.

Since the mid-1950s, several national cinematographies (in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary in particular) had gone through a period of intense renewal and creativity. Yet while the Karlovy Vary festival in Czechoslovakia was admitted to the A category by the FIAPF, anti-communism was the only interpretation key for most Swiss German critics and film professionals. When the state Film Chamber organised a screening of *When Cranes Are Flying* for its members who might ‘not have the opportunity to see it in Switzerland for the reasons we know’, several of them interpreted this as a communist propaganda campaign.⁸⁹ In the late 1950s, the relations between Bern and Locarno thus became increasingly tense, especially after Vinicio Beretta became the head of the LFF’s selection committee.

⁸² Minutes of the Swiss Film Chamber, 13 Nov. 1957, Cin, CSL11, 12.

⁸³ Perrig, *Geistige Landesverteidigung*.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* It is worth noting that Mauerhofer was a juror in Cannes 1946 and Venice 1947, when Eastern European movies were awarded.

⁸⁵ SFA, E4329.01C#1996/203*. About political surveillance in Switzerland, see Hans Ulrich Jost and Marc Vuilleumier, eds., *Cent ans de police politique en Suisse: (1889–1989)* (Lausanne: AEHMO/En Bas, 1992); Georg Kreis, ed., *La protection politique de l’État en Suisse: l’évolution de 1935 à 1990* (Bern: Paul Haupt, 1993). About the surveillance of the LFF, see Wäfler, ‘The Surveillance’.

⁸⁶ In 1958, when an official competition was finally introduced in Locarno, no feature film from Eastern European countries was awarded.

⁸⁷ However, this also led to political controversies, and it should be noted that the Soviet Union did not take part in the festival before 1964. Jose Luis Tuduri, *San Sebastián: un Festival, una Historia (1953–1966)* (San Sebastián: Filmoteca Vasca/Euskadiko Filmategia, 1989).

⁸⁸ Ars Jockheck, ‘Möglichkeiten und Grenzen filmischer Zusammenarbeit zwischen den Systemen: Artur Brauner, Aleksander Ford und die deutsch-polnische Spielfilm-Produktion “Der 8. Wochentag” von 1957’, in Lars, *Leinwand*, 203–22.

⁸⁹ Minutes of the Swiss Film Chamber, 18 June 1958, Cin, CSL11, 12.

In 1957, in an attempt to gain more public support, the festival nominated Enrico Franzoni as its president. This conservative politician, mayor of Muralto between 1952 and 1963 and national councillor from 1959 to 1975, was chosen above all for his political network. He conceded:

If the authorities were to officially or unofficially recommend that no film from Eastern European countries should be shown at the Festival, the committee would abide by this wish, although, in the minds of the organisers, the international character of the Festival should not completely exclude productions from beyond the Iron Curtain.⁹⁰

While responding that ‘it [was] not the authorities’ duty to dictate in any way to the Festival committee the attitude to be taken towards the countries of the East’, Mauerhofer nevertheless suggested that members of the Film Chamber should assist the festival in the selection of movies, knowing that several of them considered that ‘films that offend[ed their] sensibilities [were] to be rejected’⁹¹.

Because of a growing distrust from the authorities, the LFF became increasingly cautious in its relations with the East. Despite the FIAPF’s recognition of Locarno as an A category festival in 1959 (the same year as the Moscow film festival),⁹² Vinicio Beretta, feeling that he was living on borrowed time, turned down an invitation to select films in the Soviet Union.⁹³ When he became Locarno’s director a year later, Beretta immediately received warnings from the film industry and the Swiss authorities, asking him ‘to be very careful in the choice of subjects’,⁹⁴ and to exclude films ‘that seem politically dangerous’ by selecting only four or five films from Eastern Europe per year.⁹⁵

According to some people close to the festival, in 1960, political pressure was even exerted on the international jury, which was dissuaded from awarding the Golden Sail (the highest prize) to the Soviet film *Foma Gordeyev* (a hagiographic literary adaptation of Maxim Gorki).⁹⁶ This situation was due to protests from the German-speaking press after the screening of a Cuban short propaganda documentary film in Locarno.⁹⁷ However, the international jury (composed of Freddy Buache, the ‘pope’ of Swiss film criticism Martin Schlappner, the Italian screenwriter Ercole Patti, the American actress Betsy Blair, and presided over by the Austro-American filmmaker Josef von Sternberg) still awarded Silver Sails to *Foma Gordeyev* and to the Czech actress Jana Brejchova for her role in the movie *Higher Principle* (*Vyšší princip*), a story taking place during the Nazi occupation, censored in West Germany, which was awarded by the FIPRESCI in Locarno. As one West German critic reported, ‘in protest against the accumulation of prizes awarded to films and filmmakers from the East, several theatre owners and distributors left the premises and did not attend the closing reception’.⁹⁸ At the end of that

⁹⁰ Minutes of the meeting between the LFF, the Swiss Film Chamber and professional film associations, 10 Apr. 1959, Cin, ACSR (CSL2), F10.

⁹¹ Minutes of the Swiss Film Chamber, 13 Nov. 1957, Cin, CSL11, 12.

⁹² In order to limit the number of film festivals in the Eastern bloc, the FIAPF instructed Karlovy Vary and Moscow to be held alternatively biennially.

⁹³ Beretta to Franzoni, 02 et 19 Aug. 1959, ASCT, 3.1.15, V7.

⁹⁴ Minutes of the Swiss Film Chamber, 7 June 1960, Cin, CSL11, 12.

⁹⁵ Beretta to Mauerhofer, 10 June 1960, ASCT, 3.1.15, V7.

⁹⁶ According to Freddy Landry, the ‘German-speaking Swiss circles began to accuse the Locarno Festival of “selling out to the East” and threatened to launch a vigorous press campaign against it . . . The jury knew this and – freely – took it into account’. ‘Que faut-il penser du palmarès du XIII^e Festival de Locarno?’, *Feuille d’Avis de Neuchâtel* (12 Aug. 1960), 10. This testimony is similar to that of Freddy Buache in *Derrière l’écran*, and the French film critic Colette Borde in the film magazine *Cinema*. The Golden Sail was eventually awarded to Mauro Bolognini’s *Il Bell’Antonio*.

⁹⁷ This movie, titled *La Vivienda*, was produced by the Rebel Army’s Division of Culture and dealt with the nationalisation of housing. In 1960, Cuban films (including *La Vivienda*) received five international awards in festivals. In December, Beretta thus travelled to Cuba to learn more about the country’s nascent cinematography. Michael Chanan, *Cuban Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 130–1; ‘Vinicio Beretta parla alla Cineteca italiana sul cinema di Cuba’, *Libera Stampa* (14 Mar. 1967), 2.

⁹⁸ Jürg Bär, ‘Locarno: Goldenes Segel an Italien’, *Film Echo*, 62 (3 Aug. 1960), 1011.

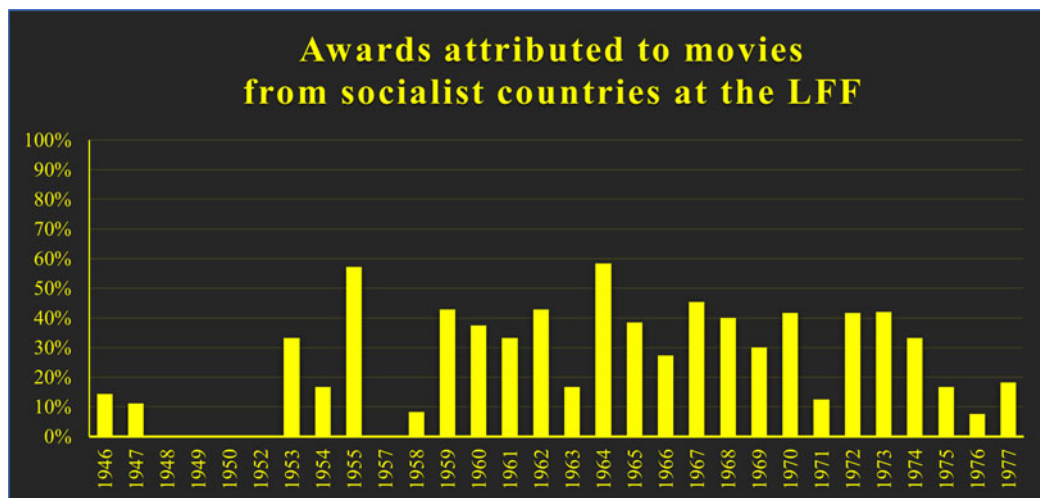


Figure 3. From 1953 until the early 1970s, the percentage of awards given to movies from socialist countries in Locarno was seemingly superior to that of their presence in the programme. This percentage did not decrease after the establishment of a 'national' selection committee in 1962, except in 1963, when the number of films from socialist countries in Locarno (nine) was the lowest since 1952. (NB: until 1963 no socialist country was represented in the international jury. From then onward, there was always one (and sometimes two) Eastern European jurors, even after Beretta's departure, except between 1966 and 1968, when the international jury was replaced by a youth jury.)

festival, the organisers, anxious that they had upset the Swiss government, worriedly asked the Film Section if they had acted with sufficient parsimony towards socialist countries (Figure 3).⁹⁹

Despite these tensions, by the early 1960s international critics praised the high quality of Locarno's programme. As director Shirley Clarke explained to the French newspaper *Le Monde*, 'the great advantage of Locarno over other international festivals was that it was the only one where the organisers chose the films to be shown without the producing countries being able to impose their choice'.¹⁰⁰ This situation was possible thanks to the in-between position of the festival: officially recognised by the Confederation (which allowed it not to be totally dependent on Swiss distributors) but not formally sponsored or supported by the authorities (which would have obliged it to take diplomatic criteria into consideration).¹⁰¹

Locarno's increasingly good reputation was also a consequence of the collaboration between Vinicio Beretta and Freddy Buache (1924–2019).¹⁰² The latter had been travelling to Eastern European countries since 1955 to develop contacts with film libraries and organise events dedicated to various national cinemas for the *Cinémathèque suisse* in Lausanne. In addition to organising retrospectives in Locarno that were unanimously praised (even by German-speaking journalists) well before other festivals started to do so, their friendship facilitated the selection at the LFF of films that Buache had discovered in Karlovy Vary, Moscow, Prague and Budapest. As Buache himself, member of the international jury in Locarno from 1958 to 1960, put it:

⁹⁹ Beretta to Mauerhofer, 10 Aug. 1960, ASCT, 3.1.15, V7.

¹⁰⁰ Isabelle Vichniac, 'Le Japon triomphe au Festival cinématographique international de Locarno', *Le Monde* (1 Aug. 1961).

¹⁰¹ As *Cinema nuovo* wrote, Locarno had created a particular identity for itself by promoting 'innovative and non-conformist experiences and by hosting works excluded from other festivals for reasons of "delicacy", diplomatic and political tact, or because of pressure from the most diverse sources, or even works that were generally "forbidden" or that came from "suspicious" countries (the German Democratic Republic, People's China)'. Guido Oldrini, 'Locarno', *Cinema nuovo*, 140 (1959), 343.

¹⁰² It should nevertheless be noted that in 1961 the Swiss Film Chamber received letters denouncing Beretta and Buache 'as very dangerous leftists'. Beretta to Buache, 3 Feb. 1961, ASCT, 3.1.15, MF12.

[Beretta and I] waited [for] shipments from Poland, Hungary, or Czechoslovakia to discover the hesitant premises of socialism with a human face. Both of us were travellers attracted by the experience of communism, but we inevitably returned disappointed from places where this system reigned in practice . . . We always shocked the establishment by asserting our positions as fighters of the non-communist left, immediately qualified, by narrow-minded observers, as crypto-communists: how could we not salute Munk and Wajda, the new Polish cinema that the Swiss commercial distribution circuits refused to show?¹⁰³

If Beretta had an undoubtedly less provocative attitude than Buache, the association of Swiss cinema operators nevertheless remained determined to put an end to the ‘communist tendencies’ of the Locarno Festival by targeting him personally.¹⁰⁴

An Ideological Tutelage?

On 21 September 1961, during one of their joint meetings, the SLV and the SFV (i.e. Swiss film distributors and cinema operators) expressed their common will to fight against the ‘clear eastward trend’ of the Locarno Festival.¹⁰⁵ The next day, the SLV launched a smear campaign against Beretta, accused of being a crypto-communist using the festival as a hub for propaganda from the Eastern bloc.¹⁰⁶ This offensive orchestrated by the leaders of the SLV (Theodor Kern and Walter R. Weber), with the help of a Swiss-German film critic (Hans-Ulrich Hug), overwhelmed the director of the LFF.¹⁰⁷ Hard hit by these attacks, that he described as a ‘manhunt’,¹⁰⁸ Beretta publicly explained that he was not a communist, but only a member of the Social Democratic Party (*Partito socialista*; PS), which had been part of the Swiss government since 1943 (an institutional integration that went hand in hand with the adoption of anti-communist positions).¹⁰⁹ As the accusations against him took on xenophobic overtones by focusing on his recent naturalisation,¹¹⁰ he had to demonstrate that the jurors of the 1961 festival¹¹¹ – who awarded the Silver Sail to *People from the Train* (*Ludzie z pociągu*, Poland) and to the short animated *Where is Mama?* (*Xiǎo kēdǒu zhǎo māma*, People’s Republic of China) – were not communist.¹¹²

These attacks, which damaged the journalist’s reputation, were particularly sensitive for the festival, which was hoping to finally receive financial support from the Confederation thanks to the coming into effect of the first federal law on cinema in 1963. Beretta, who cancelled an exhibition of Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein’s drawings in Locarno ‘for “political reasons”’ (because such an exhibition would ‘unleash the Swiss-German circles against’ them),¹¹³ then decided to meet Hans-Peter Tschudi. While disapproving of ‘the repression of the Locarno Film Festival for political

¹⁰³ Buache, *Derrière l’écran*, 105–7.

¹⁰⁴ Minutes of the SLV’s board of directors, 19 Sept. 1961, Cin, CSL11, 266.

¹⁰⁵ Minutes of the SLV/SFV meeting, 21 Sept. 1961, Cin, Georges Grossfeld (CSL54), 5.

¹⁰⁶ Minutes of the SLV’s board of directors, 28 Nov. 1961, Cin, CSL11, 266.

¹⁰⁷ Minutes of the LFF’s executive commission, 12 Oct. 1961, ASCT, 3.1.15, C4. This campaign was also relayed in West Germany by Horst Axtmann in *Film-Echo*, the cinema exhibitors’ newspaper.

¹⁰⁸ Beretta to Tschudi, 16 Dec. 1961, ASCT, 3.1.15, V7.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Huber, ‘Der Antikommunismus der SPS. Finnisch-sowjetischer Winterkrieg (1939/40), Umsturz in Prag (1948) und Aufstand in Ungarn (1956)’, in Caillat, Cerutti, Fayet and Roulin, eds., *Histoire(s) de l’anticommunisme*, 265–82.

¹¹⁰ Beretta, an Italian citizen, had tried to become a Swiss citizen as early as 1947, but his efforts were only successful in the late 1950s. Beretta’s surveillance file, SFA, E4320C#1995/391#1456*.

¹¹¹ The jury for feature films was composed of the Swiss writer Friedrich Dürrenmatt, the American film critic Gideon Bachmann, the French filmmaker Georges Franju, the Mexican screenwriter Carlos Fuentes and the Italian comedian Paolo Stoppa. The jury for short films was composed of the chief curator of the *Cinémathèque française* Lotte Eisner, the Swiss journalist Marie-Madeleine Brumagne and the American film critic Gene Moskowitz.

¹¹² *People from the Train* (or *Panic on the Train*) was a rather traditional film about German-occupied Poland while *Where is Mama* (or *Little Tadpoles Looking for their Mother*), a children’s tale, became a classic of Chinese national style animation. Beretta’s memo for the LFF’s executive commission, 18 Nov. 1961, ASCT, 3.1.15, C4.

¹¹³ Beretta to Buache and James Quinn (British Film Institute), 20 Apr. 1962, Cin, *Cinémathèque suisse* (CSL1), 35/4.

reasons',¹¹⁴ the latter refused to defend the festival and decided to stop transmitting invitations via official channels (which he had agreed to do just one year earlier).¹¹⁵ Additionally, he recommended the creation of a joint 'national' selection committee with Swiss-German distributors and cinema operators and Swiss-German journalists, i.e. the festival's most bitter adversaries.¹¹⁶ Under pressure, Beretta, who suspected that 'the SLV and the SFV [wanted to] practically control the Festival',¹¹⁷ was forced to accept this compromise while considering 'that an "official" organisation would greatly harm the Festival'.¹¹⁸

In 1962, this selection committee, aiming to make the festival act in favour of 'Western culture' by excluding 'propaganda films' from the programme,¹¹⁹ was composed of Beretta (who had just become the FIPRESCI's president), Bixio Candolfi (journalist and founder of a local film club), Fernando Gaja (prosecutor) and Bruno Pedrazzini (director of a teacher training college) from Ticino, as well as the Swiss-Germans Willy Hohl (SLV), Hans Ulrich Hug (critic from the newspaper *Der Bund*) and Martin Schlappner (from the powerful and anti-communist newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*).¹²⁰ This selection committee, reuniting several of the most critical voices against the festival and whose 'national' character was supposed to reach a consensus, did not include any member from the French-speaking part of the country, where many supporters of Locarno lived. Even if Frédéric Fauquex (Hugo Mauerhofer's successor at the head of the Film Section) explained that the government's aim was not to make Locarno 'a state festival [with] an official federal organisation', this committee was perceived as a punitive and intrusive measure by the German-speaking part of Switzerland in Ticino. But what proved most problematic for the reputation of the LFF were the criticisms of the international press.

While in 1961 foreign journalists praised 'the independence that presided over the choice of films presented . . . and above all . . . the absence of diplomatic and corporate pressures' on Locarno,¹²¹ the 1962 festival was generally criticised for programming bad and uninteresting movies, a result unanimously attributed to an 'incompetent selection committee'.¹²² For the Italian newspaper *Cinema nuovo*, 'due to the intensification of ideological pressures of all kinds, especially from German-speaking Switzerland and Germany, the Ticino event fell to a level never reached before'.¹²³ Similarly, in the French-speaking part of Switzerland critics described the 'political "tutelage" committee [as] completely useless',¹²⁴ while the Swiss-German press explained that 'this selection committee had above all political and not aesthetic functions'.¹²⁵ Be that as it may, anti-communists still regretted that Eastern European feature films received any awards that year, even if the international jury only rewarded a Czech animation film which could hardly be denounced as socialist realism propaganda: Karel Zeman's innovative and baroque masterpiece *Baron Münchhausen* (*Baron Prášil*).¹²⁶

¹¹⁴ Minutes of the SLV reunion, 28 Nov. 1961, Cin, CSL11, 266.

¹¹⁵ This only concerned countries with which Bern had diplomatic relations, and excluded East Germany, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Albania and North Korea.

¹¹⁶ Tschudi to Beretta, 22 Dec. 1961, ASCT, 3.1.15, V7.

¹¹⁷ Beretta to Landry, 27 Sept. 1961, ASCT, 3.1.15, V7. It is worth mentioning that the film industry threatened to create its own film festival in Zurich if Beretta did not cooperate.

¹¹⁸ Beretta to Fauquex, 17 Aug. 1962, ASCT, 3.1.15, V2.

¹¹⁹ Minutes of the LFF's executive commission, 23 Dec. 1961, ASCT, 3.1.15, C4; FPD to Swiss Embassy in Moscow, 26 Feb. 1962, SFA, E2003A#1974/52#1164*.

¹²⁰ Thomas Christen and Luzia von Deschwanden, 'Die beiden Martin Sch. Und der Neue Schweizer Film', *Cinema*, 51 (2006), 119–28.

¹²¹ Gene Moskowitz, 'Locarno', *Cinéma*, 60 (1961), 50.

¹²² Dt. J., 'Petit journal du cinéma: Locarno', *Cahiers du cinéma*, 135 (1962), 37.

¹²³ Guido Oldrini, 'Locarno, un festival che era tranquillo', *Cinema nuovo*, 159 (1962), 374.

¹²⁴ Freddy Landry, 'Le festival de Locarno' and 'Le XVIe Festival international du film de Locarno s'ouvre aujourd'hui', *Feuille d'Avis de Neuchâtel* (25 July 1962 and 17 July 1963), 11 and 1.

¹²⁵ Hans Ulrich Hug, 'XV. Internationales Filmfestival von Locarno. Nicht besser und nicht schlechter als andere Festivals', *Der Bund* (2 Aug. 1962), 6.

¹²⁶ The LFF already had contributed to the international recognition of this 'Czech Méliès' by selecting his short films in the 1940s and his feature films in the 1950s. In 1962, the FIPRESCI's jury also awarded a Czech movie against religious

In 1963, while some members of the Swiss Film Chamber considered that ‘the “international standing” [of the festival] had diminished a lot’, Frédéric Fauquex estimated on the contrary that the festival was ‘better than the previous years [thanks to the suppression of] all the morbid productions that were so criticised’.¹²⁷ Therefore, the national selection committee was maintained until 1965 in a reduced formation (Beretta, Candolfi, Hohl and Schlappner), with the inclusion of film critic René Dasen (secretary of the French-speaking twin of the SLV) as a sign of ‘détente’.¹²⁸ The festival, now presided over by Fernando Gaja, a local judge from the Radical Democratic Party (*Partito radicale democratico*; PRD) – that is, a public figure, giving the LFF a political and social respectability – and financially supported by the Confederation, then tried to put an end to the controversies. In 1963, it refused the proposal of Czechoslovakia to integrate director Jiří Weiss into the jury, since Beretta wanted to avoid ‘unjustly looking once again like a “dangerous communist”’.¹²⁹ Faced with threats of boycott from Eastern European countries, the festival eventually obtained the ‘authorisation’ of the Film Section to include Weiss in the jury.¹³⁰

A Swiss Thaw?

During the three following years, four major prizes were awarded to films of the nascent Czechoslovak New Wave, a generation of young filmmakers distancing themselves from the canons of socialist realism thanks to an atmosphere of political and cultural liberalisation: two Golden Sails for the Holocaust movie *Transport from Paradise* (*Transport z ráje*) and for *Black Peter* (*Černý Petr*, whose author Miloš Forman was ‘discovered’ in Locarno) and two Silver Sails for *The High Wall* (*Vysoká zed*) and *The Organ*.¹³¹ While many film critics noted that ‘Eastern countries [chose] and offer[ed] better films than other countries’,¹³² the SLV continued to denounce the selection of films from the other side of the Iron Curtain by referring to the organisers of the LFF as the ‘gravediggers of our democracy’.¹³³ Nevertheless, the political situation of the festival gradually stabilised.

The new selection committee – replacing Hug (Beretta’s most vehement opponent) by Dasen (a ‘friend’ of the festival who had also been denounced by the Swiss-German press for having ‘a pronounced liking for the East’¹³⁴) – seemed to suit both the film industry and the Swiss authorities. In 1965, Locarno’s patronage committee was even chaired by Federal Councillor Hans-Peter Tschudi (head of the Federal Department of Home Affairs). That year, neither the retrospective dedicated to the Czechoslovakian Jiří Trnka nor the Silver Sails awarded to Czech, Hungarian and Lithuanian films elicited any negative comments in the Swiss-German press, which rather appreciated Janusz Morgenstern’s *Life Once Again* (*Życie raz jeszcze*), one of the first critical Polish films about the Stalinist period.¹³⁵

Although calm was finally restored in Locarno, these years of turmoil left a lasting impression on Vinicio Beretta, who demonstrated symptoms of a nervous breakdown as early as 1961, when he wrote

persecution and intolerance – *The Devil’s Trap* (*Ďáblova past*) – and Tamara Semina’s acting in a Soviet adaptation of Tolstoy – *Resurrection* (*Voskreseniye*). Note that in the same year, the first film of the Soviet Andrei Tarkovski, *Ivan’s Childhood* (*Ivanovo detstvo*), received the Golden Lion in Venice.

¹²⁷ Minutes of the Swiss Film Chamber, 28 Aug. 1963, SFA, E3011A#1979/105#46*. In 1961 and 1962, Fauquex repeatedly expressed his desire to see more ‘constructive’ (or optimistic) films replace ‘pessimistic’ (or subversive) films in Locarno. Fauquex to Beretta, 13 Aug. 1962, ASCT, 3.1.15, V2.

¹²⁸ Minutes of the SLV’s board of directors, 8 May 1963, Cin, CSL11, 266.

¹²⁹ Beretta to Düby, 27 May 1963, ASCT, 3.1.15, V11.

¹³⁰ It is also worthy of note that in 1964, a retrospective was devoted to the Polish filmmaker Andrzej Munk.

¹³¹ Also worthy of note are the selection in 1963 of Vojtěch Jasný’s *The Cassandra Cat* (*Až přijde kocour*) in the non-competitive section (after it was awarded in Cannes) and of Jan Němec’s *Diamonds of the Night* (*Démanty noci*) in 1964 (before it received the Grand Prize at the International Film Week in Mannheim), as well as the prizes given in Locarno to the collective film *Pearls of the Deep* (*Perličky na dně*) in 1965.

¹³² Freddy Landry, ‘Le palmarès du festival de Locarno’, *Feuille d’Avis de Neuchâtel*, (8 Aug. 1964), 12.

¹³³ Minutes of the SLV’s general assembly, 26 May 1964, Cin, SLV, CSL11, 271.

¹³⁴ Minutes of the SLV reunion, 13 Sept. 1961, Cin, CSL11, 266.

¹³⁵ Marek Haltof, *Polish Cinema. A History* (New York: Berghahn Books, [2002] 2019).

to his relatives that he was ‘in one hell of a state. After so many years of work at the Locarno Festival – with very serious sacrifices, even of a material nature – [he felt himself to be] rewarded in a very strange way’.¹³⁶ Fearing that the executive committee of the festival would leave him ‘all alone against the Kern gang’,¹³⁷ Beretta was deeply affected by the smear campaign against him, to the point of describing his psychological state as ‘disastrous’.¹³⁸ Criticised by the cinephiles and the Ticinese after the creation of a national selection committee in 1962 for having given in to pressures from the German-speaking part of the country, he quit the festival in early 1966 and died six years later at the age of only fifty-one.

Conclusion

As Freddy Buache, organiser of multiple weeks dedicated to Eastern European cinema at the *Cinémathèque suisse* since 1959, bitterly wrote: post-war Switzerland was marked by the ‘absence of cinematographic culture in the official and professional film circles: the country was underdeveloped; the film clubs, the *Cinémathèque* and the Locarno Festival . . . were trying, without money, to make people aware of this underdevelopment; that was all it took to accuse them of subversion’.¹³⁹ This summary, although slightly exaggerated, has nevertheless the merit of reminding us that the LFF was one of the main contributors to the development of a cinephile culture, or at least ‘a certain taste for cinema’ in Switzerland.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, it rightfully points out the extent to which Locarno’s ambitions were held back by a political and ideological context oscillating between indifference and hostility.¹⁴¹

Initially conceived as a tourist attraction, the Locarno Film Festival was perceived during its early years as being at the service of the film industry. Seeking recognition and legitimacy at the national and the international levels, its organisers turned to Eastern Europe to obtain movies absent from the major film festivals. This decision, which allowed the Swiss event to develop its identity and increase its reputation outside of Switzerland and in cinephile circles, provoked virulent reactions in the German-speaking and anti-communist parts of the country. Walking on eggshells so as not to arouse the anger of the press and film professionals, and not to lose the timid support of the government, Locarno made ambitious choices, which were praised by cinephile circles. When violent protests necessitated the arbitration of Federal Councillor Hans-Peter Tschudi, the so-called ‘national’ selection committee created on his recommendation was seen as ‘Swiss-German interference’ in the festival.¹⁴² Its ideological objectives were criticised and its efficiency contested, to the point that its composition was rethought to allow a political readjustment and a better expertise. This consensus finally tempered the debates surrounding the festival, at least until the departure of its emblematic director.

In 1966, Locarno was taken over by Sandro Bianconi (b. 1933), a linguist and leader of a local film club, who pursued Beretta’s work in specialising the festival in ‘new cinema’. A year later, Bianconi joined forces with Freddy Buache, allowing Eastern Bloc countries and Third World countries to stand out in Locarno.¹⁴³ The two co-directors marked a clear break from the tourist and the

¹³⁶ Beretta to Fauquex, 16 Dec. 1961, Cin, CSL1, 35/4.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Beretta to Gaja, 10 Feb. 1966, ASCT, 3.1.15, C20.

¹³⁹ Freddy Buache, *Le cinéma suisse: 1898–1998* (Lausanne: L’Âge d’Homme, 1998), 49.

¹⁴⁰ This formulation is used by the research group that has been studying the activities of the *Cinémathèque suisse* at the University of Lausanne since 2019: wp.unil.ch/cinematheque-unil/projets/la-cinematheque-suisse-entre-1951-et-1981/presentation (last visited Aug. 2022).

¹⁴¹ As one American critic summed up: ‘Zurich’s supposed jealousy of Locarno, in Italian Switzerland, having a film festival while Zurich, which has the country’s sole studio facilities, has none [was] a factor of future rivalry. Locarno [played] a bold game, inviting communist participation . . . This led to one Zurich daily labelling the Locarno event “communist”. Gene Moskowitz, ‘Zurich Calls Locarno “Red”’, *Variety* (2 Aug. 1961), 14.

¹⁴² Guglielmo Volonterio, ‘Il Festival di Locarno e il buon nome della Svizzera’, *Schweizer Film Suisse*, 8 (20 Aug. 1962), 22.

¹⁴³ Once again, the Swiss Film Chamber noted the potential ‘danger of a greater influence of non-conformist tendencies’ and suggested ‘to weed out the most politically biased films’ from the programme. Minutes of the Swiss Film Chamber, 9 Nov. 1968, Cin, CSL11, 12.

commercial origins of the festival by putting an end to the open-air screenings in the park of the Grand Hotel, and by moving the event from summer to autumn. Unsurprisingly, under their leadership (1967–70), as well as that of their successor Moritz de Hadeln (1972–7), Locarno continued to be regularly denounced as a ‘red festival’ by the Swiss-German press. Nevertheless, these critics were much less violent and less insistent than in the late 1950s and early 1960s, thanks to a political climate marked by détente at the international level and by the relaxation of the spiritual defence mentality at the national level.

In conclusion, it is necessary to mention another actor that paradoxically played a determining role in the festival’s choice to distinguish itself as a hub for Eastern bloc cinematographies: Hollywood. The recurrent absence (or minor participation) of American majors in the competition, which has sometimes been interpreted as an ‘anti-US feeling’ from the organisers,¹⁴⁴ was in fact due to their disinterest in the tiny Swiss market. The void left by the American production in the programmes of the LFF was therefore one of the prerequisites that led to the arrival of movies from socialist regimes in Ticino. This is what Beretta noted in the early 1960s, when he deplored ‘the hostile attitude that the American companies [had] towards the event [while] the Eastern European countries were very open’.¹⁴⁵

While the Hollywood film industry considered Locarno as a minor event that was not worth it commercially speaking, the state organisations of the Eastern bloc felt that they had everything to gain, politically and culturally, by participating in the LFF. Yet, as US magazine *Variety* already regretted in the late 1940s, in Locarno, ‘too often some obscure Czech-made short [stole] the show, and Hollywood show[ed] up like a Gower Gulch quickie’.¹⁴⁶ In conclusion, let us hope that the diplomatic, political and ideological stakes surrounding the participation or non-participation in the Locarno Festival continue to be questioned by future research, by insisting in particular on the role of the United States, which for a long time took part ‘officially in events that were held in fascist Spain (San Sebastian) and in the Soviet Union (Moscow), while refusing at the same time to officially participate in an event that took place in a free and centuries-old democratic country’.¹⁴⁷

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¹⁴⁴ Dorothy Holloway, ‘Anti-US Feeling Sparks Locarno Film Fete; Nationalism Takes Over’, *Variety*, (28 July 1948), 2.

¹⁴⁵ Beretta to United Artists, 10 June 1963, ASCT, 3.1.15, MF16.

¹⁴⁶ Abel, ‘Moving Forward’, *Variety*, (20 July 1949), 3.

¹⁴⁷ Beretta to George Stevens (MPS US Information Agency), 15 Aug. 1963, ASCT, 3.1.15, C18.