



Università degli studi di Udine

The Cinema Pavillion at Expo '42 in Rome and the Italian Experimental Cinema.
Preliminary Notes

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article:

Original

The Cinema Pavillion at Expo '42 in Rome and the Italian Experimental Cinema. Preliminary Notes / Mariani, Andrea. - STAMPA. - (2018), pp. 317-326.

Availability:

This version is available <http://hdl.handle.net/11390/1126474> since 2018-02-27T16:44:38Z

Publisher:

Mimesis

Published

DOI:

Terms of use:

The institutional repository of the University of Udine (<http://air.uniud.it>) is provided by ARIC services. The aim is to enable open access to all the world.

Publisher copyright

(Article begins on next page)

VISTO
25 NOV 1938
VISTO DAL COM. N. 13
25 NOV 1938

470 - Strasari, de Vinci.

488 - Stranillo della Camera Oscura.

494 - G.B. Della Porta: Camera Oscura.

498 - Proiezione Kirchner.

499 - Lanterna magica.

500 - Movimento nella lanterna magica.

501 - Pellicola: Prima fotografia.

502 - Proiezione delle immagini.

503 - Proiezione delle immagini.

504 - Proiezione delle immagini.

505 - Proiezione delle immagini.

506 - Proiezione delle immagini.

507 - Proiezione delle immagini.

508 - Proiezione delle immagini.

509 - Proiezione delle immagini.

510 - Proiezione delle immagini.

511 - Proiezione delle immagini.

512 - Proiezione delle immagini.

513 - Proiezione delle immagini.

514 - Proiezione delle immagini.

515 - Proiezione delle immagini.

516 - Proiezione delle immagini.

517 - Proiezione delle immagini.

518 - Proiezione delle immagini.

519 - Proiezione delle immagini.

520 - Proiezione delle immagini.

521 - Proiezione delle immagini.

522 - Proiezione delle immagini.

523 - Proiezione delle immagini.

524 - Proiezione delle immagini.

525 - Proiezione delle immagini.

526 - Proiezione delle immagini.

527 - Proiezione delle immagini.

528 - Proiezione delle immagini.

529 - Proiezione delle immagini.

530 - Proiezione delle immagini.

531 - Proiezione delle immagini.

532 - Proiezione delle immagini.

533 - Proiezione delle immagini.

534 - Proiezione delle immagini.

535 - Proiezione delle immagini.

536 - Proiezione delle immagini.

537 - Proiezione delle immagini.

538 - Proiezione delle immagini.

539 - Proiezione delle immagini.

540 - Proiezione delle immagini.

Proiezione Kirchner.
Lanterna magica.
Movimento nella lanterna magica.
Pellicola: Prima fotografia.

Proiezione delle immagini.
macchine sulla ruota vivente.
Specchio concavo per lampada da proiezione.
Metodo del negativo.

Croce di Malta. Otturatore.
Cinematografia a libretto.
Maxwell-Compensazione ottica.
Invenzione della pellicola.
lastre essiccate.

Pellicole su tamburo di proiezione.
Apparato a visione diretta.

Primo proiettore moderno.
(Lumière)

Sensitometria: Hunter & Giliffield.

Film ininflammabile.

Disegni animati: Ruota vivente.

Cinematografia a colori:

Proiezioni con 3 proiettori.
Sistema sottrattivo.

Analisi del movimento:

Scintilla Pedersen & Tombridge.
Cinescopio: Specchio vescicale del Nitz.

Cronofotografia del Marey.

Rallentamento: Jenkins e Maskelyne.

Livellatore ottico: Stereopsed dell'Emley.

Cinechirurgia del Doyen

Registrazione sonora fotoelettrica.
Registrazione sonora su nastro di celloso.

Cinematografia del Garrigou-Lagrange.

Cinema e astronomia: Willert.
Cinema e medicina: Walter Chase. Studi sull'epilessia.

Microcinematografia: Ries di Berna.
Röntgeninematografia: Kohler & Beselsky.
Cinematografia molecolare del Frank.

Altra autocromia: Lumière.

Apparato in colorazione con iono-erato.
Proiettore di presa: Frank Emley.

Studi sul retto. Case di retto.

Proiezione sonora a disco con motore sincrono.

Film teatri di posa: Nizza-Garumont.

The Cinema Pavillion at Expo '42 in Rome and the Italian Experimental Cinema. Preliminary Notes

Andrea Mariani, University of Udine

This paper collects some preliminary notes for a research on experimental film practice and film exhibition in Fascist Italy. In the following pages we will present the three conceptual frameworks according to which we intend to question this main topic. The fragmentary and schematic character of this note, as well as the absence of a decisive and ultimate argument it has to be understood in the light of the preparatory and practical reason of this piece.

The Cinema Pavillion at Expo '42 in Rome

Framework one: Cineguf and the experimental cinema

What I call Italian experimental cinema, is a filmic practice experienced within a network of film clubs institutionalised by the fascist regime and called Cineguf. The Cinegufs were subsections of the many University Fascist Groups (GUF) hosted in all the Italian universities that often developed in separated locations in small towns as well: The documents collected during the research bear testimony of more than eighty Cineguf groups active in Italy from December 1934 to July 1943 – according the ones that provided traces of regular activities. In these groups teenagers, university students, and young workers participated to screening programs and to the film making practice.¹

The film clubs were economically sustained and technically equipped by the Fascist National Party, who were aiming at creating a new generation of filmmakers devoted to the renovation of Italian cinema “in a fascist way:” a committed and top-down drive film avant-garde. This film movement was one of the first and most important interventions of the *Direzione Generale della Cinematografia*, “The General Direction of Cinema”, founded in 1934 as part of the reformed *Ministero della Stampa e Propaganda* (“Ministry of Press and Propaganda”). In December 1934, the General Direction of Cinema ordered that all the cine-clubs, film associations and independent film organisations be centralized within the Fascist University Groups.² Furthermore thanks to an agreement with the Istituto LUCE – the fascist propaganda film institute – and Agfa film company, the General Direction of Cinema provided 16mm Movex cameras, technical equipment and film stocks to the Cinegufs that would made request, and they distributed financial prizes too, according to a National ranking of the Cinegufs based on their participation at national fascist contests (Littoriali del cinema), and their efficiency in film production and film culture activities. The Cineguf movement called its own cinema *Cinema sperimentale* – literally “experimental cinema.” They strongly rejected the label of “*dilettanti*” (beginners) while rejecting unpreparedness and approximation. By rejecting to be seen as “amateurish,” they rather saw their practice as an actual “experimental cinema,” as the Cineguf filmmaker Domenico Paoella, from Cineguf of Naples, defined it into the book *Cinema Sperimentale* in 1937:³ the first history as well as the *manifesto* of this “movement”. He wrote: “the word ‘sperimentale’ [experimental] has lost its ancient value’ – he was referring basically to the notion of ‘experimental’ meant as formalists

experiments of Cinéma pure – ‘now it finally returns to suite a more extensive category, in which the main attempt consists in the construction of the film in its totality.’⁴ So “experimental” was the experience of the filmmaking in its totality: in other words, the filmmaking itself was the “experimental experience” for the Cineguf filmmakers. Thus the identity of this peculiar kind of cinema deserves to be investigated primarily on the side of the practice, rather than on the aesthetic and formal ones.

Note di cinema, “Notes about cinema,” was a technical manual of great importance among the Cineguf filmmakers. It was published by the Cineguf of Milan at the end of 1942, and it was written by three Cineguf filmmakers. *Note di cinema* (which together with Domenico Paolella’s book is an important “inbred” theoretical reference about film practice and culture for the Cineguf filmmakers), reveals a theoretical density which goes far beyond the book by Domenico Paolella. In the chapter titled “The Cinematographic Essence of Film,” the authors introduced the reader to the filmmaking process, namely to subject, screenplay, sound and montage, and it finally recaps the potential of the cinematographic medium as the capability to foreordain and organize the pictures of memory. The cinema “serves as a background for our thoughts,” it conveys a “reminiscence” function and an “organisational” tool for the memory, according to the same “instinctive and natural” means dreams recur to in order to reconstruct reality.⁵ The authors explicitly recall Sigmund Freud,⁶ and in this chapter they provide an orientation to the filmmaker to be aware of its role as organizer and its agency as synthesis and coordination of the whole cinematographic apparatus.

This manual reveals an experience of complex nature, a moment of innovation, “experimentation”, training, and narrates a crucial moment of awareness at the triangulation of language (the photographic and cinematic ones), senses, and the technological media.

Framework two: cinema at Expo '42

My intent is to broaden the notion of experimental by framing the cinema pavilion at Expo '42 in Rome as an epitome of the metabolising process of the traces of modernity through cinema. The *Cinema Exhibition* at *Expo '42* it's an important moment of convergence

The Cinema Pavillion at Expo '42 in Rome

between different tensions that encapsulated traces of modernity and it could have been the place of the first global involvement of the Cineguf movement at the service of the fascist party, in an international arena: as to say, this event could represent a crossing point of identity proof, historical awareness, and commitment confirmation for them. Thus I will treat this exhibition as epitomical for this film practice too. In order to get deeper into these aspects, I will focus on some features of this important event: the systemic function of the substandard film formats and documentary cinema, the practice of exhibiting cinema and the role of film history. The exhibition should have taken place in the city of Rome, and it was authorized by the General Direction of Cinema, in the person of its director Luigi Freddi, the 12 May 1938.

The fascist establishment and the Italian film culture *intelligentsia* fully sustained the operation. The direction committee was variously modified during the period from 1939 and late 1940, and included the film director Mario Camerini, Luigi Freddi, director of the Direzione Generale della Cinematografia (he remained in the committee until 20 march 1939: he later became Vice-president of Cinecittà and left the direction of the Direzione Generale), Luciano De Feo (founder and first director of Istituto Luce until 1928, director of the Italian film journal *Cinema* until 1938 and promoter of an impressing and never completed *Encyclopaedia of Cinema*, written by the major film theorists and historian in Italy at that time), Vittorio Mussolini (son of Benito Mussolini and director of the film journal *Cinema*, a largely influencing journal), Augusti Fantechi (who substituted the former director of Istituto Luce Giacomo Paolucci di Calboli barone in 1940), Cipriano Efisio Oppo (president of the committee and former director of the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution in 1932, 1934, and 1937), Eitel Monaco (member of the committee from 15 June 1940, as the new director of the Direzione Generale della Cinematografia) Mino Doletti (film director and film critic, member of the committee from 20 April 1939, in charge of the film programming), Antonio Verretti (music conductor for the film exhibition, member of the committee from 20 march 1939).

In the cinema exhibition programmatic document, the cinematic technological essence was at the core of the exhibiting style of the event:

Andrea Mariani

the basic logic undergoing the exhibition will be concerned to limit to the minimum the didactic tendency of the exhibition, as to say that part of the exhibition presented through papers, billboards, graphics, photographs, texts etc. and to potentiate, up to its extreme manifestations, the “constructive” part of the exhibition, as to say to recreate the cinema technological apparatus where it don’t ‘exist not more, or in case it is still in use, to present and exhibit it in its original model, beside a reconstructed apparatus in function; thus to allow assisting and visually participating to the technological progress instead to simply imagining it.’⁷

The technological and reproducing essence of the cinematic apparatus were at the core of its program: in terms of an exhibiting representation meant as an historical reconstruction of the cinema technological progress and mechanics, and in terms of the practical and utility functions of the reproducing mechanism of cinema in documenting reality and, in this case, being a visual and active presence during Expo, in recording the overall event.

Documentary and the substandard film practice naturally connected the utility functions of cinema regarding propaganda and its meaning as a field of technical and formal experimentation and the cinema programs of the Cineguf would have taken a relevant part in this project. Interestingly, Luigi Freddi, who had a major role in directing the exhibition committee in a first time, wanted to promote the substandard cinema to officially report the event, actually *de facto* marginalising the Istituto Luce’s professional apparatus.⁸ Documentary and the substandard cinema were both belonging the amateur cinema field which was growing with great strength during the Thirties, after the standardization of the 16mm format, and the Cineguf was institutionally representing that field.

Secondly the exhibition officially involved documentary film practice within an international Olympic Games of Cinema.⁹ Thus both documentary and substandard cinema characterised that crucial value that was the utilitarian potentialities of cinema – and in particular the substandard cinema – for schools and universities, for industry, for science, for tourism propaganda, and obviously – in the case of the Cineguf movement – politics.

Over a general filmography of approximately 500 titles of short films produced by the Cineguf network, the majority of them were documentaries. I would argue that there were

The Cinema Pavillion at Expo '42 in Rome

at least two basic reasons: the first one was certainly practical, as the documentary was the easiest and the most economical way to make cinema for the young Cineguf filmmakers, and the best field where put into practice and experiment their technical expertise, towards professionalization; the second reason was political: documentary became the most important factor of political legitimation for this movement as the utilitarian function of this cinema was fitting perfectly a rhetoric of “utility” that characterized the discourses about the film-making practice of the Cinegufs, as to say a film practice at the service of the fascist regime and its reality and an expertise put into action according to the spiritual value of a political commitment. Thus documentary provided the Cineguf’s filmmaker with the basic training program for making cinema, and their documentary expertise could guarantee the major opportunity they ever had to put their technical force into practice at Expo '42. The Cineguf movement would have participated to the Cinema pavilion project, reporting the whole event and animating the Olympic Games of Cinema during the exhibition.

Framework three: cinema history and the fate of an avant-garde

Together with the Olympic games of Cinema contests and the Cineguf practical intervention at the Expo, a major event confirmed the strong interaction between on the one hand Expo and different cultural and professional contexts and on the other hand, the role of a sort of historiographical awareness in the Cinema pavilion and the Cineguf’s charge of innovation by experimenting cinema. It was a cinema history exhibition. The cinema history topic is coherently and strongly justified, at least for one reason: the cinema history exhibition at Expo was mainly oriented to re-frame cinema history. A renovated sense and “direction” of the worldwide cinema history (and the Italian role within it) was reflecting the research for a renovation of the Italian cinema: the largest part of the film critic and cinephile community, including the Cineguf network, was against the mainstream pale Italian cinema, accused to be false and far from the actual spirit and reality of the fascist Italy.

Francesco Pitassio and Simone Venturini describe what takes shape during this time as a general integrated institutional project in Italy. It includes: the creation of a new

national cinema school, the Experimental Center for Cinema (Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia), in 1935; the establishment of the Cinegufs in the same year; the establishment, in 1937, of a cinema journal, *Bianco e Nero*, and the revision of the history of cinema with the publication, in 1939 during the period of the organisation of this event, of a new “definitive” volume written by Francesco Pasinetti – the inspirational leader of the Cinegufs and the first head of the Cineguf of Venice; finally, the cinema pavilion at Expo '42 would have represent the acme of this process.¹⁰

The Cinema exhibition would have been the symbol of those tensions towards renovation and change that was the discourse on cinema in Italy during the interwar period.

The Cinema Pavillion was actually structured into three basic segments, thematically intertwined: Pre-History (before 1895), History (until 1941), and Present days (or *Cronaca*, meant as “News”). The overall pavilion was made by thirty-nine rooms:¹¹ from one to seven belonging to “Pre-history”; from eight to thirty-four belonging to “History”; from thirty-five to thirty-nine belonging to “Cronaca.” The organisational criteria were mixed: the chronological order of the room sequence was intertwined with thematic focuses. For instance, from room eight to twenty-one the organisational criteria was geographical – with great importance given to Italy, United States and France representing the age of 1910s; room thirteen and room fourteen were occupied by the technological reconstruction of the “living experience” of a theatre in 1902 and in 1914, thus a purely technological focus; room fifteen was dedicated to documentary cinema on the First World War; by going forward the set design or costume design “conquests” were celebrated by two rooms entirely dedicated, temporally located at the end of tens; by moving on we would have encountered rooms on the French avant-garde, the introduction of sound, the sub-standard cinema, dubbing and so on...

Thus the intent is clear since the beginning: “we have to take into account, since these very first moments, that the Cinema exhibition will be the first in the world with such a wide historiographical and representational criteria [...] with a spectacular feature of a never ending *attraction*”:¹² thus the historiographical order of the reconstruction was sewed up by the capability to give form and sense to the mechanical and technological essence of the cinematic apparatus, literally animating its “attractional” power (they explicitly recur

The Cinema Pavillion at Expo '42 in Rome

to the term “attraction”); finally, the undergoing mission was to “necessarily claim the many Italian invention and discoveries that contributed to the international progress of worldwide cinema, that have been much often attributed to foreign inventors.”¹³

Malte Hagener, discussing the exhibition practices in the avant-garde movements, stressed how the notion of film history which the cine-club movements contributed to institutionalized in the 20s and 30s, “presupposed a contrasting approach and a sense of change because historiography is based upon the concept of transformation over time”, and he continues, “there was a sense of historical calling in their rhetoric of advance towards a brighter future.”¹⁴

This whole exhibition entails this sense of a new beginning, a reforming process of rethink and reframe the history of worldwide cinema, together with a critical perception of the attractional encounter with the cinematic medium that the notion of “experimental” was meaning for the Cineguf movement and their peculiar charge of innovation.

In the arena of this cinema exhibition the breakdown of the film praxis, a literal immersion in its historiographical dimension and a manifestation and glorification of its non-theatrical potentialities seems to encapsulate the complex crucible of traces of modernity the experimental practice of the Cineguf was experiencing.

Notes

1 For introductory material about the Cineguf movement see: Luca La Rovere, *I Cineguf e i Littoriali del cinema*, in Orio Caldiron (ed.), *Storia del cinema italiano 1934-1939*, Edizioni di Bianco e Nero, Marsilio, Rome and Venice 2006 and Silvio Celli, *Piccoli cineasti crescono: a passo ridotto con i Cineguf*, in Alessandro Faccioli, *Schermi di Regime*, Marsilio, Venice 2010.

2 Udine State Archive - Archivio di Stato di Udine (ASU), Gabinetto di Prefettura, envelope 21, f.78 Pubblica sicurezza disposizione di massima fascicolo generale 1932-1933-1934, communication to the prefects of the Kingdom on 27 December 1934, n° 8200-94.

3 Domenico Paolella, *Cinema sperimentale*, Casa Editrice Moderna, Napoli 1937.

4 Domenico Paolella, *Cinema sperimentale*, cit., p. 13 (my translation). From now on all the translation are the authors' own. Here the original Italian version: "La parola *sperimentale* ha perduto il suo antico valore, per essere appropriata ad una categoria più estesa, in cui il tentativo consiste proprio nella costruzione totale del film, in tutte le sue parti, di qualunque genere esso sia".

5 Attilio Giovannini, Luigi Veronesi, Antonio Chiattoni, *Note di cinema*, Edizione del Cineguf, Milan 1942, p. 22 (my translation).

6 *Ibidem*. As the original text goes: "su questo tema, potremmo prendere a prestito addirittura le similitudini di Freud".

7 Central Archives of the State – Archivio Centrale dello stato, Enti Pubblici e società, Esposizione Universale di Roma, Servizi Organizzazione Mostre, Ordinamento Allestimento, envelope 1020, Il cinematografo all'esposizione universale di Roma del 42, p. 4. In the original text: "Il concetto base sarà quindi quello di limitare al minimo essenziale la parte che chiameremmo strettamente 'didattica', quella cioè che si presenta attraverso cartelloni, grafici, fotografie, stampe, etc. e di portare invece alle sue più vaste espressioni la parte 'ricostruttiva', creando là dove non esiste più l'apparato o, dove esiste ancora, presentando il modello originale affiancato dall'apparato ricostruito ed in azione. [...] quindi assistere e partecipare visivamente al progresso anziché essere costretto a ricostruirlo idealmente."

8 Central Archives of the State – Archivio Centrale dello stato, Enti Pubblici e società, Esposizione Universale di Roma, Servizi Organizzazione Mostre, Ordinamento Allestimento, envelope 1021, Proposta di mostra internazionale di cinema, p. 3.

9 Central Archives of the State – Archivio Centrale dello stato, Enti Pubblici e società, Esposizione Universale di Roma, Servizi Organizzazione Mostre, Ordinamento Allestimento, envelope 1020, Commissione ordinatrice per la

The Cinema Pavillion at Expo '42 in Rome

mostra di cinematografia, relazione finale, p. 1.

10 Francesco Pitassio and Simone Venturini, *Building the Institution. Luigi Chiarini and Italian Film Culture in the 1930s*, in Malte Hagener (ed.), *The Emergence of Film Culture. Knowledge Production, Institution Building and the Fate of the Avant-Garde in Europe*, Berghahn, New York-Oxford 2014, pp. 261-262. The “new history of cinema” is Francesco Pasinetti, *Storia del cinema dalle origini a Oggi*, Edizioni di Bianco e nero, Rome 1939.

11 Central Archives of the State - Archivio Centrale dello stato, Enti Pubblici e società, Esposizione Universale di Roma, Servizi Organizzazione Mostre, Ordinamento Allestimento, envelope 1020, Il cinematografo all'esposizione universale di Roma del 42.

12 Central Archives of the State – Archivio Centrale dello stato, Enti Pubblici e società, Esposizione Universale di Roma, Servizi Organizzazione Mostre, Ordinamento Allestimento, envelope 1020. Relazione Freddi, 12 June 1939, p. 1 (my emphasis).

13 Central Archives of the State – Archivio Centrale dello stato, Enti Pubblici e società, Esposizione Universale di Roma, Servizi Organizzazione Mostre, Ordinamento Allestimento, envelope 1020, Il cinematografo all'esposizione universale di Roma del '42, p. 3.

14 Malte Hagener, *Programming Attractions: Avant-garde Exhibition Practice in the 1920s and 1930s*, in Wanda Strauven (ed.), *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2006, p. 274.