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► **To cite this version:**

Christel Taillibert, John Wäfler. Groundwork for a (Pre)History of Film Festivals. *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, Taylor & Francis (Routledge), 2016. halshs-02177501

**HAL Id: halshs-02177501**

**<https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-02177501>**

Submitted on 9 Jul 2019

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## Groundwork for a (Pre)History of Film Festivals

### Introduction

Existing studies of the history of film festivals have usually analyzed the logics behind the development of large international festivals, through the consideration of their inherent political dimension: we are referring to studies on the Venice Film Festival (Pisu 2013), the Cannes Film Festival (Latil 2005), the Berlinale (Fehrenbach 1995), Dok Leipzig (Kötzing 2013; Moine 2014), among others. In this context, the general consensus is that the first *Esposizione internazionale d'arte cinematografica* in Venice in 1932 marks the beginning of film festivals, which is then followed by the creation of flagship events within the era's most powerful nations.

But the establishment of this type of event at the start of the 1930s and its rapid adoption as a new meeting model between cinema and a wider audience raise several questions. To what extent did the 'experiments' undertaken pre-Venice influence the format of the first edition of the Venice festival? And how did these choices gradually crystallize into the model adopted internationally for the film festivals? Triggered by these initial questions, we seek to understand the nature of the needs met by this innovation at the start of the 1930s. More specifically, we aim to explain the format adopted by the Venice *esposizione* by locating it within the broader context of interwar cinema and analyze its gradual process of institutionalization that has led to the festival format that we know today.

In this article, we put forward three related and interrelated arguments. First, we propose that the creation of the Venice event demonstrates a willingness to invent new interfaces for moving image education, in a historical context where the relationship between

cinema and education was largely dominated by educational film. We also suggest that the format of the Venice festival needs to be understood in relation to multiple events, both cinematic and non-cinematic, that came before it. And finally we argue that despite being the culmination of a series of experiments the first edition of the Venice *esposizione* did not fix the signified (the event type proposed in Venice in 1932) to the signifier (the concept and format of 'film festival') once and for all, but rather, that integration happened gradually throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Our methodology will be primarily historical, based on research and questioning of sources (primary archives, essentially linked to an extensive analysis of press clippings<sup>1</sup>), while the geographic scope is European, with a particular focus on Italy and France.

### **Venice Festival Innovation: A Historical Reading**

Understanding the conception and implementation of the first Venice festival requires us to first look at the intents and the strategic options to which the new initiative responded. We propose that the initiative was the result of an evolution of the pressing matters and priorities felt by educational film promoters. By educational film, we mean all the attempts made since the start of the 20th century to introduce moving pictures as didactic and educational tools within classrooms as well as extracurricular and adult activities. In the first decades after its birth, the cinematograph spurred strong enthusiasm from teachers and conference producers, who saw this invention as a new tool for education (Taillibert 1999). By the start of the 1930s, on the other hand, this enthusiasm ran low for several reasons. First, reflection on the topic had seemingly reached some kind of conclusion. Copious amounts of literature had been published, covering all aspects of the different educational possibilities generated by the new medium; from a theoretical standpoint, it appeared as if all had been said<sup>2</sup>.

Moreover, in the economic downturn of the 1930s, especially in France and Italy, governments no longer seemed willing to allocate budgets for the adoption of national programs to generalize educational film. Add to that the cinema industry's transition towards talking pictures, which was a fatal blow to the educational film since teachers were very reluctant to use a tool that took charge of pedagogical speech (Taillibert 1999). One of the only countries to invest in the production of educational films was Mussolini's Italy through the National Luce Institute, whose objectives, however, were propagandist and used educational film for ideological purposes.

These factors explain the early 1930s shift in the priorities of many personalities who had previously campaigned for educational film, towards other preoccupations, such as examining the role of 'spectacular' cinema, or fictional films in feeding the popular imagination and attracting thousands into theaters in unprecedented ways. The role of the International Educational Cinematographic Institute (Taillibert 1999) that was instrumental in the genesis of the Venice festival, perfectly illustrates this transition. Throughout the first few years, this international body founded in 1927 and placed under the leadership of the League of Nations, devoted a large part of its effort towards reviewing all the theories and experiments developed across the world around educational cinema and to spreading that information via various publications and events, such as, most notably, the 1934 International Congress in Rome. But long before that, the organization's director, Luciano de Feo, refocused his efforts on fiction film, despite the fact that it wasn't directly included in the prerogatives of the organization he was leading. He was sensitive to the fact that cinema has always been recognized for its significant influence on the masses, an influence that fueled debates around its morality and its potential for propaganda and moved the debate to the topic of intelligence ('Idiocy is often more harmful than meanness...' said De Feo [1934, 7]). The Rome Institute grew to support the idea that, while cinema can become an educational agent,

it will achieve its aim more effectively in conventional movie theaters and through fictional films loved by crowds rather than through less appealing didactic films. The Roman organization summed up this concept in an article published by Germaine Dulac in its monthly journal:

‘The majority of today’s artistic drama works will soon stop being what they are in the limited scope of inspiration that, though sometimes good, is often incomplete. They will be expanded. Hence why artistic and educational cinema form one bloc, simply using different expression and application methods.’ (*Revue Internationale du cinema éducatif*, December, 1931)

Luciano de Feo became therefore more and more interested in that central idea, inherited from Aristotle, according to which ‘masters must provide teaching to children; drama artists must provide teaching to adults’ (*Interciné*, January 1935). The underlying argument defines cinema as an art, not an industrial entertainment product whose sole purpose is monetary. For de Feo, the goal remained to imagine for a wider audience a meeting point around ‘fiction’ movies chosen for their intellectual and artistic qualities, and consequently, for their educational impact. This thought process illuminates the creation of the first Venice festival in 1932, the genesis of which is largely owed to de Feo<sup>3</sup>. That first edition proposes a new method of education through cinema, according to an idea that could be incorporated into ‘cultural democratization’, at a time when that concept was not as formalized as it is today in state policies, though a few intellectuals were already working towards it (Dubois, 1993):

As subtle as its essence is, intellectual life can only barely infiltrate the tightly sealed compartments built by mistrust around conflicting interests. The elite that succeeds in rising above that mistrust is pretty much the only one that can taste the delicate and refined productions of the universal art and mind. Yet they must feel - they undeniably feel - a duty to involve the masses into their spiritual pleasures. Can cinema fully fulfill that goal? It might be risky to assert it, but cinema, the most popular of all art forms, certainly offers a wonderful and incomparable means to elevate the minds and refine the tastes of the masses (De Feo 1934, 7).

These considerations allow for a first reading of the genesis of the festival phenomenon, related to the search for new popular ways of promoting cinema, an objective which at the time had not been met by any considerable proposal - either these were too elitist or they did not include any artistic requirements.

The creation of the Venice festival intimately links to the assertion of cinema as an art: it's about showing films chosen beforehand for their highly artistic and cultural character, an indispensable requirement for the educational function. The introduction of cinema into the highly renowned institution that was the Venice Art Biennale demonstrates this willingness to acknowledge cinema as art. The encounter between the audience and a type of cinema chosen and recognized for its artistic character ultimately aims to develop a taste within that audience for more demanding productions, and through that, to influence the general level of the productions screened in theaters.

### **Formal Influences on the first Venice Festival**

Multiple choices were made during the organization of the first Venetian event (location, competitive nature, social manners, entertainment). These choices resulted from mixed influences, intentional or not, and inherent to the formats implemented in cultural events at the time, whether cinema-specific or not.

### ***Cinema event formats before Venice***

Many events took place around the theme of cinema at the start of the 20th century, all of which affected the matrix that generated the first large international festivals. By ‘influences’ we are referring to the creation of an environment that nurtured the development of new types of cinema events.

The first influence was exerted by film competitions, traces of which can be found very early in the history of cinema: in 1897<sup>4</sup>, 1898 and 1899, the *Société des Bains de Mer* organized a series of ‘film photography competitions’ in Monaco. Though for the first two editions, the films had to be shot in Monaco (Corey and al., 1998, 275), for the third edition, the competition was opened to all subjects (Mari, 1980, 30). The winning films of the third edition went on to be presented in Paris during the 1900 World Expo (Toulet 1986, 191). Already, it was clear that the competition added value to the winning films, since the World Expos benefited from great fame and had a strong international impact.

After that, the most significant events took place in Italy. The *Società Fotografica Subalpina* organized the first ‘international cinema competition’ in Turin on February 5, 1907, in the context of the 8th International Photography Exhibition. The competition brought together the few active Italian producers of the time (Cinés, Ambrosio, Leonardo Ruggeri). The program consisted of two and a half hours of films, sanctioned by various awards from a jury of Torinese artists. The event also had a social dimension and brought

together celebrated figures such as the prefect of Turin, Princess Letizia di Savoia, Countess Di Sambuy or Count Fossati (Bernardini 1981, 54-55).

Two years later, a 'World Cinema Competition' took place from October 17 to November 2, 1909, this time in Milan (*Cinok place*, January 28, 1909), gathering producers, distributors and journalists, and it was open to the public. No less than 70 Italian, French and American films were shown from 10am to midnight. The rules specified that 'there must be four films per production company, and more specifically: one drama, one instructional film, one documentary and one comedy' (Ongaro 2006). Its success was phenomenal, with 30,000 to 40,000 entries submitted. The event introduced a significant novelty: after their first projection for members of the jury, the films were presented to the public in the city's various theaters, and despite the relatively high ticket price, as Lasi (2009) suggests, they were box office successes. As shown in this excerpt of a Luigi Marone article (*Cine-fono e RFC* 83, 1909), the desire for rich programming was already perceived at the time as an attempt to find new audiences for young cinema: 'The competition did cinema a massive favor by raising its profile, and helped theater owners a lot by drawing in the most skeptical, even people with an innate hatred of this type of show, who from now on will not fail to do their bit for the new industry.' (Ongaro 2006).

However, the objective of these competitions was first and foremost monetary: for production circles, it was a way of improving cinema's public image, particularly amongst wealthy and educated audiences, and assessing where cinema as an industry found itself, involving local and national authorities in order for them to facilitate the sector's industrial activities on their territories (Bernardini 1981, 54). But the intention, particularly interesting in light of the institutionalization of future film festivals, was also to engage producers to favor quality production, rather than second-rate entertainment: 'The first Universal Cinema Competition [offers] to push the cinema industry towards civic education, to spread its



knowledge, whether ethnic or moral, to cultivate humor through cheerful rather than obscene anecdotes, to expose the real truth of daily life; and finally to put cinema on a uniform path towards broad culture accessible to all' (*Ciné-journal*, February 11, 1909). The recurring presence of educational cinema in these competitions represents the ongoing desire to establish strong links between education and film<sup>5</sup>.

Two years later, the Milan event was used as a model for an international cinema competition organized in Turin in April-May 1911, as part of the International Industry and Labor Exhibition where a special pavilion was set up for the competition. A prestigious jury, including Louis Lumière distributed awards of a very high value (25,000 lira for the first prize).

Pre-World War I Italy was undeniably the most fertile land for this type of competition, but other events in Europe also deserve a mention. These include the Great Cinema Exhibition held in Hamburg from June 13-26, 1908; the gold prize went to French production company Lux films on that occasion - which didn't prevent the French (evidently aspiring to organize a similar event) to criticize it, arguing that 'the results could not be expressed in any serious or positive words' (*Ciné-journal*, August 15, 1908). Still, the distinction awarded to Lux films appeared repeatedly in advertisements published in the following years, suggesting early evidence of the symbolic power of quality recognition in these competitions, a power later found within festivals.

While war and then, at least in Italy, the cinema crisis of the 1920s, slowed down the development of this type of event, signs of a revival can be found, particularly within the Milan Exhibition, which included a 'cinema competition' in 1923 and 1927 (Ongaro, 2006). These competitions establish a number of the basic features that would later characterize film festivals: the competitive dimension of course, but also a social aspect with a very popular

character, a strong link with the needs of the film industry, local integration, and also broad media coverage.

Other events also contributed. They include, for example, ‘cinema exhibitions’, during which various industry-related materials were displayed and screenings were held. Examples include the ‘phono-cinema exhibition’ held from December 19, 1908 to January 13, 1909 in Berlin, or the ‘Exhibition on Art in French cinema’ organized in Paris at the Galliera museum from April-October 1924. The latter included lectures on the history and aesthetics of cinema as well as on educational film (Gauthier 1999, 74-76). But long before the organization of events entirely dedicated to showing films, since the first months of the cinematograph, cinema was introduced in various commercial and technological exhibitions, initially as a symbol of progress, particularly within World Expos (Toulet 1986).

Film screenings in these contexts can be explained through the attractiveness of cinema and its ability to draw in a wider audience. In March 1913, the ‘Sports Exhibition’ held in Paris included a film theater running free projections of footage of marine fusiliers and of the Joinville medical school (*Le Temps*, March 22, 1913). During the ‘Sea, Maritime and Fluvial Industry Exhibition’ held from May to August 1921 at Paris’s *Palais de l’Industrie*, ‘marine cinema’ screenings took place four nights a week (*Le Temps*, May 14, 1921). Similarly, free projections of scientific popularization films took place at the ‘Physics and TSF [*télégraphie sans fil*] Exhibition’ held in Paris from November 1923 (*Le Temps*, November 26, 1923). As a last example amongst many, the ‘Aeronautics Expo’, again organized in Paris, towards the end of 1926, held free screenings for visitors on the day of its inauguration, showing a film on the activities of East Army squadrons (*Le Temps*, November 16, 1926). The use of the ‘playful’ and ‘attractive’ aspects of cinema set the stage for the discourse of present-day festival organizers.

The notion of cinema as a ‘consumer appeal’ also occurred in events of very diverse formats. ‘Annex screenings’ worked as a playful and informational add-on complementing the offering of the different type of events they accompany. For example, on October 14, 1907, screenings were organized as part of the ‘Back to School Party’, an event held by the Teachers League, gathering 25,000 Paris schoolchildren at the *Grand Palais*. The screenings matched the various activities offered throughout the day (*Le Temps*, October 13, 1907). The educational dimension attributed to cinema again appeared alongside its attractive function at the ‘French Mother Celebration’ in 1926, during which girls’ schools were invited to attend free screenings of *La Future maman* (*Le Temps*, April 27, 1927).

As these examples show, screenings integrated within various non-cinema events took on an ‘exceptional’ character, and therefore constituted a significant selling point for organizers. The theaters themselves also exploited this exceptionality, which organized screenings to promote their regular activity and find new audiences. The organization by cinema operators of open-air, friendly and festive screenings also followed that logic: some very early examples of that trend include the open-air screenings organized by Luigi Roatto at the Milan Arena in summer 1907 (Bernardini 1981, 54).

Numerous gala evenings of the time make up a slightly different form of exceptional screenings, their media coverage growing with the ‘socialite’ character of their attendees. Among many examples, we can mention the ‘cinema gala’ organized in Paris at the *Théâtre des Champs Elysées* on April 5, 1929 by the International Cinema Consortium to benefit the *Maison des Journalistes* (*Le Temps*, March 31, 1929), the gala evening held in December 1929 at the Salle Pleyel in Paris in honor of Georges Méliès, among others.

### ***Music Festivals***

As observed above, the various formats implemented by cinema events in the first decades of the 20th century, through the habits they develop among a broad audience, lay the groundwork for the ‘festival’ concept that started to become institutionalized in Venice. However, it should be noted that other art forms, and especially music, had already implemented and popularized the festival notion. The earliest events using that terminology date back to the second half of the 18th century in Great Britain, specifically, choral music festivals closely linked to religion. In the 19th century most of these choral festivals adopted a philanthropic dimension (*Le Dilettante*, December 1, 1833), with the concept expanding to include different types of music. In 1829, the *Revue Musicale* (5, 553-554) publishes the following definition of the word festival: ‘The English call festival a great gathering of musicians at certain times of year in large English cities to play the tunes of great masters, with a significant number of voices and instruments.’ This musical festival format quickly spread to Belgium and France – most notably with the 1829 Festival du Nord in Lille, which the entire city and region, as well as the Netherlands’ amateur musicians, were invited to attend (*Journal des comédiens*, April 18, 1830).

In France, the first attempts at this type of cultural organization and mediation grew around the choral movement as early as 1830-1840, as Poirrier (2012) indicated in his references to the works of Gumpliwicz (1987). A publication called *Le Festival, journal musical et orphéonique*, began in Paris in 1874, praising these ‘music events, consisting not only of musical competitions, but also in ensemble festivals, and even religious music playing in churches, which, for the most part, lend themselves so well to these solemnities’. (November, 1874, 1-2). The competitive dimension associated since the beginning with these choral music festivals established an anchor through which the word ‘festival’ finds its continuity<sup>6</sup>. But the festive dimension, intricately linked to its very terminology - from the

Latin adjective *festivus*, ‘of a party, cheerful, happy, funny, joyful, entertaining’<sup>7</sup> also forms a central part of the origin of the concept.

In time, the word gradually infiltrated other musical spheres, as specified at the start of a book by Derode:

‘Generally speaking, a festival is a day of partying and rejoicing. More specifically, today this word seems to be used for exceptional musical gatherings where a large number of performers, whether symphonists or singers, come together. We remember the sparkling solemnities that took place in Lille, and those organized by M. Berlioz at the Palais de l’Industrie’ (1859: 5).

The festival directed by Berlioz and Strauss in 1844 served as the closing ceremony to the ‘Exposition des Produits de l’Industrie’ (*L’illustration*, August 10, 1844). This marks a link, sustained throughout history, between festivals and industry circles - confirmed both by the origin of film festivals in the Venice framework and the many cinema marketplaces organized on the side of the main festivals nowadays.

A second filiation, German this time, refers to music festivals with the *‘festspiel’*, the model of which led to the creation by Wagner of the Bayreuth Festival in 1876. It was an event based on an artist’s monumental staging, and had tighter links with stage arts. As Reynal says (2012), Wagner positioned himself firmly against the industrial, and therefore profitable, dimension of drama institutions, which he described as early as 1849 as ‘industrial enterprises, even when they receive special grants from states or princes: their direction is assigned to the same men who yesterday managed a speculation on the price of wheat, and who tomorrow will use their serious knowledge to the commerce of sugar’ (Wagner 1910,

53). He was therefore strongly against any profitability purpose, and remained attached to the notion of freedom, since art ‘can only be understood by the free man, not by the slave of money’ (56).

Two key dimensions of the emerging film festivals thus become evident – even though the idealism underscoring them has often been compromised in the course of history: The first is mistrust towards the merchandizing of culture – noticeable early on from the volunteerism and devotion displayed by choral performers (*Journal des débats politiques et littéraires*, October 1, 1879: 1-2). This dimension underscores the first cinema event in Venice, which aimed to shift the understanding of film from the status of commercial product to that of artistic object. The second is a deep attachment to the notion of freedom, which today forms one of the untouchable pillars of festival terminology, and which de Feo himself already claimed in Venice as a fundamental right<sup>8</sup>. Such freedom asserted itself despite the fierce censorship in force at the time in Italy, evident in erotic performances<sup>9</sup> as much as in political ones<sup>10</sup>. Beyond the music industry, the festival model was then slowly adopted by other artistic industries, such as theater, and soon, cinema. It is clear therefore, that the association between the festival concept and cinema developed via other media and through history.

### **The Concept of ‘Film Festival’ Before and After the First Venice Esposizione**

The use of the word ‘festival’ to talk about ‘parties with film screenings’ started building up in perfect continuity with events in the musical world. The few examples of hybridization between music and film events around the first decades of the 20th century testify to this phenomenon. Consider the example of the November 1911 annual lyrical art festival organized by the ‘Salon du Mobilier’ (Paris, *Grand Palais*), which, that year, included various film screenings (*Le Temps*, October 8, 1911).

In 1913, in the context of its great art festivals, the *Gaumont-Palace* announced the performance on October 13 of the ‘first lyrical cinema piece’, entitled *L’Agonie de Byzance*. Reporting on the event, *Le Temps* (October 18, 1913) says: ‘This piece really marks the beginning of lyrical cinema, a new type of show where musical art brings its precious help to cinematography, as it is not a simple adaptation but a real opera score tightly linked to the piece.’

The use of the phrase ‘great art festival’ should be understood in the context of the requirements and prestige related to the musical interpretation, fitting the framework of music festivals, as specified in the same article: ‘Fifty choir singers and 100 musicians will highlight the score’s wonderful ensembles.’ Moreover, the festive, exceptional dimension necessary for that phrase appeared in the program supplements offered to visitors: the projection of other ‘first-class’ films, but also other types of stage entertainment. The article ends by saying that ‘the presentation of such a program will bring to the Gaumont-Palace a crowd of Parisians passionate about truly artistic events’. Even before the war, it appears that the hybridization of film and music events worked for the recognition of cinema as an art form of its own.

This practice continued after the war, as is evident in the 1922 programming by the Gaumont-Palace of a ‘cinographic and scenic festival’ around the film *The Miracle Man* (George Loane Tucker, 1919). The screening was enhanced by ‘songs and dances from old French provinces’, the lyrical adaptation of which was signed by Jean Nouguès (*Le Temps*, May 20, 1922). On November 13, 1924, *Le Miracle des loups* (Raymond Bernard, 1924) screened in the Paris Opera, marking, as declared Emile Vuillermoz ‘the solemn addition of lyrical cinema to the National Music Academy’ (*Le Temps*, November 15). The event massively contributed to making the film the biggest popular and critical success of the year. This type of experience highlighted the importance of a movie’s ‘launch event’ for its

commercial success, but also because symbolically, cinema was welcomed in the noble *Opéra de Paris*, strongly contributing to it being accepted as art. While the above examples are all French, German history also shows instances of hybridization between film and music festivals, for example the ‘Festspiel Deutsche Kammermusik’ in Baden-Baden, which in 1927 began offering film screenings alongside the official program (Hagener 2007, 141-143).

The occasional hybridization between music festivals and special film screenings indicates the gradual association between the term ‘festival’ and cinema, as evidenced by this article from January 5, 1929: ‘The relationship between music and cinema has always been very friendly, and therefore it’s not surprising that the screen borrows methods from concerts. In the current season of the *Agriculteur-cinéma* will be organized a series of festivals dedicated to the most justly renowned directors. The first one will showcase the talent of Cavalcanti.’ (*Le Temps*, January 5, 1929). Designating the festival formula as ‘method’ underscores its ability to be adopted by other artistic fields. Also, the function of festivals to showcase the most talented directors indicates their increasing role in constructing a ‘pantheon’ of artists and in developing a modern perception of cinematic creation, since directors were thus credited as authors (especially when the programming was built around the filmography of a director, represented as a coherent body of work). The example of Alberto Cavalcanti, one of the young masters of the French avant-garde at the time, shows the link between these initiatives and emerging cinéphilie.

While it is worth picking up on the filiation at the time between music and film festivals, the autonomous use of the word ‘festival’ in the field of cinema did not start in the 1920s. From November 14 to 16, 1908, a ‘Great Cinema Festival’ was organized at the *Théâtre Fémina* in Paris (*Le Temps*, November 14, 1908): it included an evening screening of the film *La Conquête de l’Air* (a documentary by Pathé-Frères), with live comments by Henri de la Vaulx, a famous French balloonist. The exceptional nature of the screening



indicates the use of the word 'festival' and shows the term had an old meaning significantly different from what was established after Venice in 1932, but still meaningful for the public of that era.

The expression 'film festival' also appears in February 1925 to qualify the festivities organized in France in honor of the 30th anniversary of the invention of the cinematograph (*Le Temps*, February 13, 1925). This consisted of an evening attended by the most famous French cinema personalities of the time, including stars, as well as some of the most creative and avant-gardist directors of the era. The use of the term 'festival' for such an event shows the terminological blur between the notions of 'gala' and 'festival'. Both shared a festive and exceptional nature as well as a social dimension and a glamour side with the presence of stars. This anniversary, however, clearly comprised a retrospective and historic dimension as well. It also dovetailed with the objective of promoting demanding and innovative cinema, associated with the making of a first cinéophile position. These aspects very likely explain why the term 'festival' characterized this event.

Indeed, during the second half of the 1920s, 'festival' in cinema increasingly indicated a cinéophile connotation following on from the movement spurred by a group of cinema-loving intellectuals (Gauthier 1999). Specialized movie theaters sometimes used the word 'festival' to talk about one-off screenings, particularly when the films scheduled all fell under a certain theme. For example, the 'Festival René Clair' organized in December 1927 in Paris, which showed three of the director's films for 'the best possible tribute to René Clair' (*La Semaine à Paris*, 289, 1927: 64), or the 'Tolstoy Festival' organized in October 1928 by Studio 28 (*Le Temps*, October 10, 1928).

Following this cinéophile dimension, such festivals often proposed explanatory lectures, bringing them closer to the spirit of cine-clubs: that filiation is particularly relevant, as the emergence of the modern version of festivals shows undeniable continuity with the

cine-club movement as it blossomed after the war (Taillibert 2009; Wong 2011). Some cine-clubs directly organized festivals, such as the Festival Cavalcanti staged on May 14, 1930 by the Tribune Libre du Cinéma (*La Semaine de Paris*, May 9, 1930).

The link with cinephilia seems to help to fix the word ‘festival’ around the new perception of cinema developing at the time. Certain cinema events, despite being advertised as exceptional events around a chosen program, didn’t lay claim to any cinéphile dimension and did not make use of the term. Such is the case of the ‘Journées du cinéma’ held in Lyon from March 14-17, 1932 (and repeated in 1933) at the local media’s instigation and with the general purpose of promoting entertainment film. The event was attended by movie stars and was glorified by a high-quality Pathé-Nathan orchestra. Twenty films were on offer that year (Chaplain 2007, 353-354). These events took a lot from the festival apparel, but the absence of a cultural base differentiated them from the ‘cinéphile festivals’ being shaped around that time; as noted by Paul Légise (1970, 227), ‘unfortunately they did not present enough of a cultural continuation, which is indispensable to fulfill - on top of a commercial objective - deep propaganda’.

Because of their close link with cinephilia, pre-Venice festivals were also used to watch and monitor artistic innovations and experiments. They also served the purpose of furthering cinematic techniques and creative means of expression. The organization of the ‘Talking Film Festival’ in Paris at the start of 1930 illustrates this phenomenon, after which Emma Cabire (*La Semaine à Paris*, January 1st, 1930) said: ‘Such an event was useful to make the current level of sound and talking movies sensible.’

Throughout the 1930s, and therefore after the Venice event’s international success, the festival formats emphasized here continued and even increased in numbers. The various Parisian cine-clubs in particular tended to multiply ‘festivals’ around thematic programs: the ‘Womennd Cine-club’ for example organized a ‘Marcel L’Herbier festival’ on January 1,

1936 (Vuillermoz 1936, 5) and a ‘Grémillon Festival’ on May 20 of the same year (*La Semaine à Paris*, May 15, 1936). This was also a regular occurrence at the Cercle du Cinema, the first repertoire cine-club founded by Georges Franju and Henri Langlois as part of the *Cinémathèque française*: between 1936 and 1939, the club organized numerous festivals, most of which were auteur-based (about Dovzhenko, Pabst, von Stroheim, Clair, Chaplin, Vigo, Eisenstein, Lang, etc.).

In the same decade, the Independent Cinema Alliance organized its own festivals: the first Vigo Festival in 1936, and then, after the association renamed itself Ciné-Liberté, other events putting forward films that were for the most part at risk of being forgotten or going unnoticed due to their marginality or censorship (Ory 1990, 893). Titled ‘Ciné-Liberté’, these events therefore base their communication more on the association’s popularity and political foundation than on the themes uniting the scheduled films.

Movie theaters too took on the formula, a particular acceptance of the ‘one-off screening’ for cinéphile purposes. The Julien Duvivier Festival held on February 9, 1933 at Paris’s Adyar theater is one example amongst many others (*La Semaine à Paris*, February 3, 1933). These original practices build a link with the contemporary usages of film festivals, through the numerous retrospectives and homages scheduled.

Alongside the pursuit of what was the first meaning of the word ‘festival’ in cinéphile circles, other types of events developed which, following Venice this time, tend to give the festival package a completely different meaning. Without delving into the history of large international festivals, note the creation of the *Berliner Filmfestwochen* in 1934, the *Internationale Filmfestwochen* in Vienna that same year (which, already at the time, claimed to be ‘the cinema world’s largest-ever gathering’, carried by an Austrian cinema sector that hoped to ‘take the top spot of European cinema metropolises’ [Mattl 2008, 160]), the

International Cinema Festival in Brussels in 1935 as part of the World Expo, or the Moscow International Film Festival that same year.

As opposed to cinéphile festivals, these events adopt several of the characteristics put forward by the Venice event. These include: the international scope and associated willingness to be a world cinema event; the event frequency being annual or bi-annual; the duration, most often spanning several days; the number of films scheduled; the introduction of competitive categories; a strong link to the world's cinema; a social character, reinforced by the organization of ceremonies; and the desire to have a strong impact amongst a wide audience, in order to elevate public taste in cinema.

This definition of 'festival' therefore differs from the one used by cine-clubs and movie theaters to designate one-off cinéphile screenings. It seems as though, throughout the 1930s, the contours of a gradual assertion of the 'film festival' concept drew around the Venice model, to the detriment of other formats operating until then. Though this phenomenon took place incrementally, the launch and success of the Cannes Film Festival immediately after the war can be considered as the definite fixing of that terminological construction, which continues today. And when cine-clubs did go back to organizing festivals after the war, these matched that newly-approved model (the Biarritz 'Cursed Film Festival' provides a prime example [Gimello 2014]).

## **Conclusion**

Buoyed by this heritage, the first large international festivals developed as more festive, social events, in order to strengthen publicity for their activities. They also associated with cinema industry representatives that would enable them to strengthen production and distribution policies for their artistic content of their films.

While these characteristics remain present within the conventional concept of the ‘film festival’, large international festivals evolved with further influences that have transformed their initial character. These consist, firstly, of state influence and involvement as evident through the game of national propaganda and diplomacy, and, secondly, of producers, who have used these new platforms for the promotion of their own productions (as evidenced by the creation of the FIAPF at the start of the 1950s [Moine 2013]). This might explain why, after the war, another formula for ‘educating the masses’ on cinematic culture would prove more efficient: the ‘*ciné-club*’. The association of cinema itself with education loosened, with the term ‘moving image education’ being gradually adopted. Concentrating their efforts on fictional cinema, the ‘*ciné-club*’ pursued a path totally different from the twenties formula: they were no longer exclusively Parisian, but sprinkled around the country and rooted in strong militancy. After the subsequent decline of cine-clubs, beginning in the mid-1960s, festivals again took center stage as the favored media for moving image education, this time conveying a popular and local dimension, but still very much fixed within a cinéphile project

Writing a history of festivals is, by definition, made complex by the multitude of parameters to be considered. This article lays groundwork for new ways to think about it. As we understand it, the construction of the ‘festival’ concept was not linear, nor does it spring without precedent from Venice. Indeed, the earliest festival history offers alternatives up to the present day, in its relationship with other media used to allow the audience to meet cinematic culture. The Venice festival was built first and foremost from the desire to create a popular event, open to the masses (17.453 paying spectators were counted in 1932), likely to sensitize wide audiences to cinematic culture and quality productions, at a time when cinephilia had developed within a more elitist context in cine-clubs. And while it is true that the first Venetian event was designated an ‘*esposizione*’, the word ‘festival’ was immediately

used to qualify it, in numerous newspapers articles published at that time<sup>11</sup>. As this essay has shown, the Venetian formula was actually nourished by various events: those which - in the musical world first, and in the film context then – transformed the concept of ‘festival’, and those which, without referring to this concept, predispose film events to build themselves on the basis of a number of settings (competitive nature, a worldly aspect, the recognition of cinema as art etc) that now characterize the international film festival circuit.

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<sup>1</sup> In particular: the daily newspaper *Le Temps* [1861-1942], the weekly publication *La Semaine à Paris* [Paris, 1922-1944], and the corporate publication *Ciné-Journal* [Paris, 1908-1938]).

<sup>2</sup> The enormous International Congress of Educational Cinematography organized in Rome by the Institute in 1934, and the two volumes (Cinema and Education, 307 p; Cinema and Instruction, 452 p) related to the publication of the Congress proceedings, draw up a synthesis of the topic, resulting in a quantitative decline of the theoretical research afterwards.

<sup>3</sup> According to archival sources, three people are associated with the creation of the first Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte **Cinematografica** in Venice: Luciano de Feo, Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata and Antonio Mariani (Venice Art Biennale president and secretary general) (Taillibert 1999, 258-260).

<sup>4</sup> The 1897 event was a 'photography competition' with a 'cinematograph' section. (Mari 1980, 28).

<sup>5</sup> Competitions specializing in educational and didactic cinema are even organized, as early as October 1910, with the 'competition for films with religious or 'educational and moral' topics' in, for example, Milan (Bernardini 2006, 58).

<sup>6</sup> The first edition of the Venice festival includes a 'public referendum' through which viewers were asked to judge the films screened. The second edition closed with an official awards ceremony.

<sup>7</sup> 'Festivus' here is defined according to the Collatinus Latin/French glossary.

<sup>8</sup> The event's rules state that 'the hosting of cinematographic art of all backgrounds within the exhibition (...) must exclude any political meddling' (Ghigli 1992, 34).

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<sup>9</sup> An Italian journalist wrote about *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1931): ‘Miriam Hopkins’s legs which she slowly uncovers, one by one, from under that 19-century music-hall outfit are one of the most powerful and violent sexual and feminine revelations ever seen in cinema.’ (Bono 1992, 91).

<sup>10</sup> About the first edition, Luciano de Feo says: ‘The Soviet films came on with all their suggestive power, and I still remember the amazed impression of the huge crowd when it saw (in one of the last scenes of Ekk’s *Road to Life* [1931]) that locomotive, covered in red flags with hammer and sickle, move forward impetuously, while the soundtrack spilled the notes of the Internationale, full-blast on the Excelsior’s terrace!’ (De Feo 1954).

<sup>11</sup> Only in Italy, more than twenty newspaper articles published in August 1932 about Venice had ‘film festival’ in their titles (*Gazzetta di Venezia, Il Lavoro, Rivista Cinematografica, Corriere della Sera, Il Tevere, Giornale d’Italia, Corriere Padano, Popolo d’Italia*, etc.).

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