

## **KINOSMOSIS: The city and its screens.**

by Alfredo Cramerotti

### **Bologna, Italy**

What constitutes a cinematic experience in an urban texture?

The definition of the question above goes through the relation between cultural demand on one side, and its offer on the other. In a time when culture is becoming more and more crucial to understand politics (and not the other way around), a good size of the cultural offer is represented by the cinematic experience. Such an experience is one of the pillars of that 'experience economy' declaimed by the creative class. Those theorizing new modes of economy through an investment in creativity and creative modes of production, have a clear vision of what a cinematic experience in an urban setting produces: beyond the opposing terms of work/commitments and family/leisure, the essence of the relationship between a city and its screens (and screening spaces) is the function of osmosis that they constitute. In other words, the core matter at stake here is the constitution of reciprocal spaces. A Kinosmosis.

In my years spent in the Northern part of Europe (London-Berlin-Copenhagen) I became very fond of various cinematic spaces, where films were not only 'watched' but somehow 'lived', by means of events ranging from talks, Hollywood films, obscure b-movies, publishing initiatives, video days, forgotten masterpieces, biennials partnerships, and retrospectives on authors, actors and screenwriters. I found this very true for the Cinemateket and Vester Vov-Vov in Copenhagen, the NFT and Other Man Cinema in London, the Kino Arsenal and Kino Babylon in Berlin. And it is also true for the Cineteca di Bologna, the city where I live now. These sort of places contribute a lot to the urban environment of which they are part of: on one side, with time, constructing a very successful relationship with citizens (not necessarily cinephiles); on the other side, facilitating a gentrification of those city areas, and in such a way validating the creative-class credo of the political and economical decision-makers. The public sphere and the private interests: the constitution of reciprocal spaces starts here.

### **GLF / 1**

If a cinemathèque, say the one of Bologna, is a proactive space for the city, in what terms does it actually (re)act to its hosting body, namely the city? By what means? And to what results? To attempt some reflections I first went and talked to Gian Luca Farinelli, the director of the Cineteca di Bologna. Farinelli is a pleasantly nerdish guy, with the smart-classic look typical of

the institutional role. He is truly, and contagiously, engaged in transferring his interest about the cinematic expression onto 'his' people, none excluded, from programs' curators to cleaning staff. I went with some questions in mind, but set myself no particular agenda. I decided to listen and report my impressions, rather than reporting precise Q&A.

Institution-wise, the first aim of such a structure is the conservation and usability of its collections, being they on acetate or paper. The primary task is to show and preserve what they have (the concrete results of cinematic expression). There's no intended attitude towards social analysis, public entertainment, or rather intellectual speculation: any critical and engaged position comes from where a program takes off, that means it comes always from the singular curator of the screening series. Farinelli, and the Cineteca di Bologna, allows controversial point-of-views in/outside the building but always after securing to the public the availability of the broadest range of material. Somehow, one can speak of the principle of (a certain) quantity over quality. This is quite unusual for such an environment. I think it's probably a winning card, being able to tie many society's sectors, and to attract to its theatres, teenagers to elderly, from children (literally: they also have a program of cine-nursery) to specialists.

Take for instance the Festival del Cinema Libero (Festival of free cinema): a yearly series of appointments and screenings focused of the 'found-again' cinema, not on new productions. Every summer, in the major square of Bologna, past masterpieces and forgotten productions, restored by the work of the Cineteca technicians (the 'Cinema Ritrovato' department) are shown in their full cinematic potential. The Festival of Cinema Libero attracts a surprisingly international participation of authors and audience, and it is funded partly by the Comune di Bologna and partly by private foundations interested in the conservation and restoration of films.

For Bologna, this is definitely a bonus. For Farinelli and the Cineteca, a considerable achievement that they are able to secure funding from both public and private sectors. For urban developers and the political elite, an added value demonstrating the good work done. You can call it a win-win situation, since for the citizens too having such institutions and programs represents a matter of prestige and coolness, despite the rising costs of rental and goods in that neighborhood or location. Culture is definitely an asset whatever perspective you decide to consider it from.

## **GLF / 2**

When I was asked to write this piece, I wondered where my interest in cinema was lying. Everyone has an angle to enter. For my part, rather than being a self-contained interest in film and film theory is more a projection towards a society and its manifestations. I pay attention to what happens in the cinema world only because I consider it a reading of a reality, as long as other activities in which I am involved, namely art and writing. In short, cinema for me is a trans-disciplinary tool to read society's layers.

In my conversation with GLF I wondered where he was standing in regard of this aspect: does the Cineteca di Bologna differ its programs according to different platforms like in-house screenings, international festivals, and artistic exhibitions? Does the Cineteca have a unique broad attitude in the entire context in which it acts, or does it attempt diverse narrative forms?

The status of cinema, and the mode of making cinema (including its diffusion activities), has been influenced by other disciplines in an on-going modifying process. Among the contexts that have kidnapped the mechanisms of cinema, and applied them to their purpose, one can mention theatre (Robert Lepage among others) and documentar-ism (Michael Moore), not to name advertising and contemporary art, where cinema mechanisms are a feature of those milieus. In short, there has been a rich terrain for inter-work where luckily no area has remained untouched. To respond to this challenge, to face the ever-modifying panorama of cinema, the Cineteca di Bologna set up a series of parallel projects in publishing, education and diffusion. Here comes in the diverse narrative forms mentioned above, that not always privileged (a certain) quantity over quality, rather reciprocity. If you have twenty minutes to spend, I invite you to take a look at [www.cinetecadibologna.it](http://www.cinetecadibologna.it) (in English too). You'll find the whole description of the various "A scuola col cinema" (At school with the cinema, in-house activities with school); "Ipotesi Cinema" (creative workshops on documentary-making); "Cineteca/Cineteca speciale/Cinegrafie" (respectively monthly, quarterly and annual publications, and the occasional book); "Fronte del Pubblico" (collaboration with other cities and networks).

All the activities above attempt to counter a decline of the cinema status. According to GLF, cinema seems incapable of 1) attracting and forming youth and 2) tell the reality of the present. "Screen" is referred more and more to that of the computer, not the cinema's one. Film directors concentrate their effort in a timeless and placeless opera, avoiding reality. One for all: have you recently seen a film about/with police characters, which is not a romantic imaginary of the police itself, in either enthusiastically good or overly bad terms? The two axes of decline are

intertwined, since youth perceives the dichotomy between the reality and its cinematographic representation. We are not made in black and white; we are shades of grey. In journalism, art, theatre, writing, even in dance you can spot this fact, but not in cinema. The fragmentation of reality characterizes the cinema of our times, and its incapacity of representing and telling a country (and to attract its youth) is its prominent feature. Even TV, within (and without) the trash reality shows and prostitution acts, in some occasions disrupts the oiled system of representation it is supposed to establish. Not cinema: in Italy and elsewhere, films are unable (or made unable) to organize and produce a *mise en scène* of the contradictions of the society. And if, as J. Rancière put it, the aesthetic is the ability to think contradiction, then obviously cinema lacks aesthetics capable of carrying this term. The pneumatic vacuum that most producers and directors light more and more thanks to the furious economic machine of the cinema industry, leaves very few spaces for a more complex forms of narration. I believe GLF found some ways to act on a different scale, engaging his institution in a broad and public service, but also proposing smaller projects capable to disrupt the all-consuming-experience of the cultural industry. (Maybe) the constitution of reciprocal spaces develops from here.

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