

The Archives of Industrial Cinema and Business Communication in Castellanza

by Daniele Pozzi

The Archives of Industrial Cinema and Business Communication

is a non-profit association founded in 1998 by Confindustria and the Carlo Cattaneo University – LIUC and within two years, an associate member, the Centro studi per la documentazione storica ed economica dell'impresa (Center for Studies of the Historical Documentation of Enterprise) in Castellanza in the province of Varese between Milan and the Swiss border. Since its foundation, the Archives has been managed by Anna Maria Falchero, and the association chaired by Valerio Castronovo since 2000.

The Archives' field of interest centers on audiovisual material produced by and for Italian companies. This material covers a range of purposes: advertising, vocational training, internal communication and so on. The Archives, whose original core was made up of the sizeable heritage of Confindustria film archives (still being acquired), aims to digitalize the entire production of industrial records, and maintain a continuously updated census of them through the General Catalogue of the Industrial Cinema, available on the web site of the association.

Only recently have researchers begun to understand the historical value of industrial films as a source of documentation. Their immediacy is certainly fascinating; however their preservation, valorization and interpretation pose problems that cannot be ignored. Images are essential to illustrate events, to understand individual and collective histories, and to reconstruct economic and social situations. For this reason, the preservation of historical heritage assumes a relevancy that reaches far beyond a restricted circle of scholars. Therefore, the Archives has the ambition of communicating not only with the research world, but also with companies, institutions and anyone interested in business communication, whether print media, cinema, radio or television.

The association currently operates through its media library, which has made about 600 documentaries accessible to the public and uses the preserved material to organize teaching and training activities as well as conferences; and to produce multimedia and audiovisual instruments that appeal to the wider public.

Among the conferences, the Giornate del Cinema Industriale (Industrial Cinema Days) has become a regular event. Every year, the Archives organizes a multidisciplinary meeting at the Carlo Cattaneo University – LIUC. The seventh edition of the conference (Edison: Waterpower in Lombardy held on the 18th May 2007), presented in collaboration with Edison Spa, expanded on the origins and evolution of the electrical industry in Italy and featured one of the Archives' most treasured assets: the collection of documentaries of the Cinema Section Edison-Volta directed by the noted Italian filmmaker, Ermanno Olmi.

Valerio Castronovo (Chairman of the Archives), Edoardo Borruso (Luigi Bocconi University), Claudio Pavese (Università of Milan), Anna Maria Falchero (director of the

Archives) and Davide Pozzi (Manager of Institutional Communication for Edison Spa) took part in the conference.

Since 2003, the Archives has cooperated with Museimpresa for the organization of events during the Culture of Business Enterprise Week and is involved in many other projects for research and promotion of this valuable heritage, both at local and national levels.

Olmi and the Cinema Section Edison-Volta

Ermanno Olmi (Bergamo, 1931) started his career as filmmaker as a young man only twenty years old, while working for the Milanese electrical company Edison-Volta in order to pay for his studies at the Accademia di Arte Drammatica (Drama Academy). The quality of his first documentaries was such that he attracted the attention of the company management. Thus, something that started as a purely amateurish activity during the working men's recreational club became a real Cinema Section directed by Olmi until 1961, producing about thirty short films on all aspects of the life of the electrical industry group.

Indeed, Edison played a major role during the most fertile period of Italian industrial cinema. Between the 1950s and 1960s, all the major companies in Italy – Montecatini, Fiat, Finsider, Eni... - produced (or financed the production of) documentaries whose purpose was to display the latest developments of their industrial activities. However, many of these films turned out to be truly artistic productions, competing in festivals dedicated to the genre of short films (It goes without saying that Olmi's films won many awards).

The experience in the Cinema Section Edison-Volta was central to Olmi's development. In his documentaries, one perceives many themes of the fully grown director, such as his empathic representation of human labor (a sort of "heroic" work ethic) and his interest in the extended rhythms of nature. It is not by chance that the first feature film by Olmi closely followed the pattern of his documentary work., The young director started off in cinema in 1959 with the film *Il tempo si è fermato* in which the protagonist is a caretaker of the dam of a hydroelectric reservoir, a figure that Olmi had already used in the films produced on behalf of Edison.

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