

9.5mm: And Cinema Is Everywhere

International Conference, Bern and online, November 17-19, 2022



One hundred years ago, the French company Pathé introduced the “Pathé Baby,” based on a new film gauge: 9.5mm. The Pathé Baby system was designed to suit the needs of amateur movie makers: it was simple, accessible, versatile, reliable, and safe. It also had to be inexpensive and portable. Projectors were made first, together with a catalogue of films reduced to the new format. A few months later, Pathé also proposed a 9.5mm camera, that worked with safety film.

The success of the 9.5mm format, along with that of the 16mm format launched in 1923 by Kodak, ushered a new era in cinema history. Films were not restricted to the theatre anymore; they were not only the expensive productions of a distant, professional studio system based far away. They could also be made at home, or by one’s neighbours in clubs or associations. And they could be shown in town halls, churches, schools, factories, or living rooms. Other distribution networks were created for films and for machines, as well as networks of users, journals, or events. Cinema permeated the culture at every level, and to an unprecedented extent. It entered the domestic space, as well as many diverse social or political contexts. It was now everywhere.

And, of course, it was in Switzerland. In 1923, Pathé Baby opened a Swiss office in Geneva. Cameras and projectors were soon on display in many stores. They were marketed towards families, and yet they could be used by artists, scientists, or teachers. But for all of them, Pathé Baby meant a more familiar, intimate, and tactile relationship with cinema. By making film technology accessible and touchable, by literally putting cinema “in your hands,” it turned anyone into a potential filmmaker or projectionist.

This conference aims at reflecting on the 9.5mm format and its heritage, at a time when digital media are perceived as taking the diffusion of the moving image in our lives and world to a whole new level. Among other possible topics, the organizers would be interested for instance in papers on:

- 9.5mm technology: the gauge, its apparatuses and their material specificities, from emulsions to mechanic structures to screen sizes, etc.;
- 9.5mm and the history of amateur formats: 16mm, 8mm, or amateur cinema before the 1920s;
- 9.5mm versions of commercial films, their history, economic organisation, particularities;
- institutional and non-commercial uses of the 9.5mm format: educational films, religious films, cinema in health and hygiene education, etc.;
- amateur uses of the 9.5mm format: home movies, clubs, social organisation and aesthetic qualities;
- the establishment of 9.5mm in Switzerland: structures, circulations, etc.

Proposals for papers (1 page max.) or panels should be sent to 9-5@lichtspiel.ch, together with a short biography of the author(s), before April 15, 2022.



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