

Learning from the Keepers

Archival Training in Italian Cinematheques

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This piece wishes to offer a historical overview of the pedagogical opportunities that have arisen in Italy in the field of film preservation and archiving. The aim of this overview is to offer a concise discussion of the development of moving image archive education in Italy, as this has seldom been discussed in great detail in anglophone scholarship. In this contribution, I wish to summarize a few experiences that concern some of the main Italian educational and archival institutions as case studies, emphasizing the role of such initiatives and co-operations within the history of film archiving in Italy. In fact, I think that these experiences will introduce properly the pedagogical opportunities within the field of cinematheques in Italy. The recent expansion in Italian graduate programs dedicated to film preservation is contributing to empower the increasingly high interest in archival and preservation practices. A broad range of national institutions are involved in these programs, and even if international collaborations are not standard yet, the network of educational and archival institutions is currently strong.

Thus, I would like to highlight the importance of being acquainted with the institutional history and development of film archives, since they have a pivotal role in shaping the history of cinema. Audiovisual archives preserve moving images as cultural memory items, and help valorize films and media as works of art and historical proofs. In fact, in my opinion, an alternative film history could be written by those institutions that collect, restore, inve-

stigate and conserve audiovisual heritage. As film scholar Marie Frappat has argued, the film archive is included

dans un discours implicite sur l'histoire du cinéma: tentée par l'idéal de l'exhaustivité, elle se retrouve toujours confrontée à la réalité du manque et à la nécessité du choix, et ses méthodes de classement et de cataloguage sont toujours représentatives d'un discours et d'une certaine approche de l'histoire du cinéma (Frappat 2006, 21).

This archival field has considerably changed in recent years, thanks to the widespread awareness of audiovisual heritage and its policy. Furthermore, many remarkable technological developments have had a dramatic impact on cataloguing, preservation, and accessibility. Currently, film conservation practices have a systematic, academic, and ethical framework, since films require suitable policies, due to their structural fragility.

Nevertheless, this path has been longer than expected. Many countries could testify to a different experience; for instance, in Italy, wide access policies have not always been the standard for film archives. The question pointed out by Edmondson, "Is Film Archiving a Profession?" (Edmondson 1995), in Italy has not received an exhaustive answer until recently. This may depend on a misunderstanding on the relevance of film heritage. Of course, according to Walter Benjamin, photogra-

phy and cinema are art forms subject to technical reproducibility, and in Italy the approach of Benedetto Croce's idealistic aesthetics has prevailed for a long time, i.e. celebrating the artist's poetic intuition against the technological process which devalued the aura of images (Hill & Minghelli 2014, 9). Furthermore, Italy's overflowing visual environment, filled with artworks, has shaped the conventions towards mass culture in terms of axiological judgment about the value of film artifacts. As a consequence, the conservation of film heritage has always been acknowledged as subaltern to the traditional cultural heritage's preservation priorities, which have been more respected by the governmental institutions.

The first Italian academic courses on Film Studies were established in the 1960s. In 1961, the first university course on the history of cinema was instituted at the University of Pisa and taught by Luigi Chiarini; then, in 1965, Mario Verdone and Pio Baldelli became the first scholars who received teaching qualification for the subject of Film History and Critique in Italian universities. Before that, cinema had not been included among the major arts studied at the Italian universities, in spite of its huge success during the golden age of Neorealism, when Italian cinema gained widespread recognition worldwide, due to its strong ethic and educational purpose (Marcus 1986). In Italy, the academic acknowledgement of cinema followed an international tendency in the 1960s which saw the establishment of Film Studies through the foundation of university study programs concurrently with a change in the underpinning attitudes of cinema's production framework: for instance, in the 1950s Hollywood productions turned cinema into a more independent artistic attempt, and the French *auteur* theory affirmed film as the product of a director's artistic vision.

Even though the film archives had already been institutionalized in the first half of the twentieth century, it was only in the 1980s, after the UNESCO Belgrade conference (UNESCO 1980), that film was actually recognized as significant cultural heritage, rather than just a commercial product. Nowadays, the recent transitions in the media landscape, due to the current digital revolution, have brought films' consumption and film heritage towards the attention of a wide audience, and Italy is no exception. The digital era creates a new technical basis for a whole range of projects aimed at

opening up audiovisual archives. Before considering the digital transition in the Italian context, I would like to first offer a brief historical overview of the foundation and histories of film archives in Italy.

Film Archives in Italy

According to Italian law, film archives can generally be defined as places dedicated to the preservation and transmission of knowledge, where films and non-film materials (books, documents, photographs, props, apparatuses or other cultural artifacts) are preserved, collected, and maintained for use. Preservation and access are at the core of the institutional purposes; nevertheless, film scholar Gian Piero Brunetta provocatively states:

Italian film archives are like parallel lines: they never meet (...) in the absence of public catalogs, a policy of common service, but also - of course - of adequate subsidies. Just a few historians have had access to a catacomb space of conservation, and have been able to uncover by themselves the small coffins of unidentified Italian silent films; they speak of an experience very similar to that of Poe's stories and films by Mario Bava (Brunetta 1981, 47).¹

The creepy landscape of Italian film archives ironically described here sounds as entertaining as a venturesome gothic novel, but the goal of this portrait was to emphasize the issues of limited accessibility that characterized the institutions that were supposed to guarantee citizens' engagement. A critical outline of the slow establishment of scholarly-archival collaborations in joint efforts with educational institutions is crucial for understanding the range of pedagogical strategies and experiences which form the foundation for today's training in moving image archiving education.

The history of Italy's archival institutions has been accurately described in Marie Frappat's *Cinémathèques à l'italienne: conservation et diffusion du patrimoine cinématographique en Italie* (2006) and is a good reference point for offering a critical outline. Just like the major *cinémathèques* in the world, film collection in Italy also emerged and gained momentum in the 1930s, when "cinema came to occupy a different position for the nation-state" (Hagener 2007, 78), since after the introduction of sound

technology, the archival institutions defined the symbolic universe represented by cinema as the place of the national identities. In 1935, Galeazzo Ciano (head of Ministry for Press and Propaganda, later Ministry of Popular Culture) and Luigi Freddi (head of General Management for Cinematography) founded the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome, the oldest film school in Western Europe. It was a special educational institution established in Italy with the aim of teaching film directing and cinematography. Freddi and Ciano appointed Luigi Chiarini as director, who gathered a small archive of films used for teaching purposes. The small students' collection, which this appointment resulted in, would later become the current Cineteca Nazionale. During the Nazi occupation of Rome, in 1943, the Germans requisitioned and dispersed the original collection, but in 1949 the Cineteca Nazionale was instituted by the State as the central archive devoted to safeguarding and promoting Italian film culture, following a legal deposit model which prescribed that a copy of each film produced in Italy should be deposited in this collection. Consequently the collection grew bigger, and more than 50,000 films have been kept, preserved and made available for circulation by this institution. Its library, dedicated to Luigi Chiarini, the archive's first manager and founder of the seminal film studies journal *Bianco e Nero*, is a very well-stocked collection of books and the major collection on the field in Italy. Since 1997 the Cineteca Nazionale has become a private foundation with State participation under the Ministry of Cultural Heritage.²

Rome is also home to another important film archive: Cinecittà Luce, which is the merger of Cinecittà Holding and Istituto LUCE (L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa). Founded in 1924, LUCE was the first state film company in Europe. It was mainly focused on documentary production, with a huge collection of newsreels and documentaries from its early days. Since Cinecittà Luce owns the rights to the newsreels held in its vaults, there are no copyright issues related to digitizing and sharing its materials on the Internet. Both the section named Archivio Luce on its website and Cinecittà Luce's channel on YouTube portal contain thousands of meters of film stock scanned, restored and uploaded. To this day, Cinecittà Luce remains a state-funded company intertwined with the Ministry of Culture.

Since its foundation in 1947, the Cineteca Italiana, the film archive of the city of Milan, has contributed significantly to developing the conservation and valorisation of their film heritage through a broad range of activities in the artistically and economically vibrant city of Milan. It was founded by a group of cinéphiles and intellectuals—among whom Luigi Comencini and Alberto Lattuada who would later become important directors in their own right (Casetti 2005)—who shared a deep passion for film and started their adventure by preserving a stock of flammable films. Loosely based on the story of the Cineteca Italiana's founders, Comencini's film *La valigia dei sogni* (1953) described a cinema lover's quest to preserve and present silent films, as well as his sacrifices for the promotion of films' educational goals. Cineteca Italiana was a private association which became a foundation in 1996.

The Museo Nazionale del Cinema (National Cinema Museum) was founded in 1958 in Turin, by scholar and collector Maria Adriana Prolo, director Giovanni Pastrone, screenwriter Arrigo Frusta, and critic Mario Gromo. In July 2000, the museum's collection was moved to the Mole Antonelliana in Turin, the most symbolic building of the city's identity, which has also become one of the most visited museums in Turin. The museum's uniqueness is highlighted by the building's spiral-wise layout, and on the rare and precious material which is kept in it. This comprises an astonishing breadth of film related materials which form the basis for an archaeological view of the media of film: film props, apparatuses, photos, posters, film memorabilia, silent and sound films etc., with a strong emphasis on films shot and produced in Turin. The Bibliomediateca Mario Gromo is one of the most influential centres of documentation on cinema and photography in Europe thanks to the legacy of Mario Gromo's holdings, the well-known writer and critic for the Italian newspaper *La Stampa*, to whose memory the library is dedicated. The Museo del Cinema was transformed into a foundation in 1991, the year of its main founder's death.

Another very important institution in Italy is the Cineteca di Bologna, created in 1963 as a municipal institution, deeply rooted in the Bolognese local culture, and at the same time devoted to an international network. Since 1989 the Cineteca di Bologna is member of the Fédération Interna-

tionale des Archives du Film (FIAF) and of the Association des Cinémathèques Européennes (ACE). Its yearly festival, 'Il Cinema Ritrovato,' is one of the central events for scholars in the field of film heritage and film restoration worldwide, but also for all kinds of audience, since it includes sections dedicated to kids and entertainment. Thus, the Cineteca di Bologna holds a large film and non-film collection, including a rich library, and promotes exhibitions and workshops. Moreover, its building is located very close to the University of Bologna's department of Performing Arts and Communication Sciences, ensuring a strong connection with the city's educational institutions. Its library, dedicated to Renzo Renzi who was among the founders of Bologna's Commissione Cinema, supports the idea of the cinémathèque as a public research centre. In 2012, the archive became a private foundation.

Gemonà, a small town of the north-eastern region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, has hosted the Cineteca del Friuli since 1977, following the 1976 earthquake that destroyed the region. From the ruins of the catastrophe, the film club Cinépopolare has given to the citizens a message of hope and re-birth through cinema. In 1985, the film club became a proper institutional film archive, and is currently among the five major ones in Italy. Furthermore, it is a FIAF member since 1989. The film collection has grown extensively over the years, including both fiction and documentaries, but also small format films. Since 1982, the Cineteca del Friuli organizes a very important festival in Pordenone dedicated to silent films: 'Giornate del cinema muto,' one of the most highly profiled events in the field.

Many other regions and local entities have established proper audiovisual heritage institutions, such as Sardinia, Tuscany, Apulia, Sicily, Calabria, and others. There are also other archives devoted to specific kinds of collection, such as the materials held by Home Movies (Italy's Amateur Film Archive) in Bologna, or those dedicated to performing arts, held by the Archive of the Spectacle, kept by Centro Teatro Ateneo at Sapienza University of Rome, just to name a few examples. Following this overview of the emergence of film archives in Italy, I will now focus on the institutionalization of moving image archiving education at Italian universities and the interrelations between universities and archives.

Archival Training: a Network of Institutions

Film archives promote the spread of film culture but, first of all, encourage and secure the correct practice for the conservation and preservation of their acquisitions, in order to prevent the chemical and physical decay of the delicate elements they safeguard. As film archives have grown and developed, a strong need for them to find qualified personnel has emerged in order for them to cope with all the complex tasks required. Very often, one of the best ways to cultivate professional skills is to offer traineeship opportunities, which allow potential employees to work with experienced staff. In the early years of film preservation, this was informally arranged between a film archive and an intern, whereas archival apprenticeship today is increasingly university-based and nurtured by the many recently founded programs which aim at developing professional skills in moving image archiving.

In Italy, one of the most well-known academic centres for film restoration that works closely with various film archives is the laboratory La Camera Ottica at the University of Udine's department in Gorizia. La Camera Ottica is dedicated to film and video preservation and restoration and shares its facilities with the lab CREA (Center of Researches and Audiovisual Processes), which is committed to digital production and post-production. La Camera Ottica has specialized equipment, and is run by a highly skilled team, with a thorough historiographical, methodological, and technical knowledge of film, covering a broad range of different materials, including small formats, experimental cinema, video art and amateur filmmaking. The lab occupies a central role in all of the University's educational activities related to moving image studies and forms the basis for the expertise developed by the students' engagement with it. Adding to this expertise is the research of several international doctorate projects, which rely on La Camera Ottica, contributing fruitfully to the University's training in audiovisual archiving and restoration. The international character of these projects as well as the many internship programs arranged and promoted by regional fundings have also helped to open up a wide range of job opportunities in both national and international settings.

Between 2010 and 2016, one of the primary academic courses to offer a full master's degree almost

uniquely devoted to moving image restoration—in combination with postproduction skills—is the Italian-language M.A. in *Restauro Digitale Audio-Video* organized by the Sapienza University in Rome in collaboration with the laboratory of the research centre *Centro Teatro Ateneo*. Thanks to the organisers' keen commitment, the program has successfully established collaborations with the *Cineteca Nazionale*, the *ICRCPAL* (*Istituto Centrale per il Restauro e la Conservazione del Patrimonio Archivistico e Librario*), *Cinecittà Luce*, and with *L'Immagine Ritrovata* in Bologna, a state-of-the-art laboratory which works closely with the *Cineteca di Bologna*, and has been operating in the film restoration industry for over 20 years. The *Digital Audiovisual Restoration M.A.* is organised by *Desirée Sabatini* and comprises theoretical and technical classes with academics and professionals in the field, and has a laboratory for developing technical skills. I collaborated with this program in coordinating and developing internship programs for its student interns. For their internships, we could offer the students a good number of projects at Italian and foreign partner institutions, including both cinematheques and labs. Among the institutions abroad we have collaborated with include the *George Eastman House* in Rochester, New York, the *Österreichisches Filmmuseum* in Vienna, the *Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique* in Brussels, *CNC–Archives Françaises du film* in Bois d'Arcy, *EYE Filmmuseum* in Amsterdam, *La cinémathèque de Toulouse*, *Filmoteca de Catalunya*, and, very recently, *Cineric* in Lisbon. In Italy, we have mainly worked with the *Cineteca Nazionale*, *Cinecittà Luce*, *L'immagine ritrovata* and *Augustus Color*, while also occasionally collaborating with other Italian institutions and labs, such as *La Camera Ottica* in Gorizia and the *Home Movies* archive in Bologna. Each internship was supervised by the coordinator and I, and everything was registered through a portal, provided by the *Lazio Region*, designed to cover the interns' work insurance policy costs involved for the host institution or company. All these connections guaranteed several traineeship opportunities, in which students cooperated directly within prestigious preservation and restoration projects. Unfortunately, the *CTA* was shut down in 2016 due to a judicial lawsuit with the central administration of *Sapienza*³, without current plans to reactivate, leaving a gap in the landscape of moving image archiving in Italy.

Since 2002, the *Università degli Studi di Milano* and the *Cineteca Italiana* have developed a program of scientific cooperation, under the supervision of professor *Elena Dagrada* and the general manager of the *Cineteca Italiana*, *Matteo Pavesi*. The aims of this scientific cooperation are to study, spread, and conserve cinema heritage. In particular, the agreement encourages the development of collaborative research projects by making archival materials held at the *Cineteca di Milano* available to teachers, researchers, PhD students, and graduate students of the university, following a detailed set of rules for access. In return for providing access for research purposes in both national and international projects, this agreement helps the *Cineteca Italiana* in cataloguing and analyzing its film material and thus contributes to the enrichment of its holdings. This collaboration also entails the *Cineteca Italiana's* participation in the University's teaching activities, announced through detailed syllabi well in advance. Furthermore, in 2014, the University of Milan successfully applied for funding from the *Lombardy region* for a valorization project on regional cultural heritage.⁴ The project—submitted with the working title “Innovative methods and practices for the safeguarding and valorisation of film funds: The *Carlo Pozzi* fund in *Sesto San Giovanni* municipality, financed by *Lombardy region*” and carried out between November 2014 and November 2015—was coordinated by *Dagrada*, who was the supervisor and scientific manager of the project. This project has fostered follow-up research opportunities and projects, which allowed for developing additional expertise on the technical interventions necessary for preserving, digitizing and cataloguing the film elements researched (35mm and 16mm, and/or digital) and non-film material (paper, photographic, and audio elements). Consequently, the reconstruction activity, the study of historical memory and anthropology nurtured by these research activities have opened exciting new avenues for the researchers involved, and will further contribute to engaging citizens with the outcomes of this research, through a series of presentations and planned events. In *Turin*, the university and the *Museo Nazionale del Cinema* have been collaborating for many years. This collaboration entails the organization of exhibitions and conferences. Both institutions have hosted screenings and workshops on film programming and archiving that were targeted at

students, who were involved in organizing shows, setting up exhibitions, and writing journals. For instance, students have organized specialized programs at Cinema Massimo and Bibliomediateca Mario Gromo. Furthermore, the university and the Museo also published a call for “young programmers” to create events in order to strengthen the ties between the Museo Nazionale del Cinema and the university students and with the aim to involve them in realizing programs, exhibitions, and screenings, which also to some extent experiment with new media.

Having outlined the different programs for moving image archiving education that exist in Italy, one immediately notices several differences. For instance, La Camera Ottica’s initiatives and the Sapienza’s M.A. share a more international outlook, while the programs in Milan and Turin have a predominantly regional focus seeking to engage the students with its cities’ territory. Furthermore, Turin’s program is less focused on technological innovation, but rather concentrates on the programming and presentation of the moving image heritage. Conversely, the Milan program aims to develop stronger technical skills, in particular by involving computer labs in the training phase.

In addition to this overview and discussion, it is also worth highlighting the role which educational initiatives organized primarily by film heritage institutions are increasingly beginning to play. In 2017, for the second consecutive year, the Cineteca di Bologna offers eight different courses within its training program “I Mestieri del Cinema” (which can be translated into Film Crafts), supported by the Emilia Romagna region and the European Social Fund, for inhabitants of the region. These courses aim at strengthening the field of audiovisual heritage preservation in the region, seeking to meet a demand for specialized skills from companies in the region. These courses are completely free; they offer a two-fold educational opportunity—both theoretical and practical—which comprises lecturing, project work and internships. Among the courses’ partners (film festivals, associations and more), there are ACE, L’Immagine Ritrovata, and two different universities: Alma Mater Studiorum – Università degli Studi di Bologna and Università degli Studi di Parma.

Film archives have also initiated other kinds of apprenticeship programs without involvement

from universities, which seek to nurture both methodological and technical skills in order to shape a new generation of film archivists. For instance, since 2007, Cineteca di Bologna has been promoting and hosting the “FIAF Film Restoration Summer School” in collaboration with FIAF and ACE. This summer school is not an academic project, but a primarily a hands-on training program which combines technical and professional development with thought-provoking theoretical classes led by some of the most highly profiled international archivists and professors in the field. The program hosts international participants coming from a great variety of countries and aims at spreading and improving knowledge on film archiving and restoration worldwide, relying on the expertise and infrastructure of L’Immagine Ritrovata and by employing both e-learning strategies and hands-on work of training sessions with restoration professionals. As Frappat highlights, the experience of the Cineteca di Bologna in the field of restoration is internationally recognized thanks to the dissemination provided by the festival, but also by its educational opportunities. As she writes,

Cette position névralgique s’affirme d’autant plus aujourd’hui que depuis plusieurs années la FIAF Summer School of Film Restoration est hébergée par le laboratoire de L’Immagine Ritrovata où elle organise des conférences quotidiennes sur la question ainsi que des présentations de cas de restaurations. (Frappat 2013, 46).

Conclusion

Thanks to the number and the variety of their activities, the Italian cinematheques have become a hub for cultural and training initiatives, which involve universities as educational institutions. Education and training are also provided directly by the film archives themselves, both at the national and international level. This dialogue among institutions helps carry out innovative research on the conservation of materials and on the history of cinema. At the same time, it helps instruct the new generation of film archivists and film restorers who will take care of the cinematographic heritage, by molding their knowledge through diverse educational programs.

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Endnotes

1 I would like to thank Massimo Benvegnù (EYE Film Institute) for suggesting this citation.

2 http://www.fondazioneecs.it/context.jsp?ID_LINK=115&area=5. Accessed 01 Nov. 2017.

3 Sapienza University suited the CTA due to issues related to the restoration and intended purpose of its theatre, which the central administration wanted to transform into a conference room. As a protest, the head of CTA resigned and the centre has been closed. The university theatre was founded in 1934, and has hosted shows, seminars and workshops by such names as Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba, Jerzy Grotowski, Judith Malina and others, inside a department which gave rise the first Italian chairs of History of Drama and Theatre. The research centre was set in 1981 and has promoted hundreds of initiatives dedicated to the research of performing arts, plus a video archive with thousands of pieces, including both the video recordings of theatre shows and worldwide experiences between rite and theatre, which influenced European theatre culture. Furthermore, CTA has participated also to the European project ECLAP - European Collected Library of Artistic Performance.

4 <http://www.regione.lombardia.it/wps/portal/istituzionale/HP/DettaglioBando/servizi-e-informazioni/enti-e-operatori/cultura/beni-culturali/patrimonio-archeologico-siti-unesco>. Accessed 01 Nov. 2017.