

Crowdsourcing memories and artefacts to reconstruct Italian cinema history: Micro-histories of small-town exhibition in the 1950s

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Abstract:

In the mid-1950s, cinema was Italy's second most important industry (Wagstaff 1995: 97). At its peak, the country's exhibition circuit boasted some 8,000 cinemas (Quaglietti 1980). Despite the important role that cinema played within the social, cultural and economic fabric of 1950s Italy, we know relatively little about the workings of the distribution and exhibition networks across urban and rural contexts. We know even less about the individuals whose working lives and family businesses depended on the cinema industry. This article uses micro-history case studies to explore some of the broader questions associated with the history of film exhibition and distribution in 1950s Italy.

We use both the oral history testimonies collected during the AHRC-funded *Italian Cinema Audiences* project (www.italiancinemaaudiences.org) and the crowdsourced digital artefacts donated by members of the general public during the creation of CineRicordi (www.cinericordi.it), an online archive that allows users to explore the history of Italian cinema-going. Building on the oral histories gathered for the *Italian Cinema Audiences* project, this archive integrates the video-interviews of 160 ordinary cinema-goers with public and private archival materials. With this article, we aim to explore the 'relationship between image, oral narrative, and memory' (Freund and Thomson 2011: 4), where - as Freund and Thomson describe – 'words invest photographs with meaning' (2011: 5).

Addressing recent calls from within the field of new cinema history for a more film-centric analysis of the cinema-going experience (Bilttereyst 2018), this article attempts to breakdown the opposition that typically characterises the approaches associated with new cinema history and film studies. With a focus on the social and cultural history of cinema-going, new cinema history has tended to distinguish itself from a traditional film studies

approach, which privileges the film text as an aesthetic object of study (Maltby et al 2007). However, as Daniel Biltreyest's recent keynote (2018) demonstrates, there is increasing debate about how these seemingly oppositional approaches can be reconciled. This article attempts to address the question of precisely *how* the film text as object of study can be reinstated within new cinema history. Through a series of case studies, we make use of artefacts sourced from the private archives of exhibitors to examine how individual films were promoted, distributed and marketed as well as consumed at international, national and local levels. Considering the local 'consumption context' (Fanchi and Garofalo 2018) of individual films, we illustrate how considerations about the film text within new cinema history research do not necessarily need to be limited to the analysis of a film's aesthetics and style.

Keywords: Cinema history, exhibition and distribution strategies, rural cinema, Italy

Introduction

In the mid-1950s, cinema was Italy's second most important industry (Wagstaff 1995: 97). At its peak, the country's exhibition circuit boasted some 8,000 cinemas (Quaglietti 1980). Despite the important role that cinema played within the social, cultural and economic fabric of 1950s Italy, we know relatively little about the workings of the distribution and exhibition networks across urban and rural contexts. We know even less about the individuals whose working lives and family businesses depended on the cinema industry. This article uses micro-history case studies to explore some of the broader questions associated with the history of film exhibition and distribution in 1950s Italy.

We use both the oral history testimonies collected during the AHRC-funded *Italian Cinema Audiences* project (www.italiancinemaaudiences.org) and the crowdsourced digital artefacts donated by members of the general public during the creation of CineRicordi (www.cinericordi.it), an online archive that allows users to explore the history of Italian cinema-going. Building on the oral histories gathered for the *Italian Cinema Audiences* project, this archive integrates the video-interviews of 160 ordinary cinema-goers with public archives as well as private collections donated by our participants, some of whom worked in cinemas or grew up in families involved in the film exhibition industry. Fanchi and Garofalo argue that in order to determine the meaning that a film held for audiences we must consider all aspects of films' promotion, exhibition and consumption context (2018: 10):

Analysing the meaning of a film, the value it has assumed for viewers, means considering a wide and populated field of relationships, which includes the intertextual network in which it is placed, how it has been distributed, the conditions of its viewing and then the audiences, with their stories, their memory, their cultural capital.¹

With this article, we aim to unfold audiences' stories, by exploring the 'relationship between image, oral narrative, and memory' (Freund and Thomson 2011: 4), where – as Freund and Thomson describe – 'words invest photographs with meaning' (2011: 5). We also intend to follow Shevchenko's call (2016: 272) to 'move beyond the simple memory-photography equation to explore the range of complex entanglements photographs, both as images and as material objects, have with the lived experience of the past'. One of our first encounters with this complex entanglement between the image as a material object and the image as a record of lived experience occurred when Mirella, one of the participants interviewed during the 2012 pilot project, and who had worked for the 20th Century Fox office in Rome, revealed the history of a photo taken when Tyrone Power visited the Rome office in the early 1950s. Just as the picture was about to be sent to the US, the marketing team realised that one of the employees was holding a copy of the communist newspaper *L'Unità*, and made the decision to retouch the image (see Fig.1).²



Fig. 1: Tyrone Power during a visit to the Twenty Century Fox office in Rome. [Courtesy of Mirella's personal collection]

In her account, Mirella not only recalls the story behind the picture, but her narrative is simultaneously an opportunity to comment on the workings of distribution and marketing, while also positioning herself within the context of post-war Italian culture: unlike many young Italian women, at that time Mirella spoke fluent English, was employed in an

international company and had a real grasp of the dynamics of the film business, when openly commenting – for example – on Tyrone Power’s marriage to Linda Christian just before the release of his film, *Prince of Foxes* (Henry King, 1949) produced by 20th Century Fox. The so-called ‘wedding of the century’, or – as Federico Vitella (2016: 83) describes it – ‘the first post-war international media event in Italy’,³ was ‘conceived and staged for public consumption’ (Gundle 2008: 203) with the aim of peddling – as Stephen Gundle claims – ‘modern-day fairy tales’ (Gundle 2000: 47) particularly for young girls. This was not the case for Mirella, who saw through the publicity machine and was able to articulate the complex relationship between Hollywood glamour and the Italian post-war appetite for the American dream.

As one of the project’s early interviewees, Mirella provides a compelling example of the neglected narratives which the *Italian Cinema Audiences* project has sought to capture through oral histories. As the project has evolved, we have extended this approach of safeguarding the individual narratives of the cinema-going experience to also include the traces of material culture that document the experience. Combined, these oral history testimonies and cinema-related artefacts can help us to uncover a more nuanced understanding of the cinema industry and its impact on ordinary people. Much like the offending newspaper in Mirella’s picture, the stories entangled in cinema-related images and objects, particularly those held in private collections, risk being airbrushed from the wider narrative of Italian cinema history. Through this article, we hope to provide a model of research that can help to prevent these losses.

Methodology and Research Background

Funded by the AHRC (2017-2018), CineRicordi is an online archive that builds on the *Italian Cinema Audiences* project (2013-2016), which used an oral history approach to gather testimonies (in the form of questionnaires and video-interviews) from over 1,200 Italians across eight urban and rural regions. CineRicordi allows users to explore the history of cinema-going as told through the memories and experiences of ordinary cinema-goers. Both the questionnaire responses and the video-interviews can be accessed through the CineRicordi archive. With a combination of twenty-two open- and closed-questions, the raw questionnaire data provides an insight into the general patterns and trends surrounding cinema-going as a social practice and the popularity of individual films, genres and stars.

Representing the first phase of the project’s data collection, the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the questionnaires highlighted key themes and issues, which were proactively addressed in greater detail during the video-interview phase. In the online archive, these first-hand accounts of post-war cinema-going are integrated with a range of archival materials from both public and private collections. CineRicordi aims to extend the reach and impact of the *Italian Cinema Audiences* project through the processes of co-curation and community outreach. The project has, in fact, emerged out of the ‘Sharing memories’ events which were attended by over 750 members of UNITRE (University of the Third Age) across Italy. UNITRE’s enthusiastic reception of the *Italian Cinema Audiences*

findings at these events has emphasized the increase in confidence older Italians experienced when seeing their memories communicated in an audio-visual format, stimulating them to re-discover and share memories, and to feel that they were part of a community forged through cinema-going (Treveri Gennari et al. 2018). Moreover, they expressed the desire to share these memories with younger generations. The CineRicordi project was therefore developed primarily from a commitment to address these unforeseen responses to our research and to extend the legacy of the *Italian Cinema Audiences* project. Working with UNITRE as our co-investigator and community partner, CineRicordi has enabled participants to take control of their cultural heritage by becoming the living curators of a digital archive dedicated to the cinema-going experience.

Collaborating with UNITRE as a co-investigator has played a significant role in the design, conduct, evaluation and dissemination of the research. Following a national call to all of their members, UNITRE has collected and digitized just under 300 artefacts related to cinema-going in the 1950s. This crowd-sourced collection – comprising of photos, programmes, leaflets, private letters, signed posters – is integrated with the oral histories in the CineRicordi archive. Moreover, through an interactive map, users of the site are also encouraged to upload their own cinema-going memories in the form of text comments, images or videos. This approach was selected because our research not only revealed the dominance of the cinema space itself in the memories of this generation, as a source of pride, humour, nostalgia and identity, but also the ways in which its very location was effectively ‘mapped’ onto participants’ memories (Ercole et al 2017). This new vision of Italian cinema history produced by CineRicordi and its privileging of previously unheard voices provoked a strong response in our public engagement activities, where users were invited to participate in the curation and the enhancement of the discoverability of the online archive’s co-produced collections.

There are several possible avenues the research can take if one wants to analyse the crowdsourced collections against the oral history material. However, for the purpose of this article, two case studies have been selected, where the cultural artefacts, in this case the photos – ‘partial and incomplete narratives’ as Kuhn and McAllister (2002: 6) describe them – are complemented by oral history’s attempt to ‘reposition and recreate the meaning’ of those images (Kuhn and McAllister 2002: 8). Firstly, this article will attempt to apply the ‘practice of unearthing and making public untold stories’ (Kuhn 2002: 9), as the photos only provide a ‘partial record of any one event at any time’ (Kuhn and McAllister 2002: 14) and the gap between words and images must be narrowed down. We will then investigate what can be learnt by bringing together the oral histories and the crowdsourced artefacts as different ‘repositories of memory’ (Langford 2002: 223). Ultimately, we want to resolve what – borrowing from Fyfe and Law (1988) – Peter Burke (2001: 9) calls the ‘invisibility of the visual’. By adopting a methodology that puts visual evidence at the centre of the research, we aim to explore how a bottom-up approach can help to bring previously overlooked aspects of Italian cinema history to the fore. As has been noted elsewhere, the traditional narrative of Italian cinema history has tended to privilege the stories of film

production (its directors, producers and stars) (Bondanella 2009; Brunetta 2009); however, our aim is to extend this narrative to also include those who played a vital role in the distribution and exhibition of films in towns and cities across the country.

If the experience of cinema-going holds a particularly vivid and important place in the collective memory of the post-war generation, we contend that the work of local exhibitors is as integral to the formation of these memories as the films themselves. In the following sections, we use examples from CineRicordi's collection of crowdsourced artefacts to illustrate how the key to understanding the richness of cinema memory can be found in the specificity of the local viewing context.

Narratives of local cinema history: the cases of Manduria and Amelia

While Mirella's story took place in Rome, the centre of Italian film production and distribution (see Treveri Gennari 2015; Treveri Gennari and Sedgwick 2015), the case studies investigated in this article focus on two smaller towns, Manduria in Puglia and Amelia in Umbria (see Fig. 2), where the industrial dynamics at play are less familiar.

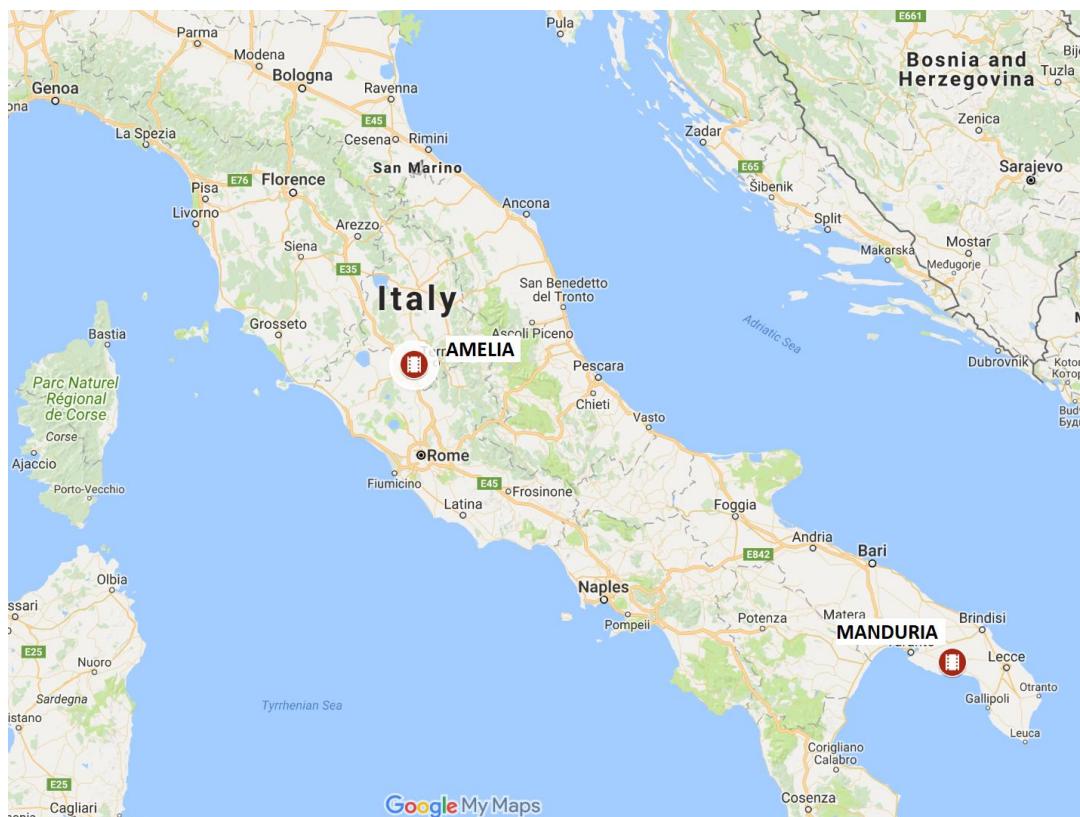


Fig. 2: Manduria and Amelia

Manduria and Amelia are two mid-size towns of between ten to twenty-five thousand inhabitants. Despite their relatively small populations, both towns had vibrant film communities in the 1950s, revolving around commercial, parish and open air cinemas. This view is somewhat at odds with the traditional narrative associated with cinema-going in

central and southern regions like Umbria and Puglia, which has historically tended to emphasise the regions' more limited availability of cinema seats per person when compared with cinema-goers in Northern regions, where the ratio was much greater (see Fig.3). While such statistical records provide an overview of the nation's cinematic infrastructure, they simultaneously reinforce the north-south divide that is characteristic of so much of Italy's social, cultural and political history. This oppositional view of the national cinema network, which highlights a greater concentration of cinema spaces in northern regions, lends itself to an uneven view of Italian cinema history, focused on large urban centres where programming and exhibition data is more readily available. However, through a crowdsourcing methodology, we have been able to start to piece together fragments of evidence that can inform our understanding of local viewing contexts; an approach which, to quote John Caughe, privileges the 'little narratives of cinema' and their potential to 'derail [...] the grand narrative' (Caughe 2016: 21). It is with this perspective in mind that we analyse the workings of the cinema industry in Manduria and Amelia, and the impact it had on the fabric of everyday life in provincial Italy.

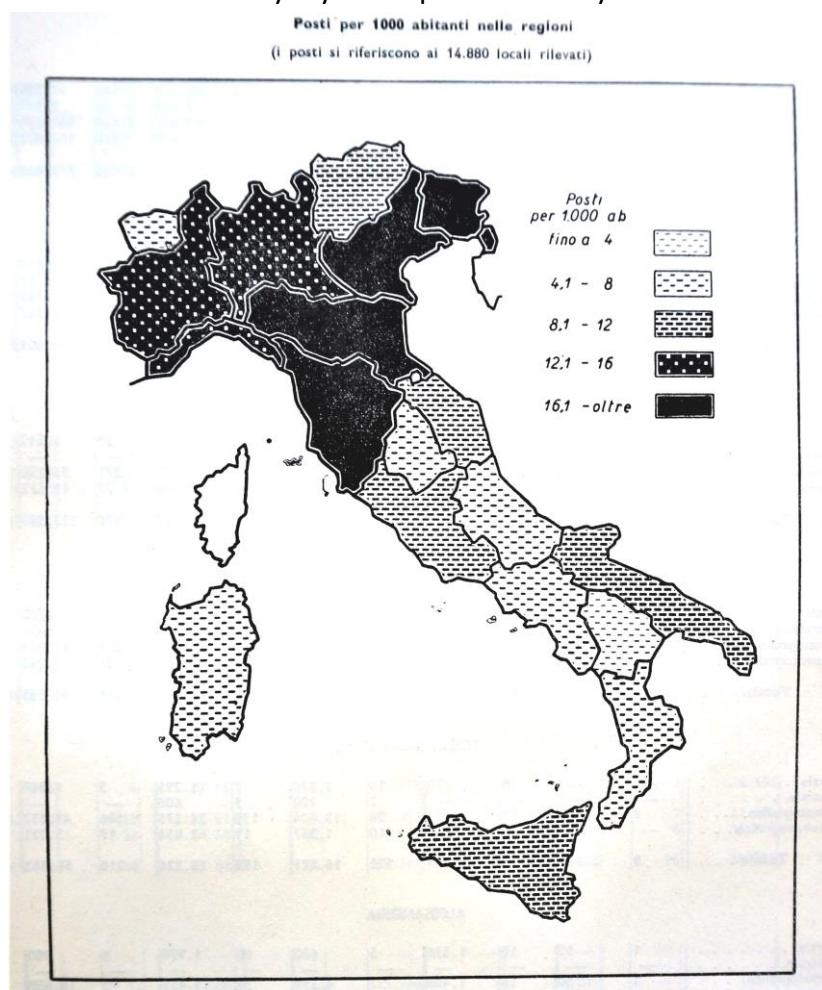


Fig. 3: 1953 map indicating number of cinema theatre seats per 1,000 inhabitants (30 June 1953)

The case studies of provincial cinemas put forward here provide a significant insight into the

entrepreneurial vision of the families that ran them. The cinemas of Manduria and Amelia, in fact, were more than just sites of entertainment, they were multifunctional spaces that served to bring the local communities together in a variety of ways: using the cinemas as spaces for political, religious or cultural events; offering alternative programming which would appeal to the local community; adapting international film productions to local audiences. While the use of the cinema theatre as a multifunctional space is a reality common to the rest of Italy (Hipkins et al 2018) especially in rural areas where the availability of spaces that could cater to a range of activities was limited, the artefacts gathered through the CineRicordi project offer examples of industrial practices still uncharted within scholarly research. These artefacts also allow us to examine how family-run cinemas dealt with marketing, programming and the sustainability of their exhibition venues.

In this article, we draw from material offered by a family of exhibitors in Manduria, the owners of three cinemas (Candeloro, Paisiello and the open air Paisiello) opened between 1917 and 1952. The first cinema in Manduria was opened by Francesco Paisiello who was from a well-known local family. He developed a passion for cinema in the early twentieth century and went on to establish the Cinema Teatro Paisiello, which first opened its doors on the 7th March 1917. After a short break while under control of the Allies (1943-1945), the Paisiello carried on its activities until 1988, but remained the city's only cinema until 1952, when the Candeloro brothers opened the Cinema Teatro Candeloro. The brothers subsequently took control of the cinematic scene in Manduria when they also became the owners of the open-air cinema Paisiello. Overseeing the management of all of the town's cinemas allowed the Candeloro family to operate cross-promotions between these sister venues, as is evident from the posters shared with the CineRicordi archive, where it is common to find adverts for the Paisiello on posters that were displayed in the Candeloro. This strategy illustrates how the family business sought to dominate the town's entertainment offering.

In Amelia, we focus on the story of cinema Perla which was owned and run by Felice Paolocci and his business partners Filippo and Vincenzo Quadraccia. Located close to Amelia's historic centre, Paolocci was the driving force behind the Perla which had a capacity of up to 550 seats. Born in 1926, Paolocci was just twenty-three when he embarked on his career as a cinema manager and programmer. He was passionate about cinema and it was initially his fascination with the world of films and their stars that drew him towards the industry. In fact, in a video-interview conducted by members of the Amelia branch of UNITRE, he explains that he named the cinema 'Perla' after Jennifer Jones' character in *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor, 1946). For Paolocci, this relatively modest local cinema would be the pearl of his hometown.

Paolocci's decision to name his cinema after a character from a film that left a lasting impression on him is a timely reminder of on-going debates within new cinema history about the place of the film-as-text within the discipline. Although a fundamental component of the cinema-going experience, as Karina Aveyard notes, the significance of the film itself is

'regularly overlooked' in historical studies of cinemas and their audiences (Aveyard 2011: 295). Acknowledging this oversight in his keynote at the *Researching Past Cinema Audiences: Archives, Memories and Methods* conference (2018), Daniel Biltreyest emphatically encouraged scholars to reinstate the film text as an object of study within cinema history research. In an effort to move towards a more film-centric analysis of the cinema-going experience, we examine how individual films were promoted, distributed and marketed as well as consumed at international, national and local levels.

How can we better understand the impact that individual films had on audiences some sixty years after they first saw them? Supported by the personal artefacts of our participants and their oral history testimonies, we closely analyse the intersection between Fanchi and Garofalo's consumption context (2018: 10) and the marketing strategies that were used to promote specific films. Through this approach, we hope to separate out the layers of the 'intertextual network' that influenced how audiences were positioned in relation to individual films, thereby moving us closer to what Biltreyest refers to as 'the imaginative aspects' of the cinema-going experience (2018).

Marketing devices to attract local audiences

If the promotion of US film productions was in the hands of the Hollywood studios, which tackled marketing campaigns 'with the same zeal and methodical planning as a general preparing for invasion' (Lukk 1997: ix), the question of how this kind of promotion was adapted to attract audiences in Italy is of a more complex nature, especially because of the limited availability of archival material that allows us to reconstruct the tactics used by local exhibitors. Some of the artefacts shared with the CineRicordi archive have helped to fill this gap, offering a greater understanding of the ways global marketing was adjusted in regional contexts. Mark Robson's film *Bright Victory* (1951) provides a fascinating example of this kind of localisation. The film arrived in Manduria in March 1952, having first premiered on the 15th February at the cinema Margherita in Bari (the region's capital city) where it ran for five days.⁴ Ahead of the film's opening night at the Margherita (Bari's largest cinema), the local newspaper *Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno* ran an advertisement [see Fig. 4] highlighting the film's success at the American Critic Awards. Adding to the sense of occasion surrounding this new release (and pointing to the cinema owner's desire to maximise the opportunity for favourable box-office takings), the advertisement also informed patrons that membership discount cards would not be accepted. For any cinema-goers who may have been deterred by this suspension of members' discounts, the advert targeted audiences with a promotional offer from a local laundry detergent manufacturer. Seeking to attract female cinema-goers in particular, the offer promised a free 200g sample of washing detergent to the first 250 women that entered the cinema (see Fig. 4). The use of local factories to further promote cinema events was a common practice, also found in other national contexts (Whitehead 2018). What is significant in this context is the screening of the film – described in the advertisement as 'the premiere of an exceptional masterpiece' – in Bari's biggest cinema, demonstrating the exhibitor's confidence in the film's potential for success.



Fig. 4: Promotional offer for the opening of *Bright Victory*

Bright Victory tells the story of a blind war veteran struggling to adjust to his condition in peacetime, combining elements of drama, romance and war films. In America, despite a ‘strong opening week’ in New York (*Variety* 1951: 3), and its lead actor, Arthur Kennedy, being nominated as best actor for the Academy Awards (*Modern Screen* 1952: 12), the film was not a box office success. It was defined by a Chicago-based trade paper as ‘dull, in spite of enthusiastic reviews’ (*Motion Picture Herald* 1951: 29) and rated mainly below average or poor on the basis of its performance in the independent circuit theatres (*Motion Picture Herald* 1952: 60). This poor performance – and the stormy weather conditions in Chicago – forced the Universal publicitor Ben Katz to come up with an ‘unusual twist’: ‘Patrons were admitted free opening day and asked to pay on the way out only if they agreed they had seen a superior motion picture. Reports were that about 90 per cent stopped on the way out to pay, with only a few “bobby-soxers” leaving without purchasing tickets’ (*Motion Picture Herald* 1951: 33). Katz’s marketing strategy is indicative of a film which struggled on the domestic circuit, despite being nominated for (and winning) awards.

A more detailed analysis of the film’s paratextual materials reveals how *Bright Victory*’s pressbook was selectively used to promote certain aspects of the film. In fact, when comparing the US promotional material⁵ with the Italian brochures printed by the exhibitors to accompany the American publicity, different narratives seem to underscore the film, in order to involve audiences in contrasting ways. The US advert describes the film as a love story of our generation, and ‘tremendously satisfying entertainment’ (see **Figs. 5a and 5b**). In the section ‘Selling Approach’ of the *Motion Picture Herald* (1951: 49), the film is referred to as the ‘ecstatic joys of the greatest love story of our time’, suggesting that exhibitors make use of the Herald, ‘which keys the campaign with its use of the leading dramatic illustration’.

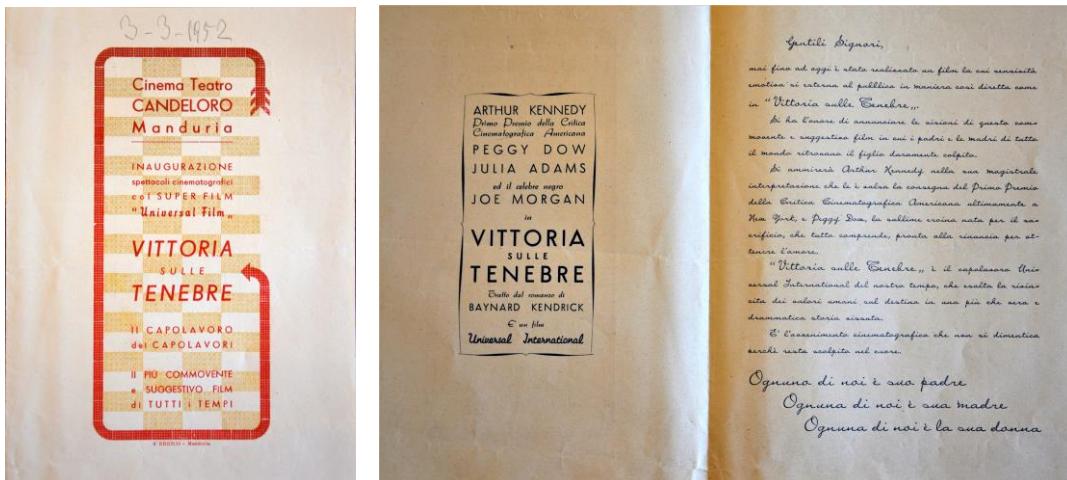


Figs. 5a and 5b: US press image and poster of *Bright Victory*

If paratexts play a significant role in establishing how genres are ‘created, merge, evolve, or disappear’, as Mittell (2004: 9) indicates, the love story is at the heart of the US publicity material, both visually and in the film descriptions. Barbara Klinger’s (1994: 37) statement that ‘Universal-International exhibition practices made these connections [between melodrama and dominant cultural ideas] by creating, on the one hand, a generic identity of melodrama as “adult” films in order to capitalize on increasing trends towards sexually explicit representations in the media’ can also be loosely applied to *Bright Victory*’s advertising material, despite the film not fitting exclusively into the melodrama genre. As seen in images 5a and 5b, the promotional poster for *Bright Victory* suggests a traditional love story, which negates the more complex themes and issues – such as disability and post-war trauma – raised by the film’s narrative. What happened to that romantic representation offered to ‘adult’ audiences once the film arrived in Italy and more specifically within the context of a small town in the South of the country?

Echoing the US marketing, the Italian publicity material also refers to the film’s success at the American Critics Award, which Maria Gabriella (a member of the Candeloro family involved in the running of the local cinemas) argues was probably a calculated strategy that aimed to attract both ‘regular cinema-goers and masterpiece fans’ (interview with Maria Gabriella, 2018).⁶ Gabriella’s comments demonstrate how it was necessary for exhibitors to decode the official publicity surrounding a film, while also remaining attentive to the demands and preferences of their own audience. Interestingly however, the publicity for *Bright Victory* created by the exhibitors in Manduria tones down the romantic dimension

of the film, highlighting its emotional sensitivity. It explicitly pre-empts the multiple ways that audiences might engage with the central character, suggesting that individual viewers can relate to the damaged hero as ‘his father’, ‘his mother’ or ‘his woman’, flattening the romantic/sexual dimension of the narrative (see **Figs. 6a and 6b**). This is a significant example of targeted marketing material (often lost in Italian archives) confirming the need to adapt generic advertising schemes to attract particular or wider segments of the audience, especially as ‘smaller markets are less able to fuel major film attractions with audiences’ (Sedgwick et al 2018: 10). It confirms Jonathan Gray’s idea that paratexts ‘can also inflect certain parts of a media text or certain character’ (2017: 37). In this context, the attempt to diffuse the romantic narrative in favour of a family angle, and therefore create a new textuality for the film, has the potential of increasing the monetary success of the film, needed in a town with limited opportunities for attracting audiences.



Figs. 6a and 6b: Candeloro's design of *Bright Victory* marketing material (courtesy of the Candeloro family)

When analysing the context in which a cultural product exists (Barrett et al 1979: 24), the practice of adapting publicity materials for local markets highlights the importance of both the historical *and* the geographical conditions surrounding the product. As we have seen, in the Italian context, and in a small provincial reality like Manduria in particular, the local exhibitor sought to appeal to a wider audience when promoting *Bright Victory* by shifting the focus from the romantic engagement between the two main protagonists – which would still be the topic of the film review in Rome (*L'Unità* 30th August 1952: 4) – to foreground a more family-centred narrative that promised multiple points of view and a film that everyone in the audience could potentially relate to. This adaptation of publicity material is indicative of the way that exhibitors like the Candeloro family needed to think creatively about how they could engage their limited audience and thereby create the strongest possible opportunity for success at the box-office.

A different type of audience-sourced artefact, the film poster for the screening of *King Kong* (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1933) at the Teatro Paisiello in

Manduria, combined with the memories found in an edited volume on the city, illustrates another example of the exhibitors' creative initiatives aimed at attracting local audiences. The film initially premiered in Bari on 7th December 1933. From here, it was circulated to Taranto, Lecce and Brindisi in 1934 (between January and August) before eventually making its way to Manduria, where it was shown at the Teatro Paisiello two years later (1936). The lengthy journey this film undertook, to travel from a main city to the surrounding rural areas, was not unusual at the time and remained a common practice in the post-war period: the Candeloro's archival material, in fact, allows us to reconstruct the movement of another film, Vittorio De Sica's *I bambini ci guardano* (*The Children Are Watching Us*, 1944), which had premiered in Bari on 21st November 1944, and did not arrive in Manduria until at least the end of 1945.

Apart from shedding light on the programming strategies used by the Candeloros, the material related to *King Kong* – both the film poster and the oral history – provides further evidence of the practice of localisation within the film's promotional campaign. The film poster emphasises the greatness of the gorilla and the imposing figure created for publicity purposes (see Fig.7). This particular aspect is described in relation to what the exhibitors of the cinema decided to use to their advantage, as indicated by Domenico Stranieri and Ada Candeloro to their son Vincenzo (Stranieri 2017: 39), and then cited again in the volume on the history of Manduria by Antonio Dimitri (2001: 31-41):



Fig.7: King Kong poster for the Cinema Paisiello in Manduria (courtesy of the Candeloro family)

During the screening of the film in 1936, at the same corner of the castle, an imposing silhouette of the monster was set up: the structure measured

about ten meters and was made by covering a support frame with straw, horsehair and linen fibers tied together by raffia threads, all appropriately colored in brown. In order to give a better idea of the proportions of the monster, and to trigger people's imagination even more, in his right hand there was a doll depicting the kidnapped girl and in the left a toy biplane.⁷

It was certainly not the first time that silhouettes were used to promote film characters (and the US publicity for the opening of *King Kong* was only one such example of that). This was not unusual even in Italy, where it slowly became a common practice. However, this type of advertising was generally more predominant in wealthier city cinemas, as seen in the examples below from the screening of *Calypso* (Golfiero Colonna and Franco Rossi, 1958), and *La Dolce Vita* (Federico Fellini, 1960) (see Figs. 8a and 8b).



Figs. 8a and 8b: Advertising of *Calypso* (1958) and *La Dolce Vita* (1960) (courtesy of the Fondazione Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia).

It was certainly less common in small centres like Manduria. Indeed it is surprising that exhibitors like the Candeloro would operate what Kathryn Fuller Seeley (2012: 398) calls 'effective on-site visual advertisements'. What is even more remarkable is the exhibitor's effort to maximise the film publicity choosing to position the built structure not outside the cinema, but at a geographical distance from it, near the castle and right in the heart of the town centre. The oral history confirms that the advertising material was not provided by the film distributor. Rather, it was the product of the exhibitors' own initiative to attract audiences and to expand – as one of our participants calls it – 'the cinematic show outside the cinema theatre' (Nino Rinaldi, Amelia, 25 March 2018).

Both the installation style advertisement used to promote *King Kong* and the localised publicity material for *Bright Victory* provide an insight into the ways that exhibitors like the Candeloros sought to captivate audiences and cultivate a culture of cinema-going within provincial towns.

Alternative Programming and Cinema as a Multifunctional Space

Recent studies examining the Italian film industry's extensive exhibition and distribution network have provided an important insight into the patterns of programming found in commercial cinemas across Italy, which was characterised by a network of first-, second- and third-run cinemas (Treveri Gennari and Sedgwick 2015; Sedgwick et al 2018). Using a combination of industry box-office records and press listings, these studies focus on the standard 'system of provision' which saw films move from first- to second- and to third-run cinemas in accordance with audience demand and the need to turn a profit (Treveri Gennari and Sedgwick, 2015: 79). Through archival research and statistical analysis, the approach used in these studies has made it possible to map the movement of individual films across Italy's exhibition network in large cities and urban areas. The application of a similar approach for cinemas in provincial towns and rural villages is hampered by the lack of programming data. Official industry records, held by the SIAE (the Italian Society of Authors and Publishers) and AGIS (the Italian General Association of Performing Arts), are limited to first run cinemas in large cities, while the availability of programming listings printed in newspapers is inconsistent or, often, unavailable for smaller cinemas in provincial towns. With the exception of cases where individual cinema owners have preserved their exhibition records, it is often not possible to accurately trace the programming history of Italy's rural cinemas in a systematic way. However, through the CineRicordi crowdsourcing campaign, the artefacts contributed by participants have revealed a diverse range of alternative programming events, which shed light on how provincial cinemas sought to engage and maintain the interest of their audiences.

Cine-variety and Musical Performances

As noted above, in the post-war period small towns in rural Italy often lacked spaces that were solely dedicated to the wide range of entertainment and leisure-time activities that inhabitants were interested in. For instance, the Candeloro in Manduria offered audiences a range of entertainment formats including live musical performances, concerts and comedy acts. Often doubling up as a theatre and a cinema, the Candeloro staged opera performances (see Fig. 9) and choral recitals (see Fig. 10).

Like many cinemas in urban areas, the Candeloro also hosted cine-variety performances, which allowed audiences to see a musical stage show and a film on the same evening. In the Italian context, this hybrid form of entertainment, which initially emerged as part of the European cinema-going experience in the 1930s and 40s (Morash 2002: 176; Frith et al 2016: 12), often featured actors who worked both on- and off-screen thereby contributing to the sense of familiarity between audiences and stars.⁸ The programming artefacts shared by the Candeloro family highlight how local exhibitors sought to capitalise on these cross-media events.

One particular example of cine-variety programming is documented in a poster from November 1954 advertising a double bill of variety show and film, both of which featured

the actor Guglielmo Inglese. A minor character actor who often starred in comedies alongside Totò, Guglielmo Inglese is presented as the headline star of the variety show *Scandal Show Melody* and the film *Libera uscita* (Duilio Coletti, 1951). It is interesting to note that in the case of the latter, the organisers of this cine-variety programme



Fig. 9: Poster advertising an operetta performance held at the Candeloro on 2 February 1956.



Fig. 10: Poster advertising the national tour of the children's choir 'Bambini al Microfono' (Children at the Microphone), which performed at the Candeloro on 16 April 1953.

at the Candeloro list Inglese ahead of the film's lead star, Nino Taranto, whose name and image is prominently given title billing in all official publicity for the film (see Fig. 11). This reinterpretation of the hierarchy of film credits is further evidence of the way that the carefully manufactured publicity machine surrounding the film industry at a national (and international) level was doctored by small-town cinema owners to tie in with their own locally targeted publicity campaigns.



Fig. 11: Poster advertising a cine-variety programme at the Candeloro, November 1954



Fig. 12: Poster for *Libera uscita*, starring Nino Taranto (Duilio Coletti, 1951)

The Dream of Stardom

The second example of alternative programming offered by cinemas in Manduria calls attention to the way the glamour and allure of the film industry was harnessed to influence and shape audiences as consumers. Among the artefacts shared with the CineRicordi archive is a poster from 1954 advertising a competition to find the 'Ideal Woman' (*La donna ideale*) (see Fig. 13). The local heat of this national competition was held at the Cinema Ideal, one of the town's three cinemas that were run by the Candeloro family.

An example of the many beauty contests that took place throughout Italy at that time, the Ideal Woman competition is indicative of the growing interest in stardom and fame as cultural phenomena throughout the post-war period. As Forgacs and Gundel note, the re-emergence of the beauty contest format, which had previously been banned under fascism, was seen by many as 'an easy route to fame and fortune' (Forgacs and Gundel 2007: 78). Open to Italian and foreign women, both young and old (*signore e signorine*), the Ideal Woman contest sought to acknowledge the 'cultural, artistic, sporting and domestic talents' of women who encapsulated all of these things with 'feminine grace'. For local winners that progressed to the national final, the promise of a television appearance and a feature in the fan magazine *Festival* (the publication behind the competition) offered participants an opportunity to follow in the footsteps of other young starlets such as Silvana Mangano, Gina Lollobrigida and Sophia Loren who set a precedent for the beauty contest participant that successfully crossed over to a career as a film star.

While the bright lights of Cinecittà may have been a farfetched dream for most participants, the beauty contest nevertheless offered a taste of the lifestyle that the world of cinema appeared to promise. Echoing the previously discussed marketing strategies that specifically targeted female cinema-goers, women participating in the Ideal Woman contest

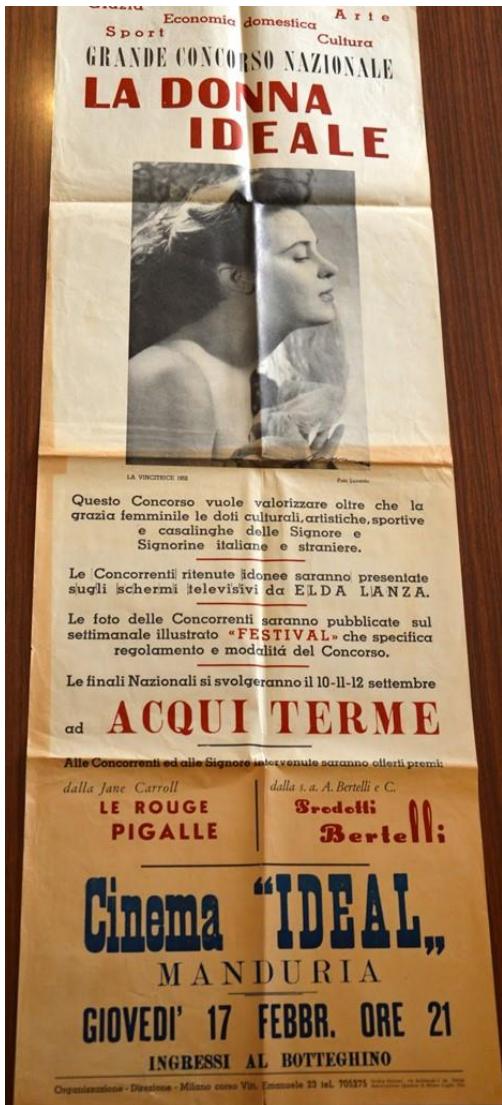


Fig. 13: Poster for the 'Ideal Woman' [La donna ideale] competition held at the Cinema Ideal, Manduria on 17 February 1954.

were also rewarded with beauty products from national and international brands. With the promise of luxury goods as prizes from perfume companies such as Prodotti Bertelli, the Ideal Woman contest illustrates how women in towns and cities across the country were positioned and proactively targeted as consumers (Morris 2006: 10). In a small, southern town like Manduria where women's economic independence would have been extremely limited, particularly in the early 1950s, beauty contests played a significant part in fuelling the aspirational materialism among the generation of Italian women that came of age during the economic boom.

Beyond Manduria, references to the Ideal Woman competition can also be found in the regional press. Some five months after the Manduria heat was held at the cinema Ideal, an advertisement for the Bari heat of the competition appeared in *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno* (Fig. 14).

With prizes sponsored by the same beauty product companies, the Bari event took place at the Gran Lido Marzulli, a beach-side venue being more appropriate than a cinema in mid-July. Although the Bari edition of the contest did not take place in a cinema, it is

nevertheless significant to our analysis of alternative programming practices in Manduria as it provides an important insight into the scale and visibility of the competition. By hosting an event such as the Ideal Woman contest, the Candeloro family illustrated how, in addition to bringing cinema into local communities, exhibitors were also central to the spread of new cultural practices and social experiences, which allowed members of smaller, provincial towns to feel connected to events that had resonance on both a regional and national level.



Fig. 14: Advertisement for the 'Ideal Woman' [La donna ideale] contest, *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, 15 July 1954.

Political Programming

Another programming trend to emerge from the crowdsourced artefacts is the use of the local cinemas as sites for political events. Throughout the 1950s, the Paisiello cinema in Manduria hosted a number of political talks with guest speakers from Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democrats), the then ruling party at a national level. One poster from 1952 (Fig. 15) advertises a public discussion on the social and economic challenges facing the southern regions of Italy, while another from 1956 promotes a conference for local Democrazia Cristiana (DC) members (Fig. 16).



Fig. 15: Poster advertising a public discussion at the Paisiello on 12 December 1952 with Domenico Colasanto, an elected representative from Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democrats).



Fig. 16: Poster advertising a conference for members of Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democrats) at the Paisiello on 6 February 1956.

The occurrence of such political events at the Paisiello is indicative of how, in addition to being a site of entertainment, the local cinema in provincial towns like Manduria also functioned as an arena for political debate and discourse. Evidence of this kind of use of the cinema space (which is also found in Amelia) provides a significant insight into how exhibitors - regardless of their personal political allegiances or financial motives for hosting such events - played an indirect role in the electioneering tactics of the DC at a grassroots level. In particular, the events held at the Paisiello can be seen in the context of the DC's strategic attempt to 'present itself as the party of labour, in touch with the needs and hopes of ordinary people' (Forlenza 2010: 332). The southern regions of Italy represented a particularly important support base for the DC, as is evident from the results of the 1958 election, which saw the party win a majority of 44.4% among voters in southern regions (Caciaglia 1982: 265). While it is beyond the scope of this article to fully explore the implications that such political affiliations may have had on the standard programming choices of the cinema owners presented here, the crowdsourcing of artefacts from exhibitors' private collections highlights the importance of viewing the exhibition practices of individual cinemas in the light of the broader socio-political climate, and the influence which that may have had on the audience's viewing context.

A similar trend is found in Amelia where the Perla frequently doubled up as a space for political events and union conferences. Felice Paolocci, the owner of the Perla, was an astute businessman who saw cinema as a fundamental component of a town's infrastructure. For Paolocci, the cinema had the power to transform a provincial backwater from an insignificant name on a map to a place of note: 'Cinema gives a town an identity, it makes it a city. Without cinema, Amelia would have been the same as any other town. Cinema must be considered an essential part of a town's cultural development'.⁹

Paolocci's vision for what a cinema could and should be is reflected in the diverse ways that he allowed the space to be used. In an extensive study of newspapers and magazines such as *Il Momento*, *Il Messaggero* and *La Voce*, local historian Umberto Cerasi (2005) has documented the happenings of daily life in Amelia over a period of more than fifty years. Cerasi's account provides us with a snapshot of some of the events that were held at the Perla from 1947 to 1960 (and beyond). During this timeframe the Perla was used as a venue for a number of public meetings affiliated with the Democrazia Cristiana party. For example, in January 1957 and February 1960 when the Junior Minister for Industry Filippo Micheli visited Amelia, he held public discussions at the Perla, which were attended by local employers and the wider community. In December 1954, the Perla also hosted the province's first Coldiretti conference. Founded in 1944, Coldiretti is the main representative body for farmers and agricultural workers in Italy. In the context of debates about how we can more clearly define what is intended by the categories of 'urban' and 'rural' when it comes to cinema history (Ravazzoli 2018), the occurrence of the Coldiretti conference at the Perla is noteworthy. Located close to the border between Umbria and Lazio, Amelia is one of thirty-three comunes within the province of Terni. According to the 1951 census, Amelia had 11,917 inhabitants, making it the fourth most populated town in the province after Terni (84,403), Orvieto (24,422) and Narni (20,804).¹⁰ As Ravazzoli suggests, our application of the labels 'urban/rural' or 'metropolitan/provincial' is often based on the 'place-based characteristic' of population density (*Ibid*: 28). In this case, our earlier classification of Amelia as a mid-sized provincial town is borne out by the above population data; however, as Ravazzoli argues, we must also be attentive to the 'human reality' that shapes our understanding of these categorisations and their significance within cinema history (*Ibid*: 24). As an event that sits outside the standard programming of the Perla's exhibition history, the Coldiretti conference highlights what Aveyard refers to as 'the cultural and social multiplicities of the rural cinema experience' (Aveyard, 2011: 294). Allowing the Perla to be used for functions other than film screenings can, on the one hand, be seen as part of Paolocci's mission to contribute to the cultural, social and economic development of the town; however, on the other, the use of the cinema as a multifunctional space may also have grown from a need to attract alternative revenue streams, particularly at a time when cinema-going was beginning to compete with television and audience numbers were dwindling as a result.

Conclusion

Paratexts can often serve the same function as the film in creating memories of the cinema-going experience, reconciling the divide between new cinema history and film studies. They also provide insightful information on how family-run exhibition businesses dealt with marketing, programming and the sustainability of the cinema venues. Our crowdsourced archive CineRicordi has contributed to this understanding of cinema-going practices across Italy as well as shedding light on some of the unknown interventions made by those working within the cinema industry at local levels. The specific measures that were taken by

individual exhibitors, when attempting to keep their businesses alive in the face of the challenges that beset the industry by the end of the 1950s, have until now been largely undocumented. Through the case studies presented here, we have outlined some of the creative strategies that were employed by the Candeloro family in Manduria, and Felice Paolocci in Amelia in their efforts to keep local audiences engaged, while also opening up the cinema space as a hub for social, cultural and economic activity within their respective communities.

By analysing this new repository of memory, which combines both oral history and personal collections of artefacts, new marketing practices as well as social performances emerge. The crowdsourced artefacts provide us with an insight into the local marketing devices and unusual advertising conventions, which contributed to the ‘conditions of viewing’ that characterised the cinema-going experience in rural environments (Fanchi and Garofalo 2018). In order to study films within the context of their viewing, audiences’ memories must be read against the traces of those cinema-going experiences, whether they are artefacts collected by the audiences themselves, or exhibitors’ documents that clarify the local remodelling of international marketing strategies. Exploring these traces of cinema-going practices emphasises the importance of fighting against the ‘invisibility of the visual’, as the visual material is key to the reconstruction of social and industrial practices which otherwise risk remaining unknown to scholars or being lost from the narrative of cinema history altogether. Turning to the film-specific materials of the personal archive also provides us with an approach that gives greater consideration to the place of the film within new cinema history.

This model of research is particularly significant in the case of cinema-going contexts like Manduria and Amelia, both of which no longer have a permanent cinema. While the physical spaces that once housed the cinemas of these town still exist, they lie abandoned (see **Fig. 17**).



Fig. 17: Cinema Perla in Amelia March 2019

However, the crowdsourced material has helped to foster a process of rediscovery that is facilitated by the CineRicordi archive. The inclusion of the personal artefacts in the digital archive has prompted participants to re-evaluate the importance of these items to Italy's cultural heritage at both a local and national level. Evidence of this can be seen in the recent exhibition that was held at the Teatro Candeloro to showcase many of the artefacts that were shared with the CineRicordi archive.¹¹



Fig. 18: Poster advertising the launch of the exhibition 'Il Cine-Teatro a Manduria nel 900'



Fig. 19: The exhibition inside the Teatro Candeloro, 20 October 2018.

Organised by members of the Candeloro family with the support of UNITRE, this public exhibition allowed older generations to reconnect with their cinema-going past, while also providing an opportunity of discovery for younger generations, many of whom have only ever known the Candeloro as a lifeless and disused space. Initiatives such as this one highlight the importance of working closely with community partners. As researchers, if we are to succeed in our mission to document and preserve cinema history, it is essential that we reach out to groups within the community to support them in their efforts to safeguard both the tangible and intangible traces of cinema-going heritage.

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Notes:

¹ 'Analizzare il senso di un film, il valore che ha assunto per gli spettatori, significa considerare un ampio e popolato campo di relazioni, che include la rete intertestuale in cui esso è collocato, come è stato distribuito, le condizioni della sua visione e poi i pubblici, con le loro storie, la loro memoria, il loro capitale culturale' [Authors' translation].

² Interview with Mirella (b. 1925, Rome)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=58&v=lAtsbHdSuDY [Accessed 25 October 2018]

³, il primo evento mediatico di risonanza internazionale dell'Italia del dopoguerra' [Authors' translation]

⁴ The film then moved to the Teatro Massimo in Lecce on 5th July, returning to Bari the following day where it ran at the Cinema Teatro La Lucciola on 6th July before being shown a week later in the city of Foggia at the Cinema Cicolella on 13th July. It reached Rome on 30th August of the same year.

⁵ see the advert placed in *Variety* 1951: 21 and *Motion Picture Herald* 1951.

⁶ ‘gli habitué del cinema o quelli dei capolavori’ [Authors’ translation].

⁷ In occasione della proiezione del film *King Kong*, nel 1936, allo stesso angolo del Castello, fu allestita una imponente raffigurazione del mostro: la struttura, tra la pedana d’appoggio e la sagoma vera e propria, misurava circa dieci metri. L’immagine del gorilla era stata realizzata ricoprendo una intelaiatura di supporto con paglia, crine e fibre di lino legate insieme da fili di rafia; il tutto opportunamente colorato di bruno. Per rendere meglio l’idea delle proporzioni del mostro, e per impressionare ancora di più l’immaginazione della gente, gli fu posta nella mano destra una bambolina raffigurante la ragazza rapita e nella sinistra un giocattolo raffigurante un biplano.

[Authors’ translation]

⁸ Well-known stars such as Anna Magnani and Totò regularly performed on-stage as part of variety shows and dramatic troupes that toured theatres across the country. See Chiara Ricci (2009) *Anna Magnani vissi d’arte, vissi d’amore*, Edizioni Sabinae, Sabina.

⁹ Il cinema da un’identità ad un paese rendendolo citta’. Senza il cinema Amelia sarebbe stata uguale agli altri paesi. Il cinema deve essere considerato parte integrante per la crescita culturale di un paese’ [Author’s translation].

¹⁰ ‘Censimenti popolazione provincia di Terni 1861-2011’, ISTAT
<https://www.tuttitalia.it/umbria/provincia-di-terni/statistiche/censimenti-popolazione/> [Accessed 30 October 2018]

¹¹ A free exhibition entitled ‘Il Cine-Teatro a Manduria nel 900’ was launched on 20th October 2018. Featuring over 100 posters, advertisements and press clippings, the exhibition provides a chronological journey through the history of the Teatro Candeloro.

See: <https://www.manduriaoggi.it/?news=40470> [Accessed 27 October 2018]