

From the National Film Archives of the Experimental Center of Cinematography in Rome to the National Archives of Industrial Cinema in Biella

by Sergio Toffetti

The National Film Archives of the Experimental Center of Cinematography, founded in Rome in 1949, is the legal repository of Italian cinema and currently preserves a collection of about sixty thousand films, comprising over seven million meters of nitrocellulose film. The Film Archives not only manages the delicate preservation and restoration activities of this earlier form of film/ photographic material, but also promotes the diffusion of Italian cinema. In 2006, the Center distributed more than 1300 copies in Italy and abroad, representative selections of the life work by such artists as Luchino Visconti, Mario Soldati and Roberto Rossellini, for example.

Interest in industrial cinema began to grow at the end of the 1990s, when the Edison company asked for permission to lodge its collection of industrial films in the Archives. This remarkable collection included documentaries by Ermanno Olmi, one of the most important Italian directors, as well as nitrate films by an “expert” of industrial cinema, Giovanni Cecchinato filmed on behalf of Montecatini mining company in the 1920s, such as *L'estrazione degli zolfi in Romagna* and *Il dinamitificio Nobel.*, which document the two productive lines of the dynamite factory of Avigliana, in the province of Turin; one dedicated to guncotton—a type of explosive and the other to cellulose nitrate, an essential material for the manufacture of films.

The interest aroused by the addition of the Edison fond led to an analysis of the Archives' collections with the intent of finding ways to integrate industrial and publicizing aspects. The importance of Italian industry as a commissioning authority for the Italian cinema is undeniable. Many protagonists of the history and the news of Italian cinema worked under contract for industrial cinema: directors such as Alessandro Blasetti, Michelangelo Antonioni, Bernardo Bertolucci, Nelo Risi, Valentino Orsini, Silvio Soldini, Davide Ferrario, Guido Chiesa, Gabriele Muccino; writers and scriptwriters such as Franco Fortini, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Goffredo Parise, Furio Colombo and Tullio Kezich; great musicians like Luciano Berio, cinematographers like Luigi Kuveiller or Marcello Gatti, who, for example, worked for FIAT during the shooting of *L'avventura di Antonioni* and *La battaglia di Algeri di Pontecorvo.*

The catalogue of authors who have filmed Italian industry from the beginning of the twentieth century up to now is very long indeed, and portrays a parallel history of Italian cinema as well as a visual history of Italian economy and society.

However, the importance of industrial cinema itself gradually emerged during our initial analysis. Its management by a general archives such as the National Film Archives was felt to be inadequate. For this reason, we decided to plan an independent structure dedicated to the collection, the preservation and the valorization of industrial cinematic fonds.

In 2003, the Experimental Center of Cinematography, the Region of Piedmont, Olivetti (later Telecom Italia) and the municipality of Ivrea signed an agreement to bring about the National Archives of Industrial Cinema in the former Olivetti nursery schools in Canton Vesco d'Ivrea (Turin), designed by the architect Ridolfi in 1955. The first of the three buildings – given with a gratuitous loan by Telecom Italia – opened in November. The archives was inaugurated with an exhibition of photos “Cinema and Work” and with the film show “Modern Times: cinema and industry”. Organized for the centenary of the Industrial Union of Turin, the retrospective portrayed the development of Italy’s productive structures; the transformation of the landscape; Italian labor in foreign countries; as well as the social actions of important enterprises through films by Ansaldo, Edison, Eni, Enel, Fiat, Olivetti, Aem-Milano, Istituto Luce, and Dalmine. In addition to the film show produced by the industries, the public event presented a survey on the relationship between Italian cinema and work, with films by Giuliano Montaldo (*Una bella grinta*), Lina Wertmuller (*Mimì metallurgico ferito nell'onore*), Ugo Gregoretti (*Omicron*), Pietro Germi (*L'uomo di paglia*), Elio Petri (*La classe operaia va in paradiso*), Mario Monicelli (*I compagni*), Alberto Bevilacqua (*La califfa*), and the more recent *Ovosodo* by Paolo Virzì, *Volevo solo dormire addosso* by Eugenio Cappuccio, *Mi piace lavorare* by Francesca Comencini, and finally, *Il posto dell'anima* by Riccardo Milani. At present, the National Archives of Industrial Cinema preserves more than 20.000 film spools in repositories conditioned according to the rules of the Fédération Internationale des Archives du Film. The archives contains the cinematographic fonds of companies including AEM-Milano, Breda, Edison, Enea, Fiat Innocenti, Olivetti, in addition to fonds of some advertising producers like Film Master and Recta Film, as well as research associations such as Enea.

The Archives is currently working on the creation of a general database and on the transfer of all the materials in beta format. Moreover, the Archives has undertaken the restoration of some films with particular historical or artistic value: significant examples include *Manon finestra due* by Ermanno Olmi with text by Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Michelino prima B* by Ermanno Olmi, *Il paese dell'anima* by Victor De Santis on the first Fiat pilgrimage to Lourdes in 1957, while the National Film Archives had already put on film some “Critofilms”¹ carried out by Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti for Olivetti, like *Il giudizio universale*, *"La Calunnia" di Botticelli* and *La deposizione di Raffaello*.

The National Archives of Industrial Cinema has been created as a Film Archives to deal with the preservation, restoration and historical analysis of the materials of the Italian cinema. It has no historical-economic role. There is clearly a pressing need to establish a close collaboration between industrial archives and researchers and experts of industrial and economic history.

¹ Critofilm is the name that Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, one of the most important critics and experts of art of the past century, gave to the films he shot regarding Italian artistic heritage.