

Between History, Archives and Film Collections: The Story of the ANCR (National Film Archive of Italian Resistance)

1965 - 1975

In 1965 the City of Turin organised a film festival for the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the liberation of Italy. The idea of the curator, the film historian Gianni Rondolino, was to show beside fiction movies also documentaries, newsreels and footage. From the materials collected for this festival in 1966 Paolo Gobetti, former partisan and filmmaker, founded the National Film Archive of Italian Resistance (ANCR) with Franco Antonicelli, former partisan as well and politician, as president. Since the start the mission of the ANCR is characterised by two related purposes.

The first is to collect and preserve film materials on the WWII and other European wars of the Twenty century and, of course, the memory of partisan fights. So the film archive of ANCR was borne from donation of partisans, film and TV production companies and from copies of footage bought from other film archives. The point was supporting historical research, an archival orientation in a very traditional way.

The second element is a cinephile vocation, the idea of shooting new footage, interview partisans and make documentaries for preserving memories and tell stories on war and civil rights. The cinephile part of the mission is also in the organization of projections in cinema and cine club on film and history (both documentary and fiction) and on starting the publication of a film magazine called *Il nuovo spettatore cinematografico*.

As Paolo Gobetti wrote in an article of the 1968 the most important things in the first years of the ANCR was collecting footage and interviews and pointed the Imperial War Museum as the best model that inspired its vision. For this period we don't have archival description system or conservation and access policies, just a register and lists attached to the acquisition contracts.

1975 - 1995

In this twenty years our mission remain mostly the same, the thing that changed is that a new audiovisual support entered in our archive. In 1971 Paolo Gobetti "discover" videos and he was enthusiastic from the beginning because, as he wrote in the nineties, video was light, practical, simply to use and cheaper than film.

In the same article he defined the work with film at the moviola as a long cut and sewing of a big tailor's shop. As film conservator I don't find nothing negative about it! but I see the point in the simplification of the production process. Video entered in the ANCR, at the beginning beside of film then, with the passing of time, becoming the only format use for shooting interviews and in documentary productions. For example a series of interviews on Spanish Civil War, one of the biggest project of the ANCR, presented at the Venice Film Festival in 1976, was entirely realised on video.

That was the golden age of the ANCR production: the most part of interviews, documentaries and education materials were shot in this years, the most of the people that work for the archive were engage in these activities and many of them carried on their careers in tv and film production or as directors at the national level.

So what we can call the cinephile side of our mission was stronger than the archival one that it was anyway on development. We bought a lot of feature films and footage about resistance and war from private collectors and we received donations from other resistance institutes and from former partisans. We made important discoveries inside our acquisitions as the only surviving copies of the two films that Rossellini realised as student at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia or [Aeroporto](#) one of the few films produced by the Italian Social Republic.

We bought a second hand telecine for recording on video the film collection allowing a wider consultation without damaging original supports. The entire catalogue of ANCR was published on *Il nuovo spettatore* magazine and available for projections or educational activities. In the nineties, the access was better guaranteed by programs as Excel and FileMaker.

1995 - 2015

In 1995 Paolo Gobetti died and the activity of the ANCR shifted most on conservation and educational side. Video shooting and production decreased. We moved in a new place at the beginning of 2003, where we are still now, with audiovisual laboratories, storages for film, video and archival materials and with a little projection room we call Mini Cinema. We started a partnership with the Istituto LUCE for the archival description of our collections and for digital restoration of film that is still on. Our last restoration [Il discorso del duce a Trieste](#) was presented at the Cinema Ritrovato in Bologna and now another is in progress. So now the archival work is the centre of our activities.

But the idea of Paolo Gobetti of going outside and collect traces of history is still alive: From 2004 we organise a national contest for schools and for filmmakers that produce educational documentaries called *Filmare la storia* and now we're thinking to make it international because we have a lot of requests from other European countries.

In these years we have a new technological revolution: the digital formats. It isn't only another technological stratification in the ANCR audiovisual archive, something that influenced only our way of shooting and production as video did, but something more deep that changed also the way of showing footage (the Mini Cinema is a digital projection room), making educational activities, preserving and accessing film and video collections. By 2016 all the films and videos were digitalised and now we have a digital archive that includes also born-digital audiovisuals.

From 2014 another big change, this time institutional, marked a new challenging phase still in progress: the ANCR was becoming part of the [Polo del '900](#).

2016 - today

In April 2016 the Polo del '900 was opened in Turin and the ANCR officially became part of it. The Polo del'900 houses various institutes and archives custodians of documentary sources, mainly paper based, about the 1900s. After 50 years of life as independent film archive we are now an archive between archives. And it happened for the contents we preserve, bound to the history, treated like an historical source, and that is good. It seems like one of the two elements that characterise our mission, the archival one, now definitively prevails on the other, the cinephile one. It seems that the only thing that makes the difference from our partners are the supports in which we preserve documentation.

But even if the process is in progress I think we are still in between of our two aims.

Audiovisuals as tool for a deep reflection on history is still our goal. Filmare la storia, as I said, is growing every year and two years ago we produced an important documentary on female resistance nationally distributed in cinema (*Libere* by Rossella Schillaci). Nevertheless this new perspective is something to think of.

From my point of view the passage into Polo del '900 is a great opportunity of discussion with my colleagues from other institutes. Together we rethought space, conservation policies, access. We are discussing how manage the integrate archival description of different kind of documents. We reached good results but is still a work in progress. What I think after this experience is that we have lot to learn from the traditional archival science theory and practice but we have also lot to give. Because archivists have to cope with new issues generated by the digital document in what we can call the age of its informatics reproduction and some of these problems are more familiar to us after decades of managing the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction.