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## INTRODUCTION: THE INTERNATIONAL CIRCULATION OF EUROPEAN CINEMA IN THE DIGITAL AGE

It is little more than thirty years since the introduction in 1987 of the European Community's most significant financial support system for cinema and audiovisual media, the 'Programme MEDIA' ('Mesures pour encourager le développement de l'industrie audiovisuelle'), with an initially small endowment that has since increased steadily<sup>1</sup>. At present, the terms of the Creative Europe programme (of which MEDIA is a part) for the 2021-2027 period is undergoing scrutiny and redefinition. In the meantime, the media and political landscapes have undergone significant changes: on the one hand, the digital revolution has shaken up, to some extent<sup>2</sup>, film production and distribution; on the other, more recently, populist political currents are posing urgent questions about the very definition of nationhood and the wider European community. This issue of *Comunicazioni sociali* reflects on the production and distribution of film and television within this context.

The data gathered and reproduced in the following essays is bleak. 'European cinema' exists clearly from a productive perspective, and the various nations of the EU continue to produce a significant number of films: an average of 1250 per year, as Andrew Higson notes in the opening of his article. And yet, if we contextualize these numbers further, through a multi-national lens, the data paints a more worrying picture – in view of two issues in particular.

The first, to some extent taken for granted, constitutes one of the fundamental reasons for which national and supra-national policies first emerged in support the production of European audio-visual media, from the 1980s onward: the supremacy of American products across the globe and the European desire to compete. Today, the picture is little different. From a political-economic perspective, the global market is still dominated by major international cinemas: Hollywood in particular – whose major studios (20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, Warner Bros., Sony, Disney) maintain control locally through national subsidiaries – but also Bollywood, Nollywood and the Chinese industry beyond Europe. This affects not only the distribution potential for national cinemas worldwide,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. G. Richeri, *Economia dei media*, Rome-Bari: GLF Editori Laterza, 2012; A. Jäckel, *European Film Industries*, London: British Film Institute, 2003, in particular pp. 67-90.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. V. Crisp, "Access and Power: Film Distribution, Re-Intermediation and Piracy", in *The Routledge Companion to World Cinema*, edited by R. Stone, P. Cooke, S. Dennison and A. Marlow-Mann, Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2018: 445-454.

but also the very style of those films which do manage to achieve exportation, as Fadda and Garofalo illustrate in their contribution.

The other issue is more local. European cinema of course does manage to maintain decent market quotas, which partially resist the popular success of Hollywood cinema. However, this 'European' cinema must really be defined as a disparate collection of national cinemas, as, more often than not, these quotas consist in home-grown products that achieve only national successes, but do not circulate abroad. There are few exceptions – such as *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* (Dany Boon, 2008) or *The King's Speech* (Tom Hooper, 2010), or occasional 'Hollywoodized' blockbusters like *Taken* (Pierre Morel, 2008) and co-productions (*To Rome with Love*, Woody Allen, 2012). As the Italian case shows, in a couple of the essays included here, there is an ongoing presence of European auteur cinema especially in the festival and arthouse circuits, however the concrete impact of these films remains absolutely marginal. As Jérôme Bourdon has observed, in a book that is principally dedicated to the reconstruction of a 'European' history of broadcasting, perhaps the fundamental problem remains that of a lack of integration between countries: despite the various efforts nothing truly 'European' has emerged at the level of popular media culture<sup>3</sup>.

In this sense, the difficulties faced by European cinema when travelling beyond its home nation present a possible challenge to Crisp's provocation that "World cinema *is* circulation", and to the important scholarship on transnational hybridity<sup>4</sup>. By studying the global circulation and distribution of the continent's cinema, and with a particular emphasis on 'non-national' European cinema (to borrow the terminology used by Jones in his contribution) within the Community, these essays hope to contribute to this area productively, to clarify the economic, political and cultural reasons for its current state of health.

This issue of *Comunicazioni sociali* questions how this situation arose, and what the 'evolved' media context could do to alleviate such difficulties. It approaches these questions through the movements of audiovisual culture, studying specifically how cinema made in Europe circulates outside of the single nations that produced it. The issue moreover employs deliberately the use of the term 'circulation' in place of 'distribution'. As the various emphases in the articles themselves illustrate, this decision seeks to enable a more nuanced image of the movements of media: accounting for the multitude of distribution windows for a film<sup>5</sup>, but also foregrounding, vitally, the wider cultural impact of cinema.

In this direction, the issue represents an extension of the interests of the "*CinCit*: The International Circulation of Italian Cinema" research project, financed by the Italian Ministry for Universities and Higher Education (MIUR) under the auspices of the 'PRIN 2015' scheme. As the pages of this issue attest, there are clear lines and trajectories that divide the European countries in terms of their ability to circulate their media products – and with them a specific image of a culture – across the continent. As some of the ar-

<sup>3</sup> J. Bourdon, *Il servizio pubblico. Storia culturale delle televisioni in Europa*, Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2015, 15. See also S. De Vinck, "The Best Defense is a Good Offense: Putting the European in European-Level Film Support", in *The Palgrave Handbook of European Media Policy*, edited by K. Donders, C. Pauwels and J. Loisen, New York: Routledge, 2014: 329-344.

<sup>4</sup> Crisp, "Access and Power", 445-446; see also D. Shaw, "Transnational Cinema: Mapping a Field of Study", in *The Routledge Companion to World Cinema*, edited by Stone, Cooke, Dennison and Marlow-Mann: 290-298.

<sup>5</sup> G. Doyle: *Understanding Media Economics*, London: Sage, 2013.

ticles illustrate, the international circulation of Italian cinema in particular is even more problematic than some of the country's neighbours, including the UK and France.

The title of the issue includes an important element of change: technology. Though the media landscape is defined by some fixed structural aspects – from the power of high-budget cinema produced by an increasingly integrated market in Hollywood, to European cinema's tendency to provide mostly domestic successes – the evolution of distribution platforms and the emergence of new agents (such as OTT services) contribute significantly to a transformation of the field. Media convergence and the proliferation of what Cunningham has called “disruptive innovators”<sup>6</sup> have introduced a series of ‘liberated’ content circulation strategies which differ from the industry's traditional distribution windows, and challenge Hollywood's integrated hegemony. These strategies have moreover become central to contemporary debates on film distribution, expanding our focus beyond theatrical distribution in order to account for the circulation of films via alternative, formal or informal channels too<sup>7</sup>. Some recent studies have emphasized in particular how contemporary research on film distribution can no longer exclude informal or non-linear circulation channels<sup>8</sup>.

The focal points that intersect the various articles in this issue are therefore principally two. On the one hand: Europe, intended in two senses as the place of origin of a series of film and audio-visual media products characterized by a set of specificities (starting with the very structure of the market, one that differs substantially from the equivalent in the USA that has evolved industrially over a century), but also as the space where ‘national’, ‘European’, ‘transnational’ and ‘global’ film products circulate and are consumed. On the other, we see a significant redefinition of the modes of distribution, where film becomes a primary resource both for traditional platforms (such as television) as well as the more clearly recent ones (such as OTTs). The question that connects these two fields could be summarized as follows: can technological innovation provide the opportunity for the greater circulation and visibility for European cinema across the world?

In the first essay, ‘The Circulation of European Films within Europe’, Andrew Higson offers a foundational answer to this question in relation to the continent itself. He identifies five categories of production and distribution of European films, which vary in relation to national and international success as well as iconographic models and registers. This comprehensive analysis unveils an power bias: namely, despite the fact that there is a significant lack of distribution of most European cinema, that minority is dominated by production companies from the USA, France and the UK.

In ‘Crossing Borders: The Circulation and Reception of Non-National European Films in Italy’, Huw D. Jones offers a counter-point to Higson's continent-wide overview, focusing in particular on the consumption of non-national European film by Italian audiences. Through qualitative and quantitative analyses, including focus groups with

<sup>6</sup> S. Cunningham, “Emergent Innovation through the Coevolution of Informal and Formal Media Economies”, *Television & New Media*, 13, 5 (2012): 415-430. Crisp centralizes the importance of this concept, in “Access and Power”, 446-447.

<sup>7</sup> C. Tryon, *Reinventing Cinema: Movies in the Age of Media Convergence*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009; D. Iordanova, S. Cunningham, eds., *Digital Disruption: Cinema Moves On-Line*, St Andrews: St Andrews Film Studies, 2012, and in particular D. Iordanova, “Digital Disruption: Technological Innovation and Global Film Circulation”, 1-31; S. Cunningham, J. Silver, eds., *Screen Distribution and the New King-Kongs of the Online World*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> R. Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema*, London: British Film Institute, Palgrave, 2012; V. Crisp, *Film Distribution in the Digital Age. Pirates and Professionals*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; R. Lobato, J. Thomas, *The Informal Media Economy*, Cambridge-Malden: Polity Press, 2015.

Italian audiences, Jones illustrates not only the varying successes of the three most 'distributable' models identified by Higson – blockbusters, arthouse and middlebrow cinema – but also certain demographic characteristics of the audiences that consume them. The article therefore raises some vital questions about the specificities of Italy in relation to other European countries, in a useful contribution to a key area of transnational film studies. The same question is raised in the conclusion of Holdaway and Scaglioni's article, 'From Distribution to Circulation Studies: Mapping Italian Film Abroad'. In it, the authors seek to illustrate some of the cultural and economic specificities that can alter the theatrical successes and failures of Italian films in specific European countries – such as the incomparable success of the theatrical distribution of a group of TV mini-series about Pope John Paul II in Poland.

Holdaway and Scaglioni parenthesize their study within a broader reflection on the shift from 'distribution' to 'circulation studies' mentioned above; an approach which is common to the remaining articles in this issue. The fourth article focuses on an element of cinema's cultural impact that goes beyond the audience alone. In 'Italian Cinema in Film Journals in France and United States', Rossella Catanese and Emiliano Morreale study meticulously the references to and discussions of Italian cinema in a sample of French and American film magazines. Though, as they illustrate, the small majority of content refers to contemporary releases, there is nevertheless also a strong sense of the long shadow of Italy's film heritage. Interestingly, though much of this print content is focused on specific individuals, the authors observe the emergence of voices beyond the directors themselves: in particular a group of Italian 'gatekeepers' who are responsible for programming, archiving and restoring national cinema.

The following three essays maintain a focus on Italian cinema, presenting a more comprehensive image of its circulation through different media. In 'The Distribution of Contemporary Italian Cinema in the United States: The Films of Luca Guadagnino and Paolo Sorrentino', Michele Fadda and Damiano Garofalo examine the contemporary models for the theatrical distribution in the infamously difficult North American market. First historicizing the circulation of Italian film culture in the USA alongside the birth and evolution of the arthouse circuit, the authors then reflect on the possible modes today via two of Italy's more (relatively) successful contemporary auteurs.

This is followed by a shift of focus to American networks and their online platforms, in the essay by Luca Barra and Marta Perrotta entitled 'The Contemporary Circulation of Italian Cinema across US Television and Digital Platforms. Methods, Limits, Main Paths'. The study reveals some of the main techniques used to 'package' Italian films on American networks, through a multitude of factors that only occasionally includes the nationality of cinema itself. The authors moreover offer some important theoretical reflections, noting the difficulties of ephemeral listings and calling for a more systematic and integrated approach to studying television content distribution.

The seventh article, 'National Screen Productions and Global SVOD Services: The Case of Netflix in the UK and Italy' provides an interesting point of comparison – studying the presence of the same content on the SVOD service Netflix. Stefano Baschiera and Valentina Re offer some compatible reflections on the function of nationhood: they demonstrate how the 'Italianness' of streamed cinema is merely a flexible taxonomic tool that ultimately serves to reinforce Netflix's own *international* brand identity.

The issue closes with Inês Rebanda Coelho's study 'Blockchain: A New Way of Distribution, Promotion and Improvement of the Artistic, Economic and Cultural Situation of a Film in the EU'. The final essay of the issue maintains a focus on the digital environment, reflecting on the potential of blockchain technology not only to circulate

European film content in an immediately accessible way, but moreover to overcome some of the dense regulation on copyright at the level of the EU, which at present complicates the free movement of content.

Thirty years after the definition of a series of policies that were designed to provide support also for the circulation of European cinema across the continent, this issue therefore concludes on some of the important possibilities with which the policies of the future will have to come to terms.