Cinema Heritage in Europe: Preserving and Sharing Culture by Engaging with Film Exhibition and Audiences

Editorial

Pierluigi Ercole, De Montfort University; Daniela Treveri Gennari, Oxford Brookes University; Silvia Dibeltulo, Oxford Brookes University; and Lies Van de Vijver, Ghent University

Introduction

The safeguarding, preservation and valorisation of the cultural heritage has increasingly become associated with the process of making cultural heritage assets available online ("Towards an Integrated Approach"). The process of digitisation of cultural assets, while playing a key role in sharing knowledge, still represents a challenge for European and global heritage. While the focus on audiovisual cultural heritage has been characterised by a limited engagement with film and television as cultural products, cinema audiences and their experiences have been virtually neglected. Looking at the cinemagoing experience shifts the focus from the film, as cultural/commercial product, to the audiences, as citizens. The articles included in this special issue of *Alphaville* demonstrate that research on cinema audiences has the potential to broaden the scope of cultural heritage by including cinema heritage as a new cultural category, which relates to cinemas and the experience of cinemagoing as the social counterpart of film and filmmaking: in this sense the consumption of cultural heritage becomes a cultural phenomenon in its own right.

In particular, the articles address three main areas of research in which this new concept of cinema heritage can be understood: tangible forms (such as the history of cinema theatre buildings and of the spatial dimension of cinemagoing), intangible forms (such as oral histories related to the cinemagoing experience) and digital forms (such as programming databases, and audiovisual archival material). By focusing on the cinemagoing experience, we intend to promote a new holistic approach to cultural heritage, while at the same time encouraging new possible developments in film studies research.

New Trends in Cultural Heritage: Digitisation of Cultural Assets, Online Access and Reuse

Over recent decades, widespread digitisation of cultural assets has taken place in both public and private institutions across Europe. Vast quantities of archival documents and images have been made available to the general public, as well as to European companies and research communities. However, in order to maximise public awareness and engagement in cultural activities, new and enhanced levels of access have to be reached. As archives and museums reinvent themselves using new technologies to enhance their collections, they are able to engage new and diverse audiences "through focusing on entertainment, tourism or education" (Dibbets 332). Karel Dibbets has noted that "digitization is a success story in the heritage world" (332), but sharing knowledge across institutions is still a notable challenge. In fact, heritage institutions have only recently started to cooperate by exchanging and

integrating their assets. One aspect of this challenge is that museums and archives work predominantly in isolation and see each other as competitors, as they are driven by self-interest and profit making. From the point of view of academia, in 2010 Dibbets lamented a lack of interest in technology by historians, which, he argued, could relegate them to the margins of the cultural heritage world as "[h]eritage institutions are developing a digital knowledge infrastructure for their own needs, which potentially will define the future research agenda to a large degree" (332). Enhanced heritage interpretation strategies—such as contextualisation, as Dibbets suggests—and further cross-sector collaboration amongst academic and nonacademic holders of cultural heritage collections are vital strategies to respond to an ever-changing knowledge economy.

The digital era and the expansion of the Internet have led to a rapid increase in the production of born-digital content of different types (e.g. blogs, websites, tweets, apps, enhanced publications, maps, music, videos, broadcast materials, etc.). Simultaneously, cultural heritage institutions such as galleries, archives, libraries and museums have invested huge resources both in the digitisation of their assets and in technology aimed at increasing public access, such as multimedia digital platforms, including social media. Among the most notable organisations that have implemented this strategy are *Europeana*, Google Cultural Institute, and Internet Archive. YouTube, then, has become a standard platform for archives—one need only think of the YouTube channels of Istituto Luce Cinecittà and British Pathé, or Hollywood studios collections such as the one of Paramount Pictures. Clearly, unlimited online access and active user participation have become crucial for the visibility and public impact of holders of audiovisual collections (Prelinger).

Over the last decade, a number of initiatives have demonstrated the requirements for responsive interfaces. For example, the project *Europeana 1914-1918–Untold Stories & Official Histories of WW1* organised roadshows in libraries in different European cities, demonstrating how the collection and presentation of cultural heritage in digital form is always anchored in a local, physical setting, involving actual people who enrich our knowledge of history and culture with their own personal objects and stories. Numerous crowdsourcing experiments have shown that online platforms allow people to contribute valuable time and knowledge to cultural heritage collections in public repositories while, at the same time, promoting engagement with this heritage (Oomen and Aroyo; Noordegraaf). An example of this type of online engagement is the *Europeana 1989* project, which collects stories, pictures, audiovisual material and more via an online platform, and maps users' contributions using the History Pin application.

Digitised cultural heritage content has been effectively presented in applications developed and exploited by the creative industries sector, ranging from educational games to multimedia setups in museums that allow visitors to engage in multisensorial experiences of the art works. A number of European projects have promoted the preservation of and access to European heritage assets through digital tools. The above-mentioned *Europeana* project provides access to over thirty million digitised cultural objects. The majority of them, however, are texts or images, while audiovisual collections are underrepresented. In fact, according to the "Survey Report on Digitisation in European Cultural Heritage Institutions 2014" 84% of the digitised objects are text-based or 2D visual resources (Stroeker and Vogels 5). And yet, several initiatives in the last decades have tried to give greater representation and access to European audiovisual material. Indeed, the European Commission encourages member states to safeguard and preserve film heritage. For example, *European Film Gateway* and *EUscreen* (both linked to *Europeana*) aggregate and provide

access to film heritage and television heritage content respectively, targeting both researchers and the general public.

A Holistic Approach to Cultural Heritage and a New Idea of Cultural Heritage which Includes Cinema Heritage

In "Creating the Strategic Research Agenda", Koenraad Van Balen argues for a holistic approach to cultural heritage:

> Cultural heritage exists in tangible, intangible and digital forms. Tangible heritage includes artefacts (objects, paintings, archaeological finds etc.), buildings, structures, landscapes, cities. … Intangible heritage includes the practices, representations, expressions, memories, knowledge and skills that communities, groups and individuals construct, use and transmit from generation to generation. Digital heritage includes texts, databases, still and moving images, audio, graphics, software and web pages. (11)

As we have noted above, research on audiovisual cultural heritage has been characterised by a focus on film and television, while audiences and their experiences have been completely neglected. Our approach embraces Van Balen's holistic perspective and, at the same time, promotes a broader notion of audiovisual cultural heritage. By introducing the concept of cinema heritage we wish to challenge traditional taxonomies that have tended to exclude cultural consumption practices from normative categorisations. In order to do this, critical attention needs to be devoted to audiences, that is, to those who experienced and consumed those audiovisual cultural products. A focus on audiences' cinemagoing experiences (cinemagoing practices, screening schedules, exhibition structures, reception of specific films, etc.) allows for the emergence of a new—and holistic—concept of cinema heritage, which entails tangible forms (such as cinema theatre buildings), intangible forms (such as oral history related to cinemagoing experience), and digital forms (such as digitised texts and images, audiovisual material and film programming databases).[1] In the following sections we will look into these specific components of the heritage that relates to various aspects of the cinematic experience.

Tangible Forms

The document "Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings" explains how in the United Kingdom architectural and historical characters directly influence the listing of buildings.[2] However, the document does not mention the local, social and associative values of places such as cinema buildings. With a growing move to a values-based approach in the protection and conservation of historic buildings, the approach we are proposing offers a unique prospect to engage more deeply with local and social values of cinema theatres, and also to establish a stronger connection between European cinema history and the buildings that served it.[3] Furthermore, this connection can be developed as a community resource: linking associative values with tangible heritage places can unlock new opportunities for their interpretation, as well as generate interest in a place and potentially contribute to the regeneration of an area. Several projects that engage with existing historic cinema buildings are able to demonstrate how communities can use cinema heritage in conjunction with a

physical location to enhance ways in which such heritage is used and understood as a place of historic significance, in its contribution to the urban character and city life.[4]

Intangible Forms

Memories of cinema audiences are a key component of cinema heritage. They are an invaluable source of information on the dimensions of a cinema culture that cannot be retrieved, let alone conserved and presented, in any other way. Memories of lived cinemagoing experiences introduce a crucial bottom-up perspective and promote the understanding of past cinema cultures, linking them to the present. As such, these memories are clear examples of intangible heritage, as defined by William Logan: "heritage that is embodied in people rather than in inanimate objects" (33). Fascinating developments in the academic fields of memory and oral history (Alivizatou; Hamilton and Shopes) have inspired work on cinema audiences (Biltereyst, Kuhn, and Meers). In order to engage with lived experiences of actual audiences in their social, historical and cultural context, and to investigate the role of cinema within everyday life and leisure culture, oral history is an adequate method to give a voice to cinemagoers and let them testify to their own experiences in regard to their filmgoing habits. One of the most striking findings to emerge from oral history research into cinemagoing is that memories of the cinema revolve far more frequently around the social act of going to the movies than around the films watched. This brings a new perspective to the foreground, one that would be difficult to recreate from archival sources. A multilayered approach, which employs oral histories as a crucial component, is more than just a complement to classical film historical work. It eventually delivers an altogether richer picture of film and cinema history, where text, context and experiences are dealt with in a nonexclusive way.

Digital Forms

Van Vliet, Dibbets, and Gras have claimed that "[d]igitization brings the promise of continuous access to cultural heritage collections because it eliminates physical preconditions for access with respect to time and place" (27). When applying this concept to the experience of cinemagoing we refer not only to audiovisual material, but to all those existing digital materials from a large number of key sources across Europe: newspapers and specialised magazines, box office data, programming sources, photos and film stills, publicity material, cinema theatre plans, etc., which contribute to contextualise "the richness of that cultural infrastructure and its larger socioeconomic context" to which van Vliet, Dibbets, and Gras refer in their research (28). By digitising existing cinemagoing heritage collections an added value for cinema-related institutions (museums, libraries, etc.) can be created. This can also provide opportunities to make these resources available to a wider audience, who can engage with, recollect and manipulate current and past cinemagoing experiences. In Europe, various projects have already developed initiatives of this kind. On a microhistorical level, the *Lost Cinemas of Castle Park* app, for instance, is a tour of Castle Park, Bristol's original commercial and leisure district, which was destroyed in the Blitz, and surrounding area with the intention of creating "a more immersive, cinematic experience", which combines digital forms of cinema heritage with intangible ones in order to map the past lives of cinemas in Bristol. At a national level, the project *Data-driven Film History: A Demonstrator of EYE's Jean Desmet Collection* (2014–2015) aims to provide a transparent tool to visualise the programming and distribution of the films of Jean Desmet, a film distributor and cinema

owner in the Netherlands (1875–1956) (as discussed in the article by Julia Noordegraaf, Loes Opgenhaffen, and Norbert Bakker included in this issue).

However, no attempts so far have been developed at European level. This is largely due to the lack of combined efforts that aim at collecting and aggregating existing cinemagoing related digital collections that are held, for instance, by academic institutions, cultural organisations and private collectors. The need was felt for a pan-European project able to bring together the wealth of digital cinema heritage—as well as promote the digitisation of nondigital material—so as to bring new insights into European cinema and film culture, while also shedding light on the links between cinema heritage and other types of cultural heritage.

The *European Cinema Audiences* Project and Possible Developments in Film Studies and the Film Industry

Cinema is one of the most emblematic, popular and globally distributed forms of entertainment. However, films are not economically exploited in similar ways and not viewed in identical circumstances. For the study of cinema as a cultural practice, historical research into the experience of cinemagoing is a quintessential area of research. The corpus of data on European cinema culture is very heterogeneous. Some European institutions have been working individually on large national datasets concerning film screening, distribution and reception. A number of relevant organisations and content providers have come a long way in this respect while others have only recently turned to harnessing the digital power of big data. However, up to now hardly any comparative research has been carried out, due to a primarily national view of cinema culture, and a gaping lack of standardisation in methodology and analysis. *European Cinema Audiences*, a funded collaboration between the editors of this issue of *Alphaville*, is the first cinema heritage project that addresses the lack of crossnational studies in this field with the aim of developing pan-European research, thus unveiling patterns of similarities and dissimilarities in film and cinema culture in Europe. The study focuses on the interoperability of existing datasets on European cinema culture, and intends to introduce a model for comparative research which includes exhibition structures, cinema programming strategies, and oral history data in mid-sized European cities in the 1950s. The project, funded by the British Academy/The Leverhulme Trust, is carried out by researches from the universities of Oxford Brookes, De Montfort, and Ghent. The universities involved in this project are part of the international research network HoMER (History of Moviegoing, Exhibition and Reception). Indeed, the project builds on the existing international network of researchers to develop new collaborations and partnerships with film archives, memory institutions, and experts in digital heritage as well as ICT specialists.

In detail, *European Cinema Audiences* addresses the gap in comparative research on experiences of cinemagoing in 1950s Europe, a time when cinema was the most popular pastime. In its onset, the project has different layers. From a historical perspective, it researches the popular reception of film through ethnographic audience studies, while reconstructing the film programming and exhibition structure of the time. Cities in the UK, Italy, Belgium, and, in a second phase, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, and Sweden will be used as pioneer case studies to provide the first detailed comparative analysis of cinema audiences, film popularity and programing patterns. The project is based on the creative reuse of existing data combined with newly collected data. The potential benefits include the reuse and accessibility of data for further research and the standardisations of data collection

models. Six cities (Leicester, Ghent, Bari, Utrecht, Gothenburg, and Brno) have been selected because they present similar population density and film exhibition structures—as well as being representative of their national film cultures. The project will investigate how their film cultures can be compared crossnationally and what patterns of differences and similarities will be revealed in a close analysis of the data. Through the triangulation of box office figures, programming data, and audience questionnaires and interviews, this research will provide a new view of the experience of cinemagoing in postwar Europe. Beyond the aim of enabling this comparison, the project has a larger ambition derived from its roots in oral history to put older European citizens at the centre as main providers of cultural heritage content.

European Cinema Audiences aims indeed to generate interest from the general public, as it involves the memories of audiences of the postwar period, something which has produced significant impact on nonacademic communities in national projects of a similar nature. The cinema heritage concept uniquely brings together a wide range of tangible and intangible heritage assets to develop synergies between these discernible strands to improve public understanding of this rich component of European heritage. At the same time, this concept suggests ways in which this type of heritage can contribute to community-generated, culture-led regeneration initiatives. The broad scope of the data and material that *European Cinema Audiences* aims to make available for reuse will provide an unprecedented resource to assist in the interpretation of cinema heritage by the public and the industry. Associating interpretive values with tangible locations, such as cinema theatres, will unlock new opportunities for these locations to be interpreted in innovative and engaging ways, thereby stimulating interest in the cultural experiences shared by European citizens. This could potentially have a regeneration impact by promoting value and opening up areas to tourism and other cultural activities by linking these areas to new interpretations (e.g. areas used in film locations) and novel ways in which this can be experienced (e.g. virtual reality, film overlays on hand-held devices). Indeed, the project will enable commercial value to be added to the digital forms of cinema heritage, allowing otherwise unrecognised cultural heritage assets not only to be exploited but also to be preserved and promoted. An aspect of the commercial value of cinema heritage is connected to the tourism industry. The 2013 report *Euroscreen: The Attraction to Screen Destinations* identifies the challenge of bringing the screen and tourism sectors together as a potential area of economic growth. The report addresses the need to encourage strategies to increase "screen production and tourism generated through the use of new and existing screen products" (Månsson and Eskilsson 9). The growing importance of location to film-oriented tourism has been widely recognised over the last two decades. Cinemas are an element of these locations, and are therefore valuable to the tourism industry. UNESCO points outs that watching films is the world's most profitable cultural industry and one of its most popular cultural practices, concluding that gathering and sharing information on film viewing is imperative ("Cinema Statistics"). In fact, while there has been a small decline in participation in cultural activities across Europe in general, cinema attendance has shown a 1% increase (*Special Eurobaromter 399*, 8). According to the 2012 *MEDIA Programme: Supporting Growth in the European Audiovisual Industry*, the European audiovisual market is worth an estimated €107.4 billion and provides 1.2 million highly qualified jobs. Cinema therefore represents not only a "catalyst for creativity for growth and jobs" but is also a vital element in the promotion and expression of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue in Europe. While examples of good practice can be found at national or local level (*Going to the Pictures*; *See You at the Pictures!*), pan-European counterparts have been lacking so far.

In conclusion, the project makes use of innovative digital tools for data analysis, which will play a key role in the development of a research model for comparative work. Through preservation and easy access, it will allow, for the first time, international comparative research on audiences and cinemagoing digital data up until now totally fragmented and isolated within national boundaries—in line with the above-mentioned focus on digital forms of cinema heritage. Studies of different experiences of the same film event in different environments at different times will be one of the main outcomes of the project, stimulating and promoting the reuse of multilingual content through the project's integrated platform, which will lead to cross-lingual collaboration and production of knowledge so far unmanageable.

Cinema Heritage in Europe: Bridging the Gap

On the backdrop of the set of issues explored in this Editorial, the aim of this issue of *Alphaville* is to bridge the gap between national and crossnational research in cinema heritage in Europe. The articles here included discuss and unravel the different forms of this new category of cultural heritage by both providing theoretical perspectives and exploring its specific incarnations in selected case studies. In Daniel Biltereyst and Philippe Meers's "New Cinema History and the Comparative Mode: Reflections on Comparing Historical Cinema Cultures" the authors observe how, within the new cinema history perspective, the call for more systematic comparative research has been high on the agenda for some time. The recent accumulation of studies on various aspects of film exhibition and cinemagoing creates an enormous potential for data to be integrated and compared, larger patterns to be discovered, and hypotheses to be tested. Biltereyst and Meers claim that the work done so far is largely monocentric in the sense that most studies focus on very specific local practices and experiences, often concentrating on film exhibition and audience experiences in particular cities, neighbourhoods or venues. Their contribution argues that, conversely, a comparative perspective would help us to understand larger trends, factors or conditions explaining differences and similarities in cinema cultures. Different levels and modes of comparative research are discussed and illustrated by using data and insights from various historical studies on cinema cultures.

Two of the articles in the issue centre, albeit from different perspectives, on what we have identified as cinema heritage's tangible forms: cinema theatres. Elisa Ravazzoli's "Cinemagoing as Spatially Contextualised Cultural and Social Practice" looks at the experience of cinemagoing as a spatial social practice and a cultural experience; it also investigates the cinema theatre as a physical, symbolic and mental setting. Overall, the contribution offers a theoretical reflection on the multiple notions of space in relation to cinemagoing. Adopting a case study approach, Julia Noordegraaf, Loes Opgenhaffen, and Norbert Bakker's article on "Cinema Parisien 3D" evaluates the relevance of 3D visualisation as a research tool for the history of cinemagoing focussing on a specific case study, the visualisation of Desmet's Amsterdam Cinema Parisien theatre. Two of the articles, then, focus on cinema heritage's intangible data: memories and practices linked to cinemagoing. Jean-Marc Leveratto and Fabrice Montebello's "Ethnography as a tool of Cinema History: Cinema Going at the Light of the Experience of a Local Film Market" focuses on how ethnography allows for the reconstruction of recent cinema history, by using Longwy, a former industrial town located in the eastern part of France (far from Paris and close to the Belgian border) as a peculiar site of observation. The essay aims at demonstrating the heuristic value of a historical study of film consumption combining oral archives and

fieldwork with written sources. With a similar focus on oral sources, in "Narrative Modes of Cinemagoing Memories" Susanne Haake discusses the results of a research project on cinemagoing heritage, while offering a matrix to analyse and categorise cinemagoing memories. Haake's project explored the ways in which experiences of cinemagoing in the 1930s and 1940s are remembered by old members of the audience. To discuss these memory processes, the author combines oral history practices with local history approaches of cinemagoing research and with narratological methods of text analysis from an interdisciplinary perspective. Furthermore, these memories are plotted into a map in order to be categorised and compared.

The final contribution, "Visualising Data in Digital Cinema Studies: More than Just Going through the Motions?", investigates cinema heritage's digital forms as it explores the role of digital technology in enhancing and deepening our understanding of cinema history and cinemagoing. Deb Verhoeven's article examines the critical role visualisation plays for digital cinema studies and proposes that cinema studies have an equally critical role to play in evaluating and developing visualisation methods. The author focuses on work undertaken in *The Kinomatics Project*, a multidisciplinary study and one of the first big data studies of contemporary cultural diffusion that explores, analyses and visualises the industrial geometry of motion pictures (the study of "kinematics" is often referred to as "the geometry of motion"). The project is based on the premise that films can be understood as cultural goods that are distributed both between "territories" or markets and across the globe according to industrially unique spatial patterns and temporal flows. Verhoven argues that seeing film in this way invites us to explore the industrial aspects of movement and location, but also invites reflection on our own approach to these large datasets.

Overall, this issue of *Alphaville* stems from and reflects the need to investigate cinema audiences with a multidisciplinary approach, and aims to demonstrate that a dialogue between anthropology, oral history, geography, digital humanities, and film studies can provide innovative perspectives on this new approach to cultural heritage.

Notes

[1] It is what Harry van Vliet, Karel Dibbets, and Henk Gras explain in "Culture in Context":

> The text or film stored is just one part of it; the venue of the show, the composition of the audience, staging notes, program sheets and reports in the press are objects which are at least just as important for assessing the totality of a show. … Given the necessity of recovering lost cultural events via residual contextual information, we must have an eye for the richness of the cultural infrastructure and its larger socioeconomic context, in its full width and depth. The enrichment of cultural objects by means of contextual information is no mere triviality; rather it is the only to "capture" the cultural "object". (28)

[2] "Designation will be warranted for those candidates that clearly possess special architectural or historic interest: this guide sets out the main factors that are borne in mind when undertaking assessments" (Historic England 2). The guide further notes that associative values, such as a venue for a certain performance, or links to artists, will be a lesser consideration when considering listing, though "social history claims may well be valid" but

"the building should survive in a form that directly illustrates and confirms the historic claim, and be a very good example of its genre" (Historic England 9).

[3] As evidenced in the 2008 publication by the English Heritage (especially pages 27–32). This document describes a range of heritage values, arranged in four groups, which may be attached to places. These are: evidential value (the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity); historical value (the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present; it tends to be illustrative or associative); aesthetic value (the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place); and communal value (the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory).

[4] See, for instance, the *Old Cinema* project and the *MACINE* project. Born in Italy in 2012, the *Old Cinema* project promotes the idea of the cinema theatre as cultural heritage; its aim is to conduct a census of abandoned cinema theatres in the country. *MACINE* is an art project born in 2011 with the aim of studying defunct cinema spaces in Rome.

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Pierluigi Ercole is a Lecturer in Cinema and Television History at De Montfort University, Leicester, UK. Much of his research is grounded in audience and reception studies, transnational cinema and the diaspora and his work focuses, in particular, on Italian cinema, cinemagoing in Italy and Britain, Anglo-Italian film culture and the distribution and reception of Italian films in the UK and Ireland. He is co-investigator for the BA/Leverhulme funded project *European Cinema Audiences* (with Ghent University and Oxford Brookes University). His publications include the articles "Screening Fascism in the Free State" *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (2014) and "The Greatest Film of the Fascist Era", *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media* (2013). His work is also included in the edited collections *Silent Italian Cinema: A Reader* (2013) edited by G. Bertellini; and *Cinema, Audiences and Modernity: New Perspectives on European Cinema History* (2011), edited by D. Biltereyst, R. Maltby and P. Meers.

Daniela Treveri Gennari is Reader in Film Studies at Oxford Brookes University. She works on postwar Italian cinema and her particular interests are audiences and popular cinema, film exhibition and programming. Her publications include, among others, her monograph *Post-war Italian Cinema: American Intervention, Vatican Interests* (Routledge, New York, 2009), the edited volume (with Daniel Biltereyst) *Moralizing cinema: Film, Catholicism and Power* (Routledge, New York, 2014), the article "'If You Have Seen It, You Cannot Forget!': Film Consumption and Memories of Cinema-Going in 1950s Rome", *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (2015). Daniela has recently been working on a project on spectatorship in postwar Rome as part of her successful British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship and is currently leading the AHRC-funded project *Italian Cinema Audiences* (with the universities of Bristol and Exeter) and the BA/Leverhulme funded

project *European Cinema Audiences* (with Ghent University and De Montfort University). Moreover, her research on audiences in British cinemas has been published in the volume *The Phoenix Picturehouse: 100 years of Oxford Cinema Memories* (London: Picturehouse Publications, 2013) written with Deborah Allison and Hiu M. Chan.

Silvia Dibeltulo is a researcher and associate lecturer at Oxford Brookes University, where she is currently working on the AHRC-funded *Italian Cinema Audiences project*, and teaching film genre and film history. She obtained her PhD in Film Studies from Trinity College Dublin with a dissertation on cinematic representations of Irish-Americans and Italian-Americans in Hollywood gangster films. Her research mainly focuses on the representation of identity on screen, specifically in terms of ethnicity, nationality, gender and culture. Her work also centers on film genre theory and history, audience and reception studies, cinema heritage, and digital humanities. Her publications include the article "Family, Gang and Ethnicity in Italian-themed Hollywood Gangster Films", which appeared in *Film International* in 2015 and the book chapter "Old and New Irish Ethnics: Exploring Ethnic and Gender Representation in *P.S. I Love You*" (in *Ireland and Cinema: Culture and Contexts*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

Lies Van de Vijver is a postdoctoral researcher at the Centre for Cinema and Media Studies of Ghent University. She is working on various research projects on the history of screen culture, film programming and cinema experience in Flanders. She is coordinator of the HoMER Network (History of Moviegoing, Exhibition and Reception) and the DICIS Network (Digital Cinema Studies). She has coorganised several conferences on media history research and has published in international journals and readers on the history of screen culture in Ghent and Flanders. She is currently working on contemporary cinemagoing habits in a post-moviegoing era and on the sociality and eventfulness of cinema culture today.