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To cite this article: Diego Cavallotti & Paolo Simoni (2022): Local/global: amateur cinema and new forms of valorization in archival film festivals, Studies in European Cinema, DOI: [10.1080/17411548.2022.2103929](https://doi.org/10.1080/17411548.2022.2103929)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17411548.2022.2103929>



Published online: 08 Aug 2022.



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# Local/global: amateur cinema and new forms of valorization in archival film festivals

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## ABSTRACT

This paper will focus on the new landscapes of valorization and access to amateur/small gauge films within the archival film festival context. Archival small gauge film festivals present themselves as something completely different from those festivals dedicated to amateur and experimental cinema in the past, mainly because their goal is to valorize assets that have been deposited in specialized archives from the 1980s onwards. This film heritage is composed not only by the products of serious amateurs, but also by home movies and experimental films. We will start from the cases of Home Movie Day, a project developed in 2002 by archivists, curators and film historians in the US, Archivio Aperto in Italy, and Orphan Film Symposium, founded in 1999. Throughout the years they have become a blueprint for archival small gauge film festivals and a label to which different experiences refer: small archival film festivals; meeting activities where the broader field of ‘non-theatrical film’ is addressed; the Home Movie Marathon, a live streaming in which amateur films from all across the world are screened, etc. Furthermore, we will focus on examples from the European context, such as Archivio Aperto and its recent developments with the *Memoryscapes* digital platform.

## KEYWORDS

small-gauge film; metadispositif; digital archive; dispositif reenactment; film access and valorization

## Introduction

In the hall of a Middle Age building in the city centre of Bologna, Italy, the light bulb of a small-gauge film projector glows in the dark. On the screen a variety of grainy images are displayed: home movies, amateur films, experimental films . . . An archive has opened its vault for a specific and important occasion: a film festival taking place every year between October and November, called Archivio Aperto (Open Archive), in which the Italian Amateur Film Archive, held by the Home Movies association, showcases its hidden treasures. Founded in 2008, Archivio Aperto falls into the category of the “specialist” or “themed” archival film festivals’ (Marlow-Mann 2013, 7), which does not offer a ‘general

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This article was jointly conceived by the authors. More precisely, Diego Cavallotti wrote the following chapters: *Introduction*, *Screening the Archive: the Small-Gauge Film Festival as Metadispositif*, and *The Screening+Conference Formula*; Paolo Simoni wrote *From Global to Local: the Home Movie Day Movement and Archivio Aperto*, *From Local to Global: The Pandemic Turn*, and *Conclusions*.

retrospective of cinema's past' (Marlow-Mann 2013, 7), but concentrates on small-gauge formats, organizing screening programs, artist's talks, workshops, and academic roundtables/conferences.

Throughout the paper we will focus on this type of festivals/events, which aim to bring together archival screenings and scientific research and to deepen the knowledge of the small-gauge film phenomenon. Thus, our purpose is to extend the research scope of projects and books such as *Archival Film Festival* edited by Alex Marlow-Mann, in which Dan Streible reflects upon the interplay between the conference set and the screening set at the Orphan Film Symposium (Streible 2013) – a key reference for festivals like Archivio Aperto. Drawing on Marijke de Valck's essays (de Valck 2008) on the establishment of a solid theoretical ground for film festival studies, this paper aims to systematically describe the different structures, frameworks, modes of communication and typologies of archival small-gauge film festivals, pinpointing a crucial concept, the notion of *metadispositif*, on a local and global scale: by this term, we refer to archival small gauge film festivals as cultural sites in which curators and scholars reflect upon and reconstruct the original *dispositif* of small gauge films.

We will focus on the notion of *metadispositif* in the first chapter, addressing a crucial issue concerning archival small-gauge film festivals, and, more broadly, archival film festivals: the *dispositif* through which films are presented and its multiple configurations, especially considering the epochal changes brought by the Covid-19 crisis. Revolving around this notion, we will then focus on our major case study, Archivio Aperto, which is crucial to understand the impact of archival small-gauge film festivals on a local level (chapter 2). Furthermore, we will reflect upon a different kind of festival setting, the so-called screening+conference formula, taking place in global events such as the Orphan Film Symposium and, on a local scale, in Archivio Aperto (chapter 3). Finally, we will highlight the changes in film presentation entailed by the Covid-19 pandemic (chapter 4).

### **Screening the archive: the small-gauge film festival as metadispositif**

The concept of *metadispositif* represents the core of our paper: archival small-gauge film festivals are cultural sites in which programmers and scholars reflect jointly on the modalities in which small-gauge films can be exhibited. This means that the small gauge film festival is a *dispositif of dispositives* or a *metadispositif* (Cavallotti 2014, 121-27): the conditions of possibility of different *dispositif* solutions are theoretically – through roundtables, workshops, etc. – and practically – through the concrete act of screening, digital broadcasting, or online streaming – questioned, pushing the boundaries of the black box theatrical set. It is not by chance, then, that archival small gauge film festivals host multiple screening configurations, referring to assemblages of *dispositives* in which archival contents are variously displayed. In other words, the festival *metadispositif* is double folded: firstly, it compels to reflect upon the best screening sets for a festival context; secondly, it pushes archivists and curators to create innovative *dispositif* solutions engaging in dialogue with the original *dispositives* and, in this way, bridging the gap between the past and the present.

This framework is strictly intertwined to a global trend in film archiving, in which archives are compelled to open their vault to fulfill the requirements of private and public funding. This trend, which Paolo Cherchi Usai links to the transformation of the archival

domain in the Eighties (Cherchi Usai 2013, 27-32), ‘is largely due to broader cultural and political shifts that have meant that the uses to which public money is put must be increasingly visible to the tax payer – not to mention the increasing burden put on public institutions [and, in our experience, also on private and small institutions that perform public service] to generate an ever-larger part of their budget and thus function more like commercial operations’ (Marlow-Mann 2013, 3)

That is why many small gauge film archives are adopting ‘access-led preservation’ (Houston 1994, 37-59) protocols, bridging the research on digital preservation and film programming. Archival film festivals answer this need, especially those aiming to combine their screenings with a thorough curatorial research on the small gauge film *dispositif* (Bellour 2012; Albera and Tortajada 2015). Archivists and curators must consider these issues, reflecting upon how film materials addressed to a private or a selected audience play now a role in a public event, connecting local micro-communities to the audience of a festival or to the global dimension of online streaming platforms – which have proven to be crucial during the Covid-19 crisis. Thus, the major challenges for festival curators are, on the one hand, to deal carefully with the inherent features of the original *dispositif* – from the ‘home mode’ set to the small gauge experimental projections – and, on the other, to find the best display solutions for the audience.

These key points for small-gauge film programming entail that the ‘black box configuration’ is most of the time a useful compromise, which should not be taken for granted: it allows archivists and curators to adapt a digitized film content to the theatrical screening context, increasing the circulation and the visibility of an archival item, but, at the same time, it represents a shift in the presentation modalities of a small gauge film (home movie, amateur film, experimental film, etc.), which need to be taken into account. From this point of view, reflecting on the variety of *dispositif* solutions is perhaps more important for festival curators than the adoption of a specific screening configuration: the small gauge film festival becomes a cultural site in which the complex relations between the original *dispositif* and the new ways of presenting home movies, amateur and experimental films are investigated.

### **From global to local: the Home Movie Day movement and Archivio Aperto**

In the early 2000s, a grassroots movement, aiming to preserve, study, and valorize the so-called ‘unpublished’ and private film heritage (home movies, amateur, experimental, industrial, advertising films, etc.), took shape in the United States. As one of its key figures, Howard Besser, pointed out, ‘we began to see communities of interest organize to preserve these neglected or “orphan” films’ (Besser 2013, 181). This movement involved archivists of younger generations, scholars, curators, and filmmakers, who worked within institutions or as independents, who were sensitive to marginal and amateur cinema, to an underground and hidden audiovisual heritage, and wanted to take part in informal networks concerning the recovery and the screening of invisible films. The logic behind the movement brought into play the local and the global dimensions at the same time and referred to an alternative narrative of cinema and media history. At this juncture, initiatives such as Home Movie Day, Orphan Film Symposium and the pioneer activities by Rick Prelinger (Lison et al. 2019), who gave access to his collections on the Internet Archive (archive.org), were emerging.

More specifically, Home Movie Day (HMD)<sup>1</sup> has proven to be pivotal for this movement on a global scale: it is dedicated to the rediscovery of amateur films through screenings and meetings that take place simultaneously in several places around the world. Each HMD event provides the people with the opportunity to bring along their private films and to screen them in public, often commenting on them and interacting with the audience. How do such events work? First of all, there is an online call-for-action: the Center For Home Movies (CHM), which gathers archivists, curators, and promoters of HMD, launches it, providing film libraries, universities, museums, and associations with specific guidelines. Later, local communities invite old home movie-makers, owners of small gauge film collections, fans of amateur and experimental cinema to take part in the event, reactivating their personal and historical memory. Thus, every local Home Movie Day has specific features that depend on the institutional host, the chosen venue, the inherent attributes of the local community, etc., and it is difficult to envisage a unified audience experience.

HMD co-founder Dwight Swanson recalls how the discussions that led to the birth of Home Movie Day originated in a forum and via email. Someone proposed to organize public screenings of home movies. As in those days there was not a tradition of home movie programming, the newsletter and forum users started to reflect on how to do it: as Swanson affirms, 'at the time there was no history of public screenings of home movies, so we also wanted to teach people that watching other peoples' home movies can be enjoyable and educational'.<sup>2</sup> The final decision to launch the HMD project was taken at a cafe table in the Fall of 2002. The stone in the pond had been thrown.

The history of Home Movie Day sees an exponential growth from its first edition in August 2003. Not by chance, our major case study, Archivio Aperto stemmed from it<sup>3</sup>: since 2004, the Home Movies association organizes the Italian Home Movie Day, shaping it as a traveling event in cities and small or medium-sized towns (Milan, Reggio Emilia, Ravenna, San Gimignano and Rimini, for instance). Moreover, in 2007, an event taking up the 'home movie day' mode was launched in Bologna for the UNESCO World Day For Audiovisual Heritage (October 27th): it was a call for action in which Home Movies' archivists and curators asked the people of Bologna to bring their films, opening the archive to the city.

Its success prompted the curatorial group of Home Movies to work on a similar event in 2008, called Archivio Aperto: it is an annual festival held in Bologna and dedicated to the small gauge film heritage, in which the Home Movie Day activities are incorporated and expanded. Initially hosted in the archive's screening rooms, throughout the years Archivio Aperto has taken place in other venues, such as art galleries, museums, and public spaces, requiring specific curatorial strategies for engaging the audience. In this way, the festival has been a testing ground for home movies, amateur and experimental film programming: it proposes itself as a cultural site for rediscovering and valorizing the small gauge film heritage (and, recently, the analog video heritage) through screenings, installations, workshops, guided visits to the archive's vault and laboratory, and meetings involving experts and non-specialist audiences. In other words, Archivio Aperto is an attempt to elaborate a history of amateur cinema, showcasing its many products, forms, and experiences, and reconstructing them through interviews and historical documents.

Thus, over the years, films by unknown amateur filmmakers have been screened, the works of underground artists of the 1960s and 70s have been rediscovered,<sup>4</sup> but, above all, stories and family sagas have been told (see, for instance, the cases of Mario Oliviero Olivo in 2018 and Francesco Berti Arnoaldi in 2019).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Archivio Aperto's curators have focused on audiovisual materials stemming from Bologna's social movements, films for school and media education projects, and even video projects developed in mental health hospitals.

Over the same period, an international dimension has been added to the local and national ones: for instance, the curators have programmed diary and autobiographical films by Jonas Mekas, Boris Lehman, Pierre Clementi, David Perlov; found footage films by Gustav Deutsch; they have held meetings with foreign archives (the Academy Film Archives and the Inedits network) and hosted curators, artists and scholars working in (or with) amateur archives (Rick Prelinger, Pip Chodorov, Jasper Rigole, Neil Cummings, Marysia Lewandowska, and Lou Dematteis). These meetings have compelled the curators to focus on re-enacting (van den Oever 2014 van den Oever and Fossati 2016) the small gauge film *dispositif* in its home, amateur and experimental mode: by the term re-enactment, we mean an experimental reconstruction of obsolete film technologies and practices through their *mimesis*, perpetuating in this way past media acts in the present (Collingwood 1946, 218). These technologies and practices – or, in other words, the *dispositif* – can be 'grasped in their technical, material, and sensory dimension' (van den Oever and Fickers 2019, 54). Thus, *dispositif* re-enactment configures itself as a performative act, in which the audience "becomes sensitive to everything which evades pure description", as Michel Serres suggests in his plea for a history of the senses' (van den Oever and Fickers 2019, 54). In this way, the curators aim to stress the inherent link between the small gauge film projection, the space in which it occurs – or it occurred in the past, and the *dispositif*. Moreover, re-enactments help to shape direct relationships with the social group to which the audiovisual materials originally belonged, turning them into repositories of the historical memory of a community.

Not by chance, then, between 2008 and 2019 the core of Archivio Aperto's programming had been the projection on film and the re-enactment of original *dispositives*, drawing on a solid historical and experiential key. These choices in amateur film curatorship had been meticulously developed through the years: during the first editions, films brought by old home moviemakers were spontaneously screened; in the last years before the Covid-19 crisis, Archivio Aperto's organizers presented new 16 mm restoration prints of amateur and experimental films.<sup>6</sup>

The use of the old film *appareil-de-base* and *dispositif*<sup>7</sup> is not a form of fetishism and nostalgia (van der Heijden 2015). It aims to re-propose and update the small gauge film projection, where the film apparatus, its noises and its light flashes were parts of the ritual, where the spectators belonged to the same family (or the same small kinship groups) and shared this cinematic experience, where the stories told before, after and during the screenings were as important as the film screened: a community built around a projector.

The curatorship of archival small gauge film festival cannot overlook these pivotal elements. The materiality of small gauge films and their screening environment/settings, the sound of the film projector and the orality of the stories told by the participants, the interrelationships between digital restoration and the analog film prints (Fossati 2018)

pose key questions concerning how to program and watch small gauge films: should we concentrate on entire film collections, on a single reel or on 'pars pro toto' fragments? Faced with the open text of a home movie or an experimental film, a closed, traditional programming formula does not work. Drawing on the multiple facets of the *metadispositif*, the curators have to deal with a spectrum of possibilities ranging from the presentation of the film document as it is, a sort of 'ready-made' mode, to the film compilation, from the hybridization between the analogue and the digital to the re-enactment of the original *dispositif*.

Archivio Aperto has tested all these possibilities, always focusing on the film screening as an event, which is the core of the micro-history of amateur cinema: it is the moment in which performing devices, small gauge technologies, and a sense of togetherness allow us to relive the past, showing how home movies, amateur and experimental films are part of a common cultural heritage. The close relationship between Archivio Aperto and Home Movie Day witnesses that this phenomenon depends on the constant exchange between the local and the global, and it is open to multiple contaminations and hybridizations.

### The Screening+Conference Formula

Throughout the years, archivists, festival curators, and scholars have realized that small-gauge film presentations appear to be incomplete without a proper contextualization: reflecting upon the chosen *dispositif* settings and reporting all the information needed to understand how and when the films were shot, who was involved, etc. have become crucial to fill the gap between the past and the present, the ways in which small gauge films have circulated and their archival lives.

This formula has gained public conscience through the efforts of Dan Streible and other faculty members at the University of South Carolina, who, in 1999, founded the Orphan Film Symposium: it 'drew together archivists, film historians, artists, curators, and other to discuss and screen works within a rigorous scholarly context. Orphan Film Symposium I was entitled "Orphans of the Storm: Saving Orphan Films in the Digital Age" and was held in September 1999', aiming 'to generate new research and curatorial activities', which have 'lent increased visibility to the orphan film cause', compelling curators and scholars to 'look more closely at these subaltern cinemas' (Zimmermann 2007, 12-13)

Within this framework, the screenings are complemented with panels concerning historical research on orphan films and their critical appraisals. This neglected film heritage, mainly composed of small gauge film materials, is screened by festival curators and investigated by scholars,<sup>8</sup> whose collaboration has been crucial for the further development of the 'screening+conference' formula. By these terms we mean an assemblage: the film screening *dispositif* and the conference panel/workshop/seminar *dispositif*, adopted in academic dissemination, are superimposed, and the pleasure of watching a film is combined with the opportunity to learn from its contextualization. More specifically, we can reflect upon several *dispositif* configurations entailing the screening of a film and a brief seminar at the beginning/the end of it; workshops in which a scholar shows clips from a film and helps the audience to place them in a correct historical perspective; roundtables envisaging film projections while the speakers are talking, etc. Within these *dispositives*, several technical frameworks are addressed, and often overlap.



For instance, workshops and seminars refer to in person presentations using laptops, digital files, and digital beamers, while the screenings are based on digital or analogue projections: sometimes, analogue projections represent the core of in person workshops and seminars, mixing up the settings of the ‘screening+conference’ formula.

We can trace back this configuration to the 1951 Berlinale festival, in which the organizers combined screenings with lectures: the ‘screening+conference’ was further developed by Pesaro Film Festival curators in the 1960s and by the 1978 FIAF Brighton conference, which is pivotal for festival programming and scientific research. On the one hand, the latter fostered the birth of Le Giornate del Cinema Muto in 1982 and those non specialist archival film festival aiming to ‘shed light on important overlooked or forgotten aspects of world cinema history’ (Marlow-Mann 2013, 7); on the other, it proved to be crucial for the development of the New Film History movement, which has focused also on the reconstruction of the historical context of marginal films and cinematographic products (Elsaesser 1986) – among them, amateur films, home movies, etc.

Especially in the last years, the ‘screening+conference’ configuration has spread throughout the world’s most important archival small-gauge film festivals and events, shedding light on the local histories of home-amateur-experimental moviemaking. In Europe, this formula has been adopted, for instance, by the organizers of Les Recontres annuelles d’Inédits,<sup>9</sup> which takes place every year in a different venue (in 2021 it was held in France, at Ciclic Centre-Val de Loire, Chateau-Renault) and, concerning the Italian context, by Archivio Aperto, which has benefitted from the ‘screening+conference’ configuration since its first edition in 2008.

More specifically, Archivio Aperto’s curators have implemented this formula throughout the years. For instance, they hosted in 2011 Les Recontres annuelles d’Inédits: during its sessions, conference panels and screenings of restored films (belonging to the Vincenzo Neri collection, for instance) (Cavallotti and Venturini 2019) were organized; in 2015, for UNESCO’s World Day for Audiovisual Heritage, the festival board decided to present audiovisual projects, film productions and academic research involving the Italian National Film Archive; in 2016, Anne Morelli, a Belgian historian, held a workshop concerning Italian emigration to Northern Europe, in which home movie screenings interacted with book readings from *Les Enfants polenta* by Francis Tessa; in 2018, Andrea Mariani, a film studies scholar, coordinated *Animazioni moderniste. Cartoni animati e passo uno nel cinema dei Cineguf (1934–1943)* (*Modernist animations: Cineguf’s cartoons and stop motion films, 1934–1943*), a seminar in which screenings of Italian animated films of the Thirties and Forties, produced by the Fascist University Groups (G.U.F. – Gruppi Universitari Fascisti) (Mariani 2018), were enriched by an academic lesson; finally, in 2019, the same setting was applied to *Sperimentare, educare. Il 16 mm e le istituzioni italiane (1932–1954)* (*Experimenting, Educating. The 16 mm Gauge and the Italian Institutions 1932–1954*).<sup>10</sup>

This event, dedicated to the Italian educational small-gauge film heritage, was the outcome of a long-term collaboration with the University of Udine and La Camera Ottica – Film and Video Restoration laboratory. It configured itself as a ‘screening+workshop’ and it was divided in two parts: the first one, *La passione del film. Produzione e diffusione del passo ridotto nei Cineguf* (*A Filmic Passion: Production and Circulation of Small Gauge Films within the Cineguf Context*), was curated by Andrea Mariani, while the second one, *Formati educati: il 16 mm come sussidio didattico (1938–1954)* (*Educational Gauges:*



*16 mm films as Teaching Tools (1938–1954)*), was coordinated by Diego Cavallotti from the University of Cagliari and Simone Venturini from the University of Udine. They elaborated a survey of the educational film phenomenon in Italy during Fascism and the early years of the Italian Republic, collaborating with several archives (Cineteca Nazionale – Italian National Film Archive, Filmoteca Regionale Siciliana – Sicily Film Archive, private archives, etc.) and working on in-house collections (such as ENAM film collection, held by the University of Udine). They focused on the 16 mm gauge, observing how the same technology was used in two different social contexts: within the Cineguf context, the 16 mm was crucial for those students desiring to experiment with filmmaking; years later, within the Republican educational system, it became an important aid for mathematics, physics, and science teachers. This historical shift was thoroughly investigated during the in-depth analyses proposed by Mariani, Cavallotti, and Venturini between the screenings.

More specifically, the curators opted for a digital projection of HD or FullHD files, which was directly controlled from their own laptops: this *dispositif* setting allowed them to interrupt the screenings whenever they wanted, comment the films, and invite the audience to join the discussion. In other words, the screenings became the core of a dissemination event in which films belonging to different archives were linked to specific historical and cultural contexts, mobilizing new interpretations on Italian film culture in the XX Century. Furthermore, this *dispositif* configuration elicited the audience to share their knowledge about these materials, helping the scholars to launch new studies: one-way communication flows were disrupted, and a community-based cultural exchange was encouraged, shedding light on the multiple local histories of the small gauge film heritage.

### **From local to global: the pandemic turn**

The year 2020 represented a turning point in terms of access and film programming. A point of no return, we presume. From one day to the next, we were locked down and our lives were ‘converted’ online (Keidl et al. 2020). Italy was at the epicenter of this pandemic.

All the pillars of home movie programming, taken up and developed by Archivio Aperto, suddenly collapsed. No more projections as community moments: re-enacting the small gauge film *dispositif* became inconceivable. The obsolete projectors turned off again.

There was not any other choice but to develop online programming, drawing on previous attempts such as the Home Movie Day Marathon,<sup>11</sup> organized by the Center for Home Movies in 2019: a 24-hour online streaming on YouTube that involved 86 archives, covering 92 countries and 24 time zones, simulating a world tour in a day, and shedding light on the richness of amateur materials and their ability to map the world. For the first time, such a global experience could be enjoyed everywhere, changing the terms of Home Movie Day: a full program online vs. many local initiatives building up a global program.

Before the pandemic, the Home Movies association had already experimented with digital platforms as an enhancement of heritage assets (Simoni 2017), launching the *Memoryscapes* platform,<sup>12</sup> a curatorial project regarding the online use of archival

contents, based on thematic, geographical, and chronological selections. *Memoryscapes* aims to give access to archival documents and is not primarily targeted to specialists (although it is open to scholarly research). While building the platform, its curators focused on two major points:

- 1) in most cases one single amateur reel contains footage pertaining to different situations, moments and places; in some cases, it is a random assemblage of several reels;
- 2) a digital interface easily allows a combination of fragments from different sources (film collections) that can be linked to each other, eliciting an archival exploration through different paths and micro-narratives. In this way, it is possible to note the common languages and visualities of small gauge films.

'Going online', then, is the new priority: we are compelled to reflect on such a phenomenon in terms of *dispositif* transition, in which the digital takes the place of the analogue. As Giovanna Fossati claims in *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition* (Fossati 2018), this issue concerns film archives since the end of the Twentieth century, and now it deeply affects also the domain of archival film festivals. With online massive participation, we have new rules of audience engagement and a general setting in which curators cannot control how films are displayed by users. In a certain way, this technological shift entails that, on the one hand, archival films become spreadable contents, and, on the other, that the audience is composed by users ready to appropriate these materials within a participative culture framework (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013).

Furthermore, there is a broader question to be asked: to what extent could archive curators use digital tools to disassemble and recombine this type of materials? These operations seem acceptable insofar as the whole working procedure is clear and does not affect the preservation of the original items nor the chance to access their copies. At the same time, we have to deal with some issues. Firstly, a reflection on the cataloging protocols for small gauge films is necessary: the archives are compelled to choose between a general account of the contents/documents (horizontal choice) and their in-depth description (vertical choice), taking the risk of focusing on a few film fragments. Secondly, we need to ask ourselves when the curator's work begins and ends (Bosma 2017, 32). For instance, they can display an entire film collection, or a single reel, or even an edited and assembled part of the archive. These choices make sense if we think of the most diverse situations and venues in which small gauge films are projected: certainly, the integrity of the film/document is a fundamental aspect, but it is not the only one to be considered. In fact, accessibility is linked to a certain degree of manipulation, especially when a film is digitized and screened through a video *dispositif*. If we believe that these processes entail a betrayal of the original small gauge film *dispositif*, we need to acknowledge that they help festival curators to disseminate and valorize hidden archival treasures.

These doubts and questions are crucial to reflect upon film programming during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, which was deeply affected by the online turn.<sup>13</sup> Locked in a hopeless situation, Home Movies's archivists decided to celebrate Liberation Day in Italy (on April 25<sup>th</sup>) streaming archival footage and asking five musicians to add sound and music to it. In time of emergency, it was one of the first attempts to find alternative connections between archival images, online streaming, and sound/music, and to engage an audience confined at home. The event was called *Memoryscapes. Liberazione*.<sup>14</sup>

The images were selected from *La liberazione di Montechiarugulo* (Marchi 1945), a film by Antonio Marchi. The first part of this selection shows a snowy and desolate landscape filmed during a heavy winter, between 1944 and 1945: Marchi is hiding in a house, filming from a window (like many people during lockdown). In the second part, everything changes: the spring has come, Partisans and Allies are stationing in the town, and the Nazis are running away, while Marchi feels confident enough to go outside and celebrate the end of the war. It is a new beginning for him and for Italy as well. In Spring 2020 we were all hoping for a new beginning: these images of the past were highly symbolic for online users.

The outcomes of this attempt were encouraging and, in Fall 2020, Home Movies/ Archivio Aperto's curators decided to go online. This edition lasted approximately two months; almost forty events were organized on several digital platforms: they were designed for web access with the aim of being coherent with the last editions. Recorded storytelling on archival materials was made available. Furthermore, the program included online meetings and workshops: the most successful one was with Yael Perlov about *Diary*, a 6-hour long film in 6 parts shot by her father David between 1973 and 1983 (Perlov 1973-1983). Streaming Perlov's work was one of the major features of the program, although it had an estranging effect for many users because they felt like they were watching an experimental diary film on a digital platform like Netflix (Verhuel 2020). In any case, this estranging effect was one side of the coin: on the other hand, streaming *Diary* and making it available for several weeks helped the audience to discover Perlov's work through a Facebook/Twitter/Instagram post or a newsletter link. Web access allowed Archivio Aperto to achieve a global level of visibility that usual screenings cannot ensure. A virtual tour of the archive's vault and video tutorials about screening amateur and experimental cinema completed the program. These contents helped to create an online community, which was then fostered by Instagram campaigns such as 'Movies at Home'<sup>15</sup>: people could send or publish pictures from their private viewing/screening.

To sum it up, we could reflect on what has been lost and what has been gained by going online. What has been lost: a live cinematic experience, screening films through a film *dispositif*, being together, the physicality of places, and the materiality of film. At the same time, there have been opportunities for improving streaming digital platforms and redefining the programming strategies, widening the audience from a local to a global level, and above all, reaching new audiences.

What about the future now? Hybridization seems to be the keyword: mixed programming strategies will help archivists and curators to overcome the binarism of online/offline. Thus, the real challenge for the viewers/users is to feel part, once again, of an in-person audience during a film screening and, at the same time, to engage in dialogue with faraway users.

## Conclusions

These examples perfectly represent how archival film festivals dedicated to small-gauge formats work, establishing relevant nodes in their network, both on a national and international level, and 'offering a virtual alternative distribution circuit for films that

would not immediately secure a wide, mainstream release' (Marlow-Mann 2013, 6), more precisely to films that have circulated within the small domain of amateur festivals and experimental reviews, or have not circulated at all, like the home movies.

The ways in which festival curators decide to showcase these films cross national borders, shaping a local-global dialogue that is constantly evolving: the call-for-action of Home Movie Day and the possibility for an audience to screen private films in public are evoked by Archivio Aperto's screenings and re-enactments; the 'screening+conference' (or 'screening+workshop') formula connects one of the most important archival small gauge film festivals, the Orphan Film Symposium, to many activities proposed by Archivio Aperto's curators; the Home Movie Day Marathon presents itself as a paradigm for *Memoryscapes*. *Liberazione* and the last edition of Archivio Aperto.

More specifically, the local and the global are shifting their boundaries through the digital and online turn imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic: for instance, a regional/local event such as Archivio Aperto has become global and visible everywhere through its online edition, trying to reach the same audience of the Home Movie Day Marathon. From this point of view, another specific feature of Archivio Aperto, such as the frequent adoption of the 'screening+conference' (or 'screening+workshop') formula, has been revised: the curators opted for shorter presentations to dedicate enough time to online screening.

There are also several setbacks concerning the digital and online turn. The most important one refers to the Covid-19 restrictions and the impossibility to publicly show a film, and therefore to reconstruct its original *dispositif*, for almost two years, making it impossible for the curators to re-enact it. Within this new context, then, both on a global and a local level, the major creative efforts have concerned the need to engage new audiences and to legitimize online fruition of the small gauge film heritage.

That being stated, we should then interrogate the global-local dialogue from another point of view, in which the possibility to bridge the gap between the old (the original small gauge film *dispositives*) and the new (the digital video technologies) plays a major role. The vertical opposition between the past and the present, then, complements the horizontal dialectics between the global and the local: festival curators need to be flexible to this constant interplay, finding the best possible solutions for each screening context and the audience that they are targeting. In other words, there is not only one way to showcase archival small gauge films; on the contrary, there are multiple programming choices to be made and many *dispositif* settings to be adopted: curators need to navigate in this stormy sea, in which the light bulb of a projector becomes a beacon in the dark.

## Notes

1. See <https://www.centerforhomemovies.org/hmd/>, last visit July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021.
2. Interview to Dwight Swanson by Paolo Simoni via email, 11 February 2020<sup>th</sup>.
3. See <https://www.archivioaperto.it/>, last visit July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021.
4. The Art & Experimental Film project refers to artists and filmmakers such as Massimo Bacigalupo, Gianfranco Brebbia, Tonino De Bernardi, Arnaldo Pomodoro, Gianni Castagnoli, Andrea Granchi, Fernando De Filippi, Valentina Berardinone, and others. See P. Simoni, 'Uncertain Space. Curating Experimental and Artists' Cinema Archives', in *Cinergie*, n. 14, online version, <https://cinergie.unibo.it/article/view/8484/8682>.

5. These collections are held by Home Movies – Archivio Nazionale del Film di Famiglia (Italian National Amateur Film Archive in Bologna, Italy), which preserves and restores small gauge films (home movies, amateur films, and experimental films).
6. Most of these restorations were curated by Home Movies – Italian National Amateur Film Archive.
7. Regarding the difference between the notions of *appareil-de-base* and *dispositif*, see J.-L. Baudry, *Effets idéologiques produits par l'appareil de base*, in 'Cinéthique', nn. 7–8, 1970, pp. 1–8 and Id., *Le Dispositif: approches métapsychologiques de l'impression de réalité*, in 'Communications', n. 23, 1975, pp. 70–71.
8. <https://orphanfilmsymposium.blogspot.com/2008/>, last visit July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021.
9. See <http://www.inedits-europe.org/>, last visit July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021.
10. See <https://homemovies.it/archivio-aperto/1-11-2019-sperimentare-educare-il-16mm-e-le-istituzioni-italiane-1932-1954/>, last visit July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021.
11. See <https://www.centerforhomemovies.org/24-hours/>, last visit July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021.
12. See <https://www.memoryscapes.it/>, last visit July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021.
13. This chapter is linked to a paper presented at the 6th FIAF Winter School, 2021: P. Simoni, *Small Gauge for a Big Challenge: Programming Amateur and Experimental Cinema in Times of Crisis* (video accessible at <https://www.fiafnet.org/pages/Training/6th-Programming-Winter-School-videos.html>, last visit July 11th, 2021).
14. Curated by Paolo Simoni (Home Movies) and Corrado Nuccini (Ferrara sotto le stelle Music Festival).
15. [https://www.instagram.com/moviesathome\\_/](https://www.instagram.com/moviesathome_/), last visit July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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